

# *Whispers in the Wind*



Anastasia Pelletier





# *Whispers in the Wind*

*Anastasia Pelletier*

© 2021, Anastasia Pelletier  
First Edition  
First Printing

## Table of Contents

Prologue.....	7
1. THE TREASURE.....	8
2. FRIEND OR FOE?.....	11
3. A BEND IN THE ROAD.....	15
4. EXPLOSIONS.....	20
5. THE CLEAR CAVE.....	25
6. TOZIE.....	33
7. CASTER.....	39
8. SECRETS.....	44
9. DREAMS.....	50
10. LOST.....	54
11. THE BATTLE BEGINS.....	59

<b>12. THE TREE TRANSPORT .....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>13. WHAT WILL YOU WISH FOR? .....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>14. A MAN IN THE WATER .....</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>15. EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF .....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>16. FIGHTING FOR THEM .....</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....</b>	<b>116</b>

## Whispers in the Wind

### *Prologue*

Once upon a time, in a far-off village called Niste, a magic ring lay in straw, rock, leaves, sand, and seed. Everything about Niste was magical. Its houses, its trees, its mushrooms, its forests and glades, and most of all its citizens. Elves, fairies, and tree people lived in Niste. For hundreds of years, Niste village grew and grew until it had towering cities full of trees and mushrooms. Only on the first of August, things changed. Tall evil monsters, humans and aliens attacked Niste. Trees were sent tumbling down, crashing and killing everyone in their path. Mushrooms swayed as the elves sprinted into their little palaces hidden underground.

The wind whirled past the fairies. Their wings wouldn't lift up their weight. The wind was too powerful for the little winged spirits. The fairies ducked as the mushroom king, King Chara's glorious mushroom tree mansion fell. The fairies watched as his majesty's palace dropped with a thud, echoing throughout Niste. The fairies all blinked and gasped. King Chara lay flat on the ground, dead.

## CHAPTER 1

### *THE TREASURE*

Ellie Padness woke up panting. Her clothes were sweaty and drenched. Ellie thought about her dream. Mushroom people dancing then suddenly dug deep underground. Fairies flying like nothing she had seen before and then not being able to fly when their world was attacked, it just seemed too crazy to believe. Ellie lived on earth and knew nothing about any fairies or elves or anything. She only knew humans who lived on earth, and even sometimes, humans made no sense. Ellie climbed out of bed, rubbed her eyes, and got dressed. The day was foggy and dreary. It was a cold August 1st for Hudson, Florida. Ellie brushed her teeth then went to her bookshelf to find answers. Books about World War II, the COVID-19 pandemic, the flu, Africa, space, but nothing about different worlds and kings. Nothing about fairies or a mushroom tree world though. Ellie sighed.

“Ugh.” She grunted and searched again. Ellie Padness’s fingers sped through pages like a race car on a track. Nothing

## Whispers in the Wind

seemed to give evidence of fairies or tree kings. At the end of her shelf lay five brown books. Ellie touched the second brown book labeled: *Mysterious Creatures: The Treasure*. Ellie's eyes lit up. She carefully placed *The Treasure* on her desk. Ellie flipped the pages. Fairies, magic trees, and elves. On the last page, a picture of a gold magic ring lay in straw, rock, leaves, sand, and seed. Underneath the picture was a caption:

*This is the King's magic ring. It is buried in Niste, a village near Elfville and Georgia in the United States of America. If you wish to seek on this quest to find the treasure, you must be no younger than 11 years in age and must be ready to fight the most dangerous animals and monsters. But beware, armies of aliens, dragons, and monsters will cross your path. Remember, the fairies and elves depend on you. Therefore you must carry on no matter what.*

C.S.N

Ellie smiled. "I'm 11, and I'm brave," she told herself. She ripped the golden ring page out of "The Treasure". Ellie

## Anastasia Pelletier

grabbed a bag, some water, a bow and arrow, some food, and paper and a pencil. Ellie wrote her mom a quick note trying to explain that she was about to go on a quest trying to save a world and trying to bring back fairies and stop monsters. Her note was scribbled very fast on a Post It and stuck on the fridge. Ellie grabbed a muffin from the kitchen and closed the door on her blue house. Ellie Padness walked away from the place she had called home for 11 years. The place she probably would never see again. Ellie Padness walked farther and farther. Each step Ellie took just reminded her that she had to keep walking a gazillion more steps in order to finish the quest alive.

## CHAPTER 2

### ***FRIEND OR FOE?***

Ellie entered the dark woods. Moss hung on trees as Ellie pushed farther and farther into the forest jungle. A rustle came from a bush up ahead. Whispering started then stopped. A bear, the size of a monster truck, pushed its way through the brush. Ellie gasped and hid behind a tree. The size of the bear wasn't scaring her. It was the deep growl. The giant bear sniffed the air as if he smelled prey somewhere in the jungle. Ellie hoped the bear wasn't searching and smelling for her. The bear smelled the moss, then some mushrooms, and then the plants. Soon, the bear decided he wasn't interested in the forest and walked away, sniffing the moss and vines hanging on each branch.

Ellie peered over the bark of the tree. She slid out and found a girl and a boy about the same age and height as her. They both had blond hair and blue eyes. They both somehow twinkled in the sun like a diamond. The girl had glasses and wore a black torn leather jacket and red boots. The boy had green braces on. Ellie stared at the two kids. Somehow, they seemed familiar, but she didn't know how she knew them. Ellie nodded and looked down.

"Hi," she said, waving her hand awkwardly at them. Both kids stared at Ellie. "I'm Ellie. Ellie Padness." Ellie

Anastasia Pelletier

waved again, this time looking straight at the two kids. The girl of the two kids smiled.

“I’m Alex. Alex Ustrutal. This is Ash.” She pointed to the boy on her left. Ash waved and smiled. Ellie looked at Ash and Alex.

“Where are you from?” she asked. Alex nodded to Ash.

“We are from Savannah, Georgia. We went to the sea once, and then our parents got swept away in a hurricane. Our house was destroyed, so we had no home. We have been living in the woods, on the beach, and in Florida for almost a year now.” He pointed to the woods and trees. “Now we just live on our own. You know, we’re twins so it’s easy.” Alex nodded in agreement.

“I’m from Hudson, Florida. I’m on a quest. To find treasure and save a world,” Ellie told Ash and Alex. Ellie didn’t know if these people were the right folks to tell about this secret magic world, but she thought that it is nice to be friendly even though they might not believe it. Ash gasped. Alex laughed.

“No way! We literally are doing that exact same thing! You know, With the magic ring?” Ash asked, leaping in the air. Alex laughed.

## Whispers in the Wind

“Yeah, duh. I mean, what other quest would she be on?” then she turned to Ellie. “You are on the elves, fairies, and magic ring quest, right?” Ellie raised her eyebrows.

“Yeah. I am.” Both girls smiled. Ellie didn’t know if she should trust these runaways or if she should continue the quest alone. It would be nice, she thought, to have more people come along. After all, they were all looking for the gold ring, and they all wanted to save the world. But Ellie couldn’t decide whether they were now her friends who she could trust or foes who she should leave behind and carry on. Ellie made up her mind.

“Since we’re both doing the same thing, how would you guys like to join me on my quest? We could do it together, the whole thing, split everything into three. We could be a team.” Alex nodded. Ash jumped up and down, picking berries from the bushes.

“Sorry, Ash is super energetic right now. We would love to join you on the quest.” Alex pointed to her brother, bouncing up and down. Ellie smiled.

“So, it’s a thing? Do we do this together? The paper says we must carry on no matter what. Are you ready to brave the monsters and dang—”

“Dangerous animals? Yeah, we’ve read the paper about a million times.” Alex said, ripping leaves. Ash grinned.

Anastasia Pelletier

“OK then, ready? Let’s start this adventure.” Ellie sighed.

“Ok, here goes nothing.” Alex thought to herself as her new friend and her brother walked through the forest. “At least we have more people for our crazy escapade.”

## CHAPTER 3

### *A BEND IN THE ROAD*

Ellie, Ash, and Alex walked through more woods, leaves falling from trees and crunching as they walked on through the forest. “Maybe we should stop here to rest for tonight. I can fish for some food, and Ash can help us make cattail tea.” Alex said, pointing to a bunch of sticks, a clearing, and a pond.

Alex walked over to the sticks and started rubbing two sticks together. Then she got some leaves and Spanish moss and threw it into the sticks. Soon, the sticks, leaves, and Spanish moss began to burn, leaving ashes in their place. A fire started to crackle and brighten as the sun slowly slipped behind the trees, leaving the fire the only source of light. Ellie watched as Alex carefully turned the logs around and blew on the fire.

“What is cattail tea?” Ellie asked as she settled down on the dirt. Alex smiled.

“It’s a kind of tea my brother and I made up. We use cattail plants and crush up berries with warm water.” Alex explained as she lay down, looking at the stars.

“Why did you make another kind of tea?” Ellie asked, warming her hands in the fire.

Anastasia Pelletier

“We got kind of bored while we were alone, so we got creative,” Alex answered, simply shrugging as she continued to look at the stars.

“These stars are beautiful,” Alex commented. Ellie hadn’t seen the stars at all until Alex had pointed them out. There weren’t many but still enough to amaze you at first glance. Ellie lay down next to Alex and sighed. She looked at the beautiful twinkling wonders in the sky. Their outer beauty was one to remember, Ellie decided.

“So, where should we sleep?” Ellie asked curiously. Alex shrugged.

“Anywhere, I guess.” She waved her hand around then leaned against a tree.

“We could sleep here, against the earth or near a tree.” Ash joined in, magically popping into the conversation like a genie in a bottle. He slid from a bush with a wide grin on his face. “I just found something unexpected,” he said proudly showing off an old worn out map covered in dirt. Alex’s eyes widened.

“OH JOYS OF A CLOCK!” Alex yelled as she clapped her hands in delight.

“Does this mean we’re close?” Ellie asked as a confused look started forming on her face.

## Whispers in the Wind

“No,” Alex answered, the excitement extinguishing out of her eyes like a candle being blown out. “But it does mean we are getting there. I think this is a clue! HOLY BANANAS! I think we're getting somewhere!” Alex high-fived her brother and hugged Ellie.

“We should probably get some sleep,” Ellie said as she pushed Alex away. All three agreed and fell fast asleep. The next morning, Ash yelped like a rooster just to be annoying to the girls. Alex pushed Ash away from her face. “Ooh, gross. Your breath stinks,” she said, rubbing her eyes. “Do we have to go NOW?” Ellie yawned.

“Yes, sleepy heads. Let's get moving. We have a long day ahead of us.” Ash said matter-of-factly. Alex grunted and jumped up.

“Ok. Fine.” Alex picked up her bag as Ellie did the same. The three friends walked slowly, still half asleep, until there was a splitting path. One side of the woods went left while the other path went right.

Ellie stared at Alex and Ash for help. “Why are you looking at us? We don't know which way we should go.” Ash said, crossing his arms.

“Yeah. You decide, Ellie. I personally think we should go right just because that's how we get around. Right is just lucky.” Alex said, looking at the left with a look of disgust.

Anastasia Pelletier

Ellie nodded. “Yeah, but what if we went left?” she asked the twins.

Alex snorted. “Oh, I don’t think we want to go left. You just said, ‘What if.’ Do you see? We need to go right because you just aren’t sure. You need to be sure about what you’re doing during this quest and ‘what if’ means doubt.” Alex said, now glaring at the left path. Ash nodded, agreeing with his sister. Ellie rolled her eyes at the twins.

“Ok. I guess I’m doubting myself, but I think we should go left.” Ellie said. Alex rolled her eyes back at her.

“No! Are you certain? Are you sure you want to do this? I mean, Going on the left path could be risky...” her voice trailed off.

“GUYS!” Ash yelled as he stepped in front of the two girls. Both girls stopped talking and looked at Ash. “It doesn’t matter what path we go on. We are wasting our precious time! Just standing here arguing won’t help A BIT!” Ash yelled at them.

Both girls apologized to each other. “I guess we can go left,” Alex said, agreeing to Ellie’s plan.

“Yes! Thank you for listening to me! Now, let’s go.” Ellie stomped to the left path and beckoned the twins to follow.

## Whispers in the Wind

“Are you sure about this?” Ash asked as the forest became darker. Alex and Ellie nodded.

“Really? Are we really sure about this? I mean...” Ellie stammered.

“Gosh, I thought you wanted to come this way. It’s not like we decided or anything.” Alex said as she climbed through plants and stumbled on roots. All three kids from then on knew something was about to happen. Something big. Something that could change the quest forever.

## CHAPTER 4

# *EXPLOSIONS*

Ash, Alex, and Ellie all walked in a row. Each step they all took just got more eerie, and the darker the forest got, Ellie decided that they should have gone right. Left was, she had decided now, undoubtedly unlucky. She could feel shadows unleashing themselves on top of her and her friends. Ellie and Ash could feel this unpleasant feeling as soon as the sky got dark. Alex was having a great time however, until great giant red sparks flew up, somewhere nearby. Ellie shrieked. Ash jumped. Even Alex flinched.

“Um, guys? What is that? AHHH!” Ash yelled as another giant red spark flew into the air.

“Those look like fireworks but...” Alex thought.

Ash pointed at the floor and screamed.

“What?” Ellie asked. She looked down at the ground. Instead of a normal floor of a forest jungle, the floor was concrete and moving.

