



Chapter 10

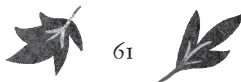
The light of the paperweight dimmed to a soft glow, barely more than a glimmer, as if it knew they needed to keep hidden. Daisy ducked low, moving stealthily through the dim shapes of the palm trees, following the thready beam of light that traced out a faint path ahead. Napoleon darted along it, confidently leading the way between the roots of the trees – and then vanished behind a cascade of vines.

She could hear Craven at the entrance to the glasshouse. The door seemed to be jammed, and he was arguing with the other man.

Daisy glanced around and pushed after Napoleon, feeling waxy leaves brush against her cheeks and catch on her clothes in her haste. Even as she ducked through the curtain of vines, she heard glass shattering as Craven broke his way into the Palm House.

‘Watch the exits, Fleish.’ His voice was harsh, and she saw him draw close to her hiding place. ‘She must be in here somewhere.’ Daisy’s breath felt stapled to the back of her throat. Her fear was so palpable she was surprised he couldn’t smell it, like a bloodhound.

‘Here, girl,’ said Craven. ‘Come out now. We won’t hurt you.’



Yeah, right, thought Daisy.

Her back was pressed against a large tree, and she crouched down to make herself smaller. And then she saw it: a small door in the heart of the foliage.



It was low and gleamed with silver light round its edges, and above it shone a coat of arms in finely worked glass: two crossed dandelions above an oak tree. The handle of the door was cool and silver, and it turned soundlessly, like something in a black-and-white film.

Napoleon leapt across the threshold, just as Craven drew closer once again. Daisy hesitated, then followed, shutting the door silently behind her.

Immediately, all noises ceased. Ahead of them was a forest of towering oak trees, twined with thorny roses. It was dim within the forest, and round lanterns were strung between the trees, scattering light like gold sequins across a narrow and winding path. Napoleon was poised just ahead of her, looking back as if to say, *Hurry up, then.* The roses were the size of dinner plates, and their scent was overwhelming, like a perfume with spikes. Plumed birds, electric blue and yellow and rainbow-coloured, glided from branch to branch, and shimmery green moths trailed from flower to flower, looking for nectar.

One thing was certain: they were no longer in Kew Gardens, or not in any part of it that Daisy knew.



She stepped forward slowly. Any moment now she'd wake up and find herself back in Kew, probably with a nasty concussion. She pinched a giant rose petal between thumb and forefinger. It was velvet-skinned and soft, and the thorn next to it, when she tested it, was sharp enough to draw blood.

'Ouch!'

Was it possible to hallucinate pain?

The paperweight shone softly in her hand, lighting the way through the forest, which seemed to grow and rise up around them. The path began to curve, and then with a sudden turn a little hut came into view, its light shining out like a star amidst the trees. As they drew closer, Daisy saw that the hut was topped with the same coat of arms she'd spotted above the silver door: crossed dandelions above an oak tree. And standing at the entrance was a squat man dressed in red overalls with gold epaulettes, like a cross between a soldier and a gardener. There was a parakeet on his shoulder and he was leaning on a sharpened pitchfork that glinted in the light.

'Hold,' he called out. 'Who goes there?'

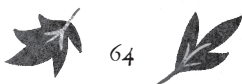
'Um,' said Daisy, glancing around. 'Do you mean me?'

'I most certainly do,' said the man. He brandished his pitchfork. 'Don't you know that inter-side travel is illegal for unaccompanied minors? Where's your grassport?'

'What?'

'No grassport,' said the man, rolling his eyes in despair. 'Give me strength. Where are your parents?'

Daisy swallowed. 'That's just it. My father is dead, and



I don't *know* where Ma is.' To her horror, she could feel tears burning in the corners of her eyes, and she scrubbed them away ruthlessly with the back of her hand.

'Oh dear,' said the man, looking discomfited. He lowered his pitchfork with a small cough. Now that it was out of the way, Daisy noticed that he had bright black eyes and a beard that came down to his belt buckle.

'I'm afraid that you are in breach of section 402 of the inter-side travel code: there's no getting away from it.' He sighed. 'I'll have to take you to the commander.'

Then Napoleon appeared from behind Daisy's ankles, and the guard leapt as if he'd been electrocuted. 'Why, you little blighter! So you're back!' Napoleon was licking his tail with lofty unconcern. 'Don't play innocent with me,' said the man, wagging his pitchfork threateningly. 'Seven sausage rolls you filched from my lunchbox, and then disappeared – for weeks! I call that poor behaviour. Very poor indeed.'

Daisy looked between the man and the cat. Napoleon had started on a hind leg, and was looking as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth.

'Erm,' she said. 'Do you know each other?'

'Know each other?' said the man. 'I've been worried sick about that cat – he's been missing for weeks. Always hanging around the guard house, he was, always after my food. I told the commander, I told her, it's only a matter of time before he goes and sneaks out through the door, but does she listen, *oh no . . .*'



Napoleon leapt onto Daisy's shoulder and curled there, gazing at the guard with narrowed green eyes as he continued to mutter to himself.

'Well,' said the man at last. 'This is most irregular. You'd better come with me, Miss, ah—'

'Daisy Thistledown.'

'Hm. A good name,' he said grudgingly. 'Captain Malarky, at your service.' He coughed again, awkwardly. 'I'm afraid I'll have to clap you in vines – Mallowmarsh protocol, you understand, nothing personal; we have to do the same for all unauthorized travellers. You can't be too careful in the Greenwild nowadays.' As he spoke, he unwound a vine from his belt, and it wreathed itself around Daisy's wrists like a pair of leafy green handcuffs. They were immovable as iron.

Mallowmarsh? thought Daisy. Hadn't she overheard Craven using that word on the phone? And what – or where – was the Greenwild? But Captain Malarky was already ducking into the guard house and shouting to someone inside. 'All right, Corporal Smedley? I'm taking an unaccompanied minor to the commander. Guard the fort and I'll be back in a jiffy.' A spotty young man in ill-fitting red overalls came to the door and saluted smartly.

'Right you are, Captain.' He shot a curious glance at Daisy as Malarky adjusted his uniform and turned back to her.

'Right,' he said. 'Off we go.'

