

The Day The Sun Rose In The World That Never Existed

By : SavvyApple

Two sisters and a brother. All working together to save their world. All working together to prevent each other from fading away. All working together to save themselves. About four months to half a year ago, Ethan (18) and Ava (15), created a magical world. This world was very much real, if you believed in it enough - under certain circumstances, of course. Certain 'rules' applied, including the fact that if you took the risk in creating this world, then it would become part the creator's lifeline(s). Therefore - it dies, you die, or at least cease to exist. Despite the known risks, Ava and Ethan take on the challenge of creating their own world in which, if needed one day, humans could live in themselves successfully. Ava and Ethan attempted at keeping this world from Zoey (7), thus saving their parents by having at least one remaining child in case something happened to their world, as opposed to none. But when Zoey gets involved in everything, well, then everything changes. Now, something's going on in the sibling's world; the sun is getting smaller and lower every time Ava sees it in her dreams, which isn't supposed to happen. They had made the sun their main focus point, their main energy source, and the holy item in their world. It was never supposed to set unless said otherwise. Because of how vital the sun is, Ava, Ethan, and Zoey, knowing that they couldn't possibly keep all Evil away from humanity, chose Seven Sun Protectors, also known as the Guardians, or the Strong Sun Seven. The leader, Eli (pronounced Ellie), was to pick out the other 6 Guardians - which happened, but now all Guardians have been stolen and hidden in multiple locations of the trio's world. The confusion alerts all three's attention, and they all must go on a thrilling adventure to save all 7 Guardians, 6 unknown, all before the sun shrinks and sets for good, because after that, their world will have never existed - and neither will have they.



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The Day The Sun Rose In The World That Never Existed : Chapter 1

Prologue

What time was it? Ava couldn't tell. It was too dark to tell - yes that was it. Too dark to tell. It had to be at least midnight - that was when she had fallen asleep. There wasn't any clock in her room, but why not? Ava brushed her chocolate brown hair out of her eyes. Her brilliant blue eyes, no doubt about that. Ava shivered. The cold was trickling down her spine like ice-cold water.

Ava turned towards the window - a gentle, rather cold wind was blowing the curtains back. Ava rose out of bed and shut the window. Zoey must've left it open last night. Zoey must've woken Ava up. Or was that just the cold January air?

Zoey was sleeping on the top bunk, as usual. Half her blankets were hanging off the bunk. Ava sighed and climbed up the ladder to fix Zoey's blankets. Little, tiny, fragile, headstrong Zoey. Zoey was almost nine years younger than Ava, who was fifteen. Zoey was about a month away from turning seven. She resembled Ava in several ways. Age, height, and the obvious wasn't really counted - but the hair, the nose, the facial features were the same, except the eye. Dark brown eyes. Eyes that shone like the sun. Ava fixed up her little sister's blankets, and tried going to sleep again. She couldn't, that dream... No. No thinking about it. No.

At this point Ava liked to go down to the kitchen to get hot chocolate, so Ava climbed out of bed yet again and silently walked downstairs.

The minute she flicked on the light, Ava knew someone was there. Hiding. Probably under the counter, or behind the cabinet. Ava called out. "It's only me, Ethan." Ethan grunted of relief and popped out from behind the cabinet. He was snacking on what seemed to be lemon squares. He had crumbs all over his face, but he probably knew. Chances were he was saving them, as a snack for later.

"You scared me, you know Mom and Dad would get pissed if they knew I was down here eating these... They're so addicting!" He sighed and stuffed his mouth with another cookie.

Ava grunted and crossed her arms. "They probably already know, they're just waiting for you to barf it all up in the morning." She reasoned. In return, Ethan simply ate another lemon square. Ava rolled her eyes then went into the pantry to grab a packet of instant hot chocolate. She filled up her cup with hot water, emptied the packet into the cup, and started stirring at the breakfast table. Ethan sat next to her and continued to eat cookies.

"What's up?" He asked. Ava shrugged.

"Not sure... But something's wrong. Has Zoey talking about it lately? Anything at all?" Ava regretted asking, out here, just in the kitchen. Anyone could've heard.

Ethan shook his head. "Nothing. You'd think she tell everyone about it, but so far she's be pretty secretive."

"I kind of regret telling her, you know. I doubt she can keep her mouth shut forever. We shouldn't have told her." Ava stopped stirring her hot chocolate and sipped it.

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"We didn't really have a choice, she would've found out anyway." He protested, starting to roll up the bag of lemon squares, or what was left of it.

Ava looked at the old cat clock in the corner of the kitchen. Half past two. She sighed and took another sip of the hot chocolate. "I'm no idiot, you know. I know there's something else on your mind... And what is that?" Ethan asked, and Ava sighed again.

"I had a feeling something was going to happen... And it is. Dreams, Ethan. Every time I go to bed they come up at least once... Something's happening. Every time it gets lower, and smaller...." Ava shuddered, not wanting to think about it.

"What's getting lower?"

Ava snickered. He wouldn't believe her, it was too ridiculous. "The sun." Ethan started to laugh, but Ava shushed him. "Don't laugh, it's true. It's probably almost gone now... I don't know, maybe I'm going crazy?"

Ethan was about to unroll the bag and eat another cookie, but he stopped and smiled. "Ava," he sighed, "you helped me create the world. You're not any more crazy than myself."

Ava snickered. "That's not any more comforting."

Chapter 2: Ava

Chapter 1: Ava

"No, you idiot. The fields can't be there, the power plant is right there! I swear, you cannot map anything." I protested, erasing the little marks Ethan had drawn to resemble grass.

"Like you know any better." He grunted, handing over the pencil reluctantly.

I smiled. "Why thank you. Now, I'm thinking the bank goes over here, don't you?" Ethan shrugged and I drew in the tiny, miniscule buildings.

"What are you guys doing...?" Ethan looked up and nudged my arm. There was Zoey, standing in the doorway.

"Zoey!" I smiled, covering up the project with multiple books. "Do you need something? Ethan and I are kind of busy..." I covered the parts that weren't covered 'casually' with my arm.

"I wanted to invite you to my tea party later, but it's clear you two are doing something much more interesting. What's with the giant parchment?" She asked, right before Ethan rose and shut the door in her face.

"I know what you're thinking, and the answer is no. We can't tell Zoey. She's too young. You've read the rules, you know what could happen. Besides, she'll tell every one of her friends. She can't be trusted."

"Shecan hear you!" Zoey yelled from the other side of the door. I gave Ethan a sarcastic look.

"Let her in, you doofus." Ethan opened the door and Zoey stepped in the room. "Zoey," I coaxed, holding out my hand to her, "if we tell you something, do you promise to not tell anyone, not even mom and dad, about it?" She nodded. I took her hand, and led her over to the table, Ethan watching and shaking his head. "In that case, we've got the biggest secret to tell you."

I propped her up on the chair. "Really? What it is?"

"Well," I started, "it starts with a little imagination, some magic, a bit of butcher paper, and a lot of belief..."

"Bye, have a good time! See you when you get back!" Zoey called to our parents as they drove from the driveway, on their way to the airport, from which they would fly to Manhattan for a business trip. As soon as they rounded the corner, Zoey turned around and skipped back inside.

I looked at Ethan. "Look at her, she's clueless, we have to tell her."

"No, we don't. We'll figure out what's going on later; when we tell her, she should have all the details at once, instead of having to wait it all out." He replied, and I smiled.

"You said when," I teased as we walked back to the front door, "meaning we're going to tell her?"

"You're right, we're going to have to, eventually."

"After we figure everything out?"

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"Right after. But Ava, this is bad... Like, really bad. We need to find out what's going on, before it's too late..."

"Okay," I agreed, "but how do we figure it all out? How do we-"

"Hey Ava, do we have any chicken soup in the fridge? I'm kind of hungry..." We heard Zoey call from down the hall. Ethan looked at me, like, *"I'll get it"*, and boom - conversation over.

Chapter 3: Ethan

Chapter 2: Ethan

After getting Zoey her chicken soup, Ava and I gathered in my room to fire out what's going on with it. "How far down was it when you last saw it?" I asked.

Pause. "Let's just say we better hurry up and solve it, or it's going to be to late." Ava replied grimly. "Ethan, we need Zoey. We're not going to figure it out without her."

I sighed. "But we can't, not yet." She wasn't ready, was she. They could keep the secret from her a little longer. They could protect her for a little while longer...

Couldn't they?

* * *

"Zoey, go do something *other* than watch TV, won't you? You've been sitting in the same exact place ever since Mom and Dad left, go and do something else. It's still light outside, why don't you go outside and play with a neighbor's dog? Go draw, go do something." I suggested, but Zoey just turned the volume on mute and shook her head. "You need to do something with your life, go on, get up."

"I don't feel like myself today, Ethan." She muttered, her face turning a slight shade of green, but passed before I could say anything. "I don't think I'm sick, but I feel kind of... I suppose the word would be *empty*."

Ava slammed down the knife she was using to cut an apple in the kitchen, where she could hear everything clearly. "That's it!" She walked into the room and shut the windows, closed the curtains, and turned again to face us. "Whatever's *going on*, it's *doing* something to us! Ethan, we're going to tell her *now*."

"No."

"Ethan! Look at her, she's turning green!" I looked at Zoey, who looked sad, but about to throw up. I hesitated; we didn't need to do it, not yet.

"...Fine."

Ava grunted with satisfaction. "Zoey, we have something to tell you about *Our World*. Something's going on... And it's not very good."

Zoey blinked, not know what do say. "See," Ava continued, ignoring the lack of response, "recently I've been having these visions - dreams - at night, and, well, the...the-"

"Ava." Zoey interrupted, looking at her feet. She brushed her chocolate brown hair identical to Ava's and her brown eyes shone through. "The sun. It's leaving, but not by wi-"

"How do you know?"

"Well..." Zoey started. "Remember when Mom took me to the park a couple weeks ago? Well, I was... examining the map a bit, and I saw this... thing. Something... I don't know, it's hard to explain, but anyway, the next time I looked, it wasn't there anymore. It just vanished. And it kept happening every time I went to

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the park and came back. I'm supposing you don't know what's going on either, but... I can tell it's something big." Zoey swallowed, probably because it was such a relief to get it all out.

"There could be thousands of possibilities," I muttered, probably not helping anyhow.

Ava snorted. "No, not thousands, just a few. Be smart about this Ethan, you're 18 in your senior year, you should know about critical thinking by now. The problem, or Challenge, if you want to go formal-

"We don't."

"-has to do with the sun, that should be obvious."

"You didn't let me finish at first you know." Zoey piped up. "The sun is leaving against its will. Someone is interfering. Remember how we agreed on there being seven Guardians? So we created one - Eli - and she was to pick the other six. That much is covered. Their job was to protect the sun, our main power source, from evil and such. If I'm right and you guys haven't changed the law, three Guardians were to also how the sun up, like Atlas from those Greek myths and stuff. The others just guarded the sun, but together they created the Strong Sun Seven, and together they general knew that they had to protect the sun. So, if something's going on with the sun, then it's pretty obvious that the first step is that the Guardians have been captured."

"Unless they're dead." I coughed. The pessimist.

"No, Zoey's right. IF they were dead, the sun would be gone by now." Reasoned Ava. The realist.

"Meaning we can still do something about it, before it's too late. We can do it." Zoey smiled like the seven year old she was. The optimist.

"So," I added to my pessimistic title, "We're supposed to find the Guardians and free them so they can keep holding up the son and not let us fade. We can assume that they're *in our world*, leaving us with another problem;"

"How do we get into *our world*?"

Chapter 4: Zoey

Chapter 3: Zoey

We decided to sleep on the thought.

After an hour of debating, Ava decided it was time to hit the sack - so she and Ethan did. I, however, used the flashlight hidden between my mattress and the heading of my bed to examine the map. There had to be a way in, I remembered us agreeing on a way to get it...

But I couldn't think, not now, not at... Ah, why wasn't there a clock in the room/ I went to bed anyway, not knowing what time it was, and wondered how we could do this, before it's too late...

I looked at Ethan, who was gnawing on an eraser tip. I was going to laugh, till I realized it was my pencil eraser. "Ew, Ethan, stop it, that's gross!" I yanked the pencil from his mouth and tossed it from my hand, not wanted to touch the thing.

Ava then came through the doorway, carrying what happened to be a tray of lemonade and cookies. "Got anything done?" She asked and Ethan grinned and shook his head. Ava set the tray down and peered over our shoulders. "No, you got some stuff done, not that it matters; you - we, I should say - are not having the bank right next to the police station and jail! That's plain stupid!" She picked up the pencil Ethan had been chewing on and used the eraser.

"Uh-"

"Plain stupid! Think guys, think!"

"Ethan chewed on that eraser." I mumbled, laughing. Ava paused, put the pencil down, and shuddered while wiping her right hand on her jeans.

"Awesome." She groaned, glaring at Ethan.

"Anyway, I don't think it matters where we put everything, even the jail - the maybe a utopia, but bad guys and evil can never be stopped. We can have a low crime rate, but it can't be stopped." Ethan said.

I jumped in. "But, small crimes don't matter as much as larger crimes, right? The police here ignores the small crimes half the time, don't they? They get to it, yeah, but they tend to put it off."

Ava seemed to consider this for a moment. "Zoey's right, but either way, we can't put the jail there, and we should have a power source and police."

"I thought we already had that."

"Yeah," Ethan agreed, "the Sun is our main focus point and there's already police and crud."

"But, like you said, evil will never be stopped, so there's going to have to be some people wanting to take down the power source - the sun."

"That's why we need someone policing the Sun, right?" I asked for clarification.

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"Exactly. But at the same time, we need a bunch of people protecting the Sun. Seven at least, or exactly that amount, seven is a lucky number right? It should keep the sun strongly protected."

"The Guardians."

"The Strong Sun Seven."

"The Po-po. Of the sun."

The next day, Ava, Ethan and I crowded around the dinner table, examining the map of our world. "There's got to be a way in. We made a way in, right?" Ethan and I nodded in response. "So then we've got to find it, remember it!" Ava searched frantically, attempting to find any mess up, flaw, or something that's not in order on the map. I watched her, but became bored. My mind flew off into other directions. Including the one that would give us the answer.

"Ava?" I asked, trying to get her attention. "Ava? Can you do something for me?"

She looked at me in annoyance. "What."

"Take a nap."

Chapter 5: Ava

Chapter 4: Ava

"What! No!" I protested. Zoey tried to push me on the couch, but I grabbed her hand in frustration and bent it backwards, a way it wasn't supposed to be. She cried out in pain. Ethan looked at her and then at me.

I tried to avoid his glare, but I couldn't avoid his voice. "Take the nap, Ava."

I backed away onto the couch, closed my eyes, and before I knew it, I was asleep.

"What if we need to get it?" Zoey asked. "The point of making this world was to give humans a place to live in case something happened to Earth, right? So what good would that be if we can't get in?"

I paused from drawing the city hall. Zoey was right - we needed a way to get in. "Town hall? Town Square?" I suggested.

"No way. You can't make a way in unless there's a way out. Anyone and everyone go into town square, they could get over here, you know strange that'd be? We need to have it somewhere inconspicuous." Than said, something smart for a change.

"Oh yeah? Where."

"The forest?" Zoey suggested. "Okay, it might be a cliché, but it's the best we've got. Unless you want people to pop in some guy's home, I mean."

Ethan snickered. "In the forest by the river, how about that?"

"I'll make sure the forest is so crowded with trees it'll be hard for anyone to see a camp or something without being in view."

"Fish in the river; you don't know what could happen."

"I've got it!" I shushed, drawing in the abundance of trees near the river full of Zoey's childishly drawn fish. "There. Than can do his weird magic thing on that part of the map and we can continue tomorrow, okay?"

We nodded, and went off in different directions.

I snapped my eyes open and got up from the couch, and looked at the time. In what seemed like five minutes, I had slept for an hour. I could hear Ethan in the kitchen, preparing lunch. Zoey was next to me, sleeping, and her hand all red. I gently moved her shoulder, stroking her hair. "Zoey," I whispered, "Get the map." Her eyes fluttered open and closed again.

"Sock drawer." She muttered. I headed off to our room, and then started rummaging in her sock drawer. When my hand touched the rough paper, I pulled it out and unrolled it on the ground. I tried to find the forest, where trees grew more than other areas. It was harder than I thought; every area looked the same. I heaved a large breath as I did when frustrated - and saw a part of the map shimmer.

"No way..." I said, thinking it was a trick of the light. I reached my hand out to where I thought I saw it shimmer, and gasped.

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The map shimmered and ripples.

My hand went through the paper.

"I found it."

Chapter 6: Ethan

Chapter 5: Ethan

I was chopping carrots when I heard Ava scream; making me cut my hand slightly. "Crud." I muttered. I didn't know that Ava was up; I thought she was still sleeping! "Ava!" I grabbed a paper towel to put over the cut and ran over to where the scream seemed to come from, Zoey on my heels (which I now realize sounds really weird coming from a guy so change that to tail.) "What happened?"

I ran into the girl's room and saw Ava practically in tears, the map unrolled before her. "Ethan," She cried out of happiness, "Look." She raised her hand, made a fist, and punched her way *into* the map. "We can get in."

My eyes probably bulged out like a deer caught in headlights. I turned to Zoey. "How did you know that she'd get the answer? If she was asleep?"

Zoey stared at me. Then at Ava. Then back to me. "She's the Dreamer."

I didn't want to ask what that meant. Neither did anyone else. Instead we practically spent ten minutes looking at the entrance to our world. "That's amazing." I looked at Ava, who was nodding in agreement. Zoey, however, seemed to be sleeping on the floor, right there next to me. "Zoey." I nudged the girl, and she got up, a lovely crust around her eyes.

"Ethan, do you still have your light saber and sword?"

"How the heck do you know about that, you weren't even born yet."

"Ava told me about them and how you guys used to play. Still got them by chance?"

I nodded. "Under the bed." Zoey got up and ran all around the house. When she came back, she had my stuff, as well as some things a seven year old really shouldn't be carrying around, like a kitchen knife. "Zoey! Put those things *down*." She obliged, but then tossed me my fake sword from childhood years. I caught it easily, keeping it from hitting Ava's head, who was eyeing Zoey suspiciously after getting up, moving the map, and standing in the corner.

"Go on," Zoey teased, pointing to the sword, "show off." I looked at her like she was crazy, but did what I was told anyway. I showed her a couple moves I picked up from my elementary school friends. I lunged, jabbed, and yet, everything came naturally, as if I had done this yesterday.

When I was done, I threw the fake sword at her feet. She smiled and threw me the light saber, telling me to do the same. After that, she tossed me a *rolling pin* and told me to do whatever I could with it. "Now what." I asked when I was finished.

"Now," She smiled, picking up the largest kitchen knives, "you think fast."

She threw a knife straight at me.

I dodged it, thankfully, and looked at her. "What the hell is wrong with you?" I yelled as I heard the knife fall somewhere behind me.

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As a response, she threw another. This time I wasn't prepared, I was half looking at the cut I had gotten earlier from a knife, so I just rose whatever I had - the rolling pin. The knife stuck in the middle of the wood, which would probably piss Mom off later on. "Zoey! What do you think you're doing, stop it!" Ava stepped forward, but not before Zoey threw the next and final knife at her.

Ava instinctively moved out of the way. "Zoey!" She screamed. But Zoey just smiled and sprinted behind Ava.

An old dartboard was hanging on the wall there, with a knife sticking out of it.

A knife.

Thrown by Zoey, seven-year-old Zoey, who had never handled or thrown a knife *likethat* in her life, was sticking out of the dartboard.

In the very middle.

Chapter 7: Zoey

Chapter 6: Zoey

Getting that bull's-eye felt pretty darn good. It had felt so natural when the knife left my hand. "Zoey," Ethan said into silence, "how did you do that?" Apparently he had forgotten about how I threw knives at him too.

"Ethan, how did you dodgethat?" Ava asked, pointing to the knife stuck in the rolling pin.

"I just...*did*." He replied. Then my two older sibling looks at me in confusion and amazement.

"Had another dream..." I remembered. Even only a few minutes ago, the memory was vague. "We... We were fighting in the forest... Someone wanted some deer I had shot for food. I got it right in the eye, but then some people came along and started... started to fight us for it. Ethan was fighting like a maniac, and... And... He was pretty good. Like he was born for that. And then I guess everything just... ended. Long story short, Ethan, I think you're supposed to be a Swordsman. Probably proved me right, what you just did there."

"Okay...Awesome. So is that what you meant when you said Ava was the Dreamer?" Ethan asked, and I nodded in response. "SO she's the Dreamer, whatever that means, and I'm a stupid Swordsman... Sowhy does this all matter?"

"I don't know, but I'm sure it's important. I'm glad we figured it out now though."

"You say you keep having dreams - can you be a Dreamer or is it only me? Ava asked. I couldn't read her face. She looked shocked, probably because of my knife throwing, but she looked happy too, as if she were saying "*yay, we're all figuring out crap that's going to save us from death later on! Woohoo!*" But then there was also worry - for us, her, Ethan, our parents. It wasn't a question that we had to go on this *journey*, I guess, because otherwise we'd all fade away and our parents would never find our bodies and planning our funeral would be devastating and we'd have broken our own parent's hearts and - and -

"Zoey, chill." Ethan held my shoulder; I was probably shaking. "It's going to be okay. We're not planning on dying any time soon, nor are we *letting* anyone die. Calm down already. Answer Ava."

I closed my eyes and sighed - not quite reassured, but feeling Ethan's hand on my shoulder was calming. "No. There's only one Dreamer. Only one Swordsman. You can have a drop of each talent, but there's only one true one. Are there any other jobs? No idea. I couldn't tell in advance, I can only tell what it is once the idea comes out into the open. But I'm positive that you're the Dreamer and you're a Swordsman."

"Maybe you're some Seer or something." Ava suggested hopefully, being the supportive big sister that she was.

"No, that's someone else."

"Who?"

"Someone we'll meet later, I guess. Their face is showing up in my mind, but... It's all blurry, like when they blur out the pictures on the television. Like that. Everything is blurred though - the hair seems like a rainbow... But anyway, we should figure out what we're going to do once we get in our world, now that we know how." I reminded.

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"Easy," Ethan smiled, "first, we pack light."

Chapter 8: Ava

Chapter 7: Ava

"Happy birthday, Zoey!" We yelled, as little Zoey blew out the four candles. As the smoke from the candles rose, Zoey laughed, as if the smoke were tickling her cheeks. Such innocence. So bright. Made me wonder if Zoey would ever break a single rule.

Then a fifteen-year-old Ethan started singing his own version of happy birthday, including a few words little Zoey really shouldn't be hearing. "Ethan!" Mom warned, making him stop.

"Sorry."

"So what did you wish for, Zoey?" Dad asked.

"Ethan said if I told I wouldn't get any presents." Zoey said, a reserved look on her face.

"What!" Mom and Dad looked at a sheepish Ethan, and pointed to the kitchen. While they were talking, I looked over at Zoey and pushed her hair back behind her ear.

"Don't believe anything like that," I reassured. "Ethan is just messing around. You can tell me though, and you'll still get presents. In fact, maybe in a few year, I'll give you the best present ever, okay?" I coaxed. Of course I'd try, of course I would. (But at that time I didn't know it'd be a whole world)

"Okay..." Zoey muttered, smiling. "I wished for the best present ever. And you know what that'd be?" She whispered in my ear.

"Hmm?"

"A pony." She giggled, forever innocent.

I didn't think Zoey could throw a knife like that, much less pick one up without trembling. So when she threw that knife at me, I was lucky I had dodged it; but I hadn't moved of instinct - I moved of luck and surprise.

I loved Zoey like nothing else - she was my little sister, after all, but the moment she threw those knives - the ones at Ethan, at me, her getting the bull's-eye by *throwing a knife at least ten feet away*- made me realize her age. Like, *truly* realize. We all have those moment, when we say "congrats, you're fifteen!" or some other age but it's not until like five months later you realize "oh my gosh, they're fifteen - they've grown up so fast" or "oh wow since when can you drive? Last I checked you were like seven." or "man, you used to be so cute...!" or "remember that time.... yeah, what happened to those kind of times?" Only for me it was like a combination of all those.

Since I realized Zoey was seven now and could *really* throw an accurate knife shot, I agreed with myself that I had to let go of the baby years. But I couldn't.

While Zoey was in the bathroom, I decided to ask Ethan about tit. "Ethan, did you ever have a breakthrough moment with me, like when you realize I'm not a little kid anymore?"

He nodded, while looking at the map of our world. "Plenty of times, Ava. Biggest one wasn't too long ago, actually."

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"When, what happened?" What did I do that made you realize?"

"You agreed to make this." He gestured to the map. "People would take it as a game, when I asked them and explained the Rules. You were the smartest fourteen year old I ever knew. You knew all the rules, the risks, right when I explained them. You even took it seriously. I could have never done that at your age. But you did. That's when I realized that man, everyone grows up."

I smiled. "Thanks."

"No problem, but don't get me wrong, that was all 100% true, but you're still a pain in my butt."

"What's 100% true?" Zoey asked, as she came waltzing through the doorway, smiling.

"Nothing," I answered, looking at Ethan. "Nothing at all. Okay look, we need a game plan. Seven Guardians, and we have loads of places where they could be. We need a game plan before we do anything."

"Ethan needs to train. Ava, you need to learn control. I can make the general packing list and start if that's okay..." Zoey suggested. I nodded, as did Ethan. This was how our adventure started - our adventure into our world.

Chapter 9: Ethan

Chapter 8: Ethan

I tried to train everyday for at least two hours. Of course, that didn't always work out, but I think I was getting in touch with my inner swordsman. There were a couple days when Ava had to go to the market, so I had Zoey chucker knives as me, and every time we found my reflexes getting better. There were some close calls, but I could manage to not get any cuts or serious injuries.

Zoey was hanging around the house, meditating with Ava mostly, but occasionally helped me with my training. Ava had come to the conclusion that somehow meditating would help her control her powers, so for a while everyday all I heard outside was... well, nothing. It was pretty scary, even for an 18 year old like me. Zoey had suggested to Ava sleeping more instead of meditating since that's when most of the visions would happen, but Ava insisted on meditating - "what use am I if I'm sleeping?" She argued. At the time it seemed like a reasonable argument.

Then I thought, what good is she if she's meditating? It's practically the same thing, only one when you get up you're usually cranky as hell.

Anyway, about a couple days later, we were all eating dinner in silence when Zoey piped up. "Ethan's training has been going really good, Ava. You should see him today, or sometime when you're not meditating, he's gotten a lot better."

I smiled as Ava looked up from her chicken soup. "Really. Well, no one's ever *that* good unless they play against someone. And that's not happening anytime soon, so -"

"Ava," I interrupted. "Not to toot my own horn at this, but, trust Zoey. I'm pretty good."

Ava sighed in disagreement. "Either way, it's not like you're battling anyone anytime soon, so right now I honestly don't think it matters yet."

"Actually, we can leave and battle whoever whenever you're ready. I've been working on the packing list, and I'm pretty sure I got all the essentials." Zoey pulled out a mangled slip of paper, and handed it to Ava, who, after carefully analyzing it, handed it to me. "Do you think we'll need our tooth brushes? I didn't but it on there, but I can if you want..."

The list varied from sleeping bags to an extra light bulb. Clothes, even soap, just in case, were listed too. All we had to do was pack all the stuff on there up and slip through the map, and there we were, on our way to save the Guardians.

"Ava, how much time do we have left? How far down is it?"

"Whoever is pulling it down, stopped. A little bit it's going down, but a lot slower now. But it's still going down... Guys, I think it'd be best if we left within the next couple days. Tomorrow should be devoted to packing. Then the next morning we should get up early and go. We have limited time; we've already wasted a lot of days. We need to finish before the sun goes down, obviously, and by the time Mom and Dad get back. Both deadlines are important. One is unpredictable. The other, if we don't get back in time, will probably cause the cops to come looking for us if we're gone long enough. We need to get going. Pronto."

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"No, naturally," I said, taking everyone's bowls and running the water, "we start packing tonight. You two start. I'll wash dishes, you two go." The two girls looked at each other and ran off. Then I plunged my bare hands into the hot water.

Chapter 10: Zoey

Chapter 9: Zoey

Ava told me we weren't going to bring an entire hiking type bag when we left. We were going to bring a tent, supplies for all of us, and a backpack for each of us. "You can cram whatever you want in here, but it's got to be reasonable. When you're done tell me and I'll check your stuff. Go pick out a pack from under the bed and go on and start, okay? I'll be there in a minute; I've got to get the tent. GO on, I'll be right there." Ava pointed to our room, put on shoes, and went outside and into the garage.

I went into the room and pulled out the second largest backpack, leaving the bigger one for Ava. Well technically since there were only two backpacks to choose from I chose the smallest, but who likes to think of it like that? I grabbed the second largest.

First I stuffed two extra shirts and some pants in the pack, then a few extra pairs of underwear, and a thin blanket, and then whatever else I thought might come in handy. I packed an extra pillow, some string, and clothespins I found under the bed.

After I finished with my room, I went into my parent's room to see what I could find. I mainly rummaged through their desk drawers, and what do you know, I find one of those things where its a knife, scissors, and almost any other sharp object - even a tiny working pen. The thing would get me busted the moment I walked through a metal detector, but seriously; what were the chances of that happening?

Then the idea hit me. I ran back to my room with the backpack and reached deep in my pants drawer and pulled out the plastic snow white I kept my savings in. I pulled out the wad of cash and poured out the coins over the floor - a wave of copper and silver covered the floor in front of me, and I started counting.

Then Ava walked in. "The tent's in the living room. It's not set up but if you want to go and take a look at it - what the heck are you doing?"

"We're going to need money, aren't we? So I'm counting up what we've got! Or what I've got, I don't know where you keep your cash. But so far I'm at fifty bucks, and I've got this much left, plus all this change, so I don't know how much I've got in all..." I continued to count the money as Ava shrugged and started packing, pushing and pulling drawers open and closed.

About ten minutes later, I stopped counting, finished. The number amazed me. "Ava," I squealed, "I have \$247.81 right here."

Ava got all wide-eyed and squealed right along with me. "Holy gravy, Zoey! How on earth did you get all that?"

I shrugged. "...Lemonade stands?" I guessed. It was a reasonable guess, for I had a lemonade and snow conerush last summer, but \$247.81? That just wasn't possible.

"Okay, well, you keep that money safe for now and put it back. We'll bring it along, but keep it safe for now alright? And go wash your hands, that stuff is really filthy." Ava nagged. She was smiling, but she still nagged. I nodded anyway and cleaned up the money wonderland, then went to go wash my hand when I ran into Ethan.

"Hey, kiddo. Seen the tent yet? I completely forgot we had that thing."

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I shook my head, no, I have not seen the tent yet, so Ethan took my by the shoulders and guided me into the living room to where the tent was. "Here's a picture of the thing, remember we used to use this for camping? Then again you might not remember it was a long time ago and you were kind of young..."

It was a medium sized tent, not very big but not really small either. By the look of it, I could tell Ethan was going to me a little cramped in there, but it was the best that we had. "It's cool." I smiled.

"Yeah. So what's this about you having over \$200?"

"Well I figured we're gone need some money, so I broke out my savings from last year, and, well, that's just what I found."

Pause. I couldn't tell whether Ethan was mad or surprised. Probably both, from all those times he asked me for an extra buck or two and I had said that I was broke. Then he smiled and ruffled my hair.

"Good thinking, I would have completely forgotten about money if you hadn't told me. We're going to need money, definitely, but how much I don't know. Whether or not we'll be able to buy food or hunt it, we're going to need loads of money."

"So I can bring it along?"

"Well, not all of it, but half. I'll bring half of mine too, and I'm sure Ava will pitch in. Now go and finish packing, I'm going to start now." Ethan walked to his room and shut the door, so I went into the kitchen, washed my hands, and grabbed two knives, a flashlight, extra batteries, and just for the heck of it if I could fit in, a frying pan. I had seen that Disney movie 'Tangled' and boy did I believe that frying pans were *deadly*.

After that I made a note to myself to go out walking with Ava or Ethan, so I could look for stuff handy outside, or get an idea at least. Then I put everything in my backpack, set it aside, and noticed it was now nine at night, changed and went to bed.

Or tried to, rather.

Right when I laid down, I got right back up again, and made a beeline to the bathroom - only I didn't make it. Instead I straight out threw up right there in the hallway, splattering my feet with little bits of regurgitated chicken soup.

Chapter 11: Ava

Chapter 10: Ava

I heard it before I saw it.

I jammed whatever I was packing - I think it was a sweatshirt - into the backpack, and ran to where I heard a lovely vomiting sound. Then I saw Zoey. There she was, the middle of the hall, throwing up bits of chicken and carrots all over the wooden floor.

I don't really do well with that kind of stuff. I wanted to throw up as soon as I saw Zoey hunched over. "Ethan, get your butt out her! Now!" I yelled, and farther down the hall Ethan opened his bedroom door.

"Wha - oh. Oh my gosh. Oh god, that's disgusting. Oh my god, Ava, get cleaner and paper towels and a bunch of... Stuff and make it go away. Zoey - oh god Zoey, stop. Zoey - Zoey - ew god Zoey. Okay. You done? K, Ava, I think she's done, let me go and get her on the couch, you get cleaner and whatever Mom gets to clean crud like this up..." I did what I was told, and got everything I needed, put on some rubber gloves, and started to clean as Ethan took Zoey to the couch to lie down.

The process wanted to make me throw up, but eventually I got all the stuff off the ground. The only thing that was really noticeable was the stench, but that could be covered up easily enough, right?

So after getting all the muck cleaned up, I threw away the rubber gloves - I wasn't comfortable washing dishes with those things anymore, alright? - I went to the living room to check on Zoey and Ethan. Tee girl was green, yeah okay, but other than that she was sleeping soundly with a worried but peaceful look on her face.

"Is she okay?" I asked, feeling her forehead. No temperature.

"I think so. I cleaned up her face a little and set her down on the couch, then she just crashed. I think we should just let her sleep here tonight. Don't wake her. But other than that everything's fine... I hope.."

"What do you think happened anyway? She doesn't just.. Throw up like that. No one does, come to think of it."

I don't know. But she'll be fine. We should make her something when she gets up though, she threw up her dinner."

"If anything we can just heat her something up. But if we do it now it's going to get cold. Just leave her alone, like you said."

I looked at sweet Zoey again and turned to Ethan. "So we're leaving in a couple days, huh." He muttered, gazing out the window.

I nodded. "Yeah. Excited?"

"More like petrified."

"Reasonable. I think I'm just numb."

"Why's that?" He asked.

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"I've known we're going to have to go for a while now, right/ At the beginning I suppose I was terrified. But now that it's been so long and the moment's practically here, the effect has gone numb."

Ethan nodded, as though he knew exactly how I felt. There were a couple minutes of silence, which were filled by Zoey's little sleeping breaths and snorts.

"Ethan?"

"Mmm."

