Compass

by Kyle Eggleston

Chapter One

"Things are not going according to plan."

"Like you expected them to go any better?"

"Silence! You had better have something good."

"Oh trust me, this should prove interesting."

Chapter Two

Joshua stood at his brother's graveside. It was a windy day. Clouds were shadowing over. Rain was the only thing that could make it worse. Gloomy days have a tendency to make a bad situation worse. Like the time I got caught in an electric cucumber slicer. Had I known it was raining out, I wouldn't have even attempted to use the electric cucumber slicer. But it was and I did. Now I have to switch TV stations with my left hand instead of my right.

But this story isn't about electric cucumber slicers or anything of the sort. No, this is a story about a compass. The very compass that Joshua took from the evil man that was slightly taller than a midget. The man who was called Master.

"I miss ya buddy." Joshua said to the grave marker. "If only we had more time together. Life would have been good. I wouldn't have to go through this journey alone. You'd be here."

Joshua of course talked about the past. One didn't expect the past to come back and change. It just wasn't how life worked. Joshua wanted life to work that way. He wanted his brother to be alive. Heck he wanted his brother to be around in any form. Instead he now had to deal with the fact that his brother would not be there. It was saddening to say the least.

He imagined life would get better at least to some degree. It had to get better didn't it? One would hope so. His mother hadn't taken the news well at all and ended traveling away to some far away land in some unknown country. It was only a matter of time before she would come back and face the truth. Her boy was dead.

Walking away from the grave site, Joshua watched a car pass. There was something out of the ordinary about the car. It was black, but that wasn't what made it strange or unique. The people in the car seemed to be staring at him.

People tend to stare for a number of reasons. Maybe your zipper is down. Or you have mustard on your face. Joshua had none of these things going on. There was no reason for people to be staring at him. Perhaps they were just worried about a man on a gloomy day in the middle of a cemetery. For no one should be out and about on a gloomy day, especially in a cemetery.

Joshua shook the feeling of someone watching him off. There wasn't a reason he should be worried or paranoid about people watching him. He was sure people were always watching. The NSA for example. They were experts on keeping tabs on people.

Getting into his car, Joshua closed his eyes and took a moment to focus on the things that mattered in life. He had his health. He was a functioning citizen of society and had the ability to rationalize his way out of anything. Okay that last one might not actually be a good thing to have on a resume. He was however skilled at talking and making idiots look even dumber than they actually were. It was a qualified list at best.

As his phone rang, Joshua didn't want to answer it. He feared bad news would be coming. Deaths usually happened in threes. One down, two to go. Rubbing his temple he pushed the bad thought out of his mind. It wasn't time to be thinking about such things. Death was nothing to think about too much. It was bad karma and bad news.

"Hello?"

There was heavy breathing on the other side of the phone.

"Hello?" Joshua repeated.

More breathing.

"One down, he was the clown. Two to go, let's make it four!" Click. The phone went silent.

Joshua looked at the number. Caller ID said Name Withheld. There would be no calling that number back. Setting the phone down, he started the car. Whoever it was, was obviously playing a sick joke. More than sick, it was down right disgusting and inappropriate. He started the car and drove off. Today was not the day to be playing games with him.

The trip across town was quicker than imagined. Joshua wasn't sure if he was driving fast, or if the town just seemed smaller than usual. Whatever the case, he was home in no time.

Reaching for the front door, Joshua had a bad feeling in the pit of his stomach. Something was terribly wrong. Wronger than the time he got his hand stuck in a bag of goldfish with sharp teeth who wanted to eat his fingers as a meal. Wronger than the other time when live squids were placed in front of him as a birthday gag only to find out that he was terrified of squids. So wrong that he didn't have words for it.

The knob turned. The door opened. The house was deathly silent. So quiet you could hear a pin drop. Have you ever heard a pin drop? You have to be listening very carefully for such an event to occur and for it even to register.

A chill ran though the house. A window was open somewhere. Joshua ran throughout the house checking all the windows and doors. Everything was secure. That was a relief, but he couldn't shake the sinking thought that something was just wrong. Joshua shrugged. Maybe it was nothing. He tried to put the thought behind him and continue about his day.

The main house phone rang.

Joshua reached for the phone and picked it up.

