

# AN UNEXPECTED DAY INTO THE JUNGLE

## PART ONE

### Chapter 1 - How it all begun -

It was the morning of November 14, a morning like any other, cold and gloomy.

Allison Smith was still in her imaginary world of dreams, sprawled out on the fine silk bed in the center of her huge room in San Francisco's most famous mansion.

It seemed that nothing could tear it from the arms of the god Morpheus, except the usual deafening and annoying sound of the 8.00 alarm clock.

<< Turn off this damn alarm clock!! >> Allison said, annoyed. Despite her neurotic morning cries, no one helped her. Got rid of the covers, she snorted from the bed and put on her soft wool slippers and took a quick look in the mirror.

She was perfect as ever, but today was a special day, so she gave herself a careful and slow brushing to her long, straight dark hair, put on some (so to speak) mascara and even a pinch of blue eyeshadow, to highlight the eyes of the color of the sky.

Then she made an elegant turn on herself, gazing at her slender frame and approving with satisfaction the figure reflected in the mirror. Then she walked heavily into the kitchen.

There she found her parents, immersed in a mysterious discussion, but once she crossed the threshold silence fell immediately.

<< Good morning Allison >> Meredith's shrill voice, Mrs. Smith, broke the silence.

<< Hi mom. >>

<< How come she is already awake? >> Asked Jack Smith, her father.

<<What? Don't you remember? >>

<< What should we remember, honey? >>

<< It's a joke, isn't it??? ARE YOU kidding?? >>

Allison did not know whether to be silent or to be furious, surely her parents were teasing her there was no other explanation.

<< It's my birthday!! Don't tell me you forgot MY gifts!! >> Allison yelled exasperated now.

<< Aaaaahh ehm .. yes o- of course, right Jack??? >> Mrs. Smith said, then winking at her husband, in a blatantly ironic way (she is not good at lying).

She immediately understood her parents' intentions and ran to her room.

There she remained even when she heard the bell of the villa ring, rejecting her curiosity and her urge to peek out of the room.

She heard various noises throughout the mansion: wrapped packages, sports furniture, whispers of the guests ... This made her feel very relieved because she understood perfectly what was happening: preparations were being made for her fourteenth birthday.

After a few hours, finally they knocked. She could go out. Excited, Allison opened the door and she found her best friends in front of her: Rachel, Primrose and Kaitlin.

Rachel White, the childhood friend, a short and slim girl: some small freckles stand out on her face, as if someone had sprinkled orange juice in her visage. She has large green eyes, like hope's colour, and long eyelashes, one of her greatest qualities that Allison envied. But her most distinctive feature is her fiery and red curly hair. She is a stubborn and introverted girl; she is kind and charismatic, but also spoiled and vain like Allison. She is the most optimist in the group. Rachel loves swimming and she also has a great passion for photography and for animals.

Primrose Davies is a friend from elementary school. She is a tall, thin, and sporty girl. She has long blond hair, not always perfectly combed; she has crafty little brown eyes and she wears glasses with black frames. She is friendly and unselfish, but also precise and touchy. She is the most thoughtful, intelligent, and cunning in the quartet. She plays basketball and she also loves reading fantasy sagas.

Kaitlin Jones, a middle-sized classmate. She is a dark skin girl of medium height, and she is neither too thin nor too strong. She has short, straight, black and helmet hair; she has big black eyes, like total darkness and the people can hardly see her pupils; she wears round glasses with purple frames.

She is a very studious girl, and a good student, but she is a very shy girl and she is almost always afraid of making mistakes; she is anxious and very pessimistic: she thinks that from one moment to the next the world will collapse on her. She has a great passion for volleyball, and she loves cooking first and second courses. Finally, one of her favourite hobby is making handcraft works with paper and wool.

How was it possible that these four girls, so different in character, were able to forge a strong friendship? We should go back a few years, but this is another story ...

## **Chapter 2 - A special gift for Allison -**

She immediately hugged her best friends, who after having made her their best wishes, blindfolded her with a sash and accompanied her to the party, in the large and bright garden of the villa.

Allison came to the garden, took off the blindfold and opened her eyes in amazement: all her family and her friends were around the table. It was prepared with all kinds of

delicacies. In the next table there was a mountain of gift packages, of all shapes and sizes.

The garden was decorated with posters, balloons, and many beautiful colorful flowers.

She spent all the afternoon chatting with friends and eating all kinds of sweets, including the most exquisite: his fourteen-year-old chocolate cake.

Finally, the time for gifts, long awaited by the girl, came.

She began to open all the gifts, leaving his parents' present for last. The gifts were fantastic, just like the afternoon: make-up, clothes, jewelry, purses and even a new phone!

