

Beyond

Snillotia Trilogy
Book One

Donna Wagner

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*For Tori,
whose love of reading, inspired.*

Prologue

As stories go, this one begins like any other. Once upon a time, there was a happy family, until suddenly tragedy struck, leaving a child parentless and totally alone in the world. And like most stories, of course, the child this one is about is no ordinary child.

Although he is seemingly no different than anyone else on the outside, as the saying goes, it's what's on the inside that counts. So, what started as a tragedy has led us to this moment—the moment when the child is about to embark on an adventure that will change his life forever.

Part I:
The Beginning

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Chapter One

Tim Tollins squeezed his knees as close to his chest as he could and held his breath. It was getting harder and harder to evade discovery. Each time he thought he was safe, they would appear, looking for him. He swore to himself they would never find him. The house was all he had left of his family and no one- not even Social Services was going to take him away, just to stick him in some crummy place where no one cared about him. This was the seventh time they'd come to the house looking for him. Lucky for him, they didn't know about the secret door.

The door wasn't really a secret. His parents had loved showing it to guests who came to visit. They'd loved the reaction everyone always had, when part of the seemingly solid wall swung open to a dark passageway, which led to a single room. That room was where Tim was now, hoping with every fiber of his being, that one of the Social Services men didn't notice the light switch that opened the door, and use it, thinking it would turn on a light. Each time they had come looking for him, he had done the same thing- hide in the secret room. Each time he was able to let out a sigh of relief when they didn't find him and finally left, giving up, but they always came back. He didn't know why they assumed he'd still be there; he tried to make them think he ran away. He bought a

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bus ticket, hoping they'd find out about it and leave the house alone. Apparently, it hadn't worked.

Tim strained to listen. It seemed like they had gone, or at least moved to another part of the house. He looked around the room. Empty potato chip bags, candy wrappers, and soda bottles littered the floor. An air mattress and some blankets were in the corner, with some other camping supplies that had been in the basement. The room had no windows, but it wasn't stuffy. He wasn't quite sure why, but it seemed that fresh air got in somehow. He'd figured it was the safest room to stay in. He could move about freely, without anyone seeing him through any windows, since again, there weren't any. He only left the room when he absolutely had to, and he never turned any lights on in the rest of the house. He didn't know how long he could live like this- he was only 13 years old, which was why Social Services wanted to take him away, but he knew he had to stay. It was the same unknown reason why he hadn't actually gotten on that bus. He had to stay with the house.

Tim heard footsteps, suddenly, running towards him. Panicking, he tried to make himself as small as possible in the corner of the room. He wondered what was going on and why they suddenly were coming back to the part of the house they'd already searched. He heard a loud click. The secret door was unlatched. Someone must have found the switch. Tim frantically looked around the room, wishing with all his might that there was some place to hide, but there wasn't. He was trapped. He quickly grabbed a blanket, with fleeting hope that

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with it on top of him, they would think he wasn't in the room and leave. They were almost to the end of the passageway. He could see the flashlight beams through the blanket. He squeezed his eyes shut and pushed himself closer to the wall, trying to make himself as small as he possibly could. The excited voices came closer. Suddenly, he felt nothing behind him and had the strange sensation that he was falling.

When the sensation stopped and he hadn't landed anywhere, he slowly opened his eyes. He could still see the room, but he didn't seem to be inside it any longer. It was as if he was behind the room, looking through the wall. He shook his head, since that seemed impossible, although he had no explanation as to what was going on. Three men entered the room and looked around and didn't appear to see him. One of them walked toward him and stopped when he was almost on top of him. The man turned to the others and said, "It looks like we found where he's been staying all these months, but he's definitely not here right now. We'll keep someone posted outside, watching for when he comes back."

Tim looked at the man, confused. He was right there, so close that Tim could grab his arm if he just reached out. For some reason, they just couldn't see him. Tim slowly relaxed and stood up. There was no reaction from the men in the room. He moved a bit closer to the man. Nothing. Tim brought his hand up and reached out to touch the man's arm. As his hand got closer, his hand and then his arm started to tingle, not unlike the feeling you get when your foot falls asleep. He

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pulled his hand back and the tingling stopped. He glanced at the men in the room. One of them was staring straight at the wall, eyes wide, pointing. The man closest turned around and looked right at Tim. Actually, he looked right through Tim. He turned back around. "Jerry, what are you pointing at?"

"Th- Th- There was a hand!" Jerry exclaimed.

Both of the other men looked at Jerry closely. "A hand?", the one nearest Tim said, "Where?"

"I- It came out of the wall." Jerry said quietly, realizing they weren't going to believe him.

The third man in the room came closer and pointed right at Tim and said, "This wall?"

Jerry nodded. The man stepped directly in front of Tim and stared at the wall closely. He was so close; Tim could see flecks of gold in the man's brown eyes. He looked very familiar to Tim, but he couldn't figure out why. Tim held his breath. The man stepped slightly back and brought his hand closer to Tim, until it flattened right in front of his face. "This is solid wall, man."

To Tim, the man looked like he was a mime, trapped in an invisible box, flattening his hand back and forth in front of him. Tim was beginning to understand. Somehow, he had gone beyond the wall. He didn't know how or why it had happened, but he was very grateful it had. The man stopped imitating a mime. "The Tollins kid ain't here," he said with a sigh, turning away from the wall.

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The man turned back briefly, giving one last glance at where Tim stood, “Let’s go,” he said, almost sadly, as he walked towards the door.

The others followed. Tim watched them go, then heard the click of the (not so) secret door shutting. He stood there, breathing a sigh of relief that he’d miraculously evaded discovery again.

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Chapter Two

Tim stood there, staring at the room for what seemed like hours. After the men had left, he had taken a moment to look around to see where he was. There was nothing there. Above him, below him, behind him, and on either side- there was actually nothing but blackness. He had reached out as far as he possibly could in all directions and there was nothing of substance to grab on to. Even below him, although it seemed as though he was standing on solid ground, when he tried to touch it, his hand kept going, past where his feet were planted. Tim knew he couldn't stay in the emptiness forever. He had to go back to the room. He was afraid, however, that once he did, he would never know why or how he had gotten behind the wall. He was also thinking about his parents, wondering if they knew what this room seemed to be able to do- or what he

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seemed to be able to do. He didn't know the answer to that either.

Deciding it was best to get on with things as quickly as possible, he lunged toward the wall and felt the falling sensation once again and before he could even question it, he was back in the room, in a heap in the middle of the floor. He picked himself up and turned around and looked at the wall. Slowly, he brought his hand up and his fingers felt the smooth plaster. It was solid. Disappointment rose. Tim ran around the perimeter of the room, pushing at different spots, hoping that maybe it was another secret door that had let him through. When he reached the corner he had been trying to hide in before, he stumbled and without even thinking reached out to grab onto something to stop himself from falling but nothing was there. Tim landed on his knees and pain shot through his legs. He slid onto his stomach and laid there, taking a few deep breaths. When he opened his eyes, he saw nothing, then slowly became aware of the tingling feeling at his stomach. He realized he'd gone through the wall, at least halfway, again.

Tim's excitement rose. He pulled himself back into the room and stared at the corner. It appeared to look like any corner where two walls and floor meet, but as Tim pushed his hand through what looked like solid wall and pulled it out again, he knew it wasn't. After his hand could no longer take the tingling sensation, he stopped and stood up. He had decided this couldn't be a coincidence. The strange feeling that

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he could not leave his house, no matter what, had to have something to do with the fact that he could go beyond the wall.

Tim decided that he needed to look for something, anything, in the main part of the house, that could possibly explain what was happening. He left the room and went through the secret door and found himself in front of the door to his dad's office. He hadn't come in here yet, since everything had happened, except to take the cash he knew his dad kept in a vase on the top shelf of his bookcase. He pushed the door open, went over to his dad's desk, and sat down. He looked around the room. He really didn't know where to start, since he had no clue what he was even looking for. Tim sighed. He wished for the millionth time that everything was back to normal- that his parents were still alive. He wished they hadn't decided to take him out the night before his birthday so he could pick out the new bike he'd been begging for. If they had just stayed home, maybe the people who broke in wouldn't have, since the house wouldn't have been empty. Then there would have been no way for them to interrupt the robbery that had led to his parents being shot.

Tim shook his head, trying to force the memory of that night away. It didn't help. He had been so excited when they got home with his new bike. He begged to be able to ride it down their long driveway and back, even though it was already dark. His parents could see he was excited and agreed, but just once, they had said. The time it took for that quick ride, was all it took. As he parked his bike next to the garage door,

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he'd heard sirens in the distance, but thought nothing about it. Then he'd seen the front door still standing wide open. As he walked over, he saw his mom lying on the ground, then as he got closer, he saw his dad. He had been confused. Then, before he could even enter the house, he was knocked over as two people he didn't know rushed out the door and out of sight. As he looked at his parents on the floor, and realized they were dead, things started to fade. He didn't remember screaming, or the police arriving in response to the house's alarm going off. He didn't remember the chaos of the next couple of days as Social Services tried to find a relative to take him in. If they had bothered to ask him, he could have told them not to bother, but they hadn't asked. His parents had always told him they had no family. They were both only children and their parents had died, and they had no aunts or uncles or cousins. The haziness started clearing around the funeral. He remembered countless faces all telling him they were sorry for his loss. He remembered thinking it was like he had misplaced his parents and could go look for them later. Then he clearly remembered being told he would be placed in a home for boys. That was when he had run away.

Coming back to the present, Tim opened the drawer in his dad's desk. Lying right on top was an oversized blue envelope. His name was written on the front of it, in his mom's pretty handwriting. He slowly picked it up. It was a birthday card. He knew it as soon as he touched it. The first day his life had been turned upside down had been his thirteenth birthday.

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He didn't even remember it. It didn't matter. There was no point to birthdays if you didn't have anyone to celebrate with. He put the card aside, unopened, and continued looking through the drawer. Nothing. He pulled open another drawer. Nothing. Drawer after drawer, cabinet after cabinet. He found nothing that seemed to explain anything to him. No secret papers. Nothing that stood out as a possible clue. Tim sighed again. He got up and started to walk to the door, then stopped and decided to take the birthday card with him. It was the last thing his parents would ever give him and for that reason alone, it was special.

After he had taken care of a few things, like getting clean clothes from his bedroom, and gathering the last of the edible food his best friend, Oliver Nichols, had brought for him from the kitchen, he went back to the room behind the secret door. He thought about contacting Ollie as he walked but was afraid someone would follow him to the house. Ollie was the only person who had known he was hiding in the secret room. Tim briefly thought that Ollie had finally given in and told Social Services where he was. He knew they had questioned him before. After reaching the room, he sat on the air mattress and pulled the card out of his pocket. Thoughts of Ollie fled as he looked at the blue envelope. He stared at his name but didn't open it. He wasn't ready. He knew his mom always wrote little notes inside cards. He didn't think he could handle it right now. He put the card on the floor next to the air mattress and

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yawned. It had been a long night and although his stomach was rumbling, he lay down and fell asleep.

Hours later he sat up in the darkness. Something had woken him up. He heard the click of the secret door. They had come back a second time in one night! Knowing they wouldn't find him, he flew to the corner of room and pressed himself into the wall. Almost immediately, he knew he had passed through. As he stood up, he remembered the birthday card. He knew there was no time to go back and get it, but then he had an idea. Slowly he started walking around the walls of the room until he was right behind where the card lay on the floor. As he'd learned earlier, it seemed like you could come out from behind the wall anywhere, even though you could only enter from the corner. The men were in the room now. While their lights were focused on the other side of the room, he reached his arm through the wall and grabbed the card. As he tried to pull it back through, his hand stuck! He started panicking, thinking his hand was stuck through the wall and he'd be caught, but then he realized it was the card. It could only enter from the corner. As fast as he could, he ran, with his hand sticking out of the wall holding the card, to the corner. His wrist felt like it was on fire as he pulled the card behind the wall. Luckily, and somewhat amazingly, the men hadn't noticed anything.

Tim ignored them, knowing they would never find him. He stared at the card. Somehow, he could see it, even though he was surrounded by nothing but black. Somehow, he knew

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this card was important, just as he knew he couldn't leave the house. He pulled the envelope open and took out the card. It was a normal birthday card, nothing looked special about it. It read, "Happy 13th Birthday to our son" on the front, in colorful letters. Tim opened the card. Something dropped from the card and landed on his foot. He left it there for a moment, his attention more focused on the folded-up piece of paper that was also inside the card.

Tim unfolded the paper. Instead of his parents handwriting, as he was expecting, it was a typed message, which read:

"To a Young Snillotian on the Completion of his or her Thirteenth Year. Congratulations! Our people have long celebrated thirteen as a special number. Your thirteenth year has brought about many changes; some you may have noticed and some you have yet to discover. Do not worry! In time, you will understand the importance of these changes. You are now a privileged member of our people. You have earned your key."