"What if we don't come back? What if we don't make it?"

"We're going too."

"But all I'm saying is *what if?*"

"Enough with the 'what if's, Ava! We're going to make it. We're all determined. We can save the Guardians and make it back home in time so Mom and Dad will never know we were gone." He took me by the shoulders and gave me a light shake. "We're going to make it Ava. Don't you dare say otherwise."

Tears filled my eyes. I looked at Ethan straight in the eye. "I'm scared, Ethan."

Ethan wrapped his arms around me, trapping me in a hug, and I felt his tear slide down my back. "Me too." He muttered. "Me too."

Chapter 12: Ethan

Chapter 11: Ethan

Ava went to her room when I said I'd care for Zoey, and would call her when she woke up. I was still pretty grossed out from just watching poor Zoey throw up. I had only one memory of me throwing up, and that was when I was around like seven years old, Zoey's age now. It was NOT a pleasant memory. Just watching Zoey splatter all that regurgitated chicken soup made me myself want to throw up, but I luckily held on to my pride and didn't.

To pass the time I turned the TV on mute and watched some random episode of *Modern Family*. I wasn't actually sure what was going on, my mind was drifting off to worrying about the journey ahead of us. Ava was right, there were a bunch of 'what if's. What if we starved? What if we were kidnapped? What if we were killed? What if only one of us died and the other two had to go on? Or what if it was vice versa? What if that was me?

It was always a possibility - death. We were taking a risk going into our world to save almost complete strangers. Heck - we took a *riskmaking* our world. What were we thinking, pretending we could do this? Did I actually believe in what I had just told Ava, or was I just kidding ourselves?

Before I knew it, the fast moving end credits for *Modern Family* came up. I turned off the television and decided to pull out one of our family's old photo albums. Looking at the cover, I picked out the one that had all the pictures from our family vacation at some lake house from about two summers ago.

The first pictures were just the family standing in front of the cabin we had rented. You could see the lake in the background and the wing that would later be broken by none other than moÑ-. The next picture was just a view of the lake. In the corner you could barely see Zoey, five years old, poking around on the edge of the water, probably looking around for a bug or two.

I was about to flip the page when Zoey moaned. At first I thought it was my imagination, until I looked over and saw Zoey's big brown cow eyes looking at me.

I closed the photo album and slid over next to Zoey. "Hey, kiddo, how you feeling?" I asked, feigning a smile.

"Okay..." Zoey broke her gaze and looked at the photo album. "That was a good summer." I nodded in agreement. "It was before all this happened."

"Sure was."

"I liked those times better." Zoey frowned.

"Yeah. They were better. A lot better, weren't they?" She nodded. "Let me get Ava, and then you can tell us what's up, okay?" Zoey nodded more and I got up and knocked on Ava's bedroom door.

"Yeah?" Ava called from inside, opening the door.

"She's up." I told her, and Ava rushed out of the room.

Chapter 13: Zoey

Chapter 12: Zoey

A small, faint cough could be heard from a small distance away. You could just see it though - a girl around seven tied to a tree. She was struggling against the rope bonds, which looked thin but strong. About five men sat around the place. Two sat on more stumps near that tree, and more guards were just around what seemed like a swamp. Somehow they had gotten a fire going. It seemed completely unrealistic, but somehow they had got one going even though they were in a swamp.

A swamp.

That's right. A swamp.

"Let me go. Now." The little girl ordered, but the men just laughed.

"You're in no position to order us around, my dear Guardian. You're at the mercy of us, I'm afraid."

The girl continued to struggle against her bonds, but seeing that there wasn't any hope of them breaking, glared at the men with pure hatred. "You will be stopped. The kingdom and world of Britannica won't stand for my absence, no more than my fellow Guardians. You will be stopped by heroes, and the sun will rise again."

The biggest man, the one who seemed to be the leader, chuckled. "Your words mean nothing. Master ordered the stop of the attack on the sun for a while. These 'heroes' you speak of are nothing but imagination that will not come to your aid, my dear Guardian. I suggest you make the best out of these last days - they're all you've got left."

The girl huffed as the men stoked the unrealistic fire and the two men at the base of the tree fell asleep. She seemed to be muttering something, or mouthing it at the least. She kept doing this until all the men fell asleep - most of them with weapons near or in hand. "Finally." The girl was relieved, but didn't smile. "Creator. Creator. Please, can you hear me? I cannot speak any louder for fear of waking my enemies. Creator, please, can you hear me?"

Though I couldn't see myself, the dream-me spoke. "I hear you." I said.

"Thank the sun! Creator, might you know who I am?" She asked. I tried to get a good look at her. She looked around seven years old, with short strawberry blonde hair that probably used to be in an elegant style until messed up by the thugs. She was tanned, but fair so it didn't look horrible. Freckles spotted her nose. A tiara - rather small one but a tiara nonetheless - was in her hair, crooked but unharmed. Her eyes, however, the most interesting of all her features, were yellow. Now a pussy yellow or a deprived of sleep yellow, but a middle of the day sunshine yellow.

"You're a Guardian. One of the Strong Sun Seven. A Protector."

"Yes. I am Elidi, one of the younger Guardians. I'm, as you can see, at a bit of a... I'm in a situation. You must come save me and my brother and sisters to save Britannica's sun from setting." I eyed her tattered jeans and blouse, and the flats just made me want to laugh. "Have you had contact with the others yet?" I shook my head, and Elidi sighed. "I expected my older sibling to gain contact with you before myself. But since they have not, and their locations are still a mystery, I suppose that you must come and free me of my bonds first."

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Then I will assist you in aiding my siblings."

"We're on our way, Elidi. We'll save you soon."

"Then I await your arrival, Creator." Elidi smiled, but then one of the men rolled over in his sleep. "My captors awake. I must break the connection. I may or may not be able to make his connection again. So for the time being, Creator, I bid you farewell. I trust that you know where to find me." Elidi waved her hand and my dream self was staring into nothingness.

"We'll save you," I muttered. "I promise."

When I woke up, I saw Ethan looking at one of the family's old photo albums, the one about the summer trip to the lake house two years ago. When he noticed me he smiled and slid over next to me. "Hey kiddo, how you feeling?"

"Okay... That was a good summer. It was before all this happened."

"Sure was."

"I liked those times better."

"Yeah. They were better. A lot better, weren't they? Let me get Ava, and then you can tell us what's up, okay?" I nodded and Ethan left the room to go get Ava. Then I wondered what really was going on. The first location of the first Guardian had just been revealed. But how could I be sure? It could have *just* been a dream. Just a dream. Ava was the true Dreamer. There couldn't be two. Maybe a Visionist, but that's practically the same as a Dreamer. And a Seer, like Ethan said. So what was I then?

What was I?

Then Ava burst into the room, interrupting my thoughts, and plopped down right next to me. "Hey buddy," She coaxed, "what's been going on?"

I shrugged. Why I threw up I didn't have a clue. But it was a sign. I can tell. I shrugged. There wasn't really anything to tell - except my dream.

"I know where the first Guardian is."

Chapter 14: Ava

Chapter 13: Ava

"What! Oh my gosh, Zoey where is Eli?" I felt ecstatic. WE were one step closer to finding the first Gaurdian. WE were close. I could taste it. And boy, it tasted good.

"It's not Eli. I... I'm figuring that since she was the leader, they're holding her with stronger forces. The one that contacted me is younger - my age. Her name, her name is Elidi. She... she was guarded by really strong looking men, like five of them. And... And..." Zoey wavered off, face glum.

"Cmon' Zoey," Ethan coaxed, "Where was Elidi?"

"i... I need the map. It's in.. It's under... It's under my bed."

I jumped up and ran to my room and dug under Zoey's bed, under the mattress. When I felt something wrinkly, I pulled out the map gently and ran back to the living room. "okay, here. Zoey, where's Elidi?"

Zoey took the map and ran her hands over it. She slowed down when she got to the forest, and finally stopped when she hit the swamp. It wasn't far from where we would come in - ten to twleve miles at most. The only problem was that it was over the river and on the other side of the forest. "The swamp? She's in the swamp?" oey nodded.

"The swamp? Oh cool. The swamp. Now why the hell did we make a swamp?" Ethan groaned. "It's like gas stations. Why the heckd id we make gas stations?"

"We didn't."

"Oh. Well still, why the heck did we make a stupid swamp?"

"It doesn't matter, Ethan! Elither way, Elidi's being held in the swamp and we need to go help her. We should go tomorrow, Zoey, if you're up for it. We need all the time we can get, and frankly we've wasted enough time. We're all pretty much done packing?" I asked, and Ethan and Zoey nodded. "Then we leave tomorrow." I kissed the top of Zoey's head and put my hand on Ethan's shoulder like Mom would. "Get some rest. I don't know how much time for sleeping we'll have in the future."

* * *

The next day I got up and went straight to the kitchen. I had already packed some of the food we'd need earlier, but we'll need more. As I walked through the living room, I noticed Zoey still sleeping on the couch and Ethan not to far away, also sleeping. I smiled and draped a blanket over Zoey and another over Ethan. Then I got an extra bag and started tossing random cans of soup and orange, apples, more ariety of fruit, and even some of those stupid canned vegetables I found in the cupboard.

I was tossing in a can of Cambell's soup when EThan opened up the sliding door and rubbed his eye. "I thought you already got food."

"Morning. I did, but we're gonna need more, I can tell. Hurry up and eat some cereal, I'm only bringing along the boxes but I can't bring the milk. Today might be your last decent breakfast for a while." I warned. "DO we have any canteens or a lot of Cop of Noodles?"

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Ehtna pulled out the box of Fruit Loops. "That stuff is in the garage. Look in Mom's emergency kit too while you're in there - there might be some decent stuff in there that only requires hot water or something."

"K. Be right back - make Zoey a bowl of cereal too, okay?"

"Sure. What about you?"

"I already ate." I called back from the back door, even though I hadn't eaten since last night. I closed the door and unlocked the garage door, opening it into darkness. I dug around the corner of the garage devoted to food, finding a few canteens I'd use for drinking fresh water and maybe one for soup. I found a bunch of cups of noodles; shrimp flavored and regular old salty. I looked around and found Mom's emergency kit, looked in, and sure enough there were a couple packs of lasagna that would expire in a few years, and some food that would come in handy.

I grabbed everything I could and turned around - then the automatic light went out, and the door must've closed, because I couldn't see a thing. At first I didn't think anything of it, just tried to make my way to the door best I could. Then of course I tripped, spilling everything on the floor. I looked around but everything was pitch black, I couldn't see anything.

My first thought was that it was very dark.

Then: I'm such a klutz.

Next: How do I get out of here?

Last: This is what it's going to be like when we're camping out there at night. Pitch black and lonely.

Chapter 15: Ethan

Chapter 14: Ethan

I made Zoey and myself a bowl of Fruit Loops and left the cereal out just in case Ava wanted more stuff to eat. Like she said, it might be the last decent breakfast for a while.

I wanted to review everything so far. Seven very rather important people stolen. Only one's location was known. In order to help us, apparently we've been given powers. Ava was a Dreamer, I was a Swordsman, and Zoey - well Zoey was unknown, but she's got to be something as of importance. She was so vital, I knew that we couldn't do anything of what we were about to do without her.

Then Ava came back, with a bunch of packets of food, Cup of Noodle, and a few canteens. "You okay?" I asked. She seemed startled.

Ava nodded. "Fine. What time are we leaving?" She asked

I shrugged. "I was thinking ten. We should spend the first day there getting a game plan to set up." I saw Ava glance at the clock, and I looked as well - it was around seven now.

"I thought we already had a game plan." Ava said, tossing the box of Fruit Loops in the sack.

"We do only partially. We need to figure out what we do when we get there."

"Go save the Guardian. Duh. Then she'll help us save the others and boom we should be able to finish up soon."

I sighed. I hated when Ava got like this. Impulsive. Not listening. At these times usually it was with Mom or Dad. They handled it calmly. I wanted to do the same, but Ava was Ava - it was a lot more difficult than it seemed. "Ava, we need a more *detailed* plan, if you haven't noticed. Who's leading us? we need to actually get a plan of action, not just an outline of -"

"Woah woah woah. What are you talking about, Who's leading? There is no leader. I thought that was another thing that we agreed on. What happened to everything we agreed on when we *createthis* world? Huh? I thought we agreed on a lot of things."

I gripped on the counter, turning my knuckles white. "God dammit Ava, why don't you listen?! We just need a plan of action, why the hell do you try to make it more than that?"

"Stop trying to be like Dad, Ethan. Just shut the heck up."

"Ava!"

"I didn't ask for this you know. I just wanted to my own world. I didn't ask for all that crap. I didn't want it. I don't want it. So don't give it to me!" Ava smashed the table hard, and you could hear some of the glasses in the cabinets shake.

"We thought you knew what you were getting into. I knew. Heck, even Zoey knew. Ava, what makes you think you don't know? What makes you think you're the only scared one? Fudge Ava, we're all scared. We're all scared to death. But together we can save all seven Guardians. What's wrong with you Ava? What are you

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scared? Why on earth is the most headstrong, perfect, smart, and even seemingly obnoxious Ava scared all the sudden? What changed?"

Ava was crying now. She was breathing hard. I didn't want to say anything more, I didn't even want to touch her. "Ava. What changed?"

"You did."

Chapter 16: Zoey

Chapter 15: Zoey

My friend Clara tried to teach me how to skateboard once. She brought her skateboard and all the needed gear and everything. Ethan had been told to supervise, but he was just taking a nap nearby.

Actually I don't think we were that bad You know, for six year olds.

And until I fell.

I don't know what happened. One minute I was skateboarding like a six year old pro (not really) and the next minute I was sprawled out on the ground crying. There was a sharp pain in my foot, or somewhere in my leg. Nearby I could faintly here Clara's footsteps pattering agasint the cemet. My vision was blurry. I could only hear a few things. "Zoey! Zoey are you okay? Hold on I'll get Ethan.... Ethan! Ethan! Ethan c'mon hurry up, Zoey's hurt! Ethan!"

I don't remember Ethan coming. I remember Ava suddenly there, lifting me up. "Are youokay?!" I believe I partially nodded. "Ethan, get over here! What's wrong with you?"

Ethan got up and stroked my hair. "What happened, Zoey?"

Ava sorted. "Now you would know if you were awake, now woulnd't you? C'mon Ethan, I thought youw ere more responsible than this."

"I was tired!" EThan protested, going inside while Ava - carrying me - followed along with Clara.

"Doesn't matter! Look at her! You couldn't prevented this you know."

"I highly doubt that."

"C'mon Ethan. When are you gonna gro wup? When are you gonna change?"

When I woke up, I could hear Ava and Ethan arguing more, exactly like my ream. "What changed Ava? What changed?"

"You did."

I got up fromt he couch and went to my room to recheck what I packed. I want to believe that I was prepared. I can honsetly say I thought I understood what I packed and why. I can honestly say that I believe that I was prepares.

And yet, was I wrong?

I grabbed my backpack and the map, along with a single stuffed animal just for the heck of it. I got my metal water bottle all filled up, and took out the knife I had stolen from the kitchen that I thought fit me best. I put that in my back pocket of my jeans, making sure it didn't cut me or anything like that.

I canned the room for anything else i'd need. Not seeing anything particularlly useful, I walked out of the room and went into the kitchen, stepping right in on Ethan pointing a knife at Ava's throat, holding her hands

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in back of her while standing in the reflection of the window. "Look at yourself, Ava! Is this really who -"

"Ethan?" I asked. Ava's eyes were red and puffy. The kitchen was a little messed up. I couldn't see any blood whatsoever, a relief. Ethan didn't look crazy like how I expected, he looked sad and sunken, defeated even. "Ethan," I coaxed, not stepping back nor forward. "Put the knife down... I don't think starting out mission with a dead sister is very good." When he didn't reply, Ava whimpered. "Ethan, put the *knifedown*. Now." Reluctantly, Ethan set the knife down. I took it from the counter immediately as he let Ava go.

"Ava's right. You did change." I muttered, looking at him as Ava ran into the living room, one of her tears landing on my shoulder.

Chapter 17: Ava

Chapter 16: Ava

Why I was being such a jerk I have no idea. All I know is that when I was yelling, all the sudden Ethan pulled out a knife and before I knew it I was in an armlock, knife at my throat.

Thanks to Zoey I was saved. I'm positive Ethan would've at least cut my wrists if not for Zoey. After she talked him into letting me go, I ran to the living room and did some heavy breathing. What made Ethan do that to me? What did I do? I thought I was just telling him how I really felt. I didn't realize... I didn't realize I was really yelling my head off. Did I really get that carried away?

After I got all my thoughts cleared up I went back to packing. It only took a few more minutes, everything was basically already packed. I'm sure that was because of Zoey.

But even then, I procrastinated. I scanned the house for more. Finally I couldn't get it. Eventually Zoey came up to me in our room and sighed, letting me know we should probably leave.

"I know, I know. We need to go. C'mon grab your stuff and then let's go." I picked up her backpack sitting next to me and tossed it to Zoey, who caught it but shook her head.

"No. Well yeah we should go, but I was just wondering if you're okay. I mean about twenty minutes ago you had a knife against your throat so..."

"Thanks, Zoe. You're great. But I'm fine, Ethan... Ethan's cool, whatever. C'mon, go get Ethan for me, tell him we're leaving. Now. Go get the map while you're at it."

Zoey left the room, saying "it's in my backpack, where is Ethan anyway... ETHANN!!" Zoey tossed me her pack and went to find Ethan. I opened her pack and saw the map, pulling it out and waving my hand over the Entrance, shimmering a little bit. I, then - and then only - made a decision. I walked to the kitchen and got some food, went back to my room, and closed the door.

I knew I couldn't take the map. The other two would need it, I was sure. But I knew I would be completely lost, but the others needed it, and I couldn't be with the others now.

I could still hear Zoey calling for Ethan. They were strong, they could figure out what they needed to do. I knew they could.

That's why I gripped the two bads I was holding until my knuckles turned white. That's why I stepped through the map without Ethan or Zoey. That's what when I stepped through, I didn't take the map with me. I left it behind.

Chapter 18: Ethan

Chapter 17: Ethan

Zoey came to find me thirty minutes after I choked Ava, or tried to. She said it was time to go, to grab all the stuff. So I did. I thought I went pretty fast and it was all good until Zoey left me to go check on Ava and started screaming for me again.

"Ethan get your butt over here now!" Zoey continued screaming that until I found her in her room - alone, the map sitting on the floor. "She's gone." She muttered, her eyes staring at me like a deer caught in headlights

"She's not anywhere else? Here I'll go check-"

"No. Don't. It's pointless. She's gone. We need to go now, Ethan, before we lose her completely. Here toss the stuff in while I hold it open, hurry up c'mon c'mon..." I picked up one of the bags and tossed it in, hoping that that bag wasn't the one full of water and soup. Then I put on my backpack took a deep breath, and was about to step through when I was pushed through by an annoyed and rather rushed Zoey.

Before I thought it wouldn't really be such an experience as it as. First it felt like I was glowing, like I was being transported to Antarctica. I felt cold... and yet at home. It was like I was being enlightened or something, but I wasn't quite sure what I was being enlightened with. When I got that feeling that I was about to figure it out, the feeling was lost and it got hot- then cold, hot, cold, and ket going on like that. THEN after it being as though I were standing in broad daylight with my eyes closed and the sun's light was just penetrating my body, it stopped and went dark. Pitch black dark, that familiar 'trying to going to sleep' familiarity. It seemed to be a normal temperature so I opened my eyes and found myself in a forest.

Considering the hard push Zoey had given me I expected to land on my face, but here I was standing on my geet in the forest. Nearby was the bag of food I hhad tossed in earlier was sitting perfectly on the ground, seemingly untouched.

I rushed to the bag and unzipped it open; everything there seemed to be perfect, as if it were just packed. I sighed of relief surprisment, and anxiety. When I turned around there was Zoey, just as she opened her eyes. She seemed not as surprised as I was, but I picked up the bag immediately picked up the food bag and followed Zoey's gaze to footsteps leading away from where she stood.

"C'mon," She muttered, "let's get moving before she gets to far."

Chapter 19: Zoey

Chapter 18: Zoey

Once I pushed Ethan in, I waited a couple minutes before I slung my own backpack over my shoulder and took my step through the map, gripping the edges tightly. I knew there was going to be *something* unusual when I went through the map, so I was prepared when it got cold. The sun was shining through my open eyes - but then it got... there wasn't any feeling. It was like I had just gotten anesthetic and been numb all over, and yet it hurt so I had to close my eyes - and that's when it started.

I was following Ethan and Ava up a mountain, or a hill. A hill, more like. Ava, ahead of us all as usual, looked behind us and turned again, jumping and sliding down the hill. Ethan looked behind him and did the same, telling me to hurry up. Like a fool, I looked behind myself as Ethan rolled down the hill catching up to Ava, waiting for me. "Hurry!" They yelled frantically, "it's going to catch you!"

When I looked behind me I saw a monster. It looked like a morphed... Chicken? Chicken seemed right. Either way I panicked and didn't want to run away from it. There were more trees that we could hide behind if I rolled down the hill, but something told me that that wouldn't help. I reached for my knife in my back pocket, but for some reason it wasn't there. My backpack was back at camp, and somehow I knew I wouldn't be able to get it soon enough. I looked to where Ava and Ethan were waiting, deciding whether or not to leave me or help me, when something golden caught my eye. From where I was standing it was hard to tell what it was, but I could tell it was sharp - maybe sharp enough to kill the giant morphed chicken.

I ran as fast as I could towards the object, which was a ways away from where Ava and Ethan were standing. I ran to the golden items, which turned out to be a bow and quiver of arrows. I grabbed them off the brance of which they were hanging.

Thankfully I had watched enough shows including archery to know how to shoot an arrow. I picked up the stuff and armed myself, watching the chicken run closer and closer, until it was finally within range. That's when I aimed and pulled back the string and shot....

I opened y eyes and saw Ethan, staring at me. I looked down at the ground when I saw a trail of footsteps leading to the right of us. "C'mon, let's get moving before she gets too far."

I started to follow the footsteps with Ethan on my heels. I kept tripping over tree roots and rocks, and occasionally my own shoelaces. The tracks weren't that hard to follow, they were practically fresh off the foot. What I was worried about was the direction she was going. It didn't feel right, but hey, maybe it was.

It wasn't until fifteen minutes of silence - except Ethan's humming of some LMAFO song - that I stopped and examined the map more. "Ethan," I asked, thankfully interrupting his song, "is there a way to make it see where we are? I don't think Ava knows where she's going..."

Ethan shrugged. "No, I think she knew where she was going even without the Map. Maybe she's heading to town or... something, if not. Zoey, we should probably hurry up to catch her like dyou said, before she gets into more trouble than she intends."

I nodded and together we jogged along the footsteps, deciding where she went. Most likely she went to save Elidi, but there's also a chance she went to town to get more supplies. The only *real* thing we decided twas that we needed to find her fast. And we couldn't be stupid either.

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Easy enough, right?

Wrong.

If we combined the two, we didn't know *how* long it would take to find Ava.

Chapter 20: Ava

Chapter 19: Ava

I honestly thought I was helping by going alone to save Elidi first.

Now I realize I probably should've thought things through.

Things were easy until I realize I didn't know the *actual* plan. Even then, I didn't stop walking. The only time I did stop was to guess which way I was going.

Of course there was that one time I stopped just to stop, beneath this giant tree... Which probably wasn't the best idea, seeing as how I got kidnapped by being gagged, blinded, and bagged. And dragged, actually.

That's how I got here, tied to a tree next to a girl that look about seven, who was looking at me. She had short strawberry blonde hair, slight tan, freckles on her nose, and a tiara on her head. She was too far away to see anything else, but she was glaring at me. Not a bad glare, just a stare.

"Who are you?" She asked.

"...El... Elidi?"

"You are not Elidi. I am Elidi, Guardian of the Sun, one of the Strong Sun Seven, a Protector. Who are you?"

"You're Elidi! You're Elidi.. Elidi, I'm Ava. Zoey's sister!"

"Creator? Creator, I truly hope this is part of your plan because otherwise this tree really rather itches and I don't like it." Elidi muttered. She had that kind of properness that a royal person should have, but seeing as how she was only seven she did have that innocent, complaining like voice, as a seven year old should have.

"I'm.. Kind of working on it..." I looked around. "Who are all these guys?"

"They're part of the rebellion. Though if they keep it up there's not really going to be anything to rebel against. There's plenty more of them though, and what stinks is that these fools are some of the *weakest*, so they'll just get stronger everytime. One's name is Junker, he's in charge. The other are Chum, Jack, Von, and Dill. They're smarter than they look, naturally, but I bet if you worked with the other Creators - where - are - the - other - Creators, Ava?"

I gulped. "They're coming. I think."

"You think?"

"Okay look, this isn't *exactly* part of the plan. But I know for a fact that Zoey and Ethan are on their way, alright?"

"Creator, if they're gonna stumble in camp that's not going to do us much good. We need to warn them, somehow."

"Zoey and I don't exactly have telepathic connection, Elidi."

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"We still need to warn them!"

"All we can really do is just try to figure out where all the other Gaurdians are while we wait for the other two to come and save us. Which one did you saw was JUnker, Elidi?"

"That one, in the red, sniffing his pits... What a pig, I mean honestly..."

I gathered up all the courage I had. For Brittanica, right? "Hey Junker!" I yelled. Of course Junker looked up. I could hear Elidi near my ear begging me to shut up, but naturally I didn't. "I bet you smell like crap. Cause that's what you look like." He walked over - of course - and glared at me. He was breathing heavily, his breath going directly to my nose.

It smelled, like gralic and skunk. That, my friend, is a *very* sucky smell. I coughed sarcastically and exaggerated. "Dude. Freaking close your mouth. You need a freaking breath mind. Actually, do you naturally have suckish breath or do you have to work at it?" Junker freaked out. He growled, kicked the tree, and probably wanted to punch me.

Ah wait, he did. And it really rather hurt. R*ight* in the gut. *Honestly*.

I suck in air, pretending I needed air from laughing too much. "That all you got?" I braced myself, for I was sure I was going to get punched again, when you could hear tiny Elidi's voice.

"Would you leave her alone? I'm the one you want, honestly. T*H*is is just a girl around and about - don't hurt her." Elidi squeaked. I opened my eyes as Junker; stinky breath, hair arms, and 5 o' clock shadow - turned away from me and towards Elidi. He smiled a sarcastic half grin tooth midding smile, and laughed.

"Is that right, Princess? I swear I heard you call this little princess a Creator? She's exactly what we need, my dear - along with you, of course. Yes, I am smarter than I seem, aren't I, Princess?"

"Not smart enough to detect sarcasm, obviously." Elidi muttered, make me snicker. Junker looked around at his mates, making sure no one else could hear. T*H*en the fool looked at Elidi and I both, warning in his eyes.

"Soon," He whispered, annoyed, "Brittanica will cease to exist. You both realize this, don't you? There's no point in arguing - Brittanica, very soon, will come to an end."

By that time, he was all up in my face, so I did the first thing that came to mind: burped, then spat at his feet.

"Seriously," I sighed, "Get a breath mint. As a Creator - yeah, don't act all surprised that I admitted it - I know for a fact that freaking breath mints exist. So get one, would you?"

Junker grinned. "You got spunk kid. See how long *that* lasts."

* * * * *

"Hey Elidi," I asked, late a night. Junker and his crew were asleep, Junker atop two logs to make a sort of bed. Two others had their feet in the swamp, their shoes or bare feet getting soaked. T*H*e other two weren't in sight - perhaps those two were off telling their idiot boss or whoever they caught me - a Creator, how stupid am I to come barging in camp alone? T*H*e three left were snoring like heck, making it hard to sleep. "How do you sleep through this? It's like a tornado right in your ear, gosh..."

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Elidi smiled, or at least I think she did, she was looking down so I couldn't see her face. "I don't, usually I stay up durin the night and sleep in the day so they can't bug me anymore then anyway."

"Smart."

"Creator, I still believe we need to tell the other Creators about this. They cannot just stumble in on camp, we'll be doomed and they'll kill us all off immediately anyway. You don't have any connection with Zoey or Ethan? I once communicated with your sister through her dreams, you cannot do that? The connection would be stronger if you two did it, seeing as how you're sisters."

"I don't know how to make the connection though, Elidi."

"i must teach you then, tonight. I would do it myself, but I'm too weak, I spent all my energy on telling you where I was. Ava, Creator, you believe you can make the connection, right?"

I nodded, then thought. I knew I was ready, gain a new skill or something. "Yes," I confirmed, looking at Elidi, "I believe - and certainly hope I can."

"Good," Elidi looked up at me, and this time I knew she was smiling. "Because that's all you need." And for the first time I could put her entire face togheter, because for the first time I saw Elidi's eyes: A great, bright, middle of day sunshine yellow that shones so brightly, you could see her eyes so clearly, even in the middle of the night.

Chapter 21: Ethan

Chapter 20: Ethan

"Morning, Silly Goose. You sleep in a really awkward position, you know that? Why don't we get some breakfast, yeah?" I greeted Zoey, who was finally popping out of her sleeping bag, messy hair, reminding me of when she was even younger than she is now.

Zoey shrugged. "You... You haven't called me Silly Goose in forever."

"I haven't?" I asked, stretching. "Hmm. Well. Then we'll have to make sure I call you it more often then, yes?"

Zoey smiled and nodded. "Ethan, do you think Ava's alright?"

I got out of bed (or the sleeping bag, rather) and tossed Zoey an apple from the food bag. "Sorry, that's your breakfast today, eat up."

Zoey took a giant bite of the apple and swallowed, realizing I avoided her question all together. "Ethan, do you think Ava's okay?"

I took a couple oranges from the bag and started to peel them for myself. "I'm sure she's fine, Zoey. Start putting away your sleeping bag, would you? We really need to get a move on." Zoey agreed and held the apple in her mouth pig style, and started packing up her sleeping bag.

I rushed rather fast through my answer because I wasn't even sure where Ava was in the first place, and if I didn't know that how was I supposed to know if she was okay or not? It was a complete mystery, to be honest. Wherever she was, we would find her - and save her, too, if the need came to that.

I packed up my own sleeping bag while thinking about this. Eventually I heard an odd chopping or something, so I looked at Zoey, who was cutting a nearby tree trunk with her knife.

"What are you doing?"

"I want more food."

"Get another apple."

"I want *real* food."

"So you're cutting a tree?"

Zoey shrugged. "I just want to get out of here already."

"We've only been here a day. And the first day wasn't even that bad - we walked, like, two miles, that's it. We ate cup o' noddles, and made a campfire like a mile back before *someone* got scared because of some weird creature and walked like another mile before we stopped for the night. Look, even Ava's footprints are still there, we can go and follow her still if we wanted too. I mean really, Zoey, it's only the first day and you're already complaining."

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"Ethan, shut up for a minute, would you? There's... the... footprints.. They stop over here..." I hadn't even realized she had been walking away. "They just *stop*. A struggle, but they stop. Ethan, Ava's in trouble."

Zoey bent over and felt the dirt as I walked over when suddenly leaves fell from the trees above, which wasn't all that right. Zoey looked up and caught a leaf, examining it. "Ethan, get out a sword or something. We're being watched." Zoey dropped the leaf as her hand went to her back pocket, where she had replaced her knife earlier. Then in a swift motion she threw the knife into the tree at a seemingly nonexistent target. We could hear it rustle through the trees, and when we expected the knife to come down, a burly man in a red shirt and blue jeans came down instead. Zoey was already prepared - she pulled out another knife and grappled her first knife before the man had time to react. "Don't both getting up, you'd fall back down after we kill you anyway. And dude - you really shouldn't wear a bright red shirt like that if you're gonna try and camouflage, alright?"

The guy grunted, on the floor slowly backing away like an idiot. "So? Not like you have the real guts to kill me."

I pulled back my sword further, threatening to strike. "I wouldn't be sure about that if I were you, that's *my* sister you're talking about after all. Sides, you think *you* have the guts to kill us if we just happened to let you? Now are you just a pussy up in the trees or you got someone that you're actually working for?"

The guy coughed. Zoey pointed her knives at him. "You know, I'd answer within the next five seconds if I were you."

"The rebellion, alright?" The guy got up as Zoey and I followed his motions with our weapons at the ready. "Some people ain't liking how things are here. They think it sucked, or sucks rather. They'd rather end it all than keep living, thus the rebellion. Found out a little history, got a little knowledge, figured out who to take down the dang sun. So that's what's happening."

Zoey looked at me. I just looked at the man, but I could see Zoey looking at me out of the corner of my eye. "So you're just on patrol here alone? how stupid is this rebellion anyway, don't they know anything about battle tactics?"

"Basically. And obviously, not much."

"Obviously. So you seen someone get taken then? Like, oh I don't know, another Creator? You know where they took her?"

"We didn't have time go back to base - they took her back to the swamp where the Gaurdian is. BUt she already seemed to know that."

"Where are the other Gaurdians?"

"Hey man, look. I'm new to the rebellion. I never cared, they recruited me by practical force, I didn't join. They didn't tell me anything important, they just needed another pair of hands. I don't know any more than you do."

Zoey, hearing this, lowered her knives a bit while I kept up my sword. "I'm guessing you'd like to start over, then?" She asked. The guy nodded as a tear went down his cheek. "What's your name."

"Red."

I chuckled. "Is that why you're wearing this shirt? Would've been better if you're named Green."

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He nodded again. "It's what the guys call me. I've got a brother - a twin - named Grey, wears all grey."

"Red, go. Leave. Start again, when you left your good life. We're gonna try and stop the rebellion. Everything is going to return to normal soon, okay?" Red nodded, smiling, crying, and thanking.

"I'm going to try and find out more for you guys. Maybe we'll see each other and I can fill you in."

I finally lowered my sword and stepped forward. "Thank you."

"Save your sister. Hurry. But be careful, they didn't even tell me what kind of security they had there."

Zoey nodded and shook Red's hand, thanked him, and walked back to camp to get our stuff. "Red," I asked, wondering, "do you have a family?"

Red shrugged.

"You don't know?"

"Define family, Creator."

I didn't say another word, just another thanks as Red turned and started walking back home, wherever home to him was. Zoey brought the stuff back and handed me my sack as I slung it over my shoulder.

"So she's at the swamp with Elidi?" Zoey asked, and I nodded. "You're right, you know. Why the heck did we make a swamp?"

"I think it was Ava's idea, actually."

Zoey smiled and snickered. "Well that backfired on her, didn't it?"

I laughed along. "Yeah, pretty much."

Chapter 22: Zoey

Chapter 21: Zoey

I laid out the map on the ground when we took another break. We had met Red an hour ago, and that was one interesting event, but we still needed to find out where the heck we were going.

"We didn't make this thing so we could see wherever we are, we just made it. So, I'm guessing we're around here, and the swamp is a good five or so miles away. Think we can make it today or should we go till we're one or two miles from it and sleep?"

