

Chapter 4 The Blue Stones

The next day, Magdalena and Liz came over. Mrs. Hernandez drove them both, arriving at 10:12—just a few minutes late—by which time Cassie was both excited and so worried that they wouldn't get along that she couldn't sit still and had been pacing back and forth in the living room nervously until her father told her that she'd be better off outside where at least she wouldn't make a hole through the floor.

Magdalena poured out of the car first, talking a mile a minute and bubbling with excitement. Behind her came a girl who could only be Liz.

She was tall, at least a few inches taller than Cassie, and pale, with large eyes that made Cassie think of an owl and long, pale, hair pulled back in a ponytail. Her jeans were old and faded, and the T-shirt she wore, a gray one with the name "The Garden of Delights" on it—probably a band Cassie had never heard of—was too large, and hung off her shoulders. Cassie smiled at her as she got out of the car, and Liz smiled back for a second before looking away at the ground.

"Hey Cassie!" Magdalena practically shouted, running over and grinning brightly. "I'd like you to meet Liz—her real name's Lizbeth, Lizbeth Trumble, but everyone just calls her Liz. Liz lives just a couple houses from me."

"Hi Liz," Cassie said, walking over to the girl, who was still looking at the ground. "Nice to meet you."

"Hi," Liz said shyly.

"Come on Liz," Mrs. Hernandez said softly, "she won't bite, will you Cassie?"

"Naw," Cassie said with a smile, "I rarely bite. Unless I'm *really* hungry, of course."

Cassie thought she saw a quick smile on Liz's face.

"Why don't you come on in?" Dad asked.

"Sure, Mr. Argyle," Magdalena said, sweeping through the door past him. Liz and Cassie followed.

"Why don't you come in for a while too?" Dad asked Mrs. Hernandez. "You can meet Grace and the baby..."



"And this is my room," Cassie announced, leading the three girls in.

"It's nice," Liz said quietly.

"You've got a lot of books," Magdalena commented, going over to her bookshelf and scanning down. "Have you read them all?"

"Yeah, mostly. Except the encyclopedias—you can't really read those, unless you're super-bored, I guess. They were my Dad's from when he was young. They're okay, but pretty out of date. Dad says half of the countries they talk about don't even exist anymore."

"Oh, you've got the new Felina Daar book!" Magdalena said, kneeling down beside the bookshelf. "The library just got one, but it's never in and there's a three or four person wait-list to check it out all the time."

"You can borrow it if you like. I read it already."

"Really? Thanks!"

"What are these?" Liz asked, looking at the table.

She was looking at the stones Cassie had brought up from the room beneath the bed.

"Just some stones I found," Cassie said with a shrug. "Pretty, aren't they? I thought they might make a nice necklace or something, if I could drill a hole through them."

“That sounds like you’d need special equipment,” Magdalena said, looking up from the books. She already had the Felina Daar one out on the floor beside her. “I bet a regular old drill like my dad has in his basement would just cut one of those in half, even with a really small bit. Plus it’s *stone*, not wood. That’s much harder to get through.”

“Where’d you find them?” Liz asked.

“They were here already, in the house,” Cassie answered. For some reason, she felt like she shouldn’t tell them exactly *where* she’d found them, though there was really no good reason to keep it a secret.

“I wonder where they came from,” Liz said. “They glow, you know.”

“What?” Magdalena asked.

“They glow,” she repeated.

“I don’t see them glowing,” Cassie said, leaning in closer.

“You mean like glow in the dark stuff?” Magdalena asked.

“I guess,” Liz said. “But these glow blue. See?”

“Maybe,” Cassie said.

“I don’t,” Magdalena announced. “Here, let’s take some and get them dark—under the blanket. Then we’ll see for sure.”

She took one in her hand, and threw the blanket over her head.

Cassie followed, as did Liz. They held the stones before them...

They definitely glowed. More than glowed, even. They were bright, a bright, light blue light.

