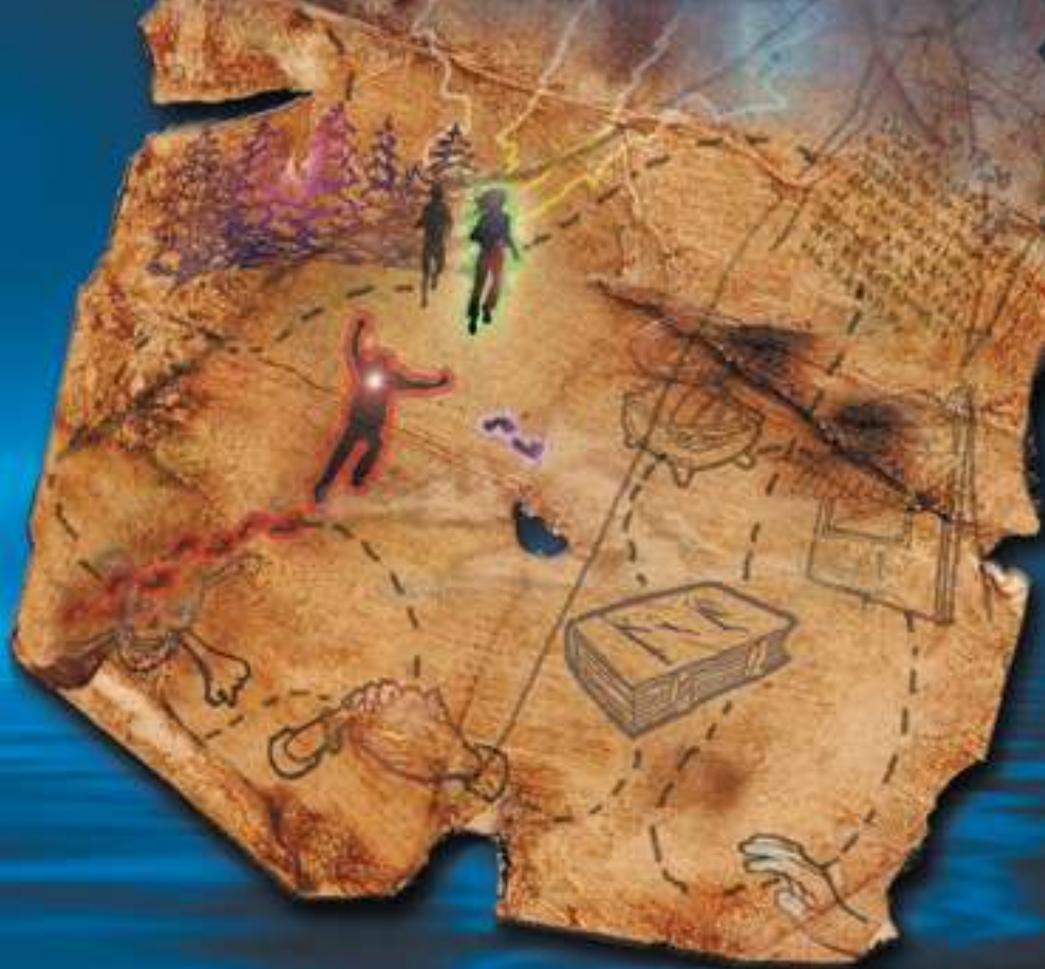


Beyond the Map's Boundary™

A Timely Sort of Adventure



Nibi Soto

Praise from children of all ages for Nibi Soto's

Beyond the Map's Boundary

A Timely Sort of Adventure



"I loved the book. Once I started to read it I was in my own little world and wanted to find out what happened next! I told my teacher at school how much I had read and she was amazed. I read 250 minutes in one day and just wanted to keep reading it, but I had to do my chores. I loved how Kash and Trevor kept freaking each other out. It is so funny!"

- A. Hansen (Age 11)

"I loved this book. I couldn't put it down! It is completely original and the plot makes you eager to read what's going to happen next. If there was a sequel to this book I would try to get it A.S.A.P. It's an amazing book!"

- L. Skaggs (Age 13)

"I enjoy reading a lot and get excited when I discover a new author that inserts as many twists as I found from Nibi Soto. "Beyond the Map's Boundary" has been one of the most fun books I've ever read. It was hard to put down. I look forward to the next book and can hardly wait to see where the adventure will go and what magical powers are yet to be discovered by Mattie."

- M. Jones (Age 18)

“Beyond the Map’s Boundary is a captivating read that will absorb you from the first page. It is full of suspense and excitement and keeps you guessing until the very end. There are moments of laughter as well as touching poignant ones. Nibi Soto has proven herself to be an author with excellent insight into the human spirit. I can't wait for the next installment!

- K. Hammock (Age 35)

"Beyond the Map's Boundary is a fantastical time-traveling adventure. Once I opened the book, I was hooked. The twists and turns kept me guessing and excited to read more. I can't wait for the next book to see "where in time" Nibi’s story will continue."

- E. Rasmussen (Age 38)

“Fun, fresh and endearing! Once you start reading it’s like a race you’ve got to run and finish.”

- S. Rammell (Age 45)

“Wow!! What a page turner! I could hardly put “Beyond the Map’s Boundary” down. In the same spirit as “Harry Potter,” young and old will be avid fans of Nibi Soto’s creative masterpiece.”