Ethan looked at the sun, setting low, and unnaturally close the ground of course. "We'll keep walking and see what happens. In the last miles we're going to need to be careful though, there might be even more spies as get closer to their ground."

"Sounds good. Okay, it seems we'll probably get within a two mile range of the swamp by seven. I'm betting you if we ambust camp during the night we won't even have to ambuh, just get the Gaurdian and Ava and get our - by morning whoever's gaurding them will be toast cuase we'l ve long gone. Sound good, Ethan?" I rolled up the map and put it back in my backpack, then looked at Ethan who was looking at me like I was a compeltely different person. "What. You got something better, hotshot?" I stuck my tongue out at him and stoff up from the floor, brushing the first off my knees.

"Since when did you become that wisdom and battle strategy goddess Athena?" Ethan teased, and I laughed.

Then, just to make him uncomfortable, stopped and said "since you made me grow up." Then I turned and kept walking towards the swamp. "C'mon, let's keep moving."

"Woah, wait, what does *that* mean?"

I rolled my eyes. "It means we need to keep on walking so we can get Ava and Elidi, yes?"

"No, the other thing. Before that."

Usually when I'm asked a question I answer it without another though. This is what I could tell Ethan was thinking, so I stopped myself and decided not to answer. I just waved my hand as a signal for him to hurry up, and so hurry up he did.

Without the benefit of having my answer.

* * *

I had to pull the map out again when we noticed it was getting considerably dark. "We're within a two mile range with the swamp, Ethan. Let's stop here for a while, okay?"

Ethan nodded in agreement. "Don't bother setting up camp or anything. We're leaving in an hour or so."

Thus we ended up sleeping with our backs and neck in uncomfortable positiions against tree trunks, and we dozed off.

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It all looked too familiar. The swamp, the bratty men, the girl - now girls - struggling against bonds. The other men that I had seen before were - again - on the floor sleeping. The girl - or the Gaurdian, Elidi, looked worse than before, but not completely out of it yet. The other girl tied to another nearby tree -

That was Ava.

"Ava?" I yelled, making sure she could hear me.

The two stopped fidgeting, and Ava looked up. "Elidi. Stop. I got the connection. Zoey? You can hear us right?"

I nodded, and looked around more. The men were asleep, the swamp was dark and gushy, and the Gaurdian seemed even more drained of energy. "How did you get there, Ava?"

She gave me a look. "Seen any guys in trees lately?" I shrugged in return, and examined the layout more. "These guys are a lot smarter than Elidi and I want to admit, Zoey."

Elidi spoke up. "You and your brother can't just come barging into the cam. Ava and I are always awake at night - you can sneak in then if you have some type of plan. Usually they sleep around us though - and usually one's always awake."

"Sounds easy enough - I mean, you know, from a hostility break, you know?"

Ava shrugged. "How's Ethan...?" She asked awkwardly.

"Fine. Sleeping. He's trying to pretend he's not completely worried about you, but it's amazingly obvious that he does care and is - is. um." I stopped, losing my train of thought. All I could hear was someone singing, and I'm almost positive that only the Gaurdian's mouth was moving. I yawned. The vision got blurrier, clearer, then blurrier again. "Ava?" I asked. "What's happening to the connection?"

"I..." Ava yawned as well. "I don't know... I think I'm getting tired so the focus on the connection isn't... Isn't..." Ava yawned again, but then this the vision didn't just get blurrier. the connection was lost.

I opened my eyes immediately. Ethan was snoring, slumped up against a tree just as we had started sleeping. I was going to wake him up to tell him what Ava and Elidi had told me, but I decided against it. I could tell him later, and it was around six anyway. We could fit in another hour or so of sleep before it got completely dark - before we would have to get on the move again to go and save the first Gaurdian - and Ava.

Chapter 23: Ava

Chapter 22: Ava

When the connection broke, I'm pretty sure I was knocked out or something for a few minutes. When I woke up, the lullaby that had been sung wasn't being sung anymore. "Elidi?" I looked over to her tree and she looked up. "How long was I out?"

"Um, until about two minutes ago when I stopped singing, so.. Only about ten minutes or so, but I think the connection was a good hour or so."

"Ah. Do you think Ethan and Zoey are on their way?"

"With any luck, I certainly hope so."

It got gradually darker, and soon enough it was pitch black. When Junker and everyone woke up, Elidi and I pretend to be asleep - then Elidi started to hum another lullaby, and soon enough they all fell back asleep.

"Elidi... Does your singing... Your singing can affect how people feel, can't it? That's how you make the guards sleep... How you accidentally broke the connection... It's how you do tons of stuff, isn't it..."

The Guardian nodded. "Usually I can direct it to only certain people... But there's no guarantee it'll stay to whoever that is... I'm afraid that since my energy is being drained the strength of it isn't as strong... When Zoey and Ethan come I'm afraid it'll affect them two as well." Elidi continued to hum as Dill kept tossing and turning in his sleep.

A few minutes later, I heard a crack. "Elidi," I whispered, "I think they're here." I looked around for some sense of movement - and sure enough, I could see a pair of eyes - no doubtably Ethan's - and the small gleam of a sword a good twenty yards away, behind a bush. He caught my eyes and gestured across the swamp - only ten yards away was Zoey, coming towards us as quietly as possible. "Elidi, stop singing, let her get over here." I advised, knowing Elidi could tell the plan as well.

The humming stopped, and Zoey made her way over. "ehy," she muttered, "our stuff is a little ways from here, about a ten minutes run. Be up for it. Can Elidi sing to keep those guys asleep while I cut you free?" Elidi, overhearing us, started to hum softly as Zoey pulled out her knife and started to cut the rope. "I can't plug my ears to keep from falling asleep myself - there's a guard missing over there and I have to know if he comes up behind me. But you can't stay here and wait for me to cut Elidi free either, you'll probably fall asleep. So when you're free go over to where Ethan is - he should've found your stuff by now, so go to him, get a weapon in case, an await. Got it?" Zoey instructed, and I nodded.

When I felt the rope fall, I sprinted off to where I had seen Ethan as quietly as I could. When I got behind the bush, Ethan wasn't there, but my stuff was, so I grabbed my own knife and watched the swamp with what I hoped were hawk eyes.

Suddenly I felt a hand on my shoulder - I automatically turned, whispered "stay back!" as quietly but as firmly as I could, and pointed my knife at - Ethan.

He smiled. "Hey, squirt. You okay?"

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I slowly nodded and lowered the knife. Then turned again, in time to see Elidi run up beside us. She nodded to Ethan. "Creator Ethan, it's a pleasure."

Ethan gave her a weird look but nodded as well. "Glad you're okay, or alive, at least. Where's Zoey?"

"She told me she'd be here as I ran off. I didn't hear any footsteps following, though."

I looked over to the two trees Elidi and I were tied to, but there was no sign of movement, which is exactly what I was afraid of. "She's asleep!" I yelled, as I saw Zoey's shoe peeping out from behind a tree. Then Ethan clasped his hand over my mouth before I realized what I had done.

"No! Dang you!" He muttered, as all guards woke up - and soon enough, all guards started to yell at each other that their two prisoners were gone. "I'm going to get Zoey..." Ethan broke into a run, but I watched him stop and crouch down as Von went around the trees and found Zoey sleeping.

"I've got one!" He yelled, as Zoey woke up and tried to crawl away. "Don't even try, Princess." He warned, as he picked up the knife she had left on the ground. He rose it above his head and prepared to strike - when suddenly he collapsed, revealing Ethan standing behind him, who had struck him with the sword on the back of his head.

"Don't even try, Idiot." He muttered, smiling as he kicked the knife out of Von's hand and to Zoey's, whom had risen and now prepared to fight. "So, who's next?"

Chapter 24: Ethan

Chapter 23: Ethan

I hoped I hadn't *killed* that guy just yet. I didn't want to become a murderer, I mean, who does?

...Don't answer that.

I don't know where Ava and Elidi went - all I hoped was that Elidi was safe and Ava wouldn't be an idiot and go off fighting.

I was hoping all this while one of the guards pulled out two swords and ran at me, swiping them like a pure maniac. I dodged by going behind a tree - both the swords got stuck in the wood - and that's when I figured Zoey could take this one from here, so I went to the guy rummaging around "secretively" looking for Ava and Elidi.

Sneaking up behind him was easy enough, honestly it was the bringing myself to actually hurt the guy that was the problem. But I had to do it - he could have killed either Ava *or* Elidi by now - and just swiped my sword at his legs. Blood ran down his calves, and after that I couldn't look. I turned and saw Zoey stab the fourth guy in the arm with her knife, the guy I had left her with at her feet nearby.

Four down, one to go.

The last one, the leader, had somehow ended up in the very middle of the swamp, the yuckiest and swamiest spot of them all. He was fighting Ava - where Elidi had gone, I don't know - but one move Ava did brought them both down on Zoey and I rushed over.

Ava kneeling waist deep in the swamp, holding the guy down with both arms above his head as he lay in the mud trying to keep from going under. When Zoey and I stopped in front of him we splashed water into his face, making him sputter. Ava snickered. "So what's up now, Junker? What now?"

As I kept my sword steadily pointed at him I looked at his eyes. They told a story. He was daring us to kill him, he knew we had the guts, and he was daring us to kill him off - but you could tell he didn't want to die, he'll trade anything for it, but he'd get killed by the leader of the rebellion anyway for saying anything and giving the Guardian as well as Ava up, so why not just kill him now?

"Where's the other Guardians?" Zoey demanded. "Tell us, or you know we'll-"

"No." I muttered, interrupting Zoey. "We can't kill him. Torture him, sure. But we can't kill him unless we get information out of him. Otherwise we'll be stuck."

Zoey huffed. "So we can't kill you. But both my siblings know I've got quite an imagination, torture *could* be my very best specialty."

Junker choked. "The boss didn't tell me anything. Nothing. Said I had to work my way up to get the trust that I wanted. Only told me some stuff that basically anyone in the rebellion knows."

"So who's the boss." Ava tucked his arms, making Junker squirm.

"Said to call him Mr. D."

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"What's the 'D' stand for?" Zoey asked.

"You want what *I* was told? He told me it didn't matter. Said it could stand for whatever you wanted - Daises, Daffodils, Dim, Darkness, Death, and even mentioned some nasty things as well, As long as it started with D, he didn't care."

Zoey stood in silence.

Ava coughed. "So what's this thing that 'Mr. D' *did* tell you."

"Didn't make sense."

"Zoey?"

Zoey prepraed to strike as Junker screamed "Okay! Okay!" Ava and Zoey smiled. "The boss said something about the groundskeeper being an old friend and knowing what to do or something, That's all I heard, and honestly I didn't even hear it directly from him, he was telling one of his better servants it as I was standing nearby. But that's all I heard, honest. Now would you let me go?"

"And let you go off to tell your boss what's happened? No, I think we'll let the news be delayed for a bit." I smiled, my way of teling him that no, thank you very much, we're no idiots no matter how much we may look like it.

"Agreed." Elidi came out of no where, scaring me like heck, but I managed to keep a straight face. "We are no idiots. I, Elidi, secenth Gaurdian of the Sun, forbade you to communitcate with anyone whom may speak back. Things that will not be able to communicate ack are the only things you may speak too. YOU will die alone. The phrase '*forever alone*' will now truly apply to you. For what you have done, you have deserved that much."

I wanted to believe that not just simple words could do that, but when Junker opened his mouth, no sound came ou.

"There is a way to communicate with us. But I'll leave you to figure that out. NOw be gone." Elidi ordered, and Junker scrambled to his feet as Ava let go of him reluctantly.

"That was so gross." She muttered, standing in the swamp and looking disgusted.

"So," I mumbled as we all stood in the swamp watching Junker scramble off, "Where to? Did anyone actually understand what that fool said about a groundskeeper?"

Elidi though for a while. "We must grab our belongings. In the old times - no, not really old Zoey, jsut old before the world of Brittanica was finished -there were a ffew more people part of the rebellion, but that rebellion was not nearly as extreme as the present. However, you must wait. Things are still not safe *here*. I shall tell you everything I'm assuming on the way to the town."

Chapter 25: Zoey

Chapter 24: Zoey

We all ran back to where Ethan and I had put our stuff - in a hollow tree about a mile away from the swamp. Before we left, Ethan had me climb the tree nearby to remove the map hidden in the branches, just in case someone stole out stuff, they wouldn't have the map.

The town was southeast from us, about a ten to fifteen mile walk. I knew if we went at the pace we had been going, it'd take a couple of days at the most. "Come on," I suggested, "let's get as much distance as we can between us and the swamp - people may come to check it out, and we shouldn't be anywhere near this place when they come."

Elidi, not wanting to be a burden, offered to help carry the extra bag of food, leaving each of us with a pack to carry.

"So what's with us going to the town anyway Elidi? Why there?" Ethan asked, climbing over a fallen tree that was in the way of the path.

"As I was saying before, there had been another rebellion before this. That one, however, was not as bad as the present one. All Guardians were still together - the matter was under and yet out of control; but you Creators were never notified of it, it wasn't that urgent. But this rebellion is smaller than the previous one - the one before this had some townsfolk in it. Thought it many more people, we believe that was their downfall; the situation had too many people in it to manage. Thus this one is smaller, and a lot more controlled (on their part) and more severe.

"Once the previous rebellion was ruled over, the law took in those who had played major parts in the rebellion. They went to court and were given a choice, to go to jail for their wrongdoing or continue life in town under probation for however many years, depending on how big of a role in the rebellion they had played.

"Most were smart and chose life on probation; only a handful chose to go to prison, but those were the ones that had positively nothing left to live for.

"Some are still on probation because their daily jobs linked to the rebellion and what they did for it, whatever their sentence from court. They could switch jobs, only they know nothing else and won't even bother to train for a different profession even if that means getting off of probation. But some did choose different occupations, and soon everyone else had already probably forgotten what they had previously done. Those are that no one watched for anymore, despite what's going on now.

"Those are the ones we've got to look for as well.

"By now there should only be a handful, but a handful in the entire town - and then there's the fact that only one will be keeping the Guardian, if I'm thinking alright. That one should be living in town, and we should be able to find them."

"What if it turns out this guy is still on probation and we're looking for him in the wrong places?" Ava asked, trying to put together pieces of the puzzle now.

"Well, I'm pretty sure that the most likely person the so called Mr. D would have hidden the Guardian with is the one that was a baker. Don't laugh, Ethan, you know how strong bakers are? He would've tried to hide the

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next Guardian with him, since he'd be able to punch anyone's lights out if they came looking."

"And the others?"

Elidid shrugged. "That's all I remember right now. But for now we should really focus on getting to town and a place to his the sack, that'd certainly be nice.."

We all agreed silently as we kept walking. An hour later, I guessed we had walked about four miles at least - Ethan notified us it was about 3 o' clock in the morning, and as soon as the time hit us we all crashed against the nearest tree, treasuring the next three house in which we would e able to sleep though, of course with a weapon withing arm's reach.

I thought I'd be able to sleep through the entire three house.

Of course, I should really lower my expectations.

Ava was shaking me soon enough, wishpering my name and if I was up.

"What's going on? Are we in troule?" I yawned, yet not opening my eyes.

"No. Are you awake?" Ava asked again.

"I don't get why people ask that. They whisper your name and if you're awak or not until you make the lighest acknowledgment, and when you do they ask ifyou're awake again. 'No, I'm not awake, I'm happening to sleep talk in words that match your questions and reply to your converstaion perfectly. Totally not awake.'"

"Sorry."

I opened my eyes. "Whatever. I'm up now, what. Why didn't you wake anyone else?"

"They wouldn't wake up."

More like were smart enough not to make the slightest movement so you'd go and leave them in peace, I thought, but yawned again instead. "Whatever. So what?"

"It got lower."

"What?"

"The sun, smartie. It got lower again."

"Well how much time do you think we have left?"

"I have no idea. They've stopped pulling it down again I think, but there's not really any telling when it'll start to be pulled down again."

I nodded. "Okay, okay chll. They probably just.. Myabe they found out we're here. Maybe Red changed his mind again and told Mr. D or something of the sort. I don't think we have anything to worry about - yet. Can I go back to sleep now?" I flopped back in the sleeping bag waiting far the expected yes.

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No answer.

I got up again and realized everyone was awake now. No one was speaking. Ava had her finger on her lips, signaling me to shush. I looked over to where everyone else seemed to be looking and saw yellow flickering lights, like fire, but more in control. I grabbed the knife that was lying underneath the sleeping bag (probably not the safest method, but whatever) and got ready to defend myself. The others did the same, except for Elidi, who didn't move, as if she knew what was coming.

It all made sense when the people came into view.

There were about five people, all holding lanterns. Two were a little elderly; a man and a woman, probably married. Then there were two other younger guys and a girl about Ava's age. You couldn't see what they looked like that well, only the man used a huge stick as a walking stick and the woman and two guys held lanterns.

The old woman spoke first. "There's not a time when young ones like yourselves should be sleeping in the forest alone at night. Come, we will lead you to the town - you can stay at the inn my husband and I care for."

Chapter 26: Ava

Chapter 25: Ava

We all hurried up and got all the stuff packed up - though there wasn't much, considering we hadn't really unpacked in the first place. Then, slightly reluctantly, we followed the five people with the lanterns. I caught up with the old woman who had offered us a stay at her inn. "Thank you, but... who are you, exactly?"

"Forgive us. I'm Mrs. Rogers - not the most original name of course, but it's my name - and this is my husband, Loyde, or Mr. Rogers. That young man is Chris, my nephew" Mrs. Rogers gestured to the guy with brown hair. "and his friend Matt." She pointed to the other black haired guy.

"Aunt P., it's Mark."

"Excuse me - Mark. And over there is my granddaughter Lizzie."

"Nice to meet all of you." Trying to get a clear focus on everyone's face was pretty difficult as I said this, but that was also because it was at least 4:30 in the morning.

I was still startled by the dream I had just had as we all continued to walk towards town. The Sun, dear Gaurdians we didn't have nearly as much time as we thought we did. We needed to get to the town, settle in the inn, but not even bother sleeping - we had to look for the Gaurdian and find all of them as soon as possible.

Lizze was talking to Zoey, getting to know each other better. "How old are you anyway?" Zoey asked.

"Oh, only twelve."

"Not possible."

"It's true, I'm just really tall so I look about fifteen. Hey, before I forget - what are you guys doing here? I've never seen any of you guys around town, and then all the sudden we stumble cross you guys sleeping on the edge of the forest like hobos. WHY are you guys here?"

I eyed Zoey, making eye contact with her, telling her not to discuss the reason. We didn't know if we could completely trust these people, and even then, we didn't know if everyone in Britannica knows about the rebellion anywya. And if they don't, well why would we notify them and make them worry if we've got it situated (for the most part) anyway?

Zoey seemed to understand well enough. She smiled and shruged. "We don't go to town often, and we were just on a plain camping trip."

"That was a heck of a lot of food for 'just a plain camping trip'."

"We're hungry people." Zoey replied, eyeing me as well as Ethan. Lizzie didn't reply after that.

I turned my attention back to Mr. and Mrs. Rogers. "So you own an inn?" I asked, picking up a rock and turning and twirling it in my fingers.

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Mr. Rogers nodded. "It's on the more quiet side of town but it's within walking distance to a market and a bit near the diner. It's not a bad location, but we don't get that much business."

"Oh. Right. *Business*. So... You... Well uh, how much would it be for the four of us to stay?"

"We don't charge minors, not really anyway. We might ask for a little, because of this young man here - but you guys were sleeping in the woods, I don't think you have to be charged.. You seem to have the food, the sleeping material, you people seem to be nice and lovely; you won't be charged." Mrs. Rogers smiled at me as we stepped onto a paved road. I dropped the rock in relief, thankful we didn't have to pay anything for the most part.

"Welcome to downtown," Mark greeted in an overly extravagant way, probably thinking I dropped the rock from amazement. "Hey wait, we didn't catch all your names! We'll need them for the tour around town tomorrow."

"Sorry. I'm Ava, and that's my younger sister Zoey and our older brother Ethan. And this is our friend Elidi. And to review you are... Mark, Mr. and Mrs Rogers, Chris, Lizzie." I pointed to each corresponding person, and they one at a time smiled at us.

Chris nodded in approval. "Tomorrow Mark and I can take youfour for a tour around town - you know, introduce you guys to some people?"

Ethan nodded. "Yeah, that'd be cool. Ava we could get a feel for around town so we know who to talk too?" I nodded. "And you guys could tell us how the heck we got to town so fast, I thought was had a heck of a lot more miles."

Chris and Mark smiled at each other like this question was a inside joke between them from a long time ago. "Shortcut we found a while back."

"It makes it so much easier to get to ther river and back."

"you young ones can talk about that tomorow - or later today, rather. For now, you four get situation - welcome to the Rogers Inn. You four can have rooms two and three." Mr. Rogers smild, handing Ethan the keys from his back pocket and pointed in the general direction of the rooms.

"Have a nice stay!" Mrs. Rogers wished, and we walked off.

Chapter 27: Ethan

Chapter 26: Ethan

We split the rooms. At first I suggested boys and girls, so naturally I would have a room to myself; but then Ava decided it should be Zoey and me and Ava and Elidi in the other room, so those two can think of what to do next.

The rooms were rather old school style. Or more like exactly how the inns or motels should be - two beds side by side, a dresser in between them while in front of them, dark rather dingy curtains and a small slightly cramped bathroom that smelled funny. That weird kind of funny where you don't know what is it, but then again you're not quite sure that you really want to find out in the first place.

Zoey claimed the bed nearest to the window and set her single pack down, then flopped on the bed. Within two minutes I could tell the girl was asleep.

I decided to take some notes. I hunted through Zoey's backpack until I found the map, unrolled it, and focused my attention on the town. We didn't make the town very complex from what I remember, but when I looked at it again, apparently the city of Birttanica had been growing rapidly. A bunch of new stores have popped up - things were more advanced than I had remembered. I didn't even know where to start taking "notes", much less where to begin when we start searching tomorrow.

We were going to have a long day.

After taking a power nap, Ava and Elidi came by asking if we wanted to go now. I looked past the two in the doorway and saw the sun up - as if nothing was going on, and yet several of us knew the actual truth. Zoey was still sleeping - turns out my "power nap" was more of an all our sleeping rage = while Zoey's was still however much longer.

"Oi! Zoey! Up!" I yelled and Zoey started to get up, only to fall off the bed.

"What! What!"

"Let's go, Sleepyhead." Ava smiled, and Zoey nodded and grabbed her backpack along with the map. "Why are you bringing your backpack?" Ava and I asked, and Zoey just gave us a look.

"I thought you wanted to go, hotshot." Zoey muttered, and we decided to just move on.

As we walked through town we didn't know where the heck we were going, and by the time we realized that we also realized that we should have waited for Mark and Chris to wake up or something so that they could show us around town.

Chapter 28: Zoey

Chapter 27: Zoey

Okay, so Mark and Chris weren't exactly the best tour guides - when we asked them about the history of one of the stores and who ran it they ignored us, and when we asked them again they said that they had no idea - but they were rather funny, making quick and random uncalled for remarks here and there.

Ava pulled me aside and scared me half to death while Mark and Chris were doing a seemingly staged joke about the street of which we were walking on. "These guys don't know half of what we're looking for, but they're all we've got. We need more information about the rebellion - the old one, say nothing about the present one - and who some people are. Maybe they know more about this kind of history than their own town's history."

Elidi, who had either been eavesdropping or included in the conversation without my knowing, nodded. "I can give you some time to ask." She ran off to talk to Mark and Chris.

I watched Elidi talk to the two guys as she pointed to a shop down the street, which we went into. Elidi looked around the shop - a random trinket shop that seemed to amuse her enough - and started playing with several of the trinkets. Ava and Ethan went off to go join her, fiddling with some trinkets as well, while I went with Mark and Chris to wait in the corner.

"What Zoey, you're not going to go off and play too?" Chris teased, gesturing to all the little toys.

"No... I wanted to ask you guys a question actually."

Mark and Chris kneeled down to my eye level. "Ask away then, little lady."

"I took a bread. "The rebellion." Chris and Mark's face stayed as confused as when I said that I wanted to ask them a question. "The one that happened a long time ago. Ava won't let Ethan tell me a thing about it.. But she can't forbid you... The people in the rebellion that still live today - I hear they did great but terrible things to a great extent from my friends.. But they didn't or don't know who did what or anything. And I obviously can't ask Ava or Ethan. And my parents wouldn't permit telling me either...."

Chris and Mark looked at each other and for a second I thought I had said the wrong thing or asked the wrong people - it certainly seemed like it - but then they took a breath.

"It's a long story," Chris started. "From who's still alive, we'd say.. there's the baker, the blacksmith, the... oh there's some middle school teacher but they're not really anything, they're pretty old too, practically dead. There are a few others, but we'll start with the baker. He... His history is long and hard. People say that he was just in the rebellion, and somehow he was really important... I think the only thing he really did was recruit people, and those who they tried to recruit and didn't want too, the baker probably hit them hard enough to have amnesia and forget everything that had happened, including himself so that he wouldn't get caught.

He still works as a baker though - not at the bakery we work at, there's one on the other end of town. He would switch occupations, only he doesn't know what else to do."

"I heard some people are on probation. Is that true?"

"Where'd you hear that?"

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"Friends," I muttered, watching Ethan and Ava play with a wind up toy. "Friends tell me a lot of things, but not necessarily enough."

"Oh. Well anyway, yeah, the baker's on probation since he won't get another occupation, though I have no idea why he can't just be an accountant or something."

Mark snorted. "He obviously doesn't have the IQ, his brain is hardwired for bread."

Chris laughed as I gave him the look. "Okay, okay. So that's the baker that works on the other end of town. The blacksmith... also on probation, by the way... I'm pretty sure he was the one that hid the fort, the main base, and he also turned off the power in the entire town once just... for a plain part of the rebellion, just like a signal or symbolism or something. There's more to it though, he was... From what I heard, he was just kind of an intimidation type thing to keep everyone else in line... That may not be the best possible job, okay, but it was pretty dang important, he had to make sure he didn't lose any followers. Thus he's been having an eye kept on him also."

"Why don't you learn this stuff in school anyway?" Mark interrupted.

I jumped. "Uh... I'm part of... I'm homeschooled. Did I not mention that? Sorry. My parents cut all this stuff out of the criteria for history. But I still want to learn more than what they tell me, at least."

Chris and Mark shrugged. "Well alright then. Did you still want to know about the teacher? Though... She's practically dead, though she did also do some stuff. Why no one charged that woman with treason I've got no idea, but anyway.

"They say she practically stole a bunch of kids from the younger generation and their parents and tried to teach them the 'good' of the rebellion. If you controlled the kids of the future, then you literally controlled the future. In every evil genius's plan there should really be that factor. Of course, sometimes the kids were too smart for that teacher's likings, so instead she would try to hypnotise the kids but things went wrong or something in her hypnotic ways or something of the sort.. But some children died of her mistakes."

I gaped. "The heck, how does that work?"

Chris and Mark shrugged. "We don't know what kind of method that lady used, but she's definitely still on probation." Just then Ethan and Ava, along with Elidi, couldn't take being bored and listening and playing with the exact same trinkets over and over again.

"We're done!" Elidi siled, looking at me with a glare though the comment was aimed at Chris and Mark.

"Excellent!" Chris and Mark exclaimed in sync, smiling brightly. "Let's move on then. Where are we?" Chris asked and Mark shrugged.

"Tommy's Toys, right?"

"Oi! We're good on time then! Down the street is the best friend chicken joint, we can get some grub there. My treat." Chris smiled and led us out the door of apparently Tommy's Toys and down the street to the chicken joint, me, with new information in my head.

Chapter 29: Ava

Chapter 28: Ava

When we entered the chicken joint Mark and Chris sat us down at one of the tables as Mark and Chris went up to order, though we could clearly hear them talking about how long the line was and how long it was going to take to get all the food they wanted.

"It might take forever to get food, but at least we're alone now." I grunted in satisfaction. "So Zoey, what'd the two guys tell you?"

I listened as Zoey told me everything, barely taking breaths in between sentences. I tried not to interrupt - the girl was clearly on a roll - but I didn't really have to interrupt in the first place, Ethan did that enough, and even Elidi popped in every once in a while saying "oh my gosh, that part was terrible, you know how long it took to sort everything out?" or something of the sort.

When she finished she sat there waiting for me to reply, but no one spoke. I was mulling everything over, more or less.

The teacher, baker, and blacksmith. All people we needed to be suspicious of until further notice.

"We need more information. Like where we can find these people. We're going to have to eat fast, and we might just have to take our own tour to avoid Mark and Chris getting into any of our business - oh my gosh, that actually looks really good." I muttered as Chris and Mark came back to the tables, now with trays full of food that you would get at Kentucky Fried Chicken.

"Okay, we got mashed potatoes, coleslaw, and chicken, my friends. Lots and lots of chicken." Chris tossed the food on the table with a huge, hungry grin on his face. "Dig in, brethren!" He exclaimed, taking a big leg for himself and biting in to the meat.

We all ended up eating a good amount of the food - the coleslaw was pretty good - though it was all pretty fantastic. Chris and Mark ate like pigs - I could tell these were the kind of people that could eat as much as they wanted and never got extremely fat. You know, those people that seriously get you rather upset sometimes?

Once everything was mostly gone, we all sat back in pleasure. "Well," Mark sighed, slightly burping from drinking a ridiculous amount of soda. "I suppose we'll hit the bathroom and then get as much as we can done as we can before the day ends, yes?"

Zoey started to pronounce her excitement, so naturally I kicked her shin under the table. "Actually, I think we're going to go and hit the sack for a few, your tour is pretty tiring you know."

"Oh! That's cool too, we'll have to come with you then -"

"No! I mean, no. It's alright, don't you want to go back to work or something?" Chris and Mark looked at each other and shrugged.

"Sure, I mean they closed earlier today but maybe they'll let us make some bread or something for a little extra cash. So see you round then, guys?"

I nodded. "See you guys tomorrow, thanks for the tour."

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Mark smiled at us as Chris took away the trays of empty containers that used to have the delicious food. "Ethan. Elidi. Zoey. See you. Ava." He took the piece of bread Ethan had been holding in his hand and scarfed it down as he and Chris walked out of the store.

Zoey looked at me like that type of annoying littler sister where we had that added annoyance of knowing what was going on, completely telling by Mark's rather obvious actions.

"Shut up Zoey, would you? We've got more important matters to think about than who likes who right now." I scolded, though I couldn't help blushing and thinking about Mark's actions myself.

"Hey. I didn't say anything." Zoey mumbled.

Ethan sniffled. "He took my biscuit...!" He cried.

I ignore him and Zoey and focused on Elidi, the only one who actually seemed the least bit concerned right now. "We should go to the baker first. Zoey - Zoey stop laughing, would you? And Ethan, dude, get over the biscuit would you? We can get you another or something."

"...But I had it perfectly buttered...!"

"Anyway, Zoey where did the guys say the baker worked?"

"The other end of town at the bakery I think."

I looked at the clock on the restaurant wall. "Okay, it's two o'clock. We need to move. I don't think we can afford to lose another day without doing something worth it. Let's head out then."

Getting to the other end of town took a bit longer than we had anticipated. There were some dead ends, making us turn back and head the other way, which may or may not have been another dead end.

Eventually we found the bakery, which was literally just about to close. We pushed past the guy looking up shop and stood in the middle of the shop as the man turned and gave us an insulted look.

"We're closed. We'll be back at five."

"We need to talk to the baker."

"We're closed."

I was about to protest again, but then Elidi stepped forward. I had nearly forgotten about her, she hadn't spoken for a while. "We need to speak with your baker. Our conversation with him will help determine the fate of Britannica. By the order of the seventh Guardian of the Sun, we need to speak with your baker."

Though she was still wearing the somewhat raggedy clothes we had first met her in, Elidi's 'speech' made even me want to go out and find a baker so we could talk to them.

The old man seemed as though he was going to deny us yet again, until he said where the baker was. "He's around back by the trash bins. You can go around the store if you don't mind, so I can lock up?"

Chapter 30: Ethan

Chapter 29: Ethan

We found the baker leaning against a filthy trash bin chewing on wheat and rolling a leaf between his fingers.

I was thinking about the location we were in at the moment. It was perfect, wasn't it - interrogate the guy behind inconspicuous trash bins as we try to save the world. What a perfect movie or book scene was that?

Elidi was marching in front of all us like she owned us all. Though I didn't quite blame her either, I would be on a roll too if I had made a speech like she did earlier.

When the baker came into view, Elidi, just stood a little distance away from him. "That's definitely him, I think I remember him." She mumbled, but it didn't appear as if she was going to consult him.

"Hey!" I yelled, and the baker looked down from staring at the sky. "Can we ask you a few questions? It's for a school. Newspaper. Project. Thing."

The baker looked around as though someone was near. Then he nodded and we all approached him at different angles, which I realized probably looked a bit frightening for the guy, we were advancing at him like a pack of cheetahs.

"You were part of the rebellion, weren't you?" Zoey asked, pulling out a pad of paper to make my 'school newspaper project thing' just that much more believable.

"You mean the present one of the past one?"

Zoey nearly dropped her pencil. "You mean you know about both? We thought almost none of the townfolk knew about this one!"

"You're right there. Almost no one knows. Almost. I'm one of the people that do, frankly."

"And what makes you so special."

"They tried to recruit me again - asked me to be the host of a Gaudian hostage."

"And you said what?"

"Turned them down, obviously. Would I be talking about this if I had agreed?"

I thought, as well as everyone. "What'd they say to you after that?" They wouldn't have just let you go just like that."

"They told me more information."

"Like..."

"You know, something tells me that's not what you came to me for. So what do you want then."

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"Name, whether or not you were part of the last rebellion. What you're doing now. And jjust for the heck of it, the other information you're refusing to tell us."

The guy eyed us like he wsa sizing us up for a fight. Then he chuckled. "I'm expecting this isn't for your school paper. Even the town paper isn't this nosy usually. So who are you guys then."

"People who like getting answers to their questions." Elidi mumbled, giving the hint that he was getting slightly impatient.

"Funny. I figured that to. Now who are you guys?"

Ava groaned. "Screw this. I'm Ava. That's Ethan. And that's Zoey. We're the Creators. This is Elidi. She's the seventh Gaurdian. Happy?"

The baker smirked. "I see. I should've known. Hello Creators and Gaurdian. Name's Kenny."

I snorted - c'mon, I couldn't help it. Kenny the baker? Seriously? Really? "So anyway," I couged, "What'd you do in the last rebellion?"

"Fine. I tried to get people to join our side of the rebellion. AN if they said no, well then I did what had to be done too."

"Like punch their lights out if they said no?"

Kenny shrugged.

Zoey noticed things getting a bit tense. "It's cool. You're being punished now, aren't you? On probation, I'm expecting?" Kenny nodded. "That's cool too. Maybe if everything fits we'll tip them and say you're off probation."

Kenny perked up after that.

Ava and Elidi sighed, seemingly in sync. "So what's the information that you're hiding from us?"

