

KATHRYN BUTLER

The
Dreamkeeper
~ SAGA ~



The QUEST for the GUARDIANS

“Faith, purpose, friendship, and hope. These themes and more draw young readers into a world where dreams come to life. Butler brings creative imagination and spiritual depth together in a way that keeps children engaged and curious. The larger-than-life storyline of *The Dream Keeper Saga* is worth daydreaming about at your desk and discussing with your family around the table.”

Gloria Furman, author, *Labor with Hope* and *A Tale of Two Kings*

“Where have all the good books gone? The ones that celebrate the beauty of light, instead of romanticizing the darkness? The ones where words are strung together so beautifully that grown-ups and children alike are captivated by the story as it unfolds? The ones where heroes do what’s right and villains are put in their place? Far too few books like these take up space on my children’s bookshelves, but as a mom, I refuse to believe that all the great children’s literature was written in days gone by. That’s why I adore *The Dream Keeper Saga*, written by the tremendously talented Kathryn Butler. My sons have devoured these books and learned important lessons as they read. These new classics remind us all that there are still great stories worth telling.”

Erin Davis, author; podcaster; mom of four

“Kathryn Butler’s writing effortlessly draws readers into an imaginative, action-packed world of fantasy that is marked with clear allegorical themes of the truest story ever told. You will laugh and cry with the characters, all while being beautifully pointed to the gospel.”

Korrie Johnson, children’s book reviewer; Founder, Good Book Mom

“I want to know Pax. With each book, he becomes more compelling, and with him, the whole saga. Some series begin with their best tale, then try to muster up sequels. *The Dream Keeper Saga* gets better with each book. Kathryn Butler wins our trust with her characters, engaging turns, and deeply Christian themes. I’m excited to add the *Dream Keeper Saga* to our family canon.”

David Mathis, Senior Teacher and Executive Editor, desiringGod.org;
Pastor, Cities Church, Saint Paul, Minnesota; author, *Habits of Grace*

“Two of my favorite things about the *Dream Keeper Saga* are the character Pax and the almost Mad-Libs-esque imaginative flow, appropriate (even necessary) to a world redeemed from humanity’s collective dreams.”

James D. Witmer, author, *A Year in the Big Old Garden*, *Beside the Pond*; and *The Strange New Dog*

The QUEST for the GUARDIANS

The **DreamKeeper** ~ SAGA ~

The QUEST for the GUARDIANS

Kathryn Butler

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To Jack and Christie.

If you go down to the depths, he is with you.

If you ascend to heaven, he is there.

