

A mystery grows at Chimney Bluffs

by Jonathan Everitt

Illustration by Steve Smock



Perhaps this is where it all began, Annabel whispered to herself.

And so, on this damp April morning, just above the place where the waves meet the cliffs, she disappeared into the trail of a lakeside forest.

At least the woods and water would never break her heart. Here, with ancient trees rising up around her, Annabel wandered deeper as her nose awoke to moss and fern and dew drops. Their alien perfume replaced the dusty cedar of her borrowed fisherman's sweater. A welcome trade.

The tree canopy had no leaves yet. Early spring sunlight spilled onto the forest floor, coaxing to life sturdy, green raspberry canes that snagged her as she walked.

Just beyond a great-grandfather oak, a burst of solid color caught her eye.

Annabel froze, instinctively clutching the locket buried beneath cable-knit wool. Then she sprang to life, and with one leap over a corpse of fallen timber, left the safety of the woodland path. Never noticed as the sound of crashing water dimmed behind her—or the warped clang of a forgotten ship's bell echoed through the trees.

Now a fluid patch of brilliant yellow came into focus as Annabel reached a clearing in the woods. Halted at its edge. Softly gasped. A sea of daffodils sprawled before her, nodding and rising in plush waves like luminous paint. She knelt at the implausible outcropping. Touched one fleshy petal with her cold fingertip, incredulous and captivated.

Annabel thought of the bluffs just beyond the trees. The haunting rock formation had stood vigil over Lake Ontario for centuries, guarding its dark memories. But on this cold spring morning, the lake would whisper a secret to a sad girl lost in the woods. Because the old water recognized a faded portrait—the one in the tiny golden heart she wore around her neck.

The one she tossed into the golden clearing as she turned to find her way home.

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