Alex screamed, “We are moving! Uh oh. I told you guys not to go down the left. Whoa!” Alex was pushed to the ground.

## Whispers in the Wind

The big, gigantic concrete box moved again, now letting its passengers see what was in store. Big green, orange, and red dragons the size of a small house opened their mouths, and a bundle of fire shot out like a cannonball. The dragons slashed their tails in the air as the three kids came into view. For the dragons, this meant fun and delight. For the kids, this meant fear and death. Alex scooped away from the dragons, but all three kids ended up in a box.

“Ugh! This stupid box! Who puts prisoners in a box when they want you killed?” Alex asked, pounding on the box.

A deep voice echoed through the box. “Ah, I see. Do you wish to be killed by Thauga, Grant, and Threem? You may have your wish.” Suddenly the box started dissolving into nothing.

Weapons dropped into all three kids' hands to defend themselves. The floor disappeared, and Ash, Alex, and Ellie were dropped on top of a dragon, each twice as big as the kids.

“Dude! This is SICK!” Ash yelled as he admired his new sword. Thauga thrashed Ash around on her back like a kid aiming for a piñata.

Alex was stuck on the green dragon, Grant. Grant was a little more calm but still rowdy. Ellie was on the back of a

## Anastasia Pelletier

very scaly dragon, Threem. She was purple with dark blue scales that covered her back side.

“You should not have taken us this way!” Alex yelled to Ellie as Grant coughed up fire.

Ellie waved both hands angrily. “Sorry! Right now, we are in the middle of a piggyback session with dragons!” she yelled, trying to hold on as Threem practically threw Ellie off her back.

Alex slipped off Grant. Her weapon clanged to the floor. Alex stood up and started fighting the giant dragon. His eyes were deep amber with a hint of blue.

Ash was next. Ash was so busy admiring his new toy, he slid down Thauga’s back. Thauga’s eyes said angry and angry alone. She lunged for Ash. “Uh oh,” Ash yelled as Thauga’s face got so close to Ash’s.

“I can smell her breath!” Ash called out to the girls. “Is that good?” Alex rolled her eyes.

“Seriously? You’re concerned about the monster’s breath?” Alex snorted.

Grant roared. Fire steamed out of his nostrils. The dragon hated being called a monster.

## Whispers in the Wind

Ellie struggled to fight Threem. Threem looked content but then looked like she wanted revenge. Her dark blue eyes made Ellie's hands shake and her sword tremble. "You're not sweet, and you're not nice. Game on. Let's fight." Threem slowly rose higher and higher until Ellie was completely covered in her shadow.

"Ah," Ellie sighed uncertainty. "This should be fun." Ellie and Threem lunged into battle. Swords and fire. Swords and fire. The big purple beast opened her mouth so much, fire the size of a car consumed the air. Ellie was standing. Then she lost all air. Ellie felt it burn. She could feel the fire spreading. She tried to get up, but Threem had more energy and was more powerful. Threem hated Ellie and wanted her killed. No one had ever wanted her killed before. This was her first time, her first experience. Ellie could feel the pain oozing inside of her. She wanted to give in, let the burn take over, let the evil enemy win. But Ellie once again stood up, then fell. Threem seemed delighted to torture but not happy enough.

Over on Grant, Alex wasn't much better off. She had gotten burnt on her hand and foot but nothing major. The big green beast was greedy. He punched Alex and scraped her with his tail. Alex raised her sword to the dragon's long nose. She pushed and slashed the dragon's nose. Steam rose. Grant wobbled. Alex stepped back. She watched as her enemy fell,

Anastasia Pelletier

thumping on the ground. She rushed over to Ash, who sat on the floor, weaponless. Alex and Ash rushed over to Ellie to see what had happened.

## CHAPTER 5

### *THE CLEAR CAVE*

Alex hunched over Ellie, smacking her in the face. “Can you hear me?” she yelled into Ellie’s ears, but Ellie lay still, not moving a muscle. The third time Alex hollered, Ellie sat up, dizzy.

“What happened?” Ellie asked, looking at her arms. She couldn’t remember getting so burnt. She only remembered the feeling of heat as the fire tried to swallow her. She remembered the pain and the dragon’s face...its purple greedy, awfully evil jaw. Then, everything went dark. Nothing else seemed to come back in Ellie’s memory. She looked around.

Ash sat on a log eating a worm on a stick. “Where exactly are we, and how in the world did we end up here?” She pointed at a black cave not so far ahead.

Alex shrugged. “How should I know? I just kept walking away from that awful place, and then we came to a clearing. It was dark, ok? I saved you! Are you happy?” She asked, crossing her arms. Alex reached into her sack and pulled out a bunch of wild berries.

“I gathered some berries from the woods. Want some?” she asked, holding up the berries.

Anastasia Pelletier

“Nah, you go ahead,” Ellie said, pushing away the berries.

“You sure?” Alex asked. Ellie nodded. Alex shrugged and shoved the berries into her mouth.

“So,” Ash said. “Should we go investigate the cave? It looks dark in there, but still, it would be super epic if we could just go close to it!” He said as he drew a diagram in the dirt.

Alex shook her head. “Nah, I don’t think we should. Last time we made one wrong move, and BAM,” Alex pounded her fist on the ground. “It just might not be good. We should wait. I think we’ve had enough adventures to last us a year.” she said, yawning.

Elie nodded. “I think I might go to bed. I know it’s early, but it’s been a super long day, and I’m sure we all are tired.” Elie nodded again. “I just don’t know how we are going to finish this quest. I used to be so certain about this, but now..” Ellie made a face. “I just don’t know. We just keep getting caught in traps. It’s like someone just follows us around and throws a net, and the next thing we know, BOOM! We just got caught in the net!” Ellie cried, throwing her hands up into the air, exasperated.

## Whispers in the Wind

Alex sighed. “OK. Let’s get some rest, and hopefully, we will be well rested and good as new for tomorrow's journey,” Alex said, smoothing out the dirt.

“Sweet dreams,” Ellie said as she laid down.

Alex smirked. “Yeah right. Good night Ash, good night Ellie.”

####

Ash waited until the two girls were asleep, then he stood up and quietly walked to the cave. Ash felt drenched in excitement, and his curiosity was itching at his sides. His mind was full of questions, and he was ready to explore the dark tunnel into the unknown. Ash stepped forward, and a rush of wind pulled him closer to the darkness.

“I don’t want to go in there,” Ash thought as the wind pulled him deeper and deeper. “Please,” He pleaded. The wind got stronger and colder as Ash was dragged on.

“Ashton,” a voice echoed out of the cave bouncing on every wall. “You are my only hope,” the voice hissed at him.

Ash looked around, helpless. “What do you want, you stupid mist?” He called out to the shades of black. “What do you want from me?” Ash yelled as the wind became stronger. “Let me go!” Ash yelled at the voice.

Anastasia Pelletier

“Now Ashton, why would I do that? Would there even be a point? There is no point. I need you. Ashton, There is no escaping.” The voice eerily boomed back.

Ash felt the wind slow, and fear crept into his body. He shivered as it increasingly grew colder. Ash felt like he was in a gigantic dark freezer or fridge. Only this kind of freezer had gusts of wind and mysterious evil voices. The wind finally slowed down and then stopped. Ash stopped moving and got a look at where he was. He was lying in a dome as clear as glass the size of a standard kitchen and dining area. He looked around. The walls were clear white, showing pictures and words like a movie screen. Six doors stood around the dome. All around him, Ash saw flickers and darkness.

The voice cackled. “Ashton.” it hissed at him. Ash looked up at the ceiling. Perched bats waited asleep upside down while others fluttered around the cave.

“W...where am I?” Ash stammered, looking around.

“You are in La...Lorna’s clear cave, of course.” The voice laughed matter-of-factly.

“W...what is that?” Ash asked the voice, pointing to the wall with the pictures on it.

## Whispers in the Wind

“Ah. I see you have found my Wall of the World. That is where I watch over the world. In fact, I've been watching you on your quest with your little know-it-all friends.” The voice replied.

Suddenly, Ash felt it get colder. The darkness ripped apart, and out came a tall 6-foot man. The man was dressed in a black robe, his eyes green as goo. The man's skin was white with a peachy accent, and his hair was tucked in his black hat. The man gave Ash an evil greedy smile.

“So, you are the v-voice?” Ash asked, stepping back and trying to breathe it all in.

The man smiled. “Yes indeed. My name is Istanboleta. You may call me Istan.” Istan said.

‘I need to escape this place,’ Ash thought.

“Oh, but you see, you can't escape,” Istan told ash. Ash didn't care. He ran to the farthest corner, where a door appeared. Istan saw that coming and snapped his fingers. Then two guards and steel barriers blocked Ash from getting any closer to the door. Ash tried the other three doors.

“Not so fast!” Istan yelled and turned in the darkness, then appeared next to Ash.

“UGH!” Ash yelled, sliding as Istan kept disappearing and reappearing in new places. Istan snapped, and all the

Anastasia Pelletier

doors locked, creating a BOOM. Ash knew that it wasn't good that he was stuck in a clear cave with a man named Istan. Ash now felt bad for leaving the girls, and he regretted following his curiosity into the cave.

“Oh,” Istan said in a baby voice. “Do you miss your friends?” he asked, faking the pity in his voice. “Well,” his voice changed. “They aren't going to save you this time. You're on your own now. Just tell me where it is, then I can take it, and we can be equal. Or I can take you right now and claim you as my prisoner for decades, and you never get to leave.” Istan yipped in joy. “Now that sounds fun! Claiming you as my prisoner. OOH! I CAN'T WAIT!” Istan said, jumping up and down with an evil grin plastered across his face.

“So, what's it gonna be, kid? Do you want to give me the ring? OR do you want to refuse and be my prisoner? I say that's the better choice, and then you'll be captured, and then we can lull your friends in to save you. Oh, how do friendships work out these days?” he asked, scratching his head. “It's always the same thing. Sacrifice.” Istan made a face. “Well, we don't have much time before the world gets destroyed and we start a war, so why don't you just PICK already?” Istan asked impatiently.

## Whispers in the Wind

Ash thought for a minute, confused. “I don't know what ring you are talking about.” He said, looking into Istan's green evil eyes.

“Oh,” Istan laughed. “But you do.” You LIE.” Istan jabbed Ash in the chest. “HOW DARE YOU LIE TO ME!” Istan bellowed above the screeching of the bats.

“I...I don't know what you're talking about, sir.” Ash swallowed. The ring in Niste? That ring?” he asked Istan.

“So you DO KNOW ABOUT IT,” Istan yelled. “Tell me more,” Istan said with a quiet, soothing voice.

“I will not give the ring to you because I don't have it,” Ash said, trying to keep his voice level.

“You LIE!” Istan yelled, outraged.

“No, sir. You are wrong. Now let me go back to my normal life,” Ash requested, now staring into Istan's pupils.

Istan cackled, “HA! You think it's that easy?” He mocked. “You have to try *more* than that.” Istan took off his robe and draped it on top of Ash.

“Ooh. This stinks,” Ash remarked.

“I have lived for over 200 years, Ashton, in this cave. It is not clean, and we don't have a washer and dryer like you. We just live underground in a cave. If I do say so myself, I

Anastasia Pelletier

think it is in fine condition.” Istan said, looking at his robe. “Now, off with you!” Istan said, snapping his fingers.

Ash was spinning, leaving the cave. “Wait!” he yelled. Ash could feel himself dissolving with each breath.

“Eternal PRISON! HAVE FUN!” Istan yelled after Ash.

Ash thought for one great second that he was going to an exit and back into the woods. But after three seconds he found that he was wrong. Istan really hadn’t been kidding that he was going to prison in the cave. Ash ended up in a room he did not want to be in. The cell.

## CHAPTER 6

### *TOZIE*

Ash looked around. He had just arrived in the worst room possible. Garbage piled on the floor. People were hanging out everywhere. Cell rooms were locked with two or more people in them, but most of the people were hanging out on the floor, sleeping, talking, or just bored. The room was way too small for all of these prisoners and mainly all who shouldn't have been there. They should have been living normal lives instead of being here, bored out of their minds. A door had just appeared out of thin air. On the front of the sign, it said:

ASHTON USTUTAL

ASH #1125

US/UP/ISTANPRISON

PRISON PERSON 2289

Ash thought, "Great, now I'm a prisoner." He walked to his door and opened it. Inside were two cots, a blanket, a worn-out dirty pillow, and a bottle of half-drunk water. A girl about 12 sat on the second cot, farthest from the door. Her cot was labeled Tozie. Ash sat on his cot and looked at the girl.

Anastasia Pelletier

“Hi,” he said to the girl. The girl smiled.

“Hi,” she said back. Ash noticed she had a British accent and only had one arm. The girl’s face was pale, and she had blue eyes like diamonds. She was wearing a purple dress and lace gloves. She wore a nice purple hat with pinkish-purple feathers.

“Hi. Where are my manners? I am from the Tozie family, the royal family of England. My name is Augusta, but you can call me August.”

“Hi August, my name is Ash. What is this place?” Ash asked August.

“I’ve been here for over 80 years now. We never age, you see. We are in the prison cells of the clear cave. Nobody has ever gotten out. I tried to escape, but Istanboleta caught me.” she told Ash.

“You mean Istan?” Ash asked.

“Yes, people call him Istan nowadays. When I came, here we called him Istanboleta. But it has changed throughout the years.” she told Ash.

“August?” Ash asked. “Hmm.” When did you get here?” August hesitated. “About...” She thought for a minute.