Allison was incredibly happy, but she couldn't wait to open her parents' gift because they discussed a lot to choose it.... it meant that it would be something special: maybe... the ticket for a vacation in Hawaii!

Her mom gave her a small, rectangular package, and Allison began to open it, very slowly... she didn't want to snatch the plane ticket for the best vacation of her life! Right? >>

But, at the first tear she realized that something was wrong: there was no trace of the ticket, and when the gift was completely unwrapped, a horror cry tore through the air.

<< AHHHHHHHHHHH!! But what the hell is it!?!?? >>

<< My love ... why? Don't you like the gift? >> Mr. Smith said innocently.

<< Books make me sick! I have never liked them! And you all knew it! What has gone into your mind? Has your brain shrunk? Did you take me for a loser who reads books?! >>

After "The show", she looked around, seeking for approval, but everyone looked at her with disgust and they seemed to have lost the use of their voices. Angry (and even a little embarrassed) she ran away to her room, with furious steps. Rachel, Primrose and Kaitlin followed her, hoping to get her to reason.

Just as the three friends entered the room, Allison, furious, threw the book against the door, missing the head of Primrose by a few centimeters.

<<Oh, calm down! Did you want to take my head off?>> said Primrose?

<<You came in at this moment: it's not my fault>>Allison justified herself.

<<What did that poor book do to you to be treated like this?>> Kaitlin asked.

<< What did it do to me?! It ruined my party! My parents couldn't give me a worse gift >>

<< Well, they could have given you a hair bow! What's worse? >> Rachel joked.

<< But what book is it? >> Kaitlin asked.

Then she picked up the book from the floor: << Ah, but it's famous! It's THE JUNGLE BOOK! >>

<< WHAT!?!? >> Primrose and Rachel shouted suddenly.

<< Your parents are crazy! Do they no longer remember what happened? >> Rachel said.

<< Why? What happened? >> Kaitlin asked curiously.

<<It is a fact that we would like to forget ... >> Primrose left the sentence hanging.

Immediately, Allison broke the mysterious silence and she said:

<< We were at the end of the third-grade year and we had to do the school play, based on The Jungle Book. I had the role of that character ... What was his name? >>

<<Akela>> Rachel reminded her.

<<Ah yes right ... so ... I had to play the part of a female wolf. But at home I hadn't studied my parts ...I had completely forgotten about the play! >>

<< Oh, dear! >> commented Kaitlin regretfully

<<Fortunately, Rachel was there ... I knew that I had not studied, so I ran away from the theatre before entering the scene. She took my place and recited my sentences that she had memorized, even if it had not been requested by the teachers>>

<<It was the worst day of my life ... but I thought it was right to tell you the truth: sooner or later you would have known this, anyway. If you want to make fun of me now, I deserve it. >> Allison concluded disappointed and embittered. Unexpectedly, without saying a word, Kaitlin hugged the girl: the two friends forgive each other. Finally, also the other friends wanted to participate in this exciting group hug, the symbol of their long friendship.

After the party, they had a big- sleepover and they enjoyed themselves like crazy ones: they played, watched comedy movies, ate lots of popcorn and chips ... and everything seemed to be going well.

But that pleasant atmosphere was ruined the following morning when Allison woke up and started screaming.

That scream woke all the other girls, confused and dazed: Kaitlin jumped out of bed in panic; Primrose woke up suddenly screaming << Expelliarmus! >> and only Rachel continued to sleep peacefully, as if nothing had happened.

<< What happened?! >> Primrose exclaimed.

<<Nothing, nothing, just a bad dream>> Allison said.

Kaitlin, who was still wrapped in blankets, jumped up hastily: << Did you need to make all this noise? You scared me! I almost had a heart attack!! >> she said, tired and angry.

Primrose snorted and she asked Allison <<A bad dream? About what? >>

<< I dreamed of that stupid book: it's all the fault of that childish book on animals! >>

But as soon as Kaitlin heard her "magic word": animals, she started talking just like a robot, never interrupting: <<Are you talking about animals? Dog or cat? For me they are both beautiful, maybe I prefer dogs...mmm... I don't know...>>. She didn't realize that no one was listening to her.

She was interrupted by Primrose, who impatiently said: <<Welcome: you finally woke up! There are no animals here: Allison had only a bad dream, about the book that her parents gave her. >>

<< Ah ok ... Anyway, Allison you can't continue like this: you must face your fears!>> Rachel exclaimed, yawning non-stop.

<< Rachel is right, I think you must read the book. >> Primrose commented seriously.

