

BARNEY KNOTT

By Susa Morgan Black

*Dedicated to children everywhere,
who are "different" than the rest*

CHAPTER ONE

THE CAVE

Barney Knott was a dwarf. In all other respects, he was a normal ten year old boy. He had short, straight brown hair, and clear gray-blue eyes. He loved stories, mostly fantasy and science fiction, and he loved exploring all by himself, especially woods and caves. Most of the things he did, he had to do alone, because other children avoided him or made fun of him.

Dwarf's have unusual bodies. Their arms and legs are short for their head and trunk, though very strong. This was an advantage when exploring caves, because Barney could squeeze into tight places where no one else could go, and he didn't have to bend over double to travel down the shallow passages.

There were lots of limestone caves in the wooded, hilly land near the eastern coast where Barney lived. The caves ran deep into the earth, where Barney imagined no one else had ever gone before. And above the hidden labyrinth in the earth were fine woods of oak and elm and dogwood. He loved traveling the deer-worn path in the dappled woods on the way from school to his parents cottage.

Barney's father was a monitor at a nuclear power plant outside of Milltown. He worked long, hard hours at night and slept, watched TV or read most of the day. Barney didn't like going to town. The dark smudged brick buildings were shabby. The stores were old and worn. The people hurried to and fro, but often stopped to stare at Barney, shaking their heads sadly before they hurried on. Barney preferred the woods and caves.

His mother was a kindly, care-worn woman, whom he dearly loved. At night she would read stories to him from her collection of fairy tales from all over the world. Her soft voice would erase all the troubles of the day, and his mind would journey to mysterious places and be peopled with wizards, dragons, griffins, fairies and elves, as he fell asleep.

Barney often tarried on the way to school. He loved all the seasons of the woods, the glistening new shoots of spring; the riotous wild flowers of summer meadows; the stately red, orange and gold trees of autumn; and the pristine purity of a snowy winter wood. He was reluctant to emerge from the woods into the harsh atmosphere of the school's asphalt black-top, the clanging school halls, the stern disapproving teachers and the hoots and calls of the other children.

"Here comes Barney Knott, Who-is-Not" The kids would hoot at him. "Not what?" another kid would ask. "Not big enough!" jibed another. Barney seldom said anything to anyone. He just walked to his desk at the back of the class, near the window that looked out on the woods and sat down. He never raised his hand and the teacher seldom called on him. His mind would wander back to the woods and caves.

During recess, Barney kept to himself and wished the other kids would leave him alone. They never invited him to play with them, but often made him the butt of their rowdy play. They would throw balls at him, hard, trying to knock him down.

One day, Barney wandered to the edge of the school property, lined by honeysuckle bushes, and crawled underneath the bushes, carving out an elfin

cave to dwell in. He loved sitting beneath the brambles, sucking the sweetness from the honeysuckle flowers, and dreaming. He imagined fairies occupying the space he had just hollowed beneath the brambles, at dusk, turning it into a fairy home or castle, and abandoning it before the dawn. Tomorrow, he would look for little signs of their occupation, a stray shoe or fairy shawl.

"There he is!" Alvin, one of the biggest school bullies shouted. Several kids gathered in front of the bush and chanted, "Barney Knott, Full of Rot, Come out, come out!" They poked sticks into the bush to drive him out, but Barney crept out of reach and stayed there until the school bell rang. He waited for the others to file in before he left the safety of his bramble cave.

"Barney Knott," Mrs. Crossen was angry, "You're late for school, you're late after recess, you don't participate in class. I think you'd better stay after school today." Several faces turned toward him smugly.

After school Mrs. Crossen repeated her list of Barney's offenses and threatened to call his parents for a conference with the principal if he didn't change his habit of tardiness and lack of attention in school.

"Oooh, Barney's in trouble!" Alvin hooted at him as he left the school building. Alvin rushed at him, and Barney ran for the safety of the forest. He tripped and fell. He heard ripples of laughter behind him, but picked himself up and headed straight into the woods without a backwards glance.

"I hate them!" Barney said angrily to the trees, "I wish I never had to go back to school again!"

The woods seemed cooler, away from the school yard. The peaceful calling of the birds, the clean, tinkling sound of the creek, the gentle swishing of the branches full of autumn leaves, made him feel better after the clamor of the school day. A huge black raven cawed at him from the branch of a alder tree. Barney slowed his pace and decided to head off the trail and deeper in the woods.

His rambling led him toward the wood's low hills. Barney enjoyed climbing hills almost as much as exploring caves, and he had often found small shallow caves concealed within the hills.

