

# The City of Ember



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JEANNE DUPRAU

DuPrau was born in San Francisco, California in 1944. She received her bachelor's degree at Scripps College and then received teaching credentials at the University of California, Berkeley. She's been a teacher, an editor, and a technical writer over the course of her life. DuPrau first garnered attention for her writing with her 1981 book *Adoption: The Facts, Feelings, and Issues of a Double Heritage*, which explored the emotional landscape of being adopted. Over the next several decades, she wrote several other nonfiction works, including the memoir *The Earth House*, but *The City of Ember* is her most famous work. She lives in Menlo Park, California, where she spends much of her time gardening.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

People have been living underground for millennia in various types of dwellings, from caves to dugouts. Most often, however, these underground structures are intended to accompany and expand aboveground infrastructure, as with Paris's catacombs, transit systems like the New York City subway, or underground floors of shopping malls. The Australian town of Coober Pedy is known for being composed mostly of dugout dwellings which, in the area's scorching climate, help control indoor temperatures without the use of air conditioning, and some northern cities like Helsinki maintain "shadow cities" underground to cope with severe winter weather. Though scientists believe that living underground long term is technically feasible, humans need the sun—or artificial light on a set schedule that can mimic the sun—for things like vitamin D (to maintain bone strength, but which is also available in vitamin form), agriculture, and to maintain a normal sleep-wake cycle and stave off depression.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

*The City of Ember* falls into a subcategory of science fiction and adventure fiction known as subterranean fiction, or fictional works that focus on life underground. The genre has its roots in the disproved 17th-century Hollow Earth theory, which proposed that the Earth is actually hollow. A variety of works can be argued to fall into this subcategory, from Dante's *Inferno* (in which hell is a subterranean cavern) and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Alice falls through a rabbit hole into an underground dreamland), to science fiction that looks more like *Ember* such as *Metro 2033* and its sequels by Dmitry Glukhovsky, which follow people living in the Moscow

subway system to escape nuclear disaster. Parts of the *Lord of the Rings Trilogy* by J. R. R. Tolkien, the *Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis, and the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series by Rick Riordan also take place underground. *Ember* is the first in a series of four novels that take place in the same fictional world. *The People of Sparks* and *The Diamond of Darkhold* follow Lina, Doon, and the evacuated Ember residents for their first year above ground, while *The Prophet of Yonwood* is a prequel that takes place about 300 years before the events of *Ember*.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The City of Ember*
- **When Written:** Early
- **Where Written:** California
- **When Published:** 2003
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Fiction; Science Fiction
- **Setting:** Ember, a fictional underground city
- **Climax:** Lina, Doon, and Poppy make it out of Ember.
- **Antagonist:** Mayor Cole and the Seventh Mayor specifically; greed in general
- **Point of View:** Third-Person Omniscient

### EXTRA CREDIT

**The Deepest Hole.** The deepest manmade hole in the earth is the Mponeng gold mine in South Africa, which stretches two and a half miles underground. At that depth temperatures can reach 150 degrees Fahrenheit, so mine operators pump icy slurry into the tunnels to cool them enough for mine employees to work. Despite these inhospitable conditions, scientists have found microscopic life in water from the mine, which they suggest could offer clues as to what life on Mars might look like.

**The Sun and Sleep.** Without the sun (or set artificial lights) to dictate a person's circadian rhythm—that is, the cycle of sleeping during the night and being awake during the day—it's possible for humans to sleep for stretches of up to 48 hours.



## PLOT SUMMARY

The head Builder and his assistant sit down. The head Builder says that people will need to stay in the city for about 200 years, and he's crafted a box to house Instructions detailing how to leave the city. The box will stay with the mayor and will open at the appropriate time. Everything goes according to plan until the seventh mayor becomes ill and, believing the box

contains a cure, tries to break into it. He dies before he can tell anyone about the box, so it ends up in the back of a closet. Eventually, it clicks open.

It's Assignment Day of year 241 in the city of Ember, which is dark except for the light bulbs that illuminate it. Today, graduating students will receive the job assignments. 12-year-old Lina hopes to be a messenger so she can run, but when she pulls a slip from Mayor Cole's bag, it reads "Pipeworks laborer." Doon, Lina's former friend, draws messenger and angrily spits that it's a useless job in light of supply shortages and blackouts. Later, Doon offers to trade with Lina—he wants to be a Pipeworks laborer so he can see the generator. Lina is thrilled and runs home to tell Granny and Lina's baby sister, Poppy. Granny and Poppy are all Lina has left, as her parents died two years ago. Upstairs in their cluttered apartment above Granny's yarn shop, Lina thinks about a bright city she likes to draw. *The Book of the City of Ember* teaches that Ember is the only light in the dark world, but Lina still wishes that her imaginary city really existed.

Lina starts work the next day. In the afternoon, an odd-looking young man asks her to carry a message to Mayor Cole. It says that there's a new delivery from Looper. At the Gathering Hall, Lina waits impatiently for the mayor. Bored, Lina wanders onto the roof. The head guard, Redge Stabmark, roughly escorts her off the roof and spits that curiosity leads to trouble. When Mayor Cole hears Lina's message, he sends her off without putting her in the Prison Room. Earlier that morning, Doon arrived at the Pipeworks ready to do important work. He accepts his boots and slicker and follows a young woman named Arlin Froll down a long staircase. At the bottom, Doon comes face to face with the **river**, which is huge and fast. Arlin walks him to each end of the river and past the generator room before taking him to fix a burst pipe. During lunch, Doon heads back to the generator room and goes in. After watching for a minute, Doon suspects that no one knows how the generator actually works. At the end of the workday, a man who works on the generator confirms this. Later, at home, Doon hurls a shoe heel in anger, but it hits Doon's father in the head as he enters the apartment. Doon tells his father about his day, but his father says simply that Doon should pay attention. He then asks about Doon's **worm**, which Doon is keeping in a box to observe. It's grown in the last few days.

A few weeks later, Lina finds Granny pulling stuffing out of the couch. She's looking for something, but she doesn't know what. Lina realizes that Granny forgot Poppy in the shop and rescues the scared, screaming toddler. The next morning, Lina asks her neighbor, Mrs. Murdo, to check in on Granny. At work, Lina carries a message to the head gardener, Clary, in the greenhouses at the edge of Ember. Lina relays the message—a shop owner wants extra potatoes and cabbage—but Clary says she can't fulfill the order, as the potatoes are bad. They hear wailing and Clary sends Lina away, but Lina hides and watches

as a young man named Sadge Merrall stumbles toward the greenhouses from the dark Unknown Regions beyond Ember. Lina joins Clary in comforting Sadge, who says that he was looking for something to help them, but it's impossible to look without a moveable light. After Sadge leaves, Lina asks Clary if there's really nothing out there. Clary pulls out a bean seed and says that it has life in it, but nobody knows exactly what life is. She puts the seed in a pot for Lina to grow.

Mrs. Murdo spends more time at Lina's apartment. Lina loves this, as Mrs. Murdo is tidy and makes sure everything is taken care of. One day, Lina hears a rumor that one shop in town carries **colored pencils**. Though she knows she should buy Granny a coat instead, Lina takes Poppy with her to go look. Looper owns the shop and shows Lina the pencils. Lina puts Poppy down and feels intense hunger for the pencils. She selects two and pays the high price of \$10. When Lina turns around, Poppy is gone. Lina rushes into the street, but the lights go out. Lina cries in fear. Finally, the lights come back on. Lina finds Poppy—Doon cared for her. Later, Lina feels like her pencils aren't so beautiful, as they make her feel ashamed.

At a town meeting, Mayor Cole shouts about solutions, but people throw rocks and garbage at him. Mayor Cole's words make Doon angry, as he doesn't believe the mayor has any ideas. When Lina gets home, Granny is excavating a closet and Poppy is chewing paper next to an old metal box. Lina stops short when she sees that the paper is covered in perfect printing, the writing of the Builders. She takes the pieces of paper. They're Instructions for something and she's sure they're important. The next day, Lina asks Captain Fleery to look at them. Captain Fleery, however, thinks it's an old recipe and tells Lina to stop worrying—she's a Believer and thus believes that the Builders will eventually save them. Lina next asks her friend Lizzie to look at the Instructions, but Lizzie is too caught up in talking about her boring job as a Supply Depot clerk and her new, older boyfriend. Lina decides that she should alert the mayor, so she writes him a note. When he doesn't respond, Lina tries to decipher the writing herself. After some study, she realizes that the document refers to the river and the Pipeworks. She decides to ask Doon for help.

Doon spends his free time at work wandering. He finds only a locked supply closet and a ceiling hatch in a tunnel marked "No Entry." There are also some rocks near the river that look like there's writing on them, but he believes he's never going to understand electricity or do anything important. One day, Doon decides to go to the library to research fire as a moveable light source, but fire only happens by accident in Ember. Lina catches him on his way out and asks him to look at her document. Doon agrees that it's important and agrees to sneak Lina into the Pipeworks the next day to check out the locked door. In the Pipeworks, Lina insists that the door must be the door out of Ember—but they hide when they hear scraping, thuds, and a muffled voice. They catch a glimpse of a man and

Doon is confused, as this person doesn't work in the Pipeworks. Lina and Doon lament that this man got to the door before them and will be the hero for saving Ember.

The next morning, Granny wakes up ill. Lina cares for Granny for two days. On the third morning, Granny dies. Lina and Poppy spend the day at Mrs. Murdo's, and Mrs. Murdo tells Lina that she and Poppy should move in with her. The next afternoon, Lina catches sight of Lizzie leaving the storeroom with a bag. Lizzie seems distracted and trips, spilling her cans. Lina picks up a can of peaches and one of creamed corn, foods she hasn't had in years. Lizzie runs away. The next day, Lina catches Lizzie before work and gets her to admit that her boyfriend, Looper, finds things in supposedly empty storerooms and shares them with her. Lizzie says that it's fine to take these things if Ember is dying anyway, but Lina insists it's not fair or moral. She refuses Lizzie's offer of more cans. A week later, Doon decides to check the odd door in the Pipeworks again. It's unlocked and inside, Mayor Cole sits asleep, surrounded by food, clothes, and light bulbs. Doon shares this immediately with Lina, and they realize that Looper must be funneling supplies to Mayor Cole. They decide that since the mayor is the one committing the crime, they should tell the guards.

Lina seeks out Clary and asks her to come look at the Instructions. She tells Clary everything about Mayor Cole and the room in the Pipeworks. Clary sighs that there's darkness everywhere in Ember, even inside the people. In people, the darkness manifests as greed. Clary also notes that Lina's seed sprouted. When Clary looks at the Instructions, she suggests that the title is "Instructions for Egress"—Instructions to leave the city. Lina shares this with Doon and they decide to announce their discovery at the **Singing** celebration in two days. The next day, Doon sneaks Lina into the Pipeworks again. Following what they can read of the Instructions, they discover a ladder down to the river and a door. Inside are boxes marked "matches" and "candles," and when Lina and Doon figure out that candles are moveable lights, they're thrilled. Using the candles, they can see that the room contains hundreds of boats, which are supposed to float on the river and carry them out of Ember.

The next morning, Doon packs a bag for the journey and checks his worm. The worm had wrapped itself up but as Doon watches, a moth breaks out of the worm's shell. On the street, Doon sees guards asking for him and full of rage, he runs to warn Lina. They find posters accusing them of spreading rumors and decide to hide in the school. They discuss whether they can still make their announcement at the Singing in a few hours, but there are always guards there. Doon suggests they leave someone a note and take a boat themselves. Lina is afraid to leave Poppy, but agrees to take Clary a note. Outside, however, guards capture Lina and take her to the Gathering Hall to see Mayor Cole. As Mayor Cole scolds Lina, the lights go out. Lina pushes through the dark onto the roof and joins in

with the Singing from a hiding spot. The lights go out during the last song, but come on again right after. Lina joins the crowd, takes Poppy from Mrs. Murdo, and meets Doon at the Pipeworks. She shares that she knows now that Ember *isn't* safe at all. Together, she and Doon wrestle a boat into the river, climb in, and untie it. They shoot down the river until they reach a pool where the river seems to end. There, they discover a book and realize that Lina forgot to give Mrs. Murdo their note. Since there's no way to return to Ember, they hike up a path Lina discovers. There's a sign from the Builders greeting them. After an hour or so, the air smells different and they come out onto a strange expanse lit by a silver orb. The ground is covered in hair. Exhausted, the three sit in silence and realize the silver orb is moving. They watch tearfully as the silver orb disappears and in its place, a bright one rises and illuminates the colorful world.

Lina and Doon turn to the book. The woman writes about her choice to participate in this experiment, which is intended to preserve humanity in the face of a disaster. She's one of 100 older adults and 200 babies who take a bus and then climb down a steep path to a pool by the river. Motorboats will take them to their final destination. The babies are never supposed to know about the woman's world, but the woman thinks that her account is important—someday, people will need to read it. Lina and Doon realize that they came from this place, though they can't see any evidence of a disaster. They spend their day searching for a way back to Ember and eventually discover a cave. Inside, they find a ledge overlooking Ember far below. They tie up the letter in a rock and throw it down. Mrs. Murdo picks up the strange package that lands in front of her.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Lina Mayfleet** – The novel's protagonist; a 12-year-old girl. Lina is thin, with long dark hair, and she loves to run. Because of this, she's thrilled when her former friend Doon offers to trade jobs with her so she can be a messenger, a job that allows her to run all over Ember. After running, Ember itself becomes one of Lina's favorite things. She loves everything about it and everyone in it, and she's happy to be able to serve the city she loves. She lives with her Granny and her baby sister, Poppy. Lina's parents died within months of each other a little over a year ago, so Lina finds herself parenting herself and Poppy as Granny's health and mental acuity begin to decline. She's extremely responsible and makes sure that Granny and Poppy are fed and their apartment is clean—and in Ember's spirit of community, Lina asks her neighbor, Mrs. Murdo, for help when she needs it. In her free time, Lina daydreams about a sparkling city and draws pictures of it. Though Lina is overwhelmingly good and generous, she's not exempt from experiencing greed: when she learns that a shop sells rare and expensive **colored**

**pencils**, she buys two instead of buying Granny a coat—and she feels horrendous when she’s too caught up in the pencils to keep track of Poppy and briefly loses the toddler in an electricity blackout. When Lina discovers an important document that’s been torn up by Poppy, she takes it upon herself to figure out what it is. Lina asks many adults in her life to help her, but Doon proves to be the one most willing and able to help her solve the mystery. As they do, Lina’s innocence begins to dissolve as she discovers that *The Book of the City of Ember* is wrong, that Mayor Cole and her friend Lizzie are stealing things, and that Ember is actually a very dangerous place. Eventually, Lina realizes that she has to leave Ember, following the instructions on the document, and do everything in her power to help the rest of the city follow. She and Doon are successful in this endeavor and leave a note so that their neighbors can follow them.

**Doon Harrow** – One of the novel’s protagonists. Doon is 12 years old, serious beyond his years, and pragmatic. He doesn’t believe that things are great in Ember; the regular blackouts and dwindling food stores make it clear that something’s wrong. Doon has a mechanical mind and so studies things like electricity and insects, though he eventually admits that he’ll never understand electricity without seeing the generator. Because of this, getting a job as a Pipeworks laborer seems, at first, to be ideal, as the generator is in the Pipeworks. However, Doon’s first day on the job impresses upon him that every part of Ember is failing—and to make things worse, nobody knows how the generator works. This makes Doon extremely angry, something that Doon’s father warns him against time and again. Despite this, Doon takes his father’s advice to heart and dedicates himself to exploring the Pipeworks, looking for anything that might be useful. When Doon’s former friend Lina approaches him about her document, Doon agrees that it’s important and throws himself into helping her figure it out. Even more than Lina, Doon is hurt, angry, and feels personally betrayed by Mayor Cole’s corruption. He recognizes that engaging in the kind of corruption like Mayor Cole and Looper engage in doesn’t help anyone, but he also makes the mistake of believing that the correct course of action is to trust in other authority figures to make things right. Though Doon has good intentions, he also dreams of being a hero and receiving recognition of some sort for saving the city. Because of this, he insists that he and Lina keep their plans secret as they deduce that the Instructions detail how to leave Ember. They plan to announce their discovery at the yearly **Singing**, but this plan is foiled when Mayor Cole tries to arrest them. Doon manages to convert his anger into a more useful emotion as he uses it to keep Lina safe, and the two leave Ember with Lina’s sister, Poppy, unnoticed. Once aboveground, Doon feels like they’re supposed to be a part of that world.

**Mayor Cole** – Ember’s mayor. He’s a massive, gray-faced man whose eyes seem to look out on people from tunnels. Lina

appears to dislike him from the beginning, an assessment that Clary later confirms is appropriate—Clary says that when the mayor first took office he was foolish, but Lina discovers that in the novel’s present, Mayor Cole is corrupt and dangerous. When he speaks to Lina’s class, he talks a lot about how it’s necessary for everyone in Ember to do their job and do it well, but he does the exact opposite. Lina and Doon discover that Mayor Cole is gorging himself on rare delicacies found in distant storerooms and hoarding light bulbs, while doing nothing about Ember’s frequent blackouts and dwindling stores of food and supplies. He also espouses conformity and believes that people should accept what they’re told without question—curiosity, in his mind, is evil and dangerous. In a sense he’s right, as Lina’s curiosity alerts her to Mayor Cole’s corruption in the first place. Through Clary and Lina’s assessments of him, the novel suggests that Mayor Cole may be undeniably evil and selfish, but he’s also someone deserving of pity—it’s sad, the book suggests, to want so much for oneself at the expense of everyone else.

**Looper Windley** – A young man a few years older than Lina and Doon who works in the storerooms and runs a shop. Lina describes him as funny looking: he’s unkempt, has a prominent Adam’s apple, and walks with a bit of a limp. Looper seems like a tangential and unimportant citizen to Lina and Doon until Lina discovers that in Looper’s dusty shop, he has a box filled with **colored pencils**. His sales technique is designed to make Lina feel anxious and bad about herself, and he succeeds in selling her two exorbitantly priced pencils. Later, Lina discovers that it’s no accident that Looper has colored pencils—through Lizzie, who’s dating Looper, Lina discovers that Looper is stealing things out of storerooms people thought were empty. Rather than sharing them with everyone, however, Looper operates under the belief that if things are as bad as they seem, it’s only right that he should live as well as he can. Lina and Doon also discover that Looper is in cahoots with Mayor Cole and is funneling supplies to the mayor’s secret room in the Pipeworks.

**Mrs. Murdo** – Lina’s next-door neighbor. She used to run a paper and pencil shop, but it closed a few years before the novel begins. Mrs. Murdo is thin, strict, and neat, but she’s kind in her own way. As Granny’s health declines, Lina asks Mrs. Murdo to stop in and check on things. Mrs. Murdo agrees and generously goes above and beyond Lina’s basic request—she makes sure that Poppy is clean and clothed, and that Lina, Poppy, and Granny are fed nourishing foods. After Granny dies, Mrs. Murdo insists that it’s just common sense for Lina and Poppy to come and live with her. Mrs. Murdo—and by extension, her beautiful, tidy home—make Lina feel safe, comforted, and cared for, and Mrs. Murdo becomes a mother figure in Lina’s mind. Mrs. Murdo is also the one to discover Lina and Doon’s dropped note from aboveground, setting her up to spread the word in future installments of the series.