<< No way! I'm sick of this damn book. Now I throw it from the second floor! >> Allison said directly.

<< NO!! >> All the others stopped her in alarm.

Kaitlin raised her hand, as if to silence the girls; then she took a deep breath and said: << Allison ... you told me you didn't study for the play. But do you at least know what the novel is about? I have read it: It is instructive and exciting. It has managed to teach me many things and it has transmitted to me the value of effort, friendship and respect. Reading this book, I started looking at the world with different eyes and I learned to appreciate even small gestures. >>

In the room fell a deadly silence. The girls looked at their wise friend, with a mixture of curiosity and wonder. Allison was the first to break this silence by saying words that impressed her friends even more:

<< Ok, ok. If you insist so much, I will read it. But I warn you: I will start reading the plot and, if it doesn't interest me and if it bores me, I will not go on a second longer. >>

Suddenly Rachel and Primrose cheered Kaitlin, and everyone laughed satisfied. Then all the girls decided to go to the kitchen for breakfast. There, on the table, they found a note written in an untidy and quick handwriting by Allison's parents. This message communicated to them that they had to go out and would be absent all day.

The day passed quickly and that evening, Allison, sad to abandon the girls before the arrival of her parents, went to her room not knowing what to do, bored and tired.

Allison remembered the book, and saw it on a shelf, ruined by what had recently happened. She hesitated for a moment, then decided to pick it up. She observed it carefully: the beautiful bright green, the color of the jungle, stood out on the cover. In the center, amid immense nature, it could be seen a small boy with a slender build; his eyes were completely black, and they sparkled with curiosity. They were small and crafty. That little boy was not afraid of anything, his gaze was fierce like that of a tiger and conveyed confidence.

She was almost about to open the book and begin reading... when the door swung open, revealing the figure of his mother.

She hurriedly threw the book under the bed, so as not to be discovered.

<< Can I come in? >> Mrs. Smith asked.

<< Well, now ... you're already in >> Allison said sarcastically.

<< What were you doing? You look scared: are you hiding something from me? >> asked the mum.

<< Don't mess with my stuff: it's none of your business, mom! >> but she realized how rude she was, she regretted it a little and soon her face started to blush.

<< Your anger has not passed yet! I hope that tomorrow morning will be different. >> her mother said with disappointment; then she left the room, without having given his daughter time to reply.

Finally, the girl, alone in the room, picked up the book from the floor, settled on the bed and started reading.

She began reading the plot, on the back of the book. The book was about a little boy who got lost and found himself in the jungle. So, he settled in the world of animals and nature that surrounded him.

In the jungle, the little boy is welcomed by a pack of wolves, who give him the name of "Mowgli". From that moment on, he will have to prove every day that he is worthy to be part of that family.

The plot managed to thrill Allison, who, amazed by this introduction, began reading the book with even more curiosity.

The days passed quickly, and the girl became more and more passionate about the novel. She found herself in Mowgli, who had become one of her favorite characters. Everything about him surprised her: from the rebellious attitude to the respectful and vigilant attitude towards the rules for survival in the jungle. Allison already knew all the "Master Words" by heart and, night after night of reading, (she preferred not to be seen by her parents reading during the day, after the big fuss she had made on her birthday), she reached the end of the book.

After reading the following nights, she stared at the floor of the dark room, not knowing what to do: after a week of sleepless reading, he could no longer fall asleep peacefully.

Suddenly all the thoughts about her way of life, all her snobbish, spoiled and lazy attitudes towards the world rained down on her. There is only one life and, until that moment, she had only wasted her time! She had not noticed how she had rejected everyone around her: even with her best friends she hadn't behaved well, and she had only quarreled with them over stupid things.

The tears were about to come out and the eyes began to pinch. She had never felt so embarrassed and embittered. But it wasn't all over: she could still make up for her childish behavior. An idea came to her.

She looked at the watch: it was 2 am ... she could do it. She picked up her computer and she started writing everything that came to her mind, everything she would say to the people she loved at that precise moment. The book had helped her a lot; so, she took her cue from that ... The following morning, she would make a gift to be forgiven by all the people who had loved her and who had been close to her despite her behavior.

....

It was finally done. It was 11.00 a.m. And she hadn't disconnected for a second from the computer. She looked at his face in the mirror, in addition to all the makeup color on the skin, in that face, she saw a better person: ready to face a new life (let's leave clothes, gifts and make-up aside!).

She wasn't entirely sure if they would forgive her, but she was proud of the work she had done.

She took the freshly printed sheets and carefully she grouped them in a transparent folder.

She breathed deeply and gave his parents a true and sincere smile, one of those we share with the people we really love. Finally, she handed them the folder.

