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**FACULTY OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES  
SCHOOL OF PEDAGOGY OF NATIONAL AND FOREIGN  
LANGUAGES-ENGLISH**

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**Translation of the Literary Work “Camino a Yangana” for the  
Development of EFL Reading Comprehension Skills of  
Intermediate Level Baccalaureate Students.**

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**PROJECT ADVISOR**

**Espinoza Pinzón, Liz Stephanie, M.Ed.**

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**CERTIFICATION**

We certify that this research project was presented by **Marcela Eduarda Garzón Bermeo** and **María Eduarda Zelaya Ponce** as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the **Bachelor 's Degree in EFL Pedagogy**.

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We, **Garzón Bermeo, Marcela Eduarda and Zelaya Ponce, María Eduarda,**

**HEREBY DECLARE THAT:**

The Senior Project: **Translation of the Literary Work “Camino a Yangana” for the Development of EFL Reading Comprehension Skills of Intermediate Level Baccalaureate Students**, prior to obtaining the **Bachelor’s Degree in EFL Pedagogy**, has been developed based on thorough investigation, respecting the intellectual property rights of third parties regarding citations within the corresponding pages whose sources are included in the bibliography. Consequently, this work is of our full responsibility.

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## URKUND REPORT

Guayaquil, Febrero 8, 2023.

Lcdo. Stanley González Ubilla, Mgs.  
Director de Carrera de  
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Presente.-

De mi consideración:

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## DEDICATION

To my parents, who have always supported my ideas, career path; my journey, overall; they are —quite literally— the reason why I am alive. Malú and Lalo, thank you for believing in me. I love you both, endlessly.

To my siblings, who have brought light and joy into my life; to the oldest of the four, I love you to the moon and Saturn. To the youngest three, thank you for existing; you have taught me so much about life without even realizing it; life truly is wonderful with you in it: Antonio, Amada, Teresa and Paolo.

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— María E. Zelaya

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— Marcela Garzón



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A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Liz Stephanie Espinoza Pinzon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'L' and a long horizontal stroke.

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**Espinoza Pinzon, Liz Stephanie, M. Ed.**

**Project Advisor**



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## ABSTRACT

The following project consists of a translation of the Ecuadorian fantasy novel “Camino a Yangana”, along with follow-up activities and a glossary appendix, aiming at creating culture-bound, context-based materials to be used within the EFL classroom to help intermediate level students enhance their reading comprehension skills. This project emerged to supply EFL students with newer materials and resources for their learning process, as well as bringing a newer focus on Ecuadorian fantasy literature, which allows an exploration of different translation methods and techniques that fit the literary work chosen as the source of analysis. Said analysis was carried out to put forward a wider understanding of the translation field. The approaches taken into consideration were applied as a way to allow teenagers to boost learning of a language through content that feels fresher and more topical to them than outdated textbooks. The rendering of the literary work intends to make a Spanish language novel available for students, a literary work that, besides speaking of and exploring their experiences, could also allow recent Ecuadorian novels to find a spotlight in a newer, more global space; its English counterpart reframes cultural aspects in a manner that does not feel alien or too complex for EFL students to comprehend. The translation methods used for the selected literary work; communicative and faithful translation; in order reproduce a comprehensible message taken from the original source, constrained at times by the grammatical structures of the target language—following the literary genre but transferring the message accordingly.

**Keywords:** *reading comprehension, fantasy novel, Ecuadorian literature, translation methods, translation techniques, translation of fantasy.*

# 1 INTRODUCTION

In today's EFL classrooms, there is an undeniable distinction made between what is considered a useful resource and one that might arguably retain the learners from progressing according to the syllabus. Oftentimes, it can be observed that there is a prominence in dialogues for the projection of reading and speaking skills, pointing to the fact that these pieces of text are used more in social or real-life situations than those found in literary texts (Khatib et al., 2011). However, this method of teaching often leaves students with little to no option of improving their reading comprehension skills, which is necessary to encourage the fluency required at their level. This, paired up with the fact that EFL classrooms most likely make no use of translated Ecuadorian works, leads to an opportunity like no other. Unlike English classics, bringing Ecuadorian literature to an English-speaking classroom will help the students immerse in a context they are already familiar with, thus making their English learning experience a more enticing one.

As previously mentioned, the literary works that are chosen for the school year fall into the category of "classic literature;" in other words, older books that retain their popularity. However, age contributes very little to their quality of *classics*; and, what makes them a classic is their timeless quality and their generally high-quality prose (Lombardi, E., 2021), thanks to these qualities, teachers tend to use these books time after time, excluding other types of literature. But it is also vital to consider the interest of the students, that are the ones actively participating in the learning process. In response, the translated work includes other tools for further learning; a glossary for the book, and follow-up activities that accompany the translated chapters of this literary fantasy work—this assures students to experience their learning in a more immersive way, in a manner that feels less academic and formal than if they were to use textbook-based activities.

The literary work *Camino a Yangana* is specially fitting for this proposal as it details a coming-of-age story belonging to the fantasy genre, which suits the interests of our target group. This genre usually consists of magical worlds

that contain fantastic creatures or protagonists with heroic feats and settings that, despite being slightly unfamiliar, are still a reflection of the thoughts and imagination of this world (Thomas, 2003, as cited in LIEN, M.O.S). Not necessarily comparable with science fiction, fantasy literature also offers means of understanding one's surroundings through the building of these imaginary worlds.

## **2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. Why is the use of follow-up reading activities necessary to help improve EFL reading comprehension skills in of Intermediate Level Baccalaureate Students?
2. What translation method should be followed for the rendering of "Camino a Yangana" to make it available for Intermediate Level Baccalaureate Students?

## **3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

EFL education in Ecuador can be usually regarded as theoretical and grammar-based, and though that kind of instruction is often preferred by the national curriculum and those students who aim for passing grades; it inevitably also affects the amount of English reading comprehension skills they would be able to acquire. Adding to the previous point, EFL educators who are only provided with the materials required by the national curriculum alone, lack literary works (or resources) to teach this skill within their institutions, which could result in very poor reading levels.

In today's EFL classrooms, reading comprehension is usually dismissed as a vital skill, students learn the language in a very formulated way which often develops a pressure that allows for no mistakes, or improvement of their knowledge. Reading comprehension skills are a must to have as it will

usually be paired with fluent speaking or writing activities; if the students lack reading comprehension skills, how will they be able to solve activities in which they have to dissect and analyze a text they have read? How will they be able to discuss about it?

Now, what is also important to note is that, though many Ecuadorian literary works can be dealt with inside an EFL classroom environment, books that are considered classics or historical books can turn into something too dated for the students. Furthermore, literary works of every scope are proven to aid the acquisition of reading comprehension skills, as it is explained in the following chapters of this paper. But a literary work like *Camino a Yangana* is one that deals with topics that might be overlooked in classic Ecuadorian literature—which makes the main objective of a translated version to let students have access to stories that are familiar and relatable to them, allowing for a reading experience that feels more personal and rewarding.

#### 4 JUSTIFICATION

The problem, as presented here, stems from the lack of translated Ecuadorian fantasy literary work hence why the shortage of context adequate resources for EFL students; an acceptable resource can be a game-changer when it comes to the improvement of reading comprehension skills thanks to the familiarity of the literary piece.

*Camino a Yangana* was chosen specifically for the subjects it tackles with regard to change and self-discovery; it also pertains to a specific context, that will help high-schoolers acquire reading comprehension skills through topics that are both familiar and interesting to them, giving them an option that is usually unavailable within their institutions.

Designing didactic tools based on the selected literary work (such as follow-up activities and glossaries) will help teachers measure the students' progress while reading a certain number of chapters – which will depend on

the amount of pages each chapter contains—showcasing their reading comprehension skills. The glossary will help students understand new words, improving and enhancing their vocabulary.

## **5 GENERAL OBJECTIVE**

To render the literary work “Camino a Yangana” as a tool to help the development of EFL reading comprehension skills; following an approach that suits the chosen literary work.

## **6 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES**

1. To identify and analyze the employed translation method for the literary work.
2. To design follow-up activities and a glossary that will assist the EFL students' comprehension skills' development and optimize their vocabulary.
3. To communicate the importance of using translated Ecuadorian literature as teaching tools and reading comprehension developers.



## 7 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 7.1 TRANSLATION

In order to be able to analyze what translation method was used and whether it is the best approach for the chosen literary work, it is necessary to become acquainted with the meaning of Translation itself.

Defined by the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary as the process of changing something that is written or spoken into another language (Oxford Advanced Dictionary, 2022); translation can also be defined as the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language. (Catford, 1965)

Translation is a craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in one language (SL) by the same message and/or statement in another language (TL). (Newmark, 1981) When translating, one may use different kinds of methods and techniques, but these two are different aspects of the field, more on that later. Within the translation field, a few terms and their abbreviations are frequently used hence why it's important to know what they mean.

#### 7.1.1 Key terms within the Translation Field

These terms are of the uttermost importance to be acquainted with because they're constantly used when discussing any translation process or product, hence why a chart has been added, each term has its abbreviation – if it owns one – and its definition.

*Chart 1 Terms and their abbreviation within the translation field.*

<b>Term</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Source Text	ST	The original text. (Hatim & Munday, 2004)
Source Language	SL	The language the text was originally written in. (Hatim & Munday, 2004)
Target Text	TT	The translated text. (Hatim & Munday,

		2004)
Target Language	TL	The language of the translation. (Hatim & Munday, 2004)
Translation Process	No abbreviation	The activity (or task) that is being made. (Hatim & Munday, 2004)
The product	No abbreviation	The result. (Hatim & Munday, 2004)
L1	L1	Refers to first language/mother tongue/source language (SL). (Rocha, 2011)
L2	L2	Refers to a second language/foreign language/target language (TL). (Rocha, 2011)

Source: autonomous

### 7.1.2 Translation Methods

Famous translator Peter Newmark (1988) argues in his book *A textbook of Translation* that the main problem translation has is whether one translates literally or freely. Translation methods involve the whole text. There are eight types of translation methods: word-for-word translation, literal translation, faithful translation, semantic translation, adaptation, free translation, idiomatic translation and communicative translation.

Newmark's (1988, p.p 45 — 47) proposal of translation methods put forward the following definitions:

- **Word-for-word translation:** in this method, the word order of the SL remains the same and each word is translated by their most common meaning not caring about if it's out of context.
- **Literal Translation:** the grammatical constructions of the SL are changed to TL equivalents —the nearest to them— but as in word-for-word translation lexical words are translated one by one, out of context.

- **Faithful Translation:** attempts to reproduce the same contextual meaning as the ST within the constraints of grammatical structures that the TL might have; it is completely faithful to the intentions of the SL writer.
- **Semantic Translation:** differs from faithful translation by caring more about the aesthetic value of the SL text.
- **Adaptation:** the freest form of translation, commonly used for plays (comedies) and poetry, certain factors — such as characters and themes— remain the same as their SL but the culture and text is rewritten into the TL.
- **Free Translation:** the TL text is reproduced without the style, form or content from the ST.
- **Idiomatic Translation:** reproduces the original message but it tends to distort nuances of meaning by using idioms and colloquialism that were not part of the ST.
- **Communicative Translation:** attempts to render the exact conceptual meaning of the ST in a way that both content and language are acceptable and comprehensive for readers.

### 7.1.3 Translation Strategies and Techniques

Unlike translation methods, translation techniques are used for smaller units of language (Newmark, 1988), as are sentences. But how or why are they used? Regardless of the selected method, the translator may face problems in the translation process; it could happen either because of a challenging unit or because of a gap in the translator's knowledge or skills. When this transpires, translation strategies are activated, they help find a suitable solution for a translation unit by using a particular technique. Consequently, strategies and techniques occupy different areas; strategies are part of the process, whereas techniques affect the result. (Molina & Hurtado, 2002)

There are a few techniques that attend to translation loss and help the rendering, among others, there are: borrowing, calque, literal translation, transference, naturalization, transposition, modulation, compensation (in kind, by merging, in place, by splitting), reduction and expansion, paraphrase, etc.

Here are four of the most significant techniques used in the selected fantasy Ecuadorian literary work, each has its concept and an example from the rendering.

- **Borrowing:** A word taken directly from another language (Molina & Hurtado, 2002).
- **Calque:** transferring words or phrases from SL literally to TL both lexically and structurally (Molina & Hurtado, 2002).
- **Compensation in kind:** where conventional translation would entail an unsuitable translation loss but is lessened by choosing a less unacceptable one, so crucial ST effects are rendered approximately in the TT by standards other than those employed in the ST. (Hervey & Higgins, 2002). Meaning that the rendering selected will make up for the textual effect of the ST.
- **Transposition:** a replacement technique for grammar categories, for example from verbs to adverbs and so on. (Hidayati, 2020).

#### 7.1.4 Translating Fantasy Literature

As previously explained, there are –according to Newmark (1988)– eight translation methods; the inquiry is which ones are should be used when rendering fantasy literature and what a translator should remember as they start the translation process.

Translators have as their main hardship when accomplishing their jobs to carry over all the fantastic elements back into the target language, attempting not to lose the meaning of the source text in the process (Zilio, 2022). Fantasy often tends to be –even in the mother tongue of the reader– a

challenging genre to comprehend; due to its content full of new languages, creatures, characters, places, games, spells, food etc.; this content can be seen in various works. There is no doubt that the sky is the limit for these fantasy novel writers, in terms of creating a world of their own.

For instance in one of the oldest and well-known fantasy novel, *Alice in Wonderland*, the author not only created a magical and breathtaking world with sceneries straight out of a dream, but creatures that are unforgettable and iconic in their own way, –in the novel’s sequel *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, Carroll even wrote a poem after a fictional being of his own creation: the Jabberwocky– where else would we be able to find a cat that disappears and appears in the air while having the biggest grin? In the land created by Carroll (1865, p. 123):

(...) “She was looking about for some way of escape, and wondering whether she could get away without being seen, when she noticed a curious appearance in the air: it puzzled her very much at first, but after watching it a minute or two she made it out to be a grin, and she said to herself, “It’s the Cheshire Cat: now I shall have somebody to talk to.”

There is no place like Wonderland, therefore translating about it is strenuous, and whoever takes on the challenge must be faithful to the author’s intentions and creative ideas so the translated product can communicate the same message. Another good example of the kind of content found in fantasy literature is magic; many books in this genre have witches and wizards for characters. Evidently, magic is present in many fantasy literary works. It can be found in the story of the boy who lived; Rowling, in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, effortlessly narrates how the characters made use of their magic abilities, (2003):

Snape reacted so fast it was as though he had been expecting an attack: Dropping his bag, he plunged his hand inside his robes, and his wand was halfway into the air when James shouted, “*Expelliarmus!*”

Snape's wand flew twelve feet into the air and fell with a little thud in the grass behind him. Sirius let out a bark of laughter.

*"Impedimenta!"* he said, pointing his wand at Snape, who was knocked off his feet, halfway through a dive toward his own fallen wand. (p. 646)

But what would be of the characters and story without a fascinating place where their adventures will occur? The setting of each of these stories is of greatest importance, when discussing any fantasy novel, it is common to think about the story's setting, they can go from and Narnia is –without a doubt– a place hard to forget, since the moment Lucy looked into the wardrobe, Lewis (1950):

"(...) She looked back over her shoulder and there, between the dark tree trunks; she could still see the open doorway of the wardrobe and even catch a glimpse of the empty room from which she had set out. (She had, of course, left the door open, for she knew that it is a very silly thing to shut oneself into a wardrobe.) It seemed to be still daylight there. "I can always get back if anything goes wrong," thought Lucy." (p.4)

For all these reasons, which mainly center on considering every aspect within the content of the literary work that is about to be translated, methods such as: semantic, faithful, and communicative; are approaches that should be employed when translating a fantasy literary work.

## **7.2 LITERATURE**

As the topic of literature and its uses in the EFL classroom maintains its relevance across the entirety of this paper, it is of major importance to consider the factors that regard to the main point to develop yet: Why literature can be so helpful in acquiring reading comprehension skills.

To begin with, it is important to define literature, as its nature is of relevance when it comes to language and reading skills, whether they be acquired in the mother tongue or a foreign language. Now, literature can take on several different meanings according to different scholars. For one, we understand that literature is consumed all around the world regardless of culture, but being culture bound; it is also timeless, but bound by the different ages in history regardless, thus, literature exists because it is a human feature (Miller, 2003).

For the specific nature of this research, a distinction has to be made. Literature, as previously mentioned, is a broadly understood term in most disciplines, taking on a different shape according to the field of study. Language education, in this case, makes use of many written resources as is mostly found in EFL textbooks. But even for native learners of a language; what difference does the type of text used affect the intrinsic motivation of the learner? One could say that learning a language is almost formulaic. And if that model of learning prevails, we are at risk of delivering poorly educated students. Literature in education; specifically speaking of the linguistic and literate aspects of language, are regarded with an importance that is best regarded by Hall (2005) as:

Linguistic and literate competencies are seen as crucial for full participation in a given society. Beyond this, claims are made for better cultural understanding of others, benefits for the ethical development of the individual and wider general educational benefits in terms of the development of worthier – or perhaps more critical – citizens. Literature for many broadens our notions of what it means to be human, and how we could live better as human beings. (p. 39)

Thus, more than just constituting an academic subject, literature in the language education field implies intertwining formal instruction with real life, critical thinking and other higher-order level skills.

## 7.2.1 Literature in an EFL Classroom

Literature within the EFL classroom constitutes a topic of study that has been developing for some time already. However, in light of the use of more practical approaches regarding English learning, it is fair to mention literature's misuse and ostracized role in EFL.

As the role of literature stays overlooked in most Ecuadorian EFL classrooms—and though it does not pertain to the defense of an EFL curriculum—Cox (Cox, 1991, as cited in Hall, 2005) presents five reasons as to why educators all around the world ought to teach literature in language learning education, as exposed in the following chart:

*Chart 2 Brian Cox's Famous Five*

<b>Brian Cox's 'Famous Five' reasons for teaching English</b>	
<b>Personal growth</b>	Focuses on the child; emphasizes the relationship between language and learning in the individual child, and the role of literature in developing children's imaginative and aesthetic lives.
<b>Cross-curricular</b>	Focuses on the child's education as a whole: all teachers of English and of other subjects too, have a responsibility to help children with the language demands of different subjects on the school curriculum, otherwise areas of the curriculum may be closed to them. English as a subject and a medium of instruction.
<b>Adult needs</b>	The responsibility of English teachers to prepare children for the language demands of adult life, including the workplace, in a fast changing world; children need to deal with day to day demands of spoken language and print; they also need writing skills to communicate clearly, appropriately, effectively.
<b>Cultural heritage</b>	The responsibility of schools to lead children to an appreciation of works of literature widely regarded as the finest in the language (includes 'birthright',



	pleasure, quality of life).
<b>Cultural analysis</b>	'English' can help towards a critical understanding of the world and cultural environment. Children need to learn about the processes by which meanings are conveyed, and about the ways in which print and other media carry values ('demystification').

Source: Hall, G. (2005). Literature in language education. Springer.

Thus, the introduction of literature into language teaching can be justified by the means it represents in a larger context. Yilmaz (2012) adds onto this by affirming that literature and language are complementary elements that aid students in developing language skills. To further emphasize the kind of impact reading literature has on EFL, several researchers agree on the fact that literature is beneficial in learning, as it offers a source of information that is relevant and authentic, which contributes to the learners' cultural and lexical knowledge of their L2, (Carter & Long, 1991; Collie & Slater, 1987, as cited in Yilmaz, 2012)

Using resources such as literary texts can turn learning into an interactive, and stimulating experience, where the learner obtains newer knowledge while simultaneously providing the class of each of theirs's perspective.

### **7.2.2 Fantasy Literature**

The fantasy genre in literature is one that has been gaining popularity in the past decade as a result of the many works that have been made pertaining to it. However, there is still a debate in how to separate Fantasy as an entire genre, from Science Fiction. The problem at hand arises when considering the elements that makes both salient or different from each other.

At any rate, many can recognize fantasy as a genre that, though it deters from reality a great deal more than *sci-fi*, it does so with a purpose. As exposed by Armitt (2005) fantasy, much like the unconscious of the human mind, is a genre that, at its core, enjoys the freedom of reorganizing and repackaging that of the real human experiences—fantasy, in a way, is another way of retelling what we know, fear, and understand of the chaos in daily life.

Armitt (2005) proposes, then, that the concept of fantasy could be interpreted as it follows “(...) fantasy sets up worlds that genuinely exist beyond the horizon, as opposed to those parts of our own world that are located beyond that line of sight but to which we might travel, given sufficient means.”(p. 8)

Whereas the question on the difference between sci-fi and fantasy lies, many have come forward to put a clear end to such discussion, though the concept that mostly encapsulated the difference in dynamics between Fantasy vs. Science Fiction is best captured by Roberts in *Science Fiction (The New critical Idiom, 2000; as cited by Stephan, 2016)*, who poses a great contrast by comparing Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* and Gibson’s *Johnny Mnemonic*, and the events that convert Kafka’s Gregory Samsa into a giant beetle—which is attributed no explanation, vs. *Johnny Mnemonic*, that contains a dolphin that can communicate his thoughts, which is explained in the way that he does so through a lightboard; and so, one can conclude that *Metamorphosis* shares the features of fantasy, as it lacks any explanation of the sudden phenomenon.

One could infer that fantasy worlds are constructed upon themselves; they exist in a reality in which whatever it entails just happens without contemplating rationale and rather, act as a characteristic that is not to be questioned but understood through the means of the narrative.

### **7.2.3 Ecuadorian Literature in the Fantasy Genre**

The history of Ecuadorian Literature is one filled with prolific writers retelling stories of an old, outdated, often violent society: a reflection of the popular culture of the country, that, if grim, also full of colorful characters trying to go by in their daily lives. This genre is mostly known as Social Realism and though its authors have contributed immensely to the perspective generations see as past and current societies, it’s not the only literary genre that surfaced when in need of a new lens of life.

In the late sixties to early seventies, the country sees a new wave of writers delving into the fantasy genre, the first one being Carlos Béjar Portilla, and, as quoted from Contag (2020) “(...) One of the first twentieth-century

Ecuadorian writers to tap into fantasy as a means to view these conditions from a different perspective, pioneering the genre of fantasy literature in Ecuador with his focus on science fiction.” (p. 20)

This way, fantasy narrative becomes a new tool for observing and dissecting human behavior and culture in a different outlook, one which might've not had any “realistic” feature to it (whether it be their worlds, characters, or technologies) but that very much produces a familiar effect on the audiences it is intended for. Besides, and as every aspect of art can be considered a reflection of its culture, fantasy literature is nothing but a different means of seeing and understanding reality. Contag (2020) makes a good contrast regarding the genre shift seen in Ecuadorian literature back in the 20th century, as is told “After 1978, Ecuadorian writers like Ubidia, Pazos, Dávila, and Páez began to experiment with fantasy to communicate parallel realities coexisting with the stark world presented by social realism.” (p. 22)

Besides, fantasy relies on real-life elements for its core subjects; fantasy is an irruption from reality by adding elements of mystery—a distorted perception of reality which becomes incomplete if lacking the imaginary (Todorov n.d., as cited in Contag, 2020).

#### **7.2.4 CAMINO A YANGANA (2018)**

The literary work that inspired this project tells the story of a young girl who, seemingly out of nowhere, is left to deal with unimaginable tasks and adventures which lead her into the path of self-knowledge and recognition. The author, Ana María Heinert, in tune with most fantasy fiction writers, developed the story based on a reality closer to her than just societal issues or cultural problematics; she wrote the story inspired on her own daughter. (El Universo, 2018).

*Camino a Yangana*, using a third-person narrator, details the incredible adventures Irina (and her newfound friends) have from the moment she enters her aunt's home. The use of the word “Camino” for the title, though it represents a very literal meaning (if taking into account the story at face value only), is also used to depict the journey Irina embarks through a stage

of her life where change is more than welcomed but oftentimes challenged by the girl herself. This story talks of topics as deep as loss and as lighthearted as friendship through the means of a fantastic world of creatures and scenery never seen before. Besides leading into adventure tropes, the core message of *Camino a Yangana* is one that explains the essence of change, more specifically the changes teenagers go through as they grow up and mature.

### 7.3 READING

Regarding reading as a skill, and though this is one of the main skills that partake in each EFL course, there's very little to account as far as extensive reading goes. There have been several case studies that deal with this skill as a viable way to acquire a language, one being the study by Grabe and Stoller (1997), in which the subject of the study successfully obtained a reasonably good level of a L2 by means of daily extensive reading and L2 dictionary use. The subject also commented on the impact this had on his reading comprehension abilities, and noted the following:

(...) His reading comprehension was enhanced when he could (1) recognize the conjugated forms of familiar verbs, (2) distinguish between transition words and nouns or verbs, (3) identify different forms of a familiar root word, and (4) realize that in certain contexts a cognate may have a minor, noncognate meaning. Bill also commented on the role of guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words and the impact of guessing on reading comprehension. He felt that high levels of frustration develop when a reader relies solely on guessing the meaning of unfamiliar lexical items; readers have a need to know that certain word meanings are correct so that they can continue reading with some level of confidence. (p. 112)

Albeit, the conditions of this study were slightly different from those presented in this paper, it goes to show just how much impact reading has, not only in reading comprehension skills but language acquisition altogether.

And as it has been mentioned previously, though EFL students have a formal instruction of grammar of their L2, what they lack is, rather, in a much more simplistic manner, the necessary materials to further improve their use of English. Going by what the subject of the case study assigned to his struggles in reading, the proposal of our research can prove to be useful, for the approach here is to indulge students in reading and aid them in terms of expanding their L2 vocabulary.

### **7.3.1 Development of Reading Comprehension skills in an EFL Classroom**

As it had been reiterated several times across this paper, the skill of reading is one that is essential for the development of both literacy skills, and, in a more general view, the further development of all other language skills. And there have also been claims that developing reading skills can help the students to enhance their creativity, learning and aid students in their resourcefulness (i.e., discovering new things) (Society of Chief Librarians 2011, as cited in Pustika and Wiedarti, 2019)

Reading, then, is seen purposeful and multifaceted, which translates into readers who are capable of maintaining a rhythm of information that allows them to infer, subtract, and make connections as they are reading (Bojovic 2010, as cited in Pustika and Wiedarti, 2019)

This comprises reading as one of the most important internal systems for obtaining information that one could nurture, and in turn, making it a crucial element for language learning.

However, reading comprehension as a skill has little to no room in most EFL courses. In fact, it is a skill that could easily be overlooked as if one is able to read (many infer), so, one might also be able to understand, retain, and gain foreign knowledge in that same process. But, matter of fact, reading and reading comprehension entail entirely different processes, and though one might not exist without the other, they each constitute a level of importance that should not lessen that of the other.

Thus, the talk of reading comprehension is one of a complex process conformed by several factors, those mainly being: cognitive, linguistic and socio-cultural variables, meaning that, though reading comprehension is a skill that can be acquired, the manner of acquiring it will change from culture to culture, and even in regards to the instructor of a course (Alenizi, 2019, and Ismail & Tawalbeh 2015, as cited in Alghonaim 2020)

This particular issue boils down to the engagement of the readers in their reading, as well as the many approaches to reading one could take. Our thesis, though, is based on the Literature-Based approach, which will be explored in more detail.

### **7.3.2 Reading comprehension: approaches and activities**

For reading comprehension, there are countless of techniques and activities which are to be done either within a classroom, or by oneself when engaging in any activity that takes critical thinking and extensive reading.

One of the concepts that sticks out the most is that of “critical reading”. Critical reading, as defined by Lestari (2015) is conceptualized around the idea of critical thinking, merging the two in the process of reading. Critical reading sees its use in this new era, as the influx of information we receive daily is one that takes time to assimilate and understand fully—either to discard what we find useless or to become more in tune with the lives we lead nowadays. Critical reading, thus, serves as a technique that allows students to look for information within a text—and though it might seem goal driven, it is not any more intentional than just reading for pleasure or enjoyment.

Regardless, critical reading is an approach that falls under the category of literary-based approaches, seeing as the main goal is to obtain information through literature. Now, the Literature Based Approach aims to have students who are fully engaged within their reading, which is why enjoyment plays such a big part in this technique.

Literature-Based Approach, or whole language approach, is one in which students take reading as a recreational activity, with the purpose of finding information as opposed to reading in an academic setting to attain a good grade (Cantony-Harvey, 1987, as cited in Budiharso, 2014). This approach lets students choose the stories they wish to read and explore literary devices at their own rate, to compare and contrast with the information they already possess.

### **7.3.3 Post-reading activities**

As developed in earlier chapters, the need of nurturing reading comprehension skills is one that deals with many different factors of said process. For techniques and strategies, though countless, some of the most common are also the most effective ones in helping students acquire this skill. And this can be either taught as techniques alone, or even with the help of activities that further foment the use of this techniques.

In the reading process, there are three stages that each student will experience individually and alongside the rest of the classroom. The stages; post-reading, while-reading, and pre-reading, all aid in the enrichment of knowledge, through the use of practices that are pertinent to each stage. The focus of this study will be place on those techniques that are usually used in the post-reading stages of the reading process.

Saricoban (2002) proposes all general ideas of what the post-reading activities could look like in a study done on two different groups. The results were presented as follows:

During post reading stage the two groups seem to differ only in two strategy use: evaluating and commenting. (...) Successful readers usually evaluate and try to comment on the encoded message by the author to extend their understanding the text as a whole. Therefore, it can be said that the strategies such as evaluating and commenting play an important role in developing one's interpretation and understanding of a written text. (p. 10)

Explained more specifically by Yazar (2013), the post-reading stage aims to

- Reflect on the text that has been read
- Recall to the learners' own knowledge, interests, or ideologies

Yazar (2013), in regards of the techniques born in response to the post-reading stage, claims

The work does not refer directly to the text, but 'grows out' of it. Post-reading may also include any reactions to the text and to the while-reading work, for example, learners say whether they liked it, and found it useful or not (p. 42)

The reading process, in turn, becomes more active with activities done around any stage of this process.

Nonetheless, in addition to said activities, it is also important to mention that the type of text selected can play a big role on motivation from the side of the students. Huckin (Huckin,1997, as cited in Correia, 2006) proposes that all educators should take into account the interest of their learners when it comes to choosing texts for reading, putting an emphasis on the importance of implementing reading resources that are pertinent and relevant to a subject and culture most familiar to the students—this way the class, and the reading process itself becomes more profitable.

## **7.4 VOCABULARY**

As explained by McCarthy (1990), vocabulary is the biggest component of any language lesson, without words to communicate a wide range of meanings, communication in L2 won't happen in a meaningful way; yet this element seems to be the last of the aspects covered when learning a foreign language.

### **7.4.1 Vocabulary in an EFL classroom**

Vocabulary plays an essential role in language teaching; therefore, it should be present and active in an EFL classroom. The vocabulary learning process



in these classrooms is usually – if there is any at all – slow, uneven; and not what it should be. As stated by Siyanova-Chanturia and Webb (2016):

This is due to a number of interrelated factors, such as insufficient input, lack of opportunities to use the language outside the classroom (insufficient output), teaching methods used (communicative language teaching vs. grammar-translation method), amount of time dedicated to the English language in general, amount of time dedicated to vocabulary learning in particular, and so on. (p. 229)

EFL classrooms should focus more on this fundamental aspect, in consonance with Kamal (2019): learners in EFL classrooms have different levels of word knowledge; it is fundamental to build word-rich environments in which to engage learners and teach and model adequate word-learning strategies.

#### **7.4.2 Strategies and approaches to teach vocabulary**

Being aware of the problem vocabulary is facing in EFL classrooms, teachers wonder about what they can do to change this matter, as explained by A'lipour & Ketabi (2010):

The best strategy teachers should utilize to enhance their students' vocabulary growth is to provide them with as much time to read for themselves as possible and to integrate reading activities into curricula so that students experience words in a variety of contexts. (p. 158)

Apart from making use of this first mentioned strategy when optimizing the learner's vocabulary, there are some basic approaches that can be used to teach EFL learners, according to Kamal (2019): activating pre-knowledge of words, arrange words categorically, searching for new words, guessing the meaning of new words, explaining words through examples, activities based on new words, lots of practice; among other strategies.

Vocabulary acquisition is one of the most important aspects while learning a new language. Oftentimes when reading a new book, there are terms or

words that are challenging to understand –even in the native language of the reader– as a result, their meaning is searched for.

## 8 METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this project is of the descriptive, qualitative scope. This research was made with one aim in mind; to deal with the lack of translated Ecuadorian Literary works, as well as providing students with resources, such as follow-up activities, to improve their reading comprehension skills, and lexicon learned. In addition, a glossary for the translated book has been created as a way to help intermediate level learners enhance and expand their vocabulary.

This project is focused on generating new resources for intermediate level students, therefore, the importance of choosing the right work to translate played a major role in our choice. With “Journey to Yangana” students have the chance to see themselves reflected on the main character of the story, in spite of the fantasy characteristics of the book itself. More than anything else, the story surrounding the protagonist, Irina, is one that most teenagers have gone through in their own lives; dealing with loss and the unknown of life, the risks of growing up and the eventual recognition that one must choose what is of priority once that “journey” has ended.

*Camino a Yangana* by Ana María Heinert, and the developed translated version, **Journey to Yangana**, is an answer to a long-standing issue within EFL classrooms all across the country: the few number of literary books used to further the acquisition of reading skills. This, in turn, provides the country’s schools with Ecuadorian literature within the EFL context, but its translation also helps in providing a few recommendations and analysis in how to deal with the fantasy genre and its unique role in the translation field.

Kok (2012) argues that in translation studies, there is not enough representation in the fantasy genre, and translators have as a challenge maintaining the sentiment the author desires to express to the readers to

keep the story and its setting consistent and believable, so the audience can enjoy the story, in addition Zilio (2022) states that the translator should consider that in the process, they are dealing with a world that comes from the imagination of the author of the ST.

As translators, considering the story and the elements the author has created and how important it is to be loyal to its source material; for the translation of the selected literary work, both faithful and communicative methods were employed throughout the rendering of the seventeen chapters.

### 8.1 Instruments for analysis

The instrument employed for the analysis made in each chapter of **Journey to Yangana** consisted of a chart of analysis regarding both the ST and the TT, as well as deciding which of the two methods used were most appropriate for each instance.

The instrument was developed as follows:

*Chart 3 Instrument for Analysis: Faithful Translation*

<b>Method</b>	<b>ST</b>	<b>TT</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
<b>Faithful Translation</b>			

*Chart 4 Instrument for Analysis: Communicative Translation*

<b>Method</b>	<b>ST</b>	<b>TT</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
<b>Communicative Translation</b>			

As it has been mentioned in earlier chapters, the use of methods alone only contributes only to the foresight of what it is to be used throughout the entirety of the text, whereas different techniques are applied to be able to develop smaller extracts of the literary work. These techniques pertain to both the faithful and communicative methods, and the instrument is similar to that of the methods’:

*Chart 5 Instrument for Analysis: Translation Techniques*

Technique	ST	TT
Borrowing		
Calque		
Compensation in Kind		
Transposition		

## 8.2 Findings

*Chart 6 Commonly found techniques used within the text*

Technique	ST	TT
Borrowing	<p>–¿Qué es un <b>Sandaluz</b>? –preguntó, sorprendida.  –Son seres de luz</p>	<p>“What does that mean? What’s a <b>sandaluz</b>?” She asked, curiosity arising. “They’re beings of light” (From Chapter IV, Makúla.)</p>

	<p>–Diferentes cosas, herramientas, comida, una especie de lámpara, polvo de <b>zandalilla</b>...</p> <p>–¿Polvo de <b>zandalilla</b>? –interrumpió Irina.</p>	<p>“Many things: tools, food, some kind of lantern, <b>zandalilla powder</b>...” “<b>Zandalilla powder</b>?” She interrupted Aunt Clota. (From Chapter VII, Departure.)</p>
	<p>Irina, un poco temerosa, se acercó hasta <b>La Giralda</b>; se arrodilló y, cuando estuvo frente a ella, la admiró una vez más, en silencio.</p>	<p>Feeling a bit fearful, Irina approached the flower known as “<b>Giralda</b>”, when she was in front of her, she knelt down and silently admired her once more. (From Chapter XII, The flower known as Giralda.)</p>
<b>Calque</b>	<p>Miró a través del <b>Tótem del Augurio</b> y pudo observar a su familia y a sus amigos, que lo esperaban con ansias.</p>	<p>He peeked through the <b>Omen Totem</b>, there he saw his friends and family, who were excitedly waiting for him. (From Chapter XVII, Final Chapter?)</p>
	<p>– <b>¡Supramástico!</b></p>	<p>“<b>Supramastic!</b>”. (From Chapter XVII, Final Chapter?)</p>
<b>Compensation in kind</b>	<p>–<b>¡Me queda clarísimo!</b></p>	<p>“<b>Clear as day</b>” (From Chapter VIII, Departure.)</p>
	<p>–Bueno, <b>en honor al tiempo</b>, es hora de partir.</p>	<p>“Well, <b>we should call it a day</b>. It’s time to get going.” (From Chapter XVII, Final Chapter?)</p>
	<p>–Lo sabía, lo sabía, <b>sabía que iba a meter la pata</b>...</p>	<p>“I knew it! I knew it! <b>I knew she would mess up!</b>” (From</p>

		Chapter X, The Spell.)
<b>Transposition</b>	–Qué raro, así de pronto cambió el paisaje –notó Irina.	“How weird, the scenery changed very suddenly.” Irina noted. (From Chapter IX, Yangana.)
	Nelfi abrió ligeramente sus ojos, esbozó una pequeña sonrisa y dejó caer su mano, ya sin fuerzas.	Nelfi slightly opened her eyes, she gave her mother a small smile and let her hand drop, she didn't have any strength left. (From Chapter III, Dwelves.)

