

Friday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020

Think about a time when you felt a strong hunger for something like Lina felt for the pencils.

What did you want? Did you get it? If not, why? If yes, how did you feel? What did it cost you? What did you have to do to get it?

Tell me about it. Write your response in one paragraph. Make sure that you think about the sentences before you write them. Structure your ideas carefully so that everything makes sense.

**NEXT WEEK WE WILL BE FOCUSING YOUR LEARNING ON CHAPTERS 6, 7 AND 8. You can read them now if you like or later before you go to bed, or even anytime over the week end. It's up to you!**

## **CHAPTER 6**

### *The Box in the Closet*

It was strange how people didn't talk much about the blackout. Power failures usually aroused lively discussion, with clumps of people collecting on corners and saying to each other, "Where were you when it happened?" and "What's the matter with the electricians, we should kick them out and get new ones," and that sort of thing. This time, it was just the opposite. When Lina went to work the next morning, the street was oddly silent. People walked quickly, their eyes on the ground. Those who did stop to talk spoke in low voices, then hurried on their way.

That day, Lina carried the same message twelve times. All the messengers were carrying it. It was simply this, being passed from one person to another: Seven minutes. The power failure had been more than twice as long as any other so far.

Fear had settled over the city. Lina felt it like a cold chill. She understood now that Doon had been speaking the truth on Assignment Day. Ember was in grave danger.

The next day a notice appeared on all the city's kiosks:

TOWN MEETING

ALL CITIZENS ARE REQUESTED TO  
ASSEMBLE  
IN HARKEN SQUARE AT 6 P.M.  
TOMORROW

TO RECEIVE IMPORTANT  
INFORMATION.  
MAYOR LEMANDER COLE

What kind of important information? Lina wondered. Good news or bad? She was impatient to hear it.

The next day, people streamed into Harken Square from all four directions, crowding together so close that each person hardly had room to move. Children sat on the shoulders of fathers. Short people tried to push toward the front. Lina spotted Lizzie and called a greeting to her. She saw Vindie Chance, too, who had brought her little brother. Lina had decided to leave Poppy at home with Granny. There was too much danger of losing her in a crowd like this.

The town clock began to strike. Six vibrating bongs rang out, and a murmur of anticipation swept through the crowd. People stood on tiptoe, craning to see. The door of the Gathering Hall opened, and the mayor came out, flanked by two guards. One of the guards handed the mayor a megaphone, and the mayor began to speak. His voice came through the megaphone both blurry and crackly.

"People of Ember," he said. He waited. The crowd fell silent, straining to hear.

"People of Ember," the mayor said again. He looked from side to side. The light glinted off his bald head. "Our city has experienced some slight difficulties. Times like this require great patience from us all."

"What did he say?" people whispered urgently. "What did he say? I couldn't hear him."

"Slight difficulties," someone said.

"Requires great patience from us all."

"But I stand here today," the mayor went on, "to reassure you. Difficult times will pass. We are making every effort."

"What?" came the sharp whisper. "What did he say?"

Those near the front passed word back. "Making every effort," they said. "Every effort."

"Louder!" someone shouted.

The mayor's voice blared through the megaphone louder but even less clear. "Working harder!" he said. "Panic. Making panic. No making panic."

"We can't hear you!" someone else yelled. Lina felt a stirring around her, a muttering. Someone pushed against her back, forcing her forward.

"He said we mustn't panic," someone said. "He said panic is the worst possible thing. No reason to panic, he said."

On the steps of the Gathering Hall, the two guards moved a little closer to the mayor. He raised the megaphone and spoke again.

*"Slooshns!"* he bellowed.

*"Arbingfoun!"*

"Solutions," the people in front called to the people in back. "Solutions are being found, he said."

*"What solutions?"* called a woman standing near Lina. People elsewhere in the crowd echoed what the woman had said. "What solutions? What solutions?" Their cry became a chorus, louder and louder.

Again Lina felt the pressure from behind as people moved forward toward the Gathering Hall. Jostling arms poked her, bulky bodies bumped her and crushed her. Her heart began to pound. I have to get out of here! she thought.

She started ducking beneath arms and darting into whatever space she could find, making her way toward the rear of the crowd. Noise was rising everywhere. The mayor's voice kept coming in blasts of incomprehensible sound, and the people in the crowd were either shouting angrily or yelping in fear of being squashed. Someone stepped on Lina's foot, and her scarf was half yanked off. For a few seconds she was afraid she was going to be trampled. But at last she struggled free and ran up onto the steps of the school. From there she saw that the two guards were hustling the mayor back through the door of the Gathering Hall. The crowd roared, and a few people started hurling whatever they could find—pebbles, garbage, crumpled paper, even their own hats.