- C. L. Humpherys (Age 64)

“At my age it’s hard to get me excited about reading anything! However, as I was getting involved in listening to the audio book I could hardly wait to hear the next chapter. It was both exciting and entertaining and kept me guessing. I recommend “Beyond the Map’s Boundary” to readers of all ages. I can hardly wait for book two to see what will happen next!”

- O. W. Thornock (Age 81)



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USA

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For O. Wayne and EuVola M. Thornock

The adventurer and the heart...



Special thanks to Carl, Audrie, Chrissa,
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Donna and *Poola, Poola, Poola.*

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Beyond the Map's Boundary

A Timely Sort of Adventure



By

Nibi Soto

Illustrations and Cover Art by Chris Humpherys



Chapter 1

The Premonition

February 21, 1992 – 11:00 A.M. –Post Office - Benton, CA

“**A**fternoon, Mrs. Bott...” the postman said flatly. He had about as much personality as white paint. Amber had never seen him smile once in all the years she had lived in Benton.

“Mr. Hail; you’re looking well today.”

“Hmm,” he grunted. “Got another one of them funny little packages fer me ta send do ya?”

“I do. How’d you guess?” Amber replied sweetly. She smiled and winked at the postman. Grouchy as he always was, she knew he liked her teasing nature and if he didn’t, she still enjoyed doing it anyway; it was part of who she was.

“Oh...I spoze after ten years, perty-near every week, one oughta catch on. I ain’t dumb, ya know?”

“...course not Mr. Hail.”

“Used ta keep me up at nights fer the longest time thinkin’ bout’ them blinkin’ little brown boxes you mail!”

“But not anymore?” Amber asked politely as she opened her purse and started digging through it.

“Nah, finally figur'd it's none of ma business anyways,” he grumbled. “Need a pen?”

“Yes, thank you.”

Amber pulled the package out of her pocket and wrote a different name and number as usual, but always the same address:

Amber Graham Bott – 022192

Box 53, Route 1

Seaport, California 93302

- FRAGILE, HANDLE WITH CARE -

Mr. Hail noticed the package was different this time. “Yer sendin’ a package to yersef?”

Amber’s eyes wandered off to the side as though she were deep in thought. “Well, yeah. Today is the day!” she mumbled.

“What about today?” A ripple of puzzlement rolled across Mr. Hail’s face. “What’s gonna happen today?”

Amber didn’t respond. She began rummaging through her purse again as though she were looking for something else.

The postman could see that Amber didn’t want to talk about it. Finally he shook his head in dissatisfaction and said, “Yer one strange lady; Mrs. Bott. That’ll be 98 cents.”

Chapter 1 - The Premonition

“Yes...well...the price has gone up hasn't it?” Amber said, further diverting the conversation.

Mr. Hail glared at Amber with a smug expression of satisfaction on his face. He tilted his head side to side and said, “Yip! Highway robbery id'n it? But, I don't have no choice--I don't set them r-r-rates now do I?”

“Oh, I know, Mr. Hail,” she said in a distracted tone. “Thank you!”

Amber turned and started walking towards the front door.

“Good day then, Mrs. Bott!”

“Yes yes...good day, Mr. Hail.”

Amber waved goodbye over her shoulder as she headed for the exit. “*Strange little man,*” she thought, pushing aside the squeaking post office door. The air was always stale inside and it was nice to get out. “I think I'm going to actually miss that old guy,” she muttered to herself and hurried on her way.

She walked towards the car automatically as her mind ran through a checklist for the picnic. Something bright flashed briefly on the ground in front of her that reminded her of a red footprint. It vanished almost instantly, before she could get a good look at it. She stopped abruptly, staring at the spot where the print had appeared, blinking her eyes several times.

“Red...just like Mattie said!” she said quietly to herself. She was deep in thought when she was rudely startled back to the present by the blast of a car horn.

“Why don’t you find a place to park that piece of junk that’s actually legal,” bellowed Fran Schnettle, the town gossip, shaking her finger at Amber out the window, “...instead of double parking every time you come to town?”

Hardly anyone came in to town on Friday morning and the streets were far from busy, but Fran could never resist an opportunity to pick at Amber. She had been the impatient, snoopy neighbor for most of Amber’s married life. Since the day Fran and her mumbling, recluse-of-a-husband had moved in she had been a pain to get along with. She had a nasty habit of driving people away from her. All, but one, of her friends had given up on her many years ago. But today, it didn’t even bother Amber because she had a lot more serious issues on her mind.

“Oh...sorry; I’m so sorry Mrs. Schnettle. I’ll get out of your way.”

Amber hurried over to her car and reached for the handle when she noticed the small, rectangular window on the passenger side of the old Chevy had been smashed out. There were several finger prints on the front window; mostly smeared, but one was exceptionally clear. She got in and checked around to see if anything was missing. Her sweater was still there and her hairbrush was lying on the seat where she had left it. However, the glove box was open. At first glance it didn’t appear as though anything had been taken. She immediately reached underneath the passenger seat and felt around. When her fingers touched the object she sought she let out a big sigh of relief.

Chapter 1 - The Premonition

“That’s odd, it smells like chocolate in here?” she thought.