Chart 7 Analysis of the Faithful Method

Method	ST	TT	Analysis
<p><b>Faithful Translation</b></p>	<p>– No, <b>solo vinimos por la flor.</b></p> <p><b>En ese momento, Nador, Makúla y Magmaneo, reaccionaron inmediatamente:</b></p> <p><b>–Shshshsh...</b></p> <p><b>Magmaneo se llevaba las manos a la cabeza y decía en baja:</b></p> <p>–Lo sabía, lo sabía, sabía que iba a meter la pata...</p> <p><b>–Ahora comprendo. Así que vienen por La Giralda</b> –dijo el extraño ser.</p> <p><b>–¿La Giralda? ¿Qué es La</b></p>	<p><b>“Don’t worry, we’re just here for the flower.”</b></p> <p><b>Nador, Makúla and Magmaneo immediately reacted.</b></p> <p><b>“Shhhh!”</b></p> <p><b>Magmaneo touched his head –repeatedly– and muttered:</b></p> <p><b>“I knew it! I knew she would mess up!”</b></p> <p><b>“Ah! Now I understand, you’ve come here for The Giralda”</b> the strange creature said.</p> <p><b>“The Giralda? What is a Giralda?”</b> Irina asked.</p>	<p>This method's aim is to convey the author's intention with the text; there is something in the source text that <b>has</b> to be expressed in the target text. In this extract, from Chapter X: <i>The Spell</i>, the ST's aim is to make the audience aware of the importance of this mysterious and miraculous flower. Irina naively states her and her friends' intentions: <b>“solo vinimos por la flor” (ST)</b> <b>“we’re just here for the flower.” (TT)</b> The characters' reactions are very important, they try to silence Irina, and one of them knew all along that she – at some point– would mess up the mission. While on the other hand, this new character, Azure, talks about the flower as if it was not a big deal: <b>“–Ahora comprendo. Así que vienen por La Giralda” (ST)</b> <b>“Ah! Now I understand, you’ve come here for The Giralda” (TT)</b>, the borrowing technique is employed for the flower's name, it remains the same just the article changes, instead of <b>“La Giralda”</b> it is: <b>“The Giralda”</b>, the flower's name does not change since it was a name given to her (she's actually named Amber, but in following</p>

	<p><b>Giralda?</b> –preguntó Irina</p> <p><b>Nador y Magmaneo intentaron callarla nuevamente.</b></p> <p><b>–Creo que ya es tarde –se lamentó Makúla.</b></p> <p><b>A lo lejos, en el cielo, se formó una especie de círculo negro; Irina miró hacia arriba y observó a unos cuervos que, en picada, se precipitaban sobre ellos. No lo pensó dos veces e, inmediatamente, tomó a Nador, Magmaneo y cubrió a Makúla, mientras que el extraño ser alcanzó a lanzarse entre unos arbustos, protegiendo su cuerpo.</b> Los cuervos clavaron sus picos sobre la espalda de Irina, que había servido de escudo para protegerlos; el impacto fue tal que la mayoría de los cuervos perdieron el conocimiento; el grupo</p>	<p><b>Nador and Magmaneo tried to silence her, again.</b></p> <p><b>"I think it's too late," Makúla lamented.</b></p> <p><b>In the distance, a black circle formed in the sky; Irina looked up and saw some crows swooping down on them. Not thinking twice, she grabbed Nador, Magmaneo and Makúla, protecting them, whereas the strange creature managed to throw himself between some bushes, to protect his body. The crows used their beaks to peck Irina on her back, the girl served as a shield to protect them. The impact made most of the crows unconscious; benefiting from this, the group fled guided by the creature.</b></p>	<p>chapters it is explained why that happens). The mention of the name, makes Irina wonder more about the peculiar flower to the extend of repeating the name aloud; (...)“<b>The Giralda? What is a Giralda?</b>” Irina asked.(...)” (TT) jeopardizing everyone’s safety without knowing. How it is expressed in the ST, is what makes the audience realize the danger the characters are in: (...) “<b>Nador and Magmaneo tried to silence her, again. "I think it's too late," Makúla lamented.</b>(TT) Showcasing the difference there is between the group and Irina, the group of three knows what is going to happen, and what they should and should not do, whereas Irina is clueless, each characters’ stance in this situation is an element that must be precise in the TT. Though Irina is oblivious of what happens around her, the author of the ST hints the audience of Irina’s pure heart with her actions, she immediately helps her friends: “<b>A lo lejos, en el cielo, se formó una especie de círculo negro; Irina miró hacia arriba y observó a unos cuervos que, en picada, se precipitaban sobre ellos. No lo pensó dos veces e, inmediatamente, tomó a Nador, Magmaneo y cubrió a Makúla,(...)</b>” (ST) “<b>In the distance, a black circle formed in the sky; Irina looked up and saw some crows swooping down on</b></p>
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	<p>aprovechó el momento para huir, guiados por la criatura.</p>		<p><b>them. Not thinking twice, she grabbed Nador, Magmaneo and Makúla, protecting them,”</b>  <b>(TT)</b> The TT corroborates with Irina selfless actions.</p>
	<p><b>–Irina, ¿has reparado en el nombre de los habitantes de Yangana?</b></p> <p>Irina pensó por un momento, sabía que podía recordar a la mayoría.</p> <p>–Recuerdo a las princesas <b>Ámbar, Magenta y Carmín</b>; está el rey <b>Amaranto</b> y la reina <b>Siena</b>, el guardia real <b>Cian</b>, las hermosas mariposas <b>Malva</b> y <b>Ocre</b>, el traidor <b>Cerúleo</b>, la pequeña...</p> <p>En ese momento fue interrumpida por Magmaneo que le dijo:</p> <p>–¡Ya niña, ya! ¡No tenemos todo el día para esto! –Irina se quedó callada, se sentía</p>	<p><b>“Irina, have you ever wondered why the people of this town are named the way that they are?”</b></p> <p>Irina thought for a moment, trying to remember each of their names.</p> <p>“Well, I remember the princesses: <b>Amber, Magenta and Carmine</b>; then there’s the King <b>Amaranth</b>, and the Queen <b>Sienna</b>, the royal guard <b>Cyan</b>, the beautiful butterflies named <b>Mauve</b> and Ocher, the traitor <b>Azure</b>, the little...”</p> <p>Before she could continue, she was interrupted by Magmaneo, who, exasperated, said to her:</p> <p>“Alright! Irina, we have no time for this!” Irina went quiet after</p>	<p>There is a particular characteristic that required great attention to detail in the translation process– a characteristic that all the people of Yangana share:</p> <p><b>–Irina, repasa solo los nombres –insistió Makúla.</b></p> <p><b>(...) –¡Colores!, ¡todos ellos son colores!</b></p> <p><b>–Los hermosos seres de Yangana tienen largos cabellos del color de su nombre y su piel igual en menor tonalidad; son realmente bellos. Con los rayos del sol y su cabello al viento, verlos andar era un espectáculo maravilloso.”</b> (ST) <b>“Irina, again, go over the names only,”</b> Makúla insisted.</p> <p><b>“Colors, they’re named after colors!”</b>  <b>“The people of Yangana have long luscious hairs colored after their names, and their skin is the same but in a lighter shade; they are truly beautiful. With sunlight and their hair</b></p>

	<p>reprendida y no entendía por qué.</p> <p>–Irina, ¿qué tienen en común todos ellos? –preguntó Makúla.</p> <p>–¡Que son de Yangana! –se apresuró a contestar Irina.</p> <p>Magmaneo se llevó las manos a la cabeza, mientras la movía de un lado a otro.</p> <p><b>–Irina, repasa solo los nombres –insistió Makúla.</b></p> <p>Se quedó callada moviendo sus dedos, como quien lleva una cuenta, no llegaba al quinto cuando sus grandes ojos se abrieron, miró a Makúla y le dijo:</p> <p><b>–¡Colores!, ¡todos ellos son colores!</b></p> <p><b>–Los hermosos seres de Yangana tienen largos</b></p>	<p>that, she felt reprimanded and couldn't understand why.</p> <p><b>“Irina, what do they all have in common?” Asked Makúla.</b></p> <p><b>“They are all from Yangana!” Irina answered confidently.</b></p> <p>Magmaneo puts his hands over his face, shaking his head from side to side.</p> <p><b>“Irina, again, go over the names only,” Makúla insisted.</b></p> <p>She kept quiet, counting with her finger, as if she was trying to sum up to something; when she reached fifth name, her eyes lightened up–she looked at Makúla and said:</p> <p><b>“Colors, they’re named after colors!”</b></p>	<p><b>blowing in the wind, watching them walk was a wonderful sight”” (TT)</b></p> <p>To remain faithful to the detail and reproduce the precise meaning and intention of the ST by respecting the TL, the names were translated to their respective counterparts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rey <b>Amaranto</b> to King <b>Amaranth</b></li> <li>• Reina <b>Siena</b> to Queen <b>Sienna</b></li> <li>• Princesa <b>Ámbar</b> to Princess <b>Amber</b></li> <li>• Princesa <b>Magenta</b> to Princess <b>Magenta</b></li> <li>• Princesa <b>Carmín</b> to Princess <b>Carmine</b></li> <li>• Guardia Real <b>Cian</b> to Royal Guard <b>Cyan</b></li> <li>• <b>Cerúleo</b> to <b>Azure</b></li> </ul> <p>The original names were changed due to the effect they create in the story and how they represent each characters' appearance.</p> <p><b>(Chapter XVI, Xions)</b></p>
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	<p>cabellos del color de su nombre y su piel igual en menor tonalidad; son realmente bellos. Con los rayos del sol y su cabello al viento, verlos andar era un espectáculo maravilloso.</p>	<p>“The people of Yangana have long luscious hairs colored after their names, and their skin is the same but in a lighter shade; they are truly beautiful. With sunlight and their hair blowing in the wind, watching them walk was a wonderful sight”</p>	
	<p>–¡Waaaoo, esta casa es enorme! –afirmó Irina, mientras Makúla revoloteaba por el lugar.</p> <p>–Ya está, lo encontré; es <b>supramástico</b> –dijo Magmaneo.</p> <p>–¿<b>Supra qué?</b> –preguntó Irina. Magmaneo sonrió, como quien es pillado haciendo una travesura, y sonrojado dijo:</p> <p>–¡<b>Supramástico!</b></p> <p>Irina miro a Makúla, como esperando que esta le diera</p>	<p>“Wow, this house is huge!” said Irina, as Makúla fluttered around the place.</p> <p>“Guys, I found it, I found a place! It's <b>supramastic!</b>” said Magmaneo.</p> <p>“<b>Supreme what?</b>” asked Irina.</p> <p>Magmaneo smiled like he had been caught misbehaving, blushed, and then repeated:</p>	<p>With faithful method, a translator must do an adequate job when it comes to play on words, ambiguities, etc. In this extract, the author of the ST created a new word, “<b>Supramástico</b>” that is rendered to “<b>Supramastic</b>”. Within the explanation of Magmaneo, the author explains the meaning of the word: something beyond fantastic; bigger and better. Calque, was chosen as a technique to fulfill the suitable rendering of the new word, creating a close meaning to what the ST wanted to communicate.</p>

	<p>algún tipo de respuesta. La Sandaluz elevó sus hombros y movió su cabeza, como diciendo que no sabía de qué hablaba.</p> <p>–¿Qué significa <b>supramástico</b>?</p> <p>–Que es algo más que fantástico.</p>	<p><b>“Supramastic!”</b></p> <p>Irina looked at Makúla, as if waiting for Makúla to give her some kind of answer. The Sandaluz just shrugged and shook her head, like confirming she was just as clueless.</p> <p>“What does <b>supramastic</b> mean?”</p> <p><b>“It means something bigger and better than fantastic”</b></p>	
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Chart 8 Analysis of the Communicative Method

Method	ST	TT	Analysis
<p><b>Communicative translation</b></p>	<p>Su abrazo fue tan fuerte que Irina sintió que dejaría de respirar; luego, la tía Clota se colocó hacia un lado, manteniendo un brazo</p>	<p>Her embrace was so strong, Irina felt as if she might stop breathing. Next, Aunt Clota moved to her side, keeping an arm around her</p>	<p><b>Chapter II – Aunt Clota</b></p> <p>1. <i>“Oh, but come in! People, please come in! My house is</i></p>

	<p>sobre sus hombros.</p> <p><b>–Pero pasen, chicos, ¡por favor, pasen! Están en su casa.</b></p> <p>La casa de la Tía Clota era enorme, tan enorme como vieja. Por momentos, daba la impresión de que las cosas, un objeto en cuestión, por sí solo, se reparaba. <b>Los ojos de Irina no daban crédito a lo que sucedía; miraba a sus padres, quienes parecían ver esto con naturalidad.</b> La tía los condujo hacia una sala para conversar cómodamente.</p> <p>La sorpresa de Irina era cada vez mayor. <b>Las cosas continuaban moviéndose dentro de la casa</b> y su <b>incertidumbre</b> se acrecentaba al ver la <b>impavidez</b> de sus padres. ¿Acaso era la única que prestaba atención?</p> <p>Escobas bailaban, limpiando la casa, <b>un juego gracioso entre el escobillón, el trapeador y el</b></p>	<p>shoulders.</p> <p><b>“Oh, but come in! People, please come in! My house is your house.”</b></p> <p>Aunt Clota's house was huge; as huge as it was old. At times, it looked like things moved on their own. And perhaps, if you focused on one specific object, it seemed to be repairing itself. <b>Irina could not believe what was happening; she then looked at her parents, who seemed to be unaffected by their surroundings.</b> Aunt Clota led them into a living room, so that they could chat comfortably.</p> <p>Irina's awe kept on increasing: <b>the objects inside the house continued to move around</b>, and her <b>confusion</b> kept on growing as she watched her parents' <b>unawareness</b>. Was she the only one paying attention?</p> <p>Brooms were dancing, cleaning the</p>	<p><i>your house.”</i></p> <p>The change from the original text to its idiomatic equivalent is rather a simple detail, but it becomes helpful in understanding Aunt Clota's character; one can tell she's loving, effusive, from this expression alone. A literal approach would have probably read as too plain.</p> <p>2. <i>Irina could not believe what was happening; she then looked at her parents, who seemed to be unaffected by their surroundings.</i></p> <p>In order to avoid over-explaining every reaction, some expressions have to be avoided. ST readers might understand “los ojos de Irina no daban crédito a lo que sucedía”, but translating a phrase like that faithfully hinders the style of the text, and comprehension of the TT readers.</p> <p>3. <i>The objects inside the house continued to move around</i></p> <p>The transfer “cosas” to “objects”, a particularization, allows the TT to have</p>
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	<p><b>saca polvo.</b> Sin embargo, <b>aunque limpia</b>, la casa siempre volvía a parecer desordenada. La Tía Clota decía que había acumulado tantas cosas como años, por lo que a Irina le pareció apropiado preguntar por su edad.</p> <p><b>Papá hizo ruidos con su garganta</b>, mamá la miró con desaprobarción. Tía Clota sonrió.</p> <p>–Hijita, la edad de una bruja no se debe preguntar; en realidad, no sabría qué contestar –rio suavemente, tapando su boca con una mano–. <b>Solo sé que ya son muchos, muchos años.</b></p>	<p>house; <b>the broom, the mop and the duster playfully competing against each other.</b> However, and, <b>although just having been cleaned</b>, the house always turned back to looking messy. Aunt Clota said she had accumulated as many objects as years to her life, so Irina thought it to be appropriate to ask about her age.</p> <p><b>As she asked, her dad cleared his throat; uncomfortable, trying to change the subject</b>, while her mom looked at her disapprovingly. Aunt Clota just smiled.</p> <p>“My child, the age of a witch should not be asked; in fact, I would not know how to answer” she chuckled, covering her mouth with one hand. <b>“I only know that to my life, there have been already many, many years.”</b></p>	<p>a more detailed narrated picture. This is not needed in the ST, for the word “cosas” changes in meaning depending of the context, but to use the word “stuff” or “things” would, in change, become way too general for the target audience.</p> <p><i>4. Confusion</i> Generalization; the word “incertidumbre” leans more into the translation of “doubt”</p> <p><i>5. Unawareness</i> Generalization; the word “impavidez” leans more into the translation of the word “serenity” or “calmness”</p> <p><i>6. The broom, the mop and the duster playfully competing against each other.</i> The change from “jugar” to “compete” stems from the fact that, if using the literal translation of jugar, <i>play</i>, the noun form of this word would not fit in the context it is being used in. To compensate for the effect, the addition of the adverb “playfully” was made.</p>
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			<p>7. <i>Although just having been cleaned</i></p> <p>To further emphasize the effect of what was happening, the choice to amplify and detailing the recurring event that Irina would come to see after entering Aunt Clota's house.</p> <p>8. <i>As she asked, her dad cleared his throat; uncomfortable, trying to change the subject</i></p> <p>As with the previous instance, the choice to amplify the sentence into a larger statement was made according to the way it would read in the TT. If translated literally, this text would probably read as strange and not formulated, one would not be able to tell what the dad was doing or why, whereas the ST intention is to demonstrate the awkwardness of the situation by having Irina's father react this way.</p> <p>9. <i>"I only know that to my life, there have been already many, many years."</i></p>
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			<p>Aunt Clota has a very usual way of speaking, from her speech one could tell she is wise and old—unthankfully, it is more difficult to transfer her speech from Spanish to English without losing this trait the author gave her. In turn, a communicative approach has been employed in order to keep her character’s personality as salient as it is in the ST.</p>
	<p>–Tía Clota, ¿tú eres una bruja?</p> <p>Tía Clota sonrió y <b>paró por un momento de cocinar, pensó un poco</b> y contestó mientras volvía a su actividad.</p> <p>–Se <b>puede decir que sí</b>, ¿por qué lo preguntas?</p> <p>–¡Porque las brujas son <b>malas!</b> – se apresuró Irina.</p> <p>–<b>¿Ah sí? – dijo, con tono de sorpresa –¿y quién lo dice?</b></p> <p>–Los cuentos.</p> <p>–Mmm, ¿y tú qué piensas?</p> <p>–Que tú no eres mala, pero todas las demás sí.</p>	<p>“<b>Auntie</b> Clota, are you a witch?”</p> <p>Aunt Clota smiled and <b>stopped cooking, just for a second, she thought about it</b>, and answered while she went back to the previous task.</p> <p>“Yes, <b>you could say that</b>. Why are you asking?”</p> <p>“Because witches are <b>evil!</b>” Irina rushed to say.</p> <p>“<b>Is that so?</b>” she asked, <b>surprised. “Who said so?”</b></p> <p>“Fairy tales.”</p> <p>“Mhm. And what do you think?”</p> <p>“That you aren’t evil, but the others</p>	<p><b>Chapter V – Melania</b></p> <p>1. <i>Auntie</i></p> <p>The change from Tía to auntie seems to be the most appropriate choice, considering how much love Irina has for her aunt.</p> <p>2. <i>Stopped cooking, just for a second, she thought about it</i></p> <p>The timing of her response is a foreshadowing of her answer—if translated as is in the ST, this effect would have been lost.</p> <p>3. <i>You could say that</i></p>



	<p>–¿Y a <b>cuántas más</b> conoces?</p> <p>Irina se quedó callada y pensando, no sabía que contestar <b>y se sentía</b> avergonzada por ello.</p> <p>–<b>Por lo que veo</b>, no a muchas.</p> <p>–Pero es que siempre se ven malas y <b>feas</b> en los cuentos que he leído y he leído mucho –dijo, titubeante, tratando de enmendar algo</p> <p>–No lo dudo, pero ¿puedes juzgar a todas desde lo que has leído?</p>	<p>are.”</p> <p>“And <b>how many other witches</b> do you know?”</p> <p>Irina remained silent, thinking. She didn’t know what to answer and <b>that made her feel</b> embarrassed.</p> <p>“<b>From what I can tell</b>, you don’t know many.”</p> <p>"But it's just... They always look evil and <b>hideous</b> in the stories I've read and I've read a lot," she hesitantly said, trying to fix something.</p> <p>“I don't doubt it, but can you judge all of them based only on what you've read?”</p>	<p>A more accurate and idiomatic response, along with carrying on the mystery of everything Aunt Clota says.</p> <p><i>4. Evil</i></p> <p>For this instance, the word “bad” would no have fit the situation. Bad is usually more casual and lighthearted than evil, and in this text, Irina is expressing her deep-rooted beliefs about witches to her aunt.</p> <p><i>5. “Is that so?” she asked, surprised. “Who said so?”</i></p> <p>In the original text, “con tono de sorpresa” refers to Aunt Clota’s inflection of voice when she hears Irina speak of witches, but “a surprised tone of voice” can become redundant if paired with the dialogue.</p> <p><i>6. how many other witches</i></p> <p>The addition of “other witches” supply the lack of impersonal noun used in the ST. In this case, the word “cuantas” speaks of the number of witches and the witches themselves, it serves as an impersonal noun, and</p>
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			<p>that effect would be poorly replicated in the TT if translated as is in the ST.</p> <p><i>7. that made her feel</i> The shift in grammar structure from the ST to the TT makes for a more cohesive and understandable phrasing.</p> <p><i>8. From what I can tell</i> An accurate and more idiomatic expression to use rather than the literal translation of “por lo que veo”</p> <p><i>9. Hideous</i> Again, as with the usage of “evil”, the connotation this word carries is one that the literal equivalent of “feo” does not have. These descriptors are coming from Irina’s internal battles; her fear of the unknown and her ignorance in certain topics.</p>
	<p>–¿Por dónde?</p> <p>Tía Clota <b>sonrió y solo ahí se dio</b></p>	<p>“Where from?”</p> <p>Aunt Clota <b>smiled after realizing</b></p>	<p><b>Chapter VIII – Departure</b></p> <p><i>1. Aunt clota smiled after realizing</i></p>

	<p><b>cuenta de que Irina no entendía nada, seguramente ella pensaba que para llegar al lugar indicado había que ir a pie desde su casa.</b></p> <p>–Irina, el lugar donde vas, Yangana, es muy lejos de aquí; el viaje sería muy largo <b>y tomaría demasiado tiempo, tiempo que no tenemos.</b></p> <p><b>Irina estaba más confundida que al inicio.</b></p> <p><b>–Pero entonces, ¿cómo...?</b></p> <p>La tía Clota, esta vez, no contestó su pregunta, sino que la tomó de la mano y la llevó hacia la salita, donde estaba la mesa de Gran Guardián.</p> <p>–Irina, la mesita, como tú la llamas, es una especie de <b>ventana</b> por la cual te puedes transportar a diferentes lugares.</p>	<p><b>that Irina wasn't understanding her. Surely enough, Irina thought that to get to Yangana she had to get there on foot.</b></p> <p>"Irina, the place you're going to, Yangana, is way far from here; the trip would be too long and <b>it'll cost you more time, and time is what we lack right now.</b>"</p> <p><b>Irina only grew in her confusion.</b></p> <p><b>"But then... How exactly am I supposed to get there?"</b></p> <p>This time Aunt Clota didn't answer her question, instead, she took Irina by the hand and led her to the living room where the Great Guardian "table" was.</p> <p>"Irina, the "small table" as you call it, also works as a <b>portal</b> from which you can transport into different places."</p> <p>Irina instantly looked at the small</p>	<p><i>that Irina wasn't understanding her. Surely enough, Irina thought that to get to Yangana she had to get there on foot.</i></p> <p>The scene takes place after Irina decides she is willing to go to Yangana; the many changes applied to this piece of text were made in order to simplify some things while putting more emphasis on others; Aunt Clota's reaction is expected as she usually responds this way to almost everything, what matters here is the very child-like thought pattern of Irina even after she had accepted to joining a very dangerous mission.</p> <p><i>2. It'll cost you more time, and time is what we lack right now.</i></p> <p>Though a more faithful rendering would have suit this extract, it is important to note that, as explained earlier, Aunt Clota has a very peculiar form of speech, and in response, some changes have been made to her manner of speaking in the TT.</p> <p><i>3. Irina only grew in her confusion.</i></p>
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	<p>Irina miró inmediatamente la mesa, <b>esta vez le parecía que miraba a través de ella.</b></p> <p>–Es decir que todas esas historias que me mostraste a través de ella...</p> <p>Tía Clota sonrió e interrumpió la pregunta que sabía que estaba por venir.</p>	<p>table, <b>but this time it felt as if it were looking back at her.</b></p> <p>“So that means that every story you showed me through this table...”</p> <p>Aunt Clota smiled and interrupted her before she could ask the next obvious question.</p>	<p>The literal translation of the phrase used in the ST can read as over-explaining, when in fact it only speaks of her incredulity. Irina, being a child, knows very little about the outside world; but adding to this, she knows barely nothing about the fantastic world she is emerged in. Thus, the expression was changed to fit this specific reaction more properly.</p> <p><i>4. “But then... How exactly am I supposed to get there?”</i></p> <p>As Irina was being cut short by her aunt, she is left with no opportunity to complete asking her question. If translated faithfully, this extract of text would have felt incomplete but not as intended by the author.</p> <p><i>5. Portal</i></p> <p>The Word portal is more commonly used in instances like the one explained in the book. And though a portal oftentimes works as a window, the same cannot be said for “window”.</p> <p><i>6. But this time it felt as if it were</i></p>
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			<p><i>looking back at her.</i></p> <p>The expression used in the ST “looked through her” has an entirely different connotation in the TT; essentially meaning to ignore someone even if looking straight at them. This would not have read with the intention of the author if translated literally, therefore the change “looking back” talks of the same sensation Irina felt this time while looking at the table—a sensation of being observed.</p>
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## 9 CONCLUSIONS

As it had been explained in previous chapters following the main concepts used for the development of this project, two things are to be reiterated: there is a definite need for literary books to be used in Ecuadorian EFL classrooms, as these types of resources aid in acquiring reading skills (and language skills altogether), and most notably, one that suits the students' scope of interest, which leads to the involvement of the student in his or her reading experience. And, the second point being that, generally speaking, the translation of any literary work that is thought-out with a target audience in mind, should be taken with the utmost seriousness so as not to hinder the main objective of such project; for this exact reason, extensive work has gone toward the rendering to make it so that, not only the vocabulary available to the students (that is, the vocabulary they already possess) aids in understanding the majority of the text by context clues, but also, added enough vocabulary above their level in order to help them expand their knowledge and reading skills—a glossary section has been developed in which students might learn more about the book as a whole, while enriching their vocabulary.

Regarding the linguistic aspect of this project, since this is the first ever translation made for the fantasy literary work *Camino a Yangana/Journey to Yangana*, there has been extensive research on the most adequate methods and techniques translators should make use of for this kind of literature, added to what has been previously learned throughout academic instruction.

Of such methods and techniques, there are several which have been employed to put forth the best possible outcome, and thus have been aforementioned in a section analyzing the different instances in which they best apply. Moreover, the methods that were employed the most in the rendering of this fantasy piece of literature were *Faithful Translation*, and *Communicative Translation*. Both of these methods were vital for the completion of this work, first, with *faithful translation*, we had to put forth the

explicit importance that the message and intentionality of the author played a bigger role in our choices; the style of the book is one that regards fantasy and thus, the translation method is one that fits the scope of translated fantasy. Additionally, given the purpose of the translation in the first place, therefore, understanding the explicit importance of the message and meaning, the *communicative approach*, in turn, plays into the reading comprehension point of the research—communicating the message weighs into the decisions taken for the final product. These methods were applied also considering the initial aim of the author; a translation can only be as good as an original only as long as it does not differ entirely from its source.

Along with these resources, it is also necessary to have the students put forward their own contributions to this literary journey. The need to have students be proactive in their reading aims to the development of their reading comprehension skills. A section of follow-up activities after a set of chapters will grant EFL teachers with enough evidence of their students' progress, as well as being a great source for creativity and self-expression in which students can partake without feeling the pressure of outperforming academically; these should be considered check-ups in which the teacher can interfere to help or advise accordingly to the students' response.

Lastly, it is important to remark the key point of using Ecuadorian literature: the main choice here is to introduce intermediate level Baccalaureate students with context-based literature. This type of literature will read as familiar to them, leading to a rewarding learning experience that isn't bound by grammar rules or a foreign culture.

## 10 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Making the choice of translating this particular piece of work was based on the need to fulfill a gap between the usual grammar-focused and textbook based EFL subject, and the role translated Ecuadorian literature can play in an EFL classroom. Consequently, addressing a skill that is most overlooked in our EFL classrooms: Reading comprehension—for which the employment of different resources comes in hand, thus the development of follow-up activities that help track the progress the students make, as well as an added glossary to further improve such skills. Simultaneously, and concerning the main objective proposed for the development of this project: it is advised to identify first-off the prioritized group or audience the rendering is being made for; after identifying the lack of Ecuadorian literary works used for the improvement of EFL skills, it had been agreed upon that the focus of the translation is placed on communicating the message to the target audience in the most effective manner.
- Added to the previous point; though it is suggested to understand the target audience and having a goal set in mind, it is also highly recommended that translators take into consideration the initial aim of the ST author at the moment of writing. The methods and techniques to be used should be concurrent to fit the literary genre that is to be translated, as well as the story that is being conveyed.
- Having students who recognize the elements presented in the book as those which they see in their lives, is one of the main purposes of the research work. As it's been stated, the literary genre chosen (Ecuadorian Fantasy), constitutes only a different lens of reality. The case made here, though, is to present students with a story that, despite being in a foreign language, and possessing all these fantastic elements of the genre it belongs to, still claims to its relatability as a coming-of-age story. It is believed that, having a story that relates to the experience of the target audience, will make for a reading journey that is appealing for EFL intermediate level students.



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## 12 APPENDIX

The following section contains all three parts developed throughout the entirety of the project;

- A full translation of the literary work *Camino a Yangana* – **Journey to Yangana**
- A section of follow up activities that follow the progression of the translated book, and
- A glossary, aimed to aid students who might be unfamiliar with some terms; both from their L2 (English), as well as terms from the story itself.

## **13 JOURNEY TO YANGANA**

# **JOURNEY TO YANGANA**

Written by Ana María Heinert Musello.

Translated by  
Marcela Garzón and María Zelaya.

## I Road trip

When she woke up, she felt like the sun had decided to shine brighter on her face. She couldn't properly open her eyes, but after **blinking** for a while she saw what looked like her mother's **silhouette**. It seemed like her mother was in a rush, putting clothes in a bag, checking everything twice, making sure she wasn't forgetting anything.

She turned her face, looking at her **eagerly** before telling her:

"Good morning, love! You must hurry and get up because we're going to Aunt Clota's house."

Then, Irinia followed her mother's order: she got up, sat next to her bed to put on her **fuzzy** rabbit slippers and stood up. On her way to the bathroom, she noticed that her mother wasn't just putting clothes in a bag, but a suitcase; that little detail made her realize that I wasn't just a visit.

"Mom, why are you packing my suitcase?" she asked.

"Sweetie" her mom responded, she made a pause, and **gulped** before continuing, "your dad and I have to travel."

"Where? What about me? Why can't I go?"

Her mother smiled, but it quickly disappeared.

"No, sweetie, no. Your dad and I are the only ones that can go on this trip."

"Why can't I?"

Irina remained quiet, and continued walking towards the bathroom. Her mother always talked about aunt Clota, she believed they met when she was younger but she didn't remember her.

"I don't understand why adults won't speak clearly, they're always so mysterious" Irina thought.

The **journey** was quiet. Irina pretended to be asleep; her parents were having a short conversation between **whispers** that she managed to listen to.

"What did you tell her?" her dad asked curiously.

"That we need to travel," the mother answered, discreetly checking on Irina.

Her dad seemed very worried, he was shaking his head from left to right, disapproving of what he was hearing. It seemed like he wasn't a fan of the situation. Irina thought about interrupting them to ask them what was really going on, but she decided to keep listening.

"Do you really think all of this is necessary?"



“If it wasn’t necessary, we wouldn’t be doing it. This is what’s best for everyone, besides it will only be a few days, she will be safe with aunt Clota.”

“Can anyone be ‘safe’ at aunt Clota’s house?” he asked **mischievously**, smiling.

“You shouldn’t talk that way, aunt Clota is helping us with all good intentions and that’s more than anyone has done for us; so let’s keep going, there’s still a long way from there” her mother replied immediately, looking displeased.

“I just don’t understand why she decided to live somewhere so complicated.”

“This has been Aunt Clota’s home for a while now. I don’t think you should keep on judging her.” she said, anger filling her voice

“Alright, alright. I was just saying...”

Before them, a huge mountain appeared, it was so big that you couldn’t see the top of it from the car.

“Where are we?” Irina asked.

“Almost there” dad answered.

“Get your things” mom added.

It looked like they were about to crash into the mountain; the road went straight to them, but, when they were close, they took a **bifurcation** and moved away from the route that seemed to lead into the interior of the mountain. After driving in a section surrounded by trees, they managed to **distinguish** a large house that looked like it was abandoned. The lights were on.

## II Aunt Clota

They were in front of the huge house, standing side by side, no one dared to take a step forward.

Suddenly, their silence became interrupted by a sound that resembled small steps made by high heels running hurriedly toward the door; a **high-pitched** voice coming from the inside of the house saying repeatedly:

“Coming! I'm coming!”

That voice... and the noise made by her high heels...

“Coming!”

The noise stopped out of a sudden, followed by the sound of a heavy object falling on the floor, a **thud...** A somewhat sharp bang, which echoed throughout the place. Irina's mom hurriedly went up the door:

“Aunt Clota, are you okay?” She asked as she got closer.

Her father, who was already following behind her mom, also appeared worried.

Again, all they could hear was:

“Yes... Coming, coming!”

Then, in almost an instant, the door opened. And there she was; the silhouette of a slightly chubby woman wearing old-fashioned clothes, (as if they had been somehow frozen in time) and her **lopsided**, flattened hat, stepping out to greet them.

As soon as she saw Irina's mom, she threw herself all over her, drowning her in hugs and kisses.

“My sweet girl! How long has it been?” she **squealed**. “Let me get a good look at that face... Oh! You look just like your mother!”

All while squishing her cheeks, and analyzing every detail of her face as if she were someone inspecting an object trying to find a difference.

After, it was Irina's father's turn. Same greeting process: kisses and hugs, plus grabbing his belly, for which she pointed out:

“You've gained some weight!”

Dad, who was already a little **flustered**, blushed and smiled at the **hurly-burly** of aunt Clota.

Finally, she stood in front of Irina, looking at her carefully and with intent for a couple of seconds, to then turn to the parents and **effusively** ask:

“This is her, right? Right?” She kissed Irina and caressed her hair. “You and I will get along great! You'll see”

Her embrace was so strong, Irina felt as if she might stop breathing. Next, Aunt Clota moved to her side, keeping an arm around her shoulders, “Oh, but come in! People, please come in! My house is your house.”

Aunt Clota's house was huge; as huge as it was old. At times, it looked like things moved on their own. And perhaps, if you focused on one specific object, it seemed to be repairing itself. Irina could not believe what was happening; she then looked at her parents, who seemed to be **unaffected** by their surroundings. Aunt Clota led them into a living room, so that they could chat comfortably.

Irina's **awe** kept on increasing: the objects inside the house continued to move around, and her confusion kept on growing as she watched her parents' **unawareness**. Was she the only one paying attention?

Brooms were dancing, cleaning the house; the broom, the mop and the duster playfully competing against each other. However, and, although just having been cleaned, the house always turned back to looking messy. Aunt Clota said she had accumulated as many objects as years to her life, so Irina thought it to be appropriate to ask about her age.

As she asked, her dad cleared his throat; uncomfortable, trying to change the subject, while her mom looked at her **disapprovingly**. Aunt Clota just smiled.

“My child, the age of a witch should not be asked; in fact, I would not know how to answer” she chuckled, covering her mouth with one hand. “I only know that to my life, there have been already many, many years.”

Irina was **perplexed** by her answer. What exactly did she mean by "witch"? Was it a metaphor, or did she actually, really mean it? After all, she had already seen what Aunt Clota could do with only a movement of her finger... the dancing broomstick thing could be understandable, but, an actual "witch"? Like the ones in fairy tales?

She was **immersed** in her thoughts when her mother turned to her and said:

“Irina, your father and I, we have to go” She had a sad look on her face; got closer to Irina and hugged her tightly. “We won't take too long, and we'll try to finish as soon as possible. Be good, help Aunt Clota as much as you can; I know you're a good kid, and that it's not necessary for me to tell you all this. I love you.”

She dodged her daughter's gaze and walked away; Irina could not get a word in before she left.

After, it was her father's turn to say goodbye. He only hugged her silently before leaving.

Right as they closed the door behind them, Irina let out a **sob**. Aunt Clota came up to her, putting her arm around her shoulder again. She then said:

“Don’t worry, they won’t take too long, and it’s for the best that you stay here.”

### III Dwelves

As the night got darker, Aunt Clota's house began to look **eerie**; it seemed as if the faces in every picture hanging on the wall watched Irina wherever she went, and the **creaking** of her steps in the old wooden floor accompanied her around. There was this uneasy feeling of the hearing of noises coming from every room, terrifying her **further**. Irina picked up a candleholder and, believing that Aunt Clota was asleep, she explored the house, putting her ear up to each closed door, trying to decipher the noise inside, but as she entered each room, all was quiet.

She advanced through the corridors, in front of her, a staircase led to another floor of rooms. But the sound of her footsteps woke Aunt Clota.

“Child, is that you?” Aunt Clota asked from her room.

“Yes, auntie!”

“Are you exploring the house?”

“Um... Yes, auntie!”

“There are too many rooms, right?”

“Way too many...” Aunt Clota laughed. “Why so many?”

“Why not?”

“You don't need that many, you live alone.”

“What makes you say that?” She laughed again.

“I mean, there is no one else here.”

“Just because you don't see them doesn't mean they're not there.”

“Who... or what am I not seeing?”

At that moment, Aunt Clota came out of her room; she looked different, better put together, and more serene. She walked next to Irina.

“There are beings that live with us,” she said, “they have always been there. But we lead such **hectic** lives, we don't take the time to see them. Be quiet, and watch.”

Then, as she watched, small, humanoid-looking creatures with pointed ears appeared before her. She rubbed her eyes in disbelief, almost unsure that what she saw was real. Discreetly, as if to not scare those beings, she approached her aunt, whispering.

“What... what are those, aunt?”

“Those are **Dwelves**,” Clota smiled.

“Those are... What?”

“Dwelves!”

Irina's surprise stayed with her, presently in the form of a shocked face; she watched them carefully.

“And what is a Dwelve?”

“Dwelves, as you can see, are small creatures, as small as dwarves, but with similar characteristics to elves”

“I've never heard of them before,” said Irina, increasingly fascinated, carefully following the movements of the Dwelves.

“Dwelves are small, and very funny,” Aunt Clota continued explaining. “And they are able to move with great agility through the structures they build. Come here child, let's sit together.”

She took Irina to a corner of the house that she didn't remember seeing during the afternoon tour with her parents. In the center laid a beautiful table, carved in different types of wood, adorned with what seemed to be **embedded** crystals of different colors; the smell coming from the table was wonderful, and it was enough to make Irina feel as if she had been transported to a forest. She closed her eyes and immediately sensed the smell of wet dirt and eucalyptus as the wind gently caressed her face. Aunt Clota then interrupted her:

“Not yet”

“Not yet? What do you mean?” Irina exclaimed, not having the slightest idea of what was going on. Aunt Clota responded with her usual smile.

“It's not time to leave yet, you have to wait.”

“Leave? But I just got here.”

Aunt Clota took Irina by the hand, and led her to two chairs sitting diagonally to the table, from where she could continue to watch her as she began to tell a story.

“A long time ago, in a forest far away, there was a kingdom, the kingdom of the **Elves**. These beautiful creatures, **agile**, intelligent, and greatly skillful, lead a peaceful life. Until one fateful day, a day as sunny as ever...

Irina's eyes focused again on the table. It appeared like its surface would project holograms according to what Aunt Clota was

narrating; **nonetheless**, she didn't pause her story even as surprise took over Irina.

"...a beautiful girl was born, daughter to the leader of the elven army, a leader who was a great warrior himself. His happiness couldn't have been greater, his firstborn was truly beautiful; so much so that, when she was born, he took her from her mother's hands, only to hold her in his arms like she was the most precious thing in this world. Since he was an outstanding leader, fair and brave, the soldiers of his troop were very loyal to him and every single one of them were also there to welcome this beautiful child into life. Her mother, who had suffered greatly during delivery, named her Nelfi."

"Nelfi was beautiful, agile like all elves, but she had also **inherited** her father's bravery; she was a very curious kid, and enjoyed exploring new places. One day, Nelfi found herself investigating the **surroundings** of the forest of her kingdom, when suddenly she heard a sound similar to that of hammers picking at wood; she climbed a tree to have a better look, and, hiding among the branches, she observed some small creatures working on a construction site. She couldn't really see what they were doing - it was sort of like a **carriage**, except it was bigger. What she could see really well, though, was the remarkably synchronized effort they put into their work."

"Nelfi, immersed in what she was seeing, suddenly heard a slight *"crack"*, a sound a small branch would make if it was broken under the weight of something else. Anyone else would have missed it, but

not her; she turned around very slowly, and saw a small shadow approaching. Immediately, she took the bow she was carrying on her back and quickly surprised the one who tried to surprise her first.

"Who, or what, are you?"

"I'm a **dwarf**, my name is Tendor"

"Tendor?"

"Yes!" the dwarf nodded his head.

"And what kind of name is that?"

"I don't know, a name, my name I guess. But who are you?"

"I'm Nelfi, and I'm an elf"

"Nelfi?"

"Yes"

"And yet you talk about my name!" Tendor smiled. "Anyway, what are you doing here in my kingdom?"

"The forest doesn't belong to anyone, besides, you and your dwarf friends were being very noisy, so I came to investigate."

Tendor **burst out laughing**.

"Well, you're right, I think us dwarves can be a bit noisy."

And from that moment on, it was more than obvious that Tendor had fallen in love with Nelfi's beauty. They became great friends and, between the two, counting with Nelfi's agility and Tendor's strength, they were able to explore places they wouldn't have dared to explore alone. It seemed that this friendship made them stronger and more agile, but, above all, it made them happier.

Eventually, Tendor and Nelfi agreed to tell each of their families about their friendship.

Nelfi approached her mother, Makita, fully prepared to tell her about Tendor.

“Mom, I have a friend...”

“Only one friend, Nelfi?” Makita, who was setting the table, acted carefree as if to let her daughter know it was no big deal; but deep down, she was deeply concentrated on every word and gesture. Nelfi smiled.

“A special friend,” she blushed as she said this.

“Huh, a special friend?”

“Yes, mom, a special one”

“And why special?”

“Because I like him different”

“What's different about the way you like him, Nelfi?”

“I like him special.”

“And would it be true to say that this friend you like ‘special’ it’s only because you especially like him?” asked Makita, smiling.

Nelfi smiled, blushing even more.

“Yes.”

“And what's this special friend's name?”

“His name is Tendor.”

“How strange!” Makita responded, surprised. “I don't remember hearing that name around. Does he come from another kingdom?”

“Yes, sort of...”

“That’s weird. Among elves, we all know each other, or have at least heard of each other. Where is he from?”

Nelfi mumbled in an almost imperceptible tone, almost like she was afraid of telling the truth:

“It's just that... he's not an elf.”

Makita froze in place, and after a few seconds, she answered:

“If he’s not an elf... What is he?”

Nelfi took a deep breath, calmed herself down, and answered:

“He’s a dwarf.”

Her mother was speechless, she couldn't manage to say another word, she couldn't move - only able to express her emotions by wearing a strangely worrisome look on her face. She took Nelfi by the arm and, in an almost demanding tone, said to her:

“I'm going to talk this over with your father, but I don't think he'll like the idea.”

Makita left the room hurriedly, letting Nelfi stand there with all her hopes hanging by a thread. She could hear the whisper of her mother's voice talking and, once she was done, the voice of her father echoing with anger, as the only thing he managed to answer was a resounding "NO".

The next day, Tendor and Nelfi met where they knew they'd find each other, the place they had first met, by this time it was different. The instant their eyes locked together, they knew. Words weren't needed.

Tendor stood in front of Nelfi, who didn't dare to face him; he took her hands, and fixed the hair that fell over her face.

"Nelfi, it's alright, don't be sad."

"Tendor, my father doesn't want us..." Her voice trembled.

"I know; my parents would not approve of the relationship either."

Nelfi lifted her head and looked at him in the eyes while a tear ran down her cheek. Tendor gently wiped the tear away. This time he was closer to her than he had ever been. Nelfi only had to slightly lift her face to find her lips meeting Tendor's. Perhaps, if their parents had not insisted on breaking them apart, this would have never had happened; but it was too late now. That kiss had made them absolutely inseparable.

The forest had become a witness to the immeasurable love that united the two, but, as one would expect, their happiness wouldn't last much longer. Each of their families found out; initially they chose to forbid them from seeing each other, but Nelfi and Tendor always found a way to be together. One day, as he was already exhausted by this situation, Nelfi's father decided to meet with Tendor's father. Well, this would have been a peaceful conversation if only his entire army had not accompanied him. They were all present: deft archers, cavalrymen and even the marching band. The

dwarves alerted the rest of their kingdom after seeing the elves approaching in such a threatening manner; war was about to begin.

After the warning, everyone in the dwarven village started preparing; parents looked for their children to take them home, men and women grouped together and took what was within their reach to protect themselves: the dwarves were a hardworking species, and though they were not for fighting, they arranged themselves efficiently.

At the entrance of the village stood Nelfi's father and his army, it was an impressive view to say the least; an entire army of unfriendly looking soldiers, stationed along with their weapons.

Tendor ran up to Nelfi's father, and in a last attempt of keeping the peace, he said:

"Sir, I don't mean to offend you, but this isn't necessary."

Nando, Nelfi's father, answered energetically:

"I have done everything in my power to get you away from my daughter, and you still don't understand!"

It was then that a part of the dwarven village came to intervene, they were smaller in comparison to the army, but they were very well armed; Tradeo, Tendor's father, was at the lead.

