

THE DISCOVERIES OF  
ARTHUR GREY

*The Society's Traitor*

## THE DISCOVERIES OF ARTHUR GREY SERIES

Book 1 The Society's Traitor

Book 2 The Minotaur Riddle

Book 3 The Eye of Amun



THE DISCOVERIES OF  
**ARTHUR GREY**

*The Society's Traitor*



BY

**V.K. FINNISH**



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WITHOUT THESE MOST IMPORTANT FOUR  
THIS BOOK COULD JUST NOT BE:  
MY BESTEST FRIEND, WHO IS THE SPINE,  
A SIXTH-GRADE KID'S BIG DREAM,  
AND A AND G WHO ME REMIND  
(WITH MISCHIEF AND DELIGHT),  
THAT OFTEN TIMES IT'S WHEN YOU GIVE  
THAT YOU REALLY SEEM TO GET.



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# *The Wolf, the Swan, and the Raven*



The boys clamor for a place in front, shoving, punching, pulling on each other's tunics, and laughing. The girls take their time, doing little dances arm-in-arm, their trimmed dresses rustling, their shiny brooches glittering. "Hurry up," I shout. "It's time for a story."

Soon, everyone is gathered by the stone fireplace. This is where the roaring fire keeps the snowy cold of outdoors at bay. In front of the fire is where the magic of stories is always strongest.

"Tell the story of Amr's Name Gift," shouts one boy.

"*Lord* Amr," Bram corrects in his deep voice.

A tingle shivers through me at the word *lord*. I don't think I will ever get used to big, grizzly Bram calling me that. Not Bram who whacked me over the head in sword-fighting lessons. Who called me a peacock-brain for not concentrating

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properly. Who cuffed my ears for goofing off during astronomy or Guarding.

Bram looks at me and grimaces, the closest his scar-covered face can manage to an amused grin. He is a massive man. His arms are almost as thick as my head. But while Bram looks like a madman, I know I can count on him to defend my life. He is, after all, my mother's most trusted guard. They say he once wrestled two bears at once and won. That he's ripped a tree trunk in two. That in battle he knocked down ten men with one sweep of his club. I've tried many times to ask him if these things are true, but he only ever raises his bristling, black eyebrows and grimaces so I can see where his teeth are missing through his wiry, black beard. So I know they must be true.

From his place curled up beside me, my large wolf Ingulf raises his clever, amber eyes. He mutters, "Have him tell the story about when Galta's father got scared by an old rabbit and went running through the street in nothing but his underwear."

I swallow hard to stop myself from laughing as Ingulf snickers beside me. Ingulf is my best friend. He and I can talk to each other, since he is my Fetch. He came to me along with my Name Gift, so today is his Name Day, too. But he always makes me laugh at the wrong times, such as now, when big, mean Galta is sitting right behind us.

"Lord Amr's Name Gift," Bram grunts. "An appropriate tale, being that we are celebrating the obnoxious, troublesome boy's thirteenth Name Day."

All my cousins and friends laugh and I join in, too, because I know Bram is only teasing me. Bram is one of the few who

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knows that my Name Day is especially unique because it happens to be exactly one year after my Birth Day. On my Name Day, I was named, and my grand-uncle gave me my special dagger—my Name Gift.

“What about the Pulling of the Sword?” asks another boy.

“Yes,” I shout, because that is my favorite tale. I nod pleadingly to Bram. He makes a grunting noise like his wild boar Belta, and nods once. I settle cross-legged on the floor and grin at Bram.

“*Ages ago, when men were great,*” chants Bram’s growly voice.

*When magic things they all could make,  
By casting Words to do their work,  
They fashioned ways to change the world.  
And so those Dwarves of old, they say,  
Dain and Dvalin, they did make  
A magic Sword that would not rust,  
Had its own strength and would not break.*

I watch the orange flames in the fireplace. They begin to look like a crowd of Dwarves hammering at a great sword as they sway to the rhythm of Bram’s words. Of course, I already know the story, but I still like to hear it told as much as the others do. I reach down at my side to touch the gold and jeweled hilt of my dagger. It too was made by Dvalin.