Tim shook his head. It didn't make any sense to him. He understood the words (except Snillotian- he had no idea what that was), but they didn't make sense all together. The key it was referring too, must have been what fell on his foot. He bent down to retrieve it. It wasn't a key, but a small disk or coin. As he held it, the center started to glow. Not knowing why, he

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touched the center of the circle. Like magic, the blackness around him disappeared in an instant.

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Chapter Three

Tim was standing in a mirror image of the room he been living in for the last two months. He looked around in shock. The room was the same, except on the wall farthest from where the secret door was to his room, there was a window, through which sunlight was pouring in. There was furniture in the room as well. It looked like a sitting room, or a den. Tim sat on one of the couches, trying to figure out what was going on. It felt real. He didn't think this was all in his imagination. He looked down at the small disk-like object in his hand. There were words written on it that he hadn't been able to see before. "The royal touch opens all." Tim had no idea what that meant. He turned it over. The other side also had writing on it. "Property of Prince Mit."

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That explained the word “royal” being on the one side, but it didn’t explain why his parents put it in his birthday card. He slipped the disk in his pocket and walked to the window. The view was breathtaking. It seemed as if this room was on top of a mountain. He could see other mountains in the distance and a valley below, with many houses. It looked like a picture out of a book, or something you’d see in a movie. He continued to look around the room. There was nothing personal anywhere, to tell him if someone lived here. As he reached the side of the room opposite the window, he was surprised to see that the passageway didn’t lead to the back of another secret door. Instead, it opened into a brightly lit hallway. Tim poked his head into the hallway. He didn’t see anyone, so he stepped into it. It looked exactly like a backwards version of the hallway in his house, the one that had the secret door in it. He continued to explore. As he did, he realized he was in a house exactly like his. The only difference, it was like he was on the wrong side of the mirror. Anywhere there was writing it was backwards.

He went upstairs to where his room should be. When he walked into the room, at first he thought he was in the wrong room. It didn’t look like his room. Instead, it was set up as a nursery. As he looked around, he realized it looked like pictures of his room as a baby. He just assumed this mirrored house hadn’t been updated in a while. He still wondered why this house existed. He wondered why his parents had never shown it to him, since it was pretty cool. Tim’s stomach

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rumbled. He decided it was a good a time as any to check out the mirrored kitchen and see if there was any food in this strange place.

Arriving in the kitchen, Tim found the refrigerator fully stocked. He took out everything he'd need to make a sandwich. As he was putting everything together, a loud voice from behind him made him drop the bottle of mustard. "What do you think you are doing?"

Tim spun around. There was a girl standing in the doorway, staring at him. As he watched her, not knowing what to say, her eyes widened. Tim stood there frozen. He hadn't been expecting to find any people in this place. "You- You look....", the girl's voice trailed off.

Tim's stomach rumbled loudly. He stared longingly at his half-made sandwich. "Go ahead, finish making it," the girl said.

Tim finished and took a big bite, then another. The sandwich was soon gone. The girl was just watching him. "Am I in trouble?" Tim asked.

The girl didn't answer at first. Then she said, "That depends on where you came from. Do you live in the village? Did you sneak in?"

Tim shook his head, although the girl already seemed to know what his answer would be. "I'm called Anna, regardless of where you come from. The important thing is, however, what are you called?"

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Tim didn't know why his name would be important but told her. "I'm Tim. Tim Tollins."

She nodded, as if she knew this already too. "You look like him," she said.

"Like who?"

"Prince Mit."

Tim recognized the same from the disk in his pocket, but said, "I don't know who that is."

Anna gave him a questioning look. "Yes, you do. I'll show you."

She grabbed his hand and led him further into the house. They approached what Tim thought was the front door, since it looked like the one in his house, but as they went through it, Tim realized they were still inside. It seemed as though this house was larger than his. They finally stopped in a large hallway, which had portraits hanging on the walls. Anna stopped at one and pointed. "That's Prince Mit."

Tim looked at the picture and gasped. It looked just like him. He looked at the next picture and the next. Each picture showed a slightly older version of the boy. As he reached the end of the hallway, Tim was startled to see a picture he actually recognized. It was his parents' wedding picture. "They're my parents!" he exclaimed.

He hadn't recognized the younger versions of his father, but there was no mistaking his mother, or that picture. It hung in their family room and he saw it almost every day of his life. "I told you that you knew Prince Mit," Anna said.

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"I don't understand."

Anna gave him that questioning look again. "Didn't they explain it to you when you turned thirteen? My parents told me all about it and that's when I came here. I've been here alone for weeks now. I've been waiting for you."

Tim stared at Anna. "Waiting for me? How could you be waiting for me? You don't even know me. I don't even know where I am or exactly how I got here. I didn't even plan to come here! It was just an accident!"

Anna's eyes narrowed. "I don't understand. This should have all been explained to you, at least by your thirteenth birthday. I've always known. After the uprising, my parents thought it best to prepare me."

Tim shook his head. "My parents didn't tell me anything. They- "

"How could they be so irresponsible? Don't they understand that if we're to save our people- I don't even know where to begin! How could they give you the key and then not explain anything? Don't they realize how important this is? Don't- "

"STOP!" Tim yelled, angrily, "Just stop!"

Anna took a step back. Tim kept yelling, "My parents were wonderful parents. They loved me and gave me whatever they could to make me happy! Don't you dare talk about them. You didn't even know them!"

"If we fail, it will be their fault. I don't have to know them to know that," Anna said quietly.

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Tim started walking away from her. "I'm out of here. I'm not staying here- wherever here is- just so you can act like little Miss Know-it-all. I'm going home."

"Well obviously, I know more than you! You don't even know you can't go home when you already are home. If your parents--"

Tim spun around. "I told you not to talk about my parents! You don't know everything, so once again, just stop!"

"But--"

"My parents are dead!"

Anna was silent. She stared at Tim. "I'm sorry," she said, "I- I didn't know."

"Obviously."

Tim started walking again. He was almost back to the first room. Anna was following him. "Wait," she said, "You really can't go back. Once you activated the key, you closed the door."

They had reached the room. "Please, just sit down," Anna said, pointing to the couch, "I'll explain to you what I know. But first, welcome to Snillotia. That's where we are now," Anna started.

She walked over to the window and pointed to the valley below. "This is our kingdom."

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Chapter Four

“When our people first began, Snillotia was ruled by a wonderful king and queen. King Mit was wise and kind. He loved his people and treated them as he would his own family. His wife, Queen Anna, was a beautiful woman. She was very caring and also thought of her people as though they were her family. The origin of our people has been lost in time, so many believe that the king and queen were more than just normal people. Some believed they were god-like and that they had created our world. Their family name was after all Snillot, which sounded a lot like Snillotia. The truth, however, will

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never be known. They later became known as the Firsts, and that is what I will call them from now on.

The Firsts had two children. They were called Prince Mit and Princess Anna. The Firsts loved their children equally; however, the Prince and the Princess did not get along. As the Firsts watched their children grow older, and farther and farther apart, they feared for their kingdom. They did not want their children's dislike for each other to cause their kingdom to be split into two. When they knew their time was close to coming to an end, the Firsts gathered the Prince and the Princess together and told them (and possibly used a bit of magic- if they did indeed possess it) that they would rule Snillotia together, as Sibling Rulers. They gave them each a disk and told them it was their key to unity and that they should each pass it to their children and instruct them to do the same. Then they decreed that for the next 1000 years that is how the kingdom would be ruled. Prince Mit would take a wife and she would bear him a son. Princess Anna would take a husband and she would bear him a daughter. The Firsts foretold that for years to come the Sons of the Prince and the Daughters of the Princess would rule together, each pair for 50 years.

"The 1000 years passed. It happened just as the Firsts foretold. After each Prince and Princess married and became King and Queen, for 1000 years, only sons were born to the Prince and only daughters were born to the Princess. King Mit XXI was your grandfather. He was the last prince to become king. His sibling ruler was my grandmother, Queen Anna XXI.

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After 1000 years, there really was no relation anymore, but the titled was still used.

“Our grandparents were nearing the end of their 50-year reign. There was talk, of course, that the 1000 years was almost over. People were afraid of what would happen. The ruling families decided to proceed as generations before them had. Your parents had met and were married. My parents had met and were married. On the night before your father’s and my mother’s reign was to begin, our grandparents came to them, in secret, and passed on their portal keys, early. They had heard whispers of a rebel group that had decided they didn’t want to be ruled any longer and thought the end of the 1000 years was a sign that they would win in a fight to power. They were told to get their spouses, and each go to their rooms and touch the center of the circle. The disks would allow them to pass into a world, quite like their own, just a little backwards. Our parents thought nothing of it. They knew that every Snillotian had some sort of special power, which awoke when the thirteenth year was reached. So, the idea of passing through to another world did not seem all that strange to them. They were told however, that once they passed through, they would not be able to return, not until their own children had reached their thirteenth year. The keys, you see, could only be used once by each Prince or Princess. Our parents used them to leave this world, and we have used them to return.

“At first, there were ways to communicate between the worlds. Our parents knew the rebels had won. When the Firsts

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had foretold the reign of their children's, children's, children, and so on, for only 1000 years, they had been correct. The Rebels declared all people free of rulers and for a while, nothing really changed, because our ancestors were not cruel and all in the kingdom had lived well and prospered. Our parents knew when certain Rebels had decided that, although they did not what to be ruled by kings and queens any longer, they themselves liked to rule. Twenty years has passed since our parents left this world, however because time moves differently between the worlds, I don't know when we've returned. The Rebel's rule is not a kind rule, but an evil one. The Rebels have enslaved our people, forcing them to prosper only for them and have forbidden them from prospering for themselves.

"My entire life, I have been told about this world. My parents have told me everything they know, to prepare me for coming back here, to prepare me to somehow save our people from the Rebels. Will you help me?"

Chapter Five

Tim stared at Anna for what seemed like a very long time. Finally, he opened his mouth to speak, but instead of telling her she sounded insane, he said, "Let me get this straight. We are supposed to rule this "kingdom", but only after we somehow defeat the people who were able to defeat our grandparents and caused our parents to go into hiding?"

As Anna nodded, Tim continued "And how are we supposed to do that? We're just kids! It's impossible! Even though for some strange reason, I believe you, I still think it's crazy to think two thirteen-year-olds can somehow defeat the

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same people who basically murdered their grandparents! I'm going home!"

With that, Tim turned to the wall he came through and started toward it. As he got closer to the corner that mirrored his own magical corner, Anna said, "Wait! I told you that you can't go back! You can only go through the wall once!"

Tim looked at her, then looked at the disc that was supposedly a key in his hand. "I've already gone through more than once and it was before I even had this."

He threw the key to her and disappeared through the wall. Anna gasped as she watched Tim disappear. The key landed at her feet. Ignoring it, she ran to the corner where she had last seen Tim. All she could feel was a solid wall. Apparently, she didn't have the same ability as Tim. "This changes everything, Tim!" she yelled, "If you can hear me, you better come back. I never said our grandparents were dead! If you don't come back, you won't get to meet them!"

Tim stopped in his tracks. He was halfway through the wall, back in his own secret room, when he heard Anna yell. At the same time, he heard the click of the secret door opening. Right then, crazy as it seemed, fighting the Rebels seemed like a better deal than letting Social Services find him. He quickly jumped back into his secret room, turned toward the corner where the portal was located. Before he could go through the wall again, he heard something that made him stop. "Tim! It's just me!"

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Ollie's head appeared first as he peeked into the secret room. Before Tim even had a chance to greet his friend, he realized he wasn't alone. The man who had impersonated a mime, stood behind Ollie. Tim immediately went on the offensive and lashed out at the only person he could. "I trusted you, Ollie! I can't believe you sold me out!"

"He said he just wants to talk to you!"

Tim looked at the man. "I don't know who you are and I don't trust you," he said, backing into the corner of the room.

The man cleared his throat. "I really only do want to talk. We have some things in common and I'd like to help you."

Tim narrowed his eyes at the man. It hit him at that moment that he looked like a boy in Tim's class. He wondered briefly if they were related. They'd played together a few times when they'd been younger. For that reason, he might have been willing to listen to the man, had he not heard what Anna had yelled. He needed to get back to her and have her take him to the only family he had left. He looked at Ollie. "Goodbye," was all he said and before anyone could stop him, he went through the wall again, back toward Snillotia.

Anna was sitting on a couch, staring at the wall when he came through. "Okay," he said, leaving out anything about Ollie and the man, "If my grandparents are alive, take me to them. I need to see them with my own eyes to believe you."

Before she could say anything, he noticed she was wearing different clothes. "Wait, how'd you change so fast?"

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She shook her head. "I told you. Time is different. It's been two days since you left."

Tim didn't know what to say to that, as it had barely been ten minutes for him. "Oh," was all he thought of, then he got back on track, "Take me to my grandparents."