Scrambling among rock rubble and bushes at the foot of one hill, Barney saw a bat fly out from behind a bush at the crevice further up the hill. Barney knew bats lived in caves, so he climbed up over the rocks and briars to the bush. Sure enough, looking through the bush, he could see the entrance to a hidden cave on the other side.

Managing to scramble around the bush, he crept into the cave. As he stood up, he realized that the cavern was quite large. It was cool, quiet and tranquil. Barney felt very much at home in the roomy cavern. "I wish I could come here to learn every day instead of school!" He said to himself.

Barney explored as far back in the cave as the autumn twilight would allow. The walls were cool and high, the floor fairly even. He resolved to come back the next day with his flashlight to investigate the depths.

The next day, on his way to school, he hid a flashlight and a blanket well off the path, to be retrieved later. He paid particular attention to Mrs. Crossen all that day so that she wouldn't find it necessary to delay him after school.

The morning and early afternoon dragged on slowly, and Barney tried hard to pay attention, rather than dream about his new discovery. That day, even the other children seemed to be bored with taunting him, and left him alone.

At last, the school bell rang, and Barney shot straight for the cache of supplies he had hidden in the woods that morning and trundled up the path toward the hill and the cave.

Unless you knew what you were looking for, or came upon it accidentally, the cave opening was not easily visible. Barney dragged dead branches and forest growth to the entrance to further obscure it from view. Then, with his flashlight and blanket, he entered the cave.

The sense of peace and homeliness welcomed him again, and he stood, breathing in the cozy atmosphere of his cave. He searched through his memory of fairy lore to come up with an appropriate name for his private kingdom, and remembered "Underhill" from Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, one of his favorite fantasy series.

"I dub you Underhill!" he announced to the cave. The echoes returned his voice to him, with a note of approval.

Exploring the back of the cavern with his flashlight, Barney noticed that the cave narrowed down to passage, sloping gently down into the earth under the hill.

Barney imagined all sorts of creatures living further along, deeper in the cave. He imagined the passage leading to a dragon's hoard, a pirate's treasure, a gnome's home, or even a fairy city.

The next day, Barney brought a wooden crate, and hid it off the path, to bring to the cave, later. After school, he carried the crate to the cave and placed it against a wall to keep his treasures in. He hid his flashlight, with extra batteries and the old weathered army blanket that his father had saved from the war. The day after that, he brought two candle holders and a collection of candles and matches for light.

Over the weeks that followed he added things to his trove. He kept a slingshot and some large smooth stones for an arsenal. The crate also contained a few battered, but precious fairy tale books, special pictures he had saved from magazines, and treasures he had collected from his walks in the wood; pretty feathers, stones and acorns. Sometimes he would save lunch to eat after school in the privacy his cave, and he was always very careful to carry out the trash and take it home to throw away.

Sometimes he would bring his pewter collection of fantasy characters to play with in the dirt floor of the cave. He had a wizard, a sorceress with a large owl on her shoulder, a dragon, an ogre, an elf and a griffin.

He often explored the narrow shaft further and further down, but never followed it all the way. It seemed endless. The mystery of it was a wonder to him, and he often sat dreaming about it in school, longing to explore further, still.

One day, Barney peered outside of the cave opening, to make sure no one had followed him. He was sure he was the only person to have discovered

this cave, he had not found evidence of anyone else's occupation, save for occasional bats and small animals. Satisfied, he crawled back into the cave.

Barney emptied his pockets. He had found more smooth black stones in the creek the day before, and added them to his hoard. He loved the feel of creek-smoothed stones in his hands.

Putting the stones back in the crate, he took out the flashlight, deciding once again, to explore the fascinating passage down through the earth.

He hadn't gone too far when he stumbled over something he hadn't noticed before. Shining his flashlight on it, he saw an old wooden box, with strange markings carved on the lid. Inside the box was a big pale clear stone, worn almost round, wrapped in an old piece of tattered purple silk.

"What's this?!" Barney asked aloud. The stone seemed to glow in his hand. Barney abandoned the exploration down the shaft and took the glowing orb back to the cavern to examine. There were so many fractures and planes inside the orb, that Barney could almost see pictures in the stone.

"Why, this is like a magic crystal ball from one of Mother's stories!!" Barney exclaimed. He imagined that the ball might have been hidden by a great wizard long ago.

He sighed with pleasure as he held the stone ball in his hand. It picked up the flicker of candlelight and his mind filled with pictures. He saw the face of a wizened old man with a long white beard, a dwarf like himself, but with a face filled with power and dignity, wearing a conical hat and dark flowing robes. The

face smiled gently at him, and then was swirled away as the ball seemed to cloud over.