Amber noticed the stick shift was kind of slippery. When she bent over to get a closer look, she could see a fine smattering of brown powder on it that smelled like chocolate. On the floor beneath it she saw a small crumpled piece of Scotch tape. She was experienced with taking fingerprints since she had done it herself almost every couple of weeks for the past 10 years. Who and why would anyone want to do that to her? Amber reached in the glove box and pulled out a roll of scotch tape and a small, plastic container of chocolate powder. She carefully lifted the only clear fingerprint from the front window and placed it in another small brown container she kept in the glove box. She scribbled the words ‘Possible Interloper’ on it and the numbers 022192 and slid it under the driver’s seat. A quick glance at the clock and she realized she was going to be late meeting her family for the picnic if she didn’t hurry. It was going to be a rare outing because she had finally committed Mattie to a date and time that worked with Kash’s schedule. It was exciting to think about all of them being together for a few hours and she was hoping that things would turn out different than she already knew they would. However, she couldn’t risk changing the course of events because of what she knew, so off she went, forgetting about the broken window for the moment. As she drove into the driveway, she saw Kash out on the lawn, sitting on the picnic basket, flipping the tablecloth at the gnats that were hovering in the shade.

“Is everything OK?” Amber asked as she turned off the car.
“Where’s Mattie?”

“She’s not coming.”

Amber knew all the answers to every question from this point forward, but had to carefully maintain the setting of what lay ahead to avoid altering the course of events that must take place. “What? After all we’ve done to coordinate this with her classes, work, dates and everything else under the sun that she does?”

Kash forced a smile, trying not to act disappointed. “It’s just us chickens, I guess. It’ll still be a rare pleasure to spend a leisurely afternoon with you; especially if it doesn’t involve breaking and entering or a high speed chase somewhere.”

Amber smiled at the description of their lives and said, “So, what’s the reason this time?”

“Mattie finally got asked out by her heartthrob, Trevor Karington, and she couldn’t see anything beyond his face. I’ve never seen her get ready that fast in her whole life.”

“Oh, of course,” Amber said sweetly. “She’s been dying to go out with that Karington boy for months. I hope she has a good time. Did you check the weather report?”

“No, but there’s not a cloud in the sky.”

“That’s kind of careless don’t you think?”

“Oh, we haven’t had a storm in weeks,” Kash said, shrugging his shoulders. “Don’t get paranoid on me now. Let’s go! We’re losing daylight. Hey, what happened to the window?”

“Someone broke in when I was in the Post Office.”

Chapter 1 - The Premonition

“Did you report it?” he asked.

“No. No time, no need.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Never mind...I’ll report it when we get back,” she reassured him. She caught herself staring at Kash in an effort to capture every detail of his face and each gesture he made before it was too late.

“What?” Why are you looking at me like that?”

“Like what?”

“Like you’re going to say goodbye forever!”

“Don’t be silly,” Amber replied, trying to put the inevitable out of her mind.

Kash strolled around to the other side of the car. “Scoot over, would you, and I’ll drive.”

Amber cleared her voice and made an extra effort to appear excited. “Where’re we going?”

“Just stick with me and you’ll see,” he said secretively.

Kash drove to a favorite picnic spot they had gone to several times when Mattie was a toddler. It was a secluded meadow near the edge of the forest, about a half hour drive from Benton. It was just as beautiful as it had been 15 years earlier. They spread the blanket beneath the only poplar tree that had grown out in the middle of the meadow, checked the skies again and settled down for a restful afternoon together. Short breaks were usually few and far

between since Amber had Inherited. It was such a pleasant, balmy afternoon. They sat down and ate lunch; Kash eating double, not wanting anything to go to waste since Mattie hadn't come along. He stretched out with a slightly painful, bulging stomach and Amber snuggled up close to him, laying her head on his chest. They reminisced about the old days before the Splitting had begun. It wasn't long before the shade of the tree and the cool grass beneath the blanket lulled them both to sleep.

1:00 P.M. – Downtown, Benton

The sidewalk café was the perfect place for Trevor to take Mattie. She loved the feelings it stirred up in her of various outdoor cafés she'd been to all over the world. Her parents always took her with them during her summer breaks from school as they traveled to distant places. It felt magical sitting there next to him. She'd been dreaming about this day for months. He knew exactly what would impress her and he didn't even know her yet. That alone was extraordinary to her.

“What would you like, Mattie?”

“Oh, surprise me,” Mattie replied with a hint of school girl jitters. Mattie was so distracted by his almond shaped eyes and handsome face that she could hardly concentrate.

“Are you sure?” Trevor asked, tilting his head and winking at her as his meticulously cut brown hair reluctantly released a single, small lock onto his forehead.

Mattie felt like her heart was going to jump right out of her mouth. It was already stuck in her throat. She had a funny

Chapter 1 - The Premonition

sensation in her knees that she had never felt before and was becoming short of breath!

“Course of...” she hesitated, shook her head and said, “I-I mean...of course! Surprise me.” She smiled weakly. It was hard to act like she didn’t care that much while her head was swimming with the many possibilities of what their future children would look like and what their names might be.

Trevor smiled, which only added to the problem, because Mattie now felt like she was going to melt right off her chair into a puddle under the table. Mattie let out a quiet sigh of amazement at how ridiculous she must appear. “*Gosh...get a grip!*” she thought to herself.

“Waitress!” Trevor called out as he lifted his hand, beckoning her with his fingers, “we’re ready to order.”

Suddenly Mattie felt a sharp pain behind her eyes. She dropped her head into her hands and before she knew it Trevor had put his arm around her shoulder. He gripped her wrist gently with his other hand.

“Are you OK, Mattie?” His voice was soft and filled with a genuine concern. She felt a mix of love and appreciation for his kindness, yet she felt sick and dizzy. Something else was going on inside of her that she liked even less than her silly school girl symptoms. With the pain flashed a scene where two people were running desperately through some trees in the darkness. She felt their fear, yet she had no idea what she had just seen.