“Wow,” Magdalena said, awed. “How come it didn’t seem as bright before? I don’t know if I’d say these were glowing at all. More like *lighting*, if you know what I mean.”

Liz stared at hers for a moment. “We touched them,” she said after a while. “I wonder...”

Carefully, she took hers and rubbed it.

The glow suddenly grew much brighter, like she was holding a flashlight in her hands that was shining in all directions at once.

“Whoa,” Magdalena said.

Cassie blinked in the light, then rubbed her own. Soon it was bright enough under the heavy comforter that it was almost like being out in the daytime.

“Rocks don’t do this,” Cassie said softly.

“They’re *magic*,” Magdalena said quietly. “*Real* magic, like in the books.”

“Maybe,” Cassie said. “Maybe not. Light bulbs make light, and lava does too, and that’s rocks, just really hot. I think plutonium makes light too, from radiation.”

“Do you think these are radioactive?” Magdalena asked, looking down at the stone in her hands. “Do you think we’ll get sick because we touched them, or turn into mutants or something?” She dropped it on the sheets, backing a little away. The stone dimmed at once, though it continued to glow.

“If they’re radioactive, I’ve had them in my bedroom all night. I might...”

“If they were radioactive, they wouldn’t glow more when you touched them,” Liz said. “Radioactive comes from inside, not from outside.”

“You’re sure?” Magdalena asked.

“I saw a TV show on it once. Plus radioactive things don’t glow as bright as this anyway, that’s just in the movies.”

“I hope you’re right,” Magdalena said.

“Then you think it’s magic too?” Cassie said.

“I don’t know,” Liz answered. “But I’d really like to see where you found it. If it was radioactive, there’d be burns there, I think.”

“But I...” But if there *were* burns there, she’d have to know. And she’d probably have to move her bedroom, if there was radioactivity around—this stuff seemed much more powerful than the radon people always talked about. Still, showing them...

“Please?” Magdalena asked.

“Okay,” Cassie said with a sigh. “But I want you to keep it a secret, okay?”



“They were right here,” Cassie said, pointing down at the old cans on the floor. “And see, no burn marks.”

“Thank goodness,” Magdalena said with a sigh. “Next time, let’s bring the stones down here for light, hmm? Especially if we can get them on a necklace. That flashlight’s hard to see by.”

“Can you shine it on the door?” Liz asked.

“Sure,” Cassie said, standing. She pointed the flashlight over at it, moving the light along all of the different carvings.

“It’s beautiful,” Magdalena said, whistling softly. “Do you know where it leads?”

“Nope,” Cassie answered. “It’s locked, and there’s no key. But I think the other side must be under our lawn, or maybe even the street.”

“Maybe it leads to the sewers,” Magdalena said. “Maybe whoever lived here before used it to go into the sewers and...” She stopped, and frowned. “Why in the world would anyone *want* to go in the sewers?”

“To fix something?” Cassie asked.

“But you wouldn’t use a door like this,” Magdalena said. “You’d use a manhole. Besides, there’s one on the street just a couple houses down. And I don’t smell sewer.”

“If it was tight enough, you wouldn’t,” Cassie noted.

“Can I have the flashlight?” Liz asked.

“Sure,” Cassie said, handing it over. “If it goes under the yard, maybe there’s an old bomb shelter under there or something. Dad told me about them once. They made them a lot, back before he was born, because they were afraid of nuclear war. Of course it turned out that most of them wouldn’t work anyway. You’d just be cooked inside, and that would be that.”

“But with a door like *that*?” Magdalena asked. “I think it’s magic, like the stones.”

“Magic isn’t real,” Cassie said with a sigh.

“Then how do you explain the stones?”

“I don’t know.”

“I know where the key is,” Liz announced suddenly.

“Where?” both Cassie and Magdalena asked at once.

“I have it,” Liz said with a small smile. “Back home.”