Trembling, Barney stared into the ball, and tried to find the face again, but was met with swirls and clouds. The face had seemed familiar, like someone so far back in his past, that he could no longer remember. For some reason, the vision's smile gave him courage.

Barney carefully packed the orb away. He scratched out a hole in the back of the cave, and buried the orb in its own box, marking the spot with a stone.

Lost in thought, he made his way home. Slowly he ploughed through the tangle of autumn leaves, and for once, was too preoccupied to look up in awe and the riotous colors of the trees silhouetted against the dusk.

The smell of hot stew brought him back to earth, and he realized that he was home.

"How was school today, honey?" his mother greeted him cheerfully at the door of their small cottage, nestled in the wooded suburbs of Mill Town.

"OK, I guess." he answered, peeling off his jacket. He wandered into the kitchen and his mother gave him a wonderful dinner of hot stew and home made brown bread.

"Do your homework, darling!" His mother prompted him.

"Yes, Ma." He answered as he climbed the stairs to his room. Briefly, he considered telling his mother about his cave and his treasure. But something about it seemed terribly private, as if it were a secret just for him.

"I won't tell Mother anything, at least not yet." he decided.

Usually, after homework, he would watch TV, or he and his mother would read to each other from her collection of folklore and fairytales. Sometimes he would play with his little pewter figures, acting out his favorite tales. This night, he went to bed early, and dreamed.

He dreamed of the wizened old man. He saw him as clearly as he had in the crystal orb. The old man spoke his name, "Barney Knott," and smiled at him again, a merry twinkle in his wise old eyes.

Barney woke up the next day, feeling happy and confident, without knowing exactly why. He didn't even dread school, realizing that afterwards, he had his cave, and it seemed, a magical new friend.

He took his pewter wizard with him, as a token of his new found friend, and kept it in his pocket. When the kids taunted him, Barney squeezed the wizard in his pocket, and paid no attention to them. For once, they didn't really bother him. They were not important. Something was happening to him. He didn't know what, but there was a sense of anticipation, like he was on the verge of a great adventure.

The air was crisp and cool, on the way to the cave. There was a stiff wind, and the bright leaves swirled around him. His feet kicked up the old brown leaves, and he could smell the tangy scent of the pine needles underneath.

The woods was alive and moving that afternoon, as he trudged his way to Underhill. Above him, two ravens reeled and cawed to each other.

"There he is!" He heard Alvin's voice behind him. Suddenly, the wood was loud with the yells of boys from school. They crashed noisily through the woods, yelling, "Barney Knott, Full of Rot, Come Out, Come Out!"

Barney ran. He ran through the woods. His legs were short, but powerful, and he had stamina. But the longer legs of Alvin and the others would soon catch up, he knew. And here in the woods, there were no teachers to stop them.

Splashing through the sparkling creek, Barney ran on. But it wasn't long before he heard the splashing of the others behind him. They were too close for him to hide, cramping his short frame into spaces they could never reach.

"Get him, get him!" The voices behind him panted, "Don't let him get away!"

Fear tasted sour in Barney's mouth, his heart was pounding and his legs felt heavier and heavier as he willed them to move faster. He darted under low branches that would slow his adversaries, and moved quickly along the rock strewn trench of an old creek bed, where they could not see him. For the moment, he lost his pursuers.

Ahead of him, he saw the hill where his cave was.

He decided to make a run for it. He scrambled to the safety of Underhill. He dove under the bush and rolled inside, breathing hard.

"Hey, I just saw him! He's in there, behind that bush! Let's go get him!"

Too late, Barney realized that they had seen him, and he had given away his secret.

In anguish, Barney realized that they knew where he was, and the cave couldn't protect him, they were already at the entrance. He could see Alvin's head, as he crawled through. Barney did not even have time to scabble in his crate for his sling shot. He ran headlong for the back of the cave, and stumbled down the passage.

He knew he could go further down than they could, his body could fit in the tiny passages long after they would become stuck and have to back out.

His gray-blue eyes had sharp night vision, but even he could not see in the perfect black of this underground world. But he could still hear the howls of Alvin and his friends behind him, and he plunged deeper into the earth. He tripped and fell, picked himself up and went on, wishing he had had time to retrieve his flashlight. He cursed himself soundly for leading his enemies to his private kingdom. He wondered if they would find the Orb and take it from him. Without the realm of Underhill, Barney was lost and hopeless once again. He traveled down blindly, not caring if he ever found his way back up again. The passage was so small now, he had to travel on his hands and knees. He'd gone down so far, no one would ever dare follow him, and he'd never be found again.