Beyond the Map's Boundary

“Oh...my gosh, I'm sorry. I don't know what's happening. I don't feel very good.”

“Do you want me to take you home?” Trevor asked. “We can go right now.”

“No...no, just give me a minute, I'll feel better in a minute. I'm really sorry.”

“Don't think a thing of it,” Trevor replied thoughtfully. “Would you rather go somewhere else?”

“No, let's go ahead and eat. Now I'm starving!” I'm fine though; really. It's gone now.” Mattie was so embarrassed she could hardly look him in the eyes. “*What a crazy bunch of sensations,*” she thought.

Trevor raised his hand again and called out to the waitress, ready to place their order.



Chapter 2

The Lightning

5:00 P.M. – Back at the Picnic Meadow

C*rack!* Amber sat up with a start. She immediately glanced towards the sky. “Oh...my...gosh!” Her face distorted with panic as she dragged the picnic basket out of the way. “Wake up, Kash! Wake up! We’ve got to get out of here. Now! Move so I can fold the blanket. Thunderheads are forming!”

Kash rolled over, sat up and lazily glanced towards the sky. “Whoa! We’d better get going! You’re not kidding! Where did they come from?”

“I don’t know, just hurry!”

“How long were we asleep?”

“Only a couple of hours I thought,” Amber said, panicking.

Kash glanced down at his watch. “It’s 5:00! It’s too dark for 5:00 in the afternoon. What happened to the clear, peaceful, pleasant day?”

“I don’t know, just come on!”

An evil wind had abruptly kicked up, bringing with it massive dark clouds at an unearthly pace. By the time they reached the car the sky was almost black. Amber took the blanket and threw it in the back seat of the old Chevy. "What have we done? We're miles away from a Double-Down! What are we going to do? It'll blast right through the car and kill both of us!"

"Maybe we can find one in there?" Kash said hopefully, pointing towards the thick grouping of trees a short distance away. "Leave everything here. We'll get it later. Maybe the trees will divert the lightning until we can find one. Run for it! I'll be right behind you."

Amber immediately started running towards the forest, with the hope of finding something that might serve as a Double-Down. Before they could even reach the edge of the thicket, the clouds had transformed into indigo whirlpools that swirled towards the earth bringing with them a heavy rain, making it difficult to see.

Their two bodies darted hastily in and out of the trees at a reckless pace. "I've never seen it rain this hard---this fast," Amber yelled back towards Kash as she ran. The ground was rapidly becoming slippery, and the wind was getting stronger.

In the distance they heard another crack of thunder. The lightning was a forbidden stalker, but it did provide some illumination for the darkened, unfamiliar terrain. *Crack!* The earth shook with the sharp impact of energy. The lightning was picking up its pace and intensity as the legends had described. It was methodically marching forward; heightening the electricity in the air

Chapter 2 - The Lightning

and was unmistakably moving towards them in a relentless pursuit. Its mindless goal was to catch her and claim her for its own. It was her against nature and her time was running out.

In this dimension Kash was typically the one who kept her safe from these potential dangers, but he hadn't seen this one coming. After all, he was the Splitter, which gave him privileges and powers of insight, and anticipation and stamina beyond an average man. "This stinking mud is going to ruin my shoes!"

"What? Are you nuts?" Amber called back, "See if you can focus! I need your help to find me a Double-Down before it's too late."

"I'm looking, but it's hard to see through this rain," Kash yelled.

Amber's usual strong, graceful movements were becoming erratic and sloppy, as the ground grew more and more slippery. Amber was nearly 45 years old, though her bloodline would maintain her body around the age of a 25 year old for many years yet to come. Ever since she was 35 she began aging in reverse, which is typical for every Trekker until they hit 55; one of the bonuses of Inheriting.

"Can you see anything yet?" Kash called out as he recovered his balance from a misplaced step.

"Not yet," replied Amber in a raspy, breathless voice. "There's not much time left." Her wet, silky-black hair flipped from side to side, mirroring the quick sweeping movement of her head. She

anxiously scanned the densely wooded landscape for a burrow deep enough to block the lightning's attraction to her.

"What's that?" Amber whispered to herself. She squinted her eyes and strained her neck in the direction of a faint red glow that had flickered in the dark for a split second. All of a sudden there were several of them in a sequence, only a few feet apart that disappeared before she could really see what they were. "Is there someone there?" she called out.

"What?" answered Kash as he wrapped his arm around a nearby tree to help support himself during his next turn.

"Nothing...just...I just thought I saw...something," said Amber, wrinkling her brow and shaking her head with a hint of uncertainty.

The increasing wind carried less of the sound of their voices between them with each passing minute. Kash was yelling consistently now as he tried to communicate with his wife, who was running ahead of him.

"I can hardly see you, let alone a Double-Down!"

A few yards away Amber noticed a hollowed out log as she ran past it. "My only hope of survival is to find a print. You drop back. It's safer that way and at least I can move without worrying about you. Hide under that log and I'll see you when I re-enter!"

"I'm not deserting you like a coward," snapped Kash. He felt helpless about his inability to meet Amber half way in her struggles.

Chapter 2 - The Lightning

It wasn't that he didn't want to, he couldn't! She had to do this alone.