"Well, it's not that easy," Anna started, "When our parents escaped into the backwards world, something happened to the castle. I think it was meant to protect it from the Rebels. No one can come in and no one can go out."

"So, your telling me we're supposed to save this place, without ever going outside? And wait! The refrigerator was full of food! How did that get there if no one can go in or out?" Tim questioned.

"Well, there is one woman. I think she was the cook here before the Uprising or something. She's the only one the castle lets in or out. My first day here, I tried to talk to her, but it was like she couldn't hear me. Every time she comes, I keep trying to talk to her. The last time she didn't say anything still, but she left a note for me in the kitchen, next to the bread she brought."

"What did it say?"

Anna pulled a worried piece of paper out of her pocket and handed it to him.

"Child- You are not alone. Those who have come before you are still in this world and have much to teach you. When the powers have been revealed, you will be able to reach them. Don't be afraid and remember to never leave his side. To find what you

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*seek, things will not appear straight forward. Look
for what's common in every world."*

Tim finished reading and looked at Anna. "This doesn't make any sense."

"I thought that at first too, but I've read it too many times to count now. It's all I had because I thought you weren't coming. But you're here now, and you helped me figure it out. I know what it means!"

"Well, spit it out!" Tim said immediately.

Anna stood there, gathering her thoughts. "Those who come before us and have a lot to teach us are obviously our grandparents and we'll need our powers to be able to get to them--"

"Well we don't know what our powers are do we?" Tim interrupted.

"You do," Anna said quietly, "You can go through the wall whenever you want. I- I can't do that. That's your power, Tim. No one else can do that, but you."

"Oh," Tim thought a minute, "Then what can you do that no one else can?"

"I don't know yet. But hopefully, your power will help us right now because I think we'll need it, if I'm figuring out this note right."

"What else?"

"You can probably take me with you through the walls. That's why I can't leave your side. The last part, I think, means, we should figure out something that's on both sides,

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which I also have an idea about. We just have to get there, because there will probably be another doorway to Snillotia there. If we come through outside the castle, we can go wherever we want!"

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Chapter Six

Anna grabbed Tim's hand and started pulling him behind her as she ran past all he recognized as the same as his house. They were once again in the hallway with the pictures of his father, but she still didn't stop. At the end of the hallway was another door. It appeared to be another house, and it was set up a lot like his, but there were small differences here and there. They went up the stairs and into a girl's room. There was a mattress on the floor in the corner. "Is this- "

"Yes, this is the mirrored room of my own room. I moved the crib out and pulled the mattress in. This is where I've been staying."

She pulled him over to a large window seat on the other side of the room. "Before I came here, I used to sit on the widow seat in my room every day and dream about what

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Snillotia was like. My parents had told me it wasn't much different then where we were living, but I couldn't help but wonder. I would make up stories, based on things I could see from my window, pretending I was looking out at the kingdom."

Anna pointed out the window. "Do you see that small building up on the hill past the trees?"

Tim nodded. "I could see the same building when I sat in my window. It was in a park that wasn't too far from my house. In the stories I made up, I made it an old fort, where the Snillotian army would protect the land from any foreign invaders. Now that I see it, here, for real, I think I was right. I don't think I made up my stories. I think I was remembering the past," Anna said quietly.

"Maybe that's your gift!" Tim said excitedly, "Maybe you can remember things about other things, just by looking at them or something."

"Maybe," Anna shrugged, as if it wasn't a big deal, "but right now, we need to get to that building. We need to go through the wall, go to that building in the park, and see if we can get back through while we're there."

"Let's try it then.

Anna got up and led the way to a small office off the kitchen. "This is where I came through," She said, pointing at a corner of the room, "On the other side, is my school room," she paused, "I never went to a real school. My parents thought it best if they taught me themselves."

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Tim thought that explained a lot about how Anna acted. He held out his hand. "Okay," he said, as Anna grasped his hand, "Let's do this."

They ran toward the wall. Then tumbled to the floor on the other side. Anna jumped up and looked around. "It worked!" she exclaimed.

Tim looked at her, confused. "It was your idea and now you tell me you didn't think it would work?"

Anna spun around, with tears in her eyes. "I never thought I'd be here again. Mom! Dad!" she yelled as she ran from the room.

Tim followed as Anna ran through her house, searching for her parents. The house was empty. "I wonder where they are." Anna said to herself.

Before Tim, could even respond, a voice sounded from behind him. "How?"

Anna nearly knocked him over. Standing in the doorway, was a very large man Tim could only assume was Anna's father. The two hugged for a very long time. Tim began to get uncomfortable. "Dog ym ho!"

Suddenly, a woman appeared and joined in the hugging. Eventually, Anna remembered Tim. "Oh! Mom, Dad. This is Tim. He finally showed up- but it wasn't his fault. His-"

"We know honey. We heard what happened. It's why we haven't been staying here since you left. It's not safe here." Anna's mother said, before she could finish.

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"Then why are you here now?" Tim couldn't stop himself from asking.

Anna's father smiled sadly. "It's her gift. She always knows where she needs to be. I just follow."

"Oh," was all Tim could think to say.

Anna's mother looked at Tim. "I'm sorry for your loss, sweetie. We did try to help. We talked to Social Services and told them we'd take you in. They said no, since we weren't relatives and they told us you'd run away. We could only hope that meant you'd found your way home."

Tim nodded, again, not sure what he should say. Anna, however, was not at a loss for words. She started explaining to them how they had returned and why. Her mother interrupted her. "Not here, honey. It's not safe," she said again, "Into the car."

They piled into Anna's parent's car and her father started driving. Anna continued with her explanation. When she was finished, neither of her parents said anything for a moment. Then they both smiled, as if they had just realized something good.

"We can go with you now. Tim can take us all back to Snillotia, and we can help defeat the Rebels. It's exactly what they were trying to prevent when they, um, when they-" Anna's father stopped abruptly.

Her mother took Tim's hands in her own. He felt tears form in his eyes as he remembered his own mother doing the same. "The Rebels killed your parents, Tim. We don't know

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how they passed through to this world, it was thought only royals could do that, but it seems as if they've found a way."

Tim didn't say anything. It really didn't matter who had killed his parents. They were dead either way. He felt numb, but at the same time he felt the same darkness he had felt when he had first been taken by Social Services. That darkness is what urged him to run away; to know he had to stay with his house. Now he knew why. He had to defeat the Rebels, at all costs, and restore the kingdom his parents had died to protect.

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Chapter Seven

As they drove into the park, the sun had begun to set. Anna led the way to the building, which, Tim saw, was the same as the one he had seen from the widow of Anna's mirrored room. As Anna reached the door, her mother blocked her way. "We shouldn't be here. It isn't safe."

She motioned for them to move back into the trees behind the building. Just as they reached the trees, Tim heard the squeal of an old hinge. "Someone opened the door!" he whispered.

"Shh!" Anna's mother hushed him.

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Two people appeared suddenly but ran right passed them. They were running in the direction of Anna's parent's house. Tim saw something fall from the hand of one of them. As it landed on the ground, it glinted in the setting sun. Tim took off, knowing he had to get to whatever it was that was dropped before the person realized they had dropped it. He raced over and grabbed it off the ground and retreated to the trees as quickly as he could. Once he was safely back in the trees with the others, he took a breath and opened his hand. It was a disc, just like the one his parents had left him. Anna's mother gasped. "This must be how the rebels are coming through to this world. I wonder how they got a portal key and how they can activate it. Only the touch of someone with royal blood can activate a portal key."

Tim looked at her strangely. He couldn't believe this woman was supposed to have been a ruler with his father. "Does it really matter how they do it? It only matters that they are doing it and that it let them kill my parents. I think those two were sent to kill you," he said, pointing in the direction of her house and the way the people had run.

"We should try the door now." Anna said from behind her mother.

They left the safety of the trees and walked back to the door. When they reached it, before going inside, they all looked at Anna's mother. "It's ok. It's safe now," she said.

Tim started walking around the edge of the room, pushing on the walls, waiting for his had to go through. Anna's

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dad stopped him. "You don't need to do that, son," he said, pointing to the far corner of the room.

Tim did a double take. Glowing on the wall were the words "The Way". He looked at Anna's dad, surprised. "It's what I do," he said shrugging, "I can reveal things that can't be seen."

Tim went to the corner, the glowing words fading as he got closer. He reached out toward the wall and felt the sort of familiar tingling sensation on his arm. He pulled his arm back and held out his hand to Anna. She took it and then held her hand out to her parents, who were already holding hands. "Are you sure this will work?" her mother asked.

"No," was all Tim answered.

She nodded and took her daughter's hand. Tim led the way and through the wall they went.

The room on the other side, although the same, was set up like a meeting area. There were tables and chairs, and a few chalk boards scattered around the room. Tim looked at one of the boards. It was a crudely drawn map. As he looked at it, he realized it led the way from the building to his house. He looked at another board, which also showed a map and led the way to Anna's house. "This must be where the Rebels met to discuss killing my parents," he said angrily. He was so mad, at the thought that someone planned to kill his parents, that before he could stop himself, he picked up a chair and threw it at the chalk board.

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The chair clattered against the board, and then to the floor. The sound echoed off the stone floor of the old building. "We need to get out of here now," Anna's mother said.

With that, they heard footsteps, running towards the room. Anna's father pointed to a door behind him. "Through there!" he yelled.

They all ran through the door. Tim was closing the door behind him when he said the first person enter the room. He gasped. It looked just like the Social Services man who had been leading the searches for him. He spun around to tell Anna and her parents this new detail, but they were nowhere to be found. "Tim!"

Anna's head popped up from outside a window across the room. "Come on! Hurry!" she yelled.

Tim ran to the window and leaped through it, just as the door was opening behind him. He kept going, following Anna's parents, who were leading the way. They seemed to know where they were headed, which made sense, since they had grown up in Snillotia. After running for what seemed like forever to Tim, who was out of breath and desperately wanted a drink of water, they reached the edge of a village.

Anna's parents stopped behind a small building. "This was a friend's house when I was young. I hope she still lives here, or we're in trouble!" Anna's mom said as she started banging on the door.

The door opened quickly. "What?" the woman who opened the door seemed annoyed, then her eyes widened. "Get

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inside now!" She rushed them all inside.

"It's you!" Anna exclaimed, then she looked at Tim, "She's the one who gave me the note!"

The woman looked at Anna. "Yes, I did, and you figured it out. You brought your parents back with you, as I hoped you would figure out you could."

She looked at Tim. "I'm so sorry about your parents."

Tim looked at the ground, nodding his thanks. "Einna, Tre," she said looked at Anna's parents, "It's so good to see you again."

"I thought your name was Anna, well like Anna," Tim said to Anna's mother, confused.

She smiled. "It is. I've always been called Einna so I wouldn't be confused with my mother. It's a nickname. I used it in the backwards world as well. I was called Annie there."

"And I was called Robert in the backwards world. My name is Trebor. Here everyone has always called me Tre." Anna's father added.

Tim started to get it. All the names were backwards. "So, my mom's name was Ellen. That means here, people knew her as Nelle?"

The woman nodded. "You are Tim, but here, really your name is Mit, just like your father and his father and his father, and so on."

"I'd rather be called Tim," he said.

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“That’s your choice,” the woman said, “And I am called Asilla. Now that all the introductions are out of the way, we need to go. There is much to learn, and they are waiting.”

Beyond

Chapter Eight

Asilla led them through her small house. As she was about to open the front door, she paused. "The four of you will be recognized immediately," she said, looking at Einna and Tre, "Yes, I still recognized you the moment I saw you, even though you are much older than me now. I can tell more years have passed for you than they have, here. It's been just five years since you left, but five years is more than enough with the Rebels in control. They've destroyed everything! They will tell you everything, but first, we need to change your appearances for the time being."

She left them and went to her kitchen and brought back four small vials of pink liquid. "Here, take this. It will alter your faces so no one will know who you are. It shouldn't last long, but we should be where we need to be before it wears off."

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Tim took the vial from Asilla, and without question, drank it. It tasted slightly like cherries. Asilla watched as they all did as she said. She looked at everyone, then seeming satisfied, said, "Okay, we can go now."

She opened the front door and led them into the village. After so many twists and turns, Tim knew he'd never remember the way back, they stopped in front of a small shack. Tim looked at it doubtfully. It didn't look big enough to hold the five of them, let alone have other people already inside. Asilla opened the door and motioned them inside. She stopped in the doorway. "I go no further. You will know where to go from here."

She stepped back and closed the door of the shack, leaving them in darkness. Before Tim could question the point of standing in a dark shack, the walls seemed to shift, and he felt like he was moving. In the next moment, everything stopped, and the lights turned on. Tim was facing a wall that looked familiar. He was back in the secret room! He looked at Anna. She recognized the room, as well. They both jumped up and ran from the room, Einna and Tre following them. "How did we get back in the castle?" Anna whined, "Everything we just did was pointless-" she stopped, seeing her parents, "Well except that you guys are here now too. But I don't understand how we're supposed to find our grandparents now if we're right back where we started!"