His face was wet with tears, when he first saw a far away glow of light.

Then he heard a trickle of water as the passage veered to the left. Suddenly he realized it had been quite some time since he could hear the voices of his pursuers. They must have given up. Barney kept crawling forward toward the light. The passage opened up again, with a ruddy glow on the walls. Barney blinked the tears out of his eyes and stood up, gaping.

He had come into a chamber, deep under the hill. The chamber was lined with shelves. There were books on the shelves. Books and scrolls and jars full of herbs and liquids, and globes, and figurines and all sorts of strange objects lined the shelves and cabinets. There were worn, ancient wooden chests along the wall. On the wall hung strange masks and maps and wood framed pictures. It looked like a combination of a library, an antique shop and a laboratory. The wood was dark and brooding, yet it had the comfort of being old and used. In the wall of the rock cavern, was a huge wooden door, carved with strange letters and faces.

Quietly, Barney crept into the chamber, listening, eyes searching, fascinated. He noted the books on the wall's shelves. Many were written in script he'd never seen, in languages he could only guess. There were objects Barney discovered to be made of the same material as his globe - crystal - in all kinds of different shapes - rods, eggs, pyramids, globes, and some in the shape of animals - hares, owls, ravens, dragons and other mysterious beasts. These objects were in different colors of crystal - beautiful clear purple, different shades of brown, dark brooding red and rosy pink. They were marvelous to see, but Barney dared not touch them.

He looked up at the masks lining the walls. Some were terrifying gargoyles, some were powerful, others were ethereal and beautiful, like fairies. Some masks were of manlike creatures and others were fantastic beasts. One in

particular drew his attention - it was a beautiful, vibrant green man's face, surrounded by vibrant vines and leaves. Another frightening mask depicted a fierce looking man with antlers growing from his skull. Then he noticed the mask of a woman, whose face seemed to change, like the phases of the moon, sometimes young, sometimes full and beautiful, and sometimes dark, old and powerful. The masks seemed to be watching him, waiting. They seemed almost alive. He felt as if he had interrupted their conversation and they fell silent when he entered the room. Barney began to shake, he could no longer look at the powerful masks.

Barney prowled around the room, sniffing at the bottles. They smelled of strong herbs and strange unguents and incenses. In the corner, there was an old fashioned astrolabe, like the one Barney had seen in the museum on a class field trip. The unrolled scrolls laid out on the table with crystal paperweights were covered with unintelligible spidery writing. Also on the table, were large round plates made of different metals with strange geometric symbols etched into them.

The room was full of strange and fascinating smells, colors and objects. Barney felt that he could stay there forever, exploring. He began to wonder who used this room. He began to wonder what was beyond the old wooden door. The strange heavy door, carved with slumbering faces, both frightening and powerful, like the masks.

The strange inscriptions on the door began to writhe and wiggle as he watched. Horrified, Barney watched the eyes of the carved faces open, their mouths move, though no sound emitted.

The door slowly swung opened, and a dwarf stood, with a dark flowing robe, speckled with tiny lights, that looked like stars, and a long, conical hat of the same material. It was the wizard of the Crystal Ball.

"Welcome to Mathonwy's Hall," the wizard smiled at him.

CHAPTER TWO

THE WIZARD

Barney stood transfixed by the tiny wizard, barely taller than himself.

"I, of course, am Mathonwy," the wizard introduced himself.

"How do you do?" Barney managed to say, remembering his manners.

"So, you want to be my student." Mathonwy commented.

"Excuse me?"

"Didn't you say, when you first came to my hill, that you wished you could come here to learn every day, instead of going to school?" Mathonwy asked.

"Why, yes I did!" Barney exclaimed, "But how did you know?"

The Wizard merely smiled.

"Do you mean you'd really let me come here every day?"

"Of course. That is, after school. What is it you wish to learn?" The wizard asked.

Barney enthusiastically gestured toward the books, the crystals, the masks, "About all of this! What's in the books, what are the crystals for? Who are the masks? What kind of door is that? Why . . ."

The wizard held up his hand, "Patience! Only one question at a time!" Mathonwy squinted his eyes and scrutinized Barney closely for a few moments. "Well, I suppose I could use an apprentice. Would you be interested in learning about magic?"

A surge of joy shot through Barney's whole body, "Yes!"

