

A2 · Teens · Reading

■■ The Mapmaker's Secret

A story about maps, mysteries, and memories

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Chapter 1

The Old Atlas

Lena's grandmother passed away in the spring. She left behind a small stone house by the sea, full of old books, paintings, and memories. Lena's parents asked her to help clean the house during the summer holiday.

"I don't want to go," Lena told her best friend Tomás on the phone. "It will be sad and boring." She was fifteen, and she wanted to spend her summer at the beach with her friends — not in a dusty old house.

But on her first morning there, something changed. Lena was looking through her grandmother's bookshelf when she found a large, heavy **atlas**. It was very old, with a brown leather cover and gold letters.

She opened it carefully. The pages smelled like time. And then, between the maps of South America and Africa, she found something — a folded piece of paper, yellow with age.

Lena unfolded the paper slowly. It was a hand-drawn map. Someone had drawn it with brown ink. There were little pictures of buildings, trees, and paths. She could see the **lighthouse** at the edge of the town, and the old library in the centre.

Three places on the map had red circles around them, and next to each circle there was a **clue** written in tiny handwriting. The first one said: "*Where the light meets the sea, look **beneath** the third stone.*"

At the bottom of the map, in beautiful handwriting, someone had written: "*For those brave enough to follow — E.M., 1975.*"

"E.M.," Lena **whispered**. "Elena Moreno." That was her grandmother's name. Her heart started beating faster. She took a **photograph** of the map with her phone and sent it to Tomás immediately.

Chapter 2

The First Clue

The next morning, Lena walked to the lighthouse. It was a twenty-minute walk from her grandmother's house, along a narrow path above the cliffs. The sea was bright blue and the wind was strong.

The lighthouse was very old. Nobody used it anymore, but it was still standing — tall and white, with a red top. Lena remembered visiting it with her grandmother when she was a little girl.

"Where the light meets the sea," she read from the **riddle** on her phone. She looked around. The lighthouse stood on a platform made of large, flat stones.

She counted the stones along the edge where the platform faced the sea. One... two... three. The third stone was loose. Lena knelt down and pulled it up. Beneath it, she found a small metal box, covered in rust and dirt.

Her hands were **trembling** as she opened it. Inside the box there was a small piece of paper with another clue: *"In the house of a thousand stories, find the book that nobody reads. Page 42."*

"The house of a thousand stories," Lena said to herself. She smiled. That had to be the town library. She put the paper in her pocket and walked back to the house.

She needed help. This was too exciting to do alone. She called Tomás.

"Can you come here?" she asked. "I found the first clue. There are two more. Tomás, I think my grandmother hid something in this town fifty years ago, and she left a map to find it."

"I'll take the morning bus," Tomás said. "This is **remarkable**."

Chapter 3

A Partner in Crime

Tomás arrived the next day. He was tall, with messy dark hair and a big smile. He loved history and puzzles — he was perfect for this adventure.

"Show me everything," he said, dropping his bag at the door.

Lena showed him the **atlas**, the map, and the first clue she had found at the lighthouse. They spread everything out on the kitchen table.

"Your grandmother was clever," Tomás said, studying the map with a **compass** app on his phone. "She didn't just draw random pictures. This map is accurate. Every building, every path — it matches the real town."

"She loved maps," Lena said quietly. "She always said that maps tell the stories that people forget."

"So the second clue says 'the house of a thousand stories,'" Tomás read. "The library?"

"The library," Lena agreed. "Let's go."

Chapter 4

The Library Riddle

The town library was a beautiful **ancient** building with tall windows and ivy growing on the walls. Inside, it was cool and quiet. The wooden floors **crumbled** slightly under their feet.

The librarian was a friendly old man named Mr Oliveira. "Can I help you find something?" he asked.

"We're looking for... the book that nobody reads," Lena said carefully.

Mr Oliveira laughed. "That could be many books. But there is one book that nobody has borrowed in forty years." He led them to the back of the library, to a dusty shelf behind the geography section. He pointed to a thick book with no title on its cover.