Kash resentfully turned his attention towards the log. When he changed direction, it was too fast for the stormy, wet conditions and he stumbled on a muddy clump of grass, losing his footing again. This time he was thrown forward, headfirst into an uncontrollable slide towards a steep drop to the jagged rocks in the deep ravine below. He started grabbing at everything he could reach, cutting his hands on the wet, sharp blades of grass and sticks as they slipped through his fingers. If he could only hang on to something solid it might stop him from being swept over the ledge. With any luck he could handle at least this situation by himself without drawing Amber's attention away from her search.

Amber was still in pursuit of the footprint that seemed less and less likely to appear. By now she had moved several yards ahead of him and was frantically scanning the ground to see if she could make the discovery before it was too late. She glanced back towards Kash and saw him sliding out of control, headed towards the cliff. She knew there might not be enough time to save him and save herself, but she couldn't stand the thought of him being hurt. Her love for him replaced her instincts for self preservation.

Kash saw that Amber had become aware of his situation.

"Don't worry about me," he yelled as he continued to slide towards the edge, "I'll be alright. You've got to find a print, before the..."

Another deafening bolt of lightning struck only a few feet away from them, muffling the rest of his words. The shock slammed Amber against an old oak tree that appeared to have been hit by lightning before. Kash's eyes grew wider as he anticipated his own impact on the rocks below at any moment.

Amber pushed herself away from the drenched, entangling shrubs and out of pure reflex she clenched her fist in a Half-Parallel, igniting a burst of energy so bright that the whole world seemed to disappear.

"To Kash," she blurted out.

Kash, having no warning, was temporarily blinded. He couldn't see anything except leftover silhouettes that created ghostly images in the darkness as his vision returned. Without any normal explanation, he came to a complete stop at his wife's feet, inches from the crumbling edge. She had appeared out of nowhere! Terror struck his heart because he knew she had wasted precious time to save him.

"Are you crazy?" Kash shouted. "Saving me could be the death of you. Go! You've got to go!"

Kash crawled back to a safe distance as Amber tried to see through the pouring rain. Out of the corner of her eye she finally spotted the familiar, bright, fluorescent-blue glow that was her ticket to safety. Her shortness of breath mirrored the shortness of time remaining and fear was beginning to raise its ugly head. The print was at least 30 feet away across a clearing, yet the ability to see one

Chapter 2 - The Lightning

at all in the midst of the storm sparked a small glimmer of hope in her.

“I see one!” she shouted. “Maybe I can make it...”

“Hurry! The next bolt will hit you! Go!” He knew the likelihood of her reaching the print was slim if she ran for it, but maybe if she could lock in a transfer she could still make it! “Hurry Amber, hurry!”

Amber spun around and ran as fast as she could towards the footprint. She wiped the rain from her eyes so she wouldn't lose her bearings and miss the small, glowing target on the ground that was critical to hit. The wind was pushing her beyond her normal ability to run, making it very difficult to remain standing. She had positioned her arms for transfer when a blinding flash of red light filled her vision. Without warning she ran head-on into something that hadn't been there the moment before. She was knocked backward to the ground, completely out of breath with a stabbing realization that she must have only a few seconds left. As she laid there stunned in the muddy trail, she saw a pair of feet directly in front of her. Her eyes followed the long body upward until an angry, older man could be seen in full view. He had a mean laugh and was enjoying seeing her crumpled on the ground, struggling in the mud. His chiseled features had a familiar feel to her. His straight, graying hair was neatly trimmed; not a single hair out of place. When he turned his head there was a patch of pure white hair behind his left ear the shape and size of a nickel. He reminded her of her grandfather, though she couldn't recall ever really seeing him before. He was dressed in the most unusual clothing. The

shimmering hue of the fabric adjusted itself to reflect his movements and the dancing light of the atmosphere that whirled and shifted around him. His countenance appeared dark and radiated a cruel, gloomy feeling that carried the putrid odor of decaying flesh. It was as if his presence had sucked all of the oxygen out of the air, leaving nothing for her to breathe, except the stench that came from him. He appeared blurry, like he was half in her world and half in another, completely dry and untouched by the wind and rain. His arms were in a Half-Parallel, but how could that be? How would he know what a Half-Parallel was? She was the Trekker. Only she and Kash knew!

Amber heard the stranger call out, "To the print!" and another blaze of red light filled the air. Before she could sit up the stranger re-appeared over the blue, glowing footprint, threatening her only hope for survival.

"He can see the print!" she thought to herself, *"It's exactly as Mattie said!"*

He glared back over his shoulder one last time, positioned his arms in a different Parallel and without an ounce of regret or concern for her safety, said flippantly, "Second corridor Missy!" stepped on the print and was gone. In spite of the noise that surrounded them, both she and Kash could hear him laughing as he dissolved into the dark, swirling storm taking her last means of escape with him. There were no other prints in sight and the lightning would complete its morbid duty, striking her at any moment.

Chapter 2 - The Lightning

Kash began screaming, “Get up and run! Run!” though he knew it was too late.

Suddenly the storm stopped as if time stood still just for them; just for a moment. Simultaneously they rose to their feet as though they were performing a scene they had rehearsed over and over again. As they faced each other from across the clearing, the rain continued streaming down their faces. Their soaked, heavy clothing hung from their tired, torn frames. Their eyes locked on each other as a terrible silence fell over them, surrounding them in a bubble of calm. It was the “Dome of Silence” they had read about in her *Book of Ancestors*. They both thought it was a myth; a fairy tale passed down through the generations of time. It never crossed their minds that it could possibly be real!

They both knew this was the last time they would see each other and it felt like their spirits joined together in one last embrace from across the field. Kash could see the tears streaming down Amber’s face, each one radiating a peculiar blue glow independent from the falling rain. He’d never seen her cry before; not once in all the years they had been married.

