

# *Chapter 1*

*L*ight was slowly but surely going elsewhere, turning the beautiful winter day into a dark, foggy night. The sun slowly slipped away behind a large rainy cloud. The fog covered over the horizon, leaving a dull glow in what was once a beautiful evening. Kyle, lying on the bed, washed under the fluorescent blue light, glare shining and glistening outside his window and throughout his room. The glare reflecting the streetlights and the dull, old, and dead trees.

The trees.

Swaying.

Swaying through the winds, as the air got colder by the second. Christmas has already passed. It caught him off guard how fast days can move and most importantly, how he got no presents. Especially the presents.

What's Christmas when you got no presents?

Boredom. Falling over his adolescent mind for the past week, questions start appearing in his tiny little head, unanswered. Disappointment rang throughout his entire body, as sorrow soaked inside his body every minute he laid in that comfy big bed. He remembered the good old days when Christmas used to be different. The laughter of joy ringing through the winter night. Memories flicker in and out of his mind. The house seemed to be laughing at him. Creaks bending with noise. Walls getting banged like bullets. The house was basically taunting him, saying, "Yea that noise? Don't worry, I could probably hold up for at least two more months."

Staring at the ceiling, A faint hum beneath him rang throughout the house. With newly profound grace he hasn't felt in forever; he

lunged out of his bed, hoping it would be something terrific. He felt the cold floor as he sprang onto the floor. He ran through the door that kept him grounded for days. Kyle started to grin like a maniac, thinking about all the possibilities that could be coming to his home. Maybe his friend was coming to visit... or maybe Santa finally remembered his address and was going to give a very late drop off.

Kyle darted down the stairs, three at a time staggering many times. Slamming his hand onto the wall as he tried to turn. He looked like an uncontrolled sock puppet trying to perform a backflip. After some bruises on his feet, and eating the wall many times, he busted the door open. No, it was not his friend coming over... also not Santa giving him his ten presents and an apology speech about getting lost on google maps.

Dang it.

Instead, it was an old, feeble mailman. Holding a crooked cane, staring blankly at him with no cofound expression. The mailman looked at Kyle hastily. His green eyes piercing down at me angrily. Then probably using all his ounce of physical strength, he said, "Here's your package. Have a wonderful day."

He said this so dryly, that Kyle could practically taste the blandness. Without waiting, the mailman turned around slowly, did a little crab shuffle, then robot walked awkwardly. Still clutching his cane for posture while making his way to his white van in the distance.

Kyle watched the mailman climb into his van and drive off.

Only then he looked down.

Reflecting his life, Kyle took the package off the ground and inspected it. The package was neatly wrapped with a bright purple ribbon, but the box was yellow. Two colors that obviously don't go well together. Whoever made this box must have been colorblind.

There was a bright white tag alongside the box. Kyle scooped it up under the light of his front porch to read it. It said, "To the one who believes in wonder." Kyle tilted his head, confused on what this meant. "Cool. I believe in wonder. Explains my decision making." Kyle snickered to himself.

Out of curiosity, he carefully opened the box, like it was going to explode at any second. Instead of expecting it was going to be a bomb, it was a little, miniature compass. Sitting there so motionless, it almost felt like a joke. Kyle was surprised it hadn't sprouted legs and ran away yet.

He took the compass out of the box, examining it. The first thing he noticed was that the compass never pointed north. It started to fiddle its point even before it was out of the box. Second, it was glowing, which probably wasn't a good sign.

Kyle decided to keep the compass, thinking it might be practical later. He slowly turned around, with thought weighted in his mind, and headed into his room. He tucked the compass in his drawer carefully and sank quietly into his bed, staring at the ceiling once again before drifting off to sleep.

## *Chapter 2*

*K*yle woke up late in the bright morning. His head hurting from all the absurd things that happened last night. Did this really happen, or was this just a dream? He was staring at the ceiling yet again, thinking of his life choices. Suddenly, suspense filled the air. There was no clatter of his mom cooking downstairs. The roar of the football game his dad watched every morning was nowhere to be heard. Even the faint thumping noise of his little brother was gone. Something was horribly wrong.

Kyle bolted downstairs, down into the living room with his heart hammering. His parents were nowhere in sight. Cold dread washed over him.

“No... no, no.” Kyle muttered, already moving.