"Tendor, go away! I'm the one to take care of the situation," Tradeo yelled.



“No! Please, dad! I’m the only responsible for my problems, and I’m the only one can solve them.” He knew that, if he didn’t try to fix things on his end, it would cost his village.

Nelfi's father interrupted this moment, turning to Tradeo.

“Tradeo, for many centuries, both of our kingdoms have known not to disrupt the peace, both too busy with ourselves - both respecting the agreement. Why start this now?”

“We have kept our side of the agreement; it was your girl... She got involved with my village! She’s the only culprit for this war!”

“What do you mean she’s the only culprit? It’s your son the one who won’t stop going after her!”

“It was your daughter! She incited him!”

“Do not speak of my daughter that way!”

No more words were needed then - the fight had already begun; two peaceful villages, two smart and understanding species, were now at war.

During the brawl, a silhouette could be seen moving hurriedly and swiftly among the soldiers; it was Nelfi, trying to reach her father. Nando, who was already in the midst of the battle, didn’t notice his surroundings, he didn’t notice his daughter approaching him - he could only notice his fury; he wielded his small, sharp knife and threw his arm backwards to gain momentum. It was at this moment that everything suddenly froze for him: his arm stopped, everything stopped. He turned to see, but he couldn’t mutter a word, the

expression on his face spoke for him; then, a loud cry of terror. A helpless Tendor who, from the other end, saw everything that had happened. His **heart-wrenching** scream, the echo of Nelfi’s name still floating around in the air, was enough for everyone to lower their weapons and realize the tragedy.

Nando, after seeing his wounded daughter, knelt down in front of her, putting his hands on the place where her blood was gushing out from, in a desperate attempt to avoid what, perhaps, by that moment, was already inevitable.

Tendor stood on the other side, talking to her, unable to hold back his tears.

“No Nelfi, stay with me, please...” he turned to his father. “Please dad, do something, help Nelfi, please, I’m begging you!”

Tradeo, seeing the utter desperation of his son in his eyes, only responded:

“Tendor, what could I do? I’m not a healer, I’m just a simple worker”

The leader of the dwarves, dismayed by what had happened, looked around as if looking for the right answer.

One of the elves addressed Nando:

“Let's get her out of here soon! We’ll find Nelfi the help she needs in the kingdom!”

“It is too late, with her wounds, the journey will outlast her. Please go home and bring my wife, she will want to say goodbye” he answered with tears in his eyes.

Diligent as always, part of the elves marched at full speed to their kingdom, and once there, the rumor of what had happened spread around much faster.

Tendor turned to Nando.

“We can't leave Nelfi here, let's take her somewhere safe.”

Nando, drowning in despair, could only follow him. Four dwarves helped lift Nelfi, placing her on some sort of tabletop, simulating a stretcher, and took her to a cave hiding inside a huge stone - a hideout estranged from the dwarves' houses.

A small woman came out from the inside

“Santra!” Tradeo exclaimed.

“Tradeo?”

“Yes, it's me, Santra!”

“It's not only you” She stopped to observe the whole scene.

“You've also brought a little elven girl... and the entirety of the elven army”

“There's been an accident.”

Santra then cut him short:

“No war can be an accident! Wars can only be the product of miscommunication and the petty interests of some men! But you... Elves and dwarves? Why would you be at war?”

With a tearful and broken voice, Nando said:

“Please, ma'am, help my daughter.”

Santra, who wasn't giving in his **pleas**, answered:

“You brought your army from so far just to destroy my people's peace, and now, you are asking for my help?”

“War wasn't brought, I came here to ask that this boy” he said while pointing to Tendor “stays away from my daughter”

Softening her face expressions, Santra asked him:

“Can love stay away from their hearts by simply asking?”

“Please, ma'am, help me,” a **distressed** Nando replied.

Tendor interrupted.

“Please, Santra, I will give you anything you want, even my life to help her.”

“Actually, that's what I need – your life.” Santra said, answering the boy's **pleas**.

Tradeo, who decided to stay on the **sidelines**, screamed when he heard this.

“No! Not my son's life!”

“Dad, this is my **choice**” Tendor told him.

“If a life is what you want, take mine, she already is my life.” Nando interjected.

“I'm sorry Nando, you're an elf, you gave her life once, you cannot do it again. I need strong blood, different from hers, someone who is willing to give his life, a new life for another one.”

There was a **heart-wrenching** silence.

Makita had just arrived, breaking in between those who were present, and she approached Nelfi.

“Nelfi! Nelfi!” Makita called out insistently, with a soft voice, similar to the voice of a mother waking up her children. “Nelfi, I’m here, your mom is here.”

Nelfi slightly opened her eyes, she gave her mother a small smile and let her hand drop, she didn’t have any strength left. With tears streaming down her face, Makita spoke to Santra.

“Please, Santra, bring me back my daughter; you can take everything you want, but bring her back.”

“Makita, beautiful elf princess, I can’t do much for you. I know your people are peaceful, but today, your husband brought war within his heart, only a dwarf can help her now.”

Interrupting, Tendor said:

“That dwarf would be me, I’m willing to do it. I love her, I won’t **regret** giving my life for her.”

“Are sure about this, Tendor? You are still very young; there’s so much you still have to live.” Santra asked.

“I learned so many things with her: what true joy is, what love that comes from the heart means, what feeling free is. With her, I grew and wanted to be better; I don’t care if she’s either an elf or a dwarf, it is her whom I love, she’s the one who taught me how to do it – how to love. My life is a small price to pay, and it won’t compare to everything she gave me.”

There was a long pause, Nando and Makita’s glances full of **regret** met each other in silence.

Tendor looked at his father and said:

“Dad, please understand, she’s my reason to live.” Santra interrupted the conversation:

“Get her in, now! Or would you also like for her to catch a cold?”

Elves and dwarves ran towards Nelfi.

“I’m sorry, but my house is too small for all of you to enter, ” Santra told Nando “You can enter, you must be by your daughter’s side” she added because of Makita’s **devastated** look on her face. Tendor anxiously asked:

“What about me? Can I go?”

“No, boy, I will let you know when.”

“What can I do until then?”

“What everyone else will be doing: **wait.**” The mysterious woman answered.

Nearly every elf remained seated outside, Nando, who was leading them, never took his eyes off the entrance of Santra’s cave. Though he was still breathing, it felt like his body was lacking its will to live. Tendor walked towards him, they both looked at each other, their eyes told different things, a pair of eyes was asking for forgiveness, while the other pair was saying “thanks”. And just with their eyes, everything was said, since they couldn’t say a word.

The hours felt longer due to not knowing what was going on. Meanwhile, inside the cave, Santra was placing some leaves on top of Nelfi, these changed colors when they touched her skin. She placed some purple flowers that had a violet **pistil** and some pink dots, they were star-shaped but with six points, while doing that she sang some kind of prayer.

Makita silently watched everything; she couldn’t bring herself to ask a thing.

Outside the cave, dwarves were treating elves as their guests, they gave them blankets, some big leaves that on the bottom had a wrinkled texture and provided **warmth**. They were offered some kind of hot and sweet drink. The elves were thankful for such generosity. After a while, the same creatures that had fought hours ago were now chatting and exchanging recipes for combat tactics.

“Is Nelfi going to die?” a concerned Irina interrupted the story.

“I suggest you keep on listening to the story” Aunt Clota answered, and continued with the story.

Tendor made the most of the time, he went home to say goodbye, he was aware of the little time he had left and knew that the worst part of it all would be facing his mother.

When he arrived home, he spent some time with his two younger brothers. The tragic news had traveled fast, and with them so did his cousins who kept asking him if he was certain of what he was going to do, they were trying to talk him out of it.

“I’ve never been so certain of anything in my life” Tendor calmly responded.

He entered his mother’s room and hugged her, the room’s door slowly closed, shielding the crying and begging that no one else would hear but him. When he finally made his way back to Santra’s cave; he walked **among** elves and dwarves. When he noticed his presence, Nando stood up. Words weren’t needed.

Tendor felt a mixture of emotions, he was so scared and his hands were **trembling**; he opened the door very slowly. Among the small amount of furniture, the house had, there was a bed that one easily could tell apart from the rest, in that bed was Nelfi. The first thing he thought about was how her skin looked much paler than it already

was; he, then, looked at Makita and her anguished face made him shudder. He walked towards her and gently touched her shoulder, making Makita snap out of the trance she seemed to be in. With tears in her eyes, she hugged him.

The emotional moment was cut short when Santra’s silhouette darkened the dimly lit place.

“We shouldn’t waste more time,” the woman rushed.

Shortly after, she took a worm with a round mouth and lots of teeth, it was an intimidating and terrifying creature. Tendor walked until he was next to Santra.

“Makita, I need you to leave,” Santra said while looking at her.

“What’s going to happen now?” the mother asked with a trembling and broken voice.

“This **brave** dwarf is going to give his life in exchange for your daughter’s, it’s better if you leave” Santra answered.

Makita couldn’t stop crying, nonetheless she followed the instructions and slowly walked towards the door, before leaving she looked one last time at Nelfi and Tendor, she thanked the latter with a smile.

Santra took Tendor by his small but strong arm and guided him towards Nelfi. He grabbed her hand and thought about how cold it was. After that, any doubt or fear disappeared, in fact, Tendor looked peaceful next to Nelfi holding her hand.

Santra brought the scary looking worm and placed it in a way it formed a bridge between Tendor’s arm and Nelfi’s delicate one, the purple flowers immediately changed color, their pistils were now a vibrant yellow-orange color. The healer was in some kind of **trance**,

she was no longer just saying some prayers, it seemed like the sound of some **mantra** came out of her.

Tendor's face, known for his pink cheeks, was losing color; his strong arm was slowly losing its strength.

Just as someone that has woken from a long **slumber**, Nelfi opened her eyes; she saw Tendor next to her, she saw the hideous worm that linked them. She immediately remembered everything and in a **swift** movement, took the worm and threw it away before Santra could say anything. Nelfi held Tendor's face in her hands.

"Tendor, Tendor, please, open your eyes" Nelfi softly called him.

Tendor, who was seated and very weak, didn't react to her calling his name.

"Is he... is he dead?" she asked.

Santra just stared at her with one of those looks that can pierce completely through someone, and with a very serious voice, she answered her question.

"He gave his life for you."

"I don't want a life without him." Nelfi answered back. Tears flowing down her face, she couldn't stop crying. She hugged and kissed Tendor.

"He's too weak, I don't know if..."

Tendor opened his eyes, looking at Nelfi.

"If every time I die, I'll get to be kissed like that, I believe I'll spend more time in the **Underworld**" he delicately chuckled.

Nelfi was so happy, she couldn't stop kissing and hugging him. Santra, who was amazed by what happened, couldn't hide her happiness.

"Calm down, girl! He's still too weak for so much love"

"No! Santra! It's okay, I will never be too weak to handle that"

Tendor said with a bit of a broken voice.

Santra moved towards the door and quickly opened it. Nelfi and Tendor's parents were waiting with puzzled looks on their faces. The sadness that filled the atmosphere contrasted with Santra's joy. Everyone looked at each other without understanding what was going on. Only when they noticed Nelfi standing next to Tendor's silhouette, both of them smiling with the **dim** light shining on them, all problems went away.

The concerned parents entered the house. Makita and Nando hugged Nelfi, asking for her **forgiveness** with tears in their eyes. Tendor's parents carefully moved close to their son.

"Santra, can I touch him? Is he... Is he dying?" Tradeo asked. Tendor's mother, already next to him, was delicately hugging their son.

"Tradeo, your son is very strong, love has made him **invincible**. Not only is he not going to die, although he's weak at the moment, from now on besides being strong he will be more agile."

Both dwarves started shedding happy tears while they kissed and hugged their son. Nando took Nelfi by the hand, and with Makita they tried to express how grateful they were with Santra, who was smiling, happy with the work done. Tendor and Nelfi were as happy as their parents, both never stopped looking out for each other.

Dwarves and elves, after being aware of everything, started what it seemed like a party. There was joy and happiness like never seen before. A very distinguished delegation of elves entered the place; they were the Elf King and Queen, who came to celebrate the happy news and show all their support for Nando.

“Nando, strong warrior that has demonstrated loyalty in battle, you who provides the safety to all the kingdom and are a leader to your army, have you now found peace of mind?” the Elf Queen asked.

“Yes, my queen.” Nando answered.

“Makita, daughter of mine, are you happy now?” the Queen asked again.

“Yes, mother.”

“Santra, there are no words or actions that can repay what you have done for us, for my people and especially for my granddaughter. I thank you from the bottom of my heart, my people, and especially I, have an eternal debt with you.” She said, addressing Santra.

She then, with a sweet voice, addressed Tendor:

“Tendor, brave and generous dwarf, you were willing to lose your life over the one you love, is there something I can do for you?”

The queen wasn't done talking when Tendor nervously said:

“Y-yes– yes, my queen, I mean, Queen of the Elves; with you here, I would like, if it's not too much to ask, for you to intercede for me before Nelfi's parents, because I...” he looked at Nelfi, and with a certain a slow tone said, “Nelfi, I love you.”

He walked towards her and took her hands in his, she looked at him and smiled. She already knew what was going on, but excitedly listened to his words, like everyone present. Tendor, who was still weak, with all the courage inside of him, talked to the Queen again, this time saying:

“My queen, I would like to marry your granddaughter”

The elf queen was left **astonished**. She looked at him, with a serious face and then not being able to hold her smile, she said:

“I don't think that's an answer I can give, or the authorization for it either. But you have my blessing and all my support.”

Everyone smiled, Tendor focused on Nelfi, kneeled in front of her, and holding her hand, he finally asked:

“Nelfi, will you marry me?”

Thanks to the moment and emotions, she jumped on him, forgetting he was still weak.

“Yes, Tendor! Yes! A million times yes!” she said with tears in her eyes while she hugged and kissed him.

Tendor, with Nelfi still holding his neck, looked at Nando and Makita; he wanted to ask them for their blessing but Nando, anticipating Tendor's moves, hugged him.

“It will be an honor to have you as a son.”

The jubilation didn't want to make anyone wait so they decided to have the **wedding** in that same place. The Elves and Dwarves celebrated the union together, all helping to get every little detail perfect. The elves' carriages arrived full of food, flowers and fabrics for the great feast, and, of course, a beautiful and delicate wedding dress. It was one of the most beautiful weddings.

Aunt Clota hadn't finished telling her story when Irina asked:

“Okay, they got married and then, what else happened?”

“Dwelves happened, the union between Elves and Dwarves.” Aunt Clota chuckled.

Irina remembered the little beings she had asked about before.

“Now, go to sleep, it’s late” Aunt Clota told her.  
Irina said her goodbyes, and before she went to her bedroom, she walked towards the Dwelves’ room.  
“Good night, dwelves.” she told them before leaving.

#### IV Makúla

Next morning, **birdsong** and sunshine flooded every single corner of the room; in front of Irina’s bed, there was a huge window. The light and the noise woke her up in a sort of frenzy, as she was trying to find out what was happening.

Seeing those majestic mountains far out from her window was inexplicable. The huge trees were a luscious green—something like she’d never seen before—the way the light hit the leaves made them shine like rhinestones. The wind, light and subtle, brought out the coldness of the forest, and the flight of the birds let their multicolored wings glimmer through.

“Whoever is in charge of this scenery must be the most talented artist” Irina thought. It looked as if a rainbow was formed every time the birds took flight; it was almost like a spectacular show, and Irina had the best seats in the house.

After a while of looking out her window in wonder, she observed in her window frame what appeared to be **droplets** of gold, when she reached out to touch them, they seemed to force her back—Irina got closer and took a better look: they were moving! Like crowding away from her touch, like protesting against it; they even seemed a little upset. Irina could not believe her eyes, she rubbed her eyelids trying to make sense of it, after all, she just woke up, so she’d better shake herself from such a dream. However, she was awake, and those little droplets were very much alive.

Aunt Clota arrived right at that moment, startled and hurried, which was her usual state.

“Good morning, Irina, did you sleep well?”

“I did but...” Irina started explaining what had happened.

Aunt Clota extended her arm toward the droplets and, as if out of routine, the little droplets started climbing up. Irina felt very confused, she just stood there in silence, staring at her aunt interacting with the golden droplets. They were telling her something, to which Aunt Clota responded by nodding her head.

“Irina, my sweet child, what did you do?”

“What did I do? I didn’t do anything! I just woke up and wanted to look out the window when suddenly...”

“Suddenly what?”

“... When suddenly I saw those little golden droplets move”

Aunt Clota’s **demeanor** changed; the seriousness washed off of her with a loud chuckle.

“Little golden droplets! Oh, I see now!” She laughed.

On the other hand, Irina couldn’t understand a single thing; her face reflecting how puzzled she was. Aunt Clota walked toward the bed and sat on it, indicating Irina to follow her and do the same. As Irina sat down, she stared at her aunt’s hand, her palm facing up, still open for those little golden creatures to move around. They seemed to be looking up at her in response.

“Darling, these are not golden droplets” said aunt while looking at Irina.

“They’re not?”

“Not at all”

So, Irina got a better look at them and could observe that, what she thought were plain droplets, were actually little golden silhouettes that took different forms.

“Here, look carefully” Aunt raised her palm in the direction of the sunbeam coming from outside the window. The light made them shine even brighter.

“Now I see them perfectly, but what are they?”

“They’re **sandaluces**”

Irina could see their faces now; sunshine seemed to make their bodies more apparent.

“What does that mean? What’s a **sandaluz**?” She asked, curiosity arising.

“They’re beings of light”

“Then why do they look so upset?” Irina asked, complaining about their contradicting nature.

“Well, you almost crushed one of them, Makúla”

Irina looked like she was about to faint. Her big brown eyes staring back at her aunt, and almost shamefully, she recognized:



“Yes, I almost crushed it... I’m so sorry aunt I truly didn’t know, had I known better I wouldn’t have...” Aunt Clota smiled while patting Irina’s back, one hand still busy holding the group of sandaluces.

“How awful! I could’ve killed them!” Irina said, **distraught**.  
“Little one, don’t beat yourself up. Next time, just be more careful. Here, talk to Makúla and apologize to her, so she’ll know you never meant to hurt her.”  
“But how do I talk to her? Do I just use words? Like I’m talking to you?”

Aunt Clota smiled at her worry.

“Sometimes, to be able to communicate with beings different to us, we don’t need to use our words. Sandaluces are so little, they will be able to understand you by hearing your thoughts”

Irina, surprised by this, looked at her aunt, and then focused her gaze on the Sandaluces.

“Really?”  
“As real as the two of us. Try it”

At that moment, a tiny figure landed on Irina's hand. The girl's face showed a combination of emotions; excitement, curiosity and embarrassment.

“I... I truly didn’t mean to... I just wish you’d forgive me” Irina’s words portrayed the sincerest regret.

However, a little, sarcastic-riddled voice replied:

“Forgive you for almost crushing me?”  
Makúla expressed her anger not only with words, but also with actions: her tiny arms were crossed, and she wouldn’t even look at Irina.

That is, until Irina let a tear escape one of her eyes, shining almost as brightly as a Sandaluz. Makúla then turned to look at her, she finally let her guard down after seeing the girl in such a state.

“Hey... It’s alright. Let’s just forget this ever happened.” She told Irina.

Aunt Clota smiled, stood up and extended her hand back to the Sandaluces’ resting place; the window frame. As soon as she was done, they found their place and started sunbathing right in the same position Irina had found them.

“Could you take me with my friends?” Makúla asked Irina.  
“Of course, just a second” Irina almost jumped out of bed and lifted her down delicately; then looked at her aunt who was already on her way out, and asked her:  
“Well, what are they, auntie?”

Her aunt responded with the typical smile and said:

“Do you think it’s fine if we talk it over breakfast?”

“Of course!”

So, she took her slippers and a sweater and walked downstairs with Aunt Clota; whose heels always knocked down on the wood. Once downstairs, while aunt was preparing breakfast, Irina couldn't wait to learn more about those shiny beings.

“Are they some kind of firefly, auntie?”

“No, darling, fireflies are insects” She answered, busy moving around the kitchen.

“Then they must be like fairies, right? Like the ones in fairy tales?”

“Oof, not even close, my child. You’ll see the difference once you’ve encountered **fairies**. Plus, if I were you, I wouldn’t compare the two, fairies are quite vain.” Aunt laughed. Irina only growing impatient.

“Then tell me what are they!”

Aunt Clota took their plates out of the kitchen and led Irina to the same living room in which they had been talking the day before; the one with that fantastic table.

At the sound of aunt's voice, colors began to appear over the table’s curvature, as if drawing a multicolored frame, rising and falling, like flashes of light.

“Let’s sit here, like when I talked to you about the Dwelves.”

Irina took her plate, her glass of milk, and, while having her breakfast, observed every little detail of what was happening on the

table as Aunt Clota spoke; colorful projections sparkling from its inside, and its carvings taking different shapes according to the story.

“As I said earlier, Sandaluces are beings of light; they were born directly from the sun, so, fittingly, they feed of solar energy and live on that way.”

“What about cloudy days? What do they do when there’s no sunlight?”

“Well, my child, cloudy days or not, the sun is always there—and even if it’s hiding behind the clouds, Sandaluces always know where to position themselves to get the most out of those hidden sunrays.”

“Does that mean they die at nighttime, then?” Asked Irina, intrigued.

“Oh my! Not at all!” Aunt chuckled.

“Well then how do they do? I mean, we all know the moon doesn’t produce light itself but rather reflects sunlight so...”

“Right, and just like you’ve mentioned, the moon functions as a mirror; sort of like Sandaluces, who store sunlight to last them at night” Irina just listened attentively while her aunt continued explaining. “In fact, my child, if Sandaluces have stored more sunlight than needed for one day, then moonlight will be less necessary for them to thrive at night.”

Her answers made sense to Irina, so she continued on asking.

“So, they’re made from sunlight? And that’s it?”

Aunt Clota settled back in her chair as she started explaining; she knew this would be a long conversation.

“No, darling, it’s not like that. Listen, everything began when both sun and moon shared the same space, and traveled the universe together; so, once order was put in the cosmos, they had to be separated. The sun had the days, and the moon had the nights. The first days after such a big change were very sad for these lovers, as they only shared a couple of minutes together while one raised, and the other hid. The sadness of these two propagated to the rest of the stars, for which they were given special days to be with each other...”

Irina then interrupted her aunt’s story before she could continue, and excitedly said:

“Eclipses!”

Aunt Clota nodded.

“Correct! Eclipses are, in a way, a conception of love” She said  
“Such was the happiness the sun felt after meeting again with its beloved moon” She continued narrating  
“It cried tears of joy, and from those tears, a Sandaluz was born, falling down to earth and propagating throughout the world. And that’s why they live among us, all thanks to the sun.”  
“Does that mean the moon would be their mother, then?”

Aunt Clota smiled.

“Sort of, yes.”

“So, what do they do? Why haven’t they left earth? Curious Irina asked. “They bring light to the homes of those who don’t have warmth in their places. They also make good company for little kids who stay alone all day; sometimes they can perceive Sandaluces as luminous flashes that pass by them very quickly...”

“And can they communicate with Sandaluces like I did earlier?”

“Of course! Kids, when they’re very young, are free to believe in the unimaginable, therefore, they’re able to appreciate what’s inconceivable to adults”

“So... What happens when they stop believing? Do Sandaluces just disappear when that happens?”

“No, Irina. Generally, when kids start getting older, they lose this clarity I was telling you about, so eventually they’d just ignore their Sandaluces. What’s worse, sometimes they just replace the sandaluces’ light for artificial light sources like lamps, so the Sandaluces have to leave as they become less useful...”

“But that’s so sad!”

“It is, Irina. But that’s just the way things are.”

There was a moment of silence, and in the meantime, the images projected in that tree-shaped table began to fade out.

Irina took her plates and followed aunt Clota back to the kitchen.

“Aunt, can I be excused now?” She asked

“Sure, my child. Go upstairs and get out of your PJ’s”

Once inside her room, Irina ran up to her window to have another look at the sandaluces.

‘‘Hi little Sandaluz’’

Makúla, who was previously laying down, stood up as soon as she heard Irina.

‘‘You’re still **sunbathing**?’’

‘‘Yes, the sun hits us better around these hours’’

‘‘Do you feel better now?’’

‘‘You mean, feel better after almost being murdered?’’ Irina got sad after hearing that. Makúla saw this and immediately tried to lighten the mood:

‘‘I was just kidding, it’s alright. Plus, I’ve proved by now that I’m stronger than you’’ She smiled, Irina smiled with her.

‘‘Do you wanna get ready so we can go out together?’’

‘‘Of course!’’ Irina said excitedly.

She took her things and walked toward the bathroom. She thought to herself she should ask about where exactly they were going, but quickly realized she didn’t mind not knowing all that much. She ran down the stairs and passed by her aunt, to whom she said something along the lines of ‘‘be back later’’ on her way out. Aunt smiled, already knowing where Makúla was taking her.

Makúla was very fast and she was even harder to reach; Irina barely managed to see the burst of light in front of her; so, at a certain

point, she stopped, agitated, and almost without the strength to speak.

‘‘Makúla, can we stop here?’’

She stepped back and dropped herself onto the grass, so tall and cushioned it felt like a mattress; only then she finally noticed where she was: a very lush forest, with large brown trees whose branches full of leaves barely allowed the light to pass through.

Though she was short of breath, she sort of forgot about it for a second, and, while her pulse settled back to normal, she tried listening for the surrounding sounds. More than anything like noise, it sounded like music.

‘‘Makúla, are you seeing how beautiful everything is?’’

Makúla sat down next to her; it’s not that she hadn’t noticed it before, but, once one becomes used to seeing something so frequently, it oftentimes leads to forgetting about what made it so enthralling in the first place—the beauty that lies in its simplicity, in its nature; that kind of beauty that’s only found out there in what surrounds us.

They laid there in silence, Irina felt the eucalyptus filled breeze brush against her body, she felt happy. Still, it was time to continue.

‘‘We have to go now, otherwise the night will get to us’’ Said Makúla.

Irina stood up immediately and let Makúla sit on one of her shoulders.

‘‘I think I’m better off staying in your shoulder, you’re quite slow, so we’ll go at your pace’’

The both of them smiled and kept on walking, always according to Makúla guidance.

They reached a path where a large tree stretched upward and sideways; standing huge and proud, its roots twice as high as Irina and its branches, immense, strong, loaded with bright green leaves that seemed to touch the sun.

‘‘What is this place?’’ Irina asked.

‘‘Here’s where Great Guardian lives’’

‘‘Great... Guardian?’’

‘‘Yeah, you know, as in, the master of all the other guards’’

‘‘What other guards?’’

Makúla rolled her eyes disapprovingly, and in a slightly exasperated tone, answered:

‘‘Ah! I guess I’ll have to explain everything to you!’’

Irina wasn’t really understanding her, so she only observed as Makúla stood in front of her, suspended in the air, like a droplet, posing resistance against gravity. Irina extended her arm to let Makúla rest on her hand while she

explained; it was very sweet, seeing as Makúla assumed the role of teacher as she began her lecture.

‘‘Trees communicate with each other,’’

Irina, interrupting her as she tends to do, said:

‘‘Right! Through their branches!’’

At that moment, Makúla got mad, her beautiful golden skin turning a fiery red.

‘‘No! That’s not right! Be quiet and listen!’’

‘‘Ok, sorry’’ Replied Irina.

Makúla took a deep breath and continued her explanation.

‘‘Trees communicate from below the ground, through their roots, which have terminal connectors that let them take information from one tree to all trees; that’s why they always know everything. They have a bigger domain underneath the ground rather than above it, that’s how they never miss on anything.’’

Irina was looking at everything, the trees, their roots—her shock was as big as this complex communication system.

‘‘So, that means this huge tree is even huger underneath?’’

‘‘Correct! Its terminals connect with every other tree in this forest’’

‘‘Wow!’’

Makúla interrupted her moment of abstraction; she took Irina by the tip of her finger and said:

“Here, let’s take a closer look”

The closer they got, the smaller and more fascinated Irina became.

“It really is so beautiful and huge!” She spoke  
“It is”

Irina was minutely dissecting the grandiosity of the tree, when suddenly her observations were interrupted by what appeared to be colorful, strange dragonflies. She got closer, and saw that these were actually beautiful creatures moving around the tree.

“What are they?”  
“They’re fairies”

Irina’s eyes widened in surprise; she was excited.

“Seriously? These are actual fairies?” She asked, trying to contain her thrill.

“Yeah... So?” Answered Makúla, acting indifferent toward Irina’s excitement.

“Can I go talk to them? Can you get me closer to them?”

“Alright, sure, why not?” One could notice Makúla was getting uncomfortable now.

Irina turned to a group of fairies moving around one of the tree branches, almost at the height of her head:

“Hello, little fairies, how are you all?” The fairies stopped what they were doing to look at her, Irina was already rushing to ask the next question. “What are you all doing here in this branch?” They all looked at each other, confused by this interaction, until one decided to respond.

“We are the ones who guard Great Guardian”

“Really? But it’s so big! And you are all so little!” Irina replied.

“Yes, but there are many of us. There are more fairies surrounding this tree, and, when we all work together toward the same goal, our job becomes easier” The fairy smiled.

“And... What’s your name?” Irina asked.

“My name’s Darina, Irina”

The first thing Irina thought was how similar their names were. Then, suddenly, she realized she hadn’t told the fairy her name, but she knew it already somehow.

“You already know my name!”

“Of course, I do! Great Guardian told everyone about you!”

“Does the Great Guardian know about me?”

Darina smiled and covered her mouth with her little hand, as if trying to hide a secret, and said:

“Yeah! He knows everything”

“And you... Can speak to trees?”

“More or less... Every creature inhabiting this forest knows how to communicate with each other”

Irina, in a reflective attitude, observed all the movement around Grand Guardian. She whispered to Makúla, who had stayed on her shoulder, sitting in silence all this time.

“Makúla, how many fairies live here?”

In a sarcastic, annoyed tone, an arms-crossed Makúla answered:

“Way too many.”

“Alright, no need for that tone... Or I’ll think you’re just jealous” said Irina while smiling.

“Oh! I could never be jealous of such creatures!” Her reaction was just what Irina pictured in her head.

Irina found this situation amusing. Then, directing her attention to Darina again, she asked:

“Do you all live in this tree?”

“Most of us do. But you can find fairies everywhere in this forest”

“I see”

As Darina engaged in what appeared to be a thorough examination of the tree, her wings slowed down. Irina, noticing this change, had become **enraptured** watching the beautiful fairy. Suddenly, Makúla grabbed Irina by the hair and, pulling it softly, said to her:

“Hey, come here, I wanna show you something”

Irina noticed that one of the branches of that huge tree was cut off, and asked:

“What happened there? There’s a huge part missing!” She pointed to the cut-out branch, showing concern.

And she was right to point it out, for you see, though this missing part did not diminish the tree’s splendor and grandeur, it did signal a mutilation; someone or something had cut off a part, leaving an evident trace.

“It happened a long time ago. Some men, somehow, found the Great Guardian. And though their greed was as clear as day, we couldn’t do anything about it. They brought all sorts of machinery with them, in an attempt to take the Great Guardian down.”

“That’s awful! How did you guys stop them?”

“Well, you see, at that moment, Great Guardian sent some sort of signal through his roots to the rest of the forest. Many of us came to his rescue, including those who hide and those who hunt. The tiniest of ants, termites, and bees, all attacked and stung the men—the bigger creatures all roared in anger; scaring off the men and destroying their machines. Unthankfully, they had already chopped off a huge part of Great Guardian. The moment the men fled the scene, Aunt Clota arrived. She cast a spell so that nobody could ever hurt Great Guardian again.”

“But why were they even trying to hurt him at all?”

“They were after his wood... The men were looking to sell it at a high price. They wanted to make money off of him”

“But that’s terrible! If they took him down, they would’ve had to kill him!”

“And you’re right. But it seems like they don’t care about anything but money.”

Irina stood there thinking, then looked closely at the missing part of the tree, and, in a thoughtful gesture noted:

“What happened to the branch they cut down?”

“Well, Irina, you see... The Great Guardian is as ancient as earth is. He’s all-knowing, therefore, he knows if something bad is about to happen. His sight is perpendicular and flexible—through his branches, which are connected to the deepest parts of this forest, allow him to foresee what’s going to happen! It’s like he can see in the future. Remember I told you Aunt Clota cast a spell in this forest?”

“Right! You never explained why she did so...”

“Yes, well, your aunt used her powers to protect all of this” The little sandaluz said as she extended her arms and turned around to show Irina the vastness of the forest. “It was no easy job, a forest this full and big”

Irina observed quietly as she pictured the kind of effort Aunt Clota made to protect the place.

“And was she the only one to help protect this forest? Her alone?” She asked, slightly surprised.

Makúla; chest puffing up with pride, quickly answered:

“Yes! Her alone!”

“How did she do that?”

“Your aunt worked on this place day and night, tirelessly. Her hard worked proved useful, as once she was done, she was exhausted; she even aged a little faster”

“What do you mean by that?”

“What you heard. Usually, when people work as arduously as your aunt did, it means that, in the work that they do, they’re leaving behind traces of themselves. That’s just how much dedication was given to the task, and that’s what makes it worth it. Your aunt, she gave everything of herself to protect this place; her talent, skills, and love. She paid no mind to her exhaustion, for she had to spend hours on end working for the forest. At times, she felt hunger and thirst, but even then, Aunt Clota did not leave until she knew the work had been done successfully. Ever since then, the forest is only ever visited by beings of love and light; creatures that have only peace at heart. Any stranger with evil intentions isn’t even allowed to look at the Great Guardian.”

“So, what happened then? I mean, what happened to auntie?” Irina asked.

“Once she was done, she fell right asleep at the feet of Great Guardian. She slept a whole day there. When she woke up, she realized the branches of the tree were guarding her and forming some sort of bedding around her. As she stood up from her sleeping place, she felt revitalized, like she had found a new source of energy. She explored her surroundings for a bit, and that’s when she noticed what the creatures of the forest had done for her. Around her, they had left food and fruits; fairies were awaiting her in her sleep, as well as a group of dwelves, dwarves, gnomes, and elves. She spent some time with them, and when she decided it was time to get home, she went up to Great Guardian; to give him a goodbye hug. At that



moment, though, the branches of the tree held her in place to try to tell her something, they were pointing somewhere: the part of the tree that was cut off. At first, she didn't know what to make of this, but then, as the fairies intervened, they told her that Great Guardian wanted her to take it with her, as a sign of gratitude, since she had already helped so much protecting the great guardian."

Irina, in awe, listened attentively.

"So that means auntie is now the guardian of Great Guardian?" She asked.

"Yes, I guess you can say that," Makúla said while smiling.

Irina then landed her eyes on Makúla, ready to ask another question.

"And what happened with that branch, did auntie really take it?"

"Yes, that's the log Aunt Clota keeps in that room where she tells you stories. The log looks like a table."

Irina's face lightened up.

"Ah! So that's part of Great Guardian? But how does it work? I mean... Since it was cut off..."

"Just because it's away from its body doesn't mean it's no longer connected to Great Guardian. And thus, it maintains the same abilities as the rest of Great Guardian here in the forest." Makúla replied, already understanding what Irina was going to ask next.

"Of course, it's a magic tree"

"Sure, I guess you could say that. However, there's something you should know: Great Guardian only ever shows himself to those he considers worthy."

"So that means not everyone gets to see through him?"

"That 's right!"

Irina stayed quiet for a little while, taking in everything Makúla had just told her. After a little while, Makúla got closer to her, and in a whisper, she said:

"Hey, let's leave before it gets too dark."

V  
Melania

When Irina arrived home, she was so **exhausted** that she only greeted aunt Clota and then hurried upstairs to take a shower, without saying a word. Meanwhile, aunt Clota was finishing dinner while humming a song.

Irina took her time while climbing down the stairs, she went down step by step and watched how her aunt waltzed gracefully through the kitchen while different gadgets and objects were moving and doing **pirouettes** around her, as if they were dancing; it seemed at times like she was talking to them and every single one followed on what she said. She stood there for a while, watching, **flabbergasted** by all the movement.

Aunt Clota, who had already noticed her presence, still paying attention to her chores, asked Irina:

“How was your day?”

Irina ran to her and started to tell her all about the Great Guardian, the forest fairies that were dancing and working all around her, Makúla’s story about her and the special relationship with the enchanted forest. Aunt Clota listened, paying attention to every detail Irina talked about, smiling at how thrilled Irina was, she even felt proud of what had happened. All of a sudden, Irina went silent while staring at aunt Clota. Something was on her mind, it was a risk, but she was going to ask it:

“Auntie Clota, are you a witch?”

Aunt Clota smiled and stopped cooking, just for a second, she thought about it, and answered while she went back to the previous task.

“Yes, you could say that. Why are you asking?”

“Because witches are evil!” Irina rushed to say.

“Is that so?” she asked, surprised. “Who said so?”

“**Fairy tales.**”

“Mhm. And what do you think?”

“That you aren’t evil, but the others are.”

“And how many other witches do you know?”

Irina remained silent, thinking. She didn’t know what to answer and that made her feel embarrassed.

“From what I can tell, you don’t know many.”

“But it's just... They always look evil and hideous in the stories I've read and I've read a lot,” she hesitantly said, trying to fix something.

“I don't doubt it, but can you judge all of them based only on what you've read?”

“I’m no one to judge...”

“Within us, we all have the ability to judge, this helps us evaluate and categorize everything that surrounds us.”

“And is that bad?”

“No, it isn’t, but we shouldn’t generalize before knowing the full story”

“So that means that not all witches are evil, well at least not most of them.”

Aunt Clota analyzed what Irina had said and looking at her, she asked:

“And, are you evil?”

Irina was taken aback; she didn't understand what her aunt was trying to tell her.

“I'm not a witch!” she answered.

“You're not one? Who told you so?”

“I did! If I was one, I would know.”

“And what makes you think you aren't one?”

“For starters, I've never done **witchcraft**” she smiled “Besides, I don't own a magic wand or practice spells with a **cauldron**” she concluded by mocking.

“Well, me neither!”

Irina made a long pause and with a serious tone asked:

“Auntie Clota, are you really a witch?”

“If that's how you want to see it.”

Irina opened her big eyes; she was starting to understand.

“So, it's true. You're a witch, but a good one. You don't cause **harm** to anyone.”

“You will always find kindness and evil in the hearts of different beings, each chooses what they're going to let out, kindness or...”

“But... You've never hurt anyone, right?” asked an anxious Irina, interrupting Aunt Clota.

“It depends on one's point of view.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Do you remember what happened with Great Guardian?”

“Yes, you were a **heroine!**” Irina's words expressed pride and admiration.

“Few of the men who ran away must not think the same...”

“But they were bad guys that only wanted to hurt Great Guardian.”

“Yes, Irina, but from their point of view, I was the wicked witch who got them out of there, stopping them from doing their job.”

Irina stayed quiet and thoughtful for a while, then she said:

“There's also bad people; not only witches are evil.”

“That's right, Irina. It happens everywhere.”

Wanting a final explanation on the matter, a thoughtful Irina asked:

“But you said I was a witch too. Is that true?”

“Yes, it is true.”

“But how do you know?”

“Because I know!”

“That's not an answer.”

“Well then, what do you want to know?”

“If I'm a witch, how come I've never cast a spell, or blown up anything, or made things move like you do?”

“Have you ever tried to do any of these things? Or, has someone ever explained it to you?”

“No.”

Aunt Clota stopped what she was doing for a moment, after wiping her hands on the apron she was wearing, she said:

“Come sit with me, next to the table.”

Irina sat down next to her aunt at the kitchen table and once again, asked:

“What about my mom? Is she a witch?”

“Your mom is an **outstanding** witch, one of the best.” Aunt Clota smiled while Irina interrupted, once again.

“But I've never seen her doing witchcraft of any kind, what about my dad?”

Aunt Clota **tenderly** looked at her for a moment.

“As I was saying, your mother is an outstanding witch, the best of the entire group of apprentices.”

“Did you teach her how to be a witch?”

“No, Irina. She was already one; I only helped her channel and use her powers.”

“When did that happen?”

“Before you were born.”

“And then what happened?”

“You would know if you let me finish the story.”

Irina put a finger over her lips, trying to be quiet, she settled down and looked carefully at Aunt Clota, letting her continue with her story.

“Your mom was very similar to you when she was little; they brought her here just like they did with you.”

"That's why I'm here! Right, right! I shouldn't interrupt the story" she justified herself.

Aunt Clota took a deep breath and continued:

"When she was little, your mother was very beautiful, I mean she still is beautiful. She was like you, eager to know everything, agile, intelligent and enthusiastic. She and the others were ready. Your mother was extremely smart and clever, she didn't need things explained more than once; she would stand and watch, listen to what she was being told and then would repeat what she had been taught. She was capable of doing it all and more."

Aunt Clota took Irina's hand and led her to the old room where she kept a piece of the Great Guardian; she took her drink in a tiny cup and continued. When she spoke, without fail, the surface of the table came to life and projected images of what her aunt was saying.

"Your mother began practicing her own spells, it was as if she had found the path of wisdom by herself, even the Great Wizard was surprised by her progress."

"Great Wizard? Who is the Great Wizard?"

"Great Wizards is the Master of all Wizards."

"Even yours, auntie?"

Smiling again, aunt Clota hugged her niece from one side.

"Even mine. We were partners once, but his skills, like your mother's, were unmatched. His skills immediately stood out from the group of apprentices; they even surpassed many of his teachers."

"Where does he live?"

"At the White Palace."

"Can we go there?"

"When the time is right, you will."

"And what happened with mom?" Irina asked while carefully paying attention to the picture that was being shown by the log.

Your mother quickly **stood out** from the group, which many of her peers didn't like, especially one: Melania. She came from one of the most traditional witch families, so everyone expected a lot from her. It's not like she wasn't capable, it's just that your mother's abilities surpassed her. Your mother began to draw the attention of the teacher committee and the Great Wizard, deeply hurting Melania's ego, and soon she was forgotten. Your mother was very generous; she shared her knowledge with her classmates, her new spells, and the results of the research she made. Every time she called Melania, she would leave and say that there was nothing she could learn from your mother.