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North
America



The Green Mountains,
Vermont, US

Atlantic Ocean

Europe

Africa

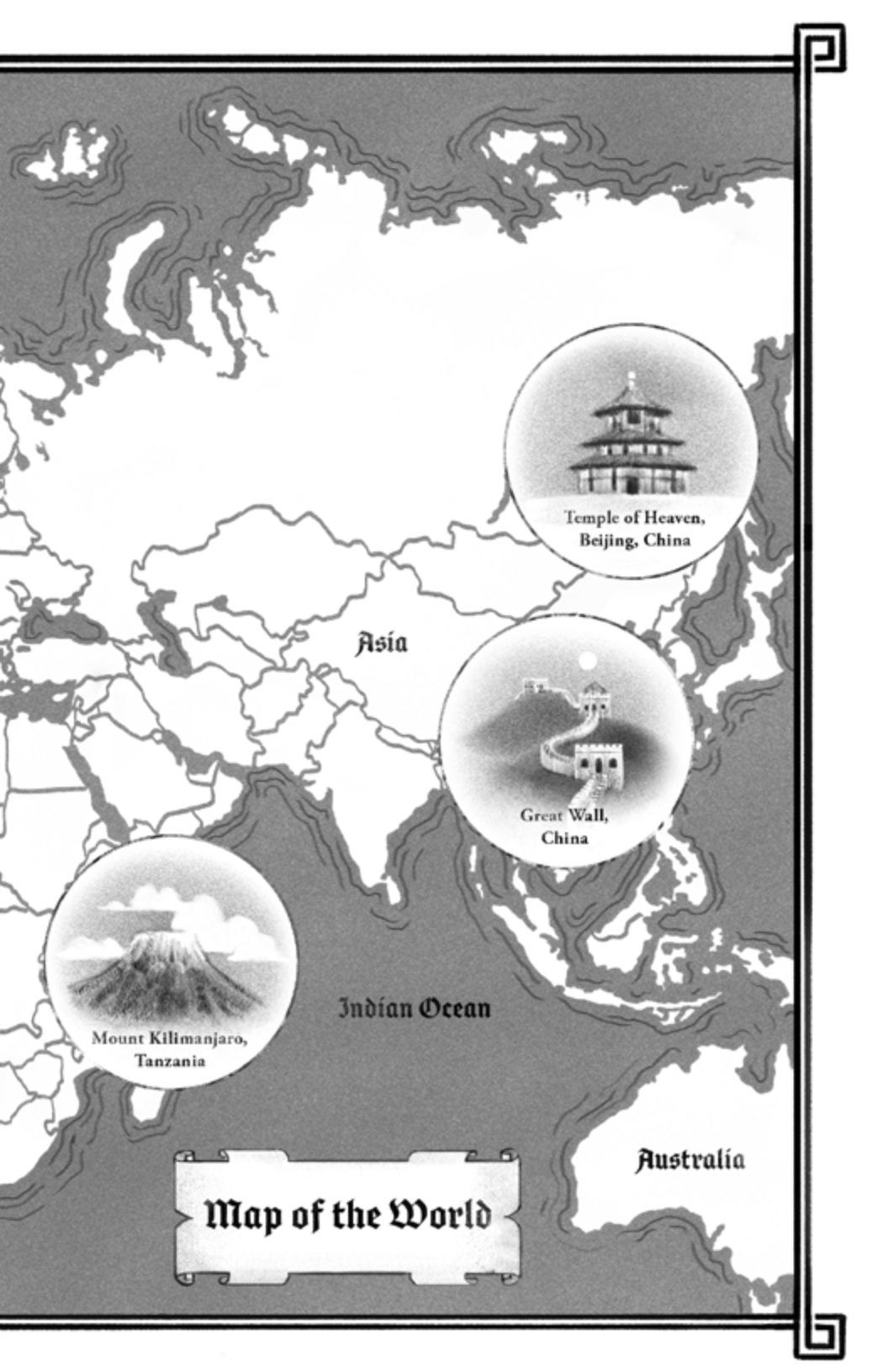


Machu Picchu,
Peru

South
America

South Pacific
Ocean



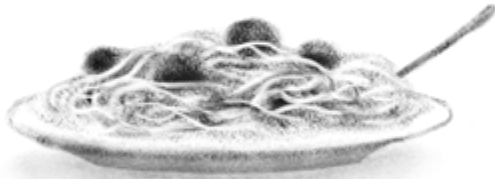


Asia

Indian Ocean

Australia

Map of the World



CHAPTER 1

Home

The light of the soothstone faded, and Lily wrapped her sweater around herself against the chill of twilight. She stood among trees she knew by heart, their every branch and knot markers of the stories she'd spun in the woods when she was little, long before she knew anything about soothstones and dwarf dragons, shrouds and caves teeming with lights. As leaves crunched beneath her feet and crickets graced the evening with their song, Lily wondered if all she had just endured, and all the beauty she had just left, were only a fantasy. Had the caverns, the Veil, and the Painted Woodland sprung from her own daydreams? Were Enlacia's gleaming walls only the product of her imagination?

Then she scratched her arm, glanced down at her hands, and rubbed grains of sand from the Desert of the Forgotten between her fingers. She stood in the cool of the woods, *her* woods, far removed from any hint of dreams run amok, and yet the Somnium Realm still clung to her. To eliminate all doubt, Lily's favorite star kestrel landed on her shoulder and nipped her ear.

"Better stay out of sight, Rigel," Lily whispered. Rigel scattered silver dust onto the forest floor as he flew into a nearby tree, and Lily patted her cardigan pocket, where Flint snuggled down into hiding.

Mattie sidled up beside her. "Where do we go? Do you know this place?"

Lily brushed the sand from her fingers. "Definitely. This is home for me. My dad built that tree house over there."

"Oh, wow. I always dreamed about a tree house. My dad said he wanted to build me one, but we only had the maple tree in the park. We pretended it was ours, but, you know, it wasn't *really*."

"I bet he'll build one with you now."

"Do you really think so?"

"I'm sure he'd like nothing better."

Mattie's eyes sparkled, and Lily couldn't help but smile at her enthusiasm. Although they'd known each other for only a short time, Mattie's bravery and wit had already saved Lily's life more than once. Lily found she stumbled upon such great friendships readily in the Realm, even as she struggled to find them in the waking world.