“I love you with all of my heart,” she said in a gentle, strangely amplified voice that echoed in the still. She was oddly calm and seemingly unafraid. Her incandescent, blue eyes were on fire and Kash could see them clearly through the heavy precipitation. “Tell Mattie that I love her and I’ll see her again. Teach her who she is and remember the book if you run into trouble. She is the only one left now and it must not die with her.”

Kash gazed longingly at her, hoping for a miracle. “Amber...I...”

Amber interrupted him, sensing the time was short. “I’ll find a way to...” Crack! A fatal bolt of yellow lightning struck Amber from behind and in a burst of green light she was gone. Gone forever!

Kash dropped to the ground. He could hardly breathe from the terror he felt inside. The storm instantly began to dissipate now that it had accomplished its deadly task. The rain slowed to a gentle, rhythmic pattern, tapping its own melody of regret on Kash’s back. He felt dizzy, nauseated and completely alone as he buried his head in his hands and sobbed.

“What am I going to tell her?” he repeated to himself over and over again in a condemning mantra. “How can I explain how foolish we were to get caught in the thunderstorm? Why didn’t I see it coming? This is going to kill Mattie!”

There had always been a deep bond between Mattie and her mother. They looked so much alike, and it was as though they had always shared the same consciousness in everything they ever thought or did since Mattie was old enough to walk and talk. He tortured himself with the thought that she may hate him for the rest of her life or worse, would refuse to learn who she was and what her heritage had bestowed upon her. He replayed everything in his head over and over again like a looped movie scene trying to change its horrifying outcome to a better ending, yet the reality was always the same. Amber was gone.

Chapter 2 - The Lightning

A throbbing pain filled his chest, his stomach knotted and his thoughts darted back and forth to a dozen questions he could hardly bare to entertain any longer. “How could this have happened? How could I have been so stupid? Why didn’t she flash to the footprint instead of running? Could she have bypassed the stranger if she had? Why was she crying? Am I dreaming? Please let this be a dream!” The reality of his living nightmare came rushing back to him. He knew it wasn’t a dream. She *was* gone!

For a brief moment his thoughts returned to the deadly stranger and rage filled his heart. It was a welcome relief from the pain that engulfed him to feel the anger inside instead. Thinking of the unwelcome predator who destroyed his greatest treasure and the most amazing woman he had ever known brought a different range of emotions and strength that only comes with the distasteful desire for revenge.

Like Amber, Kash had also seen and heard the stranger and had detected a brief whiff of the sickening odor before he vanished. He would never be able to forget his face or the sound of his cold laugh as he mocked his sweet wife in her darkest hour. Disturbingly, the old man was familiar to him, too. He began searching his memory for clues as to who the deadly intruder was and how he could have appeared and disappeared so abruptly. He found nothing accessible within his experiences to answer the endless stream of haunting questions burning in his mind.



Chapter 3

The Inheritance

5:10 P.M. – Back at the Café in Benton

The last thing Mattie remembered was reaching over to place her hand on Trevor's during the best conversation she'd ever had with a guy. The hours felt like minutes as they talked about everything in their lives that had brought them together. It had even started raining, in fact, pouring as they sat under the awning, yet they were completely oblivious to the weather and everything around them. It felt as though they had always known each other. Now she was lying on the cool, hard ground, struggling to focus on what appeared to be a few people standing over her talking in hushed tones. She sensed that someone was holding her hand and supporting the back of her head. Everything was a bit blurry. As the light began to fill in the colors of clothing and people's faces again she saw the concern in Trevor's eyes as he watched her face for a sign of recovery.

“Don't move, Mattie,” Trevor said kindly. “Take your time; there's no rush.”

She began to realize that he was the one holding her hand and supporting her head as he knelt close to her. She felt warm inside and a sense of complete trust in him.

“What happened?”

“I don’t know, Mattie. One second we were talking and the next you grabbed your head again and passed out. I laid you down on the ground so you wouldn’t fall and hurt yourself. You’ve only been out for a few seconds.”

“I dreamed something or saw something in my head like before.”

“Before?” Trevor was confused.

“Yes. Something’s happened to my parents. My father’s alone somewhere in the forest. He’s hurt and he needs my help.”

“Do you feel like you can sit up, Mattie?”

“I think so.” Mattie sat up and tried to remember if her parents had said where they were taking her on the picnic. It was going to be a surprise for her; somewhere that was special to them since they used to take her there when she was a little girl.

“Come on, Mattie. Let me take you home.” Trevor helped her up to the chair, “I’ll go get my car; stay here. Will you be alright?”

“Sure...sure,” she stuttered. “Thank you.” After Trevor left, Mattie noticed her fingers were beginning to tingle. When she looked down at her hands, they were surrounded with a glowing blue light. She glanced around to see if anyone else was watching.

Chapter 3 - The Inheritance

When it started raining everyone went inside, except one of the waitresses who remained to clear a table on the other side of the patio. Mattie stuffed her hands into her pockets, shoved the chair back sharply with her legs and started running. The further she went the further the blue glow moved up her arms towards her head. She didn't know what was happening, but she knew she didn't want Trevor to see any more of the freak show than he'd already seen in one day.

It was strangely dark and had been raining unseasonably hard for such a mild afternoon so there was scarcely anyone in the streets, which helped her get back home without being noticed. By the time she walked into the house her whole body was surrounded by a fluorescent blue glow and her eyes were as bright as flood lights. She felt strong and powerful like she had never felt before. As she stared at herself in the mirror the glow that surrounded her body popped to a bright white light and then stopped instantly. It was gone!