*But twisted lies, falsehoods, untruths  
Undid the power, broke men’s control.  
And evil won as One stepped forward  
To steal Relics to give him power.*

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*Old and weary was Dvalin then,  
And full of wrath at wicked men.  
So to his hall he took his Sword  
To where the sacred tree trunk stood.*

*Then Dvalin pierced it through the Tree  
And at it cast a prophecy:  
"Only one shall pull this Sword,  
Take hold of it and pull it free.  
And then that hero will go forth,  
Tearing down that wicked lord,  
Black Ravager, who boldly takes  
Those magic Relics we have made."*

*But heavy years went sadly by,  
And many fought and many died.  
Then one day Dvalin's hall received  
A weary ragged stranger's plea.  
Unwelcoming, the steward asked,  
"What do you want, you worthless lad?"  
"Just food and drink, a place to sleep,"  
The young man pleaded wearily.*

*"This hall is not for beggars poor,  
Nor do we serve our enemies.  
If food you want and quiet rest,  
Then we your strength will surely test.  
Your weapons firstly we will take,*

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*That you may enter humbly.  
Then you will try what all have failed:  
To pull the Sword out of the Tree.”*

*Tired and hungry, but brave and true,  
This task the youth agreed to do.  
Throughout the hall stood Dvalin’s folk,  
To watch him fail without a chance.  
His fingers ‘round the Sword hilt curled,  
His head bowed low, his eyes he closed.  
And all the folk watched hopelessly,  
The hope of Dvalin’s prophecy.*

*But Dvalin’s daughter understood.  
She felt her hand fly to her throat.  
“My father knew this day would come.  
This man is the awaited One.”  
Then all at once did Dvalin’s hall  
Erupt in gasps and cries amazed.  
And every person bowed their knee:  
The Sword was pulled out from the Tree.*

Just as Bram finishes the story, I hear Galta’s annoying voice. “We’ve all heard this boring tale,” Galta yawns. “Let us hear another now. Don’t you have any tales of young Amr’s father? Or has no man yet admitted to fathering our newly deemed lord?”

At these words, my face grows hot. Beside me, Ingulf lifts

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his head and shows his teeth. "Do you want me to bite his leg off?" he demands. Before I can respond to Ingulf's tempting request, Bram interrupts.

"Peace, Galta," Bram growls. "Just because *your* father doesn't want you, doesn't mean everyone else's is the same way." He holds up his large, warped hand to stop everyone's snickering. "Do not show your ignorance by opening your mouth, boy."

I wish I could punch Galta into pulp. He thinks it's funny that no one knows who my father was. He likes to tell me that my father was probably a cowardly servant. But I know that Galta's own father is a scummy worm who makes up lies about others. Galta only wishes my mother would marry his father and make them Lords of Tarn.

"Now if there are no more interruptions," Bram threatens.

However, at that moment, the wooden door at the end of the hall bursts open. My mother's handmaid enters and her eyes turn to Bram's hulking shadow before the fire. She hurries to him and bends down beside him to whisper in his ear.

Since I am near, I hear her words: "The Lady Anna sends for you. Unexpected messengers await in Wood Hall."

Abruptly, Bram stands. "Oh, look at that," he says, pointing to the long table at the other side of the room. "The food is ready. Who's going to get the honey cakes before Galta eats them all?"

His distraction works. All the others push and punch as they run toward the table. I hear Galta threatening anyone who gets in front of him.



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I, however, look to Ingulf, who stares at Bram's departing back. Ingulf turns his nose to me and we agree without a word. Quickly, we follow Bram.

Wood Hall is the greatest hall in our dwelling. It is used for special guests and events. There are great fires that go from one end to the other. The fires are always fed. At the center of the hall grows the vast tree Branstock. Its thick, silvery trunk rises from the earth and reaches up into the hall until it disappears beyond the roof, where its branches spread above the entire dwelling. A black wound stands out in its otherwise pure trunk: the scar from where the Sword used to be.

Ingulf and I sneak to the back of the hall where several guards and advisors stand. I move sideways until I am hidden behind a long tapestry. No one notices Ingulf or me. I see my mother seated at her throne, her beautiful white swan Nimué resting on its arm. Bram makes his way to stand below her with five other advisors. Before them are two people clad in green cloaks. One has a raven of the deepest blue perched on his shoulder.

"Ah, Bram," begins one of the old advisors—Olathe, I think is his name. "We have an emissary sent from the Green Isle."

I blink at Ingulf. The Green Isle? I have heard of that place. It is far from here—many months of journeying. I have never seen such foreigners here in Tarn before.

"Tell me," Bram mutters.

One of the figures in green steps forward and bows low.

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“Aye, we have come to offer a warning and a choice, for our news concerns your own lands as well.”

The voice is that of a young woman. Startled, I peek further out from the tapestry. The speaker is the figure with the raven. Her hood has fallen back and I can see the back of her head. Her long hair is braided down her neck, a green strand twisted into it. I see that around her neck glitters a thin, silver chain.

She faces my mother and Bram and continues. “Word has reached the Green Lady of the Isle that the King at the Towers of Din Arth is really the Red Ravager who collects many objects of old. And that he will stop at nothing to get them.”

Red Ravager? Like the Black Ravager? It is as if the story of the Sword is continuing even now. I hope no one else can hear my heart beating fast in the silence that waits for her to finish.

