

THE CLOCKMAKER

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Book One

Ethan and the Giants

To Austin, Samuel, and Eden.

So you know...

Chapter One

The Bully

Boom. Boom. Boom.

My heart rattled against my ribcage.

“Ethan. Ethan!”

I didn’t want to be here. I wanted to be in *Viik*.

“Ethan!”

Was that Dad?

I turned towards the school fence to see him waving. Kevin still loomed over me, but had also turned to look. He couldn’t do anything now that Dad was here. Instead, he let go of my shirt, ran his hand through his spiky orange hair, and took two steps back.

“Next time.” He muttered as he picked up his backpack and lumbered away.

The Clockmaker

Even though we were the same age, Kevin was a Giant—at least a head taller than me. Other kids at school said they had seen him rip a Coke can in half with his bare hands. That was probably a lie, but still...

I hated that he picked on me. It's not like we ever spoke to each other. He had his own friends, and I had mine—well, sort of. It was all because of *that* day in class. I was so stupid.

"Ethan, come *on!*" Dad called again.

My legs were shaking and my heart still clattered, but I picked up the scattered books off the ground—including my favourite one about rainforests—and slid them into my backpack. Lobbing the bag over my shoulder, I ran across the playground towards Dad.

Most of the other kids and cars had already gone. He was late as usual, but at least he was here.

His long, gangly arms wrapped around me twice. In my excitement to see him, I forgot it was a trap. His fingers dug into my sides and I burst out laughing.

"Dad!" I stuttered, "Stop!" Though I wouldn't have cared if he hadn't.

"How many tickles does it take to make an octopus laugh?" He asked.

"Hmm... I dunno." I replied.

"Ten tickles." He cracked up.

“Ugh. Terrible!” Sighed Rosie, having already climbed into the front seat. “Are we going?” It had been two weeks since I’d seen Dad—longer than usual, so I didn’t mind making her wait a little longer.

“I’ve missed you, buddy” He said, as I wriggled free of his arms. I had missed him and the Orb more.

I climbed into the back seat as he adjusted the crooked beanie on his head. It was beginning to look normal on him.

As we drove to Dad’s house, Rosie sung out-of-key to some pop song blaring through the speakers—hand choreography included. Dad was looking back at me in the rear-vision mirror more than usual. He twisted down the volume.

“Who was that?” He pried.

“Who?”

“That boy you were ‘talking’ to at school.”

I wasn’t sure how to answer. I rolled my hand to look at the healing scab on the inside of my forearm from when Kevin had pegged rocks at me a few days ago. Rosie tried to turn the music back up, but Dad’s fingers were faster.

“Is he a... friend?” I could tell from his tone that he knew that Kevin definitely wasn’t a friend.

I shook a loose no. “He’s just a boy in my class.” An uncomfortable silence joined us as a passenger on the seat next to me. Dad’s green eyes continued to stare into me from the mirror.

Rosie chimed in: “Urgh. Kevin’s an idiot and a bully. Don’t let him get to you.” She said, turning to me. “He’s not even cute.” I wasn’t sure if she was trying to help, or if she just wanted to turn the radio back up.

“A bully?” Dad asked.

“Everything’s fine, Rosie!” I fired. “It doesn’t matter.” I thought about him standing over me again, and my stomach tightened into a familiar knot.

Things weren’t fine. Not much was nowadays. But at least I was getting better at pretending.

“Yasmin wasn’t there today?” He asked.

“Nah...” Which was odd—she’d usually tell me if she wasn’t coming to school. It meant I had to sit by myself at lunch. I thought about calling her when we got home, but she’d probably just want to talk about Kevin, too.

After another long silence, Dad realised he wasn’t getting anything else from me, so changed the topic. “Well, then. Sorry I was late, but it was for good reason this time. I have a surprise for you both at home.” A lopsided grin crept across his face.

For a moment I forgot about Kevin, the knot in my stomach relaxed, and even Rosie took interest.

“What is it?!” I first asked, then pleaded. Dad shrugged each time—his grin not budging.

“Why won’t you tell us?” Rosie asked, unusually excited.

More shrugging.

“Did you *finally* buy a TV?” She quizzed. “Ooh! Are we having breakfast for dinner?”

As Rosie slowly made her way through an endless list of guesses, I wondered if the surprise might be about our *adventures*. Maybe the Orb was warm, but it probably wasn’t that. Dad and I didn’t talk about Viik in front of Rosie—she didn’t believe in those sorts of things.

The drive to Dad’s new house always took longer than the drive to Mum’s apartment in town, but today it felt like each house and tree crawled by. With each block that passed, the question grew and grew in my mind:

“What could the surprise be?”