At the other side of the square, Doon and his father battled their way down Gilly Street. "Move fast," his father said. "We don't want to be caught up in this crowd." They crossed Broad Street and took the long way home, through the narrow lanes behind the school.

"Father," said Doon as they hurried along, "the mayor is a fool, don't you think?"

For a moment his father didn't answer. Then he said, "He's in a tough spot, son. What would you have him do?"

"Not lie, at least," Doon said. "If he really has a solution, he should have told us. He shouldn't pretend he has solutions when he doesn't."

Doon's father smiled. "That would be a good start," he agreed.

"It makes me so angry, the way he talks to us," said Doon.

Doon's father put a hand on Doon's back and steered him toward the corner. "A great many things make you angry lately," he said.

"For good reason," said Doon.

"Maybe. The trouble with anger is, it gets hold of you. And then you aren't the master of yourself any-more. Anger is."

Doon walked on silently. Inwardly, he groaned. He knew what his father was going to say, and he didn't feel like hearing it.

"And when anger is the boss, you get —"

"I know," said Doon. "Unintended consequences."

"That's right. Like hitting your father in the ear with a shoe heel."

"I didn't mean to."

"That's exactly my point."

They walked on down Pibb Street. Doon shoved his hands into the pockets of his jacket and scowled at the sidewalk. Father doesn't even *have* a temper, he thought. He's as mild as a glass of water. He can't possibly understand.

Lina was running. She'd already dismissed the mayor's speech from her mind. She sped by people on Otterwill Street going back to open their stores and overheard snatches of conversation as she passed. "Expects us to believe . . .," said one voice. "He's just trying to keep us quiet," said another. ". . . Heading for disaster . . .," said a third. All the voices shook with anger and fear.

Lina didn't want to think about it. Her feet slapped the stones of the street, her hair flew out behind her. She would go home, she would make hot potato soup for the three of them, and then she would take out her new pencils and draw.

She climbed the stairs next to the yarn shop two at a time and burst through the door of the apartment. Something was on the floor just in front of her feet, and she tripped and fell down hard on her hands and knees. She stared. By the open closet door was a great pile of coats and boots and bags and boxes, their contents all spilled out and tangled up. A thumping and rattling came from inside the closet.

"Granny?"

More thumps. Granny's head poked around the edge of the closet door. "I should have looked in here a long time ago," she said. "This is where it would be, of course. You should *see* what's in here!"

Lina gazed around at the incredible mess. Into this closet had been packed the junk of decades, jammed into cardboard boxes, stuffed into old pillowcases and laundry bags, and heaped up in a pile so dense that you couldn't pull one thing out without pulling all the rest with it. The shelf above the coatrack was just as crammed as the space below, mostly with old clothes that were full of moth holes and eaten away by mildew. When she was younger, Lina had tried exploring in this closet, but she never got far. She'd pull out an old scarf that would fall to pieces in her hands, or open a box that proved to be full of bent carpet tacks. Soon she would shove everything back in and give up.

But Granny was really doing the job right. She grunted and panted as she wrenched free the closet's packed-in stuff and tossed it behind her. It was clear that she was having fun. As Lina watched, a bag of rags came tumbling out the door, and then an old brown shoe with no laces.

"Granny," said Lina, suddenly uneasy. "Where's the baby?"

"Oh, she's here!" came Granny's voice from the depths of the closet. "She's been helping me."

Lina got up from the floor and looked around. She soon spotted Poppy. She was sitting behind the couch, in the midst of the clutter. In front of her was a small box made of something dark and shiny. It had a hinged lid, and the lid was open, hanging backward.

"Poppy," said Lina, "let me see that." She stooped down. There was some sort of mechanism on the edge of the lid—a kind of lock, Lina thought. The box was beautifully made, but it had been damaged.

There were dents and scratches in its hard, smooth surface. It looked as if it had been a container for something valuable. But the box was empty now. Lina picked it up and felt around in it to be sure. There was nothing inside at all.

"Was there something in this box, Poppy? Did you find something in here?" But Poppy only chortled happily. She was chewing on some crumpled paper. She had paper in her hands, too, and was tearing it. Shreds of paper were strewn around her. Lina picked one up. It was covered with small, perfect printing.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### *A Message Full of Holes*

It was the printing that sparked Lina's curiosity. It was not handwriting, or if it was, it was the neatest, most regular handwriting she had ever seen. It was more like the letters printed on cans of food or along the sides of pencils. Something other than a

hand had written those words. A machine of some kind. This was the writing of the Builders. And so this piece of paper must have come from the Builders, too.

Lina gathered up the scraps of paper from the floor and gently pried open Poppy's fists and mouth to extract the crumpled wads. She put all this into the dented box and carried it to her room.

