

PAGES
& CO

TILLY AND THE
MAP OF STORIES

Books by Anna James

PAGES & CO:

TILLY AND THE BOOKWANDERERS

TILLY AND THE LOST FAIRY TALES

TILLY AND THE MAP OF STORIES

PAGES & CO

TILLY AND THE MAP OF STORIES



ANNA JAMES

Illustrated by Paola Escobar



HarperCollins *Children's Books*



First published in Great Britain by
HarperCollins *Children's Books* in 2020
HarperCollins *Children's Books* is a division of HarperCollinsPublishers Ltd,
HarperCollins Publishers
1 London Bridge Street
London SE1 9GF

The HarperCollins website address is
www.harpercollins.co.uk

1

Text copyright © Anna James 2020
Illustrations copyright ©Paola Escobar 2020
Cover design copyright © HarperCollinsPublishers Ltd 2020
All rights reserved.

ISBN 978-0-00-822994-8

Anna James and Paola Escobar assert the moral right to be identified
as the author and illustrator of the work respectively.
A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Typeset in Aldus LT Std 12pt/16pt by <typesetter>
Printed and bound in England by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY
A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Conditions of Sale

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or
otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior
consent in any form, binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without
a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.



MIX
Paper from
responsible sources
FSC™ C007454

This book is produced from independently certified FSC™ paper
to ensure responsible forest management.

For more information visit: www.harpercollins.co.uk/green

For Adam
I love writing our story together.



Previously in Pages & Co.

In *Tilly and the Bookwanderers*, Matilda Pages discovered that she was a bookwanderer; that she could travel inside her favourite books. While looking for her missing mother with her best friend, Oskar, she discovered that her father was a fictional character and that meant she was half fictional herself.

In *Tilly and the Lost Fairy Tales*, Tilly and Oskar came up against the Underwood siblings. Melville Underwood has managed to get into power at the British Underlibrary and wants to control who has access to bookwandering. His sister, Decima, is experimenting with book magic in order to try and steal stories' innate immortality and believes that Tilly's half-fictional nature may be the key.

Tilly has found or been given several clues while bookwandering, and she and Oskar believe that there may be a map to find the Archivists, who are supposed to protect bookwandering but who haven't been heard from for many, many years.

A PROPER PLAN

‘I’m looking for a book.’

Matilda Pages and her grandad looked up from writing book recommendation cards to see a man standing in front of them at the desk of Pages & Co. The shop was quiet and golden-hour sunlight dripped in through the tall windows, making everything feel sleepy and peaceful.

‘Well, we can definitely help you with that,’ Grandad said, glad of a customer. ‘Which book was it?’

‘I can’t quite remember the title, I’m afraid,’ the man went on. ‘Or the author, now I come to think about it. But I know that it has a blue cover. Or at least I think so.’

'Can you remember *anything* about what's inside?' Grandad said encouragingly. Tilly grinned: she loved watching him work out which book someone wanted from whatever tiny bits of information they could remember.

'Not really . . .' the man said vaguely. 'How strange! I came to the shop specifically to pick this book up – it was my favourite when I was little, or was it my mum's favourite? It slips my mind. And, now I'm here, I can't remember the first thing about it. Maybe it wasn't so special after all . . .'

'Sounds like it meant a lot to you once upon a time,' Grandad said. 'I'm sure I can make some educated guesses if you can remember anything at all about it, or maybe we could help you find something different to read?'

'That's very kind of you,' the man said politely, although he was already glancing back at the door. 'But honestly – and I know this is the wrong thing to say in a bookshop – I just don't seem to care any more.'

Grandad raised an eyebrow.

'I'm sorry, I don't mean to be rude,' the man went on. 'It's just the more I think about it, the more I'm confused about what I even came in for.'

'A book,' Grandad reminded him. 'With a blue cover.'

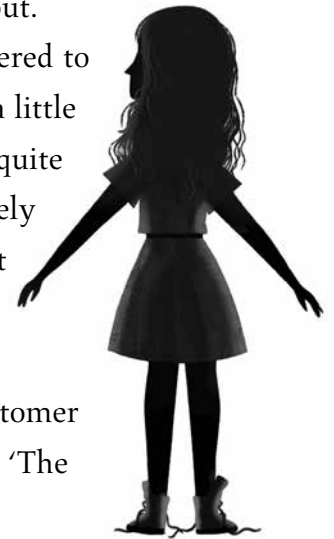
'I'm not even sure it was blue,' the man said, shrugging. 'Oh well, thank you for your help.' And with that he was gone.