Your mother's magic was white magic; since she was kind, all her classmates emerged with her, perhaps not at the same pace as hers, but they advanced remarkably. Meanwhile, Melania, prey of envy and resentment, didn't make any progress. She wouldn't let us help her; she said that we, her teachers, preferred your mother and claimed we didn't give her the support she needed.

One day, when we woke up, she was no longer there; she had taken all her things and left, leaving a warning: “I have to go to find someone who wants to teach me, and I will come back knowing more than all of you. Then you will know how powerful I really am.”

We were all very sad, especially the Great Wizard, since he knew each of her apprentices by their hearts and knew Melania's future was not good.”

“But auntie, what happened with Melania?”

“Wait, wait, we’ll talk about that.”

Aunt Clota took another breath and continued with the story.

The first days were confusing; even the girls felt discouraged, but we had to move on, and that's what we did. We talked to them and explained that along the way, they would encounter beings who, at first, would seem nice, but inside would have weak hearts making them easy victims of selfishness, envy, and hatred. They can choose to change only; if they acknowledge their problem. Otherwise, they will limit themselves to thinking life is not good for them, always looking for someone to blame and holding resentment against everyone, which is what happened to Melania. She didn't have to prove that she was better than anyone, but better herself. She could've gone far with that. But, instead, she let her heart fill with resentment towards your mother.

Time went by, and while your mother's group progressed more and more, earning importance and respect, Melania heard about the Dark wizard: Fezeco.

“And who is Fezeco?”

“Fezeco is a dark sorcerer. He was our peer and, like Melania envied your mother; he felt the same towards the powers that Grand Wizard started to develop. In the same way, he distanced himself from all of us and began experimenting with black magic.”

“Black magic?”

“Yes, black magic does not build or create; but brings destruction and misfortune; it operates on people's fear, it haunts them and makes them slaves to it, and it doesn't allow them to progress. Only cruel beings use it, always with the most defenseless and faint of heart.”

“Like Melania's black magic?”

“Yes, unfortunately, like Melania's.”

Aunt Clota's face displayed sadness; she lowered her gaze “And then what happened?” Irina asked.

Melania searched for Fezeco; she didn't mind going through the dark area, the one bewitched. Very few make it out alive, and those who make it are no longer the same: they become evil and destructive beings that feed on fear and the faint of hearts. That's where the Dark

Magician lives. He knew that Melania would be looking for him, so he opened the dreary swamp for her to pass through and get inside. Word has it, Melania offered him her heart in exchange for him to transform her into a powerful witch. And so, it happened.

Melania turned into the dark witch and returned one stormy night. Lightning and thunder followed her steps. She was not alone; a group of creatures that looked like giant rats with big red eyes came along with her and destroyed everything in their path. Melania's appearance had changed a lot: her skin was a grayish white; her eyes were black as night; the blush that had always been on her face disappeared; she was cold and; her heart was black; it would only beat at the rhythm of her wickedness. Behind these terrifying creatures was a trail of destruction and a stench. Melania frightened villages that just began to believe that all witches were equal. Fear blinded them, and armed with torches and sticks, went looking for all they thought were witches and eliminated them.

Aunt Clota lowered her gaze, and a tear appeared from her eye and rolled down her chubby cheek. Irina, with a trembling and frightened voice, asked:

“And were they eliminated?”

Aunt Clota looked up while the tear slowly rolled down as if it was kissing her sad face. She sank into deep sorrow.

“Yes, they were eliminated. It was all part of Melania's evil plan since most of the witches were light witches, their magic was good,

and helped others. It was all part of her revenge plan; she said it wasn't her fault, that it was the fault of the mortals, but we all knew that the reason why people were so afraid was because of what they had done; they were frightened because of the destruction and horror that she had planted.”

The dark witch's laughter echoed throughout the place each time a witch was eliminated; she was delighted at all the pain and suffering she caused; she enjoyed all the chaos and fear she provoked. Melania became arrogant; she believed that she could handle everyone and everything. Her evil laugh... Every time I remember it, chills run down my back.

“And what happened to her when she came here?”

“She stood outside the school, a cautious distance from the doors. Her minions emerged from the mist that surrounded her, dark shadows also appeared from there; they stood behind the evil witch, thousands of red lights could be seen around her, lights that most likely belonged to those creatures. The atmosphere became solemn; it felt as if a cold air that entered through everyone's noses, it was very frightening. We knew she was coming, the Great Wizard had already predicted it, but when I saw her, I froze. I couldn't believe she was the same Melania, I refused to believe it.

She arrived and, with her arrogant voice challenged us to go down and confront her, Great Wizard told her:

“Melania, I order you to leave us all alone, do not return to the villages, stop turning the creatures of the forest into hideous, wild

and monstrous creatures that destroy and bring misery wherever they go” Melania laughed, it was horrendous and gloomy; it echoed throughout the place. She sneered at him and replied:  
“You! You. Are you ordering me?” she laughed again.

She took a trident, its tip had a crystal ball, with it pointed to the Great Wizard, wasn’t expecting the hit, got struck by lightning. Right on time, he placed his hands in front of him.

“Melania, you’re powerful; you have a strength granted by evil, but take this final warning: leave us alone.” he told her, showing off his authority.

Melania wasn’t anywhere near giving up, her anger increased by the second, she ordered her group of minions and creatures to attack everyone, and so they did. Your mother and the rest of the students were inside the school, she asked them to follow her and left the studies of lower levels inside the walls. The battle was fierce. Most creatures were overpowered by magic, but there were too many, and we couldn’t hold them all. Then your mother appeared, accompanied by her classmates; cavalry had arrived. We were exhausted, but your mother, in a well-planned strategy, started moving from behind. A group stayed guarding the school's entrance, fighting with the shadows and giant rats; the other group caught up with us and moved forward, we fought against the creatures that surrounded us. Ultimately, your mother and the high-level students stood shoulder-to-shoulder with us and continued to fight. There still were more creatures than us, but now we were more powerful; we had twice the strength, and the more we fought together, instead of feeling

exhausted, we grew powerful. We battled throughout the night, and at the moment of greatest darkness, Melania and your mother faced each other. The Great Wizard and the other apprentices were still holding off the last batch of hideous beasts.

Melania stared at your mother.

“Wow! I see you've made progress since the last time I saw you. “I could say the same about you, but– no, truth is, you only have more power. You haven’t made any progress at all.” Melania let out one of her terrifying laughs.  
“You’ll pay for your audacity!”

Aiming at your mother, Melania sent another spell at her. To everyone's surprise, she knew how to defend herself from her and lash back at her. We were impressed; we knew she was strong and skilled, but we had never witnessed her power's magnitude. She didn't need help from us and wasn't even thinking of asking us; she carried out her counterattacks with the mastery of someone who, from experience in battle, makes her own decisions. She was able to greatly outclass Melania. The Dark Witch, almost without an army – only with a surrounding her in that moment–, she looked desperate, she was losing strength, and made erratic decisions that sank her more. Great Wizard spoke once again:

“Melania, this is your last warning, you still have time, surrender, go away and don’t come back, you’ve been defeated, and by one of my students.”

Melania was burning up in anger. Her pale cheeks were red as fire, she felt humiliated and vulnerable. Thanks to the Great Wizard’s



words, the group grew stronger and confident, certain of their powers.

The dark witch pointed to your mother, and with a energetic yet threatening voice, she said:

“You will have a daughter that won’t be born from the force because your good heart will love someone that is not from our kind, that will make you vulnerable. When the time comes, I’ll come get her.” After the threat she disappeared into thin air. Her and her army just vanished. We stayed calm, exhausted, but we knew that just for that moment, her reign of horror was over.

“But how did you know Melania wouldn’t come back?” the girl inquired.  
“Your mother had proved that together we were stronger, almost invincible. Melania had been humiliated enough; she wouldn’t return until she felt as if she could defeat everyone, but that hasn’t happened yet.

“But Melania talked about my mother having a daughter, was she talking about me?”

Aunt Clota got near her, she gently rested her chin on top of Irina’s head and answered:

“Yes, my sweet child, she was talking about you.”

Irina was left shocked; she was totally surprised at what her aunt had told her.

“What now, auntie? What should I do?”

“What do you want to do?”

“I don’t want to be a witch, she said I’m vulnerable. Is that true?”  
“She is. But we all are vulnerable.”

“But, am I more vulnerable than everyone?”

Aunt Clota waited for Irina to find the answer on her own. Irina remained quiet, she was thinking and wouldn’t stop looking at her.

“I know, my dad...”

“When the battle was over, the school needed to be repaired.

It wasn't a fortress, so the damage caused had to be restored, such as the facade and other things. Your mother along with the rest of the students were very helpful; having already demonstrated all their skills and abilities. After three days, when the school was fixed, or to be honest, better than before, the Great Wizard called a meeting for everyone. He explained that their learning process at school was over and that they should go their own way.

That said, they all went their separate ways. Your mother went out into the world and connected with humans. She said that she found

their different cultures and traditions fascinating, their way of life, and how they adapted to any adversity. She explored many parts of the world and learned a lot from them, the good, the bad, her mistakes... Eventually, when she decided to come back, she took the train that would change her life.

“What do you mean by “the train that would change her life, auntie?”

“On her way here, she had to take three trains, as she wasn’t in a hurry. When she took the first train, she sat –as she always used to– by the window. She looked up; diagonally to her, she noticed eyes hidden behind thick frames of black glasses and a book. She noticed that those eyes looked at her from time to time, but every time; she tried to meet his gaze, he would look at anything but her. She had already given up when that slightly shy, bearded boy with scruffy look plucked up his courage, sat across from her and started a conversation. When they arrived at the second station, they got off to see the small town. Its landscapes were beautiful; they explored it together; with each conversation something inside them grew. So obvious to everyone but them, too lost in their world to realize about; the knowing glances and smiles, their hands almost touching. At the end of the, they left and headed to the third station; they would say goodbye there, each one would continue their way. However, when they had to turn their backs, neither could. They turned around and smiled at each other; there wasn’t much to say they knew at that moment: they would be inseparable.”

"Are you talking about mom and dad?"

“Yes, Irina. I’m talking about your parents.”

Irina was amazed, she had never heard the story of how her parents met, now there were so many things she didn't know and never imagined. She remained silent for a moment as she reflected on all that she had just met, she then asked:

“Auntie, does that mean that mom never came back?”

“Irina, she did come back. She came back happy, she felt complete, I mean, she was already happy with her life before she met your father but after meeting him, she had someone she could share all of these experiences with, someone to grow with and smile, someone who would allow her to become a better person.

“But...”

“But Great Wizard, didn’t dare to say anything after seeing your mother’s happiness.”

“But, did my dad know that mom was a witch?”

“Not at first, but a relationship cannot be built based on secrets and lies. For a healthy relationship to work, there has to be enough trust to be able to look at your partner’s face and be able to tell them everything. Your mother was aware of that, so one afternoon, when the two of them were together –right were you and Makúla resting for the first time before going to meet the Great Guardian...”

“You saw us?” a surprised Irina interrupted.

“Remember that through the Great Guardian” Aunt Clota pointed to the table “I can see everything” a smile appeared on her face; Irina responded with another one; a feeling of always being protected washed over her. Aunt Clota continued. “In that same place, your mother was laying on your father's legs, looking at the beauty of their surroundings, while your father read.

“Sweetie?”

“Yes, my love?”

"There's something I need to tell you."

"Sure, tell me," Your father told her, without taking his eyes off his book.

“But I need you to pay attention to me.”

"Sure thing! I always do."

“Can you stop reading and look at me?”

Your mother subtly took the book off his hands and stood up facing him, they both sat down, legs shaped in a kind of triangle. He looked at her. After taking a deep breath, she just said it:

“I’m a witch!” he smiled and let out a chuckle.

“I’ve always known, love. You have bewitched me since the first time I saw you.” he told her, still smiling.

“I’m being serious.”

“So am I!”

Your mother realized that your father wouldn’t listen to her unless she showed it to him.

“Look” she said, taking your father’s book.

He looked at the book that began to float in the air. His face changed; your mother made every page of the book; come out. The pages did a synchronized dance, turning around them. The pages went up and down, your father looked amazed by the magic. He took his book, it seemed to be on fire. Surprised, he managed to murmur:

“Please, don’t burn my book!”

“That’s enough!” Immediately, by command of your mother's voice, the pages were arranged in a silent and orderly manner, going back to the book, which was still on fire. As a noteworthy presentation, the last page threw water on the book's cover, putting out the fire. In a graceful gesture, the book bowed in front of your father, expecting applause, and it fell into his lap. He watched in awe; he touched the book and couldn't believe his eyes. He tried to mutter something, to which your mother replied:

“It’s just magic.”

Just like you, your father spent most of the day asking questions. Your mother answered almost everything.

“What do you mean by “almost”?”

“I think she forgot a little detail.”

“What detail?”

“Melania!”

## Irina

Irina went to bed **restless**, she wanted to learn all about the things that had happened before she got there, but by the end of dinner, aunt Clota had suggested it was better if they went to bed since it was late and they had a long and hectic day. When she lay down on bed, she observed how Makúla settled next to her bed, looking through the window.

“What’s wrong, Makúla?” Irina asked.

“Irina, look! The moon is in its **crescent** shape.”

“I can see that, what about it?”

“She’s waiting for her children to come to her.”

“Her children?” she asked surprised.

Makúla started singing right away, it was a slow melody, similar to a **lullaby** that had fine but intense chords that came out of her small throat and echoed through Irina’s room, who thanks to her tiredness couldn’t hold on anymore and fell asleep to the rhythm of Makúla’s melody.

Irina felt as if she had just closed her eyes when the sun came out the next day. The night went away in the blink of an eye. Irina quickly put on her shoes and observed how Makúla was next to her siblings on the window, powering up with the sun’s rays that at that time in

the morning fell **perpendicularly**. After saying “good morning” to them, she hurried down the stairs. Downstairs, as always, aunt Clota was waiting for her; preparing breakfast while humming a song. “Irina, good morning! I see you’ve woken up earlier this morning.”

“Yes, auntie. Good morning. Now, I need you to tell me more about my parents” she insisted and a smile appeared on aunt Clota’s lips.

“So... you’ve been thinking about what I told you yesterday.”

“Yes, auntie, and I want to know more!”

“What about breakfast first?”

“What about eating breakfast while you tell me the story?”

The older woman burst out laughing, taking the plates as she got closer to that particular table as she always did every time, she started a story. Even though Irina was feeling impatient, she followed her aunt and made herself comfortable, both placed their plates and mugs to their sides, and then aunt Clota began telling the story.

*“Your parents' wedding was stunning; everyone was in **attendance**. You see, all of us love your mother dearly because she has always been so generous with us. That day, she was radiating happiness, which made her look even more beautiful. And your father, yes, he’s good-looking, but that suit made him even more attractive. Everyone came: the sandaluces, elves, fairies, dwarves, the animals and*

*creatures of the forest; it was a great party. When night came, they left one by one. The Great Wizard didn’t want to anticipate [get ahead of himself], so he decided to wait until the next day.*

*By dawn, very early, your parents were ready to leave for the trip they wanted to make. Great Wizard approached them to say his farewells and said to your mother:*

*“I wish you nothing but happiness in this journey you two will share.”*

*“Thank you!” your parents said in unison.*

*“I know that, right now, both of your hearts are full of happiness. Those hearts that belong to people **noble** and pure, don’t deserve to be deprived of all the joy you deserve. Nonetheless I must remind you of Melania’s words.”*

*“That’s it!” your father rushed to say “we won’t have kids and everything will be alright.”*

*The Great Wizard’s eyes looked at him with **tenderness** and compassion, just as parents do when they know their kid is about to do something wrong.*

*“I’m aware there are things that go beyond what you’ve lived in your ordinary world, and you should never be **ashamed** of that. However, I can assure you that three moons from now, the news will come and you’ll find out your wife is with child.*

After his words, both of your parents looked at each other. Your mother decided to look down, she felt embarrassed, on the other hand, your father in a playful tone replied:

“Great Wizard, you shouldn’t worry. **Nowadays** there are methods that prevent those things from happening, everything will be okay. Don’t you worry.”

Great Wizard looked at your dad, just for a brief amount of time before recommending both of them to be careful.

“What about mom?”

“Well, both of them were so happy they got a little bit carried away. They went on their trip and just as predicted, after three moons your mother woke up feeling nauseous. She ran to the bathroom, but before getting there she **fainted** onto the floor. Your dad was so frightened, he carried her and rushed to the closest doctor he could find in the little town they were staying. After the doctor **examined** her and ran some tests, he came to the conclusion that your mom was pregnant.”

“What was my dad’s reaction?”

“He couldn’t believe it; he kept looking at the doctor with **disbelief** and surprise. “Excuse me, doctor. But this can’t be happening, I’m pretty sure me and my wife used all the methods to prevent this from happening, I even made some research and studied all of them just to be sure...” he told the doctor, who replied to him with a smile and joyful tone “Sorry, son, but there’s nothing that can stop the **miracle**

of life from happening.” Your dad sat there, **perplexed**. I think he was more afraid of becoming a father than of Melania.”

“And my mom?”

“She was happy but scared at the same time. They decided that they should come back, fast.”

“But... What happened? Did they come back?”

“They didn’t. Before coming back, the Sandaluces warned your mother that if they did, Melania would find out. So, they did what was best for them and you; go out into the world and live life as a normal family.”

“That’s why I never met you before! I mean, we only spoke on the phone, but that was it.”

“That’s right.”

Irina took a short amount of time to think about all the things she had learned, and quickly said:

“But... Why am I here? Melania probably knows by now!”

Aunt Clota took a deep breath, took Irina by her hands and asked her:

“Irina, tell me... Do you trust me? I know it’s too soon to fully do it, but do I seem to you as someone **trustworthy**?”

“Yes”

Aunt Clota nodded her head, approving of the situation.

“My dear Irina, you’re of age, and you get to decide now. Do you want to be a witch?”

Irina remained silent; she didn’t know what to answer. Aunt Clota decided to step forward to stop the moment from becoming more uncomfortable.

“It’s okay, Irina, I don’t need an answer for today, but you have to decide soon.”

“Why would I want to be a witch? I mean, I’ve never done anything that’s related to what witches do, in fact, if you hadn’t told me, I wouldn’t have known.”

“That doesn’t stop you from being one.”

Irina was getting angry, so she raised her shoulders. It seemed like Aunt Clota was not paying attention to her position, or the way she was reacting, she instead began to hum the same sweet melody that Makúla had the night before, the same melody that made her fall asleep was having the same effect on her.

“Can you see the **moles** you have on your chest... The ones that are arranged as a pyramid?” aunt Clota asked, interrupting her sleepiness.

With a rude tone Irina answered:

“Yes, but those are not moles, they look more like **spots**.”

“Well, those moles or spots as you like to call them, are common for witches to have, your mother has them, and surely if you have children, they will have them too.”

Irina made herself comfortable in the seat, apparently when the song stopped from being sung, the sedative effect disappeared with it, and there was a change in her attitude.

“Auntie, if I’m a witch, will my friends still love me? Will they accept me? Won’t they be scared of me? Maybe, they won’t want to play with me anymore”

In a very **empathic** tone, she replied to Irina’s questions.

“If they truly are your friends, why would they behave in that way?”

“I don’t know... They may get scared.”

“Are you going to scare them?”

“No! I’m not going to, but...”

“Well, then how would they know you’re a witch? Unless you do something to make them realize, they’re going to treat you as they already do.”

Irina leaned back into the chair, her mind was making up all the possible scenarios that could happen. Aunt Clota smiled and said:

“I think you and that little head of yours should rest a bit. Please, start eating your breakfast.”

Once again, Irina made herself comfortable, she took her chair and got closer to the table, while she watched how her aunt moved everything around them just with a glance.

Invaded by her curiosity Irina said: “But auntie... I don’t do anything like you do.”

“That’s because you haven’t learned yet.”

“I thought that witches were born with powers and...”

“Yes, each one of them” she interrupted “But everyone has a special gift, not only witches, how you use this special gift or benefit from it, depends only on you, what’s left is for you to learn.”

“I don’t have any special gifts,” Irina said in a serious tone while she put the spoon back into her large bowl of cereal.

“Some take longer than others to discover them.”

“I know, but I’m serious. I don’t know how to do anything” Irina said with her mouth full of food.

“Is that so?”

“Yes”

“What about the first time you saw Makúla?”

“What about that?”

“Did you understand what she said when you almost crushed her with your finger?”

Irina smiled mischievously.

“No,” she said as she continued eating. She seemed to be so captivated that she wasn’t paying attention to the conversation she was having with aunt Clota.

“Then how come you can perfectly communicate with her and with all the beings you weren’t aware existed before?”

After hearing her aunt’s question, Irina was so **stunned** she stopped eating. This time her aunt had left her speechless. Irina looked at her as she got up off her chair and turned her back on her, although she had her back turned, she could still watch Irina’s reflection in the window glass so she smiled. With the spoon on her hand, Irina tried to make sense of how that was possible, how did she learn to speak to all these magical creatures? She remained silent and calm, which was unusual of Irina’s behavior.

“You’re right... How do I do it? Yes! At first, I didn’t understand anything, but now we talk all the time!”



“All of us have **gifts** – or abilities, that are inside of us waiting for the right moment to come out. With practice, these gifts can become really powerful. And those are not only powerful gifts but a strength that helps you become the best at what you do.”

“How do I get this strength?” asked Irina with her mouth full.

“Well, this strength comes from the **conviction** and the desire you put into everything you do. The more you believe in yourself, the greater your strength will be.”

Irina continued eating while processing everything aunt Clota had told her.

## VII The Brown Forest

During the afternoon, Irina and Makúla had explored a large part of the forest. They made their destination up to a very high **hill**, from where they could see the ocean. Irina was tired but happy, she sat down on a big rock, while Makúla settled on a smaller one that was almost the size of a fingernail. It was quite a funny picture.

The view from there was spectacular, there were towers as high as the hill they were sitting on, pillars that, upon first impression, seemed like those of huge cathedrals: they were tall but thin, painted in different shades of brown, stained by the time, probably. It was a new landscape for Irina, it had allowed her to disconnect completely from the conversation she had had in the morning with Aunt Clota.

“Makúla, what’s in those huge towers?”

“Which ones, those over there?”

“Yes”

“Those aren’t towers! They’re mountains, like the one we’re currently sitting on”

“I don’t believe you! A huge mountain like this transforming into a pillar like those?”

“Everything changes, Irina, it’s a matter of time. And wind.”

“Wind?”

“Yes, the wind did that. The wind that gently caresses the mountain day by day, not without taking from it... And little by little, with the help of time, transforms an apparently immovable mountain into a simple pillar”

Irina reflected for a moment, while she observed that majestic sculpture of nature.

“So, you’re telling me nature works alongside perseverance and patience?”

“Yes, nature, and life as we know it. Just like this mountain turned sculpture, we function similarly...”

“Sure, but I don’t have as much time as the mountains here,” Irina interrupted teasingly. Makúla was surprised by her answer.

“You know it doesn’t matter much how much time you have, what matters is what you did with it. The things you enjoyed, what you learned, and what you lived—and if you made the most of it. That is your ‘sculpture’. Sometimes people just breeze through life, they breathed, they walked, but they did not do anything with their life. Only ever worried about material things, and getting from one place to another, not realizing that what matters isn’t based on how much you have, but if what you have is even worth it at all”

After that speech, they both remained silent, looking at the beautiful landscape. The wind kept them company, peacefully ruffling Irina’s hair.

On their way back, Irina sparked some more conversation with Makúla.

“You ever met my mom?”

“I sure have!”

“So, you’re from her generation?”

“I’m from all generations” said Makúla, laughing.

“But you look so young!”.

“I am!”

“Then how are you from every generation?”

“Well, Irina, age is just a number, the sum of years you’ve accumulated, but that’s about it”

“Sure, but I bet that with so many years, the body no longer responds the same way,” Irina replied. Makúla burst out laughing.

“That’s not true, in fact, it responds better! Because it already knows what it needs, and what it doesn’t like. Plus, it channels its energy better. But if you’ve been mistreating your body for a long time, don’t expect it to improve over the years, cause it’s going to go the other way around”

Their conversation was interrupted when they noticed some shadows moving in the middle of the bushes. Makúla motioned Irina to keep quiet with a gesture. It seemed that, whatever was hiding in the bushes, was surrounding them. It was not that dark, so they could see the movements, and something like the sound of heavy breathing could be heard. Irina was paralyzed. At that moment, she remembered everything Aunt Clota had told her about Melania, and felt shivers running down her spine. Never before had she been in such a frightening situation. Makúla slowly looked at her and motioned for her to wait. Irina didn’t know what to do. Makúla rose up and circled around Irina, very quickly; and suddenly she was surrounded by golden trails. Then Makúla, exhausted, sat down on Irina’s shoulder, trying to recover some energy.

“What’s hiding?” Asked Irina, frightened.

“They’re...” Makúla tried speaking up, panting, her voice cracking. She wasn’t done answering when those small creatures revealed themselves. Irina observed carefully.

“Oh my, they’re just goblins!” Irina felt relieved.

Makúla opened her small eyes in disbelief at what she had just heard, and tried covering her embarrassed face with her hand. Irina saw this, but couldn’t point out what her blunder was this time.

“What did you just say?” roared one of the angry creatures.

“My apologies. It’s just that, I was so scared, I thought you were going to attack us... But now I know I don’t have to worry about goblins”

After hearing this, the small creature’s face turned a deep tomato-like red color, and, raising his voice, he replied:

“Goblin? You’re calling us goblins?”

Irina didn’t know what to say, so she looked at Makúla, who was covering her eyes as if trying to escape the situation, and shaking her head from side to side.

“Um... Sorry... So I guess you’re not goblins then, right?”

Makúla opened her little hands, revealing between the spaces her eyes, that clearly expressed to her that she had made a mistake and, using a conciliatory voice, she said:

“Irina, these are dwarves, not goblins” she corrected her, while pointing to the small creatures that were now looking at them with disdain.

Irina looked at each of them, and none of them could hide their disgust. She was silent for a moment, and then, as if to make matters worse, she let out a light chuckle, and concluded:

“They look the same! Just as small”

Makúla covered her face again, waiting for the dwarves to respond.

“You did not just say that! My, my, these witches! They are all the same!” replied the dwarf, very upset.

Although Irina didn’t identify as a witch, she, strangely enough, took offense to that comment, so she answered in the same way.

“Well, they're not all the same!”

“Well, dwarves and goblins are not the same either!”

The two, upset, and with their arms crossed, looked at each other for a while.

“This argument is not going to get you guys anywhere; what do you say we forget about what happened, and star all over again?”

Interrupted Makúla. The two of them looked stared fiercely at each other, but neither of them moved, until Makúla, now out of patience, spoke again, "Enough already! We won’t get anywhere this way!"

she took a breath and regained her calm. "Alright so, tell me, Magmaneo, how can we help you? You really did give us a scare there..."

Magmaneo, putting aside his pride, addressed Makúla with urgency.

"Something is happening in the forest; we noticed it's been changing. It started today, early in the morning," he explained. Irina, who still had her back turned, couldn't help but be interested in what the little dwarf was saying; she lowered her arms, turned around and stood next to Makúla, to hear everything. "The Brown Forest is losing its life" he continued, "it is as if its energy is running out; the leaves are falling dried from the trees. We went to Great Guardian, and he explained that they've been **poisoned**... There's poison that runs through the trees from the inside and contaminates their fruits. The animals and other creatures that have eaten from them are very ill. It seems that it is all Melania's doing"

"How? Since when has all this been happening?" Makúla asked in anguish.

"It started at dawn"

"How's Great Guardian? What did he say?"

"He warned us that, if we continued like this, the whole forest would be contaminated, since the poison is spreading from underground, where their roots are connected, and the water runs; he himself is endangered, since he's communicating through his roots, he is also exposed to the poison. It is a very potent substance that acts inside the tree, paralyzing its responses... As if they were frozen from the inside. What we began to notice is that the transmissions of the trees in the Brown Forest had diminished, they did not have the

strength or vigor that they usually have on a daily basis... And when the rest of the creatures went to see what was happening, they discovered that the trees were losing their strength, some even in process of withering, with few signs of life. Their insides are slowly drying out and some are already unresponsive"

"It surely is Melania!"

"Yes, Great Guardian told us that Fezeco once tried to do something similar. But at that time his power was not so great, so he reversed it with the help of the witches. That time, the trees and forest creatures managed to overcome it. Great Guardian says that this time it's different, as the strength of his evil is superior, because of the help of a black witch. By joining forces, their venom is much more potent, and the destruction it can cause will be worse. If things continue this way, Great Wizard fears that the Brown Forest will disappear in a few days"

Irina, horrified after hearing what had happened, looked at Makúla and, without uttering a word, both understanding the gravity of the situation, quickly set off on their way to Aunt Clota's house.

When they arrived, they found several groups of various forest creatures, Irina was amazed as there were some she had never seen before, they were of different shapes and sizes, some looked like oddly-shaped stuffed animals, while others were similar to common forest animals, like rabbits, for example, only this time larger, and with an arrow-shaped tail, very similar to the sting of a bee. Insect-like characters lurked around the place, one looked like a stick insect, except bigger. All the beings she had heard about through stories were now at her aunt's place.

The atmosphere was charged with **hopelessness** and fear. Worry stuck on the faces of every present creature; they were talking quietly. When they noticed Irina's presence, they watched her, those who were not attentive were warned; giving each other knowing glances. This way, a path was opened at Irina's slow pace, until she reached the door of the house. The forest creatures kept looking at her, murmuring. Irina watched them too. She felt a little uncomfortable with the unwanted attention.

“Let's go, we can't waste more time" Makúla told her.

Entering the house, Irina and Makúla hurried to find Aunt Clota, calling her as they ran through the living room and dining room, crossing the adjoining rooms, until Irina went to the small room off to one side, where the Great Guardian trunk was—where Aunt Clota always told her stories. And there stood Aunt Clota, surrounded by several creatures, all with their eyes on the table. She looked up;

“There you are!” She said, after looking at Irina.

“Yes, I'm here" she replied, her voice startled. Aunt Clota held out her hand.

“Come here, I wanna show you something" the creatures around her settled down enough for Irina to enter the “meeting”. Holding Aunt Clota's hand and watching the table, she listened attentively, "Little Irina, pay close attention to what I am going to tell you”

The images that appeared across the board were desolate, hundreds of trees of an earthy gray color could be seen, with their branches bent, their leaved dehydrated; not like autumn, when the fallen

leaves are of a wonderful golden tone, adorning the season; speaking of renewal. The atmosphere in that place was gloomy, you could feel the life fading, little by little.

“Look, Irina. That's our Brown Forest, we named it this way because its trees are so full of leaves and life, that sunlight, barely passes through its openings, making the green of its trees look brown”

One of the small creatures that was there intervened, it looked like a beaver, with bulging eyes and plush fur, stripes covering all over its body, but the fur in its face was white and dotted.

“The Brown Forest has always been our home, we have lived there forever, in communion with the trees, which have protected us and fed us with their fruits and leaves; some of us have already become seriously ill, we are afraid that... Um... Uh, I can't even say it...”

“Calm down, Zortas; together we will find a solution; we just have to collect ourselves first" said Aunt Clota.

“What did Great Guardian tell you, Aunt Clota?” Asked Makúla.

“Well, first remember that below the ground, all the trees are connected through their roots, so... The situation is critical: Great Guardian has already alerted everyone; he is even sending vital sap through their connections to keep them alive. But this poison is very difficult to stop, and more trees are becoming infected”

“And what does Great Wizard say?”

“He's working on a potion to counteract the poison, and he has called a meeting of all the magicians to find a quick solution”

Irina, startled, intervened:

“Magmaneo, the dwarf, told us that this was the work of Melania and Fezeco”

“He’s right, little one. They’re the ones behind all this,” answered her aunt.

“Why, though?”

“Because of you,” she answered. Caressing Irina’s head with one hand. Irina was surprised, she frowned and shook her aunt’s hand off her head.

“Because of me? Why?”

“Melania has sensed your presence in the woods, and since she hasn’t been able to find you yet, she’s trying to get you to come to her”

“To do what?”

“That’s what we don’t know yet”

“And what should I do? Shouldn’t I be hiding?”

“That’s a tempting option, but that’s not the way to solve things; we’re going to meet in council, and from there try to find a solution”

“And what do I do?”

“You help us”

“Sure! What’s the task?”

“I want you to keep calm and listen. There is a magic flower whose nectar juices, we think, can help the trees and the contaminated creatures. Great Wizard is already working on making a similar substance, but so far he hasn’t had much success”

“Why not take the flower altogether?”

“It’s not that simple, Irina; if it were that easy, we would have done it already. This beautiful flower only grows in the deepest parts of Yangana”

“Yangana?”

“Yes, it’s a forgotten valley that’s not easy to get to, the paths that take you there are dangerous, most of them are cursed; only the creatures that have not wanted to live in communion with the rest have migrated to this place, we don’t know if we have friends in this area, or if we can trust anyone”

“Should we put together a group that is willing to explore, then?”

“Yes, Irina, but listen closely: you must know that not just anyone can take the flower, since only a pure-hearted person can collect its nectar; otherwise, the flower could die immediately when cut and the contents of its juice would be of no use”

“Pure... Pure-hearted person?”

“Yes” Irina didn’t take long to realize what her aunt meant by that: all eyes were on her. She looked at those present and then, turning to Aunt Clota, said:

“It’s me that has to go, isn’t it?”

“No, Irina, you don’t have to go, it’s not your obligation. Besides, it’s very dangerous and all the creatures of the forest know that”

“Isn’t there any other solution?”

“If we had another solution, we would have found it by now, that’s why Great Wizard is working on it and the council is meeting today. I have to leave soon”

“I’ll go with you”

“No, Irina. You have to stay here”

“But I don’t want to do nothing and let the forest and its creatures perish while I watch”

After saying that, the room filled with silence. Irina was deep in thought, it was as if her own words had resonated within her, and she felt that only she could take this journey; so, gathering strength, she said:

‘‘Auntie, I will go. You have taught me that to seek solutions one must take risks, and the forest and its creatures have given me so much that I have no other choice, and I’m going’’

‘‘Hold up, Irina; not only is this journey dangerous, and you may encounter hostile creatures that will **hinder** your path, but you will also be exposed to Melania and Fezeco’’

‘‘But you’ll protect me, won't you?’’

‘‘I have to go to the council meeting, the more we try to look for a solution, the better opportunities the forest has to survive’’

‘‘Then I'll go alone’’

‘‘And I will go with you!’’ Interjected Makúla.

And following Makúla enthusiasm, like an echo in the room, a bunch of little voices claimed "Me too", "I'm going too", "I'll go with you"... Aunt Clota could only watch, moved by the sudden act of solidarity.

‘‘It's good to know that everyone is willing to go. Unfortunately, the more people who travel, the more exposed we will be and the more difficult the journey will become,’’ she warned. Then she turned to Irina. ‘‘It's a very dangerous trip and there's really no guarantee that you'll be able to return with the flower, are you sure you want to go?’’

‘‘Yes, auntie, I’m sure,’’ Irina answered with absolute confidence.

‘‘If that’s so, you’ll go with Makúla, Magmaneo the dwarf, who knows how to prepare potions, and Nador, who will be your guide along the way’’

‘‘Nador?’’

‘‘He’s Tendor and Nelfi’s grandson’’

‘‘Grandson?’’ asked Irina, surprised.

‘‘Irina, the stories I told you happened a long time ago. Nador is their grandson, and he is a brave warrior, agile, cunning, he knows the roads, and he has come the farthest. He’ll be a great guide’’

‘‘And what should I take with me?’’

‘‘I’ll give you what you need to take. And some food, too’’

At that moment, Zortas interrupted the conversation and said:

‘‘Look at the table!’’

The tree reflected a terrible scene: not only were the trees and forest creatures lying unconscious, but a form of thick, black fog was invading the place. Aunt Clota, horrified, said:

‘‘Melania and Fezeco! Hurry, there is no time to lose; if this keeps up, they will take over the Brown Forest like they did with the Dark Forest before, transforming it into a dreary swamp. Come on! Let's get your stuff ready!’’

Irina went up to her room, thinking to herself, "what have I gotten myself into". Aunt Clota followed her upstairs.

‘‘Growing up isn’t easy, Irina,’’ she said tenderly as they got to her room.

‘‘Can’t I avoid it somehow?’’

‘‘Unfortunately, no’’ Aunt Clota smiled. Irina looked down, she seemed worried and sad.

“What's wrong Irina?”

“Auntie, I don't wanna grow up...”

Aunt Clota was moved by Irina's words, she hugged her and told her:

“My child, everyone grows up, it's a part of life. It's true that it can sometimes hurt, but it doesn't have to be a bad experience, after all, growing up is what makes up a person”

“I'm not following...”

“Irina, growing up is the sum of all the experiences you have had, everything you have learned, all the good and bad situations you have had to go through; it is what makes you unique. It is what shapes you as a person, it is not about the things you've inherited from your parents or your personality changes. What makes us unique is our personal journey through this life. We are subject to constant change, and because you never know what will come next; it's what makes of life an adventure”

“What if I'm not prepared?”

“Even if we are unprepared, we do it, and we learn from it. It is so, that you can try again but with the gained experience from previous attempts”

“What if it's my first time ever doing something like this?”

Aunt Clota smiled, and answered.

“You're smart Irina, you'll know what to do and how to improvise if the situation calls for it”

“What if I don't know how to improvise?”

“It is **innate**, my child. It's in your essence... That gut feeling; you just have to let it flow, and it'll come out when you least expect it, giving you the answer, you need," said Aunt Clota, laughing.

Irina remained silent and thought for a moment, then she looked at her aunt, who had not stopped looking at her. She then said, a little embarrassed:

“I think... I think I'm scared”

Aunt Clota smiled again, as she hugged her.

“My sweet girl, fear is what makes us feel alive, fear is nothing more than a response from our bodies, telling us to be careful and alert. If we were not alive, there would be no reason to feel fear; if we had nothing to lose, then we'd have nothing to fear. You just have to remember to listen to your body, and respond to it. It gives you an advantage, it keeps you moving”

“But what if I fail, auntie? What will happen to the creatures of the Brown Forest?”

“If you do your best, give your best effort, you'll never fail. But it's a learning process, you'll have to examine your victories and your mistakes, take a step back, and try again”

At that moment, Irina started feeling calmer, like all her doubts had suddenly disappeared. She looked at her aunt, and said:

“I'm ready”



Aunt Clota hugged her tightly while smiling.

## VIII Departure

Later that afternoon, Aunt Clota was finishing up the arrangement of things Irina would need for her journey, meanwhile, Makúla had leaned against the window frame to catch the last rays of sunshine before the **sunset**.

“Irina, aren’t you worried at all?” The little lightbeam asked.  
“I’m not really sure how to answer that. Should I be worried?”  
“Maybe, maybe not.”

In the meantime, Aunt Clota, jumpy as she usually is, entered the room with the Irina’s backpack and said:

‘‘Here, Irina, is everything you’ll need... Are you a hundred percent sure you can do this?’’  
‘‘I am sure of this, but are you sure I’m the right person to do this?’’  
‘‘Irina, do you think that if I didn’t believe in you this much, that I’d ever let you go on this kind of trip? No way!’’ She replied affirmatively, as if she knew something Irina didn’t.  
‘‘Will it be dangerous?’’  
‘‘It will. But so is living, Every day one has to face new challenges; unexpected things happen, and so, every day we have to confront adversity, that’s how life moves along.’’  
‘‘Aunt Clota, can I ask you another question?’’  
‘‘Sure, my child, what is it?’’

“you said that whoever takes the flower should be a pure-hearted person. Am I truly the only pure-hearted person here?”

Aunt Clota never thought this question would come out of Irina’s lips. She looked at her carefully, took her by the hand and led her to the edge of the bed. There they sat; and in a slow, soft voice, she answered her:

“Irina, most of us adults have already dealt with many struggles, battled enough battles; and perhaps due to time or the experiences we’ve lived, we have let hate take place in our hearts. Now, that’s the past, we’ve freed ourselves from it. But when a feeling takes root for a while, it’s bound to leave traces; that’s why there’s no purity in our hearts anymore, unlike you. And the magic flower is very sensitive to this—she’d see right through us, putting in danger the only possible solution at this moment. Do you understand now?”  
“Clear as day”

Afterwards, Aunt Clota and Irina held each other tightly.  
“Let’s go downstairs now, we can’t waste time.”

Downstairs, Aunt Clota told both Irina and Makúla:

“We have to say our goodbyes to everyone outside.” She opened the front door and all of the forest creatures who were there started cheering them and **chanting** their names. Irina was in awe.

“Aunt Clota, why are they doing this?” She asked.

“They see in you the hope that they need. And they admire your courage”

Irina smiled and waved her hand at the creatures. Zortas took a step forward.

“Little one, we’re here to give you something” he said. Immediately, five different creatures approached her, and put in her hands five different little packages; each with different colors and ribbons. As she inspected the objects in her hands, she asked:

“Aunt, what is this?”

“Many things: tools, food, some kind of lantern, zandalilla powder...”

“Zandalilla powder?” She interrupted Aunt Clota.

“Yes”

“So, what’s that?”

“Magic dust. It aids in the preparation of different potions”

The conversation was interrupted by the presence of Nador and Magmaneo, each carrying a small bag.

Nador's contained arrows and other pieces for his weapons, and Magmaneo's was closed, but it was a very small bag hanging diagonally from his shoulder, surrounding his body. Every creature there chanted their names; a very festive atmosphere in the midst of so much misfortune. Aunt Clota interrupted the chant, saying:

‘‘It’s time. We have to go now’’ She took Irina by the shoulder and held her in place after closing the door. Only the four chosen ones were inside, the rest of the creatures stayed out.