She goes on. “I can tell that my news be meaningful to you. So know this: the High King of Din Arth holds three objects, and now he seeks a fourth. The Aurora Cauldron.”

The advisors tremble and gasp, and everyone begins speaking at once.

“This is impossible!”

“We cannot let this be. We must stop it at once!”

“But the High King helped defeat the Ravager of old—surely this is false information?”

“This does not concern us!”

Then Lady Anna holds up her hand and the voices quiet. My mother does not speak often, and when she does, her voice is low and courteous, her words few. Nevertheless, no one doubts for a moment that she is the Lady of Tarn.

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“How came you by this news?” she asks.

The stranger in green straightens. “We have been keeping watch, Lady. We have long suspected that his claims to uphold the old ways are lies.”

The two women are silent as they study each other. However, there is so much tension that it feels as though there are swords battling back and forth between them.

At last, Mother breathes a sigh. “You speak truly,” she says, and the advisors gape at each other, aghast. “What would you have us do?”

“Stop him,” the woman blurts. “Help the Lady of the Green Isle stop him. Do not let him become so powerful that the Guardians cannot fight back.”

Olathe the advisor coughs. “Lady Anna,” he frowns, “we cannot afford open battle. We are now a peaceful people, living quietly on the lake, with only enough weaponry to hold our own here. What can we possibly do to stop the High King if he has, as she says, become a traitor?”

At these words, the hall once again fills with loud voices, each advisor and messenger competing for Mother’s attention.

“Send someone to speak with him,” one says.

“Send a spy.”

“Let us wait to see what signs he shows.”

“This cannot be!”

Again, Mother holds up her hand and there is silence. Nimué the swan curves her soft neck around Mother’s arm. Lady Anna regards the two messengers before her. “It is true we have no army to send that can hope to defeat a Ravager,”

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she says softly. "For us, those days are over. But we will not do nothing. We must learn all the truth we can. We have had dealings with the High King before. We will send an emissary."

"But who?" demands Olathe. "Who will go?"

This time no voice speaks. The cloaked lady looks around the silent hall. I see her face. A long scar angles down the side of her cheek. Her eyes are as green as her cloak and they are filled with despair. Around her neck is the silver chain and it is clasped by a locket that is etched with delicate designs and symbols, markings from ancient times. The moonlight bears down from around the Tree and glints off the locket, making it look like cold ice. She does not see me.

All at once, I cannot bear it. That lady is not much older than I am, and she has come so far for her queen to find help that no one wants to give. Beside me, Ingulf is rigid, angry at the silence the realm of Tarn offers. I step out from behind the tapestry, my hand gripping the hilt of my Name Gift. I feel my lips parting, hear words coming from them so loud and firm, echoing throughout sacred Wood Hall, wrapping around the Great Tree and showering down upon all the wise people there.

I see everyone's eyes turn to me in utter surprise. I hear their voices shouting in protest, their hands waving. I see Bram looking grimly at me and my mother's eyes closing slowly, heavily. I feel the woman in green staring at me, and her raven with a glittering eye turned to me. I see the silver locket glowing like an eerie star. And I say my words again.

"I will go."



# I

## *The Adventurer*



There was nothing special about Arthur Grey; anyone would tell you so. In fact, the only thing that interested anyone was that he lived in Ivor Manor, that big mansion on Hill Court. Before the Greys came, the place had been abandoned for ten years and the only people who went in there were sneaks hoping to find treasure.

The townsfolk of Maizegrove told the story that the manor once belonged to an old World War II general named Ivor. He considered himself an explorer, and often went away on journeys to collect antiques. On one trip, the locals say, he came back with a strange treasure. He became so obsessed with hiding this particular treasure that he kept his house locked up tight to prevent anyone else from knowing what he had.

But, in the end, it was all for nothing, because General Ivor went crazy. He couldn't even remember his own name, much

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less where he had hidden any of his valuables, and he died without telling anyone his secrets. The townsfolk blamed this sudden tragedy on the mysterious, hidden treasure.

Years went by and no one—not even sneaks—found anything. Finally, most folks began to think the idea of a hidden treasure was a whole lot of hogwash-baloney-nonsense. That's precisely what Mrs. Mildred Bernice Grey insisted when she moved to town and bought Ivor Manor.

For a year, everyone in town waited to see if she would go crazy like the general had. Instead, she started giving tours of the manor. If the thought of hidden treasure ever crossed her mind, she never let on.

But her grandson was a different story.

Arthur Grey was in the first grade when they moved to Maizegrove, Wisconsin. He spent recesses wandering around the school playground, digging in the dirt, or leaping out of trees at people, while acting out Robin Hood. He played pretend battles by himself. He collected junk in the many pouches of the leather belt he always wore. Actually, he still did those things now that they were in the fifth grade, but by now Penelope was used to it.