"You never had to find us. We've been here all along. You just had to be shown how to see us."

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Tim and Anna spun around. Behind them, sitting calmly in a room Tim hadn't seen before, were eight people. Einna and Tre ran past them. Four of the people stood up and embraced them. Anna and Tim looked at each other. Einna was crying and hanging onto an older woman who looked very much like her, and very much like Anna, Tim realized. An older man was standing behind them both with his hands on their shoulders. Tre was also still greeting an older man and woman. Tim realized they were his parents as well. Tim had only been expecting Einna's parents. Her parents were the royals- not Tre's. Einna called Anna over and introduced her to her grandparents. They smiled happily and hugged her, then Tre's parents also did the same. Tim stood where he was, looking away from the happy scene in front of him. Instead, he shyly looked at the other four people still, seated in the room. "I guess you're my grandparents?"

One of the women, who Tim saw looked like an older version of his mother, started crying. Soon the other woman started crying as well. The two men looked uncomfortable and didn't move to comfort the women. No one answered Tim. The room slowly grew silent. "Mit! Cire! How dare you treat that child that way!" the woman Tim assumed was Einna's mother admonished the two older men. She came over to him and smiled warmly. "Hello, Tim. I'm the last crowned Queen Anna. You may call me Grandma An, even though we're not actually related. I'm deeply sorry for the way they are acting," she said,

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gesturing to his grandparents, "They only recently found out about your parents and are still in shock."

Grandma An's comment about Tim's parents seemed to wake one of the women up. She stood up and rushed over to Tim and grabbed his face in her hands. "You look exactly like my boy," she whispered.

Tim could see the tears starting in her eyes again. Before he could respond, the other woman was also there, looking closely at him. "Yes, he looks like Prince Mit, but his eyes are Nelle's. He has my daughter's eyes."

Both women started crying again, but instead of retreating, they hugged Tim, as tightly as they could. A loud cough echoed through the room. The women let go of Tim. One of the men stood up and came toward him. "I'm sorry, my boy. I'm your Grandpa Mit. Welcome home."

Tim didn't know what to say. The four people surrounding him, as the other man had also stood up at this point, were complete strangers to him, but he knew they were also the only family he had left. One by one they introduced themselves and gave him a hug. His father's mother was Grandma Amme. His mother's mother was Grandma Aras and his mother's father was Grandpa Cire. As everyone in the room came back into one group, he also learned that Einna's father was Grandpa Leumas and that Tre's parents were Grandma Eilime and Grandpa Siul.

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Everyone eventually sat down. Anna was the first to speak. "How did you get here, in the castle? You weren't here before. I was here all alone until Tim showed up."

Grandma An smiled at her granddaughter. "We were always here. You just couldn't see us, just as anyone who came into the castle through the door, if it would open for them, at this moment wouldn't be able to see any of us, including you."

Seeing Anna's confused face, she continued, "Maybe I should start at the beginning.

On the night before Prince Mit and Princess Anna were to be crowned king and queen, I saw what would have happened, if things went according to plan. I saw the Rebels attacking the castle during the ceremony and killing everyone inside. Then I saw them taking over, much as they have actually done. That is my gift. Every now and then I see things that will happen unless we change them. So, I decided to change things. I went to King Mit and told him about the vision. He agreed that we had to save our children. It was the only way there would ever be a chance to save the kingdom from the Rebels. Just in case the Rebels also changed things, Mit and I used what little power we had together as Sibling Rulers and put a spell of sorts over the castle. We made it so only one who was pure in heart and loyal to the royals could enter. Then we quickly got your parents and sent them to the backwards world, knowing that even though we would never see them again, we were saving their lives. We didn't think the protection on the castle would last long, so we all gathered

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together, here in this room, and we added another layer of protection to the spell. We made it so we couldn't be seen by anyone, unless the one who was pure and loyal led the person to us. We didn't know at that point in time, that person would be Asilla, but she has faithfully cared for us through the years. She has brought food and news of what is happening in the kingdom. We have waited for you both to return. We knew our children would send you back. I saw it as soon as we sent them through the walls. However, Mit and I did not know then what we know now. You both are different than any other prince and princess. We don't know the real reason why; we just know that is a good thing. You will be able to save us all."

Tim didn't know what to say. He knew he was already different because he could go through the wall whenever he wanted. Was there supposed to be more he could do? And what about Anna? They didn't know what she could do at all yet. Anna apparently had the same thought. "The only way I'm different is because I can't do anything at all," Anna pouted.

"That's not true, sweetheart. I've seen the future, remember. I've seen you saving our world."

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Chapter Nine

Anna looked surprised for a moment and then a look of determination crossed her face. Simply accepting her fate, she calmly asked, "Okay, so what do we do first?"

All of the grandparents looked at each other. Slowly they all shook their heads. "We don't really know. We have been searching the castle for the last five years for a clue, for something that would point in the right direction. We've found nothing. None of us possess the powers need to find what we

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do not know,” Grandpa Mit explained. Then he smiled, “But we do now.”

Tim realized they were looking at Tre. Tre nodded once and scanned the room. Tim looked around too. He didn’t see anything different. Nothing jumped out at him or lit up the way that doorway they had come through had. Slowly, he realized that everyone was staring at him. “What?” he asked.

Anna pointed above his head. He looked up and saw a glowing arrow pointing down at him. “But I don’t know anything! How am I the answer or the clue or whatever it is we’re looking for? I didn’t even know any of this even existed until a few hours ago!”

“Well”, said Grandma An, “before you, no one was able to use a doorway to another world more than once. In the entire history of our people, no one has ever possessed that power. The fact that you can, and that you can take people through with you, is quite remarkable. How does that help us, though, is the question.”

She looked at Tim, imploringly. Everyone else was silent, also looking at him, as if the answer would magically appear like the arrow still above his head, though the light of it was fading. Tim opened his mouth to question the staring again, but instead, he yawned.

Grandpa Mit started laughing. Slowly, so did everyone else, including Tim, but he didn’t know why. Grandma Amme spoke first. “It’s been a long day for Tim, and more eventful than most of us have had in a long time. Why don’t we rest for

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a bit? Nothing is going to change in the next few hours, and we could all use some sleep.”

Murmurs of agreement were made by all. After sleeping arrangements had been decided, Tim’s grandparents hugged him one by one and wished him goodnight. He made his way to the room he was told he could sleep in, which, thankfully, was not the room with the crib in it. He lay down on the bed and was soon fast asleep.

“Tim! Tim!”

Lost in his dream, Tim thought his mother was calling him. Then he felt someone shaking him. That didn’t seem right. As sleep slowly left him, he realized someone was leaning over him. He jumped back, almost falling off the bed. “Relax!” a voice called in the darkness.

Confused, Tim couldn’t place the voice. Everything that had happened tumbled back into his head. “Anna?”

“Who else would it be?”

Tim shrugged, wondering why she woke him up. He was still tired. She sat down on the bed next to him, the moonlight coming through the window, now shining on her black hair. “Why’d you wake me up?”

“I couldn’t sleep. I’ve been thinking,” she stopped.

Tim waited. He felt like she was trying to think of a way to say something and shouldn’t interrupt. After a moment, she continued, “With everything I know, all my parents told me, from the time I was old enough to understand, I thought I was

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prepared. This world isn't strange to me; it's as familiar as the one I grew up in. My parents thought that was the best way to prepare me to come back here. I came here, expecting this immediate change, that I'd know what I was supposed to do and that you'd be as ready as me to face the Rebels. I didn't think much about how we were going to face them; I was just confident we would win. But then you didn't show up and I didn't feel any different. I felt like me. I couldn't do anything special and I was here alone for so long. So, I keep thinking, trying to figure out what I can do to help because I'm supposed to. So, I can't sleep. I had to think--"

"Anna--"

"No! Let me finish! I thought of something! I think I know what we must do next, at least where we should look for a clue. I don't think it's here. I think that arrow pointed at you because of what you can do. I think the answers are in the other world. I think we have to go back and search your house!"

"Okay. We'll tell everyone tomorrow morning. We can all go."

"No! I think we should do this alone. No, I know we must do this alone. We must do it right now. Maybe I'm just trying to feel special, but I really do have a feeling that we have to go right now."

Tim sighed. "Okay. So much for sleep, I guess! Let's go!"

Beyond

Chapter Ten

Tim and Anna walked silently, but quickly toward the way back to Tim's house. As they reached the hallway that led to the room, a figure blocked their path. They froze.

"I knew I should be here right now," Einna said, "What are you two doing? You should be resting."

"We can't, Mom. We have to go. It's what has to be done. I just know it is."

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Einna looked at her daughter for a moment. Seeing the determined look on her face, she finally nodded and stepped aside. As Anna walked past her, she grabbed her and squeezed tight. Tim stood awkwardly next to them, till suddenly, he found himself part of the hug as well. "Both of you, be very careful. You should also know that time is short. You shouldn't be there after the sun is up. Trust me. I know."

Anna and Tim understood. They continued to the room with the doorway, hand in hand. "Ready?" Tim asked.

"Of course!" Anna replied, "It's what we have to do."

Tim led the way and through the wall they went.

It was very dark in the secret room. The light Tim had set up in there was gone, as was everything else he had moved into the room. It was completely empty. They made their way to the rest of the house. Tim gasped when they reached the living room. "Where is everything?"

"I knew we had to come tonight. It looks like someone is finally emptying the house. Your parents are gone, Tim, and you're a kid. Did you think the house would just stay vacant forever?"

"I hadn't really thought about it. What if they already took whatever it is, we're looking for?"

Anna shook her head. "No, I think that's why I knew we had to come. I think whatever it is, is still here. "

As they made their way through the rest of the house, they saw that it wasn't completely empty. His father's office

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didn't look like it had been touched yet. "Why don't we start in here?" Anna asked.

Tim started to disagree. "I already looked in here, after I went through the wall the first time. I had no idea what was going on and I was trying to find an explanation."

"But you weren't looking for a clue then. You were just looking for an answer. Maybe we'll find something different."

Tim shrugged and turned to a bookcase on the closest wall. "I guess I'll start here."

Anna moved further into the room. "Then I'll start over here."

They searched quietly. All that could be heard was the sound of books thumping and pages shuffling. After some time had passed and most of the books had been looked through and Anna had gone through the desk again, she announced, "I guess I was wrong. Maybe we should look somewhere else?"

Tim started to pull the next book off the shelf. He heard a very loud click and the book didn't move any further. "What was that noise? Is someone coming?" Anna sounded panicked.

"I think it was this book. It won't come off the shelf. I don't think it's a book at all."

He pushed it back into the shelf. The loud click sounded again. He pulled it out as far as it would go. Click. "It sounds like the hidden doorway to the secret room unlocking. Maybe this was the original way to open it and they had the easier way installed later?" Tim thought out loud.

Beyond

They raced from the room back to the secret door. It was closed. Tim flipped the light switch and it opened. He pushed it close. "I guess it wasn't it."

"Tim, are there any other secret doors in your house?"

Tim gave her a look. "Why would there be another one? And if there was, why wouldn't my parents show it to me? They showed this door to everyone!"

"Maybe they hid things in there they didn't want you to see, since they didn't tell you anything about Snillotia!"

Anna looked up. "What's above us?"

"Umm, my parent's room."

"Come on!"

Anna grabbed his hand and pulled him toward the stairs. As they entered the room, the first thing Tim saw was that the wall across from his parent's bed wasn't a wall anymore. Anna was right. There was another secret door. "How'd you know?"

"I just thought about it. You have a secret room downstairs. There has to be something above it!"

Tim started toward the newly revealed door. "Wait!"

Anna pointed at the window. "Look! The sun's coming up! My mom said we shouldn't be here when the sun comes up!"

Just then, they heard a new noise. It was the sound of the front door opening and closing. Then the sound of footsteps echoed in the almost empty house. "Quick!"

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Tim pulled open the new secret door and stepped inside. Anna followed him. Tim pulled the door shut and heard the click of the lock engaging. He also faintly heard the book thumping back onto the shelf downstairs. He prayed that whoever had entered the house hadn't heard it too. Then he prayed this secret door stayed a secret longer than the one downstairs.

Tim and Anna stood right behind the door for a very long time, as quiet as they could. After some time had passed, Anna said, "I think we're okay. I don't think whoever came in knows we're up here."

"I think so too, but whoever they are, they're still downstairs. I can hear them. I think they're packing up the dishes and glasses in the kitchen."

"Well, should we see where this door leads?"

Tim nodded. He already knew he was in another hallway. He had realized that when they had been waiting to be discovered. It was dark and he could barely see Anna, who was right next to him. They both started looking for a light switch by running their hands along the walls in the hallway, as they walked. "I wish we could find a light!" Anna exclaimed.

By the time she had finished saying the word light, a strange thing had begun to happen. Her hand seemed to be glowing. "Tim!"

