Forever Land

Trembling with anticipation, Laurel reached out a ghostly hand. "Wait," whispered Fred. "What if it isn't here?" "I don't know, but we've come this far Fred; we're not giving up now," she replied, though she was not as confident as she had been at the beginning. This time there was an uncertainty in her tone, as if she were trying to convince herself too.

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They had just spent the last twelve hours traipsing through dense woodland, battling against angry, twisted branches and trudging through leaves which lay breathless in deep, rotting heaps. Just as they entered the dank cave, Fred looked up one last time at the incredible moon. It was a heavy, yellow mass hanging low in the clear sky; so close and bright that it could have been mistaken for the setting sun. He wondered, at that moment, if it might be the last time he'd ever see the sky.

The cave was really a steep opening at the bottom of a giant tree trunk which led them below ground. Inside, it was a wretched, twisting maze which oozed an unrecognisable smell. Fred pulled his jumper up over his nose and followed close behind Laurel. Hanging above them was a multitude of interconnected threads and throngs, which seemed to be pulsing with life. Laurel and Fred, as terrified as they were, had one thing on their mind and they had to focus in order to reach their goal. They had to conjure every morsel of energy they could find to fight against their protesting muscles and weary minds.

The first door they passed had a symbol of fire etched deep into the wood. "No," Laurel said as she scrutinised the now ragged piece of paper in her numb hand. "We need one with a water symbol." They continued past the next two doors, displaying earth and wind signs respectively, and then they were there. Finally, they stood in front of a door with waves carved across its face.

"Go on then," Fred sighed, as if to say there's nothing left to lose. Cold and tiredness had wrapped themselves around him, curled their fingers across his aching ribs and crushed his hope. At the start of the journey, the prospect of entering the kingdom had filled him with joy. The stories he'd read, along with the images of a peaceful and beautiful community of creatures, still swirled in his imagination, but hour by hour an increasing amount of doubt and dread sneaked in. They had greedily eaten away at his dreams and left just a crumb. Now everything was hanging on this very moment. Knock. Knock. Knock...