Penelope Riffert was not sure why she had hung around Arthur these four years. Though she liked Ivor Manor with its many old-fashioned rooms, she didn't care about its rumors of treasures and madness. Perhaps she just liked that Arthur was interesting and nice. Or maybe she liked the simple way he looked—with his sloppy brown hair, his ratty sneakers, his

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oversized shirts, and his curious hazel eyes. Whatever the reason, Penelope knew she was quite stupid for it.

Every time she hung around Arthur, she ended up in trouble. Now she found herself eleven-years old and following Arthur on tip-toe up a dark, rickety stairway they had just discovered in Ivor Manor. They were *definitely* going to be in trouble for being there.

“We’re going to get caught,” Penelope whispered, clutching at the two brown braids on either side of her head. All the while, she told herself that she should never again come over to Arthur’s house to say ‘happy birthday.’

“Don’t worry. Sasha is vacuuming on the first floor and Simon is cleaning out the garage.” Sasha and Simon were the manor’s housekeeper and gardener.

Penelope wrung her hands and frowned down the stairs toward the door they had come through. The door was normally locked, but today (to Penelope’s dismay) when Arthur tried it, the door came right open. Penelope swallowed hard and looked up—passed the cobwebs that gleamed in the flashlight beam—at the closed door at the top stairway landing. It smelled like moldy plants in here. “What about your grandmother?” she worried.

Arthur turned to wrinkle his nose at her. “Gree? Come up here? Now *that’s* funny.” He dug in his belt pouch and pulled out a dark grey rock. “It’s that one.” He pointed the flashlight to a step ahead of them. “The eighteenth stair.”

The whole thing seemed silly to Penelope, really. Though

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she knew there was no point wondering why Arthur couldn't celebrate his birthday like a normal person. Eat cake and play games and open presents. Oh, no. He didn't even look at the gift his grandmother had left at the table for him: a collection of books entitled *How to Keep Your Room Clean and other Useful Habits*.

Instead, Arthur went on saying things like, "There's something exciting about turning eleven," and, "It's like getting a magic lamp—you can wish for all sorts of things." Penelope, however, had been eleven for five months now and knew there was nothing to it. But she let herself be talked into following cryptic directions on a rock they dug up in the backyard that morning.

Though all Penelope saw was a dirty rock with some worn scratch marks, Arthur insisted that the marks represented the stairs, doors, and levels of Ivor Manor. So here they were, sneaking up eighteen stairs behind the eighth door on the third level.

Arthur stepped on the stair and it squeaked. He knocked on it. "It sounds hollow," he breathed.

It *did* sound hollow. Penelope pushed up her glasses and crouched down to inspect the stair. "Do you think there's something inside?"

"Of course. Now are you glad we followed the directions? That old journal in the study led us to the stone and the stone led us here. This could be it." His eyes were wide. "Old General Ivor's secret treasure. It's like we're King Arthur's Knights,



looking for the Holy Grail.” He paused, scratching his head. “Hm. There might be something guarding it. Maybe a three-headed dragon?”

Penelope scooted away from the stair. “That’s not true. Dragons aren’t real.”

“How do you know? They could be.” Arthur gazed around the hallway. “I guess we should probably—”

Penelope gasped when Arthur suddenly turned the flashlight beam away. “What are you doing?” she squealed, looking at the top landing where he now pointed the light.

“What’s that?” muttered Arthur.

Penelope sputtered when he got up, leaving her in complete darkness. “Arthur! Come back.” But he went up the stairs, taking the precious light with him. Penelope clung to the railing on the wall next to her and swatted spiderwebs out of her face. She hated dark, narrow, creepy places and this was definitely a dark, narrow, creepy place. And she especially did not like talk about scary dragons. Penelope felt a scream ready to burst out of her. She stared wide-eyed at Arthur’s light as it bobbed around a wooden railing that ran along the landing.

That’s when Penelope saw it, too. Something small and grey dangled from the rickety railing. At first it looked to be nothing more than a tangle of cobwebs, but when Arthur reached out to grab it, Penelope thought it looked more like a thin chain.

“W-w-what is it?” she stammered as Arthur slowly descended, the flashlight under his arm. When he stopped in front of

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her, she looked at his hand and caught a glimpse of a dirty locket.

A sudden noise made them both jump. The door at the top of the stairs swung open with an echoing creak and banged against the wall, showering a wave of gritty dust down on them. Arthur jerked his flashlight beam at the door. The light revealed a scowling, mustached face with a straight line of heavy eyebrow flattened across it. Penelope screamed and clutched Arthur's waist.

"Oh," sighed Arthur. "Hi, Simon."