"Hello?"

"One down, he was the clown. Two to go, let's make it four." Click. Again the mysterious phone call.

Setting the phone down, Joshua walked back down the hallway. His television would help get over the thoughts in his head.

There was nothing on TV that night. Well there's always something on TV. Joshua had over six hundred channels of something going on but nothing that interested him. He even tried the nature channel hoping a monkey would be doing something silly. No luck. Nothing good on the television at all.

That's when the final call of the night came in. Right through to his cell phone.

"Hello?"

"Joshua?" A female voice asked.

Joshua nodded. "Yeah it's me." The caller didn't need to introduce herself. It was his best friend from high school, Betty. She worked as a member of the hospital staff these days. Something to do with the front desk, like a receptionist.

"Betty, what's up?"

"Have you heard from your dad yet?" Betty asked.

Joshua froze. His dad? Why would his dad be calling him. Dad hasn't been in the picture for years. Why would be be calling now?

"No, why?"

Betty's voice got quiet. Almost too quiet Joshua couldn't hear her words. She was whispering.

"They found your mom."

Joshua stood from his chair. Mom was in trouble. "What happened? Is she okay?"

Betty tried her best not to cry. But the tears came anyway. Between sobs, she managed to say what had happened. Joshuas' mother had been in a terrible automobile accident.

He froze as the phone at the end of the hallway started ringing. "Hang on, that might be dad!" Joshua said. He ran for the other phone.

"One down, he was the clown. One more, just for show. Two to go. That will make four."

Chapter Three

"Who are you!" Joshua screamed into the phone. "Who are you?!" The line went dead.

"Joshua? Joshua!" Betty's voice could be heard on the cell phone.

Joshua regained his composure. "Betty, I've got to go. Have to meet with dad."

"I understand." She said. "They're both here at the hospital."

"Thanks." Joshua said. He hung up the phone.

Joshua raced across town in his Chevy Cobalt. He passed through intersection after intersection trying to get to the hospital as quick as possible.

The hospital smelled of old people waiting to die. Mold and mildew covered the ceilings. It was amazing how the health department hadn't shut the place down yet. They were in the process of renovating, but that was no excuse to let the place get in such disarray.

The hallways were dimly lit as it was afternoon. The hospital decided it a good way to conserve energy. Joshua passed by an old woman in a wheel chair who grabbed onto his arm.

"Please talk to me." The woman said. "Won't someone talk with me?"

Joshua moved her hand from his wrist and smiled. "Another time perhaps." He continued walking.

The nurses station was almost deserted except for Betty who was sitting there waiting for Joshua to arrive.

"Joshua" Betty said. "It's good of you to come."

"Which room?"

"Four Thirteen." Betty said. "Take the elevator at the end of the hall."

Joshua nodded. "Right."

He took the stairs. The elevator didn't seem too stable at the moment. Especially with the recent reports of electrical problems, on the news, the town had recently been experiencing.

The stairwell was probably the cleanest part of the hospital. I have been there myself on a few occasions. It's so clean you can eat food off the steps. Of course you wouldn't want to eat food off the steps, that would be unhealthy no matter where you were. What it means here is, the floors were quite clean. No one ever used the stairs, which is why they were so clean.

By the third floor, Joshua was walking slowly. He had managed to slip on the floors. They had been waxed. His ankle wasn't feeling the best. He kept walking towards his destination.

The fourth floor was quiet. Joshua passed several rooms that had quarantine signs on them. Caution. Do not enter. Authorized personnel only. Signs that didn't seem to be very welcoming. Doctors walked in and out of the rooms wearing what looked like radiation suits. Joshua did a double take as he watched them walk by. He wondered what had happened to his mother, car accidents didn't required radiation suits.

He found room thirteen without problem. It was easy considering they were numbered. As Joshua entered the room, he saw his dad.

Mark looked to his son. Tears were swelling up his eyes. "It was good of you to come." He said. "I'm sorry son, it's too late. She's gone."

No. Joshua's mind yelled. No this can't be! Mom can't be dead it's not fair. Joshua knelt down by the bed and held his mother's hand.

"Mom" Joshua said. "Mom please wake up."

Joshua felt his dad's hand on his shoulder. "I'm sorry son."

Joshua stood and faced his dad. "How?"

