

LANTERN LANE

BOOK 1



THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL LIBRARY

TESSA GREENE



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CHAPTER 1

Letty squinted at the glaring yellow sun, attempting to gauge its position in the sky. It was late afternoon; in only an hour or two, the sun would be setting over the kingdom of Trielle, casting pink and gold beams across the castle and all of the surrounding villages. She glanced down the long lane bustling with people, hoping to see her father in the throng. He had been gone longer than she anticipated, and Letty was growing more concerned by the hour.

She shook her head to clear it of her worries and peeked down into the large wicker basket hanging from her arm. She had one final delivery to make that afternoon for her father's dry goods store, and it was always her favorite. After a quick glance to ensure the road was clear of any wagons or carriages, Letty crossed the street to the cobbler's shop and walked around the back of the quaint stone buildings, stopping momentarily to smell the pink winter roses in the garden. Just beyond the garden, where the cobbler and his family lived, two sets of baby-blue eyes peered expectantly through the window under gingham curtains. As soon as Letty came into view, the eyes vanished from the window, and a

moment later, the door flew open. A little boy and girl came racing down the walkway toward her.

“Letty! LETTY!” the children cried in unison, throwing their arms exuberantly around her legs.

Letty laughed sweetly and leaned down to scoop up the little girl, whose hair was tied into swinging blonde pigtails with yellow ribbons. “And how are you today, my little friends?” Letty asked, taking the boy affectionately by the hand.

“Papa made us new shoes!” he said, bouncing and swinging Letty’s hand enthusiastically.

“Look!” his sister added, pointing to the leather boots on her dangling feet. “They have flowers on them!” Indeed they did: the sides of each boot were adorned with delicate hand-painted daisies.

“Beautiful, Elsie!” Letty exclaimed before an insistent tug on her hand brought her attention to the little boy.

“Are my shoes beautiful, too?” he asked somberly, as though it were the most important question in all the world. Letty pressed her lips together in a smile, revealing a slight dimple in one cheek, and did her best to suppress a giggle.

“Yes, Liam, your shoes are very beautiful, too.” He seemed satisfied with that answer. “Well, let’s bring these groceries inside for your mama, shall we?” Letty proposed, shooting a glance at the basket on her arm.

Entering the small kitchen, Letty was greeted by cheery lemon-yellow walls, each plastered with childlike drawings of flowers, ships, mountains, and animals. Red

gingham curtains fluttered in the light breeze coming through the open window, and a heavy wooden table sat in the middle of the room, adorned by a vase of winter roses from the family's garden. Letty placed her basket on the table and emptied its contents while Elsie and Liam stood on their tiptoes to watch. Dried beans, oats, cornmeal, jars of applesauce, and packets of yeast were set one by one on the tabletop. Finally, Letty withdrew a round loaf of crusty bread wrapped in an ivory tea towel covered with elegantly embroidered leaves and vines.

As Letty finished unloading her delivery basket, Kiana—Elsie and Liam's mother—entered the room, a cooing infant in each arm.

“Mammy!” Elsie exclaimed, dancing and twirling around the kitchen, her boots tapping and her pigtailed bouncing on top of her head. “Letty brought our groce . . . groce . . .” She squinted her eyes, concentrating with all her might on pronouncing the word correctly. “Groc-er-ies,” she finally managed to say.

Her mother smiled encouragingly. “Yes, I see that.” Kiana had the same golden-blond hair and blue eyes as her children. She looked tired—Letty could see dark bags beginning to form under the woman's eyes—but that was no surprise. Even though Letty was only fourteen, she knew that taking care of two energetic toddlers and twin infants would be exhausting work for any mother.

As Kiana's eyes scanned the groceries laid out on the table, her smile faltered slightly. “I'm sorry, Letty, but you must have made a mistake. I didn't order any bread.”

“Oh,” Letty answered cheerfully, “I know. My mother made more than we can eat. You would be doing us a favor to take it; it would only go to waste.” This was mostly true. Mama had indeed made more bread than their family had planned to eat, but Letty did not mention that this was intentional. After all, a fresh loaf of bread seemed the least they could do to make life easier for the young mother.

