



## II. THE SLEEPING GIANT DETOUR

Written by Katie L. Carroll and illustrated by Paul Meisel

“**T**h-the castle,” stuttered the usually sure-tongued Norm. “It’s gone!” Mr. Espizona and the students stared in shock at the empty ridgeline. Instead of the slate-colored fieldstone of Gillette Castle, there was blue sky.

Norm, who knew the outline of the castle by heart, thought the glaring autumn sky felt empty. The missing castle was like a gap tooth shining in the mouth of a jack o’ lantern.

Li-Ming and Thomas glanced sideways at each other, knowing what the other was thinking as only best friends could. *How does a whole castle disappear?*

Murmured whispers spread through the deck of the *Becky Thatcher*. A sudden crack of thunder silenced them. A lightning bolt flashed out of the river and streaked high up into the sky.

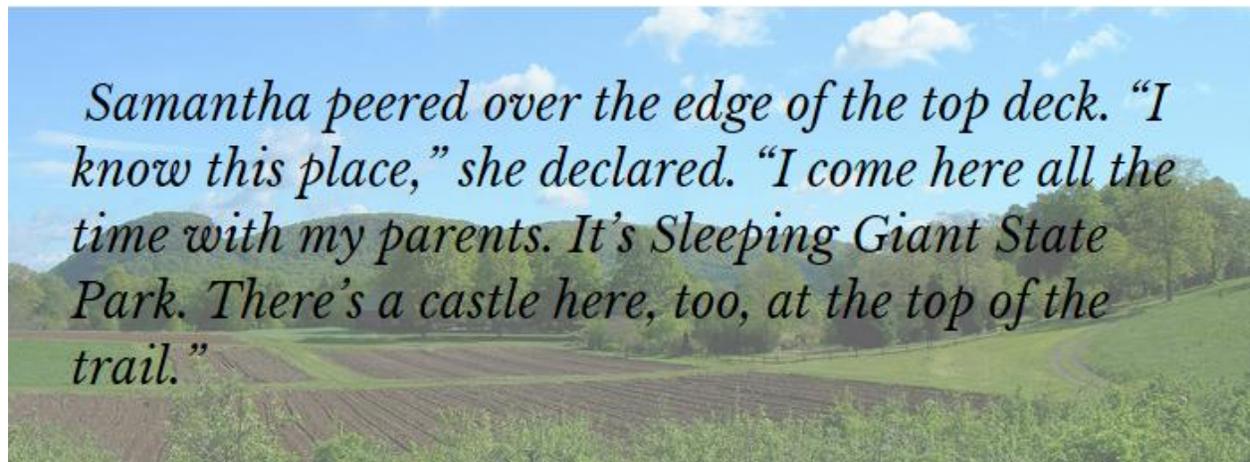
With a loud gurgling, a whirlpool the size of a circus tent opened up in the middle of the Connecticut River.

The front of the boat tipped and plunged in. Li-Ming clutched her notebook to her chest. Thomas grabbed her elbow, as much to keep himself upright as to steady her.

They circled deeper and deeper into the whirlpool until there was only swirling darkness. There was a loud pop and the boat lurched. A wash of sunlight blinded everyone aboard. The *Becky Thatcher* had landed on a wide hiking trail in the middle of a forest.

Once the shock wore off, it was established that everyone was okay, albeit a little wet.

Norm turned to Mr. Espinoza with a bewildered expression and asked, "Now what?"



"Another castle," said Thomas. "Let's go see it. Maybe there's a clue about Gillette Castle." He made his way to the stairs leading off the boat.

Mr. Espinoza waved his arms. "Wait, wait, wait." He surveyed the eager faces of his students and gave a resigned sigh. "Okay, but stay close and be quiet."

Li-Ming walked shoulder to shoulder with Thomas as they wound their way around the trail and up the Sleeping Giant. Finally they turned a bend and entered a clearing. In the middle, stood a castle.

"That's not right," Samantha said, just as Norm cried, "That's Gillette Castle!"

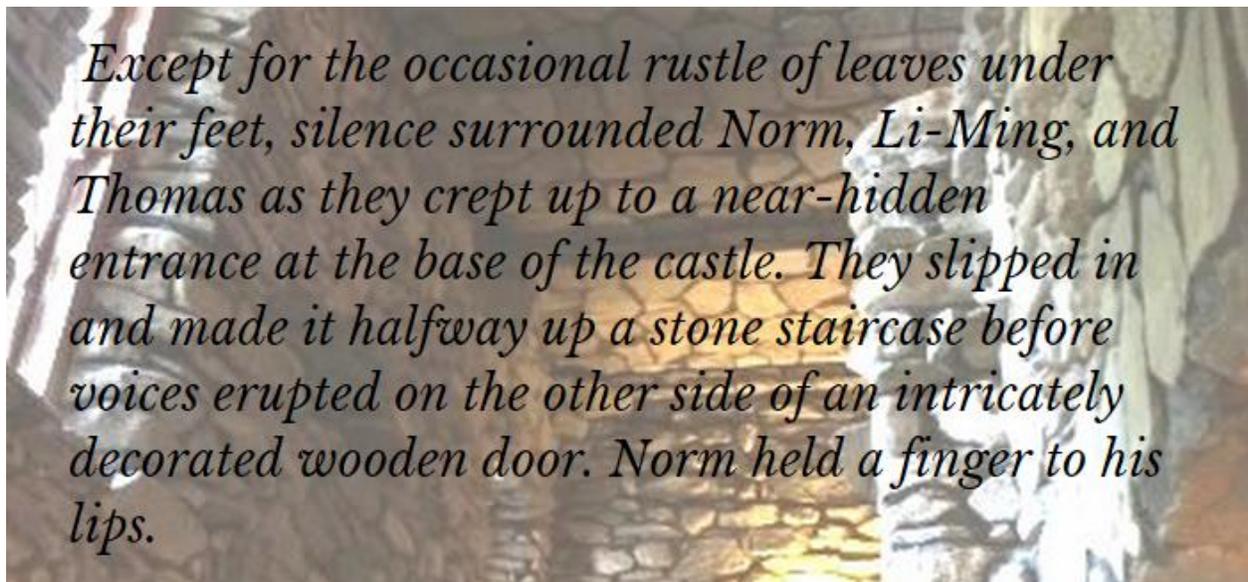
Norm stared in wonder at the familiar jagged stones that appeared to drip down the castle, like wax melting on a candle.

Mr. Espinoza instructed them to huddle in, and the two adults decided that Norm and two students would go in while the rest remained hidden among the trees.

“I’ll go,” Li-Ming squeaked out, surprising everyone, including herself. This was the kind of thing Thomas would volunteer them for, but Li-Ming’s eagerness to explore the castle outweighed her fear of speaking up.

“I’m in too,” said Thomas. Prepared to defend his right as an aspiring detective, he was surprised when no one else volunteered, not even Miss-know-it-all Samantha.

“Okay,” said Norm, a youthful glint in his eyes that contrasted with the crinkles surrounding them. “If we’re not back in thirty minutes, go for help.”



A man with an angry Scottish brogue said, “We’re in the wrong place, Iona. Lady Hallow won’t be pleased.”

“Aye, I know,” Iona said in a similar accent. “The magic is imprecise.... Don’t worry, Jasper. I’ll try again.”

She began to chant in an ancient language. The three eavesdroppers barely had time to ponder the strange, throaty words before a boom of thunder shook the castle.



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