There was a twinkle in the old wizard's eyes, "Somehow, I thought you would! Pull up a stool." Mathonwy eased his body into a large wooden chair against the wall.

Barney pulled up a stool, at the foot of the wizard's chair and listened. He listened for what seemed hours while Mathonwy talked.

Mathonwy talked about dwarves, the history of dwarves. Tales that Barney had never heard of, or even read in fairytales.

"The dwarves were once one of the mighty races of earth. We ruled the underworlds. Caves, mines, barrows, caverns! We were well respected miners, smiths, jewelers and tradesmen. Some of the ancient crowns of Europe are the work of dwarven smiths and jewelers. Much of our craft is in museums now. But knowledge of us has been relegated to fairytales, where many old truths lay hidden."

"When Man became predominate among the races, our caves were plundered, our people taken as slaves. Most did not survive. And some few of our folk bred with man and had children, strange halflings. What people today think of as a medical condition, is in fact, remnants of the old blood."

A tingle of pride raced up Barney's spine and made him shiver.

"If your heritage is strong, you may have still some of the ancient dwarven powers of the Earth."

"What do you mean?"

"Dwarves are fey, like all the fairy folk. Many of us have certain powers.

"What kind of powers?" Barney asked, incredulous.

"Powers of earth and stone. Powers to work with gems and minerals and metals." The old man smiled mysteriously. "Let me show you."

Mathonwy took a small velvet bag from out of the folds of a sleeve. From it, he produced a dark round crystal and handed it to Barney.

"Look into it closely, Barney." The wizard commanded. Barney obeyed. He looked into the depths of the dark crystal until the darkness seemed to reach up all around him, and all was dark and silent.

He woke up with a start - he was lying on the floor of his own cave, Underhill. The wizard was standing over him. Barney sat up and looked around. The cave was a mess. His crate was broken, his belongings broken, torn or missing. A horrible thought crossed his mind, and he jumped up and ran to the spot where the crystal was buried. It was safe, the stone had not been moved.

"How did I get here?" he turned and asked Mathonwy.

"Never mind that now. I'm going to show you how to seal a cave against intruders. Come outside."

There was a full moon outside, lighting the woods eerily. Barney suddenly realized that his mother would be worried about him.

Mathonwy raised his hands to the sky and said something in a language Barney had never heard before, "*Anol rathbak, uth vas bethard, do he-el dien ve!*"

"Quick, we have work to do!" Mathonwy ordered, as he placed his hands against the rock on one side of the opening.

Mathonwy started to sculpt the rock as if it were clay, to close the opening.

"Barney, you start from the other side and work toward me." Mathonwy ordered.

"How do I do it?!"

"You are a dwarf! You have the ability. Believe in yourself and concentrate. Imagine the rock is clay and use the clay to close the opening."

Barney closed his eyes, with his hands on the stone. In his mind, he imagined what clay felt like. Concentrating hard, he pretended he could feel the clay ooze through his fingers. Then he noticed something. His fingers were wet. He opened his eyes and looked at his hands - there was moist clay

between his fingers! The hard rock had turned into clay! He turned to the wizard ecstatically, "I did it!!"

"Of course you did. Now mold it to cover the opening. Quickly, we haven't got all night."

Mathonwy and Barney worked at it until they were both sweating. Finally, Mathonwy was satisfied that the opening looked like a solid rock wall.

"Now," Mathonwy instructed, "put your hands against the wall and imagine the surface to be as hard as rock again." Barney did as he was bid and remembered the feeling of hard rock under his hands.

"There now!" Mathonwy laughed, "Your friends will be mighty surprised when they come back looking for your hideout tomorrow!"

Mathonwy stood back admiring their handiwork, "and now Barney, you must hurry home. Your mother is probably worried."

"How will I find you again?" asked Barney, suddenly alarmed.

"Don't worry, I shall find you!" and then the old wizard did an astonishing thing. He muttered something under his breath, took a deep breath and walked *through* the cave wall, where the opening had been! Barney gaped at the rock wall for several moments before he turned and sped through the moonlit forest.

His mother was furious at Barney for coming home so late, and he found himself on a week's restriction for the first time in his life. He did not complain, feeling guilty about having to make up a story about falling asleep in the woods. Still, he couldn't bring himself to tell anyone about the cave or the old wizard. Not yet.

It was a week before he saw the wizard again. Mathonwy was sitting cross legged on a boulder several yards from the path.

"Off restriction?" Mathonwy greeted him.

"Yes. I have to be home before dark from now on." Barney said gloomily.

"That should be enough time for now, and after Christmas, the days will get longer!" Mathonwy promised cheerfully.