Before Kiana could thank her, Letty’s attention was pulled away by another adamant tug on her hand. “Do you want to play wolves with me?” Liam asked. Though his voice was as serious and somber as ever, excitement danced in his pale eyes at the thought of such a game.

“You know I would love to,” Letty said, crouching down to look him in the eye, “but I can’t today. I have to get ready for my papa to come home from the mountains.”

“Your father isn’t back yet?” Kiana frowned, suddenly concerned. “I thought he left yesterday morning.”

“He did,” Letty responded, trying to mask the worry in her voice. “We expected him back last night, but he never arrived. I’m sure he will be home very soon, though.”

Anxious to change the subject, Letty returned her attention to Liam and Elsie. With a wink to Kiana, she let out a small gasp as her hand flew to her mouth. “Oh my, I nearly forgot!” she cried dramatically.

“What? What?” Liam and Elsie squealed excitedly. They knew what was coming next, and they adored the game Letty always made of it.

With exaggerated motions, Letty pretended to shuffle through her now-empty basket, then patted down the pockets of her dress and apron, muttering loudly. Liam and Elsie looked at each other expectantly, letting out small high-pitched giggles that sounded almost like the chirping of baby birds.

“Ah! Here it is.” At last, Letty drew two red licorice ropes from her pocket and placed one into each child’s chubby waiting palm.

“Thank you, Letty!” they cheered in unison as they clasped their hands around the treats. They each gave her a peck on the cheek before beginning to nibble on their sweet treasures.

“Yes, thank you, Letty,” their mother added with gratitude shining in her eyes.

“Of course.” Letty smiled and waved to Liam and Elsie one last time before leaving.

Upon stepping outside, Letty inhaled a deep breath of the crisp late-afternoon air. The words she and Kiana had exchanged about her father replayed in her head. *Of course Papa will be home soon*, she assured herself. Putting a smile on her face, Letty greeted her neighbors cheerily as they walked past, fixed her empty basket into the crook of her arm, and took off racing down Lantern Lane toward home.



CHAPTER 2

Do you see anything, Letty?”

Letty drew her violet shawl more tightly around her slender shoulders as she leaned out the second-story window and peered as far down the street as she could. Flickering orange lanterns lined the cobblestone lane. Beyond the lights, mountains rose majestically from the ground, and as her eyes moved upward, Letty could see the first evening stars beginning to appear like fireflies in the night sky. All these things were certainly beautiful, but Letty barely noticed them tonight. She only hoped to see her father’s figure approaching the shop below her.

“No, nothing,” Letty said, dejected. For over fifteen years, her father had journeyed up the mountain nearly every fortnight to stock the travelers’ hut at the peak with supplies from his dry goods store. In the past, he had always left before sunrise and returned by sunset the same day, but this time he had taken much longer: this was the second consecutive night he had been away from home, and his family was more than a little worried.

Letty’s mother crossed the kitchen to look out the same window, hoping to see something her daughter hadn’t. After flicking her eyes hopefully up and down the street

for a few moments, she heaved a defeated sigh, pulling the window shutters firmly closed and pacing back to the washbasin on the table. Her husband was nowhere to be seen.

“A storm will be rolling in before long,” she murmured, scrubbing vigorously at a plate with her dishrag.

Letty’s older brother, Miles, lifted his head from its resting spot on the dinner table. “He didn’t take an extra coat, did he?”

“No,” their mother replied. “He was supposed to be back before the cold front came.”

Miles’s square jaw clenched, just as it always did when he was thinking about something that concerned him. Letty came up behind her mother, took the dishrag from her hands, and wrapped her arms tenderly around her mother’s shoulders.

“I’m sure he’s all right, Mama,” Letty assured her, resting her cheek on top of her mother’s head. The reality was, she wasn’t sure; the mountains could be dangerous, especially if the cold turned to snow, but what good would it do to worry Mama further?

