Ana Lupton

The Secret Town in the Forest

The Town off the Map

There was a story that your mother used to tell you as a child. A story that you wished could be real, but never thought to find out. It was the story of a town; not just any old random town, but a magic town. Hiding in the forest amongst the winding trees and yawning chasm, there was a path that led to a small town that appeared on no map. This was a town known as Wailwood, a place that wasn't like anything that you had ever seen before. The magic that was in this place was what made it a secret town to begin with. Not like fairy magic or even wizard magic, just magic. No one in the town could really tell you what kind of magic it was because even they didn't know. This would look just like any other town you could find in the world and you wouldn't even know that there was magic there.

The entrance to Wailwood could only be seen by those who needed help and were lost in the dark forest that surrounded the town. Wandering through the dark and scary forest, you might hear a small kind voice. A voice that would guide them to the town, but only if they chose to follow the voice. Many chose to move the other way without hearing the voice out, but for those who followed well…. something magical waits at the end. The few who listen to the voices have that of a heart of a traveler who wishes for a better life for themselves. A town of wonder and lights who wishes to help all who may need it.

The forest awaits the travelers.

The forest awaits you.

Ana Lupton

The Traveler

Through the magic trees and chasm, there wandered a traveler named Kai who wanted nothing more than to escape the life they had back home. They were a young person, about twenty three, and had a simple life back on the farm, but always wanted more. More than just milking cows or gathering eggs from chickens. A life that was full of wondering that wasn't like any other. That is what made Kai leave their life behind to find something new on their own. Kai wandered and wandered through the forest hoping to find somewhere to call their new home; that was until they heard a voice.

"Follow me, follow me to a town amongst the winding trees and yawning chasm. A town unlike anything you have seen before."

Kai didn't see anyone around them and didn't know where the voice was coming from. But scared and alone, they decided to follow the voice deeper into the forest. What awaited Kai was unlike anything they had even seen before. Through some trees was a small town that glowed unlike the forest behind them. It was a bustling town with many people running around, going in and out of stores, and kids playing in a river that ran right in the middle of the town. Kai was amazed at what they were seeing. It was like this town was straight out of a fantasy book. There were beautiful tall trees with the most amazing color of leaves Kai had ever seen before. Blue, pink, white, and even purple leaves like no other. The trees covered the top of the town, like a canopy to cover and hide the town from the outside world. From here, you could tell it was a sunny day out with the sun shining and the birds chirping.

Walking around the town, Kai was greeted by a young man. The young man seemed to be younger than Kai with light brown hair and bright blue eyes. He wore a green button down shirt

with some brown shorts that looked to be worn down a bit. Almost looked to be an elf; just without the pointed ears.

"Why hello there! My name is Levi and I'm here to help welcome you to Wailwood!"

"Thank you…. My name is Kai. I have never heard of this place and it's not even on my map. How is it not on my map?" Levi laughed a little at Kai as he turned around and looked back at the town.

"Well, that is the beauty of this town in the forest! It wouldn't be on any map you have! This town is hidden away from the rest of the world with some kind of magic that even we don't know what kind! Now, how about you follow me and I can show you around!" Levi started to walk into the town as Kai trailed behind him, excited to see what this magical town would have to offer. Maybe even call this place home.

Town Life

It had been eleven years since Kai had made a new life in the town of Wailwood. They were now thirty four years old and loved the town more than anything. To them, it felt just like yesterday that they found the town off the map. It was crazy to them how time had flown by so fast. And even in all of those years, they still never knew what or how the magic worked. Kai never really let this linger on their mind too much as they loved the town. The town and its people welcomed them with open arms as they adjusted to all of the new things this town had to offer.

For one, Kai now worked at a potion shop selling and making all kinds of potions. Health potions, strength potions, even love potions. Whatever potion you wanted, they had it. Learning to make the potion came easy to Kai. No one, not even the shop owner, could understand why or how Kai was able to learn so fast. It was as if that magic was a part of Kai somehow.