That evening, Granny and the baby were both asleep by a little after eight. Lina had nearly an hour to examine her discovery. She took the scraps from the box and spread them out on the table in her bedroom. The paper was thick; at each torn edge was a fringe of tangled fibres. There were many little pieces and one big piece with so many holes that it was like lace. The chewed bits were beyond saving—they were almost a paste. But Lina spread out the big lacy piece and saw that on one edge of it, which was still intact, was a column of numbers. She collected all the dry scraps and puzzled over them for a long time, trying to figure out where they fit into the larger piece. When she had arranged them as well as she could, this was what she had:

Instru                      r Egres

This offic    doc                      in stric  
secur            period of            ears.  
prepara                      made for  
inha                      city.  
as foll

1. Exp  
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to edge appr            eight  
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ker. Ke                      hind small steel  
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nec            uip ent. Bac  
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6. Usi                      opes, lowe  
ter. Head dow st            . Us pa  
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7.            approx. 3 hours. Disem  
                    . Follow            pat .

Lina could make sense of only a few words here and there. Even so, something about this tattered document was exciting. It was not like anything Lina had ever seen. She stared at the very first word at the top of the page, "Instru," and she suddenly knew what it must be. She'd seen it often enough at school. It had to be the beginning of "Instructions."

Her heart began knocking at her chest like a fist at a door. She had found something. She had found something strange and important: instructions for something. But for what? And how terrible that Poppy had found it first and ruined it!

It occurred to Lina that this might be what her grandmother had been talking about for so long. Perhaps *this* was the thing that was lost. But of course not knowing what had been lost, Granny wouldn't have recognized the box when she saw it. She would have tossed it out of the closet just as carelessly as she tossed everything else. Anyhow, it

didn't matter whether this was the thing or not the thing. It was a mystery in itself, whatever it was, and Lina was determined to solve it.

The first step was to stick the scraps of paper down. They were so light that a breath could scatter them. She had a little bit of glue left in an old bottle. Painstakingly, she put a dot of glue on each of the scraps and pressed each one into its place on one of her precious few remaining whole sheets of paper. She put another piece of paper on top of this and set the box on top to flatten everything down. Just as she finished, the lights went out—she'd forgotten to keep an eye on the clock on her windowsill. She had to undress and get in bed in the dark.

She was too excited to sleep much that night. Her mind whirled around, trying to think what the message she'd found might be. She felt sure it had something to do with saving the city. What if these instructions were for fixing the electricity? Or for making a movable light? That would change everything.

When the lights went on in the morning, she had a few minutes before Poppy wakened to work at the puzzle. But there were so many words missing! How could she ever make sense of such a jumble? As she pulled on her red jacket and tied the frayed and knotted laces of her shoes, she thought about it. If the paper was important, she shouldn't keep it to herself. But who could she tell? Maybe the messenger captain. She would know about things like official documents.

"Captain Fleery," Lina said when she got to work, "would you have time to come home with me later on today? Just for a minute? I found something I'd like to show you."

"Found what?" asked Captain Fleery.

"Some paper with writing on it. I think it might be important."

Captain Fleery raised her skinny eyebrows. "What do you mean, important?"

"Well, I'm not sure. Maybe it isn't. But would you look at it anyway?"

So that evening Captain Fleery came home with Lina and peered at the bits of paper. She bent down and inspected the writing. "Foll?" she said. "Acks? Rem? Ont? What kind of words are those?"

"I don't know," said Lina. "The words are all broken up because Poppy chewed on them."

“I see,” said Captain Fleery. She poked at the paper. “This looks like instructions for something,” she said. “A recipe, I suppose. ‘Small steel pan’—that would be what you use to cook it with.”

“But who would have such small, perfect writing?”

“That’s the way they wrote in the old days,” said Captain Fleery. “It could be a very *old* recipe.”

“But then why would it have been kept in this beautiful box?” She showed the box to Captain Fleery. “I think it was locked up in here for some reason, and you wouldn’t lock up something unless it was important. . . .”

But Captain Fleery didn’t seem to have heard her. “Or,” she said, “it could be a school exercise. Someone’s homework that never got turned in.”

“But have you ever seen paper like this? Doesn’t it look as if it came from someplace else—not here?”

Captain Fleery straightened up. A look of puzzlement came over her face. “There *is* nowhere but here,” she said. She put both her hands on Lina’s shoulders. “You, my dear, are letting your imagination run away with you. Are you overtired, Lina? Are you anxious? I could put you on short days for a while.”

“No,” said Lina, “I’m fine. I am. But I don’t know what to do about . . .” She gestured toward the paper.

“Never mind,” said Captain Fleery. “Don’t think about it. Throw it away. You’re worrying too much—I know, I know, we all are, there’s so much to worry about, but we mustn’t let it unsettle us.” She gave Lina a long look. Her eyes were the colour of dishwater. “Help is coming,” she said.

