## Prologue

We live on the edge of the Disappearing Forest. It is rumored that anyone that enters never returns. The forest does have this way of drawing you in, which is what makes it dangerous. If you listen closely you can hear the wind whispering for you to enter. At night, fireflies gather and create a magical spell with their lights beckoning you to come in. We are careful to never travel in further than a few rows of trees.

Our father is a woodcarver and so makes his living cutting down the forest one tree at a time. In a sense he is making the Disappearing Forest disappear. However, each time he cuts down a tree we make sure to plant a tree sapling. Our father is not a fan of the replant. He claims that it costs us too much to maintain their growth, but the earth does most of the work. He also thinks it is a waste of time; that my brother and I should be busy growing and harvesting our vegetable garden or helping our mother keep the house. Still, I cannot help by want to keep the mysterious forest alive and well. And so my mother and I planting a sapling for a white oak tree and Hale acting as lookout is where our story begins.

## Chapter 1

A high-pitched whistle cuts through the silence, a warning. Another sharp whistle cuts the air and the sound of rustling leaves and snapping branches lets us know that someone is quickly approaching. Turning, I find Hale out of breath trying to swallow fresh air. Walking over to him, I ask him if it is our father that is the cause for the signal. Still gasping he nods his head and my mother and I move into action. Mother wipes away the dirt from her hands on her apron and re-braids her long red hair that has come undone as we worked. I gather the tools and begin to walk away when Hale finally regains some of his strength after running from the lookout post.

“Greta, wait. He looked mad, really mad,” he says in almost a whisper, his voice and body shaking.

“It’ll be okay, Hale,” I reply and ruffle his wavy blonde hair to comfort him. “Now go on home and make the beds. I’ll be along shortly.”