‘‘Where are you taking me? I thought we had to leave now.’’ Irina said.

‘‘Yes! We can’t waste more time!’’

‘‘But you’re leading me inside the house!’’

‘‘Correct, and you are leaving from here.’’

‘‘Where from?’’

Aunt Clota smiled after realizing that Irina wasn’t understanding her. Surely enough, Irina thought that to get to Yangana she had to get there on foot.

‘‘Irina, the place you’re going to, Yangana, is way far from here; the trip would be too long and it’ll cost you more time, and time is what we lack right now.’’

Irina only grew in her confusion.

‘‘But then... How exactly am I supposed to get there?’’

This time Aunt Clota didn’t answer her question, instead, she took Irina by the hand and led her to the living room where the Great Guardian ‘‘table’’ was.

‘‘Irina, the ‘‘small table’’ as you call it, also works as a portal from which you can transport into different places.’’

Irina instantly looked at the small table, but this time it felt as if it were looking back at her.

‘‘So that means that every story you showed me through this table...’’

Aunt Clota smiled and interrupted her before she could ask the next obvious question.

‘‘They were happening in real time when you saw them. As I’ve said before, those stories, as all stories, leave their mark on earth, so Great Guardian, in his endless knowledge, let’s us watch everything that’s happened’’

‘‘Oh, I have an idea!’’ She exclaimed the way someone who found the perfect solution would. ‘‘Why don’t we take a look at how everything started and stop it from happening?’’

‘‘Because, my child, this small table only helps you see what happened, not change the way things happened. Knowing about the past offers an advantage for future reference, meaning it can only help you help yourself now.’’

‘‘Like a superpower?’’

‘‘Or something of the sort’’ said Aunt Clota, smiling.

Irina stood there staring at the small table, and after a while of reflecting on her own, she said:

‘‘Well then, how am I supposed to pass through the table?’’

Aunt Clota looked at her, then smiled. She thought about going into detail in explaining her, but they were tight on time.

“Come closer, lend me your hand” She took Irina’s hand and put it on the table. Irina thought she’d feel a solid surface, as that’s what wood feels like, however she was caught in a surprise when she saw the way her hand passed through the surface with ease. Irina was agape, her brown eyes now giant like two moons.

“I think you’re ready to go now” said Aunt Clota. Irina only nodded her head while exploring the other side of the portal with her hand. Aunt Clota hurriedly hugged her, while trying to hide her teary eyes, and said to her:

“Go ahead, my child. I hope you know how **proud** of you we all are.”

Irina smiled and let herself through the portal; her hair, caressed by the wind, floated in the air—that was the last thing Aunt Clota saw of her. Makúla went with her, always holding on to the shoulder of the girl. Following was Nador, who couldn’t wait to jump through the table; lastly, Magmaneo, who held his breath as he took the impulse to jump through.

## IX Yangana

It was like waking up inside a dream. As she opened her eyes, Irina was met with an amazing landscape: the sky had the most beautiful pastel colors she had ever seen—in a combination of violet, melon, pink and gold that looked as if they had been borrowed from the palette of the most whimsical painter.

“Am I dreaming?”

“What are you talking about?”

“This landscape, it’s surreal”

The other three: Makúla, Nador, and Magmaneo looked at each other incredulously. What they considered a regular view, to Irina, was the most fascinating thing she had ever seen.

“Wow, this is... This is really beautiful!”

“What exactly is catching your attention at all?” Asked Magmaneo, staring at her.

“Just look at those colors! And the way sunshine lights up the clouds!”

“We’re in Yangana! An **inhospitable** place!”

“It doesn’t matter! It’s beautiful!” Interrupted Irina as usual.

“It doesn’t matter, it’s dangerous.” Magmaneo emphasized.

“None of that matters, we have to keep moving” Nador intervened.

“Move where, though? Is there a path we can follow?” Questioned Irina.

“Move where your feet can get you” Replied Magmaneo.

Irina didn't understand what he meant, so Makúla explained to her:

“There's not one defined path, you have to make it yourself. You can walk the same trails or the same roads, but your path will always change, you can get wherever you wish if you craft your own path.”

“That's right! But this time Nador will help guide us” Magmaneo added.

“Just follow me” Nador said in response.

And thus, their journey through Yangana began. Everyone was alert, looking out for any possible **threats**. Everyone, except for Irina, who was still only paying attention to the landscape.

“Irina, are you focusing on the path here?”

“Sure!”

“No, you're not! You're just walking around aimlessly! Look around you! There's nothing interesting to see. Just a dirt-colored land without trees nor plants!” Magmaneo pointed out, angrily.

“Exactly, it's beautiful because it's different” Irina insisted. Magmaneo kept quiet after hearing that; Irina really seemed to be enjoying herself, after all. “Nador, how many times have you been here before?” She then asked.

“How many times?”

“Yeah! You're the guide, you must know this place very well.”

“This is my first time in Yangana...” He replied, looking at both Makúla and Magmaneo.

“What did you just say?” Irina exclaimed, stopping abruptly after hearing that.

“What you heard, never been in Yangana before.”

“But... You're the guide...”

“Right”

“Then, how will you guide us at all, if you've never been here before?”

Nador could only look at her—in silence, trying to compose himself before speaking. Magmaneo looked around as if trying to find an escape to such **awkwardness**.

Makúla, the most patient one out of the three creatures, decided to intervene:

“Irina, Nador isn't our guide because he knows the place, he's our guide because he's agile and cunning. Even if he's never been in Yangana, he's the most capable explorer out of the four of us. As you've pointed out before, Yangana has no pathways or roads, but that's where Nador and his abilities will help us. He'll take us where we need to be.”

“I'm sorry, Nador, I did not mean to offend you. If my auntie sent you with us, she must know how skilled you are, and how important your presence is for this mission.” Irina apologized.

Having said this, they resumed their pace. The grasslands, much more overgrown than usual, seemed to absorb them. The greyish-brown tone of the place contrasted with the sky painted in wonderful colors.

They remained in silence until they found a stretch of the path where large, shiny black rocks, covered with moss, forced them to stop.

“How weird, the scenery changed very suddenly.” Irina noted.  
“Yes, that’s Yangana!” Exclaimed the cowardly Magmaneo, while taking his hands up to his head, like trying to hide.  
“Magmaneo, if you’re so terrified of everything, why did you decide to come along?” Asked the girl, who was already running out of patience.  
“Your aunt said you would need me.”  
“So you came here for me? Why’s that?”  
“Because what you’re doing here, this mission, you’re doing it to help every single one of us. So I couldn’t refuse to help you.” Irina felt the urge to hug him after hearing this confession, but right at that moment, Magmaneo added:  
“And I don’t want you to hug me just because you think I’m sweet. You could surely crush me if you were to.”  
“Huh? You wish! And for your information, I didn’t even think of doing such a thing.” She responded snarkily. Makúla and Nador smiled at the exchange.  
“Guys” Nador retook the lead of the conversation. “Seems like we’ll have to cross this stretch, now, you have to be careful, for the rocks are **slippery**, and you could fall and hurt yourselves.”

Irina didn’t like this one bit. She had trouble climbing such huge rocks; and it was the same thing for Magmaneo. Nador, on the other hand, had already advanced further in this segment—Agile as all dwelves, he carefully premeditated his next step. Eventually he turned around to see how his crewmates were doing, and in doing so, he couldn’t help but chuckle: Irina was laying horizontally on top of one of the rocks, her body forming an arch

around it, she was sliding herself from one rock to another, trying to hold on to them, like a lizard moving in between them. Magmaneo wasn’t much better. With great effort, he’d climb a rock to then slide right off of it, but the roughness of these rocks had been hurting his little body. After each obstacle was surpassed, he’d stop to pat his butt a little, like trying to comfort the pain. It was a funny sight to see.

Nonetheless, time was getting shorter, and if they continued this stunt, they would not reach their destination soon. Nador, using an energetic tone, called for their attention.

“Guys, listen to what I’m going to say!” He called out. “Here’s what you’re going to do. First you’re going to squat down on the rocks, then, with your arms at your sides, you are going to push yourselves in such a way that when you go from one rock to another, only the tip of your feet touch the surface, giving you enough impulse to advance to the next one. The jump will happen so fast that you won’t even have time to slip.”

Irina and Magmaneo looked at each other as if to say ironically, “how easy”. Either way, they followed suit. Irina gained momentum and started jumping from rock to rock, like a toad; although at first she almost lost her balance and fell, but she used her arms to regain stability and continued jumping. For Magmaneo it took a little longer to master such a trick, but eventually he managed to do it.

“Don’t rush it, try to only focus on the rock in front of you. Take it step by step,

and surely you will be able to pass every obstacle without any trouble.” Nador reassured them.

And he was right. It wasn't long before both Irina and Magmaneo had passed through the rocky stretch of the path, and though they were exhausted, they also felt proud of themselves. In the distance, a loud roar could be heard, like the sound produced by waves after crashing into rocks.

“Can you guys hear that too? What's that sound?” Irina asked.

“That's the sea”

“Yangana has a beach?” She kept questioning the group. “Yes, Irina.”

“Where is it? Why haven't I seen it?” She turned her head around as if trying to locate it by sound.

“It's behind those mountains over there.”

Irina had the chance to observe her surroundings while the crew rested for a little while.

“We have to keep moving, night approaches, and we have to find a safe place to sleep.” Nador told the group.

After gathering strength from resting, the group continued. In the distance, it seemed that the sound of the sea was transforming into a beautiful melody, intoned by a magical voice. Irina thought it was a product of her imagination, due to her tiredness, and preferred to ignore it altogether.

Their steps became slower, everyone was too tired to even talk; they preferred to preserve the last of the energy they had still. Soon enough, darkness arose, and the beautiful evening sky had turned into the most wonderful starry night. The crew advanced until they reached a place with rock formations; one in particular looked like a cave.

“Here is where we'll stay the night” Nador said as he pointed to that particular rock.

“Oh! But it's so dark!” Cried Irina.

Skillful Nador took notice of his friends' fear, so quickly he set up a fire by putting together some small sticks and hay. The flame immediately lit up the place and provided them with warmth in the cold night.

“This cave is tiny”

“Better for us. This way, we'll be protected from any creature that might find us.”

“Creature?” As in creature of the night?” Exclaimed Irina and Magmaneo in unison, terror shining through their words.

“Yeah, sure. Just come inside”

“I'm hungry...” Said Magmaneo while holding one hand on top of his stomach.

“There's food in my bag”

Once they were settled inside the cave, they shared half of what looked like wheat bread with ginger; and though it was not bigger than the palm of Irina's hand, they were all satisfied from that small

portion. Irina set her head on a medium-sized rock and quickly fell asleep; Makúla found herself between Irina's hair. Magmaneo took shelter next to them, and Nador, always vigilant, took position on a rock that allowed him to have a better view of the area.

Finally, after a long day of walking, talking, and sharing each other's company, they all fell asleep.

## X The spell

Early in the morning, just before dawn, Nador was in charge of **patrol**. Everything was quiet, maybe too quiet for his liking. He took a small wood log, used it as a **torch** to light the place and walked around. He found some sweet fruits that were similar to grapes but with a large black **seed** inside, so he decided to take a few to share with the group. The first sun rays started to show, making their way through the middle of the night.

When he got back, he found Makúla on top of a rock, sitting towards the sun, **recharging** her energies as she always used to. Magmaneo and Irina were still sleeping, wasting time they didn't have. Having that as main priority, Nador motioned with his hands to Makúla, whom immediately stood up and went straight to Irina, whispering to her ear she said:

“Wake up, **sleepyhead**.”

Irina struggled to wake up. Makúla's voice was soft and lulled her to sleep, things such as this reminded Irina of her mother. She missed her terribly and thinking about her made her sad. She tried opening an eye, the other seemed as it was still asleep; Magmaneo's raspy voice woke her from her peaceful **slumber**.

“Somebody better wake her up, before I do” and that was enough to do the trick, Irina stood up at once, looking at her companions; with a big smile on her face, she told them “Good morning” while stretching out her arms.



Breakfast was **short-lived**; Magmaneo –still with food on his hands– started to walk. Time was precious, they had to hurry because with every second that went by, many suffered. The sun made its way through the clouds, leaving the cold morning behind. Makúla placed herself on top of Irina’s head so she could **soak up** as many sun rays as possible.

The path started to change, the once light brown **straw** turned into a dark green, making it seemed like burnt grass. There was some greenery left, –just a little– it made contrast with the landscape. Nador, who was always leading the group, immediately stopped, he turned around and brought a finger to his mouth so they would remain silent, shortly after followed by a gesture so they would stop. The wind was the only thing to be heard, but it was really faint, a sound that anyone but Nador would be able to perceive. Magmaneo, Irina and Makúla looked like statues, with only their eyes moving they watched as Nador’s **agile** body quickly ran until he disappeared behind some bushes. A sharp scream, soon followed by, scaring the three of them, making them jump and hug each other,

“Are you okay?” Irina asked.

“What is it? What’s going on?” Makúla asked.

A strange figure appeared from behind the bushes, it had a round face, pointed ears that ended in what looked like a full head of hair. Under big **bulging** eyes, was the nose which consisted of two very wide holes. Its brown skin blended with what he was wearing: a dirt-colored shirt and pants, with b lashoes that were –almost completely– covered in mud.

Nador was on top of the strange creature, pointing a sharp arrow right where its neck artery was **throbbing**.

“What are you?” he asked.

All of them slowly approached him, Magmaneo always staying behind.

“What am I? Why do you care? Agh, agh! Can someone take this off me!”

“Who sent you?” Nador asked.

“Who sent me? What are you talking about? You’re the ones in my land, what are you doing here?”

“Your land? Do you live here?” Irina asked, surprised.

“Yes, I live here, human. Unless he ends up killing me. Can you get him off me?” the creature spoke while moving, trying to get Nador off him.

“Nador, I believe our friend here isn’t a threat. Let him go.” Makúla ordered.

“Don’t try running away, I can get you as easy as the first time,” Nador told him.

“Running away? Running away? Why would I run away from my own home? Home you’re about to conquer.”

“Conquer?” a smiley Irina intervened “Don’t worry, we’re just here for the flower.”

Nador, Makúla and Magmaneo immediately reacted.

“Shhhh!”

Magmaneo touched his head –repeatedly– and muttered:

“I knew it! I knew she would **mess up!**”

“Ah! Now I understand, you’ve come here for Giralda” the strange creature said.

“The Giralda? What is a Giralda?” Irina asked.  
Nador and Magmaneo tried to silence her, again.

"I think it's too late," Makúla lamented.

In the distance, a black circle formed in the sky; Irina looked up and saw some crows **swooping down** on them. Not **thinking twice**, she grabbed Nador, Magmaneo and Makúla, protecting them, whereas the strange creature managed to throw himself between some bushes, to protect his body. The crows used their beaks to peck Irina on her back, the girl served as a shield to protect them. The impact made most of the crows unconscious; benefiting from this, the group fled guided by the creature.

"Quickly, let’s go to the cave," the creature shouted.

In the distance, they couldn’t see a cave but suddenly, next to a large rock, a small hole appeared, Irina barely made it through it.

"Are you okay, Irina?" Makula asked.

“My back... It hurts a lot.”

"You saved my life," said Magmaneo, touched.

"Everyone's lives" Nador corrected.

"You would’ve died for me!" Magmaneo said, eyes flooded with tears while Makúla checked on the wounds that were Irina's back.

"You need to lay here," she told her, taking Irina by one finger. She led her to a little pile of straw, already there, that was shaped like a mattress. Irina complained just a little, but she felt a great deal of pain, it was a burning sensation through her entire body, but especially on her back. A concerned Makúla continued attending the wounds, this time she addressed the goblin.

“Magmaneo, I need your magic to heal Irina's wounds, she won't be able to continue with these wounds' ' the sandaluz looked troubled. Magmaneo immediately opened his little bag and took out a vial full of multicolored powder; with them he made a mixture and applied it on Irina's back. After a while, the girl felt so much better.

"Thank you, Magmaneo, the pain is almost gone," she confirmed.

“Calm down, little one, don't move.”

“What happened out there?”

They all looked at each other, the strange creature spoke. .

“Did you bring the girl to find Giralda without warning her?” Makúla, Nador and Magmaneo looked at each other, and lowered their heads, feeling regret and shame.

"I still don't understand, can someone please tell me?" Irina exclaimed.

“Did they tell you about a magical flower with extraordinary qualities capable of reversing the evilest of spells?” the creature asked.

“Yes, but I didn't know that it's called the—” an unanimous and very strong “SHHHHH” was heard, her friends silencing her once again.

“Why is he allowed to say the name but I’m not?” Irina realized she still didn't know the creature’s name. “Also, your name? What's your name?” she asked, addressing the creature.

“That’s right! He hasn’t told us his name” Magmaneo said.

“Yeah, that’s true! What's your name, creature of Yangana?” Nador asked.

“Now you’re interested?”

"Are you going to say it?" Nador exclaimed threateningly.

“Stop with the violence! I’m Azure” the creature answered, and silence returned.

"Okay, now, you can tell me. Why Azure can name the flower but I can't?" Irina insisted.

“Oh, so you’re the bewitched little witch...”

“The bewitched witch? Hm, no, I don’t think so.”

“How ironic, a little witch bewitched by another witch...”

“I still don’t understand what you’re saying.”

“I’m guessing no one tells you anything.”

“She knows everything she’s prepared to **handle.**” Makúla interrupted.

“I think she should know more.” Azure said.

“Who are you to comment?” Nador asked him.

“Shouldn't I be the one deciding what I can or can't handle? By the way, can I move now?”

“No!” they all answered in unison.

“Okay, fine! But at least tell me more about the flower, with a name I shouldn’t say.”

Azure answered.

“A long time ago, there was the kingdom of Yangana situated over green lands and meadows. The king's pride was, without a doubt, his three beautiful daughters, each prettier than the other. They had unique abilities; their fame went beyond the kingdom. Carmine, the youngest, had the gift of abundance and made the crops productive whenever she was going to cultivate; to guarantee a fruitful harvest; it was necessary for Carmine to plant the first seed so the fields and meadows would be full of all kinds of fruits, vegetables and greens; with large and magnificent trees that protected with their shade the flower crops, which were the most beautiful and delicate in the entire region. Magenta was the middle child; she had mastered the singing arts and played many musical instruments. Hearing her sing was **thrilling**; she would always sing accompanied by a violin, and when she didn't sing, she played it with great skill. Amber, the oldest of all –the most beautiful of the three, in my opinion– was very kind; they said she mastered white magic. There was this rumor that assured the luck of the kingdom was thanks to her and her potions that provided health to whoever required it, no matter where they were.” Azure lowered his head and was silent, it seemed as he was reminiscing on the good old days. Irina couldn't stand Azure's silence.

“But what happened?” She insisted.

"Melania," everyone gasped, they looked at each other in silence.

“How are you feeling?” Nador asked Irina to break the silence.

“I'm feeling much better already.”

"Very well, get up and let's keep moving."

Irina jumped and got up. The pain was the slightest, and curiosity was getting the best of her. Everyone had remained so quiet that she didn't know if she could ask. So while everyone started walking, she looked at Azure and asked him in a low tone:

“What happened to the princesses?”

Azure shook his head, he felt sad, and also answered in a low voice:

“As I was saying, the fame of the princesses went beyond the kingdom; unfortunately, the news reached Melania. She swore to end all happiness that reigned this earth, as you can tell now, she did. One dark and early morning, Melania and her group of overfed rats invaded us; she brought destruction with her, the king, queen and guardians captured. At first, the princesses hid in a secret room. But that was not enough for Melania; she found them and, once they were in front of her, she casted a spell on the three of them.

“My! My! Look at these beautiful and unprotected girls. With the whole kingdom in their command, yet no one can save them. Well, let's see, little girls, what shall I do with you?”

The terrified princesses didn't know what to do; Amber bravely stood in front of them and said,

"Do whatever you want to me, but don't touch my sisters."

"How brave!" Melania sarcastically said "You want to protect them, do you really think you can protect them?" and furious, she declared: "You will be the last to die, you will see their suffering." then, stretching out her arms, she opened her hands, and casted a spell on her:

*You will be the most beautiful flower, the sun will always shine,  
brightening your candor; your essence  
will hold the nectar of the secret you shall always keep,  
but whoever  
dares to touch you, if they aren't pure of heart and hatred lives in  
their hearts will inevitably be your doom!*

"Later, a flash blinded those present; a dense and dark fog surrounded the castle for a moment. Where there was music, laughter and joy, silence reigned. The evil laugh! That evil laugh that gives you the creeps; echoed through the kingdom as Melania left. The castle turned into ruins after a while, the habitants of the kingdom fled out of fear, the ground was no longer fertile. No one heard of the king and queen, guards and residents of the castle ever again. The story of the princesses that turned into flowers reached everywhere, mainly because they heard that the nectar concentrated in them had magical powers, strong and capable of canceling Melania's spells."

"But why didn't anyone do anything to get them back?" Irina asked.

"The place was enchanted; word has it that the three princesses were transferred to an unreachable place. The worst part was the spell.

The first time the princesses were seen was when the Great Wizard, accompanied by a few witches, overcoming all obstacles, reached the steep top of the mountain. When they were close to them, they appreciated them, amazed by the beauty of the three. They decided to start with Carmine, attempting to extract her nectar. Amber's attitude caught their attention; the flower repeatedly waved its petals as if trying to alert the wizards.

But it was too late. As soon as they touched it, its vigorous leaves lost their color and began to wither. The flower was completely devitalized and died. Amber and Magenta doubled over in showing their intense pain; only then did the Great Wizard understand.

"But what happened?"

"The same wondered the wizards who had been able to get there; The Great Wizard, with tears in his eyes, explained to them: "Dear friends, our hearts have lived through many battles, we have felt hatred and, although we are not clinging to it, it has left traces. Melania warned her in her spell: "*whoever dares to touch you, if they aren't pure of heart and hatred lives in their hearts will inevitably be your doom!*" – to Irina, this reflection sounded familiar. Azure continued. "The Great Wizard sat next to Amber and, heartbroken, informed her: "From now on, I will enchant this land, the names of the princesses will be forgotten; the legend will die too. No one will look for them, which means no one will endanger them. Access will be prevented by what mother nature can provide and; whoever tries to get here will pay with their life before touching them. The four wizards put their backs to each other, creating a perfect square that

pointed in four different directions, raising their arms and extending their hands..."

"Four directions?"

"Yes, North, South, East, and West." Azure took a breath, swallowed hard, then continued.

"They were so immersed in performing this ritual that they didn't realize that someone had followed them; a creature driven by the ambition for power and egoism approached Magenta. Clota, the witch, lifted the creature into the air, but Melania emerged and counteracted her magic. The creature fell on Magenta and; the flower died, just as anticipated. Amber writhed in pain when she saw her second sister die. The Great Wizard confronted Melania. It made her angry at him, Melania, wrapped in laughter, sneered:

"Don't look at me like that, Great Wizard. I didn't do anything. It was you who brought the destruction here."

The Great Wizard, with tears in his eyes, replied: "When are you going to stop?"

"When all the powers and knowledge are mine," Melania concluded.

Her **bloodcurdling** laughter resounded throughout the place; then, she disappeared. Great Wizard felt defeated; he looked at Amber and said:

"Forgive me, I never wanted this to happen..." The three wizards looked at Amber, and Clota spoke to finish the spell: "From now on, your name will change and - you will become the Giralda."

Azure continued:

"Later, huge rocks were placed around the flower, creating sharp walls that didn't allow anyone to enter or find it. Some say the whole place was enchanted. Since then, anyone who comes along these roads gets lost; strangers who say the flower's name get attacked by beasts that inhibit entering."

"So that's what happened to me with the crows?"

"Yes, exactly!"

"Now I understand why I can't say her name, but there is something that isn't clear to me. How am I going to be able to reach her if she's so protected?"

"Because of your heart, Irina," Makúla, who had been silent, came forward and answered. It seemed that Makúla's answer had left her more puzzled, but she remained silent and continued walking, listening to that melody that she thought came from her head and she had heard since they arrived in Yangana.

## XI The Old Kingdom

You could see the wooden structures from the distance, long windows and huge doors; the cobbled streets contrasted with what was similar to modern buildings. In the background, the sea, touching the shores of what seemed to be fortresses built so as not to die in time, with firm stone like the gallantry of the towns that passed through them. Irina was surprised, it was the first time she was in that place and she knew it, however there was a feeling of belonging that invaded her.

“Have you been here before?” she asked.

“Not that I remember, but it’s really beautiful.”

“Seems like time is frozen in this place.”

“Exactly, there are places that remain stucked in time, their people come and go, but their essence stays there, in its environment. Look at those large forts that seem like they don’t defend anything, Irina, those will protect you permanently” while Makúla continued speaking, Irina slowly moved forward “Irina, listen to the music that’s filling the streets, can you hear it?”

That’s how, little by little, Irina started listening; letting herself feel the music, getting carried away by the rhythm.

“This is such a beautiful music!”

“This, is music that will never die, music that lives for generations and is passed on from time to time by its people.”

“Are those drums?”

“Yes, they are...” Makúla answered with a smile on her face.

Nador turned around, and gestured them to be silent, the human and sandaluz looked at each other, without knowing what was going on, they watched as the agile Nador climbed the **rubble** and the walls of what looked like the entrance of an old kingdom. It was amazing watching how easily Nador could jump between the rocks, it seem as he didn’t even touch them; and that’s how getting through beams of wood and stone remains (that were about to crumble), Nador’s small figure reached the highest point. He looked down and gestured them to get to where he was, as they moved forward, he told them to stop by holding both of his hands upright, with their palms facing inwards, he turned around, and, once again; asked them to be quiet. Makúla, Magmaneo and Irina looked at each other without noticing Azure’s absence, who had stayed a couple of steps behind. Nador who could see everything from above, looked at him – terrified. He quickly got down, brushing past the three, he headed towards Azure.

“Just leave me here, I’ll come back, but please, don’t make me go in there.” the three of them had come closer to hear what was going on “I would only hold you back, you should go, I’m staying here.”

**Vehemently**, Nador addressed the crew, telling them:

“He’s scared, his fear won’t let him go any further. Let’s go, it’s going to be late.”

“We’re just going to leave him?” Irina asked while looking at both of them.

“We’re not leaving him, he has made his decision; he’s being controlled by fear and it won’t let him go any further. If we stay with him, we won’t accomplish our mission, and by trying to convince him, we would be losing time. We already knew this journey wouldn’t be for everyone.”

Irina looked closely at Nador; she found his words to be true and wise, so she looked back, waving her hand as a sign of goodbye to Azure. They’ve been walking for at least less than a hundred yards when they heard something crash behind them. They noticed – whatever it was– it had passed through the large gates that were now closed; making a thunderous noise. Right in front of the, what seemed to be a door opened on the floor; Nador felt coming from below the door, he managed to jump and hold onto a beam, he was about to warn his crew but it was too late: Irina fell with Makúla sitting on her should, followed by Magmaneo who was distracted.

They went down large **slides** that –in a zigzag– took them quickly to the bottom. Since they didn’t know where they were going It was scary but still fun, thanks to the slides. They reached bottom and looked up, where Nador’s silhouette, who was against the light, asked them:

“Is everyone okay?”

“Yes” everyone answered at the same time.

“Can anyone see anything?”

“Everything’s dark” Irina answered.

“Your bag! Look into your bag, there you will find some light crystals. When Makúla touches them, they’ll light up.”

She immediately came down and did as Nador said. Makúla touched the crystals and the place illuminated.

“Where are we?”

“It looks like the castle’s basement.”

Carefully, Nador went down to where they were.

“We’re at the basement of Yangana’s castle, we’re exactly where the cells are located, in fact, I think we’re inside one.”

“How will we get out of here?”

“Come with me, we will look for a way out.” Nador responded.

The cell’s path was gloomy, and it didn’t help either that: the chains that were hanging on the walks constantly collided with each other making noise, and the feeling of being followed – had them feeling **uneasy**.

“Nador, is there someone following us? Behind us?” Irina asked by whispering.

“Do you really want to know?”

“Shouldn’t we be aware of it so we can protect ourselves?”

“Well, now you know; there’s something following us.”

A scared Irina looked at Makúla, who’s light illuminated only part of Irina’s face, and at Magmaneo, who looked more scared than Irina, frightened even. Wanting to overcome all the fear he was feeling, he asked:



“But, what is it? What is following us?”

“Can’t you see them?” Nador inquired.

“No”

“Well, me neither, I just know they’re there.”

“And if they attack us?”

“We will have to fight back.”

“Don’t we have to make a plan so we can fight them back? Or make a plan to run away?”

“If you don’t know what you’re dealing with, how can you get ready for it?”

“There has to be something we can do!”

“And that’s what we’re doing, we’re movin on, going forward and not stopping, fully aware that something is following us.” Nador concluded. The three remaining – Irina, Makúla and Magmaneo– looked at each other, and without saying a word, kept on walking knowing that someone else was with them, stalking them. They looked everywhere, but couldn’t see a thing; they felt very distressed, no matter how they felt, Nador had been determined, they wouldn’t go back or stop.

They arrived to what seemed to be a huge iron door, it was closed, had huge holes and a complicated lock. They stopped, and whatever was following them, did too.

"And now, how are we going to get out of here?" Irina asked, worried.

"Leave it to me," Nador answered confidently.

Nador moved deftly through the gaps until he reached the lock, when he was in front of it, he took out from his bag, near the arrows, a small –but elongated–, metal, a lock rake. He made several movements, then, putting an end to the painful silence, a "click" was heard and the door opened. At that moment, several footsteps were heard.

"Quick, come now," Nador hurried the three. Just by hearing Nador’s orders, Magmaneo, didn’t have to think twice, with Irina, they quickly crossed through the threshold, closing the door. When they were on the other side, they observed hundreds of eyes, that were looking at them.

“Are those **xions**?” Nador mumbled.

"I think so" Makúla said. The two looked at each other, surprised by what they had in front of them– they couldn’t stop looking at them. Irina, who didn’t understand the magnitude of the situation, asked:

“Who– I mean, what are they?”

Nador looked inside and said: “You can come out now”

Small, plump figures, covered of hair, with broad feet, and short stature, came out; they were a grayish color; (similar to the color that comes into view when you remove the paint from a wall or old clothes losing their color.) Not even Magmaneo had seen this species before.

“Okay, I get it, they are Xions but, what are they?” Irina curiously asked.

“They’re transformed beings. They’re the oldest residents Yangana’s castle, they were isolated and later turned into Xions” Makúla answered.

“I thought this land was **uninhabited**, specifically after everything that has happened.”

“We all thought the same, but clearly we were wrong. There were several stories, but we thought they were just that: stories. No one ever knew for sure what happened to the missing people of Yangana.”

"Who is in charge?" Nador questioned.

Moving through the crowd, one of them got closer and said:

“I’m Cyan, the royal guard.”

"You don't look like a royal guard," Irina spoke in a low tone.

“I know. After we were captured, we were turned into this.” He looked down and continued his explanation. “Our army was reduced; part of it was taken by Melania; she turned them into something similar to giant rats; the rest of us were turned into this.”

“But... How did you let yourselves get **overpowered**?” Nador uncertainty asked.

“Melania's attack – similar to every coward– was at night, when she came that disgusting fog that's always surrounding her; entered our homes. We've always been peaceful people; we weren't expecting a fight; those in charge of the lookout after, breathing in the fog, felt dizzy. Many fell unconscious and remained asleep, while the remaining of us who could resist it were turned into these balls of fur.”

“What about the king?” Irina asked this time.

“King Amaranth, ruler of Yangana, and Queen Sienna, his beautiful wife, also suffered the same fate; they were transformed and imprisoned here with us.”

“How have they managed to survive?”

"The water filters through the cavities on the exterior and we have learned to hunt the small creatures that appear here; it hasn't been pleasant at all." He lowered his head while moving it from one side to the other, regretting everything that had ensued.

"Why didn't they try to escape? I don't know, maybe through the slides or...?" Irina asked, wanting to know more.

"Of course, we've tried," Cyan interrupted with an energetic voice. "We've tried everything! Unfortunately, the trap mechanism is activated from the outside and; we don't know when or what is going to fall here; besides, not many beings have dared to return to Yangana after Melania's spell, and the four sorcerers that came after."

"You mentioned the king and queen, where are they?" Nador asked.

"They like to be separated from the rest. After the princesses were taken away, they both fell into a terrible depression; they could barely eat. Seeing our leaders act that way; lowered our morale; all we do is survive, hoping something would change."

Nador looked at Makúla, and made a sign. The doors immediately opened. Irina hoped, along with Magmaneo, that everyone would run away happily. But it didn't happen as she expected.

"What's going on? Why aren't they leaving?" Irina asked, surprised.

"They are waiting for the king," replied Nador, in a low voice.

"We will wait for our king," Cyan replied, in a solemn tone.

"After so many years, I don't understand it," Irina said.

Makúla, Nador and Cyan told her in unison: "Loyalty!"

"Amaranth is still our king, that hasn't changed. We understand and share his pain, he should be the first out."

Irina remained silent, she understood that in the most unfortunate circumstances is where people's loyalty is tested. There was a movement within the group; slowly, two figures with little spirit, and as if they were carrying their entire lives on their shoulders, emerged from the mass of xions.

"My king, my queen," Cyan told them, making a small bow as a greeting.

"I'm Amaranth, King of Yangana. Who are you?" Irina, spoke faster than anyone and without thinking, rushed to say:

"We came to free all of you, and to search for the flower."

Magmaneo, Makúla and Nador looked at each other immediately: Makúla raised her little hands to her face and shook her head, Magmaneo took a deep breath and Nador immediately took a defensive stance, he stood in front of Irina, grabbing her bag. Irina could feel that her words, this time, would bring greater consequences. King Amaranth immediately reacted to the girl's words.

"What?" he roared, clearly annoyed.

The small beings, –the Xions– moved restlessly; it became increasingly clear to Irina that she had done something bad, but she still didn't know what. Queen Sienna bursted into tears almost immediately. Irina tried to make things better by saying:

"The forest is under a spell..."

She couldn't finish due to being interrupted by the king.

“What are you telling me? That you want to take the only of my daughters that is still alive? The only reason why we're alive?” Irina's face changed completely, only then she understood what was happening “You give me and my people freedom, but in exchange you want to take the life of the only daughter I have left!”

The king was silent with his fist clenched, he was hitting his leg, feeling sad and frustrated. Cyan, noticing the situation, walked towards the door.

“The proposal of freedom is tempting; we have little ones who aren't familiar with the outside world, we have suffered so much locked up, lacking all the basic needs, with few medicine to heal the wounded or the sick, the small amount of food we have to survive with... But I must stop you from searching for Princess Amber and I'm willing to give my life while doing it. I speak on behalf of everyone: if that's what it takes, we don't want our freedom.”

“Who sent you?” Interrupted the king, already calmer but still consoling his wife next to him.

"The Great Wizard," Makula replied.

King Amaranth made a gesture with his mouth and nodded his head; he took a deep breath and thoughtfully looked at each of his people.

“We have already seen the destruction that Melania can cause, entire lives transformed, families separated, confinement... I order all of you to leave.”

There was a great uproar, murmurs and everyone looked at each other, confused.

"But my king... your daughters..." Cyan said.

“I'm still the king of Yangana and I order it.”

While squeezing his wife's hand, Amaranth took a few steps forward and in the final step – the one between being inside or outside– he stopped, hesitated a bit, but finally took it, with Queen Sienna by his side, who couldn't stop crying. King Amaranth turned around and, with tears in his eyes, but without losing the temper of his voice, told them:

“You have been loyal people, you have gone through sadness, poverty, physical and emotional pain, you have been with us showing your respect and affection at all times, both in good and bad. I couldn't out of my selfishness, keep you all here, not even for one hour more. So this is my order, all of you, out!” he said as he walked hand in hand with his wife.

“Makúla, but...” Irina questioned.

“It's his way of repaying everyone for everything they've done for him.”

There was silence; what should have been a happy walk towards freedom, became a silent exodus where only the fearful footsteps of all the Xions could be heard, all of them following their king.

“What happens now?” Magmaneo asked.

“Now we have to follow the king, he knows the way out.”

And so they did, they moved through small and intricate tunnels that, –like labyrinths– were shown in front of them.

“Makúla, how is it possible that he can remember, after so many years, where to go?”

“He built this place.”

King Amaranth stopped his walk and with a firm voice said:

“We’re so close to getting out, I recommend that you cover your eyes for the first few minutes and then, little by little, remove your hand from them.”

It was amazing seeing all the Xion's faces and reactions; for some, it was the first time they felt the cool wind hitting their face and the heat of the sun, it was contradictory to appreciate the bliss of their release and then remember the cost of it. When everyone left, the king went towards Cyan and gave him instructions.

The Xions recognized the place, there was laughter. One of the little ones approached Irina, excited to see her free, she asked:

“Are you happy now?”

"I always was," replied the little Xion, very certain of her answer.

“But you were locked up in that castle...”

"Yes, but it was the only thing I knew," she smiled and kept running around the place.

The king after speaking with Cyan, addressed everyone:

“My beloved and loyal people, as you can see, the whole kingdom is now destroyed and neglected; but you can go and repair your houses, rebuild your home.”

They all immediately moved and took numerous paths, while the king walked away. Irina turned to Makúla and asked:

“Where is the king going?”

"To what's left of the castle."

“And what about us?”

“We must continue!” Nador exclaimed, Cyan approached them.

“I have very strict orders to take you to where they think the princess may be.”

“Are you going to do it?” Nador asked.

"I will only take you to where the princess is, then I'll leave and you'll finish the mission you were entrusted to do." He lowered his head and, although his sadness was evident, he moved forward.

The feeling was strange; although they were close to fulfilling their mission, they knew that by taking the Giralda, the last of the princesses would die. The further they got from town, the weather changed and got a little colder. Once again, it seemed that the air that subtly brushed Irina's cheeks, had brought with it the same melody that she had heard since the beginning of the journey. but no one said a word.

"Behind the great mountains is what you're looking for," Cyan said, stopping the entire group and pointing into the distance.

The four of them looked ahead: it was an extremely high and very steep mountain range; it looked more like a built wall than a group of mountains; the wall they needed to climb was very straight and with very few ledges to hold onto during the climb. Nador observed everything carefully, studying the mountain; he knew that he had the skills to do it, but he highly doubted that his friends could make it.

“What about you? You're not coming?”

“No!” Cyan emphatically responded.

“Why?”

“it would only take my presence to notice the hatred that's inside my heart, she would most likely die.”

Irina remained silent after hearing his words, she could he truly meant them, Makúla leaned on her cheek, while Nador, approaching Cyan, said:

“We thank you for what you have done for us, but I highly doubt we will be able to climb this mountain in time, it's enormous and it would take a lot of training to do it.”

“King Amaranth has already thought about that detail, he has ordered that Ocher and Mauve take you there.”

“Ocher and Mauve?” Irina asked, intrigued.

After waiting a short amount of time, Cyan emitted a long, high-pitched whistle; the wind increased its intensity and from each side emerged two enormous butterflies, – or something very similar to them: their wings seemed carefully painted with the most beautiful and intense tones, each accordingly with their respective names. Ocher, the male, had wings so large that when they were extended towards the sun, its rays passed through it, illuminating the place with magical golden tones. Mauve was truly wonderful, with stunning purple and lilac colors, as if she had been painted with greatest skill.

Irina and the others were surprised, more than one of them with their mouths open, admiring the spectacle. They were beautiful creatures,

utterly fabulous, their brilliant colors contrasted with the silver of the towering mountains.

“Are you sure they can carry my weight?” Irina asked.

“Of course! Ocher and Mauve are both very strong, now just go up and hold on.”

Its wings shook harder and rose little by little, generating a wind that stirred the plants that remained around.

Magmaneo was very afraid and held onto Malva tightly, Nador seemed to enjoy the fly. Irina and Makúla climbed on Ocher –the strongest– while saying goodbye to Cyan, who was getting smaller and smaller the farther they got, until he disappeared. The wind ruffled Irina's hair; she smiled, she felt happy thanks to the incomparable view she had of the entire kingdom of Yangana.

Magmaneo, clinging onto Mauve with all his arms' strength and his eyes closed, asked Nador:

“Do they know where we are going?”

“Let's hope they do.”

He looked at Nador as someone that is about to have a panic attack would, the dwelf smiled at him and replied:

“Of course, they know where we are going!”

They rose high enough to touch and get lost among the clouds until, in the midst of them, they looked at what seemed to be low peaks and sharp points that in the center had a prominent hill from where a glow came through. Slowly, Ocher and Mauve flew until they reached a **plain**, very close to the hill. After getting down and looking in front of them, they admired the magnificence of The Giralda.

Nothing they had seen before –or even imagined– compared to the splendor of this magical flower.

## XII

### The flower known as “Giralda”

Irina, Makúla and Nador, couldn't stop admiring the **spectacle** before them: how the flower moved in such a magnificent and perfect way, wiggling her silhouette thanks to the wind that was generated by Ocher and Mauve's landing.

Magmaneo would **stagger** in his walk, he covered his mouth with his hand while he put his free hand on his stomach.

“Ugh, it's finally over...” he said feeling **dizzy**, his steps were hesitant. He ended up falling onto the floor.

“Are you okay?” Irina asked.

With a gesture Magmaneo indicated that it was better to not ask him anything, he moved aside and lied down. Irina, Nador and Makúla stepped forward, letting him rest.

“It truly is beautiful” added a marveled Irina.

“It's wonderful!” Makúla repeated while opening her big eyes.

“Let's go, we have a mission to complete.” Nador said.

Ocher and Maude flew away. Irina watched them as they left while waving goodbye; thanking them. The three of them got close within a meter to the flower. Then, Irina heard again the melody that had been with her the whole time, except this time, it was closer.

“Can you hear that?” she asked as soon as she could, not missing her chance.

“Hear what, Irina?”

Magmaneo, panting and agitated, caught up with them.