## Whispers in the Wind

“Umm...I think it was like, what, 70. Yeah. About 1970. Around there. What year is it now?” August asked Ash.

Ash was too stunned to speak. “It is 2022.” You’ve been here a long time.” he told her.

August looked stunned. “Wow. I need to get out of here.”

Ash nodded. “Same, I’ve only been here for like 10 minutes, and you’ve been here for a lot longer!” Ash told her.

August smiled. “Ok. Well, I think it’s late, and I am going to go to bed now. Nice meeting you, Ash.” She said settling herself in her cot. “See ya tomorrow.”

Ash nodded. “Good night.”

#####

“I’m Telling you!” Alex yelled. “Ash is in danger!”

“Ok!”

“Fine!”

“I saw it in my dream. He walked to the cave, and then the wind took him. It sucked him in! Now, he is stuck in a room with a bunch of weird, bored people!”

“Listen, Alex,” Ellie said. “I know that he could be in that cave, but then again, it was a dream. Dreams don’t just

Anastasia Pelletier

tell you things. Normally it's a vision or a fantasy. Dreams are just dreams, Ok? Ash probably just went to get more wood for tonight's fire or something." Ellie told Alex. "Just relax. I'm sure he's fine." Ellie assured her. But for a tiny second Ellie doubted herself. She worried that Ash had gone into the cave and gotten lost.

Ellie and Alex made a plan. "OK, so Ash wanted to go into that cave, but we said we wouldn't go. We fell asleep, and he acted asleep," Alex said, rolling her eyes. "That little trickster. So, then his curiosity carried him into the cave where we don't know what happened." Ellie concluded, puzzled.

"Hmm.." Alex thought.

"Oh! I think I know where we can find him." Ellie said, looking at the cave.

"I read a book once, and in it, a royal family named the Tozies were on a carriage ride in the south part of town. They were stopping for teatime when they noticed their youngest daughter and son were missing. They looked all around but couldn't find them. What they didn't know was that the cave could only speak and lure in kids under 16. Adults didn't get the messages. Now it is known to be a myth and just a story. But the cave, that could be real." Ellie told Alex.

## Whispers in the Wind

Alex nodded. “So,” Alex asked. “You think that Ash could be in the cave somewhere stuck in an underground village?”

“No, well...Yes.”

“Thanks, well that really clears it all up,” Alex said sarcastically. “I think there is some sort of beauty trap in that cave.”

“Beauty trap?” Alex asked.

“Yeah. you know, like it looks really beautiful from the outside and then once you step too close...something...takes you.”

“Like what?”

“I don’t know!” Ellie yelled in frustration. “But we don’t have time to think. We have to do something. For all we know is that Ash is in real danger!”

“How do we get in?”

“The only way,” Ellie said, walking to the entrance of the darkness.

“That's the only wa...” Alex stopped. “Oh, no. Don’t you think there's another way in? I mean. Can’t we find an entrance under a rock or something...” Alex said, looking at Ellie, nervously.

Anastasia Pelletier

“No,” Ellie said matter of factly.

“Well, if this is our only way in, how will we get out?” Alex asked.

Ellie shrugged. “I have no idea. Let’s just focus on one thing for right now.” She said, overwhelmed.

“Ok...”

“I’m going in,” Ellie said. She took a deep breath and stepped into the beginning of the long dark cave.

## CHAPTER 7

### *CASTER*

Ellie was sucked into the cave immediately. She could feel the rush of wind and the temperature rising and falling. She looked down. Her hands were clenched together as if they were in handcuffs, though invisible.

The wind whispered to her. “Elinor,” the wind hissed softly.

“Elinor,” the wind said loudly.

“Who are you?” Ellie asked loudly. “Reveal yourself!” The wind whirled around her.

“You are so ambushed, child. I am Caster, brother of the King of Caves.” The darkness ripped apart, and out came a man. At first, Ellie thought the man looked like her father. Then, Ellie realized it was her father.

“You look a lot like my dad in the photographs on the mantel at home. Wait. Are you my dad?” Ellie asked the man. The man smiled. The man was dressed in all black except for a tie that was navy blue. His goatee was smokey grey, and his hair was the color of ivory.

“Yes. Ellie. Boy, has it been a long time since I’ve seen you! You’ve grown!” Caster said, looking at his daughter.

Anastasia Pelletier

“Wow. Wait. You are my dad? So, how come you’re here? I thought you died at sea!” Ellie said.

“Yeah, well, I am immortal, and I can't die. I went on a sea cruise with my friend Saloh, and the boat was sinking. It was right after you had just turned two. I thought I was going to never see you or your mother ever again. But then, something crazy happened. My brother saved Saloh and me. He brought us to a very old village called Niste. We escaped the sinking boat minutes before it sank.” Caster explained to Ellie. She nodded and smiled. Caster hugged Ellie.

“Dad, have you by any chance come across a boy named Ash? He wandered off here, and we are trying to find him.” Caster laughed.

“Find him? Ha! You’d not be the first. My brother, Istan: King of the Caves, takes prisoners. I take visitors. You are a visitor. Visitors can’t see prisoners and vice versa.”

“So,” Ellie said, crossing her arms, puzzled. “I can’t see my friend because he is a prisoner? How does that work?” Ellie asked, scowling at Caster.

“Kid, I don’t make the rules here, and could you please quit the questions? I dropped out of college like 300 years ago, and even during school, I couldn't learn. Now, my brother makes the rules. I have no say.” Caster said, sighing.

## Whispers in the Wind

“Well, would you like some tea?” Caster asked. Caster snapped twice, and a white teapot with ancient letters and pictures of ancient towns came bobbing over to the table, and the teacups followed. Ellie’s eyes widened as the teapot magically poured tea into two identical cups, white as snow. Ellie noticed a town on the teapot that had a mushroom carved onto it.

“May I take a look at your tea pot?” Ellie asked politely. Caster nodded. Ellie reached for the elegant china piece. She studied the intricate details and shapes until she found Niste.

“Is this?” she started. Caster smiled.

“Indeed. China teapot from the small village of Niste. Your quest for the ring? The ring is on it too. Saloh was very talented.” Caster said with a sad smile, recalling his old friend. “He made beautiful works of art,” Caster added, rubbing at his chin.

“And Saloh was?” Ellie asked, sipping her tea.

“Saloh was King Chara’s most helpful servant. When he wasn’t serving Chara, he was making beautiful works of art like this one,” He pointed to the tea pot. “Or he was planning with me to overrun Niste-” Ellie choked on her tea.

“You were planning to do what?” she asked, throwing her tea on the table.

Anastasia Pelletier

“You were the one? You're the one to blame for an innocent magic old town being thrown to pieces? You?” Ellie yelled, angry at herself for not thinking of it faster. “That book in the library, it was you! UGH! C.S.N Caster, Saloh, Niste! Why didn't I think of that!?” Ellie yelled, angry and frustrated. Ellie picked up her chair, aiming it at Caster.

“I wouldn't do that, if I were you.” He said calmly, waving his hand at Ellie, signaling she should sit down.

“Ugh.” Ellie frowned but sat down anyway.

“Look, I wanted to destroy Niste with my pal, but once we did it, I regretted it. I killed a whole town, fairies! Mushrooms! Plants! People! I did that! Knowing that I destroyed something beautiful is even worse than breaking and destroying.” Caster told Ellie. “Now, I want to bring back all that is gone. I want to help you, Ellie! We need to build nature up again! I want to help Niste become beautiful again!”

Ellie scowled. “So what? You can tear it all down again?” Ellie asked Caster.

“No! So, I can help recreate people and kings! And then I can forgive myself and feel better. And I can help you and your friends get the magic ring. We can do this together. I can help you. Please?” Caster asked, swatting away the teapot and cups.

## Whispers in the Wind

Ellie gave in. “Fine,” she said, pursing her lips. “But first, you have to find my friend Ash with me. Deal?” Ellie held out her hand. Caster nodded.

“Deal,” Caster said, smirking as he shook hands with his daughter. “Let’s do this.”

## CHAPTER 8

### *SECRETS*

“What the,” Ellie said as Caster came to a halt. Ellie and her dad stopped in front of a huge statue. The statue was tall and textured as if it had been made a thousand years ago, the magic from its creator still spreading within the sculpture. The 3D kid looked so real in the statue. Ellie looked around her. Her dad had led her to a small, clear room. On the walls were pictures of people in Africa, America, Australia, England, and Hawaii. Caster caught Ellie looking bewildered at the walls and statue. “Do y-you uh, live here?” Ellie asked her dad looking around the room. Her dad laughed.

“Well, no. This,” Casper gestured to a desk in the far right corner, “is my office.” He finished proudly revealing his workspace like it was a prized possession. Ellie started to laugh but stopped herself when she saw her dad’s expression. She covered her mouth.

“Sorry, I just,” Ellie shrugged. “I don’t know. This wasn’t really what I was expecting.” Ellie told her dad.

Ellie’s dad shrugged. “Well, we better get going on into the next room,” he said. Caster smiled and snapped his fingers. A huge grand piano stretched its way across the room. Caster sighed with satisfaction.

## Whispers in the Wind

“Um, Dad. I hate to ruin all the cool stuff going on right now with the piano, but how does a piano help? It’s not like it’s a door or something.” Ellie said, crossing her arms and looking confused at the instrument.

“Well, It’s the only last portal that connects to my bangoon,” Caster sighed and pointed at a remote in his hand. “Everyone in the clear caves has either a bangoon or magic. Well, me, I have both. My magic hasn’t been working for a while, but that’s not the point. The point is that if I lose this key,” Caster held up a wooden stick. “The Barnibles will not be happy.”

“It looks like a stick,” Ellie said, staring at the key.

Caster nodded. “Indeed. In its true form, it is powerful. This key can do anything you wish it to when it’s in your hands. Its magic of looking like a stick is what tricks many folks. Lately, people have stolen our bangoons or keys. Mine and my brother’s are the only ones that have not disappeared. See this statue?” He asked Ellie. Her dad nodded at the statue. Ellie nodded. “That’s Saloh, if you were wondering.”

“Well, I think we should go. Enter the door, daughter. Then, you can find your friend. I can only go this far with you.” Caster said as he started to dissipate into the air.

Anastasia Pelletier

“You must do this part now. I believe you. If you ever need anything, just think of me, and if you tell me, I might be able to help you.”

Ellie nodded. Her dad was disappearing fast. “But...,” Ellie started to say, angry. Her dad smiled sadly.

“I’ll see you soon. But for now, little hero, time to go rescue your friend. Here, take this.” Caster handed a polished knife to Ellie.

“Thanks,” Ellie said, waving. Ellie opened the piano top and stepped into the portal, whirling through air, space, and time.

#####

Ellie found herself in a bigger clear dome. The dome was the same except for its ceiling and the doors around its perimeter. Alex was sitting in a chair, binded with handcuffs. Alex looked flustered and was unaware of Ellie behind her. Ellie took a knife out and cut the ropes that were holding back Alex's wrists. Alex felt the ropes loosen and then pop.

Alex screamed. “Ahhhh!!” she yelled, jumping in her chair. Istan’s face appeared in the air, shimmering and rippling in the wind. Ellie ducked away and hid behind a pillar.

“Anything you need?” Istan said with an evil grin.

## Whispers in the Wind

Alex shook her head vigorously. “Think. Think. Think!” Alex said to herself as time ticked on. “N-no, sir. I was...well...Um...I saw a bee! Yes, and it scared me out of my m-mind! Yes, that’s it! You can go back to your normal business now, uh sir.” Alex said hastily. Alex felt nervous as Istan checked her out. Istan didn’t buy it.

“Saw a bee? Eh? Well, there ain’t any bees down here,” he said, suspicious. Alex coughed and nervously laughed.

“Uh, yeah, well about that... It was a dragonfly! Yes! I saw a dragonfly and thought it was a bee!” Alex lied, thinking on her feet.

“Ah, I see. We don’t get those down here either. Good try, though. Now, don’t you scream again, or I’ll have you sent to the prison room and keep you hostage for thousands of years!” Istan squealed, gleefully thinking about having another captive.

Alex stared at Istan. Istan walked around Alex’s chair. Alex tried to cover her hands and rewrap them in rope, but she was too slow. Istan’s eyes narrowed, and he growled. “Ahha,” He said with satisfaction. “I knew it. You’re too smart. And that’s how your hands are untied. You need to go to prison,” he said in a fierce voice, urging Alex to stand up and walk to the door titled: PRISON. Alex didn’t budge.

Anastasia Pelletier

“NOW!” Istan yelled. Snapping ropes tied onto Alex’s wrists and arms and forced her to move. Istan chuckled.

Ellie couldn’t stand it anymore. Watching her friend get forced to move and practically tortured was not fun. Ellie felt like she was also being hurt. Ellie stepped out of the shadows. “Hey, boggled brain!” Ellie yelled. Alex turned and tugged at the ropes. Istan turned around too. He raced over to Ellie and picked her up by her shirt.

“What did you just call ME?” He yelled, outraged. Alex managed to get one rope off her hand. Alex made the symbols for no, but Ellie took a deep breath. Ellie charged into battle. She only had the knife her father had given her. Ellie took out the knife. She slashed it against Istan. Istan smiled. He snapped, and a sword flew into his hand.

“Kid,” Istan said while grinning wickedly as Ellie fought on. “We don’t need to fight. Your friend here has broken the laws,” Istan said, dodging Ellie’s flying knife.

