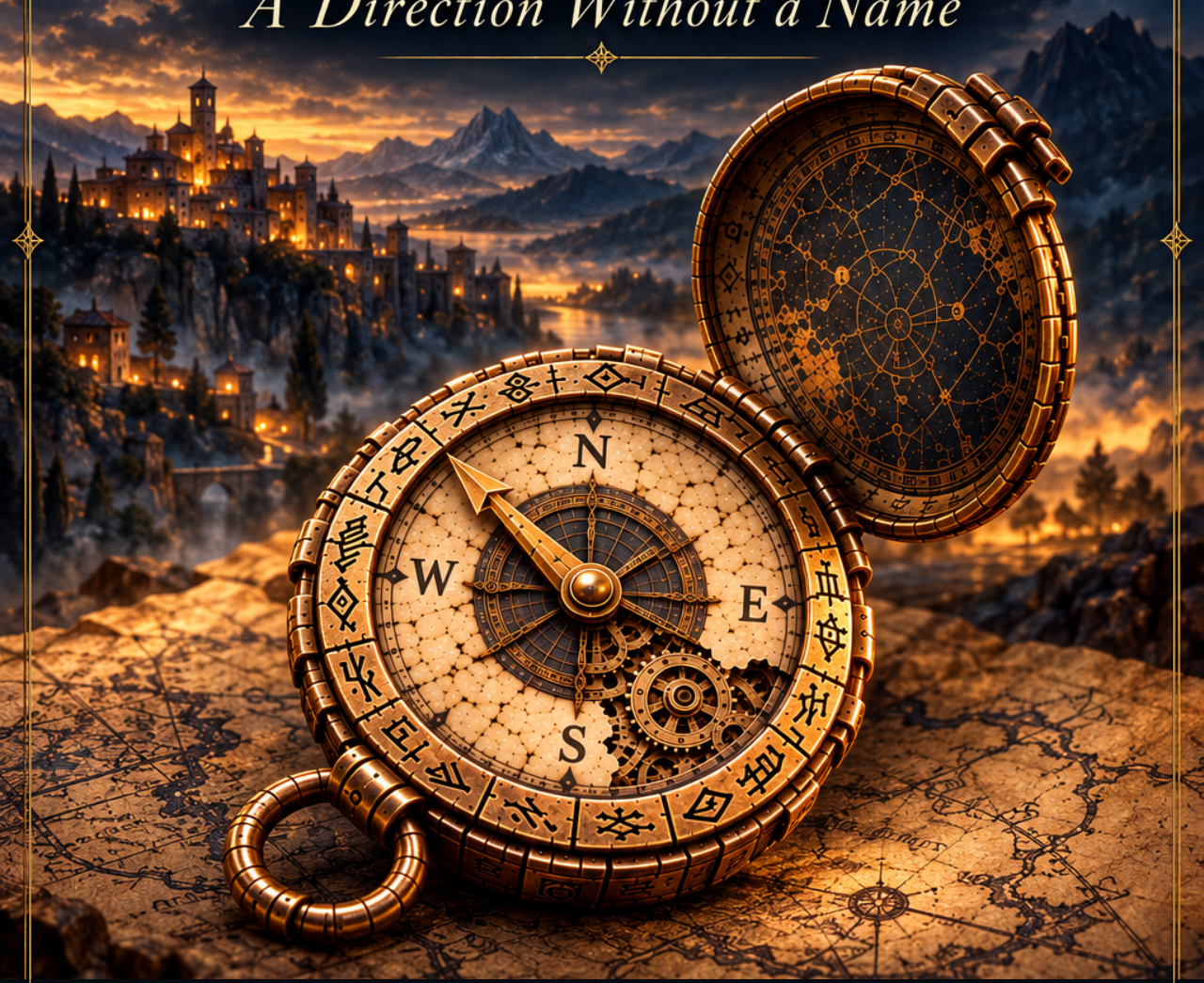
AAN TALES WORKS

ERASED NORTH

CHAPTER ONE

A Direction Without a Name



ENGLISH ILLUSTRATED EDITION

CHAPTER ONE

A Direction Without a Name

The world is full of stories. Some become nothing more than tales as the years pass. Parents tell them to their children, until nobody remembers which parts were true and which were only stories.