Miles’s knuckles rapped slowly and gently against the table, breaking the tense silence in the kitchen. Faster and faster, harder and harder, his knuckles rapped as his jaw continued to clench tighter, until suddenly he shot up from the table with a determined look on his face. “I’m going after him,” he said.

“What do you mean, you’re going after him?” Mama responded, staring in disbelief. Letty felt the breath leave

her lungs for a moment. She was used to her father going up the mountain. He was so familiar with the mountain-side that Letty hardly worried about the danger anymore when he was gone—except for now, of course. But Miles? He had never made that trek without their father, much less with the risk of a snowstorm looming. It was too dangerous.

“I mean that he could be ill or hurt. What will happen to him if he’s stranded on that mountain when the storm comes in?”

“No,” Letty and her mother replied in unison. Letty was prepared to launch into a long lecture about how Miles shouldn’t rush into danger, especially when he didn’t know where their father was or what he might need. While she was trying to gather her scattered thoughts, however, Mama took a deep breath and spoke before Letty could.

“No,” she repeated, “at least not alone.”

Now Miles joined Letty in her shock. “Mama,” he said cautiously, being very careful not to sound argumentative. “I’m eighteen years old; you don’t need to be so worried. I’ve gone with Papa twice before, and I can take care of myself.”

“Oh, I don’t doubt your competency, Miles. I know you can take care of yourself. What I’m worried about is that you may be right: your father could be injured or ill, but you have to realize that going alone is unwise. You don’t know what he will need, and you don’t know enough about medicines to help if there is a problem. I

do. Besides, if he needs to be carried down the mountain, you cannot do it alone. Letty and I need to come, too.”

Me? Letty thought, stunned. She had never been on the mountain before, not even with her father; everyone knew she was too scared. And to be there for the first time when there could be a storm? What if she got lost? What if she fell or froze or was caught in a rockslide? The very thought of it started Letty’s head reeling.

Miles considered what his mother had said for a moment, then nodded. Clearly he knew she was right.

Deep down in her heart, Letty knew it, too. At that particular moment, however, she was too busy trying to keep her heart from pounding out of her chest to pay attention to anything else it was trying to tell her.

“Miles, go get the extra coats from the attic while I go down to the storage room for healing salve and bandages. Letty, pack the rest of the bread and any other food you can find into the lunch pail.”

Immediately, Miles and Mama went about their tasks. Letty, however, had barely heard her mother’s instructions; her heartbeat pounded in her ears, and her breathing was quick and shallow. Her legs started to quake beneath her. Afraid she would collapse, Letty stumbled backward, grasping at the air until she finally felt a chair behind her and toppled into it. Anxious thoughts raced like stallions through her head. *No, no, I can’t do this. I can’t climb the mountain. I’m going to get hurt. Miles is going to get hurt, or Mama. What if Papa is already hurt? But if he is, I can’t do anything! I can’t help!*

Miles re-entered the room, a large stack of warm wool coats piled in his arms. “Letty, does this coat on top still fit—” He cut himself off when he saw her squeezing her arms around herself, her thin frame trembling like a birch leaf in the breeze. Quickly setting the coats down on the table, he knelt beside her. As he gently folded one of her quivering hands in his own, he tried to catch her eyes.

“Letty, what’s the matter?”

Letty took a shaky breath. The lump in her throat kept her from answering immediately, so Miles continued. “Papa will be fine. We’ll find him and bring him back. It will be all right.”

Letty shook her head slowly, and tears began to fill her eyes. Why couldn’t she be more like Miles? He was so brave. All he was thinking about was their father and how to help him. How could Letty be so cowardly, worrying about herself?

“That’s not it,” Letty said, her voice quivering. She avoided Miles’s gaze as she spoke, fixating instead on a spot on the floor next to her. “I mean, of course, that’s part of it . . . it’s just that . . . m-maybe it would be best if only you and Mama go.” She began to speak more quickly, rattling off the only excuse she could think of as it popped into her head. “After all, we can’t leave the shop unattended. What if someone needs something? I should stay back and run the shop, just in case. Besides, it’s not as though I’ll be much help if I go.”