Frantically, he searched around the whole house. He tore through the garage, attic, and basement, but no luck. Everyone he loved was simply gone.

He stood in the middle of the house; confusion knotted in Kyle’s brain. His chest tightened. He froze; mind swirled in bewilderment. He felt the air thicken around him.

Then, he heard something.

A faint hum upstairs in his room. He hesitated. Then, very quietly, he ascended the stairs, slow like a snail. Each step was deliberate. He felt like the house would crash down if he moved too fast.

Trying not to make any sound, he opened his door to his bedroom. His hand trembling. His drawer, where he put his compass in last night, was glowing again. He opened the drawer. Suspense held the air. The compass was glowing brighter, burning through his eyes. It shone brighter than ever before.

Kyle grasped up the compass with huge fascination. He lifted the compass close to his face. He saw something was wrong. The dial of the compass faded into a dark and murky screen. Kyle squinted into the screen with immense curiosity. As he lifted the screen to his face, a scene shifted. The black screen turned into a dark forest. It looked like the forest right next to his house. He saw a dark hooded figure sprinting through the scary woods. Branches whipped through the air as he ran. A huge, bulky sack behind his back, seeming to be slowing him down, each step he took.

As the compass returned to its normal form, and Kyle caught his breath. Kyle put two and two together. Ok, so there is a black hooded figure, out in the middle of the woods, and he is carrying a large sack. His parents couldn't have just magically disappeared so that means...

Anger started to build up Kyle's stomach. Newly profound anger has washed over his mind. It had lingered over him that his parents were gone... unless he had reacted. But what could he do? He had no experience going out in the wilderness alone. He wasn't fast, he didn't have crazy confidence.

He stared at the ceiling, then at the compass, back and forth. The compass was still glowing and trembling in his hand. He hesitated. Then he thought of his parents. So, loving so caring. He was desperate.

"Alright good ol' magical compass. Lead the way."

## *Chapter 3*

*R*ushing him out the door, he quickly found his pace. The compass, which was weighing down his arm, was pointing west. That was right towards the dark forest. Without hesitation, Kyle sprinted over into the dark and murky forest. Sharp thorns kept scraping his knees, as the forest began to close in on him. Slipping on muddy puddles, pushing aside thick branches, Kyle pushed his body all the way to the limits.

The compass tugged at his arm, not letting him rest for even a second. Guiding him through the thick forest and sudden drops in the path. Cold air, slicing his body as he ran, trying to swerve over the unpredictable obstacles. After what it felt like an hour, he began to worry. What if I made the wrong decision and accidentally ended myself? Too late to turn back now.

While he was thinking, the compass jerked into a stop. It twisted and shuddered, then there was nothing.

No movement.

Kyle was worried that the compass broke. A tight pain in his chest, a worrisome fear. He was starting to believe he was stranded, when he looked up and found out why. In front of him were three paths, stretched in three completely different directions. All three paths would lead him somewhere unexpected.

Great. Just great.

The compass needle twisted a little, then it slowly pointed in a random direction. Kyle wanted to scream at the compass for not working properly. It was no use though. Kyle had to make the decision all by himself.

He decided to go left. The path narrows; the forest seemed to get smaller. Then there was another 3-way path. Kyle stood still, his heart still panting from the run. He gritted his teeth and realized, this was not normal. This was a maze.

He chose right, hoping it would be the right path. Yet again, another 3-way path. The forest growing darker, more mysterious. More scarier. He chose middle, guessing blindly. He stopped dead. Oh, great. Another 3-way path.

“You got to be kidding me.” He muttered.

Kyle lowered his arm that held the compass. He absolutely wasn't letting the compass lead him anymore. He did not trust it. It was weighing down his arm the entire time! His muscles ached. His shoulder was burning like needles sticking in it. How can he trust it if it's slowing him down?

He clenched his jaw, guessing randomly, forcing his feet to take him elsewhere. Each decision felt heavy. Taking each second of his precious time. Seconds turned into minutes. Then minutes stretched into hours. No luck.

After a while, with desperation, he took out the compass. It was glowing again, out in the dark forest. Illuminating like a glowstick around his fingers. Kyle's breath slow and ragged from all that running. His breath covering the silence in the gloomy and forbidden forest. “Alright, you won. Lead the way.” He told the compass.