'How peculiar,' said Grandad.

'People can't remember what they're looking for all the time, though,' Tilly pointed out.

'Yes, but usually, if they've bothered to make it into the bookshop, they're a little more persistent, sometimes even quite annoyed that we can't immediately identify what they're after. *He* just seemed to forget what he even wanted as we spoke.'

'Actually, there was another customer like that,' Tilly said, remembering. 'The



other day a woman was just standing, staring at a bookshelf for about ten minutes, not picking up any books or anything, and, when I asked if I could help her find something, she said she wasn't sure, and then wandered off.'

'Mmm, very strange,' said Grandad, but his attention had been distracted by a list of numbers on the screen of the till, his brow furrowed in concern. 'Well, let's hope it's not a trend,' he said. 'We've been selling fewer and fewer books over the last couple of months. Maybe it's just that it's finally getting warmer and people are getting excited about being outside. As if we didn't have enough to worry about. How are you coping without bookwandering?'

'I hate it,' Tilly said vehemently. 'I hate that I can't do it, and that I can't talk to Anne or bookwander with Oskar, and most of all I hate that the Underwoods could just take it away without asking.'

Since Melville Underwood had become Head Librarian at the British Underlibrary and made his sister, Decima, his official Advisor, they had made

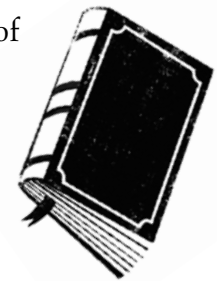
good on their threat to limit bookwandering by binding Source Editions. They had promised, in a series of very formal statements, that it was only a short-term measure to keep bookwandering safe while they got to grips with their new roles, but the Pages family had very little trust in statements or promises from the twins.

'Remind me how bookbinding works?' Tilly said. 'Why did somebody even invent that in the first place?!'

'It was the Bookbinders,' Grandad explained. 'That group of librarians who, years and years ago, first wanted to try to control who could bookwander. They use book magic to do it: that black sticky stuff you saw when the Underwoods were breaking up the fairy tales. It's barbaric, really, the uses they put book magic to – the very opposite of where it comes from.'

'But how does it work? Have you ever done it?'

'Books should only be bound in



the most serious of situations,' Grandad said. 'And some would say never at all. While I was in charge at the British Underlibrary, we only bound a book once and I'm still not certain it was the right thing to do. However, the process itself is fairly simple. All you have to do is trace an X of book magic over the first word of a book's Source Edition and it's like locking the door.'

'So the Underwoods have done that to all the Source Editions?'

'All the ones at the British Underlibrary, it would seem. Although, knowing them, they got some of their underlings to do it – no doubt the librarians who've gleefully revived the Bookbinder name. But don't worry, Tilly, we'll think of something soon.'

'I don't understand why you're so calm about it,' Tilly said, the anger at having her freedom to bookwander stripped from her still prickling under her skin.

'I'm not at all calm about it,' Grandad replied. 'I'm as angry as you are, but it's too big a fight to just wade

into and cause more problems. We have to make sure the Sources are protected at all times, as well as the people working at the Underlibrary. We need a proper plan.'

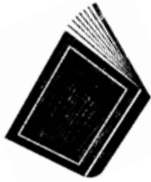
'I *suggested* a proper plan,' Tilly said mutinously.

'I know you think that . . . I mean, I understand that you believe . . .' Grandad faltered under the apparent strain of trying to say what he meant – without actually saying what he meant.

'I know you don't believe me that the Archivists are real, or that I know how to find them,' said Tilly. 'You don't need to explain again. You're not going to convince me, though. Two separate people told me and Oskar that they use maps to tell you where they are – and I'm sure I've been sent one.'

'You weren't given a map, sweetheart,' Grandad said gently. 'You found a collection of items that you think are linked together because you want to be able to help. And we love you so much for that, but it's too great a risk to follow those clues . . . Well, we *couldn't* follow them. Where would we even start?'

Tilly rolled her eyes. 'We'd start at the Library of Congress, in America,' she explained as if speaking to a child who wasn't paying attention. 'That's where the first clue said to go. It had a . . . what did Mum call it, an American postcode?'



'A zip code,' Grandad said.

'Right, a zip code! And it had a library classmark—you said yourself that classmarks are like maps – that's how I knew!'



'We can't fly all the way to America to find a book, Tilly,' Grandad said. 'Now, give me a few moments of quiet so I can look through these sales figures again. Why don't you go and find your mum, there's a good girl?'

