

Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2020

Write each word 5 times neatly in your book.

Abundance

Accomplice

Curtly

Defying

Dispersing

Enraged

Impudence

Ponder

Rummaged

Tumult

Now read the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 14**

### *The Way Out*

The next day was Song Rehearsal Day. Everyone was let off from work at twelve o'clock to practice for the Singing. It was a slow morning for messages. Lina had a lot of time to sit at her station in Garn Square and think. She put her elbows on her knees, rested her chin in her hands, and stared down at the pavement in front of the bench, which was worn smooth by the many feet that had passed there. She thought about the mayor, down in his room full of plunder, gorging on peaches and asparagus and wrapping his huge body in elegant new clothes. She thought of his great stack of light bulbs and shook her head in bewilderment. What was he thinking? If he still had light bulbs when everyone else in Ember had run out, would he enjoy sitting in his lit room while the rest of the city drowned in darkness? And when the power finally ran out for good, all his light bulbs would be useless. Possessions couldn't save him— how could he have forgotten that? He must be thinking the same way as Looper: everything was hopeless anyhow, so he'd live it up while he could.

She leaned back against the bench, stretched her legs out, and took a long breath. Very soon, the guards would storm into the secret room and seize the mayor as he sat stuffing himself on stolen goodies. Maybe they already had. Maybe today the stunning

news would come: Mayor Arrested! Stealing from Citizens! Maybe they'd announce it at the Singing, so everyone could hear it.

No one came with any messages to be delivered, so after a while Lina left her station and found a step to sit on in an alley off Calloo Street. She pulled back her hair and braided it to keep it from sliding around. Then she took from her pocket the copy of the Instructions she'd made just after she sent her note to the mayor. She unfolded it and began to study it.

This is what she was doing when, a little before twelve o'clock, she looked up to see Doon running toward her. He must have come straight from the Pipeworks—he had a big damp patch of water on one leg of his pants. He spoke in an excited rush. "I've been looking all over for you!" he said. "I've found it!"

"Found what?"

"The E! At least it looks like an E. It *must* be an E, though you wouldn't know it if you weren't looking for it. . . ."

"You mean the rock marked with an E? In the Pipeworks?"

"Yes, yes, I found it!" He stood breathing hard, his eyes blazing. "I'd seen it before, but I didn't think of it as an E then, just a squiggle that looked like writing. There are all these rocks that look like they're covered with writing."

"Which rocks? Where is it?" Lina was on her feet now, bouncing with excitement.

"Down at the west end of the river. Near where it goes into that great hole in the Pipeworks wall." He paused, trying to catch his breath. "And listen," he said. "We could go there right now."

"Right now?"

"Yes, because of rehearsals. Everyone's going home, so the Pipeworks will be closed and empty."

"But if it's closed, how will we get in?"

Grinning, Doon produced a large key from his pocket. "I ducked into the office on my way out and borrowed the spare key," he said. "Lister—he's the Pipeworks director—was in the bathroom practicing his singing. He won't miss the key today. And tomorrow, everyone will be off work." He did an impatient shuffle. "So come on," he said.

The town clock struck the first of its twelve noontime booms. Lina stuffed her copy of the Instructions back in her pocket. "Let's go."

The Pipeworks was empty and silent. Lina and Doon went up the hallway past the rows of boots and the slickers hanging on their hooks. They didn't take any of these for themselves. This was not a Pipeworks tunnel they were about to enter, they were sure; it wouldn't be dripping with water or lined with spurting pipes.

They went down the long stairway and out into the main tunnel, where the river thundered alongside the path, its dark surface strewn with flecks of light.

Doon led the way along the river's edge. As they neared the west end, Lina saw the rocky outcroppings Doon had described to her. They were strange bulging shapes creased with lines like the faces of the very old. Not far beyond, Lina could see the place where the river disappeared into a great hole in the Pipeworks wall.