The compass started to work again. It slowly stirred in his hand. It was twitching, as if someone had woken it up. It's needle fiddling, changing course wildly. Then, the needle snapped into place, pointing right. Kyle, relieved, followed the compasses' order. The forest once again swallowing him as he walked toward that path.

It led him to another 3-way path. Kyle's heart has stopped. His chest was heavy. This was the same path he had took. The compass was not worried though. It confidently pointed left.

Then middle.

Middle.

Right.

Middle.

Left.

They both repeated this process until after what it felt like days. Kyle's throat burned. His chest heavier than ever before. His thoughts grew quiet as his feet were experiencing the top ten worst moments of feet injuries compilation. Then after minutes, there was just one path. Standing in front of Kyle. Silence filled the air, forest watching him from all around him.

Kyle took a huge breath of relief. He untightened his grip on the compass. He stared at the compass for a moment. Trees swaying from side to side in the unwanted silence. The glow from the compass wrapped around Kyles' fingers.

"I didn't trust you." Kyle said softly. "That's why you didn't work."

The needle shook back and forth, like it was nodding.

Kyle nodded. "Fine. You lead. I'll follow. But I expect frequent breaks."



## *Chapter 4*

**K**yle and his newly trusted buddy, compass, traveled for days.

As they moved, the forest seemed to shift apart. Trees grew taller. Space started to open up. The air seemed to be less dense. Without questioning, Kyle followed the compass, only stopped when Kyle's legs begged to rest.

A small cave, far from a distance, caught Kyle's eyes. It must have also caught the compasses' eyes. They both rushed toward the cave.

Then a flash of movement caught Kyle's eye. A purple, mysterious figure that looks suspiciously like a deer, sprinted past him. Leaves flying and branches snapping as it flew past. Kyle jumped, clearly scared out of his mind.

Before he could think, two more of these mysterious figures shot passed him, leaving him on the ground this time. More clumps of dirt and leaves flying as they disappeared into the bushes.

Kyle trudged through the thick forest, ignoring the creatures that flew past him every 10 seconds. His feet ached with pain. His stomach growled in hunger. His patience was thin.

Then it happened.

A tiny creature, dark, furry, and speedy, dashed in the middle of the path towards Kyle. He got close and closer until he was pocket reach to Kyle. He leaped gracefully and took the granola bar from out of his pocket. He held the prize triumphally in his mouth and darted away.

“Hey! That’s mine! Give it back you little thief!” Kyle yelled, sprinting at it.

The compass tugged his arm, trying to force Kyle in the other direction. Kyle ignored the warning. Kyle zigzagged through the trees, scraping his knee into branches. “Not now compass! I want my food back!”

By the time Kyle ran out of breath, his pants were covered in muck and dirt. His breath was uneven, like he just ran a marathon. Clutching his knees, he noticed that the forest seemed different. The forest was different than when he was on the track. He wandered far from the path.

The compass glowed brightly, as if it was scolding him. It spun around and tugged forcefully Kyle all the way back to the path. Kyle, using his remaining strength, held on to the compass for dear life.

Kyle looked down. “Alright. I swear I’m back on track. If you don’t forgive me, I’m blaming the raccoon.”

The compass shook its needle back and forth impatiently.

Kyle rolled his eyes. “Yeah yeah. I get it. Lesson learned.”

They both trudged foreword, under the bright, gray moon. Mud squelching under Kyles' feet every step he took.

## *Chapter 5*

*T*hings were going smoothly, until vines strapped around

Kyle's legs, and flung him into the air, making him do an unnecessary backflip, and ended with him crashing him into a tree. Painfully, of course. Let me back up.

Kyle was tracking his way, through the thickening vines, muddy swamps, and the compass, still leading the way. He actually learned his lesson. He ignored the creatures stealing his sandwich, biting his hair off, and tugging his clothes. Kyle marched on, without any hesitation. Leaves slapped him in the face if he wasn't careful. Branches stuck out, leaving gashes on his legs. He groaned, but still, he trudged on.

Maybe you're wondering, "This doesn't clear up the backflip part."

Relax child. The human catapult is coming.

Kyle walked for hours his feet squishy from all the gunk under his shoe. Eventually, he came across a giant pond, giant enough to fit an entire football field in it. The thick fog obscured his vision. He squinted, trying to scan his surroundings. He finally saw a tiny little pedestal rising in the middle of the pond, with a glistening object

sitting on top of it. He tried to catch on what it was, but it was just too far to see.