One of the things that Tilly loved most about her grandparents was that they almost always spoke to her as if she were a proper person who understood things, and felt things, and had good ideas. But that meant it stung even more when they spoke down to her, as though she were just too young to understand

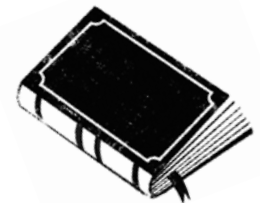
what they were dealing with.

She stood up without saying anything else, meaning to go and find Bea and talk to *her* about the map, but, before she could wander over to the stairs, the phone behind the counter started ringing.

'Good morning, Pages & Co.,' Grandad said. 'Archie speak— Oh, Seb, hello, any news? Oh . . . Right . . .' He looked up to check Tilly hadn't gone and held a hand out to tell her to stay put. 'I've got her here,' he said down the phone, and Tilly felt a wave of fear crash over her. Grandad slammed the phone down and dragged her towards the door that connected the bookshop to where the Pages family lived.

'What are you doing?' she asked, trying to wriggle out of his grasp. 'You're hurting me, Grandad!'

'I'm sorry, Tilly,' he said, 'but we need to get you hidden. Right now. That was Seb. The Underwoods are on their way here – and it's you they want.'



A SMALL INKLING OF DOUBT

What do they want me for?' Tilly asked as they ran through the kitchen and up the stairs.

'I dread to think,' Grandad said, 'considering that the last time you saw them they were trying to steal your blood.'

'But it's not like they can do anything here at Pages & Co.,' Tilly said, out of breath as she jogged after Grandad right up to the top floor where her bedroom was. 'And it's not as though they've got anything to bargain with now they've already stopped us bookwandering.'

'I'm not taking that risk,' Grandad said. 'As far as

they're concerned, you are at a friend's house for tea. Your grandma and I will speak to them and find out what they want, and I'll send your mum up here to wait with you. I'll lock the door to the shop, and you must promise me that you won't come downstairs. Yes?'

'I promise,' Tilly said sincerely.

'This is the first time I've been glad that you can't bookwander, so you won't be able to disappear off somewhere,' he said grimly as he shut the door behind her firmly.

Tilly listened to his footsteps fade as he headed back downstairs, and realised she'd left her phone in the bookshop and couldn't even text her best friend, Oskar, to tell him what was happening. She had her bookcase, of course, but she wasn't sure she'd be able to sit and focus on reading when she was so anxious. Although, judging by the pile of only-just-started books by her bed, her concentration had been all over the place for a while. Tilly realised she hadn't finished a book for nearly a week – a seriously long time for a reader of her commitment.

Tilly ran her fingers along her shelves, trying to summon that faith she had always had in the serendipity of a bookshelf – that you often ended up finding exactly the right book at the right time. Maybe there was something there that would distract her. Usually, her bookcase was so full that it took quite a yank to even get a book out, but Tilly noticed there were a couple of gaps at the moment. She couldn't quite place what was missing – she must have left them downstairs or lent them to Oskar.

On one of the shelves was a curious selection of objects: the items that she was sure were clues to lead her to the Archivists. Even though Grandma and Grandad thought the Archivists were nothing more than a bookwandering fairy tale, Tilly just knew it was too much of a coincidence that these particular

items had all ended up with her.

A slim book and a ball of red thread given to her by a librarian at the



French Underlibrary, a key from *The Secret Garden*, a bag of breadcrumbs from 'Hansel and Gretel'. All of them had found their way to her over the course of a few days. Surely they had to mean *something*? But, when she looked at them lined up like this, she couldn't ignore a small inkling of doubt. It was hard not to see them as Grandad did – a row of unrelated objects she'd picked up while bookwandering, smothered in wishful thinking.

Tilly sighed. Not for the first time, she wished she could bookwander – to try to find some more clues, to get Anne Shirley's take on the situation, or just to take her mind off whatever was going on downstairs in the bookshop. All of them had, of course, tried to bookwander after Seb told them what Melville had done, but it just didn't work. There was a flash of a moment where you felt the familiar pull of the story, the leap in your stomach and even the faint smell of toasting marshmallows, but then there was a feeling like an elastic band that had stretched as far as it could and you were bounced back again.

Tilly grabbed a book at random off her shelf and stared at it in frustration. It was *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. It was one of Tilly's favourite places to bookwander, and Alice often used to pop into the bookshop to say hello.

