

CHAPTER I

MIA AND THE GIANT'S HEART



Mia clutched her backpack like a shield, her feet pounding down the dim hallway. Her heart felt like it might burst right out of her chest, thudding so loudly she was sure everyone could hear it. Behind her, the cruel laughter of her classmates rang out, sharp and mean, bouncing off the walls like a bad echo.

“Run, Mia! Run faster!” one of them called, their voice full of mocking glee. The words felt like thorns, twisting into her heart. Blinking away tears that blurred her vision, Mia’s eyes darted around for somewhere—anywhere—to hide. That’s when she spotted the janitor’s closet. Without thinking twice, she lunged for the door and ducked inside.

The door creaked shut behind her, cutting off the awful laughter. The silence that followed was so sudden it was almost a relief. For a moment, Mia stood there, breathing hard, the darkness wrapping around her like a blanket. The air smelled strange—like lemony cleaning supplies mixed with old metal and dust. It wasn’t exactly comforting, but it was better than being out there with them. She leaned against the wall, her legs trembling.

When she finally felt calm enough to leave, she reached for the handle. It didn’t move. Frowning, she jiggled it again. And again. Nothing.

“No, no, no!” Mia whispered, her voice shaky as she yanked on the handle. It was stuck. Like really stuck. Her heart sped up again. She twisted and pulled with all her might, but the door refused to budge. She was trapped.

Sliding down to the floor, Mia hugged her knees to her chest. The tiles were cold under her, and her breath came out in little, uneven gasps. “Why me?” she whispered, resting her forehead on her knees. “Why do they always have

to be so mean?" The minutes dragged on. The silence in the closet was heavy, pressing down on her like a weight. After what felt like forever, her exhaustion took over. Bit by bit, her eyelids drooped, and before she knew it, she was asleep.



A sound startled her awake. It wasn't the usual creaks of an old building or the hum of pipes. No, this was something different—soft, almost like a song, but strange and mysterious at the same time. Mia sat up, blinking in the dark. Her heart thumped as she looked around, trying to figure out where the sound was coming from. That's when she saw it: a faint, golden light glowing through a crack in the back wall.

"What...?" she murmured, crawling closer. The light pulsed gently as if it was waiting for her. A string of curiosity pulled at her. Before she could think about it too much, she reached out and pressed her fingers against the glowing panel. With a low groan, the panel slid open. Behind it was a staircase spiraling down into the glow. The strange humming sound grew louder, wrapping around her like an invitation. Mia hesitated for just a second before stepping onto the first stair. The stairs seemed to go on forever. Each step took her deeper into the golden light, and with each step, her fear began to melt away. There was something about this place—something that felt... right. Finally, she reached the bottom. And there it was. A library. But not just any library.

This one was enormous, the shelves towering so high they seemed to touch the sky. Every book shimmered faintly, some glowing as if they were alive. Mia's mouth

fell open. “Whoa.” The air hummed with energy, making her skin tingle—not in a scary way, but in a way that made her feel awake and alive.

At the center of the room stood a giant wooden desk, its surface carved with swirling patterns that seemed to shift when she looked at them. Behind it sat an old man with a long, silvery beard that reminded her of a waterfall. His eyes sparkled like he had just heard the best joke in the world, and his colorful cloak rippled as if it had its own secret breeze.

A sleek white cat with a golden vortex spiraling from its golden tail sat gracefully nearby, its bright blue eyes gleaming with an uncanny wisdom as it regarded Mia with an air of curious mischief, tail flicking lazily.

Old librarian smiled warmly. “Ah, Mia,” he said, his voice deep and kind as her favorite bedtime story came to life. “We’ve been waiting for you.”

Mia blinked. “Wait... me? Are you sure? I think you’ve got the wrong person.”

The old man chuckled, his beard shaking a little. “Oh, no, my dear. The library doesn’t make mistakes.”

Mia hesitated, her hands clenched at her sides. “How do you know my name?” she asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

The old man chuckled softly. “This is the Midnight Library,” he said. “It doesn’t make mistakes. It finds those who need it most—those who need help or a lesson. Now tell me, child, what brings you here?”

For a moment, Mia stayed silent. Then, like a dam breaking, the words spilled out—about the teasing, the cruel laughter, and the heavy loneliness she carried every day.

The librarian listened carefully, his kind eyes never leaving her face. When she finished, he nodded slowly. “You’ve been carrying a heavy burden, Mia. But don’t worry—this library holds the answers you’re looking for. Come with me.” He led her through a maze of towering shelves. The books around them seemed to shimmer faintly, glowing brighter with every step. Finally, they stopped in front of a section with thick, ancient-looking tomes.

“These aren’t just books,” the librarian explained, pulling one from the shelf. “Each one is a doorway to a world, a story you can step into. But remember, not all tales are safe. Choose wisely.” He handed her a large leather-bound book titled **‘The Giant’s Heart’**. Then, from his pocket, he pulled a small wooden bookmark, intricately carved with swirls. “This will keep you safe and guide you when you’re lost. Trust it.” Before Mia could ask any questions, the book’s pages began to glow. A rush of wind swirled around her, and everything faded into light.