Beyond

Tim stopped and looked in the direction of Anna's voice. Immediately he noticed her hand. "Um, did you know you could do that?" was all he could think to ask.

Anna shook her head. "Well, I guess you found your power."

Anna nodded. She held her hand out in front of her. The light wasn't very bright. She could see about a foot in front of her and then it was dark. "This won't be very helpful if we have to look through anything in there," she said gesturing ahead, "I wish it was brighter."

Again, as soon as she finished her last work, the glow changed into a bright light. The entire hallway was lit, and they could see into the secret room, she could make out a desk, against the far wall. Tim grinned. "Come on!" he said, grabbing her unlit hand and pulling her into the room.

They stopped just inside the doorway. Tim took in the room, a section at a time. There was a desk straight across from him, filled with scattered paper, books, and pictures. On either side of the desk were bookcases, filled with books, which sort of resembled his dad's office downstairs. To his right, there was no furniture, but instead, what looked like a window. As he looked closer, he realized it wasn't a real window, but something tugged at his memory. Not being able to bring whatever he was thinking to the surface, he continued his survey of the room. Across from the fake window to his left was a large, overstuffed chair and ottoman. The room looked well used. Tim couldn't help but wonder when his parents

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used it, since he couldn't think of a time when he couldn't find them. "I can't believe I didn't know about this room. I guess we should start looking around, since we're here."

Anna moved toward the desk. Tim looked at the window. It seemed so odd. He approached it and touched the glass pane. Nothing happened. He tapped along the edge of the frame. Still nothing. He tried focusing hard, to figure out why this window seemed so important. Nothing happened. Unable to figure anything out, he turned to move away. The curtain he had been holding back floated back into place, which he saw from the corner of his eye. Suddenly a memory came flooding back.

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Chapter Eleven

Tim is very small. He is sitting on the floor and above him is a floating piece of fabric. He tries to grab it, but it's just out of his reach. A laugh reaches his ears. He looks past the fabric and sees Mommy. Mommy is looking at Daddy, who just walked into the room. "Da-DEE!" he yells and raises his arms. Daddy looks down at him and smiles. He steps closer and lifts him into the air. Tim loves being lifted high. He squeals in delight. Daddy looks at Mommy and says, "You know you can't bring him in here much longer, if you

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want to keep everything from him till he's older. He's going to start remembering things soon."

Mommy looks sad. "I know. He's not going to be my little baby much longer."

Tim doesn't like that. Whose baby will he be, if not Mommy's? The happiness he felt being lifted into the air fades. He starts to cry. Mommy walks towards him and takes him from Daddy's arms. She bounces him up and down on her hip. "Shhh, baby. What's the matter?"

Tim looks at Mommy through his tears. She's smiling again. He still isn't quite sure what to feel. What was it that made him sad? Was Mommy leaving him? Mommy walks to the window. Tim likes the window. Mommy makes it do pretty things. Mommy holds her hand in front of the window and closes her eyes. Tim watches as pictures start flickering across the glass. Tim sees himself. Mommy and Daddy are on either side of him and he seems a lot smaller than he is right now. He has no hair! That makes Tim smile a little. Mommy moves her hand again and Tim sees Mommy with the people she says are called Mom-mom and Pop-pop. They're looking at her and smiling. They look nice. Mommy whispers, "They would love you so much, Tim."

Tim feels this makes Mommy a little sad. Tim wishes they would come see him for real, so Mommy would be happy. The pictures stop and Tim sees what he thinks is Mommy's favorite one. She always leaves it there. Tim sees grass and hills and a big sun. Mommy smiles again. "That's home, Tim. I wish I was home."

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Daddy comes and stands behind them. He puts his arms around both Tim and Mommy. He doesn't say anything. Tim knows something happened and Mommy can't go home, but as Tim looks at the picture, he's happy he's here with Mommy and Daddy. He thinks maybe if he told them that, they'd be happy here too. "Tim ha-PEE here! Tim ha-PEE! Ma-MEE ha-PEE!"

Mommy and Daddy laugh. Tim can feel that they are both happy again. Mommy looks at Daddy and says, "You're right, honey. It's time," she looks at Tim and adds, "Tim's a big boy now!"

Tim looks over Mommy's shoulder as they leave the room. The light follows them and as the room gets darker, he sees Mommy's home fade from the window.

"I've been here before!" Tim yelled, as the memory replayed in his mind.

Anna stopped shifting through the papers on the desk and looked back at him. "I was a baby- maybe two years old. I think it was the last time I was in here. My dad told my mom I'd start remembering things soon and if she wanted to keep them from me, she had to stop bringing me in here. Then I was crying, and my mom made me stop by showing me pictures on this window!" he said, pointing at the window.

Anna came over and looked at the window. "How?" she asked.

Tim shrugged. "I don't know," he said, waving his hand in front of the window, "She did this and there they were."

Nothing changed on the window. Anna looked at her dim reflection in the glass, next to Tim's. She waved her hand,

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forgetting that it was still glowing. Suddenly, the bright light left her hand and floated over to the window. As it touched the glass, the glass changed. It actually looked like a window. If Tim didn't know any better, he'd think it actually was a real window. It looked exactly like the picture his mom had left there. As they stood watching, a bird flew passed. They looked at each other. Pictures didn't move. Tim reached the bottom of the window and slowly lifted it. The scene on the other side didn't change. As he opened the window, he could even feel air, coming through, exactly like it was a real window to the outside. When it was open enough to stick his hand through, he moved his hand slowly, not wanting to hit what must surely be magic glass, hard. There was nothing there. His hand was outside the window. "How?" Tim echoed Anna's earlier question.

He looked at Anna, his hand still outside. She looked shocked. "Anna! What did you do?"

She shook her head. She didn't know what she did. She had been thinking about the papers on the desk, about how they still needed to search the room to find something, but they didn't know what they were looking for. She'd vaguely heard Tim explain what he remembered and basically just copied what he did when he waved his hand in front of the window. Most importantly, she'd been thinking more about how they were going to get back to the secret room and through the wall, since they had stayed passed the time her mother had warned then not to. "Basically, I was wishing we were back in Snillotia.

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I don't know why my mom didn't think we should stay after the sun rose, but it did, and I was worried about it."

Tim went over to the chair and sat down. "Arf!"

Tim jumped up. On the chair was a small pug dog. It was staring at him with its giant, bulging, eyes. "Where did that come from?" he exclaimed.

Anna walked up to the dog and held her hand out in front of the dog. The dog immediately sniffed her fingers and stuck its tongue out in a way that made it look like it was smiling. "I don't know where it came from, but it's cute!"

Tim wasn't too sure about it being cute, but it found it really odd that a dog had just randomly appeared in a secret room that had also just magically grown a window. "Wait a second!"

Anna looked away from the dog. "You said you wished!"

Anna gave him a confused look. "You said you wished we were back in Snillotia. I bet we are!"

Anna shook her head. "We didn't go through a wall. We didn't go anywhere!"

"No! It makes sense! You wished we had a light, and then your hand glowed. You wished the light was brighter, and then it was! You wished we were back in Snillotia and now we must be!"

Tim ran out of the room and down the hallway. Sure enough, at the end of the hall was a normal door. Tim turned the knob and the door swung open.

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Chapter Twelve

His parent's room was not on the other side. He was in a hallway he'd never seen before. He looked to his left. There was nothing except more doors. He looked to the right. Again, there was nothing but doors. There did not seem to be an end to this hallway, in either direction. Tim hesitated before venturing any further. He decided Anna should go with him, wherever they were, and turned around to go get her. He walked into her instead. Anna had followed him out of the

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room, the pug in her arms. He looked at the dog. "Why are you bringing that?"

"She is not a "that". She is a girl. She started following me when I left the room. Obviously, she wants to come with us."

Tim looked at the dog, suspiciously. The pug stared back, with a hopeful expression on her face. "Fine, whatever!" He pointed to the hallway, "Do you see that we're not in my house anymore? You must have wished us back! If you knew you had that power earlier, it would have made things so much easier!"

Anna shrugged and looked up and down the hallway. She didn't really think her power was to wish for whatever she wanted, but she didn't want to get into a long conversation about it right then. "Where do you think we are?"

"Let's find out."

Tim led the way down the hallway. He chose to go to the right first. At the next door he came to, he tried the handle. "It's locked!"

Anna tried the door across from the locked one. "This one's locked too!"

They ran up and down the hallway, trying every door they reached, each one had the same result. There was still no end to the hallway in sight, and still more doors. "Where can we possibly be?"

Anna looked lost. "I'm more worried about how we get out of here."

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“Arf!”

They looked down. Anna had put the pug down as they were trying to find a door that would open, and the dog was at her feet. “Arf!” she barked again.

“She was here, wherever here is. Maybe she knows the way,” Anna suggested.

She looked at the dog. “Do you know how to leave here?”

“Arf!”

The pug turned and ran. They hurried to keep up with her, only to realize a minute later that she had run right back to the room they had started in. “I guess she doesn’t know the way out, after all,” Anna said, disappointed.

“Arf! Arf! Arf!”

Although Tim didn’t quite know what to make of the dog, he suggested, “Maybe we missed something in the room, and she wants us to come see.”

They walked back into the room and found the pug standing in front of one of the bookcases. As they got closer, she started pawing at one of the books on the bottom shelf. Tim leaned over and pulled the book out. It was an old notebook. Written in large, childish writing on the cover was “Nelle Rellim”. Recognizing the backwards version of his mom’s maiden name, he opened the notebook.

“My name is Nelle Rellim and I have just completed my thirteenth year. I am leaving tomorrow to start my stay at the Ymedaca. I know everyone leaves their parents and does this

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after the thirteenth year to prepare for whatever changes may come, but I'm still scared. I don't know if anyone will like me there or if I'll make any new friends. I've been told I'll be on the 10th floor, but none of my friends are going to be on the same floor. Mother says I'll still be able to see my friends, that I'm not going to be on the 10th floor forever (although she seems very excited that I was assigned to this floor, for some reason), but I still wish I knew at least one person going who would be living near me."

Tim stopped reading. "Apparently this is my mom's journal from when she was 13."

Anna, who had been reading over his shoulder, nodded excitedly. "And now we know where we are!"

Tim thought for a moment. "The Ymedaca!" he exclaimed, then catching on to all names seeming to be backwards, he continued, "The Academy! So, this was like their school?"

Anna nodded. Her mom had told her about the school in Snillotia and how it was different from what she knew Tim had experienced so far. "Kids here learn to read and write from their parents when they're young. Then their parents also usually teach them their trade since things are always kept in families here. Asilla's family, for instance, must be like doctors where we grew up. I thought about that when she had that potion for us that changed our appearances for a bit all ready. Anyway, when they turn 13, they go to the Ymedaca, or as most kids referred to it, the Y. They're assigned a floor, usually

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because of what some old person whose power has something to do with seeing the future, has said. My mom said family connections are also a part of it. All though the floors can interact, generally, each floor is entirely self-sufficient, so each floor tends to stay in their own spaces. The people on your floor become like your family. You live at the Y for eight years. This is where our parents all met. Obviously, my mom and your dad knew each other before, but they didn't know my dad or your mom. That's probably why Grandma Aras was happy. The Prince and Princess are always on the tenth floor, and if I'm remembering correctly, they're a year older than your mom, and my dad is a year older than them, so when your mom came, everyone was finally together. One other thing that always happened here was that people stayed close to those on their floor- there wasn't much chance to meet others very often, so most of the time, the person they married was on their floor. Grandma Aras knew as soon as your mom was assigned to the 10th floor that there was a good chance she'd end up marrying the Prince."

"So where is everyone? Why is this place totally empty and locked up?"

"The Rebels probably closed it. They don't want the people happy, or to be able to fight them. Why would they keep open the place that helped people learn to use their powers in the best possible way?"

"I guess that makes sense. This still doesn't help us figure out how to get out of here, though."

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“No, but you were right. I did bring us back to Snillotia, somehow. At least now we can contact my parents and tell them we’re okay!”

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Chapter Thirteen

Anna took something out of her pocket. "Cell phones work here?" Tim asked, before seeing what was in her hand.

She held up her key. "Of course not, but there is a reason every Snillotian is given one of these when they turn 13. Only royal keys are supposed to also be portal keys, but all keys can be used to communicate. You can connect with whoever has touched your key. Watch."

Anna held her key in one hand and touched the center of it with her finger. Light shot from the key and Anna said, "Mom."

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Suddenly on the wall next to the window a square of light appeared, as if there was a projector pointing at it.
“Anna!”

There was Anna’s mom, projected on the wall, looking surprised and relieved at the same time. “Where are you? Oh, I’m so glad your father explained how to communicate with keys to you! Where are you?” she asked again.

“Can she see us, too?” Tim whispered.

“Mom, can you see us?”

“No! I don’t know where any keys are here. Hold on, I’ll use your father’s. Tre!”