Ellie scowled. “What laws?” she asked, dodging Istan’s sword. “What laws in this awful dump? I bet you’re making that up because you’re not smart enough to even have rules!” Ellie spat back. Ellie watched as Istan’s face got red.

“That girl...” Istan started.

## Whispers in the Wind

Ellie glared. “That *girl* is my friend. You’re too dumb to realize it, but I was the one who cut her ropes.” Ellie shot back. She swung her knife. Istan’s face got red with anger. Ellie ran to Alex.

Alex glared at Ellie. “Geez, way to solve the problem. Now we’re both in trouble! Thanks a lot.” She said as Ellie cut the ropes.

Ellie rolled her eyes.

“So...” Istan said, rubbing his chin. Ellie turned back. Anger flushed her face like a paintbrush brushing against the wind.

Ellie was about to throw her knife when Istan said, “Stop.” Ellie looked at Istan. Her face was a sweaty mess. “Go to prison,” Istan said, shooing away Ellie. Something whooshed through Ellie’s body. She obeyed. Alex watched as Istan controlled Ellie’s feelings and thoughts. Ellie didn’t even try to argue under his force. Alex watched as her best friend walked into the door labeled PRISON and disappeared.

## CHAPTER 9

### *DREAMS*

The smell was what bothered her most. Ellie saw all ages of people. She wondered why they were all crowded in such a tiny room. Ellie looked around. Orange doors lined the edge of the walls. Names were pasted on like someone had hastily taped them, and people were as bored as sheep grazing the grass. Ellie spotted a boy with blondish hair. The boy's eyes widened. He smiled. Ellie noticed that the boy was with a girl with reddish hair and blue eyes like the sea. Ellie walked over to them. She smiled.

“Hi, Ash.” she said looking at her long lost friend.

“Oh! Hi! When did you get here?” he asked. Ellie shrugged. August coughed.

“Ahem,” she said, waiting for Ash. Ash jumped.

“Oh right! This is my friend, Princess Augusta Tozie,” Ash said proudly.

August smiled. “Or just August,” August added. Ash shrugged.

“So, How do we get out of here?” Ellie asked. August exchanged glances with Ash.

“Uh, you see, you kind of can't,” Ash said.

## Whispers in the Wind

“But I’ve tried for a long time. This place is designed for us. To keep us in and not let anyone out,” August said, pointing at the walls. Ellie sighed. August leaned against Ash. Ash started to snore. August opened one eye. “You said your name is Ellie, right? Well, I’ve been here a long time, and maybe now we can find an exit. We’ll find a way. Soon. We will.” August said, closing her eyes sleepily. Within minutes, Ash and August were fast asleep, leaving Ellie one choice, longing for a pillow.

####

*Ellie’s father and Istan stood in a courtyard with singing birds and whooshing wind. They were standing in front of a board, planning.*

*Istan rubbed his chin, “Let’s do this tomorrow.”*

*Ellie’s father rubbed his chin. “But brother, wasn’t I supposed to kill her?” he asked.*

*Istan frowned. “No, Brother, I am the one with the power. You are the one who watches me do all the work,” Istan said, folding up his map. “For now, we have some company,” Istan laughed.*

*The brothers pulled out two long shiny swords that looked like if you tried to fight them, you would end up*

Anastasia Pelletier

*dripping with blood. Istan smiled evilly. “Who do we have here?” Istan laughed hysterically.*

*For the first time, Ellie noticed that she was in chains. She tugged and pulled, but they wouldn’t budge. Ellie got angry.*

*“Hi,” her dad said sweetly. “Don’t mind my big brother,” he said pointing to Istan.*

*Istan narrowed his eyes. “Little hero, you think you're so great. You won’t see that girl or the magic ring anytime soon. None of you,” Istan said, walking over and tapping the tip of Ellie’s nose. Ellie tugged at the metal cuffs binding her hands and feet.*

*“Ugh!” was all she could say. She could feel the dream fading.*

*“Just remember. I can and will do anything in my power to stop you. Just remember.” Istan said, waving and grinning.*

#####

Ellie woke up. Sweat poured down her face, and shock devoured her body. She almost forgot how she’d gotten stuck in this dump. Ellie checked her hands. Then she checked her feet. There were no metal bindings keeping her

## Whispers in the Wind

on the ground. She sighed in relief. August spotted her and ran. “Hey, guess what?” she asked.

“What?” Ellie said.

“We think we've found a way out.”

## CHAPTER 10

### *LOST*

August opened a trap door. Ellie peered down at it.

“Ew,” she said. “What’s that?” she asked, pointing to a monster the size of a dragon. Ash grinned. This is going to be so much fun!” he yelled, jumping into the hole.

August gulped. “Ok, well...” she said, urging Ellie to continue.

“It’s our only way out?” Ellie asked, looking with great hate at the trap door.

August nodded. “Unless...well, you know, this is just easier,” she said, shrugging.

Ellie nodded and started opening the trap door. It smelled like a thousand zoo animals in one place. Ellie stopped. “What about, your um, thing.” She said, pointing to August’s missing arm.

“I’ll just have to use the other arm.” August shrugged matter-of-factly.

Ellie sighed, “Ok. Here we go.” She hopped through the hole and plummeted downward. Ellie felt like she was falling down as deep as the ends of the earth. Finally, she slowed down and stopped. Ellie looked up. A shadow grew

## Whispers in the Wind

closer and bigger as August started to slow down. Ellie moved away. August landed with a THUMP next to her.

“Rubbish! Look at all this RUBBISH!” she whispered madly. Ellie nodded. She wasn’t worried about the trash that lined the room or how it smelled or anything. She looked into the big beast’s eyes. One eye was green the other eye was purple. Both eyes gave the message that the beast was fierce and mighty. The beast roared as Ellie charged at the huge furry monster.

“It’s a Mantalope!” August yelled.

“Don’t strike it! It will add more! More will come!” Ash added.

Ellie looked at the two friends. “What? How can we fight it? No striking?” She yelled, confused. Then, Ellie had a brilliant idea. She thought about what her dad had said: “In its true form, it is powerful. This key can do anything you wish it to when it’s in your hands.” She smiled and ran to August and Ash. “Can you guys cover me while I go get something?” she asked. Ellie didn’t wait for an answer. She ran towards a door labeled “Caster’s office.” Ellie said to herself, “Perfect.”

Ellie scrambled around her dad’s office, looking for a magical key/stick. She checked his desk and even the Saloh statue but couldn’t find anything. She frantically searched

Anastasia Pelletier

around until she discovered a hidden drawer with seven sticks. Ellie gasped, “Dad? He is a thief?” She took the sticks.

A man appeared in the hallway. He smiled. “Going somewhere?” he asked. Ellie nodded. “Well, good luck. I could give you a ride out. I’m a servant,” he said.

Ellie nodded. “Thanks, but I think we're good with these,” she said, holding up the sticks. The man nodded and disappeared.

Ellie ran out with one stick. She opened the door just as the Mantalope lunged for August. August screamed as the Mantalope thrashed her in the air. August was strangling upside down. “Help!” she screamed, kicking the monster.

Ash screamed.

Ellie ran towards the monster. “HEY!” she yelled, swinging her knife around for the beast's attention. The Mantalope growled and looked at Ellie. He dropped August on the floor. Ash ran to catch August. August lay motionless in his arms. The Mantalope lunged at Ellie. Ellie stuck the stick into the monster's fur and prayed to the stick to kill the monster and let her and her friends' exit. For a moment, nothing happened. Slowly, the beast backed off as the stick produced a warm green glow. The Mantalope's eyes closed

## Whispers in the Wind

as if he were sleepy. Then, without warning, the beast fell to the floor.

“You did it!” Ash cried. “Now, let’s get moving,” said Ash.

Red lights flashed all over with a voice saying, “Emergency, Emergency, Alert, alert.” Ellie looked at August.

“Will she be okay?” she asked Ash.

Ash nodded, “Yes, I think so.” He scooped her into his arms.

“We should get going,” Ellie yelled over the sounds of the sirens as loud as a thunderstorm. “Here, follow me.” She led Ash out of the mayhem, but it was too late. Ash and Ellie watched as three doors appeared in the center of the room. Thousands of people with white coats marched out in single file lines.

“Uh oh,” Ash said, looking at all the people. “What do we do?” he asked, horrified.

Ellie studied the army. “Well, we will have to take them down. But first, put August down where she won’t be harmed,” she said, looking at the army. “Put her down somewhere over there.” Ellie pointed to a spot in the corner of the room. Ash nodded. Ash set down August on the floor.

Anastasia Pelletier

She lay there as still as a rock. Ash slowly walked away, and the battle began.

## CHAPTER 11

### ***THE BATTLE BEGINS***

Ellie and Ash stood in front of thousands of people dressed in all white. They had weapons the size of poles and eyes the color of purple hate. “Uh oh,” Ash said again. He looked in his pockets for a weapon. His eyes widened. He had no weapon. Here he was in front of alien people who wanted to kill them, and he had nothing to defend himself with.

Ellie looked at Ash in disbelief. “You don’t have a weapon? Ash!” she yelled at him. “Well,” Ellie said, thinking. “I guess you’ll just have to fight without one.” She shrugged, “No! Well, ok.”

Both friends faced their enemy. “Ok,” Ellie said, preparing her shiny knife. “Let’s do this.” Ellie began fighting a huge muscular guy with abs so large he looked like a blown-up balloon. His eyes were flame red, and his neck had many scars on it. Ellie’s knife cut through his skin like teeth biting into a strawberry. Nothing harmed the big guy. He didn’t even flinch.

“Arrggghhh!” he boomed, pounding his chest. He looked around. For a moment, his eyes stopped the anger. He showed puppy dog eyes. Then, without realizing it, he itched

## Anastasia Pelletier

his belly and started throwing rocks at Ellie. Ellie looked around for anything to grab onto.

“I think they're being controlled!” she yelled at Ash. Ash looked at Ellie.

“Really? Well, that explains why he keeps gurgling and throwing things! Are you having any luck?” he asked, dodging his monster’s foot.

Ellie ducked a boulder. “No! He keeps generating weird rocks! I don’t know how to beat this guy! Any suggestions?” she yelled over all the roaring of the people.

Ash ducked as a flying asteroid crashed inches behind him, sizzling like a burnt engine. Ash shuddered. “Uh, No. I have nothing. You're the brain here!” he yelled. “Think!” He dodged another flaming boulder.

Ellie stuck her knife into the beast’s eye. He cried out in pain. “Yee-op!” He yelled across the room. “Yee-oopy-op!” he boomed. He banged his chest. The monster stumbled around, blind. He tried to stop, but it was too much. The monster cried out again.

Over with Ash, things weren’t too good. Ash watched as his monster picked up a boulder the size of an extra large car and raised it above his head. The beast grunted. Ash watched as the shadow of the rock became bigger and bigger until the

## Whispers in the Wind

darkness started to consume him. Ellie yelled and tried to stop the monster. Ash took a deep breath and looked at Ellie. “Help!” he yelled, struggling. But Ellie couldn’t move. She couldn’t believe what she was seeing. She stopped fighting.

“Ash!” Ellie yelled. Ash looked helplessly at Ellie. Ash couldn’t move anywhere. There was no time. Slowly, Ash felt his eyes close and his breathing slow. Little by little, the rock swallowed the ground and everything on it, including Ash.

Ellie watched her friend get crushed. She closed her eyes. A watery tear trickled down her face. Ellie was sad, then angry. She bawled her fists. She couldn’t believe what these giants just did. She turned to her contestant.

“You!” she screamed. “How dare you do that to my friend!” she yelled, tears streamed down her face. “I can’t believe it! YOU ARE A HORRIBLE CREATURE!” she yelled, perturbed. Tears flooded down her face like a rainstorm. Ellie didn’t care to wait for a groan or moan from the monster. She took out her knife. At full speed, barely thinking, she jumped on the back of the monster. He stumbled. Ellie stuck her knife into his neck. Ellie jumped off his back. She landed on the ground, sitting down and heavily panting. The monster doubled over and coughed. Then, he was still.

Anastasia Pelletier

“Ellie?” August quietly coughed. She looked at the debris. Her dress was torn and ripped. Her face looked tired and worn. She walked out from her corner and helped Ellie up from the ground. She and Ellie smiled. Alex looked at Ellie’s face and noticed that Ellie’s face was caked with dry tears.

“Where’s Ash?” August said, looking around.

Ellie’s smile faded. “I’m sorry. He well...” She looked at the pile of rubble. She couldn’t say anymore. August understood. All the color in her face drained. She looked at the boulder.

“Oh no,” August said, shaking her head in disbelief. “No!” she yelled, her voice echoing. She covered her face with her hands.

August hugged Ellie. “It’s ok. We’ll finish the quest,” she told Ellie. “It’s Ok,” she said again. But, deep down inside, August doubted herself.

Ellie took a long deep breath. “Ok,” she said, looking at the rubble. “Let’s get out of here.” Both girls didn’t have to be told twice. Together, they mournfully walked away, trying to find an exit.

## Whispers in the Wind

“Not so fast,” a familiar voice said, booming. Ellie stopped walking and held her hand out to make August stop moving any further.

“It’s that awful, Istan,” Ellie hissed. She felt like chewing her words and spitting them out into a big pile of mucus and muck.

Istan laughed. His face was covered with dirt and spilling with scars. Istan sighed and leaned his back to the wall. “So, How are you going to get out?” he asked mockingly.