Kai didn't think too much about it and just enjoyed their new life. Their old life was behind them as the days had turned into weeks and weeks into years. Life in the town was amazing. One of Kai's favorite places to go was the bookshop to not only get something to read, but to also talk to one of their close friends, Bailey. They went almost everyday, well more like every other day, to get a new book. Today would be no different, at least that's what they thought.

Bookshop

Bailey's daily routine was to wake up, get ready for the day, have breakfast, and then head to her favorite place, and place of work, the bookshop. Books being one of her favorite things in the whole wide world, it was exciting for her to work at the bookstore. The owner, Mr. Arthur loved having her around. She was a hard worker and made sure that everyone who came to the store left with what they needed. It was like a second home to her, and if Arthur ever would let her, Bailey would sleep there.

As Bailey was cleaning up the store and making sure all the books were in order, the bell to the shop's door rang. "Hey Bailey!" Bailey smiled as she knew that voice anywhere with ever turning around. "Hey Kai! What brings you in today?" Bailey finished what she was doing to turn to them.

"Just looking for another book to read as always." Kai replied with a smile.

"Do you have a book in mind this time or do I have to pick a random book again?" Bailey laughed. "Well…I don't have any book in mind right now. But I'll look around this time so you don't have to think too hard about it." Kai laughed along as he went off to look for a book. Bailey smiled again as she got back to work cleaning again.

Kai got to work looking for something, anything that would catch their eye. Nothing romantic, love wasn't their strong suit and no history, didn't care much for that. What they really

liked to read was action packed books. Anything about going on an adventure or exploring the great outdoors. As they were looking, one book popped out to them. It had a colorful spine with blues, greens, and even a bit of purple in it. Kai was enchanted by the book as he pulled it out. On the cover were swirls of stars and light. The title read, *Of the Unknown*, and had nothing other than that on the front. They kept turning it over trying to find out who had written this kind of book, but nothing was found. This intrigued Kai more about wanting to get this book.

"Hey Bailey" Kai shouted, "I found a book!"

"What book is it?" "*Of the Unknown.*" Bailey stopped what she was doing with a confused look on her face. "I have never heard of that book before. Let me see it." Bailey reached out to take the book as Kai handed it to her. She turned the book all around just as Kai had done and flipped through the pages of the book.

"This is not a book that I have seen before. Where did you find it?" "It was just on the shelf right here next to all of the other adventure books." Bailey kept looking at the book trying to find anything else about it, but nothing was there other than the title. "Well.. if you want it you can have it." Bailey tossed the book back to Kai and got right back to work. "Wait, how much?" "On the house!" Bailey replied with a smile. "Are you sure?" "Yea just take it. There is nothing other than the title. No price no nothing on it anyway."

Kai gave a small nod as they walked out the door and back to his home for the day. 'What a strange book.' Thought Kai. 'What secrets do you hold for me?'

Old Forgotten House

On the outskirts of the town, there stood a house known only as the Homestead of Brightholme. It was an older looking house that had a tree coming right from the middle of it. A look inside would tell you that it was in fact a tree growing right at the center of that house that

went straight through the roof. The townsfolk shunned it, and its sole occupant, Theron, was more than content with his solitude. He was an old man with long gray hair that fell down to the floor, gray eyes that almost seemed white, and a beard that was equally as long as his hair. Theron was a collector of peculiar things. His home was filled with trinkets that defied logic: a clock that ticked backward, a mirror that reflected yesterday, and a gramophone that played conversations from the future. But the crown jewel of his collection was something hidden in the basement of his home. Many had tried to see what was down there, but something always made them turn their back once they got too close. Theron was the only one who could go down there to see what was hidden below.