Some stories disappear with time. But others are not simply forgotten. They are hidden on purpose, beneath familiar roads, behind ordinary doors, and inside buildings people pass every day without wondering what might be concealed there.

Sometimes, uncovering a hidden story takes just one person willing to ask a question everyone else has stopped asking.

This story begins in a small, peaceful town, surrounded by green hills, with tall mountains rising in the distance.



Every morning began in much the same way. Before the streets filled with people, the bakers lit their ovens. Shopkeepers opened their doors and swept the dust from their doorsteps. Farmers unloaded baskets of fruit and vegetables, while traders arranged their stalls in the market.

Soon the air filled with the smells of fresh bread, warm pastries, fruit, flowers and woodsmoke drifting from chimneys.

Little by little, the town came alive with voices. Neighbours greeted each other by name. Children hurried through the streets. Old friends stopped for conversations they had shared many times before. The first sunlight touched the mountain peaks, then moved down into the valley, turning the windows gold.

Nobody seemed to be in a hurry. Nothing looked dangerous.

Nobody knew that some of this peaceful town's old secrets had been hidden on purpose. To most people, it was simply another beautiful morning.

Among the market stalls was a sixteen-year-old boy named Rayan. He had grown up in these streets, among these familiar faces. He knew which bakery smelled best in the morning and which neighbour could turn a simple greeting into a ten-minute conversation.

But there was something else people knew about Rayan. He liked helping others. Sometimes, though, he rushed in before thinking.

If someone struggled with a heavy box, he rushed to help. If a shopkeeper needed an errand run, he volunteered. Mr Halden rarely had to ask twice when he needed help at the General Store. That morning, he stood behind the counter while Rayan tried to manage a heavy wooden crate.



"Easy," Mr Halden said.

"I've got it."

The crate tilted to one side. Mr Halden reached out just in time to stop it from falling. Rayan quickly adjusted his grip. "Well... I've got it now."

A faint smile appeared beneath Mr Halden's white moustache. "Rayan, helping others is a good thing."

Rayan set the crate on the counter. "I think there's a 'but' coming."

"There is." Mr Halden rested a hand on the crate. "You don't always need to rush. Sometimes stopping to think is just as important as stepping forward to help."

"So... less rushing and more thinking?"

"Better still, think before you act."

Mr Halden pointed to another crate. Brenna needed those apples for her morning baking. Rayan lifted it and set off towards the market.

Outside, the town was fully awake. Customers moved between the shops, traders called out their prices, and cart wheels rattled over the stone street.

The smell of Brenna's Bakery reached Rayan before he saw the shop: warm bread, sweet pastries and cinnamon.

Rayan greeted Brenna as he approached. In his hurry to wave, he tilted the crate a little too far. One apple rolled out. Then another. Within moments, several were bouncing across the street.

"Oh, no!"

He hurried to gather them. Another apple rolled away, but a hand caught it before it could go any farther.

"Dropping apples again?"

Rayan recognised the voice. He looked up to find Sami standing beside him. Sami was fifteen and had been his friend since childhood. He held the runaway apple and grinned.



"You could help instead of laughing."

"I am helping. I've just saved this poor apple from a dangerous journey."

"It only rolled three feet."

"Exactly. Who knows how far it might have gone?"

Rayan could not help laughing. Sami crouched beside him, and together they collected the remaining apples.

A little later, Mr Halden joined them. He looked at the crate of rescued apples, then at Rayan. Rayan sighed.

"I know. I rushed."