“Well, you know what they say! If there’s a way in, there’s a way out!” Ellie said, trying to sound upbeat and confident.

Istan raised his eyebrows. “You kids! There is no way out. I’m a master at this stuff. I’ve sealed all the doors,” he said, grinning evilly.

August looked at her hands in deep thought and examined her nails. August looked at Ellie, and their eyes met and locked. An understanding passed between both of them. Ellie nodded, approving. August reached into her pocket. “Maybe not all doors!” She said, pointing to a moving door, lowering itself down to the floor.

Istan scowled at the girls. “Aagrah!” he yelled, charging at them. Ellie and August looked up at the room’s top. On a

Anastasia Pelletier

balcony above the two girls was a girl wearing a black leather jacket and red boots. Alex lowered two ropes down off the ceiling. Knots were tied in the ropes. Some of the parts of the ropes were frayed. Alex winked at Ellie. Ellie nodded and messaged thank you through her eyes. Then, Alex lassoed three long ropes. One landed on Istan's arm, tightening as fast as a blood pressure machine. Istan's eyes showed fear, but he tried not to show it. He shrieked as another rope tightened around his left arm. Then another rope swiveled around one of his legs. Forgetting that his legs were tied together, Istan tried to run. Istan stumbled and tripped. He fell flat on his face.

August smiled and motioned to Alex for another rope. Alex shrugged, "Here!" She pulled out a small rope, as thin as a small snake. She balled up the rope and threw it to August. August caught it and ran over to Istan. She put her foot on Istan's back. She tied a knot.

Istan scrambled. "You won't get away!" he screamed, squirming. "You got away this time, but it won't happen again!" he yelled. Alex swung down on her rope. She stuck out her tongue to Istan. Together, all three girls ran for their life, away and out of the clear cave.

## CHAPTER 12

### *THE TREE TRANSPORT*

Alex stopped to catch her breath. “Whew,” she said, wiping the sweat off her forehead.

“Well, that was long. Ash would have liked to see that. It was a great fight.” August said, stretching her legs. Alex gave a sad look at August. “Oh, sorry. I mean, um, well... I don’t know how to say this, but...Ash...” she said.

Alex nodded sadly. “I know. I saw it all happen,” Alex said, looking down at her feet.

Ellie looked at her friend. “What? How did you see it? You were gone!” Ellie said, confused.

Alex nodded, agreeing. “Yes, but I got into Istan’s Wall of the World and found you,” she said.

Her friends looked at her like she was speaking a foreign language. Pasted on their faces were looks of disgust and confusion. “You did what?” Ellie asked.

“The what-a-world?” August asked.

Alex sighed. “Istan threw me into a prison cell not so far away from his main cave. I used my knife to open my cell door and sneak into the main cave. There I had to figure out

Anastasia Pelletier

what was going on with you guys, and I hacked into the system,” she said.

Ellie raised her eyebrows. “How'd you manage that?” she asked.

Alex shrugged. “I figured that the wall showed anything you wanted it to show you, so I got it to think that I was Istan, and I asked it to show me you,” she said, matter-of-factly.

“Really?” Ellie laughed. Alex nodded.

“Then I saw you guys, fighting mega people with rocks the size of bulldozers. I had to help. But, I got sidetracked. I tried to get to you guys, but by the time I had gotten to you, it was too late. I saw it all happen. His scramble, his scream, the boulder as it hid the ground. I saw it all. I will never forget that,” she explained.

Ellie sighed. She rubbed her friend on the back. “It was good of you to help us. It’s okay. Now, we have to find the ring. The magic could do us some good,” she said, trying to put on a smile.

August nodded. “This Ring...,” she hesitated. “Is it by any chance the ring of?” she paused, looking at her friends.

“Niste?” Ellie, August, and Alex said all together.

“Yep! That’s the one!” Alex said.

## Whispers in the Wind

August smiled. “Ok. I know how to get there,” she said, looking through the woods.

“You do?” Alex and Ellie said, bewildered.

August nodded. “Yes. Now, Take my hat, scarf, and jacket,” she said, handing them her old ancient clothing. August walked to the edge of the woods. A river stretched across the land, rushing wildly. August scooped up some river water and walked over to the nearest dead tree. Branches waved rapidly, and the tree swayed. She cupped the water in her hands, holding it safely, as if it were fragile. She dumped the water onto the dead tree. Slowly, almost as if it were being controlled, the little old dead sapling’s branches began to turn a dark, healthy brown. The leaves turned green as if the seasons had already changed. The tree’s bark seemed to shine in the sunlight.

Ellie gasped. The bark began cutting itself into a door. Skinny stones appeared on the ground. August stepped on the stones, Alex and Ellie followed. A garden wove its way around the sapling, and flowers bloomed. August pushed open the door of the tree and stepped inside. It was surprisingly huge for a very small skinny tree. Walls lined the room decorated with primary colors, red, yellow, and blue. A broom stood in the corner, waiting to sweep the floor. A table and wooden chairs made out of logs sat in one

Anastasia Pelletier

corner, while a white couch sat in another. There was so much to look at that Ellie didn't know what to think.

“Does someone live here?” Ellie Asked August.

She nodded. “Oh yeah. My great uncle used to live here. I used to come here with my brothers and sisters all the time. We used to play with my uncle's children. They were so young then,” she said, thinking about her family. Alex nodded.

“Follow me,” August said, clearing her throat. “Just walk through that door,” she added, pointing down the staircase. They made their way down the stairs. Four mirrors hung on the wall.

“Um,” Ellie said, looking at the mirrors. “I don't see a door,” she pointed out.

Alex nodded. “Yeah, All I see is mirrors,” she agreed, puzzled.

August rolled her eyes. “Yeeha, dummies! Can't you see it? You're so blind! Open your eyes! Look to the impossible,” she said, knocking on the wall.

Ellie closed her eyes. Then she opened one eye, then both. “Nope! Still looks the same to me!” she said, shrugging.

## Whispers in the Wind

“Ugh. Just watch.” August said, annoyed. She stepped up to the first mirror. She whispered a six-digit code into the glass. Then she reached up to the top of the wall. The mirror had a hinge that opened and closed. She opened it up. Rock music blared. A bar filled with people drinking sat in the middle of the room. Tables lined the sides of the bar where people sang songs, drunk in the middle of the room, watching the stage as a man playing piano sang his song.

August was about to close the mirror of the bar when a man in a dark blue suit came over to the opening. He had a beard and blue eyes. His hair was nicely combed and gelled like he'd spent hours on it. August's eyes widened, and she quickly closed the mirror. She sighed in relief and laughed nervously.

“Who was *That?*” Ellie asked. August ignored the question and checked the second mirror. Then she checked the third and fourth. August opened the fourth mirror.

To Ellie and Alex's surprise, a man with a cigarette and playing cards stood behind the mirror, waiting. “Where do you wish to go?” he asked, checking his playing cards.

August stepped up to the man. “The old Village of Niste.” She handed him six gold coins.

Anastasia Pelletier

The man studied the coins. “That is only 60 TT. You need 90. Next!” The man closed the mirror. August stomped her foot. She pried open the mirror.

The man looked up from his playing cards again. “I said next, young lady,” he said, chewing on his cigar. August pounded on his arm.

“Do you want my money or not? Please get us to the village of Niste!” she yelled. The man ignored her. “NOW!” she yelled, punching him. The man winced and walked away. August walked to a sign that read: PLEASE WAIT HERE. YOUR TREE TRANSPORTATION WILL BE HERE SOON.

Alex sighed. “Where are we?” she asked, looking around.

“The tree mobile will be here soon,” August answered, irritated. They waited for what felt like 20 minutes, but it was only five minutes to get their tree mobile. A small mini car whizzed through the station and slammed to a stop. The car had green doors and a skinny top. Half the car was green, the other half brown, like a tree.

“Here is our ride,” August said, pointing to the mini car. Ellie looked at the vehicle. Alex backed away. “Is it safe?” she asked.

## Whispers in the Wind

August laughed. “Of course, it’s safe! Plus, it’s the only way to Niste.” She hopped into the car and revved the engine. “It can fly! Come on!” she said. Alex stepped into the car. Ellie slid in. August tapped the gas pedal with her foot, and the car began spinning up into the air. Wings sprouted out of the car, green and ruffled, like a tree branch.

“Can you drive this thing? Like do you know how to?” Ellie yelled over the roar of the car.

“Uh, Yeah! Anyone can drive the tree mobiles! Come on! To the Village of Niste!” She rolled down the windows. Smoke puffed out of the back of the car, filling the air with gas. “Buckle up!” August yelled. She revved the engine and lifted into the air.

Alex screamed as they dodged trees and people. Ellie tried to look for a seat belt but had no luck.

“Um, About buckling up? There are no...Woah!” Ellie yelled. The car roared to life, flying higher and higher into the sky. The sun flooded the mini car.

“Can you see?” Alex yelled.

“No.”

“Is that good?” she asked, hanging onto her seat.

“No.”

Anastasia Pelletier

“Well, should you be driving?” she asked. August shrugged.

“No.” she turned the wheel. Alex gasped as a bright blue brilliant sea stretched across the horizon. A tiny island lay in the middle of the sea.

“Is that Niste?” Ellie asked.

August nodded. “Yep. Time to search for the ring. I’m going to land,” she told them.

“Okay. Thanks for telling us.” Alex said as the car dumped toward the sea.

“Ahh!” Ellie yelled as the car accelerated. “We’re falling!” Ellie yelled.

August tried to hit the brake. “Do you think I know that?” she yelled sarcastically. She pounded the brake, but the car didn’t slow down.

“Have you ever used this tree transport thing before?” Alex yelled as the engine roared.

“Yes! But I think we’re about to crash! Everyone, open the doors and jump,” she yelled.

“WHAT!?” You’re crazy!” Alex yelled, clinging onto the seat.

“3, 2, 1

## Whispers in the Wind

“No!”

“GO!” August yelled. All three girls jumped out of the car. The tree mobile flew down and hit the water, sinking to the bottom of the ocean. Ellie hit the water with a smash. The water punched at her face. She started sinking but swam up to the surface. Her head broke through, and she gasped for air. She swam to the shore where Alex waited.

Not so far behind Ellie was August. She was struggling to swim. “I can’t do this!” August yelled. She tried to paddle to her friends, but the waves pulled her back.

“We’re coming!” Ellie yelled, frantically trying to unwrap a rope from Alex’s pocket. Alex tugged on the rope and threw it out.

“Grab the rope! I’ll pull you in!” she yelled. August found the rope and grabbed it, holding on for dear life. August gasped as she got close to the shore. She spit water out and coughed.

“What happened?” Alex asked as she and Ellie helped August up onto the shore.

“I can’t swim,” August admitted, shaking her head. “It was a horrible idea to jump off the tree mobile. Thanks for saving me,” she said, wiping her forehead.

Anastasia Pelletier

“It looks so different compared to what it looked like before,” August said, looking at the village of Niste.

“Wait, You’ve been here before?” Alex asked.

“No. But my mother grew up here,” she said. “It looks so different from what I had imagined in my head. There are no buildings. There’s just rubble,” she said, looking in awe at Niste.

“It’s a floating village? I thought. Well, I don’t know. It’s directly on the sea.” Ellie said, scratching her head.

August nodded. “Yeah. Let’s go over there. Maybe they will have food, and boy, I’m hungry.” She pointed to an older man. He wore a poster that said, HELP. PLEASE! I AM HOMELESS.

Ellie looked at the man. His shoulders were covered by a ripped blanket that looked like it was a thousand years old. It probably had seen better days. Alex walked over to the man. The man tipped his hat. He held it out for money.

“Please,” he huffed. The man squinted at them as if he were part blind. “Do you have...money?” he asked, pulling his shawl over himself. He tugged at a loose thread.

August sighed. “No. I’m afraid not, sir. We just came here to ask you a few...questions.” August said.

## Whispers in the Wind

The old man let out a sound that sounded like a laugh.

“If you have no money, then be out of my sight! GO!” he yelled. The old man muttered something like, “funny kids,” and turned and walked slowly toward a pile of rubble.

Alex shook her head. “Can he even see?” she muttered to Ellie.

Ellie shrugged. “That’s a good question,” she said. “I have no idea what the answer is.”

August ran towards the man. “Wait!” she cried, grabbing onto the man. The man flinched as August touched his skin. A burn mark etched into the man’s arm. He rubbed it. Instantly, the burn faded, like it was stitching itself back up, mending the wound.

“Who are you?” Alex asked, looking at his arm in amazement as if trying to peer inside his soul.

The man stopped walking. He turned. Half his face was hidden by shadows. He scowled. “Do you kids really want to know?” he asked, focusing on the three girls. They nodded. He raised his head to the sky and stomped once. He turned.

A kid about 20 stood in front of them. Alex gasped. The man smiled. Now, no wrinkles lined his face, and the homeless guy who had stood in front of the girls minutes

Anastasia Pelletier

before was gone. Instead, a twenty-three-year-old man stood on the road, grinning wickedly.

“My name is Earl Auger. Come,” He said. “We have lots to talk about.”

## CHAPTER 13

### *WHAT WILL YOU WISH FOR?*

“Are you the only one here?” Alex asked, looking the man up and down for clues.

The man nodded sadly. “Oh, yes. Sadly, none of the others survived the...battle,” he said, looking away. The kids nodded.

“Okay...” Ellie said.

“Can you tell us about yourself and Niste?” August asked Earl.