**The Builders** – The people who built Ember over two centuries

before the novel begins. Though the Builders are human, the people of Ember regard them almost as godlike figures. Nothing is known about who the Builders actually were or why they built Ember until Lina and Doon begin to piece together the contents of the Instructions, which detail how to get out of Ember. As Lina and Doon piece the Instructions together, leave Ember, and discover the journal of the woman, one of Ember's original residents, they discover that the Builders constructed Ember to preserve humanity in the face of some sort of disaster aboveground. The Builders also purposefully withheld information about the existence of the world above and about portable light sources, among other things, so that Ember's residents would stay put until it was safe to leave the city and return to the Earth's surface. From what the woman writes in her journal, the Builders were likely a group of scientists and engineers.

**Granny** – Lina and Poppy's elderly grandmother and the girls' only caregiver after the deaths of their parents. Granny is a small woman with wild white hair. She runs a yarn shop above which she, Lina, and Poppy live—but the yarn shop is disorganized and easy to get tangled in. The narrator implies that Granny has been a competent caregiver in the past, but around the time the novel picks up, Granny starts forgetting things and becomes obsessed with finding something lost in the house—but she can't remember what that thing is. In her attempts to find the lost object, Granny begins to forget Poppy and leave her unsupervised in potentially dangerous situations. She also doesn't do much housework, leaving Lina to perform most household duties like cooking, cleaning, and caring for Poppy. Despite her decline, Granny loves Lina dearly and is supportive of her job. Granny dies after struggling for two days with a fever.

**Lizzie Bisco** – Lina's best friend in school. Lizzie has bright red hair and talks a mile per minute, often about herself or things that she finds interesting, but she is capable of expressing genuine care and sympathy for her friends. This begins to change when Lizzie receives the job of Supply Depot clerk, a job she's miserable to get. When Lina sees her in the weeks after starting the job, Lizzie seems distracted and able to focus only on herself. Lina eventually discovers that this is because Lizzie has an older boyfriend at the Supply Depot, Looper, who is secretly funneling her foodstuffs most people believe ran out years ago, like pineapple and fruit cocktail. Lizzie suggests that what she's doing isn't wrong if Ember is failing anyway; it's fine for her to make the most of things while she still can.

**The Woman** – An unnamed woman who was one of the original residents of Ember. Lina, Doon, and Poppy find her handwritten journal abandoned in the cave where the **river** ends and read her account. They discover that the woman, like all the original residents, was over 60 years old, single, and was assigned a partner with whom to care for two babies who would go on to populate Ember. The tone of the woman's account is sad and

scared; she isn't sure if Ember is the correct answer to the problems aboveground, but she's certain that *something* must be done. Her account is instrumental to Lina and Doon's coming of age and growing understanding of who they are, as it connects them to a part of their history they didn't know about and shows them clearly where they came from.

**Doon's Father** – Doon's father is a tall, thin, bald man. Unlike Doon, Doon's father is mild-mannered, logical, and in Doon's opinion, seems incapable of anger. He runs a shop that sells various small objects like shoe heels and old tacks. Throughout the novel, Doon's father counsels Doon to control his anger and through doing so, avoid unintended consequences. Though he validates Doon's frustrations and fears, he also encourages Doon to recognize that people Doon despises, like Mayor Cole, are also in difficult positions and deserve compassion. He also tells Doon to keep his eyes open for information that others might miss.

**Clary Laine** – The head gardener and formerly Lina's father's boss. Clary is a solid, square, and quiet woman. Lina often seeks Clary out for guidance or comfort, since when Clary does speak, it's often hard-hitting and truthful. For instance, Clary is the one to suggest to Lina that all people, no matter how good or bad, have darkness inside them, but what matters isn't the darkness itself—it's what people choose to do with it. She takes Lina's concerns and suspicions about the Instructions seriously and is able to help Lina decipher the partially destroyed document.

**Poppy Mayfleet** – Lina's younger sister. Poppy is a happy toddler who's just learning to walk and talk, though she has a bad habit of running away from Lina if Lina gets distracted. She also is somewhat destructive, but not maliciously so—she discovers the Instructions for Egress and chews them, which turns deciphering the Instructions into a mystery for Lina. Lina is extremely devoted to her baby sister and takes on much of Poppy's care. Because of this, Lina insists on taking Poppy with her when she and Doon escape from Ember.

**Barton Snode** – The young guard who works at the desk in the Gathering Hall. He's huge, but with a head that seems too small for his body. Lina wonders if he's new at his job, as he seems nervous and flustered as he shows her in to see Mayor Cole. Though Lina trusts Barton with the revelation that Mayor Cole is engaging in corrupt activity, she notices that when he informs his superiors, he looks greedy and pleased to be able to share such important information.

**Mrs. Polster** – The fourth-year teacher in Ember. Mrs. Polster is very interested in teaching children right from wrong, which she does mostly by telling her students every single time they make a mistake—even long after they're no longer her students. She also has no sense of humor and teaches students to memorize passages from *The Book of the City of Ember*.

**Redge Stabmark** – Ember's chief guard; a hulking man with a

huge black moustache. He's dour and humorless, and sinisterly tells Lina that curiosity only leads to trouble when he escorts her off the roof of the Gathering Hall. Later, Lina and Doon discover that Redge is in cahoots with Mayor Cole and is likely just as corrupt as the mayor is.

**The Seventh Mayor** – Ember's seventh mayor. He was a dishonorable man and when he became ill, he selfishly believed that the box containing the Instructions to leave the city contained the cure. Because of this, the Instructions ended up in the back of a closet. The seventh mayor is Lina's great-great-grandfather, which is why Lina finds the box in her apartment decades later.

**Arlin Froll** – The young blond woman who supervises Doon on his first day in the Pipeworks. According to Lister Munk, Arlin is an expert at her job, even though she looks far too tiny and delicate to perform the hard manual labor. Despite being excellent at her work, Arlin is unsmiling and somewhat cold toward Doon.

**Sadge Merrill** – A Supply Depot clerk who always seems drawn and worried. Lina is around when Sadge stumbles into the greenhouses after venturing into the Unknown Regions, looking for something to help Ember. His experience was terrifying and he declares that there's nothing out there. He later seems to experience a mental breakdown as a result of his foray.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Captain Allis Fleery** – The captain of the messengers and Lina's boss. She's a slim and sharp woman with piercing, pale blue eyes. When Lina asks Captain Fleery for help in deciphering the Instructions, she discovers that Allis is a Believer.

**Farlo Batten** – The head of the storerooms. He's a demanding boss who takes issue with employees arriving even a minute late or writing too big.

**Nammy Proggs** – An old lady in Ember who doesn't give Doon's location away to guards.

**Natty Prine** – A cantankerous old man who gives Lina her first job as a messenger.

**Miss Thorn** – The teacher who teaches the 12-year-old students of Ember.

**Edward Pocket** – Ember's elderly librarian.

**Dr. Tower** – The kind doctor in Ember.

**Lister Munk** – The Pipeworks director.

a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



## COMING OF AGE

*The City of Ember* transports the reader to the titular city, Ember—which, unbeknownst to its residents, exists underground. The city, which has existed for over 200 years, is in crisis: power outages are becoming more frequent, while stores of food and supplies, especially light bulbs, are running low. Twelve-year-olds Lina and Doon formally come of age in this tense environment when, at the beginning of the novel, their schooling ends and they receive their job assignments, an indicator of adulthood in Ember. Despite having achieved this outward marker of adulthood, the novel goes to great lengths to show that neither Lina nor Doon are adults simply because they have jobs. Both are still children in fundamental ways—but, the novel suggests, both move more toward adulthood as they begin to stand up to authority figures and think for themselves.

Lina, the novel's primary protagonist, filters most of the reader's experience of Ember. Of the two protagonists, she's also the one who undergoes the most significant change as she comes of age, as she begins the novel extremely idealistic about Ember's future and her place in it. On Assignment Day, the day in which students receive their first work assignments, Lina is thrilled to become a contributing part of her city and to be able to explore all it has to offer. Though she's distraught when she draws the job of Pipeworks laborer, her angst evaporates when Doon offers to trade her and give her the job of messenger that she actually wanted. This all builds up Lina as an individual who doesn't necessarily see at first that there's anything in Ember to push back against. While the assignment process may leave a lot to be desired as far as Lina is concerned, her narration reveals that she nevertheless understands that the jobs up for grabs in any given year are still jobs that are necessary for the city to continue functioning.

Doon, on the other hand, makes a scene on Assignment Day when he angrily tells Mayor Cole that Ember is failing and they need to take drastic action of some sort to save it from ruin. While this represents a degree of maturity and pragmatism that Lina doesn't exhibit at this point in the novel, Doon also suffers from a similar unquestioning belief in the importance of being a Pipeworks laborer, a belief that is shattered on his first day of work. In this sense, both Lina and Doon begin the novel with uncritical beliefs regarding the importance of one aspect of Ember or another, something that the novel attributes to a combination of their youth and of the way that they were raised to not think critically about many aspects of life in Ember.

This lack of critical thinking proves to be the greatest indicator of Lina and Doon's immaturity. When Lina and Doon begin making important discoveries about corruption, incompetence, and dangerous situations throughout Ember, they do what



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have

they've been taught to do and trust who they've been told to trust—the adults in their lives, and eventually Mayor Cole's force of guards—to do the right thing and bring these things to their attention. While adults like the head gardener, Clary, and Doon's father are supportive of Lina and Doon's attempts to find a way out of the city and concerned about the corruption they uncover, it's a major shock when it turns out that Mayor Cole's guards are actually just as corrupt as he is, and that they're out to help their boss, not the citizens of Ember. With this, Lina and Doon must come to terms with the fact that the authority figures they've been taught to trust and respect actually deserve neither of these things. The children also recognize that since Mayor Cole and the police force aren't going to do anything about the power outages and food shortages plaguing Ember, it falls to them to learn whatever they can, critically consider their options, and ultimately, to come up with a plan to help the residents of Ember leave the city.

As the first in a series, *The City of Ember* doesn't neatly tie up these loose ends or see Doon and Lina fully come of age. The novel ends when they discover the way out of Ember and, aboveground for the first time, discover a cave through which they can see Ember below and drop a letter explaining to whoever finds it how to lead everyone else out of the city. Most important to Lina and Doon's coming of age, however, is that they discover they cannot trust authority figures to care for them or do the work of saving the city. Rather, as they come of age, they themselves must become citizens who are willing and able to step up, do the work, and become the trustworthy leaders that Ember needs.



### SELFISHNESS, GREED, AND CORRUPTION

Soon after entering the adult working world, both Lina and Doon—but Doon in particular—make shocking discoveries that point to the inarguable fact that Ember isn't the idyllic, if somewhat troubled, place they've been told it is. Rather, Ember is plagued by more than just the darkness of power outages: food, medicine, and supply shortages mean that everyone lives in a somewhat desperate state, while at all levels of Ember's government and administration, power, secrecy, and blind trust on the part of the general populace allows corruption to run rampant. The novel is careful to illustrate that it's possible for anyone to experience greed, no matter how morally good they might appear. It also suggests that it's extremely important to recognize societal structures that enable simple greed to transform into full-on corruption—and to not give in and conform to systems that allow people to corruptly prioritize their own short-term wellbeing over the long-term health of the community.

Due to shortages of all manner of things in Ember, from shoes

and coats to canned goods, everyone in the city hoards whatever they can. Specifically, the reader gets a close look at Doon's father's shop, which sells everything from shoe heels to potentially useful bits of wood and metal, and Lina's Granny's yarn shop, which sells "yarn" made from used clothing and linens that have been unraveled and unwoven. These businesses create the sense that Ember is experiencing a supply crisis. This becomes especially apparent when Lina hears Granny's stories about having canned pineapple once as a child, a food that has since run out and that Lina has never had. Though pineapple is a delicacy and not necessary to survival, there are other clear indicators that the storerooms are low on all manner of necessary things, from coats and children's shoes to necessary medicines. In turn, this leads to exorbitant prices for even staple foods and items in shops. On the whole, the novel's descriptions of what people have in their homes and shops—overwhelmingly, piles of junk or scrap material that may someday be useful or possible to sell—suggests that everyone in Ember is desperate on some level for necessary things, as well as long-disappeared luxury items that might make life easier or more comfortable.

The state of living with major shortages is, for most, simply the status quo; many in Ember simply do the best with what they have. However, for those with money, connections, or power, doing without isn't necessary. Ember, the novel suggests, is a city ripe for corruption, which exists at all levels of society. Ember's mayor, Mayor Cole, is perhaps the least surprising individual to engage in corrupt activity. Lina and Doon discover that in the Pipeworks, there's a hidden room where the mayor can eat himself into a stupor on all manner of delicacies. At the same time as he does this, Mayor Cole tells his citizens that he's working on the problem of shortages, something that Doon and Doon's father recognize is a lie. Instead, Doon understands that the mayor's greed is fueled by the belief that if things are inevitably going to get worse, it's best to make the most of life while he can. Far more surprising and hurtful for Lina is discovering that her childhood best friend, Lizzie, is also aligning herself with corrupt individuals. As a storeroom clerk, Lizzie doesn't have much power herself—but when she begins dating the young storeroom manager, he gives her access to goods like canned asparagus and peaches, which she then hides from her friends like Lina. Like Mayor Cole, Lizzie believes that if the situation in Ember is really as bad as it seems, it's only natural to want to make the best of things before life in Ember grinds to a halt when the lights in Ember inevitably go off for good. Through Mayor Cole and Lizzie, the novel makes it clear that it's surprisingly easy for all different types of individuals to be selfish and greedy.

Even more disturbing for Lina than Lizzie's flirtations with corruption, however, are Lina and Doon's own instances of greed and selfishness. Lina feels a wild sense of hunger and desire when she discovers that a shop still has a few **colored**

**pencils**, exorbitantly priced at \$5 each. Though she purchases two, the thrill is dampened when in the power outage immediately following her purchase, she loses her toddler sister Poppy in the pitch black street. This shows Lina that her desire to better herself, rather than purchase Granny or Poppy a new coat, has potential dire consequences if she chooses to indulge it. Similarly, Lina and Doon both crave glory and recognition for their sleuthing efforts, and so they choose not to loop others into their plan to escape Ember in the hopes that they'll be able to make a grand speech at the yearly **Singing** celebration, where everyone gathers to sing songs about the city. This selfish plan ultimately means that Lina and Doon end up escaping alone and leaving a note, which has no guarantee of being found, or for that matter, followed, by whoever finds it. With this, the novel makes it clear that greed, selfishness, and a desire for glory may all be part of what it means to be human, but more important than whether or not a person experiences these negative emotions is what they choose to do with them. It's possible, the novel suggests, to simultaneously recognize one's selfish tendencies and perform great acts of kindness and community service, as Lina and Doon do in *The City of Ember* and go on to do in future installments of the series.



### FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Family is a tricky subject in *Ember*. Due to difficult lives peppered with illness, accidents, and dwindling medicine stores, many families in the city are comprised of grandparents or single parents caring for children that, possibly, aren't related by blood. Or, as in Lina's case for much of the novel, children find themselves caring for their ailing grandparents and younger siblings. Despite these fractured family units, however, residents in *Ember* are still close and, in many cases, care deeply for each other, both in an emotional sense and through their actions. With this, *The City of Ember* positions the idea of the conventional nuclear family as ultimately less meaningful than caring for others in a very basic sense, whether that be in a chosen family unit, or on a grander scale at the community-wide level.

In *Ember*, families—and human life in general—are constantly at risk. In the two years before the novel begins, Lina's father dies of a coughing sickness, while her mother dies giving birth to Lina's baby sister, Poppy. Doon, meanwhile, shares that in the Pipeworks where he works, an employee perishes in the **river** with shocking regularity. All of these tragedies create the sense that a traditional nuclear family is, for many in *Ember*, too much to expect, given how likely it seems that at least one family member will suffer a life-threatening accident or illness. Despite this, the two families that the reader gets a close look at, Lina and Doon's, are nevertheless close and supportive. Lina does everything in her power to care for Granny and baby Poppy, aided by her kindly neighbor, Mrs. Murdo. Doon's father, for his part, consistently guides Doon to make the best

choices he possibly can and encourages him to check his anger, all while making Doon feel safe and supported. These relationships suggest that family has less to do with the form it takes and more to do with how its members treat and care for one another. However, this doesn't mean that there aren't major consequences of existing in a community with so many fractured families. Lina still experiences crushing grief for her parents, and the responsibility she has at home is a lot for any 12-year-old. Indeed, though Granny's death of an unnamed illness is certainly sad and traumatic for Lina, in a way, it's also a relief: Mrs. Murdo insists that Lina and Poppy come live with her, where Lina will be able to assume the role of a child again and not have to act like an adult. Through Lina's experiences, the reader can see that the family structures most prevalent in *Ember* lead to children having to grow up too soon and essentially parent themselves.

This isn't to say, however, that there isn't a robust community of caring individuals in both Lina and Doon's lives, ready and willing to care for the children if and when they need it. Mrs. Murdo is one of the most compelling examples of an adult taking on the responsibility of caring for others in a familial way, and Lina also seeks out guidance at times from her father's former boss, the head gardener Clary. Further, as Doon and Lina rekindle their friendship in the weeks after receiving their work assignments, they both discover that close, trusting friendships can provide yet another avenue for support when it's impossible to get that support elsewhere. This all gives the impression more generally that *Ember* is a community-oriented place where, despite the greed and corruption that plague it, people are more than willing to step up in service of others and in service of their city. This is best represented by the **Singing**, an annual celebration in which the entire city comes together to sing three songs about *Ember*. Doon and Lina choose the **Singing** as their time to slip out of *Ember* unnoticed, but upsets and run-ins with the police mean that Lina finds herself on the roof of the Gathering Hall in the middle of an escape attempt during the **Singing**. Even though, at this point, Lina is considered an outsider—Mayor Cole has posters up insisting that Lina and Doon are spreading misinformation and will be imprisoned upon their arrest—the **Singing** is still a meaningful experience for Lina. When the lights go out in the middle of the **Singing**, the unwavering voices of *Ember*'s residents, which Lina joins, stand as a symbol of the community's unity and belief in the importance of standing together in the face of adversity. In this sense, while *The City of Ember* doesn't go so far as to suggest that blood relationships within families are unnecessary, it does go to great lengths to illuminate other places where it's possible to find the same kind of support.



### CENSORSHIP

All of *Ember*'s residents learn the history of their city in school. They are told simply that, years ago,



the Builders built Ember to last, with everything it would need to do so. For many in Ember, this knowledge is more than enough—it means that they should, in theory, be able to trust that the Builders left them enough food, light bulbs, and other supplies to live comfortably, presumably for the rest of time. However, unbeknownst to the residents of Ember, censorship and the control of information have been a part of Ember's fabric from its very beginning, resulting in an underground society that is wholly disconnected from its history and from the knowledge that could save it from impending eternal darkness. Though the novel makes the case that this original instance of censorship was necessary to preserve the human race in the face of some sort of disaster aboveground, it nevertheless argues that censorship comes at a dangerous cost: in this case, inaction, complacency, and blind trust in leaders who continue to censor the population.

In Ember, there's only one school, and all students—who only attend school until age 12—learn the same things, primarily from *The Book of the City of Ember*, the history of the city compiled and provided by the historical Builders. As far as anyone in Ember knows, *The Book of the City of Ember* contains all there is to know. It talks about the city's history and how society is supposed to function. However, what the book doesn't answer are any questions about why the Builders built Ember in the first place, how electricity works, or how plants grow from hard, seemingly lifeless **seeds**—all the things necessary to truly understand what Ember is and how it functions. Instead, the book asks residents of Ember to simply trust that everything is going to be okay, something that becomes increasingly difficult as rumors of light bulb shortages circulate and power outages become longer and more frequent.

