

The Biting Book



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Page Pending

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Published by Page Pending, Box Hill High School, 1180 Whitehorse Rd, Box Hill VIC 3128. Julia Baillie, Kayleigh Buick, Dylan Edwards, Imogen Mcgartland, Sasha Panisset and Sherlyn Tang

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Parameters

Primary character 1 Helicopter pilot
Primary character 2 Poet
Non-human character Book
Setting Observatory
Issue Treasure hunt

Random words

..... Whistle
..... Light
..... Gold
..... Hungry
..... Bubbly

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The Library

The towering oak shelves of the Melbourne State Library touched the crusty white ceiling, forcing patrons to wander through with no direction until they found the book they needed. There were many nooks and crannies in the place because of it and nestled into one of the many hiding places was Kim and Bastian, furiously pulling books out and shoving them back in, desperately trying to find the book they needed.

"Where is it?" Kim grumbled under her breath; brows knitted tightly as she pulled out the row of books and scanned the titles. When she couldn't find the one that she was looking for, she sighed before slowly placing the books back on the shelves.

"I don't know! That's why we're here." Bastian frantically pulled more books out of the shelves, barely glancing at them before letting them fall onto the floor. Fellow wanderers looked at him with distaste, at the books on the floor, at his long, ebony hair and at his painfully pale skin where a clear sheen of perspiration was shining under the dim library **light**. He was high on adrenaline and clearly half-crazed. But then, anyone who did not want to pay a hefty library fine would.

"I hate you." Kim mumbled, rubbing her sore arms. Her movements were slower now, almost sluggish. It took nearly all her strength to reach the top shelf. "How can you think that we can find a missing book in the *State library*? You know, the one with millions of books?"

"Two million." Bastian muttered as he scanned the books with wide, bloodshot eyes. When he could not find it, he turned the corner to the other side of the shelf and continued searching, barely paying any attention to the world around him or Kim half-asleep on the library floor.

"And that makes this easier how?" Kim slurred drowsily, lying on the floor after having completely given up on the search for Bastian's *badly misplaced* library book. She was preoccupied with more important things like when they were going to finally go out and relax in the day **light** and whether or not people's brains get affected by the thick cloud of dust that seemed to cover everything in sight.

"I don't know. But I don't want t – "

Kim heard a thud and a scream of pain. Her eyes snapped open at once and landed on Bastian who was rubbing his head and whimpering. By his feet lay a book.

“Grow up, Bastian. It’s just a book. To be honest, I think you needed a knock on your head.”

“No...” He winced. “The book just bit me!”

Kim gave Bastian her are-you-serious-right-now look and bent over to pick up the book up.

“See, look. Ordinary book. “She flipped it upside down, flicked through the pages, and then let it fall on the floor. “No mouth, no teeth, no bite.”

“No...I’m pretty sure that the book bit me.”

Kim sighed before giving Bastian her most sympathetic smile. “Come on. I think we have spent too much time here. Why don’t we get some ice-cream? My treat.”

Bastian’s face fell. “You don’t believe me.”

“Of ‘course I don’t believe you. You just said that a book – ow!”

She felt something nip her feet and she immediately flinched away. The book stood upright, and on its front cover was a mouth with rows of razor-sharp teeth and two unblinking eyes that watched her threateningly.

“I am a book, yes. But I can bite. Are you discriminating against immobile objects?”

Her jaw opened, shut, and then opened again. She couldn’t believe it.

“Books can’t talk.”

“This one can.”

"I told you." Bastian hissed at her. Her mouth flattened. Should she report this to a librarian? What could she say? *Oh, excuse me ma'am, there's a talking book going around terrorizing people. Is it one of your books?*

"Come on, Bastian. Let's leave." She started walking away, stepping over the books that Bastian had left lying on the floor. "Your book's not here anyway."

"Wait!" The book cried out. She stopped in her path, wondering whether the other patrons in the library could hear the book screaming.

"What do you want?" She turned around, scrutinizing the book. Why on earth was she doing this? She didn't know. She was talking to a *book* for goodness sake!

"I need your help."

"What for?"

"I need to get to the observatory. Please I can't get there by myself." The book begged; its inhuman eyes perfected the puppy dog look.

"No. I'm not helping some random talking book!"