Miles released Letty’s hand and stood. He crossed his muscled arms as his thick eyebrows knitted together. “The

shop will be fine for one day, Letty.” His voice was not harsh, but it had lost its softness from a few moments before. “People can wait for their groceries, but Papa may not be able to wait for us.” In a few long strides, Miles crossed the room and began digging through the cupboards, removing bread, apples, and dried meats and nestling them in the lunch pail. “As for the idea that you won’t be much help,” he said, turning back toward her and resting his hands on the cabinet tops, “I think you would be surprised. Mama was right. I can’t carry Papa down the mountain alone, and you’re stronger than Mama is. If he’s hurt, I will need your help. If he’s sick, Mama will need help treating him, and you can do that better than I can.” He paused, casting around for the right words to comfort Letty, but unable to find them, he simply reiterated, “Papa needs you.”

“I know,” Letty whispered, “but I’m so scared.”

Her confession was met by silence. Letty waited for Miles to speak, but the seconds dragged on, feeling more like hours. Finally Letty lifted her head, ready to see disappointment on her brother’s face. Instead, she saw that Miles was still leaning against the kitchen cabinets, but his arms were now outstretched to her. Relieved, Letty jumped from her chair and ran to Miles’s embrace, letting a small sob escape her throat as she buried her face in his shoulder. Miles wrapped his strong arms around his sister protectively and hugged her while she tried to collect herself.

“It’s OK, Letty. You’re OK.”

Mama appeared at the top of the stairs. When she saw Letty sobbing on Miles's shoulder, she lifted her eyebrows, confused. Miles gently shook his head, quietly indicating that this was a bad time to interrupt; he had things under control. His mother nodded and silently slipped through another door into her bedroom. She knew that Miles was better than anyone at calming Letty.

"I wish I were brave like you are," Letty sniffled after a few moments. Miles squeezed her even tighter, wrapping her as securely and safely in his hug as possible.

"I'm not any braver than you," Miles answered her. "I'm scared, too."

"You are?" Letty pulled away to look at him, finding it difficult to believe that was true.

"Of course I am. I'm scared that we won't find Papa. I'm scared that we will find him and he'll be hurt or that I won't be able to care for him, and I'm scared that one of us will get hurt. But being afraid doesn't mean you're not brave."

"It doesn't?"

"Not the way I see it. Isn't bravery just facing something that scares you straight-on?"

"I guess so." Letty wiped tears from her eyes.

"So you can't really be brave without being afraid first, can you?"

"No. No, I guess not."

"You know, sometimes I think that the bravest thing we can do is take a leap of faith and trust that God will work everything out."

Letty hesitated. What Miles said made sense, but she knew that if she agreed, she would have to try to be brave. Was she ready for that? She still wasn't sure.

“Look, Letty,” Miles went on, sensing her hesitation. “Mama and I won't make you do anything. If you truly don't want to come, you can stay home, but I believe you can do this. I think Papa needs you. Ultimately, though, it's your choice.”

Letty's heart continued pounding in her chest. Closing her eyes momentarily, she tried to think about things the way Miles did. She was scared, yes. Something could go wrong, true. But if her papa needed her, how could she possibly say no? Besides, if she were to stay behind, she would just worry.

“You're right,” she said at last, trying to square her shoulders. “Of course I'll go.”

Mama entered the room behind her just at that moment. “Good,” she said. “If your father isn't home tonight, we will leave first thing in the morning.”

BOOK 1

LANTERN LANE

Citizens from the Kingdom of Trielle who dared to journey into the ominous, dark forest just outside the village were usually never seen again. Thus, Lantern Lane was created and lined with huge, beckoning lanterns set aglow each night. Fourteen-year-old Letty is perfectly content with her life on Lantern Lane until she faces her father's mysterious disappearance and then is mistaken for the princess's runaway lady-in-waiting. Whisked to the castle, Letty finds herself in a whole new world as she encounters daunting experiences and unexpected adventures. Featuring beautiful writing, a hallmark of *The Good and the Beautiful* literature, *Book 1* of *Lantern Lane* is sure to uplift, entertain, and inspire.




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