“Gorgeous! I'm speechless!”

“Listen!” Irina insisted.

“To what?” Magmaneo asked.

“I can hear it now all the time...”

“What are you hearing, Irina?” Makúla asked her.

“I think the **altitude** is affecting her, she's now hallucinating” Magmaneo said as a joke.

“I can hear it since we arrived, it sounds like a sad song; but it's just music but I can feel it inside of me like it's going through me.”

Makúla and Nador looked at each other not understanding what Irina was talking about.

“A sad song?”

“Yes, Makúla. It's a melody, it kind of sounds like a crying violin...”

“Irina, I believe she's trying to tell you something, get close to her...”

“Are you sure I'm allowed to do that?”

Nador said yes.

Feeling a bit fearful, Irina approached the flower known as “Giralda”, when she was in front of her, she knelt down and silently admired her once more. She admired the flower's perfect figure, the impressive colors she had never seen before, the enormous petals



with a red base that changed to violet, aquamarine, and blue that seemed to move on top.

“You truly are beautiful!” she told the flower. As she began to hear a voice coming from the flower, the music didn’t stop.

“So you’ve come for me?” Giralda replied to her previous comment.

“Are you talking to me?” Irina asked, she couldn’t believe she was hearing the flower talk.

“There is no one else I could be talking to.”

“Oh... Then yes, I think so... I mean. Yes.” Irina replied with a **reluctant** tone; still amazed by the talking flower.

“And I should willingly give myself to you? Without a fight?”

“There are creatures who are suffering.”

“I know, I’m aware of it. Everything is connected. You’ve come for me so I can stop the suffering.” Giralda interrupted.

“Well, you’re right.”

“And who’s stopping my suffering?”

Irina wasn’t expecting that question, she looked at her with eyes full of respect as the flower would softly move with the wind.

“I don’t know, time maybe?” Irina replied to the flower’s question while lowering her head.

“Is that supposed to make me feel better?”

“I don’t think so but...”

The flower wouldn’t let her talk.

“Besides, if it’s time what we’re talking about, you’re reducing mine. The second you get me out of here, I will die.”

Irina didn’t know what to say, she felt very embarrassed. She sat down next to the flower when little Makúla floated to her shoulder.

“What’s the matter, Irina?”

“I don’t feel good doing all of this.”

“Okay, but that’s what we came for.”

“I know but I thought we were doing the right thing!”

“And we are!” Makúla vehemently affirmed.

“We’re not! If I take the flower’s nectar, the princess will die.”

“It’s the **sacrifice** of one life for thousands.”

At that moment, the flower decided to talk. She interrupted the conversation and burst in by saying:

“I didn’t choose this! I didn’t choose to sacrifice myself!”

Makúla watched the flower's soft and gentle movements. She seemed arrogant and proud she stood in a firm position as if what she expressed would change her already set fate.

"Why are you doing this?" Makúla asked the flower.

Irina was surprised by Makúla's reaction. She listened and watched the interaction between the two without saying a word.

"Why am I doing what?"

"You knew we were coming for you, you knew why."

"Yes, but that doesn't mean I have to be okay with it and accept it."

"But it's your fate!"

"I didn't choose it!"

Makúla –already annoyed– changed from orange to red and clenched her small hands into fists said:

"I can't believe how **selfish** you're being!"

"Why should I die for them?"

"You can feel their pain, you're connected to them through the ground, you can perceive all of this..."

"Yes, I can, and they have also felt my pain but haven't done anything about it. There have been several years of loneliness, exposed to the coldest weather and **scorcher** days.

Victim of her impulses, Irina decided to interrupt her.

"And you want to keep on living that way?"

Makúla and the flower looked at each other; they were perplexed by Irina's question and remained silent for a moment. The flower was getting ready to answer when suddenly, Irina heard the song again, not realizing when it had stopped. Irina looked up, motioning them to not say a word, hushing them with her finger to her lips.

"Can you hear that? It's getting louder by the second."

Surprised, the flower looked at Irina.

"You can hear her?" she asked in the same state of shock.

"Yes, since the beginning of this journey; when we arrived in Yangana. At first it was very low but now I can hear it much better. It's such a beautiful song, where does it come from?"

The flower went from proud and arrogant to shrinking, looking like she was about to **wither**. With a broken voice, she said:

"It comes from what's left of my sister."

You could see the grief behind the flower's eyes; eyes full of melancholy were looking at the ground and watering. Invaded by sadness but without leaving curiosity behind, Irina looking at Makúla, asked:

“How can that be possible if she's no longer here?”

“I don't really know. I assume some of her spirit stayed in places where she used to be, leaving a mark behind, something that usually happens when a life is taken away unexpectedly.”

“So... Are they dead?”

“All I know is that they were touched by creatures whose hearts were full of hate after that Great Wizard sat next to them and cried; he didn't want to hurt them, so he dug Magenta and Carmine from their roots. He put them in a crystal **urn** and took them away. We all thought they were dead, but we don't know what happened after what I just told you.”

After listening to everything they'd been talking about, Giralda immediately stood up.

“Take me, take me with you. I'm willing to give my life away. I want to see my sisters again before doing it,” she said immediately.

“I don't think I made myself clear,” Makúla rushed to explain, “Great Wizard took them away, but I doubt they're still alive, actually; I'm pretty sure they're no longer with us.”

“Then take me to the Great Wizard.”

“We were going to take you there from the beginning,” Irina said.

“Great, now, get me out of here!”

“B-but...How am I supposed to do that?”

The flower smiled at her.

“Okay, listen carefully in your backpack; you have all the tools they gave you, right?”

“Yes, how do you know that?”

“Irina, I already told you. She knew we were coming.” Makúla explained.

“Take the tool that looks like a **shovel** and come,” Giralda explained to her.

Irina immediately went where Nador and Magmaneo were and took her backpack. Both watched her as she –hurriedly– searched for the requested tool. Makúla, sitting on her shoulder, told her:

“Take it easy, Irina, relax. Calm down, breathe and then do what you have to do.”

“What if she changes her mind?”

“She won’t change her mind.”

When she had everything, she needed, Irina got close – once again – to the flower that seemed to smile at her.

“Okay, good, take the **shovel**. Make a circle around me and start digging until I tell you to stop.”

Irina got started right away on the task while the flower watched her.

“So, you’re the newbie witch?”

“I’m not a witch,” Irina answered without neglecting her task.

“For real? You’re not a witch?” the flower smiled “You’re small but a witch, without a doubt.”

“I’m not!” Irina answered emphatically.

“Then how come you can listen to my sister?”

“Because I have a gift, just like everyone else.”

“If you combine all your gifts and learn how to use them, I believe that makes you a witch; at least one with a title since you’re already one.”

“I’m not one besides; I don’t even like witches.”

“Me neither; thanks to one of them, my sisters died, my father’s kingdom ended up in ruins, and I turned into a flower.”

“Yes, but a beautiful flower.” Irina said while groaning, exhausted.

“How does that make my situation any better? I can’t move or share it with someone else. I’m a prisoner behind these stone walls; the worst part is that at least all the most beautiful flowers know their lives won’t be **everlasting**; that’s why they enjoy their beauty and share it with the rest. I’m alone,” she paused and changed her voice tone to an upset one and said “But you, witch girl, have a gift that won’t share, you have the opportunity to help everyone, and still, you choose not to do it, just so they don’t label you as a witch that makes you the worst of people.”

Irina got upset after she heard what the flower had said; she stopped digging and replied to her:

“How can you judge me without even knowing about me? I came all the way here to help the entire forest and all the creatures that live in it while you, on the other hand, know how much they need you but won’t help them. You can feel their suffering, and it isn’t enough.”

Smiling, the flower’s face showed that she got what she wanted.

“How interesting! Although you’re **upset** about it. I can’t feel any hate from you, not even a little bit.”

Irina looked at her, and with a disapproving look, she carried on with her task.

“I’m **upset** with your attitude, but I don’t hate you; I could never understand everything you’ve gone through, the things you’ve suffered. I can’t tell how you feel.” Irina moved her hand to her head, pushing away a strand of hair that was bothering her. The flower observed her in silence, stunned by the answers of the small girl.

The silence lasted a while; it was one of those comfortable silences. Irina kept on doing her task. The flower couldn’t figure out what else to say while Makúla watched the situation. At one point, Irina looked up; she was exhausted.

“I finished. The circle is done. What now?” she stared at the flower while waiting for new instructions.

“Take the largest shovel, stick it through the circle you made, and once you’ve reached the bottom, put it horizontally and go through until the other side. Be very careful, or you will damage my roots.”

On one side of Irina’s face, sweat ran down; it looked like she was about to perform surgery on someone. Giralda interrupted Irina’s concentration by saying:

“What if I don’t want this anymore?”

“You’ve already told me to get you out of here.”

“I didn’t think you would go through with it.”

“Don’t forget about the possibility of the Great Wizard having your sisters.”

“Right! Hm... Are you aware of the danger you’ll face when you get me out of here?”

“From the start.”

“Do you want to die?”

“No, I don’t want to die, but the reward it’s worth it.”

“You don’t get anything from it.”

“That’s where you’re wrong. While the forest is alive, so will I. I’ll live in it. I’ve never felt as I did while running through it; full of life. If I have to die, I’ll do it as a tree, standing.”

“But, you’re so young.”

“How many years have you lived? Just take a look at yourself; is that truly living? Is that how life is supposed to be? I loved and have been loved; in the past few days, I discovered places and creatures I never dreamed could exist. I didn’t make many friends, but I learned that” she looked at Makúla, “when you have a true friend, she’s more like a sister.”

“Love? What “love” are you referring to? You’re too young to have loved someone of your kind.”

“I've had love from my parents, family, and friends. You're right, I don't know any other kind of love yet, but since I don't know it, I don't need it. I'm happy with how my life has been until now; I've had both difficult and extraordinary moments. I'd like to keep on exploring other paths and see the surprises life will bring me; but if that's not for me, I'm fine with what I've lived up to this day, I'm okay with it.”

“Fine, poet girl. Get me out of here.”

Nador and Magmaneo got closer and gave Irina a crystal urn whose upper part had a crossed opening with a cross; that was divided into four quadrants. On its sides, the walls had small holes that went all the way through it, at the bottom, it was completely sealed so the soil wouldn't slip through it.

“You have to place the princess here,” Makúla explained.

Irina went back to extracting the flower from the ground, and **meticulously**, she lifted the flower, carefully placing her in the urn.

“Well, my new prison isn't that bad.” Giralda jokes.

“What do you mean by that?” Irina asked.

“At the end of the day, I'm still a prisoner.”

“The urn isn't what is imprisoning you.”

The flower reflected on what Irina had said for a while, she got serious and continued by saying:

“That's right, I'm a prisoner of my own body. Whenever I am, I'll always be a prisoner.”

Irina tried to cheer her up by telling her: “But we're taking you on a journey.”

The Giralda smiled.

“A journey to my death?” she sarcastically asked.

“Well, we're all going to die; that's the only thing we can be certain of. We don't know when it will happen, which is why it's important to enjoy the ride and think about it as a journey.”

Everyone –including the flower– smiled, and after a while, she remained silent.

### **XIII**

#### **The Enchanted Garden**

The wind was blowing, and the sun showed signs of wanting to set. Nador, vigilant and always at the front of the small crew, made sure that there was no danger, followed in line by Irina, who carried The Giralda in her hands, resting in her urn. Little Makúla, as always, was sitting on Irina's left shoulder. Magmaneo followed them closely, while staring at The Giralda.

“What do you keep looking at, you?”

“You’re truly beautiful...” Answered Magmaneo, slightly embarrassed.

“Yeah, I know.” The flower answered coldly. “Why are you here, anyway?”

“Why am I here?” Magmaneo replied, surprised.

“Yes. What is your role? What do you do here?”

“Oh! I think it’s because of my potions...”

“I see... So, you’re like the wizard of the group?”

“Not quite” Magmaneo laughed.

“No?”

“Nope, I don’t do magic. But I can prepare potions”

“And you think that’s going to be helpful at all?”

At that moment, and given the sarcastic tone used by The Giralda, Irina intervened, already a little tired of the flower's attitude.

“Well, for your information, we’ve already used his potions, with great results. They are, for the most part, the reason why we’re here right now. So, will you please stop being so passive-aggressive?”

“What do you mean passive-aggressive?”

“Well, you know, you’re being self-defensive and mean”

“Yeah I’m aware of that. I’m sorry I can’t be happy like the rest of you guys”

Irina paused to think carefully about what The Giralda had just said.

“You’re not happy?” She asked after reflecting a little while.

“Could you be happy in a situation like mine?”

“Like I said earlier, I’d have to be you to truly understand. But I believe I would’ve still found joy in seeing the sunrise, feeling a soft breeze, sharing my nectar with little butterflies. I would’ve tried to enjoy what was available to me. I know nothing compares to freedom, but if I had no other choice, I would’ve chosen to find happiness in what I had. There’s nothing worse than being a self-inflicted victim; feeling so trapped within yourself you’re unable to enjoy what surrounds you.”

They were so immersed in their conversation that they failed to notice an imperceptible but constant clicking sound that followed them; that is, with the constant exception: Nador, who was in front, had distanced himself enough from the group. He knew that something was following them, but he was not sure where it was; it was definitely something or someone that knew the place very well, and camouflaged itself perfectly in it. Nador noticed that there was a pile of tall grass that was resisting the wind, not moving at all. He

jumped up and dived into the patch of grass. After a few blunt hits, a few grasses flew around until Azure emerged, through the grass, and again with the small but sharp knife against his jugular, grappling with Nador.

Makúla, Irina and Magmaneo shouted his name.

“Yeah, yeah, It’s just me... Will I always be received this way everytime we cross paths?” Asked Azure.

Nador, angry, and still grabbing him by his neck, said:

“Azure, if you’re truly our friend you shouldn’t hide like that! Why were you trailing us? What are you hiding?”

“Jeez... I see my intentions have been misinterpreted... Relax, my friend, you don’t need to worry about me”

But there was no convincing Nador, who still had the knife against the creature’s neck.

“I’m glad you’ve come back Azure. Nador, let go of him already. He’s our friend” Irina intervened.

Nador, reluctantly, let him go. Something inside him told him it wasn’t safe.

“Yes, listen to the girl, you” said Azure, while rubbing the part of his neck that had been exposed to Nador’s knife. “I came back because I realized it was cowardly of me to leave you guys alone. And I

wanted to offer my help” He paused briefly, and then asked Irina. “So... What have you got there?”

“The Giralda!” She replied mindlessly, like showing off a trophy.

“No! Irina!” An exasperated Makúla tried to shut her up, but it was too late.

At that moment, the wind blew much stronger; it was very cold, condensed steam could be seen coming out of everyone’s mouth and nose. It got dark very quickly and the sound of evil laughter could be heard echoing in the background. Irina, aware of what she had done, looked at her friends with a look of terror.

“I’m so sorry! What do we do now?”

“Let’s find a place to hide! Now!” Nador yelled.

They all ran toward a jumbled row of rocks.

“How far are we from the castle?” Irina asked the group.

“We’re still far from it” Makúla answered

“Can we get there from here?”

“It’ll take us longer. But this is the safest option for now” Nador explained. “We should find a hiding place for the flower alone. Can you help us, Magmaneo?”

“A potion might help with that” The dwarf answered. “But I need to prepare it first”

“Do you think you could do it here?”

“Yes, don’t worry”



In the rush of the moment, they didn't notice Azure had disappeared again.

"Where did Azure go?" Irina noted

"He escaped again" Nador said. "I knew it from the start, I knew he couldn't be trusted..."

"But, where could have he gone to?"

"I would rather not think about that now"

Nador had not finished saying this when a black fog began to invade the place.

"Fast, this way!"

"Where to?" Makúla inquired.

"Wherever this path leads you to" Nador answered. "You, guide Irina with your light. Take her through this cave. Magmaneo, you, finish that potion. No matter what it takes."

Magmaneo turned to Irina, and said:

"I'm not done yet but... Here, take this with you" He gave Irina a small glass container. "It's not finished, but it'll protect you"

"C'mon Irina! We have to leave, now!" Makúla interrupted.

They could hear high-pitched squawks approaching, as the thick, black mist took over the place and became denser and denser. Irina turned to Nador:

"You're going to be alright all alone?"

"Yes, leave now"

"I want to stay with you"

"No, leave, Irina! This is my mission, yours is to keep the Giralda safe. Leave now!"

"He's right Irina, let's go"

"But it could be dangerous..."

"Nador is a skillful fighter, he'll know how to help him if anything happens"

Irina watched him as he left, she knew that the situation was very dangerous and that, although Nador was very good, he was going to need help; but at the same time, she could not put The Giralda in danger, if she did, the sacrifice of all would have been in vain. So, they ran through the cave, Makúla, ahead of her, illuminated the place.

Out of that black mist appeared terrifying shadows; Nador began to battle against them.

It was a totally unfair match, the shadows emerged from everywhere, and just like that, it seemed that this fog covered him entirely, but, Nador was a strong fighter, after a while he could be seen jumping and moving in the midst of it.

Turning to Magmaneo, trying to talk in between deep breaths, Nador said:

"I need you to hurry that up!"

"I'm almost finished!" He said, sweat running down his forehead.

Irina, who was carrying the Giralda, and Makúla, had slowed down their pace; in the cave there were many rocks and holes, and in spite of everything Makúla noticed that Irina was upset, and wanted to know why.

“Things never go my way...” Irina said, sulking.

“But why be so upset? What good does it do?”

“At least I’m letting off steam”

“And where does that lead you, exactly?”

“It leads me to nothing, but...”

“Exactly, you’re just wasting energy for no reason. Why don’t you redirect that anger toward finding solutions to get us out of here safely?”

“I can’t do that, I’m too upset.”

“My point exactly! There’s no use in being upset!”

“Uh huh”

“Alright, what’s making you so upset?”

“Everything, everything went wrongly.”

“If everything always went your way, what would you learn?”

Irina stayed silent and tried to look at Makúla over her shoulder, turning her head away a little.

“I trusted Azure, I thought his friendship was real. But he betrayed us.” She concluded after a couple of seconds.

“And was he even worthy of your friendship?”

Irina thought for a little while, and, in a reflective tone answered:

“Well, that’s what I thought at some point”

“What made you believe that in the first place?”

“He approached us, he got close and I thought that meant he wanted to be friends”

“Well, not everyone who gets close to you has the same intentions as you do. Sometimes they want something from you”

“So I can’t trust anyone, then?”

“No, Irina, you just have to learn who to trust”

“Of course! It’s that easy! Why couldn’t I think of that before?”

“It is precisely because you can’t anticipate it, that you must live these experiences. Even if it’s not that pleasant”

“It was not not pleasant, it was awful”

“But you learned from it, didn’t you? Every experience, as negative as it might be, leaves you with something positive. You just have to recognize it after it’s happened”

Irina was silent, pondering what had happened with Azure; then, she looked for a place to hide with Makúla and the Giralda. Once they sat on the floor of the cave, the Giralda, who had been silent, said:

“I understand what you’re going through, you know? There was a time when I felt exactly like you... But, even though it’s hard to admit it, I learned from it. Just as Makúla said...”

The silence was short-lived after those words, for all around the place there seemed to rumble something like drums: it was a flat noise made by the contact of something heavy against the surface of the place. Each time they could hear it get closer and closer, and the closer it got, the more the place started to shake.

“What’s that?” Asked Irina, frightened.  
“I think Melania finally found us...” Makúla said.  
“Her again!” The little flower yelled, agitated, like forcing out fists from her petals. “Oh how I wish to have her here right now just so I can...”  
“Don’t you think you’re too small to confront her?” Irina asked her.  
“That’s what I believed back when she did this to me. If it were on me, I’d fight with my entire soul now.”  
“You’d probably lose, though...”  
“I would’ve fought regardless”

At that moment, they heard footsteps that, in a hurry, were heading towards them. The three of them, frightened, tried to take refuge in the corner where the rock was more concave, when they realized that it was Nador and Magmaneo who were hurrying to meet them.

“Hey! Let’s go! Move! They’ll be here soon!” They yelled in unison.  
They were all running; Irina still holding onto the Giralda, tightly.

“What’s going on?” She asked Nador in their escape.  
“They found us. Magmaneo used one of his potions to deviate them, like a smokescreen. But it’s not going to hold up that long”  
“Are those... Are those cries?”  
“Those are the creatures that Melania transformed in whatever monstrous thing they are now” He answered.  
“But that’s such a horrible cry! It sounds like nails scratching on glass!” She tried covering one of her ears with her free hand, while the other held the Giralda.

“These monsters... They’re still forest creatures deep inside. Inhabitants of the many towns that Melania destroyed, or creatures that simply had the disgrace of running into her. They’re all suffering, that’s why their cries are so intense.”  
“But if they’re still forest creatures... Why are they so evil?”  
“Because their hearts have been corrupted by Melania’s hatred”  
“Her heart is that full of hatred? Really?”  
“That is the case, unthankfully. She’s full of frustration, fears, and irrationality... Which she has channeled into this...”  
“It’s a venomous hatred, then”  
“What kind of hatred isn’t?”  
“Yeah, I mean, her hatred, it has made her very powerful, right?”  
“Yes. But she had the help of Fezeco as well”

Nador then took a turn;

“Come this way!” he called to the rest. He took Irina by her arm, and led her to a place where they all had to fit in very closely to each other. Nador told them to be quiet. The crew looked like a game of crates; everyone occupied a specific place. Magmaneo took one of the small bags he was carrying and scattered a gray powder on the floor that immediately transformed into what seemed to be a rocky wall, that camouflaged perfectly with the place, and allowed them to stay hidden and out of sight; they, on the contrary, could observe everything.

A few minutes passed, not even five, when the thick black fog began to invade the place, expanding from top to bottom. Up close, the smell was nauseating, and the constant screeching was unbearable.

Everyone was stuck to the wall, even more so than before; the beating of their hearts could be heard like railroad engines. The dark mist was spreading, steady and stealthy, followed by an awkward tumult of beings that were raiding the place. One of those monstrous beings stopped to sniff just ahead of them. They watched in terror as each of the hairs that made up its long, thick mustache, and sharp teeth protruded in disgust. Nador was already about to draw his knife when the nasty creature finally turned around and followed the rest. They stayed there for a while longer, hidden like one of the many rocks that surrounded them, without a sound, petrified.

Nador took the first step. Without speaking, he signaled them to come out little by little. Already in the wide part of the cave, the trail of bad smell was still present; the shrieks, fortunately, were more and more distant.

“Why does it smell so awful?”

“Irina, these creatures... Their only function is to crawl around and obey orders. They can't think for themselves, they have no purpose; to put it this way, they're stagnant, they've been left to rot away”

“I see... Is that what makes them so clumsy?”

“Not really. They struggle walking because they're too big, and too heavy. The thing is, when Melania transformed them, the only goal she had in mind was to make them terrifying to look at without a regard of whether they could even support such weight with such little balance. So, when they try to go faster, they trip and fall under their own weight.”

Nador, who had moved forward a few more steps, was touching the cave walls, as if hoping to find something.

“What is he doing?” Asked the flower, looking at him intently.

“Looking for any sort of opening, I'd guess” Answered Makúla.

“Nador, can we help you?” Irina wanted to know.

He was so focused and busy that he had not paid attention to what was being said. Suddenly, he stopped in front of a stone wall.

“This way. Let's go” He said.

First, they all looked to the large rock wall in front of them, then they looked at each other strangely; no one understood what he was talking about.

“This way... What?”

“I noticed something while we were hiding. There was a current of air coming from somewhere through those rocks, which meant that if we were to follow that current, we'd find the opening that'd let us out of here. And I found it”

He was standing in front of a segment that appeared to have been manually arranged, as if rocks of almost the same size had been taken to form it.

Nador put his strong but thin hand between the stones and noticed that, indeed, with a little strength and a lot of technique, they gave way.

“Here, Irina” He signaled for her to help him. “I need you to stand here. This wall is too tall for me, and I need you to hold me to get to its higher part. Makúla, I need you to lighten up this area here”

Little Makúla then went to help Nador. With the help of her light, once they moved the first rock, they were able to see a green garden, full of leafy trees laden with fruit; but there was still not much space to make up a clear escape. Nador hastened to remove a few more stones, and as he did, they could better appreciate that wide and fabulous garden, full of flowers of many kinds and ornaments of different colors that formed rainbows that unfolded in different corners. The smell was wonderful and, at the bottom, there was a waterfall that fell vertiginous, full of freshness.

“What is this place?”

“I have no idea...”

Everyone, surprised by the discovery, admired the beautiful landscape.

“Can I take a look?” The giralda asked, curious.

“Of course” Irina took the flower and positioned her so that she could get a good look of the garden.

“Oh my! It looks just like I remember it!”

“You’ve been here before?”

“It’s a secret garden, my sisters and I used to come here to play and spend our evenings.”

At that moment, Magenta’s melody began playing.

“You hear it too?” Asked the Giralda

“Yes.” Irina smiled. “It’s a beautiful melody”

“It’s your sister Magenta, right?”

“I think I hear it too!” Exclaimed Magmaneo, surprised.

“I think this is the first time in the entire trip I can catch up with you guys. I hear it too. It’s really beautiful.” Nador added.

“Yes, it is Magenta. But the thing I don’t understand I how you are able to hear it too”

“Hold up... Your other sister, Carmine, she had the gift of harvesting, right?”

“Yes!” Replied the flower, incredulous.

“So... they’re here then...?”

“That’s nonsense. I was there when they died. When they were touched by undeserving hands... And then Great Wizard took them with him...”

The Giralda deep in memory, looked to the ground, the others maintained their expression of amazement.

“Did you see who touched them before Great Wizard?”

“I couldn’t make up a face... The moment whoever touched my sisters, it got transformed into a strange-looking creature.”

“Azure!”

“Azure? I know him!” The flower continued, “He was one of the most skillful explorers of our kingdom. He was able to go far beyond any other explorer could, but he was greedy, way too greedy. He wanted power to the point he’d just give orders to the rest. But my father forbade him of this, because, even though he was the best of his kind, he needed more virtues to ever be in charge. I think that

bothered him, because after that, he left, swearing he would not come back until he had power above us. My father tried to make him understand that he was being irrational, but I don't think he cared by then... Once he left, we never heard from him again"

"Doesn't that sound similar to another story?" Magmaneo said sarcastically.

"Hm... I think Azure probably went to Melania after hearing about her and what she had done to the princesses. And he probably went looking for the flowers himself, trying to steal them from her, not knowing they'd die if he touched them. Knowing how skilled he was, he probably trailed behind the wizards without them noticing, taking the first opportunity he got to get to the flowers. Then, Great Wizard cursed him, transforming him into a creature as horrible as the selfishness inside him."

"Why didn't the other wizards do anything to stop him, though?" Irina asked.

"Well, magic is considered a science. It takes knowledge beyond our imagination to be able to become a wizard. Witchcraft takes knowledge and certain gifts, but it still doesn't compare to the magic of a wizard." Makúla explained. The Giralda and Irina were stunned after such lesson. They didn't know how complex this system was. "I'd assume Great Wizard" Makúla continued "took the dried-out flowers with him and, to contain their essence elsewhere, he freed them into this secret garden, where they'd be able to live. The same garden you used as a playground when you were little girls."

"Does that mean my sisters are alive? And they're living here?" Asked the Giralda, with child-like excitement.

"Sort of."

The Giralda was seen rejoicing on these news, it looked as if she had gained something that made her stronger and more proud.

"I know you guys are tight on time, but, could you leave me here for a while, next to that fruit tree?"

Irina took her and put her where she had indicated. For a moment, the music was echoing throughout the place, the melody seemed to change and was more cheerful. The fruit trees and the beautiful roses of the place shone with a special glow that made them look more beautiful than usual, they looked bigger and brighter.

"What is it? What's happening?"

"The sisters are together again... And it is shining through this whole place."

No one dared to speak for a while, they were happy admiring the beautiful scenery.

## XIV Xions

Seeing the sisters part ways again left everyone feeling down. After Nador signaled to Irina to hurry, she approached The Giralda. They looked at each other, knowing that the time to leave had come, the flower inhaled deeply and then exhaled little by little, and the melody that was playing earlier changed, it became nostalgic, reaching the bottom of everyone's heart, making them understand how inconsolable she had become. As she left, the Giralda kept her gaze on the same spot, over her garden, until it was out of sight.

Nador, as always, led the way. They moved forward until the dwelf noticed what looked like a messy mound of stones.

"I think this is the backside of the exterior wall of the castle"

"Are we going back to that town again?"

"No, it's too dangerous. Melania is probably looking for us there. We'll have to find another way"

The all followed behind him.

"What's the matter? Why do you feel sad?" Irina asked the Giralda, who had turned her petals down.

"I wanted to see my town one last time"

"Well, it might not look as you remember it..."

"That's true. But you saw it, how does it look now?"

"It's... It's in ruins."

"Oh... Of course... I don't know why I imagined it differently"

"I'm sorry, I should've chosen my words more carefully" Irina apologized, as seeing the flower just kept getting sadder.

"But does that change the facts? Wouldn't that just be lying?" She answered by smiling.

"You're right. But maybe I should've been kinder with the facts, to not make you feel too bad"

"It's alright. We have to continue, and move on. There's a mission to be completed" The Giralda replied, straightening herself out.

"A mission?" Irina echoed.

"You're surprised?"

"Well... It's just that you said you weren't doing this willingly... So..."

"I didn't know you guys back then, but now I do. And I see your objectives are noble and honest"

"You could lose your life"

"You too. And yet, you've accepted this fate"

There was only silence after those words, but something inside Irina had changed, she did not know why, but she felt calm, in complete peace with her fate.

The journey, this time, was a little slower, perhaps because the tiredness accumulated from the previous days was starting to take over them. Nador advanced, while the others stayed behind. The landscape suddenly became rough, as if mist was about to pour down on them.

"Are we safe here, Nador?" Magmaneo asked.

"Nowhere is safe for us now."

“These... These are all ruins, right?”  
“It looks like so”

Nador took his distance as he moved through the ruins and rugged rocks around the place, stopping when he reached what appeared to be a cave. The others stayed outside, and after a moment, he came out.

“Alright, we’ll camp here”  
“This cave?”  
“It’s not a cave. It’s the remains of an old rural house. It looks better on the inside”  
“So... We’re going to go inside?” Asked the fearful dwarf.  
“That’s correct. And we’ll spend the night here”  
“You make it sound like Melania is nearer than we imagine”  
“And she might be. And if there’s no choice, we’ll face her right here”  
“But... We’re a few compared to her army of undesirables... We won’t be able to keep them out or hide forever”  
“You’re right, and that’s why we have to ask for help”  
“Who are you going to ask for help?”  
“The people of Yangana”

At that moment, the Giralda’s expression changed.

“My people have suffered enough already. I don’t think it’s wise to ask them to fight again”  
“Did they fight at all last time?”  
“They did... Maybe not like you’d expect... But...”

“But what? What happened to them?” Irina interrupted.  
“We were entrapped, my sisters and me. She transformed us into flowers, and the rest of them...”  
“The rest of them what?”  
“The rest of them were jailed”  
“And they were also transformed”  
“Transformed?”  
“You didn't know?”  
“No! I have no idea what you're talking about”  
“We thought you knew already!” Makúla interrupted, “After she made you into a flower, Melania, not only entrapped your town, but she also transformed them into small gray-colored creatures. They’re called Xions”  
“Oh... I see she missed no detail” Said the flower “Her Revenge was well-thought-out”  
“What makes you say that?” Irina asked  
“Irina, have you ever wondered why the people of this town are named the way that they are?”

Irina thought for a moment, trying to remember each of their names.

“Well, I remember the princesses: Amber, Magenta and Carmine; then there’s the King Amaranth, and the Queen Sienna, the royal guard Cian, the beautiful butterflies named Mauve and Ochre, the traitor Azure, the little...”

Before she could continue, she was interrupted by Magmaneo, who, exasperated, said to her:



‘‘Alright! Irina, we have no time for this!’’ Irina went quiet after that, she felt reprimanded and couldn’t understand why.

‘‘Irina, what do they all have in common?’’ Asked Makúla.

‘‘They are all from Yangana!’’ Irina answered confidently.

Magmaneo puts his hands over his face, shaking his head from side to side.

‘‘Irina, again, go over the names only,’’ Makúla insisted.

She kept quiet, counting with her finger, as if she was trying to sum up to something; when she reached fifth name, her eyes lightened up—she looked at Makúla and said:

‘‘Colors, they’re named after colors!’’

‘‘The people of Yangana have long luscious hairs colored after their names, and their skin is the same but in a lighter shade; they are truly beautiful. With sunlight and their hair blowing in the wind, watching them walk was a wonderful sight’’

‘‘Was?’’ Asked the Giralda.

‘‘I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to offend you...’’

‘‘No used hiding the truth. I thought I was going to take with me the memory of seeing my people as they were, beautiful beings,’’ she reflected for a moment and added, ‘‘But you were right before, we should go and look for them... I’m sure they’ll help in battle’’

‘‘Who’s willing to go looking for them, though?’’ Makúla added

‘‘Nador, you are the most agile and fast, but also, you’re the only one capable of keeping Irina safe’’

Magmaneo then called up for their attention by making a noise with his throat, like clearing it.

‘‘Remember, I’m also here...’’ Eyebrows raised and chest puffed out.

‘‘I’ll go’’ said Nador, ‘‘We don’t have much time left. Magmaneo will have to brew one of his potions and try to trick Melania’s minions’’

Without further ado, the four of them entered the ruins, as they watched Nador’s silhouette quickly disappear in a thin fog. They walked into what appeared to be a cave, which gradually transformed into the doorway of a relatively well-preserved house, as Nador had described it. It was full of dust and cobwebs. Makúla lighted up the place by scrunching up her nose and puffing out her cheeks, which, in turn, made her look like a radiating balloon.

‘‘I’ve never seen you do anything like that before,’’ Irina told her.

‘‘The opportunity had to arise’’ Makúla answered.

‘‘What should we do now?’’ asked the Giralda.

‘‘Let’s explore the house, take a look inside’’

‘‘I don’t think that’s a good idea. I think we should stay here, near the door, so that when Nador returns it will be easy for him to find us,’’ said Magmaneo, his voice trembling.

‘‘Stop being such a coward and go look for a place where you can prepare your formulas,’’ exclaimed Makúla.

‘‘Right, my potions. That moment of weakness was only to remember that I can still feel fear’’ He smiled. Irina smiled with him.

“Wow, this house is huge!” said Irina, as Makúla fluttered around the place.

“Guys, I found it, I found a place! It's supramastic!” said Magmaneo.

“Supreme what?” asked Irina.

Magmaneo smiled like he had been caught misbehaving, blushed, and then repeated:

“Supramastic!”

Irina looked at Makúla, as if waiting for Makúla to give her some kind of answer. The Sandaluz just shrugged and shook her head, like confirming she was just as clueless.

“What does supramastic mean?”

“It means something bigger and better than fantastic”

Irina and the Giralda smiled. When Makúla flied back to where they were, they saw a large wooden table located in a large space, arranged in a way to indicate it used to be a kitchen. In what was left of the place, there were several doors with huge corridors in between them. There was no furniture in these corridors, only moldy wood. Everything was full of dust, so when someone walked around, the dust would rise up. The squeak of the wooden floor was eerie.

“I'm starting to get scared" whispered The Giralda.

“Just now?” replied Irina.

“We have to check every room, for places to hide" Makúla said.

They opened one of the rooms, it was the first one on the right; in contrast to the outside, it was quite well-preserved, but it was still dirty and dusty. It had everything a room should have: old furniture, but worked in fine wood, the bed perfectly laid out with what seemed to be a wine-colored cover, the curtains around them, still fastened with golden cords; two bedside tables, one with a beautiful lamp that must have helped in reading; a drawer unit with a huge mirror on top; and a seat that had its upholstery in the same color as the bed covers. On the dresser laid a small hand mirror, an antique bottle of perfume, and a dusty brush, with no hairs caught between its bristles.

“This is a beautiful room, it's like trapped in time. I wonder what the owner of this house could've been like” said Irina.

“Every house has its story, however we should probably move along before we get more invested. We should...”

“Look!” Irina interrupted, pointing to a beautiful porcelain ballet dancer figurine. She had a cord still attached to it, so, without giving it much thought, Irina went and twirled it; in a few seconds, a music flooded the place, its chords were clear and somewhat creepy, reminiscent of a horror movie. The tune was interrupted by Makúla, who stopped the dancer.

“Irina, don't make any more noise”

They left that room, and moved to the one on the other side; Irina was carrying La Giralda, who, to her surprise, was very quiet.

“Is there something wrong?” She asked, turning to The Giralda.

“That melody is very familiar to me... But I can't point exactly where from...”

“We'll find out eventually, I'm sure”

The second room was completely empty. They continued to the door in front of it and found themselves in a large bathroom with a huge bathtub and a shower on one side; the tiles were still elegantly and neatly arranged.

“What a luxurious bathroom...”

“Looks like so. Let's go”

“Is something bothering you, Makúla?”

“I don't feel safe here, I want to find a good hiding spot”

The next three rooms had a similar arrangement of a bed, and a small bedside table on the right side. Very simple rooms compared to the first one they explored. The next one was narrow, and scary-looking, it only had a small chair, and a long padded stool sitting across a small white wooden coquette; the light of the room was distributed in such a way that it only illuminated that section, making the rest of the room look lugubrious. Makúla explored and lightened up the rest of the room, dissipating the fear of her team when they saw nothing was hiding in the shadows.

“Irina, I need you to wait here”

“Here? Why?”

“Just trust us, and stay here. Now let's go look for Magmaneo”

Irina followed in silence. She didn't understand why everyone was being so secretive; she felt afraid and a little angry, like exposed to something she didn't know about. And what worried her most was that she didn't know how to protect the Giralda

Outside, Magmaneo was moving from one side to the other; he had managed, through his formulas, to generate some dim lights, enough to lighten up his station. There were some bright-colored potions: one was bright green, another was electric blue, and farther down the table was an iridescent orange one. It was a spectacle to see such a range of colors in those small bottles. Some were still hot from cooking.

Irina forgot a little about her discomfort, and let herself be carried away by Magmaneo's spectacle of light and movement.

“What are you doing?”

“What I was brought here for. This is supramastic, it seems that the powders of the formulas are never-ending” Without slowing his pace, he took a small cloth bag with powder, and mixed some more into the potion.

“Are you finished?” asked Makúla.

“Let the genie work in peace”

“We don't have much time, genius” said Makúla, sarcastically.

“Time for what, exactly?”

“Look under the front door”

“Is that fog?”

“Yes. And not the normal kind. It's Melania, she's already found us. She and her whole army will be here soon. How much longer?”

‘‘Ok, relax, Makúla, don't rush me. I'll be done soon’’

‘‘Irina, listen, there's no time to explain everything; I thought I could've at least said something, but time is running out. All I can say is that you have to trust us’’

Irina just nodded her head.

‘‘I need you to take The Giralda here, to this side’’

‘‘You said her name!’’

‘‘Yes, but they already know we're here’’

‘‘It have enough potion for the Giralda now, but i'm still not done with Irina's'' Magmaneo said, without losing focus.

‘‘Listen, Irina: The Giralda will be hidden in this corner, Magmaneo prepared a potion so that she will stay hidden like back in that cave. But Melania isn't easy to deceive, she will come for you, and for The Giralda. She needs you to be able to take it. Obviously, she's bringing company; but Magmaneo is still making his potions to counter-attack her army. Let's hope Nador arrives here soon. Until then, I need you to distract Melania’’

‘‘What should I do?’’

‘‘Remember the last room? The creepy one?’’

‘‘Yes’’

‘‘Remember I told you, you'd have to wait there?’’

‘‘Yes’’

‘‘Well, you have to go do that, now'' at that moment, the deafening sound of Melania's army echoed in the place. ‘‘There's no time to spare, you have to go’’

‘‘But what about you? Where are you going?’’

‘‘Just trust me’’

Something seemed to be coming up through the ceiling and walls; there was the screech of fingernails sliding across the wood, and loud banging noise coming from outside. Irina ran through the house and hid in her assigned room. She could hear everything from her hiding place; she could hear that the front door had been thrown open and hundreds of footsteps were moving around the place. Irina was frightened, but she trusted that her friends would come back for her. Then she began to hear glass breaking, and remembered the table with Magmaneo's potions—she worried about him

Suddenly, the noises became much more intense, like bodies and objects falling; there were shrieks and drowned screams. Then, out of nowhere, there was only silence.

## XV Dark Moon

With a piercing **shriek**, the door slowly opened behind them, a light breeze accompanied her; Irina felt the fear of what she could find if she turned around was present; how fast her heart was pounding and could be heard by her ears; the anxiety that was imprisoned in her chest, that felt like it was compressing it and preventing her from breathing; her **dilated** pupils and overwhelming silence of the room made her heartbeats louder.

The cold wind moved rapidly across the room, and was soon followed by a gloomy **fog**. Time went slowly. Melania's **high-pitched** and demanding voice was what broke the silence.

"Irina, turn around and look at me. You know I'm here."

Slowly, Irina did as she was told. She stood up from where she was sitting, calculating each of her movements. Her body didn't want to but it seemed like Melania had control over it.

"Look at you, you're nothing but a scared little girl." Melania let out a **scornful cackle** that resounded all over the place. She raised an eyebrow with contempt while glancing at Irina. "So you are the great savior of the Brown Forest. You. A little girl." Melania let out another cackle "Who else is going to defy me? Who else is going to try and confront me? Because to me, it looks like you're on your own."

Irina looked pale; she couldn't find the right words to answer. Looking directly to her eyes, she said:

"I'm not scared of you"

"You should be," Melania replied, still laughing. The dark witch glanced at her with eyes full of hate and in a sudden movement, she threw her arms to her back – like when someone is about to throw a ball or any object – and sent some kind of evil force at the girl. Hidden in one of the edges of the mirror, Makúla reacted immediately and pulled Irina's hair, who struggled to get away but she did enough to only get a lock of her hair cut by the beam of light.