In the absence of any of this knowledge, and in light of the very clear signs that everything is not fine in Ember, some people—including Lina and Doon—begin to ask these questions and search for answers themselves. Some people begin trying to construct portable light sources (flashlights and purposeful fire are unheard of in Ember) to explore the dark and uninhabited tunnels leading away from Ember to find a way to another city. Others, like the spiritual group known as the Believers, do little but sing and preach that the Builders will eventually return to save Ember. While the novel overwhelmingly suggests that this kind of curiosity displayed by many of Ember's residents is a normal part of being human, it also shows how the government, led by Mayor Cole, does everything in its power to stifle questions and keep the population as benign as the Believers' singing. One of Mayor Cole's guards even tells Lina that "Curiosity leads to trouble," a sentiment that authority figures echo again and again in attempts to convince everyone that they have the situation under control.

While the current situation in Ember is inarguably bleak

because of the role of censorship, the novel also shows that censorship can, in certain circumstances, be somewhat beneficial. Censorship in Ember was supposed to come to an end a few decades before the novel begins, when a box that was supposed to be in the mayor's possession opened to reveal instructions for leaving Ember. Further, after Lina and Doon do manage to decipher the Instructions and leave Ember, it becomes clear that it was absolutely essential to restrict knowledge of fire and electricity that might enable someone to create a torch or a flashlight, since the route out is not through the surrounding tunnels as many suspect—exploring further into those tunnels could've needlessly put people in danger while searching for a route that wasn't there. The Builders' original censorship efforts, then, can be read as efforts to essentially sacrifice knowledge and free thought for several generations for what the Builders hoped would be the good of humanity. The novel suggests that this is a more or less acceptable use of censorship; the real issue, Lina and Doon discover, is with Mayor Cole's attempts to curb the citizens' curiosity and his own, decades after Ember's residents should've left the city.

With this, *The City of Ember* suggests that when it comes to censorship, what makes it acceptable or not is one's intentions. Whereas Mayor Cole and his cronies seek to silence Lina and Doon so they can continue profiting while others starve, with no consideration as to how to solve Ember's problems, the Builders instituted censorship in Ember to save humanity and planned for the day when censorship would no longer be useful or necessary. Though it's still possible to take issue with the Builders' actions despite their good intentions, *The City of Ember* nevertheless makes the case that censorship attempts, no matter their origins or intentions, will inevitably come to an end—curiosity, fueled by responsibility to one's community, will always lead to more information and, hopefully, the truth.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



## THE SINGING

The Singing represents the deep sense of community present in Ember. It's a yearly celebration in which all residents of Ember sing three songs: "The Song of the City," "The Song of the River," and "The Song of Darkness." As the celebration was likely intended to do, singing these songs gives Ember's residents something to work together on to make beautiful. Tellingly, as Lina secretly listens to "The Song of the River" while trying to evade capture, she feels as though the song (and all the people singing it) is telling her to go and leave Ember—something that, if she's successful,

will allow her to give back to the city and her community by discovering the way out. Further, when the power goes out during this Singing, Ember's residents' voices waver but continue singing stronger than ever—a clear indicator of the sense of community present in Ember, which the Singing makes a point to celebrate every year.



## COLORED PENCILS

The colored pencils Lina purchases from Looper illustrate the consequences of greed, selfishness, and desperation that plague Ember. Looper's colored pencils are likely some of the last in Ember and because of this, are exorbitantly priced at \$5 per pencil—and though Lina knows that she could use that money to buy clothing for Granny and Poppy, and that doing that would be a better use for the money, she still finds that she's overcome with desire when she sees the pencils. As Lina looks over and purchases the pencils, the power goes out, and Lina loses Poppy in the darkness. With this, Lina begins to see that the feelings of greed, desire, and selfishness that she experienced have potentially devastating consequences if she chooses to indulge them. In this sense, while the pencils aren't inherently bad, the selfish feelings they stir up make it clear to Lina that rare luxury items—and even basic staples as supplies become scarcer—have the potential to replace the strong sense of community in Ember with dangerous, individualistic practices and beliefs.



## THE SEED AND THE WORM

The seed that Clary gives Lina and the worm that Doon raises into a moth both represent Lina and Doon as they move from the darkness of Ember to the light aboveground. All of Ember's residents are, in a sense, akin to the seed and the worm: they haven't yet become what they're supposed to be, given that the Instructions that detail how to leave the city and complete humanity's foray underground have been lost. As Lina and Doon decipher the instructions—and, at the same time, as the seed sprouts and the worm emerges from its chrysalis as a moth—Lina and Doon solve the mystery and, just like the sprout and the moth, find themselves with the knowledge of how to leave Ember for the world aboveground, where they can grow and flourish in the light.



## THE RIVER

The river that runs through the Pipeworks symbolizes Ember's dangerous disconnect from the natural world and from the knowledge of how things work. Many people who have seen the river fear it, as its size and power are awe-inspiring and deadly—and yet, though people know that it powers the generator that runs Ember, no one truly understands how exactly this happens. The novel makes it

clear that this disconnect and the fear that fuels it have dire consequences, given that the generator is in disrepair since no one knows how it transforms the river into electricity. In this sense, when Lina and Doon discover that the river is actually the way out of Ember—and in this sense, is truly life-giving—they begin to connect with the natural world and, in doing so, discover necessary information about how their world works.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Yearling edition of *The City of Ember* published in 2003.

### Chapter 2 Quotes

●● Lina could see this city so clearly in her mind she almost believed it was real. She knew it couldn't be, though. *The Book of the City of Ember*, which all children studied in school, taught otherwise. "The city of Ember was made for us long ago by the Builders," the book said. "It is the only light in the dark world. Beyond Ember, the darkness goes on forever in all directions."

**Related Characters:** The Builders, Lina Mayfleet

**Related Themes:** 



**Page Number:** 25

#### Explanation and Analysis

As Lina thinks of an imaginary city that's light and bright, she understands that, given what she's been taught about the aboveground world outside of Ember, her imaginary city is an impossibility. This shows the success of the Builders' censorship attempts: Lina and the rest of Ember's residents have no idea that they're not actually the only people on Earth, and further, they have no idea they're underground. While at first this may seem like a bad thing to cut everyone in Ember off from knowledge of what else is out in the world, it's important to consider the context in which the Builders made this decision. The Builders originally created Ember during a time when a catastrophic event was occurring on Earth. Further, they understood that if people in Ember believe that there's something out there, they'll look for it—and in underground tunnels, that could be an especially dangerous proposition. Instead, it was most important to the Builders to make everyone in Ember think like Lina does—that Ember is it—in order to keep them safe, both from the potential dangers of exploring underground and from whatever disaster happened aboveground.

☛ She bent over *The Book of the City of Ember* and read a few sentences: “The citizens of Ember may not have luxuries, but the foresight of the Builders, who filled the storerooms at the beginning of time, has ensured that they will always have enough, and enough is all that a person of wisdom needs.”

**Related Characters:** The Seventh Mayor, The Builders, Lina Mayfleet

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 34



### Explanation and Analysis

While Lina waits for Mayor Cole so she can deliver a message, she flips through *The Book of the City of Ember* and reads about how the Builders filled the storerooms with enough supplies. Despite the fact that it’s written in the book—and is therefore, to many in Ember, inarguably true—the book offers lots of evidence that this *isn’t* actually true. Lina hears whispers that the city is low on light bulbs, and she’s never had canned pineapples or other canned fruits. Clearly, there’s hardly enough in the storerooms for people to have enough right now, let alone for people to have luxuries.

However, it’s worth keeping in mind that, had everything gone to plan, people in Ember may have always had enough. They were probably supposed to leave the city a few decades before the novel starts in accordance with the Builder’s Instructions, which would’ve left a lot of food and supplies in the storeroom. However, because of the seventh mayor’s greed and his decision to take the box containing the Instructions home, *The Book of the City of Ember* is no longer actually true.

☛ “Curiosity leads to trouble.”

**Related Characters:** Redge Stabmark (speaker), Lina Mayfleet

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 37

### Explanation and Analysis

Lina is on the roof of the Gathering Hall, where she went just to see what was there when she got bored of waiting for Mayor Cole. When he escorts Lina off the roof, the head guard, Redge Stabmark, quips that curiosity is a bad thing. Keeping in mind that Redge Stabmark turns out to be one of

Mayor Cole’s cronies and is complicit and profiting from Mayor Cole’s corruption, this mindset makes lots of sense. For Redge, and for others who are engaging in unethical activities, other people’s curiosity *will* lead to trouble—for them. If people find out about the corruption, they’ll likely try to put a stop to it. Because of this, it’s essential that people like Redge and Mayor Cole dissuade anyone and everyone from being curious and asking questions if they wish to continue with their nefarious activities. In this sense, it’s possible to see curiosity as something that exists in direct opposition to corruption and censorship. Censorship is able to happen and corruption is able to flourish when people—like the people of Ember—aren’t very curious about what their neighbors and those in charge are doing. Instead, they simply trust that everything is happening exactly the way things are supposed to happen in Ember. While they can’t be faulted for this entirely, as Ember was designed to dissuade curiosity like this, this shows that people like Redge Stabmark and Mayor Cole exist and say things like this because they’re products of a society that has few ways to uncover or check corruption.

## Chapter 3 Quotes

☛ “Can you explain to me about the generator?” he asked. “Can you tell me how it works?”

The old man just sighed. “All I know is, the river makes it go.”

“But how?”

The man shrugged. “Who knows? Our job is just to keep it from breaking down.”

**Related Characters:** Doon Harrow (speaker), The Seventh Mayor, The Builders

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 48

### Explanation and Analysis

When Doon finally has an opportunity to speak with a man who works on Ember’s generator, the man confirms Doon’s worst fears: that nobody knows how the generator works, and that it’s in worse condition than Doon thought. This is more proof that the Builders’ attempts to control information in Ember were extremely successful. Given that their entire goal was to keep people in Ember, it was necessary to restrict knowledge of electricity to prevent someone from inventing the flashlight.

However, it's also important to remember that the Builders never intended for anyone to still live in Ember by this time; it's unclear how long the box containing the instructions for leaving the city have been open, but it's possible it's been open for decades by now. The Builders never intended for anyone to have to know how electricity works, or how the generator transforms water power into electricity in the first place. The Builders, in this sense, never planned for human selfishness to mess up their plans—the issues plaguing Ember are, to a degree, the fault of the flawed seventh mayor who didn't play by the rules and instead, gave into his selfish desires. In this sense, the dire situation in Ember reflects just how harmful selfishness can be, as such behavior has far-reaching impacts on the entire community.

## Chapter 4 Quotes



☝ “You haven't forgotten the baby?”

“Oh, yes. She's...I think she's down in the shop.”

“By herself?” Lina stood up and ran down the stairs. She found Poppy sitting on the floor of the shop, enmeshed in a tangle of yellow yarn. As soon as she saw Lina, Poppy began to howl.

Lina picked her up and unwound the yarn, talking soothingly, though she was so upset that her fingers trembled. For Granny to forget the baby was dangerous.

**Related Characters:** Granny, Lina Mayfleet (speaker), Poppy Mayfleet

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 55

### Explanation and Analysis

Lina comes home to discover Granny tearing apart the sofa—and that Granny forgot baby Poppy downstairs in her yarn shop. This makes it clear to Lina that while Granny is technically the adult in the family, she is getting to the point where she can no longer effectively care for her granddaughters. Knowing this, Lina has to step up to make sure that Poppy stays safe and under adult supervision. This is one of the major consequences of Ember's fractured family units: children like Lina have to grow up and take on adult responsibilities as very young people. Because Lina doesn't have parents and because Granny is declining, Lina's childhood is coming to a premature and difficult end. Further, though the novel guides the reader toward empathizing with Lina more than anyone else, it's worth

considering the consequences beyond physical danger when older siblings raise toddlers like Poppy, mostly singlehandedly. Their situation means that going forward, Poppy won't have an adult with life experience at home to draw on for a long time—Lina won't turn 18 until Poppy is almost 10 years old. Though Poppy will certainly have access to other adults in the community and can form relationships with them like Lina formed a relationship with Clary, this still means that Poppy will likely find herself in a situation very similar to Lina's when she's Lina's age.

☝ Just recently, an official job called trash sifter had been created. Every day a team of people methodically sorted through the trash heaps in search of anything that might at all be useful. They'd come back with broken chair legs that could be used for repairing window frames [...] Lina hadn't thought about it before, but now she wondered about the trash sifters. Were they there because Ember really was running out of everything?

**Related Characters:** Lina Mayfleet

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 58



### Explanation and Analysis


While delivering messages one day, Lina begins to think critically about the relatively new job of trash sifter and considers the reasons why the job exists at all. Especially given what the trash sifters come back with, this passage paints a picture of Ember as being a place where there aren't enough supplies to fix even the simplest things, and so people have to make do with whatever they have on hand to get by. As Lina recognizes here, this does mean that the rumors that Ember is low on supplies are probably true, something that Lina hadn't really believed until now. This shows her beginning to think critically about what she sees around her, rather than simply taking at face value what authority figures, like the Builders who wrote *The Book of the City of Ember*, tell her—an important skill as Lina continues to come of age. It is only by synthesizing and analyzing her own observations that Lina is able to question what she's been told her entire life and draw her own conclusions about what's going on in Ember.

## Chapter 5 Quotes

Later, in her bedroom, with Poppy asleep, she took the two colored pencils from her pocket. They were not quite as beautiful as they had been. When she held them, she remembered the powerful wanting she had felt in that dusty store, and the feeling of it was mixed up with fear and shame and darkness.

**Related Characters:** Looper Windley, Poppy Mayfleet, Lina Mayfleet

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 82-83

### Explanation and Analysis

In the evening of the day that Lina loses Poppy during the blackout, Lina decides that her new colored pencils aren't as pretty as they once were—after all, they're the reason her little sister got lost in the first place since Lina was distracted by the pencils while watching Poppy. This begins to situate the colored pencils as symbols of shame and of Lina's desire for luxury items. Though they seemed to represent that things aren't actually so bad when Lina pored over them in Looper's store, now, they make it clear to her that things are that bad, and will be even worse if she succumbs to her occasionally selfish and greedy thoughts as she did earlier. Poppy could've been seriously hurt or lost for a long time during the blackout because of Lina's focus on the colored pencils, which shows Lina that there are true costs to wanting and pursuing such luxury items. Her family, she sees, will suffer.

### Explanation and Analysis

The narrator explains that when Lina's neighbor Mrs. Murdo spends time at Lina's apartment looking after Granny and Poppy, Lina is able to relax. Though the book uses the word "relax," in reality, it's not just relaxing that Lina gets to do: she actually gets to act like a kid and have someone care for her, which Lina hasn't fully experienced since her parents died more than a year and a half ago. The specific things that Lina thinks about Mrs. Murdo doing around the house are likely things that, without Mrs. Murdo, Lina would have to do herself, which again suggests that Lina is having to take on a lot of responsibility simply to keep their household running.

Mrs. Murdo's willingness to help out, meanwhile, speaks to the generous community spirit that exists in Ember. She willingly gives Lina the gift of childhood by stepping up to care for Poppy, Granny, and the apartment. This generosity shows that while Mrs. Murdo may be brisk, she's one of the kindest individuals in Ember, and exemplifies what it looks like to have a strong community support network in lieu of traditional nuclear families.

“Is it true about the light bulbs?”

“Is what true?”

“That there aren't very many left?”

Lizzie shrugged. “I don't know. They hardly ever let us go down into the storerooms. All we see are the reports the carriers turn in— [...]

“But when you see the report for the light bulb rooms, what does it say?”

“I never get to see that one,” said Lizzie. “That one, and a few other ones like the vitamin report, only a few people can see.”

## Chapter 7 Quotes

Lina rather liked having Mrs. Murdo around—it was a bit like having a mother there. [...] When Mrs. Murdo was there, shoes got picked up and put away, spills were wiped off the furniture, and Poppy always had on clean clothes. Lina could relax when Mrs. Murdo was around. She knew things were taken care of.

**Related Characters:** Poppy Mayfleet, Mrs. Murdo, Granny, Lina Mayfleet

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 71

**Related Characters:** Lizzie Bisco, Lina Mayfleet (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 103



### Explanation and Analysis

Lina interrupts Lizzie, a Supply Depot clerk, to ask about light bulbs and receives an unsatisfactory answer. Though Lizzie's answer doesn't answer Lina's questions, it does point to the fact that there's censorship at all levels in Ember: keeping the vitamin and light bulb reports secret from the clerks, let alone from the general populace, means that there's only a few people who know how many there

actually are—and that makes it easier for those few in the know to abuse that power. Lina learns soon after this that not being able to see the light bulb report doesn't stop Lizzie from behaving corruptly herself, which impresses upon Lina that keeping people in the dark doesn't guarantee that they'll fall into line and behave appropriately. Rather, in a society like Ember that's experiencing shortages and beginning to become more individualistic as people try to look out for themselves, the censorship merely means that no one knows how bad it is—and on the flip side, no one knows just how important it is to work together in service of the community.

☛ Maybe she should show it to the mayor. She didn't trust him, either. But if this document was important to the future of the city, he was the one who should know about it.

**Related Characters:** Mayor Cole, Lina Mayfleet

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 107

### Explanation and Analysis

As Lina pores over the mysterious document she finds in Poppy's mouth, she decides that she should tell Mayor Cole about what she found. This choice reflects Lina's youth and naïve belief in Ember's systems and hierarchies—in other words, Lina has grown up believing that the mayor has her best interests at heart, and so he is the one to tell about something seemingly important like this. While this mindset is commendable, it's also important to recognize that Lina's instincts tell her that the mayor isn't trustworthy. He has already gotten angry at Doon for speaking the truth about the supply shortages and electricity crisis in Ember, and he threatened to put Lina—a child—in the Prison Room simply for exhibiting entirely natural curiosity about how her world works. To someone who has been taught to trust themselves, these threats would flag Mayor Cole as someone to treat with caution, no matter what role he might play in Ember's government. However, because at this point Lina has been taught to believe what people tell her rather than her own assessments of situations and people, she loops Mayor Cole in anyway—with dire consequences later.

## Chapter 8 Quotes

☛ He found another supply closet at the far south end of the Pipeworks—at least, he assumed that's what it was. It was at the end of a tunnel with a rope strung across it; a sign hanging from the rope said, "Caved In. No Entry." Doon entered anyway, ducking under the rope. He found no sign of a cave-in, but there were no lights.

**Related Characters:** Mayor Cole, Doon Harrow

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 115



### Explanation and Analysis

While wandering in the Pipeworks, Doon comes across what he believes is a supply closet in an unlit tunnel. While this supply closet—in actuality, Mayor Cole's secret locked room filled with supposedly long-gone supplies—becomes more important for other reasons later, it's important here to pay attention to the way Doon interprets what he sees in front of him. Given what the reader has learned about how Ember's residents are taught to think (basically, to believe anything that's written in *The Book of the City of Ember* and to respect chains of authority), Doon really should just take the sign at the entrance of the tunnel that says it's caved in at face value. His unwillingness to do so shows that even now, Doon is already willing and able to think for himself and to think critically about what he sees and hears around him. This, in turn, sets him up to be able to solve the various mysteries about Ember and its origins later in the novel.

## Chapter 11 Quotes

☛ The blue-green room, the orderly apartment, the meals cooked, and the blankets tucked in cozily at night—all this gave her a feeling of comfort, almost luxury. She was grateful for Mrs. Murdo's kindness. I am not ready yet to be alone in the world, she thought.