Many years had passed since the last person had tried to break into Theron's hidden room, which was good news for Theron. It meant that his secret was still a secret without anyone finding out. But as time went on, he grew older and wouldn't be able to watch over the secret anymore. Someone would need to take his place. But who? Who could or would do what he has been doing for years and not tell a soul? It would take a special kind of person to do this job. Whoever it was, had to be ready for anything and everything.

Without warning, a feeling came over Theron. A feeling unlike anything he had ever felt before. It was as if he could tell something was going to happen very soon. What would happen is what puzzled him. It felt like something or even someone who came to find out his secret soon enough. This time he thought it was good. It was as if Theron needed this someone to find it.

Whoever this someone was, it excited Theron. It gave him something to look forward to before he would move on.

"Oh what joy and wonder I am feeling!" exclaimed Theron. "I haven't felt this much excitement in almost 168 years!"

This someone who was something special that was for sure. Theron had an idea about how to find this person as well. He ran over to his books and pulled one out. 'This is the one.' Theron thought. 'Whoever finds this book is the one that will take over for me and guard the secret of this home.'

Home

You wander into the forest as you had wanted to do for so many years. This was it, this was when you would find the Town off the Map. No matter how long it would take, you would find it even if it meant wandering around for hours, days, or even years. From the outside, it didn't seem like the forest was that big. But the inside made it seem like it went on forever and ever and ever.

The trees twisted and bent into the sky as if they became a part of it. The wind whistled through the trees as the leaves floated down onto the ground one by one. It was as if the forest itself was magical just as your mother had told you. It called to you, wanting you to explore more and dive deeper into the forest. The colors of the forest also mesmerized you with all of the greens, blues, purple, and every color of the rainbow. You wondered how a forest could have so many colors and be real.

As you travel farther into the forest, you start to hear a voice. Not a scary voice, but an almost calm and caring voice. It makes you feel safe and not scared to listen as it keeps repeating the same thing over and over.

"Follow me, follow me to a town amongst the winding trees and yawning chasm. A town unlike anything you have seen before."

Without hesitation, you follow the voice as it leads you to something deeper into the forest. No fear in your mind at all, just the feeling that something amazing was about to happen to you.

The forest awaits you.

Magic

In the eleven years Kai had been in this town, nothing lingered or worried them. After all, it was a hidden quiet town. But now, there seemed to be only one thing that was bothering them. Something that they couldn't get off of their mind. That was the book he had been reading.

It wasn't like any other book he had ever read before. It told stories of the town of the olden days and how the town came to be. No other history book, or at least what Bailey told them, ever talked about how the town was made. Most say that the town was made by the magic of the forest which is why it is hidden away. Others say a man with magic powers made the forest to protect him and his family and others who needed to hide as well. At the end of it all, no one had a set idea about how the town was formed.

But this book, this magic book as Kai put it, described not only the town itself, but the magic within the town as well. The magic was protected by a guardian of some kind and was hidden away to protect that magic. So maybe some of the story's the people tell are true. Kai kept reading and reading so they could learn more about this guardian and the magic they were protecting.

The Guardians of Wailwood have been watching over the forest and all who live here for over 700 years. Their job is to protect the heart of the magic, Arera. Arera is an ancient magic brought here by the first Guardian named Theo. This ancient magic is used to protect the people and all who live within the circle of magic. Theo brough this magic here and made the forest to

protect his family from the evil that overcame their home land. He wanted a place where people could live safely and not have to worry anymore. Theo then made a promise to Arera that when the time came, a new Guardian would be picked to take the place of the last. A new one who shared the same values and wanted to protect the forest as much as the other Guardians who had come before.

Kai's eyes widened as they read more and more about this magic, or Arera as the book had put it. All of this couldn't be real right? Right? Kai had no idea what to think about all of this. Some ancient magic was brought here to protect a family and made a new home and there are new Guardians who take the place of the last? What could all of this mean? If this was all true, who was the Guardian now?

As Kai kept thinking about this, there came a knock at the door. Kai placed the book down as he walked over to the door to answer. They opened the door to someone they had never met before.