From out of his voluminous sleeve, the wizard produced a stone and held it out to Barney.

Barney took it tentatively, remembering what happened last time he took a stone from the wizard, "What is it?"

"A key."

"To what?"

"Mathonwy's Hall, of course!" the wizard explained, "Until you learn to travel through rock on your own, you will need this key. Sit down, I'll show you."

Barney sat at the wizard's feet, the ball in his hand, and looked up at the old dwarf quizzically, wondering what would happen next.

"Look into the ball. Relax. Yes, that's right. Now look deeply into the ball and recall what Mathonwy's hall looks like. Visualize it exactly as you remember it." The wizard's voice intoned, "Relax, breath deeply. The ball is getting larger, larger, it is as big as you, bigger, it is all around you, you are in Mathonwy's Hall."

Barney felt as if he had been startled from a deep sleep, and looked around him. He was in Mathonwy's Hall.

"Very good, Barney. And you can do that for yourself, you know. It's a very special kind of hypnosis."

Barney stood shakily to his feet, "You mean I could use this ball, imagine I'm home, and find myself in my room?"

"If you can concentrate hard enough, of course!"

Barney's lessons began in earnest. Mathonwy taught him how to induce self hypnosis, so that he could use the crystal ball as a key to travel from one place to another. Mathonwy taught him how to travel through rock by becoming one with stone, so that it was his natural element, and traveling through stone was like moving through air. The old wizard taught him how to use telekinesis - to move stones without touching them. How to turn rock to molten lava and back to solid again. And Barney practiced. He practiced in the woods, in his room, hidden in the bushes surrounding the playground.

Barney learned the history of the dwarves, the long ago kings and queens, their underground geography and ancient realms and barrows. He began to understand the art of smithing and crafting metals, the making of fine jewelry and magical devices.

School was still a trial to Barney. But the more he learned from the Wizard, the more he sought all knowledge. Barney began to pay attention in school, especially to science. The Wizard had taught him that at a certain point, science and magic become one and the same, and the magician has the advantage over the scientist, because he realizes this and puts no limits on where knowledge leads him.

Barney began to do well in school, and the Mrs. Crossen began to call on him in class, and treat him with more kindness.

Other things began to happen, too. Some of the other kids, not his previous tormentors, but the children that had merely left him alone, began to talk to him. Like red headed Sarah, who was the class expert on volcanoes and dinosaurs. One day after Barney had correctly answered the teacher's question about igneous rocks being caused by the hot volcanic action, Sarah brought her favorite scrapbook to school to show Barney. It was filled with wondrous pictures of volcanoes from all over the world. From that day on, Barney had a friend to talk to. But still he kept his wizard a secret.

Alvin did not like the changes that were coming over Barney. Alvin did not like it when Barney answered the teachers questions, and she smiled her approval. Alvin did not like Barney's unexplainable air of happiness and confidence. And he especially did not like it when Sarah, the pretty red head, made friends with Barney. But what really bothered Alvin the most was when

Barney disappeared down the inside of the cave, and the next day, after school, Alvin had gone back to the cave to see if Barney dared to return, and found the cave entrance gone, as if it never was. He never told the other boys, and for a while, he just watched Barney warily. It had been a long time since anyone chanted, "Barney Knott, full of rot."

That day, during recess, Alvin watched Sarah and Barney laughing together. One of the boys, that had been with Alvin on the foray into the cave, joined Barney and Sarah and was soon talking and laughing with them.

Enraged, Alvin shouted, "Barney Knott, Who is Not!" The other kids just looked at him. No one answered, "Not what?" or "Not big enough." The kids just shrugged, ignoring Alvin and went on playing. So Alvin charged toward Barney, fists doubled.

Barney looked up just in time to see Alvin, red faced and angry, charging across the playground toward him. Barney didn't move. He looked down at the ground in front of Alvin, and noticed a good sized stone. He concentrated urgently, and the stone moved in Alvin's path. Alvin tripped over the rock, went flying head over heels, and landed flat on his face. The whole playground was in an uproar of laughter! Only Barney knew how it had happened. Alvin got to his hands and knees, the wind knocked out of him, and glared at Barney. Then the school bell rang, and the children went inside.

After that day, no one made fun of Barney, and no one avoided him, either.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MAGIC

Barney's parents were pleased with the changes in their son. Although Barney and his mother had always been close, Barney's father had always been remote. Barney studied both his parents, wondering from whom he had inherited his dwarfish blood. His mother was medium height, fair and slender; his father short, dark and stocky like most of the dwarves in stories. Yet it was his mother who was interested in things fey and mysterious. Barney wondered for the first time about his ancestors. He decided to ask both his parents about their heritage.