**Related Characters:** Granny, Mrs. Murdo, Lina Mayfleet

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 144

### Explanation and Analysis


Following Granny's death, Lina thinks of Mrs. Murdo's neat home and decides that it's not true that Lina is alone in the world. This makes it clear that no matter how mature Lina

tends to act, she's still a child. The comforts and the security that Mrs. Murdo is able to provide are still extremely attractive to Lina because she is young and vulnerable, and understandably wants to be protected by a parental figure. Though Granny's death makes Lina feel very alone, this thought shows that Lina is realigning herself with her neighbors and recommitting herself to Ember's spirit of community. Even if Lina may feel alone, given the intense community bonds that tie Ember together, Lina is never really on her own while she still calls Ember home and its citizens her neighbors.

It's also worth considering why Lina suggests that the kind of care she receives from Mrs. Murdo is a luxury. This suggests that Lina has deeply internalized that, to some degree, she is alone—it's no longer normal for her to trust or expect that a parent or guardian will care for. This, more than anything, drives home the fact that Lina has been forced to grow up far too soon thanks to the fractured family units in Ember.

☞ And if the cans hadn't come from a market, where had they come from? There was only one answer: they had come from the storerooms. Somehow, Lizzie had gotten them because she worked in the storeroom office. Had she paid for them? How much? Or had she taken them without paying?

**Related Characters:** Mayor Cole, Looper Windley, Lizzie Bisco, Lina Mayfleet

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 148

### Explanation and Analysis



After discovering Lizzie with cans of creamed corn and peaches, foods thought long gone, Lina wonders where Lizzie got them. In doing so, Lina comes to terms with the fact that although Lizzie is a friend and Lina trusted her, she's still engaging in corrupt behavior. This begins to show that anyone, no matter who they are, is capable of giving in to their greed and getting drawn into corruption. The dire situation in Ember likely makes it easier for someone like Lizzie to justify doing this. It's significant, though, that Lizzie is able to do this because she works in the storerooms. While she may not have power in terms of being an especially influential person, she works in proximity to powerful and corrupt people like Looper and, though she might not know it, Mayor Cole.


☞ “And Lizzie—he isn't just stealing things for you. He has a store! He steals things and sells them for huge prices!”

“He does not,” said Lizzie, but she looked worried.

“He does. I know because I bought something from him just a few weeks ago. He has a whole box of colored pencils.”

**Related Characters:** Lizzie Bisco, Lina Mayfleet (speaker), Looper Windley

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 151

### Explanation and Analysis

Over the course of Lina and Lizzie's conversation, Lina tries to tell Lizzie about all the ways that Looper is engaging in corrupt activity. The worried look on Lizzie's face is an indicator that even though she's willing to engage in these behaviors now, it's possible that she hasn't really considered the implications of what she and Looper are doing. This marks her as either immature or willfully ignorant of the consequences of her actions—or, for that matter, of the possibility that the smuggling she and Looper are doing is actually much bigger than just her and Looper. Indeed, Lina and Doon discover at about this time that Mayor Cole is engaging in corrupt behavior along with Looper, which situates Lizzie as a cog in a much larger system of corruption and deceit. Again, this shows that anyone, even the most young or innocent-seeming people, can get involved with this kind of scheme.

☞ “Looper says it's all going to be gone soon anyway, why not live as well as we can right now?”


“But Lizzie, why should *you* get all that? Why you and not other people?”

“Because we found it. Because we can get at it.”

“I don't think it's fair,” said Lina.

Lizzie spoke as if she were talking to a not-very-bright child. “You can have some, *too*. That's what I'm *telling* you.”

**Related Characters:** Lizzie Bisco, Lina Mayfleet (speaker), Looper Windley

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 153

**Explanation and Analysis**

To try to get Lina to drop the issue, Lizzie offers to get Lina some of Looper's cans. Essentially, this would bring Lina into the circle of corruption and deceit that's beginning to take shape. Lizzie's tone and emphasis suggests that she believes most people would be willing to join her and go along with this, especially given how dire the situation in Ember is right now. A sympathetic reading of Lizzie's character could argue that she is in a tougher position economically than Lina is—though Lina doesn't eat like royalty, she always has enough to eat, and it appears that her family members have clothes to keep them warm for the most part. There's no evidence that Lizzie has the same level of stability that Lina has, which may make her more willing to jump at the first opportunity to have more than anyone else.

When Lizzie parrots Looper's guiding principle, it shows how these desperate times corrupt the egalitarian and community-oriented ideas that once guided Ember. Lizzie and Looper are thinking about themselves and their own enjoyment, not the health and safety of the entire community. This suggests that it's extremely difficult, in times like these, to remain focused on the greater good and subsume one's own desires for self-preservation and comfort. To a degree, their greed is understandable.

the darkness. Hoarding everything for himself doesn't benefit the community, and thus shows how Mayor Cole has corrupted the ideals of Ember and made them work to support his own selfish goals. Though Doon is right to take offense to Mayor Cole's greed, his intense display of emotion here also shows how youthful and naïve Doon is. For him, this isn't a matter of discovering that corruption exists someplace he didn't suspect. Rather, it's discovering that corruption exists at all, something that utterly disrupts Doon's understanding of his world and his neighbors as fundamentally good.

☞ “If this were an ordinary situation, the mayor would be the one to tell.”

“But the mayor is the one committing the crime,” said Doon.

“So then we should tell the guards, I guess,” said Lina. “They're next in authority next to the mayor. Though I don't like them much, [...] Especially the chief guard.”

**Related Characters:** Lina Mayfleet, Doon Harrow (speaker), Redge Stabmark, Mayor Cole

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 161



**Explanation and Analysis**

As Lina and Doon consider what to do, they go down the list of who they should tell about Mayor Cole's corruption. Their discussion of the fact that under normal circumstances they'd tell the mayor shows again that they've been raised to believe that the mayor is the one who's supposed to protect them. That Lina and Doon start from this point in their deductions here speaks to how youthful and naïve they still are, especially since they do ultimately decide to tell the guard force. They don't understand that Mayor Cole likely has people working with and for him—the guards—who are aware of what he's doing, and who have no reason to stop supporting him and arrest him. Though two children who believe they live in an ideal society cannot be faulted for not making this connection, it does make it clear that they still have a long way to go as they learn about human nature and come of age.

**Chapter 12 Quotes**

☞ “That's the solution he keeps telling us about. It's a solution for *him*, not the rest of us. He gets everything he needs, and we get the leftovers! He doesn't care about the city. All he cares about is his fat stomach!”

**Related Characters:** Doon Harrow (speaker), Mayor Cole, Lina Mayfleet

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 158-59

**Explanation and Analysis**


After discovering Mayor Cole's room of food, clothes, and light bulbs, Doon shares his discovery with Lina and angrily takes offense to Mayor Cole's selfishness. For Doon, a lot of the issue here is that he's been raised to believe that the mayor is supposed to look out for him. Mayor Cole's actions, however, make it clear to Doon that this mayor, at least, has no intention of doing that. The other half of the issue is that Mayor Cole's corruption flies in the face of everything Ember stands for as a community standing together against



☝☝ “My grandmother died.”

“Oh!” Doon’s face fell. “That’s so sad,” he said. “I’m sorry.” His sympathy made tears spring to Lina’s eyes. Doon looked startled for a moment, and then he took a step toward her and wrapped his arms around her. He gave her a squeeze so quick and tight that it made her cough, and then it made her laugh. She realized all at once that Doon [...] was the person she knew better than anyone now. He was her best friend.

**Related Characters:** Lina Mayfleet, Doon Harrow (speaker), Granny

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 161

### Explanation and Analysis

When Lina shares with Doon that Granny died, Doon’s sympathy shows Lina that Doon is her best friend. Prior to this, Lina told her friend Lizzie about Granny’s death, and Lizzie’s reaction was largely distracted and unsympathetic. Though Lina has likely told others aside from Lizzie by this point, it’s telling that Doon’s reaction is so meaningful for her—it suggests that, possibly, nobody else has reacted quite so kindly to the bad news. If true, this could point to the possibility that the sense of community in Ember is breaking down as a result of everyone’s mounting fears and desperation.


Realizing that Doon is her best friend, meanwhile, shows Lina that even if she did lose an important family member, she can get support from people other than family. Doon can support her through this difficult time, as can Lina’s kindly neighbor Mrs. Murdo. In this way, this moment again proves to Lina that she’s not alone.

## Chapter 13 Quotes

☝☝ “There is so much darkness in Ember, Lina. It’s not just outside, it’s inside us, too. Everyone has some darkness inside. It’s like a hungry creature. It wants and wants and *wants* with a terrible power. And the more you give it, the bigger and hungrier it gets.”

**Related Characters:** Clary Laine (speaker), Mayor Cole, Lina Mayfleet

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 168

### Explanation and Analysis

After Lina tells Clary about Mayor Cole’s corruption, Clary sighs and tells Lina that Ember is filled with darkness. In Clary’s description, the darkness that’s in humans is a metaphor for greed and selfishness. Notice that Clary implies that the darkness is something present in all people, not just “bad guys” like Mayor Cole. This begins to make the case that experiencing greed, selfishness, or other bad emotions isn’t the problem. The problem is what a person chooses to do with these urges—specifically, problems arise when people act like Mayor Cole give into their greed rather than focusing on how to help everyone in a society. Using Clary’s framework, it’s easy to see that Lina and Mayor Cole share similarities: both want something that other people didn’t have, whether that’s food, light bulbs, or colored pencils. While Lina, however, focused on the feelings of shame and guilt she connects to her colored pencils after losing Poppy in the blackout (which leads Lina to make decisions that benefit the community), Mayor Cole instead focuses on the hunger and desire he feels when faced with items no one else has.

## Chapter 14 Quotes

☝☝ 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?

**Related Characters:** Lina Mayfleet (speaker), Mayor Cole

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 178-79

### Explanation and Analysis



During a slow time at work, Lina thinks about Mayor Cole’s corruption and realizes that material possessions aren’t going to help anyone in Ember. This is a major turning point for Lina, as this is one of the clearest situations in which she acknowledges that not all is well and good in Ember, as she once thought. Furthermore, the dwindling stores aren’t even Ember’s biggest problem—the problems are huge, structural issues with the electrical and water systems, and if Emberites can’t figure out how to set those systems right, all the peaches and light bulbs in the world won’t save them. What will save people, the novel suggests, is remembering that they’re part of a community. Working for the good of

everyone not only leads to kinder, more compassionate people—it also allows them to work together to solve problems, like those that plague Ember, and do so far more successfully than individuals could alone.

## Chapter 15 Quotes

☝☝ For a moment, the fear he'd felt when he saw the guards was replaced by rage. The familiar hot wave rose in him, and he wanted to grab a handful of his father's nails or pot shards and throw them against the wall. But all at once he remembered: if the guards were after him, they'd be after Lina, too. He had to warn her. He dashed down the stairs, his anger turning into power for his running feet.

**Related Characters:** Lina Mayfleet, Doon Harrow

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 201

### Explanation and Analysis

In the moments after Doon sees guards asking for him (they want to arrest him for spreading “rumors” about Mayor Cole’s corruption that, in actuality, are true), he experiences a wave of anger. Important here is the fact that, for the first time, Doon is able to take his anger and turn it into something healthier and more useful. Prior to this moment, anger has made Doon do things he regrets, like throwing things and accidentally hitting his father, or smashing an interesting bug he found in the Pipeworks. In those situations, Doon allowed his anger to isolate him, and in turn, wasn’t able to do anything that helps others. In this instance, however, Doon manages to focus on Lina and their friendship, which helps him control his anger and transform it into something far more powerful. When he’s able to do this by thinking about Lina and their friendship, it begins to show that friendship is one of the most powerful forces at work in the novel. It helps Doon be a better person and do more good in the world by going to save Lina from wrongful persecution.

## Chapter 18 Quotes

☝☝ “Because that’s what I suddenly realized on the roof of the Gathering Hall, Doon. I’d been thinking before that I *had* to leave Poppy because she’d be safe with Mrs. Murdo. But when the lights went out, I suddenly knew: There *is* no safety in Ember. Not for long. Not for anyone. I couldn’t leave her behind. Whatever happens to us now, it’s better than what’s going to happen there.”

**Related Characters:** Lina Mayfleet (speaker), Mrs. Murdo, Poppy Mayfleet, Doon Harrow

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 247

### Explanation and Analysis

After their journey down the river, Lina shares her reasons for bringing Poppy with her with Doon. This is one of Lina’s most important coming of age moments, as she realizes that she must reject everything she’s been taught—and learn to think for herself—if she wants to save herself and her community. The idea that there’s no safety in Ember shows that Lina no longer believes what authority figures, or *The Book of the City of Ember*, say about endless stores. She’s seen for herself that the dominant narrative isn’t true and, given what she’s learned over the course of the novel, she’s now comfortable trusting what she’s learned firsthand over what others tell her is true. Coming of age in this moment also means sharing what she’s learned with others, specifically Poppy. While Poppy isn’t old enough to be thinking about censorship herself, Lina is still setting an example for her—and for other adults or children in caregiver roles in her community—of how to pass these critical thinking skills on to others.

## Chapter 20 Quotes

☝☝ *Disaster seems very close. Everything will be all right, they tell us, but only a few people believe them. Why, if it’s going to be all right, do we see it getting worse every day?*  
*And of course this plan is proof that they think the world is doomed.*

**Related Characters:** The Woman (speaker), The Builders, Doon Harrow, Lina Mayfleet

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 259

### Explanation and Analysis

Lina and Doon find the journal of a woman who was one of Ember’s original residents. In the journal, which contains the woman’s account of traveling underground to populate Ember, she writes about the atmosphere of fear and danger she sees developing aboveground. There are authority figures—“they” who say everything will be all right—but most people, including this woman, don’t believe them. This suggests that, at the time this was written, people were undergoing a similar shift as has happened in Ember over

the course of the novel. People in this woman's life are learning to judge for themselves what they see happening, gather evidence, and come to their own conclusions—just as Lina and Doon have gradually learned to do.

The plan that the woman refers to is the plan for Ember, a place designed to preserve human life on Earth no matter what disaster strikes. The similarities between the woman's account and Lina's own lived experience help Lina and Doon

to understand their own history (that they came from aboveground) as well as to understand that situations like are happening in Ember have happened many times throughout history. In all situations, it's necessary for ordinary citizens, like this woman, Lina, and Doon, to do their own research, recognize censorship attempts, and make decisions from there.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## THE INSTRUCTIONS

As the city of Ember is being built, the head Builder sits down with his assistant and discuss that the city's future residents can't leave for at least 200 years. The chief builder tells his assistant that they can't know for sure that it'll be long enough, but they'll leave instructions for how to leave the city with the mayor in a box with a timed lock. The box will open at the appointed time. They decide not to tell the mayor what's in the box, just to keep the box safe until it opens. Though the assistant is concerned the plan won't work, the head builder insists that nothing about this endeavor is certain—there might not be a world for people to return to, anyway.

Things go as planned for many years and the mayors pass the box on to their successors. The seventh mayor, however, is dishonorable. When he comes down with the coughing sickness, he attacks the box, believing it contains a secret to the cure. He only manages to dent it and dies before he can pass it on. The box ends up in the back of a closet where it sits forgotten. One day, the box clicks open.

*This conversation between these two Builders lets the reader in on the fact that Ember—the city they're talking about—was created for a reason. However, it's extremely important to keep this reason secret, which introduces the idea that censorship is an intrinsic part of Ember, whether future generations realize it or not. In this case, however, it seems that censorship isn't a bad thing since it's implied that those living in Ember are being protected from a dangerous outside world.*



*The first six honorable mayors show that, for the most part, those in charge of caring for Ember are good people who believe in the importance of doing the right thing. However, the consequence of the seventh mayor's greed is that future mayors aren't given the important instructions about the box.*



## CHAPTER 1

In Ember, the sky is always dark. Flood lamps mounted on buildings and poles illuminate the streets while they're on; when they're off between nine p.m. and six a.m., Ember is too dark to see anything. Sometimes, the lights go off in the middle of the day, as Ember is an old city and everything is in disrepair. People don't like to think about the possibility that one day, the lights will go out forever. Most of the time, life proceeds as usual: adults work and children, until they turn 12, go to school. On the final day of their last year of school, Assignment Day, students receive job assignments. Lina, a graduating student, twirls her hair and plucks at stray threads on her worn cape and ragged socks. She waits for the class of year 241 to receive their assignments.

*There are a lot of indicators here that not all is fine in Ember. While life proceeds as usual for the most part, the descriptions of Lina's clothes show that they're not new or in good condition by any means, just like the electrical system and everything else in the city. Though Lina still manages to be hopeful about her future, the fact that the narrator says that people don't like to think about the lights going off forever—a possibility that seems likely—suggests that Lina might not have much of a future in Ember without some major changes.*



A few desks away from Lina sits Doon Harrow. Doon's corduroy jacket is so worn that its ridges are gone. Both Lina and Doon hope urgently, their eyes closed. Lina imagines herself as a messenger as she silently says goodbye to everything in the classroom and pays little attention to Miss Thorn's goodbye speech. The class waits silently for the mayor to arrive as Miss Thorn pulls her worn shawl around her shoulders. Mayor Cole arrives, looking annoyed. From the front of the room, he scans the students and says that it's Assignment Day, the day when education stops and students begin to serve the city.

Mayor Cole pulls out a small bag and reminds students of the procedure: the job students draw today will be theirs for three years, at which point they'll be evaluated, and potentially reassigned. He insists that it's extremely important that every job in Ember gets done. Lina's friend Lizzie Bisco volunteers to go first and draws a slip of paper that reads, "Supply Depot clerk." Lizzie looks crestfallen—being a clerk is dull, as it consists entirely of keeping records of what goes in and out of Ember's storerooms. Another boy chooses the job of electrician's helper, while a girl gets the job of building repair assistant. The narrator explains that the jobs offered change every year depending on need. Some years there are mostly bad jobs like Pipeworks laborer, trash sifter, and mold scraper, but Ember always needs electrician's helpers.

Lina steps up next and chooses a slip. She reads her assignment in a whisper: Pipeworks laborer. She tries not to cry as she returns to her desk. Pipeworks laborers work far belowground, in Ember's water and sewer pipes. It's cold and dangerous work, and someone sometimes falls into the underground river and disappears. Lina thinks that anything would've been better; being a Pipeworks laborer makes her feel like she's going to be buried alive.

Doon is the last to choose. He selects "messenger" and with a scowl, crumples and throws the paper. Mayor Cole angrily sends Doon to his seat and insists that students should be glad to work for the city, as Ember will only prosper if everyone does their best. Doon blurts that Ember isn't prospering. He talks over the mayor and says that Ember is plagued by blackouts and supply shortages, and something awful will happen if no one does anything. Lina thinks Doon is overreacting, like usual, as Miss Thorn calms Doon and the mayor bids the class goodbye.