The gardener silently took in the scene. He looked for all the world like he was trying to make his lips and eyebrow meet at his nose. Then he yanked a string above his head and a lightbulb blinded Arthur and Penelope with sickly yellow light from the ceiling. Simon pointed a stiff finger at Arthur. "You," he spat. "Down."

"Okay," Arthur blurted. "But first I just want to look at this—"

"Down."

"But we found something. There might be—"

"Now." And Simon raised his eyebrow right up to his hair-line so that Penelope was positive his eyes were going to pop out of his head.

Arthur hung his head and traipsed back down the stairs, Penelope close behind him. She was terrified of Simon.

They emerged into a brightly lit, wood-paneled hallway that was decorated with various Victorian antiques. Simon

closed the door with a menacing thud, locked it with a toothy skeleton-key, and turned to glower at them. In the light, they could see his hands and knees were caked with mud and dried leaves. Dirt dangled from his bushy mustache. "So," he hissed, crossing his arms. "Someone. Someone thought it would be fun to dig. A pit. Dig a pit in the back yard. Did they?" Simon always spoke like that; like he wanted his words to slowly ooze down into your ears and torture you.

Arthur was not put out by Simon. "Oops," he said. "You mean the hole we dug? Well, I needed the water-hose to soften the ground. But I'll go take care of that right now."

"Stop," snapped Simon before either of them could move. He held out his grimy hand.

Arthur looked at it for a moment and then at Simon who said nothing, but continued holding out his hand. With a heavy sigh, Arthur deposited the rock into it.

Simon clucked his tongue. "Let me guess," he growled. "More treasure. Hunting."

"But this time it really—"

"This way," Simon interrupted.

Now they were in for it. He was going to take them to Arthur's grandmother. Normally, Mrs. Grey was very nice to Penelope. But now she would be stern and lecture them about dangerous behavior and letting everyone down. She would tell Penelope's mother about this and Penelope would be grounded for the rest of Winter Break and everyone would be disappointed in her.

Penelope did not look up until Arthur stopped, and she

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bumped into him. To her surprise, instead of seeing Mrs. Grey's office door, she found herself standing next to the rack of postcards and souvenirs in the front entry.

Simon pointed to a large, cardboard box on the floor and scowled at them. "Donations. At the bookshop," he snapped. "Now."

Arthur took one look at the box and then he and Penelope grabbed their winter coats from the closet. His floppy ski cap pulled over his ears, Arthur hefted the box. Simon held the front door open and a cold wind charged in, shaking their coats and pinching their cheeks. They stepped out onto the porch.

"And," Simon added, his mouth twisted sourly. "House tour. This afternoon. Remember. The rules." And he slammed the door behind them.

Penelope gasped in relief, clutching her mittens to her chest. "Oh my, oh my! Arthur, I am *never* doing that again! We could've been in so much trouble! Thank goodness he let us go—thank goodness!"

But Arthur was not listening to her. He was staring at the door. "I wonder why he didn't take us to Gree," he said. "That's weird."

"I don't know. But let's get away before he changes his mind and comes back. Simon gives me the heebiejeebees!"

The Good Knight Book Shoppe stood by itself on a corner downtown. It had been an old deli shop before George Riffert took it over. On humid summer days there was still a faint

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smell of ham sandwiches that lingered about the place. But now, over the heavy, wooden door hung a weather-worn sign with old-fashioned, gold lettering and a clumsy carving of a knight's helmet. For the street corner, George had even managed to find an antique lamppost which was kept lit with a gas lantern—whenever he remembered to light it, that is.

Apparently he had forgotten the lantern today. Even though the sky was dreary with cloudiness, the lamp was unlit.

As Arthur and Penelope approached the lamp, a great bird fluttered down to perch on the roof of the bookstore. Once it settled, it cocked its head and stared down at them with one of its keen eyes.

“Ooh,” exclaimed Penelope. “How pretty!” The bird had a curved, pointed beak and feathers of silvery white with brown speckles. When Penelope spoke, the bird ruffled its wings and turned its other eye at them. “It looks like a falcon,” she said. “But it’s awfully big. I know the gyrfalcon is the largest falcon in the world, but I think the white ones only live in the Arctic, so this can’t be one. I’ll ask my dad.” She gave the bird a nod of appreciation and turned to the door.

But Arthur stood still, holding his box and gawking at the magnificent falcon. “It’s weird,” he said and began looking around. “It feels like it’s watching us.”

Penelope grabbed the door handle. She did not like talk about being watched. “Let’s go in,” she said quickly.

Arthur moved to follow her, but slowly, like it was hard for him to do.

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The bell above the door tinkled merrily and Penelope felt safe again. Inside, the shop was warm and smelled like a musty attic. It was cozy and friendly with its neat shelves, cushy chairs, and crackling fireplace. Today, gold tinsel, bows, and Christmas bells decorated the shop. Holiday music floated through the tall aisles of books.