The Sandaluz started to flutter around the place.

"Is that the best you got? Nothing but a small and weak Sandaluz to protect you? I honestly didn't think this would be so easy for me" Melania mocked her.

"You can hurt me all you want, or even kill me, but our mission will succeed." Irina replied with all the courage she could gather.

"And how are you going to do that?"

Melania put back her arms again, and casted a new spell, Irina who was paying attention, moved to one side and fell to the ground injuring part of her shoulder. She got up and touched her arm and face. Realizing that Melania wouldn't stop trying to cast the **spell**, she started to jump around the place – just like they did at the

beginning of their journey to avoid falling from the huge rocks. Irina's actions angered Melania, because although the room wasn't big, she couldn't aim at her due to all the movement. The attack lasted just a few minutes. After a while, Irina noticed Makúla's absence but she could hear the terrifying music from the ballerina in the first room.

Melania started to scream, she raised her hands to cover her ears and press them hard.

"What is that? I command you to turn that off immediately! Where is that awful noise coming from?" Full of rage, she moved all over the room, Irina just stood there without knowing what was going on. "Someone turn that off!" She screamed nonstoping.

The noises that were coming from the outside got intense by the second, they were louder than the ballerina's music, Melania kept on moving and screaming. Outside the room, a battle was taking place, her army was fighting the people of Yangana. Voices and orders from Cyan could be heard from inside the room.

All of the sudden, the music stopped, and before Makúla could turn the rope again, Melania realized what was going on, how much effort Makúla was putting on carrying the ballerina from one place to another, without giving too much thought, she extended her right hand and stretching out her fingers aimed to the little doll smashing it to pieces. Makúla was able to avoid the pieces that went flying around her.

Anger and **outrage** was all Melania felt, through her eyes you could see nothing but hatred.

"That's your big plan, huh?" Scared from a corner, Irina just stared at her, unable to give an answer. "I asked you a question! Answer me!" the dark witch yelled.

Blinded by her anger, the witch aimed towards Irina destroying everything that surrounded the girl, who spinning swiftly – in a way that was similar to Nador's move – made it out right on time just with a few bruises. She stood up, a bit unsteady and while holding her arm she looked at Melania.

"One would imagine your aim would've improved over the years." she said without fear.

Irina's comment made Melania upset, it seemed like all the anger and resentment she had inside her didn't let her think straight, up to the extent she got out of control and screaming, she started to destroy the entire place. When Irina was about to run away, she was cornered in a different place. Irina felt terrified, she couldn't find a way out, as a way to protect herself she crouched down. Melania showed her arrogant side once again, and as she raised an eyebrow and was getting ready to speak; Irina realized how her weakness made her enemy stronger, so setting her fears aside and taking a deep breath, she stood firm.

"Wow, it looks like you're going to stop running, girl. Ready to die standing on your feet?"

Irina Smiled.

"I might die standing but never on Fezeco's side."

Enraged, Melania couldn't help but scream. Her face changed radically making her look more terrifying than before, her screams made the purple veins on her neck swell. Right when Melania raised her arms ready to –once again– cast a spell against Irina, an arrow broke the window and **embedded** itself right on the prominent vein

of the witch's neck; on the arrow's head was a deadly poison made by Magmaneo.

"But... How?" Melania asked, touching her neck, her legs started to feel weak and couldn't put up with her weight.

"That was our plan, we knew you were going to come for me and the flower, we needed time so I was the perfect **bait** to distract you, they handled the rest.

"No!" Melania growled falling to her knees "You won't get away with this..."

With the last of her strength, she casted a spell and aimed it at Irina. Everything happened so fast. Makúla didn't have enough time to pull Irina away from danger, so she decided her only choice was to expand as a light circle and cover the girl, almost completely preventing Melania's lightning bolts from reaching Irina.

On the ground were Melania's lifeless body and the weak –but still alive– small Makúla. Irina kneeled down, feeling like she couldn't breathe, and was barely illuminated by the faint light. Small Makúla was lying in front of Irina, the others were behind them, without daring to say a word.

The Giralda's voice broke the painful silence.

"Irina, you have to let her go."

"I can't."

"Irina, let her go."

"No, I can't. I feel like I'm being torn apart, like I'm splitting apart, it's too much pain."

"She's suffering, she needs you to let her go, she's not okay, she's getting weaker by the minute. Please, let her go, let her rest once and for all."

Irina was crying, she couldn't find the strength to talk, so the only thing she did was slowly approach her and after giving her a small and silent kiss on her forehead, she murmured:

"I love you."

She cried like she never had before, heartbroken and without making any sound, she saw the small creature take her last breaths.

Through tears, she could see how Makúla's small body rose above like a light diamond. Once it was over their heads, it shone one last time before disappearing.

As they were leaving the room, Nador noticed there weren't any bodies from the beings that were on the battle, neither from Melania's army nor from the people of Yangana. He thought about pointing it out but sadness filled the air, he looked at Magmaneo, thinking that maybe he would notice.

The road was short but they couldn't afford to lose time, the night was coming and grief was definitely felt between them, Irina carried the Giralda in her hands.

"Why are you so sad?"

“Because she died, she’s gone, I won’t see her grow up…”

“Isn’t death a part of life and the only thing we’re certain of?”

“I know, but I can’t stop feeling sad.”

“It’s okay, I understand crying is necessary in the grieving process, but why should her memory be a sad one?”

“Because she’s gone.” After the words left her mouth, tears started to spill from her eyes again.

“You have so many good memories with her, you shared both sad and happy moments, you went through so much together, isn’t that right?” Between cries, Irina was saying yes.

“Then she’s not truly gone, she’s always going to be there, living in your memories.”

“But we won’t, we made new memories!” she interrupted, feeling anger.

“Then, the time you spent together was a gift, you had the chance to meet her and share good times. Don’t cry over the uncertain future, nothing guarantees you that even if she was still alive you would’ve spent more time together. Be glad for what you both enjoyed while she was by your side, be happy thanks to those memories, the only certain thing is what you already have. She would’ve liked for you to be happy thanks to her memory rather than sad. She’s inside your

heart, all those memories are inside there too, they will always be there, they won’t ever leave, no one can keep her memory away from you.”

After hearing those words, Irina remained silent with her head low, looking at the floor; Magmaneo who was close by, and had heard everything, sighed before drying his tears. After a while, Nador’s voice interrupted the silent night.

“Only after having experienced complete darkness is that one truly **cherishes** the light.”

Irina raised her head, neither she nor Magmaneo understood Nador’s words, but that didn’t make them any less comforting. The girl searched for something in her backpack, it seemed like it was the last of what had been supplied to her, it looked like a pencil wrapped in a sheet of paper; it was weird. No one was paying a lot of attention even though it seemed as if Irina knew what to do with it.

The Giralda was distracted by the movement of the very serene lights that were –almost– by ground level, she moved her gaze towards what looked like a chunk of wood that was cut in a way that revealed the tree’s internal circles, it was huge and moved slowly in a wavering way from side to side. With the glow of the late afternoon, it seemed like blue and purple colors were projecting.

“What’s that?” startled, the flower asked while pointing at it with one of its petals.

Taking the left side of his body with his right hand, below where his ribs were and struggling to stand up, Nador exclaimed:



“The portal!” Both Irina and Magmaneo, who were looking down the floor and weren't paying attention to anything that was going on, looked toward where the Giralda and Nador were.

“The portal?”

“Yes, it's right here. I thought we had to go all the way to Yangana, but we won't have to. We're right on time.” he whispered.

“What do you mean by that?”

Nador quickly changed the subject and answered. “It's the door that will bring us back.”

Magmaneo got happy briefly.

“Are we going back home?”

“Yes, and we'll finish our mission right on time” they stood up, Irina clung onto the Giralda.

“Does that mean I'm not going back to my kingdom?” the flower asked.

“I'm so sorry, but we're running out of time.” Nador answered.

The Giralda let out a whimper whereas the three – Nador, Magmaneo and Irina– surrounded the tree trunk.

“What happens now?”

“As we did the first time, we have to go through it. Magmaeo goes first, he'll wait for you on the other side, you'll hold onto the Giralda, don't forget to cover it with your body. I'll go last so I can carry the portal with me, that way none of the other creatures can go through it.”

And that's exactly how it happened.

## XVI Homecoming

Waking up, Irina found herself in a huge and white room; the light made it hard for her to open her eyes; her eyelids were very swollen and felt heavy. She was holding onto Giralda tightly, she looked at her and checked if she was okay.

“Irina, are you okay?” asked a familiar voice.

Placing the flower between her legs, Irina raised her hands to her eyes; putting them as a visor on her forehead, all she could see at first, were shadows, then she saw a large amount of people surrounding her. Aunt Clota grabbed her arm and helped her stand up, while two young women dressed in white **cassocks** with a gold rope hanging from their waist approached her, smiling at her, they showed her what looked like a silver platter that reflected the light from the place.

“Irina, take the Giralda and place it there.”

Irina did as she was told, looking at the flower one last time; she felt a tear come out her eye. Neither said a word. She held on tight to her aunt while the two young women walked away while carrying the flower.

“It’s okay, sweetie, it’s okay” Irina clung into the embrace even more, and began to cry inconsolably, Aunt Clota caressed her hair while repeating: “I know, I know, don’t worry, it’s okay.”

With her eyes full of tears, she saw the people that once gathered around her, dispersing, giving her the impression that as the Giralda went away, so did they.

Then, two more beings quickly entered with a kind of **stretcher**; Irina left her aunt’s embrace and started to search for Magmaneo and Nador. She spotted the goblin lying next to the dwelf, who hadn’t woken up yet.

She watched closely, **noticing** that Magmaneo's face showed concern and distress, Irina walked to his side.

“What’s the matter?”

Magmaneo couldn’t answer, he looked at Nador, who was still lying with his hand on the side of his body, without opening his eyes. Those beings delicately examined him while they were placing him on the stretcher.

“The battle was very hard and despite the fact that the people of Yangana fought with all their strength, helping us defeat them, Nador was wounded” Irina's tears, which for a moment had stopped, began to flow with tears, again with intensity.

“Is he going to be okay?”

Irina sat next to Magmaneo, their looks said it all, they didn't need to talk to each other. Aunt Clota went towards them and did the best thing she could’ve done at that moment: sit down and share their silence. Not many minutes went by when a door was opened out of a sudden, and, counteracting the moment of seclusion and silence, a

jubilant voice told them: “Everyone, come, come!” while waving at them.

The room was huge and they couldn't recognize who she was or what she was doing. Aunt Clota took Irina by her shoulders and helped her get up, Magmaneo did the same. His eyes met, but no one said anything, they just walked where Aunt Clota was leading them.

They went to the side of the room to a smaller door that led them to another one –almost as large as the first. The walls were lined with shelves that had bottles of all shapes and contents of various colors, two large windows on the sides allowing light entering the room, the light hit most of these bottles, projecting on the floor like a rainbow. There were three large tables where there was no longer a place to put anything else: they were full of open books, empty bottles and around them, various people, with very happy faces, hugging and congratulating each other. Some had a tired face, but they seemed happy.

"This is the place where we've been working all this time," Aunt Clota explained. “And look...” she pointed towards a corner, there, Irina could recognize a familiar shape.

“Do you know what that is?”

“Is it the little table that is a part of Great Guardian?”

“Yes, yes, as you call it, the “little table”. Thanks to it I could see how things were going.”

"We needed your help more than once." interrupted an annoyed Magmaneo.

“And more than once we sent help.” replied Aunt Clota, looking at him fixedly.

Magmaneo and Irina looked at each other puzzled; they had no idea what Aunt Clota was talking about. She looked at them, smiling as usual.

“Although help sometimes isn't obvious” she said, “we were always there, we were attentive, providing, supporting and, above all, guiding.”

Aunt Clota's response left them more confused than before. Right away, some footage was played, where Magmaneo was preparing his formulas and every time one was about to run out, they magically refilled, or when the ballet dancer appeared with that gloomy melody. Then they realized that the chords had been previously worked on, preparing them in a way only Melania could be affected by it: the melody was made by all the screams of fear from all the beings she had transformed. It seemed like the pictures weren't stopping until, suddenly, a very beautiful young girl approached them, her excitement could be told from miles away. She stood in front of Irina before hugging her.

“Thank you! Thank you so much!” She kept on repeating her.

Irina didn't have time to react, she just couldn't move. She was paralyzed as she watched the woman walk away from her and, from time to time, when she turned around, would look at her and smile.

“Who is she?”  
“An apprentice...”

Her aunt hadn't finish speaking when the young girl had approached them again, only this time she went towards Magmaneo, she took his hands, harshly shaking them as an effusive greeting, to which Magmaneo didn't know how to answer, Aunt Clota took them both from behind their backs and pushed them forward.

"Come on, come on, you can't miss this," she said, as she dragged them along with her.

She led them straight to the table, from afar, she could watch as the surface movements flashed small but powerful bursts of color. Irina and Magmaneo were almost pushed by Aunt Clota, because of the heat of the moment.

"Look guys, look what you've accomplished!" She kept on repeating.

Irina and Magmaneo saw how the Brown Forest, which was surrounded by a deep gray layer of mist, lightened up. The trees that had taken on a greenish hue in a clear state of decomposition, almost without leaves, and the beings that rested next to them, now began to change color and seemed to breathe very slowly again.

“But I don't understand...”  
"Wait, wait, and you'll see," said Aunt Clota.

Irina watched as the mist disappeared, the trees made movements from the bottom up, giving the impression of shaking and, with a force that seemed to come from within, they stood up vigorously towards the sun. Its leaves shone eagerly and its trunk took on the stocky appearance it had before. The beings that were stationed around him sat down, giving the impression of rising from a long and heavy sleep; some even made sounds of joy.

“Did you see that, Irina? See what you did?”

Irina smiled and looked at her aunt Clota, while she moved her head to the other side, where Magmaneo was, who couldn't stop wiping away tears.

"We did it, Irina. It was worth all the effort and sacrifice," said Magmaneo. The two hugged and cried together.

Irina was just enjoying the moment, she thought about how her last tears were of sadness, were now of joy. Aunt Clota got closer to where she was and looked at her.

"That's life," he said, "it can give you moments of extreme sadness and, just as quickly, of infinite joy." Irina just looked at her and smiled. Then she looked at the table again.

The place joined the thousands of creatures that, as they woke up, joined those who were about to wake up, hoping to share a great party together. Irina felt a little more relieved and consoled by the whole situation. She thought of Nador, she hadn't heard from him,

the Giralda or the people of Yangana. All these ideas came suddenly to her head, it was too much. Her thoughts were interrupted by a familiar voice calling them.

“Irina! Magmaneo!”

The two turned to find the small, strong figure of Nador, who was supporting himself with a crutch. Irina and Magmaneo ran towards where he was and hugged him.

"Don't worry, it still hurts a bit," said Nador, overwhelmed by all the affection.

“How are you?” Irina asked, while she tenderly placed her hands on Nador's face.

“Already feeling so much better. Great Wizard soothed my pain and treated my wounds, I'm better now.”

“Great Wizard?”

Irina thought that between all the fuss, she hadn't seen him. She kept an image that she had as soon as she fell from the portal: in the background, standing, there was a tall figure, covered in white and with silver hair, he smiled at her; but she wasn't sure, it was possible that he was part of the confusion, because she didn't see him again.

“Aunt Clota, where is the Great Wizard?” she asked.

"Busy," answered Aunt Clota, smiling. “His work is not done yet. You will have time to see him, now come with me, I have something to explain.”

Aunt Clota and Irina walked towards another door that was separated from the first one by a huge corridor. Aunt Clota turned to Nador and Magmaneo and, smiling, told them:

“You can come too.”

They both moved behind Aunt Clota while she continued talking; they moved at a slower pace given Nador's conditions.

“When we are trusted with a task and we do it with all our heart, giving our best, and it becomes into something extraordinary. Each one of you risked your life more than once and, despite the conditions, you were never selfish, you remained united and were there to each other, you worked as a unit, a single body. When the Giralda met you, her way of thinking changed a lot thanks to what you told her, the example you gave her. She was taught to believe, to trust, to fight for others, to the point that her dedication was total and without question. We never thought that Melania could be eliminated, we didn't think it was possible; but when she disappeared, her spells also disappeared” Irina's face changed, her expression as well, she wanted to know more. Aunt Clota continued. “Yes, her spells disappeared as well as all evil she generated. The Great Wizard used that to reverse everything he could.”

At that moment, Aunt Clota opened a door that led to a room where three silhouettes could be seen; one of them headed towards the newcomers. She was a beautiful young woman with sparkling golden hair and brown eyes, her facial features were fine and

perfectly distributed; she was wearing a wine-colored dress that seemed to have her own movement. She stopped in front of them.

“You don’t recognize me?” she asked.

Complete bewilderment, that’s how they were feeling. Magmaneo made a face as if he had never seen such a beauty, Nador, a little more modest, tried to control his expression of astonishment at such beauty.

“I’m sorry... your voice, it's so familiar; but we would definitely remember you if we had met you before.”

She smiled and her face lit up even more; she reached out her hand and placed something in Irina's hands. The girl, surprised, opened her right hand and found a tiny flower but exactly the same as the Giralda. She looked at her carefully for a while, then she looked at the beautiful young woman and her eyes filled with tears. She couldn't speak. Magmaneo and Nador, who had not missed out about anything that was happening, looked at her, astonished.

“It 's you? The Giralda?” Magmaneo asked.

“Yes, it’s me. I’m Amber, your Giralda!” She answered, smiling.

The four hugged each other and cried with happiness.

As Irina wiped away her tears, she watched the other two figures slowly approach. One was less tall and a little thicker, her skin a subdued purple as if it had been washed with water, her hair, on the other hand, had all the intensity and vivacity that magenta could give; her large eyes were of a similar intensity and color as her

sister's; you could see the familiarity in the features of the three. Lastly, the smallest, her skin color seemed tanned in the sun, her beautiful long hair was a very dark crimson color and she was wearing a beautiful dress.

Irina felt proud of these three women, so different from what she had known before, so beautiful and above all so happy. Amber noticed that Irina was distracted, she took advantage of the moment, she turned to her sisters and smiled at them.

“I present to you my sisters, they are Magenta and Carmine,” she said, still smiling. They both stood next to Amber.

“We thank you for everything you’ve done for us,” Magenta said. “We will always carry it in our hearts.”

“How is it possible?” Irina asked, turning to where Aunt Clota was.

“When the incident happened and they were touched by Azure, the Great Wizard was able to separate their body from their spirit just in time. He took their withered body; preserved it until now, and released their spirits so they weren't trapped in a dying body. That's why you could hear her sing, do you remember?”

“Yes, but not everyone could hear her at first.”

“Not everyone could hear her, but she lived through her music. The Great Wizard was able to preserve her essence after all this time, using the same nectar that the Giralda produced and that he used to free the Brown Forest from Melania's spell, he cured the princesses; the power of the spell that imprisoned them was greatly reduced

when Melania disappeared, since her strength was the hatred that she constantly generated. By fading, it was easier for an experienced wizard like Great Wizard to reverse the process, which is why the Giralda didn't die." Irina felt really happy just like the whole group; not only because the Giralda had not died in the process, but because she had managed to reunite with her sisters.

"But you should know that this doesn't end here," said Aunt Clota. Everyone looked surprised, even the princesses, who didn't know what she was referring to. "Come all with me."

They left the room they were in and moved down the long corridor, returning to one of the doors they had already seen. It was the second room they had been in, the one full of potions, books, huge shelves and, on one side, the "little table" of the Great Guardian, where the images that kept the whole story were projected.

Upon entering, most of the people had already left; there were a few apprentices left around one of the tables that were not even disturbed by the presence of the group, they looked very focused on what they were doing.

"Look, the Omen Totem! We had heard about it, but we thought it was just a legend," Amber said excitedly.

Irina was looking around the room looking for that particular object the princess was mentioning; after a few seconds, she noticed that they were referring to the "little table", as she used to call it. She looked at Aunt Clota, waiting for an answer. She just smiled.

"The Om... To... what? You never told me that it was called that."

"There was no special reason to do it, besides you named it "the little table", and I like it"

"Is this your table?" Interrupted Magmaneo "The Totem of Omens is a permanently open portal that allows one to observe the past and, in some cases, even the future; it sees everything and is even used to transport itself to various places, as we did. It is one of the most powerful weapons to ever exist, it is part of Quinterria."

"Quinterria?"

"Oh, sweet child, how little you know!"

"There wasn't time to explain many things," Aunt Clota excused.

"Auntie, what is a Quinterria?" Irina asked, ignoring Magmaneo's surprise.

"There are five elements that come from the earth..."

"May whoever have them, reign forever," Magmaneo completed.

Aunt Clota made a disapproving face, made a gesture with her pursed lip.

"It is true, they are very powerful, who has them has to be careful."

"And where are they?" Irina asked.

"Only a few have been found. This one, the Totem of Omens, I have it. The elixir of life we just found..."

"The elixir of life?"

"Yes, it was the nectar that the Giralda had inside. When Melania put a spell on Amber, she never imagined that her hate-motivated power when mixed with the powers of white magic and being united to a flower from a fertile place, plus the protection of the Great Wizard, would result in one of the most powerful formulas, capable of preserving life. That's why we were able to bring back the majesty of the Brown Forest and the creatures to their natural form."

"And that is why Melania wanted the Giralda."

"Exactly, it would've made her much more powerful."

"Wait, did you say the creatures? They're back in their natural form?"

"Yes, yes. And that reminds me..." she approached the Totem of Omens and placed her hands on it. "Look, does this look familiar?"

"Yes," Carmine exclaimed, a little embarrassed. "Yangana, as it used to be, beautiful, fertile and prosperous; with their magnificent and perfect people."

"Take another look!"

The image was surreal, it was beautiful to see all those sublime beings of different colors, shining in the sunlight, their green gardens, full of big trees all loaded with fruit, happy children of different shades, running around with their sweet and melodious laughter, flooding the place. Only a few small and already scarce mounds of stones called attention. The princesses looked at him and then looked at each other, unable to understand.

"I don't remember those piles of stones," said Magenta.

"Those ruins are what remains of the devastation that occurred because of Melania and that still needs to be fixed," answered Aunt Clota, smiling.

The three of them looked at each other, they let their smiles escape from their lips, they held hands while tears came down their eyes.

"That means..."

"That means I haven't finished." This time, although her smile was the same as always, it seemed that her eyes were brighter than usual. The princesses were puzzled, like everyone else; Aunt Clota looked at them, one by one "Turn around!" she added.

They all did, almost synchronously. Turning around, they were met by two majestic figures, tall and imposing. There was King Amaranth, whose color was very similar to Magenta's but slightly darker, he was big and stocky, his hair shone in the sun just like his copious beard; and Queen Sienna, tall, slim in figure, with large dark sienna eyes, beautiful hair that seemed to blow in the wind, with a tiara on her head; her tanned skin made her as beautiful or perhaps a little more beautiful than Amber.

The emotion they felt was indescribable, so much happiness that it could not be contained. The three princesses ran to their parents and hugged each other. After so much time suffering, finally they were all together. The scene was moving, even Nador raised his head trying to prevent tears from falling. Time, relentless as always, does its thing, brought the afternoon and, therefore, an imminent farewell.

"I have no way of thanking them for everything they have done for me, for my family and for my people. They have given me back my life," said King Amaranth, hugging his daughters. "The Xions were turned back into the happy residents they always were, they recovered their beautiful colors. After our first meeting, the reconstruction work began. It was not easy, but we were together and free. Nador looked for us to go to battle and we did fight with all our might. In the midst of the fighting we were suddenly moved, and



when we knew it, we were in the center of Yangana, still with our weapons in hand, and we had all recovered our shapes and colors. That made us even more excited to repair the kingdom” King Amaranth paused; his tears assailed his eyes. He continued, his voice cracking. But I never imagined it would be possible to see my beautiful daughters and hug them again.

"Pleasem, excuse my husband," Queen Siena intervened, "we've been through a lot of pain and now so much joy comes suddenly that we don't know how to handle all these emotions." Her eyes of hers filled with tears. "You all have a very special place in our hearts and you will always be welcome in Yanagna, you will always find its doors open for all of you” she looked at her husband also hugging her daughters. She wiped the tears from her eyes. "All that is left to say is thank you, thank you from the bottom of my heart.”

Saying this, she approached each of them and hugged them; Nador, Magmaneo, Aunt Clota and finally Irina, who couldn't hold back her tears either.

"Well, well, it's time to leave," said Aunt Clota, also hiding her tears.

Amber rushed to hug each one of them; upon reaching Irina, she told her: "I will keep you here, in my heart, like all of you, brave warriors who freed Yangana." Then she went to her parents.

"Put your hands on the Totem of Omens and let yourself fall," said Aunt Clota.

They all did as indicated, while Amber smiled and looked at Irina. Just like that, they disappeared.

Everyone looked through the Totem and observed the joy of the people of Yangana, the kingdom seemed to shine; the sunset lights mixed with the beautiful colors of the town's inhabitants.

“Brave warriors of Yangana!” Magmaneo repeated, surprised by his own actions “Supramastic!” He paused and thought a bit about it. “Me? A brave warrior? But I’ve always been terrified”.

Irina and Nador laughed out loud. Aunt Clota approached Magmaneo and, placing her hand on his back, said: “Exactly. You were afraid, however, you did not let that stop you and you faced each battle with determination and courage, as a brave warrior does.”

Magmaneo raised his head and puffed his chest, he had never felt like this, full of that strength that comes from the heart and not just from the muscles. The smile did not last long on Irina's face.

“What's the matter, Irina?” Magmaneo asked.

“I can't stop thinking that Makúla would've loved to be here” answered Irina, lowering her head.

Behind them, a strong and hoarse voice was heard; a tall, somewhat stooped man with long silver hair walked toward them.

“First of all, I would like to congratulate you; I must tell all of you that exceeded our expectations beyond what was predictable.”

“Great Wizard!” the three said, turning around. He smiled and put his hand on each of their heads.

“Are you feeling better?” He asked Nador.

The Great Wizard led them into a huge room with large windows, whose white curtains fluttered in the wind. Aunt Clota stayed a little behind.

“Go ahead, I'm going to find someone that can help me move the Totem.”

The three followed the Great Wizard.

“You brave warriors, will always be remembered by all of us. Now you are heroes. I would've liked to guide you from the beginning, but my presence would've put you in danger. Now I've been able to help the rest, help that without you would've been impossible” he made a short pause, he carefully looked at each one; they didn't need many words, he just smiled.

The three of them were confused for a moment, it was one of those small and eternal silences in which one doesn't think much or in which one thinks a lot without specifying anything. The Great Wizard, without further ado, reached his right hand towards his beautiful long silver hair. There, in the middle of his locks, a golden flash appeared.

Irina thought that she wasn't seeing clearly, so she moved her head from side to side and then took a step forward. There, some very

small golden hands were raised towards the sky, like when someone wakes up from a deep slumber.

“Makúla! Is it really you?” Irina asked excitedly.

They didn't waste any time, she immediately threw herself at Irina. The two began to laugh and cry, Irina very carefully took her in her hands, gave her kisses and smiled. Nador and Magmaneo joined the celebration and also hugged her. Everyone laughed, they were all so happy.

"Thank you, really," Irina repeated, non-stop, to the Great Wizard. “But what happened?” she asked “I saw how she expanded and then disappeared.”

The Great Wizard smiled, there she was, the curious Irina; always asking for questions and explanations.

“Little one, Makúla is living energy in movement. When Melania casted that spell on you and she intervened to protect you, she was very weak – so much so that we thought we couldn't do anything. As soon as she got up, we took her to her father, the sun. He knew what to do, he recharged and revitalized her and then, thanks to a drop of the flower's nectar, she came back. Now through her, runs the strength of her father and the powerful nectar of life from The Giralda.”

“Amber would've been even happier if she had known.”

"She knew, she just waited for me to tell you," Her aunt smiled.

Then, with the help of some apprentices, Aunt Clota quickly entered, carrying the Totem of Omens.

## XVII Final Chapter?

They stayed a little longer, smiling and sharing stories. They were happy. They were alive, together, and without any pending **debts**. The Great wizard who was also in the **gathering**, interrupted the conversation.

“Well, we should call it a day. It’s time to get going.”

“Go where?”

“Irina, we must go home with our families and our people. It’s time to rest,” he mentioned the last part while pointing at aunt Clota.

A moment of silence followed the wizard’s words. The four of them looked at each other; they hadn’t thought about it. Yes, they did want to go back to their homes with their families, so they could tell them all about the adventure they’ve just experienced, but at the same time, they didn’t want to leave. It was difficult for everyone after everything they’d been through together. Their nervous smiles didn’t take long to appear, trying to cover up the situation. Someone had to take the first step, and as expected, Nador took it.

Aunt Clota and Great Wizard decided to watch from aside as silent witnesses what was happening. Nador looked at his friends and embraced his crutch.

“I completed this journey with a goblin as my brother and two sisters: a human and a sandaluz.”

They all hugged with tears streaming down their faces. Nador looked at them one last time before saying goodbye to Great Wizard and aunt Clota. He peeked through the Omen Totem, there he saw his friends and family, who were excitedly waiting for him. He smiled and let himself go. They all headed towards the Totem and saw how his friend was welcomed by his people; he was welcomed like a true hero. Nador was happy and surrounded by the hugs of his people; took some time to look up where his friends were.

“He’s so brave, truly a hero.” aunt Clota stated.

They all agreed. Aunt Clota, in a delicate manner, directed her gaze to Magmaneo.

“I know! I know! It’s my turn.” the goblin said; he looked at Irina and Makúla, “I’m certain we’ll see each other again.” he affirmed, then looked at Great Wizard and aunt Clota.

“Without a doubt.” aunt Clota said.

Magmaneo took Irina’s hands in his; and with his index finger, Makúla’s little hands.

“I will always carry you here, in my heart,” he told them.

He tried not to cry, but it was impossible. He headed towards the Totem, and as he jumped, he raised his hand as a sign of **farewell**, disappearing. As before, Irina and Makúla approached the Totem,

followed by aunt Clota and the Great Wizard, and saw the welcome the goblins gave Magmaneo. It seemed like he was a celebrity; they were cheering his name, calling out “*Hip, hip, hooray!*” in his name... Magmaneo was happy. Mid-way through the celebration, looking up, he said something.

Irina and Makúla smiled when they saw him.

“What is it? What did he say?” aunt Clota asked.

“Supramastic!”

“Supra— What?”

The two best friends laughed knowingly.

Soon after, the Great Wizard stepped forward, approaching Irina; she looked at him, hoping he wouldn’t tell her what she was so afraid to hear.

“Don’t worry, child. Makúla will stay by your side.”

Irina felt **elated**; Makúla clung closer to her cheek, closing her eyes.

“And, what will happen to me?” Irina asked, looking at her aunt.

“Your parents are picking you up; I told them everything.” the old witch replied.

“It looks like there isn’t a big celebration waiting for you.” Great Wizard pointed out.

“I don’t need anything. This journey has been wonderful; a dream I’ve never dreamed has come true.”

Great Wizard; placed his arm on her back and guided her across the vast hall.

“Finally, some peace...” Irina expressed.

The wizard shook his head; from left to right, doubting the words of the little girl. “We’ll have to see how much it lasts,” he said.

“Why do you say that?”

“Fezeco will want to seek revenge for this.”

“I forgot about him. How are you so certain?”

“Because I know my brother and his way with things.”

“Brother? He’s your brother?” Irina inquired, not knowing how she should react. Great Wizard; rushed to answer before she could ask any more questions.

“There will be time to tell you that story. But for now, you will ask me all those questions you carry in that little brain and are troubling you.”

Irina looked at him smiling; a little bit shocked by his request.

“Great Wizard, you’re all-seeing, which means you saw everything I went through to get to the Giralda.”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“And you knew our mission wouldn’t hurt anyone.”

“Yes, I was aware of that.”

“Then, why didn’t you do anything?”

“What do you mean?”

“You could’ve helped us. Lent us a hand in many tough situations, why didn’t you?”

“Because you need to learn by yourself how strong your will is.”

“But, I could’ve died on many occasions...”

“If that was your fate, there was too little I could’ve done to stop it. It would’ve been part of the sacrifice necessary to pay.”

Irina looked at him with a **baffled** expression. After **reflecting** on it for a while, getting a little bit annoyed, she said:

“I was willing to pay the price, but do I get something out of this?”

“Something?”

“Like a reward, maybe...”

Great Wizard grinned; he knew where the subject was going, smiling, he replied:

“Tell me, Irina. What do you want?”  
“I don't want to be a witch anymore.”  
“No, huh?” the magician said, trying to act surprised – although he knows it all.  
“No” Irina lowered her head.  
“And, may I know why?”  
“Because witches are evil, just like Melania. Just by hearing the word witch, certain creatures get scared, and I don't want to scare anyone.”  
“And, are you sure about it?”  
“Yes,” Irina answered, hesitant about her answer.  
“And tell me, are all witches the same?”  
“No, obviously,” she replied, with more conviction this time.  
“Then, what's the matter?”  
“I don't want them to be scared of me when they see me.”  
“And has anyone done that in this journey?”  
“No, I know too little for my **identity** to be exposed.”  
“So, are you sure this is what you truly want?”  
“Yes?” she answered this time, doubting herself.  
“And tell me, dear Irina, if you had known your powers, would they –at some point– be able to help someone?”  
“Yes, but...”  
“But?”  
“If I had helped them with my powers, I could've scared them away and they would've not come near me.”  
“I see... That means you would put yourself first, before the **well-being** of others.”  
“Yes,” Irina said, ashamed.

“That means you've become everything you have criticized and despised in a witch.”  
“I hadn't thought about it in that way,” Irina said, after contemplating it for a moment.  
“Do you realize how it is so easy to think that you are on one side and, without realizing it, you cross over to the other?” Irina looked at him, puzzled. “That is why it is important to check on ourselves everyday and examine if what we do to others is what we would have liked them to do to us.”  
“But, Great Wizard, I can't please everyone either; if I do it, what would I become?” replied Irina, taking strength. The Great Wizard raised his left eyebrow; for a moment, he looked at her, motionless.  
“That's why you have your intellect. Being kind does not indicate being stupid. You have to know how to establish limits so that your generosity does not become an act of stupidity.” Irina felt a mixture of admiration and embarrassment; she knew that the Great Wizard was right, but she felt as if he had scolded her. Great Wizard instantly noticed and, employing a more subtle tone, continued.  
“On any path you encounter, you will find those who will value all the things you can do for them, things that you may not even notice and that won't include using your powers. Things; are as simple as your time, you being there, or; even your silence. But there will be situations in which, no matter how hard you try, no one will acknowledge what you have done. That's why it is essential if you do something for someone to not expect anything in return. Being able to help is priceless” Great Wizard paused briefly and then continued, “Reward or no reward, you win. What you have done will make you grow as a person.”

After hearing the wise words of the old wizard, Irina felt something growing inside her; it made her want to run and practice everything she had learned. She stared at him with shining eyes. She went towards him to hug him. Little Makúla remained seated on her right shoulder, silent. The Great Wizard couldn't contain his face of satisfaction and pride and strongly hugged her back.

"It will be an **arduous** journey to travel, but I know that you will always do your best," he told her.

At that instant, the doors of the large living room opened, and Irina's parents entered with aunt Clota; the girl looked at them before running toward them. Aunt Clota approached the Great Wizard, who was left behind.

"She's exceptional..." she told him in a whisper.

The Great Wizard nodded.

"She will be just like her mother."

"She will be better than her mother. Better than us even." Irina was happy, she felt **delighted** and complete, in that moment everything was perfect. A while later, she returned her gaze to the Great Wizard.

"What happens now?" she asked him.

"Now, we have to move on, get to know this fascinating world, keep an open mind and share the best of ourselves with those around you."

Irina just looked at him. Her eyes shone even more; she took her parents by their hands; with aunt Clota on the other side, she moved through the room. She stopped and made a reaction –like

remembering something– she released her parents' hands and went back to where the Great Wizard was, she reached out her hand and handed him a piece of paper folded in four, smiling. The Great Wizard smiled back.

"What is this, Irina?"

"The question that I know you have in your head and; you want to ask me." The two looked at each other with a particular air of complicity.

"I'm sorry for intruding, but what would that question be?" Said Aunt Clota.

"What did I learn on my journey to Yangana?" Irina said, smiling.

This time it was the wizard, the one, who approached to embrace her; words were not required.

"It's getting late; you better go," he said after a while.

Irina walked towards her parents; they held hands and walked until the doors of the great hall were closed. She felt great, she knew something had forever changed, and she knew; it was just the beginning of many more adventures.

**THE END**

## **14 FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES**



# **“JOURNEY TO YANGANA”**

**Activities designed by:**

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**Supervised by:**

- Liz Espinoza.

## **CONTENT**

- 1. ABOUT THESE ACTIVITIES & INSTRUCTIONS**
- 2. SET 1 – CHAPTERS I TO III**
- 3. SET 2 – CHAPTERS IV TO VI**
- 4. SET 3 – CHAPTERS VII TO IX**
- 5. SET 4 – CHAPTERS X TO XII**
- 6. SET 5 – CHAPTERS XIII TO XV**
- 7. SET 6 – CHAPTERS XVI TO XVII**

## ABOUT THESE ACTIVITIES

These follow-up activities were designed as a tool to assist EFL students' comprehension skills' development. For answering each set, the student **must** previously read the translated Ecuadorian Fantasy Novel, "Journey to Yangana", as recommended per set. The book was written (in its original language – Spanish) by Ana María Heinert Musello, translated by Marcela Garzón and María E. Zelaya.

## INSTRUCTIONS

Before working on each set, the teacher must assign the students to read the chapters needed for each follow-up activity. There are 6 sets. Each activity mentions (at the beginning of each set) from which chapter until which chapter should the student read to complete the activities.

## FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY #1 "Journey to Yangana" From chapters: I, II and III.

**With your own words, answer the questions about the three first chapters you read.**

- a. Do you think Irina's parents are telling her the truth? Yes? No? If you think they aren't, explain.

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- b. Do you believe adults are mysterious and never speak clearly? If you do, please, explain why.

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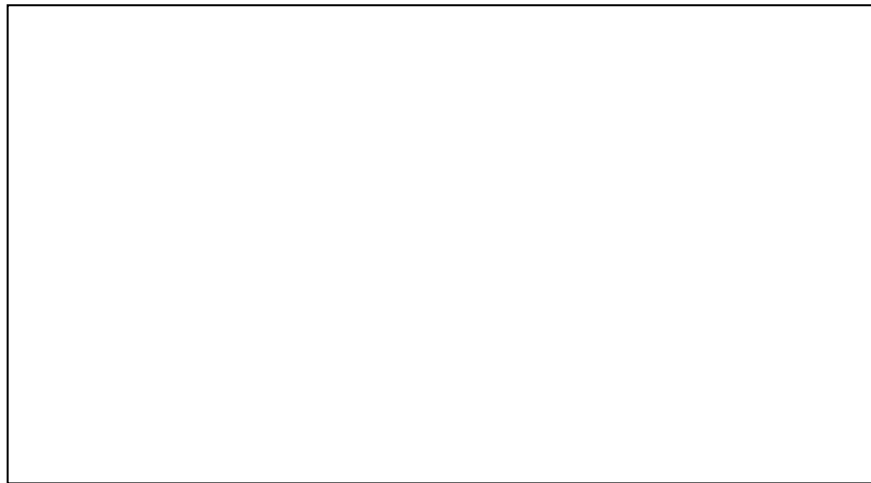
c. What are your impressions about Aunt Clota's personality?

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d. *“There she was; the silhouette of a slightly chubby woman wearing old-fashioned clothes, (as if they had been somehow frozen in time) and her lopsided, flattened hat, stepping out to greet them.”* After reading the description of Aunt Clota, draw how you picture Aunt Clota in your head.



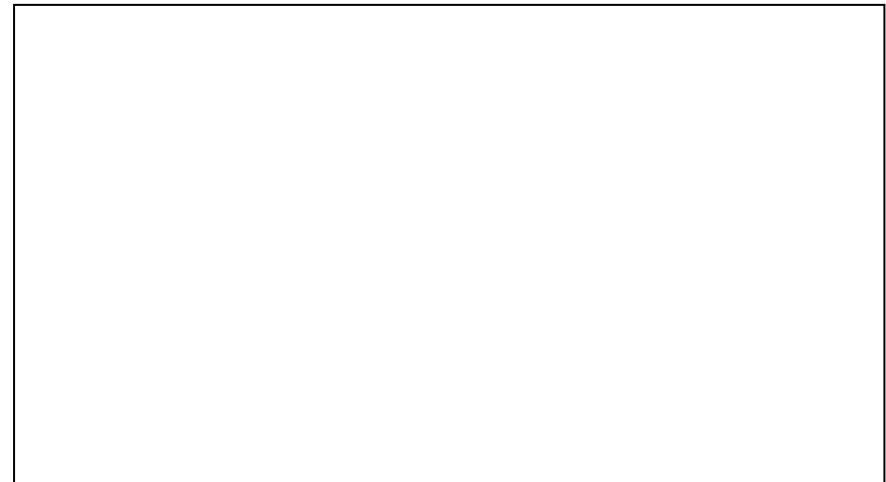
e. What was your favorite part of the story about the **Dwelves**?

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f. *“Then, as she watched, small, humanoid-looking creatures with pointed ears appeared before her.”* (...) *‘And what is a Dwelf?’* *“Dwelves, as you can see, are small creatures, as small as dwarves, but with similar characteristics to elves”* – Journey to Yangana, Chapter III. After reading the description of these magical creatures, draw them as you pictured them in your head.



g. What was the main conflict within the Nelfos' story? Explain with your own words.

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Clota, Irina's parents or any character that has been in the story so far.)

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h. What did you feel while reading the love story of Nelfi and Tendor? Did you enjoy the ending?