Earl nodded. “Yes. My name is Earl Auger. I am immortal. My father, well, he was Niste’s king. This village is now, as you can see, destroyed,” he said, pointing to the remains of buildings. He walked over to a clearing.

“You see, this used to be where the palace stood, mighty and strong. My father’s throne’s pieces are here,” he pointed to a red ruby pile of rubble. “My father was an elf. He was a great king, you know.” Earl said. Alex walked over to the palace debris.

“Wow. Surely the ring won’t be here!” She walked away, towards the sea.

Anastasia Pelletier

Earl turned. “What? This thing? You mean the ring of Niste?” He pulled out a silver ring about the size of an ant.

Ellie gasped. August choked on her spit. “You mean you really...Wow. It’s the ring!” she said in awe.

Earl smiled, but his smile faded. “No. This is a duplicate. The real ring belonged to my father. This is something I found when the palace was destroyed.” he said.

Alex shook her head in disbelief. “So, what did you do with the real ring?” Alex asked.

“I burned it.”

“What?!” Ellie said, not believing her ears.

“What good did the ring do for me? My father is gone, and the ring just reminds me of him.” Earl shrugged. August sat down and looked around, puzzled.

“Well. I knew this would happen. We get to Niste, and we can’t bring back the town. What a shame. Well, I never really wanted to do this anyway.” Alex said, walking away to the water. She sat down and dipped her feet into the sea. The breeze whooshed her long blond hair around her face. She sighed and looked out at the waves rushing hurriedly towards her, then pulling back.

## Whispers in the Wind

Ellie walked over to Alex and settled right next to her. She rubbed her friend's back. "It's okay," she said.

Alex turned away from Ellie. "No! It's not! After all we've been through...Losing Ash for what? Now there's nothing we can do!" she said angrily. She walked towards Earl.

Earl sighed. "Look. I knew that I could bring back my dad and save Niste, but I burned the ring because I knew that even though the ring brings him back, it will never be the same," Earl said, walking to the edge of the dock. "But, there is another way to save him," he said. August and Alex stopped walking and stared at Earl.

"There is?" Alex asked.

"How?" August chimed in.

"You need to ask your friend here. Ellie knows what to do." Earl said, picking up his hat.

"I do?" Ellie said, confused.

Earl smiled. "Oh yes. When the time comes, you will need to decide. Find the ring's remains. Take the ashes and sprinkle them on a wish. But be careful what you wish for." Earl snapped once, and the old man reformed. He smiled, then slowly walked away, disappearing in the cold dark shadows that covered the streets.

Anastasia Pelletier

####

“Where do you think these remains are of the ring?” Alex asked as they ran through empty alleys.

Ellie shrugged. “Don’t know,” she panted. “Very hot. Need brake,” she huffed.

August stopped abruptly, her eyes wide with fear. Alex ran into her. She rubbed her head.

“OUCH! Why did you stop?” August covered Alex’s mouth.

“Shh. Look. I see a lady. I think this is it,” she said, creeping near the gates. The short lady bent down to her garden and started humming. A small old brick house lay on the lot. An old black fence stretched across the property, guarding any trespassers who dared to walk by.

“You really think the ring’s remains are in *there*?” Ellie asked, pointing to the house. August nodded.

“How do you know?” Alex asked.

August shrugged. “I just do, Okay?” she said. They crouched down low. The woman hummed “It’s a Small World” while tending her flowers. She stopped as she picked a tomato off her tomato plant. She whistled. A huge dog

## Whispers in the Wind

bounded out of the bushes. The dog wagged its tail and patiently waited for the woman to throw a stick.

“Do you see anything out there? I heard something,” the woman said, looking near her gates. The dog whined and turned his head to the right. A stick lay right out of the dog’s reach. He sniffed the ground and looked hopefully at his owner. She sighed, “Oh, ok.” She threw the stick, and it whirled through the air. The stick landed over the fence.

Alex stared at her feet in fright as the women pulled open the gates and the dog bounded out. The dog sniffed the air. He went to Alex’s feet. He sniffed her shoes and picked up the stick in his mouth. The dog cocked his head and looked at Alex.

“Shoo. Go. Back to your owner now!” she inched away. The dog followed. The woman stepped out from her driveway and put her hands on her hips. “Come on, Rocky. What are you looking at?” She wiped sweat off her face. She inched closer to Alex. Alex closed her eyes and tried to imagine she looked like a bush. The dog wagged its tail and dropped the slimy stick at Alex’s feet. Alex slowly bent down and threw the gooey stick across the road. The old lady scowled.

“Who goes there?” the woman said, walking towards the three friends. August pushed Ellie and Alex. They stumbled

Anastasia Pelletier

and tripped. The dog wagged its tail and barked. Alex pushed Ellie. The woman stood frozen, as still as a statue. “So, you are...?” she asked.

“Ellie.” “Alex.” “August.”

The woman smiled. “I see. Well, why don’t you kids come inside and have some cookies? Then, you may tell me your wish.”

Alex, Ellie, and August followed the woman into her house.

“Sit down,” she directed. The woman held out a platter of cookies for the girls. Alex hesitated as she took one off the tray. Ellie gulped down three cookies, and just to be polite, took three more.

“So,” The woman said, stuffing a cookie into her mouth. “My name is Dyllis. I am a witch, a good one. I grant wishes. But only one wish. If you wish to have a wish granted, you may ask wisely,” she said. Dyllis tipped her plate over to Rocky, and he gulped down the cookies as fast as lightning.

Ellie nodded, then whispered to August, “We want the ring remains, like powder, right? You ask her. She seems kind.”

August sighed, “Ok, fine.” She cleared her throat. “Um, Miss. Dyllis, We would like to make a wish,” she said.

## Whispers in the Wind

Dyllis looked up from her plate of cookies. “Hmm?” she said.

“We would like to wish for the ring of Niste,” August concluded.

Dyllis looked up from her plate of cookies. Her eyes widened. “No one has wished for that in a long, long time. Did Earl Auger tell you to come to me?” she asked.

August nodded.

“Well, that insufferable man was wrong. Fine, take your ring. I don’t care. It’s upstairs,” she huffed, walking to the kitchen. Alex and Ellie wanted to laugh about how Dyllis had forgotten that they didn’t know their way around her house, much more where the stairs were.

“Um, Miss. Dyllis,” Alex called. “We don’t know where your stairs are,” she yelled into the kitchen. Dyllis stumbled out of the kitchen.

“You’re right. I’ll go get it,” she mumbled as she took off. Rocky barked. He wagged his tail happily and pounced onto the rug. Ellie smiled. A minute later, Dyllis bustled down the stairs with a black bag surrounded by straw, rock, leaves, sand, and seed, about as small as a jewelry bag. She set it on the table. The bag had three words on it.

KING CHARLES CHARA.

Anastasia Pelletier

Alex gasped. Dyllis reached into the black bag and pulled out golden dust. “Is this the real ring dust?” August asked in disbelief.

Dyllis smiled. “Well, of course.”

“What do we do?” Alex asked, staring at the magical dust.

Dyllis grinned. “Just sprinkle the dust and wish for what you wish for. The dust will do the rest.” Dyllis shook the bag.

“Well, this means you must be off. Be careful when you bring back Niste. Promise me you won’t use all of it? It’s the last of its kind, also very valuable,” she said, giving them each a hug.

Alex, August, and Ellie all walked to the front door. Alex pulled the handle, and the door swung open, revealing how bright outside was. Alex stepped out of the door first.

Dyllis waved then yelled, “Wait!” She ran up to her bedroom and fetched three newly sharpened knives, a sharp sword, and a dagger. She walked to the three girls and handed them their new weapons.

“Wow,” Alex said, admiring her new knife.

## Whispers in the Wind

“Thanks!” Ellie said, looking at the dagger and sword. Rocky bounded up to Ellie. “I know,” she said. “I’ll see you again.”

“Be safe. Bring back Niste. Good luck!” Dyllis yelled as the three friends walked away. Dyllis watched until Ellie, Alex, and August had walked so far away that she saw almost no evidence that they had been there. The sun started slipping down, disappearing behind the trees. The moon hung high in the sky, lighting up the whole house from top to bottom.

## CHAPTER 14

### *A MAN IN THE WATER*

Alex, Ellie, and August slowly walked towards the rubble. Earl stood in the center of the road in old man form, leaning on his cane. A big smile stretched across his face. “I knew you could do it!” Earl said, hobbling over to the kids. Alex smiled. Earl shivered as he turned into his twenty-three-year-old self.

“Do you have it?” Earl asked eagerly.

Ellie nodded and pulled out the black bag. “Yep,” she said. Earl squealed with joy. He stopped when the sound of helicopter blades erupted around the city.

Earl’s smile faded. “What was that?” He asked.

Alex looked up at the sky and gasped. “Uh, guys? There is a helicopter in the sky,” she said, pointing to the sky. Sure enough, a big black helicopter with flashing spotlights hovered in the sky.

“STOP RIGHT THERE!” The helicopter’s speaker boomed.

“It’s Istan!” August screamed. Alex and Ellie took out their weapons. August unsheathed her sword.

## Whispers in the Wind

Earl began shaking at the sound of Istan's name. "The last time... I... Uh, I will leave now." He shuddered and disappeared in a cloud of dust and smoke.

"WHAT?" Alex cursed. "Not NOW!" she wailed. Ellie nodded grimly.

"Earl is afraid of Istan, for some reason. Right now, we have to get a move on. I guess we have to fight him by ourselves." She said.

August sighed. "But it's dark... I can barely see!" she said.

Ellie shrugged. "We'll do our best," she said.

The helicopter searched its spotlights through the dark until it found Ellie and her friends. Ellie shielded her eyes as the bright light focused on her. The helicopter veered down. Istan threw down a rope ladder and climbed down it. Ellie watched as the helicopter slowly started to descend, getting closer to the ground. August began thinking that they were planning to chop their heads off with their propellers spinning at least as fast as a small race car.

"What do we do?" August yelled, her hair blowing in her face.

Anastasia Pelletier

“What?” Alex yelled over the wind. “I can’t hear you!” She tried her best to holler over the chopping noise of the helicopter.

August grunted. “Oh, whatever!” She yelled in exasperation. Wind blew in everyone's faces, causing the kid’s hair to flop all over the place. August gripped her hat. “Well,” she yelled.

The helicopter stopped spinning its propellers. Three spotlights moved around the dark until they focused on the three girls. Alex shielded her eyes. “Hey! What?” she yelled. Alex and Ellie exchanged glances.

Istan slowly began climbing down the rope ladder. He stepped on the last ring and jumped down to the ground. He hit the ground with such force, his knees started to buckle, but he held himself up. He smiled coldly. “Well, hello,” he said, taking his sword out. It glinted in the moonlight. Ellie looked at the sword. It was the biggest sword she had ever seen. Its rims were clean, and its hard metal body was freshly polished.

“Long time no see,” Istan said walking over to Ellie. He smiled, showing all his badly crooked and broken yellow teeth. Alex backed away.

“Look at you, always backing away from what you fear or possibly what you *hide*.” Istan laughed. Ellie’s eyes

## Whispers in the Wind

bulged. Could Istan possibly know that they had the magic ring dust in their hands? She didn't want to know. She stuffed her hands deeper into her pockets so that they touched the magic bag. Istan smiled evilly. "Surprised? You know, I can read minds." He said. He looked at his sword. "I could kill you now. Or I could wait until your father gets here. I'm sure he wouldn't want to miss the fun," he said happily, looking straight into Ellie's eyes. Ellie shuddered as Istan looked at his sword. He lifted his head into the air and threw up his sword. "Erupción del volcán!" he yelled into the sky. A deep rumble filled the city. Istan laughed with delight as the moon darkened and the night became even darker. "Ahhh," he sighed in satisfaction.

Ellie, Alex, and August watched in horror as a huge volcano, the size of a monstrous mountain, poured its hot liquid all over the village of Niste.

The air shimmered, and a tiny Earl appeared in the mist.

"I can't be here for long, But..." he said. The connection was failing. "I just want you to know that you need to sprink..." Earl's face darkened and glitched, leaving him stuck in mid-sentence. The image flickered, and he said, "Remember." Then his face flickered and was gone.

Alex rolled her eyes.

## Anastasia Pelletier

“Great, that helped a lot.” Ellie sighed. “What does he mean?” she asked.

Before Alex or August could answer, The air suddenly got warmer, and heat steamed off the pavement. “OH. NO,” Alex said in warning. Ahead of them was a steaming pile of lava, sliding down the hill, into the street, practically saying: If you don’t move, I’ll suck you up, and it’ll hurt. Alex backed away, trying to find a branch of a tree, a building, or a safe place to stay away from the lava, but she had no luck. Only ashes remained from the trees.

“Ugh!” She grunted in frustration.

Ellie touched her dagger and met her friend’s eyes. “RUN!” she yelled. August and Alex didn’t need to think about that decision. All three of them ran as fast as a lightning bolt.

Istan grunted. Cars swerved, and all the stoplights turned red. A traffic line blocked his view of the kids.

Alex tried to see what was ahead of them, but she couldn’t. Lava gushed down the streets, rushing towards Alex. She screamed as the lava pushed itself closer, trapping her inside a hot spring. She frantically searched her pocket and found her sword. Alex clenched her hands around the hilt. Her fingers became sweaty and clammy. She gripped the hilt, but it slid out of her fingertips. The sword dropped

## Whispers in the Wind

heavily, splashing lava all over the place. She yelled in outrage. Alex was weaponless and a burning mess. She watched as her weapon slowly sank into the fiery liquid and disappeared. The lava was cornering her, making her step backward until there was nowhere else to go. The lava had pushed her right onto the edge of a cliff.