Arthur came in behind her and heaved a noisy sigh before dropping the box on a nearby round table. "I like how it smells like an old treasure chest in here," he said aloud, and Penelope rolled her eyes.

"And well it should," came a calm, leisurely voice from one of the aisles. "There is an enormous wealth of treasure here. In fact, it's a treasure portal that leads to a thousand different worlds. All you have to do is open one. What will it be today? Did you come to drop into a medieval battle or sail to some far away jungle? Will you become a daring pirate or a famous explorer?"

Arthur grinned, but Penelope sniffed and began taking off her scarf. "We just came to drop off a donation box from Mrs. Grey, Dad," she announced.

"Ah, well that's pleasant, too." George Riffert bustled out, though all they could see was a tower of books with legs. "I was just about to shelve some used books I got in this morning." He steadied the wobbling book stack on the table. "Perhaps if you both warmed up with a nice hot cup of cocoa, you might feel invigorated enough to lend a hand?" He smiled hopefully

as he adjusted his red bow tie and brushed dust off his tweed vest.

“Sure,” said Arthur.

As George worked on heating the water for hot cocoa, Penelope and Arthur began shelving books. Then Arthur remembered the donations box and added those to the pile.

Penelope was just coming back for another stack. “Oh, man,” Arthur moaned, taking a book out of the box. “She’s always giving away this stuff!”

“Who is?”

Arthur held up what looked like an old, faded textbook. “Gree,” he grumbled.

“Why should you care? Where’d she get it?”

“Judging by the title, it was probably my dad’s.”

Penelope pushed up her glasses and blinked. “Your dad’s?” she asked. She had never met Arthur’s dad and Arthur rarely mentioned him. “When was the last time you saw him?”

Arthur shrugged. “Ages ago. I think I was five. It was before we moved here. But he always sends me stuff for my birthdays. Like my adventure belt here.” He lowered his voice. “But Gree doesn’t get along with him, I think. At least, she keeps all his old stuff locked away except when she tries to sneak it off like this. I bet this was his. In fact,” he added loudly, “I bet that’s why Simon was in the attic today. He was probably gathering up this stuff. I wonder what else is in here.”

While Arthur rummaged through the box, Penelope picked up the book. It was called *Euclid and the Laws of Invisibility*. It looked like a school book, but with that kind of title, Penelope

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thought it must be a joke book. "Why in the world would your dad have this?"

"Oh, it could be from his travels," Arthur answered distractedly as he dropped a book on jewelry-making and began fishing something out of his belt pouch. "I don't know. He's in some kind of secret government work."

"Is that why he never visits you?" Penelope asked without thinking. When Arthur didn't answer, she put the book down. "Stupid," she muttered at herself. Aloud, she began, "Arthur, I didn't mean—"

But he did not look at her. He was staring at something in his hand. When she peeked over his shoulder, she saw that he held the dirty locket from Ivor Manor. Where the dust was smudged away, the locket shone as silver as moonlight. Tiny, intricate designs and strange symbols were delicately etched into the surface. Before Penelope could make a sound, Arthur's fingers closed on it, the thin chain dangling from his fist. "That's what you found in the attic, isn't it?" she breathed.

Arthur nodded, hard thought wrinkling his forehead. "I just remembered this weird dream I had last night. Something about a wolf and a tree and towers and . . . and a boy who sees a treasure. Sees a locket," he murmured. He paused. "Do you think it means anything?"

They both jumped when George's voice answered. "Oh, probably not." He entered, carrying two mugs and smiling pleasantly. "Now, what you dream *tonight*—that's a different story. You pay attention to what your dreams tell you this night."



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“Why?” asked Arthur, accepting a mug, but not before Penelope saw him slip the locket back into his belt pouch.

“Oh, there are many stories about strange events and magic that happen in connection with the solstices. And tomorrow is the winter solstice, you know.”

Arthur leaned forward. “What kind of magic?”

“Well now. Some say that the dreams we have this night foretell the future. Let me think.” George tapped his temple as if trying to knock his thoughts out of his head. “Ah yes. There are also tales of animals being able to speak on Winter Solstice Eve. That’s right—animals and humans understanding each other.” He nodded emphatically. “And the Germanic people thought promises made this day were magically bound to be kept. Then there are stories of treasure being easiest to find at Solstice. And of course,” he smiled, “someone by your very name, the infinitely famous *King* Arthur, is said to have been born on the eve of Winter Solstice.”

At this, Penelope realized that Arthur’s eyes were as round as quarters, and he was holding his breath. She sniffed loudly and thumped down her mug. “Daddy,” she chided. “They’re not true, though. They’re just stories, right? Magic doesn’t exist.”

