

# The Glass Forest

by Matteo Angelo

Rowan had always been warned about the forest.

The villagers spoke of trees made of glass, their branches sharp enough to cut through skin and bone. They whispered of voices that called out, begging travelers to stay—and of those who never returned.

But Rowan's brother was missing, and she had no choice.

The forest was colder than she expected. Frost clung to the branches, even though it was midsummer, and the ground sparkled underfoot as though dusted with shards of ice.

She moved carefully, afraid that a single misstep would shatter the world around her.

As she walked, the air grew heavier, thick with the sound of whispers.

"Turn back," they said.

"Go home."

But Rowan pressed on, clutching the pendant her mother had given her—the only thing left to guide her.

Deeper into the forest, the trees grew taller, their branches weaving together to block out the sky. The whispers grew louder.

And then she saw it.

A clearing bathed in pale light, and at its center, a tree unlike any other. Its trunk was black as night, and its branches shimmered like glass. But tangled within its roots was something else—a boy, frozen as though made of stone.

Rowan's heart leaped. It was her brother.

She ran to him, but the ground shifted beneath her feet. The roots tightened, and the whispers turned to laughter.

"Another one for the forest," a voice said.

Rowan's hands shook as she reached for the pendant.

"No," she whispered.

The light from the pendant flared, and the tree recoiled. The roots loosened, and the glass branches trembled.

Rowan didn't hesitate. She grabbed her brother's hand and pulled.

The forest groaned, the glass cracking and shattering as they ran.

When they reached the edge, the trees fell silent. Rowan turned back one last time, but the clearing was gone—swallowed by the shadows.

Her brother stirred beside her, his voice barely a whisper.

"You found me."

Rowan smiled. "I'll always find you."