"Hello Kai," the old man smiled. "My name is Theron. We have much to talk about. I think it best for you to follow me to my house."

Guardian

As Kai and Theron journeyed to Theron's house, Kai tried to talk to Theron about everything going on.

"So are you the Guardian? What is going on with the magic? How long have you been the Guardian? Do you like being the Guardian? What kind of-" Theron put his hand in front of Kai's face. "Please Kai, calm down. Everything will be answered, but for now quiet down until we get to my house." Kai frowned at this but kept walking alongside Theron. The walk to Theron's house was quiet as Kai kept trying to figure out what was going on. 'Who is this guy

and what does he want with me? Does this have to do with the Arera?' Kai, confused as to what was going on, started to slow down and walk at a slower pace than Theron. "Keep up now, we are almost there." Theron called behind himself, not even turning around to look at Kai. Kai's head popped up at this and got back to being at Theron's side.

Once at the house, Theron walked right inside and stopped at what looked to be the base of a tree that was inside the house. Kai, not paying attention being so distracted by the inside of the house, ran right into the back of Theron. "Sorry." Kai exclaimed as he rubbed the back of their neck embarrassed by what happened. "It is quite alright Kai. I have much to tell you, but now here." Theron waved his hand right at the middle of the tree base and a passageway opened up. Kai's mouth dropped to the floor as he kept looking at the hole that just magically opened. Theron, not phased by this, walked right into and down the stairs. Kai followed quickly behind and asked once again, "So now are you going to explain what is going on?"

Theron smiled at Kai as he started to speck,

"I know you have many questions, but let me speak first" he took a deep breath. "As you know, no one in this town knows how or what the magic is. Well, that most people don't know. Only few are allowed to know about the true magic of this town. Follow me and I will show you." Theron began to walk down the stairs as Kai chased after him. Theron talked more as they traveled down the stairs.

"I have been the Guardian of the Arera, or the magic as you call it, for about 168 years give or take. It takes a special someone to watch and protect this magic. It is what gives this forest, this town the life that it has today. Without it, well nothing would be able to remain the same as it is now. Every generation, one outsider was chosen to stay and protect the Arera, ensuring the balance between the town and the forest remained intact."

"What does that have to do with me?"

"It chose you Kai. The Arera chose you to be the next Guardian of the Arera. It feels something within you to be the one who will do what is needed for not only it, but for the people as well. It sensed something in you from the monument you came into the town. Did you not feel something with the magic?" Kai thought about it and realized how clear that made things. From being pulled to the book to making potions no problem. The magic had always been within them from the start.

"You mean like, how I could make the potions with little to no training?"

"Yes! Anything that has to do with magic, like the potions, comes easy to you! It was the same as when I first came to the town."

"Wait, you came to this town too?"

"I did. I left home to find a better life for myself and heard a voice coming from the forest. It pulled me in and I found Wailwood. From there, I lived and worked at the potion shop for about twenty years before I found the magic book that would change my life forever. Now, you are on the same path that I was once on. You can choose to become the new Guardian just as I had, or not to and the Arera will find another. It is up to you."

Kai was hesitant. The idea of staying in this strange, magical house forever was daunting. But, on the other hand, Wailwood and Arera needed a new Guardian. With deep thought, Kai finally answered, "Ok. I will do it." Theron smiled at Kai and bowed down to them.

"I know Wailwood and Arera will be in great hands."

Theron began to say a magical chant as the room lit up brighter than ever as something began to happen. Kai was lifted off the ground. They felt the Arera's power flow through them, connecting them to Wailwood and its secrets. They became the new guardian, their life

intertwined with the magic of the town and the forest. Once Kai was back on the ground, they noticed that Theron was gone. Kai smiled sadly, not realizing that Theron would be gone as soon as they became the Guardian. It was going to be hard, but deep down, Kai knew that they would be fine.

Now it was Kai's turn to watch over the forest, Wailwood, and the Arera.