

The
Pínzgau Díaríes
(Chapter 1)

The key turned with a reluctant creak in the lock of the old alpine house. Resi paused, her hand trembling on the worn brass knob of the door. The scent of pinewood and memories filled the air, and for a moment, she could almost hear her grandfather Josef's booming laughter from inside.

But Josef was no longer there. The thought brought a fresh wave of grief over 16-year-old Resi. As she entered the quiet house, dust motes danced in the slanted afternoon sun, settling on familiar furniture and faded photos. Every corner held a cherished memory: the old armchair where her grandpa told his fantastic stories, the kitchen where they drank hot chocolate after long hikes, the creaky stairs leading to the attic...

Resi wiped a tear from her cheek and reminded herself why she was here. "Just go through his things," her mother had said. "See if there's anything you want to keep as a souvenir before we... before we have to sell the house." The words got stuck in her throat, and Resi had nodded, also unable to speak. With a heavy heart, she climbed the narrow stairs to the attic. The room was crammed with adventures from a lifetime: dusty hiking boots, old maps, and curious trinkets from Josef's travels. Resi's fingers traced over each item, memories flickering like old film reels in her mind. Resi had explored her grandfather's treasures so many times that she immediately noticed something different this time. In the corner, partially hidden by a faded curtain, stood an intricately carved wooden chest. Resi hesitated for a moment, as she didn't recognize this one from her childhood. But curiosity won out, and she pulled the curtain aside and knelt before it. With her fingers, she slid the battered latch open.

The chest creaked open, revealing leather-bound diaries. Resi gasped in surprise. As she lifted the top book and opened it, a folded note fluttered to the floor, bearing her name in her grandfather's familiar handwriting. The piece of paper looked new compared to the age-yellowed pages of the diary. With trembling hands, Resi unfolded the paper and began to read:

My Dearest Resi,

If you are reading this, then I am no longer there to be with you in person. But don't be sad, my little darling. Our adventures are far from over!

Do you remember all the stories I told you? About the alchemist of Kaprun who could turn waterfalls into liquid gold? The mysterious creatures that dwell in the depths of Lake Zell? The hidden caves where ghosts guard ancient treasures? Those weren't just bedtime stories, Resi. They were real adventures, and more secrets await the right person. And that person is you.

In these diaries, I have recorded every mystery and puzzle I uncovered in our beloved Pinzgau. You will see that some of my missions unfortunately remained unfinished. Many I was able to uncover myself, some I only scratched the surface of, and others I failed just before reaching the goal. All the hidden treasures and artifacts are well concealed and protected so that only a true adventurer can find them. I tried to keep this world away from you for as long as possible to protect you. I wrapped the truth in bedtime stories and fairy tales, but one thing was always clear to me: You have the heart of an explorer, Resi. It's in your blood. You are ready. The time has come for you to continue the stories and follow in my footsteps. Will you accept this challenge? Will you become the guardian of Pinzgau's secrets?

In each diary, a different adventure awaits you. Trust your instincts, use your mind, and remember that the greatest treasures often lie hidden.

I am with you every step of this journey, my love. Make me proud.

All my love, Grandpa Josef

Tears dripped onto the paper, but this time they were accompanied by a widening grin. Resi clutched the diary to her chest, her grandfather's words igniting a familiar spark in her heart.

Memories flooded her, vivid and bittersweet. She remembered the first time Josef had taken her hiking in the Pinzgau Alps. She was barely seven years old, her legs short and wobbly on the uneven terrain. But Josef had been patient, pointing out every wonder along the way.

"Look, Resi," he said, crouching beside her and pointing to a tuft of delicate white flowers. "Edelweiss. Do you know why they are so special?" Resi had shaken her head, fascinated by the star-shaped blossoms. "They only grow in the high mountains," Josef explained, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper. "Some say they are magical. That they can grant wishes to those who are pure of heart."

From that moment on, every hike became a treasure hunt. Josef told them stories of mountain spirits and hidden kingdoms, transforming the already beautiful landscape into a realm of endless possibilities. Resi's favorite story was always the one about the mysterious Lake Zell.

"They say there's an entire city down there," Josef had told her one evening as they sat by the shore, skipping stones across the glassy surface. "An ancient civilization that retreated underwater when people began to settle the valley. On quiet nights, if you listen very carefully, you can hear the bells of their sunken cathedral."