"This one. It's a record of fishing catches from 1920 to 1960. Nobody is interested in old fishing records."

Lena took the book and opened it to page 42. There, tucked inside the pages, was another piece of paper. Her grandmother's handwriting again: *"Where the sea hides from the sun, look behind the blue stone. Bring something to dig."*

Chapter 5

The Cave

"Where the sea hides from the sun," Tomás repeated. "A cave. Is there a cave near here?"

"There's one below the cliffs, near the **harbour**," Lena said. "My grandmother took me there once when I was small. She called it 'her secret place.'"

They went back to the house and found two old garden spades. Then they walked along the cliff path until they reached a narrow staircase cut into the rock. At the bottom, the sea splashed against dark stones.

The cave was not big, but it was deep. The light from outside only reached halfway in. They used their phone torches to look around.

"There!" Tomás pointed. On the back wall of the cave, between the brown and grey rocks, there was one stone that was a deep, beautiful blue.

They moved the blue stone. Behind it, there was a small hole in the rock. But it was empty.

"Bring something to dig," Lena remembered. She looked down. The ground beneath the hole was soft sand.

They started digging. After ten minutes, Tomás's spade hit something hard. They dug more carefully. Slowly, they uncovered a metal **capsule** — round, about the size of a large cooking pot, and sealed tightly with tape and wax.

"A time capsule," Lena breathed.

"From 1975," Tomás said, reading the date scratched into the metal. "Your grandmother buried this when she was about our age."

They carried it carefully out of the cave and up the cliff stairs. Lena held it against her chest like a **treasure**. They didn't open it yet. Some things are too important to rush.

Chapter 6

The Time Capsule

Back at the house, they sat at the kitchen table. Lena used a knife to cut the old wax seal. The lid was stiff, but after a moment, it opened with a soft pop.

Inside, they found several things wrapped in cloth: a bundle of letters tied with a red ribbon, five black-and-white photographs, a small notebook, a **compass**, and a glass bottle with a rolled-up message inside.

Lena picked up the photographs first. They showed five teenagers — three girls and two boys — smiling on the beach, sitting in front of the lighthouse, and standing in front of the library. One of the girls was unmistakably her grandmother: the same dark eyes, the same bright smile.

"Look at this," Tomás said, holding up the notebook. The cover said: *"Our Town — A Map and History Project by Elena Moreno, Age 15."*

The notebook was full of hand-drawn maps of every street, every building, and every path in the town. Next to each drawing, Elena had written notes about the heritage of the place — who built it, when, and why it mattered.

The letters were even more moving. Elena had written one letter to each of her four friends. In each letter, she described their friendship and what she hoped for their future.

The last letter was different. It was addressed: *"To whoever finds this — perhaps my own grandchild."*

Lena read it aloud, her voice shaking:

*"If you are reading this, then the map worked. I buried these things because I believe that the past matters. Our town is changing, and one day people might forget what it was like. These maps, these letters, these photographs — they are the proof that we were here. That we laughed and explored and loved this place. Keep them safe. And if you can, make your own maps. Every **generation** should leave its story for the next."*

Chapter 7

Grandmother's Story

Lena sat quietly for a long time after reading the letter. Tomás didn't say anything. He understood.

Then Lena stood up and went to the window. The sea was orange and pink in the evening light. She could see the lighthouse in the distance.

"She made this map when she was fifteen," Lena said. "The same age as me. She explored this whole town and drew every detail by hand. She wanted someone to find it. She wanted someone to care."

"And someone did," Tomás said. "You."

That evening, Lena called her mother. She told her about the map, the clues, the cave, and the time capsule.

"Mum," Lena said. "I don't want to sell Grandmother's house."

There was a long silence on the phone. "What do you want to do with it?" her mother asked.

"I want to come here every summer. I want to keep it alive."

In the weeks that followed, Lena did something **remarkable**. She photographed every page of her grandmother's notebook and posted them online with the story of the treasure hunt. People from the town — and from all over the world — responded.