“What on earth?” Mattie shook her head in disbelief as she slumped down in her favorite chair by the fireplace in her bedroom. “Well, I guess that'll be the last time I ever see him,” she said to herself sadly, feeling stupid inside. She thought about how wonderful he was and how completely crazy she had been. If first impressions meant anything, she knew she'd never see him again.

8:00 P.M. – Somewhere Near the Forest

Kash lay in a heap where he had last seen Amber; soaked, bleeding and lost in a swirl of thoughts that were paralyzing him.

He had lost all track of time. With great effort he managed to stumble back to the car where he fell asleep in the front seat for several hours. Finally, he woke up still dazed, peering through the rain splattered windows to the stars that were now shining brightly through the clear night sky. He struggled to stay awake as he drove home to Benton. Kash drifted into the driveway, finally jerking to a stop.

Mattie saw the headlights through the living room window where she had been pacing all night, waiting for her parents to return. She threw the front door open and called out from the porch. "Dad! Where have you been? It's two in the morning!" Mattie hurried over to the car, "Where have you been? Dad?"

"Mattie...I...a-a-a-a..."

"What's wrong Dad? Where's Mom? Why are your clothes all muddy and torn?" She reached through the window to help support his head. "What happened, Dad?"

"She's gone."

Mattie wiped the dirt from her father's cheek with her sleeve. "Who's gone?"

"The lightning..."

"The lightning's gone?" said Mattie with a puzzled expression on her face.

Kash rolled his head towards Mattie and hung his arm out the window, "It took her!"

Chapter 3 - The Inheritance

“You’re not making any sense, Dad. Let’s get you inside.” She carefully opened the door and pulled him out of the car. He kept mumbling something about a red light and footprints. “Come on Dad, you’ve got to help me get you inside; I can’t carry you by myself.”

They stumbled into the house and up the stairs towards his bedroom before she collapsed under his weight on the rug at the foot of his bed.

“Get up, Dad! You have to help me!”

Kash was unconscious and there was no way she could get him into his bed alone. She did her best to remove most of his wet clothes, placed a pillow gently underneath his head and covered him with a quilt. Then, she went back out to the car to see if she could find any clues as to where her mother was. All she found was the smashed in window, a picnic basket, and the blanket in the back seat. She also noticed a faint odor of chocolate. She took the leftovers inside and went back out to pull the car into the garage before “old lady Schnettle” began her early morning snoop around the neighborhood. She had always been a source of trouble for the family and took every opportunity she could find to discredit Amber. She was such a jealous old bitty.

She paced the floor for another hour or so as her mind raced with concern for her mother. She didn’t know where her mother was or what had happened to her father. Unexpectedly, a warm, peaceful feeling came over her as though someone was telling her

that everything would be alright. She checked on her father one more time and was finally able to lie down and fall asleep herself.

Her dreams carried her fretfully through the events of the day. Each time she reached the part at the café where she had felt a sharp pain in her eyes she would flash from her experiences to what appeared to be her parent's experiences during the same time frame. She was living everything through her mother's eyes until there was nothing left to see anymore. Each time she arrived at the abrupt end of the information she became upset and would wake up. She laid in bed trying in vain to figure out what it all meant until she fell back to sleep, only to start the dream sequence again. She saw the red footprint in town, the chocolate powder on the stick shift; the crumpled tape on the floor and the mean elderly man in the forest that disappeared over a blue footprint. This happened in three separate dreams; each becoming more detailed than the one before, painting a clearer picture of how all the pieces fit together.

Morning finally arrived and with it came an awful feeling of loss for Mattie as she awoke. All she wanted to do was ask her father a million questions. She remembered that she had left her father on the floor and immediately jumped out of bed to go check on him. She threw her robe on and ran into her parents' room. Her father was nowhere to be found.

"Dad," she called out. "Where are you? Dad?"

She ran from room to room, fearing that he had fallen somewhere and couldn't respond since he was so weak the last time she saw him. As she was leaving the kitchen she noticed the refrigerator was angled slightly forward away from the wall.

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“That’s strange. Who’d pull out the refrigerator like that?” she thought. As she drew closer she could see a small opening behind it and could faintly hear a muffled voice repeating something over and over again, but couldn’t quite make it out. She wedged her body between the fridge and the wall, expecting that she would need a lot of leverage to push it open further. To her surprise it glided easily away from the wall, revealing a small doorway that led down a set of winding stairs. As she crept quietly down the steps the chant became clearer though a bit slurred.

“By bloodline you’re destined, by marriage we’re tied; let the strength of our love bring you back to my side. By bloodline you’re destined....”

“Dad?” Mattie called out as she recognized her fathers’ voice. “Dad...what are you doing? What...is...what is this place?”

She glanced around the dimly lit room while her eyes were adjusting to the light. What she saw was the strangest thing she had ever seen. The room was draped with beautiful, full, dark blue velvet curtains that covered every wall. The ceiling was painted in the same deep blue and was covered with jewels that resembled twinkling stars; smattered from edge to edge. In the center of the room there was a platform that was surrounded by a plush, burgundy rug. On the platform she could see her father wedged tightly inside of an elaborately carved, three-sided box where he stood, slumped and tired; repeating the chant over and over again. His bare feet were placed exactly over a pair of metal footprints that were shaped perfectly to match them. The interior was lined with satin cushions that were sown in a diamond cut pattern. The open

face of the box was bordered by two brass bars on either side and reinforced by heavy rubber sleeves that connected them to the floor and ceiling. Another thick rubber pad covered the top edge of the box itself where her father's forearms rested for support and acted as a buffer between surfaces. Mattie could see that her father had been holding onto the bars so tightly that the blood had been forced out of his knuckles, leaving them as white as powdered bone. Directly facing him was another such box with porcelain footprints and white satin cushions, except it was empty. Mattie could hear him quietly repeating the same phrase, "By bloodline you're destined, by marriage we're tied; let the strength of our love bring you back to my side."