Mark shrugged. "I don't know. She was driving to the grocery store. A reckless driver came out of nowhere and ran into her. The doctors say he was drunk."

"The doctors" Joshua repeated. "So he's here?" Joshua turned and ran out of the room down the hallway. He would find this man who killed his mother. He would find him and ask him what he was thinking!

Approaching the nurses station, Joshua looked at the nurse on duty. "The man who hit my mom. Where is he?"

The woman looked up. "Oh hi Joshua. Now you know I can't give you that information."

Joshua stared back. "Listen Lisa. I don't care about your rules. You will tell me who hit my mom!" He pounded his fist down on the desk.

The nurse's eyes got cold. "You'll be asked to leave if you cannot keep your composure. I told you we cannot let you see him."

Joshua turned around. Looking down the hallway he tried to guess the room. After a few moments the nurse spoke up. "Besides, he's in a coma. There wouldn't be any use talking to him."

"Coma?" Joshua flew back around. "Will he come out of it?"

"Uncertain." She said. "I've told you too much already." The nurse continued about her work.

Mark walked down the hallway towards his son. Again he rested his hand on Joshua's shoulder. "There's nothing left to do here. I have some paperwork to fill out. Let me take care of the funeral arrangements."

Joshua nodded. "Yeah. Okay." He said. "It's just that... first James, now mom. Who's next?"

Mark nodded. His hand squeezed lightly on Joshua's shoulder. "I know son, I know." He sighed. "Go home, get some rest. I'll keep in touch."

Joshua left the hospital in a slow pace. What else was he to do?

Chapter Four

The drive home was slow. Joshua took the scenic route. He drove past places his mom used to enjoy going to. She never told anyone of those places. They were special to her. The only reason Joshua knew of them was because he had followed her on a few occasions wondering where she was leaving to late at night.

Joshua drove by Clemmens Park. A nice rich peaceful area full of sunshine and good vibes. That's where his father had proposed to his mom.

A few hours passed as Joshua finally drove home. Walking into the house he jumped as the phone rang. Joshua had a feeling what it would say if he picked it up. He let the machine get it.

As the message played, Joshua blocked it from his hearing. There was no use hearing those words again. People were dead. Whoever was playing this cruel sick joke on him needed to stop. They would get their payback soon enough. All he had to do was find out who it was.

Joshua walked past his den towards the master bedroom. A high pitched sound came from the den causing him to stop in his tracks. Joshua walked towards the den to find out what the noise was.

The den was dark. An item in the corner shined brightly. It was the compass. The same compass Joshua had retrieved from the small island.

Picking up the compass, the noise got louder. It was a cross between a hum and an opera singer singing her highest note. Joshua turned the compass over in his hands when it went quiet.

"Choose." The artifact said in a whisper.

Joshua held the device closer to his ears. Did it just talk to him?

"Choose." It said again.

Joshua pulled back from the device. It had talked to him. Choose? What was he suppose to choose? Sitting down he stared at the device. There were no markings on it. It was plain and simple.

"What am I suppose to choose?" Joshua asked half expecting the device to tell him. It went silent. He sighed. "I wish I knew where you came from."

In a blinding flash of light, Joshua disappeared from the room. The device had taken him on a journey.

Chapter Five

Woosh! Joshua closed his eyes tight as he traveled through what looked like space. Floating above the Earth had scared him. Moving faster than light had panicked him even more.

Coming to a stop, Joshua fell to the ground with a hard thud. The sand under him gave way and provided a solid bed upon which he laid.

Rubbing his head, Joshua stood up and dusted himself off. "What the hell?" He looked at the compass in wonder.

The compass remained silent. It didn't talk back to him this time.

Joshua looked around. He was standing in a cave. A cave full of paintings. The paintings consisted of stick figures kneeling down and worshiping a drawing of what looked like the compass in his hands. Joshua stared at the compass again.

"Oompah!" A voice said from behind.

Joshua dropped the compass to the ground. He held his hands up as the man put a spear in his face.

"Oompah!" The man said again.

"I, I don't understand what you're saying." Joshua said. "Do you speak english?"

"Oompah! Oompah!" The man repeated. He thrust the stick forward a bit so it almost touched Joshua's face.