Tilly opened the book and, thinking about what Grandad had told her about bookbinding, stared at the first word. She could see that there was the suggestion of a shadow across it. She tried to scratch or rub it off, but nothing happened. There was still a slight mark there, echoing the book magic that had bound the Source Edition at the Underlibrary. She flicked through the pages, stopping at the familiar scene of the Mad Hatter's tea party, the first place she had ever bookwandered to.

She sat on the edge of her bed and read it aloud, trying to conjure up the feeling of awe that she'd experienced the first time she had been pulled inside the pages of a book.

'There was a table set out under a tree in front of the house, and the March Hare and the Hatter were

having tea at it: a Dormouse was sitting between them, fast asleep, and the other two were using it as a cushion, resting their elbows on it, and talking over its head.'

Tilly kept reading and let herself be swept away by the story. A few moments later, she sneezed.

'Stupid hay fever,' Tilly said to herself, brushing away the flowers that were too close to her face – before realising they had not been there a moment ago.

'Where have you come from?' she said, looking up to realise that it wasn't just flowers that had appeared. Instead of her wooden floor, there was a carpet of grass, fragrant and slightly damp from the dew. More brightly coloured flowers were sprouting up in the corners of the room, and there was even the unmistakable sound of birdsong in the air, even though her skylight window was firmly closed against April showers. The wooden legs of a table seemed to be growing up out of the grass, creaking as they shimmered



into existence.

Tilly started and the book fell shut on her bed, and in the blink of an eye it all disappeared.

'What

is

going

on?'

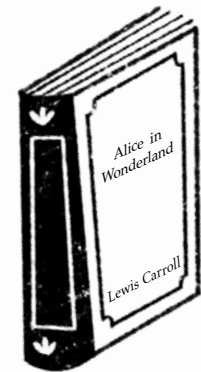
she whispered.

3

I'VE ALWAYS LIKED TREASURE HUNTS

Tilly sat on her bed, staring at the copy of *Alice*.

She was thinking about when she'd accidentally pulled the secret garden out into her bedroom just before Christmas, and the fairytale forest that had escaped on to the train to Paris. She picked the book up again, a little gingerly, and turned over a few pages to the passage where Alice meets the tricky caterpillar that sits on top of a mushroom.



Wanting to know more about what was happening, she tried to concentrate on pulling that scene out

of the book, but all she managed was to make her bedroom smell like mushrooms. Tilly put the book down again and reached across for the large, ornate key that had stayed put even when the secret garden that had erupted into her bedroom had gone. She looked round her room, wondering if anything had been left behind this time – maybe another clue even – but there was only the faintest scent of spring grass in the air.

‘I bet the Underwoods would love to know about this,’ she said, smiling to herself. ‘They might have been able to stop me travelling inside books, but they haven’t stopped the stories coming to *me*.’

But her satisfaction in slipping round the edges of the Underwoods’ rules didn’t last long. After all, Melville and Decima were, at that very moment, in Pages & Co. The siblings looked like twins – both slender, blond and cold – but were less alike in character. Melville occupied the most powerful position at the Underlibrary, but it was his sister, Decima, who was the brains behind the operation.

Melville had manipulated his way to the top with sly words and charm that he turned on and off as easily as a light bulb, while it was Decima who understood book magic, and what you could do with it. She was the one who had realised that some of the everlasting nature of stories might be contained in Tilly’s half-fictional blood.

Even though she was four floors up, and separated from them by several doors, at least one of which was locked, Tilly felt as though she could sense them downstairs and her knees started to fidget as she resisted the urge to go and stand up for herself. She was saved from having to decide whether to disobey Grandad by a soft knock on her door.

‘It’s Bea,’ her mum said. ‘I mean, it’s Mum.’

After Bea had been away for so long, trapped in *A Little Princess* for eleven years, they still hadn’t quite settled on what Tilly should call her, and sometimes neither term felt quite right.

‘Come in,’ Tilly called and her mum slipped round the door.

'How are you doing?' Bea asked, moving the copy of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* out of the way and sitting next to Tilly on the bed.

Tilly shrugged, not sure what to say. 'Kind of scared, and kind of confused, and kind of frustrated,' she said. 'I suppose?'

'All of that makes sense,' Bea said.

'Do you know what the Underwoods want?' Tilly asked.

'Not yet. Your grandad whisked me away just as they were arriving.'

'But they can't do anything bad, can they?' Tilly said. 'There are customers around.'

'I hope not,' said Bea. 'But I don't know, Tilly. Whatever they want unnerved Seb enough to call ahead. We'll find out when your grandparents come up and get us. But while we've got a moment to ourselves . . .' Bea glanced around and her eyes settled on Tilly's collection of clues. 'Tell me again what you've worked out.'