Kenny laughed. "I don't think you really need to know that stuff. Or not yet, rather. Come back another time."

Elidi groaned. "So you're not holding the next Gaurdian?"

"No! God. ALl I know is that it was Gaurdian Ravi they were talking about. have no idea who they went to after me. But I do know other things. No that I'll tell you."

Elidi groaned again. "He knows where another Gaurdian is. I can tell, don't deny. You finch whenever you say the word 'Gaurdian'."

We all eyed Kenny and probably took a step cloer. "Tell us. Now. Or don't bother hoping to get off of probation any time soon."

Kenny grunter. "So what else is in it for me then? Oh wait,I got an idea, how about me not only lower or compeltely extinguish all my probation years, but also be a favor, yes?"

Ava sighed, probably in annoyance with all the stings attached with the deal. "Fine. What do yo want."

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"Easy. Pay raise."

I laughed. "You're kidding, right? A pay raise?"

"Just wait till you get off your lazy bum and get a job, then you'll see what I mean, hot shot."

Zoey, always calling me that name, started to crack up and clapped Kenny on the back. I eyed her too, and he of course shut up, and frankly so did I.

Ava coughed. "So we go to the boss of yours and ask him to give you a pay raise? And if he says no?"

"Then you are out of luck!"

Elidi sighed in annoyance just like Ava did. "Fine. Okay. Whatever. We'll get the pay raise and come back when we have it."

"See you then. The boss, by the way, is the one coming by at five. He goes home on his break or to the library."

"Great. Okay. Bye. See you." I mumbled. I'm pretty sure that annoyance was contagious.

"Good luck, hot shot."

Chapter 31: Zoey

Chapter 30: Zoey

"So I'm supposing that we're not going to visit that teacher or the blacksmith if the baker needs this favor done, are we?" Ethan sighed, probably looking forward to seeing the blacksmith and how buff he was. We all ignored him.

Seeing as how we had no idea where the guy lived, we headed to the library to see if we could find Kenny's boss. Of course, us being us, things were never just that easy.

Things were so croded we could barely find each other through all the bookshelves.

Ethan did a facepalm after a while. "It. Is four o' clock. We started seraching here at around three, didn't we? We have been looking for an hour. Guys, I have never in my life spent this long in a library. In my entire life. And I never thought it would be possibly this tedious"

I rolled my eyes, but Ava slammed the book she had been reading shut. "Ethan's right, screw this. I'll be right back." She walked off toward the chek out counter.

"What's she doing...?" Ethan asked, staring after her.

Elidi smiled, like she knew exactly what Ava was doing. "She's being smart."

We all just watched Ava as she talked to a middle aged lady as she wrote stuff own on an extra post-it. After about five minutes we watched Ava shake hands with the lady, who all the sudden looks estatic. They wanted goodbye and Ava walked up to us again.

"His name is Benny. He hasn't-"

Ethan laughed. "So Kenny works for Benny. Seriously? This is just funny now?"

Ava ignored him. "He hasnt some in at all today. But since I whispered that we were Creators and Elidi was a Gaurdian, she let me have his address. 1182 Story Place. C'mon, let's try to get that pay raise before dark."

Ava was walking so quickly I had to jog to keep up, along with Elidi. Ethan, lucky for him, had long enough legs, so he could walk at his normal pace. "Ava," I couhed, annoyed at her for not slowing down, "You can't just go around telling everyone we meet that we're Gaurdians and Creators. Word's going to get around, and we'll be toast! You can't just go around syaying stuff like that!"

Ava nodded, though she didn't seem to be completely listening. "There it is. 1182 Story Place." Ava marched up to the front door and banged loudly and nonstop. "Yo! Benny!"

I started to reach out to Ava, ready to pull her back if she started punching Benny. "Ava -"

"We have to talk to you!"

"Ava -"

"Come out of hiding already and give Kenny a pay raise!"

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"Ava!"

"What!" Ava yelled, facing me.

"Calm and collected, Ava. Calm and collected."

Ava sighed and took a breath, probably counting to ten. "Fine." Ava knocked once more, and thankfully the door opened.

"Who in the hell is banging like hell on my do-" Benny's eyes widened as he saw all four of us again. "Oh, I see. It's you four again. What do you people want now, oh so great Creators and Gaurdian?"

"We need information from Kenny," I stepped in explaining before Ava could start screaming again, "and to get that information needed, you need to give him a pay raise. So could you please give Kenny a pay raise? Please!"

Benny snorted. "Sales aren't high enough to give him a pay raise at the moment, sorry girlies."

Ethan coughed. "Hey!"

We all ignored him again. "So what can we do to make you give him the raise then?"

"Get sales up, obviously."

"Any suggestions then? Besides buying a bunch of bread everyday?"

Benny thought. For a while. Then he smiled, as Ava's foot kept up a rythmic tapping. "Got it. We could get a heck of a lot more sales if we had a brownie recipe form the other bakery. Get that, and tell them I'll even revise it a bit and not even copy exactly, and Kenny's go the pay raise - and you four have got that information you need.

"You mean the bakery that Chris and Mark work at? That one?" Ethan frowned. "So we've got to walk all the way back across town again? No!"

I rolled my eyes. "Ignore him. That's the one, right?" Benny nodded. "Then we'll get it. In return we expect you to keep your word and ive Kenny a ray raise. WE'll be back when we have it." Benny nodded, lightly pushed us off his doorstep, and closed the door in our faces. "Let's get going. Again."

We made our way to the bakery Mark and Chris work at with minimum amount of setbacks. As we entered the shop, the familiar smell of deliciousness hit us agin. I saw Mark alomst immediately, sweeping floors. "Hey Mark," I called out, "where's your boss?"

Mark looked up, smiled, and waed. "In the back, why?"

"We need to ask him something, could you get him for us?" He nodded, and soon enough the boss, yet another Chris was asking us what we needed his assistance with.

"We'd like your brownie recipe." Ethan spoke, pleading in his voice, making me roll my eyes.

Chris, or Christopher as he preferred to be called, laughed. "And why might that be?"

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"Um. Well. We... Kind of need to give it to the other bakery across town?" I rolled my eyes. Oh, how did I know this was going to end badly?"

Christopher laughed again. "You're asking me to give away a recipe to one of our main competitors. How are you expecting me to do that exactly?"

"Please. They wouldn't copy it, they said they'd add their own touch to it so it wouldn't even be 'stealing' your recipe."

"Why do you need to get it to him."

"So he'll give Kenny a pay raise so Kenny will give us information that we need?"

"And why do you need it?"

Ethan stopped there. No doubt he had heard me tell Ava she couldn't go around telling people about who we truly were. Ava was eyeing me, silently telling me *I told you so, now what, smart one?* I sighed. THE last thing I wanted to do was tell yet another person who we were, but I figured we weren't to get the recipe any other way.

"Look. It's important to us because it will help us solve a problem worth the attention of Guardians and Creators."

Christopher's eyes widened. "I see. Well. I still can't just tell you people the recipe to give to one of our top competitors. I'll need something in return."

Elidi yawned sarcastically. "What else is new?"

"you four friends with Mark and Chris?" We all nodded. "Well, the parents of Chris used to be great bakers themselves, and made some awesome cake pops for a fundraiser once or twice. If I'm going to give away a recipe, even if it's going to be changed, I want a recipe in return. Get me the cake pop recipe and you've got the brownie one."

Ava rolled her eyes. "You're kidding me, right? You're a baker! You can't make your own cake pops?"

"These have got a special ingredient I can't figure out. If you really want to do minimum work, get me the secret ingredient, find with that, Christopher went back into the back room, leaving us with yet another task.

"You think Chris would have the ingredient?"

Ava looked at the clock and shrugged. "We might as well go back to the inn - we'll see them there at dinner or something anyway. Let's go, I'm tired of Ethan's whining of him being tired, so shut up would you Ethan?"

Chapter 32: Ava

Chapter 31: Ava

We didn't see mark of Chris that night, so we slept on it. When we asked Mrs. Rogers where they were, she shrugged and said they were probably at work, but they weren't there either. Christophere said it was thei day off and they wouldn't be in all for the rest of the day, they had only come in for thirty minutes to collect payment earlier in teh day.

As we were sulking back to the inn, Zoey surprised me witha simple question. "Ava, you know we're being stupid, you know that right?" We stopped, and Ethan and Eliid nearly kncked both of us over.

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

"Why do we want to ask Chris what the ingredient is when it's his mother's recipe?"

I was silent.

Wow okay, I was stupid.

"We'll go back to the inn then and ask the Rogers!" I muttered, now frustrated with myself. "Let's get moving already then."

We made our way back to the inn and started to look for Mr. or Mrs. Roger, only to run into Chris and Mark in the kitchen - they were sharpening knives to start cooking - so they looked pretty busy.

"Hey Chris, where are your parents?" I asked smiling and eating a tomato cube previously cut.

He looked up from his knife sharpening and smiled, though for some reason Mark wouldn't look up or meet my eyes. "They're in the basement, working on something."

"You said no one was allowed in the basement except them and occasionally you. Can we go down?" Elidi askd, and Chris nodded.

"I don't think it'll be that much trouble, go ahead, first door on the left."

We nedded and headd out. We opened the door adn there in front of us was a long descending staircase, no lightswitch. Ethan and I were about to step forward, when Zoey stopped us. "Guys, wait." We all looked at her expecting a long lecture or story of going down dark staircases. "Take this."

I couldn't believe it, we hadn't even noticed the sword hanging beside Zoey's side. She pulled it out and tossed aside the casing, handing the sword to Ethan. She opened the backpack she always had been holding with her and pulled our three knives; one for me, herself, and Elidi. Then she zipped her pack back up and slung it over her shoulder again. "Okay."

"Be prepared for anything." Ethan warned, readying his sword. We all nodded in agreement, and all descended into darkness, stepping quietly and catiously down teh staircase.

The stairs were longer than we anticipated - it seemed as though we were going two stories ungerdround. And even then, when we reached the basement (we only knew because there weren't anymore stairs - other than

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that we couldn't see), it was still pitch black. We couldn't see each other even, in that matter. Zoey sighed. "I hate the dark sometimes, I swear." We heard zipping, and suddenly we had the light of Zoey's flashlight light all our faces.

"Thanks, that's much better Zo-

There was a bunch of scuffling, and Ethan's voice was gone. Zoey shone the light to where Ethan was standing before - then she was suddenly taken, the flashlight dropped, along with Elidi, then me - blinded, gagged, and my wrists tied together.

Chapter 33: Ethan

Chapter 32: Ethan

Smelly socks stink.

Not to be obvious or redundant, but it's completely true. Especially if they're stuffed in your moth as a gag. After being gagged, blinded, and everything else, the lights came on after a lot of muffled screaming and struggling.

When the lights came on, all four of us were tied to a different column. We were still gagged, but we could still see. Or I could at least, we were all poorly blinded - the cloth that covered our eyes were see through.

A voice started to speak, though I had no idea where from. Even though I could just barely see, the image wasn't that clear. "Look, what special guests we have here tonight! ISn't it special, dear Loyde?"

Loyde. The name rung the bell. "Mrs. Rogers?!" I exclaimed.

"Lookie there, they're smart too! Not smart enough to not trust us though!" A disgusting type of laugh emerged from the terrible woman's throat. "And of course, I suppose we'll be nice and let them see what's happened. Boys, go ahead and untie their blindfolds, would you?"

MY blindfold was off last, though I already knew who must have untied it. "Chris. Mark."

"Not Mark. Lizzie!" Lizzie squealed.

Zoey gasped. "You were so nice! Lizzie.. How could you? I thought you were nothing but nice the first time we talked!"

"Don't ever ever ever judge a book by it's cover, Zoey. Both ways." Lizzedsaid sarcastically.

"Then, Mark, what the heck are you doing here?" Ava accused, too much hurt in her voice for my liking.

Mark shrugged. "You could call me a trainee, I suppose."

Elidi and Zoey were the only ones who seemed to be thinking. "The teacher and blacksmith. They were... They were you two!"

"But how did you get off of probation?"

"Killed them off, of course." Mr. Rogers laughed.

"It's not that easy. Nothing is that easy."

"Of course it is! Look where we are. We became innkeepers to get the police and you idiot Gaurdians off of our trail, when really, we were putting work off and continued it all underground." I looked around. They were right, we were standing in a full on blacksmith's workshop - and that was a lot scarier than one would think.

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"So you guys are the ones holding Ravi." I concluded, looking around for him. "All this time we were looking all over town for him, when really, he was right under our noses the entire time. So where is he?" I demanded.

"Oh, doing some extra work." Mrs. Rogers gestured to the darkest corner of the room, closest to the fire. AND there, if you looked close enough, you could see a tired kid sweating, curled up in a ball not even aware what was going on around him.

Ava looked devastated. "Have you even fed him anything?" The Rogers shrugged

Elidi was horrified. "Ravi! It's me, Elidi! Ravi! Please! You have to let him go."

"We don't have to do anything."

Zoey just eyed all the Rogers - like she was determining the best possible way she would torture them all in return. I did the same, except I wasn't staring at the Rogers or determining how to kill them off one by one. So in reality, I wasn't doing the same at all. I was staring at the poor kid Ravi. Sweating and yet shivering, thin as a toothpick. I felt bad for him - we couldn't just take the entire day wondering how we were going to get out of here. We were going to have to get out of here today, possibly right now. But it was going to take something. A lot more than just us. We needed someone who wasn't bound to a pole.

"Mark." I called out, pleading him. I made eye contact with the guy, and he tried to look away but I kept eye contact with him. "Please." I said, and he shook his head.

"I can't. I think that has already been covered. And if it hasn't, then it just was." Mark got up after annoyance and walked right past me, and out of the basement, probably to make some of his delicious smelling bread - though it probably sucked. A lot. Because he sucked. A lot.

Ava coughed. "Okay, so you've got us. So now what are you guys going to do with us?"

"Well, we'll turn you all into Mr. D, naturally."

"The leader of this entire rebellion thing."

"That's the one. And I'm sorry to say, but you three will probably be dead, along with the world - we'll kill off all the Guardians, the sun will die, and thus so will you."

"Why are you guys doing this? Killing the world will kill yourselves as well. What are you guys thinking?"

Mrs. Rogers spat at Ava's feet. "All those in the rebellion know the reason of which you brought this world into existence in the first place - it's a refuge in case your own world blows up. Well, Mr. D is working on that. Britannica will be overrun but you people, who will pollute it just as much as you are to your own world. It'd be better to simply die for Britannica than just die by pollution because of your people. Britannica is good enough now - we don't need your aliens damaging our paradise."

"We would never pollute and destroy Britannica like we are to Earth. This is all a mistake. You have to listen to us and let us go." Zoey reasoned.

"That isn't an option."

"But-"

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"Silence! Loyde, I say it's time for this place to blow up now, don't you?"

Loyde smiled while the rest of us looked absolutely terrified. "Of course, dear."

I tried to trip them while they were heading out of the basement. "What are you talking about, blow this place up? You can't do that! You'll destroy your own inn!"

Lizzie laughed. "We're not idiots like you people. This place is so far underground that it won't even touch our inn above. No one will know what happened. We can continue our lives... For you however, I can't say the same. It was nice knowing you people, especially you, Zoey." Lizzie smiled and skipped up the stairs, out of the basement, followed by Mr. and Mrs. Rogers. Chris stayed behind, pulled something from his pocket, and attached it to the wall.

"Goodbye, Ava. Elidi. Ethan. Zoey. Ravi." He smiled, activated the small device on the wall, and then ran out of the basement.

We all struggled against our bonds. Whoever had tied them must have been strong - there wasn't a possible way that we were going to be able to escape this one. "What now?!" I yelled, trying to untie the bonds, probably ruining my fingers at the same time.

"We get out of he-" Someone clapped their hand over Ava's mouth before she could finish her sentence. Zoey and Elidi didn't even notice, being on the very other side of the room, they continued to try and get out of their situation.

"Don't scream." Mark said, removing his hand from Ava's face. "I'm here to help." He said, and grabbed Zoey's knife from nearby on the ground and started to cut the ropes. "You can't let them know that you're free yet though. We can't let them escape, they're just going to come after you all this time, and you won't have another place to stay. I can take over the inn - Chris taught me enough. I'm so sorry, you guys. I didn't mean for this to happen.. I thought... I thought..."

Ava interrupted. "It doesn't matter. You're doing the right thing right now. So what is it now, what's the plan?"

"We're going to have to convince them that the bomb isn't working, and then they're all going to have to come down and fix it. Then we can make a break for it, but there's going to be a fight. I'm not going to cut your bonds through all the way, they have to believe that you're still tied up. But I'll put a knife in all of your guys's hands so that you can finish it, and when it's time I'll tell you when and we can make a break for it."

Mark finished cutting all of our bonds almost all the way through. "Cut Ravi free," I commanded, "and then we'll believe you." I said, not sure what I should think of this guy, even though he placed a knife in my hands after he finished cutting.

"I was just about to do that next." He agreed, and he slashed Ravi's chains and picked him up. "I'm so sorry. We'll be able to care for him upstairs, where the medicine is, but we're going to have to get you guys out of here first. I'll have to stop the bomb... But it might take a while. I'll be right back. I'll take Ravi now, put him in my bedroom, and then tell everyone to come down here so they can 'fix the bomb'. Sit tight, guys. And again, I'm so sorry about everything. Really."

Ava sighed and screamed at Mark, though I could tell she really liked him anyway. "Go already, you idiot!" Mark went ahead and ran upstairs, carrying a dead looking boy in his arms.

"Everyone be ready," I warned, clutching the knife in my fist. "this is going to be tough."

Chapter 34: Zoey

Chapter 33: Zoey

Ethan was right, this was going to be close. When the Rogers came down, along with Mark of course, they all stood right next to us with a weapon of their own - Chris worked on the bomb, and Mrs. Rogers carried a whip, Mr. Rogers with a gun, Mark unwillingly with a knife of his own, and Lizzie nothing - but that didn't tell me anything good, that meant she was good enough with her hands to not have a weapon at all.

Mark stood by me. "I moved your backpack upstairs along with Ravi too. The map's in there, it should be unharmed." He whispered, but I gave no sign that I noticed, for Lizzie was staring me down like a hawk. I tared back, out of habit. "Don't let her get to you. She's tough and she's a black belt already in karate, but you should be able to get by her without a problem." He advised, and I gave a slight nod.

My mistake.

Lizzie's eyes widened and screamed. "They're planning something! Mom, Dad, activate the bomb to go off immediately! They're... They're planning something!"

"NOW!"

Everyone's bonds came off like butter, and we started slashing our way out. Everyone was almost to the door, except me, since I was farthest away from it. Then, suddenly, someone grabbed me by the collar of my shirt. "Not so fast!" Mr. Rogers growled, and hit me with the butt of his gun, making me nearly black out. "LOOK AT YOUR FRIENDS RUN, ZOEY! LOOK AT THEM RUN, SEE HOW THEY WON'T EVEN COME BACK TO SAVE YOU EVEN AFTER KNOWING I'M GOING TO BASH YOUR HEAD IN WITH A BRICK!" He yelled, throwing me against the wall. I crashed into the brick and crumpled.

Seemingly distant, I heard Ava scream my name. "ZOEY!" I felt Ethan's hands pick me up delicately and made another run for it as I looked up to see Ava thrashing around, trying to cut Mr. or Mrs. Rogers, I couldn't tell, the image was too blurry. "ELIDI! ETHAN! HELP ME!" She screamed again, just as I saw her knife thrown away from her. Mr. Rogers aimed his gun at her, my big sister, and smiled.

"Funny, you thought you could get away."

Ethan dropped me right there, right on the ground, not even setting me down or anything, just dropping me right there. "Ava!" He yelled, and slammed right into Mr. Rogers, making his shot off by that much, making Ava curl into a ball and slowly crawl towards me.

"Oh Zoey, come on, we've got to get you out of here, how's your head?"

I wanted to say "I'm fine," but I'm pretty sure it came out as "Mm Fgah." I sighed instead, after making that unclear remark. She tried to pick me up, only to be dragged away by a very angry Lizzie who had been trying to deal with Elidi, who was where I couldn't see her - probably trying to stop Chris from 'activating' the bomb again. Her dagger was near me too, as well as Ava's. That meant that more than half of us was without a weapon, and one of us was an idiot with a weapon, making the odds not quite in our favor.

The last thing I saw was Ethan get hit with the whip a thousand times, Ava getting a gun pointed at again, and Elidi was slammed against the wall just like I was. And here I was, leaning on the wall like I was a helpless rag doll, which I practically was. I remembered gripping something cold and fitting in my hand and throwing

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it.

Someone screamed. "MOM!"

I grabbed another cold object in my hand and threw it again. "DAD! PLEASE, ZOEY, STOP! THEY'RE THE ONLY ONES I HAVE LEFT-"

I threw another.

I watched Chris as he tried making a run for it, but I was half blocking the staircase and he tripped. I heard a deathly crack nearby, and a moan. I heard nothing else after that. All I knew was that I had ended the fight, I killed four people in less than 3 minutes.

Chapter 35: Ava

Chapter 34: Ava

The rest of the day was a blur. All I remember was that Zoey, my little Zoey, had surprised me once again with her accurate knife throwing - she killed all of the Rogers, unless you counted Chris just being a plain fool and tripping and killing himself. I was going to say good job to her, only that she blacked out after she did what she did. Ethan, half knocked out, helped me carry her and Elidi upstairs, and Mark said he'd take care of the Roger's dead bodies in the basement.

"I'll just have to get rid of the evidence and blow the place up. I'm not doubting Chris when he said the explosion wouldn't even touch the inn. I'm not going to doubt my best friend, even if he did turn out to be a jerk. I'm just going to blow the place up." He muttered to himself, and I watched the guy sadly as I set Elidi on the couch, back in the inn.

"You do that." Ethan sighed, literally falling flat out on the floor and falling asleep. I checked the time - we were down there longer than we had thought, we had gone down there at around eleven in the morning, and it was already eight at night. I sighed.

"I'm going to hit the sack too." I said, looking at Ethan already drooling on the floor. "Thanks for saving us though Mark." I looked at Mark gratefully, and then I had to look away. It was never going to work, between him and me. He wasn't even from an existing world, if you wanted to go technical. And he was like four years older than me, and it seemed as though Ethan wouldn't ever accept it. It was better to just not think about it anyway.

I lied on the other couch that Ethan had missed flopping on by about a yard, and started sleeping.

It was bright. Very bright. But it was also beautiful. It was a simple garden, yes, but it seemed so peaceful that it was so beautiful.

It was a circular garden - rows and rows of plants of every single type - tulips, lillies, roses, everything - and in the very middle sat a boy with short brown hair and a deep tan, and yet he had freckles. He couldn't have been more than nine years old - any older and it would have just been awkward. He wore a yellow shirt and orange flowy pants, the type that I would totally wear to bed, only clean. The boy's pants were stained with grass and dirt stains that probably couldn't come off, and bits of blood here and there. It looked disgusting, and yet totally natural, like it was completely meant to be there. He seemed to be meditating - I almost wanted to turn back and not interrupt him, only I didn't know where turning back meant.

"It's okay." The boy muttered, not even opening his eyes. "You can come near."

I stepped forward, seemingly against my will. I sat down in front of the boy, who opened his eyes and looked at me. His eyes almost scared me - they were similar to Elidi's - a yellow, only a later type of yellow that just said that the sun was almost going to set. It almost made me sad, thinking that this kid's eyes reflected off of the current state of the sun, but the yellow was a lot more natural - as if the sun weren't being dragged down at all, which I didn't understand at all.

"Ravi." I greeted, finally understanding who the heck this little boy was.

"Ava." He welcomed, open arms. I was going to hug the kid, but it didn't seem quite that appropriate - as if hugging him would just drain him of his energy. "It's okay." He smiled, probably reading my thoughts. "I'm

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healing. touching each other would ruin the mirage, but it's fine, you don't have to do anything - I'm healing. I just wanted to thank you - and warn you, of course."

I was smiling all up until that moment. "Warning? What warning? We're doing well - we've already got you two Gaurdians, we're now a group of five, we're doing pretty well! Only five left, right?" I said hopefully, maybe being a little to optimistic.

"You are doing very well. Very very well. Zoey has a very good aim, and she's a very gifted archer as well. You should take her and get her a bow and arrow."

"We don't have any money."

"No worries, destiny wil find away. Though destiny is also quite foggy at times too. Anyway. She did well, though it is sad for the Rogers' lives have to perish. Though they were bad, they could have done well in other circumstances in perhaps the future. But I suppose they didn't dserve to live, now did they?"

"Not particularly, they starved you, didn't they?"

"I lived."

"You might not have!"

Ravi held up his hand to silence me. I was about to argue, saying I was much older than him and I practically made him, so in a way he should obey me, but he seemed pretty serious. "But I did. Anyway. The warning. Mr. D. He has been alerted of your comings. He is strengthening all this defenses around himself as well as all the Gaurdians. Things are going to get a lot more complicated from here on out."

"We can take anything and everything that comes at us!" I argued.

Ravi held his hand up again. "I have no doubt upon that. But be warned, things are about to get a lot more complicated."

I huffed. "Okay. Fine. Good job, and more complications are heading our way. What else you got."

Ravi smiled. "i admire you for your readiness, Ava, this is why I chose you to speak too. That, of course, is not the only reason. You shouldn't dodge love, Ava."

I was caught off gaurd. Completely. "What are you talking about? Who said anything about love?"

Mark did. He was in the blacksmith workshop earlier, and mentioned you, and your name and 'love' was in the same sentence. I can read minds, Ava. I know that you like him, but you don't want to risk it - your priorities aren't in that order, you want to save Brittanica first, don't you?"

I sighed. "Well - well of course I do! Brittanica... It's part of me! I have too!"

Ravi rolled his eyes. "Look, I hate being the wise guy, but frankly, you're not going to be able to ignore Mark the rest of your time here. He's going to be important, he might even have to accompany you on this trip to save the other five gaurdians. You need to get along with him, even if that means falling in love along the way."

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I was about to protest that I couldn't even talk to Mark anymore without falling just that much more in love, but just then we heard a loud explosion and the entire garden shook. "That's our cue, I believe. It's time to wake up, that's teh basement falling and you just might fall with it. I'll see you when you wake, Ava, and don't say anything about this conversation in the real world. The others don't need to know about our conversation, not even the warning - just know it, and I'm sure the others have figured it out by now too." I nodded, and stood up as the garden started to fall apart. "And Ava, don't blame me and Elidi if we're mysterious to you - we need to heal completely if we're to help you completely." I nodded again, and that's when the garden floor of where I was standing collapsed, me falling with the ground.

Chapter 36: Ethan

Chapter 35: Ethan

A loud explosion noise woke us all up, except Zoey, still crashed out on the other couch. I would've fallen off the couch, but turns out I was sleeping on the floor anyway, which, by the way, is not as bad as the movies make it out to be. "Wha- What was that?" I yelled, not noticing Ava, who was apparently yelling the exact same thing.

We didn't hear any reply to our question, so we both got up and walked around the inn - I remembered what had happened to the Rogers, and how Zoey had killed them by throwing a knife at each one of them, so I wasn't expecting to see them at all. But I didn't see Mark, I only saw Zoey, sleeping on the couch. When we walked around we saw in a bedroom, twin beds with Elidi on one and Ravi on the other, both curled up, sleeping. Ava and I continued to look for Mark, when he popped up behind us.

"Sorry about that, we had the bomb go off, I didn't realize it'd be that loud. I just checked down there, half the stairs to the basement are completely destroyed, so there's no going down there anymore. How was sleeping?"

I yawned. "Alright. Wait, you mean you didn't get any?"

Mark shook his head, "I figured I should probably just pull an all nighter to make sure the Gaurdians were alright. They should be fine, waking in a few hours. They should be just fine." He wiped his hands on his shirt like it was nothing, like a cool guy would, and I watched Ava to see how she was reacting, only she was clearly trying not to notice.

"Shouldn't you be at work?" She asked, still not looking at Mark, her foot tapping. Ava's foot tapping was never a good sign - it meant she was frustrated with something, usually a perosn, and sometimes frustrated with herself.

"I went there this morning, explained what happened, and Christopher -" Mark choked on that name "- said that I could ahve as many days off as I needed, in order to help you guys. So long story short, I'm going to help you guys, no matter what it takes."

"Awesome!" I exclaimed.

"NO!" Ava almost yelled, only to remember that Elidi, Ravi, and Zoey were still sleeping. "I mean, that won't be necessary. At all."

Mark looked startled. "What do you mean? I'd be more than happy to let you guys stay here, now that I'm in charge of the inn, no cost, at all, I could go with you guys to help get the rest of the Gaurdians..."

Ava suddenly seemed to have an epiphany. "Wait." She said, her eyes widening. "You said you went to the bakery in the morning. What time is it now?"

Mark looked at the clock behind us. "Three in the afternoon, why, you guys gotta be somewhere?"

Ava's eyes widened even more, if that was even possible. She turned to me. "Ethan," She muttered, worry written all over her face, "the information. We need it."

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I realized what the heck she was talking about. "Oh my gosh, you're right." We needed the secret ingredient. But... The Rogers were gone. No one.... "Mark." I said, turning to the last possible person I would have wanted help from, "you're the only one alive that might know the recipe to those cake pops that the Rogers used to make. We need it. That's what we came back here for yesterday... Do you know the ingredient?"

Mark thought a long time, too long for comfort. Maybe, just maybe, this guy would know the ingredient so that we wouldn't have nothing to work with. "Why do you guys need it?" He asked, still with a thinking face. It seemed as though he asked us that literally just to buy himself time.

I sighed, trying to remember. "Because.. because... We need information from the baker Kenny across town, but he'll only give the information to us if we can get him a pay raise. But Benny will only give him a pay raise if we could get the brownie recipe from the bakery you work at, but Christophe - sorry - would only give us the recipe if we have the secret ingredient. Please remember."

Mark thought a while longer. Then he snapped his fingers. "Oh I've got it. It was lemon zest. Simple, I know, but they told me that everything was better with lemon zest, that was their reply when I asked them why they were adding the zest to the cake pops we were making."

I smiled. "Oh, thanks so much, take care of Elidi, Ravi, and Zoey for us would you? Ava and I will be right back okay?" Mark nodded, and I'm sure he was about to say something else, but by that time Ava and I were already out the door.

Chapter 37: Zoey

Chapter 36: Zoey

When I woke up, Ethan and Ava weren't where they had fallen asleep. There was only Mark, chilling on the couch opposite of me. He looked over at me and smiled. "About time you woke up, it's like four in the afternoon."

"Where... What... How...."

"Ethan and Ava are out, finishing what you guys started I suppose. What happened? You're going to ahve to specify. And how? You're going to have to specify that question too."

I rubbed my eye. "How did the Rogers know who we we were....?" I asked, half yawning in the middle of the sentence.

"My boss Christophere spilled the beans. I guess you told him who you were, and he was kind of talkinga bout it with us around, so Chris heard and he told his parents, and then... They just set up the trap."

I knew we shouldn't have told a buch of people who we were. I suppose that last reveal was all my fault - but still, I knew it, it was going to leak out, and now I bet that even that rebellion leader - Mr. D? - knew that we wre in the world of Britannica and he was probably planning just about how to take us down. "What happened down there...?" I asked, yawning yet again.

"You killed all the Rogers, and tripped Chris, who hit his head on the edge of the staircase and cracked his head open. He bled to death. You killed everyone else by throwing a knife at them. I've gotta say Zoey, you've got tremendous aim."

The compliment took a while for me to comprehend. "Oh. Right. Thanks." I lied my head back down on the pillow, but I didn't close my eyes. "Ravi - Elidi. Where... Where are they?"

Mark smiled, like he knew that question was next. "They're in my room sleeping. Don't worry, I successfully force fed Ravi, and cleaned up a bunch of his wounds - apparently Mr. Rogers was whipping him without me knowing, I swear I would have stopped that if I had knew about it."

I didn't answer, I still didn't completely trust this guy, even after he had practically saved all our lives. "How did you even get draggedinto this mess anyway?" I asked, not sure if Ieven wanted to hear the answer.

"I was Chris's best friend, I swear, ever since grade school. We were still best buds, even had the job at the bakery together. But then one day he askd me if I wanted to get involved in something bigger than the best of us - I thought he was tlaking an awesome adventure, and in a way, I suppose it was, for him. But this isn't what I meant to sign up for. But it was already too late, I couldnt back out without losing Chris. I was scared, I didn't want to lose Chris after all we had been though. Come to think about it, I didn't really want to die anyway, if I had backed out I'm sure they would have killed me in the first place anyway. I didn't want any of that. At all. But I guess it's good that I said I'd get involved, I ended up doing some good in the end, didnt I?"

I didn't reply. Yes, okay, he had done good, but I still wasn't sure. But I supposed we were going to need him. He would give us a place to stay - he had corrected his wrong doings taht he didn't even want to happen - I could trust him, I was practically 99% sure. "I'm sorry." I apologized, realizing how hard this must be on him. "I killed your best friend. I'm sorry."

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Mark shrugged. "I think I would have gotten annoyed with it all eventually anyway, I'm sure I would have killed him eventually too, it's alright. It was bound to happen - he didn't deserve to live."

There was an awfully awkward silence. Luckily, we heard the door slam. "We got it!" I heard Ethan exclaim, and with that I got off of the couch like a lazy bum and made my way slowly to the front door - I didn't feel like falling face first quite yet, even if it was already evening. Ethan saw me walking and he grinned. "We got it!" He repeated, and I smiled.

Ava smiled too, as Elidi and Ravi emerged from Mark's room, probably woken up by Ethan's excitement. Ravi looked better - wearing a bright yellow shirt, orange pants with some stains, but no shoes - I supposed he more or less enjoyed being barefoot. Ravi was rubbing his eye, and they both seemed extremely tired, and I'm sure I looked the same, but he spoke anyway. "What'd you get?"

"The information that we needed so badly from Kenny." He grinned, waiting for us to praise him, though there wasn't quite time for that.

"And what wa the information, Ethan?" I asked, impatient. We needed to get a move on - I doubted that the sun was going to stay up much longer.

"Elidi was right. It was where the next Gaurdian was hidden. But the... information was not all entirely clear. All we have is that we need to save Gaurdian Apollo, and that he's being held by a monster of some kind. It's a poem, that's the clue, it's a poem. Wait, hold on... I wrote the poem down somewhere... Aw screw this, Ava could you tell us the poem again?"

Ava cleared her throat like she was preparing to make a speech.

*"Named after the Greek god of the sun,
Gaurdians of all sort mustn't be won.
Under a man-made crossing may he be found
Gaurdian gaurded by an alien who lives underground.
A single question may he ask,
get it wrong, you must turn back.
Turn back, don't take another whack,
Or you might become the Gaurdian's gaurdian's snack."*

Chapter 38: Ava

Chapter 37: Ava

"Named after the Greek god of the sun,
Gaurdians of all sort mustn't be won.
Under a man-made crossing may he be found
Gaurdian gaurded by an alien who lives underground.
A single question may he ask,
get it wrong, you must turn back.
Turn back, don't take another whack,
or you might become the Gaurdian's gaurdian's snack.