Alex looked down at the wavy sea. She couldn't imagine jumping off the cliff. She had never done it before. She nervously backed away. The lava was advancing, getting stronger. Alex yelled as she slipped off the edge of the cliff. She made the biggest mistake she had ever made in her life. She looked down. A bright Blue Ocean paraded itself across the shore, rushing wildly with frantic, energetic waves. The drop was manageable, except she didn't think she'd survive the fall. The ocean rushed below her, making her seasick. She gripped onto the side of the cliff with one hand. Her hand started slipping. The lava poured down the side of the cliff. Suddenly, the lava changed shapes and formed into a dragon. The lava dragon breathed in and let out a long, smoky breath. Alex tried to stay calm, watching the dragon. She tried to feel like she and the dragon were content, except she still knew she was about to die, plus she was facing a gigantic lava dragon. The dragon roared and sent sparks flying out of his nose. Alex could feel she was losing her grip on the rock. She let one hand go and tried to reposition herself.

## Anastasia Pelletier

“Help!” She yelled. The lava dragon reared backward and charged Alex. At first, she was shocked. Then she was confused. Her hands completely lost grip, and she felt herself flailing downwards, trying to slow down. Alex watched as the dragon shrunk to the size of an ant, and the sea stretched across for miles. She hit the water with a kerplunk. Alex lost all her senses. Her face ached, and she felt like she had just been hit with a big semi-truck.

Alex collapsed as the warm air disappeared, and the cold air seemed to overtake her. She felt like she had just plummeted face first into cement. “I’m drowning,” she thought in amazement. “I can’t believe I’m dying,” she thought, dazed. She almost sank to the bottom of the ocean, but she thought of her friends. “They’re still out there,” she thought. “I can’t die and let them down.” She struggled to regain her senses. Alex tried to swim up to the surface, but she was too tired.

Alex stopped. She squeezed open her eyes. A light not so far ahead was speeding towards her. No, not a light. She decided it was a shark. The shark whizzed past Alex and stopped. As the shark got closer, Alex realized it wasn’t a shark. It was a Sharkmobile. A man stepped out of the shark and swam to Alex. Alex smiled and opened her mouth to say thank you. Water poured into her mouth. She coughed and created bubbles. The man nodded. Alex stumbled on

## Whispers in the Wind

seaweed and closed her eyes. The man picked up Alex and took her into the Sharkmobile. They sped through the water and rocketed up onto the surface. Alex coughed. Finally, she had normal air.

“I-Uh-Um-” she started. She coughed again. “Thank you,” she finally said. The man nodded. She realized the kind man was the servant who had offered to help Ellie get out of the clear cave when the Mantalope had attacked. They jumped out of the shark and swam to shore. As tired as she was, Alex knew her friends needed her up on the cliff.

Istan chased Ellie around the city, knocking cars aside with one small gesture of his hand. Istan raised a Honda Minivan up into the air. He threw the heavy automobile at Ellie. Ellie ducked as the car went soaring past her head. Istan grunted. “Stupid girl,” he growled. He raised his blade. Ellie’s eyes widened in terror, and she took off. Not looking at where she was going, she ran into a hard wall.

The wall was August. She struggled to get up underneath the heap of Ellie, but eventually, she lifted herself up and faced Istan. August gripped her sword, and Ellie gripped her dagger.

“Are you going to kill us now?” Ellie asked, looking nervously at Istan’s sharp blade.

## Anastasia Pelletier

Istan chuckled. “Oh, how fun it would be to kill you now. But I need something first. Something I know you have,” he said, looking straight at Ellie.

Ellie gulped. “What kind of something?” she asked while fidgeting with the string of the black bag that held the magic ring. Istan’s eyes narrowed.

“DO NOT LIE TO ME, GIRL!” he boomed. Ellie stepped back. August’s hands became red. She clenched her teeth.

“Show me that you have it,” Istan said, eyeing Ellie’s pocket. Ellie shifted her weight to her left foot.

“Have what?” She asked, doing her best to pretend she had no clue what he was talking about.

Istan scowled. “Don’t play dumb. I know you have it. Give it to me, and you will be unharmed,” he said. August focused on Istan...his evil grin, laugh, sword, and greed for the ring dust. Then the air started to shimmer. Dust, fake ring dust, appeared in a nice neat green bag near Istan.

August smiled. “You might want to re-think what you just said. Look behind you,” she said. Istan turned around. August grabbed Ellie, and they ran for it. They jumped over burned bushes and steaming puddles of lava. Istan reached for the bag and opened it. He screamed in outrage. Instead

## Whispers in the Wind

of magic ring dust, the bag held sunflower seeds. Istan cursed. He dumped the sunflower seeds out of the bag. Almost immediately, sunflowers began to push themselves out of the ground. They twisted themselves around Istan, trapping him in a circle of vines. The sunflowers bloomed and hid Istan's face. He screamed, but the plant gagged his mouth so he could no longer speak. August and Ellie ran back to Istan and smiled.

“How did you do that?” Ellie asked in amazement. “That thing?” Alex smiled. “I guess a little plant power, huh?” she laughed. Then, she stopped. The sunflowers had stopped growing around Istan. His mouth was still gagged, but he could now walk. His feet were not glued to the ground anymore. The sunflowers stopped moving and suddenly shriveled up into the ground, leaving Istan unharmed. August scowled. This was not part of the plan, but everything she did didn't go according to plan, she decided. Istan raised his sword and grinned wickedly. He lunged for August, and before she knew what was happening, she fell to the ground, aching with pain.

## CHAPTER 15

### *EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF*

August felt herself thump on the ground. The cold ground numbed her whole body. She saw Istan striking. Then her vision went blurry. She saw stars, millions of trillions of bright, beautiful stars, each one brilliant in the moonlight. She thought about her friends, the danger they were all in. She wondered why in the world she had wanted to go on this quest. So many things had happened. And she had no idea how to deal with them right now. From a distance, she could hear Ellie yelling her name, but August felt too tired to get up and answer Ellie.

Ellie looked at her best friend, in a heap, lying motionless on the ground. With tears streaming down her cheeks, Ellie shook August hard, rolling her over so she could look at August's face. She couldn't imagine fighting Istan alone. She tried to imagine it was all a dream, her mom and her, back in her cozy bed. She hadn't been in a nice comfortable bed in a while. She missed Hudson and couldn't wait for all of the chaos to be resolved, and she could have a normal life again, with normal people and normal events. She looked at August and thought about Alex.

They couldn't just leave her. She needed them. They were a team. Deep inside Ellie's mind, she knew she had to

## Whispers in the Wind

have all of them. She had a feeling they had to work together to win against Istan and bring back Niste.

Istan laughed. His sparkling sword was held tightly in his right hand, waiting for the perfect moment to lunge. He breathed in and then out and smiled. His plans were working out perfectly, except for the fact that that hideous girl had interfered with her sunflower magic. Now, everything was messed up. His lava dragon had come back and reported Alex dead, fallen from the cliff, drowning. Istan crossed his arms and looked at Ellie. Ellie stood up and strode over to Istan, her face red with tears. She grunted. Istan slowly lifted his head and looked into Ellie's big eyes.

“*Where is it?*” Istan's voice seemed to echo through Ellie's mind. Ellie shook her head but couldn't seem to get that line out of her head. “Where is it?” his voice growled again, though this time much more clearly. Istan took his sword and placed it right in front of Ellie. He frowned at Ellie and then turned to face August. “Well, you can either give the object to me now or...” His frown flipped over to be a goofy clown smile. “Or we could do it the *hard* way,” he laughed, thinking about how wonderful it would be to kill another human. “Give *it* to me now, and you will not be harmed,” he said, wheeling around to face Ellie again. “Or, if you insist, I could kill you and your *friends*.” he sighed,

Anastasia Pelletier

looking at his sword. Istan seemed to spit out that last word. “Friends.”

Istan had never had any real friends before. In school, people were always too afraid of him bullying them. He was the mean kid. That’s when he had quit school after his parents had died. Then, it had just been him and his brother, all alone. He liked killing people because he wanted everyone in the world dead, gone, just like his parents were forever gone. He took a shaky breath and cleared away the old memories. Then, his smile grew into a grin.

“Or, are you too afraid to give it to me?” Istan laughed. Ellie’s eyes narrowed, her face became red with anger, wanting to shoot a million daggers right through his soul. Istan shoved his shiny sword into Ellie’s face. Before she knew it, she was on the ground, backing away from Istan’s sharp blade. Ellie had a bruise near her eye and a nasty cut on her cheek, but she wasn’t badly hurt. She reached for her dagger in her pocket. Istan chuckled, sending a shiver down Ellie’s spine. Ellie looked at August, unconscious on the ground. She wished that August would wake up, help her. Ellie backed off as Istan crept closer. “GIVE ME IT,” he whispered in her mind. She looked up at Istan’s face.

“Back off,” Ellie said, not knowing where she got the words. Istan snorted. Ellie’s nostrils flared. “I said, BACK

## Whispers in the Wind

OFF.” She said again, this time much more confident, her words rolling out of her mouth as fierce as a lion's roar.

Istan hesitated, then thought better of it. He turned and walked over to August. She lay flat on the ground, not moving a muscle. Istan picked up August by the scruff of her neck and dragged her over to Ellie. He turned his sword around and around until finally, he looked up and smiled evilly. “It will be better to kill her quickly while she’s asleep,” he said. Istan raised his sword into the air, and then August's eyes fluttered open.

“Ahgh!” she gasped. At first, her vision was blurry, and then, she saw Istan’s face. He seemed almost frozen in shock. Then, slowly his face softened.

“I guess we’ll have to kill her alive. That’s even better!” he squealed in joy. August scrambled to her feet. Istan caught the seam of her shirt and pulled her back. August felt like time had been slowed down. She couldn’t walk or move. Her feet tried to walk, touching the ground, but she wouldn’t go anywhere. Her feet felt like they were glued to the ground. Finally, she stopped. She gasped.

Istan had begun to raise his sword even higher and was almost about to hurt her. She tried to run, move, walk, do anything to escape, but she couldn’t. August yelled out Ellie’s name. Ellie tried to respond and started running

Anastasia Pelletier

towards August. Then, Istan snapped his fingers, and Ellie was chained in metal chains, binding her to the ground. She tugged and tugged, but the chains wouldn't budge.

“Help!” she yelled. She tugged and tugged at the chains. Istan started to lower his blade, its edge so close to August’s arm, the hairs near her elbow began to stick up. Then, Istan slashed his sword across August’s arm, making her fall to the ground with pain. Ellie felt helpless. There was nothing she could do. She watched miserably as her friend suffered. Blood gushed out of August’s arm, puddling onto the floor.

August yelped and jumped back in surprise as she watched her own blood trickle out of the wound. Ellie gasped as August started shaking. Ellie screamed. “What have you done!?” she yelled. Tears formed in her eyes.

Istan nodded. “I figured you wouldn’t know. You see, your friend won’t live long. I’ve poisoned her,” he said, smiling. Those words hit Ellie like a big comet. It blew her upright in front of her enemy and her friend. Poisoned. Won’t. Friend. Long. Live. Her. Those words stung Ellie. Suddenly, a loud bang echoed through the village. Istan looked around, alarmed.

Alex ran straight over to Ellie. She whispered three words into Ellie’s ear. “Please, Don’t Panic.” Then, Alex ran over to August, picked her up and looked into August’s face.

## Whispers in the Wind

Istan yelled in outrage. That girl who was helping the poisoned one, was supposed to be dead. Why wasn't she dead? Had she survived the fall? Surely, that couldn't happen. Yet, here she was, standing in front of his eyes, helping the poisoned one. Alex had her back turned away from Istan. It was the perfect moment for Istan to strike. He marched over to Alex and August and advanced quietly. Ellie wanted to scream at them, tell them to run away, but her mouth felt like sandpaper, and she was unable to speak. Istan made his way over to Alex and August. He started to swing his sword towards them when suddenly Ellie said, "Stop."

Istan turned towards Ellie. She didn't know where it had come from, but somehow she had summoned all her courage to speak up. "Stop," she said again, this time a little more calmly. "I know that you don't need to do this. In fact, you shouldn't do this. Killing innocent people is crueler than dying. It isn't fun for anyone." She took a deep breath. "I believe you have a good part of your heart. Not all of your heart is bad. You have lots of potential to grow into a good person. I know that it's possible. You just need to try," she said, rubbing the chains that bound her hands together. "This is not friendly or nice. Don't just go around killing people for no reason. You have to have evidence for your actions. You are not a bad person. It's just I know you can change,"

## Anastasia Pelletier

she said. She looked into Istan's eyes, and for a scary moment, she thought Istan would turn away and hurt her friends.

Then, Istan did the craziest thing. He snapped his fingers and hunched his shoulders. Ellie's hands were free, out of the cuffs that had imprisoned them. Istan snapped again, and August stopped gagging and wasn't poisoned. She hopped to her feet.

Alex scowled. "Why are you doing this?" Alex asked Istan.

Istan shrugged. "I suppose I can change after all," he said. Suddenly, Ellie's father walked out of the dark. "Hello," Caster said. "Did I miss the fun?" He asked. Istan laughed. "FUN? Oh yes, you missed a lot of fun," he said. Then, both brothers whispered something to each other. Caster and Istan exchanged glances and then burst out laughing.