Mr Halden spoke gently. "You want to help people, Rayan. That's a good thing. But wanting to help and helping in the right way are not always the same. Slow down a little and think."

Rayan nodded. A few minutes later, the delivery was finished, and he and Sami walked through the familiar streets. They had grown up together. They shared childhood memories, private jokes and dreams for the future. Their friendship needed no explanation.

"It still feels like home," Rayan said.

Sami looked around. "Some things never change, do they?"

Neither of them knew how soon that would change. At the next street, Sami asked, "So, what are you doing for the rest of the day?"

Rayan sighed. "That old storeroom at home is still waiting for me. Mr Halden says I have to finish cleaning it today."

Sami grinned. "Then prepare yourself for years of dust!"

"Thanks for the encouragement."

"That's what friends are for."

They said goodbye, and Rayan headed home. The storeroom was in a quiet part of the house. When he opened the door, sunlight caught the dust floating in the air.

Old maps, letters, travel equipment, boxes and forgotten objects filled the room. Most had belonged to his father. Rayan began sorting through them. Whenever he picked something up, a question came with it. Where had his father taken this? Why had he kept that map?

Then Rayan spotted a small, worn pouch. Something solid rested inside. "What's this?"

He opened it and carefully tipped a compass into his palm. Its brass casing was old, its glass was cracked, and unfamiliar markings circled the dial. Rayan opened the lid.



The needle turned and stopped, pointing in one direction. Rayan turned around. The needle moved again, then settled along the same line. He tried several more times. The result was always the same.

"However I turn it, it keeps pointing that way."

But that direction was not north. Rayan closed the compass. The cleaning would have to wait. There was someone who might know more about an old object like this.

He found Sami, and together they went to Mr Halden. The older man examined the compass carefully.



Rayan explained that he had found the compass among his father's belongings and that its needle did not point north. Mr Halden turned it in his hands. The needle moved, then returned to the same direction.

"I've never seen a compass quite like this."

Rayan looked at him. "Do you think my father knew something about it?"

Mr Halden paused to think. "Your father loved old roads and forgotten places. If he found a mystery, he wanted to understand it."

He followed the needle's direction. "It's pointing towards the old part of town, near the Town Archive."

Sami glanced at Rayan. "The Town Archive? Is it leading us to old records?"

"Maybe," Rayan said. "But it's enough to start looking."

Mr Halden handed the compass back. "Be careful, Rayan. Curiosity is a good thing, but don't rush into something you don't understand."

Rayan remembered that morning's advice. "We'll be careful."

As they stepped through the heavy doors of the Town Archive, the sounds of the street faded behind them. Books, old papers and records filled the tall shelves. A girl named Mira sat at a desk. She was sixteen, and she knew the Archive's records well.

Rayan and Sami approached her. "We need your help with something unusual," Rayan said. He took out the compass and opened it on the desk.

Mira leaned closer to examine it.



"That marking... I think I've seen it before."

She studied the compass, then disappeared between the shelves. A little later, she returned with an old reference book and opened it. On the page was a pattern like the one on the compass, made of several connected sections.



"So the marking must mean something," Rayan said.

Sami leaned closer. Part of the entry was missing. "Could someone have tried to hide what it means?"

Mira studied the gap in the writing. "If we want to understand this, we'll have to look at the older Archive records."

The three of them moved farther into the building. The deeper they went, the older everything seemed.

Some old catalogues had broken bindings, and several records had been damaged. Several maps had torn edges, while others contained incomplete information. It felt as though someone had left the story unfinished.

Mira found another record with the compass marking. Parts of it were missing too. At first, it seemed possible that age had caused the loss.

Then she noticed that the same kinds of details were missing each time.



"The same parts are missing from every record."

Rayan looked at the pages. "Did someone remove them?"

"It looks that way."

It was becoming clear that this was more than ordinary damage. Someone had deliberately changed the records.