George cleared his throat and stood up. “Well, now. Well, of course—”

But he was cut off by the sudden jingling of the bell on the door and a cold wind that swooped inside with it.

Curiously surveying the shop was a short, round man with

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a prickly beard of tawny whiskers. He was dressed in a long, weather-stained overcoat and wore a straw Panama hat.

"Welcome, welcome," George smiled as he came forward. "It's a north wind that's blowing at us today, isn't it? Come in and warm up by the fire."

"G'day," the man responded. "Thanks, mate. I'll jest sit fer a bit. It's much bettah inside than out. Crikey, that wind's enough to blow a brown dog off a chain." He rubbed his pink nose tenderly and then held his hands out toward the fireplace.

Arthur poked Penelope's arm, and she nearly knocked over her cocoa. "Hey, where do you think he's from?" he whispered. "Australia?"

"I don't know," Penelope sniffed. "But I'm sure he said something about a brown dog blowing away."

"It's gotta be an expression. I'm telling you, he's from Australia."

The stranger turned his bottom toward the fire and rubbed it. He gazed around at the shelves of books that rose to the low ceiling. "I like the name o' this place—the Good Knight," he remarked. "It's like . . . like a goodnight story only with armor and a sword, whatcha reckon? Crikey, this fire's a cracker. By the way, do ya sell any books on foreign countries?"

George straightened his glasses. "Sir, I try to keep many kinds of books to please all visitors. What country can I find for you?"

"Well, whatcha got on South America?"

"Hm, hm." George rolled his eyes to the ceiling and tapped

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his forefinger to his temple. "South America. Let me see what I can turn up." He disappeared among the aisles.

Penelope and Arthur sat at their table with their mugs, while the stranger shuffled in front of the fire. Penelope kept her eyes down and focused on her cocoa, but she could feel Arthur shifting in the chair next to her. She raised her eyebrows sternly at him as a reminder that they were not supposed to talk to strangers. Arthur shrugged and took a sip of his cocoa, but his eyes were on the man with the stained coat.

George came back with another mug and several books. "Here are these to start. Are they the kind you're looking for? Also, I've made a nice hot cup of tea to thaw your fingers so you can take a look at these books. I'll look for any others."

"Thanks, mate," the man said, accepting the cup and books.

Arthur watched as the man set the tea on another table next to them and began flipping through one of the books. Penelope was just taking a sip of her cocoa when Arthur blurted, "So you're reading about South America?" Penelope nearly choked on her drink.

"Jumpin' jelly beans!" Startled, the man jerked his head toward them, noticing them for the first time. "Eh, right," he said suspiciously. "Jest havin' a bit of a look."

"George is great," Arthur offered. "He knows every book in here. He'll be able to help you find something."

The stranger tipped his head and smiled. "He seems right he'pful. Couldn't find bettah service anywhere. I'd know, as I've been all ovah." He set down the book and lifted the tea cup to his lips.

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"I'd like to go places someday," Arthur gushed.

Penelope sucked in her breath. "Arthur!" she warned.

Immediately, the man let out a violent cough, sputtering tea all over himself and the table. They both stared at him.

"Hot," he gasped, wiping his chin. Then he grinned. "By the way," he said, coming around the table. "Name's Hobbs. Nicholas Hobbs, that is. I jest stopped in as I enjoy books. But I've actually gotta get to a tour ovah at . . . what's it called? Ivah Manah. Though I'm not sure where that is."

Penelope and Arthur exchanged glances. "Ivor Manor?" Arthur said slowly. "It's not far. You can see it from the end of the street. I actually live there. I can show you where it is, if you want."

"Ah, that would be good of ya, mate, if ya could. I'd be grateful."

At that moment George returned again with several more books for the visitor Hobbs. Penelope took that time to glare at Arthur. "What are you doing?" she sputtered.

Arthur shrugged. "Just helping." But the corners of his lips twitched. "Penelope, this is my lucky day. First of all, I turned *eleven*. Second, tomorrow's Winter Solstice, and you heard what George said about that. Plus, we're really close to uncovering the Ivor Manor secrets, *and* we discovered the mysterious locket. Now this Hobbs guy is here. I've never actually been allowed to meet anybody who comes for a tour. Gree always makes me wait in my room or go out. So, this is really something. It's like . . . like I'm Aladdin, and all my wishes are coming true." He rubbed his hands over an imaginary genie's lamp.

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Penelope looked at him with a mixture of frustration and admiration. “Arthur, you’re always sticking your head into adventure,” she said, feeling just like a grown-up. “Won’t you ever get tired of it?”

“Don’t worry,” he replied. “I won’t.”



*A Missing Visitor*

Maybe it was his worn-out coat, or perhaps his thick hiking boots, or just the general rugged air about him, but the man called Hobbs reminded Arthur of a lazily stalking lion. He made Arthur think of jungles, muddy trails, and camels. “So you have a tour today?” Arthur asked politely as he led Hobbs down the main street of town.