“Help?”

“Yes. Coming to save us.”

“Who is?”

Captain Fleery bent down and lowered her voice, as if telling a secret. “Who built our city, dear?”

“The Builders,” said Lina.

“That’s right. And the Builders will come again and show us the way.”

“They will?”



“Very soon,” said Captain Fleery.

“How do you know?”

Captain Fleery straightened up again and clapped a hand over her heart. “I know it here,” she said. “And I have seen it in a dream. So have all of us, all the Believers.”

So that’s what they believe, Lina thought—and Captain Fleery is one of them. She wondered how the captain could feel so sure about it, just because she’d seen it in a dream. Maybe it was the same for her as the sparkling city was for Lina—she *wanted* it to be true.

The captain’s face lit up. “I know what you must do, dear—come to one of our meetings. It would lift your heart. We sing.”

“Oh,” said Lina, “thank you, but I’m not sure I . . . maybe sometime . . .” She tried to be polite, but she knew she wouldn’t go. She didn’t want to stand around waiting for the Builders. She had other things to do.

Captain Fleery patted her arm. “No pressure, dear,” she said. “If you change your mind, let me know. But take my advice: forget about your little puzzle project. Lie down and take a nap. Clears the mind.” Her narrow face beamed kindness down at Lina. “You take tomorrow off,” she said. She raised a hand goodbye and went down the stairs.

Lina took advantage of her day off to go to the Supply Depot to see Lizzie Bisco. Lizzie was quick and smart. She might have some good ideas.

At the Supply Depot, crowds of shopkeepers stood in long disorderly lines that stretched out the door. They pushed and jostled and snapped impatiently at each other. Lina joined them, but they seemed so frantic that they frightened her a little. They must be very sure now that the supplies are running out, she thought, and they’re determined to get what they can before it’s too late.

When she got close to the head of the line, she heard the same conversation several times. “Sorry,” the clerk would say when a shopkeeper asked for ten packets of sewing needles, or a dozen drinking glasses, or twenty packages of light bulbs. “There’s a severe shortage of that item. You can have only one.” Or else the clerk would say, “Sorry. We’re out of that entirely.” “Forever?” “Forever.”

Lina knew that it hadn’t always been this way. When Ember was a young city, the storerooms were full. They held everything the citizens could want—so much it seemed the supplies would never run out. Lina’s grandmother had told her that schoolchildren were given a tour of the storerooms as part of their education. They took an elevator from the street level to a long, curving tunnel with doors on both sides and other tunnels branching off it. The guide led the tour down the long passages, opening one

door after another. “This area,” he would say, “is Canned Goods. Next we come to School Supplies. And around this bend we have Kitchenware. Next come Carpentry Tools.” At each door, the children crowded against each other to see.

“Every room had something different,” Granny told Lina. “Boxes of toothpaste in one room. Bottles of cooking oil. Bars of soap. Boxes of pills—there were twenty rooms just for vitamin pills. One room was stacked with hundreds of cans of fruit. There was something called pineapple, I remember that one especially.”

“What was pineapple?” asked Lina.

“It was yellow and sweet,” said Granny with a dreamy look in her eyes. “I had it four times before we ran out of it.”

But these tours had been discontinued long before Lina was born. The storerooms, people said, were no longer a pleasure to look at. Their dusty shelves stood mostly empty now. It was rumoured that in some rooms nothing was left at all. A child seeing the rooms where powdered milk had been stored, or the rooms that stored bandages or socks or pins or notebooks, or—most of all—the dozens of rooms that had once held thousands of light bulbs—would not feel, as earlier generations of children had, that Ember was endlessly rich. Today’s children, if they were to tour the storerooms, would feel afraid.

Thinking about all this, Lina waited in the line of people at Lizzie’s station. When she got to the front, she leaned forward with her elbows on the counter and whispered, “Lizzie, can you meet me after you’re through with work? I’ll wait for you right outside the door.” Lizzie nodded eagerly.

At four o’clock, Lizzie came trotting out the office door. Lina said to her, “Will you come home with me for a minute? I want to show you something.”

“Sure,” said Lizzie, and as they walked, Lizzie talked. “My wrist is killing me from writing all day,” she said. “You have to write in the tiniest letters to save paper, so I get a terrible *cramp* in my wrist and my fingers. And people are so *rude*. Today they were worse than ever. I said to some guy, ‘You can’t have fifteen cans of corn, you can only have three,’ and he said, ‘Look, don’t tell me that, I saw plenty of cans in the Pott Street market just yesterday,’ and I said, ‘Well, that’s why there aren’t so many left today,’ and he said, ‘Don’t be smart with me, carrothead.’ But what am I supposed to do? I can’t *make* cans of corn out of thin air.”

