

Collette was too stunned to speak. She was staring at the poster, her mouth wide open. Five simple words, but that could impact her world so much.

The poster read: "**The Crystal has been stolen.**"

Everybody in the region knew Collette, and, because of her bravery, she was known as 'Courageous Collette'. She lived in an archipelago where people all got along, thanks to the Crystal. Before this blessing, tribes from the islands fought, wanting to gain more territory. But legend says a goddess used the last of her power to create the Crystal. From that moment, the tribes lived in perfect harmony.

"I have to do something about this," Collette told herself.

As she left, a voice stopped her. "Hey, Coward Collette! Saved the world yet?"

The girl whipped around. It was Alvar, a boy who always seemed to want to annoy her. Collette didn't like him either.

"Ugh, stop it. What do you get out of making fun of people?" she countered, and turned back around.

She decided to go investigate the Crystal Palace, where it all started.

The Crystal Palace is where the Crystal is (normally) guarded. Collette was puzzled by the fact that somebody could trespass the unbeatable security.

As she arrived, the interior of the building was in complete chaos. The girl tried to move through the crowd of elves and finally reached the director's office.

There he was, looking as miserable as ever. Collette asked some questions, and soon had part of the story: The security's camera footage showed a man dressed completely in black, approaching the security camera...then, there was nothing. "The thief must have broken our camera," the director added.

The girl thanked the director and promised to give him updates on the case. Before she left, he stopped her: "Wait! I forgot to tell you that someone will be helping you from now on. Oh, there he is."

A fifteen-year-old boy entered: Alvar. Collette's jaw dropped. It couldn't be possible.

"Uh, Sir, you're not expecting us to work together, right?"

"Of course I am. Collette, the fate of the islands depends on you. You need all the help you can get. Besides, I think you two will form a particularly good duo."

As Collette mumbled a particularly grumpy "If you say so", the two new partners exited the room and ran out of the palace.

They didn't lose any time and directly went straight to the Feeling Forest, where they hoped they could find more clues. When they arrived, the floor moved and the forest turned blue, leaves falling off the trees and the floor turned slimy.

"Huh," Alvar looked around. "I always wondered why it was called the 'Feeling Forest'. I guess it changes with your emotions. I assume this function is 'nervousness' then."

Collette had always asked herself the same thing, actually. Not that she was ever going to prove Alvar right.

It was already getting dark so they tried to find somewhere to sleep, moving through the piles of slime on the floor.

They settled for a cave, and left early the next morning. For the next few days, they searched, desperate, for any possible small information. Just as they were losing hope, luck smiled at them: printed in the dirt of the forest, there was a footprint!

"Finally, a clue!" Collette exclaimed. "Though the footprint looks small, it's impossible that an adult has this shoe size."

Alvar frowned. "Oh, um-we should probably look for other footsteps, right? Let's go."

'He's acting weird,' Collette wondered. 'What's wrong?'

But as the days passed, Collette found Alvar not so bad at all. He was observant, smart and helpful. Maybe the director was right when he said that they would form a good team. The woods slowly turned a bright shade of yellow and rainbows appeared out of nowhere.

Until it started to rain. A lot. The solid ground turned muddy, and the two teenagers were drenched. Suddenly, Collette, who was walking behind Alvar, realized something that made her heart skip a beat.

“Wait. These footsteps look familiar. Didn’t we see them before?”

Alvar gulped. “Um, no. No. I don’t think so.”

Collette narrowed her eyes. And all the pieces clicked together.

“It was you.” she murmured.

“What? Of course no-”

“IT WAS YOU! YOU STOLE THE CRYSTAL!” The whole forest turned a fiery red. It stopped raining, the floor broke into burned pieces and lava started rising from the ground. The sky clouded, and it became very dark.

“HOW COULD YOU?” Collette bellowed, pointing accusingly at Alvar. “JUST WHEN I STARTED TRUSTING YOU? You were the one who stole the Crystal, the footsteps were yours, you played the nice guy all along, you were the one who scratched the message in the bark of the tree just to distract me. IT WAS YOU!” She was now crying in rage.

Alvar looked at her. Silence. His eyes seemed pleading and desperate. “I’m sorry I have to do this,” he whispered, then whistled three long notes.

At first there was nothing. Then the floor rattled and a huge ship came out of it. Alvar climbed into it, and mouthed “I’m sorry”. And Collette was left with an army of robots coming out. She panicked, but told herself ‘I need to get back the Crystal’ as she dodged the robots and pushed them into the lava. She reached the ship and climbed inside it.

Courageous Collette had landed in a large circular room, with the Crystal laying on a cushion in the center. She didn’t hesitate. She grabbed the crystal and sprinted out of the room as fast as she could. But two strong arms grabbed her by the shoulders. She turned around ; it was Alvar.

“Give me the Crystal,” he whispered. “Give me the Crystal, please, and we’ll leave you alone,” he said, his voice cracking.

Collette said nothing.

“Please, I need the money for my family,” a tear rolled down from his eye.

Collette finally reacted. “Don’t do this. You’re playing with the future of our islands.”

He tightened his grip on her shoulders, then released the pressure all of a sudden. “You’re right. This is wrong.”

They ran out of the room and jumped from patch of burned ground to patch of burned ground. Abruptly, they got lifted from the ground. Alvar and Collette thrashed, but the force pulling them was too strong.

“Don’t worry, you’re safe.” was the last thing they heard before waking up a few days later in the hospital.

The people that had taken the two heroes were the elves that worked at the Crystal Palace ; the director had been alerted of the situation and ordered to rescue the children. The Crystal had been put back in its original position and the leader of the operation to steal the sacred crystal had been sentenced to jail for a long, long time. Alvar and Collette became friends, and the boy received the money he needed for his family. Everything was perfect once again...