Joshua took a step back. "Okay, yes we can go this way if you want." He continued walking backwards as the man continued forward.

Once they were out of the cave, Joshua was able to get a clearer view of the man. He was naked except for a loin cloth. His face was painted like a skull.

Out in the sun, Joshua squinted at his surroundings. Several huts were lined up in the distance on the West. A tall mountain stood in the East. The huts were rudimentary at best. A pre-industrial civilization for sure. Perhaps stone age.

"Amazing" Joshua said. "Absolutely amazing."

The native didn't want to hear Joshua speak so he hit him over the head with a rock. As Joshua blacked out, he could see the compass in the distance.

Joshua needed to get home. There was no other way about it. He didn't belong with these people. Whoever they were. Joshua wondered which island he had ended up on. There had been islands where people haven't progressed beyond spears and the like, that must be where he was. He rubbed his head as he came to.

Joshua looked at the man sitting before him. The same who had found him in the cave. Rubbing the back of his head, Joshua figured it would be best to not agitate them any further.

The man stared at Joshua. His look wasn't that of evil or malice. He was more interested in Joshua than anything else. In his hand was Joshua's watch. He stared at the device mesmerized.

Joshua shrugged. No use in fighting to get it back. He needed a way to escape though. He figured trying to negotiate with these people might be difficult. Joshua figured he would wait until sun down. When his captor was fast asleep. Yes that might work.

So he waited.

As the day progressed, the natives were friendly towards Joshua. The fed him and took care of his basic needs. Nothing more than that of course. They didn't want to be more friendly than they had to.

Joshua accepted their gestures of simple friendship. He didn't trust them, but they didn't need his trust. He needed their guard down so he could get free.

About noon, during the lunch meal, a young boy approached Joshua. The boy stared at his father's captive. He even went to ask questions of his father regarding Joshua, all of which the father gladly answered.

In the end, the boy kicked Joshua and ran away. Joshua didn't retaliate. He couldn't afford to make them upset.

Night fell quickly. Joshua found himself alone in the back of a hut. Shuffling around, Joshua managed to stand up and work his way towards the front of the hut where his captors were asleep. They were snoring quite loudly actually.

I don't know about you, but snoring can be annoying. Joshua found their snoring to be quite annoying. He was pleased to be escaping.

Halfway to the cave, Joshua managed to get the ropes off of his wrists. He was free. Another few steps and he was at the cave entrance.

The cave was empty. The natives didn't see the use of guarding it at night. Lucky for Joshua they felt that way. He picked up the compass where it had been dropped the day before.

The device had managed to get him there in the first place, it had to have a way to get him back. Joshua paused, writing had appeared on the compass. It was a year. He gasped. The compass had taken him to the past.

Fiddling with the device, Joshua tilted and moved parts on it trying to activate it.

"Come on" Joshua said "You worked before!" He kept turning dials. Finally it started to hum lowly. Joshua smiled at this. It was working. Well, he hoped it was working. No time like the present for it to actually work!

Turning the year to 2014, Joshua held the year in place and pressed it in. He vanished out of sight.

Chapter Six

Joshua found himself on the floor of his den. He was back in his house. He looked at the compass. Had he really traveled through time? Joshua was beside himself. No really, he was literally sitting beside himself.

"Gah!" Joshua screamed.

The other Joshua sighed. "Yeah I remember when that happened. I was pretty scared."

"What? Who?" Joshua asked.

The man nodded. "I know, I know. You just traveled through time. Don't worry about it, you'll get the hang of it. Well I think you'll get the hang of it."

Joshua looked confused. "You're me? I'm you?"

His future self nodded. "Yes."

The two Joshua's stood up. "What are you doing here?"

Joshua's future self scratched his head. "Well, I think I still have a few bugs to iron out of this thing. I didn't create the thing of course. So I'm not quite certain how it works one hundred percent, but well I'm working on it. I was trying to take myself back two weeks ago."

Joshua nodded. "To save James."

His future self nodded. "I have to start somewhere right?"

Again, Joshua nodded.

"Well, since this isn't the right place for me, I'll be going. Oh, don't answer the phone when it rings. It's of no use and will do you no good."

Right. The phone. Joshua sighed.

He watched as his future self disappeared.

The phone rang.