THE LIGHT THIEVES SEARCH FOR THE BLACK MIRROR

"A WILDLY ENTERTAINING RIDE RIPPED FROM TOMORROW'S HEADLINES."
Eoin Colfer

When a young boy and his friends unwittingly uncover a massive hoax while a tech-billionaire hoodwinks people into believing that only he can save the world – *who do you trust?*

To Jo and Bobbie
(and Mushka – the very best bestfriend)

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THE LIGHT THIEVES
SEARCH FOR THE BLACK MIRROR

HELENA DUGGAN

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THE STORY SO FAR

1. THREE YEARS AGO AN EARTHQUAKE SHOOK THE WORLD LEAVING A BLACK MARK ON THE SUN. PEOPLE BELIEVE THE WORLD HAS SHIFTED OFF ITS AXIS.

2. HOWARD HANSOM BUILDS THE TIPPING POINT ENCOURAGING VOLUNTEERS TO MOVE THERE. WITH ENOUGH WEIGHT IN THAT LOCATION THE WORLD WILL SHIFT BACK TO ITS ORIGINAL AXIS. EVERYONE WILL BE SAVED.

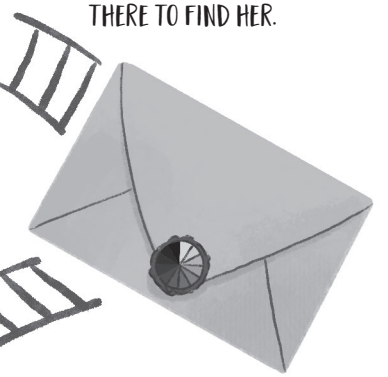
3. GRIAN'S SISTER SOLAS RUNS AWAY TO THE TIPPING POINT. GRANDAD GOES TO FIND HER.

4. MYSTERIOUS FIGURES IN BLACK CLOAKS SEARCH GRIAN'S HOUSE. HE FLEES TO JEFFREY'S HOUSE.

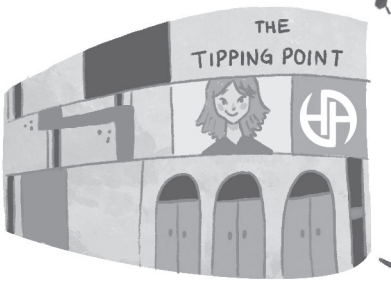
5. HIDING IN THE WILDE FOREST THE BOYS MEET SHELLI. SHE SAYS THE MYSTERIOUS FIGURES ARE PROCTORS. THEY BRING TROUBLE. THE THREE KIDS TRACK GRANDAD.

6. WITH PROCTORS CHASING THEM THEY DISCOVER AN UNDERGROUND POSTAL RAILWAY AND FOLLOW IT.

7. THEY SEE A MAN IN A LONG COAT LEAVING A NOTE ON A DERELICT PLATFORM.



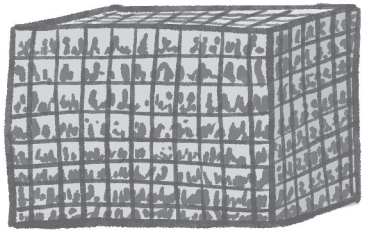
8. AFTER SEEING SOLAS ON A BILLBOARD EXCLAIMING SHE LOVES THE TIPPING POINT THE KIDS BREAK IN THERE TO FIND HER.



9. THEY ARE DISCOVERED BY HOWARD HANSOM. HE TELLS THEM THE MAN IN THE LONG COAT IS HEAD OF THE PROCTORS – A GROUP TRYING TO STOP HANSOM'S PLANS TO SAVE THE WORLD. HANSOM NEEDS THEIR HELP TO FIND HIM. HE PUTS THEM UP IN A HOTEL.

10. THEY DISCOVER THE HEAD OF THE PROCTORS ATTACKING HANSOM. THE CHILDREN SAVE HANSOM AND THE MAN IS TAKEN AWAY.

11. THE KIDS DISCOVER SOLAS AND OTHER VOLUNTEERS LOCKED IN CAGES UNDER THE TIPPING POINT.



12. ON CCTV THEY SEE GRANDAD AND THE MAN IN THE LONG COAT LOCKED IN A ROOM. GRANDAD SAYS THE MAN IS VERMILION, A MEMBER OF THE COUNCIL OF COLOUR TRYING TO STOP HANSOM BECAUSE HE IS LYING ABOUT WHAT'S GOING ON.