Something told me that that wasn't good. I had a feeling of what the poem meant, but it kind of scared me. This stuff was only in the fairytales I read as a little girl, that's what I thought. There wasn't any possible way... And besides, we didn't make anything like this in our world. As far as I knew. OF course, the towl had obviously changed a lot without out noticing, a bunch of other stuff must have happened as well..

"So, the Greek god of the sun was Apollo," Ethan proudly concluded, even though I was the one that had come up with that. "So that's the next Gaurdian we have to save. 'Gaurdians of all sort mustn't be won'... I think that was just a warning not to let anyone get them. But obviously they didn't count on us coming. So I'm pretty sure we can ignore that line. And 'an alien'. Well we didn't make any aliens - but we're sure that some type of monster must have formed, so that's the thing blocking Apollo."

I watched Zoey. You could see the wheels in her head turning, trying to put the pieces together. "'A man-made crossing'... A bridge...?It seemed too easy. It's too easy." She met my eyes, and I knew that we both knew what was going on.

"It's the classic fairytale isn't it?" Elidi laughed, also catching on. The guys, however, remained clueless.

"It's a troll-"

"-under the bridge-"

"-that is going to give a riddle-"

"-to let us pass-"

"-or in this case-"

"-get the Gaurdian."

"Now the question is... What bridge?" Ethan asked, always being the downer. Things were just getting exciting as freaking girl power brought a poem together in understanding, and of course Ethan would always be there to ruin things.

We all looked to Mark. He looked startled. "What are you guys looking at me for? You guys created this world, didn't you? What do I have to do? Why am I in this?"

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Part of me wanted to agree with him - we shouldn't get him involved, it required hurt and it was going to bring difficulties to all of us. But then I remembered what Ravi had told me earlier - we were going to have to include him if we were going to succeed, and even though that might require me getting hurt, well, it was a lot better than dying.

"This is the first time here. You've been here for a long time, your entire life. You've got to know of a bridge where a troll lives, or at least heard stories. We've heard nothing. We need you, Mark. Don't you know something, where the bridge is manmade and there's been stories of a troll underneath it?"

Mark thought. I noticed how he bit his lip when he was deep in thought. I was about to say that was cute, but then I caught myself, when it was already too late. Shoot, I was starting to really like Mark, and yet I knew I couldn't. I was turning into one of those deep cliché storybook girls where she practically has the guy in her hands but she doesn't want him.. and yet she does.

I thought I swore not to be one of those girls when I was little.

What happened to that promise?

Mark kept thinking until he snapped his fingers. "There's a bridge that crosses the river from the mainland to an island. It's a long ways to go, it's basically back the way you came when we first found you, but that's probably the bridge their talking about."

I nodded. "You're sure it's man made?"

Mark nodded. "I'm pretty sure - the story goes something about there being awesome riches on the island or something, so they had to build a bridge to get to it... But there's one part that might not fit. The underground part. If it's underground then it can't be over a river because that's not really underground. But I can't really think of any other bridge that it'd be."

I looked at Ravi and he nodded in agreement. Suddenly I heard his voice in my head - I told you we were going to need him.

I rolled my eyes and pretended I hadn't heard him, though I'm certain he knew anyway. "That's going to have to do. We should get a move on today though, even if it is like six. Just pack up everything we came here with and we should get a move on." Everyone agreed and ran off to get their stuff.

Grabbing my stuff in my room, I made sure I had everything, though there wasn't really anything to check for anymore. "Hey." Startled I turned around and saw Mark waving with an apologetic and sheepish grin on his face. He was holding something behind his back, but he was hiding it well enough that I couldn't see it. "Sorry I scared you. I just had to ask you something."

I turned my back on him and mumbled a "what."

"Am I welcome to come with you?"

Shoot.

I froze, and turned around and faced him again. He was looking down, scuffling his foot along the floor. "What?"

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"Can I come with you guys?" He asked again, probably a little louder. Or maybe that was just my nerves talking.

I didn't answer immediately. This is what Ravi had warned me about, making me think that the kid was able to see into the future too. But I don't think this is what he ment in particular, I think what he said was more of just a general thought.

We were going to need Mark, based on what Ravi had said. He had already proved himsel trustworthy, by killing the family that had tekhn him in, along with his best friend. He was nice and cool, which is what I liked about him. He was smart, and he knew the area, meaning he would be lots of help throughout the trip. But... How long would we have to have him? There was no way he was going to be able to accompany us the entire trip, it was too dangerous, and so far he hadn't proved himself as a swordsman or anything of that sort.

And yet, we knew that we needed him.

I hesitated, thinking if I could possibly get aroud this, when I decided I couldn't. "Yeah. Sure." I sighed. "Get stuff packed dude. You're gonna need some stuff, it's going to be a long trip."

Chapter 39: Ethan

Chapter 38: Ethan

We were ready to go within a few minutes.

Somewhere along the way, it was decided that Mark was going to be allowed to come, which was perfectly fine with me and seemingly everyone else - except Ava, who seemed reluctantly keeping her space between herself and Mark. He decided that he'd just close the inn for the time being - barely anyone stayed here anyway, no one would come by asking for him to give them a room anyway.

"We should take the shortcut that led us first here," Zoey reminded, concluding that Mark would be the leader for the first few hours. Ava seemed to only reluctantly follow - usually she was somewhat walking ahead of the group - this time she was walking slowly behind, taking her time to kick every single little pebble out of her way before continuing on the path.

I slowed myself so that I was walking behind with her, and Elidi, Zoey, Mark, and Ravi were all walking ahead of us. "What's up with you and Mark?" I asked, probably just then fulfilling the stereotypical nosy big brother type thing, but hey - they're right, big brothers can't help not helping their little sisters sometimes, alright?

Ava looked up startled as if she hadn't known that I was there. "Nothing! What are you talking about Ethan? Stop being weird." She teased, and she started to walk faster as if nothing were going on.

But of course, also being a big brother, I could let it just like that - I would just have to save my nosiness for later, wouldn't I?

I caught up with Ravi as Ava trailed yet again back. "So Ravi," I started, ready to ask him a few questions, "what's your take on the rebellion and all?"

"It's a complete threat, obviously. But we're not going to be able to get past it by just talking about it, we're going to have to find all the Guardians. And there's a problem too, because because of the traumatic experience for all Guardians, I don't think any of us completely remember who every single Guardian is."

Elidi, hearing us talk, nodded in agreement. "I had completely forgotten Ravi as a Guardian until his name was mentioned. And I had no idea who the heck Apollo was until you mentioned his name."

Ravi gestured towards Elidi, for she was just proving his point. "She what I mean? I don't know just how much help us Guardians will be to you, but if you could help all us escape from our captors then that'd be magnificent. Obviously, of course, no one likes being held captive."

"Yeah, I think I remember Apo- po- po-" Elidi sneezed and sighed. "I hate the outdoors sometimes...." She muttered.

Zoey laughed. "I feel you there sister!" An kept walking, as if she hadn't said anything.

Ravi clapped his hands. "Oh! Oh! Oh!" We all stared at him till he realized we were giving him silent permission to say whatever was on his mind. "We used to call Apollo Po, remember that Elidi? That's what we were missing. See what I mean, we didn't even remember his nickname much less his name until we stuttered upon it!" Ravi exclaimed, and I laughed.

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"Okay, okay, I'm not doubting you there. What we really need to focus on is what we think that this troll or whatever kind of creature is going to ask us once we get to this bridge."

"We'll probably have the night to sleep on it," reasoned Mark, moving a large tree branch out of the path, "it's already pretty late and the trip is going to take us a while to get to the bridge. It's on the other edge of the forest - we might have some nasty encounters on the way there, in fact, you never know what the heck is in the forest."

"Brilliant." I said sarcastically. Okay, so maybe I wasn't the brightest person around. But still, it's not like we really needed anything getting in our way - the sooner we got this quest thing done, the better - the less chance of Zoey, Ava and I evaporating and ceasing to exist.

That was a factor that I'm pretty sure most of us had forgotten about. If we failed, then we failed as people, and we died. There wasn't any room for mistakes. There wasn't a Plan B, where if this world died Zoey, Ava, and I could make a new one. There wasn't a plan like that - it was either we succeeded or not, and if we didn't then we died. I'm pretty sure that everyone had forgotten that, or it sure seemed like it. But I haven't.

I couldn't help thinking about Mom and Dad, and how if we died they would never know what happened to their kids. That was the point in leaving Zoey out of this - if something happened to me and Ava, well, Mom and Dad would still have Zoey so they wouldn't be completely alone with each other. Sure they might be able to have other kids, but come on, I don't want to sound completely self centered here, but if we died they couldn't ever have kids exactly like us. And they had already devoted their lives to us - if we died, that devotion would have been for nothing.

What's more, they'll probably plan a funeral... With three empty caskets. Now that would be extremely depressing, wouldn't it?

I shook the thought out of my head. We couldn't have thoughts like that, not now. We needed to focus on getting Apollo (or Po, apparently), and after that if the sun started to set more rapidly then we could worry. But for now, it was time to focus.

I was so indulged in all my stupid thoughts that I hadn't even looked where I was going - of course I tripped over the very log that Mark had earlier moved. Of course.

Ravi helped me up, handing back, even further than Ava was. "Thanks," I muttered, dusting off my pants - yeah okay, even I didn't like a bunch of dirt on them, alright?"

Ravi laughed. "It's alright. And by the way, I haven't forgotten. You're not the only one that remembers. And neither have the others, they're all terribly worried. WE're all trying our hardest. But you're right, you need to focus. We all do." He smiled and ran up to catch up with Elidi and Zoey, who were laughing as if they had been the best of friends.

Boy I missed times like that, when I could talk to friends and pretend I didn't have a care in the world, when really, I was worrying like hell on the inside.

Chapter 40: Zoey

Chapter 39: Zoey

We weren't able to get quite that far before it got completely dark and we all had to hit the sack. We decided that it would be safest if we stayed near the path instead of trailing off completely into the forest to sleep, so naturally we went about ten yards from the path and set up a little camp. We made a fire so that we could eat really quick, and Mark and Ethan worked together to stomp it out afterwards so that no one would be able to see the smoke - at most, they would only find ashes, and by that time, we would be long gone in case someone came along that wasn't really on our side.

Everyone agreed that we should get up slightly early so that we could get a move on and find this stupid bridge. Thus, everyone got out their sleeping bags and only used them as a pillow, not even bothering to unroll them at all. I did the same, and soon enough, basically as soon as my head hit the pillow (yeah okay sleeping bag, whatever) I was asleep.

It was a dark room, those creepy rooms where you could barely see anything and yet you could see just enough - but usually whatever you saw you didn't want to see, making it even more terrible. Shadows lurked around the walls, though you couldn't see the people. And even then, the only thing that didn't seem to be a spirit was the chair sitting in front of a very stereotypical fireplace, with the shadow the only way of noticing that sure enough, someone was sitting there.

"Mr. D! Mr. D!" Someone was yelling, though it seemed to be one of the shadows that was speaking. "Terrible, terrible, horrific, horrific news!" The shadow exclaimed, its shadow ending up right next to the one in the chair, the so called Mr. D.

"Dagmar. The news. Out with it already!" Mr. D commanded, getting annoyed - of course, that didn't really seem like such a big surprise, it seemed as though Mr. D was always annoyed with anything and everything.

"Master, forgive me for being the one that must deliver the news to you, but no one else was available and I was most eager to see you again, thus I volunteered and here I am delivering this terrible, terrible, horrific, horrific -"

"DAGMAR! Don't make me turn on the lights, extinguishing you! Even the light hurts my eyes, but if that's what makes you shut up, then I'm willing to flick on the lights! This news! Tell me! Now!"

The shadow curled up in shyness and spoke rather fast. "Two of the Guardians have been freed by the Creators, who have entered this world, and they're on their way to Guardian Apollo to attempt to save him. The Guardian's guardians have been diminished, killed, their lives live no more - they are merely shadows and spirits, like myself. They're succeeding in their little pathetic quest, Master!" Dagmar shivered in fright, but Mr. D merely banged his fist loudly on the arm rest of his chair.

"Dammit! They will free all the Guardians soon enough before the sun is pulled down if we don't do something quickly. Dagmar - you must send more shadows, including yourself, to the defenses. Stop the Creators from succeeding completely in their quest! Don't get caught."

Dagmar nodded in agreement, though even for a shadow he was obviously scared to death. "M-M-Master.. There's more..."

"Out with it, no more of my time shall be wasted."

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"One of them.. They're here... A Creator... I sense their presence."

Mr. D laughed. "Don't think I don't know that. It's simply Creator Zoey, it's fine. Creator Zoey, you wish to have a glimpse of your future? Be my guest."

The image rippled, and I saw a familiar image of Ava, Ethan and I running down a hill with some kind of monster following us. I remembered how I had last seen it - I had made it to a bow and arrow and shot the monster, killing it. I was expectin that, I wasn't expecting the image Mr. D had given me.

INstead of me running to get the arrow, I threw my knife at Ethan and Ava, killing them both, so that I could get away and the monster ate them. As the monster devoured my siblings, I was able to run away and find Elidi, Mark, and Ravi, and together we ran as fast as we could - until we fell into a river. Then the water level started rising, rising, and for some magical reason the water wasn't draining out of the river like it should as if it overflowed - instead it kept bilding, until an invisible force pushd all us underwater and kept us there - drowning us all.

"Enjoy your future." Laughed Mr. D, his laugh echoing in my head until I woke up.

Chapter 41: Ava

Chapter 40: Ava

We all got up earlier than we regularly would have. Maybe that was because we knew that we had too, or maybe that was because we had reminded ourselves too the evening before. When I got up, I packed away all my stuff - which was practically just putting the sleeping bag into my bag after dusting it off - and ate a pear for breakfast. Everyone else got up gradually as well, one at a time, and did the same, varying in the types of fruits.

When everyone was finally up, we started to let Mark take the lead again, leading us to the trail with the bridge and the mythical type creature thing that was guarding the Guardian Apollo - or Po, as the other Guardians seemed to call him. Mark leading only semi bothered me. Yeah okay it was quite a pain at times, the fact that I had to follow hiim around everywhere, or at least for the given amount of time.

He seemed to know where he was going for the most part, telling everyone that the next few steps of the path were rather tricky, either really steep going downwards or just a tricky turn. In our group of now six, there were mini groups: Zoey, Elidi, and Ravi, who were telling each other various jokes and making each other laugh like heck, and Mark and Ethan who were at the front of the line, making me even more upset. Not only was I a loner at the back of the group, but I had to watch my brother be all buddy buddy with the guy that I found extremely annoying.

I trailed along side Zoey, who didn't pay me any attention whatsoever - she merely kept telling weird jokes that I did not understand to Elidi and Ravi, who somehow, maybe it was just kid logic or something, understood it.

Meanwhile, I was just kicking a rock around the legit path.

Zoey groaned. "How much longer do we have to go, Mark?" She complained, and Mark laughed.

"I don't think it's that much farther, maybe... Five miles at the most if you guys are up for that. And if you're not, well too bad, we're not going to give piggy back rides anytime soon."

Zoey moaned, along with Elidi and Ravi joining in with her for added effect. "That's so far...! I thought you knew a bunch of shortcuts and stuff...!"

Mark laughed and turned around, about to answer (taht he didn't have any shortcuts and the moment, I was sure), when then his eyes widened. "Nobody. Move." He advised, and we all froze. "Turn around very, very, very slowly. Or not. But turning around might give you an idea of what we're up against, and maybe it might motivate you guys to run faster, just maybe."

One by one they all turned around in front of me, and finally I had to turn up the nerve to turn around. So slowly, I turned around - bracing myself for what I was about to see.

Who was standing in front of us was a giant morpher monster - like a chicken of some sorts. It was just a giant chicken that had a bunch of scales like a gross crocodile. But then it also had those beady bird's eyes that seemed to be eyeing us and yet it was as if we were completely invisible.

Yeah, okay, it made me want to run really fast.

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"There should be a slope a couple feet away. If we can all back away and get down that slope I don't think that thing would notice if we made a break for it."

We all nodded slowly, and we all started to back away. Of course, Ethan, however, just had to be the dork that he was and fall down the slope that everyone was talking about. "Ethan!" Zoey yelled, realizing her mistake just after she had called out.

The chicken thing went beserk. It started pecking everywhere, though it seemed as if it had no idea where we were. We all made a break for it. We made it down the hill, only to come to a fork in the road. "Right!" Mark yelled, though Ethan and Zoey had thought he had said right, and I followed them, calling out to them to go back and go the other way - but of course, they kept running, screaming their heads off.

I surpassed Zoey, and caught up to Ethan, trying to tell hiim to turn back - but the chicken was right behind us, chasing after us instead of the others. I looked behind us as we climbed up a steep hill, and my eyes widened. It was right behind us, so naturally I jumped over the peak of the hill and ended up tumbling down. Ethan rolled afer me, and we both kept running until we realized Zoey wasn't following.

"Hurry! It's going to catch you!" I warned, Ethan yelling the same thing. We watched in horror as Zoey looked behind herself, wasting valuable time. She seemed to try to get a knife from her backpack, only to realize that the backpack wasn't there - I remembered seeing Elidi holdin Zoey's backpack for her for a while, until Mark had warned us about this giant chicken monster.

I wanted to help Zoey, and I'm sure Ethan did too, we just weren't sure what to do. Zoey was going to run for it, so I prepared to do the same, and she did start to run - but not in the direction I had hoped. Instead she ran towards another tree, and out of seeminly no where she pulled out a golden bow and arrow. She armed herself and prepared herself to shoot - but it seemed as though se were waiting too long, making me worry too much. "ZOEY! SHOOT IT ALREADY!" I yelled, though she didn't seem to hear me - instead, she waited till the chicken was literally right in her face - and then she shot the arrow, killing the chicken.

She stared at it in disbelief, not thinking she had killed it. Finally, after about two minutse of staring, she just spat at it and walked over to us. "Hey guys guess what." She muttered, slightly laughing, "I found a bow and arrow!"

Chapter 42: Ethan

Chapter 41: Ethan

"Dude, you just literally took out that giant chicken headed thing and you're excited about the bow and arrow that you found? Seriously? Only you would be excited about that." I laughed, dusting my butt off from sliding down that hill.

Zoey shrugged. "Now if I can make my own like endless supply of arrows or something then I don't have to use my knife, meaning more defense for you guys! You guys should be happy too." She stuck the bow into her backpack being extremely careful, making sure that if she needed to reach for it at a moment's notice she would be able to reach it. She slung the quiver of arrows over her shoulder and smiled like she hadn't done anything.

Ava and I kicked the chicken thing's carcass away from us, disgusting by it. Come on, why wouldn't be? That thing was pretty dang gross if you ask me. Then we walked back up to the path where we had gotten separated from Mark, Elidi, and Ravi, only we didn't know how far they had gone - we had to guess and check out way on the path now, or at east until we found the other three.

"Great," Ava sighed, now clearly annoyed after an hour of walking with just the three of us, "just what we need, to be lost. Great. Just great."

"Like you care," Zoey snickered, rolling her eyes, "I thought that you didn't want to be anywhere near Mark anymore. Or at least that 's the impression you were setting up for yourself."

Ava seemed to try to ignore the comment, but I was with Zoey on this. What was with her anyway, what did she have against Mark? "Yeah dude you seem to seriously hate him, what's up with that?!" I asked.

She coughed, like she was going to try to get out of the question, but realized that we probably weren't going to let her get out of it. "Fine. I just don't know if I actually trust him or not okay? Cause I mean like. I kind of like him, and yeah he's probably going to be a real help in getting all the Gaurdians back and stopping the entire rebellion.. But I just don't know, something seems off about him. I don't know. Maybe that's just my... Stupid girl hormones talking or something. I just don't feel comfortable around him, alright?"

No one really wanted to reply to her after that - things were too awkward for that.

We kept walking, guessing on the tricky turns and stuff and almost dying on the steep slopes, until finally we saw Elidi and Ravi slumped up against a tree. Mark wasn't anywhere in sight, but I didn't even notice that at the time - it looked as though Elidi and Ravi were dead, until we ran up to them and shook them till they woke up.

"Guys, where's Mark?" Ava asked urgently, probably more urgent than she meant to sound.

Ravi stretched and shrugged. "We don't know exactly... We got to the other fork in the road you should've passed like ten minutes ago and he said to go down the right one and wait for him while he went down the other path."

"He just ditched you like that?" Ava asked, eyeing me.

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"He said he was going to find you three because the monster had chosen to follow you guys instead... So we've been waiting here forever... But now here you guys are, and Mark... We don't know where he is anymore."

Zoey shook her head. "Well, we can't wait for him forever. We'll wait an hour at most, but after that we've got to keep moving. The sun isn't going to stay up much longer, and we've got five more Guardians to save - we really need to get a move on to this bridge."

"He told us the path and some of the things that we should be aware of, but he also said to wait for him just in case he found you guys in time that he could get back before something happened to us or something, but that's basically it." Ravi said, frowning slightly. He probably knew that things were about to get much more complicated without Mark in the lead.

We all agreed on waiting an hour at most for Mark, so we all slumped against various trees waiting for him. Seemingly exactly on the dot of an hour, Ava jumped up from where she was sitting and picked up all her stuff. "Okay, we've waited an hour - I knew it, this guy was just going to ditch us, and now we're going to leave without him because frankly we have no other choice. Come on, let's go already."

Nobody wanting to leave Mark behind, but nobody really wanted to wait any longer either. Thus, we all got up, dusted ourselves off, and picked off our stuff and started to get back on the path, continuing on our way to the bridge with Po, who was to be guarded by some kind of mystical creature - this time, without Mark.

Chapter 43: Zoey

Chapter 42: Zoey

I didn't really want to leave Mark behind at all - but I knew I was right, we had to get a move on, the sun wasn't going to stay up for much longer, and yet we only had saved two Gaurdians out of the seven. We all picked up all our stuff and kept walking on the path that Mark was supposed to be leading us on for a good two hours or so.

We all traveled as a true group now that Mark was gone, instead of the groups in groups type of things that we were doing when Mark was here. I don't kow what made us change our minds about traveling, maybe it was the fact hat yeah, in fact there are other things besides the rebellion people tha would more than love to eat us. So naturally we travel in a pack as opposed to more spaced out.

Elidi and Ravi were somewhat leading, telling us to go this way and that, based off of what they seemed to remember Mark telling them. Ava didn't look too happy about Mark being gone, but I knew that she wasn't too happy if he here anyway. Personally, I didn't even understand Ava's situation with Mark - I just knew that it was probably going to get a lot more annoying from here on out.

I showed Elidi and Ravi the bow and arrow I had found - I still hadn't been able to get a good look at them, noticing every detail, but all I knew was that they were perfect for me. Though they were golden and pretty high end, it looked as though you could just make one of these - I could definitely make an arrow or two later, if we ever got the time at night while the others slept.

I was about to share my ideas of how I would make the new arrows when Elidi stopped me, starting to walk a lot more slowly. "I think Mark said that there was going to be a really steep part of the path around here, so guys be careful..." Elidi warned, looking around nervously.

Sure enough, about ten yards away from her warning, was an extremely steep slope - only from there on, the path seemed to become a lot more visible, along with a lot more level. Nobody seemed to want to go down - it was literally rock climbing down a wall that seemed about ten feet high. Ethan and Ava were debating whether or not they should just wait till morning to handle rock climbing, but it was four. We would lose to much time if we just camped out here.

I shouldered my bag and sighed. "Come on guys, we don't have time for waiting. Like I said before, the sun isn't going to stay up much longer - we need to cover as much ground as we can everyday. And that requires big jumps and little jumps - or in this case, long climbs."

I made my way to the front of the group and threw my stuff down there, so I'd have free hands cautiously stepped on the first rock. I made sure i was stable, then lowered myself down more. The rocks edged out of the wall seemed pretty secure, though there were some that weren't. I marked those by pushing them down at an awkward angle for the others who were going to come down next. "Careful down the left side, most of the rocks aren't stable there - you're going to have to try and use some, but the right seems a lot safer." I advised, and kept making my way down.

Some of the rocks were pretty sharp, making me cut myself when climbing down. Most of the rocks were edged out of the wall at a decent and handy angle, but some that were necessary to get down were just little stones in the wall that you were going to have to fingernail the dirt to grab hold of.

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Eventually I finally made my way down with minimum amount of scrapes, then signalled the others to climb down one a time. I watched Ethan climb down carefully, digging out the stones that weren't stable for sake of the others, tossing them down - almost hitting me whiel he was at it. "Hey! Careful!" I yelled, and he snickered.

"Sorry," He muttered, as he jumped down to the ground. Elidi came next, who Ethan was able to simply lift off of the wall as she came within five feet of the ground, and Ethan did the same for Ravi.

The only one left was Ava.

"Come on, Ava! It's easy, all you do is just grab hold of the rocks and climb!" Ethan comforted. The tone of his voice made me remember why this was going to be rather hard for Ava. Ethan had told me that when she was little she had tried to rock climb, and she fell when she was twenty feet in the air and broke her arm and leg.

It was a dramatic experience, and I barely remembered the story, as I wasn't even born when it happened, but I'm sure that Ava remembered that moment perfectly, how she supposedly spent such a long time in the hospital she cried when she left, clinging to the bed.

"Come on, you can do it! It's not that hard!" I yelled along side Ethan, trying to get Ava to take the first step down the wall.

She shook her head, and backed away from the edge of the cliff, making things even more difficult, since we couldn't see what she was doing. "Ava," I called, waiting for her to come out of her 'hiding', "You can do it. Just take the first like three steps and you'll be on your way. If you fall we're all down here to catch you, nothing's going to happen to you, come on down." I coaxed, though I didn't see her trying to climb down at all.

"Just.. Just give me a second okay? Can you guys look away or something?" She yelled down, and we all looked extremely perplexed.

Ethan laughed. "Look away? Why, what the heck, are you going to come down naked or something?" He laughed more, until Ava threw a rock at him from above, hitting his head. "Ouch. Okay. Fine. Everyone look away I guess." He sighed, and we all turned our backs on the wall. "Okay, we're not looking, you can come down now!" He yelled, and we heard scuffling along the wall, followed by a loud thud.

"Okay, let's keep moving." She muttered, and we all turned around to see a heaving Ava brushing all the dirt off of her shirt, though I couldn't see anything.

"How did you get down so fast?" Ravi asked, extremely perplexed.

"I jumped." Ava replied, shouldering her bag and sniffing. "Okay, let's keep going. Like Zoey said, the sun's not going to stay up forever. We do not have all the time we need, we really need to get moving." She smiled, and we all started walking yet again - though everyone except for Ava was either extremely confused or impressed; and yet it was also probably both.

Chapter 44: Ava

Chapter 43: Ava

I always hated rock climbing.

I fell twenty feet down the first time I had tried it, something went wrong with the harness and everything so I fell like a brick all the way down to the ground, breaking an arm and leg.

It hurt like crap.

I thought I would never have to rock climb again, but of course, we had to encounter that huge wall thing. I didn't want to risk climbing it, though now that I really truly think about it that probably would have been the safer thing to do. But instead I climbed down about a foot of the wall and then jumped the rest. I landed on my hands and knees, scraping myself just enough for me to bleed a bit, but nothing too severe - the main point was that no part of me was broken.

I know I had just left everyone pretty confused, but we didn't have time to go into detail. We had to keep walking. "Elidi, Ravi, how much father did Mark say we had to go?" I asked, wanting to be able to reach the bridge already.

"I think he said something about five more miles, give or take a few." She replied, whacking various parts of nature with a giant walking stick she had found a little bit earlier.

"Sounds good, we just might be able to make it within a mile of that place by the time it gets dark - as long as we still see the path we should be fine." Zoey reasoned, and we continued to walk for a bit more.

Because of our luck, it got dark after we had traveled about three miles - about two miles off of our destination, 'give or take a few'. We went off of the trail a bit and got ready for bed - we figured we could sleep in slightly, who knew, maybe Mark would catch up after all and we would be a group of six again.

Not that I really cared if Mark joined up with us again, I mean, after he kind of ditched Elidi and Ravi - the Guardians - all alone like that just to find us made me even more skeptical, like it could have very well been a very well thought out trap.

I decided to try and not think about Mark the entire rest of the night. Until I was forced to, that's what it would be. I wouldn't think about him unless I absolutely had to.

Now the problem was whether or not the situation was absolutely necessary or not.

Everyone fell asleep one at a time - I could tell, the snores got louder the more people added to them. I was asleep last, but eventually I woke up again - I couldn't sleep. The sun was almost down again. I could feel it this time, but I didn't have a single dream, making me even more scared.

Luckily, I wasn't the only one awake so I didn't have to fret alone. Zoey was up, cuddled up, sitting in a ball and looking up at the sky. "Hey," I whispered, so no one could hear us, "you couldn't sleep either, could you?"

Zoey shook her head. "The sun set." She sighed, not even looking at me - she just continued to stare at the stars above. "The Sun sets daily, and yet we're the only ones who know that one day, maybe, just maybe, it's going to set and never come back up."

Chapter 44: Ava

The Day The Sun Rose In The World That Never Existed

I sat right next to her on her sleeping bag and stared up along with her. "Don't think like that."

"But you know it's true, right? If we fail, the sun's never going to rise, this world is going to die, and so will we?"

I nodded, but I was half hoping that it was too dark for Zoey to see that I actually did agree. "It's beautiful though isn't it." I commented, hoping to get a bit off subject.

"I suppose. I just wish it would last. Why can't we have night skies like this in our world, there are so many more stars...." Zoey sighed, and lied down a bit, showing she was starting to relax.

"It's the exact same sky as our world - but all the city lights from where we live take awesome the sight of some of the stars. If you want to see a real starry night, you've got to go to the desert or something and look up at night - you can more stars than you're ever going to see in your life." Even I kind of wanted to do that, and maybe one day I would.

Zoey grunted in return, and there was silence for a few minutes, only our breath. Suddenly, Zoey whispered almost exactly in my ear, "Ava, I had a dream the other night."

I looked at her. "About what?"

"I saw... Well I didn't actually see him, but I saw Mr. D."

"The rebellion leader dude?"

"Yeah. Some kind of creature named... Dagmar I think it was warned him about us and how we were going around saving al the Gaurdians."

"What'd he do?"

"He said to send out more.... somethings to gaurd more of the Gaurdians."

"Do you remember what those 'somethings' were?"

"I think.. I think... I think they were shadows. That's what Dagmar was. A shadow."

I thought. Shadows? Half of me wanted to say that no, there was no such thing as a shadow attacking us, the was ridiculous. But the other half of me told me that that wasn't at all rediculous - in fact, it was probably the most reasonable thing to do. "So they're coming after us?"

"I think they're just going to gaurd the Gaurdians. Extra protection."

I huffed. "Great. How do we get rid of them?"

Zoey thought. "I think Mr. D said something about light getting rid of it, which doesn't make sense if you really think about it, cause you know. Shadows. Light. Those go together. Dark and shadows. Not.. Not really."

"All you have to do is shine a light on them?"

"I think so."

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"They might.... Hm... There are some flaws in that. They could easily win if they do what I'm thinking... But I think we'll be fine. We just have to be sure to get to the ridge and get rid of the main gaurdian so we don't have to worry about the shadow gaurdians so we can get to the other Gaurdian."

"Those are a lot of 'gaurdians!'" Zoey laughed, and I playfully punched her.

"Whatever. Did you want me to tell the others about this?"

"I'll get to it."

I nodded, though I wasn't even sure if Zoey could see me, it wa extremely dark. "Good. Okay, well I think we should both get to bed now if we're going to hit the bridge tomorrow."

"Okay. Oh, and Ava?"

"Yeah?"

"Mark's not all that bad, you know that right?"

The comment caught me off gaurd. "I guess." I said, not really wanting to give yet another straightfoward answer - better be vague than exact when it comes to this kind of situation in my opinion. Then I remembered to ask soething that I had nearly forgotten about. "Zoey, what do you think of Ravi? Not like... Like like kind of way. Just... I haven't really been able to completely talk to him, and neither has Ethan, to be honest. But I know that you guys do actually talk, what's he like?"

"He's funny. And he's serious. But I'm pretty sure he wants to get the Gaurdians safe more than any of us - he seems pretty serious about that part." Zoey replied, after thinking about it for a few seconds.

I nodded, and started to move back towards my sleeping bag again. "Okay. Goodnight, Zoey. Get some rest, okay?" I didn't even wait for an answer - I snuggled up inside my sleeping bag and fell asleep almost instantly - and this time I slept sound through the night.

Chapter 45: Ethan

Chapter 44: Ethan

I must admit, it was unusually nice to sleep in even a minute. Of course, Ava though, of course had to say that we had slept in too much, thus making us rush through bathroom breaks that we usually had in the morning, skip breakfast, and head back onto the trail towards the bridge.

We had nearly forgotten what direction we had come from and which direction we were supposed to go in. When we did remember, Zoey took the map out of her backpack just to be sure. The bow and arrows trailed along with her - partially dragging on the floor, but not really. She was the only one that really had to carry extra baggage, except for the extra bag of food.

We had lost a good amount of food bags from the great chicken run, but luckily everyone's stomachs seemed to have adjusted to the lack of food each day - no one seemed to complain that much, except for Zoey that first day we had spent in Britannica.

Elidi and Ravi usually took turns carrying the food bag, since they didn't want to act like brats who didn't have to carry anything - thus they had offered, and of course we had accepted. It was Ravi's turn to hold the bag, and at the time I was walking next to him and Ava. We were dodging by, and it seemed as though he were struggling with the bag. My bag that I was carrying was relatively light - maybe switch them?

"Here, switch." I offered, and Ravi smiled at me and took the bag with all my stuff me and I took the bag of food from him, grabbing myself an apple. It was a lot heavier, that was for sure, but I didn't really mind - as long as Ravi's job was easier.

"You have indeed made my job a bit easier, thank you Creator Ethan." Ravi said, and I snapped my head towards him.

This kid could read minds? Seriously? Go figure, everyone seemed to have an awesome talent except for me. The only thing I had was being a beast at swordsmanship, but frankly that just showed how much of a no lifer I was when I was younger and spent all my time playing video games and walking around the house with sticks, pretending that they were swords.

"You're a lot more important than you think yourself to be," Ravi said, again reading my mind, "you just don't think the talent is there. You're a Creator, Ethan. You had the imagination to make this place. That's pretty important."

I huffed. "Thanks, but come on. You can read minds. Ava is like... Ava is a Dreamer, and so is Zoey. Zoey is even beast at archery, which is saying something. And I'm sure Elidi has got some hidden power."

"She can persuade people rather easily."

"See. And me... I'm just. Ethan." Luckily Ravi and I were kind of trailing behind everyone, so the other three didn't hear me say that - otherwise I would never be able to live that down, it would erase my entire reputation as being the cocky Ethan that I was.