They passed through Harken Square, around the Gathering Hall, and down Roving Street, where three of the floodlights were out, making a cave of shadow.

“Lizzie,” said Lina, interrupting the flow of talk. “Is it true about light bulbs?”

“Is what true?”

“That there aren’t very many left?”

Lizzie shrugged. “I don’t know. They hardly ever let us go downstairs into the storerooms. All we see are the reports the carriers turn in—how many forks in Room 1146, how many doorknobs in 3291, how many children’s shoes in 2249 . . .”

“But when you see the report for the light bulb rooms, what does it say?”

“I never get to see that one,” said Lizzie. “That one, and a few other ones like the vitamin report, only a few people can see.”

“Who?”

“Oh, the mayor, and of course old Flab Face.” Lina looked at her questioningly. “You know, Farlo Batten, the head of the storerooms. He is so *mean*, Lina, you would just hate him. He counts us late if we come in even two minutes after eight, and he looks over our shoulders as we’re writing, which is awful because he has bad breath, and he runs his finger over what we’ve written and says, ‘This word is illegible, that word is illegible, these numbers are illegible.’ It’s his favourite word, illegible.”

When they came to Lina’s street, Lina ducked her head in the door of the yarn shop and said hello to Granny, and then they climbed the stairs to the apartment. Lizzie was talking about how hard it was to stand up all day, how it made her knees ache, how her shoes pinched her feet. She stopped talking long enough to say hello to Evaleen Murdo, who was sitting by the window with Poppy on her lap, and then she began again as Lina led her into her bedroom.

“Lina, where were you when the big blackout came?” she asked, but she went right on without waiting for an answer. “I was at home, *luckily*. But it was scary, wasn’t it?”

Lina nodded. She didn’t want to talk about what had happened that day.

“I hate those blackouts,” Lizzie went on. “People say there’s going to be more and more of them, and that someday—” She stopped, frowned, and started again. “Anyway, nothing bad happened to me. After that, I got up and figured out a whole new way to do my hair.”

It seemed to Lina that Lizzie was like a clock wound too tightly and running too fast. She’d always been a little this way, but today she was more so than ever. Her gaze skipped from one spot to another, her fingers twiddled with the edge of her shirt. She looked paler than usual, too. Her freckles stood out like little smudges of dirt on her nose.

“Lizzie,” said Lina, beckoning toward the table in the corner of her room. “I want to show you—”

But Lizzie wasn't listening. "You're so lucky to be a messenger, Lina," she said. "Is it fun? I wish I could have been one. I would have been so good at it. My job is so boring."

Lina turned and looked at her. "Isn't there *anything* you like about it?"

Lizzie pursed her lips in a tiny smile and looked sideways at Lina. "There's one thing," she said.

"What?"

"I can't tell you. It's a secret."

"Oh," said Lina. Then you shouldn't have mentioned it at all, she thought.

"Maybe I'll tell you someday," said Lizzie. "I don't know."

"Well, I like *my* job," Lina said. "But what I wanted to talk to you about was what I found yesterday. It's this."

She lifted the box away and took up the piece of paper covering the patched together document. Lizzie gave it a quick look. "Is it a message someone gave you? That got torn up?"

"No, it was in our closet. Poppy was chewing on it, that's why it's torn up. But look at the writing on it. Isn't it strange?"

"Uh-huh," said Lizzie. "You know who has beautiful handwriting? Myla Bone, who works with me. You should see it, it's got curly tails on the y's and the g's, and fancy loops on the capital letters. Of course Flab Face hates it, he says it's illegible. . . ."

Lina slid the piece of paper back over the pasted-down scraps. She wondered why she had thought Lizzie would be interested in what she'd found. She'd always had fun with Lizzie. But their fun was usually with games—hide-and-seek, tag, the kinds of games where you run and climb. Lizzie never had been much interested in anything that was written on paper.

So Lina quietly put the document back in its place, and she sat down with Lizzie on the floor. She listened and listened until Lizzie's chatter ran down. "I'd better go," Lizzie said. "It was fun to see you, Lina. I miss you." She stood up. She fluffed her hair. "What was it you wanted to show me? Oh, yes—the fancy writing. Really nice. Lucky you to find it. Come and see me again soon, all right? I get so bored in that office."

Lina made beet soup for dinner that night, and Poppy spilled hers and made a red lake on the table. Granny stared into her bowl, stirring and stirring the soup with her spoon, but she didn't eat. She didn't feel quite right, she told Lina; after a while she wandered off to bed. Lina cleaned up the kitchen quickly. As soon as her chores were out of the

way, she could get back to studying her document. She washed Poppy's clothes. She sewed on the buttons that had come off her messenger jacket. She picked up the rags and sacks and boxes and bags that Granny had tossed out of the closet. And by the time she had done all this and put Poppy to bed, she still had almost half an hour to study the fragments of paper.