*When the narrator describes Doon's jacket and Miss Thorn's shawl as extremely worn, just like Lina's clothes, it gets rid of the possibility that Lina is just the least well-off kid in her class—wearing tired, worn clothing is commonplace in Ember. The beginning of Mayor Cole's speech sets up the idea that serving one's community is a guiding principle in Ember, showing that a sense of community and togetherness is a part of the city's ethos.*



*The fact that there are so-called "bad jobs" in Ember is a clue that despite Ember's community oriented, more egalitarian ideals, there is still a hierarchy among residents based on what jobs they perform. This, in turn, gives way to the rise of social and economic classes. However, it's important to recognize that these jobs are still essential if Ember is going to keep functioning. Respect for all roles is an element of the community spirit of Ember that, in some cases, gets corrupted.*



*Here, Lina is forced to reckon with the emotionally difficult consequences of living in such a community-oriented place: it's very possible that, to serve her community, she's going to have to do work she doesn't like or that scares her. The dangerous river begins to suggest that Ember's residents are afraid of and somewhat disconnected from the natural world.*



*Though Doon comes off as somewhat idealistic here, the book's descriptions of life in Ember so far suggest that he has a point. When Lina thinks Doon is overreacting, it shows that she, thus far, has bought into everything people—like Mayor Cole—have said about how the city is prospering, despite clear evidence to the contrary. Doon thus shows that he's already better able to think for himself.*



Lina and Lizzie walk outside together, but Lizzie scurries off. Lina looks around Harken Square and thinks that this is where she wants to be, in the middle of things aboveground. Doon comes up behind Lina and asks to trade jobs—he wants to do something useful, not carry gossip. Lina is flabbergasted. Doon says he wanted to be an electrician’s helper, but Pipeworks worker was his second choice. He wants to see the generator, which mysteriously makes electricity from the **river**. Lina is thrilled to trade—she doesn’t think being a messenger is useless, and the job will be perfect for her since she loves to run. Lina runs the whole way home.

*Both Lina and Doon show here that they hold idealistic views about Ember: Lina believes, uncritically, that being a messenger aboveground is the most useful thing, while Doon is convinced that the only way to do good in his world is to work in the Pipeworks and learn about the generator. Both jobs, it should be noted, are important—communication is necessary to maintain a sense of community, while maintaining the water systems is necessary for people to keep living in Ember comfortably.*



## CHAPTER 2

Lina takes the fastest route home, enjoying the sight of the familiar shops with apartments above. She dashes around piles of unfixable appliances and broken furniture, but she slows on Hafter Street, which has three floodlights that are out. Lina flashes on the rumor that some kinds of light bulbs are completely gone and worries what might happen if all the lights outside went out. She briefly wonders if Doon is right about the state of things, but she reaches a brightly lit street and speeds up again, feeling thankful for Doon.

*Even if Lina is idealistic and uncritical about her city, she demonstrates as she runs through Hafter Street that she does have the capacity to consider that what she’s been told about Ember’s prosperity might not be correct. The obstacles in her way suggest again that Ember is in disrepair and is falling apart—and Doon’s insistence that there are supply shortages raises the question of how, or if, people can replace their appliances.*



Years ago, Lina and Doon were good friends. They did everything together until their fourth year of school, when kids would challenge each other to various feats of strength and agility. Lina climbed several feet up a light pole and others tried to follow her lead. When it was Doon’s turn to try, he declared that he was going to climb to the top. He got higher than Lina, but slipped and fell with his legs sticking straight up. Lina and the other kids laughed, but Doon didn’t think it was funny. He shouted at Lina and was scolded by the principal for his temper. After that, Lina and Doon stopped being friends, but Lina wonders if they could rekindle their friendship now. She’d like to ask him about the Pipeworks.

*Providing some nuance here about Lina and Doon’s relationship makes the case that though Ember prizes community spirit, it’s not a utopia—people do have their differences and not everyone likes each other. Being able to recognize that not everyone in Ember is without faults primes Lina to later recognize corruption in others. Wanting to rekindle a friendship with Doon, meanwhile, shows that Lina is naturally generous and doesn’t want to make enemies, per se.*



Lina passes the head gardener, Clary, and shouts that she’s a messenger. She finally reaches Granny’s yarn shop, where Granny unwinds unwearable clothing so people can weave, knit, and sew new clothes. The shop is in disarray, as Granny spends most of her time dozing. Lina bursts in and shouts that she’s a messenger. Granny reminds Lina that she’s a student until she remembers that it was Assignment Day. Poppy, Lina’s baby sister, toddles out from behind the counter and gleefully dances with Lina. Lina loves Poppy so much it hurts, as she and Granny are all the family she has. Lina’s father died two years ago of the coughing sickness, while Lina’s mother died giving birth to Poppy. She desperately misses her parents.

*The fact that Granny initially believes that Lina is still a student indicates that she is struggling some with memory. In fact, the narrator’s description of Granny’s shop suggests that she is getting old in all ways, which means that orphaned Lina is probably having to care for herself in many regards. That Granny is getting her yarn from old clothes, meanwhile, shows again that Ember is running low on new supplies.*



Lina takes Poppy upstairs to the apartment. It's small, but there's enough stuff in it to fill 20 apartments. The floor is covered with rugs and carpets, while the couch is piled so high with blankets and pillows that no one can sit on it. Tables are cluttered with odds and ends, and hooks on the walls and ceiling hold all manner of clothing. On the walls are pretty things, like a label from a can of peaches and several of Lina's drawings of an imaginary city that looks like Ember, but is taller and brighter. Lina draws this fictional place often and almost believes it's real, even though *The Book of the City of Ember* teaches that the Builders built Ember and it's the only light in the whole world.

Lina has been to the edge of Ember and looked into the Unknown Regions, which are dark enough to make her believe the book. Nobody has gone into them and returned or arrived from elsewhere, but Lina still thinks about her imaginary city and wishes it were real. In the kitchen, Lina fetches a can of Baby Drink and a jar of boiled carrots for Poppy. She feeds Poppy and assures her that everything will be okay.

The next morning, Lina reports to the messengers' station and greets the captain, Allis Fleery. Captain Fleery hands Lina her red messenger jacket and reminds Lina of the rules: a messenger must repeat messages back to customers to make sure they're correct, must always wear their jacket, and must go as fast as possible. They must also only deliver messages to the intended recipient. With a smile, Captain Fleery sends Lina to her station. Lina first carries a message for old Natty Prine. On her way back to her station, Lina passes a group of singing Believers. She's not sure what they believe in, but whatever it is makes them smile.

Then, Lina carries a message for Mrs. Polster, the teacher of the fourth-year class. Mrs. Polster is a fanatic about teaching children right from wrong. The message reads that Mrs. Polster is disappointed in the recipient after the recipient engaged in "disreputable activities." Though Lina finds the message perplexing, she cares less about the messages than about the places she gets to see. She learns that the mender sleeps on her couch as her bed is piled high with mending work, while Dr. Tower has a skeleton hanging in her living room. Being a messenger makes Lina feel ready to burst with love for her city.

*All the stuff in Lina's apartment is likely a product of the fact that there's not a lot of new things in Ember due to a lack of resources—it's possible that there are no more new rugs or pillows being made, for instance. What Lina says about The Book of the City of Ember indicates again that censorship is an essential part of Ember—from the first chapter, the reader knows that Ember isn't the only place that exists (though, it's impossible to know if there's anything left aboveground in terms of civilization).*



*Wanting her imaginary city to be real shows that Lina is on the cusp of coming of age: she wants there to be more in the world, and she's beginning to feel curious about what else might be out there. This questioning is a normal part of growing up, while feeding Poppy suggests that Lina is taking on adult responsibilities when it comes to caring for her sister.*



*For Lina, receiving the red messenger jacket in particular is proof that she's now an adult, contributing member of Ember—something that makes her feel extremely proud and useful. This speaks again to Lina's sense of community engagement; getting to see everything there is to see in the city through the course of her work is a way for her to celebrate it—even if, as with the Believers, she doesn't entirely understand what she sees.*



*Though the novel never gives any real indication of what exactly Mrs. Polster is teaching kids in terms of right and wrong, it's important to keep in mind that in such a small, insular community as Ember, it's essential that everyone follow the rules—there's nowhere else to go, and since Ember is supposedly the only place in the world, they can't bring in new resources or leadership to improve things either.*



Late in the afternoon, an odd-looking young man who walks with a lurch flags Lina down. He has a message for Mayor Cole, which says that there's a delivery at eight from Looper. Lina races to the Gathering Hall, where the mayor has his offices. She approaches the guard's desk. The guard, Barton Snode, is a big man with a surprisingly tiny head. He leads Lina to the Reception Room to wait for the mayor to return from business in the basement. He seems nervous and Lina wonders if he's new at his job. Lina looks around the once-impressive room and flips through the open copy of *The Book of the City of Ember* on the table. She reads that thanks to the Builders, the people of Ember will have enough but no luxuries, and the timekeeper must faithfully wind the clock and post the date in the square.

Not all timekeepers have been as faithful as the book would have one believe; Lina knows of ones who would forget to change the date sign or even wind the clock, resulting in very long days or nights. It's impossible to know because of this how long it's been since Ember was built, but Lina thinks it doesn't matter as long as the lights go on and off on a somewhat reliable schedule. Lina then studies the pictures of all of Ember's mayors. She doesn't like the look of the seventh mayor, an ancestor of hers.

Wondering if they forgot her, Lina opens the door and takes the stairs up. She finds the door to the roof and steps to the edge. People notice Lina, so she laughs and dances. It makes people laugh, but a guard named Redge Stabmark grabs Lina. Lina innocently says that she was just curious, but Redge snaps that curiosity leads to trouble. He escorts Lina downstairs, where they find Mayor Cole looking angry and Barton Snode looking flustered. Mayor Cole scolds Lina, but wants to hear her message before deciding whether to put her in the Prison Room. After hearing it, he smiles and sends her away. Doon sees Lina run out of the Gathering Hall. He's on his way home from his first day at work. Doon is tired, wet, and wants to talk to Lina—but he doesn't want to answer questions, so he stays silent.

*Lina's thought that Barton Snode might be new at his job again shows that she's perceptive and compassionate, qualities that are essential when living in a community like Ember. What she reads in *The Book of the City of Ember* this time indicates that life in Ember is tightly regimented (as evidenced by the need to faithfully keep time) and that it's designed to be as egalitarian as possible (people have enough, but no luxuries). Keep in mind, however, that though these guidelines are in the book—and therefore, for Lina, true—this doesn't mean that they're accurate in practice.*



*This confirms that not everything in Ember has gone according to plan, but notice how Lina is generally forgiving of past timekeepers' mistakes. She's forgiving because she figures that being forgetful doesn't mean that someone is a bad person, and that of all things, timekeeping doesn't matter much. The fact that the reader knows that the box containing the instructions is open, however, shows that Lina is wrong about this.*



*Redge's remark that curiosity leads to trouble encapsulates the way that he, the mayor, and other authority figures try to maintain power. If no one is curious enough to consider the possibility that not everything is well in Ember, Mayor Cole will never have to admit that Doon is right in suspecting that there are lots of things wrong in Ember. Mayor Cole's reaction to Lina's message, as well as his willingness to put a 12-year-old in prison, are indicators that he's a nefarious individual who rules Ember with an iron fist. Unlike Lina, he doesn't accept that curiosity or forgetfulness are normal parts of being human.*





## CHAPTER 3

Earlier that morning, Doon arrived at the Pipeworks, excited to do useful, important work. He finds a room filled with people putting on boots and slickers. The Pipeworks director, Lister Munk, gives him size medium boots to wear. The boots are worn and cracked. Doon also gets a tool belt, and then Lister assigns Doon to work with a young woman named Arlin Froll. Without so much as a smile or a greeting, she leads Doon down a damp, worn staircase. Doon starts to hear a low roar and wonders if it's the generator, but when Arlin opens a door marked "Main Tunnel," he sees that it's the **river**. Like many in Ember, Doon has never seen the river and always imagined it looked like a horizontal sink faucet. The river, however, is huge, wide, and thunderous. It makes Doon's heart stop.

Doon and Arlin stand on a six-foot wide path that runs parallel to the **river**. The river runs along the north side of Ember, and all the Pipeworks tunnels branch off the path to the south, under the city. Arlin leads Doon to the beginning of the river, where it bursts out of a chasm, and points to a big double door containing the generator room. She acts scandalized when Doon asks if they can go in. Then, Arlin leads him back down the path to where the river vanishes into the wall before leading him to Tunnel 97, where their job is. She shows him how to use his map to find his way around and warns him that it's easy to get lost. On the walk, Doon calculates that he's about 50 feet underground. The thought makes him nervous.

Doon and Arlin find their job: a spurt of water coming straight out of the wall. They fix it, but it takes the whole morning. Doon realizes that the city is in horrendous shape: the lights are failing, the pipes are leaking, they're about to run out of supplies, and no one is doing anything to fix these issues. When it's time for lunch, Arlin tells Doon to stay put while she eats with friends. Doon, however, finds his way back to the main tunnel and waits by the door to the generator room until someone comes out. He slips in before the door closes and almost falls over; the noise is earsplitting. The generator is a black machine two stories high, and people wearing earmuffs scurry around it. Doon catches the attention of one man and yells that he wants to learn, but the man glares at Doon.

*That Doon's boots are so cracked means they're not going to protect him from getting wet—another indicator that Doon is right, and not all in Ember is as it should be. Doon's reaction to seeing the river, and the explanation of what he thought it'd be like, drives home how disconnected Ember's residents are from the natural world. The river's size and strength impresses upon Doon that there's a lot he doesn't know about his world—though what he doesn't know is that the river is symbolic of a much larger, natural world that he doesn't even know exists.*



*Doon and Arlin's walk along the river shows clearly that the river comes from somewhere and continues on to somewhere, which raises the question of why no one has wondered about where the river starts or ends. Though it's impossible to know for sure that no one has ever wondered, it's likely that The Book of the City of Ember has been successful in convincing people that Ember is all there is in the world, meaning it's no use being curious about the river, since it doesn't matter.*



*Fixing leaky pipes, in Doon's opinion, isn't going to fix the bigger problem: that clearly, the Ember's entire infrastructure is breaking. Fixing pipes like this is a convenient way to make it look like they're doing something, but it doesn't address the larger problem. Disobeying Arlin and sneaking in to look at the generator shows again that Doon already knows how to think for himself and figure out how to answer questions that nobody else will answer for him.*



Doon stands and watches for a few minutes as people run between the generator and big bins of bolts, screws, and gears. He leaves after a few minutes, horrified. He's spent his entire life taking things apart and putting them back together again, and he's proud of what he's learned. He knows he doesn't understand electricity, though, and he thought that seeing the generator would solve this mystery for him—but now, he knows that was a foolish idea. Doon suspects that *no one* knows how the generator works, and that they're just trying to keep it from falling apart. Doon confirms this when, after work, he catches the man and asks about the generator. The man says he doesn't know how it works; he just knows the **river** makes it run. His job is just to keep it from breaking down.

The man says that he's been working on the generator for 20 years and it's always seemed fine, but now, it seems to break down every few minutes. With a wry smile, the man says it won't matter if the generator breaks down forever if they run out of light bulbs first. This is what's on Doon's mind as he sees Lina on the roof of the Gathering Hall, and he's angry that she seems so lighthearted when everything is dark and dire. Doon heads for the apartment he shares with his father, which is above his father's Small Items shop. It contains bits of things that might be useful someday, like nails, springs, doorknobs, and chunks of wood, and there are boxes of shop items in the apartment too. Doon goes upstairs without greeting his father and flops on the couch.

Doon feels stupid for thinking he could understand the generator after a few minutes, especially when others don't understand it after working on it for their whole lives. Doon thinks that he's always thought of himself as being smarter than other people, and he's always wanted to be the one to save Ember by figuring out the mystery of electricity. Doon's father has been telling him for his entire life that Doon is smart and will do something great, but now, Doon's job seems even more useless than being a messenger. He picks up a shoe heel and hurls it at the front door just as it opens, hitting his father in the ear. Doon's anger disappears instantly.

Doon apologizes and explains that he got angry. Doon's father asks about Doon's first day at work, and Doon tells him everything. With a sigh, Doon's father validates Doon's fears and sense of hopelessness, but he suggests that Doon has choices as to what to do with his job and what he learns. Doon's father suggests that the best thing Doon can do is pay attention, as then, he'll know things that no one else knows. Changing the subject, he asks about the **worm**.

*Again, what Doon discovers and what the man confirms about what people know about the generator and electricity shows that there's a great deal of censorship at work in Ember: if the Builders intended Ember's current residents to be actually fix the generator, they would've left something behind—whether a written document or just spoken knowledge passed down through generations—about what to do. The quip that the river makes the generator run is an answer that might shut down further, as-of-now unanswerable questions—but it's not a real answer.*



*The man's insistence that nothing about the generator matters if they run out of light bulbs first drives home for Doon the danger he and his fellow Emberites are in: stores of necessary items are dangerously low, and at this point, it's a race to find out what's going to plunge Ember into darkness forever. Note that Doon doesn't live with his mother and doesn't mention her at all; this suggests that, like Lina, Doon also lives in a fractured family unit and will have to suffer the consequences of this.*



*In a sense, Doon's job is useless—fixing the leaky pipes, again, won't do anything about the fact that the entire system is crumbling. This becomes a major coming-of-age moment for Doon, as he's forced to accept that his idealistic beliefs about how Ember functions and about his own intelligence were wildly misguided. It's not going to be simple for Doon to save the city; rather, if he's going to save Ember, he's going to have to think further outside the box and maturely accept his own limitations.*



*Even if Doon's family is small, the way that Doon's father talks to Doon shows that they still have a loving, supportive relationship. Doon's father is clearly doing everything he can to point Doon in the right direction by impressing upon him the importance of being curious about his world, no matter how Mayor Cole might feel on the matter.*



Doon goes and fetches a box from his room and he and Doon's father peer into it. It contains a small, green **worm** with stubby legs and some cabbage leaves. Doon has always loved bugs and keeps a notebook of drawings and observations of bugs he finds. Most, like moths and spiders, die within a few days of capture, but this worm seems to be thriving. Doon shares the observations he's made about the worm with his father, and his father suggests that Doon might find more interesting bugs in the Pipeworks. Doon agrees, but thinks that he can't just look for bugs when they are living in a state of emergency.

*The worm is clearly a caterpillar; that Doon calls it a worm shows again that he's disconnected from nature to the extent that he doesn't know the actual name of this creature (though this does imply that he knows what worms are). Doon's scientific notes show again that he's curious and methodical about gathering information, habits and qualities that will serve him well as he comes of age and tackles this emergency.*



## CHAPTER 4

A few weeks later, Lina comes home from work to find Granny pulling stuffing out of the couch. Confused, Granny says she's looking for something important that's lost, but she can't remember what that important thing is. Lina gently suggests they put the couch back together and asks where Poppy is. Granny is confused, but remembers that Poppy is in the shop. Lina is horrified and runs downstairs. Poppy sits, tangled in yarn, and cries when she sees Lina. Lina untangles Poppy and comforts her, though she's upset enough to tremble—forgetting about Poppy is dangerous. Granny has been forgetful before, but this is the first time she's forgotten Poppy altogether.

*This is a major turning point for Lina, as she must now accept that Granny cannot truly care for her and Poppy. This puts Lina in the situation of assuming an even more adult role than she was a few days ago, and Granny's inability to remember what she's even looking for suggests that Lina will also have to take on the work of caring for her ailing grandmother.*



Back upstairs, Granny sadly tells Lina that what she was looking for wasn't in the couch. Granny says that it was lost a long time ago, according to her father. Lina feels frustrated and impatient; Granny seems increasingly to only remember or care about things from long ago. Granny says that her grandfather, the seventh mayor, was talking about it before he died, but nobody knows what exactly he was talking about. Lina figures it was something unremarkable like a sock. The next morning, Lina stops in at the apartment of her neighbor, Mrs. Murdo. Mrs. Murdo is brisk but kind, and she has nothing to do since she had to close her paper and pencil shop. Lina tells her about Granny's forgetfulness and asks her to check on Granny during the day. Mrs. Murdo agrees.