Mira found a reference to the building's older records. She laid an old plan of the Archive beside a newer one.

One section shown on the old plan was missing from the new one. Rayan placed the compass beside the drawings. The needle began to tremble more strongly, pointing towards that missing part of the building.



"So part of the Archive has been hidden?"

Mira studied the plan. "It wasn't removed. It was concealed."

Using the old plan, they made their way into the Archive's East Wing. Everything grew quieter. According to the drawing, a room should have stood beyond one of the walls, but there was no doorway. The compass began to shake harder.

Mira examined the stonework. Sami noticed strange marks near one edge, and Rayan found a thin seam between the stones. Then Mira discovered a concealed latch.

"It looks like an ordinary wall, but this section can move."



Rayan pressed the hidden mechanism. A faint click sounded. Stone scraped against stone, and dust fell to the floor. Slowly, a section of the wall shifted aside.

Darkness lay beyond it. A narrow passage led away from the Archive, and the compass pointed straight inside.



The passage was built differently from the rooms around it. It looked much older, and it was clear that someone had made it for a particular purpose. The compass needle pointed directly along it.

They stepped inside. The passage sloped down beneath the Archive. As they descended, the air grew colder and the silence deepened.

Mira ran her hand lightly along the stonework. "This passage is older than the Archive above it."



The compass shook more strongly. "We must be getting close," Rayan said.

Farther ahead, the passage opened into an enormous round chamber. A design covered the floor, with seven empty spaces arranged around it.

Sami stared. "Seven empty spaces... but what belonged in them?"

Mira studied the carvings carefully. Every part seemed to have been placed there for a reason.



Rayan brought the compass closer, but it did not fit into any of the empty spaces. Instead, its needle pointed towards another part of the chamber.

Mira noticed a section of wall that looked slightly different. The three of them approached it. "It sounds hollow," Sami said after tapping the stone.

A fine seam ran between the blocks. Working together, they eased one stone aside. Behind it was a small compartment, with an old object wrapped in cloth inside.



Mira carefully lifted it out. The cloth was very old, but the object inside had been well protected. They unfolded the wrapping and found a stone plate.

Seven sections were linked together around an empty centre, just like the arrangement in the circular chamber. The compass began to tremble again. Mira studied the edges of the hollow space.

"This part didn't break away with age. The edges are too clean."

Sami understood. "You mean someone took it out?"

The centre had been removed deliberately.



This was more than the discovery of an old object. It was evidence that someone had tried to hide something.

They wrapped the plate again and left it safely in its compartment. Then they returned to the Archive records and searched more carefully. If someone had altered the stone plate, perhaps the written accounts of it had been changed too.

Mira found an early description of the plate, but later records told a different story. Someone had changed what the earlier account said.

"Time didn't ruin all of this," Rayan said.

"No," Mira replied.

Sami looked at the evidence. "Someone planned it."

Mira noticed the cover of an old ledger. "This binding is thicker than the others."

She examined the spine and found a small gap, just wide enough to hide a folded scrap of paper. Rayan carefully opened it. Most of the writing was missing, but a few words were still readable.

"Archive Record No. 79... Section... Ref 4."

The fragment did not hold the whole answer, but it gave them a clue that might lead to one.



Mira began searching the Archive catalogue. Following the references on the scrap, she traced three record numbers in turn: AR-315, then AR-316, and finally AR-317.

"AR-317?" Sami said.

Mira checked the ledger that listed records sent elsewhere. AR-317 was not missing. It had been transferred to another building.

"The Municipal Records Storehouse."

The compass began to vibrate. Rayan held it firmly. "Then that's where we go."

The sun was beginning to set when they reached the Storehouse. A stern-looking attendant stopped them at the door.

"What are you doing here? What do you need?"

Mira explained that they were tracing a record transferred from the Town Archive. She showed him her Archive identification. He examined it closely.

"Nobody can enter without permission. These records aren't open to everyone."