“That’s right, mate. At 2 o’clock. I enjoy studying old architecture an’ such, an’ was told this is a ripper one to see whilst I’m in the Madison area.” He looked around with calm interest.

People milled about, bundled in thick coats, warm hats, and scarves as they window-shopped. A freight train rumbled by on the tracks, blowing a forlorn whistle and shaking all the shops, which were decorated in red, green, and gold for the holidays. Little white lights glittered in many windows. At the corner, they passed a man dressed in a Santa outfit and merrily

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waving a clanging bell. "Ho, ho, Merry Christmas to you," he called.

"A quaint little town, this," Hobbs nodded. "Quaint. So, did I hear ya name right back there? Ahthur, is it?"

"Yeah, that's me." Arthur kicked at a pebble on the sidewalk. "Well, there you go," he said, pointing.

They had turned the corner and Ivor Manor came into view, sitting primly atop its tree-strewn hill. Chimney stacks rose out of the sharply angled roof while windows with half-drawn shades peered around like a disapproving cat.

"Capering Cinderellas! Is that it?" asked Hobbs. "It's been kept up well. Lemme see—built by Swedes, if I had to guess. Nineteenth century?"

"Uh . . . I don't really know," Arthur admitted. "It was owned by an old general called Ivor. But I'm sure Gree—uh, Mrs. Grey will tell you all that."

The man nodded eagerly. "Right. I've heard the rumors of mad Gen'ral Ivah and his hid treasure on the grounds. They say he was rotten rich from all his travels." He chortled and lightly punched Arthur's shoulder. "What do ya think of that, eh, mate?"

*Ah ha*, thought Arthur. *He's interested in treasure. Well, he can't have this one—I'm going to be the one who finds it.* "Oh, lots of people have looked," Arthur said aloud. "The police say there's nothing to that story, for sure."

"I expect so," Hobbs shrugged. "Still, folks'll have their stories. An' that's good if ya're in the business of giving 'em tours then, eh? But seems a fine place to grow up in, if ya

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got freedom and such to explore an' ask questions, right?" He winked.

Arthur pulled his hat further over his ears and nodded. Explore and ask questions—two things he *definitely* wasn't allowed here. He wasn't sure if he liked this strange guy. "Never trust treasure hunters," Gree always warned. They still came every now and then, hoping to find something at the manor. Arthur suspected this man was one. He seemed rough around the edges and had a crooked nose—probably broken several times. But he was jolly enough. Arthur *wanted* to like him.

"So," Arthur began. "Did George find the kind of book you wanted?"

"Nuh. But that's all right. I'll find what I'm looking for eventually. Always do, ya know."

That only made Arthur more certain that this man was out for treasure. "So, what kind of book are you looking for, anyway?"

Hobbs smiled at Arthur as they entered the gate to Ivor Manor property. "Oh, jest books about the Inca people. They were an empire in South America when the Spanish got there. Pretty much wiped out, the lot of 'em. But," he added, lowering his voice and glancing around, "on the subject of hid treasures, did ya know the Incas were responsible for one o' the biggest rumahs o' treasure evah? Fair dinkum, an entire city . . . o' *gold*." He straightened. "But like ya manah, nuffin's evah been found o' that treasure—not by the Spaniards nor anybody. Most say it don't exist." He smiled cheerfully and whistled a few notes. "So,



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mate, what's ya taste fer then? Ya like treasures? Like science or animals?"

"The things I like aren't real," Arthur said without thinking. He pulled his hat down to his eyes and focused on the ground. "Giants and dragons and stuff. I just read books."

"Ahh. An adventcha at heart then? I could tell. Don't let it get ya down, mate." Hobbs tapped his crooked nose and nodded with a knowing smile. "After all, who's to say those things ahn't fer real? You might find out differently some day, eh?"

For a moment, Arthur thought the man was making fun of him. But as he took in the stranger's face, his clothes, and his talk, Arthur shivered. All at once, he opened his mouth to ask if Hobbs really thought there were ever giants or magic or if there was a golden city and where it was supposed to be and why the Incas would have built it. But when he lifted his head to blurt his questions, he was distracted by a movement above.

On a high window ledge of Ivor Manor, sitting like some sort of statue, was a large white falcon with dark beady eyes. It was the same one that he and Penelope had seen at the bookshop earlier. Arthur scanned the shadows, feeling watchful again. There was something mysterious and cunning about this creature. Where had it come from?

Then, with a jump of his heart, Arthur remembered what George had said about the winter solstice and talking animals.

While he was staring at the falcon, to Arthur's amazement, the great bird shuffled its wings and suddenly *disappeared*. It vanished out of the air.