She sat down at her desk and uncovered the document. With her elbows on either side of it and her chin resting in her hands, she pored over it. Though Lizzie and Captain Fleery had paid it no attention, Lina still thought this torn-up page must be important. Why else would it have been in such a cleverly fastened box? Maybe she should show it to the mayor, she thought reluctantly. She didn't like the mayor. She didn't trust him, either. But if this document was important to the future of the city, he was the one who should know about it. Of course, she couldn't ask the mayor to come to her house. She pictured him puffing up the stairs, squeezing through the door, looking disapprovingly at the clutter in their house, recoiling from Poppy's sticky hands—no, it wouldn't do.

But she didn't want to take her carefully patched-together document to the Gathering Hall, either. It was just too fragile. The best thing to do, she decided, was to write the mayor a note. She settled down to do this.

She found a fairly unspoiled half-piece of paper, and, using a plain pencil (she wasn't going to waste her coloured ones on the mayor), she wrote:

*Dear Mayor Cole,*

*I have discovered a document that was in the closet. It is Instructions for something. I believe it is important because it is written in very old printing. Unfortunately it got chewed up by my sister, so it is not all there. But you can still read some bits of it, such as:*

*marked with E*

*find door of bo*

*small steel pan*

*I will show you this document if you want to see it.*

She folded the note in half and wrote "Mayor Cole" on the front. On her way to work the next morning, she took it to the Gathering Hall. No one was sitting at the guard's desk, so Lina left the note there, placed so that the guard would see it when he arrived. Then, feeling that she had done her duty, she went off to her station.

Several days went by. The messages Lina carried were full of worry and fear. "Do you have any extra Baby Drink? I can't find it at the store." "Have you heard what they're saying about the generator?" "We can't come tonight—Grandpa B. won't get out of bed."

Every day when she got home from work, Lina asked Granny, "Did a message come for me?" But there was nothing. Maybe the mayor hadn't gotten her note. Maybe he'd gotten it and paid no attention. After a week, Lina decided she was tired of waiting. If the mayor wasn't interested in what she'd found, too bad for him. *She* was interested. She would figure it out herself.

Twice during the week, when Poppy and Granny were both asleep, she'd had a little free time. She'd spent this time making a copy of the document, in case anything happened to the fragile original. It had taken her a long time. She used one of her few remaining pieces of paper—an old label, slightly torn, from a can of peas. The copy was as accurate as she could make it, with the missing bits between the letters carefully indicated as dashes. She had tucked it under the mattress of her bed for safekeeping.

Now she finally had a whole free evening. Poppy and Granny were both asleep, and the apartment was tidy. Lina sat down at her table and uncovered the patched-together document. She tied back her hair so it wouldn't keep falling in her face, and she put a piece of paper next to her—blank except for a little bit of Poppy's scribbling—to write down what she decoded.

She started with the title. The first word she'd already figured out. It had to be "Instructions." The next word could be "for." Then came "Egres"—she wasn't sure about that. Maybe it was someone's name. Egresman. Egreston. "Instructions for Egreston." She decided to call it "The Instructions" for short.

She went on to the first line. "This offic doc" probably meant "This official document." Maybe "secur" meant "secure." Or "security." Then there were the words "period" and "ears" and "city." But after that, so much was missing.

She studied the line next to the number 1. *Exp*. That could be *Expect* or *Expert* or so many things. She moved on to *riv*. That might be part of a word like "drive" or "strive." What could *ip* and *ork* possibly be? They were so close together, maybe they were part of one word. What ended with *-ip*? *Whip*, Lina thought. *Trip*. *Slip*. What ended with *-ork*? *Fork* came to mind immediately. *Tripfork*. *Slipfork*. Nothing she could think of made sense.

Maybe it wasn't *fork*. What else ended in *-ork*? Starting at the beginning of the alphabet, Lina went through all the words that rhymed with *fork*. Most of them were nonsense: *bork*, *dork*, *gork*, *hork*, *jork*. . . . This isn't going to work, she thought miserably. Oh . . . *work*! The word could be *work*.

Then what would the first part be? *Tripwork*? *Flipwork*? But maybe there was a letter between the p and the w. *Dipswork*? *Pipswork*?

Suddenly it came to her. Pipeworks. Pipeworks! That had to be it. Something in this message was about the Pipeworks!

Lina looked back at *Exp* and *riv*. *Riv*! That could be *river*! Rapidly she ran her eyes down the page. In line 3, she saw *iverb nk*—that looked like *riverbank*. The word *door* jumped out at her from line 4, whole on its scrap of paper. Lina took a quick breath. A door! What if it was the one she'd wished for, the one that led to the other city? Maybe her city was real after all, and these were instructions for finding it!