Doon knelt down beside a clump of stones. He ran a finger over their convoluted surface. "Look here," he said. Lina stooped down and peered at the deeply carved lines. It was hard to see the E at first, because it was surrounded by such a tangle of other lines, and because she was expecting it to be an E drawn with straight strokes. But once she saw it—an E drawn with curving lines, a script E—she was sure it had been carved on purpose: it was centred on its stone, and its lines were deep and even.

"So from here we should look down at the river," said Doon. "That's what the Instructions said, 'down riverbank to ledge.'"

He lay on his stomach next to the rock and inched forward until his head hung out over the edge of the path. Lina watched him anxiously. His elbows stuck up on either side of him, and his head, bent down, was nearly invisible. He stayed that way for long seconds. Then he shouted, "Yes! I see something!" and scrambled to his feet again. "You do it," he said. "Look at the riverbank right below us."

Lina did as he had. She lay down and pulled herself forward until her head was over the edge. Eight feet or so below her, she saw the black water churning by. She tucked her chin in and looked at the riverbank. It was a sheer rock wall, straight up and down and slick with spray, and at first that was all she saw. But she kept looking and before long could make out short iron bars bolted into the bank, one below the next, almost directly below her. They were like the rungs of a ladder. The y *were* a ladder, she realized. The bars provided a way to climb down the riverbank. Not a very appealing way—the bars looked slippery, and the water below was so terribly fast. And because of the dimness and the flying spray, she couldn't actually see if there was a ledge at the bottom or not. But the E was clearly an E, and the bars were clearly a ladder. This must be the right place.

"Who'll go first?" said Doon.

"You can," Lina said, getting to her feet and stepping away.

“All right.” Doon turned so that his back was to the river, and he eased himself carefully over the rocks, feeling for the first rung with his foot. Lina watched as he sank out of sight, little by little. After a few moments his voice called up from below: “I’m down! Now you come!”

Lina inched backward, just as Doon had, letting one foot dangle over the edge, lower and lower, until it touched the first rung of the ladder. She shifted her weight to that foot, clinging with cold fingers to a ridge in the rock, and lowered herself slowly until she was standing on the rung with both feet. Her heart was beating so hard she was afraid it would shake her fingers loose from their grip.

Now she had to move downward. She felt for the next rung with her foot, found it, let herself down. It would have been easy if it hadn’t been for the river waiting below to swallow her.

“You’re almost here!” called Doon. His voice came from right below her. “There’s a ledge—one more rung and you’ll feel it.”

She did feel it, solid beneath her foot. For a second, she stood there, still clutching the ladder. The surging water was only inches below her now. Don’t think about it, she told herself. She moved sideways two steps to stand next to Doon, and there in front of them was a rectangular space carved out of the river wall, rather like the entry hall of a building. It was perhaps eight feet wide and eight feet high, and would have been invisible from anywhere else in the Pipeworks. You had to have climbed down the riverbank to see it.

They stepped into this entry hall and walked a few steps. Enough light to see by came from the tunnel behind them.

Lina stopped. “There’s the door!” she said.

“What?” said Doon. The water roared so loudly they had to shout to be heard.

“The door!” Lina yelled happily.

“Yes!” Doon yelled back. “I see it!”

At the end of the passage was a wide, solid-looking door. It was dull grey, mottled with greenish and brownish blotches that looked like mildew. Lina put her palms against it. It was metal, and it felt cold. The door had a metal handle, and just below the handle was a keyhole.

Lina reached into the pocket of her pants for her copy of the Instructions. She unfolded it, and Doon looked over her shoulder. Together they squinted at the paper in the dim light from the main tunnel.

“This is the part, right here,” she said, pointing:

3.                    adde down iverb nk  
                       to edge appr                    eight  
                       low.

4.    acks to the  
                       wat r,                    find door of bo  
                       ker. Ke                    hind small steel  
                       pan            the right                    . Rem  
                       ey, open do .