"You're a Creator!"

"That's not that special, so are Ava and Zoey."

Chapter 45: Ethan

The Day The Sun Rose In The World That Never Existed

"It's extremely special."

I shrugged. "Sure." There was a moment of awkward silence following my pessimism. "So," I said, wanting to get to know Ravi a bit better than just the optimistic person that tries to convince people they're not worthless, "tell me about yourself. Eli chose you as a Guardian. What makes you so special?" I asked, slightly teasing.

"Eli?"

"...The other Guardian?"

"...The other Guardian...." Ravi seemed to have an epiphany, and that's when I remembered that it was hard for Elidi and Ravi to remember any other Guardians unless their name rang the bell - almost literally. "Eli. She... Eli. She picked me.... I forget."

"You really don't remember why you were thought to be qualified for this job?"

Ravi looked at me like I suddenly was talking gibberish. "Being part of the Seven Sun Protectors isn't a job. It's a way of life. And it's certainly an honor." Ravi argued, and I held up my hands in surrender as we decided to let that part go. "She said something about me being the spiritual side of the sun. The spiritual side of everything, which apparently was extremely important." He muttered. I could tell little Ravi was a bit embarrassed.

I clapped him on the back. believe it or not, I was actually, yeah, okay, really impressed. This kid was what, nine, could read minds, and he was a Guardian. Impressive.

I was about to applaud Ravi more so, when Zoey coughed. "Guys," She muttered, examining the map a bit more before looking up at us, "I suggest we get off the path now and get ready for the bridge encounter. Put our stuff in trees or something. We've come within about half a mile of the bridge."

Chapter 46: Zoey

Chapter 45: Zoey

We trailed off of the path for about five minutes, then we tied our stuff up in some trees, only taking a few weapons for ourselves. Ethan had his sword, Ava had a knife, as did Elidi and Ravi, though they almost looked as if they knew exactly what they were going to do with it, as if they had held a dagger of some sorts before.

That thought kind of scared me, to be honest - they were only what, seven and nine?

I had my bow and arrows of course, which I had covered in dirt to prevent it from gleaming too much - just in case we didn't want to spotted. I could always wash the dirt off later - the dirtiness was only a minor setback on showing off my new wonderful bow.

We headed back onto the trail after we made sure that all of our stuff was securly tied into the trees. It took us about ten minutes to see the edge of the river, and another five mintes to travel alongs the banks of that river to find the bridge.

The bridge seemed as though it were the perfect bridge in the movies - just a plain wooden bridge going across at least half a mile of water, like a boardwalk, and yet semingly more peaceful than it ever could be. The river wasn't to noisy, and yet we knew tha if we had to swim across we had a small chance of making it to the other side.

Everyone was extremely confused - it seemed too... abnormal. Elidi circled around the area, now extremely perplexed. "Do we just... cross?" She asked, hesitating to set a foot on the bridge.

I stopped her, pulling her back onto her butt. "No. It can't be that easy. There's supposed to be a Gaurdian nearby.. Asking us.. This doesn't fit the poem! Ava?"

She thought for a moment, then recited the poem.

"Named after the Greek god of the sun,
Gaurdians of all sort mustn't be won.
Under a man-made crossing may he be found
Gaurdian gaurded by an alien who lives underground.
A single question may he ask,
get it wrong, you must turn back.
Turn back, don't take another whack,
or you might become the Gaurdian's gaurdian's snack."

"Thanks," I muttered, thinking more so. "Apollo-"

"Po," Ravi corrected, wanting me to be on friendship terms with all the Gaurdians.

"-Po, should be being held under the bridge. Which means underwater. And the guardian that's guarding the Gaurdian that we want... Is living underground too... meaning... He's probably right below our feet in a cave underwater."

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"Who's going to answer that riddle that the gaurdian might ask us? Something tells me we're only going to be able to let one person answer - but that person is the one that might get eaten if we get it wrong." Ethan reminded, always the one to make things a bit more complicated than they actually needed to be - you know, because we totally needed everyone to worry about geting eaten and all that.

"Ethan, shut up for a minute would you?" Elidi scolded, and Ethan shrank back in defense.

I thought. We needed to get underwater somehow and make it to the cave without being swept away by the current or drowning. We were going to need like oxygen masks or something, if only we could. Something told me that we weren't going to attract anything's attention just by stepping onto the bridge.

Thinking more so, I came to a conclusion. "We need to be able to breathe underwater. We need to find this cave."

Everyone gave me that "dude you're feraking crazy, we're human, we can't breathe underwater' type look, but I ignored it for the most part. I knew I was right - but I didn't know if we would be able too. "Fine, okay, fine, I'll just dive in myself and find it and come back up and tell you guys. I'll be back." I sighed, kicking off my shoes and leaving my bow and arrows on the shore along side with it. I felt the water carefully with my toe, as if expecting a shark to come out of the river and bite my leg off.

Seeing that it's not that cold, I jumped right into the river.

Okay, I was wrong, it was a lot colder than I thought it was. It was freezing, but I adjusted to the coldness, though I knew sadly inside that once I got out of the water it would be even more cold. I popped my head above water and took a deep breathe, not sure if I was facing my family and friends or not.

I remembered when I was little I took swimming lessons, and just as an extra treat they taught us how to open our eyes underwater. At the time I thought that skill was awesome - then I realized that I would most likely never use the skill.

Oh gosh was I glad I ever learned it.

I opened my eyes and looked around underwater. The current made it a bit more difficult to see, but I was able to make out a cave that was a ways down, but not to much down. I knew I wouldn't be able to make it all the way to the cave witht ehr est of the breath that I had, so I went up and got another breath of fresh air and then tried to swim all the way down to the cave.

I almost made it. I knew that I could, but about a yard away from it I stopped and turned back. I couldn't pass. I didn't know why not, but I did know that somehow there was some type of sheild blocking the cave. The only thing that really told me was that we were in the right place.

I swam back up to the surface and climbed back onto the banks of the river. I was right, it was freezing cold, so instead I just lowered myself a bit more into the water, coughing and sputtering a bit. "There's a cave about.... I'm going to say about a thirty second swim to the cave, almost straight down."

Ava immediately started to take off her shoes and her jacket, and stuck her knife in her belt. She also rolled up her jeans, though I have no idea why - it wasn't like they weren't going to get wet. "And you're sure that Po is in that cave?" She asked, before lowering herself into the water. I didn't blame her for asking - I wouldn't want to dive in for an empty cave either.

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I hesitated. "Well to be honest I didn't go in the cave. I couldn't get in. It was protected by some kind of air bubble or something, some kind of enchantment that I couldn't break through. And by the way, does anyone know what the heck we're up against here?"

Everyone shook their heads. "Nope."

"Not at all."

"I haven't got a clue."

I sighed. "Fine, okay, whatever, We're about to find out anyway. So - after you guys take off all your shoes and stuff - who's jumping in, who do we have to pull in, and who's the one that's going to take their own merry time lowering themselves into the water?"

Chapter 47: Ava

Chapter 46: Ava

Ethan went ahead and pulled off his shoes and socks and stuck his sword in his belt and jumped right into the water. Ravi wanted to not get in at all - "I'll wait here!" He had said, - and we ended up pulling him in. Elidi slid into the water a bit faster than me - but at least she still slid in so I wasn't completely alone.

Though everyone was probably really mad at me, I took my 'merry time lowering' myself into the water. It was freezing, I had no idea how Ethan and Zoey just jumped right in. everyone seemed to be waiting for me and only me to get settled into the water, and eventually I just got annoyed and started to splash everyone and go underwater a bunch so I'd get used to the cold.

When I finally did (it did take about five minutes, okay, okay), we all prepared ourselves to dive and swim the thirty second dive to the cave. Thirty seconds didn't seem like much - but I was almost positive that things would be a lot more difficult bonce we were underwater.

"Okay, everyone ready?" Ethan asked, already getting impatient. Though I wasn't sure why, I'm almost positive that he had already peed in the river already, what was his rush?

Everyone nodded. "One," Zoey said, making sure that we all dove at the same time. She grabbed her bow and arrow, probably hesitantly, knowing that the water was probably going to kill the awesomeness of it, along with wiping away al the dirt that she had previously rubbed on it prevent it from glinting in people's eyes.

"Two," Elidi continued, preparing herself.

"Three!" I finished, and we all dove underwater.

We all had a bit of rouble opening our eyes underwater - especially the Gaurdians, so Ethan and I ended up holding eithe rof Elidi's or Ravi's hands to guide hem just in case. Zoey led us towards the cave, guiding us. She stopped about a yard in front of it. Half of me wanted to ask what the heck she was waiting for, we weren't going to be able to hold our breaths forever. But the other half of me knew what as stopping her - this was where that barrier air bubble thing separating the cave from the water was.

We all tried to push through it, but nothing happened. Finally, I felt Zoey take my hand and motion for Ravi to take Elidi's. We were all going to charge the barrier, no matter how slow we were going to go since we were underwater.

We all 'charged' at the air bubble wall, and I'm kind of proud to say we succeeded. We all flew through the wall, we all heard a loud pop, and we were all thrown upon sand. It was dark, humid, and musty, a combination that I doubted anyone really liked.

Everyone was coughing and sputtering until someone had already gotten up and looked around - I couldn't remember what they were looking for, all I knew was that I was wet and I wasn't comfortable. "No," The muttered. "This isn't right."

That made me get up and look around without complaining. Then I realized the frustration.

The cave was empty.

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Empty.

"This isn't right." I repeated.

Everyone else got up one at a time, seeming to catch on at their own paces. Zoey seemed to be the most frustrated - she had been the first one to come down here and she thought she was right - she knew she was right - and yet it appeared as though she had been wrong.

"There's got to be some hidden entrance!" She muttered, picking up her bow and arrow and started banging on the walls.

I thought I saw something move by Zoey the first time she had banged on the wall, but I agreed to myself that it was just my imagination. "Zoey!" I yelled, trying to snap her out of her anger, "Dude, that's not going to help any time soon." I scolded, right after she hit the wall and it rippled.

Everyone stopped and stared. Zoey reached out to the wall more, whispering to herself. "It's like the map, isn't it? IF I touch it.. My hand will go through... And..." She touched the wall this time, but this time it didn't ripple.

This time, what seemed to be the wall attacked her.

Chapter 48: Ethan

Chapter 47: Ethan

The things Zoey said when the wall attacked her is not appropriate.

She was cussing at the thing, which turned out to be some dark leathery looking thing that kept trying to swoop down on her. She had set an arrow on the string of her bow and shot at it, but the arrow only went through the thing.

"Dammit!" She yelled, scrambling away from the thing, back towards us. We all pulled out our weapons - though the enemy looked pretty untouchable, seeing as how we only had knives and a sword.

And by untouchable I didn't mean like it was to powerful to even challenge. I meant it was untouchable as in it didn't even seem as though it were even there.

Zoey looked at all of us, just standing in place with weapons at the ready, while she was scrambling on the floor trying to make the shadow thing retreat -

That was it. That was it was, a shadow.

I hadn't even realized that Elidi and Ravi were slowly backing away from the shadow, probably going to try to find something where they could actually fight this thing. Ava and I stood in place, petrified. Ava was still probably trying to figure out what the thing was still.

"It's a shadow." I muttered to her, just so that she and Zoey could hear me. They both looked up at me once I had said that - they couldn't believe it.

"It can only be destroyed by light." Zoey mumbled, warning us. Stabbing it with knives, slashing it with swords, shooting it with arrows - that wasn't going to work. We were going to need light - real life light, so that it would die.

In this cave, nothing was real life light. It was all weirdly colored, like the color of the reflection of water, if that made any sense at all. It was that kind of light when you were in an aquarium. When the water was lit up, but where you were standing was not, so it didn't actually look like light - it just made it look like you had squiggly lines all over your face.

Zoey was still holding her bow when she rose. The shadow didn't attack us - as if it were waiting for more back up, which is exactly what we didn't want. "We need light." Ava said, whispering, as if if we spoke loudly the thing would get mad and all the sudden start attacking us. "Zoe, your bow... Can you make a bright shine off of it or something?"

Zoey looked down. "There's still dirt on it. I can't. I would but I can't - the water should have washed it all off, but I'm not going to be able to make a glint off of this thing - there's no real light anyway."

We were all just standing there like a bunch of idiots that didn't have one single clue of what to do. Which we didn't. I just held my sword as if I actually knew what to do with it, when I really didn't - back when we were fighting Junker and all of those people I was just swinging my sword random places and I got lucky whenever I dodged a blow from the enemies.

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I got lucky rather a lot then, didn't I?

I thought we would be standing there forever for sure. I didn't know what would happen if the shadow touched you, and something told me that I really didn't want to find out anyway. Maybe you'd be turned into a shadow too. Maybe you'd be petrified. Maybe you'll get sewn into a cloak of souls once you died and you were worn by the king of shadows. Something of the sort - I just knew that I really didn't want that thing to touch me, but how long could we be able to avoid that?

As far as I knew, shadows didn't sleep. Humans did, get got tired, we'd be defeated eventually - and then one of those terrible things I had mentioned would be in our future.

Yeah, that wasn't too much of an appealing future for me.

Suddenly there was a splash of water and a lot of coughing and sputtering. At first I thought more people had arrived as the shadow's back up. Actually people, too, instead of things that couldn't be killed unless you touched them with natural sunlight. But it wasn't more back up for the shadow - it was more back up for us.

Okay, it wasn't really new back up - it was Elidi and Ravi, but there were dripping wet yet again and coughing. They were holding hands, but not in the way you're thinking - they were holding hands like they were helping each other carry something that we couldn't see.

The shadow's attention was diverted from Ava, Zoey, and I so we ran away to the other side of the cave as we watched Elidi and Ravi start to swing their hands towards the shadow as it advanced slowly. "Now!" One of them had yelled, and they released their hands, releasing something so bright that none of us were able to look - except for Elidi and Ravi, I was sure.

There was a big boom after that. Okay, not so much a boom either. More like a really loud pop. But either way, when we looked back, the shadow wasn't there - all that was there was Elidi and Ravi standing there by the air bubble wall thing, and nearby was a great big ball of light.

"Don't stare at it too long," Elidi mentioned, as Ravi knelt down to scoop up the light. "You'll go blind. It may be an extremely mini sun, but it's still the sun, it can still blind you."

"...If it's still the sun, then how are you guys holding it?" Ava asked, bewildered. She kept looking around the room, still fearing whether or not the shadow was there.

"We're part of the Seven Sun Protectors, remember Ava? We are almost literally part of the sun - holding it, touching it, looking at us, even fighting with it apparently - won't hurt us." Ravi said, stuffing it in a plastic bag that he had plucked from the river outside, showing just how much this place was already polluted. Then he slung it over his back, making him look like a hobo.

"Is it heavy?"

"Not particularly."

"So you can just shine that at the shadows we encounter and they'll disintegrate? And it's not heavy? It's... just... Light?"

Elidi and Ravi nodded. The rest of us shrugged, more or less impressed. "Well alright then." I said, picking up the sword I had dropped when we had turned our backs on the Guardians when they first swung the light out. "We should keep looking for a way into the cave, the actual one where Po is being held. Everyone check the

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walls. But keep the weapons at the ready - that shadow might not have been the only one." I muttered, feeling the walls of the cavern just like Zoey did.

Words cannot express how much I was hoping they didn't ripple like when Zoey touched the one with the shadow.

Chapter 49: Zoey

Chapter 48: Zoey

We all felt around the walls for a long amount of time. We thought we had gotten every single nook and cranny in the cavern when we discovered a little hidden pathway to a brand new cavern - meaning that we got to feel around the place for a long amount of time too!

It wasn't long before we found part of the cave wall that led to an even bigger and darker space of the place, first introduced by a rather long and frightening corridor. We all were readying our weapons - Ava and Elidi with their knives, Ethan with his sword, Ravi with his own knife and his pouch of light, which I was sure was going to come in handy sooner or later. And then there was me, with my knife and my bow and arrows.

I was rather excited to use my equipment on shooting stuff other than something I shouldn't have shot at because it wasn't even worth it or anything morphed like that giant chicken. This time, I was actually going to kill real people with my arrows, if that was what it was going to come down to.

We stopped at the end of the corridor when we knew that someone was there, either watching us or readying themselves for a fight. We knew that this was going to be very difficult - we would all be ready to fight anyway, even if this magical creature or something was 'only going to ask a riddle'. And if that was really what they were just going to do, then we were all going to be ready to offer up the person that will risk their life dying or answering the question right and getting pure bragging rights.

Ethan was at the front of the group at the moment, leading us through the corridor, then holding us all back as he peeked around the corner of the wall.

Me being in the back of the group was eager to see what we were about to face. Then Ethan beckoned for me to crawl up along side him. "What?" I whispered, peeking around the corner of the wall myself.

"I don't know whether or not we should shoot anyone now - cause if we should, then you're the person to do it, you've got the bow and arrows. You're the only one that can shoot people from a distance - except Elidi or Ravi with their light, but I'm pretty sure that only works on shadows, and so far, none of those."

I looked around the corner quietly again to see if I could get another look. The room was huge. It was the same appearance as all the others, especially the first room we had been in. There was that weird aquarium feel to it because there was another air bubble wall type thing on the other side of the room. There were a lot more rocks and boulders on the ground and edging out of the ceiling and walls. There weren't that many people in the room - only a few, and I was almost positive that they weren't people.

One was a little girl sitting on a rock carving something with a knife. I made a mental note that yes, they did indeed have weapons in case we did end up fighting them. Another person was leaning against the opposite wall, chewing on some wheat, which strongly reminded me of Kenny back in town. The other two people were sitting on the ground, seeming to be playing cards, though at the angle we were it was kind of hard to tell.

There was one other person who I knew for a fact wasn't human. She was swimming outside of the air bubble, which I then noticed was a little different than the one we had entered in. This one was an air bubble alright, but it looked as though there were a pond inside the cave so that the person can stay in the water and yet have fresh air at the same time. She kept swimming outside the air bubble, for a long enough time when I was starting to wonder what the heck she was.

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That's when I realized the tail.

That girl, that girl with the too-good-too-be-true flowing brown hair, could hold her breath for a while, all because she could in fact breathe underwater, all because she was a freaking mermaid.

"Guardian guarded by an alien who lives underground." I repeated that line of the poem and made the connection. The mermaid was the Guardian's guardian, she was the one that was going to ask a question, she was the one that would eat one of us if we got that certain question wrong.

And even then, I was betting that girl was a siren too. If it came to it, I was betting that all she needed to do was to sing, and she would have us all under her spell - the bigger the meal for her.

I wasn't going to be able to shoot her. From what I saw, Apollo - Po, whatever - wasn't in this room. We were going to need that mermaid to tell us where he was, unless the other people in this room knew. And somehow I was highly doubting that. And I couldn't shoot the people either - chances were, they were the mermaid's servants, and if she lost a servant, we'd all be screwed.

"I can't shoot anyone." I concluded. "We're just going to all have to walk out and answer the question." I said, slinging my quiver of arrows over my shoulder and held my bow, proud and strong. Ethan told Ravi to pass it on behind them, and everyone soon stood up and tucked all their stuff in their belts, where it was barely visible.

"We can see you...!" We heard someone say in a sing song voice, and we all froze and stiffly walked out of our hiding place. We walked into the open cave, and everyone stopped what they were doing and rose.

That's when we all realized that these 'people' or 'humans' were actually trolls - what we were originally expecting. But not the guardian of Po.

"The light you carry," The mermaid said, swimming into the little pool in the cave, "it's very bright. Any one of us could detect it within a milisecond."

Ravi looked at the bag that carried the light. "Really?"

The mermaid smiled a smile I was immediately jealous of. "Well yes, that and all you people's shoes are wet. They squeak an awful lot."

"Thanks," Ava snorted sarcastically. "Next time we try to sneak up on your people we'll be sure to not wear wet shoes. Though I have no idea how that'll be possible, seeing as how we're in a river?" I figured this mermaid was already getting on Ava's nerves.

The mermaid looked confused. "A river? I thought this was the ocean! Kiki, you said this was the ocean! I've not been swimming in my homeland waters this entire time?"

The troll that appeared to be Kiki shrugged. "I was under the impression that it was the ocean mistress, please forive me for misleading you!" She squeaked, obviously terrified, telling me that this mermaid was going to be a real butt if we messed with her in the slightest.

"it's alright Kiki. Just be sure next time!" The mermaid forgave, and yet shot Kiki a look that said they were having a serious talk later - it even made me want to run. "But we have guests now! Please! Elidi! Ravi! Ethan! Ava! Zoey! Make yourself comfortable. My grotto is always welcoming new people, and I see it led travelers here! But I must ask, what compelled you five to jump into the oce- I mean river?"

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We all hesitated to sit down, but we figured it would be best to get on this mermaid's good side before we started attacking her if we actually did need too. Ethan was going to answer, though something told me that that was going to turn out rather bad - so I answered instead, raising my voice over his. "We were just all so thirsty and filthy - we needed a drink and a bath, so we jumped in, and we saw your cavern entrance, and we were compelled to come forth to you."

The mermaid smiled again, making me even more jealous. "Interesting story. Are you still thirsty? We have plenty of water here." She did some special flip of her tail splashing water before us, and a drop of water landed in front of each of us, somehow turning into a goblet of water. We all sipped from the goblets, and all made that "ahh" sound. The water tasted unbelievably good.

Ava, Elidi and I wiped our mouths at the exact same time. Ava stood up from sitting on the ground and started to speak. "This isn't what we came for -"

"Marina. Call me Marina." The mermaid smiled again, and this time I just wanted to go straight on up to her and punch her in the face.

"-Marina. We came to get the Gaurdian Apollo back. We are willing to let... the consequences proceed if we get whatever question you ask us wrong. But we demand that you ask the question."

I wanted to do a facepalm right then and there and slap everyone in the room - Ava, you shouldn't just say that we're here to oppose you guys and the rebellion. You just don't do that.

Marina made a face. "I'm not on either of your sides on this rebellion, you five know that right? Being under the sea - oh I love that song! Disney always does fabulous jobs - I never really cared to involve myself in all that political stuff up above." We all nodded, but something told me half of us weren't listening. "I'd be happy to give you the Gaurdian, only you do have to answer a question. And I'd be more than happy to tell you other things as well. Of course, there are other requirements."

"The question. Yes. Okay."

Marina laughed. "Eager, I see."

"We don't exactly have all the time in the world."

Marina huffed. "Fine. The question is only part of the deal."

Ethan looked up from drinking his water from that water made golden goblet. "What's the other part?"

Marina smiled at him, making me want to scream, punch her, and then just kill the girl right there and then. "One of you has to stay."

Chapter 50: Ava

Chapter 49: Ava

Elidi yelled. "What? One of us has got to stay with her?" She looked around at all of us, expecting everyone to argue, but no one did - it wasn't that we were willing to stay, it was that, we were all just plain speechless, even the guys.

Marina nodded, the poop head. "That is my deal."

"It isn't much a fair deal, don't you think? I mean, one of us is about to risk their life to answer your stupid question, and then another is going to have to give up their life so that we can know other stuff? That seems barely fair." Ravi reasoned, trying to rake up the courage and talk to this crazy lady - he succeeded, not that it matters, Marina didn't seem to even care about him.

"So! The question! Who will be answering my riddle?" Marina said cheerfully, making me want to puke. This girl was seriously getting on my nerves.

I looked back at everyone, who was nodding and looking at me. Not only was I probably the smartest one here - well, Ethan was older than me, and a lot smarter, not that he used his knowledge - I was probably the best bet. "Are we allowed to comtemplate with my friends and family?"

Marina dunked her head in the pool and looked at me. "To a certain extent."

"Then I will." I said, and Marina smiled knowingly at me, making me a bit nervous - did she forsee that I was going to fail or something? Or was that just her annoyance getting to my head?

Marina applauded. "Wonderful! Then I shall ask you my riddle."

I nodded, taking out a piece of paper so that I could write whatever it was down - I did hate repeatedly asking things.

"I turn polar bears white, and I will make you cry. I make guys have to pee, and girls comb their haird. I make celebrities look stupid and normal people look like celebrities. I turn pancakes brown and make your champagne bubble. If you squeeze me, I'll pop. If you look ta me, you'll pop. Can you guess my riddle?"

i finished writing the riddle down and I studied it long and hard, leaning against the cold rock wall as everyone as well as Marina watched me try and solve this riddle..

I turn polar bears white? That would be ice. But ice doesn't turn pancakes brown, or make normal people look like celebrities, or anything else. It might make guys have to pee... But girls comb their hair? Really? Not really.

What would we look at and have us be popped?

I hadn't even realized that I was muttereing to myself until Elidi and Zoey walked over and patted me on the back, telling me that everything was going to be alright, as if I were some kind of dog stuck in the middle of a lightning storm.

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I looked at the other four of us. "Help me." I sighed, probably about to regret this for the rest of my life but I seriously needed help - if I didn't get help, there probably wouldn't be much of my life for me to regret this.

They all walked over and read the piece of paper of which I had written the riddle.

Naturally, I watched them all as they scratched their head in trying to figure it out.

"Spiders?" Ravi suggested, but I shook my head.

"That doesn't fit anything, Ravi."

"You're not a guy, you don't know what makes us pee." Ethan argued, agreeing with Ravi.

I rolled my eyes. All guys were idiots when it came to riddles.

Elidi kept thinking. She seemed like she was about to get something when she sighed and fell down out of exasperation. "This is impossible!" And she started to bang her head against the wall.

Zoey kept bursting out with random objects in this demension, which wasn't helping, only distracting my train of thought. You'd think someone more mature than Ethan wouldn't do that.

Ethan kept looking at the piece of paper and turning it at different agles, as if that would help. "Ethan, stop it, I need to look at that again." I sighed, holding my hand out asking for the paper.

"Please, you probably already memorized it, just let me see if I can figure this out..."

I begged Zoey to get the paper back from Ethan - it was a win win situation, she stopped annoying me and I'd get the paper back. Well it was win-win for me, anyway.

The answer could easily be time. I mean, time could turn polar bears white... Well actually their fur was actually clear, the color was recieved from the reflection of the ice, but still! It could easily be time. And I guessed time could make girls comb their hair, I mean, after a certain amount of time we've got too... right?

But you can't squeeze time and it won't pop. You can't look at time and be popped.

"I only have one guess for this riddle don't I?" I asked Marina, who nodded as she conitnued to watch us try and figure out her riddle in a struggle - and she was probably enjoying herself at the same time. "Okay, fine then."

Ethan sighed and handed me the paper back. "This is pathetic. I can't answer this, you're on your own."

I took the paper back and read it again. I turn polar bears white, and I will make you cry. I make guys have to pee, and girls comb their hair. I make celebrities look stupid and normal people look like celebrities. I turn pancakes brown and make your champagne bubble. If you squeeze me, I'll pop. If you look ta me, you'll pop. Can you guess my riddle?

This was pathetic. I couldn't answer this!

I thought long and hard about it. Then I read it over again and thought more, just to make sure.

Epiphany.

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It might not be the answer, and yeah okay I only had one shot, but I might as well just take it - the others wouldn't have to be punished. I turned to them. "If I'm wrong, guess time. You guys can do this without me, if I get this wrong - but I'm almost positive that I've got it." They all nodded and hugged me, as if we really were saying goodbye.

I walked up to Marina, and smiled, crumpling up the piece of paper as well. She smiled back at me, making me still want to punch her, even though I knew we could get past her. "Have you made your decision?" She asked innocently, as if she were a first grade teacher with never ending faith in her students.

I nodded sarcastically. "No."

Marina blinked like she didn't understand. "That's my answer. No."

"Are you sure?"

I hesitated. I hated it when people did that, honestly, it was always really cheap when they did. "Yes." I answered. "The answer is no. I cannot answer the riddle you've given me. I can't. So no."

Marina smiled. "The Guardian is yours."

Chapter 51: Ethan

Chapter 50: Ethan

I almost didn't believe it.

It was just too easy.

Answer a question, boom, say no, you get the Gaurdian? Seriously?

I was going to argue, but frankly Marina was just too pretty to argue with, so I decided against it - besides, we got the Gaurdian, there wasn't really much else that we wanted, now was there?

Oh yeah, except that information, except here was also that catch, though I couldn't remember what it was - was it even mentioned, or was I blanking out? It had to be that it just wasn't mentioned, yeah that was it. Marina had said something about a catch. But nothing more.

"Just like that?" Zoey questioned Marina. I wanted to shout out what an idiot she was, questioning this beautiful woman, but I thought better of it - Zoey could beat me up in a heartbeat.

Marina nodded. "Just like that."

Ava shrugged. "So where is he then? Where's Gaurdian Apollo?"

Marina nodded to each of her little troll henchpeople. "Fetch the Gaurdian for these people. Keep his bonds on though - we don't want anything happening that shouldn't, now."

"Like what?" I asked, but she completely ignored me.

Psh, she totally wants me, I could tell.

"So the other information," Marina continued, smiling at us, making me want to go over and do whatever the hell she wanted, "were you interested?"

"What kind of information were we talking about here?" Elidi questioned. That girl was smart for her age - always getting all the facts before getting herself into anything major.

Marina didn't answer. "You all seem to be excellent at riddles; why don't you guess?"

We all thought, but I'm pretty sure we were all thinking the exact same thing anyway. "Where the next Gaurdian is?" Marina nodded. We all looked at each other. The girls looked back at us, the guys, and we were all telling each other by our stares that we were deciding whether or not we actually needed this information. Chances were, we could get it on our own.

But then again, what if we couldn't?

I shrugged at Ravi who shrugged at Elidi who shrugged at Zoey who looked at Ava who rolled her eyes.

We tried to continue to think about the choice, but just then Gaurdian Po came out with shackles around his ankles and wrists. He looked extremely tired, like any second he would collapse and take a nice five year long

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nap, but he couldn't be more than thirteen. He wore shorts like mine, like we would wear them any time we went camping, and an orange tank top with sandals. He looked pretty chill with his blonde floppy hair that he constantly had to flip out of his eyes - only he didn't, I'm sure because he was just too tired - and you'd think he'd also have the blue eyes that usually came with blonde hair. Only he didn't. If you looked closely, couldn't really tell what color they were. It was as if they were morphing from a really bright yellow, kind of like Elidi's, to something similar of Ravi's, and then to a just dark blue. I didn't get it - here I was, very good looking at age eighteen, and I was jealous of a thirteen year old.

"Apollo." Ava gasped, apparently taken aback by his appearance.

Elidi and Ravi smiled and started to tear up. "Po!" They yelled together, and they ran forward to hug their old friend, but they were repelled back by some invisible force, kind of like how we were when it came to the air bubble defense. "Let him go." Elidi commanded, speaking to Marina but looking at Po, as though she would never take her eyes off of him again.

"Ah, but you haven't answered me! Are you interested in this other information I have? Do you know what I offer?"

Ava nodded. Apparently she had just made the decision in her head without consulting the rest of us. "We know what you offer. We thank you for your generosity. But we cannot take this information; we can't have one stay behind. We simply can't. And with that we kindly ask you to let Guardian Apollo go as well as us and we shall be on our way."

Marina laughed and shook her head as she signaled to her stupid trolls to take Apollo back to wherever she had hidden him - from what we saw, there wasn't anywhere she could have kept him, in fact, the trolls walked with Apollo straight through a wall and disappeared. "You children can't go now!" She laughed, like we were the most idiotic people she had ever met in her life.

But something told us that she wasn't kidding one bit.

"What are you talking about?" Ravi nearly screamed, backing away and reaching for his knife he had put in his belt. "We must be on our way!"

"Well, I never specified if you could leave at all once you got the Guardian in the first place. Realistically, getting the information and only leaving one of you behind was the smarter option - much less crowded down here for me and the trolls, thanks. But since you don't want the information you all must stay...!" Marina explained, as if it were the most easiest thing to understand on the planet.

Zoey prepared to shoot an arrow at the mermaid, putting an arrow on the string. "You can't keep us here. You're outnumbered, bring Apollo and your troll back out here and it's six to three and a fish. You're outnumbered."

Marina shrugged and did as Zoey had suggested - she brought Apollo back out, still bonded, as well as her trolls, though they weren't bonded. Though this time they were certainly armed. "I wouldn't say we're quite outnumbered. See, Zoey, you thought I was a siren the first time you saw me, didn't you? Yes, Kiki told me. And well, I am. We may be outnumbered, but you are outmatched, and you're also about to be outnumbered."

"What, you're going to signal more trolls to fly and swim down here and come to your fishy aid?" Elidi retorted, grabbing her knife too. The trolls ran to the back of the room where we had come from, making us have to stand in the middle of the room - we were now trapped.

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Marina laughed and scolded at the same time, which is a pretty amazing and yet terrifying thing if you think about it. "I was thinking more about making the odds a little more even without risking other people's lives."

As soon as Marina opened her mouth, Ava yelled "Cover your ears!" And we all did so, but I could still faintly hear the voice more beautiful than I had ever imagined. It was amazing, that voice. I had to do whatever it told me. Slowly, as if afraid the beautiful voice could hurt me, I uncovered my ears and looked at my family. They were all covering their ears still, except for Ravi, who was doing that same thing as me.

We both walked towards Marina and stood by her side, sword and knife out ready to fight.

I had no idea what I was thinking - I still had my conscience. I knew I didn't want to do this at all, but my body had a mind of its own. Literally, it was almost as if I could feel another brain cloning out of my original one, the copy programmed to follow whatever Marina sang.

Ravi and I were both under Marina's control now.

We were so screwed, we were fighting with a bunch of dwarves.

Trolls.

Whatever.

Chapter 52: Zoey

Chapter 51: Zoey

As soon as I saw that Ethan and Ravi were now under a spell and that we didn't have them on our side anymore I knew we were going to be screwed. I looked at Ava as Marina kept singing, and Elidi lookd just as pained. Then we realized that we still had Apollo, who somehow wasn't affected by the siren's song.

Apollo could fight. A thirteen year old typical sterotypical California looking boy and he couldn't fight? Not possible. We knew that Apollo would be able to fight and help us. We knew that. But he wasn't going to be able to do anything while he remained in those bonds. We had to get him loose of those bonds.

Eventually Marina stopped signing, but that's when everyone on her side started swinging. As soon as Ava, Elidi and I uncovered our eyes the trolls started to swing the various items they carried, varying from nunchucks to just a big mallet. Ethan and Ravi attacked too, slashing and swinging their swords everywhere.

We all ran towards Apollo and tried to undo the metal bonds, except they were locked - they needed to be opened by a key, we weren't going to be ble to break them any other way without breaking Po's hands as well. At the sme time, we were also being repelled by some mysterious force - probably the same force that was keeping Po from being affected by Marina's singing, but now that she had stopped it wouldn't matter if the force field were there or not.