The compass stopped. Then it flared to life. First, the glow was soft, then, it slowly got brighter each second. Kyle stared at it with awe. After, it was basically a giant ball of sun, reflections showing from the pond with a golden light. The glare was enough to light up his full own room. Kyle shielded his eyes, wincing from the brightness.

Something felt odd though. The vines around the pool looked vicious, with thorns more than the harmless ones he faced earlier. He could see the vines inching slowly towards him, as if they were alive. He saw moving steppingstones across the pond, leading towards the pedestal. He saw dark moving spots in the water. When he looked closer, he saw violent piranhas in the water, snapping furiously at him. If he wanted the object, he was going to have to get through bunches of trouble. One misstep, and he was done for.

Kyle was seriously considering bailing out from getting himself killed when the compass forcefully wrenched him back. The compass was convincing him to get the object, whatever that is. Kyle groaned. He didn't feel like dying today, but he had no choice.

Listen, you got to chill. I can hear you screaming, **"WHY IS HE STILL ON THE GROUND? BACKFLIP. NOW."**

I'm getting to that part. Hold on, hold on.

Kyle gritted his teeth with determination swirling through his mind. He closed his eyes, trying to predict where the vines would latch out and knock him over. One vine in particular took control. He attacked Kyle with extreme precision, unlike others. Spiraling through the air in a corkscrew. Kyle twisted to the side, trying to dodge it. He ran, trying to be faster than the forest itself. For a second, Kyle thought he was faster.

News flash! He wasn't.

The vine clamped on his leg hard, yanking him off balance. Before Kyle could even think, he was flung high weightless into the air, performing an impressive triple backflip. That quickly ended when he fell back into the ground and slammed into a tree with a sickening crack.

As he was sprawling on the ground with pain, he recalled something in a haze. A memory. His parents. Gone. Snatched away. Every scrap of fear turned into pure rage. Anger has clawed against his chest, and it got hotter every second. His hands curled into fists, clenching his teeth.

Kyle slowly got up, knowing this was his last chance to get to his parents until they were finally gone. If he failed here, his parents would be gone forever. He stood up, shaking. He got a new profound rage in his body he hasn't gotten in forever.

Kyle dashed forward, vines lashing out instantly. The vines snapping through the air at Kyle, somehow not latching onto Kyle. He ducked under one vine. Then rolled beneath another. Thorns scraped across his arms and legs, gashing blood all over his body, but he barely noticed. Kyle vaulted over the water onto the steppingstones.

The forest seemed to be fighting harder. One by one, the vines twist and reach for the ankle, trying to keep him off balance. Kyle ears roared and voices echoed through his mind. Still pushing himself for the sake of his parents.

Finally, he reached the pedestal. His breath was shaky as he slammed his hand onto the stool, with the glowing object slightly shaking as it sat before him. Kyle didn't even hesitate to pick it up. Whatever it was, he made it.

When his eyes cleared, he saw that the glowing object was a dagger, a crooked black dagger. It fits perfectly in his tiny little hands. Judging its unusual shape, he saw that the dagger was probably suited for traps, not for combat.

He pulled the compass out of his pocket. The moment it saw the dagger grasped in Kyle's hands, the compass glimmered approvingly. Suddenly, the needle struck and pointed to a near visible part of the forest, just the right of Kyle. Kyle wanted to catch his breath, but he had no choice. Besides, his parents were probably up ahead.

Swallowing his fear, Kyle got up and ran ahead.

## *Chapter 6*

*K*yle ran towards the dark heart of the forest, his compass igniting with a glow. His feet ached; his lungs almost gave out. His feet sank into the mud, squishing every step he took. As much as he wanted to rest, he knew that he had to keep going. Not until his parents were back. Not until this nightmare was over.

Plowing through the thick forest, he noticed the air was getting thicker, deeper as he went inside. The air was suffocating his lungs, slowly but surely, making him gag. Branches once again tore through his pants and shirt, making him look homeless.

Finally, the compass lunged to a stop. In the middle of nowhere. All around him, the trees formed a perfect circle. The fog, twisting around and over the thick branches, circling over Kyle like it was watching him. Kyle heart raced. He reached the center, and he knew that this was his final challenge before he could get his parents back.