13. HANSOM THROWS A PARTY TO THANK THE KIDS FOR SAVING HIS LIFE. THE KIDS ARE HEROES. BUT THEY KNOW THEY'RE BEING SET UP.

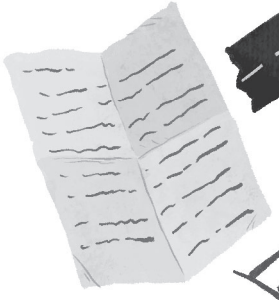
14. THE KIDS RESCUE SOLAS AND SOME OF THE VOLUNTEERS WITH THE HELP OF SHELLI'S ANIMAL FRIENDS.

15. GRIAN SAVES GRANDAD AND VERMILION. THERE'S A HUGE EXPLOSION. SHELLI IS CAPTURED BY HANSOM.

16. GRIAN TELLS GRANDAD HE SUSPECTS HANSOM OF SETTING THEM UP. GRANDAD GIVES GRIAN A SMALL HESSIAN BAG, TELLING HIM TO TAKE IT TO THE COUNCIL OF COLOUR.

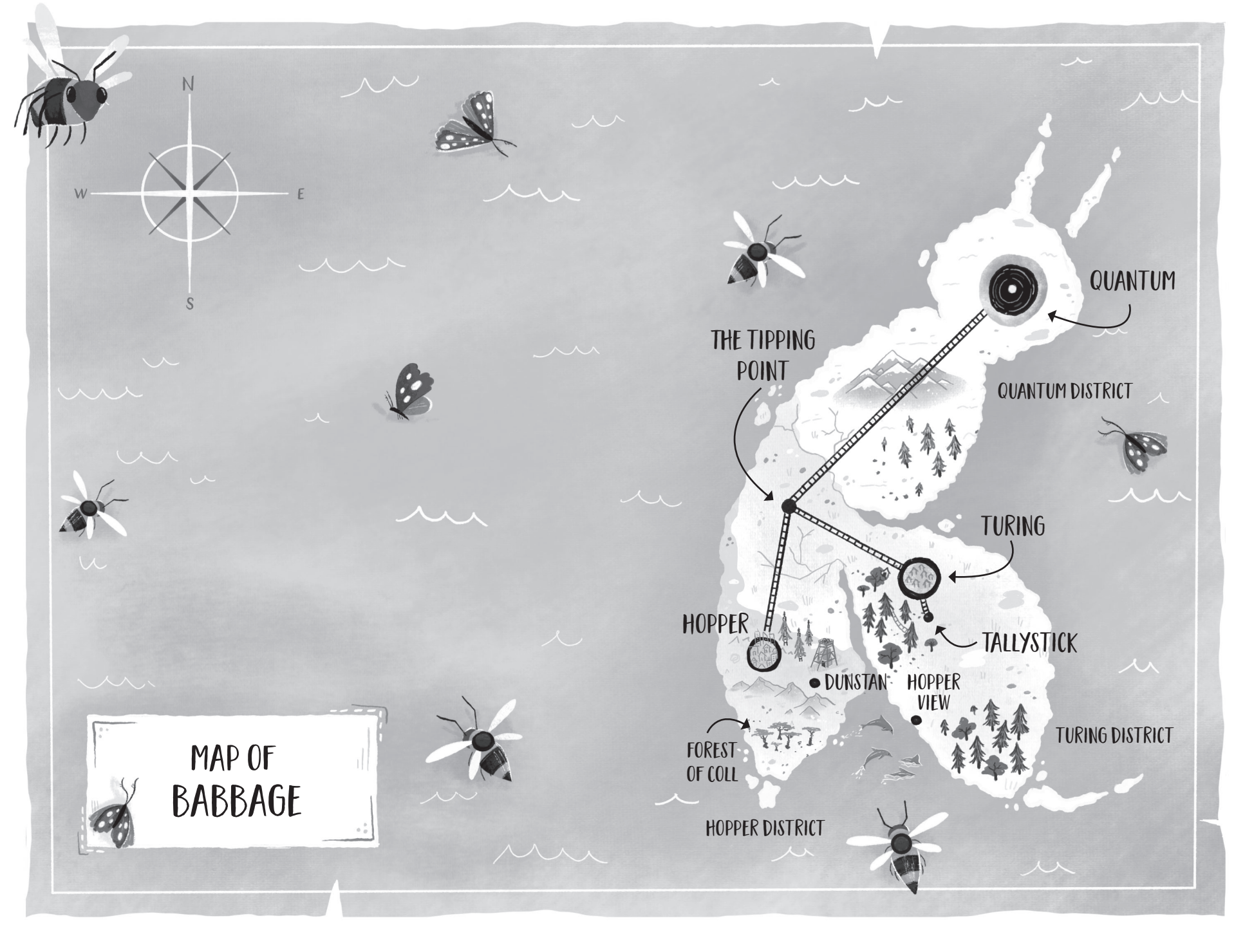
17. HANSOM ADMITS HE IS BEHIND WHAT'S HAPPENING TO THE SUN BUT SAYS THE WORLD WILL BLAME GRIAN FOR THE DESTRUCTION. HE DISAPPEARS ON THE HYPERLOOP, KIDNAPPING GRANDAD.