Lina ran her finger along line number 3. “This must say, ‘Something, something down riverbank to ledge approximately eight feet below.’ That’s what we’ve just done. Then 4 is something about . . . ‘backs to the water, find door . . . something.’ And then ‘Ke hind’—that must be ‘key behind,’ and then there’s the small steel pan. Do you see a small steel pan?”

Doon was still studying the paper. “It says ‘right.’ We should look to the right of the door.”

And quite easily they found it. It wasn’t a pan at all, but a small square of steel embedded in the wall. “A steel *panel*,” said Lina. She ran her fingers across it and felt a dent at one side. When she pressed there, the panel sprang open easily and silently, as if it were glad to have been finally found. Inside, a silver key was hanging on a hook.

Lina reached for it and then drew her hand back. “Shall I do it?” she said. “Or shall you?”

“You do it,” said Doon.

So she took the key from its hook and put it in the keyhole. She turned it and felt a click. She grasped the door handle and pushed, but nothing happened. She pushed harder. “It won’t budge,” she said.

“Maybe it opens outward,” said Doon.

Lina pulled. The door still didn’t move. “It *has* to open,” she said. “We unlocked it!” She pulled and pushed and hauled on the handle—and the door moved, not inward or outward but sideways. “Oh, *this* is how it goes!” cried Lina. She pulled the handle to the left, and with a deep rasping sound, the door slid away, into a slot in the wall. Behind it was a space of utter darkness.

They stared. Lina had expected to see something when the door opened. She had thought there would be light behind it, and a path or road.

“Shall we go in?” said Lina.

Doon nodded.

Lina stepped across the threshold. The air had a dank, stuffy smell. She turned to the right and put her right hand against the wall. It was smooth and flat. The floor, too, was smooth.

“There might be a light switch,” she said. She patted the wall just inside the door, from the floor to as high as she could reach, but found nothing.

Doon turned left and felt on the other side, with the same result. “Nothing,” he said.

Very slowly, keeping a hand to the wall and tapping the floor cautiously with their feet before every step, Doon and Lina made their way in opposite directions. Each of them soon came to a corner and turned again. Now they were going deeper into the dark. They both had the same thought: Is the way out of Ember a long dark tunnel? Must we go mile after mile in absolute darkness?

But suddenly Lina gave a yelp of surprise. “Something’s here on the floor,” she said. Her foot had banged against a hard object. She knelt down and touched it cautiously with her hands. It was a metal cube, about a foot square. “It’s a box, I think. Two boxes,” she added as she explored farther.

Doon took a step toward her in the darkness, and his knees banged into a hard edge. “There’s something else here, too,” he said. “Not a box.” He ran his hands along it. “It’s big and has a curved edge.”

“The boxes are small enough to lift,” said Lina. “Let’s take them out where it’s lighter and see what they are. Come and help.”

Doon made his way to Lina and picked up one of the boxes. They walked back through the door and set the boxes down a few feet from the river’s edge. They were made of dark green metal and had grey metal handles on top and a kind of latch on the side. The latches opened easily. Lina and Doon raised the hinged lids and looked inside.

What they saw puzzled and disappointed them. Lina’s box was full of smooth white rods, each about ten inches long. At the end of each one, a little bit of string poked out. In Doon’s box were dozens of small packets wrapped in a slippery material. He opened one and found a lot of short wooden sticks, each with a blue blob on the end. Both boxes had a label on the inside of the lid. The label on Lina’s box said “Candles.” The label on Doon’s said “Matches,” and under it was a white, inch-wide strip of some kind of rough, pebbly material.

“What does ‘Candles’ mean?” Lina said, puzzled. She took out one of the white rods. It felt slick, almost greasy.

“And what does ‘Matches’ mean?” said Doon. “Matches what?” He took one of the small sticks from its packet. The blue stuff on the end was not wood. “Could it be something to write with? Like a pencil? Maybe it writes blue.”

“But what’s the point of a whole box of tiny pencils?” asked Lina. “I don’t understand.”

Doon frowned at the little blue-tipped stick. “I don’t see what else it could be,” he said finally. “I’ll try writing something with it.”

“On what?”