Resi smiled at the memory. She had spent countless summer evenings pressing her ear to the dock, hoping to hear those mythical bells. Of course, she never did, but the magic of the possibility never faded. As she grew older, Resi began to assume that Josef's stories were just that - stories. Enchanting tales to make their adventures more exciting, though she always held a spark of hope that they were true. Now, holding this diary and the letter in her hand, a shiver of excitement ran through her. Her childhood tales could be true... just as she had always hoped.

Resi's eyes drifted back to the box, looking at the stack of diaries with newfound appreciation. Each one, she realized, must contain a piece of the puzzle that Josef had spent his life assembling. The secrets of Pinzgau, waiting to be uncovered. She thought of the times she had seen her grandfather poring over old books and maps, making notes in the margins and muttering to himself. She had assumed it was just a hobby, a pastime for the off-season and retirement. All the visits from strange people, where she was never allowed to be present. Sometimes she had tried to listen in, but the snippets of conversation she caught never made sense to her. But now she understood: Josef had been on a mission. And now, it seemed, it was her task to continue that mission.

Resi stood up and brushed the dust off her jeans as she surveyed the attic once more. Every item now held potential significance. The old compass on the shelf - was it just a keepsake, or did it point to a hidden location? The faded photos on the wall - did they contain clues she hadn't noticed before? As she took it all in, Resi felt a twinge of fear and nervousness. What would she find? What lay ahead? But her drive and sense of adventure were stronger than any fear.

Curiously, she leafed through the diary from which the letter had fallen. The pages were filled with Josef's neat handwriting, interspersed with sketches and diagrams. One page showed a detailed map that looked like an underground cave system. Another page contained a list of strange symbols that Resi didn't recognize. As she flipped through the diary, another small, folded piece of paper slipped out. Resi caught it before it could fall to the floor and carefully unfolded it. It was a newspaper clipping, yellowed with age. The headline read: "Local Man Finds Ancient Artifact at Krimml Waterfalls." Resi's eyes widened as she skimmed the article. It described how a hiker - whose name was not mentioned - had discovered a seemingly ancient amulet during his explorations behind these famous waterfalls. The article went on to say that experts were baffled by the find and could not determine its age or origin. Josef had scribbled a single word in the margin of the clipping: "Breakthrough?" Resi's mind raced.

The Krimml Waterfalls were one of the most popular tourist attractions in Pinzgau. She had visited them countless times with her family, marveling at the roaring cascades. But

she had never thought they could hide ancient secrets. She turned back to the letter, searching for the promised first clue. At the bottom of the page was a small riddle:

“Where water quietly turns to mist,
And rainbows dance in colorful bliss,
Behind the veil, secret and hidden,
Three steps left, two steps right - unbidden,
What long was hidden, now brightly revealed,
The secret of the depths, to light unsealed.”

Resi felt a smile spread across her face. The waterfalls. That had to be it. But what exactly was she supposed to find there?

She glanced out the attic window. The sun was already beginning to set behind the mountains, painting the sky in vibrant shades of orange and pink. It was too late to start her adventure today, but tomorrow...

Resi carefully packed the diaries back into the chest, along with a few other items that caught her eye - an old compass, a magnifying glass, and a small notebook filled with what looked like encrypted messages. She would take the chest home tonight and start planning her expedition in the morning.

As Resi descended the stairs, she felt a change within herself. The grief that had weighed on her shoulders when she entered the house was still present, but now it was infused with a sense of purpose. Although Josef was no longer there, the diaries and the adventures he had planned for her offered a way to stay close to him in a whole new way. Resi paused at the front door and took one last look at the house that held so many memories. “I will make you proud, Grandpa,” she whispered. “I promise.” As she stepped outside and closed the door behind her, Resi felt like she was closing one chapter of her life and opening a new one. The Pinzgau she thought she knew was about to reveal its hidden wonders, and she couldn’t wait to discover them all.

The walk home was a whirlwind of excitement and anticipation. Resi’s thoughts raced ahead, imagining what other secrets awaited discovery. The alchemist of Kaprun, the creatures of Lake Zell, the wolf song of Saalbach—how many of these legends held an adventure for her?