Tre appeared next to Einna. “I need your key. Anna’s communicating!”

Tre pulled out his key and handed it to Einna. She touched the center. “Oh!” she exclaimed, “You found Nelle’s secret room, which is wonderful, but you should have come back before the sun came up. I told you, you shouldn’t be there after the sun rose.”

“We are back.”

“You knew about my mom’s secret room?”

“Wait- They have to be back to communicate.”

Anna, Tim, and Tre all spoke at the same time. “Let me go first. Honey, to communicate like this with keys, they must be in Snillotia. So, they are back, but-

“Then you’re at the Y? How on Htrae did you get there?”

“Well, I can try to explain, if you let me-”

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"Wait. I want to know how you knew about my mom's secret room! I didn't even know it existed, so, how did you?"

"We always can keep our Y rooms with us, if we choose. Upon completion, we're told how to essentially copy our room and its contents, in any room we're living in. I didn't even think to try it in the backwards world, but Nelle loved her room, so I guess she did, and it obviously worked. I recognized that old chair behind you."

"But how did you know it was a secret?"

"Well, when we first escaped, we talked and saw each other all the time. It was just the four of us and we didn't know anyone or anything about the place we were living in. We had discussed how our future children would have to be the saviors of our world. Unfortunately, we didn't agree how we were to go about preparing you for that. I knew she didn't plan to tell you until you completed your 13th year. It was one of the reasons we stopped talking. You both were getting older and if Anna knew things that Nelle didn't want you to know yet, she didn't see how to keep you from learning whatever Anna knew. You two always had so much fun playing together," she finished wistfully.

Tim looked at Anna, she didn't look surprised by the revelation that they had known each other before. A fleeting image of a tiny dark-haired girl in pigtails flashed through his head. Before he could respond Anna cut in, "Okay! Now on to how we get out of here!"

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Anna recounted their story of finding the secret room and discovering they were in the Y. "But it's just a never-ending hallway! There is no end at all and no way out!"

"It sounds like you're in storage," said Tre, then he continued, "Once you have a room at the Y, it exists forever. Rumor was that it went to storage after you left and a new room took its place. That's how you could copy it if you chose. I guess the rumor was true. I wonder..."

He had trailed off, lost in thought.

"What, Dad?"

"Well, part of that rumor was that storage existed because of, and was controlled by, a creature no one ever saw, but was said to be horribly ugly, with large eyes that barely fit into its head! But don't worry, I doubt that parts true," he said, not to worry them, "The creature's called a Gup, but it's just mythical- not real at all!"

Tim laughed. Anna looked at him, then smiled. He was looking down at her feet. "Well, Dad, I can tell you Gups definitely are real!"

She picked up the pug, so her parents could see. "She isn't scary at all though. Actually, I think she's really cute!"

"Gup... pug... now why didn't I put that together? Our neighbors down the street in the backwards world have a pug!" Tre exclaimed.

"Well, pugs aren't horrible, dear, they're just little dogs- quite nice actually-" Einna started to say.

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Anna cut her off. "Guys! It doesn't matter! We still need to figure out how to get out of here!"

"If the Gup is real, honey, I'd take a guess, that only she can show you the way out," Tre said.

They all stared at the dog in Anna's arms. She stared back, her mouth open so wide she actually looked like she was smiling. "Well, I guess we wait to see what she does, then," Tim sighed.

"We'll see you later, Mom and Dad!" Anna said, cutting the connection to her parents.

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Chapter Fourteen

Once they were alone again, Anna sat on the chair with the dog on her lap. The pug licked her face once and then curled up and went to sleep. Anna gave a half-hearted smile. "She is really cute, but she's a dog! She can't talk to us or tell us where to go from here. She isn't even leading us anywhere now!"

Tim looked around the room again. "She brought us back into this room before. She led us to my mom's journal. Maybe what we're looking for is here. Maybe it's in her journal!"

"Maybe," Anna agreed, "but, Tim, did you happen to notice how many notebooks are on those shelves?"

Tim looked up from the page of the journal he was looking at. "There are more?"

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Anna nodded. "Your mom wrote a lot. She must have really liked writing."

Now Tim nodded. "She did! That was her job, you know."

Anna shook her head. "Wait! I know something about my own family you don't?" Tim asked, "My mom wrote children's books. She had a whole series. They're pretty popular. "They're about a princess who doesn't know she's a princess, but she has magical powers..." Tim's voice trailed off.

"What?"

"Maybe she wasn't just writing stories. Maybe she was writing about herself! Maybe that's why the stories were so good!"

"I guess that could be true, but your mom wasn't technically a princess. She just married the prince."

"Oh. Maybe not, then. Her stories were so good though. It was like they came alive, right off the page when you were reading them."

Anna's eyes widened. "Tim, it was probably her power. I've heard of that one. My mom told me she knew someone with it once. It must have been your mom she was talking about."

"Well, the stories remind me a lot of what I've been learning about Snillotia. Maybe they have a clue in them, along with maybe these journals of hers. But we can't stay here forever reading! We need to get back to the palace!"

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"Plus, if your mom wrote these books in the backwards world, they wouldn't be here."

Tim looked at her, with a look on his face that said he had an idea. "What are you thinking?"

"Well, you made other stuff happen just thinking about it. Maybe you could do it again. Just try it!"

Anna shrugged. "Okay. Books written by Nelle Rellim, appear!"

Nothing happened. "Try again. Remember she wrote them in the backwards world. Her name was Ellen Tollins there."

"Books written by Ellen Tollins, appear!"

Again, nothing happened. "You didn't say you wish."

Anna sighed. She didn't really believe this was going to work. She just couldn't wish for things and have anything come true! That couldn't possibly be her power. Tim was looking at her, encouragingly. "I wish the books Tim's mom wrote in the backwards world were here."

There was a loud crash behind her. She spun around. A pile of book was now sitting on the desk along with some papers that hadn't been there before. She was shocked. "You did it!"

Anna shook her head. It really hadn't seemed like she did anything. When the light had appeared in her hand, she had felt that power. But coming back to Snillotia and now these books, she hadn't felt anything at all. She saw a movement out

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of the corner of her eye. The pug was looking at her, with that expression that resembled a smile again. "It's her!"

"What?"

Tim had been looking through the books that appeared. "It's the dog. She brought us back here, not me. I'm pretty sure she brought the books too. I didn't do it. I just know it wasn't me."

Tim looked at the dog. Feeling a little foolish, he asked, "Did you do this? Are you really a magic creature called a gup and not a pug dog?"

"Yes."

Anna and Tim both froze. Tim hadn't really been expecting a response, but he'd clearly heard a little girl's voice answer him. He looked at the dog, still staring at him from the chair. "You can talk?"

"Not the same way you can, but I can make you understand me. My name is- well, you can just call me Goldie."

Anna recovered from the shock first. "You brought us here. How do we leave?"

"I don't want you to leave. I've been alone for so long. There are no new rooms in storage. There are no students living here any longer. There haven't been for many years now. When I felt your wish in the copied version of the room, your wish to return to Snillotia, I complied. You got your wish and I would no longer be alone."

Anna and Tim looked at each other. "Goldie, we have to leave. We're the only hope for Snillotia. We have to save

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everyone from the rebels. If we do that, there will be new rooms again, with new students. You wouldn't be alone," Anna tried to explain to her.

Goldie did not look convinced. Tim tried another way. "Goldie, do you know who we are?"

Goldie turn her large eyes right on him. "You are Nelle's son. That is the only way you could have been in her copied room. Plus, she already said who you were when she asked for those books," she replied glancing at Anna, "Though, you are bigger then when I last sensed you in the room."

Goldie looked at their confused expressions. "I control the rooms. I can always tell who is in them, even the copies. After the students stopped coming, people also stopped copying their rooms. Your mother was the only one who kept hers. I had no one else to sense except her and whoever entered the room with her. I didn't feel so alone when she was in her room. It's been empty for a while now until you suddenly appeared! I was so happy when I sensed you!"

Tim looked at her sadly. "My mom died."

Goldie's sad looking face appeared even sadder. She whined and nudged Tim's hand. "I am sorry, Tim."

After a moment of silence, Anna said, "If you could sense Tim's mom, do you know who she actually was, after she left school here? Who his dad was, as well?"

"No. I only could feel their presence. Once in a while, if they thought about Snillotia hard enough, like you did, I could

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hear snippets. Why does this matter? I'm not alone any longer and now I am happy."

"I'm sorry, Goldie, we can't stay here. You have to let us out. We have to defeat the rebels and we can't do that from here," Tim told her.

"You're barely old enough to be students here, I don't see-"

Anna cut her off. "We are the prince and princess! You have to obey us!"

Tim looked at Anna in surprise. He hadn't quite thought of himself as a prince until she said it and he realized it was true. Goldie had gone silent and she looked very sad again. "You can come with us," he told her.

Goldie almost looked surprised. "Leave here? I have never been anywhere else. I always must remain to control the storage."

"But you said it yourself. There are no students and my mom was the only one who had copied her room. Please, Goldie, we need to go back to the palace."

She blinked her large eyes very slowly. She jumped off the chair then and ran towards the door.

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Chapter Fifteen

"Wait!"

Anna and Tim raced after her as they saw her curly tail disappeared down the hallway. They reached the door and she was sitting, patiently in front of it. The door clicked open and began to open on its own. "We are in the palace."

Tim tore his eyes from the pug and saw the room he had been sleeping in. He rushed in, with Anna close behind. When they turned back, Goldie was still in the doorway watching. Anna bent down and picked her up. "Thank you, Goldie. We insist you stay with us, so you aren't alone anymore."

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Goldie licked her nose, catching Anna totally by surprise. Tim laughed. "Wait, the books!"

He ran back in the room and came back with the books his mom wrote and dumped them on the bed, then he went back for all her journals. He started to close the door and Goldie barked, "Wait! You'll cut off my connection to Storage, if you do that. I can't be disconnected from Storage!"

Tim stopped just in time and swung the door wide open. He went to the large armchair in the corner and pushed it in front of the door. "There. Now we can't even close it, accidentally."

"Thank you," Goldie said, feeling more comfortable staying in the palace with a link to her home present.

Suddenly, the door to the bedroom burst open. Anna's mom came running in. "I thought I heard voices! I'm so happy your back," she cried hugging Anna, who was still holding Goldie. Goldie let out a yelp at being squished between them. "Oh! Aren't you the cutest thing!"

"Actually, I'm supposed to be scary. Don't tell anyone my secret!"

Anna and Tim laughed, while Einna jumped back in shock. She smiled slightly as she recovered herself. "Let's go downstairs. You must be hungry, and everyone will be so happy your back."

Their grandparents were overjoyed to see them back safe and sound and of course scolded them playfully for leaving in the first place. They all loved Goldie as well, after

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they got over the shock that she was the mythical gup and that she could talk. "So, what did you discover?" Tre asked after they had finished eating.

"Well, nothing yet, but I learned my mom wrote a lot of stuff down. I think there may be a clue in her journals."

Tim's grandmother smiled, remembering her daughter's fondness for journaling and how it had worked out wonderfully when her power had appeared. Anna shook her head. "I think the books are what we should focus on, not the journals."

"What books, dear?" Grandma An asked.

"My mom, uh, wrote books. It was her job. She wrote a whole series of children's books. She was writing the last one when she, uh, well she didn't finish the last one."

Grandma Aras smiled again, thinking how wonderful those stores must be, again remembering her daughter's gift, then the color drained from her face. "Why would she be so careless? No wonder they found her," she said with tears in her eyes.

"No, she used another name. A pen name, I think they call it. Sarah Erickson," Anna explained.

"How did you know that?" Tim asked, quite surprised.

Anna rolled her eyes at him. "I read it on the cover of the books, back in the room."

"Oh."

Grandpa Cire smiled. "That's my clever girl!"

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Grandma Aras slowly smiled again too, catching on. Tim knew that was the name his mom used, but it seemed like an ordinary name to him. He didn't know why his grandfather thought it was clever. Anna rolled her eyes at him again. "I don't get it," he said more to himself, then anyone in the room.

Goldie heard him. "Your mother turned her parents' names backwards and used them to create her pen name."

"Oh," Tim said, again, "I think I need some sleep!"

At that, everyone said goodnight and went to their rooms. Tim moved the pile of books and journals to the desk in his room. He grabbed the journal they had found first since it seemed to be the earliest, planning to read a little before going to sleep. As soon as he lay down, he heard a tapping on the door. Anna poked her head in. "I want to read the first book your mom wrote."

He pointed toward the desk and Anna went over to look at the pile. There were fourteen books so far. She assumed the papers were what had been written of the fifteenth. "Which one is first?" she asked, looking back at Tim.

Having read the stories as long as he could remember, he knew without even thinking about it. "Invisible".