"If we help you what can you give us in return?" Bastian asked. He had stopped cradling his head and his eyes looked less weary. Instead, he was staring at the book with genuine interest and curiosity.

"I'll solve your missing book problem." The book sniffed.

"How do we know that we can trust you, you have just been sitting on that bookshelf for who knows how long!"

"I am offended I am in one of the best libraries in Australia and you think I just sit here. NO, I am a magic book I get bored just like you guys, I have read so many books and I remember every single fact from every single one of them."

"Well in that case maybe you could actually be useful"

"Ok. Deal." Bastian fist pumped the book's bind and was returned a look of utter disgust.

"We should head to the observatory" said the book

"But the observatory is so far away!" Kim could not believe that Bastian would seriously go along with this. But to be fair, the book that he had misplaced was one of the library's older books.

"Let's go to the hangar. If we take my helicopter, we can get there in no time." Bastian strolled around the corner and out of sight, a bright grin plastered on his face. He finally got a way out of this mess, and it was as easy as helping a talking book.

"Did you know that the fastest helicopter can go up to four hundred kilometers per hour?"



The Observatory

As they flew over the observatory, they saw the Sliding Spring Observatory, as they insisted on calling it. Why they didn't have a helicopter landing pad Bastian thought was very inconvenient. The problem with having flown to a place that a book told them to go was that the book had no consideration for what it took to get there. They landed on a muddy grass field.

"The book *had* to send us to an observatory that doesn't have a helicopter pad *and* the only place to land the helicopter is incredibly muddy." Bastian grumbled.

"Don't be such a downer. It could be far worse." Kim said optimistically.

"How could it be worse than this?" Bastian shook his head, muttering under his breath before he walked off.

"Humans have been making huts and pottery from mud for approximately 30,000 years." The book added.

"Oh, shut up." Bastian spat out.

"Shut up was first a longer phrase of shut up one's mouth. The abbreviation is first thought to have been used in the 18th century."

They trudged all the way to the observatory and was greeted by the manager. Her very professional looking attire didn't seem to fit what he expected from a manager. He honestly thought that it looked more like what a politician would wear.

"Hi, I'm Charlotte. Welcome to the Sliding Spring Observatory. Feel free to explore."

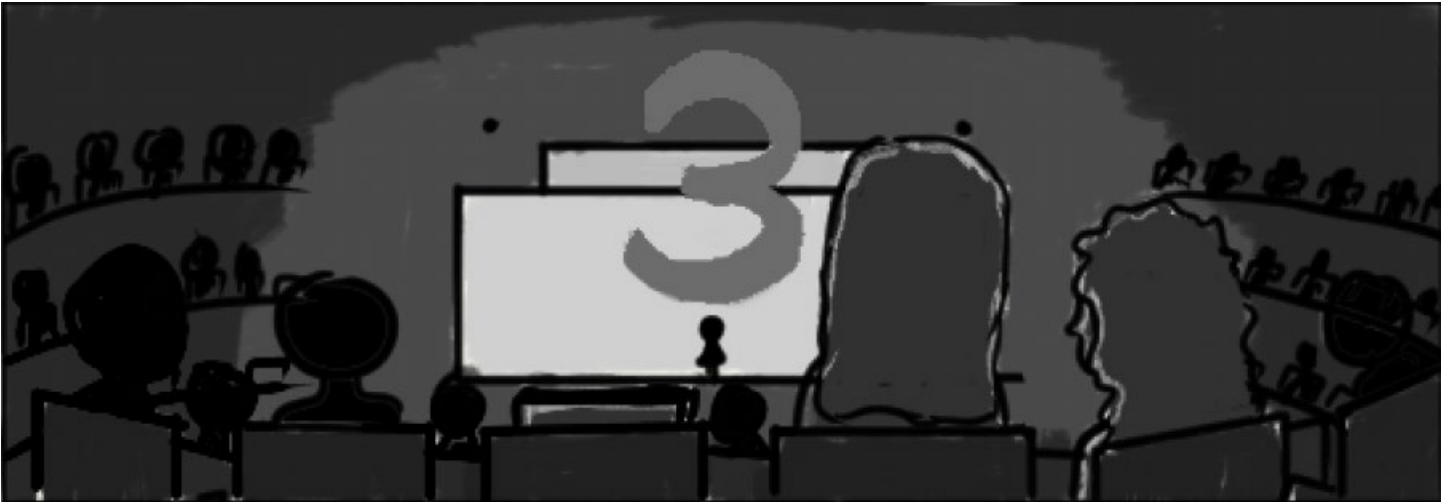
They walked into the observatory room where the telescopes were standing. It was amazing to see the sleek telescopes waiting for them to explore the stars. But that was not what they were here for.