18. GRIAN RESCUES SHELLI. ON THE WAY BACK TO THE WILDE FOREST GRIAN FINDS A LETTER IN THE BAG. IT'S FROM THE WHITE ROSE, WHO SAYS THE SUN IS BEING STOLEN AND SETS OUT A WAY TO SAVE IT.



19. GRIAN DISCOVERS THAT HIS DAD IS TAKING ANOTHER LETTER FROM THE WHITE ROSE TO THE COUNCIL OF COLOUR.

20. THE BLACK MARK ON THE SUN GETS BIGGER – THE WORLD DARKER. GRIAN AND HIS FRIENDS MUST SAVE THE WORLD FROM HANSOM'S PLOT TO STEAL THE SUN.


N
W
E
S
QUANTUM
THE TIPPING POINT
QUANTUM DISTRICT
TURING
HOPPER
TALLYSTICK
DUNSTAN
HOPPER VIEW
TURING DISTRICT
FOREST OF COLL
HOPPER DISTRICT
MAP OF BABBAGE

CHAPTER 1
DOOMED

"I am standing here a good distance back from the city, Mike," the woman said, speaking to the man in the brightly lit TV studio. "As you can see, fire and police officers are everywhere. No one is allowed in or out of the smart city. The Tipping Point was always a no-go area to everyone except those who selflessly volunteered to live here, but tonight, since what some are reporting as an explosion, security is even tighter and reporters are only allowed to stand outside these barriers behind me.

"The scene is eerily similar to those witnessed in Quantum, the capital city of Babbage, hours and days after the earthquake that rocked our world three years ago and left a black mark on our sun. I'll never forget the

devastation I witnessed that day, the day that infamously became known as the Tilt."

The news reporter was shaking as she held the large microphone to her quivering lips. Her eyes were glassy as if she had been crying. Behind her, sirens raged, lights flashed and fires could be seen blazing in the distance.

"Though tonight, Mike, feels worse than three years ago. This time we know the black mark that appeared on the sun is a sign the earthquake tilted our planet into a precarious position. We know if this current unstable position is not fixed, the earth will, in the not-too-distant future, fly off into outer space and combust. We also know the Tipping Point and its creator – tech entrepreneur Howard Hansom – were our only chance of survival."

The reporter paused for a moment.

"I remember exactly where I was and how ecstatic I felt, after all the fear and hopelessness, the day Howard Hansom announced he had discovered how to save the planet. I remember the relief when he revealed plans to build his smart city, the Tipping Point, in the exact geographical location where if enough weight were applied, the world would tilt back into its correct position and save us all. And then I couldn't believe it when he declared he would create enough weight by paying people to move to his utopian city, full of his latest technologies, and effectively give ordinary people the holiday of a

lifetime while turning them into real-life superheroes. It was the stuff of dreams, Mike; it was the storyline of a blockbuster movie.

"And now…now Howard Hansom, our hero, is missing presumed dead, and the Tipping Point – well, some say it can be rebuilt, that there may still be hope, while others say…they say we are doomed."

The man in the studio shook his head.

"And all the volunteers living in the Tipping Point – can you give any update on their situation, to family and friends currently watching this broadcast at home, Susie?" he asked after a few moments.