Anna grabbed it and went back to her room. Goldie was curled up on the chair in the corner. Anna pulled a blanket off the bed and put it around her. A loud snore was her response. She smiled and climbed into bed, opened the book and began to read. Suddenly, it was like a movie was playing in front of

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her. She had been right. Nelle had had the power to give life to the written word. She watched the story unfold.

Once upon a time, when the air sizzled with magic and anything was possible, there lived a child. This child was always watching, waiting for the magic to come to her. As she grew older, she saw all those around her suddenly be able to do wondrous things. Her older brother could create winds. Her older sister could create music out of thin air. Her younger sister could paint anything then make it real by pulling it off the paper. Her younger sister's power was the latest to appear, it had shown up on her thirteenth birthday the week before. Even her younger brother, who was only eleven, was beginning to show promise of some kind of power with animals. As long as she could remember, she felt different than the rest of her family and magic was no exception. Her mother told her to be patient, but her patience was wearing thin. It was the last day she could hope to be like everyone else. Magic came when you were thirteen. Tomorrow would be her fourteenth birthday.

"Eimaj!"

The girl jumped at the sound of her younger brother, Semaj, calling her name. She was right behind their small house, sitting at the base of the closest tree. Her brother couldn't see her once again. She sometimes thought that would be the only power she would have. No one could ever find her. She was quiet and always watching. She only spoke when spoken to or had something important to say. People tended not to notice her unless she made her presence known. However, this was no magic at work. It was simply from always being

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in the middle. She was the third oldest child and the third youngest. Her brothers and sisters always stood out more than she did for one reason or another. She really didn't mind, much. She liked being able to just watch. Sometimes it was good to seem invisible.

"I'm right here, Sem," she said, quietly.

"I need your help, Em. One of the sheep went into the cave at the end of the field. I can't see him any longer. It's too dark."

She stood up without a word and followed him. Her older brother, Bocaj, must not be home yet. Sem would have gone to him first if he was there. Ailuj wouldn't go near the sheep. Her older sister thought she was meant to be royalty or something. She had a crazy idea that the Prince would marry her someday, as if that snobby boy would ever marry a girl from a family of sheep farmers! Eimaj shook her head as she thought about it. Her younger sister, Einaoj, was afraid of the dark, even though no one ever mentioned it. If Sem had asked her, she would have come up with an excuse quickly once she heard the words "dark cave". Her brother was chattering away, basically saying everything she had just thought. "Bo isn't here. Lulu and Ina wouldn't have helped. I didn't even bother asking."

Eimaj was surprised at being asked first for once but realized her brother really hadn't had a choice. As they reached the mouth of the cave, Eimaj looked around until she saw a large enough branch she could use as a torch. Using the flint her father had given her for her birthday last year, she lit the torch and entered the cave. She found the sheep and sent it back toward the entrance and her brother. She had noticed something else. There were carvings on the wall in

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the very back. She yelled back to her brother, "Go ahead back! I found something interesting in here I want to study!"

She heard her brother pulling the sheep away. Everyone was used to her habit of studying things. She went back to the carvings. It could only be a quick look because her torch wouldn't last much longer. In the dim light she could make out something that resembled a doorway carved in the stone. It was surrounded by arrows. Always two together pointing the opposite ways. She reached out to rub her fingers along one of the arrows. Suddenly everything was dark. Her torch had gone out.

Anna closed the book after a few pages. Even though Nelle's power made it almost like watching a movie, her eyes were getting heavy. It had been a long day. The story was interesting so far. It seemed like it took place in Snillotia. She recognized the reversed names: Jamie, James, Jacob, Julia, and Joanie. Deciding to read more in the morning to see if anything in the story was helpful, she turned off the light and went to sleep.

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Chapter Sixteen

Tim woke the next morning, with the sun streaming through the windows of his room, surrounded by his mother's journals. He had read the first one cover to cover, amazed at the things he was learning about his mother when she was his age. Once his mother's power had surfaced, he'd become hooked. It was like he'd actually witnessed his parents meeting for the first time, through his mother's eyes. He'd seen his father and Anna's parents all when they were just slightly older than him, in his mind's eye, brought to life by what his mother had written. He hadn't, however, discovered anything that might be helpful to them. He decided to just flip through some of the other notebooks, in hopes that something stood out, but

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had no such luck. A knock at the door pulled him from the comfort of the warm blankets. Upon opening the door, he was slightly surprised to see Grandpa Cire standing on the other side. "Good morning, Tim. Did you sleep well?"

Tim nodded. "Yes, sir."

"No need to be so formal, my boy! I'd like to talk to you for a moment. Can I come in?" Grandpa Cire asked, gesturing inside the room.

Tim nodded again and stepped aside. He closed the door behind his grandfather, who had stopped in the middle of the room. He was staring at the books and journals that were left piled on the desk. Then he turned and saw the notebooks on the bed. "I wonder," he said, almost to himself, "did it present even in her journals?"

He reached out to pick up one of the notebooks then hesitated. "Do you mind if I...?" he asked Tim.

"Sure," he said, picking up the closest one and handing it to his grandfather.

His grandfather opened it at random and began reading. He slowly smiled. "It's wonderful, knowing we have this almost living memory of her. Her mother will be so happy."

Tim smiled awkwardly back at his grandfather. It was very weird for him to think about these people he didn't know having known his mother longer than he had. They knew more about her than he did. It made him sad to realize the person he knew as his mother wasn't really who she was at all. "It's a neat power."

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"It's a wonderful power. Your mother was not the first to have it. However, I'd never seen it present in personal writings. Usually it only presented if the person was writing about something made up or that they were not involved in," he smiled, "Your mother always had to be different! Seems that even carried over to her power!"

Tim took the journal as his grandfather handed it back to him. "People can have the same powers?"

Grandpa Cire nodded. "They usually run in families. Once in a while, something new will pop up, but usually, looking back, you tend to find that the power was in the family somewhere- possibly another branch that formed its own family in the present time that shows the power more dominantly. Many families in Snillotia have common ancestors if you go back far enough. Like your family and Anna's. Your father's ancestors were brother and sister after all- the first Sibling Rulers."

Tim nodded, understanding a little better. He looked at his grandfather, who had moved to the desk where all the books were piled. Grandpa Cire was running his fingers across the covers, almost lovingly. Tim started, shyly. "Am I allowed to ask people what their powers are? I know Anna's parents' and Grandma An's because they all told me. And now I know my moms, but what about my dad's? And yours and Grandma Aras' and Grand-"

Tim stopped talking, as Grandpa Cire laughed. "Slow down, son! I forget you didn't grow up here and don't know

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much how about things work, sometimes! Why don't we go find the rest of the grandparents? Yours, I mean, and we'll have a little family reunion! We'll tell you anything you want to know, that we know ourselves, of course!"

Tim followed his grandfather from the room. As they walked, Tim realized the castle was a lot bigger than he originally thought. Besides the sections that looked like the house he grew up in and the house Anna grew up in, there were yet more doors and hallways he had not yet seen. Tim shook his head. His grandfather glanced over at him. "I know; it's very confusing at first! You'll get used to it soon, I promise! After all, this is your home now!"

Tim nodded, slowly, as that reality once again, sunk in. It didn't feel like home yet, even the section that did resemble his real home. Putting those thoughts aside, they finally stopped in a cozy room. Tim's grandmothers were sitting at a table with Grandma An. The women looked up, surprised as they realized Tim was with Grandpa Cire. Grandpa Amme smiled warmly at Tim. "Good morning, dear. Did you sleep well?"

Tim nodded, as Grandpa Cire spoke, "I realized, while talking with Tim, that our children really did not tell him anything about who he really is. Most likely they were waiting for when they thought would be the best time and, unfortunately, we know that they didn't get a chance."

Grandpa Cire's voice caught, thinking of his daughter, then he continued. "Tim has a lot of questions. Questions that

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will need to be answered if he's to play the part in our salvation that we believe he is to play. I also have some questions for him. I'd like to get to know my grandson better. I think we need to take some family time and just talk."

Grandma Aras nodded in agreement. "What a wonderful idea!"

Grandma An stood up. "I think we'll do the same with Anna!"

She closed her eyes. "I've told Mit what we've planned to do. He'll meet you here shortly," she paused, "and he'll bring some breakfast!"

Tim looked surprised and Grandma Amme laughed. "It's a sibling ruler thing, Tim," she explained, "They can communicate telepathically. It does take some getting used to."

Tim just nodded, his head already filling with more questions than he would ever find time to get answers for. As Grandma An left to find Anna and the others for their family time, Tim sat in the seat she vacated. "I don't know what to ask first!"

Before anyone could respond, Grandpa Mit came in, arms full of donuts and other pastries. "Breakfast is served!"

While Tim chose a danish to eat, Grandpa Cire, took charge. "I know you have many questions, Tim, but before we answer yours, I'm sure we all," he paused, indicating the grandparents around the table, "would like to know the same thing. Were your parents happy?"

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Tim thought for a moment. "Yes, for the most part I think they were. I can remember times- around holidays mostly- where it would seem like they were lonely. But they laughed and smiled a lot. They always did what they could to make sure I was happy, and I think that made them happy too. I don't understand, though, if you could communicate with them when they first went through, why did you stop? They told me you were dead. If they had known you were all here, I'm sure they would have still missed seeing you, but at least they could talk to you."

"We don't know what happened, Tim. After your parents and Anna's went to the backwards world, we knew they were safe. Yes, we could communicate, at first, but it wasn't like using a key or a "phone" as your picturing in your head," Grandpa Mit paused, "Yes, I can see what you're thinking, but not all the time- only when you're thinking about something quite a bit, and only if I'm near you. It's my power. As, I was explaining though, communicating between the worlds was more like signs that we could read, but after a while they stopped coming, and we assumed ours stopped getting through as well. Your parents must have assumed that meant the worst. We didn't. We didn't think anyone else but a royal with a portal key could get through the wall."

"They can! When we came back through the fort, with Anna's parents, I almost got caught because I thought the social worker- the man who was trying to take me away from my house- was there. There was a man who looked just like him!"

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Grandpa Mit frowned. He didn't know if it was the same man, if somehow the rebels devised a way to keep crossing between the worlds, or if they came up with a way to communicate with those over there already. There had always been rumors that the other worlds that existed were actually other realities instead, which meant everyone existed in each world, so it could have been a coincidence that Tim recognized the man, if he wasn't actually a part of their situation.

While Grandpa Mit was thinking about the new development, Grandma Cire continued the conversation. "Tim, earlier, you asked if you could ask what people's powers are. Generally, no, it's not polite to ask, but it's usually not secret either. As I told you earlier, powers run in families, so most of the time you can usually tell what family someone is in because of the power. Powers present during your thirteenth year. Sometimes there are signs at an earlier age. Once in a while something we've never seen before presents. For instance, we've never known of anyone who can pass between the worlds, like you do; then again, we've never tried. The only royals that we know of who have used their portal keys have been old kings or queens who felt, once their reigns were over, that they weren't needed any longer in this world. Your father and Anna's mother were the first prince and princess to ever leave, and the first to take someone with them through the portal, but I'm getting off track! Where was I? Oh, yes! When someone's power fully presented, there would be a celebration!

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This is another reason someone's power isn't generally a secret! Now, let me share my secret with you!"

Grandpa Cire put down the cup he had been holding during his speech. He held out his hand and suddenly there was a second cup sitting on the table, next to the first one. He moved the second cup in front of Tim. "I can manifest a copy of anything I've touched," he gestured to the cup, "It's real, can be used, but that's only because it's the first copy. If I were to keep making the cup, eventually, it would no longer be substantial enough to hold liquid!"

Tim picked the cup up, amazed. It felt completely real to him. The cup flew from his hand. Tim followed it with his eyes to find that Grandma Amme was now holding it. "I can move things with my mind. This was your father's power as well. It's a very strong power in my family- there has been one who presents it in every generation for years. I'm actually surprised it's not your power."

Tim laughed, thinking about all the times something had magically appeared in his father's hand. His dad had always shrugged it off, but now Tim knew better. "This explains so much about my dad!"

Grandma Amme smiled. "It must have been incredibly hard for him not to use it for everything! I loved my son very much, but he became quite lazy once he had full control over this ability!"

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Tim reached over and squeezed his grandmother's hand after noticing the tears in her eyes. Then he turned and looked towards Grandma Aras. "I guess that just leaves you."

Grandma Aras smiled. "My power has two parts. Thankfully, I can't show you one part right now. Let me explain," she said seeing the confused look on Tim's face, "I can heal people, you see. I'm thankful that right now, no one is hurt or sick, which is a good thing! My family has always been the healers, or doctors as you know them. Asilla, the woman who brings us food and showed you how to see us- she's my cousin's child," she paused, and then continued almost shyly, "I can show you the second part of my power, if you'd allow me to give you a hug?"

Tim nodded and stood up. "Sure."