The book led them to the back of the wall and urged them to push. They did, and the wall opened into a long, dark, and narrow passage. The book jumped up and flicked on the light and the trio walked down the path with chilling anticipation.

At the end of the passage was a gate with impressions on them in the shape of objects.

"This is what we have to unlock." The book said.

"Let's go to the helicopter then." Bastian turned around to head back the way they came. "We've got things to find."



The Sydney Opera House

The book jumped up eagerly and it exclaimed “Talk, whisper, or shout with glee, you will always be heard.”

“WHAT WAS THAT?” Kim screamed in fright.

“What was what?” asked the book.

“You just said some very strange things” Kim replied, crept out.

“What did I say?”

“What do you mean? You said it. You tell us!” Bastian snapped

“Talk, whisper, or shout with glee, you will always be heard.”

“THERE AGAIN!”

“What are you talking about? I didn’t say anything!”

“Talk, whisper, or shout with glee, you will always be heard.” Bastian thought aloud, tapping his fingers against the throttle.

“A microphone.” Kim’s eyes lit up and everything started to connect together. “The Sydney Opera House. That’s where the first item will be.”

“Genius! You’re a genius Kim!” Bastian tapped his head before pointing at her. “See? One poet knows another.”

“Poets don’t write riddles.” Kim huffed. Bastian never understood it in all their years of friendship. She didn’t expect him to get it now either.

“But you got the answer, didn’t you?” He raised his brows. “Anyway...next stop, the Sydney Opera House!”

They flew over Sydney, marveling at the sight of the city spread below them. Everything was whitewashed in a blinding glow from the torturous sun. People were bustling to and from at the beach, sipping coffee with friends in the air-conditioned cafes, and eating sausages straight off the barbeque. It looked like paradise if the sun was not so steaming hot.

Bastian landed on the far corner of the beach. The landing helicopter and thunderous whirring blades still drew attention, but there was no one in this corner, which made it considerably safer than landing smack bam in the middle of the open umbrellas and beach towels.

“Sorry, excuse me ladies, gentlemen.” Bastian weaved through the crowd that had gathered around the helicopter, charming the girls and winking at the boys, like always.

“What?” Bastian turned to look at Kim’s iconic are-you-serious face. “Unlike you I don’t discriminate.” He gave her a wink for good measure, shoved his hands into his pockets, and strolled away whilst whistling a cheerful tune.

“He’s really good.” The book noted. “He could compare his charm to the likes of...”

Kim zoned out and left the book behind her to scurry along his little legs. If he wanted to talk, he could talk to himself.

...

Bastian breathed in deep and breathed out, his silly grin still stuck on his face. A talking book offered to help him with his missing book problem, he got to fly his helicopter today, and now he was standing before one of the greatest structure Australia. He loved how the roof looked like the waves at the beach before they crashed into the shore, and how it was right next to the big, blue ocean. Honestly, this architect had outdone himself.

“The Sydney Opera House was designed by Jorn Utzon and Karl Langer in 1957 and...”

“Not even you can ruin my mood, Book.” He glanced at the book by his feet who was still droning on about the construction, before walking through the doors and into the opera house.

The inside was beautiful, and to understand how all the intricacies of the opera house worked was a wonder in itself. The classic wooden walls and the chairs with the plush red seats as well as the majestic stage felt so...

“Amazing.” Kim breathed, gobbling down the sights with her own eyes. She had never thought that she would ever stand in this place, but here she was, inside one of the most iconic Australian structures.

“Ok, enough gawking.” Bastian chuckled in front of her face. “I know I’m pretty but...uh...that’s just embarrassing.”

Kim rolled her eyes and fought the urge to knock his head a second time. She almost wished that he went back to the crazed, high on adrenaline self he was this morning. Then he wouldn’t be egoistically inflated like he always was.