'You believe me?' Tilly said.

'I always believe you,' Bea said. 'And I want to try and understand what you're saying about the Archive, because I for one cannot bear just sitting around, waiting to see what those creepy siblings are going to do next, especially when they're so focused on *you*.'

'So, there's that string of numbers and letters that we found in that pamphlet,' Tilly said, forgetting a little of her fear as she got to explain her theory to someone who was taking it seriously. 'And Grandad said it looked like a classmark, which is how you find books in a library.'

'Right,' Bea agreed. 'And therefore you think it's telling us we need to go and find something at the Library of Congress in Washington DC, because the zip code matches the address of that building?'

'Yep, exactly,' Tilly said. 'See, it's not complicated.'

'But what about all this other stuff?' said Bea, pointing to the objects on Tilly's shelf. 'How do they all link up?'

'I don't know,' Tilly admitted. 'But surely they found their way to me on purpose? And Oskar's

grandma, in Paris, she said that there's a map to the Archive.'

'How do you turn a key, a ball of thread and some breadcrumbs into a map?' Bea asked.

'Maybe map is the wrong word,' Tilly said, looking up at her mother. 'I think it might be more of a treasure hunt.'

'I've always liked treasure hunts,' Bea smiled. 'And I think it's probably fair to assume that finding the most secretive group of bookwanderers that have ever existed would involve a little more effort than following a dotted line.'

'Exactly,' Tilly said, pleased. 'But what can we do about it stuck here?'

'There are always options,' Bea said. 'And—' But she was interrupted by a knock at the door.

Tilly's bedroom door opened to show Grandma, her face pale with worry.

'They've gone,' she said quietly.

'What did they want?' asked Tilly nervously.

'Come downstairs and have a cup of tea and a slice

of cake and we'll talk properly,' Grandma said. 'We've closed the shop for the rest of the day.'

Ten minutes later, the four members of the Pages family assembled round their battered old kitchen table. Grandma had been stress-baking ever since the Source Editions had been bound and they were all picking at slices of carrot cake with cream-cheese icing, too worried to enjoy it.



'So?' Bea said, a little impatiently.

'The Underwoods are keen to understand more of your heritage, Tilly,' Grandad started. 'They were all forced smiles today, aiming to sweet-talk us on to their side.'

'They want compliance among bookwanderers,' Grandma said. 'They would like us, and you, to help them willingly.'

'But why on earth would we do that?' Tilly said, baffled.

'Well, quite,' said Grandad forcefully. 'But they're

trying to set themselves up as legitimate guardians of bookwandering, and it's not a good look to have a former Librarian and his family so publicly against them.'

'If they want to be seen as respectable, they shouldn't have tried to steal a child's blood!' Bea said angrily.

'Again, we're all on the same page,' Grandad said. And Tilly knew things were bad because usually Grandad could never resist making a joke about their surname when someone used that expression.

'They've asked that Tilly voluntarily help with their research into book magic,' he said. 'They are positioning what they're doing as an important exploration into how bookwandering works, and what book magic can do, with the suggestion being that anyone opposing them must be against progress.'

'But we already kind of knew that, didn't we?' Tilly said. 'Why did they come here? What do they want from *me*?'

'Well,' said Grandma, 'they wanted you to go

with them to the Underlibrary to see what they're working on, with one of us. That's obviously out of the question.'

'So we say no,' Tilly said. 'That's not so scary. What can they do if I don't go?'

'Stop us bookwandering,' said Grandad.

'But they already have,' Tilly pointed out.

'Temporarily,' Grandad said. 'And, if that was the whole price, then we would pay it – while we worked out what to do next. But that's not what they're threatening.'

'If we don't help,' Grandma explained, with a grim look on her face, 'then they're going to stop all children from bookwandering – *forever*.'

4

A WILD GOOSE CHASE

‘All children?’ said Tilly.
‘Yes,’ Grandad said. ‘They were very specific.’
‘Well, I have to go then,’ Tilly said, trying to sound brave, even though her stomach had just turned inside out. She steeled herself. This was what her favourite heroines would do: sacrifice themselves for the greater good. She’d be just like . . . just like . . . Tilly found that she couldn’t quite put her finger on the name, but this is what they would want. She was almost sure of it.
‘No,’ Bea said firmly. ‘Absolutely not.’
‘It’s not an option, Tilly,’ Grandad said, and Tilly couldn’t deny the huge wave of relief that washed over her. ‘Both on a personal level, because we love

you and it’s our job to keep you safe, and on principle, because we do not give in to people like this.’