As they wove through the trees, Lily wondered with a twinge of anxiety about the scene awaiting her at home. Cedric had called her back to the Realm to tackle the Blight just weeks before the end of the school year, with summer only flirting with the land and sky. Now, although a cool breeze drifted through the woods, the smell of a charcoal grill and the rattle of a nearby lawn sprinkler told Lily that summer had tightened its grip. How long had she been gone? She remembered the note she'd hurriedly scribbled to her parents, promising that she'd return, and she wondered if Barth had delivered it. How much did they know? How much would she have to explain, and would they understand?

A boy in the front yard of a neighbor's house threw a tennis ball at a mutt dog, then froze and gawked at Lily and Mattie. Lily suddenly realized that the lavender weave of Isla's tunic and sweater were smeared with grime from her adventures in mysterious caves. She offered the boy a timid wave; in response, he dashed into the house and screamed for his mother.

"You don't have the friendliest of neighbors," Mattie remarked.

"No, not really. Although I guess I can't blame him. We do look like a mess."

"It's not our fault. I'd like to see him try to stay clean while fighting against Magnus and his dwellers!"

They turned the corner, and Lily spied her mailbox. Its door hung slack, and the surrounding grass was unkempt, sure signs that something had distracted her parents from the usual business of keeping the house. *I hope they're not upset*, she thought. She

bit her lip as she walked up the steps. She tripped on the stoop, and then cringed as the rusty hinges of the screen door squeaked. When she entered the house, she grimaced at her grimy face in the mirror and then loitered in the doorway.

“Dan? Is that you?”

Mom. Lily opened her mouth to respond, but words failed her. *What can I even say? “Mom, I’m home!”?*

“Dan, are you okay? Dinner will be ready in—”

Lily’s mother stepped into the corridor. She held a wooden spoon—the same one Lily had grabbed to defend herself against Cedric when he ransacked the kitchen—and wore an apron dotted with tomato sauce over her scrubs. In one moment, she stared at Lily in wide-eyed disbelief. In the next, the spoon clattered to the floor, and she swept Lily into her arms.

“Lily! My sweet girl, you’re okay! You’ve come back! I didn’t know—we were so worried—”

Lily squeezed her eyes shut. “I’m okay, Mom,” she whispered. “Everything’s all right. Better than all right.”

Her mother pulled away and gripped both of Lily’s shoulders, squeezing them to convince herself that her daughter was real. Then she cupped Lily’s face with both of her palms, caressed her cheeks, and finally gathered her into another hug and whispered a prayer of thanks. She stroked Lily’s hair, as she’d done so many nights while reading her stories before bed.

Lily’s dad appeared, and he, too, cried out and then joined in the embrace. They held each other for a long moment, most of

their words only fragments. In the warmth of their arms, Lily's worries washed away.

"Lily, are you all right? You're *sure* you're all right?" her dad finally said, pulling away and studying her.

"I'm fine, Dad. I'm fine."

"What happened to you? What did you go through?"

"It's a long story—a *really* long story—but I promise you, I'm okay."

"We've been so worried."

"I know. I'm sorry I worried you."

Dad wrapped her in another embrace, and over Lily's shoulder he noticed Mattie still standing in the doorway. "Hi," Mattie said with a bashful smile.

Mom turned at the greeting, wiped her eyes, and reached out a hand. "I'm so sorry! You were so quiet, we didn't even realize you were there. I'm Andrea. Are you a friend of Lily's?"

"Yep. I'm Mattie."

At the mention of the name, Dad loosened his arms from around Lily. "Barth's daughter? Mattie, as in Barth's daughter?"

Mattie beamed. "Yes! How did you know? Have you seen him?"

"He was here a couple of weeks ago."

"That's great! Oh, Lily, it's just like Pax said! He said we'd find him! This is wonderful!"

An expression Lily couldn't pinpoint flitted over her father's face as he looked from Lily to Mattie, and back again. "Where did you come from?" he asked Mattie.

Mattie bobbed up and down on her toes in her excitement. “Lily and I met in the Realm, and she brought me back. Do you know where I can find my dad?”

Dad studied her for a moment and opened his mouth to speak, but then decided against it. As Lily wondered what thoughts troubled him, he clapped his hands and adopted a lighter demeanor. “You know what?” he said, rubbing his palms together. “We have a lot to catch up on. Why don’t you girls go get cleaned up, and we can talk about everything over dinner?”

