

## Prologue

The two builders were very tired, but their work on the city of Ember was over.

'The people must not leave Ember for a long time,' one builder said. 'They must wait two hundred years or more.'

'How are they going to know when to leave?' asked the other man.

'We put instructions in a box,' said the first builder. 'The mayor keeps the box but she knows nothing about the instructions. She gives the box to the next mayor, and that mayor gives it to the next. After many years, on the right day, the box opens.'

And so the first mayor took the box and told no-one. When the second mayor took the box, he did the same thing. For many years everything was OK. But then, one day, the seventh mayor didn't feel well.

'Maybe the thing inside the box can help,' he thought. He took the box home. He tried to open it, but it wasn't possible. Later the mayor died. But now the box was not in its special place.

And then one day the box opened. It was time to leave Ember, but no-one knew ...

## CHAPTER 1 The city in the dark

The sky over Ember was always dark. When the city lights were off at night, everything was black. Sometimes they went off during the day too, because everything in the city was old. Many people thought, 'Maybe one day the lights are going to go off and never go back on.'

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Today was Lina Mayfleet's last day at school. The mayor was there.

'Today I am going to give you all jobs.' Mayor Cole said. 'Everyone in Ember helps the city.'

One of Lina's friends, Lizzie, was first. She pulled a bit of paper from the bag in the mayor's hand. 'I'm working in the Store Room,' she said.

More children went up for their jobs. Lina waited. She liked to run and she wanted to be a messenger. Then it was her turn.



She looked at the paper. 'I'm going to work in the tunnels under the city,' she read sadly. This was terrible!

Doon Harrow was next.

'Messenger,' he read. 'But I don't *want* to be a messenger!'

The mayor was not pleased. 'Things are good in Ember when everyone helps!'

'No!' shouted Doon. 'Things are worse every day. There isn't enough food. Nothing works!'

The mayor was angry. 'Sit down,' he said.

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After school, Lina was sad. She didn't want to work in the tunnels. But then Doon ran up to her.

'Do you want my job?' he asked. 'I don't want to be a messenger.'

Lina didn't understand. Why did anybody want to work in the tunnels?

'I want to learn about the city,' said Doon. 'I want to understand it.'

And so they changed jobs.

Lina ran home to tell her sister Poppy and Granny\* – she was a messenger!



\* Children often call their grandmother 'Granny'.