‘But how could they stop just *children* bookwandering?’ Bea questioned. ‘If you bind a Source Edition, you bind it. For everyone.’

‘Well, they seem to be requiring people to swear loyalty to the new regime, and then they’re finding a way to sneak them into bound books – or at least dangling that prospect in front of them, as they just did to us, as if it might sway our allegiance. But I’m not at all sure that they’ve actually worked out a way to do it. I think it’s just something to string people along while they plot their next move.’

‘But what exactly do they want me to do?’ Tilly asked.

‘We don’t know,’ said Grandma. ‘But it can’t be good, whatever it is.’ She and Grandad shared a glance.

‘We have to go and find the Archivists,’ Tilly said firmly. ‘There’s nothing else to do – you have to see that now?’

‘No!’ Grandad snapped. ‘Tilly, I need you to stop

talking about them and stay put in the real world.'

'Why won't you believe me?' Tilly said, struggling to fight back tears.

'Because there's no evidence that the Archivists are real, and I will not have us going on a wild goose chase around the world based on one scribbled note.'

'Dad . . .' Bea started.

'Not you too,' Grandad said, his head in his hands. 'You have to trust me on this.'

'I just don't understand how you can believe in bookwandering – in actual magic – and not understand that the Archivists are real,' Tilly persisted, carefully ignoring Grandma's warning glance.

'Because I have *been* bookwandering!' Grandad said. 'Because I have seen and experienced the evidence. Bookwandering is not some old wives' tale, rumour or gossip – unlike the existence of the Archivists. I love you, Tilly, but a pile of miscellaneous objects you were given or found in books does not constitute a reason to go hunting for a fairy tale.'

'Fairy tales are real!' Tilly said in frustration.

'That's not the point,' Grandad said.

'Well then, I don't know what the point is!' said Tilly.

'The point is that we're in a bit of a bind,' Grandma sighed. 'But this family is a team and together we'll come up with a plan. Archie, why don't you go and call Amelia and get her take on this new development.'

Grandad nodded. 'I'm sorry I snapped at you, Tilly,' he said, standing up. 'I just . . . I just want to keep you safe. I want to keep you all safe.'

'We'll keep each other safe,' Grandma said firmly.

'If we just sit here, trying to stay safe, they're going to keep coming back until something awful happens,' said Tilly. 'It's not enough to hide at home – we have to go and find some answers.'



After Grandad had gone back out to the empty bookshop to phone Amelia Whisper, who had been the Head Librarian before Melville had forced her out, Grandma let out a huge sigh.

'What a to-do,' she said. 'What times we're living through.'

'Why do the Head Librarians even have so much power?' Tilly asked. 'No one should be allowed to stop bookwandering.'

'You're right,' Grandma said. 'But there has to be someone in charge, and what we're learning now is that the system isn't best set up for when someone abuses that position. People are scared and so they believe the lies that the Underwoods are spewing about progress, or whatever they're dressing up their power grab as. And, of course, there are others who have always shared their opinions, but have previously – and rightfully – been too embarrassed to publicly say so until now.'

Bea had stayed quiet throughout the conversation, seemingly lost in thought, occasionally looking at Tilly without saying anything.

'Have you got plans to see Oskar soon?' she said eventually.

'He's supposed to be coming round tomorrow,' said Tilly. 'Why?'

'I was just wondering . . . It'd be nice to see him. I might just give Mary a quick ring and . . . see what her plans are,' she finished vaguely as she stood up and left the room to make the call.

Then it was just Tilly and her grandma, who stretched out her hands across the table and grasped Tilly's tightly.

'It will work itself out,' she said. 'I promise. Don't be scared.'

'I'm not,' said Tilly, although she wasn't sure if that were true. 'But I don't want bookwandering to end for children *forever* because of me. If I could stop it, surely I should try? We could at least go and see what they want.'

Grandma didn't say anything, but a look of uncertainty crossed her face.

'Did they already say what they want?' Tilly said quietly.

Grandma shrugged helplessly. 'Your grandad doesn't want you to be scared,' she said.

'I can deal with it,' Tilly said. 'And I don't think

it's fair to keep it from me.'

'I know, I know,' Grandma said, clearly conflicted. 'Anyway, I'm sure you can imagine. You know what they wanted when they lured you to the fairytale book. They think your blood, or something to do with your very nature, is the key to permanently being able to steal the true immortality of stories. It's just not worth the risk – we don't know what they're capable of.'

'And we're not going to find out,' Bea said from the doorway.