He scanned his surroundings, finding tricks that the forest could play on him. He flailed his head warningly when he saw green smoke come from right in front of him. A dark figure, seeping out of nowhere. He squinted, trying to focus.

Kyle snickered. "What maniac would come to face a little kid out in the woods?"

Soon enough, he got his answer. Right in front of him, was the same old, feeble mailman that had gave him the package. His eyes, still glazing off into the distance. Except now, he was not using the cane for his balance. He stood upright with his cane in his hands, holding it like a staff. His face twisted into pure anger like he wanted to pulverize him.

The mailman opened his mouth in the same raspy voice as Kyle remembered too well.

"You're supposed to be dead."

Kyle gave his innocent confused face, not wanting to get in a fight with a random person.

"Sorry, but what?" Kyle asked carefully.

The mailman shook his head in disgust, keeping his cold eyes at Kyle.

"The package was supposed to destroy you. The compass, you are holding right now." The mailman said with a fierce look on his eyes. "If the compass didn't side with you, you would have been dead."

Kyle slowly stepped back, not sure if he should stay at the party longer. "Explain."

The mailman sighed. "The compass was supposed to lead you to the forest, towards me. The compass was supposed to lead you to your death. The compass was helping me in my life, stealing the souls of people. That made me stronger until you came. The compass chose

you, thinking you could put an end to this. So, because of that, I took your parents. Then I thought that you would come to the forest to get yourself killed. But no. You survived all of my traps. Fortunately, the compass is not always right.” The mailman said with a sighed expression on his face. “The only way you can get your parents back is to defeat me, which will be impossible I assure you.”

That got Kyles' attention. “But-”

“No more talk! I will start by destroying you!”

Without warning, the mailman ran towards him intensely and jabbed him with his cane. Kyle dodged the attack just in time. The compass burned in Kyles' hand.

Suddenly, the scene shifted as the mailman laughed wildly. The forest shifted into five different paths, each leading into a random direction. Earlier, Kyle would have panicked and ran blindly. But he knew better.

“Alright compass. Lead the way.”

The compass flared bright as the needle quickly pointed to the farthest right. Kyle sprinted there as he heard the echoes of the voices of the mailman's getting closer. He bust through the thick vines and suddenly, he was back to the circle of trees. He saw the mailman laughing vigorously.

Kyle didn't even hesitate to throw his dagger. Time seemed to slow down. The dagger was slowly making its way to the mailman.

“Hey mailman! Special delivery!” Kyle yelled.

“What? Here already?” the mailman said as he dodged the dagger. “I'm going to have to kill you quickly then.”

The mailman raised his hands, and two illusions shaped like bulls rose out of the ground. Hooves pounding; they charged over at



Kyle. Kyle caught his breath, but he didn't move. He remembered; he learned to ignore it.

He stood dead calm, forcing his dagger to come back to his hands. Fortunately, the dagger flew back in his hands, slicing the two bulls in half as if they were made out of smoke. The bulls exploded in purple dust.

Kyle squinted, searching for the mailman. He saw that the mailman busted through the purple dust and slashed at Kyle. Kyle quickly blocked it with his dagger. Kyle slashed at the mailman, but the mailman leapt back safely into his original position.

The mailman looked annoyed. "Hmm. Seemed like you've learned how to stay calm around my illusionists." He scowled. "Don't worry. I will deal with you personally if these doesn't work."

The mailman sprung towards Kyle with his cane in his hands. He slashed wildly, but Kyle intercepted it. The backflip must have woken him up. He can predict every move the mailman has to give him. Kyle slashed with immense power, and the mailman slashed back. The mailman snarled, clearly annoyed by the fact that Kyle was strong.

They did this for a while. Slashing, intercepting, creating openings, and jabbing.

Then finally, Kyle flew down his dagger with one precise strike. It was perfect. It passed through the mailman. The mailman caught this by shock. Then he exploded. Yellow and purple confetti flying over Kyle as he stood up slowly. He had done it. He had defeated the mailman.

Kyle stood up, shaking from all the commotion that had just happened. With one more look at the forest, he had no remorse of going back into it. He quickly ran back into the forest, his compass leading him for the last time. He ran all the way to his loving parents.

So, the moral? Love is stronger than fear and power. Or it could be don't accept gifts that are yellow and purple. I'm gonna let you choose.