His Mom was Scottish-Welsh decent, and his father German and Norwegian. All these backgrounds had a wealth of dwarf-lore in the fairytales and folklore. He knew his mother was interested in stories and tales, but he didn't really know what his father was interested in. He'd never really asked him.

"Dad," Barney asked his father one night, "What do you like to do best?"

His father was a rather quiet man, given to long pauses and short answers. He took his time considering his answer, "I like to watch football and read."

"What do you like to read?"

"Just about anything."

"Do you like your job?"

"Pretty much."

"What do you do at work?"

Mr. Knott let out a long sigh and settled himself more comfortably in the recess of his overstuffed chair. "I am a monitor at the power plant. I make sure the temperature in the nuclear stacks doesn't go above dangerous levels."

Barney had been reading about power plants in his science class. Mrs. Crossen felt it was important since the main industry of Mill Town was the nuclear power plant. She impressed the children on the possible dangers of the plant if things went wrong. They had all heard of Three Mile Island and Chernobyl.

"Dad, could I come see where you work sometime? Could you show me what you do?"

"I could arrange it, if you're really interested." His father seemed pleased.

"Yes, I am! I am supposed to do a project for science. I could do a report on what you do at the plant!"

"All right. I'll take you this Saturday." his Dad promised.

It was a cold, frosty winter Saturday. Barney and his father drove through Mill Town, which had put up its shabby, ancient festive decorations in preparation for Christmas. Wreathes were hung on telephone poles, the town Christmas tree had been erected in the town square and ceremonially lit with colored lights. The stores broke out their winter supplies and products, and

trimmed the windows with holly berries and plastic Santa's and reindeer. Nature herself contributed the frosting on the glass windows and doors, and children drew silly faces in the frost with their fingers.

The power plant was a huge ugly concrete and metal complex at the other side of town, near the river. It looked out of sorts with the tired old town.

Barney's Dad showed the security guard his pass, and they were allowed to continue through the huge iron gate onto the grounds of the complex. It was an unpleasant place, cold and efficient. There was a large concrete building with huge smoking pylons on top, and several smaller buildings. There were no trees, no boxes of flowers, no splashes of color to catch Barney's eye or imagination. Barney felt sorry for his father having to work in this dismal atmosphere.

They entered the main building. To Barney untrained eye, it was a confusing jam of machinery - valves, dials, throttles, gauges, engines and containers. Metal stairways and platforms arced high over his head, and there was a constant clanging, whistling and throbbing of machinery.

"How is it going, Jack?" Barney's father asked one of the technicians, who was hurrying by with a clipboard in his hand.

"Mr. Knott! What are you doing here on your day off?" he looked Barney over, curiously.

"Jack, this is my son, Barney. He wanted to see where I worked, for a science project at school."

Jack shook Barney's hand and told him, "Your father's job is a very important here. Someone has to monitor the nuclear reactors at all times so that the temperature does not raise to dangerous levels and we don't have a nuclear incident."

Barney nodded. His father showed him the tiny cubicle where he spent most of his day, watching the gauges and dials. A bearded young man in white overalls was bent over a manual. He looked up when they entered and cast an inquiring glance at Barney.

Barney's father introduced them and asked how it was going today. "No problem." Raymond answered, glancing at the dials. Then, with a puzzled frown, he glanced back. "Number Two is a little high. Would you take a look at it Mr. Knott?"

Barney's dad studied the dial. "We'd better notify the supervisor, may need a little coolant, it's climbing too rapidly." Raymond got on the phone and called his supervisor. "Check Number Two, it's climbing rapidly." There was a nervous strain in Raymond's voice.

Suddenly, there was a piercing metallic ripping sound and a clang. Barney looked out the glass window of the office and saw steam emitting from a hole in a huge cylindrical pipe. Raymond and his father jerked their heads up.

"Oh, my God!" Raymond screamed, "The pipe ruptured!" A shrill whistle ripped the air apart and everyone was in motion, running. His father manned the gauge, reading off figures into the phone, his brow sweating profusely and there was panic in his voice.

"Get my son out of here," His father screamed at Raymond, "This whole plant may blow any moment!!"

Raymond grabbed Barney's hand and ran, they scrambled down the metal staircase. Because Barney was short, it was awkward for the tall Raymond to hold his hand, and in the panic, Raymond let go and ran.