Tilly and her grandma looked up. They hadn't noticed her come back in.

'Oskar's coming round this evening for a sleepover,' Bea continued. She turned to Grandma. 'Mum, can I have a word with you and Dad in the shop?'

Tilly went to protest, but saw something in her mum's eyes that stopped her in her tracks.

'I'll go and get a bed ready,' she said instead, and Bea gave her a tight smile as she headed back into the bookshop. Tilly and Bea were still

getting to know each other, but one thing Tilly knew for sure was that her mum was definitely up to something. And Tilly wanted to find out what it was.



That evening, a few hours after Oskar had arrived, and after a dinner of potato-and-spinach curry, the two friends were chatting on the sofa in front of the fireplace in Pages & Co. There were not many days left before Grandma would clear out the fire and replace it with garlands of fresh flowers, but it still felt cosy and warm for now.

Tilly had started carrying the key from *The Secret Garden* around with her as if it might suddenly reveal how she was supposed to use it, and was playing with it as they watched the flames dance.

'Do you have any more idea why you ended up with that?' Oskar asked, pointing at the key.

'No,' said Tilly with a sigh.



When she'd spoken to her mum, it had seemed so clear and so logical, but it was hard to maintain her confidence in the clues when it was questioned over and over again by her grandparents, not to mention the Underwoods' new threat adding even more pressure to what she chose to do. 'Over Christmas there was so much going on, and I was convinced it all meant something, but now I don't feel so sure.'

'There was the key, and that really thin book, and something else, right?' Oskar asked.

'The thread,' Tilly said. 'The red thread. I just can't ignore the feeling that they mean something important. I said to my mum that it seems like a treasure map, as though, if I could just work out how all the clues fit together, it would become obvious. But now we can't even bookwander, and aren't allowed at the Underlibrary, I don't know what we're supposed to do. And Grandma and Grandad are just cross about it all the time, but don't seem to be actually doing anything to stop the Underwoods.'

'Can I tell you something weird?' Oskar said.

'Of course.'

'It's just that I feel more cross about not being *allowed* to bookwander than not actually bookwandering. Does that make sense?'

'Kind of,' Tilly admitted. 'I wonder if it's like learning a language or an instrument or something, where if you don't use it you sort of forget about it. And sometimes I get this bad feeling in my stomach, but I can't work out what's causing it.'

'What a weird six months we've had,' Oskar said. 'Finding Bea, and going to Paris, and getting lost in fairy tales, and dealing with . . . what was his name?'

'Who do you mean?' Tilly asked. 'Melville?'

'No, no,' Oskar said. 'There was another man, wasn't there? I want to say he was the Underwoods' . . . butler? He had some kind of . . . hat? And was there a fire or something? Maybe I'm just getting confused with something I read in a book.'

'I have no idea who you're talking about,' Tilly said. 'What kind of hat?'

'A . . . Do you know, I can't remember,' Oskar said.

'Never mind. I'm obviously mixing him up with some other story. Strange.'

There was a fraction of a second where Tilly thought that maybe she knew what Oskar meant, but the thought vanished as quickly as it had arrived and she shrugged. There were bigger things to worry about. And so they changed the subject to what Jack had been cooking up for the bookshop café, and said no more about the man in the hat or the fire.



5

THOUGH SHE BE BUT LITTLE

Tilly woke in the middle of the night to Bea's finger on her lips. It was dark except for the gentle haze of London's streetlights soaking through the skylight.

'Is everyone okay?' Tilly whispered, glancing over at Oskar, who was snoring gently on the air bed in the other corner of the room.

Bea nodded. 'Do you trust me?' she asked very quietly, and Tilly didn't have to think twice. She nodded.

'I need you to get together some clothes and other bits very quickly and quietly, and I'll answer all your questions when we're in the taxi.'

'The *taxi*?' Tilly said, adrenalin coursing through her, ridding her of any traces of sleepiness. 'I *knew*

you were up to something! Where are we going? What are we doing with Oskar?’

‘He’s coming too,’ Bea said. ‘I spoke to Mary on the phone earlier and arranged everything.’

She went over and gently shook Oskar awake. He grunted in a somewhat undignified way, which Tilly and Bea pretended they didn’t hear.

‘Huh?’ he said, still half asleep. He took in Bea and the dark and sat upright. ‘Ohhh, are we going? Mum said you’d asked if she was happy for me to go on a trip with you, but I didn’t realise it was going to be in the middle of the night. Where are we going?’

He looked at Tilly, who just shrugged.

