The GRIFFIN GATE



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Barrington Stoke

For Zachary, Oliver and Erin

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Invisible



Rain dribbled down the windows of Griffin House and the skies were a dismal grey. The weather perfectly matched Grace Griffin's mood.

Grace sat on her bed, pretending not to hear her mum knocking on the door.

"You have to go," said Watson, the family raven. He was perched on Grace's bedpost.

"No one will notice if I'm not there," said Grace.

There was a soft whirr of turning cogs as Watson spread his mechanical wings and ruffled his feathers.

The door swung open.

"Grace, come on!" said her mum, Ann. "Why aren't you wearing your uniform? It's not every day we're invited to the Mayor's office."

But what was the point, Grace thought, when she still had two years to wait before she was allowed to take part in a real mission? "Do I have to go?" she asked. "I could stay and watch the map today."

"No," Mum replied. "And hurry up. Bren's waiting." Mum went to Grace's wardrobe and took her training uniform from the hanger. "Griffins stick together, Grace," Mum went on. "We have an important job and—"

"—Moreland relies on us wardens to keep the country safe," Grace finished. "I know." She

took her uniform and began to get changed. It was a light brown jumpsuit with a gold symbol of a gate on the chest. There were pockets everywhere: the arms, the waist, the hips and the thighs. But Grace's favourite pocket was at the bottom of the leg, where the stun stick would be kept when she was finally allowed one. Each pocket contained an item of warden's equipment: notepad, rope, medi-kit and a variety of small tools. All lightweight for easy travel.

"Watson, will you watch the map while we're out?" Mum asked.

The Griffin map was the most important piece of technology in the city of Copperport. It showed the entire country of Moreland and included portals that let the Griffins travel into the map to help people. The Griffin family had been wardens of the map ever since Great Grandma Griffin had invented it. They helped to keep law and order in Moreland. Mum was a warden, and Grace's brother Bren too – now

he was fifteen. Crime in the country had been halved since the invention of the map. Ann Griffin took the family's position as wardens very seriously.

"I would be delighted to watch the map," Watson said.

Grace huffed to herself.

"Grace, you're going, and that's that," Mum told her.



Grace, Ann and Bren walked along the wet streets of Copperport, rain pounding on their umbrellas and the many layered rooftops of the city. The hydro-mill, which supplied the city with power, turned slowly in the distance. It kicked up a strong, salty aroma from its position where the river met the sea.

Grace glanced at Bren. “You’re walking like a peacock,” she whispered. “And why is your hair all smoothed back like that?”

Bren scowled and pulled up the collar of his uniform.

Grace and Bren used to do everything together. But now that Bren could go out on missions, he was acting superior to Grace and wasn’t interested in training with her. She sighed to herself. She was just as good as Bren at self-defence. Last week Grace had scored more points than him in the rescue simulator where they practised missions. Bren had accused Watson of helping her.

As they walked, everyone they passed greeted Ann Griffin with a nod or a word of thanks for keeping Moreland safe. Ann always smiled humbly and said it was an honour to be looking out for those in need.

Soon Grace, Bren and their mum were outside Mayor Pick's house. It was a tall red-brick building with a pillared entrance, the most impressive in the street. One of Mayor Pick's assistants led them up the stairs to a grand office. The golden-haired Mayor Pick sat behind a large desk, smiling in his green velvet jacket and ruffled-neck shirt.

"Ann, Bren, how lovely to see you!" Mayor Pick declared. "Do come in and sit down."

Grace looked down at herself, wondering if she'd become invisible.

Bren and Ann sat in the two seats in front of Mayor Pick's desk, which was covered in toppling piles of paper. Mayor Pick moved a stack to the side so that he could see Ann better. "It seems I spend my days signing pieces of paper," he said, smiling sadly with a small shrug.

Grace stood behind Ann and Bren, feeling like an unwanted guest at a party.

Mayor Pick turned to Bren and said, "Congratulations on your recent mission into the map! The way you handled the attempted bank robbery in Redwick really was incredible. The residents of Redwick have declared you a hero for putting a dangerous thief out of action with the swift use of a stun stick. Apparently the thief was planning a series of burglaries across towns in the east, which have now been prevented. It just shows how important the map is in keeping our country lawful."

Grace's eyes began to wander around the room as Mayor Pick continued to lavish more praise on Bren. She took in the oak shelves filled with books and many spyglasses.

Grace counted thirty-two spyglasses. *The Mayor must collect them*, she thought.

Bren began recounting the details of the mission and Grace shuffled quietly towards the shelves.



Her attention was caught by a large beautiful spyglass. It was crafted in rosewood and overlaid with a wave pattern and the Mayor's family crest, both in gold. The crest was a shield with a "P" in the centre and a galleon ship on the top. Grace took the spyglass from its holder and raised it to her eye.

"What are you doing?" Mayor Pick snapped.

Grace jumped and the spyglass slipped from her hands. She fumbled to catch it, but it clattered to the floor. Her back tensed.

Mum rushed over. "Grace!" she said with quiet force.

"Sorry," Grace said, and flashed an apologetic smile at Mayor Pick.

Mum picked up the spyglass and replaced it on the shelf. "I'm very sorry, Mayor Pick," Mum said. "Do forgive my daughter. She's keen but gets easily distracted."

Bren rolled his eyes while Grace followed Mum back to the desk and stood behind the chairs.

"As I was saying," the Mayor continued, "I would like to give you one of my spyglasses as a reward, Bren. I don't give them to just anyone, you know." The Mayor glanced at Grace and frowned.

"They're very precious," Mum said. "We can't possibly accept, Mayor Pick."

Bren slumped in his chair.

"Nonsense, Ann," the Mayor argued. "And call me Clemence. After all, we did go to Copperport Academy of Science together."

Mum smiled, but Grace knew she would keep calling him Mayor Pick because Mum did everything *by the rules*. Like not allowing Grace to go on a mission until she was fifteen, no matter how much Grace begged.

The Mayor put a spyglass on his desk in front of Bren. It was just like the one Grace had picked up.

"It's beautiful," said Bren.

"My family have crafted spyglasses for generations," said Mayor Pick. "We've become rather good at them!"

Bren accepted the spyglass and another of the Mayor's assistants saw them to the door.

Outside, Mum and Bren both turned to Grace.

"Can't you stop fidgeting for one moment?" Bren snapped. "I was so embarrassed when you dropped that spyglass!" He stormed off ahead.

Mum shook her head. "Your time will come, Grace," she said.