PART TWO

# *Allison Smith*



## *An unexpected day into the Jungle*

(Freely inspired by Kipling)

### CHAPTER 1

- Curious to transgress -

I had been waiting for this moment for a long time: I am in the middle of the sea, on a luxury cruise, with my best friends: Rachel, Primrose and Kaitlin.

I'm enjoying this wonderful moment so much!! And it's all thanks to my parents: they were great! On my fourteenth birthday, they gave me this beautiful gift: a cruise trip.

Now I'm chatting with my friends. Rachel has just made one of her usual funny jokes: it made me laugh so hard I spit my lemonade out of my mouth!

Tonight, we decided to be up to no good: after dinner, we will move away from our parents' table from the cruise restaurant, with an excuse, and we will walk around the back of the ship and we go to one of the lifeboats, attached to the sides of the ship.

Then we will take a selfie, we will post it on Instagram and finally we will write in the caption that we are alone in the middle of the sea, on a private boat. Our friends will die of envy!

Here we are, our time has come. We are sitting at the table with our families and we are waiting for the dessert.

We take this opportunity: we ask our parents anxiously to go to the toilet.

We follow the plan: we run out of the restaurant and arrive breathlessly at the lifeboats. We choose the one that seems to us best linked to the cruise and, without thinking twice, we go upstairs trying not to make noise.

But we don't even have time to pick up the phone... that the cruise night watchman arrives. Immediately, we curl up on the bottom of the boat.

The man's fast and determined steps are getting closer and closer to us. My heart begins to beat faster and stronger and with my hand trembling, I bring my finger to my lips, ordering the others not to breathe.

Primrose rolls her eyes, as it is taken for granted, Rachel looks paralyzed and doesn't move a single muscle; Kaitlin is trembling with fear.

We are still with our heads down, until we hear the caretaker go away. I raise my head and I see no one; so, I reassure the others and slowly we get up.

Rachel was hidden in the narrow corner of the lifeboat; to get up, she leans on a crank, which strangely starts to turn and makes the girl fall to the ground.

We realize that the lifeboat has lowered from the edge of the cruise. The lever continues to turn and there is no way to stop it: we hear a rope breaking and we don't even have time to shout that we find ourselves in the sea.

We are stunned and look at each other in fear for a few seconds. I look for the phone in my wet bag. Then I find it and I try to call my parents, but my smartphone no longer works and it's all full of water. The same thing happens with my friends' cell phones.

Me, Rachel, Kaitlin and Primrose start screaming with all the breath in our throats, but the cruise is long gone.

Primrose starts rowing quickly with her hands in the water, but to poor results: she struggles, and the sea current pushes us further and further.

We still don't really believe it. Kaitlin starts crying and breathing heavily and I realize it is not just a bad dream: it's almost night and we're in the middle of the sea, without water and food... we are alone.

...

We remain silent all night, hugging and waiting for help. I am dying of cold and hunger. I try to sleep, but I'm terrified of being devoured by some marine animal or being swept away by a wave.

<< Girls, we must not give up: we cannot give up, there must be a solution, Right Prim? >> It is Rachel's voice. She is frightened, but she proves strong for us.

<< The only way is to find an island to take refuge. The phones don't work. I have a pack of biscuits in my backpack, better than nothing. >> says Primrose next to me.

<< Yes, but it isn't enough anyway! I also have some snacks in my backpack, but what will we do when they finish? On an island, we will never be able to survive!!! >> Kaitlin screams desperately.

We all look at her in amazement, but I know she is right. I cannot even stand camping, let's imagine being able to survive on an island!

<< Listen ... tonight I'll stay awake, and you two try to sleep. If there is something new, I'll wake you up. >> Primrose says in a calm voice. We make ourselves comfortable to sleep, disturbed by the sound of the waves.

...

<< Hey girls! Get up! Soon! >>

Primrose's screams suddenly wake me up. I open my eyes: it is morning and there is a blinding sun.

I get up and I am about to get out of the lifeboat when I remember that we were in the middle of the sea.

Primrose says << Listen to me. There are two pieces of news: a good one and a bad one. The good news is that fortunately we found an island! The bad one is that we are shipwrecked on ... >>

I look around and what I see takes my breath away.

We are in the Jungle.

## CHAPTER 2

### - Secrets in the backpack -

... A jungle. >> Primrose ends the sentence. We try to be calm, but we are all agitated. Kaitlin and Rachel come close to me and Primrose. With perplexed and incredulous looks we begin to observe the landscape that surrounds us.

After the meter of land on which we are positioned, an immense natural landscape opens before us: it is full of wild plants, trees, bushes and dry branches.