Caster nodded as the sun began to rise. Shadows danced across their faces as the sun rose high above all the trees.

Caster leaned over to kiss his daughter. Ellie smiled but then stepped away. She looked at her friends for approval. They nodded. She reached into the black magic bag, pulling out the real magic ring dust. She took a deep breath. This was it. Their plan could work or go completely wrong. Ellie

## Whispers in the Wind

sprinkled the dust onto the ground. For a minute, nothing happened. Then, the wind sped up, and then, all was still. Completely still. Nothing moved. The world stared in awe as magical creatures crept out of their dark shadowy blanket and revealed themselves.

## CHAPTER 16

### *FIGHTING FOR THEM*

Alex gasped as a little girl, about three, bounced out of thin air, fluttering her wings.

“It’s a...a...really...wow. It’s a...a fairy!” Ellie breathed.

August coughed, and her eyes watered as a short, tiny man with skin-tight red leggings, a red suit, and a really wound-up hairdo popped out of the air. A series of oohs and ahhs filled the air. The man smiled, and a fairy, who had just popped out of the air, held a huge golden crown, sparkling from the top to the bottom with purple and red jewels. The man coughed, and another fairy fluttered in with a throne, about 45 times bigger than the small man. The man positioned himself on the gargantuan throne and clapped his hands impatiently. Another fairy flew in with his crown. Gently, the fairy placed the crown on the king’s head, handling it like a tiny, cherished china teapot. The fairy acted as if the crown were a bomb, and it was about to blow up. The man, now wearing the huge, oversized crown, made a

## Whispers in the Wind

shooing motion with his hands, signaling the poor servant to scurry away. Istan stopped, seeing the king back. The king studied Istan's face. Then without any thought, marched over to Istan and slapped him. Istan cried out in pain, not expecting the king to do such a thing.

“You!” the king cried, pounding his little fists on his throne. “To do such a thing! To ruin my life! Tear down my village! I AM THE KING!” he boomed. “No one else rules here! I am the king!” he repeated again. Istan stepped away and bowed over enthusiastically.

“I am so, so, sorry, your majesty. I ruined your life! I am *so sorry, your majesty. I really am,*” Istan lied.

The king nodded. “You'd better be. Or else, I'll have to throw you in the dungeons!” the king roared.

A fairy flew over and whispered, “We don't have any dungeons, sir.”

The king frowned. “Well then, I'll send in the dragon!” he yelled triumphantly.

The little fairy shook her head. “No, sir, We don't have the dragon either. We lost him too.”

The king frowned again, thinking. He pounded his fist on his throne, creating a loud, startling BOOM! “Well then,

Anastasia Pelletier

I'll do something to you! Just look, look what you've done to my kingdom!" he yelled.

Istan snickered and took a deep breath. "Well, sir, first of all, I didn't *destroy* your kingdom, and second of all, I WANT TO BE KING!" Istan blurted out. The king stopped and looked at Istan in disbelief.

"You could say that again." The king gritted his teeth. Istan laughed, and without warning, charged at the poor king. Thunder echoed through the sky. The clouds opened up and drenched the kids, king, and villains.

The king had no time to prepare. He just stared in amazement at the predator in front of him. Istan clawed like a lion with his sword. He bared his teeth and evilly grinned. The king looked like a scared mouse, wanting to shrink and fade into the background.

"GRAH!" Istan lunged right onto the king, his sword ready. Then Istan smiled, having a most unpleasant thought. Slowly, Istan lowered his sword and walked over to Caster. Istan smiled and handed over the sword. Caster's eyes widened as if he was holding a fragile piece of art. Caster took a deep breath and walked over to the king.

"Please, I beg you! No death! Please!" the King pleaded. Caster laughed. He lunged with all his might.

## Whispers in the Wind

“No!” King Chara whimpered. Then it happened. Caster sliced his sword into the king. The king screamed, filling the tired waking dawn with a blistering scream.

“No!” Ellie yelled. She watched as her dad grinned with delight. They all stared at the unmoving king, blistered with blood, cut to pieces, slowly sank to the floor.

Ellie’s eyes stung. She wanted to yell, to leave, to make a huge storm and take away these ugly monsters. But, she watched, acting as if everything was calm, even though anger was bubbling ferociously to the surface inside of her. Finally, she couldn’t stand it anymore. Tears streamed down her cheeks, flooding her face. Ellie dropped her weapon and stared into her dad’s face.

“I...thought” sniff “that you” sniff “were a good...person! I thought you would never” sniff “ever, do such a thing, you murderer!” She spat. Ellie sobbed, spitting, and sniffing. She was drenched from head to toe, but she didn’t care. Lightning flashed, illuminating the street.

Caster faked a sad face. “I know, sweetie. But I had to. He was the bad guy.” Caster said, walking over to his daughter. Caster tried to hug her, but Ellie shrugged him off and walked away.

“You think *he* was the bad one?!” She burst out, half laughing, half crying. “You are the bad one!” Ellie’s back

turned away towards the cliff. Istan seized the opportunity to attack. He quietly took out a bow from his pocket and placed the arrow in the right spot. He had the perfect aim, just enough to send Ellie down off the cliff and into the dark, murky waters below. Istan's hands released the arrow. Ellie cried out in surprise as the arrow pierced her back. The last thing she remembered was falling off the cliff, watching as the dark water seemed to pull her towards the sea, stealing all of her strength.

“Why?” Alex questioned Istan. “Why are you such a bad person?” she asked, drawing out her sword. “First, you kill my brother, and now you knock my best friend off a cliff? What are you planning next? You're just a greedy, selfish monster longing for power. Isn't that right?” Alex asked, practically exploding with anger. Istan backed away, closer to the edge of the cliff. Istan's lips moved, but no sounds came out. Fear lingered in Istan's eyes. He was speechless. Alex swung her sword with all her might at Istan. She kicked him hard, making him double over in pain. Before he knew it, Istan was falling off the cliff, and in minutes, he disappeared under the shadowy blanket of water. Alex watched as the waves seemed to devour him whole. She smiled.

“Good, maybe he'll learn his lesson this time.” Alex hissed. She smiled triumphantly again.

## Whispers in the Wind

August high-fived her. “Nice!” she said, beaming. “You have some skill,” she told Alex.

Alex smiled. “Yeah, well, thanks,” Alex smiled shyly, brushing a strand of hair out of her face. “We need to find...” she was about to say Ellie when something caught her eye. A small black bag sat on the beach. Alex gagged, and coughed, then laughed with joy. A tiny figure rose out of the waves and swam to the shore. The figure coughed and shuttered, spitting out a pool of water. Another figure rose out of the black sea. Alex’s smile disappeared. The second figure launched its dripping, soaked, tired self at the first figure, catching them by surprise. The first figure screamed, kicking the second to the ground.

“Ellie!” Alex yelled over the cliff. The first figure stopped fighting for a minute and looked up at the cliff. Then the second figure rose out of the water and tackled the first. The first person, caught by surprise, screamed as the second person threw her into the waves.

“No!” Alex screamed. She watched as her best friend got flipped over, becoming weaker and weaker as the waves pushed on. The first figure had vanished, leaving the second figure tall and strong. Istan cackled in delight, controlling the waves. Tears stung Alex’s eyes, hate boiled inside of her, and grief drenched her. What would they do without Ellie?

Anastasia Pelletier

How would they survive? These questions lingered in her head, longing for an answer.

“Look, It’s Earl!” August said, pointing to the sky. Alex looked up and waved. The pilot waved as he lowered the tree mobile to the cliff. The girls climbed aboard.

“Earl!” they chorused, patting him on the back.

Earl smiled, then looked at the gap in between them.

“Hey, where did that other girl go? Weren't there three of you? I swear there were three of you....” Earl asked, muttering possibilities. Alex and August just stared at the poor man, hoping someone would change the subject.

“Uh, We’re kind of, well, we just don’t want to talk about it,” August said quickly. Alex nodded in agreement.

Earl could tell something was wrong, especially when they had lost their leader, but he didn’t push it. Nobody talked, and the mood was definitely down. Earl flew the tree mobile, far, far away from the cliff. Nobody talked. Alex watched all the clouds as they flew by them, trying to identify a shape within them. August looked down out her window to see birds and the brilliant blue sea stretching across the horizon. Earl sat there in the awkward silence, steering the tree mobile and listening to the ongoing hum of the engine.

## Whispers in the Wind

“We're here!” Earl declared, well into the night. The sky was black, and a huge and wonderful city loomed in front of them, complete with bright buildings.

“Whoa.” Alex breathed.

“It's beautiful,” August whispered. Earl zoomed closer to the city.

“Welcome to Chicago,” Earl said.

“Let's drop down right there,” Alex said, pointing to a spot on the ground. Earl nodded. Their tree mobile touched down onto the ground.

“Whooooooeeeeee,” August whistle. “I haven't been here since I saw Billy Joel live in 1962!” she exclaimed. Alex's eyes widened.

“What? You got to see Billy Joel live in concert? I'm jealous!” Alex said, crossing her arms.

“Yeah, I did. It was amazing! His fingers just skimmed across that keyboard...well, anyway, that was before I got separated from my family.” August said, remembering the concert like it was yesterday.

Earl stepped in, ruining the moment. “Let's get a hotel, get some rest and wake up tomorrow ready to go,” Earl suggested. The girls nodded. They walked for what seemed

Anastasia Pelletier

like miles until they found a hotel labeled: SPIRIT ELITE. The doorman opened the door and ushered them in. They checked into room 31, a nice room with two beds, two bathrooms, and a very nice balcony overlooking the city.

“Good night,” Alex said to August.

August bit her lip. “Goodnight, I’m sorry about all you’ve been through. Losing a brother is hard enough. Losing a friend is just mean. I’m sorry you have to go through all these feelings, but I’m here for you if you need me. I’m here.”

#####

“Alex!” August whispered. “What is that?” She asked. Alex squinted at August.

“What do you mean?” “Go back to sleep,” Alex said, rolling over.

“No,” August said again, listening with all her might. “I think something is happening out there. Something important,” she told Alex.

Alex snorted. “Really? If you ask me, your ears are playing tricks on you. NOW LEAVE ME ALONE,” Alex said, taking her covers and burying her face into them.

## Whispers in the Wind

August sighed. “Ugh, fine. I’m going to check it out.” August walked over to the sliding door and slid it open just a crack. Cannons were set on the sidewalk below their hotel. People dressed in all black were screaming commands to each other in a different language. August's heart practically stopped when she saw two people in the street she hated. “Alex! Earl, come see this,” she yelled into the hotel.

Earl scrambled out of bed in his robe and slippers to come see what was going on. on outside. Alex finally took it seriously, and the zombie walked out of bed. She yawned and then finally seemed to wake up completely.

“Ahh!” Alex pointed. “What are those!?” she pointed to a bunch of tiny things with four legs scrambling around on the ground. “And that...that’s...Istan,” she spit out his name like poison, spraying the whole world with the awareness of evil.

“They must have followed us,” Earl said with a sinking heart.

Alex waited. “Come on guys, if we want to go fight, then we gotta get moving!” Alex yelled into Earl and August’s faces. Alex took a deep breath as she opened their hotel room door. She could see the lobby. Istan’s army was surrounding them, and there was no way to avoid them. Alex positioned her sword on her belt and felt her two emergency ropes. If

Anastasia Pelletier

only she had a plan, a plan worth saving thousands and defeating ten thousands. If only the ones she had lost and cared about most could come back, she could see her mom, her dad, her family. If only she had not met Ellie, then Ash would still be alive and well, just the two of them surviving in the wilderness as a team.

“You okay?” August asked Alex, looking at the sweat on Alex’s face with concern. Alex nodded. She thought about how the night before, August had said she would always support Alex. She had said, “I’m here for you.”

“Come on. We can’t stay here for forever. Besides, we can do this because we’re a team. We can win this together,” August said, pushing Alex towards the exit.

Alex nodded again. “Together.” That word felt like a foreign language on Alex’s tongue. So many things she had wanted to go right had gone wrong. Alex looked at her sword. She wasn’t fighting for herself. She was fighting for all the other people in the world who had somehow felt the same way as her. She was ready to fight, even though she might lose someone else.

“We’re gonna win,” she told August and Earl. “We have to.”

## Whispers in the Wind

## ***ACKNOWLEDGMENTS***

First off, I'd like to thank my grandpa for editing and publishing this book and my grandma for reading and editing my book over and over again. Next, I'd like to thank my family, Mom, Dad, my sister, and my brother for supporting me and reading my writing. I'd also like to acknowledge my three cats, Eggplant, Parmesan, and Hamlet for sitting on my lap and writing with me for some chapters of this book

I also would like to thank all of my teachers who have taught me how to write stories and for helping me grow in every possible way I can as a writer. Thank you for helping me create the magic of different worlds, dragons, characters. Thank you for helping me write my first book. Thank you for keeping the enchantment of Niste flowing smoothly and or giving other readers a chance to see the unbelievable.

## Whispers in the Wind



## *Anastasia Pelletier*

Anastasia Pelletier lives in Ohio with her mom, dad, sister, brother, and three cats. She is in fifth grade. When she is not busy writing stories, Anastasia enjoys singing, being in theater productions, and reading fantasy books. She also loves listening to Billy Joel music. This is Anastasia's first book, and she is beyond excited to have created her own world of magic.