We had to get this thing open, but none of us knew how. Elidi and I kept trying to get the bonds open as Ava decided to go and fend off the trolls, Ethan, and Ravi. I heard her yelling battle cries (which weren't as awesome in person than in the movies, trust me), and a lot of scraping against stone, making me every now and then look at the trouble. There were some times when I would hear Ava scream, and I'd prepare another arrow for a shot hen really wthat was one of her cheesy battle cries.

"We can't open the bonds with this force field on!" Elidi exclaimed, but there obviously wasn't any way for us to 'shut off' the force.

"Maybe we just have to pick the lock or something, here, try a bobby pin or something, here -" I suggested, handing Elidi a bobby pin from my hair when Ava screamed - this time a real one, not a battle cry, I could tell by the urgency.

I turned, and there she was, pinned against a rock by the female troll, making me even more pset. She was being chokd up against the wall, so I did what came to instinct. I took a shot at the troll.

I admit, the shot was probably the worse one I had taken yet - my hands were endlessly shaking and the shot wasn't that clear - Ethan was in my way, the idiot. The arrow stuck in the troll's shouler, but luckily that was enough to make her loosen her grip on Ava, who basically round-house kicked everyone in the face, including Ravi and Ethan. That part made me grimace, but not too much - we just needed to get out of here.

Ava continued to fend off the trolls and the 'bad guys', but something told me she wasn't going to be able to hold them up much longer. I watched her, wanting to help, but knowing I should get Po free first. I still helped though - a troll tried picking up the arrow and sneaking up on Ava and tried to stab her in the back - I threw a knife at him, getting him in the stomach.

Now it was four to four - plus a fish.

The Day The Sun Rose In The World That Never Existed

Elidi as still scrambling, trying to make the bobby pin fit the lock. "It's not going to work!" She muttered, obviously getting rather frustrated. I grunted and looked aaround for a key of some sort, anything that would work. I watched as Marina enjoyed the fight between Ava and the trolls, Ava picking up the arrow I had shot earlier and using it against the trolls herself.

Epiphany.

"Use an arrow." I said, offering one to Elidi. She looked at me like I was crazy.

"An arrow isn't going to fit into the keyhole."

I shook my head. "No, just slash at the bonds. It's got to work. Hold on, I've got an even better idea, but wor on the arrow idea." I ran over and grabbed the bag of light that Ravi hadbeen carrying, only to abandon it when he fell under Marina's spell. It was still full of light - enough to blind everyone in this room, probably. "Soak the arro in this or something and then try to cut the bonds. It's got to work." I said, and Elidi did as she was told while I went off the help Ava - Ethan had her once again pinned to the wall.

I couldn't stab him, I couldn't shoot him. That basically required killing him, the very last thing that I wanted to do. The biggest way I was able to help Ava, was, well, kick my very own brother in places that should never be kicked.

Chapter 53: Ava

Chapter 52: Ava

When Ethan was choking me I felt as though we were back in the kitchen, only this time for once there wasn't a knife. Then Ava came along and kicked out very own brother in the genitals, and I as dropped to the floor like a sack of potatoes ,but I managed to get away quickly so that the trolls, brother (now in pain), and Ravi wouldn't be able to get me that fast.

"Thanks." I coughed, grabbing a better hold of my knife after that. Zoey armed herself with another arrow and started to try and shoot at the trolls, but she kept missing - that or just just got cleared out of the way by Ethan's stupidly good reflexes and deflecting arrows with his stupid sword.

I looked back at Elidi to see what she was doing, but her back was towards me so I couldn't see that well.

Zoey huffed after wasting her last arrow. She took out yet another knife from her belt and gripped it. "We're going to have to do hand to hand combat." She muttered, and I knew it was bad - practically two against four, we were outnumbered two to one. But we were going to have to do it, at least until Elidi could join in after getting Po's bonds off.

I yelled something that even I couldn't understand and charged for my brother. I didn't want to hurt him one bit - I didn't even want to bite him, which was saying something, since I loved to bite him especially when he was being annoying. But this time I just didn't want too - it seemed so wrong, one song from a siren and he was fighting against me and Zoey. But I willed myself to remember every single little thing I had ever been mad at him for, and that was enough to make me at least go hand to hand with him.

I had to watch out for the other troll - he was a lot shorter than me, but I still had to watch out - he stabbed me in my calves once in a while - nothing serious, I didn't think, but still; I doubted we could really afford even small injuries like that.

Zoey was somewhere across the room fighting off the last troll and Ravi - I bet she had the same situation that I had with Ethan right now, which made it even worse - we were both at a loss. Meanwhile, Elidi kept trying to free Po, who I bet was getting restless. I knew that that boy could fight, that was no secret - but we seriously needed his help, but at the moment it seemed almost impossible.

Then I made the mistake of looking at Marina - that was when Ethan was able to disarm me with a swift move with his own blade and I was powerless against him. I backed away and turned to run, only he ran after me and grabbed me from the back. blade at my throat again.

Yup, this was definitely like the scene in the kitchen.

Ethan led me to right in front of Marina - he stood beside her proudly, as if he had been on her side his entire life, here in this grotto, which personally was pretty pathetic. I watched as the troll overtook Zoey and did the same to her as Ethan did to me. We were both standing by Marina's side, except now we were being spun to face towards her.

She was smiling.

I wanted to punch her so badly, kick her, scream in her ear, fry her and eat her for lunch, anything. That smile bugged me so freaking much it was getting plain silly.

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"You can't win. You can't leave. You're not allowed too. You answered my riddle, you go the Gaurdian. But you can't leave. Ladies, ladies, when you make a deal, you need to learn that you need all of the information before you make that deal. That's always the reason. Weren't you two taught not to sign anything like contracts unless you read all of it throughly? THAT's like this. YOu really need to know all the informationi before making any deals."

Zoey yawned sarcastically and I spat in Marina's pool, making her gasp. "Disgusting. Rude. You all will be exterminated. Drowned, I tell you, drowned! Boiled in oil! You wil have the cruelest punishment in which we can set upon you - "

Zoey and I had both been pretending to be asleep - thus our eyes were closed, but they snapped open when Marina screamed. "Don't look!" Someone yelled. I could tell it was bright, I could hear something shriveling, and Zoey and I looked away. I was hoping Ethan and Ravi were doing the same.

"Okay." The voice sighed, happy that that was over. I looked over and saw that it was Apollo, holding the bag of sunlight that Ravi had brought earlier. He was holding it open in the mermaid's face, only the mermaid wasn't in the grotto anymore. She was floating out in the river, of which I realized was just an isolated box. If you really wanted, you could actually say that we were in a giant fishbowl. Or she was, anyway. A fishbowl with perks.

Everyoen by then was snapping out of Marina's spell. Ethan let go of me, and the troll backed off of Zoey and clambered up against the wall, scared to death. Ravi walked over, a bump growing out of his head from where Zoey had probably hit him with a rock or something. Elidi was there too, handing Zoey a bunch of the arrows that she had saved from around the cave.

Ethan looked at Marina swimming in the fishbowl and realized that the entrance was blocked off - she was never going to come out of there now, ever. He sighed. "Well that's over with." We were all relieved.

We all slumped up against the cavern walls, the trolls still trying to climb away on the opposite one. We were all resting, breathing hard - Apollo was rubbing at his ankles and wrists, where the bonds had made makrs on his skin. But that just reminded me.

"Oh yeah, by the way, Apollo." I sighed, still trying to catch my breath. "Welcome back." I smiled, and then I fell asleep against the cavern wall.

Chapter 54: Zoey

Chapter 54: Zoey

I didn't like the mountains. Not really.

And to make matters worse, Mark wasn't even here this time to guide us safely to the mountains - all we had was the Map.

We thanks the trolls and wished them well, and that their terrible 'Mistress' would do alright in the fishbowl thing. Then we all headed out one at a time, swimming up to the river banks once again. Apollo didn't seem to have a problem - he just kept gripping onto that bag of sunlight like it was his life.

Once we all clambered upon the riverbanks and got our breath back, we started to examine the map and look at where we were.

"Beside the river, on the side that we started. We're going to have to go back through the forest as fast as we can and take the shortcut through the town and get to the mountains by going through the farm field on the other side. And then after like I'm going to say three days we'll hit the mountains and then we can start climbing up, right?" I traced the path with my finger along the map, and everyone looked at Ava, expecting her to butt in like she usually did.

And she did. did.

"Three days? There's no way we're going to be able to get to the mountains in three days. We also have to climb up, like you said. Not to mention pick which mountain? There's a reason there's a 's' at the end of 'mountains', Zoey - there are many, meaning many to choose from. This is going to take longer than you think, as well as be a lot harder than we al may think."

I cross my arms in defense. "Okay, then how long do you think it'll take to get there, Miss Know It All?" I teased, and Ava thought.

I thought along with her - she was right, three days was just not enough. It was probably going to take two days alone to get through the forest and reach the town. Then we were going to be lazy in town, probably break into the inn or something, and then find some other supplies that we're going to have to lug around, and seeing as how the farm was so big, maybe a day and a half. Then we'd probably hike up the mountain for the rest of that day, camp, then continue until we found the place where the next Guardian was hidden.

"Five days, if we're lucky." Ava answered, and that's when everyone started to get nervous.

No one said anything - instead they just all looked at the sky. It was around five in the evening and it was practically dark - that wasn't normal, the sun was going down earlier and a lot faster nowadays. That just showed how much they were now pulling the sun down - we didn't have that much time anymore, not when we first started.

This made me deeply regret all the days we spent at home, doing practically nothing.

"We don't have that much time." Ravi warned, a very worried look on his face. "We need to get there as fast as possible."

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I grunted and rolled up the map, put it in my backpack, and picked up my bow, still slightly damp - probably not good for it at all. "Well then we're just going to have to get a move on here. Who cares if it's dark - we'll dry eventually. We need to get a move on now."

We all agreed, and we headed off. Ava was right - things were going to get a lot more complicated than we all thought it would be, but we weren't going to let that stop us.

We had saved three Guardians out of the seven - and now we were going to work on our fourth one, it wasn't going to be that hard, was it?

Chapter 55: Ava

Chapter 55: Ava

The walk through the forest the rest of the day was tedious. We all tried to remember the path that we had all originally taken - the most likely person that would have remembered didn't, mostly because he wasn't even with us when we started.

This was one of those times when I deeply missed Mark, a lot more than I thought I would, or would like to admit for that matter.

Nonetheless, we troopers kept marching on, until we saw the bright, bright stars and decided to talk only a bit more until we were going to have to sleep. And that's what we did - we only walked about four more steps before Elidi and Ravi crashed straight down onto the ground, making us all laugh.

"I'm too tired!" Ravi exclaimed. "Walking is such a pain, why do we have legs?" He cried, getting more comfortable on the ground. Everyone laughed and knelt down next to him and Elidi, who already appeared to be asleep.

I looked up at the sky and noticed that not all the stars that should have been there were shining - something bright and light must have been blocking the shine from some stars.

"Come on, champ, we've just got to walk a bit farther, and then we'll stop! Okay?" I asked, and Ravi groaned a bit but allowed Ethan to pick him up and be carried. I did the same with Elidi, who didn't seem to be as heavy. We walked a bit more, and I'm sure Ethan and Zoey were extremely annoyed with it. Apollo was practically sleep walking, running into trees every here and there.

Eventually we stepped onto the pavement of downtown after five minutes. We had been traveling a total of three hours, so it was around eight now. We all wondered how on earth we got to the town so fast - it should have taken a day or two. But none of us argued, instead we went to the inn, and broke the door down.

Not literally, we found the spare key, but we 'broke in' anyway.

Then we all headed off to bed, finding a random bed in a random bedroom and crashing for the night.

It was cold. That's the first thing that popped into my mind when I was dropped into the dream. It was very, very cold. I thought things were going to be a little warmer, but obviously I was wrong.

We were in a cave. No one else was in the room except me, and a girl who had their head down. From what I could see, she was wearing long skinny jeans and hiking boots, along with a white tank-top. Her hair was blonde - but it was almost as if she had dyed little bits of it orange and bright yellow, so you couldn't really tell exactly the color. But besides the hair, she looked like one of the girls that went to my school - one of the ones that barely talked but excelled in everything she did, and yet had barely any friends because she really preferred not too.

"Can you hear me?" I asked, the first question that came to mind at the time.

The girl suddenly looked up and looked thrilled. "Creator." She almost sang, out of happiness. "I have reached you. Finally." She sighed out of relief and then looked at me.

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"You're tired." She muttered.

"Great observation, yes. I'm tired. I fought for my life today to get back Apollo. And before that I had to fight people who I thought I could trust for Ravi. And before that I had to fight a bunch of losers for Elidi. And now we've got to climb up some mountain to save you, right?"

"Being Eli the first Guardian, yes, you do have to save me, but I can tell you what mountain you climb so that it won't be a waste of time as you proclaim it to be." Eli offered, and I shut up. She tugged at her bonds - she was chained against the wall with bonds that looked like they were extremely painful. "It's the mountain that has so many caves that you cannot count. I'm in a save hidden within a cave, I believe."

"Who are we up against?"

"Monsters. Creatures beyond your imagination, which is saying something, because you dreamt up this place. And tricks. Lots of tricks. Be prepared, Creator."

I thought for a while, trying to gather all this information. I knew from experience that Guardians like this, meeting them in dreams, would not last long - we weren't going to have that much more time. "I need an image to know what we're up against." I said, and suddenly there was a lot of pounding.

"Who is our little prisoner talking too?" A huge voice boomed through the cave, making parts of the ceiling crumble. "You know there isn't supposed to be any communication with the outside world."

"He comes!" Eli exclaimed, and hung her head like she was already ashamed.

I watched as the shadow of a huge monster came into view - it was at least four stories tall, had horns, and very, very beefy arms. It almost made me want to give up. But I knew I couldn't, naturally.

"I'll go now." I muttered just so that I could hear, and the scene faded into darkness.

Chapter 56: Ethan

Chapter 56: Ethan

No one wanted to get up after going to sleep, we were all tired and damp and plain out lazy. I didn't want to get up at all either. But frankly I had to, especially when some idiot flickered the light on in the room I was sleeping in.

"Turn it off." I moaned, putting the pillow over my head and trying to block out the light, as if that would really help.

"Hey, I thought you guys were in a rush to get your mission done."

I removed the pillow and cracked my eyes open at the sound of the voice. "M... Mark?" I asked, and yet there he was, leaning against the doorway like a chill brother trying to balance the lightswitch between off and on, in the very middle.

He smiled. "Sup?"

I groaned and flopped back down on the bed. "What the hell are you doing here?" I sighed, closing my eyes again and trying to get a few more minutes of peace.

"I lost you guys. You guys lost me. We lost each other. I didn't know where to go, I had no idea where you guys were after I hit the river - so I came back home, thinking that you'd come back here after you were finished. I was right, apparently."

I rolled over on the mattress and faced him, eyes only slightly open. "You knew we'd come back?"

Mark nodded. "I don't get why you guys thought you'd have to break in, I had the back door open. It took a while to find that last key, why on earth did you guys put it in the bathroom shower?"

I shrugged. I wasn't in charge of the key, that was Ava - she must've gone to the bathroom and somehow got it in the shower. "So what do you want now?" I groaned, still not wanting to get up. It had been a long day yesterday, I was still really sore.

"What, since I left I'm not allowed to come with you guys anymore?"

I didn't reply, instead I used all my existing energy to actually sit up in bed and try prevent myself from falling back down asleep. Then I remembered that I should probably answer the guy's question. "We'll see." That was the best answer I could come up with without being extremely legit, though I knew I was being legit anyway. "We'll have to talk to the others first. Speaking of the others, why don't you just go turn on the lights in their rooms so that they'll get up so you can leave me alone?" I suggested, and Mark huffed but left.

I flopped back down on the bed, though since the lights were on I couldn't fall asleep anyway. Though even if I did, I'd have woken up five minutes later anyway - I heard Ava scream, which immediately made me jump up and go running.

"What the hell happened now?" I yelled, and ran to where Ava's voice was coming from. I saw Mark standing in the exact same place he had woken me up, just leaning against the doorframe. I saw Ava with her knife out, ready to strike him, and yet Mark didn't seem too worried. "Ava, chill. It's Mark."

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She rolled her eyes at me. "No duh it's Mark, what's Mark doing here?" She asked.

"Why don't you ask him yourself, he's literally right here you know. Did you wake up the little ones yet?" I asked, and Mark shook his head, though by now I'm sure they were awake anyway - Ava had screamed pretty loud.

I went to go find where the little ones were sleeping and turned on the light in their bedrooms. "Wake up." I coaxed, probably not as soft as Ava would have woken them up. "Mark's back, we should get another move on."

That mostly woke Zoey up. "Mark? He's back?" She muttered, rubbing her eyes and shaking Elidi awake, who nearly stepped on Ravi who was sleeping on the floor.

"Yeah, he was here last night or something, or he's back now, but either way he's back. And he wants to keep coming with us. I don't care, if up to you guys and Ava."

Zoey shrugged. "I don't care, sure, he should be a lot of use."

Elidi and Ravi looked at each other, and frowned. "What's up?" I asked them, and they looked at me, and I could see in their eyes that they didn't like the idea. "Man, you guys just gotta hate on everyone huh." I teased, and they stuck their tongues out at me.

"He's nice, yeah, but i don't think we can completely trust him. He's done a lot of things for us, yeah, he led us to Ravi and everything, but I just don't think that... Well, yeah. I suggest you ask Po, he's better at judging people." Elidi reasoned, and Ravi readily agreed.

I sighed, dreading more walking. "Fine, whatever. Okay, wait, where is Po anyway?" I asked, and they all shrugged as Zoey got up and took the map out of her backpack. I walked out of the room and went to find Po, finding him on the balcony a couple floors of the inn up. "What are you doing up here?" I asked, shivering at the cold.

"I slept here."

"It's freezing."

"It's wonderful." Po fought back, and I just gave up.

"So there's this guy named Mark and he helped us find you. He's a nice guy, at least I think so, but I think some people here don't like him or don't want him with us. It's up to you."

Po didn't reply right on the spot. First he kept staring out into the sun, which kept hiding the appearance of what it really was - really low, jeopardizing everything in this world. "You're going to have to introduce him to me first, " Po decided, "and then I'll tell you if we can trust him or not." I sighed and got up again from sitting down next to Po, and got ready for a bit more walking.

Boy, was I getting lazy.

"Come on then, let's go get breakfast so that you can meet Mark too." I said, he Po followed me downstairs where everyone was 'up', having some soup from a can. There were two other cans on the table, ready for Po and my taking. We went ahead and ate the soup, and I pointed out to Po who Mark was. I gave him a bit of time to analyze the guy, hoping that he didn't judge too harshly - I wasn't even sure what the bad points of Mark

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could possibly be, he seemed pretty chill to me.

"So Mark," I mentioned, loud enough where everyone could hear me. "About you joining us on our little adventure to save the next Gaurdian." Mark leaned against the kitchen counter and threw away his can of soup, done with it.

"Can I?" He asked, and I shrugged.

"Everyone is kind of on the line. The main person deciding this thing is Po. Po, what's your descion?" I asked, and Po analyzed Mark a bit more.

"I don't trust you Mark, but you're an important person towards this quest. You must, must, must. Come along."

Chapter 57: Zoey

Chapter 56: Zoey

Once we all fully awake, we actually consulted the idea that Mark should go with us.

It was a more or less even fight. Mark wanted to go with us, and Po foresaw that he should. Ava of course was against the idea, using the whole 'trust' factor to go against him, when really if you thought about it, you couldn't trust anyone right now. Elidi wanted Mark to go with us, but Ravi was skeptical about the whole idea as well. I didn't really care, i preferred to stay on the fence, but I do have to admit that we did kind of need all the help that we could get.

"He's a traitor! He left us alone to die!" Ava shouted.

"He was coming to find us Ava, you very well know that!"

"Still! We can't trust anyone now!"

"Ava!"

"Ethan!"

"Stop being an idiot, even Po says that he needs to come with us."

"Who cares what Po says?"

"You should, actually."

During all the fighting, I was cutting an apple I had gotten from the fridge. They were all fighting in the so called living room, so I could see and hear them perfectly from where I stood.

Everyone was on either side of the room, usually with the people that they sided with. Mark was leaning against the bathroom door chewing on wheat or something, acting completely chill with everything.

The hipster.

"HE'S NOT COMING WITH US!"

"HE'S GOT TO COME WITH US!"

That was when everthing broke out, if you could believe it. I slammed down the knife I was using to cut the apple and started throwing apple slices over the counter at anyone who was yelling.

"BE QUIET!" I ordered, and Ava kept yelling.

"He's not going to come with us, he's an idiot, he could be a traitor, he left us alone to die, we don't even know him, his friends were un trustworthy-"

I threw the other half of the apple I had failed to yet cut at Ava, to get her to shut up. "AVA!" She went silent, looking at the apple half rolling around at Mark's feet. "Thank you. Alright, here's what we're going to do

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since we can't act mature enough to make up our minds, knowing we very well have a freaking deadline that we kind of need to make.

"Po says that this Mark figure needs to come with us. I agree. Most of us agree. I don't care about you others, he's going to come and if it turns out that you guys were right we can all work together to capture the fool again and we'll give you guys the pleasure of killing him. Alright? Does that sound nice?"

Everyone shrugged more or less forcibly, and Mark only kind of smiled - I'm sure he didn't appreciate the 'killing him' part, but hey, it was necessary.

"Okay, fine." Ava sighed, realizing that there was no point in fighting anymore. "We'll leave in fifteen minutes, okay? We should get a move on. Right, Zoey?"

I nodded, knowing that she meant it as a diss, but I didn't let it get to me. "Right. We really need to get to the mountains fast - Eli is counting on us."

Chapter 58: Ava

Chapter 57: Ava

In the next fifteen minutes, we had gotten the main stuff all together - we decided to ditch the rather heavy and annoying food supply, so we only took what we really thought that we needed instead of being the high maintenance children that we started out to be. We all only packed a set of extra clothes, and "forgot" the toiletries in the bathroom - there were no bathrooms in the wilderness, they were only getting in the way.

In the end, we ended up with one bag each. The only thing that we didn't change from the very beginning was the weapons - we all had at least two weapons on us, and if not, well, we made sure those who didn't had pretty good self defense skills anyway.

Zoey had the map in her hand. "We need to get out of town first. Don't talk to anyone guys. Just make it past the border of town and we're home free - then we've got to go north east towards that dry patch of land there - dammit, Ava? Ethan? Why didn't we put something there? There's just a freaking patch of land there, that's so stupid! Anyway, after we walk through there we should hit the base of the mountains and after that just climb the right one, find the cave.. And.. Well okay, let's make it to the lake pond thing first, okay?"

Everyone nodded in agreement, and we headed out of the inn to get out town.

As we traveled through town, it seemed as though we were attracting too much attention towards us. A lot of people were staring at us, as though we had never seen them in our lifetimes. Which, I suppose, made sense in the least, but still - just because we had blown up a basement and saved a Guardian and they had no idea what was going on -

Oh.

Well, the people that were staring at us we shot off with good glances - we had talked about that before leaving too - if anyone gives you a weird look, just give them a weirder look until they bug off.

Our logic. It's beautiful isn't it?

We traveled to the other side of town before we actually got out of it, meaning that just that many more people got to look at us weird - and we got to stare at that many more people weirdly as well. We passed the bakeries and the blacksmiths, and the little cottages in the middle of town, and the little school right in between. We even passed a few shops that Mark and Chris hadn't showed us on our first tour - it was such a cute little town, it almost made me want to stay a bit longer just so that we could check out the entire thing and not miss a single building.

Ethan and Mark were at the very front of the line as usual, with Zoey kind of nearby so that they could check on the direction every now and then. Next to Zoey was Elidi and Ravi, and Po straggled along behind them, looking for an opening in which he could walk - it reminded me of the excluded kid that I always saw in the elementary schools, the one that everyone seemed to tolerate but no one really liked - that was always the saddest kind of love in my opinion, the fake kind.

I walked in the back. It wasn't much of my choice. I didn't mind to stand back here, but it sounds a lot better if I said that I was ordered to by - who else, Zoey, Ethan and Mark. They said that I should stand back here so that I could "keep an eye on the younger ones just in case someone was following us and wanted to steal them away."

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BS, if you ask me.

After about half an hour we finally made it to the edge of town - you could kind of tell that it was the end of town, there were less and less people as we took more and more steps, and the buildings seemed to be taken less care of. We kept walking until I had realized that soon enough the pavement of the road had turned back into the familiar mixture of dirt and sand, and then eventually just dirt.

"Zoey, are you sure this is the right way?"

"The pond is straight ahead, we're fine. Just keep walking, I think we'll make it there in about an hour or so - not too long, but by the time we get there it's going to be like one, so we can take a break for like ten minutes and then we'd better keep going. But we should also probably get a lot of water and take some too - use those extra containers we brought - we don't know how long we're going to be in the dry patch of idiotic land that we created and water is pretty dang important."

Ravi and Po agreed, and started spouting random facts about the desert.

"Lots of animals like to burrow themselves in the ground to stay cool."

"Yes, because it's a lot cooler down there."

"And when it's night all of them come out."

"But it's really cold there at night too."

"But not so cold whereas things freeze,"

"Because that would be really awesome."

"There's a lot of scorpions down there too, so I hear."

"I hear that too, a lot are poisonous!"

I groaned. "Better not let them sting you then, how tragic that would be!" I warned sarcastically, and they just glanced back at me like I was crazy.

"Yes, that would be tragic!"

"Thank you for proving our point Ava." They both smiled and continued on talking about pointless stuff that only children their age could talk about.

I sighed in exasperation, and kept walking. I took out the piece of wood that I had grabbed off of one of the trees in town and started shredding it down with my knife, bored to death. The others could hear the sound of my carving, I could tell, and I think it was bugging them - all the more reason to just keep going.

I didn't want to annoy everyone, but everyone was getting on my nerves - maybe it was the prescene of Mark, who knows?

No matter their annoyance with me or my annoyance with them, I kept sharpening the pointless piece of wood. I didn't know what I was making exactly, I was probably just going to make a bunch of shavings until there wasn't any wood left, but then again maybe I could carve something useful - a spear or something.

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Right, a really short spear.

Go me.

Chapter 59: Ethan

Chapter 58: Ethan

Mark and I had been talkin the entire time that we had been walking. The topics varied from typical guy things (or at least I hoped they were typical, if it was otherwise I would be immensely worried about him and myself) and stuff about the mission. The guy was funny, I'll give him that - no matter what topic we came too, there was always something that he had to say. I loved that kind of people, the kind that could carry a conversation no matter how weird it got.

"Cows." Mark muttered, unsure whether or not he should even bring the topic up. We were on the general topic of animals, so naturally the topic of cows just has to come up.

"They're weird, what about them?" I asked, not really sure where he was going with this.

"I feel bad for them!"

"Why? They're animals!"

"They're sad creatures."

"And you think that because...?"

"They have no idea how delicious they taste. Not to offend all those vegetarians in the world, but cows, cows they have no idea how delicious they taste!"

I laughed. "Point taken. I love hamburgers. But that can't be the only reason - that's a stupid reason. What else you got man."

"I feel bad for them!"

"Because they don't know of their own awesomeness? Seriously?"

"No, because they're geting their unmentionables squeezed man, so we could drink from them."

"Stop right there man. That's not cool. Stop right there."

Mark laughed. "Sorry, but it's true. That's the only thing that I hate about cows, they're gross when you think about it. Though it'd be pretty weird if we got milk at the same time when we get beef... if you catch my drift, you know?"

"Dude. Stop it. That's gross."

"Fine. Chickens."

"Um yeah I don't like the sound of that either, you're going to go along with the idea of embryos and eggs and stuff, let's move on. Zoey, are we almost there?" I thought that at least an hour had passed, maybe I was wrong - I had a bad habit for interpreting time incorrectly.

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She studied the map a bit and looked around us. The surrounding looked all the same, just a bunch of trees and bushes all around. The trees were so close together that you couldn't see the sky, we were literally walking underneath a tree tunnel. The sun was shining through the leaves where all the light was practically green, making everything kind of glance off of the lower leaves so that everything looked the exact same. I had no idea how she could tell where we were compared to on the map - maybe it was just some kind of map reading person specialty that came with Zoey naturally.

"I think we're almost there. It's like one right now, so now I know that we're really close, should be there by 1:30 if you guys don't mind. Sorry, I thought it was closer."

Po smiled. "It's alright, I'm sure we can walk a bit farther no matter how much longer it takes, it's okay, we're not in a rush."

Ava shot a mean look at him. "What are you talking about? One of your family members is in a great danger right now, and you're saying that we're not in a rush? What kind of situation are you thinking of man?"

Po looked at her with bewilderment. "Just because one is in trouble does not mean we should make rash decisions."

With that, Po turned away and dragged Ravi more towards the front to where everyone else was, leaving Ava behind.

I motioned for Elidi to come near, and she caught up with us, leaving Ava even more behind. "Elidi, can you keep Mark company for me? He likes to talk about cows." I hinted, and she nodded with enthusiasm.

I then slowed down to talk to Ava, asking her what was wrong and all that stuff that a big brother should do. "Talk to me." I coaxed, and finally she gave in. I was amazed at all the stuff that she was willing to share, though something told me that half of her didn't even know that she was doing it.

I listened, and eventually just told her what to do. though I wasn't sure if she even believed me, she put a smile on her face and we kept walking, this time catching up with the others so that we didn't seem as far behind as we actually were.

It wasn't long before Zoey stopped us all and pointed ahead to a great big lake right in the way, its waters just shimmering - I supposed we were all thirsty, even though we did have water bottles with us. She smiled. "1:20 guys. We have about ten minutes until we should get another move on."

Chapter 60: Ava

Chapter 60: Ava

"I don't even remember you mentioning a lake when you brought up all that stuff about all the stops that we were going to have to take, Zoey." I recalled from earlier, kneeling down to the lake to take fill up my water bottle.

Po stopped me though, of course - being as thirsty as I was it was just my luck to get stopped from drinking some of this glorious water - warning me to be careful. "You might have to purify it first, we don't know how safe this water is."

I looked at him with dread. "Well then." I curled up into a semi-ball while Zoey used a makeshift pot she got somewhere - who the heck knows where - to boil some water. We all sat around eating apples and little snacks waiting for the boiled water so that we could reload. I looked at my watch - if Zoey had been serious about only having a ten minute rest stop, we had about six minutes to keep resting before Zoey was going to force us to go.

Of course, that wasn't nearly enough time to boil a pot of water - I wasn't sure if Zoey knew that herself, but if she did, then she was trolling us all.

I tore away last bit of the orange peel that I had been peeling and flung the peel into the lake, causing a bunch of ripples in the very center.

Okay, I honestly thought nothing of it.

I seriously thought nothing was going to happen.

But hey, we're us, and we just do not have decent luck.

So naturally after a few seconds - probably after the orange peel at sunk to the bottom of the pond - a bunch more vibrations caused the pong to ripple more, and before we knew it, we were all on our feet facing a giant monster.

Elidi whipped out a knife that Zoey must've given her, while I heard Zoey cuss like a sailor as she grabbed her bow and arrows. I'd have to have a talk with her later about that, I had never heard those words in that combination come out of her mouth. Ethan and Mark had been caught completely off guard and were now coming out from behind trees from which they had first hidden, swords in each's hands. Po and Ravi whipped out their weapons, though I couldn't tell what those are.

"What the hell is that?!" Ethan cried out, swiping at the monster as it tried to come closer towards him.

No one replied to him, they all just stared at the monster.

It was a stereotypical monster, but let me tell you, those things are a lot scarier up close than in those picture books. Slimey looking green skin, giants fangs, and a huge long neck coming out of the water.

That's really all I could tell you about it.

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The rest of the body was underneath the water, where we couldn't see it. We had no idea what we were up against besides what we could see - the rest we were going to have to dive for, and that was pretty dangerous.

The monster seemed to eye all six of us one at time, figuring out what it was up against and such. It looked at me last - I wasn't sure whether or not I was just that worthless or not as threatening as the others, or if it was saving me for last.

I think I was insulted either way.

I prepared to slash at it with my knife in case it lunged at me. So naturally, Mark taunted it as well. "Six against one, Slime Face! Bring it on!" He yelled and the monster snarled at him and faked a lunge at Mark, the idiot. Mark stepped back, caught slightly by surprise, which I was surprised by. If you're going to taunt a monster then expect it to come at you, right?

It stared at all of us, trying to guess which one was going to attack first. But that was just the thing, we didn't know what our battle plan was. We were caught off guard, and now we had no idea what we were doing.

The monster seemed to get that.

It craned its neck over Po, threatening to attack him. Po slashed and hissed, trying to scare the thing off. Its scaly neck went right by me and I could have easily chopped its neck off - but something told me if I did that I'd just make things worse. Something like the hydra, the Greek mythical creature that grew back two heads if you chopped one of its six off.

The thing was going after everyone now, and everyone kept slashing with no tactic whatsoever. Po and Ravi stuck together when they had a grand chance to go in from opposite sides to cut it but they didn't. Zoey seemed to be wasting arrows willy-nilly, which slightly pissed me off. We needed those, hello?

"Ava!" I heard Ethan yell and I turned, watching him fight the monster head on, lunging and ducking and rolling all over the place. "Don't just stand there! Do something!" He yelled. I looked around - the neck seemed to be infinite, all coming from the water. We could pull a classic and make it tie itself into a knot, but something told me that that wasn't going to be too easy like it was in the movies.

We needed a lot more options.

"AVA!" Zoey screamed, and I jumped out of the way just as the serpent (I had decided it was a serpent after seeing the infinite neck) tried to squish me by slamming part of his own neck into the ground where I stood.

I thought its attack on me was over - there were like, five other people to go attack, but no, it continued to move towards me as I kept running from it. "Holy shoot someone do something!" I yelled! I looked back and saw the everyone was doing something - there was countless cuts all along the serpents neck, but it didn't seem to have any effect. The neck just kept getting longer and longer, I could see it rushing out of the water.

I swear, if this thing wanted to set the Empire State building on fire from the very top, it could.

That's when I got the idea.

I needed to investigate though, and frankly I couldn't do that with the serpent right on my tail.

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"I've got an idea! Someone take it!" I yelled, and the closest person - Elidi - ran in front of me and slashed with her sword and nicked it on the face - then it started chasing her around and I had some time.

I wanted to stop and catch my breath - I must have been running for ten minutes already - but I couldn't. Instead I took a deep breath, and then dove into the lake.

Chapter 61: Ethan

Chapter 61: Ethan

Things got really hectic after the monster-serpent thing started to chase after Elidi. We thought that Ava had a plan - and maybe the girl did, who knows - but either way apparently part of her 'plan' was to dive into the pond. Go Ava. Let's see how long she can hold her breath.

I had no idea what her intention was but at the moment Elidi had tripped over a rock and the serpent was gaining on her. Mark jumped in front of her and started to slash, and I saw just for a second him look at me and mouth 'go'.

I took that as well as I could.