I'm going to faint: why are we up a big mass of wilderness and all this sickening green?! Couldn't we arrive on a comfortable desert island?

I am sure that dangerous and terrifying animals are hidden everywhere. Maybe now a ferocious tiger is watching us, and it is waiting for the right moment to devour us for breakfast! I feel like crying: where is my warm and comfortable bed of fine silk? Where are all my comfortable and dry clothes? Mom, dad, where are you? I can't take it anymore; I want to go back home with you!

The first to speak as usual is Rachel. << Do we want to stay here all day?! What are we waiting for? Here we go! >> She is about to enter the jungle when Primrose grabs her by the sleeve of the sweatshirt << Are you crazy?! First, we must have a plan! We cannot wander in this unknown and dangerous jungle as if we are in the park of San Francisco! >>

<< Prim is right! Now we must organize ourselves, then we will think about exploring this new environment>> protests Kaitlin.

I nod with conviction: I don't want to take a single step into the jungle. Primrose shows us the tasks we should do.

<<First, we should signal our position by writing the letters "SOS" on the sand with twigs. So, the planes or the helicopters flying over the area would have received the help message.

After that, we must look for a source of drinking water: a spring, a pond, or a waterfall. Of course, animals also need to drink to survive; so, following their tracks we should arrive at our destination. >>

<< But there is sea water, why do we have to move away from the shore? >> Kaitlin asks.

<< Sea water is only for washing; it certainly cannot be drunk. It isn't good for us! >> Primrose exclaims.

Then she shows us a long, sturdy piece of log at the edge of the jungle. Together we go take it; we carry the boat on the sand, and we place it next to the piece of wood. Prim orders us to flip and lift the boat from one end only; then she tells us to fit the trunk vertically at the other end. In this way we have built a shelter, under which we would have been if it had rained.

<< But how do you know all these things? >> I ask amazed and admired.

<< I have read a lot of Fantasy and Action books. >> is her answer, and I look at her confused. I knew she enjoyed reading, but I didn't think she was so practical and resourceful.

Then we must check the things we have available and we sit under the shelter in the new shade built. Primrose empties his backpack, dropping all its contents: the packet of chocolate biscuits, a bottle of water, the soaked phone, a hair band, some bills, and sunglasses.

<< What do you have? >>

I take my bag, now soaked, and rummage inside.

<< I have the phone -soaked-, the wallet, the make-up with the portable mirror and the sunglasses. >> I say embittered. I would have had something more useful.

Rachel turns her purse over. << I have my broken cell phone, my wallet, some chewing gum, a ham sandwich, a packet of chips and some cat food. >>

<< What do you carry that useless cat food for? >> I ask. She smiles and makes a gesture meaning "move on".

Kaitlin rummages through the backpack, but she doesn't put out anything << I left the phone and my wallet at the restaurant ... >>

<< So, what do you have in your backpack? >> Rachel asks curiously. Kaitlin hesitates for a moment, then lowers her head, embarrassed. She doesn't want to show the contents in the backpack. Rachel, impatient, with a quick movement, grabs it from the girl's arms. She doesn't even have time to reply that all the contents of the backpack are spilled on the ground.

<< OH... >> I can't hide my amazement towards Kaitlin.

A multitude of threads, elastic bands and colored cards come out from her backpack. There is also a ball of wool. But the thing that amazes me most is... the latest generation Swiss Army Knife!!

<< Wow! How many things!! >> exclaims Primrose. << Kaitlin you are fantastic! We can build "heavens" with these objects! >>

<< Even a knife? What do you need it for?! Not even my father has one like that!! >> Rachel takes the hand of the knife, watching it carefully.

I know Kaitlin likes manual work, but I agree with Rachel. << Well, I need it. Anyway, Prim said we need to find a source of water. What are we waiting for? >> She immediately changes the subject. Strange.

<< Exactly. Now we must think about food and water. We must enter the jungle. But first we must have the weapons to fight against dangerous animals if they attack us.>> Primrose says. We take four long and strong branches.

We look for the stones and sharpen the points with the Swiss army knife; then, Kaitlin, with strings, ties them to the ends of the sticks: finally, we have spears.

We prepare and encourage ourselves to enter the jungle. I'd rather stay here and not enter: the thought of being attacked by a ferocious animal makes my legs tremble. But also being alone on the beach is terribly scary...The first to enter is Rachel, who does not find any danger and beckons us to continue. We go on for about a kilometer and we see only trees and plants.

We stop to rest, in a quiet area. We enjoy Rachel's packet of chips, savoring her tastiness, as if we'd never eaten anything better in our life.