Mia blinked as the world around her came into focus. She was standing in a tiny village surrounded by green hills. The air smelled of fresh bread, but the streets were oddly quiet. People huddled together, whispering nervously.

“What’s wrong?” Mia asked a boy standing nearby.

“It’s the giant,” he said, his eyes wide. “He’s taken all our food again.” Mia followed the villagers to the edge of the town, where she saw him—a towering figure with shaggy hair and tired, drooping eyes. He carried a sack full of food,

his shoulders slumped as though the weight of the world rested on them.

Fear prickled at Mia's skin. Her heart pounded, fear prickling up her spine. She almost turned back, but her fingers brushed against the bookmark tucked in her pocket—the one the librarian had given her. It was warm, almost alive, and as it glowed faintly against her hand, a strange calm washed over her. Her breathing steadied, and courage began to replace the fear in her chest.

She clenched her fists, stepped forward, and called out, "Hey! What's your name?"

The giant froze and turned slowly. His shadow fell over Mia, but she stood her ground. His face was rough and weathered, but there was something sad in his eyes.

"Who dares speak to me?" he rumbled, his voice low and deep, like distant thunder.

"I do," Mia said, trying to keep her voice steady. "What's your name?"

The giant stared at her for a moment, his brow furrowing. "It's Rowan," he finally muttered, his tone softening just a fraction.

Mia nodded. "Rowan, why are you taking the village's food?"

Rowan sighed, lowering the sack. "They're afraid of me," he said. "They've always been afraid. I'm big, and ugly, and I don't belong anywhere. Taking their food is the only way I know to survive."

"That's not fair to them," Mia said gently. "But maybe they're afraid because they don't understand you. Have you ever tried asking for help?"

Rowan gave a bitter laugh. “And let them laugh at me? Or chase me away? No thanks.”

“Maybe they just need to see who you really are,” Mia said. “Why don’t we try talking to them together?”

Rowan looked at her in disbelief. “I’m not sure.” He hesitated.

Mia smiled. “Everyone deserves a chance, Rowan. Let’s go.”

Back at the village, the people froze in fear as Mia and Rowan approached. They clutched their tools and whispered nervously.

“Everyone, this is Rowan,” Mia said, stepping forward. “He’s not here to hurt you. He’s just... different. And he needs your help.” The villagers murmured uncertainly, but Mia raised her hands. “Rowan is strong,” she said. “He can help rebuild your homes, carry heavy loads, clear your fields. All he asks for is a little food in return.”

For a long moment, no one spoke. Then, an old man stepped forward.

“The mill’s been broken for weeks,” he said cautiously. “Could you help fix it?”

Rowan nodded, a flicker of hope crossing his face. “I can do that.”

And he did. With Mia by his side, Rowan repaired the mill, moved heavy stones, and cleared a field faster than anyone had ever seen. The villagers watched in awe as the giant worked tirelessly, his actions proving he was more than his appearance.

By nightfall, they set a table for Rowan, offering him food and a seat among them. For the first time in years, Rowan smiled—a big, warm smile that lit up his entire face.

As Mia prepared to leave, Rowan knelt beside her, his large hands resting on his knees.

“Thank you,” he said, his voice thick with emotion.

“You did this yourself, Rowan,” Mia said. “This just reminded me to be brave—and you needed someone to believe in you.” With a nod, Rowan stood and watched as Mia turned back toward the hills, the faint glow of the bookmark lighting her way.



The next morning, Mia woke up in her own bed, the wooden bookmark still in her hand. Had it all been a dream? She wasn't sure, but something inside her felt different—stronger.

At school, she saw Matilda, the leader of the girls who teased her. Instead of avoiding her, Mia approached her.

“Why do you pick on me?” she asked, her voice calm but firm. Matilda looked surprised.

“I don't know what you're talking about,” she said, avoiding Mia's gaze.

“Yes, you do,” Mia said gently. “You don't have to act that way. What's really going on?” Matilda hesitated, then mumbled.

“Nobody notices me unless I'm loud,” she admitted. “It's the only way I know how to fit in.” Mia saw a glimpse of the loneliness she'd seen in Rowan.

“You don’t need to hurt others to be noticed,” she said. “Why don’t you sit with me at lunch? We could work on that art project together.” Matilda blinked, surprised. Slowly, she nodded.

Mia felt a glow in her chest—not from the bookmark, but from the knowledge that she’d found the courage to stand up, not with anger or fear, but with kindness. From that day on, the teasing faded, replaced by an unexpected companionship. Matilda even became one of Mia’s closest friends, proving that even the hardest hearts could soften when given understanding and care.

As Mia tucked the bookmark into her favorite book that night, she whispered, “Thank you,” knowing its light had shown her the way.

And in the Midnight Library, the old librarian smiled as he placed a new book on the shelf. It was Mia’s story—a reminder that bravery, kindness, and understanding could light the darkest corners of the world, one peaceful step at a time.



LESSON LEARNED: True strength comes from courage and kindness, not from hiding behind fear or power. By understanding and empathizing with others, even those who seem the hardest to reach, we can transform conflict into connection. Bravery is not just about standing up for yourself but also offering others the chance to change and grow.