Grandma Aras came around the table and gave Tim a tentative hug. As he hugged her back her arms tightened around him and he could feel her power pouring into him. When she released him, she had tears in her eyes. Grandpa Cire grabbed her hand reassuringly. Tim was confused. He felt normal, maybe a little better than normal, like he just woke up and was ready for the day. He looked at his hands, his arms, down at his feet. Everything looked the same. "Am I missing something?"

Grandma Aras smiled at him again. "I can restore energy. You just woke up and haven't done anything to really drain your energy yet, so it wouldn't be as noticeable. When I

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touch someone, their energy is restored, just like a full night's sleep," she explained.

Tim nodded in understanding, then something popped into his head. "Why do you have two different powers? I thought everyone only got one."

Grandma Aras nodded. "Most people do only have one. Mine go hand in hand, though, so I assume that's why I can do both things. In more recent times, we've seen that more and more. Either someone has two things that are connected, or they have a dominant power, but also a smaller power as well. Your mother was one of those people."

"My mom? What she writes comes alive like a movie. I know that, but what else- the light!"

His grandparents looked at him in surprise. "How did you know that?" Grandpa Cire asked.

Tim explained about the memory he had when he and Anna had been in his mom's copied room from the Y and about the fake window. "I don't understand though. Anna can do that too, the light with her hand, I mean. If powers run in families does that mean Anna and my mom are related?"

"No, Tim," Grandpa Mit explained, "Little powers like that have no significance. Many families have been able to make light through the years."

Tim felt like something was lifted off his chest. For some reason he felt a lot better knowing he wasn't related to Anna somehow. After that they started talking about more general things. Tim told that about some funny stories he remembered,

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and they shared some stories about his parents when they were young. Grandpa Mit soon brought an end to their reminiscing.

"An is requesting that we join them in Tim's bedroom. Anna has a theory about Nelle's books and would like to share it with everyone all at once."

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Chapter Seventeen

Tim heard Anna before he saw her. "I still don't know what my power is, Goldie. Do you have any way to find out for me?"

Tim looked at his grandparents, who were walking with him. He didn't think they were near his room yet and his grandparents didn't seem to hear anything. "Yeah, I know I can make light, but what good will that do? If it's dark I can make it easier for a rebel to see me so they can kill me?"

Tim looked at his grandparents again. Anna really seemed to be upset and they didn't seem concerned at all. "I know there's still time, Goldie, but not much. I'll turn fourteen in just 3 months! My parents said that powers present during

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the thirteenth year and whatever happens happens. If nothing except the stupid light is all I get, I'm a pretty sad excuse for a princess who's supposed to save the world."

Tim reached the door to his room and paused before opening it. He assumed Anna was inside and he didn't want everyone to storm in on her all at once. He looked at his grandparents. "Umm, Anna seems upset. Give me a minute, okay?"

He slipped inside his room, not seeing the surprised expressions on his grandparents faces, only for one to appear on his own face when he realized his room was empty. He looked over at the doorway propped open to the copied room. Maybe Goldie wanted to feel more connected to her home, he thought. He went through the doorway, but the room was empty. "I guess this is what Grandpa Siul gets to feel like all the time. No offense, Goldie, but you do look like a dog that exists where I grew up and he can talk to animal! That's awesome! We had a cat when I was little and always wondered what he thought about," she paused, then laughed, "You don't like cats? Neither do dogs!"

Tim frowned. Why could he hear Anna? Then he realized something. He could only hear Anna. She was obviously talking to Goldie, but if they were somewhere nearby, why couldn't he hear Goldie too? He opened the door to his room, to find his grandparents standing there with Anna's grandparents. Anna wasn't with him. "She's, um. not in here."

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Grandma An was the first to speak. "Why did you think she was? She said she was going to clean up and get properly dressed before meeting us here."

Tim looked down at himself, realizing he was still wearing what he'd slept in. "I thought I heard her. I could hear her while we were walking here. She had to be close by. She seems upset..." Tim trailed off, confused.

"Amazing!" Grandpa Mit exclaimed.

"What?" Tim asked.

"You're communicating, telepathically, with Anna, dear. She's sending what she's saying to you, but I don't think she realizes it." Grandma An explained.

"Oh, cool! Wait! Why is it amazing? I saw you tell Grandpa Mit something earlier in your mind!"

"Son, the telepathic ability between sibling rulers only exists when they are the rulers- after the coronation ceremony. That Anna is sending you thoughts now, years away from when you'd even be the age to be crowned- well that's something special," Grandpa Mit added.

The other grandparents were silent, listening, since they were not familiar with what went along with being a royal. "I always knew you two were different. I could tell in my visions. I suspect this is only the first of many surprises!" Grandma An said.

"Surprise? What did we miss?" Anna asked as she joined them, with her parents behind her, "And why is everyone standing in the hallway?"

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They all moved into Tim's room. It was very crowded, with eight grandparents, two parents and Tim and Anna all in one room. "Uh, why did we have to meet here?" Tim asked Anna, "I think there'd be more room somewhere else."

"Your mom's books are in here, silly. I only have the first one, but once Grandma Eilime told me her power, I thought she should see them all," she looked at Grandma Eilime before continuing, who nodded for her to go on, "She can touch things and know all about them, so with books, it's like she reads them completely in seconds, just by touching the covers!"

"I still don't understand why you think they're important. It's just a story my mom made up."

"Tim, I read the first book last night. I woke up in the middle of the night and couldn't fall back asleep, so I finished it. I didn't want to wake you so I couldn't continue with the second, but if you know the story your mom is telling, I don't see how you don't realize what she was writing about. Tim, it's like she knew what your power was going to be."

"What do I have to do with the books? I'm not in them. The main character is a girl!"

"Think about it! What happens at the very beginning of the first book?"

Tim really had to think about it. It had been a long time since he'd read the first book. Even then, he hadn't been interested in it really. "The girl goes into a cave. I remember that much."

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"Oh please, I'll just read it for everyone! Let's see," she said, flipping through the pages, "Here's the part I'm trying get you to remember. *'She reached out to rub her fingers along one of the arrows. Suddenly everything was dark. Her torch had gone out',*" Anna read from the book.

As she continued reading Tim saw it happening.

Eimaj reached out with her hands, looking for the way out of the cave. She could barely see her own hand; it was so dark. She stopped and looked around. She felt she should be able to see better by now. There should be light coming from the entrance of the cave. However, it was just complete darkness. She turned around, and kept walking slowly, her hand in front of her, looking for the wall with the carvings. If she could start there again, maybe she could reorient herself. Maybe she just walked in the wrong direction somehow. She frowned. The wall should be in front of her by now. She hadn't walked that far. Her hand started tingling. She stopped and put it by her side for a moment, thinking she needed to get the blood flowing into it again. The tingling stopped as soon as she put her hand down. She shrugged and put her hand in front of her again, to continue searching for the wall. The tingling started again immediately. She put her hand down again and it stopped. She was beginning to get worried. She wondered if Semaj would remember he left her here if she didn't make her way home soon. She tried her other hand. This hand tingled too. She decided it didn't matter. she had to keep going. With her hand still in front of her, she moved a step forward. The tingling sensation traveled up her arm, as she kept moving and she felt it

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everywhere. Then, as quickly as it started, the feeling stopped. She turned around and immediately felt pain. Her hand had crashed into the wall. Somehow the wall was behind her.

Tim was speechless. Why hadn't he remembered that? The girl in the story experienced almost the exact same thing he had when he first went through the wall. "She went through a doorway," he stated, "That was exactly how it was the first time I came through. Totally black everywhere. Except, I could see the secret room. It was like the wall turned into a one-way mirror. I could see the men searching for me, but they couldn't see me. I felt that tingling too! I can't believe I didn't remember my mom's story."

Anna nodded. "It was like that for me too, the first time I went through, though without the tingling. Once I went through everything was black until I touched my key. I think it connected me to this world, so when I did that, the world appeared. I didn't try to go back. I knew I had to keep moving forward. But I recognized it right away- that nothingness surrounding you. Except one thing, Tim, like you, she went through the doorway, and back through it again."

"How did my mom know that was possible? Do you think she could do it too? Do you think maybe she tried to come home?"

Tim looked at Grandpa Cire and Grandma Aras. They both shook their heads. "We don't know, Tim."

Grandpa Cire pointed to the journals. "If she did, I suspect the answer may be in there."

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He ran his hands across all of the journals. He looked toward Grandma Eilime. "I can copy them, but I can't tell what they hold without reading them normally. Anna's right. Your power would be most helpful."

"But I meant the books- not the journals,' Anna started.

Tim gave her a look. She stopped talking. Eilime picked up the journal on the top of the pile. She closed her eyes. When she opened them, she said, "This one is from her time in school," she looked at the large number of books, "This could take a while, even for me."

They all chuckled. One by one, she touched the journals. After she had touched about half of them, the bedroom door opened. "Well, well, well. Isn't this a nice surprise?"

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Chapter Eighteen

They all turned toward the door in surprise. There was a man standing there and he held some kind of weapon. "You!"

The man snickered. "No, not me actually. The man you think I am is my twin. He chose to live in the backwards world, but he did tell me you'd made it through. That's how I knew to find you here! You should have gone with him, boy. If you had, you'd have lived a nice long life, oblivious to all of this," he said, waving his hand around, "but now I have no choice but to kill you."

Grandpa Leumas stepped in front of Tim, blocking him from the man's view. "No, you won't."

Tim saw Grandpa Leumas' hand start to glow, kind of like Anna's, but it kept glowing, until he was holding a ball of

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fire in his hand. "His power's the only one out of all of us that could actually save us," Anna said.

Tim looked at her, wondering why she'd announce that, then realize, after seeing her terrified face that she hadn't spoken it allowed. He'd heard it in his head again. He focused all his energy into sending a thought to her. "Don't worry, Anna, we'll be okay."

He kept thinking the same thing over and over, finally, she must have heard him. She looked at him, in shock. "I'll explain later," he thought and directed it the same way.

She nodded slightly. The man, however, did not miss this exchange. "How did you do this? How can they communicate already?" he seemed almost afraid, then his face turned to steel, "No matter. I came to finish the boy, but the rest of you are a bonus. Everyone thinks your all dead anyway!"

He raised the weapon and pointed it at Grandpa Leumas first. Suddenly, the man stopped moving. He stood there, frozen, taking on a slightly blue tint. Grandpa Aras gasped. "It can't be!"

Another man appeared in the doorway behind the frozen one. "Come quickly. You know it doesn't last forever."

Grandpa Cire's face lost all color, but he clutched Grandma Aras' hand tightly and they followed the man. All the other grandparents and Anna's parents looked like they were in shock as well but followed too. Soon it was just Anna, Tim and Goldie left in the room. Grandpa Siul paused in the hallway and called back, "Come on kids, it's okay, hurry."

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Tim picked up Goldie, thinking she'd have trouble keeping up. She squirmed in his arms. "No, Tim. I can't go. I need to stay connected to the Ymedaca. Take the medallion from around my neck and close the door after I go through. I'll be able to find you again as long as you have that medallion. If you need me, just call."

Tim took the medallion, barely listening to what she was saying, then quickly pushed the chair holding the door open out of the way. Goldie went through and Tim closed the door after her. Then he grabbed Anna's hand and they ran after everyone else. Anna let out a cry and Tim felt her pulling back on his hand. He spun around. The frozen man was no longer frozen, and he had grabbed Anna's other arm.

"I'll deal with the rest of them later, but you two are the important ones anyway."

"Go, Tim, run!" Anna cried, letting go of his hand.

"No, I won't leave you," he said trying to pull her away from the man.

"Trust me, Tim. Let go." Anna's voice was loud in his head.

Surprised, he let go and stepped back. The light Anna could make was glowing. It kept getting brighter, but instead of turning to fire like her grandfather's, it turned blue. The man let go, his face showing fear again, but it was too late. Anna directed the blue light at him, and it shot from her hand and hit him squarely in the chest. It hung around him for a moment and then suddenly, the man was gone. The force of whatever

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Anna had done was shaking the whole castle. "Come on!" he grabbed Anna's hand again and they raced away from the shaking walls.

Anna and Tim kept running. They didn't know where they were going, since they didn't know which way anyone else had gone. They ran through the hallway where all the portraits were and back into the version of Tim's house. This part of the castle wasn't shaking so when they reached the room Tim had arrived in, they stopped to catch their breath. As they were standing there, there was a horrible crashing sound. "I think I made that part of the castle completely collapse," Anna said, in shock.

"Yeah, what was that?" Tim asked.

"I don't know. I think my light is actually energy. I think I found my power, but I don't think I like it," she said, with a short laugh, and then collapsed onto the floor.

Tim rushed to her side. She was unconscious. Tim didn't think they could stay where they were much longer. He didn't know how the man had gotten into the castle and if he did, others could be inside now as well. He also didn't know who the other man who had led everyone else away was or where they went. He looked at Anna again, lying on the floor. She was small. He thought he could carry her, at least for a little while. He scooped her into his arms and carried her through the wall.

To Be Continued...

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