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# The Nevergarden

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## Introduction

Beneath a sky where stars seemed to hover just out of reach, the little town of Hallowmere slumbered in gentle obscurity. Days passed in quiet procession, each echoing the last, and the world outside felt more like rumor than reality. On the edge of this world lived Lyra Telwyn—an ordinary girl, or so everyone thought. Her days spilled by in unremarkable rhythm: boots muddied by the riverbank, hands ink-stained from scribbled dreams, and eyes continually searching the horizon for something she had never seen.

Lyra had always felt the weight of stories in the air, as if the wind might whisper secrets only she could hear. In a place where nothing ever changed, she had inherited her grandmother's attic—a trove of forgotten treasures and dust-laden memories. On one restless afternoon, as rain pattered against the shingles, Lyra's life shifted. There, hidden amid stacks of old books and brass trinkets, she discovered a map so ancient its colors bled together, half-disappeared by time. Lines curled across parchment like vines, and in the center, just beneath the faded ink, glimmered two words: "Nevergarden Awaits."

That night, Lyra dreamed of crystalline rivers and trees ablaze with sapphire leaves, of laughter that rang with echoes of another world. When she awoke, her bones thrummed with anticipation and uncertainty. She could not shake the feeling that the map was no relic—it was an invitation. Outside, the petals of the old elm brushed against her window as if urging her forward, and every shadow seemed eager to share its secret.

The days that followed were filled with a peculiar magic. Lyra poured over the map, tracing its cryptic symbols under candlelight. She began to notice subtle changes: the shuffle of unseen feet in the hall, hushed voices curling around her in twilight, and a persistent tug at her heart whenever she considered the boundaries of her small existence. The world she had accepted as ordinary now bristled with possibility.

Yet for all her longing, the first step was the hardest. The Nevergarden—if it existed at all—was a promise of awe and danger, beauty and peril. With each passing hour, Lyra felt herself teetering on a ledge between the familiar and the unknown. She wondered whether she could measure up to the legends she had devoured as a child, whether she might find her own story within a hidden realm where time itself slumbered.

This is where Lyra's journey begins: not with grand proclamations or trumpeted fanfare, but with a single choice. To follow the map through the gates of the unimaginable. To risk everything for a taste of adventure. And to discover, in the heart

of the Nevergarden, both the magic of a forgotten world—and the truth within her own.

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## CHAPTER ONE: The Map in the Attic

The rain had been falling for three days, a relentless drumming against the windowpanes of Lyra Telwyn's small bedroom in Hallowmere. It was the kind of rain that seemed to wash the color from the world, leaving everything a muted charcoal and gray. For Lyra, it meant another afternoon confined indoors, another stretch of hours filled with the humdrum rhythms of a life she felt increasingly disconnected from. Her mother was downstairs, baking her weekly batch of oat biscuits, the scent of cinnamon and sugar wafting up the narrow staircase, a familiar anchor in the quiet monotony.

Lyra, however, sought a different kind of solace. Her grandmother's attic was a sanctuary, a dusty haven where time seemed to fold in on itself. It was a place where the ordinary rules of Hallowmere—the predictable schedules, the whispered gossip about Mrs. Gable's prize-winning petunias, the endless discussions about the quality of Mr. Henderson's latest crop of potatoes—simply didn't apply. Here, amidst forgotten furniture shrouded in white sheets, stacks of brittle newspapers, and trunks overflowing with forgotten garments, Lyra could breathe.

She pushed aside a moth-eaten tapestry depicting a rather disgruntled-looking lion and squeezed past a towering stack of leather-bound books that smelled faintly of vanilla and age. Sunlight, fractured and pale, pierced through the single grimy attic window, illuminating motes of dust dancing in the air like tiny, golden fairies. Lyra often imagined these dust motes were echoes of stories, fragments of conversations long past, swirling around her.

Her current mission, if it could be called that, was to reorganize a particularly unruly corner of the attic, a forgotten nook tucked behind an old spinning wheel. Her mother had mentioned something about needing space for "winter provisions," a phrase that always sounded far more ominous than it actually was. Lyra approached the task with her usual blend of dutifulness and a secret hope for discovery. Every item in the attic held a whisper of a past, and Lyra was a diligent listener.

She began by carefully lifting a worn wooden chest, its brass clasps tarnished green with age. Inside, nestled amongst stiff lace collars and faded silk gloves, was a collection of sepia photographs. Lyra picked one up, a portrait of a stern-faced woman with eyes that seemed to pierce through the lens. Her grandmother, she surmised, in her younger days. The woman's gaze held a hint of something unreadable, a flicker of an untold tale. Lyra smiled, a familiar warmth spreading through her.