She wanted to leap from her chair and shout. The message had something to do with the river, a door, and the Pipeworks. And who did she know who knew about the Pipeworks? Doon, of course.

She pictured his thin, serious face, and his eyes looking out searchingly from beneath his dark eyebrows. She pictured how he used to bend over his work at school, holding his pencil in a hard grip, and how, during free time, he was usually off by himself in a corner studying a moth or a worm or a taken-apart clock. That was one thing, at least, that she liked about Doon: he was curious. He paid attention to things.

And he cared about things, too. She remembered how he'd been on Assignment Day, so furious at the mayor, so eager to trade his good job for her bad one so he could help save the city. And he'd taken Poppy inside his father's shop on the day of the blackout, so she wouldn't be afraid.

Why had she stopped being friends with Doon? She vaguely recalled the incident of the light pole. It seemed silly now, and long ago. The more she thought about Doon, the more it seemed he was the very person—the *only* person—who might be interested in what she had found.

She placed the plain sheet of paper over the Instructions and put the box on top. I'll go and find Doon, she thought. Tomorrow was Thursday—their day off. She would find him tomorrow and ask for his help.

## CHAPTER 8

### *Explorations*

Doon had taken to wandering the Pipeworks alone. He would go to his assigned tunnel and do his job quickly—once you got good at using your wrenches and brushes and tubes of glue, it wasn't hard. Most of the workers did their jobs quickly and then gathered in little groups to play cards or have salamander races or just talk and sleep.

But Doon didn't care about any of that. If he was going to be stuck in the Pipeworks, he would at least not waste the time he had. Since the long blackout, everything seemed more urgent than ever. Whenever the lights flickered, he was afraid the ancient generator might be shuddering to a permanent halt.

So while the others lounged around, he headed out toward the edges of the Pipeworks to see what he could see. "Pay attention," his father had said, and that's what he did. He followed his map when he could, but in some places the map was unclear. There were even tunnels that didn't show up on the map at all. To keep from getting lost, he dropped a trail of

things as he walked—washers, bolts, pieces of wire, whatever he had in his tool belt—and then he picked them up on his way back.

His father had been at least a little bit right: there were interesting things in the Pipeworks if you paid attention. Already he had found three new crawling creatures: a black beetle the size of a pinhead, a moth with furry wings, and the best of all, a creature with a soft, shiny body and a small, spiral-patterned shell on its back. Just after he found this one, while he was sitting on the floor watching in fascination as the creature crept up his arm, a couple of workers came by and saw him. They burst into laughter. “It’s bug-boy!” one of them said. “He’s collecting bugs for his lunch!”

Enraged, Doon jumped up and shouted at them. His sudden motion made the creature fall off his arm to the ground, and Doon felt a crunch beneath his foot. The laughing workers didn’t notice—they tossed a few more taunts at him and walked on—but Doon knew instantly what he’d done. He lifted his foot and looked at the squashed mess underneath.

Unintended consequences, he thought miserably. He was angry at his anger, the way it surged up and took over. He picked the bits of shell and goo off the sole of his boot and thought, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt you.

In the days that followed, Doon went farther and farther into the Pipeworks, holding on to the hope that he might find something not only interesting but important. But what he found didn’t seem important at all. Once he came upon an old pair of pliers that someone had dropped and left behind. Twice he found a coin. He discovered a supply closet that appeared to have been completely forgotten, but all it held were some boxes of plugs and washers and a rusty box containing shrivelled bits of what must once have been someone’s lunch.

He found another supply closet at the far south end of the Pipeworks—at least, he assumed that’s what it was. It was at the end of a tunnel with a rope strung across it; a sign hanging from the rope said, “Caved In. No Entry.” Doon entered anyway, ducking under the rope. He found no sign of a cave-in, but there were no lights. He groped his way forward for twenty steps or so, and there the tunnel ended in a securely locked door—he couldn’t see it, but he felt it. He retraced his steps, ducked back under the rope again, and walked on. A short distance away, he found a hatch in the ceiling of the tunnel—a square wooden panel that must lead, he thought, up into the storerooms. If he’d had something to stand on, he could have reached it and tried to open it, but it was about a foot above his upstretched hand. Probably it was locked anyhow. He wondered if the Builders had used openings like this one during the construction of the city to get more easily from one place to another.

On days when his job was near the main tunnel, he sometimes walked long the river after he’d finished working. He stayed away from the east end, where the generator



was; he didn't want to think about the generator. Instead, he went the other way, toward the place where the river rushed out of the Pipeworks. The path grew less level at this end, and less smooth. The river here was bordered with clumps of wrinkled rock that seemed to grow out of the ground like fungus. Doon liked to sit on these clumps, running his fingers along the strange creases and crevices that must have been carved somehow by running or dripping water. In some places there were grooves that looked almost like writing.