“Good idea,” Lily’s mom added. “Mattie, please make yourself at home. Lily, why don’t you give her some fresh clothes? I need to get back to the sauce before it bubbles over.” She planted a kiss on Lily’s cheek, then hustled back to the kitchen.

Dad lingered for a moment before wrapping Lily in one more hug. “I’m so glad you’re home, Scout,” he said. A glint of pain shone in his eyes, but it quickly vanished as he followed after Mom.

Lily ran her hands along the walls in the main hallway and pressed her fingers into a familiar crescent-shaped divot in the plaster, the product of a collision when she once tried to roller-skate on the carpet. She spotted Gran in her favorite chair in the living room, asleep with a photo album on her lap, and she motioned for Mattie to go on ahead while she slipped into the room. She padded silently toward Gran, placed a hand on the back of her chair, and smiled at the pictures of her grandparents, decades younger, waving at the camera during one of their many

expeditions traveling the world. In each photo Lily's grandfather wrapped a sturdy arm around Gran, who leaned into him as if he were a mighty sycamore shielding her from a storm. A lock of hair—her signature—dangled in front of her eyes in each picture. Lily's mother now tacked that lock back with a bobby pin; Lily had a sudden urge to loosen the pin, fan out the strands, and recapture a glimpse of the woman in the photographs.

Gran's eyelids fluttered open. She blinked at Lily for a moment, and then her eyes moistened and a wide smile brightened her face. She reached out a single finger to stroke Lily's cheek. "Lily!" she said.

"Hi, Gran. I'm home." Lily clasped her hand. When Lily's dad first disappeared, Gran's understanding and language seemed to vanish with him. The sporadic memory lapses the family had noticed over the years worsened precipitously, and Gran could no longer even remember Lily's name. The change was so unsettling that Lily's heart had leapt when she first heard Gran talking like herself in the Wilderness, only to discover, with horror, that it was really a shroud impersonating her. The sound of Lily's own name on Gran's lips now sounded like music. Lily felt like she was reclaiming something she'd lost.

Gran's eyes wandered again to the pictures, and when she glimpsed Mount Rainier towering above a field of wildflowers, she gasped. "Look at that," she said, tracing the silhouette of the mountain. Gran couldn't remember her trip to Rainier, or the fact that she'd taken the picture herself, but her capacity to

wonder still burned. As Lily kissed her cheek and turned away, she heard Gran's soft voice singing "All Creatures of Our God and King," and Lily couldn't help but smile. *I'm home*, she thought.

And yet . . .

The hallways were so familiar, the sounds and scents like sinking into a warm embrace. But deep within, in a part of herself that seemed as vital as a long-buried root, Lily already missed the Realm. She missed the magic that Pax imbued into his land.

An idea bloomed in Lily's mind. What if she could convince her family to come back to the Realm *with* her someday? She'd learned so much since the first time Cedric catapulted her into the Wilderness. She had gifts, and under Pax's mentorship she'd learned to use them for good. Couldn't her parents be a part of that story, too? Couldn't the people she loved most and the place where she most belonged come together?

They gathered around the dinner table as the night deepened and the cricket song intensified. When Dad asked Lily to tell them about what she'd endured, her heart felt light. Any hurt she'd caused them, she thought, would surely wash away when they'd heard about all the wonders. She prattled on about everything she'd experienced, the joys as well as the fears: the Blight, her apprenticeship with Barth, Muzzytown and Ash Canyon, the Sea of Oblivion, and Pax giving his life for the Realm and rising again. The words flew from her mouth like a gushing stream. As she talked, she hoped her parents would lean forward, their forks paused half-wound with pasta, and ask questions as

they'd always done about topics much less important—grades and classes and summer camp.

Instead, as her story unfolded, worry lines creased her mother's face and her father stared at his hands. Finally, Lily's monologue petered out, and she studied her parents with unease. "What is it?" she asked.

Mom drew a breath. "Honestly, Lily, I'll be glad if I never hear another word about that dreamworld again."

Lily felt like a deflated balloon. "I'm so sorry I hurt you by leaving, Mom, but if you could see the Realm, I think you'd understand. It's such a wonderful place. It's a *magical* place."

"And deadly," Dad said. "I'll never forgive myself for the pain I put you and Mom through when I was captured. And then, to have you caught up in the keeper business, too—" He clenched his jaw and stabbed at his food with his fork.

"Dad, didn't you hear anything I just told you?"

"I did. And I'll never forgive myself for putting you through it. The Somnium Realm is no place for a kid."