Then it all happens amazingly fast, so fast that I don't even have time to take the spear. Something big and hairy throws itself at me; I cry with terrible screams, then the whole world goes black and I see only darkness.

## CHAPTER 3

### - We ran away from an angry bear -

I must have passed out. When I recover myself, I find a panther cub next to me. It is about to jump on Rachel and so I get up screaming.

<< Rachel careful! >>

She picks up the puppy and approaches me laughing.

<< Are you afraid of this little animal?! >>

<< I remind you that that "little animal" almost killed me! >> I reply indignantly and annoyed.

<< He just wanted to play! It's a puppy, look how cute it is! We will then call him Rocky. >> Then scratch the animal's tummy and ignore the surprised looks of her friends.

<< What do you have to watch? >>

<< We certainly can't take it where we want! The mother will be looking for him! >> Kaitlin exclaims terrified.

Primrose and I agree with her.

<< Anyway, even if we leave him here, he will follow us. >> Rachel replies with a shrug. We decide not to contradict her: she could be offended. So, we get back on the road and the puppy follows us hopping.

On the way, Prim orders us to collect sticks and lianas, to make the hut built with the boat more resistant. Then we collect the wood for the fire. The fire is particularly important to be able to warm up during the cold night and to be able to cook the edible food that we would find.

Kaitlin, who is the only one who knows how to distinguish edible fruits and plants, begins to collect lots of them, and fills her entire backpack to the brim. We walk for a long time, following the footsteps of animals. After crossing a forest, we find ourselves in front of a fantastic landscape, full of wonderful colorful flowers and a beautiful waterfall with fish jumping from one side to the other.

Next to the waterfall we find large coconut trees. One of his magnificent ideas immediately comes to Primrose, which we immediately implement: use them as water bottles!

We break the coconut into two parts; then we eat the inside and leave the shells aside; after that, we fill the shells with water from the spring and we gather them. Finally, we take them to our "shelter", on the shore.

We walk taking care not to drop the water. The path seems longer, and even more unknown. We keep losing our way and then we struggle to find our way again because we don't even have a compass.

So, we rely on our new friend Rocky, who knows the jungle well. We move our hand in a wave, to show him the waves of the sea and thus make him understand our destination. We aren't so convinced, but the panther cub seems to understand.

We cross winding roads and muddy paths. On the way we meet some animals including a horrible stone-looking chameleon that I was about to step on. But the worst moment has

not come yet. As we are crossing a vast swampy plain, I stumble upon a stone and end up with my face in a pool of mud. I am exhausted: this jungle is ruining the outfit I just bought for the summer holidays!! I can't take it anymore; I don't want to stay in this jungle one minute longer! I let out an exasperated scream: I don't care where I am or who's around me, I just do it.

<< AHHHHHHH!!!! WHY THIS ALL TO MEEE!!!!???? >>

Suddenly we hear a rustle in the leaves, then heavy footsteps that make the ground tremble. Fortunately, Rachel covers my mouth, almost choking me, to block my screams. I immediately regret my screams: if only I had been silent ... A huge bear with dark fur and fierce eyes approaches us, yawning with its mouth wide open and baring its enormous, pointed teeth.

I see my friends running away, but I'm so terrified that I can't move a single muscle: my legs are shaking. If Rachel hadn't stopped my screaming, I would have surely died in the clutches of that horrible monster.

I already see the new ad in the newspaper: "Allison Smith, a 14-year-old girl got lost in the jungle and was killed by a bear." Nice happy ending isn't it?!

My best friend grabs me by the arm, and we run away, towards the waterfall where we got the water, with an angry bear chasing us and trying to remember the way. I don't think I've ever run that fast in my life. I want to stop. I'm out of breath, but the heavy footsteps behind us give me the strength and courage to run faster. We are leaving it behind: fear makes us faster than an angry bear! But we don't dare look back.

Finally, exhausted we arrive at our destination and hide behind a boulder, still trembling. "Did we leave it behind?" Kaitlin asks. Rachel raises her head and peeks cautiously and carefully. << Yes... but, down, go down! >>

She sits next to us, with a sweaty face and a terrified look.

<< Hem ... >> I said nervously << What did you see? >>

She doesn't even have time to answer that we see a shadow slowly approaching. But this is not a strong and big figure: on the contrary, it is thin and agile, and it does not look like a bear.

Great: another stupid monster ready to eat us! Rocky begins to fidget next to me, as if it had received an electric shock; it jumps to his feet and with a big jump overtakes the boulder.

Then it lashes out at the beast, which rolls down. We observe the two animals fighting on the ground and, after that kind of "fight", our little friend joins us happy.