"No, Mike, we're not being told much. Hopefully we will be briefed soon. I have managed to interview a few people who were given special access to attend the earlier celebrations in the city tonight, prior to the explosion, but none were actual Tipping Point volunteers. No survivors have been found yet, but no bodies have been reported or recovered yet either…"

The woman looked away from the camera for a moment. Her eyes were watery when she looked back.

"And this deliberate destruction of the Tipping Point was carried out by children, Susie – am I understanding that correctly?" the man said a few moments later.

"Yes, Mike," the woman replied, as firefighters rushed past her. "That is correct. Grian Woods, Jeffrey Slight and

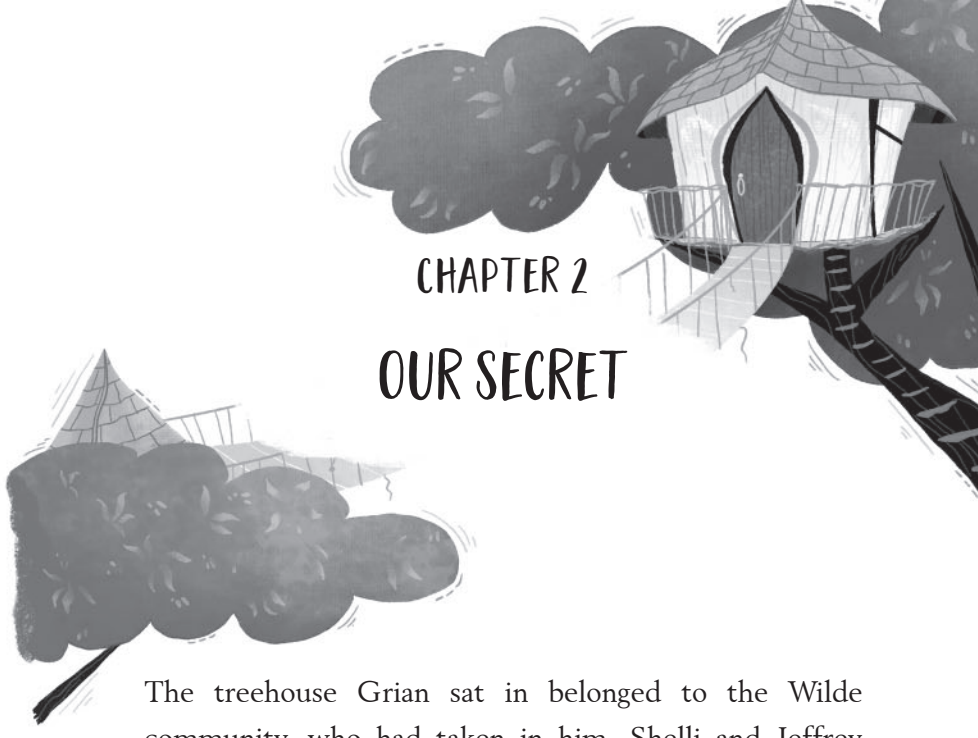
a Wilde girl who we believe goes by the name Shelli – the very same children, who only moments before the explosion, were celebrated as heroes all over our screens for saving the life of Howard Hansom himself.

"Police don't think the children were acting alone though. They are believed to be members of a group called the Proctors, who have been trying to sabotage Howard Hansom and the Tipping Point since his plans to save the planet first came to light. The Proctors are a group of radical Tilt deniers who believe the planet hasn't shifted on its axis and that the earthquake was a hoax…"

"Huh – what an elaborate hoax that would be!" The man in the studio snorted, as the TV screen cut to pictures of Grian, and his friends Shelli and Jeffrey onstage earlier that night in the Tipping Point auditorium.

Grian huffed angrily and switched off Bob, his Hansom watch.

The news report was all lies.



CHAPTER 2

OUR SECRET

The treehouse Grian sat in belonged to the Wilde community, who had taken in him, Shelli and Jeffrey when they fled the Tipping Point earlier that night. The Wilde lived simply in the forest, in tune with the rhythms of nature. They didn't trust technology and, unlike almost everybody else in the world, they had never fallen for Howard Hansom's lies. Most people in Babbage thought the Wilde were weird.

Grian lay back on his beanbag, frustrated.

He wasn't just angry at the news report, he was angry with himself for daring to turn on his watch again. Because, unlike only a few days before, now he knew the truth: Bob wasn't his friend, and Howard Hansom and his technologies could not be trusted.

