

Imly's Story – In Progress:

Imly stood on the doorstep as she watched the doctor take the long walk down the hill. As he passed the half-way tree, he stopped, turned, and raised his hand to her in a gesture of farewell. She raised her own in return, then lowered it to wipe her eyes. Even though the doctor couldn't explain why father was so sick, he refused to believe in the town gossip that the family curse had returned. Imly was grateful for his scientific practicality, but it still left them without answers, and without a cure.

She took a deep breath and turned back into the house to start cleaning up after the visit. She could hear her parents talking in their room, and hummed to herself so she didn't have to hear her father's gasping, brittle cough. The song had been stuck in her head for days anyway.

The house was more like a large tower, really. It was a three story stone cylinder with a conical thatched roof. The top floor was her mother's workspace, with the weaving room on one side, and the spinning and dying room on the other. The second floor was split into her room and her brother's room, and the bottom floor contained her parents' room, the kitchen, and the family area. The top of the hill flattened to a plateau, with the house near the center and father's forge towards the back left of the house. The deep well was in the very center of the hill, and the chicken coop, made out of the same grey stone as the house, mirrored the forge's location on the right of the hill.

She had lived all 17 years of her life here in her ancestors' home. The local legend was that the house was the remains of a castle that once stood on top of the hill, and her family had been the ruling clan over two hundred years ago. Castle or not, it was home and comfortable despite its lack of nobility. Besides, there had never been any evidence of ruins at the bottom of the hill, and it would be pretty hard to hide an entire castle of stones.

Imly dried her hands of the dishwater and made her way to her parents' room to say goodnight before she went upstairs to bed.

Imly woke early to clear space for the new garden behind the house. It was a project she'd been working at for a few days now. Only the large flat stone remained, and she would need plenty of space to heave it over. It was almost flush with the grass, and required a lot of digging.

As she dug, she hummed her strange song again, and could almost swear someone was humming it with her. She finally reached the bottom edge, slid the shovel under, and with all her strength, heaved the stone up, to kick the brace log underneath. As the great stone finally budged, the sound of rushing air going into the uncovered space collided with the sound of music coming out.

The brace went in, and Imly was knocked to the ground by the rush of air that shoved the stone completely aside. Now the music had a voice with it, talking to her and growing louder as it spoke.

"Well it's about time you finally got the stupid rock up. I've been singing that ridiculous song for days now, trying to get you to hurry up. Do you want your whole family to die? Because if you don't get

down here and fix this curse, we're never going to be rid of it and you're going to go the same way as the rest of us. Can you hear me girl? You took so long, you only have one more day to fix this. Come on, grab your shovel and get down here!"

As Imly crawled to the edge of the hole, she saw the top of a small stone staircase and a bluish light coming from below.

How we got here: The story of the curse.

Two hundred years before Imly's tale begins, Three brothers, Ardal, Barhart and Tomaltock, were lords of their land, great war heroes, and keepers of the people's sacred artifacts. These artifacts were said to have been made by the fair folk themselves to keep the family safe from those that would do them harm, as well as for those who showed allegiance to them.

Ardal, the eldest and ruling brother, was also a new father when the Great War broke out. By the time his child was able to ride a horse himself, Ardal and his brothers, all Knights of the High King's court, were called away to serve their duty to fight for their country. Though proven in battle many times before, The Great War was more terrible than all before combined. The day before their departure, each brother hid one of the artifacts deep within their castle lest the fighting come that far and threaten the safety of the great gifts.

Ardal hid his staff in a secret room beneath his reception chamber, along with other valuables and family heirlooms.

Barhart hid his mirror in his beloved library where his vast collection of books, scrolls, maps and charts were a treasure trove of knowledge.

Tomaltock hid the bell in his forge, where, as master of the Armory, he knew the secrets fire would reveal in metal and in men.

The brothers knew that the war would be long, and even if they were to survive, they would not return for many years. Ardal's son would inherit the gifts, but the brothers asked the help of the fair folk to guide him toward his inheritance. He would have to be brave enough to seek the staff, wise enough to find the mirror, and strong enough to earn the bell. At the fountain of their garden courtyard, they asked the fair folk to keep their home safe, and their family prosperous in exchange for their guardianship of the gifts.

Valiant though they fought, the brothers did not outlive the battles of the Great War. True to their word, the fair folk kept the castle safe and Ardal's son and his descendents were always prosperous. However, fair folk often interpret the word of men differently than perhaps intended. When the family received news of the brothers' deaths, overnight their castle was buried to the top of the second highest tower. The tallest tower stood above the mound, to house Ardal's widow and her son. The people that worked in the castle and those living nearby became confused. Some remembered a great fire, some a tornado,

some an earthquake that destroyed the castle. Though Ardal's descendants would never want for food on the table, or business for their trade, the legend of the family's curse would follow them all of their lives.

As for the three brothers, they were to be the guardians of the gifts until their descendent recovered them. To the fair folk, it mattered not that they were dead. Though not permitted to enter the castle until sunlight was present, their ghosts would wait to find the one who could break the curse. The inheritor of the gifts had to use their own courage, wit and strength to restore the family's status.