He rubs his little face on Rachel's leg, then jumps off again past the stone. Rachel stands up, looking for the panther cub.

Then she smiles, encouraging us to join her. I get up slowly and observe the scene in front of me: Rocky, hugs himself with a black panther, which with his paws cleans his fur, dirty with leaves and mud.

Now I understand everything! it's its mom!

Panther mom looks up at us. Of course, it would have thanked us for looking after his puppy!

On the contrary, it grabs Rocky with its teeth, pulling him away from us and moving him to the other side. Then it approaches us, and it starts growling. It sits on its hind legs, ready to jump on us.

We understand its intentions: it thinks that we stole her puppy, and therefore it wants to take revenge against us.

## CHAPTER 4

### - When I realize that I am useless -

The panther is about to jump on me, but I stand still. Fortunately, Primrose pushes me to the side, to prevent the panther from attacking me, but I hurt my knees. I'm angry and I am about to scold her; but I realize she just saved my life, so I shut up.

I hide behind a bush and I decide to stand still and watch the scene in front of me. Maybe, I can seem lazy and cowardly to you, but I'm too terrified and, if I fight into battle, I can only cause trouble.

Kaitlin throws papaya pieces at the panther and Primrose hits her with his spear. But it's all in vain: it seems that nothing hurts or annoys it, but it is even more angry!

Rachel is rummaging in her backpack, but I don't understand what she is looking for so important and useful in this situation. "The spear is behind you, why don't you use it?" I think. She emits a small yell of joy and, happily, she takes a small box out of her backpack. I look better ... they are the treats for cats! But I don't understand, and I'm confused: why, does my friend think about defeating that panther with some cat food!?

Rachel slowly approaches the mother panther, cat treats in hand; then she looks into its eyes, throws his spear aside and she takes off his rucksack. Great, my friend is crazy! The panther is probably thinking that too, because it is as confused as I am. After she gets even closer to the panther and she reaches out her hand. Kaitlin and Primrose are motionless, with wide-eyed and amazed.

I think at any moment the panther eats her hand, but it only sniffs the treats. Then it tastes one; then another and another. She likes those treats! I am amazed! Rachel starts stroking the panther mom's fur and it rolls on the ground as if to thank her. After that we take the opportunity to have the panther with us and we let the painter show us the way to get to shore.

Finally, we can rest, have lunch, chat, and joke. Kaitlin cooks a delicious dinner and soon it's time to sleep. I lie down in my bed made of leaves and I rest my head on the backpack, as if it was a pillow. But I can't fall asleep because there are a lot of thoughts in my mind: this is strange! I realize that I didn't do anything useful during this jungle adventure; instead, all my friends have qualities that have been very useful and that have deeply impressed me.

Primrose showed his cunning and intelligence, which she learned from reading fantasy books; Rachel, thanks to her love for animals, has trained a very ferocious panther and Kaitlin has got fantastic "golden hands", with which she has created excellent food when I was very hungry. And me? I know how to do a perfect make-up, how to match clothes,

sing and play the guitar ... but these passions can't help anyone. Suddenly shame comes over me.

Why have I never noticed the fantastic characteristics of my friends? It's just my fault. Since they are my friends, they have not used these skills and they adapted to my life: my interests, my hobbies, and my passions.

I can't sleep, so I walk away from my friends to do the only thing that makes me feel good: sing. I never said to anyone I can sing because I'm afraid of being made fun of.

Only my grandmother, a snake charmer who lives in Africa, knows that I sing. Because she told me that I have a beautiful voice: this encouraged me a lot, so I started singing more often.

I walk away from the shore and I sit on a rock. I start singing my favorite song "Driver's License". I feel better, so I go back to my friends. I immediately realize that something is wrong: they are not there.

## CHAPTER 5

### - The snakes' charmer -

There is no trace of my friends. I'm terrified. Where are they?? I put my fingers in my hair, desperate. I sit on the sand, then I hug my backpack and I start crying desperately. I have been away just for a moment: how did they disappear? Is it just a bad dream? I force myself and go to look for them. It takes all my courage just to enter that chaotic jungle, but I do it for my friends.

The dark doesn't help me. Luckily, Primrose taught me how to light a fire, so I walk among the plants with a flaming stick in my hand, looking for clues. I think of all the information that my friends have given me: the most dangerous animals are the bear, the panther, the tiger, the snake, the wolf, the hippo ... ah... and also the monkeys that may seem harmless! They love to make jokes and are very rebellious.

Now I remind of the story my father always told me. He told me that the curious monkey people love to kidnap the babies of other animals, to get noticed ...