He had only turned on his watch because he had been desperately trying to reach his grandad again, when the news report flashed across his screen. On impulse he had swiped it open, then couldn't look away.

Grian knew the report was all lies, but he was sure most people would believe it.

He longed to go back to the time when he was like most people. When his watch was his best friend and Howard Hansom, the wealthiest and smartest tech entrepreneur ever, had all the answers and was going to save the world.

Grian's sharp learning curve had begun when his sister, Solas, ran away to the Tipping Point to help save the world, and his grandad, who had been minding them, went to find her. When Grandad never came back and black-cloaked strangers turned up at their house, Grian was forced into a dark adventure with his neighbour Jeffrey and a Wilde girl called Shelli.

The adventure led them to the Tipping Point and to the eventual discovery that the black mark on the sun hadn't been created because the earth had shifted on its axis, that the volunteers who had signed up to live in the Tipping Point had in fact become Howard Hansom's prisoners, kept in cages beneath his smart city – and that everything the tech entrepreneur promised the world was a lie.

And now, even though Grian and his friends had managed to save his sister and a few of the volunteers from Hansom's clutches, the situation was somehow worse than ever.

Grian's grandad was gone, kidnapped by Hansom and taken somewhere on his high-speed hover train, the Hyperloop, along with the rest of the volunteers who'd signed up to live in the Tipping Point. And the black mark on the sun had grown so big it now filled a quarter of its face.

You'll be the most hated boy in Babbage, Howard Hansom had promised Grian only hours before. And the man was right.

Grian's face, along with those of Jeffrey and Shelli, was all over every news channel, watch face, billboard and bus stop in Babbage and across the planet. All because of the false story of blame that the tech billionaire had concocted and spread through his Hansom-owned media networks, to divert attention away from whatever evil it was he had planned.

Solas, his sister, snorted loudly in her sleep, pulling Grian from his thoughts. She was curled up on a beanbag across from him, in the treetop hut swaying gently in the wind.

Grian felt for the small package in his pocket and pulled out the cream drawstring bag his grandad had given

him in secret, just before he was kidnapped. Inside the bag was a piece of yellow rock crystal and a letter. The letter and crystal were from a mysterious person called the White Rose, who seemed to know what was happening to the sun and how to stop it.

Hansom was desperate to find this person too; so much so he'd kidnapped Grian's grandad, convinced he knew something.

Grandad had sworn he knew nothing about the White Rose, right up until he handed Grian the hessian drawstring bag. He made his grandson promise to tell nobody about it except a person named Yarrow, who was head of the Council of Colour, a group of academics, scientists and sceptics who refuted what Hansom said was true.

The letter revealed lots of details. Most importantly, though, it revealed it was one of four letters, and when all four were found the information they contained could help save the sun.

Grian glanced out the round window of the treetop hut at the moon, dreading the reminder the dawning sun would bring. He shivered and looked away, slinking deeper into his beanbag. His head swam in worries for both the planet and his grandad.

"What's that?" Shelli asked. His Wilde friend sat sleepily upright from her spot on the floor.

She nodded at Grian's hand.

Oddly, his left fist pulsed from a deep red to a subtle pink as he clutched the drawstring bag. Slowly he opened his fist.

A soft light throbbed from inside the bag.

"What's de light?" Shelli whispered, crawling over to his side.

Grian almost wrenched his arm away, before stopping himself.

He really wanted to tell his friends everything. To tell them the full truth of what had happened to him in the Tipping Point while Shelli was held captive by Hansom and Jeffrey was helping the volunteers escape. But if he told them everything, he'd be breaking his promise to his grandad to keep the White Rose's letter a secret.

But Grian knew he needed his friends, now more than ever. Grandad would surely understand he couldn't do this alone, not when the whole world was at stake.

"It's something grandad gave me…before Hansom took him…" he mumbled. "It's from the White Rose."

"Oh," Shelli gasped, in recognition of the name.

"I promised Grandad I'd keep it a secret, and now I'm breaking that promise!" he stuttered. "What if I never see him again… I've let him down already…"

"Grian, look!" Shelli nodded at his hand again.

The pulsing was quicker now and the light stronger.

Grian trembled, loosening the drawstring to peer inside. The small piece of cut yellow crystal shone brightly from within.

He emptied the crystal out onto his palm.

"Wow," Shelli gasped again, pulling something from her own pocket. "It's just like mine. I didn't think there were others!"

