

The Hidden Map
By: Anna C.

The boy's eyes trailed up to the sky, his blue eyes shining. It seems the very forest was on the edge of its seat, the trees looming over him, watching with growing curiosity. The path of the forest twisted ahead of him, slithering into the darkness like a snake.

An icy breeze swept by, momentarily breaking the cold silence of the shadowy forest. The stillness and icy temperatures of the place was nearly unbearable to almost anyone, though for this boy the warm feeling of excitement in his chest and the sound of quick breath was enough to keep him content.

Then, after what seemed like an eternity, the twisted limbs of trees thinned, and the skinny dirt path widened, opening up into a small clearing.

"Finally!" the boy murmured excitedly as he slumped against a tree. He quickly lifted off his worn leather bag, flexing his fingers to rid the cold, stiff feeling in his hand where he'd been clutching his compass. Smiling, he gazed up at the stars. This was it. He rummaged through this bag and pulled out his small, black walkie-talkie, sliding it open smoothly.

"Quinn, this is Tom. Did you find anything?" Within a couple of seconds a distant, slightly scratchy voiced girl responded. "No not yet...what about you?"

"Nothing yet, but we have to hurry. If we don't get back to the orphanage before they notice we're gone—" He never finished. A giant blast of light flashed in front of him.

Tom yelped and jumped back, slamming into the rough bark of a tree. But as soon as it had come, it was over. The light dimmed to normal and everything settled as it had been.

It was like nothing ever happened, the only sound being Quinn's worried questions, emanating from the walkie-talkie in the grass. But Tom was speechless. In the place of the flash, there lay an old, crinkled map.

“Tom? Tom! What happened? Are you alright?” Tom slowly bent down and picked up the device. “You had better come over and see this,” he muttered, eyes wide.

Only after Quinn arrived did Tom dare to approach the map. He had recognized it as a map because of its layout. It was actually a map of the same forest they were in, but mysteriously lead into land that...just didn't exist.

“I don't think this is such a good idea,” Quinn whispered.

“Well it's possibly the only chance we've got. Both my parents and yours went missing... What if this is where they've gone?”

Quinn was silent for a second, but she nodded, a determined look in her eyes.

“Alright,” Quinn said. “Let's follow that map!”

So the two set out, venturing into the deep, dark interior of the forest, with little else than an old, yellowing map and the small compass to guide them.

Soon they reached the end of the map. Nothing beyond this point of the forest was listed on the map, just the unknown.

“So...this is it?” Quinn asked slowly. Tom just nodded. “I guess so.” Then out of nowhere, Tom's compass shot out of his hand and skidded across the rough green turf.

Tom and Quinn glanced at each other, Tom grinning adventurously and Quinn smiling nervously. Before them a wide swirling portal had opened, blazing colors of violet, blue and red. As the two joined together and stepped through the portal, a thought lingered in their minds, *'This would not be their last adventure.'*