But as for things of importance, Doon found none. It seemed that the Pipeworks was no use after all to a person who wanted to save the city. The generator was hopeless. He would never understand electricity. He used to think he could use electricity to invent a movable light, if he studied hard enough. He took apart light bulbs; he took apart the electric outlets on the wall to see how the wires inside wound together and in the process, got a painful, vibrating jolt all through his body. But when he tried to wind wires of his own together in exactly the same way, nothing happened. It was what came *through* the wires that made the light, he finally understood, and he had no idea what that was.

Now he could see only two courses of action: he could give up and do nothing, or he could start to work on a different kind of movable light.

Doon didn't want to give up. So on his day off one Thursday, he went to the Ember Library to look up fire.

The library occupied an entire building on one side of Bilbollo Square. Its door was at the end of a short passage in the middle of the building. Doon went down the passage, pushed open the door, and walked in. No one was there except for the librarian, ancient Edward Pocket, who sat behind his desk writing something with a tiny pencil clutched in his gnarled hand.

The library had two big rooms, one for fiction, which was stories people made up out of their imaginations, and the other for fact, which was information about the real world. The walls of both rooms were lined with shelves, and on most of the shelves were hundreds of packets of pages. Each packet was held together with stout loops of string. The packets leaned against each other at angles and lay in untidy stacks. Some were thick, and some were so slim that only a clip was needed to hold them together. The pages of the oldest packets were yellowed and warped, and their edges were uneven rows of ripples.

These were the books of Ember, written over the years by its citizens. They contained in their close-written pages much that was imagined and everything that was known.

Edward Pocket looked up and nodded briefly at Doon, one of his most frequent visitors. Doon nodded back. He went into the fact room, to the section of shelves labeled "F." The books were arranged by subject, but even so, it wasn't easy to find what you wanted. A book about moths, for instance, might be under "M" for moths, or "I" for insects, or "B" for bugs. It might even be under "F" for flying things. Usually you had to browse

through the entire library to make sure you'd found all the books on one subject. But since he was looking for "fire," he thought he might as well start with "F."

Fire was rare in Ember. When there was a fire, it was because there had been an accident—someone had left a dishtowel too close to an electric burner on a stove, or a cord had frayed and a spark had flown out and ignited curtains. Then the citizens would rush in with buckets of water, and the fire was quickly drowned. But it was, of course, possible to start a fire on purpose. You could hold a sliver of wood to the stove burner until it burst into flame, and then for a moment it would flare brightly, giving off orange light.

The trick was to find a way to make the light last. If you had a light that would keep going, you could go out into the Unknown Regions and see what was there. Finding a way to explore the Unknown Regions was the only thing Doon could think of to do.

He took down a book from the "F" shelf. *Fungus*, it was called. He put it back. The next book was called *How to Repair Furniture*. He put that back, too. He went through *Foot Diseases*, *Fun with String*, *Coping with Failure*, and *Canned Fruit Recipes* before he finally found a book called *All About Fire*. He sat down at one of the library's square tables to read it.

But the person who had written the book knew no more about fire than Doon. Mostly the book described the dangers of fire. A long section of it was about a building in Winifred Square that had caught fire forty years ago, and how all its doors and all its furniture had burned up and smoke had filled the air for days. Another part was about what to do if your oven caught on fire.

Doon closed the book and sighed. It was useless. *He* could write a better book than that. He got up and wandered restlessly around the library. Sometimes you could find useful things just by choosing randomly from the shelves. He had done this many times—just reached out and grabbed something—in the hope that by accident he might come upon the very piece of information he needed. It would be something that another person had written down without understanding its significance, just a sentence or two that would be like a flash of light in Doon's mind, fitting together with things he already knew to make a solution to everything.

Although he'd often found something interesting in these searches, he'd never found anything *important*. Today was no different. He did come across a collection called *Mysterious Words from the Past*, which he read for a while. It was about words and phrases so old that their meanings had been forgotten. He read a few pages.

### **Heavens above**

**Indicates surprise. What "heavens" means is unclear. It might be another word for "floodlight."**

### **Hogwash**

**Means “nonsense,” though no one knows what a “hog” is or why one would wash it.**

**Batting a thousand**

**Indicates great success. This might possibly refer to killing bugs.**

**All in the same boat**

**Means “all in the same predicament.” The meaning of “boat” is unknown.**

Interesting, but not useful. He put the book back on the shelf and was about to leave when the door of the library opened, and Lina Mayfleet came in.

Write about a time when you felt a hunger for something like Lina felt for the pencils.  
*What did you want? Did you get it? If not, why? If so, what did it cost you?*