Grian looked at the familiar stick of rock crystal in Shelli's hand – she called it her Glimmer and had used it loads to guide them through darkness. The long hexagonal rock was a mix of jagged and smooth sides that shimmered in hues of purple and gold. But when it was activated, deep inside it a central circle of light beat like a living heart.

Then he stared down at the piece of rock in his own hand. Shelli was right: though much smaller and less regular in shape, this crystal was like her Glimmer.

"My Glimmer works when I think about someone I love – watch." Shelli was whispering, in case she woke Jeffrey and Solas.

She closed her eyes and bowed her head, her much larger piece of crystal sitting in her cupped palm. The Glimmer began to glow, and the glow grew gradually stronger until it highlighted both their faces as if they sat round a roaring campfire.

She shrugged, half opening her amber eyes. "I thought about Mam."

Shelli hardly ever mentioned her mam. All Grian knew was that she'd disappeared when Shelli was much younger. The Wilde believed the Proctors may have been behind her disappearance. Grian and the others now knew the Proctors were not some hooded gang opposing Hansom like the man had said, but that they were in fact his own private guards used to do his dirty work, so that Howard Hansom could double-cross the world while keeping his squeaky clean image.

"Oh," Grian said. "I was thinking about Grandad when this one lit up!"

"Well, maybe that one works de same way as mine then," Shelli replied, grabbing the crystal from Grian.

She waited for the crystal to stop glowing, then bowed her head again and closed her hand over it. A few seconds later her fist turned warm pink as an inner light shone through it.

"See." She smiled. "We should ask Mother! I thought my one was de only one ever made, but she'll know more. She gave de Glimmer to me when my mam went missing."

"No," Grian said firmly. "We can't tell anyone about it, or the letter. Grandad made me promise—"

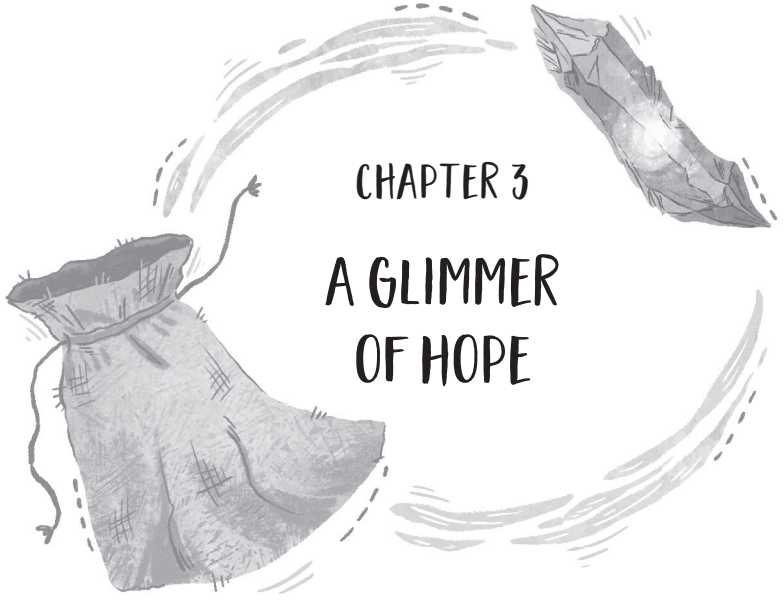
"What letter?" Shelli asked.

"You have to promise," Grian pleaded, his cheeks red. He took the folded page out from inside the bag. "It's our secret – okay?"

He stared at Shelli until she nodded.

"Okay – it's our secret," she replied. "Just open it!"

"A secret?" Jeffrey said, sitting up on his beanbag. "I don't condone secrets. Unless, of course, I'm in on them!"



CHAPTER 3

A GLIMMER OF HOPE

The three friends sat in a tight circle watching the small piece of yellow rock crystal pulse in Grian's palm while he explained exactly what had happened that night after he'd left Jeffrey and Solas in the postal railway tunnel under the Tipping Point. "I'd rescued Grandad and told him my suspicions about Hansom. It was just before we went out into the warehouse where Hansom had you, Shelli." Grian shivered, the terror of the previous few hours washing over him. "That's when Grandad gave me this bag. It had been stitched inside his jacket… He made me promise to take the bag to Yarrow, the head of the Council of Colour, and not to tell anyone else it existed.