"I understand. I work with the Town Archive. This is my authorisation."

The attendant checked her identification, then handed it back. "Very well. You may go inside. Take care with the records."



Inside, long rows of shelves stretched into the shadows. The compass began to tremble, and they moved through the aisles, checking the record numbers. First came AR-315, then AR-316. Suddenly, Mira stopped.

"There it is. AR-317."

She took the file from the shelf. It looked older than the others around it.

Rayan studied it. "This isn't an ordinary office report."

Mira opened the cover. "These are notes from a journey."

Inside were detailed sketches, written observations and an old survey route. The trail left the town and continued into the mountains. One name appeared on the page: Northern Pass.

The compass shook strongly. Rayan looked at the map. "Then our next answer is in the mountains."

Mira traced the route with her finger. "This trail goes through Northern Pass."



Sami looked from one of them to the other. "Beyond the town... a real journey at last."

The record had not answered everything, but it had shown them where to go next. They spread the pages from AR-317 across a table and compared the old survey route with a newer official map of the town. Mira pointed to a difference.

"Look. On the old map, this road leaves the town and continues through Northern Pass."

Rayan checked the newer map. The route was missing. Sami leaned closer. "It's been erased."

The route had not simply faded, and the map was not damaged. Someone had removed it. They checked another official map and found the same thing. There was no road beyond the town boundary and no route through Northern Pass.

"So they didn't just hide the records," Sami said.

Mira grew serious. "They removed the road's name and route from the official records."

Rayan set the compass beside the maps. Its mechanism trembled, and the needle turned towards the forgotten road.



Now he knew that the trail his father might have followed led beyond the town. Rayan looked towards the distant mountains.

"If my father followed that road, I need to find out where it goes."

They left the Storehouse and began preparing for the journey. Sami gathered strong rope, oil lanterns, dried food, blankets, water and the other supplies they would need. Mira checked the maps of the northern route.

For now, the compass had shown them what it could. They knew which road to take. They would leave at dawn.

Sami looked at the supplies. "This morning, I was picking your apples up off the street. Now we're getting ready to follow a road someone erased from the maps."

"You don't have to come with us," Mira said, folding the map.

Sami stared at her. "I'm coming. You think I'm letting you two solve this without me?"

Rayan smiled.



This was no longer only about a strange compass. Rayan's father, the missing records, the altered stone plate, the hidden passage and the road erased from the maps were all beginning to connect.

Early the next morning, the three friends stood at the edge of town. Behind them were the streets they had known since childhood. Ahead lay open fields and distant mountains.

Rayan looked back once. Only a day earlier, the town had seemed ordinary. Now, beneath those familiar buildings, he knew there were secrets they had yet to understand.

"Yesterday, I didn't even know this road existed," Rayan said. "Now it might help me understand what my father was looking for."

"Then we'll find out together," Sami replied.

Mira straightened the map in her hands. "And if someone removed this road from the records, there must have been a reason."

Sami smiled. "Which means we're following exactly the road they wanted everyone to forget."

They set off before sunrise.



"There's no turning back now," Rayan said. "We have to find out where this road goes."

Mira looked towards the mountains. "We need to be careful. We don't know what dangers could be waiting."

Sami nodded. "Whatever happens, we'll face it together."

Rayan opened the compass. The needle settled in the same direction as before. "It still points the same way," he said. "Towards the mountains."

The three friends walked on. At first, the road was beautiful and familiar, but every step carried them closer to a world they did not yet know.

Behind them, among old stone ruins and bushes, someone watched. The figure stood silent and still, as though waiting for something.

Rayan, Mira and Sami did not see it. They kept walking, unaware that someone else had been waiting for this moment too.



Some roads are forgotten. Others are erased. But when someone begins walking them again, old secrets do not always stay hidden.

END OF CHAPTER ONE

BOOK CREDITS

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Published by AAN Tales Works

English illustrated edition