“Where’s the microphone?” She asked, her eyes zoning straight to the stage.

“You got it.” Bastian pointed to the stage. “Front and center. That’s the one we need.”

“Ok, then. Let’s go, get it.” Kim marched with purpose down the path towards the stage before she was pulled back. “What?”

“That’s stealing, Kim, and that’s *illegal*.” Bastian pointed out. He drew two tickets out of his pockets. They were slightly crinkled and smelt like salt and vinegar chips. “I’ve got us both tickets to the show of an opera singer which is going to start any minute now. And then *after* the show we can politely ask her to give us the microphone.”

“Because she’s just going to say *sure, here you go!*” Kim snorted.

“Unless you want to get arrested for theft, let’s just go with my plan.”

Kim grumbled before taking a seat. Might as well enjoy the show while it lasted.

It was rather good. The opera singer, Vicky, had an amazing voice, and Kim couldn't help but be reminded that her own voice sounded like a croaking frog.

"Let's go get it now." Bastian nudged her shoulder. "Everyone's leaving."

She stood up, admittedly a little groggy of the hour or so performance, and they made their way down to the stage.

"Um, excuse me miss. We were wondering if we could have your microphone." Kim asked politely.

"My microphone? Whatever for?" Vicky asked, her brows creased in confusion.

Uh, I don't know. I want it for a treasure hunt for treasure that I don't even know truly exists. All I saw was a vault that could hold anything inside, like a moldy cheese sandwich. But I also really, really need your microphone.

"We need it for a treasure hunt." Bastian said confidently.

"I do love a good treasure hunt!" Vicky sighed. "Well, I suppose it couldn't hurt."

She handed them the microphone and waved goodbye.

"Be sure to have a wonderful adventure for me!"

"Ugh. I want this to be over and done already." Kim groaned and kicked over a stone that had the misfortune of being in her way. They were walking on the pathway that lead down to the beach. The huge crowd of people that were here had died down to a small group of people here and there.

"Remember." Bastian tapped his head. "Help talking book, no expensive library fine."

"Yes, yes. That's all good for you." She mumbled.

"Are you okay?" Bastian paused in his tracks to look Kim in the eye.

“Yeah, just tired.” She trudged on along the sand, feeling her feet sink every time she walked. “Let’s just go back to the helicopter.”

“Are you sure? We can go back if you want. We don’t have to...go on this crazy adventure.”

Kim stopped and turned around. “Nah. This is important to you. I still can’t remember how many zeros you have on that fine of yours. So even if I’m tired, I’ll do this for *you*.”

Bastian’s eyes misted over, and his smile turned watery.

“But you owe me.”

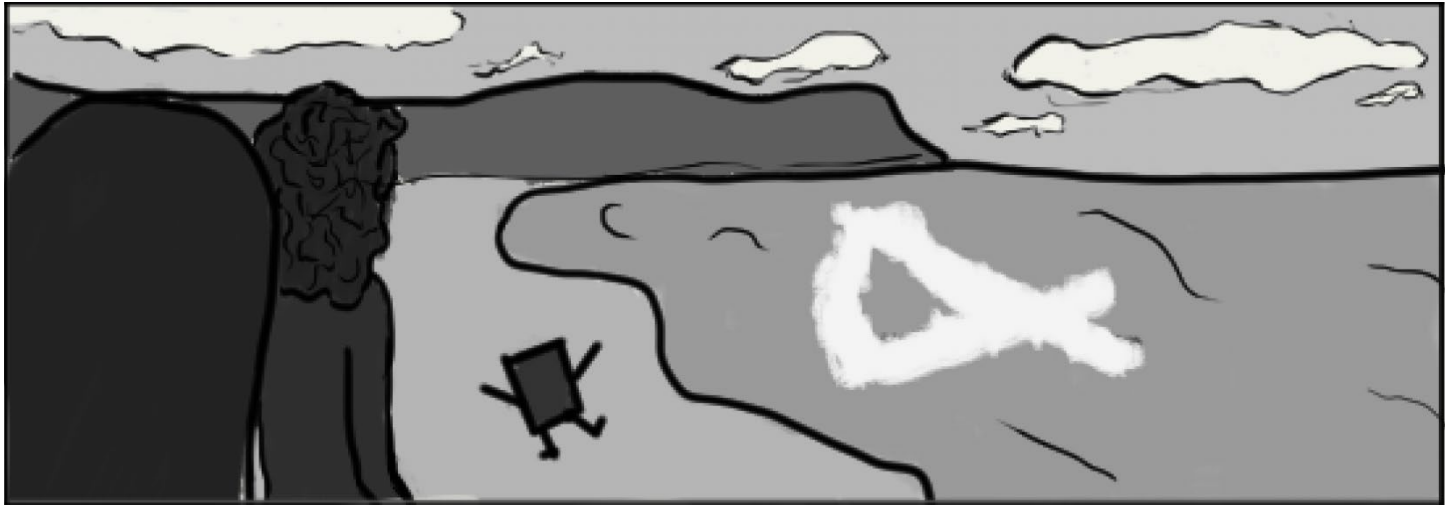
A bark of laughter burst out of him.