She approached Kash slowly, quietly, and without hesitation she reached up to gently place one of her hands on top of his.

"No, Mattie!" Kash yelled out with what little strength he had left in him. "Don't touch me!" His warning came too late. The moment she touched him a burst of energy started from out of their hands, warping the air flow. Tiny, silver strands of light bound both of them tightly to the bar. The particles formed a beam that swirled outward, completely filling every crevice, every fabric, every inch of the previously dimly lit room. When it felt like it was impossible that it could get any brighter the light was drawn inward towards the empty box. It outlined the shape of a person that grew clearer and more formed with every passing second. The blue box began pulsing with a bluish light that illuminated her father as he began to stand tall and strong. His face began to beam with its own energy and he appeared to be growing younger in years. Mattie tried to let

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go of the grip, but couldn't. Her hand felt like it had melted into her fathers' and the bar appeared to have turned to glass. She was terrified, but couldn't get away. When she looked back toward the white box she could see that it was her mother that was forming out of the white light. She was hovering within it as though she were made of extremely fine particles of light herself. The sight of her mother brought a sense of peace, reminding her of the feeling that had come over her during the night.

“Amber,” Kash said excitedly. “Is that you?”

Amber smiled lovingly. She appeared to be happy and content. Her lips were forming words; still the room remained completely silent. She was repeating the same words over and over again, but neither Mattie nor Kash could make them out. Finally, she clasped her hands together over her heart as if to say, “I love you both” and immediately began to fade.

“Don't go...” he whispered. “Please don't go!”

Suddenly, Mattie got another sharp pain behind her eyes. “Dad...my gosh, Dad...what's happening?” Her mother's entire life started playing like a fast forwarded, three-dimensional movie that was being projected on the tiny particles that still remained. She saw cities and times of the world that had long since passed away. She felt the pain and joy of people she didn't even know. Curiously, her compassion for all those strangers and their struggles burrowed deeply within her soul. She could see a thousand scenes that were all changing because of her mother's presence. She saw her grandfather, his mother and on and on as each generation of her

ancestors produced a single representative to carry on the unusual inheritance. She felt the love, support and guidance they all had towards her mother in a whole host of unexplainable dangers that surrounded her on every journey. Her mother's knowledge, experiences, joys, fears, struggles and beliefs filled her up and blended with her own as each generation had done before her. Mattie felt as though she was connected to all of them and had a clear understanding of each person that was in her mother's line and it seemed like there was no beginning to them.

Then she knew! She was like them! Everything was clear to her and every event made sense. She had a full recollection of her mother's journeys for the past 10 years and felt every emotion her mother had experienced. An overwhelming feeling of appreciation and admiration welled up inside of her as she saw her father, at great physical cost, 'split' time for her mother to return to the present after each Divvy. They were a team! They did things that couldn't be explained to anyone; not even Mattie, until now.

The light began to dim and she felt her hand separate from her fathers. She noticed he was changing back to his old self except he was aging beyond his normal appearance. It was as though he was gaining a year for every second that passed. When the room finally became still, Kash reflected his true age of 45. He typified a weary, middle-aged gentleman rather than the vibrant, young man of 25 that Mattie was used to.

Mattie wasn't sure she could take any more. The experience left her feeling extremely weak herself as though she had lost two

straight nights of sleep. She moved in close to her father and helped him out of the box.

“It’s called a Time-Keeper, Mattie!”

“What is, Dad?”

“The box,” Kash said as he moved sadly away from the footprints, “and I’ll never enter it again. She’s gone isn’t she, Mattie?”

“I think so, Dad, but I’m not sure. I can’t believe how amazing you are Dad and what wonderful things you and Mom did for thousands of people.”

They stumbled up the staircase together. Mattie helped Kash sit down for a moment while she went to turn off the lights in the secret room. She slid the refrigerator snugly against the wall and went back to help Kash up.

“You shouldn’t have Inherited yet, Mattie; you’re way too young and you don’t have your own Splitter yet. I don’t know how much you learned through your transition. I don’t even know if there will be a limit to your powers or not until you reach the proper age. You weren’t supposed to Inherit for another 17 years.”

“Come on, Dad. You need to lie down and we’ll sort all of this out later. I’ve got to sleep, too... I’m so tired. Is this how it was for you and Mom every time she Divvied?”

“Yes. However the recovery time is quite short in comparison to what you would think. By the time we get upstairs you’ll be

Beyond the *Map's Boundary*

completely recovered, or at least you should be. I don't know what will be different with you now."

"What about you," Mattie asked. "Won't you recover fast, too?"

"Not anymore," he said with a tone of regret in his voice, "not anymore."

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✧ ABOUT THE AUTHOR ✧

Nibi Soto grew up along the Wasatch Mountains of Utah, in the Great Salt Lake valley. She has three advanced degrees and a diverse background with many prestigious awards in a wide variety of fields from college and professional sports to art, music and writing.