Beneath the photographs, wrapped in a brittle piece of linen, lay a flat, rectangular

object. Lyra's fingers trembled slightly as she unwrapped it. It was a map, or what looked like one. Not the kind of map you'd find in a geography textbook, meticulously detailing rivers and mountain ranges with neat, colored lines. This map was different.

It was made of parchment, so old and delicate that she feared it might crumble at her touch. Its edges were ragged, as if gnawed by time itself, and its surface was crisscrossed with fine, almost invisible cracks. The colors, once vibrant, had faded to soft, ethereal washes of ochre, deep greens, and a surprising, shimmering azure that hinted at a forgotten brilliance. Lyra carefully spread it open on the dusty floorboards, the scent of ancient paper and something else—something wild and earthy, like moss and distant rain—filling her senses.

At first glance, it appeared to be a chaotic jumble of lines and symbols. There were no familiar landmarks, no names of towns or oceans she recognized. Instead, swirling patterns like intricate Celtic knots snaked across the parchment. Tiny, stylized trees with improbable, blossoming canopies formed dense forests. Rivers, depicted with glittering silver ink that still caught the faint light, wound through impossible landscapes. Mountains, sketched with a delicate hand, rose in sharp, crystalline peaks.

As Lyra leaned closer, her breath held, she began to discern more. There were faint inscriptions, written in a script she didn't recognize, yet somehow felt familiar, like a half-remembered melody. One particularly prominent symbol, etched in what looked like powdered starlight, depicted an opening, almost a gate, flanked by two towering, gnarled trees. The gate seemed to pulse with a faint, internal light, even on the faded parchment.

Her gaze drifted to the very center of the map, where the colors converged in a swirling vortex of deep blues and greens. There, in a flowing, elegant script that defied the ravages of time, glimmered two words, picked out in an ink that held a surprising luster, as if infused with moonlight: "Nevergarden Awaits."

Lyra traced the words with a fingertip, a shiver running down her spine. Nevergarden. The name resonated in her mind, echoing with forgotten dreams and untold adventures. It sounded like something from the stories her grandmother used to tell her by the fire, tales of hidden worlds and magical beings, stories that always ended with Lyra drifting off to sleep with a sense of wonder. But this wasn't a storybook illustration; this was a map. A tangible, undeniable invitation.

She spent the next hour absorbed, completely lost in the intricate details of the parchment. Each time she thought she'd seen everything, a new symbol would reveal itself, a tiny star, a miniature crescent moon, a delicate flower with petals that seemed to unfurl before her eyes. The map was alive, a breathing thing, not just a static drawing. It felt as if she held a piece of another world in her hands.

A faint grumble from her stomach reminded her of the world outside the attic, the world where oat biscuits and the incessant rain still existed. But Hallowmere suddenly felt distant, almost unreal. The map had opened a door in her mind, a glimpse into a place far grander and more mysterious than anything she had ever encountered.

She carefully folded the map, feeling the delicate crackle of the ancient paper. It seemed to protest slightly, as if eager to remain unfurled and reveal its secrets. Lyra tucked it into her pocket, the parchment warm against her thigh, a secret weight that thrilled and terrified her in equal measure. She knew, with an undeniable certainty, that this discovery was no ordinary coincidence.

Descending the creaky attic stairs, Lyra felt a transformation. The familiar scent of cinnamon and sugar now seemed to blend with the wild, earthy aroma of the map. The quiet hum of the house, once a sound of comforting routine, now felt charged with anticipation. The rain, still falling, seemed to whisper encouragement rather than confinement.

That evening, as she lay in bed, the map tucked safely under her pillow, Lyra's mind raced. Sleep felt impossible. Every shadow in her room seemed to deepen, every rustle of the old elm outside her window sounded like a beckoning call. The words "Nevergarden Awaits" replayed in her thoughts, a mantra of possibility.

She imagined journeys through luminous forests, encounters with creatures beyond her wildest dreams, and the feeling of air in her lungs that tasted of pure magic. A spark, long dormant, ignited within her, a hunger for adventure that Hallowmere, with all its predictable charm, could never satisfy. The map wasn't just a drawing; it was a key, a promise, a challenge. And Lyra Telwyn, for the first time in her life, felt truly ready to unlock whatever lay beyond. The mundane life she knew was about to be irrevocably altered, and she felt a thrilling, terrifying surge of readiness.

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