Some people recognised the teenagers in the old photographs. One was now a retired teacher in Lisbon. Another was a painter in Barcelona. They wrote to Lena with their own memories of Elena Moreno and the summer of 1975.

Lena and Tomás spent the rest of the summer making their own map of the town. They drew every building, every path, every tree. They talked to old people in the town and wrote down their stories.

On the last day of summer, they buried their own time capsule in a new hiding place. They sealed it with wax, just like Elena had done.

Inside, along with their maps and letters and photographs, Lena put one extra thing: her grandmother's **compass**.

"For the next mapmaker," she wrote on the lid. "Follow the clues."

Vocabulary

Word	Definition
atlas	A book of maps
compass	A tool that shows the direction of north
clue	A piece of information that helps you find an answer
lighthouse	A tall tower with a strong light to guide ships
riddle	A puzzle or question that is difficult to understand
treasure	Something very valuable or important
beneath	Under; below
ancient	Very old; from a long time ago
whispered	Said very quietly
crumbled	Broke into small pieces
capsule	A sealed container to protect things for the future
photograph	A picture taken with a camera
generation	All the people born around the same time
harbour	An area of water next to the coast where boats are kept
remarkable	Very unusual or surprising in a good way

Fill in the Blanks

1. Lena found a hand-drawn map inside her grandmother's old _____. (atlas)
2. The first clue was hidden _____ the third stone at the lighthouse. (beneath)
3. "Look at this!" Lena _____ to Tomás. (whispered)
4. The town library was an _____ building with tall windows. (ancient)
5. They followed the clues to a cave near the _____. (harbour)
6. Inside the cave, they found a metal time _____. (capsule)
7. Tomás used a _____ app on his phone to check the map. (compass)
8. Elena's letter said every _____ should leave its story. (generation)
9. Lena's discovery was truly _____. (remarkable)
10. The old wooden floors in the library _____ under their feet. (crumbled)

Word Bank: atlas, beneath, whispered, ancient, harbour, capsule, compass, generation, remarkable, crumbled

Answer Key: 1. atlas 2. beneath 3. whispered 4. ancient 5. harbour 6. capsule 7. compass 8. generation 9. remarkable 10. crumbled

Comprehension Quiz

1. Where did Lena find the map?

- A) In a box under the bed
- B) Inside an old atlas
- C) In a drawer in the kitchen
- D) Behind a painting

2. Who drew the map?

- A) Lena's mother
- B) Mr Oliveira
- C) Lena's grandmother Elena
- D) Tomás

3. Where was the first clue hidden?

- A) In the library
- B) Under a stone at the lighthouse
- C) In the cave
- D) At the harbour

4. What did 'the house of a thousand stories' mean?

- A) A bookshop
- B) Elena's house
- C) The town library
- D) A cinema

5. What did Lena and Tomás find in the cave?

- A) A treasure chest full of gold
- B) A time capsule from 1975
- C) An old fishing boat
- D) A secret room

6. How old was Elena when she buried the time capsule?

- A) Ten

- B) Twelve
- C) Fifteen
- D) Twenty

7. What was inside Elena's notebook?

- A) Recipes
- B) Hand-drawn maps and notes about the town
- C) School homework
- D) Letters to her teachers

8. What did Elena's letter say about the past?

- A) The past is not important
- B) Every generation should leave its story
- C) Old things should be thrown away
- D) Maps are useless

9. What did Lena and Tomás do at the end of summer?

- A) Sold the grandmother's house
- B) Moved to a different town
- C) Buried their own time capsule
- D) Forgot about the map

10. What extra thing did Lena put in the new time capsule?

- A) The old atlas
- B) Her grandmother's compass
- C) A photograph of herself
- D) The blue stone from the cave

Quiz Answer Key: 1-B, 2-C, 3-B, 4-C, 5-B, 6-C, 7-B, 8-B, 9-C, 10-B