*When Lina approaches Mrs. Murdo for help, it indicates that Lina has learned well to lean into Ember's spirit of community and togetherness, something that manifests here as being willing and able to ask for help when she knows she needs it. This is also a very mature thing to do, as it shows that Lina is aware that she cannot properly look after Granny and Poppy while also holding down a job and being a kid. Taking this mature step, in this sense, also allows Lina to hold onto her childhood a bit longer, as it helps her share her adult responsibilities with someone else.*



Later, Lina carries a message from the owner of the vegetable market to Clary. Lina is happy to see Clary and be in the greenhouses, but it's sad too since her father worked there. There's nothing out by the greenhouses except the trash heaps. It used to be that no one went out there, but now guards watch the area and trash sifters sort through the rubble for anything that might be useful. Lina wonders if the job of trash sifter was created because Ember is really running out of everything. Beyond the trash heaps is only the Unknown Regions, where it's entirely dark.

*When Lina wonders about the reasoning behind the trash sifters' jobs, it indicates that she's continuing to mull over Doon's assertion that not all is well—and in addition, she's starting to make her own connections and observations about what's going on in her city. This habit will help her understand that her community spirit is valuable, but it's ultimately useless if she doesn't use it to help everyone in her community face their impending doom.*



Lina enters the first greenhouse. She looks up, almost expecting to see her father tinkering with the sprinklers. Lina's heart fills with love and warmth—she spent a lot of time here as a child and since her parents' deaths, working in the gardens has helped Lina forget her grief. Clary is working on a bed of carrots but smiles when she sees Lina. Lina relays the message asking for extra crates of cabbages and potatoes, but Clary says she can't. She leads Lina to a bed of potatoes. The plants' leaves are black, and Clary explains that the potatoes are runny and stinky. Most of the potatoes are infected with a new disease. Lina is worried; potatoes are an important staple food.

Lina and Clary chat for a while, and then Lina gets up to go. Just outside of the greenhouse, however, they hear sobbing and wailing getting closer. Clary sends Lina away and refuses to explain anything, so Lina ducks behind a toolshed and watches a man stumble and fall when he trips over a hose. Lina recognizes the man as Sadge Merrall, a Supply Depot clerk. Clary helps Sadge up and leads him toward the greenhouse, but she struggles to open the door. Lina opens it for them. Sadge talks about knowing that it'd be dark, and how walking into the dark is like walking into a wall. He says he fell and realized that there could be anything out there, from deep pits to huge rats. He got so scared he ran all the way back to Ember.

Lina asks what Sadge was looking for. Sadge says he was looking for something to help them, like stairs to somewhere else or more supplies. He found nothing and says it's impossible to be successful without a light. Sadge excuses himself and leaves. Lina is curious, but not afraid. Several people have tried to go into the Unknown Regions, and Lina herself wonders if there's a tunnel out there that leads to the city in her dreams. She thinks it'd just take the courage to keep walking away from Ember, but that's a tall order given that there's no such thing as a moveable light. Many people have tried to light sticks on fire with their stoves, but the sticks don't last long. Lina and Clary watch as guards at the trash heaps scold and arrest Sadge for no reason. Clary says the guards need something to do.

Clary says that Sadge is the fourth one this year to try to penetrate the Unknown Regions. She tells Lina that she's pretty sure there's nothing out there, but she isn't sure if Ember is really the only light in the world. Clary pulls a bean **seed** out of her pocket. Rhetorically, she asks how the seed knows how to turn into a bean plant. She says that it has life in it, but nobody knows what life is or where it comes from. Lamps come alive because electricity and cords connect them to the generator—which Clary knows nothing about—but humans and plants have whatever makes them alive *inside* of them.

*The existence of the greenhouses indicates that Ember's residents aren't entirely cut off from the natural world, but they interact with it in a decidedly human-controlled way. The potatoes' disease, however, especially combined with Clary's concern, makes it clear that there are major limitations to being so cut off. In this case, because the Builders' censorship is so successful, Clary doesn't know what's happening or how to stop it.*



*When Clary sends Lina away, it shows that at least in her eyes, Lina is a child who should be looked after and not exposed to potentially disturbing experiences like this. In this way, Clary shows herself to be an important mentor and trusted adult in Lina's life. The fact that Sadge went out in to the Unknown Regions is another clear indicator that things are dire in Ember, so people are becoming increasingly curious—and desperate to find solutions.*



*While it may seem odd to the reader, the fact that moveable lights don't exist in Ember was likely a very smart move on the part of the Builders—a moveable light would allow people the tools to be more curious about the world beyond Ember, which they probably cannot be if they're to remain in the city until the appointed time. Keeping this information, then, is a way for the Builders to protect Emberites—and possibly, all of humanity in the process. That the guards arrest Sadge for no reason implies that not everything in Ember's community is working as it should; people are becoming power hungry.*



*The acknowledgement that Sadge is the fourth to attempt leaving Ember drives home again that people—and not just Doon and Sadge—are desperate for more information. When Clary talks about the bean, she acknowledges that there are lots of things they don't know. Identifying what she doesn't know, however, means that Clary is curious about these things and is in a good position mentally to figure them out.*



Clary says that there's something at work they don't understand. They know that the Builders made the City, but where did the Builders come from—and who made the people of Ember? Clary doesn't know the answers to these questions, but moves as though to go back to work. Lina tells Clary about the sparkling, bright city in her mind and says she's certain it's real. She doesn't know where it is, but she wonders if there's a door somewhere that leads to it. Clary isn't sure about this, but she plants the **seed** in a pot and gives it to Lina. She says that somehow the seed is a clue, since it has life inside. Lina wants to hug Clary in thanks, but doesn't want to embarrass her.

*The seed in general is a symbol for Lina's progression from being literally and figuratively in the dark about what's going on in her city, to understanding everything about it. At this point, Lina is like the seemingly lifeless seed: she's full of potential to know more, but she hasn't had enough information (water or sunlight) to figure it out (and sprout) yet. That Clary is asking these questions in the first place shows that she doesn't believe The Book of the City of Ember is the final word; she, like Doon, is thinking critically.*



## CHAPTER 5

Granny's mind seems to get muddier by the day. Lina often comes home to find Granny rifling through closets or digging under mattresses, though she still can't remember what she's looking for. Mrs. Murdo starts spending lots of time in Lina's apartment. This annoys Granny, but Lina likes having Mrs. Murdo around. Even though Mrs. Murdo is nothing like Lina's mother, she feels like having a mother around since she makes sure everyone eats and takes their vitamins, and everything is tidy when Lina gets home. Her presence means that Lina gets to relax.

*Granny's decline means that more and more, Lina has to take care of herself. Mrs. Murdo's willingness to step in speaks to the culture of caring and compassion in Ember, as there's no indication that she's unwilling to do this or sore about being asked. Rather, it's just what should be done to preserve harmony in Ember. This makes the case that in some places, at least, Ember's community spirit is still going strong.*



Every week, Lina and the other workers under age 15 get Thursday off. One Thursday, while Lina is in line at the market, she overhears two people talking about how one shop was all out of new paint, but apparently still had **colored pencils**. Lina's heart leaps. She used to have several, but she used them until they were stubs. She'd like more for her drawings of the imaginary city, but she knows that her money would be better spent on a new coat for Granny. Lina tells herself that Granny seldom goes out and so doesn't really need a new coat—and it's possible she could buy a coat *and* pencils. She bundles Poppy up to go out in search of colored pencils.

*Like most people, Lina isn't immune from wanting things like colored pencils. This starts to show that wanting things and possibly, being a little greedy and selfish about those desires, doesn't make someone a bad person. Lina still hasn't forgotten that she has other responsibilities to Granny and to Poppy, which shows that she's still thinking about the health of her family. It's also worth keeping in mind that Lina is a child still in terms of development; wanting something like this is especially normal for a kid her age.*



Lina and Poppy pass the laundry stations, where laundry employees stir clothes in washing machines. The washing machines used to stir themselves, but not anymore. The other streets are alive with people, making Lina feel happy, but she stops when she sees Sadge Merrall shouting. He shouts that he's been to the Unknown Regions, and that there's nothing there but darkness, monsters, and holes. Several people step up and lead him away. A few blocks away, Lina passes a group of Believers singing and finally, comes to an unmarked shop.

*Sadge Merrall's behavior begins to suggest that the desperation that plagues Ember is dangerous. This shows how desperation—which, Lina will learn, exists in part because other people are taking things for themselves—can begin to dissolve Ember's spirit of community and turn people against one another.*



Lina recognizes the shopkeeper: it's Looper, the man who gave her the message for Mayor Cole on her first day of work. Poppy starts to wail as Lina asks if he has **colored pencils**. Lina puts Poppy down and Looper says that he has them sometimes, but they're expensive. He finally goes into the back room and returns carrying a small box. Inside are a dozen brand-new colored pencils. Lina asks the price, but Looper suggests it's too much for Lina. The pencils each cost \$5. Lina is shocked, since coats cost about \$7. She says it's too much, but then asks to see the pencils again and announces she'll buy two. She reasons she can buy Granny a coat next month and notices that she feels hungry.

Looper makes impatient noises as Lina selects the colors she wants. She decides on blue and green, pays for the **colored pencils**, and turns around. She realizes that Poppy is gone. Looper shrugs indifferently and Lina races outside, calls for Poppy, and asks people if they've seen a toddler. No one has. Lina starts to run toward the populated square when suddenly, the lights go out. She stands still and thinks of Poppy, alone in the dark. Lina begins to feel her way forward until she hits a wall and realizes that the map in her mind is jumbled. She feels like she's suffocating and can't call out for Poppy. Lina thinks that she only lost Poppy because she was greedily caught up in colored pencils.

Lina suddenly wonders if she's moving away from Poppy and feels ready to cry. She wills the lights to come back on and finally, they do. Lina leaps up and resumes asking people if they've seen a toddler, but everyone is in a hurry to get home to safety in case the lights go off again. An old woman scolds Lina for losing Poppy, but another person leads Lina to a shop. Someone leads Poppy to the door and Lina scoops up her sister and comforts her.

When Lina looks up, she sees that Poppy's rescuer was Doon. She thanks Doon profusely and tries to ask him about the Pipeworks, but Doon isn't interested in talking. Lina takes Poppy home, puts her to bed, and doesn't tell Granny that Poppy got lost. When everyone else is asleep, Lina takes out the **colored pencils** and remembers the feeling of desire she felt in the store. Now she feels ashamed and like the pencils aren't so beautiful anymore.

*The way that Looper talks to Lina is specifically calculated to make her feel first as though she has to prove that she has enough to be able to buy the pencils, and then makes her feel off balance and insecure about purchasing them. These techniques increase Lina's sense of desperation—that feeling of hunger—and means that Lina feels like she has to make a decision about the pencils right now. As Looper's manipulation works, Lina becomes more selfish and greedy.*



*Again, Looper's impatient noises are another tactic to make Lina feel rushed and desperate. When Poppy disappears, Lina is forced to reckon with the fact that if she focuses too much on her own desires, it will naturally take her attention away from the things that matter more—in this case, her family and specifically Poppy's safety. While this sequence of events is coincidental, it does impress upon Lina that there can be all sorts of unintended consequences for those she loves if she focuses only on herself.*



*The blackout incites feelings of fear and desperation in everyone else in Ember, making it even harder for Lina to do the right thing and locate Poppy. This again shows how desperation (and, behind the scenes, authority figures' corruption and inaction which leads to the blackouts) begins to dissolve feelings of safety and community among Emberites.*



*Though it's heartbreaking that Lina now feels bad about her colored pencils, this experience taught her an important lesson about the consequences of being selfish. While sad and uncomfortable, Lina's shame over her purchase contributes to her coming of age as she becomes a mature, responsible adult.*



## CHAPTER 6

People usually chat about blackouts, but everyone is strangely silent the next day. Lina carries the same message 12 times that the outage lasted seven minutes, and people seem afraid. Lina understands that Doon was telling the truth on Assignment Day, and that Ember is in danger. The following day, notices appear summoning everyone to a meeting the following evening. Lina leaves Granny and Poppy at home when she goes to the meeting. Mayor Cole appears and through a damaged megaphone, speaks unintelligibly. People in the front of the crowd translate for those in the back, but others shout for more information. Mayor Cole's main point is that no one should panic, as they're finding solutions.

People begin to cry out, asking what the solutions are. Lina feels pressure behind her as people push forward, so she tries to get to the back of the crowd. She finally reaches the steps of the school in time to see guards ushering Mayor Cole back inside, away from the rocks and garbage people throw at him.

On the other side of the square, Doon and Doon's father escape the crowd too and head home the long way. Doon suggests that Mayor Cole is a fool and at least could tell people the truth, but Doon's father suggests that the mayor is in a tough spot. Doon admits that he's angry, but his father encourages him to not let his anger take over. Letting anger take over leads to unintended consequences. Doon scowls at the ground and thinks that his father can't understand, since it seems he doesn't even have a temper.

Lina doesn't think about Mayor Cole's speech as she races through town, catching snippets of angry, fearful conversation as she goes. She doesn't want to think about it; she just wants to make dinner and draw with her new **colored pencils**. When Lina bursts through the door, she trips and falls. The floor is covered in boxes and junk that Granny has thrown out of the closet. Granny announces that "it" will be in the closet as Lina asks where Poppy is. She finds Poppy behind the couch next to an open metal box. Lina inspects the box, which is dented and empty, but seems like it housed something valuable. Lina turns to Poppy and sees that Poppy is chewing and tearing a piece of paper. The paper is covered in perfect printing.

*The nonfunctional megaphone undermines Mayor Cole's speech, as it suggests that he doesn't care enough about what's going on to come up with a way to more effectively communicate with the people of Ember. As Lina's understanding of the fact that Ember isn't safe grows, she's able to identify those people (like Doon) who may have seemed crazy a while ago—but now seem to be telling the truth. In this way, Lina is learning to identify and prioritize people who think critically and speak truthfully.*



*Here, the fear that people feel about their fate turns into mob mentality—and that turns perfectly normal people into violent ones. Lina's need to escape, when these people might normally protect her, drives home this fact.*



*What Doon's father is getting at here is that Doon should be compassionate, even if he does understand that Mayor Cole is lying and doing nothing. This will allow him to think of Mayor Cole as still a member of the community they should all be caring for, rather than turning the mayor into an evil outsider.*



*Poppy has clearly been left unsupervised again in a potentially dangerous situation, another indicator that Granny isn't able to effectively care for her grandchildren anymore. That Lina must come to Poppy's rescue drives home that Lina is having to take on even more responsibility as Granny declines. Finding this interesting piece of paper will give Lina the opportunity to put her critical thinking skills to the test and demonstrate how she's come of age thus far.*



## CHAPTER 7

Lina is curious about the printing. It's not handwriting; it's the machine-made writing of the Builders. She gathers what she can from the floor and Poppy's mouth and carries the box and the scraps to her room. After Granny and Poppy are asleep that night, Lina spreads out the fragments and the one big piece, which looks lacey because of the holes. There's a list of numbers down one side of the big piece, and Lina arranges the rest the best she can. Though part of the title is missing, Lina can tell that the first word should be "Instructions." She doesn't know what the instructions are for, but she wonders if this is what Granny has been looking for. Lina decides she's determined to solve this mystery, no matter what.

First, Lina glues down all the pieces, but has to stop when the lights go out for the night. She spends all night wondering if the document contains instructions for fixing the electricity or making a moveable light. The next morning, Lina decides to ask Captain Fleery for help, since she'd know about official documents. Captain Fleery agrees to come home with Lina, but can't make sense of the nonsense words like "foll," "acks," and "rem." When she sees "small steel pan," Captain Fleery suggests it's a recipe and explains that the printing is just how people wrote in the old days. Lina says she believes it's important since it was locked up, but Captain Fleery doesn't seem to hear her.

When Lina says the writing is too different and wonders if it came from somewhere else, Captain Fleery straightens up and offers to put Lina on short days to manage her anxiety. Captain Fleery tells Lina to throw the paper away, stop thinking about it, and trust that help is coming. She says that the Builders will come soon and show them the way; she and the rest of the Believers know it in their hearts. Lina wonders if this belief is like the city Lina sees in her dreams—maybe Captain Fleery just *wants* it to be true. Captain Fleery invites Lina to come to a meeting of Believers with her, but Lina declines.

On her day off, Lina goes to see Lizzie at the Supply Depot. She notices that everyone in line for supplies seems snappy and impatient, more evidence that it's true supplies are running low. Near the front of the line, Lina hears many clerks tell people that they can have fewer things than they asked for, or none at all. She knows it wasn't always this way; when Granny was a child, students toured the storerooms. Granny saw the stores of pineapple, a delicacy that she had a few times but which Lina has never had. Lina thinks that if the rumors are true, it'd be terrifying for children to see the empty rooms, and this is why they stopped taking tours. When she gets to the front of the line, Lina asks Lizzie to meet her outside after work.

*As Lina realizes that this document is from the Builders and begins to put it together, she uses context clues—an essential part of thinking critically—to do so. This shows that even if Lina has, for the most part, bought into what the Builders say about Ember and hasn't made a habit of questioning what she's been taught, she still has the skills to think critically about things like this. Because of this, Lina is in a better place than most to solve this mystery.*



*When Lina's first course of action is to ask Captain Fleery for help, it shows that though Lina is thinking critically about what the document might be, she still leans heavily on what she's been taught to do when she doesn't know something—that is, turn to authority figures and adults she trusts. When Captain Fleery appears disinterested in the document, Lina begins to gather evidence that she shouldn't trust someone or take them at their word, just because they're an authority figure.*



*Lina's ability to see Captain Fleery's point of view and to consider how she views the Builders shows again that Lina is a compassionate and caring individual. Being able to consider another person's point of view like this, moreover, speaks to Lina's maturity and the fact that she understands that other people might think differently than she does. By extension, Lina might not always be right, either.*



*Again, when Lina is able to puzzle out exactly why students no longer tour the storerooms, it shows that she's continually getting better at synthesizing and making sense of information. Especially given what Lina is dealing with here (that is, evidence that not all is well, despite Mayor Cole's speeches saying things are fine and he's working on it) shows that Lina is now able to, at times, see through attempts by others to control and restrict information. That people are restricting the information in the first place says just as much as what's actually in the storerooms.*





After work, Lizzie finds Lina outside and agrees to go to Lina's apartment. The entire walk, Lizzie complains about her cramped hand and how rude people are to her. Lina interrupts and asks if it's true about the shortage of light bulbs. Lizzie says she's not sure; she doesn't get to see many reports, and only people like Mayor Cole and Farlo Batten, the prickly head of the storerooms, get to see the ones for light bulbs and vitamins. Lizzie stops talking long enough to greet Mrs. Murdo, then keeps going on about the blackout. Lizzie has always been tightly wound and a fast talker, but Lina notices she looks nervous and paler than usual.

As Lizzie starts into another explanation of how much she hates her job, Lina asks if there's anything she likes about it. Lizzie says there is, but it's a secret. This annoys Lina. Lina shows Lizzie the patched-together document. Though Lizzie agrees that it's strange, she starts talking about a coworker's lovely handwriting and continues to talk. Lina covers up the document, listens to Lizzie until Lizzie talks herself out, and then says goodbye. Later, Lina makes beet soup, but Poppy spills hers and Granny eats little, as she doesn't feel well. Lina cleans up quickly, does some mending, tries to put more of Granny's mess away, and finally sits down to study her document.

Lina still believes the document is important. She reasons that if it's so important, possibly to the future of Ember, then she should tell Mayor Cole about it. She doesn't really like or trust the mayor, and she knows she can't invite him to her apartment, but she thinks he should know. Lina writes him a note and leaves it on the guard's desk the next day, feeling as though she's done the right thing. Over the next few days, the messages Lina carries are all fearful. The mayor never returns Lina's message, so she moves forward with figuring it out herself. First, she copies the document onto the back of a can label. Then, she sits down to decipher it.

