

Chapter 1

Jones Makes a Discovery



His name was Billy Jones. He was 10 years old, had big, brown eyes, freckles on his nose and a mop of wavy, dark blonde hair.

He lived with his family, and his dog Ruff, in a small town called Wildwood. The Joneses had a tomato-red, brick house with a bright, emerald-green lawn. Billy loved his family. But that wasn't all he loved.

Billy loved nature. He was drawn to it. To the ocean, the trees, the animals, the lakes, the rivers, the mountains that surrounded his house. In fact, he felt like he was a part of nature.

And that was the problem.

Every time he told his friends that he felt like he was part of nature, they'd laugh at him. Even his best friend, Tony.

"Tony, I feel like I fit into nature in some special way, but I'm not sure how." Billy blurted this out one day as the two of them skipped stones across the surface of a pond. His stone only skipped once before it sunk out of sight.

"Billy," Tony replied, "I like nature too, but you're a person; you're not a tree, or a lake, or a deer!" Tony shook his head and laughed as he threw his stone. Billy's heart sank before the stone did.

He had hoped Tony would understand but he didn't.

And when he asked other kids what they thought their special place in nature was, they just stared at him. Or they walked away. Sometimes, boys and girls he didn't know very well told him he was crazy—that nature is made up of animals and plants, not people. One day,

Ellis, a new student in school, heard Billy talking about how he felt like he was part of nature. Looking at him squarely in the eye, Ellis said, "C'mon Billy, that's just stupid!"

It wasn't stupid; not to Billy, but he kept his feelings to himself.

As much as he liked Tony and most of the other kids in school, Billy felt alone; no one seemed to understand what he was talking about. Of course, he was a person, but, he wondered, couldn't a person also be a part of nature?

Sometimes, Billy felt closer to the forest, to the ocean, to the rocky hills, than he did to his friends. The forest and the ocean and the hills listened to him when his friends didn't. Even when Tony didn't.

Occasionally, when he passed by an old, high-as-the-sky Elm tree near his house, he'd imagine its roots running long and deep into the earth, crisscrossing into a wild, woody shape all their own. Sometimes, he felt like that jumble of roots, himself, grown strong over generations of Joneses.

Sitting under the Elm one evening, Billy glanced up to see its thousands of leaves—all of them nearly identical, with pointy edges, perfectly formed ribs and shiny skins.

So many leaves, he thought, but they all look alike. And then he realized—a lot like I feel! There were a lot of Billys in school, which made it hard for him to stand out. Billy never wanted to be just another kid in school. He wanted to be himself.

The name, Billy, made him feel exactly like one of those leaves. Commonplace. Yet, in his heart he felt closer to the roots of that Elm. In fact, he loved his roots.

Things, he decided, needed to change.

The next day, he asked everyone to call him by his roots; to call him simply Jones—his friends, his teachers, even his mother and father. And they did. He liked that. He was just Jones.

On his way home from school one Friday afternoon, not long after he took on his new name, Jones noticed two envelopes tucked between two large, grey stones he'd never seen before. And he had walked this road many times. He was curious. He went over and picked up the envelopes, but then stopped. Should he open them? Were they meant for someone else? And if they were, and he opened them, would he get into trouble?

Jones looked around. He was by himself; no one else was in sight. Slowly, gently, he opened the first envelope which had the number '1' marked on it. What

he found startled him.

It read: *Jones, blaze your trail and others will follow.*

What does this mean, he wondered. What trail? A trail into nature? Who exactly will follow me? How did someone know my name and that I'd find these envelopes? And how do I even know where to begin?

Jones sat down on the stones, not knowing what to do next. A moment later, he reached to open the second note, which had the number '2' written on it. Its' message was even more surprising than the first one.

It read: *Soon, you will know where to begin.*