“Alright, I’ll go get us some ice cream after this is all over.”

“And chocolate?”

“And chocolate.”

They boarded the helicopter and lifted away, on to their next adventure.



The Reef

“Deep in the deep blue sea, bumpy and smooth can hold all sorts of surprises...” The book said, blankly staring off into space.

“There. You did it again! You ruined the mood!” Bastian retaliated, throwing his arms up in the air.

“What do you think that means, Bastian?” Kim asked.

“I don’t know you tell me.”

Kim stared at him for seconds disappointed but then started muttering to herself “Well, it has to do with the sea and something that can hold things, could it be a bucket? No that is not bumpy what could it be a coral but that can’t hold anything.”

“Maybe it’s a seashell” Bastian replied checking his nails for any dirt not really paying attention.

“A seashell! Bastian you’re amazing! Because seashells are bumpy and smooth, also creatures live and grow inside them! That must be the surprise”

Bastian was a little surprised with his friend’s reaction but moved along with it “but where would we find a seashell?”

Suddenly the book spoke up. "The Great Barrier Reef is the world’s largest reef system!"

“It's a bit extra but that is where you can find a seashell”

“Let's just go already” Bastian was starting to get sick of all of this, he just wanted his book back.

All of them headed to where the helicopter was and got in.

“Off to the Great Barrier Reef!” the book shrieked.

The sun was still gleaming on them even if it was approached the afternoon.

“We are here” Bastian said as he got out of the helicopter, the warm sand made a crunch when he landed on the ground.

“Finally! Riding in the helicopter is fun but it gets tiring after a while.” Kim complained.

The waves from the ocean crashed against the shore, foamy white bubbles erupting.

“Look.” Kim walked up the ocean edge and knelt to touch the water. “The water is all **bubbly**.”

“Well yeah, that’s what water does.” Bastian said offhandedly.

“Do you have to be all moody right now?”

“There are no shells here.” Bastian said, completely ignoring her comment.

“What?” Kim replied confused.

“There are no shells here.”

“Maybe we can look up the beach.”

The trio walked further down the beach until they reached a jetty. They saw a boy sitting on the edge, holding a bright, white seashell.

“Shell!” The book exclaimed.

“We should ask him if we can have his shell.” Bastian proposed.

They all walked down the jetty to get to the boy.

“Excuse me?” Kim tapped the boy’s shoulder “can we please have your shell?”

The boy jolted his head around with fire in his eyes “NO!” the boy screamed and ran down the jetty.

“Nice one” Bastian joked.

Kim replied tad bit annoyed with Bastian remark “I should go apologize”

Kim walked down the jetty as well with the two others followed her; she saw the boy who was with his mother and walked over to them.

“Hello, I just wanted to-” she was cut off.

“How dare you ask my dear Tommy for his shell! You selfish vail woman!” the mother yelled.

“I-uh I’m sorry, I just-” Kim attempted to reply.

The mother kept on yelling at Kim with her son stuck to her side.

Bastian had enough of this “Kim lets go” he grabbed Kim’s arm, picked the book up, and made a quick exit. He rushed down the beach even after Kim protested; until he found a place near the end of the beach. He forced to Kim and the book to sit down with him near the shore.