She can tell that the first word is "Instructions," but there are missing letters after and then the word "Egres." Lina wonders if Egres is someone's name and moves on. She works through the document and realizes that it's probably about something in the Pipeworks that has to do with the **river** and a door—hopefully, she thinks, a door out of Ember. Lina is thrilled, as she knows she can ask Doon about the Instructions. He's curious, serious, and knows something is wrong. He also saved Poppy during the blackout. Lina wonders why she and Doon stopped being friends and decides to find him tomorrow on their day off.

*The dynamic between Lizzie and Lina shows that as a friend, Lizzie is somewhat selfish and is mainly concerned with having someone to talk at—Lina gets few words in edgewise, which suggests that she's not going to get as much out of this conversation as Lizzie is. Meanwhile, what Lizzie says about her role at the Supply Depot shows that she's not very powerful in the grand scheme of things—she's just a grunt in the system.*



*Telling Lina that she has a secret is a power play on Lizzie's part; it allows her to make herself seem more knowledgeable and connected than Lina is. Meanwhile, Granny and Poppy's behavior at dinner and the work Lina does after the meal show again that Lina is pretty much on her own when it comes to keep the household running smoothly. Dealing with the document herself also shows that Lina is beginning to trust in her own abilities to figure things out, without the help of authority figures.*



*Just as when Lina decided to ask Captain Fleery for help, realizing that she needs to loop in Mayor Cole reflects Lina's understanding of how Ember works: the mayor is the most powerful person and is tasked with caring for the populace, so it's only natural that he'd be the one to save Ember using this document. When Lina ignores her intuition that the mayor is bad news, it shows how receiving only this heavily controlled information and education makes Lina less likely to trust herself.*



*Lina's aside that she's not sure why she and Doon stopped being friends is a mark of how much she's grown. Now that she's older and more mature, she recognizes that she and Doon parted ways because of a misunderstanding and childish behavior on both of their parts. It also shows that Lina is beginning to expand her community of trusted people and look for support and validation from peers, not just authority figures.*



## CHAPTER 8

Doon starts spending time wandering the Pipeworks. Most workers do their jobs quickly and then play cards, since the jobs themselves aren't hard. Since the blackout, however, Doon has vowed to not waste any time. He pays attention, like Doon's father said to do. Doon follows his map for the most part, but he leaves trails of objects for himself when he has to leave the map. Already, he's found several new bugs. A group of Pipeworks employees caught him with one and teased him a while ago. Doon angrily stood to yell at them, but stepped on his bug. He feels frustrated by his anger and the unintended consequences that accompany it.

Doon hopes to find something interesting, but he doesn't find much except for lost tools and someone's lunch. One day, he finds what he assumes is a supply closet. It's marked "No Entry," but Doon enters anyway. It's dark and there's nothing in it but a locked door on the far wall. Back in the tunnel, Doon discovers a hatch in the ceiling that he assumes goes to the storerooms. He wonders if the Builders used it to move easily from one place to another. On days when Doon works closer to the main tunnel, he walks along the **river**. He avoids the generator and instead spends time at the river's end. There are rocks there that almost look like there's writing on them, but nothing in the Pipeworks seems important.

Doon resigns himself to the fact that he's never going to understand electricity after seeing the generator. He takes apart an outlet at home, but gets a painful jolt when he does. Later, when he tries to wind wires to mimic what he saw in the wall, nothing happens and he realizes that whatever makes light comes *through* the wires—it's not the wires themselves. Not wanting to give up on a moveable light, on Thursday Doon goes to the library to look up fire. The Ember library, run by ancient Edward Pocket, contains two rooms, one of fiction and one of nonfiction. Everything in the library was written by an Ember resident and though things are arranged alphabetically, a book on moths, for instance, could either be under M, B for bugs, or F for flying things. Doon starts in the F section.

Fire usually only occurs in Ember when there's an accident, so it's rare. Doon knows that the trick will be to make fire last long enough to go into the Unknown Regions. He finally finds a book on fire, but the author clearly knows little and mostly talks about a fire that destroyed a building. With a sigh, Doon begins pulling volumes randomly off the shelves. This sometimes yields interesting results. Doon reads a book of phrases with unknown origins, such as "hogwash" and "all in the same boat." Annotations say that no one knows what a hog or a boat is. As Doon puts the book back, Lina walks in.

*Doon's mention that most Pipeworks employees do only what's required of them and then goof off suggests that a sense of complacency runs through Ember. Clearly, these employees feel no sense of urgency or alarm, even though they see evidence every day that Ember is crumbling around them. It's possible that one of the reasons Doon struggles so much with his temper is because he feels frustrated and alone, as he's seemingly the only one who cares.*



*Ignoring the sign at the tunnel's entrance shows clearly that Doon isn't going to accept things without verifying for himself first. This is one of the reasons why Doon is so hyper-aware of the fact that things in Ember are as bad as they are: he can see clearly that the way things are doesn't match up with how Emberites, or The Book of the City of Ember, talk about things. Doon's willingness to look at places not marked on the map is another indicator of this; he's clearly willing to question what people tell him is true and correct.*



*Even if Doon doesn't yet have enough information to figure out what electricity is, he's still discovering remarkably important things as he experiments with the wall outlet and with wires. His choice to turn to the library looks a lot like Lina's choice to turn to Captain Fleery and Lizzie for help with the document. The library represents the collective knowledge of Ember, and it functions as its own kind of authority figure—though one that's admittedly less reliable and harder to deal with than individual people are.*



*The fact that no one in Ember knows what hogs or boats are again speaks to how successful the Builders were in controlling the information that Ember has: these phrases still exist and are things people use, yet they're entirely devoid of their origins. In this sense, the words a lot like the citizens of Ember themselves, as Ember's citizens are also cut off from understanding their history.*



## CHAPTER 9

Doon hurries to Lina when he sees her. Lina asks him to come right away to look at her document, since it has to do with the Pipeworks. He agrees. At Lina's apartment, Lina is surprised to see the yarn shop closed. Upstairs, Mrs. Murdo explains that Granny doesn't feel well and is asleep. In Lina's room, she feels self-conscious as Doon looks around at the pot with the bean **seed**, her disorganized messes, and her drawings of the imaginary city on the wall. Doon asks about the pictures and shares that he draws pictures of insects he finds. Lina doesn't think this is interesting, but says nothing. She directs Doon's attention to the box on top of the document.

Doon inspects the box, but Lina motions to the paper underneath. She tells him that she thinks it's called "Instructions for Egreston" or something similar and says that she wrote to Mayor Cole about it, but the mayor doesn't seem interested. When Doon says nothing, Lina points to the few words she can decipher—*Pipeworks*, **river**, and *door*—and says she thinks they're instructions to reach another place. Doon is confused about the mention of a small steel pan, but he agrees that the document is important. Lina is relieved and says that she knows now that things are as bad as Doon said they were on Assignment Day. He admits that he found a door, but it's nowhere near the river. Lina insists it has to be the door out of Ember. Doon is unconvinced, but he agrees to sneak Lina into the Pipeworks after work the next day.

The next afternoon, Lina rushes to the Pipeworks and accepts a slicker and boots from Doon. Doon leads her down and Lina is dumbstruck by the sight of the **river**. He leads her to the appropriate tunnel, assures her they'll be fine without lights, and shows her where to put her hands out and feel the door and its keyhole. They rattle the knob, but it won't budge. The turn to go, but they hear scraping nearby and race out of the tunnel and around the corner. They hear more thudding, scraping, and muffled words—and then the sound of a key turning. Lina and Doon peer around the corner. They hear the door closing again and hide from the quick footsteps. When they peek, they see an untidy, lurching figure walking away. He looks vaguely familiar.

*Lina's choice to not say anything to Doon about his uninteresting bug drawings shows again that she's a kind individual, which allows her to rekindle her friendship with Doon rather than pushing him away with her rudeness. Censoring herself, in this case, leads to more meaningful connections, showing that censorship has its place, especially in situations like this where saying the wrong thing could leave Lina even more alone in the world.*



*That Lina leaps on Doon's discovery of a door that doesn't make sense—either in terms of how the Pipeworks works, or really, in terms of whatever the Instructions are setting out—is, first and foremost, an indicator of how little Lina understands about the Pipeworks. While she may know intellectually that they're as big as Ember itself, it's telling that she jumps on this one door as being the right one when, in all likelihood, there are others. Doon again looks like the sensible, pragmatic one, while Lina looks childishly idealistic.*



*When Lina's reaction to the river is so similar from Doon's, it shows again that the people of Ember are seriously cut off from the natural world—they don't understand it and so it's scary for them. The reader will likely remember that Lina described Loooper, the man whom she carried a message for, as "lurching." Using that term to describe this person, then, suggests that this is Loooper. He's clearly doing something secret, which should raise the reader's suspicions about his motivations. This encourages the reader to start asking these questions, along with Lina and Doon.*



Lina and Doon leave the Pipeworks and sit on a bench. They reason that someone got there first, and that whoever got into the room walked as though they were looking for something and then found what they were looking for. Doon is confused, though, as he's certain that the man doesn't work in the Pipeworks, and therefore shouldn't have a key. Doon says that regardless, this man got there first and he'll be a hero for finding the way out and saving Ember. He sits glumly and says that it really doesn't matter who figures it out first, but he'd hoped it would be himself and Lina. They decide to wait for an announcement and Doon mutters that the room is probably just a supply closet, but Lina isn't convinced. Even if it's not the door out of Ember, she's certain that it's somehow connected to the mystery.

*Keep in mind that Lina and Doon's interpretation of what they heard is majorly colored by what it is they're looking for (a way out of Ember). Because they're so intent on finding the way out, it's inconceivable to them, at this point, that Looper found something that doesn't fit in with this worldview. Doon's glumness that he and Lina won't be Ember's heroes suggests that although Doon definitely cares about others, he also longs for glory and recognition—and in the future, may make decisions that ultimately hurt him as he tries to construct situations that will give him glory.*



## CHAPTER 10

Lina spends her night tossing and turning and experiences scary dreams. When she tries to wake Granny in the morning, Granny is breathing hoarsely and says she's not feeling well. Her forehead is hot and her hands are cold, so Lina asks Mrs. Murdo to come, tells Captain Fleery she won't be at work, and runs for Dr. Tower. Dr. Tower agrees to come, but warns Lina upfront that she's low on medicine. She examines Granny and tells Lina to make soup and mop Granny's brow with cool cloths. Lina spends all day at home, trying not to remember her father's labored breathing or Dr. Tower coming out of her mother's bedroom with newborn Poppy and bad news. Granny wakes up at one point and asks if they found it. Lina tells her they did, and Granny falls asleep, relieved.

*For Lina, Granny's illness is part of a long history of illness and death in her family, which makes this far more traumatic. As Granny declines, Lina also has to relive her parents' deaths because it's impossible, in this situation, to forget or ignore what happened to them. This makes it clear that Lina is carrying around a lot of trauma and anxiety when it comes to family. That family will be around for her isn't something Lina can trust, which may explain some of why she is such a mature and put-together kid: she's had no choice but to be that way.*



Lina stays home the next day too. Poppy is thrilled to have Lina home, and after dinner Lina gets out can labels and her **colored pencils**. She gives one label and the green pencil to Poppy and keeps the blue one for herself. Lina draws buildings, streetlamps, and greenhouses. They're all white, the color of the paper. She colors the sky blue and thinks of how strange it would be to have a blue sky.

*In this situation, the colored pencils symbolize what's possible. Just as Lina thought having more colored pencils were impossible, when she colors the sky blue, it foreshadows that at some point, Lina will discover that the sky can actually be that color.*



In the middle of the night, Lina wakes up when she hears Granny call for help. Lina stumbles through the dark to Granny's room and falls onto the bed. Granny says she had a dream about her baby as Lina checks Granny's pulse. It's fluttery. Lina offers to get Granny water, but Granny asks Lina to stay for a while. They settle in and Lina concentrates on Granny's breathing and soothes her when she mumbles. After a while, Granny sends Lina back to bed. Lina hugs Granny and wishes she could see Granny's face in the dark. She feels lonely as she stumbles back to bed. When the lights come on a few hours later, Lina finds that Granny is dead.

*Lina's desire to see Granny's face shows one of the most heartbreaking consequences of living in Ember: Lina doesn't have control over the lights in her home, as the city's electricity goes out for the night. Because of this, Lina doesn't get the opportunity to say goodbye to her beloved grandmother face to face. Though Lina doesn't mention this again, this likely impresses upon her the necessity of finding a solution that will save others from suffering like this when loved ones die.*



## CHAPTER 11

Lina and Poppy spend the day at Mrs. Murdo's neat apartment. There are three lavender turnips on the table, and Lina thinks that Mrs. Murdo put them there in part because they're pretty. Lina spends all day on the couch under a warm blanket, feeling sad but comforted too. The next day, Lina gets up to go to work. Mrs. Murdo makes her breakfast and they discuss the upcoming **Singing**, which they both love. Mrs. Murdo tells Lina that she'll care for Poppy today and when Lina gets home later, they can talk about where to go from here—Lina and Poppy can't live alone. Mrs. Murdo shows Lina her empty bedroom, which is cozily decorated in green and blue. Lina thanks Mrs. Murdo, but Mrs. Murdo briskly says that it's just common sense.

Three days after Lina and Doon's excursion into the Pipeworks, they still haven't heard word of an announcement. Lina doesn't understand why the man they saw is keeping his discovery of a way out of Ember to herself. As she works, she notices that people seem gloomy and scared. Lots of shops are closed or open reduced hours. Inside, she feels strange and repeats "alone in the world" to herself. It's not true, since she has Poppy, Mrs. Murdo, and friends, but she also feels like she's become her own mother since Granny died. Gradually, Lina begins to focus more on Mrs. Murdo's beautiful extra room. She feels grateful for Mrs. Murdo's kindness and thinks that she's not ready to be alone yet.

In the afternoon, Lina catches sight of Lizzie exiting the Supply Depot and yells. Lizzie doesn't answer, so Lina runs after her. Lizzie only stops when Lina grabs her coat, but she seems distracted. Lina shares that Granny died, but Lizzie expresses only halfhearted sympathy. Lina asks what's in Lizzie's sack, and she replies that they're groceries from the market, which confuses Lina—she saw Lizzie leave the storeroom office. Lizzie starts walking and talking even faster and says that she has a boyfriend. As Lina starts to ask about the boyfriend, Lizzie trips and spills her groceries. The cans roll away and Lizzie immediately tries to grab them. Lina picks up a can of peaches and one of creamed corn, delicacies she hasn't had in years. Children pick up a can of applesauce.

Lizzie flashes a fake smile and tells the children and Lina that they can keep the cans before rushing away. Lina knows Lizzie is lying; the cans must've come from the storeroom. She wonders how much, or if, Lizzie paid for them. At home, Lina offers the cans to Mrs. Murdo, who gasps. Lina says she got the cans from a friend, but doesn't know where her friend got them. They have a feast for dinner and it's the best meal Lina has had in a long time. She feels bad, however, about where the food came from.

*Here, Mrs. Murdo embodies the generous, giving spirit that the Builders seem to have tried to purposefully cultivate in Ember. She's entirely selfless as she offers to care for Lina and Poppy; she offers because she knows it's the right thing to do. For Lina, this reminds her that she doesn't just have to get support from blood relatives. There are many people in Ember who are more than willing to care for her and help in times of need—Mrs. Murdo is proof of that.*



*Notice that here, at least, it never seems to occur to Lina that the door they found might not be the door out of Ember—Looper may have good reasons to not want to share the door with others. This makes Lina look especially young and idealistic, as it shows that she believes everyone has the community's best interests at heart and will, without fail, do the right thing to help others. Though this attitude doesn't entirely help Lina, it's still a good thing when Lina decides to feel grateful for Mrs. Murdo, as doing so allows her to be a child for a while longer.*



*Lizzie's behavior is a red flag for Lina that something is up—even if Lizzie is somewhat self-centered, it's wildly selfish and odd to not acknowledge Lina's grief. Because it's clear that Lizzie is lying about where the cans came from, this is an even more shocking experience for Lina. It means, among other things, that Lina now has proof that people she loves and cares about aren't doing good, moral things—and they're willing to tell lies to continue doing so.*



*It's telling here that Lina doesn't try to rationalize Lizzie's behavior, as she did with Captain Fleery's beliefs as a Believer. Though Lina cares about Lizzie, she is able to accept that what Lizzie is doing is wrong—a mark of maturity and bravery.*



The next morning, Lina goes to find Lizzie before going to work. Lizzie tries to ignore Lina, but Lina grabs her scarf. They tussle for a minute and Lina demands to know where the cans came from. When they finally hit the ground, they both start laughing. It feels like being kids again. Lizzie finally shares that a storeroom worker, Looper Windley, is how she's getting things. Lina remembers she carried a message for him and describes him as funny-looking, which offends Lizzie. Lizzie says that Looper explores the storerooms and finds all sorts of things in rooms that are marked as empty in the ledgers. She admits that he takes things, but not often, and says he gives things to her because he likes her. Lina realizes that Lizzie has a crush on Looper.

Lina points out that Looper is stealing and tells Lizzie that he's taking things and then selling them for wildly high prices in his store—she knows because she bought **colored pencils** from him. Lizzie, however, is offended that Looper has never given her colored pencils. Lizzie insists that what Looper is doing is fine. She says that if there's only one can of peaches, it wouldn't do any good for everyone to know about it since only one person can have it. She offers to get Looper to find some good things for Lina. Lina immediately asks what kinds of things, and Lizzie says he has colored paper, cough medicine, and girls' shoes—a treasure trove. Lina knows that Lizzie is right that people will fight over the few things left in the storeroom, and she desperately wants the items for herself.

Lizzie says that Looper found a can of pineapple, and she'll share if Lina promises not to say anything. Lizzie lists the other delicacies she's tried and Lina thinks it wouldn't be so wrong to try the pineapple. Smugly, Lizzie says that she and Looper finished the cans of the special things. Looper says that if it's all going to run out soon, there's no reason to not live well. Lina asks why Lizzie should get the food instead of other people. Lizzie says that she and Looper get it because they found it, and she reiterates that Lina can have some. Lina doesn't think it's fair that two people should get everything, even though she doesn't know how they should divide up one can of applesauce among the city. Remembering how she felt when she was purchasing the **colored pencils**, Lina says she doesn't want any of Looper's cans.

*Despite the giggling that Lina and Lizzie share, discovering the truth is anything but heartwarming. Lina learns here that even though Lizzie isn't powerful, she has connections that allow her to profit and have unfair advantages over others. The fact that there are clearly things left in supposedly empty rooms also begs a number of other questions, such as why the storerooms were marked empty in the first place. Taken together, this suggests that there's more secrecy and censorship going on in Ember than meets the eye.*



*In a sense, Lizzie is right—there's no way to split up one can of peaches among all of Ember's residents in a way that's fair and makes sense. However, this doesn't mean that what she's doing is right, or that she's really thought about the consequences of what she's doing. (For one, inviting Lina to join in and share things with her means that there's less to go around, even just among the three of them, something Lizzie generally seems opposed to.) Especially given that Looper has found cough medicine, it shows clearly that only those with connections will be able to stay comfortable and healthy.*



*Looper's thought process reveals that he hasn't internalized Ember's community spirit—or, at least, the desperate situation Ember is in right now makes it far easier for him to ignore it and behave selfishly. Lina's choice to leave Lizzie and refuse Looper's food is a commendable and brave decision—but there are also major potential costs. It means she's giving up the only opportunity to get cough medicine—something that, if things continue to decline, will be important. There are real costs, in this sense, to taking the moral high ground.*



## CHAPTER 12

A week after Lina and Doon's trip into the Pipeworks, Doon fixes a clog in Tunnel 207. He finishes quickly and walks past the locked door in Tunnel 351. He finds it strange that no one has announced a way out of Ember yet, so he suspects that he and Lina misunderstood something. As Doon reaches for the handle, his mind is on Lina and his **worm**, which has been acting oddly and hanging from the side of the box. Doon startles when he feels a key in the lock, but he pushes the door open. The interior makes him gasp: it's piled with cans, clothes, and light bulbs. There's an armchair next to a table covered with food. Mayor Cole is fast asleep in the chair.