Yes, of course! How did I not understand it before?! The monkeys have kidnapped my friends!! I'm not sure, but that's the only hope I have. I immediately become sad: I will never be able to defeat them. I look for a solution.... Kaitlin told me that monkeys are afraid of only one animal: the snake! I start walking until I see a long snake coiled around the tree: it's huge!! But I'm afraid and then I start to tremble: how could I capture it? Surely, it would kill me! Then I remember my grandmother, the snake charmer in Africa, and an idea comes to me. I start singing.

The song is slow, sad and very melancholy. I see the two eyes of the snake, two yellow lamps staring at me. I am very scared, and I can hardly stand up. The reptile unrolls from the tree, then it stands in front of me and it begins to hiss. Its verse stays in my head, so I extend all the letters "S" of the lyrics in the song. The snake seems hypnotized. The snake watches me closely, then with a sudden movement it twists my waist, and it traps me with its tail. I scream and cry, then I start singing again.

The snake relaxes and calmly lets me go. I breathe a sigh of relief. I try to walk to leave, but the snake follows me: wow, great! I go on for about a kilometer. Suddenly I find Kaitlin's Swiss Army knife on the ground: I get angry and nervous, then I pick it up and start singing louder.

I walk and pass a wall of leaves in front of me. I observe the place where I am, and I am amazed. I am in an immense space, without trees and plants, made only of stone and concrete, and in front of me there are the remains of a historic and beautiful Mayan temple!

But I certainly cannot enter. In the dark of the night I immediately notice the presence of my best friends: they find themselves in a situation that I don't like at all, a very dangerous situation! The monkeys have captured them: their arms and their legs are tied to the temple columns with sturdy ropes. There are hundreds of monkeys around my friends jumping among the ruins of the temple and throwing fruits, branches and stones from one side to the other: there is a great confusion!

As soon as they see me, the monkeys freeze in fear and my friends look with wide and frightened eyes at something behind me. I turn around, without stopping singing, and I am convinced to find the snake behind me ... but there isn't only that snake: I have attracted all the snakes in the jungle!!

I stop singing; suddenly many groups of reptiles attack the monkeys, who run away screaming in terror. I take advantage of the moment and I run to free my friends. Quickly I take Kaitlin's Swiss army knife out of my pocket and, with strength and courage, I cut the ropes that tie my friends to the columns.

<< Since when have you been a snake charmer!?! >> Primrose screams.

<< For about an hour!! >> I exclaim, not knowing if it is a compliment.

<< When we leave this terrifying place, we talk about it!! >> Rachel says, almost offended because I hadn't told this to her before. Well, I didn't even know I was a snake charmer! We run away, entering the jungle, illuminated only by my torch. As we move away, the noises of the battle between reptiles and monkeys subside. Finally, we arrive ashore, with little breath in our throat.

We hug each other happily with a loving hug, a hug that is worth a thousand words to us. Then I see something small and black running towards us.

<< Rocky!! >> Rachel exclaims.

We also welcome the puppy in the group hug, which brings the little face close to the faces of each of us. How cute that puppy! We sit down and then we start discussing how to get help.

But suddenly we hear a helicopter: immediately we are enlightened by a blinding light and we hear the voice of a man in a megaphone.

Help has arrived! We are safe!

We must leave the place where we had an unforgettable experience together and we must say goodbye to Rocky, the best puppy in the world. I will miss all this. I'm about to cry, but I don't do it because soon I'll see my parents and I must show myself strong and courageous.

We get on the helicopter where our parents are seated. I look at them and start to cry, then I hug them tightly to my chest.

In a short time, we tell them about our long and adventure in the jungle:

We worked to survive in that strange jungle thanks to Primrose's advice and knowledge. Later we discovered Kaitlin's love of handwork and cooking which served us a lot when we were hungry. Then, Rachel tamed Rocky, the panther cub; but we were chased by an angry bear, who "transformed" into a new danger: the panther mother. It wanted its puppy back, but Rachel managed to calm her down with cat treats! Finally, a gang of monkeys have kidnapped my best friends. To save them, I hypnotized snakes with singing, which attacked the monkeys and allowed us to escape.

They look at us with surprise, not knowing what to say. They just nod: they seem proud of us. In this strange and terrifying adventure, I have understood many things. The most important is that my friends are fantastic: they will always help me when I am in trouble. Then, I realized that there are things more important than the nonsense of snobbish life: respect, generosity, friendship, and family.

I'm still sorry I left Rocky in the jungle. However, it has its family there, who protects him and grows him healthy: we would never be able to look after it like his mother.

In any case, the jungle is not that bad and terrifying place... but I will never get on a cruise again in my life!