Doon looked around. The floor was too damp from the spray of the river to write on. “I could try it on the Instructions,” he said. Lina handed them to him. Carefully, he rubbed the blue end of the stick along the edge of the paper. It didn’t leave a mark. He rubbed it along his arm. No mark there, either.

“Try this white stuff,” Lina said, pointing to the white strip inside the lid of the box.

He scraped the blue tip across the rough surface. Instantly, the end of the stick burst into flame. Doon cried out and flung the stick away. It landed on the floor a few feet off, where it burned brightly for a moment and then sputtered out.

They stared at each other, their mouths open in astonishment. There was a strange sharp smell in the air that smarted in their noses.

“It makes fire!” said Doon. “And light!”

“Let me try one,” said Lina. She took a stick from the box and ran it across the rough strip. It blazed up fiercely, but she managed to hold on to it for a moment. Then she felt the heat on her fingers and let go, and the flaming stick dropped over the ledge and into the river.

“Firesticks,” said Doon. “Are they what saves Ember?”

“I don’t see how they could be,” said Lina. “They’re so small. They go out too fast.” She shivered. This was not turning out the way she’d thought it would. She held up one of the white things. “Anyway, what are these for?”

Doon shook his head in bewilderment. “Maybe a candle is a kind of handle,” he said. “Maybe you tie the stick on with the string, and then you can hold it longer while it burns.”

“It would still go out just as fast,” Lina said.

“Yes,” said Doon. “But it’s all I can think of. Let’s try it.”

With a great deal of effort, they looped the string of a rod around one of the sticks. Lina held the rod while Doon scraped the blue tip into flame. They watched the stick flare brightly, making shadows jump up behind them. The wood turned black, and the charred firestick crumbled and dropped to the ground. But the light didn't go out. The string itself had caught fire. As they watched, it sputtered and smoked and then burned steadily, filling the little room with a warm glow.

"It's the movable light," said Doon in awe.

All Lina's excitement flooded back.

"And now, and now—" she said, "we can go back into the room and see what's there."

They went back down the passage to the doorway and stepped inside. Lina held the movable light at arm's length before her. In its flickering glow they saw something made of silvery metal. They walked slowly around, examining it. It was long and low, filling up the center of the room. One end of it came to a point. The other end was flat. Across the open middle stretched two metal strips. Four stout ropes were attached to the outside, one at each end and one on each side. And on the floor of the thing were two poles, each flattened at one end.

"Look," said Lina. "There's a word on its side." They squatted at the pointed end and held the flame near the word. It said, in square black letters, "BOAT."

"Boat," repeated Doon. "What does that mean?"

"I don't know," said Lina. "And here's another word, on these poles: 'Paddles.' The only paddle I know is the one Mrs. Polster uses on kids who misbehave in school."

Once again, she took her copy of the Instructions from her pocket and consulted it, holding it in the light of the flame. "Look," she said, "right here: 'oat' must be 'boat.'"

5.                    oat,                    stocked with  
nec                    uip    ent. Bac  
ont    s                    eet.

"And the next part must say, 'stocked with necessary equipment,'" said Doon. "That must be what's in the boxes."

"Then there's this." Lina ran her finger along the next line.



6. Usi ropes, lower  
ter. Head downstairs. Use  
ropes to lower the boat, and assist over rapids.

"This word must be 'ropes,'" she said. "Then 'lower' . . . and then . . . would this word be 'downstairs'? Maybe it says, 'head downstairs'?"

"That doesn't make sense," said Doon. "There aren't any stairs, except the ones that go up." He frowned at the word, and then he took a short, sharp breath. "Downstream," he said. "The word must be 'downstream.' It must say something like, 'Use the ropes to lower the boat, and head downstream.'" He looked up at Lina and spoke in a voice full of wonder. "The boat goes on the water. It's something to ride in."

They stared at each other in the flickering light, realizing what this meant. There was no tunnel leading out of Ember. The way out was the river. To leave Ember, they must go on the river.