

The Last Map of Elara Voss

The cave entrance was barely visible beneath a curtain of damp moss and twisted roots. Sixteen-year-old Elara Voss pushed them aside with a trembling hand, her lantern casting wild, jumping shadows across the stone walls. She had spent three years deciphering her late grandfather's journal — a battered, water-damaged notebook filled with cryptic sketches and coded observations — and every clue had led her to this remote gorge in the Halvenmoor mountains. The journey had taken four days on foot, crossing two swollen rivers and a ridge so narrow that one misplaced step would have meant a plunge into the grey valley below.

Elara was not the type to surrender to fear. At school, her peers considered her peculiar — always buried in maps or debating the reliability of historical documents. Teachers admired her persistence but frequently warned her that obsession without discipline could lead a person astray. But out here, in the dense wilderness, her meticulous attention to detail felt less like a flaw and more like armour. She could identify animal tracks, read cloud formations for incoming storms, and navigate by starlight when necessary. Tonight, however, the sky was smothered by thick cloud and rain hammered the valley floor below. She was on her own.

Inside the cave, the air was stale and mineral-sharp, like old coins left in a tin. Elara moved cautiously, one hand trailing the rough wall. Her grandfather, Professor Aldric Voss, had been a renowned cartographer — a maker of maps — who vanished on an expedition twelve years ago when Elara was just four. Most assumed he had perished in a rockslide. Elara had never accepted that conclusion. The journal, she believed, was his final message — a trail of breadcrumbs left deliberately for someone with the patience and intelligence to follow them.

The cave narrowed for a time, forcing Elara to press sideways through a gap barely wider than her shoulders. On the other side, the passage broadened into a low, domed chamber. The walls had been smoothed — deliberately, by human hands — and covered in faint engravings. Animal figures, geometric patterns, and then, twenty metres in, something extraordinary: an intricate map carved into the stone. Every line was precise and deliberate, depicting valleys, rivers, and a structure labelled in a script Elara recognised immediately. It was her grandfather's private cipher — the same one he used to conceal sensitive discoveries. Her heart hammered against her ribs. This was not a dead end. This was a beginning.

She pressed her palm flat against the carved stone, as though touching it might somehow close the twelve-year distance between them. A strange calmness replaced the frantic energy she had felt since entering the cave. This was what her grandfather had always taught her: that the greatest discoveries are not stumbled upon by accident, but pursued with patience, rigour, and an unshakeable belief that the truth — however deeply buried — is always worth finding.

Elara pulled out her own notebook and began to copy every detail of the map with urgent, careful strokes. Whatever her grandfather had found here, she was determined to follow it to the end — even if that end was still buried somewhere in the dark, waiting for her, just as it had been waiting for twelve years.

1. What had Elara spent three years doing before reaching the cave?

- A) Studying cartography at a specialist university
- B) Interpreting her grandfather's encrypted writings and illustrations
- C) Training as a wilderness survival instructor
- D) Searching for the gorge using government-issued maps
- E) Writing letters to other explorers about her grandfather

2. What physical challenges did Elara face during the four-day journey to the cave?

- A) A collapsed bridge and a flooded underground tunnel
- B) Two flooded rivers and a dangerously narrow mountain ridge
- C) A forest fire and a steep cliff requiring ropes
- D) A landslide blocking the gorge and a raging waterfall
- E) An icy plateau and a series of unstable rope bridges

3. How did Elara's teachers respond to her habits and personality?

- A) They were impressed by her outdoor and athletic abilities
- B) They found her disruptive and difficult to manage
- C) They respected her determination but warned her about obsession without discipline
- D) They considered her a perfect student with no flaws
- E) They worried she had no practical skills at all

4. What does the word 'cartographer' mean as used in the passage?

- A) A historian who catalogues ancient civilisations
- B) A geologist who studies rock formations
- C) A scholar who decodes forgotten languages
- D) A person who professionally creates and draws maps
- E) An explorer who surveys new territories for governments

5. What was the most widely accepted explanation for Professor Aldric Voss's disappearance?

- A) He deliberately went into hiding to escape his work
- B) He was believed to have died in a rockslide
- C) He emigrated abroad under a different identity
- D) He was captured by a rival group of explorers
- E) He fell into an underground river while mapping caves

6) Why did Elara never accept that her grandfather died in a rockslide?

- A) Her determination meant she could never accept what she had not proven herself
- B) The journal gave her a reason to keep searching rather than grieve
- C) The journal's deliberate clues
- D) Grief made it emotionally impossible to accept he was gone
- E) She rarely accepted any explanation without questioning it first

7. What did Elara believe was the true purpose of her grandfather's journal?

- A) A private diary of his emotions during the expedition
- B) An official report intended for a geographical society
- C) A deliberate trail of clues left for a patient, intelligent person to follow
- D) A warning to future explorers about dangers in the cave
- E) Her grandfather left the journal wanting her to follow it.

8. What made the inner chamber different from the entrance tunnel?

- A) The chamber was far colder and had no light source
- B) The walls had been deliberately smoothed and covered in engravings by human hands
- C) The chamber contained a deep pool of underground water
- D) The entrance tunnel had carvings while the chamber walls were bare
- E) The chamber was significantly narrower and harder to pass through

9. Which of the following statements is NOT TRUE according to the passage?

- A) Elara was capable of navigating using stars on a clear night
- B) The air inside the cave smelled fresh and earthy like soil after rain
- C) Professor Voss disappeared when Elara was approximately four years old
- D) The inner chamber walls had been worked and engraved by human hands
- E) Elara used a lantern to light her way through the cave

10. 'Her heart hammered against her ribs.' What literary device is used here and what does it convey?

- A) Simile
- B) Personification
- C) Metaphor
- D) Alliteration
- E) Hyperbole

11. 'Her meticulous attention to detail felt less like a flaw and more like armour.' What does this figure of speech reveal?

- A) She had started wearing protective gear during all her expeditions
- B) A trait others viewed as weakness had become her greatest protection and strength
- C) She was so precise that rivals were too afraid to challenge her
- D) She had built emotional walls to prevent herself from forming friendships
- E) She imagined herself as a medieval knight on a dangerous quest

12. Elara felt a 'strange calmness' after pressing her palm to the carved stone. What does this reaction most likely reveal?

- A) She had finally accepted that her grandfather was dead and felt relieved
- B) She realised the cave was not as dangerous as she had feared
- C) Physical contact with the stone triggered a memory that distracted her from her task
- D) Finding tangible proof of her grandfather's work gave her a sense of purpose and emotional connection
- E) She was simply exhausted after the long journey and her body was shutting down

13. 'Renowned cartographer' — which word is the closest synonym to 'renowned' as used in the passage?

- A) Disgraced and publicly shamed
- B) Obscure and largely unknown
- C) Controversial and widely disputed
- D) Celebrated and widely respected
- E) Retired and long forgotten

14. '...an unshakeable belief that the truth — however deeply buried — is always worth finding.' What type of word is 'unshakeable' as used in this sentence?

- A) A verb
- B) An adverb
- C) A noun
- D) An adjective
- E) A conjunction

Answers

1. B
2. B
3. C
4. D
5. B
6. C
7. C
8. B
9. B
10. C
11. B
12. D
13. D
14. D