Kim was taken back; Bastian was obviously angered by the woman. She wasn’t able to decide if she should talk to him.

“B-Bastian?” she stuttered out.

“What” he replied in a harsh tone staring out into the ocean.

“Are you okay?” she nervously responded.

“No, that woman shouldn’t of spoke to you like that” Bastian grumbled.

“There’s nothing we can do about it now and I’m okay.”

Bastian sighed “that’s right” he showed a small smile “you’re okay” he looked over to Kim and smiled some more “are you sure?” he suddenly questioned.

“Yes, yes I am silly” she reassured him while shoving him a little.

“Hey!” He shoved her back.

“You deserved it Mr. Fines man” she laughed shoving him again.

In the mist of their little fight the boy approached them “hi?”

The two quickly turned around to face him and Kim let out an awkward “hey...”

“I’m sorry” the boy shyly replied.

“Don’t worry about it” Kim replied.

“Um I got this for you” the boy held out the shell that he retrieved earlier.

Kim took the shell “thank you” she smiled at the boy.

The three of them got up and hugged the boy before they walked down the beach with the boy back to his mother.

"I'm sorry for yelling at you" the mother apologized to Kim.

"Don't worry about it we all make mistakes" Kim replied sweetly before bidding goodbye to the mother and boy before heading back to their helicopter.

When they were seated comfortably in the helicopter and preparing to lift off, they looked at each other wearily before they started laughing hysterically at everything that had happened.

"What on earth are we doing?" Bastian laughed.

"You tell me." She raised her brows and shrugged her shoulders. Some things were just meant to happen. It's not every day when you meet a talking book.



The Whistle

“Something loud, something proud.” The book was running around in circles, its eyes bulging out of its sockets, and it was chanting the same words over and over again.

“Why would something be loud and proud?” Kim banged her head against the window. “Actually, that sounds like humanity at its best.”

“And why’s that?” Bastian glanced over for a second before turning back to keep his eyes at the sky in front of them. The afternoon sun was just starting to set.

“Have you been to China Town? Or the Victorian Market? Or you know, any shopping mall?”

“What about a...a **whistle**?”

“A **whistle**?”

“Yeah.”

“Why?”

“Because I **whistle** and I’m loud and proud.” He gave her another wink.

“That’s it? The answer is a **whistle** because you relate to it?” Kim deadpanned.

“Yup.”

Kim tugged at her hair in frustration. Why were they going on this impromptu adventure with a talking book to find treasure? And why on earth did it have to be with Bastian. She had other friends too. Friends who didn't lose library books, get massive fines, and get whisked away onto an adventure all around Australia.

“Did you know that in prehistoric Egypt, people used small seashells as whistles?”

“No, I didn't know.” Kim bit out. “You know what? Go away – wait a minute. You're not chanting anymore.”

Bastian swiveled in his seat and placed his face directly in front of the book which had bitten him hours earlier.

“So, I was right? It is a whistle.”

“I don't know.” The book sniffed. “Unfortunately, I have knowledge of everything I have ever read, and the answers to the treasure hunt are not part of it.”

Bastian settled back into his seat; a smug grin spread across his face.

“I hate your stupid hair.” Kim muttered.

“Shut up. Nothing you say can ruin this for me. I'm right and you're wrong.” He popped a salt and vinegar chip into his mouth.

“Next stop...” He glanced down at the buildings and trees that rushed below them.

“How about that?” Kim pointed at a beam of light circling the waters near the coast. It was difficult to see against the dimming light and the setting sun, but it was clear where the light came from.

“The lighthouse.” Bastian grinned and began to maneuver the helicopter over to the white tower.

They landed on the grassy meadow next to the light house and made their way to the arched entrance.

“The Macquarie Lighthouse was first lit in 1883 and was the first lighthouse site in Australia...”

The book droned on after them as they climbed the stairs, round and round, until they reached the top.

“Wow...” Kim gasped. Her eyes were wide open in wonder, the wind ruffling their hair and clothing, comforting them after a long day.

“The scenery is amazing.” The deep blue ocean glittered under the light of the setting sun and the meadow that surrounded the lighthouse was blowing in the wind like soft, green waves. Up there, on top of the lighthouse, higher than he had ever been without the aid of a machine, Bastian felt like he was flying. He could feel the wind swirl around him, teasing his hair whilst whistling a sweet tune of freedom. He could stay here for a very long time, for eternity if he could.

