

Title: Neverending

"Stop it!" I screamed as loud as I could. Continuous jolts ran through my entire body and my feet, inside of my worn leather boots, felt strangled by the iron straps around them. "Tied." I thought. "Tied to a torture table." The jolts stopped for a second, hopefully letting me rest. My breath sounded ragged and broken to my own ears, a sound no one wants to hear from themselves. I stared up into the tree that *the makers* used to torture the kids they brought here. As if living here wasn't torture enough. Bleh. The jolts began to come back, and build up. I screamed my throat out and right before my world went black, I heard a whisper. A quiet, creepy whisper. "You know why you are here Althea. You know what you've found. Don't go looking for it again."

I sat up quickly, beads of sweat still all over my face. My shoulder length black hair was all over my face. As I pulled the strands of hair off my face, I saw the two other 14 year-olds here with me, Eleanor and Will. Eleanor's white hair was pulled back into a simple pony tail, and she sat in her green outfit in the trees around me. Will sat on the ground poking the roaring fire with a stick. Eleanor was the first one to see me. "Thea!" she yelled. "Where in the world did you go?" Now Will was on his feet. "Althea. What happened? Did you find any food?" I grimaced upon standing up and said "Listen, I've found a way out of this never ending forest. I've found it."

Will and Eleanor gasped, their jaws dropped and their eyes became enormous with the slightest hope of escaping this forest. "Althea. It's been seven years since we got here. We all know that there's no way out! We all know they torture us when we don't play by their rules. This is their game. We're just their game pieces. Accept that!" Will's jaw was firmly closed and the hope in his eyes was prehistoric. Gone.

I held my chin high, saying " No, Will! I've found it! It's a tunnel. A tunnel out! The torturers told me I'd found it, and I'm leaving tonight. I refuse to believe I'm as useless as a game piece. Even if we are the game pieces, the game can't go on without any action."

Eleanor looked at me oddly, her head tilted to the smallest angle possible. Her eyes were looking straight into mine, but it felt like she was digging through my brain to see if I was lying. Quietly, she announced, "I believe you. I'll take any chance I've got to leave this horrid, lush, torture chamber, even if it's the slightest percent chance that it'll work." I smiled and changed my gaze to Will. "Tonight, we're leaving." I pointed at him intensely and said, " Life can't be lived without trying."

It was getting dark, and almost time to leave for the tunnel. I was in my tent trying to pack what I had, but all I had was a lion's tooth anklet that circled my ankle three times. " I'm done!" I called to Eleanor's tent, since Will was already outside staring at the fire emotionlessly.

"Me too." Eleanor said, strolling out of her tent in contempt. "Let's go." Will lifted his head up. "are you sure we're safe to do this? Even if we get to where the tunnel leads, what will we do? Where will we go?" Eleanor looked at Althea. "I – I think we'll figure it out just like we always do." I mumbled. Will looked at me faintly. "Okay."

I led Eleanor and Will through the branches until a hole in the ground showed up. "I'll go last." I said, "I'll watch." Eleanor jumped in first and just as Will jumped in after, I heard the yell of *a maker* from

somewhere close. They knew we were here. We had to go. It was dark now and I knew that their attack plan would be easy to make happen since we were left defenseless, jumping into a tunnel out. We were as good as dead.

I jumped into the hole and landed on hard stone before I broke off running. Eleanor and Will were straight ahead but they got my message. Run. We ran until the tunnel ended, but it went straight up. There was no way we could reach it! "Eleanor!" I yelled, and Will threw her up the hole. She was screaming her head off and her hair had come out of its ponytail. "WILL! ALTHEA! Why me?" she screamed as she landed outside of the hole. I shook my head, trying to rid that image from my mind. Will turned to look at me, probably about to throw me up too, but when he grabbed me like he had Eleanor, I whispered, "I won't let you throw your life away for mine. I'm sorry." As he was about to launch me, his face became confused and he said, "What?" I used his mid motion to fore myself against the ground and propel him up instead of me. His face was full of horror as he landed on the ground, out of sight. "Out of sight, out of mind." I thought as I gulped down my guilt like a rotten apple. Another roar sounded and I knew they were right in front of me. Except, the weren't the makers! They were lions. I took one prayer to God and, thinking of the bible story about the man and the lions that didn't eat him (my mother had told me that the night before I woke up here), I charged at the lions. With a skip of my heart, I ran right through the lions. I smiled, they were just projections. Really, really good disguised projections! One of the projections roared and right then, Eleanor lowered a rope of twine for me to climb up.

Epilogue:

I sat in peace at the town coffee shop, drinking hot chocolate. Will came in with Eleanor and I gave them a big hug. This was it, my new life.