Lily chewed a mouthful of meatball and tried to sort her words. "It's not all awful. Don't you remember? You used to love the place. I know you did—just think of all your stories! If you only saw what Pax did—"

"Lily, it's true that I used to love the Realm, but the stakes are too high. You have a home and a family, and you're just a *kid*. There are plenty of adults in this world to go into the Realm and be heroes."

“I wasn’t trying to be a hero; I was just trying to follow what Pax asked me to do. You should have seen what he did, Dad! He died for the Realm and made everything whole and beautiful again. And then he came back to life! And when I showed others what he’d done, it changed them. Entire kingdoms of people—the Iceleins and the Forgotten—it was like they became new creatures. It was like Pax’s words *transformed* them or something. This light came down my arm and shot out of the soothstone, and—”

“Enough! You should never have gone back!”

“But, Dad—”

“You should *never* have gone back, Lily! There’s no excuse!”

The sternness in his voice silenced her. She pushed the food around on her plate and wished she could bring back the laughter and joyful tears from just half an hour before.

As she shrank into herself, Dad softened a touch. “Lily Bean, I think about what could have happened to you, and it terrifies me,” he said. “When Barth brought me your letter, I thought I’d lost you forever.”

“I’m sorry, Dad,” she said, barely whispering. She searched her mind for the right thing to say, something tender and true, but as usual her words fell flat. Flint rolled over in the front pocket of her pajama top; she wondered if *he* would have better success in persuading them.

“Excuse me, Mr. McKinley?” Mattie asked. “When did my dad come to see you?”

Dad suddenly looked embarrassed. “Oh, forgive me, Mattie. We’ve been yammering on all this time, and you’ve been waiting so patiently. He came about two weeks ago. Apparently, he’d been staying with a friend of yours, Lily?”

“Keisha Reynolds?”

“Right. Her family let him stay with them for a few weeks and helped him research what’s happened since he left. He was able to connect with your mother.”

Mattie grinned. “Mom? Oh, that’s great! Is she okay? Where is she?”

“She’s been through a lot over the years, but she’s okay. She’s still living in San Francisco.”

“And—where are we again?”

“Massachusetts.”

Her shoulders sagged. “Not exactly around the corner. Still, I’m so glad she’s all right. When can I see them? Is that where my dad went, to San Francisco to see her?”

“He hasn’t gone to San Francisco yet.” He paused, weighing his words. “He’s looking for you.”

“Looking for me? Where?”

“Mattie, do you realize exactly how long you’ve been gone?”

Mattie’s smile faded. “Ages, I guess.”

“It’s been twenty years.”

A long pause ensued, during which a cloud seemed to descend over Mattie. As Lily saw the light in Mattie’s eyes dull, she felt a pang of pity. Lily had been gone only a few weeks, and her

world had upended; how could poor Mattie cope after being gone for *twenty years*?

“You haven’t aged at all,” Dad said. “It was the Realm, wasn’t it? You were in the Realm the whole time?”

Mattie nodded.

“What exactly happened?” Dad asked.

As she fiddled with the strands of her ponytail, she looked wispy and frail, as if a strong breeze might break her. “I followed my dad. I didn’t mean to, but he left the house with my sketchbook, and so I ran to grab it from him. Then—”

“You transported with him, didn’t you? Barth suspected as much, but he didn’t understand why he didn’t come across you during all those years when you were both in the Realm. How did he not know you were there?”

“I was trapped. Underground.”

“Where, exactly?”

Mattie stared into her lap and shredded her napkin.

“She was trapped in the lairs of the Forgotten, Dad,” Lily said.

The words took him aback, and sympathy glistened in his eyes as he shook his head. “I’m so sorry, Mattie. How awful for you.”

“I’d rather not talk about it, please. I’m just glad to be out of there, and I can’t wait to finally see him again. Where did he go, after he came to see you?”

Lily’s mom shot Dad an uncomfortable glance. “He took the news that you’d vanished pretty hard,” Dad said, returning Mom’s look. “He blames himself, both for your disappearance

and for leaving your mom alone for twenty years. He promised your mother that he'd find you."

"But find me where? Not back in the Realm, I hope?"

"No, not back in the Realm. He couldn't go back there without a soothstone."

"Then what did he do? Where did he go?"

"You have to understand, Mattie, that he felt desperate. He was so determined to find you."

"Mr. McKinley, please, just tell me! Where is my dad? What did he do?"

He drew a breath. "He's trying to go back in time to stop you from entering the Realm."