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i. So far, which characters do you like the most? Write their names, and why you like them. (They can be: Irina, Aunt

**FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY #2**  
**“Journey to Yangana”**  
**From chapters: IV, V and VI**

**With your own words, answer the questions:**

**a.** After reading the description of the Sandaluces, draw how you picture them in your head.



**b.** Have you heard a story similar to that of the Sandaluces’ origins before? If not, what did you think about this particular story?

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**c.** How did you feel after reading the story of the Great Guardian? Do you think it’s justified to profit off of nature in our current society?

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**d.** Up to these chapters, did you suspect Aunt Clota, Irina, and her mother being witches? If you did or didn’t, what made it obvious in retrospect?

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e. After all the things you've heard or read about witches, what are your thoughts on them? Do you believe witches and witchcraft to be good or bad?

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f. What are your thoughts on Melania's actions towards mortals and the good witches? Do you think what she did was good or bad? Explain.

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g. Can you mention all the guest (or magical creatures) that attended Irina's parents wedding?

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h. Let's pretend that as Irina, you just discovered you have magic powers, and are a witch or wizard. Would you like to be one? What do you think your friends will think about it?

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**FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY #3**  
**“Journey to Yangana”**  
**From chapters: VII, VIII and IX**

**With your own words, answer the questions:**

**a.** So far, the story has introduced us to many magical creatures and characters—in **chapter VII** there is one character named “**Zortas**” which is described to be similar to a beaver, but we don’t know the species it belongs to; invent a name for it!

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**b.** Draw a picture of *Yangana* as described in the book:



**c.** Now that you know Irina is a witch, do you think she’s ready to confront this new adventure? Why or why not?

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**d.** Regarding the previous question, have you ever had to confront a frightening situation (e.g: taking a test you were not ready for; taking a bus for the first time; having been caught doing something you shouldn’t have; etc.) while growing up?

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**e.** In your personal opinion, how “scary” is to grow up?

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f. Had you already imagined the “table” at Aunt Clota’s house was a portal? What other fantastical surprises about the story would you like to *predict*?

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h. According to the progression of the story, do you think Irina and her friends will be able to find the flower Aunt Clota told them about before time runs out? What do you think would happen if they can’t find it on time?

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g. In chapter IX Irina is taking us, the readers, alongside her adventure, but she also has other three escorts with her. In a group setting, which of the four characters do you take the role of? Why?

**Irina:** observant, curious

**Makúla:** the mediator; cautious

**Magmaneo:** kind, anxious

**Nador:** skillful, good improviser

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**FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY #4**  
**“Journey to Yangana”**  
**From chapters: X, XI and XII**

**With your own words, answer the questions:**

a. If you were on a journey like Irina’s, would you trust strangers you encounter in your path?

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b. Do you think it's fair to hide important information from Irina? Or do you agree with her crew in how they let her know as their journey continues?

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c. Irina doesn't like the idea of being a witch. Would you enjoy the responsibility of being one or would you react the same as Irina?

d. Following the previous question: Do you think it's harmful to keep information from Irina?

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e. What do you think about Azure’s decision to stay behind due to fear? Would you do something similar or would you face your fears?

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f. Why do you think the people stayed loyal to their king? Do you believe loyalty to be an important value to have?

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g. *“Small, plump figures, covered in hair, with broad feet, and short stature, came out; they were a grayish color; (similar to the color that comes into view when you remove the paint from a wall or old clothes losing their color.)”* – Journey to Yangana, Chapter XI. After reading the description, draw Xions as you picture them in your head.



h. (...) *“two enormous butterflies, – or something very similar to them: their wings seemed carefully painted with the most beautiful and intense tones, each accordingly with their respective names. Ocher, the male, had wings so large that when they were extended towards the sun, its rays passed through it, illuminating the place with magical golden tones. Mauve was truly wonderful, with stunning purple and lilac colors, as if she’d been painted with greatest skill.”* – Chapter XI. After reading the description, draw Mauve and Ocher as you picture them in your head.



**FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY #5**  
**“Journey to Yangana”**  
**From chapters: XIII, XIV and XV**

**With your own words, answer the questions:**

a. If you were in the same situation as the flower, would you have tried to be happy? Say why.

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b. Do you understand why the flower is in such a bitter mood?

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c. Do you see Nadors action as heroic? Would you've stayed behind if it was necessary for the mission?

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d. State your opinion about the quote *“If things turned out as we wanted to, what would we learn?”*

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e. Did you suspect Azure? How did you feel after reading about what he did?

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f. Do you see any similarities between Azure’s backstory to that of Melania’s?

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g. Do you believe it is necessary for them to stop and rest, even with the imminent threat of Melania being closer now?

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h. After reading the backstory of the people of Yangana, do you believe that their lack of freedom is related in any way to their lack of color? Explain why.

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i. Now that you know how the people of Yangana used to look like, create your own based on your favorite color.



j. Do you think its unwise of Melania to underestimate Irina just because she's young? Have you seen adults in real life act the same?

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k. After the battle, and having lost one of the members of the crew Nador told Irina: “*Only after having experienced complete darkness is that one truly cherishes the light*”. How do you relate this sentiment to having lost something you loved?

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**FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY #6**  
**“Journey to Yangana”**  
**From chapters: XVI and XVII**

**With your own words, answer the questions:**

a. Did you suspect Aunt Clota’s help in Irina and the crew’s journey? Did you suspect that they were being watched?

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b. Do you believe life works as aunt Clota describes it? That there are moments full of sadness but short after endless joy can follow. Have you had a similar experience to what she said?

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c. Did you see coming that all of Melania's spells will wear off after being defeated by Irina and her brave crew? Yes? No? Explain what you believed was going to happen after defeating her.

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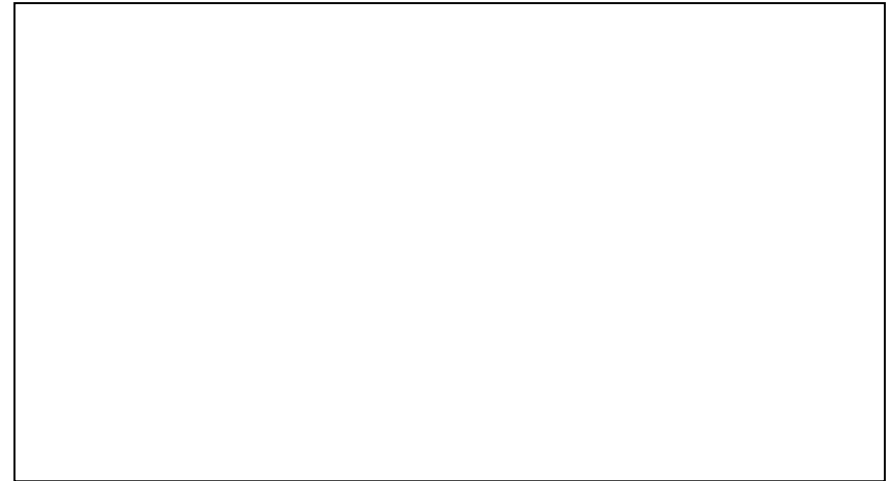
d. Were you aware that people can be brave even when they are afraid just like Mangmaneo; why do you think this is considered as bravery?

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e. Did you picture the Great Wizard as he was described in the book? If you did, draw him as he was described, if not then draw him as you did.



f. Is it hard for you to say goodbye as it was for Nador, Magmaneo, Makula and Irina?

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g. Between the battle and the journey back home, the story details in how uncertain and changing nature of life is; and we see these effects on Irina, our main character. Do you think that, as a teenager, life changes affect you more deeply than those around you? Why?

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h. Irina and Makula shared a beautiful friendship, which seemed to affect Irina further than she'd imagine. What is your opinion on friendship; do you believe it's powerful enough to help you learn and grow throughout life, even if it eventually ends?

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i. Would you have imagined that Fezeco was the Great Wizard's brother? Do you believe it's common for rivalry to spur between siblings?

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j. In chapter XVII Irina and her friends are being told about how they were being observed their every step; to which Irina inquires why'd they have to go through so much emotional and physical torment as they could've had the help they needed from the beginning. In our life, our parents, older relatives, and figures of authority, often only help us in ways that seem to be counterproductive – Do you think it's important for teenagers to make mistakes, get hurt, and learn the hard way in order to grow? Why?

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## 15 GLOSSARY



# JOURNEY TO YANGANA

## GLOSSARY

e.g.

**WORD:** definition.

*“Quote from the book, how the word is mentioned”*

**if a word is followed by this symbol: ☆ , it means the definition is based upon the magical beings that appear in the story.**

**agile:** able to move your body quickly and easily

(...) *“they watched as Nador’s **agile** body quickly ran until(...)”* – Chapter X.

**altitude:** height above sea level

*“I think the **altitude** is affecting her, she’s now hallucinating”* Magmaneo said as a joke.” – Chapter XII.

**among:** in the middle of or surrounded by other things

(...) *“When he finally made his way back to Santra’s cave; he walked **among** elves and dwarves. (...)”* – Chapter III.

**arduous:** difficult, needing a lot of effort and energy

*“It will be an **arduous** journey to travel, but I know that you will always do your best,”* he told her.” – Chapter XVII.

**ashamed:** feeling guilty or embarrassed about something you have done or about a quality in your character

*“I’m aware there are things that go beyond what you’ve lived in your ordinary world, and you should never be **ashamed** of that. (...)”* – Chapter VI.

**astonished:** very surprised

*“The elf queen, was left **astonished**. (...)”* – Chapter III

**attendance:** the fact of being at an event or going to a place; the number of people who are present at a place or an event

*“Your parents wedding was stunning; everyone was in **attendance**. (...)”* – Chapter VI.

**awe:** a feeling of great respect sometimes mixed with fear or surprise; to cause someone to feel awe.

(...) *“Irina’s **awe** kept on increasing: the objects inside the house continued to move around, (...)”* – Chapter II.

**awkwardness:** embarrassment, or a situation that is difficult and not relaxed

. *“Magmaneo looked around as if trying to find an escape to such **awkwardness**.”* – Chapter IX

**baffled:** to cause someone to be completely unable to understand or explain something

*“Irina looked at him with a **baffled** expression.”* – Chapter XVII.

**bait:** something that is said or offered to people in order to make them react in a particular way

*“(...) we needed time so I was the perfect **bait** to distract you(...)” – Chapter XV.*

**bifurcation:** the fact that something is divided into two parts or the act of dividing something into two parts.

*(...) “when they were close, they took a **bifurcation** and moved away from the route that seemed to lead into the interior of the mountain.” – Chapter I.*

**birdsong:** the musical calls of a bird or birds

*“Next morning, **birdsong** and sunshine flooded every single corner of the room; (...)” – Chapter IV.*

**blinking:** to close and open the eyes quickly, once or several times.

*“She couldn’t properly open her eyes, but after **blinking** for a while she saw what looked like her mother’s silhouette.” – Chapter I.*

**bloodcurdling:** causing a feeling of extreme fear

*“Her **bloodcurdling** laughter resounded throughout the place; then, she disappeared.” – Chapter X.*

**brave:** showing no fear of dangerous or difficult things

*““This **brave** dwarf is going to give his life in exchange for your daughter’s, it’s better if you leave” Santra answered.” – Chapter III.*

**bulging:** sticking out in a rounded shape

*(...) “Under big **bulging** eyes the nose consisted of two very wide holes. (...)” – Chapter X.*

**burst out laughing:** to suddenly start laughing

*“Tendor **burst out laughing**.” – Chapter III.*

**cackle:** to laugh in a loud, high voice

*“Melania let out a scornful **cackle** that resounded all over the place.” – Chapter XV.*

**carriage:** a vehicle with four wheels that is usually pulled by horses and was used mainly in the past

*She couldn’t really see what they were doing - it was sort of like a **carriage**, except it was bigger.(...)” – Chapter III.*

**cassocks:** a long, loose, usually black piece of clothing worn especially by priests

*(...) “while two young women dressed in white **cassocks** with a gold rope hanging from their waist approached her,(...)” – Chapter XVI*

**chanting:** to repeat or sing a word or phrase continuously

(...)“*all of the forest creatures who were there started cheering them and **chanting** their names. Irina was in awe.*” – Chapter VIII

**cherishes:** to keep hopes, memories, or ideas in your mind because they are important to you and bring you pleasure

“*Only after having experienced complete darkness is that one truly **cherishes** the light.*” – Chapter XV.

**choice:** an act or the possibility of choosing

“*“Dad, this is my **choice**” Tendor told him.*” – Chapter III.

**conviction:** a feeling of being certain about something; a strong opinion or belief

“*Well, this strength comes from the **conviction** and the desire you put into everything you do. (...)*” – Chapter VI.

**creaking:** when a door, floorboard, etc. creaks, it makes a long low sound when it moves or is moved

(...)“*and the **creaking** of her steps in the old wooden floor accompanied her around.*(...)” – Chapter III.

**crescent:** (something with) a curved shape that has two narrow pointed ends, like the moon when it is less than half of a circle

“*Irina, look! The moon is in its **crescent** shape.*” – Chapter VI.

**debts:** something, especially money, that is owed to someone else, or the state of owing something

“(...) *They were alive, together, and without any pending **debts**.* (...)” – Chapter XVII.

**delighted:** very pleased

(...) “*Irina was happy, she felt **delighted** and complete, in that moment everything was perfect. (...)*” – Chapter XVII.

**demeanor:** a way of looking and behaving

“*Aunt Clota’s **demeanor** changed, the seriousness washed off of her with a loud chuckle.*” – Chapter IV.

**devastated:** completely destroyed; very shocked and upset

(...)” “*You can enter, you must by your daughter’s side” she added because of Makita’s **devastated** face.*(...)” – Chapter III.

**dilated:** wider or further open than usual

(...) “*her **dilated** pupils and overwhelming silence of the room made her heartbeats louder. (...)*” – Chapter XV.

**dim:** not giving or having much light

(...)“Only when they noticed Nelfi standing next to Tendor’s silhouette, both of them smiling with the **dim** light shining on them, all problems went away.” – Chapter III.

**disapprovingly:** in a way that shows that you feel something or someone is bad or wrong

(...) “while her mom looked at her **disapprovingly**.” – Chapter II.

**disbelief:** the refusal to believe that something is true

“He couldn’t believe it, he kept looking at the doctor with **disbelief** and surprise. (...)” – Chapter VI.

**distinguish:** to recognize or understand the difference between two things, or to provide a quality that makes someone or something different or special.

“After driving in a section surrounded by trees, they managed to **distinguish** a large house that looked like it was abandoned.” – Chapter I.

**distraught:** extremely worried, nervous, or upset

(...)““How awful! I could’ve killed them!” Irina said, **distraught**.”– Chapter IV.

**cauldron:** a large, round container for cooking in, usually supported over a fire, and used especially in the past

“Besides, I don’t own a magic wand or practice spells with a **cauldron**” – Chapter V.

**distressed:** upset or worried

““Please, ma’am, help me” a **distressed** Nando replied.(...)” – Chapter III.

**dizzy:** feeling as if everything is turning around, and that you are not able to balance and may fall over

““Ugh, it’s finally over...” he said feeling **dizzy**, his steps were hesitant.” – Chapter XII.

**droplets:** a very small drop of a liquid

(...)”she observed in her window frame what appeared to be **droplets** of gold, (...)” – Chapter IV.

**dwarf** ☆: in stories for children, a creature like a little man with magical powers.

“I’m a **dwarf**, my name is Tendor” – Chapter III.

**Dwarves mentioned in the story:**

- Tendor
- Tradeo (Tendor’s dad)
- Tendor’s family (their names aren’t mentioned in the story, they’re referred as “two brothers” and “his mom”)
- Santra

**dwelves (singular, dwelf or dwelve) ☆ (singular, dwelf or dwelve)**

☆ : beings that come from the the union between Elves and Dwarves (*their name is originated by mixing the name of each creature **dwarf** + **elf** = **dwelf**.*) ; this species started thanks to the elf princess Nelfi and the dwarf Tendor.

*“Dwelves, as you can see, are small creatures, as small as dwarves, but with similar characteristics to elves” – Chapter III.*

**A dwelf mentioned in the story:**

- Nador (Nelfi and Tendor’s grandson)

**eagerly:** in a way that shows that you want to do or have something very much, especially something interesting or enjoyable.

*She turned her face, looking at her **eagerly** before telling her (...)” – Chapter I.*

**eerie:** strange in a frightening and mysterious way

*(...)“Aunt Clota's house began to look **eerie**(...)” – Chapter III.*

**effusive:** expressing welcome, approval, or pleasure in a way that shows very strong feeling

*(...) “to then turn to the parents and **effusively** ask (...)” – Chapter II.*

**elated:** extremely happy and excited, often because something has happened or been achieved

*“Irina felt **elated**; Makúla clung closer to her cheek, closing her eyes.”– Chapter XVII.*

**elf ☆:** an imaginary being, often like a small person with pointed ears, in popular stories.

*““A long time ago, in a forest far away, there was a kingdom, the kingdom of the **Elves**. These beautiful creatures, agile, intelligent, and greatly skillful, lead a peaceful life. (...)” – Chapter III.*

**Elves mentioned in the story:**

- Nelfi
- Makita
- Nando

**embedded:** fixed into the surface of something

*“(...)an arrow broke the window and **embedded** itself right on the prominent vein of the witch’s neck;(...)” – Chapter XV.*

**empathic:** having the ability to imagine how someone else feels

*“In a very **empathic** tone, she replied to Irina’s questions.” –*

**enraptured:** filled with great pleasure or extremely pleased by something

*“Irina, noticing this change, had become **enraptured** watching the beautiful fairy.” – Chapter IV.*

**everlasting:** lasting forever or for a long time

*(...) “at least all the most beautiful flowers know their lives won’t be **everlasting**; (...)” – Chapter XII.*

**examined:** to look at or consider a person or thing carefully and in detail in order to discover something about them

*(...) “After the doctor **examined** her and ran some tests, he came to the conclusion that your mom was pregnant.” – Chapter VI.*

**exhausted:** extremely tired

*“When Irina arrived home, she was so **exhausted** that she only greeted aunt Clota and then hurried upstairs to take a shower, (...)” – Chapter V.*

**fainted:** to suddenly become unconscious for a short time, usually falling down

*(...) “She ran to the bathroom, but before getting there she **fainted** onto the floor. (...)” – Chapter VI.*

**fairies**★: an imaginary creature with magic powers, usually represented as a very small person with wings.

*“Irina was minutely dissecting the grandiosity of the tree, when suddenly her observations were interrupted by what appeared to be colorful, strange dragonflies. She got closer, and saw that these were actually beautiful creatures moving around the tree.*

*“They’re **fairies**” Irina’s eyes widened in surprise; she was excited. – Chapter IV.*

**Fairies mentioned in the story:**

- Darina.

**fairy tale:** a traditional story written for children that usually involves imaginary creatures and magic

*“Who said so?”*

*“Fairy tales.”*

*“Mhm. And what do you think?” – Chapter V.*

**farewell:** an occasion when someone says goodbye

*“(…) he raised his hand as a sign of **farewell**, (…)” – Chapter XVII.*

**flabbergasted:** feeling shocked, usually because of something you were not expecting

*(…) “She standed there for a while, watching, **flabbergasted** by all the movement. (…)” – Chapter V.*

**flustered:** upset and confused

*“Dad, who was already a little **flustered**, blushed and smiled” – Chapter II.*

**fog:** a mass of cloud consisting of small drops of water near the surface of the earth

*“The cold wind moved rapidly across the room, and was soon followed by a gloomy **fog**. (…)” – Chapter XV.*

**forgiveness:** the act of forgiving or the willingness to forgive

*“The concerned parents entered the house. Makita and Nando hugged Nelfi, asking for her **forgiveness** with tears in their eyes. (…)” – Chapter III.*

**further:** to a greater distance or degree, or at a more advanced level

*“There was this uneasy feeling of the hearing of noises coming from every room, terrifying her **further**(…)” – Chapter III.*

**fuzzy:** a fuzzy surface feels like short fur.

*(…) “she got up, sat next to her bed to put on her **fuzzy** rabbit slippers and stood up.” – Chapter I.*

**gathering:** a party or a meeting when many people come together as a group

*“(…)The Great wizard who was also in the **gathering**, interrupted the conversation. (…)” – Chapter XVII.*



**gifts:** a special ability to do something

*“All of us have **gifts** – or abilities, that are inside of us waiting for the right moment to come out. (...)” – Chapter VI.*

**gulped:** to make a swallowing movement because of fear, surprise, or excitement; to swallow hard because of a strong feeling.

*(...) “she made a pause, and **gulped** before continuing, (...)” – Chapter I.*

**handle:** to deal with, have responsibility for, or be in charge of

*“She knows everything she’s prepared to **handle**.” – Chapter X.*

**harm:** to hurt someone or damage something

*“So it’s true. You’re a witch, but a good one. You don’t cause **harm** to anyone.” – Chapter V.*

**heart-wrenching:** causing great sadness or sympathy

*“There was a **heart-wrenching** silence.” – Chapter III.*

**hectic:** full of activity, or very busy and fast

*(...)”” But we lead such **hectic** lives, we don’t take the time to see them. Be quiet, and watch.” (...)” – Chapter III.*

**heroine:** a woman who is admired for having done something very brave or having achieved something great

*“Yes, you were a **heroine!**” Irina’s words expressed pride and admiration. (...)” – Chapter V.*

**hideous:** extremely ugly or bad

*“(...) she saw Tendor next to her, she saw the **hideous** worm that linked them. (...)” – Chapter III.*

**high-pitched:** A voice that is high-pitched is higher than usual

*“Melania’s high-pitched and demanding voice was what broke the silence. (...)” – Chapter XV.*

**high-pitched:** having a high and sometimes also loud or unpleasant sound

*(...) “a **high-pitched** voice coming from the inside of the house” – Chapter II.*

**hill:** an area of land that is higher than the surrounding land

*(...)” They made their destination up to a very high **hill**, from where they could see the ocean.” – Chapter VII.*

**hinder:** to limit the ability of someone to do something, or to limit the development of something

*“Hold up, Irina; not only is this journey dangerous, and you may encounter hostile creatures that will **hinder** your path, but you will also be exposed to Melania and Fezeco” – Chapter VII.*

**hopelessness:** the feeling or state of being without hope

*“The atmosphere was charged with **hopelessness** and fear.” – Chapter VII.*

**hurly-burly:** noisy activity

*(...) “blushed and smiled at the **hurly-burly** of aunt Clota.” – Chapter II.*

**identity:** the fact of being, or feeling that you are, a particular type of person, organization, etc.; the qualities that make a person, organization, etc. different from others

*“No, I know too little for my **identity** to be exposed.” – Chapter XVII.*

**immersed:** to become completely involved in something

*“She was **immersed** in her thoughts when her mother turned to her and said(...)” – Chapter II*

**inherited:** an inherited situation, problem, department, etc. is one that you have become responsible for dealing with or managing

(...) *“Nelfi was beautiful, agile like all elves, but she had also **inherited** her father's bravery;(...)” – Chapter III.*

**inhospitable:** an inhospitable area is not suitable for humans to live in.

*‘We’re in Yangana! An **inhospitable** place!’ – Chapter IX*

**innate:** an innate quality or ability is one that you were born with, not one you have learned

*“‘It is **innate**, my child. It’s in your essence... That gut feeling; you just have to let it flow, (...)” – Chapter VII.*

**invincible:** impossible to defeat or prevent from doing what is intended

*“Tradeo, your son is very strong, love has made him **invincible**. (...)” – Chapter III.*

**journey:** the act of travelling from one place to another, especially in a vehicle.

*“The **journey** was quiet.” – Chapter I.*

**lopsided:** with one side bigger, higher, etc. than the other; not equally balanced

(...) *“And there she was; the silhouette of a slightly chubby woman wearing old-fashioned clothes, (as if they had been somehow frozen in time) and her **lopsided**, flattened hat, stepping out to greet them.” – Chapter II.*

**lullaby:** a quiet, gentle song sung to children to help them go to sleep

*“Makúla started singing right away, it was a slow melody, similar to a **lullaby**(...)” – Chapter VI.*

**mantra:** a word or sound that is believed to have a special spiritual power; a word or sound that is repeated as a prayer

*“(...)it seemed like the sound of some **mantra** came out of her. (...)”*  
– Chapter III.

**mess up:** mess (something) up –to spoil or damage something, or to do something wrong or badly

*“I knew it! I knew she would **mess up!**”* – Chapter X.

**meticulously:** in a way that shows great care and attention to detail

*“Irina went back to extracting the flower from the ground, and **meticulously**, she lifted the flower, carefully placing her in the urn.”*  
– Chapter XII.

**minions:** a person (or creature) who is not important and who has to do what another person of higher rank orders them to do

*“Her **minions** emerged from the mist that surrounded her, (...)”*

**miracle:** an unusual and mysterious event that is thought to have been caused by a god because it does not follow the usual laws of nature

*“Sorry, son, but there’s nothing that can stop the **miracle** of life from happening.”* – Chapter VI.

**mischievously:** in a way that is slightly bad but is not intended to cause serious harm or damage.

*““Can anyone be ‘safe’ at aunt Clota’s house?” he asked **mischievously**, smiling.”* – Chapter I.

**moles:** small, dark spots or lumps (= raised area) on a person's skin

*“Can you see the **moles** you have on your chest... The ones that are arranged as a pyramid?”* – Chapter VI.

**noble:** moral in an honest, brave, and kind way

*(...) “Those hearts that belong to people **noble** and pure, don’t deserve to be deprived of all the joy you deserve. (...)”* – Chapter VI.

**nonetheless:** despite what has just been said or done

(...)“**Nonetheless**, she didn’t pause her story even as surprise took over Irina.” (...)” – Chapter III.

**noticing:** to see or become conscious of something or someone

“She watched closely, **noticing** that Magmaneo's face showed concern and distress, Irina walked to his side”. – Chapter XVI

**nowadays:** at the present time, in comparison to the past

“Great Wizard, you shouldn’t worry. **Nowadays** there are methods that prevent those things from happening, everything will be okay.(...)” – Chapter VI.

**outrage:** a feeling of anger and shock

“Anger and **outrage** were all Melania felt, through her eyes you could see nothing but hatred.” – Chapter XV.

**outstanding:** clearly very much better than what is usual

““Your mom is an **outstanding** witch, one of the best.” Aunt Clota smile while Irina interrupted, once again. (...)” – Chapter V.

**overpowered:** to defeat someone by having greater strength or power

(...)” “But... How did you let yourselves get **overpowered**?” Nador uncertainty asked”. – Chapter XI

**patrol:** to go around an area or a building to see if there is any trouble or danger

“Early in the morning, just before dawn, Nador was in charge of **patrol** (...)” – Chapter X.

**perpendicularly:**at an angle of 90° to a horizontal line or surface

(...)“powering up with the sun’s rays that at that time in the morning fell **perpendicularly**. (...)” – Chapter VI.

**perplexed:** confused, because something is difficult to understand or solve

(...)“Your dad sat there, **perplexed**. I think he was more afraid of becoming a father than of Melania.” – Chapter VI.

“Irina was **perplexed** by her answer. What exactly did she mean by “witch”?(...)” – Chapter II

**pirouettes:** a fast turn of the body on the toes or the front part of the foot, performed especially by a ballet dancer; to do a pirouette

(...)“her aunt waltzed gracefully through the kitchen while different gadgets and objects were moving and doing **pirouettes** around her, (...)” – Chapter V.

**pistil:** the female reproductive part of a flower, consisting of one carpel or a group of carpels joined together

(...)“She placed so me purple flowers that had a violet **pistil** and some pink dots, (...)” – Chapter III.

**pleas:** an urgent and emotional request

“Santra, who wasn’t giving in his **pleas**, answered(...)” – Chapter III.

**poisoned:** a substance that can make people or animals sick or kill them if they eat or drink it

“We went to Great Guardian, and he explained that they’ve been **poisoned...**” – Chapter VII.

**prisoner:** a person who is kept in prison as a punishment

““I mean that at the end of the day, I’m still a **prisoner.**”” – Chapter XII.

**proud:** feeling pleasure and satisfaction because you or people connected with you have done or gotten something good

“Go ahead, my child. I hope you know how **proud** of you we all are.”” – Chapter VIII

**recharging:** to get new energy or to give new energy to something

*“When he got back, he found Makûla on top of a rock, sitting towards the sun, **recharging** her energies as she always used to. (...)” – Chapter X.*

**reflecting:** to think carefully, especially about possibilities and opinions

*“After **reflecting** on it for a while, getting a little bit annoyed, she said:(...)” – Chapter XVII.*

**regret:** a feeling of sadness about something sad or wrong or about a mistake that you have made, and a wish that it could have been different and better

*“That dwarf would be me, I’m willing to do it. I love her, I won’t **regret** giving my life for her.” – Chapter III.*

**reluctant:** not wanting to do something and therefore slow to do it

*““Oh... Then yes, I think so... I mean.. Yes.” Irina replied with a **reluctant** tone; still amazed by the talking flower.” – Chapter XII.*

**restless:** unwilling or unable to stay still or to be quiet and calm, because you are worried or bored

*“Irina went to bed **restless**, she wanted to learn all about the things that had happened before she got there, (...)” – Chapter VI.*

**rubble:** the piles of broken stone and bricks, etc. that are left when a building falls down or is destroyed

*“Nador climbed the **rubble** and the walls of what looked like the entrance of an old kingdom.” – Chapter XI*

**sacrifice:** the act of giving up something that is valuable to you in order to help someone else

*“It’s the **sacrifice** of one life for thousands.” – Chapter XII.*

**sandaluz ☆:** beings of light, they’re so little, that can communicate by hearing thoughts. they were born directly from the sun, they feed

of solar energy and live on that way, sandaluces have stored more sunlight than needed for one day

*“Such was the happiness the sun felt after meeting again with its beloved moon” She continued narrating ‘It cried tears of joy, and from those tears, a **Sandaluz** was born, falling down to earth and propagating throughout the world. And that’s why they live among us, all thanks to the sun.’” – Chapter IV.*

**Sandaluz mentioned in the story:**

- Makúla.
- Makúla’s friends (little golden droplets, nickname by Irina.)

**scorcher:** an extremely hot and sunny day

*(...)“There have been several years of loneliness, exposed to the coldest weather and **scorcher** days.” – Chapter XII.*

**scornful:** showing or feeling scorn for someone or something

*“Melania let out a **scornful** cackle that resounded all over the place.” – Chapter XV.*

**scruffy:** untidy and looking a little dirty

*(...) “She had already given up when that slightly shy, bearded boy with **scruffy** look plucked up his courage, sat across from her and started a conversation. (...)” – Chapter V.*

**seed:** a small, round or oval object produced by a plant and from which, when it is planted, a new plant can grow

*“He found some sweet fruits that were similar to grapes but with a large black **seed** inside, (...)” – Chapter X.*

**selfish:** caring only about what you want or need without any thought for the needs or wishes of other people

*“I can’t believe how **selfish** you’re being!” – Chapter XII*

**short-lived:** lasting only for a brief time

*“Breakfast was **short-lived**; (...)” – Chapter X.*

**shovel:** a tool consisting of a wide, square metal or plastic blade, usually with slightly raised sides, attached to a handle, for moving loose material such as sand, coal, or snow



*“Okay, good, take the **shovel**. Make a circle around me and start digging until I tell you to stop.” – Chapter XII.*

**shriek:** a short, loud, high cry, especially one produced suddenly as an expression of a powerful emotion

*“With a piercing **shriek**, the door slowly opened behind them, a light breeze accompanied her (...).” – Chapter XV.*

**sidelines:** to stop someone taking an active and important part in something

**silhouette:** a dark shape seen against a light surface.

*(...) “she saw what looked like her mother’s **silhouette**.” – Chapter I.*

**sleepyhead:** a person, especially a child, who is tired and looks as if they want to sleep

*“Wake up, **sleepyhead**.” – Chapter X.*

**slides:** a structure for children to play on which has a slope for them to slide down and usually a set of steps leading up to the slope

*“They went down large **slides** that –in a zigzag– took them quickly to the bottom.” – Chapter XI*

**slippery:** If something is slippery, it is wet or smooth so that it slides easily or causes something to slide

*“Seems like we’ll have to cross this stretch, now, you have to be careful, for the rocks are **slippery**, and you could fall and hurt yourselves.” – Chapter IX*

**slumber:** to sleep

*“Just as someone that has woken from a long **slumber**, Nelfi opened her eyes;(...)” – Chapter III.*

**sob:** an act or sound of sobbing ; to cry in a noisy way, taking in sudden, short breaths

*(...) “Right as they closed the door behind them, Irina let out a **sob**.” – Chapter II.*

**spectacle:** an unusual or unexpected event or situation that attracts attention, interest, or disapproval

*“Irina, Makúla and Nador, couldn’t stop admiring the **spectacle** before them (...)” – Chapter XII.*

**spell:** spoken words that are thought to have magical power, or (the condition of being under) the influence or control of such words

*“Realizing that Melania wouldn’t stop trying to cast the **spell**, (...) – Chapter XV.*

**spots:** a mark, usually round, that is different esp. in color from the area around it

*“Yes, but those are not moles, they look more like **spots**.” – Chapter VI.*

**squeal:** to make a long, very high sound or cry

*““My sweet girl! How long has it been?” she **squealed**.” – Chapter II.*

**stagger:** to walk or move with difficulty as if you are going to fall

*“Magmaneo would **stagger** in his walk, he covered his mouth with his hand while he put his free hand on his stomach.” – Chapter XII.*

**stood out:** to be much better than other similar things or people; to be very noticeable

*“Your mother, quickly **stood out** from the group, which many of her peers didn’t like, especially one: Melania. (...)” – Chapter V.*

**straw:** the dried, yellow stems of crops such as wheat, used as food for animals or as a layer on the ground for animals to lie on, and for making traditional objects

*(...) “The path started to change, the once light brown **straw** turned into a dark green, making it seemed like burnt grass. (...)” – Chapter X.*

**stunned:** very shocked or surprised

*“After hearing her aunt’s question, Irina was so **stunned** she stopped eating.(...)” – Chapter VI.*

**sunbathing:** the activity of sitting or lying in the sun to make your skin darker

*“You’re still **sunbathing**?”*

*“Yes, the sun hits us better around these hours” – Chapter IV.*

**sunset:** the time in the evening when you last see the sun in the sky

*“Makūla had leaned against the window frame to catch the last rays of sunshine before the **sunset**.” – Chapter VIII*

**Sure thing:** something that is certain to happen

*“**Sure thing!** I always do.” – Chapter V.*

**surroundings:** the place where someone or something is and the things that are in it; the place where you live and the conditions in which you live

*“One day, Nelfi found herself investigating the **surroundings** of the forest of her kingdom,(...)” – Chapter III.*

**swift:** happening or moving quickly or within a short time, especially in a smooth and easy way

*“(…) She immediately remembered everything and in a **swift** movement, took the worm and throw it away before Santra could say anything. (…)” – Chapter III.*

**swooping:** to move very quickly and easily through the air, especially down from a high position in order to attack

*(…) “saw some crows **swooping** down on them. (…)” – Chapter X.*

**tenderly:** in a gentle, loving, or kind way

*“Aunt Clota **tenderly** looked at her for a moment.” – Chapter V.*

**tenderness:** the quality of being gentle, loving, or kind

*“The Great Wizard’s eyes looked at him with **tenderness** and compassion, (...)” – Chapter VI.*

**thinking twice:** to consider something more carefully

*“Not **thinking twice**, she grabbed Nador, Magmaneo and Makúla, protecting them(...)” – Chapter X.*

**threats:** the possibility that something unwanted will happen, or a person or thing that is likely to cause something unwanted to happen

*“Everyone was alert, looking out for any possible **threats**.” – Chapter IX*

**thrilling:** extremely exciting

*“Hearing her sing was **thrilling**; she would always sing accompanied by a violin, (...)” – Chapter X.*

**throbbing:** having a strong, regular beat

*(...) “pointing a sharp arrow right where its neck artery was **throbbing**. (...)” – Chapter X.*

**thud:** the sound that is made when something heavy falls or hits something else

*“The noise stopped out of a sudden, followed by the sound of a heavy object falling on the floor, a **thud...**” – Chapter II.*

**torch:** a stick that burns at one end and is held at the other end and is used as a light

*“He took a small wood log, used it as a **torch** to light the place and walked around. (...)” – Chapter X.*

**trance:** a temporary mental condition in which someone is not completely conscious of and/or not in control of himself or herself

*(...)“The healer was in some kind of **trance**, she was no longer just saying some prayers, (...)” – Chapter III.*

**trembling:** shaking slightly in a way that you cannot control, for example because you are frightened, angry, or excited, or because of illness

*“Tendor felt a mixture of emotions, he was so scared and his hands were **trembling**; he opened the door very slowly. (...)” – Chapter III.*

**trustworthy:** deserving of trust, or able to be trusted

*“Irina, tell me... Do you trust me? I know it’s too soon to fully do it, but do I seem to you as someone **trustworthy**?” – Chapter VI.*

**unaffected:** not influenced, harmed, or interrupted in any way

*(...)“she then looked at her parents, who seemed to be **unaffected** by their surroundings.(...)” – Chapter II.*

**unawareness:** the fact of not knowing, understanding, or realizing something

*(...)“and her confusion kept on growing as she watched her parents’ **unawareness**.(...)” – Chapter II.*

**underworld:** in mythology, a place under the earth where the spirits of the dead go

*“If every time I die, I’ll get to be kissed like that, I believe I’ll spend more time in the **Underworld**” he delicately chuckled. (...)” – Chapter III.*

**uneasy:** slightly worried or uncomfortable about a particular situation

*(...) “and the feeling of being followed – had them feeling **uneasy**. – (...)” Chapter XI*

**uninhabited:** An uninhabited place has no people living in it

*“I thought this land was **uninhabited**, specifically after everything that has happened.”– Chapter XI*

**upset:** to make someone worried, unhappy, or angry

*(...) ““I’m **upset** with your attitude, but I don’t hate you; I could never understand everything you’ve gone through, the things you’ve suffered. (...)” – Chapter XII.*

**urn:** a container, especially a large, round one on a stem, that is used for decorative purposes in a garden, or one that has a lid and is used for holding a dead person's ashes

*“He put them in a crystal **urn** and took them away.” – Chapter XII.*

**vehemently:** in a strong and emotional way

*“**Vehemently**, Nador addressed the crew, telling them:(...)” – Chapter XI*

**village:** a group of houses and other buildings that is smaller than a town, usually in the countryside

*“Melania frightened **villages** that just began to believe that all witches were equal. (...)” – Chapter V.*

**wait:** a period of time when you stay in one place until someone comes, or something happens, or until you can do something

*(...)” “What everyone else will be doing: **wait**.” The mysterious woman answered.” – Chapter III.*

**warmth:** a high temperature that is comfortable but not hot

*(...) “some big leaves that on the bottom had a wrinkled texture and provided **warmth**. (...)” – Chapter III.*

**wedding:** a marriage ceremony and any celebrations such as a meal or a party that follow it

*“The joy was so strong and present, that they decided to have the **wedding** in that same place. (...)” – Chapter III.*

**well-being:** the state of feeling healthy and happy

*“I see... That means you would put yourself first, before the **well-being** of others.” – Chapter XVII.*

**whispers: (verb)** to speak very quietly, using the breath but not the voice, so that only the person close to you can hear you.

*(...) “her parents were having a short conversation between **whispers** that she managed to listen to.” – Chapter I.*

**witchcraft:** the activity of performing magic to help or harm other people

*“For starters, I’ve never done **witchcraft**” – Chapter V.*

**wither:** (to cause) to become weak and dry and decay

*(...) “looking like she was about to **wither**.” – Chapter XII.*

**xions** ☆: these transformed beings; the oldest residents Yangana’s castle, they were isolated and later turned into xions.

**Description of a xion:** Small, plump figures, covered of hair, with broad feet, and short stature, came out; they were a grayish color; (similar to the color that comes into view when you remove the paint from wall or old clothes losing their color.)

*“Are those **xions**?” Nador mumbled. – Chapter XI*

**Xions mentioned in the story:**

- all the people of Yangana.

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## DECLARACIÓN Y AUTORIZACIÓN

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## REPOSITORIO NACIONAL EN CIENCIA Y TECNOLOGÍA

### FICHA DE REGISTRO DE TESIS/TRABAJO DE TITULACIÓN

<b>TÍTULO Y SUBTÍTULO:</b>	Translation of the literary work “Camino a Yangana” for the development of EFL reading comprehension skills of intermediate level baccalaureate students		
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<b>PALABRAS CLAVES/ KEYWORDS:</b>	reading, vocabulary, comprehension, fantasy, literature, ecuadorian literature, translation methods, translation techniques, translated fantasy.		
<b>RESUMEN/ABSTRACT (150-250 palabras):</b>	<p>The following project consists of a translation of the Ecuadorian fantasy novel “Camino a Yangana”, along with follow-up activities and a glossary appendix, aiming at creating culture-bound, context-based materials to be used within the EFL classroom to help intermediate level students enhance their reading comprehension skills. This project emerged to supply EFL students with newer materials and resources for their learning process, as well as bringing a newer focus on Ecuadorian fantasy literature, which allows an exploration of different translation methods and techniques that fit the literary work chosen as the source of analysis. Said analysis was carried out to put forward a wider understanding of the translation field. The approaches taken into consideration were applied as a way to allow teenagers to boost learning of a language through content that feels fresher and more topical to them than outdated textbooks. The rendering of the literary work intends to make a Spanish language novel available for students, a literary work that, besides speaking of and exploring their experiences, could also allow recent Ecuadorian novels to find a spotlight in a newer, more global space; its English counterpart reframes cultural aspects in a manner that does not feel alien or too complex for EFL students to comprehend. The translation methods used for the selected literary work; communicative and faithful translation; in order reproduce a comprehensible message taken from the original source, constrained at times by the grammatical structures of the target language—following the literary genre but transferring the message accordingly.</p>		
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