Barney stopped. There was confusion all around him. People in white overalls and lab coats were running in every direction, people screaming, "We can't contain it, it's going to melt down!", people running for the exits. His father was nowhere to be seen.

Barney moved toward the huge containment cylinder with the ruptured pipe hanging above it. He was scared, but he had an idea. He knew he could turn rock from molten to solid and back again. What if he could do that with the nuclear material in the container? If he didn't try, there might be a nuclear incident that would contaminate the whole community. He thought of his father, risking his life in the control booth. He thought of his mother waiting for them at home and of his new friends in school.

He was small enough to crouch behind one of the gear boxes that surrounded the nuclear container. He placed his hands on the metal casing and concentrated.

"Liquid, turn solid." He chanted quietly over and over again. In his mind, he saw the wizard's confident smile, "You can do it!" Barney saw his ancestors, the smiths and warriors and kings. He felt a surge of power he had never felt before, his blood rang with it and his body shook with it. He felt the power rise

from the earth, from the hidden caves, from the rocks themselves and surge through him.

He concentrated harder, focusing that power into the container. He saw through the container in his mind's eye, the roiling nuclear soup began to thicken and harden. Time and space lost all meaning for Barney as he concentrated on solidifying that soup.

"Here he is, Mr. Knott!"

Jack had discovered him behind the gear box.. His father ran and pulled Barney's limp body out and held him. "GET A DOCTOR!!" he screamed.

Barney opened his eyes, "What happened?"

His father stared at him anxiously. "Are you all right? What on earth were you doing there?"

"I got lost." Barney said lamely.

"That was the most dangerous place you could have been! You might have been killed!"

"Mr. Knott, Mr. Knott!" one of the lab technicians ran to him, shaken, "According to the probes, the material in the container **IS SOLID ROCK** inside!!! What could have happened?? This is not possible!"

Barney's father looked at the man, stunned. He had no answers.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE STEWARD

The near incident of the power plant was the talk of the town for weeks afterwards. Federal investigators came in and interrogated everyone who had been there, including Barney, who had little to say about it. A doctor examined him for possible contamination, and found nothing.

Barney was the center of attention at school for a while. Everyone wanted to hear his account of the story. Barney told them what happened, but offered no explanations for the mysterious solidification of the container. It became *Milltown's Great Mystery*.

Soon after the incident, Barney had gone back to Mathonwy's Hall and found it empty, with no trace of the wizard. The masks were silent and the door was still. Barney returned day after day, but the wizard did not return.

One afternoon, he tried contacting Mathonwy through the crystal orb. Barney settled himself in the wizard's ancient oaken chair and stared deep into the ball, willing it to show him the whereabouts of the wizard.

The room seemed to darken, and the veils and cracks in the ball turned to swirling mists. Then the mists parted and Barney saw the woods he had played in all his life as it changed through the seasons of the year. He saw himself walking through that woods as before, playing in his private Underhill, being chased by Alvin and his friends, learning magic in the Wizard's cave. Then the veils lifted from Barney's eyes, and he could see the dryads that lived in the trees, the fairies that lived in the plants and flowers, the undines of the river. As

Barney looked deeper, his consciousness spread until it was everywhere at once and he could see each animal, plant, rock, tree, insect and fish in the wood, as if it were a universe unto itself, and he it's steward.

Then, he understood. He was the steward of the woods.

"Yes, Barney" The wizard stood before him. "With magic comes responsibility.

"Where have you been!" cried Barney jumping to his feet.

"We are gathering all over the world. There are other students like yourself, and other teachers like me. There is a great need for us in the world today. I have taught you well, as you proved at the power plant. But that was just one incident, in one small town."

The old wizard looked pointedly at Barney, "The Old Races are awakening everywhere. It is time to take our place in the world once more. The race of Man has learned much of power, but little of responsibility. But the races have mingled and the blood of the Old Ones runs now in all people. As you have learned, now you must teach. Mankind must take its place with us as stewards of the Earth."

The wizard looked around the cave, "For now, I must leave you, there are other places that call to me." he smiled at Barney, "But before I leave there is something I must do."

Mathonwy opened a cupboard and pulled out a large package wrapped in black silk. "Open it, Barney."

Barney opened it. Inside was a beautiful conical hat and a deep purple robe, speckled with moons and stars.

"I made these for you, Barney. For now you are the Wizard of Mathonwy's Hall."

Barney's eyes misted as he put on the robe and hat. He looked at himself in the ancient mirror against the wall and smiled to see how solemn and regal he looked. Barney turned to show Mathonwy, but the wizard was gone.

THE END

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