“If I throw you out the window will you...get injured?” Bastian asked casually, all notion of wonder all but disappeared.

“Unfortunately, as a highly intelligent book, defenestration will not *injure me*. However, if you throw me into fire...”

“Well.” Bastian looked around grimly. “There’s no fire. Is there a needle around here somewhere? Or a pen? I wonder what he will feel if I graffiti his pages.”

“Now’s not the time, Bastian.” Kim held out a cylindrical, metal whistle with *K.G* etched into the side from some long-ago lighthouse owner. “We have our whistle. Now let’s go.”

They boarded the helicopter again, this time with all the necessary items.

They watched as they lifted higher and higher into the air, but now that they were safely confined inside, they didn’t feel like they were flying as they had been when the wind billowed around them on the top of the lighthouse.

“What are you going to do after we find the treasure?” Bastian asked.

"I don't know." Kim gazed out the window, never taking her eyes away from the lighthouse even after it long disappeared from sight.

"Maybe I'll write a ballad about this adventure, about the bravery of the charming Bastian and the heroics of the woeful Kim who never wanted to be here in the first place."

"And the book." The book chimed in, baring his rows of teeth for a reminder.

"And the mysterious book that brought them all together for this adventure." Kim grudgingly added it in.

"Do you regret this though? Coming with us?" Bastian watched her face, gauging her reaction.

"No, actually." Kim said in surprise. "I wouldn't miss it for the world...or another talking book."



The Treasure chest

They flew through the skies, elation blooming in their chests, ecstatic that they held all the missing pieces to finally unlock the gate and discover whatever was inside. But when the observatory came into view an unreasonable fear thrummed in their bones.

What if someone got to the treasure before them? What if all this had been for nothing?

Nothing. Nothing. Nothing...

The word echoed in their minds. Bastian bit his lower lip and fidgeted in his seat, he could not stare at his destination hard enough. Kim tapped her nails against the glass windows, her heart beating so fast she could have been running a marathon. The book was...well...

"Symptoms of an anxiety attack include a quickened heartbeat, fidgeting, delusions of a talking book..."

"Shut up!" Bastian and Kim growled out.

"That was a joke." The book mumbled; its little paper heart broken. "And you know serious books like me don't make jokes."

They landed the helicopter in the same muddy field as before. They raced across the field, not caring about the mud splattering on their clothes.

"Ahem. Uh...short leg problems?" The book called from the helicopter, staring warily at the frothy mud below.

"Ugh!" Kim ran back, or rather, slowly walked through the moist, squishy, sludgy mud to reach the book. "Next time, I'm considering an actual baby carriage."

They ran inside the observatory, the mud caked on their shoes and pants slowly falling and staining the pristine floor. They ran all the way to the wall, pushing it away, and into the passage, not bothering to turn on the lights.

At the end they skidded to a stop and hunched over to breathe.

"Quick. Hurry. The items." Kim panted and dropped the book on the floor.

“Turn on the lights!”

Kim turned the light on, and they feverishly scrambled to place the items in the proper places.

For a second nothing happened. But then suddenly, quietly, almost discreetly, the gate opened.

Mountains of gold coins littered the room. There could be millions, trillions!

“Wow...there’s a fortune here.” Kim said in surprise.

“We’re rich!” Bastian yelled and pumped his fist in the air. “I knew this was worth it.”

They didn’t notice the book walking into the room and picking up one of the gold coins. It bit into it.

“Um...guys? This isn’t real.”

“But it is. Look.” Bastian pointed at the **gold**.

“No.” The book peeled open the **gold** foil to reveal the silky brown colour underneath. “It’s chocolate.”

“I was **hungry** anyways.” Kim said tentatively. “And besides,” She nudged Bastian gently. “You promised me chocolate, remember?”

Bastian nodded begrudgingly with a small smile.

“I did.”

They sat together in the

“Are we going to find my book now?” Bastian asked, suddenly remembering why this whole mess even started in the first place.

Kim and Bastion's day had already been somewhat stressful, but when a book from the library starts talking and asking for help, their day gets a lot weirder.