‘Get dressed in something comfy,’ Bea said, ‘and grab anything you’d want for weather a little warmer than this. Oh, and make sure you have your passport to hand.’

‘My passport?’ Tilly repeated in surprise, and Bea shushed her, looking a little jumpy. ‘I promise I’ll explain in the taxi. But we need to get going.’

‘Do . . . do Grandma and Grandad know we’re

going?’ Tilly asked, but she knew the answer already.

‘It’s time for us to take matters into our own hands,’ Bea said. ‘I’m going to get your toothbrushes, and I want you ready to go in ten minutes.’

Bea crept out of the bedroom, leaving Tilly and Oskar staring at each other.

‘You knew we were going somewhere?’ Tilly said accusingly. ‘And you didn’t say anything all evening!’

‘I thought you knew!’ he said. ‘And anyway Mum just made it sound as though your family might be going to, like, the countryside for a night, not somewhere that needed a passport! Do you think I should text her?’

‘Let’s find out where we’re going before we worry her,’ Tilly said. She was nervous, but she had a feeling this was going to be their one chance and she didn’t want anything getting in the way. They quickly got dressed and Tilly pulled out a few bits of clothing and shoved them into the small wheelie suitcase her mum had put out.

‘Ready to go?’ Bea whispered, her head round the

door, holding out a washbag for Tilly to put in her suitcase.

They nodded, fizzing with nervous excitement, and the three of them crept downstairs, through the kitchen, cold in the spring night air, and into the bookshop, which was still and dark around them. Tilly couldn't help thinking about her grandparents, and how they were going to wake up tomorrow and realise they were gone.

Hopefully, her mum had left them a note.

On the road a car was waiting in the orange puddle of a streetlight. The driver helped Bea put their bags in the boot as they slid into the taxi and it set off, heading west, out of London.

'Can you tell us what's going on now?' Tilly said, the reality of what they were doing sinking further in with every mile that they got from Pages & Co.

'I think it's time that we trust your instincts about the Archivists,' Bea said. 'There has to be a reason you can do the things you do, Tilly, and there has to be a reason why you've ended up with all those

clues. Bookwanderers treat the Archivists as wishful thinking, but it makes sense to me that there are people somewhere who could stop Underlibraries doing such terrible things. I trust you, Tilly. And so does Oskar.'

'He does?' Oskar said in surprise. Tilly and Bea stared at him. 'I mean, of course I do,' he said. 'In a general sense, at least.'

'I'll take it,' Tilly grinned. 'I trust you too . . . in a general sense.'

'And anyway,' Bea went on, 'I for one am not just going to sit around, waiting for the Underwoods to do even more damage to bookwandering, and goodness knows what other problems they're causing. They clearly don't give two hoots about the impact of their actions. However –' she paused – 'I could not get your grandparents to agree. I tried one last time this afternoon, and they're convinced it's not worth the risk. But this isn't the time to be sitting around: we have to stand up to the Underwoods. Have you two ever heard the saying, "If not us, who? And if not now,

when?" That's how I'm feeling. Tilly, if you think the start of the map – or the treasure hunt or whatever we want to call it – is at the Library of Congress, then that's where you need to begin.'

'Hang on,' Tilly said as Bea's words sank in. 'We're going to *America*?'

'We're going *where*?' Oskar repeated incredulously. 'Does my mum know?'

'Sort of,' Bea said, looking sheepish. 'She knows you're going abroad and that you'll be looked after. You'll meet one of my old university friends, in fact! He owns a bookshop and his husband is a librarian at the Library of Congress and I've filled them in on what's going on. They're both bookwanderers, of course. Tilly, I put your clues in your backpack – double-check you have them all?'

Tilly looked inside her backpack and made sure everything was there: the slim book, the key, the thread and the breadcrumbs.



'Got them,' she said.

'Good,' Bea said. 'Now I'll take you into the airport and get you to security, and Orlando will meet you at the other end.'

Tilly stared at her mum in horror. 'You're *not coming with us*?'

'I can't, I'm sorry. But I'll text you a photo of Orlando so you know who to look for when you get there, and I've given him a codeword too. Make sure he says "Hermia" to you.'

'Why Hermia?' asked Tilly.

'She's a character from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.' Bea smiled. 'Another character says about her "though she be but little, she is fierce", and it's a line that makes me think of you.'

'That's very lovely and all,' Oskar said, 'but could we focus on the fact that you're sending us to America by ourselves? Why can't you come with us?'

'I have something I need to take care of here,' Bea said,
determination running
through her voice
like **steel**.