My first, human, not nearly as cool Ethan side said that 'go' meant that he could handle it and that I should get all the littler ones and run for it.

But of course, I was more awesome now.

I ran up to the serpent as close to the water as I could and chopped its head right off, just as an arrow shot from Zoey's good aim got stuck in the thing's eye.

There was a sad scream from the serpent - it almost made me feel bad.

But even after the head wasn't connected to the body anymore it kept screaming. That made me feel bad. And it kept screaming. I had to cover my ears after a while. I wondered if this was how my parents felt when I was younger, the baby that never stopped crying.

The thing kept screaming and screaming. I saw Ava's head pop out from the pond, look at what we've done, and then go back down. I wanted to know what she was doing, but something told me that she wouldn't have gone back down unless she figured that the battle was over.

So the battle, I supposed, wasn't over.

The serpent kept screaming. Mark walked over to me and we all looked at each other not knowing was to do. "Should we push it back into the water?" Mark suggested, but I shook my head.

"Ava's doing something down there."

Mark nodded and we just kept staring at the creature that kept screaming and screaming its head off. (Ha, see what I did there? Screaming it's head off? You know because - nevermind.)

I turned around once I heard Elidi and Zoey cussing like sailors for the second time behind me. "Hey!" I said as I turned around, but then started to cuss myself as I saw what they were cursing about.

The body... the part disconnected from the head... It was growing another head. And the head disconnected from the rest of the body... Was growing another body. With legs visible and everything.

Crap.

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Mark, Po and I were already trying to kill the neck that was growing another head, while Ravi, Elidi, and Zoey were trying to stop the head from growing a body. Po snapped his fingers and his hand lit on fire - which surprised and scared the heck out of me, by the way - and tried to burn the neck stub to a crisp so that he head couldn't grow back like Hercules did, but this wasn't Greek mythology.

This was freaking real life.

"Ethan! Help us!" I heard Zoey cry, and looked over from my attempts at slashing the neck into little sushi bits. The head had almost grown back a complete other body - it was growing its legs now, and man, it looked pretty pissed off at everyone, particularly me.

I ran over to help the girls and Ravi, leaving Po and Mark to handle the big guys. For every leg that the creature grew, I cut it off with Ravi's help, while the girls tried to stab the creature anywhere they could.

Suddenly the bigger serpent screamed and I looked over - Mark and Po looked shocked as the thing seems to go back into the water. As the neck finally slipped into the water, I saw Ava's head pop out of the water, knife in hand and something orange between her teeth.

The smaller creature had stopped growing at the same time that the bigger serpent had slipped into the water, so Mark, Po, and I carefully rolled the thing into the water, trying to avoid all the cuts we had given the thing so we could avoid the blood. That proved to be difficult, as it seemed almost as though the girls were drawing pictures on the thing's hide with their knives.

Ava climbed out of the lake and laid down sprawled out on the grass, spitting whatever she had between her teeth out onto the ground. We all walked over to her and I picked up the thing she had spit out - it was an orange peel.

"Seriously? This is the thing that you dove down there to get while the we all had the fight of our lives? Elidi was almost killed! We all were!" I yelled, and Ava looked at me.

"You could thank me."

"Why? You left us!"

"Okay well I suppose you don't really have to do anything - I started this thing anyway. Sorry about that."

"And how did you start it?" Ravi asked, in his curious voice.

"Sorry. Shouldn't have littered."

Chapter 62: Zoey

Chapter 62: Zoey

I'll give it to you guys straight up, alright?

I was tired.

And hungry.

And thirsty.

And now I'm five times how tired, hungry, and thirsty I was to begin with.

Remind me never to throw an orange peel into a pond okay? I don't want any more serpents chasing me - it gets tiring after a while, you know.

We all decided to boil as much water as we could and then be on our merry way - we didn't want any other accidents happening, not after giant serpent. That was not fun.

I cannot stress that enough.

After we all packed up and refilled our water bottles we kept walking. It was the kind of slow walk that you would do when you're walking to your least favorite class in school - full of dread, laziness, and sadness. Not so much the sadness part, but we were pretty dang close anyway.

I know Ava and Ethan had heard me cuss, and I know that they were going to have a long conversation with me about that later - but man, if they had entered my head for half the day I'm pretty sure they would wash my mouth - mind? - out with soap.

We walked in silence - completely and utter silence except for the squashing sound of Ava's wet sneakers - for about thirty more minutes. I kept the map out and navigated our way around. If we hit halfway through this complete dry patch of land by night fall we'd make it to the base of the mountain by the afternoon tomorrow, meaning we could climb our way maybe to the cave, do an inspection, camp, then attack late at night or early in the morning.

Knowing us, nothing was going to go according to plan.

We trudged on until the forest turned into a barren wasteland. Note to self - make something here. Not just a barren wasteland. Another town. A park. I don't know, something. Something, anything just to make this place seem less like a desert because right now it was really intimidating to be walking through a desert.

The thing about deserts is that besides the sun you really have no idea what you're doing. You can't see anything, only sand, sand, and more sand. Even the horizon land it sand, which can get pretty depressing after a while. Every once and a while you think you see a tree when in reality it's just the person walking next to you. You think you see a giant pond but that's some hallucination - and besides, even if there was a pond I wouldn't drink from it, not after stupid serpent thing.

We kept walking through the desert for another thirty minutes. I knew everyone was already draining their water bottles - I hoped they saved some, we only had like two bottles each. We were still walking in silence

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until Ethan ran up to me from behind and whispered in my ear. "It's not even that hot, Zoey. We could run through this and barely break a sweat, I swear."

The sound of someone's voice actually startled me, but then it clicked what he had said. I checked myself, wiping my forehead - nothing, not even slightly sticky. I pressed the back of my hand against my neck - nothing. It couldn't have been over 80 degrees, and that was pushing it. I looked back at the others. Most of them were holding their water bottles, and I could tell by how they were holding them tha barely any water had been drank.

Ava, sensing my thoughts, looked at me. "It's the sun. It's getting lowered, remember? It's not even that high anymore, it's losing it's power. It's being drained."

Po nodded in agreement. "I can feel it. Can you guys?" He asked Ravi and Elidi, and they both nodded as well. "We're getting weaker. We can still go, don't let us stop you, we need to save Eli and stop this Rebellion, but we're kind of crunching it now. When the sun is getting drained of its power, we're getting drained of ours. Eventually, if we're completely drained, we're going to die, and if we die, then you guys die too."

I looked at everyone. They were all looking solemn, like they had all already given up. I huffed. "Well, let's keep going then and get to the mountain base at the least. Anyone up for a little speed walking?"

Chapter 63: Ava

Chapter 62: Ava

Even I could feel the power draining out of me, and as far as I knew I wasn't even that closely connected with the sun.

Yeah, okay, I mean sure I'm going to die if someone blows out the flame, but like honestly, I don't know why it was effecting me too. I wondered if Zoey or Ethan felt this way too, but frankly I was too scared to ask; we had been walking in silence for the past hour and a half - Zoey had offered to make us run so we'd get to come place cooler faster, but frankly we didn't even care; this weather wasn't even that bad. It was like, spring in southern California weather. Not that bad.

We did a little speed walking anyway, since it wasn't that bad and we needed to get to at least the base of the mountain by the end of the day, which as far as I could see, was approaching rather quickly. Within a few minutes of speed walking we were able to see the tiniest peak of the tallest mountain, which inspired us to get into a run. We could only hold that for a couple minutes though - Elidi, Ravi, and Po were kind of slow, and their powers getting drained was just making it worse - but by then we were a good amount closer to the mountains, making it a bit happier.

We drank while we walked, but none of us really drank that much - again, it wasn't that hot.

And then we got to the base of the mountains about thirty minutes later.

From far away they weren't that intimidating. Then we got closer up, and we realized just how tall they were. We would have to climb that. We were going to have to climb that huge mountain.

That was going to be a lot sweating.

"Holy crap." I muttered as we all just were looking up at the peak of the mountain.

"Yeah." Mark sighed.

Ethan, trying to be the heroic hero that he always tried to be, rubbed his palms together and stretched a bit. "Well, let's get started then." He put his foot on a rock about a foot up and started to rock climb his way up - only to fall after about five minutes, and naturally he was only about five feet up. "Dang. That's tough." he sighed, and went up and tried again.

Everyone and I just stared at Ethan like he was crazy, which, of course, he was, but we weren't about to tell him that - he had good reason to keep climbing, unless we miraculously found another way up.

"There's got to be another way up." I said. Sure, I'd climb that mountain, but only after assurance that that was going to be the only way to get up there. I started making my way around the wall of the base of the mountain, which in reality wasn't that much to work with, but I kept trying to pat the walls, seeing if there were any secret openings or anything."

"You're not going to find anything." Ravi heaved, obviously devastated. We all knew it - none of us wanted to climb this mountain anyway. And even then, we weren't even sure if this were the right one.

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Elidi started helping me, convinced that I was right. "But Ava's right. There's got to be another way up the mountain - the right mountain, for that matter. The Rebellion's not going to mark down a specific mountain and make everyone in it memorize that specific mountain. No one's got time for that. They're going to make it easy on themselves, if anything. They're going to make some kinda of secret entrance or tunnel or something so that whoever's on the Rebellion's side that needs to get to the cave, and whoever wants to but shouldn't, by their means, wouldn't get lucky by choosing the right mountain anyway."

"Chances are, the actual mountain that we want to get to, is, for all we know, like, thirty miles inwards. We'd never get to it in time and still be able to have it be a decent timing. And the Rebellion isn't going to walk thirty miles just to get to the place. So, they're going to make a tunnel." Po also started feeling around, running further down along the mountain sides.

The funny thing is, that I didn't even think of any of that, I just really didn't want to climb the dang mountain.

Zoey, just for the heck of it probably, joined with us too, as did Mark. Ravi finally gave in and started feeling around too. Ethan, I'm sure, would have helped, but he was busy aiding his wounds he had literally just gotten from climbing the mountain side. The idiot.

I'm pretty sure if another random person had come walking and had seen us all feeling around a bunch of rocks, they would have called some mental hospital or something, mentioning that they were going to get seven new patients very soon. Luckily, no one did. Unluckily, no one found anything for a good twenty minutes.

"This is pointless!" Ravi exclaimed on minute twenty one, and frankly, I didn't blame him. It felt completely stupid feeling a bunch of rocks trying to look for something, and we didn't need any more stupidity in life. "We're not going to find anything, we need to start climbing! We need to find Eli! Now!"

"There's got to be an easier way up the mountain though!" Zoey argued, now completely determined to find another way.

"Maybe it's not... Maybe it's not in the mountain side. Or maybe the trigger thingy isn't in the mountain side. It could be anything. A password, a pebble out of place, anything. It could be anything." Ethan offered for his words of advice, and we all pondered that thought. Well that made things a little more complicated.

We then discussed all the main ways that a secret entrance was revealed in the stories. There was sitting on a boulder; a random code that only the opponents knew; A guard, waiting for a fight. Anything. Everything varied. We tried everything that we thought of, and nothing happened. Nothing. Nada.

"This is hopeless, see?" Ravi huffed, both disappointed and proud that he, after all, was right. "We just wasted a good hour and a half, and that was a good hour and a half that we could have used to climb this mountain in the first place to find Eli!"

Mark leaned against the cave, only to stumble. "Ouch!" He yelped, and Zoey rolled her eyes.

"What happened."

"I cut myself."

"Did anyone else hear that?"

"I did."

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I turned around to Po and Ravi, who were looking around, just as I was, but in their direction. "Hear what?"

"There was a sound. Like... Rocks crumbling."

We all scrambled, feeling our way around the rocks yet again. I placed my hand on a place I swear I had touched twenty minutes ago, but the wall wasn't there. It was just a gap. Not a big enough gap where any of us could slip through at any extent, but it was a gap. "Mark, I know this is a really weird thing to say, but did you just so happy to bleed on that wall?"

"What? What the heck? Why would you -"

"This could be just like Harry Potter. Maybe not enough, but you know. It's a thought. So did you?"

"Uh, yeah, just a drop though."

I thought for a second. In Harry Potter, Dumbledore cut his hand and smeared his blood all over a rock to make a cave reveal itself. What if this was basically the same thing? Only one person's blood wasn't good enough.

"Different DNA." I muttered. "That's what it is. Different DNA."

Po looked at me weird. "What?"

"Mark's blood - his DNA - is smeared on that wall. The door to the passage way, I'm supposing, opened just a tiny bit. More of his blood isn't going to work, it's the same DNA. The wall is going to need more DNA from different sources. Whether it's blood or just a hair stuck on it, I don't know, but I think that's what it wants."

Elidi was the first one to argue. "I'm not going to cut open my hand and smear blood over a rock. You can go first, if you're so convinced."

I sighed. "Well I don't want to cut my hand open either. But maybe it's just the DNA that it needs. Maybe it's just... Anything. Anything that's big enough for the thing to recognize it as your DNA." I walked over to where Mark had bled over a rock and ran my hand over the surface. "That should leave some dead skin cells, do you think that's stong enough?"

"Doubtful." Ethan muttered. I ran my han dover the wall again, pressing a little harder to get more skin cells off without having to cut myself on the wall. "That's not going to be enough." He said, and I sighed. I tried plucking a strand of my hair and making it stay on the wall, only to have that utterly fail. "Oh my god, here." Ethan rose from where he was sitting and walked over to where I was stood, arms crossed.

Then he spit on the wall.

Then we heard rocks crumble.

He wiped his mouth. "Boom. Recognizable DNA without hurt." Then he walked over to the soon to be entrance, and sighed. "It's not enough. Ava, spit on the wall?"

I spat.

"Someone else now."

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Zoey spat.

Then Po.

Then Elidi.

Then Ravi.

"Okay, that's all we need. We're in."

Chapter 64: Ethan

Chapter 63: Ethan

The tunnel was dark as night and it wasn't fun going through it. For a tunnel that was leading us to a Guardian, you'd think that this tunnel would be used like heck, so there wouldn't be any spiderwebs. But naturally, since I was leading the group first, there were. So I could feel a bunch of those little suckers all over my body - you know how uncomfortable that feeling is?

It's not fun.

On the bright side, however, I got to show off my awesome ninja skills whenever we ran into one.

There wasn't any telling how long this tunnel was going to lead on for. All we really knew was that we had to follow it until we came to something worth coming too, no matter how long.

No one really spoke when we filed into the tunnel - not really. I heard an "oh my god" and "holy crud" here and there, but besides that, no real conversation was exchanged. I think everyone was just really in shock or just really scared because we all knew that this was it. This was going to be tough, once again. We've all gotten through three so far, but it was equally terrifying each time, if not a little more each time - you never know when each moment was going to be your last, if you might die in battle. Even though that's considered rather heroic and such, I don't think any of us really wanted to die at all.

Since it was so dark in the tunnel, we all agreed to keep our right hand on the right wall and to create a kind of conga line and hold onto each other from the back.

There was no telling anymore what time of day it was. I knew it was around three o'clock or so when we had first entered the tunnel, but other than that I had no telling. All of our watches, my mere coincidence, were solar powered - thus, no power. We had nothing. All we could do was keep walking.

We walked for probably a two hour period before. I noticed that the path that we were following was kind of steeped uphill. We were going someplace, whether we wanted to or not.

Eventually, after a few more hours, we came to a huge room. There wasn't anything in it - there weren't even two tunnels going two different directions - it was just a huge room. It was a bit brighter, so we could see a bit more, though none of us could figure out why. There was more of the tunnel on the other end of the room, no doors, no guards, no nothing. Just the rest of the tunnel.

"I say we stop here. Rest. It's got to be well into the night by now - we all need rest, and then we can continue on. By now there can't be much more of the tunnel, we'll hit wherever they're keeping Eli tomorrow, and we'll all be nice and rested." Po suggested, and we all silently agreed. No one unpacked or anything - we all just found a nice spot of soft dirt and knocked ourselves out until the next day.

I don't know about anyone else, but I woke up to a burning sensation.

Being the lazy teenager I was, though, I naturally didn't do anything about it. I just laid on the ground for a few more minutes before it got way too uncomfortable. Then I opened my eyes, and I found us surrounded by fire.

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How did we not hear the crackling of the flames, I have no idea. No one else was up - for some reason they weren't bothered by all the smoke everyone was inhaling and the heat that was coming from the flames.

How did the flames get here anyway? Who came and set us a trap? Even the doorway was blocked, but the hall behind the doorway didn't seem to be on fire, which obviously made no sense to me.

"Guys!" I yelled, trying to yell above all the noise, but no one could hear me - or the flames, for that matter. It was up to me to put out the fire; I didn't want to use our water bottles; it wasn't going to help, and it was just going to be a waste. So I did what any other teenage dude would do - I woke up my little sister. "Zoey! Crap Zoey, get up!" I yelled, shaking her. She woke up almost immediately, half making me think that she was just avoiding having to get up altogether.

As soon as she realized we were surrounded by flames, she screamed. "We need to put that out"

"No duh, Sherlock! How! We can't use our water, that's going to be a waste, there's too many flames!"

Zoey looked around for something that would help, anything. Nothing came to her. She ran over to her backpack and used her own waterbottle to try and put out the flames nearest to the doorway, with no luck. I didn't know what to do - I didn't want to use my own water - until I noticed Ravi shaking. Someone shaking in his sleep? Never a good sign.

"Ravi! Ravi, get up man, we're in kind of a crisis moment. Kind of a crisis moment! Ravi!" Ravi didn't get up, even as I yelled in his ear, and the flames only grew. "Augh! Zoey, help me! Give me some of that water!" Zoey twisted the cap back on and threw the water bottle across the cavern. "If you die dude, I'm so sorry, but we'd all die anyway if you don't get up." I untwisted the cap and poured the remainder of the water bottle's contents all over Ravi, which immediately aroused him from his nightmares.

Immediately, the flames withdrew into the ground, as if they were never there - there weren't even any marks on the walls.

"You woke me up! And now I'm all wet! What did you do that for?!" Ravi was screaming at us, which happened to wake everyone up.

"What happened?" Ava asked, looking around. "Ethan, what did you set on fire? It smells like smoke. This is not the place to have a barbeque."

"I don't know, ask this guy! I didn't do anything."

Ava looked at Ravi. "What happened?"

Zoey huffed, trying to breathe in air that wasn't smoke. "This guy set the room on fire in his sleep."

"How?"

"I don't know. Usually it only happens in my nightmares when it gets uncontrollable, but usually I'm able to control it. It doesn't take that much to control it either... But if I don't even have the power that I can control something like that, I don't think we have that much time anymore. We need to move."

It took a while for this to sink in. When it finally did, everyone's eyes got wide and we all picked ourselves up from the ground and moved through the tunnel, to wherever that took us.

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"Wait, so let me get this straight. When you have a nightmare, you set the room on fire? What happens if someone puts your hand in warm water while you sleep?"

Chapter 65: Zoey

Chapter 64: Zoey

I was sweating.

Sorry, I forgot: I'm a girl; girls don't sweat, they sparkle.

Like vampires.

Let me start over.

I was sweating.

That fire had burnt all my power out of me (pun intended... Okay not really, but I looked back at what I had said and realized, so now I'm going to say it was totally intended), and for some reason now I was just not sure if I was up for fighting whatever thing we had to fight to get Eli back.

The tunnel seemed to keep going for another half hour or so - no one could really tell the actual time, we were really bad at that and it was too dark for watches (even those that glow in the dark) anyway. Eventually we finally came to another cavern like the one we were previously in - except this one seemed to be a lot bigger. Mark and Ethan had almost stumbled right through it, before they realized that this was our stop.

We heard voices, kind of like slithers but we could understand it completely.

"Do you think they'll come soon? I'm hungry."

"Shush! They must come! The Guardian is here! They have to come if they don't want their precious kingdom to fall."

"Yes, yes, you're right. But we haven't eaten in so long! I dreamt of food last night, a big feast - it was made out of all the fools. That little one tasted the best, I must say."

I shuddered - she was probably talking about me. I mean, yay, thanks, I taste good, but seriously? Cannibalism. Cannibalism. Or not, murder, rather, since those creatures didn't sound that human.

Ava tapped me on the shoulder from behind. "Those things don't sound like the creatures that were in my dream. I don't think they are - there's no way. They're female. Or sound female, rather. That thing in my dream wasn't human. These sound like snakes - the thing's shadow looked like a bull. Like the Minotaur or something. There's no way that's them." I shushed her and we all stood in silence, continuing to try to listen.

"When will they come!"

"Silence!" The more assertive one exclaimed. As far as we knew, there were only two - of course, the others could just be extremely quiet, though I don't know of a single creature that can keep quiet. "You never know, they might be right behind us!"

"Look then, they're not."

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"Fine. They're not. But that's because they're right behind the door!" Suddenly I felt a strong feeling in the pit of my stomach, and I was being pulled forward by an invisible rope. The rest of them were too - our weapons we had been holding had disintegrated or disappeared - either way we didn't have anything. We struggled against the invisible bonds, but we were pulled forward, until we were facing two Medusas.

Of course they weren't Medusa. First, we'd be stone. Second, there couldn't be two. But the sight of both the monsters was just as bad as seeing a Medusa. Apollo spoke first, trying to get over his fright. "Who are you!? What are you hiding? Where's Eli?"

"Quiet!" One of the serpent like things spoke. She was bright orange with red hair, flowing all over the place as if on fire. She had a spiked tongue and sharp teeth - her feet were webbed, like a frog's. Her hands were like a gorilla's. She looked as though God tried to combine all the animals in the world, got fed up with the outcome, and cast the thing there. "We are The Sisters. We hide nothing - it is you that hide. Eli is not here - you're not to see Eli until you are ready, and that will most likely be in death - right after we kill you!"

The other sister laughed. She was a dark purple and had blue hair. Other than that she looked exactly like her sister, only she had chosen to wear a bright yellow mini skirt and a light pink shirt. She looked like a very confused Lakers fan, to be honest. "Yes! Yes! Right after we eat you! It will be delicious! And I see my dessert!" She eyed me carefully, probably trying to imagine what part of me would become her whipped cream.

"Where's Eli then?" Mark snarled, an expression on his face that I had never seen before. "Where is she?"

"Oh, she's father along your path, if you get by us - but that of course, will not happen. There's no way." The purple sister smiled.

I sighed in exasperation, Honestly, I was getting kind of sick of the weird monsters. "Wait, you said you were The Sisters?"

"Yes! Yes! You have heard of us, I presume? We are quite famous - there is no way you haven't heard of us!"

"Sorry, no. But I was just wondering... If you're The Sisters... Usually peoples' titles include an 'of'. You know, like the Guardians of Gahoole - Loved that movie, by the way - but, you guys should be The Sisters of something. Like food. you guys seem to like food a lot."

"Food! Yes! Brilliant!"

"Quiet! No, we are not The Sisters of Food. We can be the Sisters of Something, like you said. The Sisters of Something. I like that. Pam, do you like that?"

Ethan snorted. "You're name is Pam?"

"Yes! Pam! Pam, Sister of Something! Why?"

"Nothing. It's a cool name. I just thought it'd be something else like.. Something I can't pronounce or something."

"Why would it be someone one can't pronounce? We want our names to be feared, and it can't be feared if one cannot pronounce it!" Pam retorted.

Mark laughed. "She's got a point, Ethan. When she says Pam I tremble in my socks. Anyone else?"

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We all laughed and agreed, before Pam got fed up and started to act like her sister. Her skin turned bright orange and her hair red, and the other Sister's hair turned blue and her skin purple. The other sister groaned. "Augh! Pam! I told you, I always get to be orange! Change back!"

"No, Pam! When ou're purple you're Pam, and when you're orange you're Susie. They fools ar right, Susie is a lot more intimidating than Pam! What a foolish name, Pam!"

Ravi snorted. "Yes, much more intimidating. Much."

"Enough!" Susie, now apparently Pam, screamed in frustration. "The hiding! The fears! You will face your fears now! If you dont' succeed, you die! If you succeed, we kill you! Let the games begin!" Pam (Susie?) strolled over to where a level sat and pulled it, and suddenly I found myself in a glass box.

Chapter 66: Ava

Chapter 65: Ava

I now hate glass boxes.

Before I thought that they were okay, since I mean, they were all pretty and reflected glass and made all that rainbow stuff that we learned from Mrs. Frizzle and her Magic School Bus... But now I hate them. I was in a glass box. Besides me was a hammer, knife, rope, chair, and nails. I looked around - the others were nowhere to be found.

The Sisters had said something about fears - which scared me in itself. Fears. What was my biggest fear? When you think about it, can you really tell? I noticed that I tend to hate whatever my fear is so much that I push it down so much that I forget about it - but when it pops back up again it's pretty terrifying.

I wasn't sure what I was supposed to do with the given items. I wasn't scared of any of them. Would the rope turn into a snake? No, that'd be too easy - I'd just chop off its head with the knife. What if the knife turned into something too? Then what? Well, they said that if we succeeded in facing our fears, they'd eat us. Okay, ignore the eating part, but they did say that we could succeed - so what was the thing that I had to surpass.

I was worried about the others - what were their fears? Was anyone going to die today? No one should die. They couldn't. No. The group was going to have to be invincible, no one was going to die...

"Ava?"

Zoey. I looked up and around but saw no one. "Ava?" I heard her voice again. "Ava, help me."

"Zoey! Zoey, where are you?"

No answer.

"Ava, help me."

"Ava?"

"Ava, help me."

"Ava?"

"Ava, help me."

I heard the voices of the entire group. I looked around but saw no one. "WHERE ARE YOU?" I cried out, and fell on the ground. "I want to help you but I don't know where you are! Help me help you!" I sounded like an advertisement. No.

"Ava?"

I looked up once more and expected to see nothing, just as before. But instead I saw everyone - everyone, perfectly fine, perfectly still, but their faces looked petrified.

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"Ava."

"Guys!" I rose and ran towards them, only to notice that I was being blocked by the glass wall. "Guys!" I put my hand against the glass door and waited for them to do something, but they didn't do anything. They just kept calling my name, like zombies. "Ava."

"Ava, help us."

"We need you, Ava."

"Ava, we thought we could trust you."

"Help us, Ava."

I pounded on the glass wall but it didn't break. I picked up the hammer and banged on the wall - not even a crack. "Ava. Help us."

"I'm trying! I'm trying!" I looked at them once more - they were all standing on chairs. "Guys?" I blinked - There was a noose hanging from an invisible ceiling. "Guys. NO! ZOEY! ETHAN! MARK! STOP!" I blinked once more and there wasn't a chair. Their heads were through the noose, and they were all just hanging there. They had hanged themselves.

"No." I muttered. I looked away from the image, only to figure out that this room wasn't just glass, they were mirrors. Everywhere I looked I saw them. "No." I didn't want to do anything. What was I supposed to do? Was it all a dream, or did they actually do so? Did they all fail their fears too and so that's their punishment before they go?

I just wanted to be with them again. I needed them back. I looked around again. The chair. The rope. The nails. I stood on the chair without any emotion and hammered a nail into the ceiling - it didn't break. I made a makeshift noose out of the rope and hung it from the nail - stood on the chair, put my head through the noose, and -

I was back in the cavern with a screaming Pam and Susie.

Chapter 67: Ethan

Chapter 66: Ethan

Oh god...

I had forgotten what my worse fear was. That was terrifying. How was I back here? How had I survived? Impossible. I was sure I was going to die and not make it... It was a lose lose situation.. how had I made it through?

Beside me were the others. All of them. All of them seemed scarred, scared, and they were all breathing heavily, especially Mark and Elidi, but other than that everything seemed okay. Pam and Susie were in the corner, hunched over like elderly woman with terribly bad backs.

"Never.... Has anyone... Defeated their fears with that much confidence and trust... Why.... What has happened..." Pam and Susie said in sync. They seemed to be crying in the corner, not bothering us. I looked around and moved my arms a bit - they moved, they hadn't even rekidnapped us, and yet we were all too scarred to do anything. I looked around, and saw all our weapons lying against a wall of the cave - I would only have to back up a few paces and grab my own sword.

I started edging backwards. Ravi noticed me and gave me his signature curious look, and I put my finger to my mouth and whispered "Well we can't let the live."

I grabbed my sword as quietly as I could and edged back forward again. Pam and Susie moaned. "Oh, they move! The strongest continues to taunt us with his willpower! He moves! Kill us now, strong beast, take away our lives, save us of suffering!" Pam moaned, basically leaning her own head towards me. "Now, now, kill us now!"

I didn't know what to do. The heroes in movies, they also saved the person's life if they offered it to them. but I couldn't take that chance. We had to get through this, we had to keep going. I charged forward and chopped off both of the Sister's heads with one clean swipe.

"Sisters... Sister... Sister..." Susie screamed, then faded out.

Ava grimaced. "What'd you do that for?"

"We had to get rid of them. We couldn't risk it. We have to go and find Eli now. The next tunnel - we need to find it. We need to find Eli. Ravi, Elidi, Po - how do you call each other when something up, even when times are normal? I mean, you guys must have some way of contacting each other even when everything's okay."

The three looked at each other. "We don't do anything. They just come along. I mean, sometimes we send each other sun glares, but I don't think that's possible right now, is it." Po offered, which - he was right - it didn't help that much.

"We need to move." Ava suggested, grabbing everyone's sacks and weapons and passing them carefully to their owners. "We can't stay here forever - we're running out of time. I mean, anyone else feel really light headed after facing their freaking darkest fears?"

Mark raised his hand and shook his head, like he was trying to get rid of the memory. I don't blame him - my experience was just as bad. No one really wanted to talk about it though, so instead we all just grabbed our stuff

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from Aa and continued on our way.

"Next stop, hopefully, it's saving Elidi." Ravi muttered. Maybe he was trying to put a good spin on things. Or maybe he was just being obvious.

Chapter 68: Zoey

Chapter 67: Zoey

I hadn't exactly realized how serious my worst fear was until it hapened. I think that's how it was with everyone. But seriously. I hated the experience... Having everyone depend on me, having everyone follow me, i Just wanted to die...

But we had to all get passed that. No one really alked about what they had to face - none of us raelly wanted to, for that matter. We all just kept to ourselves and continued to walk down the next tunnel, hoping that that tunnel was the one that would lead us to Eli. Not some random creature that was going to try and stop us from getting to her.

We must have traveled for at least another thirty minutes before we hit another cavern like the two before. This time, Po adnd Ravi had almost waltzed right in before we stopped them. We took this as a bad sign, though the optimistics in the group tried to make good out of it - since they had waltzed right in and people hadn't killed them yet that's got to be a good thing, right?

No one answered those optimistics.

I huffed. "Let's see what's in there, then, since you all are so much of wimps to find out." I sighed, passed the others, and peeked my head behindt he corner of the tunnel exit, and I found myself looking at emptiness.

There wasn't anything there. It was just another cavern.

"It's fine, you idiots, there's nothing here."

"Zoey?"

I turned. That voice was not one of the groups, and had come from somewhere behind me. "Hello?" I called out, quietly - there was definitely someone there, and if someone was there, hat means that someone else was there too - and that was not going to be a peson on our side.

"Over here."

"I can't see you. Who are you?" I called out again, drawing my dagger just in case.

"It's me, Eli. Help me. I'm in the corner of this cavern, but you can't see me - these fools must have cast a invisibility charm over me - please, come. Touch me, that's all you have to do, and then I'll become visible again. Please, hurry, I don't know how long my captors will be gone."

Elidi had heard the entire thing, naturally, and being the excited little person she was, ran forward. "Eli! I've missed you so much, how are you, where are you? I must help you, I'm -" Her happy words of excitment was interrupted by her piercing scream. "Let me go you big jerk! Let me go!" Elidi starting cussing like a sailor as Eli started chanting some weird spells, probably trying to protect Elidi.

Ethan ran out from behind the wall before we could stop him. "Put her down! What?" He threatened, and then stood back, confused. There wasn't aything there. Of course we could tell that something was there, otherwise Elidi wouldn't be hanging in the air with her face pointed upwards towards the ceiling - she would be back on the floor, not a scratch.

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"Everyone out from behind the wall! Everyone! Drop your weapons where I can see them! Or the girl dies! And I don't think you want one of your Guardians dead! Of course, you'll all be dead in an hour or two - the sun is almost out - I've absorbed all its powers, it can't go anywhere, you are all screwed! Of course, this one can last a bit longer if you all drop your weapons now!"

We all regretted it, but we all came out from behind the wall and dropped our weapons in a pile in front of us. "Now let her go." Mark demanded, and the thing laughed.

"Haha, good one, I'll keep this little one for now."

"Let her go!" Ethan yelled again, picking up his sword again and pointing it in the general direction of the monster. "Release her!"

The giant growled and slowly started becoming visible. He was as tall as a mountain - at least forty feet tall, a pure giant. I hadn't realized how tall this cavern was, but the giant becoming visible just made it that much bigger. How were we supposed to slit his throat or something if it was all way up there? The rest of him came visible as well. He had incept pointy horns on the top of his heads that could easily just be knives, if you were to rip it off. He had large biceps and looked almost like a Hercules, if the guy didn't have the horns. He wore, for some reason, a fez, which made him almost look cool, except that the horns just completely ruined the look. The giant was a nice tanned brown which would make any other girl swoon, if he weren't holding our friend at least twenty feet in the air with a huge knife against her neck. He could have easily made a decapitated Elidi at any moment, even if his hand was shaking in the slightest, but he didn't. The only thing that was really shaking was Elidi herself. I didn't blame her - having a blade against your neck must not be that comfortable.

"The sword."

"The girl."

"You make it sound as though you aren't fond of this little girl in the first place. What's this one's name? Elidi? Ah, Elidi. I've heard a lot about you. I feel like I know you practically, since I have heard so much. See, I studied each and every one of you so that I knew exactly what I was doing when I was thinking of this. You thought that you wouldn't run into anyone like me, did you? You thought this would only be people, just regular old citizens that wouldn't be citizens because they'd be part of the Rebellion. You didn't expect any of this, did you? But I also read that you all must be very bright. Thus, you must have been expecting the enemy to demand for you all to put down your swords. Put them down!"

"Ethan!" Eli yelled, "just drop the sword!"

"Follow her orders, young man. Set a good example for these others."

Ethan, reluctantly, dropped his sword. The monster held out his hand and all our supplies flew towards the other end of the cavern, way too far for us to reach it without us getting squished by the giant's foot.

"Ah, see how easy that was? Good job. Now, what to do, what to do. I'm going to put the little girl down now. And you guys can either leave and try to get your lives, though I don't know if you really have a good chance at that, or just stand against that wall over there like I'd really rather prefer you do. Sound good?"

The giant lowered Elidi to about six feet and dropped her - she nearly landed on her head, but thank God landed on her back instead. She gave a little oomph, then we all lined up against the wall like the guy wanted us to do. We didn't know what else to do. What else were we supposed to do? Sure, there were seven of us, eight if you counted Eli (but we didn't since she was all tied up), but there was a forty foot giant standing in

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front of us waiting for us to do something so that we could give him the opportunity to crush him.

Because, you know, that's always fun.

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