

SEPTIMUS HEAP

✦ BOOK FOUR ✦

Queste



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MORE!

ANGIE SAGE

National Bestselling Author

 HarperCollins e-books

Septimus Heap

Book Four

Queste

Angie Sage

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For Katherine,

my editor—

thank you

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PROLOGUE:

NICKO AND SNORRI



It is the weekly market

on Wizard Way. A girl and a boy have stopped at a pickled herring stall. The boy has fair hair, twisted and braided in the style that sailors will be wearing sometime in the distant future. His green eyes have a serious, almost sad expression, and he is trying to persuade the girl to let him buy her some herring.

The girl, too, has fair hair, but hers is almost white. It is straight and long, held in place with a leather headband, the kind worn by Northern Traders. Her pale blue eyes look at the boy. “No,” she tells him. “I cannot eat it. It will remind me too much of home.”

“But you love herring,” he says.

The stallholder is an elderly woman with pale blue eyes like the girl. She has not sold a single herring all morning and she is determined not to let a chance of a sale go by. "If you love herring, you must try this," she tells the girl. "This is done the proper way. It's how herring should be pickled." She cuts a piece, sticks a small pointy wooden stick into it and hands it to the girl.

"Go on, Snorri," says the boy, almost pleading. "Try it. Please." Snorri smiles. "All right, Nicko. For you, I will try it."

"It is good?" asks the stallholder.

"It is good, Old Mother," says Snorri. "Very good."

Nicko is thinking. He is thinking that the stallholder speaks like Snorri. She has the same lilting accent and she does not have the Old Speak patterns that he and Snorri have become used to in the few months they have already spent in this Time. "Excuse me," he says. "Where are you from?"

A wistful look comes into the old woman's eyes. "You would not understand," she tells him.

Nicko persists. "But you are not from here," he says. "I can tell by the way you speak. You speak like Snorri here." He puts his arm around Snorri's shoulders and she blushes.

The old woman shrugs. "It is true I am not from here. I am from farther away than you could possibly imagine." Now Snorri is looking at the old woman too. She begins to speak in her own language, the language of her Time.



The old woman's eyes light up at hearing her own tongue spoken as she had spoken it as a child. "Yes," she says in reply to Snorri's tentative question. "I am Ells. Ells Larusdottir." Snorri speaks again and the old woman replies warily. "Yes, I do—or did—have a sister called Herdis. How do you know? Are you one of those thought-snatchers?"

Snorri shakes her head. "No," she says, still in her own language. "But I am a Spirit-Seer. As was my grandmother Herdis Larusdottir. And my mother, Alfrún, who was not yet born when my great-aunt Ells disappeared through the Glass."

Nicko wonders what Snorri could possibly be saying to make the old woman grip her flimsy stall table with such ferocity that her knuckles go white. Although Snorri has been teaching him her language, she spoke to the old woman much faster than he was used to and the only word he recognized was "mother." And this is how it happens that Great-aunt Ells takes Nicko and Snorri to her tall, thin house in the Castle walls, throws a log into her tiled stove and tells them her story. Many hours later Snorri and Nicko leave Great-aunt Ells's house full of pickled herring and hope. Most precious of all, they have a map showing the way to the House of Foryx, the Place Where All Times Do Meet. That evening Snorri makes two copies of the map and gives

one to Marcellus Pye, the Alchemist in whose house they are staying. For the next few weeks their days are full of plans as they prepare for their journey into the unknown.

It is a gray and rainy day when Marcellus Pye stands on the Castle Quay and waves their boat farewell. He wonders if he will ever see them again. He is still wondering.

1

NICKO'S RELEASE

Jannit Maarten, boatbuilder, was on her way to the Palace.

Jannit, a lean, spare woman with a long stride and a sailor's pigtail, had never in her strangest dreams thought that she would one day be tying up her rowboat at Snake Slipway and heading for the Palace Gates. But, on a chilly gray spring day, here she was, doing just that—and feeling more than a little apprehensive.

Some minutes later Hildegarde, the sub-Wizard on door duty at the Palace, looked up from her night-school assignment titled “The Politics, Principles and Practice of Transformation.” She saw Jannit hesitantly walking over the wide plank bridge that spanned the ornamental moat and led to the Palace doors. Happy to have a break, Hildegarde jumped to her feet with a smile and said, “Good morning, Miss Maarten. How may I help you?”

“You know my name!” said Jannit, amazed.

Hildegarde did not tell Jannit that she made it her business to know everyone's name. Instead she said, “Of course I do, Miss Maarten. Your boatyard repaired my sister's boat last year. She was very pleased with the work.” Jannit had no idea who this sub-Wizard's sister could possibly be, but she could not help wondering what boat it was.

Jannit remembered boats. She smiled awkwardly and took off her battered sailor's boater, which she had worn especially for her visit to the Palace—it was Jannit's equivalent of a party frock and tiara.