Lina carries lots of messages that day, mostly about the four blackouts in the last week. Everyone is nervous and many refuse to leave home. As she's on her way home, Doon races up behind Lina and shares his discovery of Mayor Cole's secret treasure room. Suddenly angry, Doon spits that Mayor Cole's solution is just a solution for *him*, not for everyone else. Doon suggests they tell everyone, but Lina leads him to the square to talk. They sit down and watch Believers singing. About 20 people pace around the square carrying signs that read, "WHAT solutions, Mayor Cole?" Lina shares what she discovered about Lizzie and Looper, and she connects that Looper is leaving things for Mayor Cole. They realize that when they were in the Pipeworks, they heard Looper dropping things through the hatch from the storerooms.

Lina says that in normal circumstances, they'd tell the mayor about this, but Mayor Cole is the one committing the crime. They decide that they should tell the guards, but Lina doesn't like this plan much after the way they treated her on her first day of work. Doon agrees and suggests that when the guards see what's down in the Pipeworks, they'll arrest the mayor and put things right again. Lina says that then, they can get back to figuring out the Instructions and figure out which door is the right one. Doon sourly says that he thinks the Instructions are hogwash and doesn't want to think about them.

As Doon stands to go find a guard, Lina catches hold of his sleeve and shares that Granny died. Doon offers his condolences, which makes Lina cry. Doon wraps her in a big hug and Lina realizes that Doon is her best friend now. Together, they enter the Gathering Hall and approach Barton Snode's desk. Barton Snode leads them to a private hallway and listens to their tale. When they finish, he whispers that Mayor Cole is stealing. Just then, a group of guards including Redge Stabmark come into the hallway. Doon tells Barton Snode that the guards need to arrest the mayor, and Barton Snode agrees and makes a note. As Lina and Doon leave, Lina sees Barton Snode stand, excited to share this news with his boss.

*Discovering Mayor Cole in this room shows Doon that this isn't just about Looper wanting to save all the possible glory for saving Ember for himself. Rather, what he finds is clear evidence of rampant corruption. This explains why Mayor Cole seems so unconcerned about what's going on, and why he seems so intent on parroting the Builders' ideals—if the citizens listen to him, they'll never wonder if he's actually cheating them.*



*Seeing the Believers and the protesters shows again that the dangerous circumstances in Ember are leading to unrest and fractures within the community. The protesters in general are evidence that they don't necessarily see Mayor Cole as one of them, which suggests that there may be others in Ember who at least suspect that he's a corrupt leader. In this conversation, Doon reads as the more idealistic and youthful one, while Lina's behavior shows that she maturely recognizes this situation is more complicated than simply exposing the mayor's corruption to the city.*



*In this moment, Lina and Doon must confront that the person they've been taught their entire lives to keep them safe—the mayor—isn't someone they can trust. This becomes a major coming of age moment for both of them, as it means that they themselves have to start stepping up and becoming the citizens that Ember needs. Deciding to tell the guards, however, shows that they're still not grown up enough to suspect that the corruption is more widespread than just the mayor.*



*Realizing that Doon is her best friend, and Doon's willingness to comfort Lina like this, impresses upon Lina that she absolutely isn't alone in the world. She can turn to her friendship with Doon for support that she might have once gotten from her parents or from Lizzie. At this point, Barton Snode reads as just as shocked and idealistic as Lina and Doon are—though, like Doon, he also seems very excited about getting to do something important and heroic.*



## CHAPTER 13

As Lina heads home alone, she hopes that Doon isn't right that the Instructions aren't important, even though she knows she got a little carried away. Feeling confused, she heads for the greenhouses to talk to Clary. Clary agrees to keep Lina's secret and Lina tells her everything about the Instructions, the room in the Pipeworks, and Mayor Cole's corruption. Clary shakes her head. She says that there's darkness all throughout Ember, including inside people. In people it's like a hungry creature that wants and wants, and it gets hungrier the more it gets. Lina knows this is true as she remembers the hunger she felt for the **colored pencils**. She feels sad for the mayor and how he must be so hungry for more.

Clary says she'd like to see the Instructions and agrees to come home with Lina. In Lina's room, Clary notices that the bean **seed** sprouted. Lina is surprised; she hadn't noticed. She's thrilled. Clary pores over the Instructions and validates what Lina already worked out, but Lina realizes that Clary doesn't know any more about it than she does. Lina sighs that it's hopeless, but Clary says that's not true. She suggests that the word "Egres" in the title is just missing it's final letter that will make it "Egress." The Instructions, she says, are for the way out.

After Clary leaves, Lina races across Ember to Doon's apartment and tells him about Clary's theory. They return to Lina's apartment and puzzle over the directions. The first one is still unintelligible, but they reason that the second direction must say to find a stone marked with an E by the **river's** edge. They think that the next direction says to find a ledge down by the riverbank, and that the fourth instruction talks about a door and a key that must be under the Pipeworks. They wonder where it goes. Doon pauses and suggests it'd be great if they find the way out and then announce it at the **Singing** in two days. Doon has to run home before lights out, but he agrees to look for the E at work.

Doon struggles to sleep. The noise of him tossing and turning wakes Doon's father, who asks if Doon is worrying. Doon wants to tell his father everything, knowing that his father would be thrilled to help them and expose Mayor Cole. However, Doon wants to make his father proud when the guards announce that Doon uncovered the mayor's crimes, so he says that he's fine. After Doon's father goes back to bed, Doon retraces the Pipeworks' paths in his mind. Just as he's about to fall asleep, he gets to the rocks by the **river** that look like they have writing on them.

*Clary makes the case here that it's a normal and expected part of being human to want things and, at times, experience greed—what matters, however, is how someone chooses to deal with that greed by either giving in (like the mayor) or standing up for what's right (like Lina). That Clary can say this at all suggests that she's not entirely sold on the Builders' writings that cast Ember as almost a utopia, which suggests that she's more likely than others to take the Instructions seriously.*



*When the sprouting bean coincides with figuring out what the Instructions are for, the bean comes to symbolize Lina's growing knowledge. This development will allow her, like the sprout, to move toward the light, both figuratively as she gathers more information and literally as she works toward leaving Ember.*



*The suggestion to solve the mystery and announce it at the Singing shows again that for all Doon's pragmatism and understanding that something must be done, he still experiences greed and desire like everyone else. Unlike Mayor Cole and Looper, however, Doon desires recognition, not material goods, which puts him in a somewhat more honorable position than others who also desire things.*



*Though it doesn't seem like much now, Doon's decision to not loop in his father has major consequences later, which shows that even desiring non-material things have the potential to harm others or make things difficult. Figuring out where the E on the rock is, however, allows Doon to use his critical thinking skills to piece together information he already has.*





## CHAPTER 14

The next day, everyone in Ember gets off work at noon so they can practice for the **Singing**. It's a slow morning, so Lina sits at her station and thinks of Mayor Cole gorging himself on peaches and hoarding light bulbs. She wonders if he'll enjoy sitting in his lit room when the rest of the light bulbs run out, and thinks that when the power does go out for good, his light bulbs won't save him. Like Looper, he must want to live well while he can. Lina wonders if the guards will announce the mayor's arrest at the Singing. After a while, Lina moves to an alley and studies the Instructions. Doon finds her there, right after coming up from the Pipeworks, and shares that he found the E. Doon pulls out the spare Pipeworks key and they decide to go check it out.

Lina and Doon don't grab boots or slickers, reasoning that wherever they're going won't be spurting water like the Pipeworks tunnels. Doon leads Lina along the **river** to where it ends and points out the E on a rock. He then lies on his stomach and hangs his head over the edge. From there, he can see metal bars bolted to the sheer rock face, down to what must be a ledge. Doon goes first and then calls for Lina. It's terrifying climbing down, but Doon shouts encouragingly until Lina reaches the ledge. There, they find a space carved out of the wall with a door in the back. They puzzle over the next few instructions and get stuck on the mention of a "small steel pan," but when they look to the right of the door, they find a small steel *panel*. Inside is a key.

Lina unlocks the door. There's nothing inside but darkness, and no sign of a light switch. Cautiously, Lina and Doon step into the darkness, wondering if they have to walk out of Ember through a dark tunnel. Lina yelps when she hits two metal boxes, while Doon bumps into something big and curved. Doon helps Lina carry the boxes into the light. They open easily but the contents are disappointing: one is full of smooth rods with string on one end labeled "candles," while the other is full of short wooden sticks with blobs on one end labeled "matches." Doon wonders if he's supposed to write with a match, so he tries to write on the Instructions and then on his arm.

*Here, Lina identifies the pointlessness of corruption, given Ember's situation—light bulbs and food won't do much for Mayor Cole in the long run, given what else is wrong in Ember. Piecing this together allows Lina to reaffirm her commitment to helping her community over helping just herself, as she's able to see that the cans of peaches are pointless if, in Ember's dark and dangerous future, that's all they have.*



*Lina and Doon's reasoning suggests that they're both still pretty idealistic about what they're going to find in the Pipeworks; there's little evidence, from what Doon has described, that any part of the Pipeworks is in good repair. Lina is reminded again that she can trust Doon to help her, which he does by encouragingly talking her down the ladder. When they both look around the door and don't get sucked into what exactly the directions say about the small steel pan, it shows that they're learning to gather information from a variety of sources.*



*Watching Lina and Doon struggle with candles and matches may be somewhat humorous for the reader, but their struggle drives home the very real consequences of censorship: Lina and Doon don't understand that they're holding the one thing that doesn't exist in Ember (moveable light), and which will enable them to leave the dying city.*



Lina suggests he tries writing on the white stuff in the lid of the box. When Doon does, the match bursts into flame and he throws it in surprise. Lina lights a match too, but is only able to hold it for a minute. They're excited, but confused as to how these useless fire sticks are supposed to save Ember. They wonder if the candles are match holders and painstakingly tie a candle's string around a match and light it. To their surprise, the string catches fire. The candles, they realize, are moveable light. With a candle, they return to the dark room and inspect the large, rounded, metal object there. One end is pointed and the other is flat, and there are two poles in it. The thing is labeled "BOAT" and the poles are labeled "PADDLES."

Lina checks the instructions and identifies part of the word "boat." The next line says something about ropes and going down something. Doon realizes that the directions say to lower the boat with ropes and head downstream. The boat, they understand, is something to ride in: the way out of Ember is on the **river**.

## CHAPTER 15

Doon is confused, as the boat is only big enough for two people. He grabs another candle and he and Lina discover another door. Behind it is a room full of boats, each equipped with paddles and boxes of candles and matches. Back at the **river's** edge, Lina puts the boxes away. Doon puts a candle and some matches in his pocket and they close the door. They stare at the river with wonder and decide that tomorrow, at the **Singing**, they'll tell the city what they found.

Back aboveground, Lina and Doon realize it's almost six p.m. They make a plan for the next day and then run home. Doon knows that tomorrow, his father will be so proud and happy when he learns what Doon found. Doon is even happier when he realizes that the guards will probably arrest Mayor Cole tomorrow, too. In the morning, when Doon's father goes downstairs, Doon puts supplies in his pillowcase so he's ready to go. He puts in food, extra clothes, and paper and pencil so he can record their journey. He reasons that in the new city, people will give him more food. Doon flips through his book of bug drawings, but decides to leave it behind.

*It's important to keep in mind through all of this that had everything gone according to the Builders' plan, this process wouldn't be so painful and so late—they planned specifically for a future in which censoring methods of making moveable light would no longer be necessary. This drives home one of the novel's main ideas: that censorship must inevitably come to an end, whether on purpose by those doing the censoring or by accident because those who are censored get curious and ask questions.*



*Leaving via the river will dramatically reconnect Ember's residents with the natural world and show them that while the river is something to fear, it's also something that will very literally give them life as they leave the city.*



*Though the Singing itself symbolizes the community spirit of Ember, Lina and Doon wanting to tell everyone about their discovery reads less as a desire to support the community and more as a selfish desire to contrive a situation in which Lina and Doon get to feel important and heroic.*



*The fact that Doon reasons that people in the new city will be more than willing to help feed Ember's residents speaks to just how ingrained the community spirit is in Ember. Even though Doon has been confronted with clear proof that not everyone is actually looking out for others in, it's still unthinkable to Doon that they might just as easily find a more individualistic or greedy society.*



Doon pulls out the box with the **worm** inside to check it. A few days ago, the worm bundled itself up, hanging from a cabbage stem. Though it hasn't moved for days, the bundle is moving now. The bundle splits and Doon watches a wet moth crawl out. With a smile, Doon lets it go out the window. He knows that he witnessed something amazing and greater than even the power of the Builders or the power of Ember. Doon wonders again if he should take more things but then laughs—he'll be with everyone else, and someone will lend him whatever he might forget.

Doon sees three burly guards approach old Nammy Proggs and ask for Doon. They say that Doon is spreading rumors. Nammy says she saw Doon heading for the trash heaps and the guards leave. Doon is stunned and doesn't understand why he's in trouble for telling the truth. He *does* realize that Nammy Proggs helped him. Thinking hard, Doon decides that if the guards had investigated the secret room, they'd know he was telling the truth. It's also possible, he realizes, that the guards are also profiting from the storerooms. He feels suddenly full of rage, but races away to warn Lina.

Lina comes home to Mrs. Murdo's with the sound of the **river** in her ears. She feels like she contains the river in her and has a voice that's answering it, and she realizes that her dreams of a gentle path out of Ember were childish. Lina feels safe as Mrs. Murdo tucks her and Poppy in and sings a song about treetops. As she tries to sleep, Lina thinks that tomorrow is bound to be a mess. People will certainly fight over the boats. She vows to hold on tight to Poppy, Mrs. Murdo, and Doon. The next morning, Lina gratefully eats the breakfast Mrs. Murdo cooks for her. When someone bangs on the door, Mrs. Murdo opens it to find a wild-looking Doon. In Lina's room, Doon tells her about the guards and says they have to hide.

Doon says that there are signs up all over the city, asking people to report it if they see Lina and Doon. Lina can barely think, but she waves to Mrs. Murdo and follows Doon to the school. She tries to pull down the signs as they run. The signs tell people to believe nothing Lina and Doon say. They finally reach the school and slip in. They sit in silence for a bit and then discuss what the guards will do when they find them. Doon says that they really only have to hide until the **Singing**, and then they can tell everyone about the boats and Mayor Cole. When Lina points out that there are always guards at the Singing, they sit in frustrated silence.

*Again, Doon doesn't have the language, education, or connection to nature to accurately describe what he sees: a moth emerging from its chrysalis. Rather than depressing him, however, Doon now recognizes that this is showing him how much is still out there to learn—and how amazing some of that currently unknown information might be. The moth itself is also a symbolic parallel to Doon's own coming of age, as he, too, is preparing to make a dramatic transition in potentially leading people out of Ember.*



*Nammy Proggs is significant primarily because she only appears a handful of times in the novel—and yet, here, she chooses to protect Doon. This makes it clear that there are others who see that the guards are corrupt too, and it drives home how community-oriented many of Ember's residents are. Doon begins to come of age here as he turns his anger into a more useful emotion by allowing his friendship to motivate him.*



*Part of coming of age is being able to recognize that previous thoughts or belief were immature and childish; that Lina can do this here shows how much she's grown in the last few weeks. When she also recognizes that people will definitely fight over the boats, it also shows that she's learned that all humans, no matter how good, have the potential to be greedy and selfish—especially when fear is a part of the mix. Gaining this more nuanced understanding helps her more clearly understand Ember and how it functions.*



*Because the people of Ember have been taught to trust authority figures like the mayor and the guards, Lina and Doon are probably in very real danger here. This means that if they're going to come up with a way to get out of this mess, they're going to have to think for themselves, not just look to authority figures who, they see now, have no business being in positions of authority in the first place.*



Lina looks around and catches sight of *The Book of the City of Ember*. She remembers it saying that Ember is the only light in the dark world, but she knows now that's not true. Doon suggests that they could leave a note with someone they trust, take a boat, and go. Lina is worried about leaving Poppy, but Doon points out that everyone will follow soon. Hesitantly, Lina suggests they write to Clary, since Clary will believe them and lives close to the school. Doon excitedly points out that this way, they can be the first ones in the new city.

Lina lists all the things that will have to happen before everyone else can leave Ember, and she says that Poppy will need her. Doon insists that Mrs. Murdo is organized and will take care of Poppy. Lina knows this is true and tells herself she's being selfish. Doon eagerly says they'll be able to show everyone around the new city. He writes a note explaining everything, and Lina declares that she'll deliver it to Clary. Lina suggests that Clary could come, but she realizes that Doon is intent on doing this themselves. They decide to deliver the note and then wait until after the **Singing** starts to head for the Pipeworks. Lina slips out, thinking of how scared Doon's father and Mrs. Murdo will be when they see the posters and realize that they're gone. Doon watches two guards spot Lina.

## CHAPTER 16

Lina is terrified. She remembers that the library is often open on holidays and runs for it, but it's locked. She tries to flatten herself against the door, but the guards see her and tackle her to the ground. Lina rips at the guard's beard, but he says that Lina is going to see Mayor Cole for telling rumors. There are already a few people in the square for the **Singing**, while others begin to unfurl the banners representing the three songs. The guards shove Lina into the same room she visited on her first day of work and Redge Stabmark tells her to sit in a small chair. Mayor Cole enters a moment later, seeming larger than ever. He dismisses the guards and then accuses Lina of going places she's not supposed to go.

Mayor Cole says that curiosity is a dangerous and unhealthy quality, especially now when Ember is going through tough times and needs people to stay in line. Lina ignores the mayor and begins to plan as Mayor Cole says that it's his job to understand things too complex for other citizens to grasp. When the mayor says that he's doing things for the good of others, Lina says that's hogwash. This angers the mayor, and he suggests that Lina should spend time in the Prison Room. The mayor reaches for his bell to call the guards back, but the lights go out.

*Once again, Doon is still very attracted to being recognized for saving Ember. While entirely understandable in and of itself, this does mean that, as things stand now, nobody else knows what's going on or why Lina and Doon are in trouble with the mayor in the first place. Because of this, there's really no one to help them.*



*After her experience purchasing the colored pencils, Lina now is able to recognize selfishness in herself and she can make the choice to not indulge it. Especially since this is such an emotionally charged and difficult situation, it's commendable that Lina is able to get a handle on this negative feeling now. Similarly, it's also a mark of maturity when Lina can understand that Doon's father and Mrs. Murdo are probably sick with worry right now, as it shows that she's able to think outside herself and consider others' perspectives.*



*Noting that Mayor Cole seems larger than ever is a way of showing that he's becoming even greedier and more corrupt. To echo Clary's wisdom to Lina, Mayor Cole's greed manifests as literal hunger that makes him literally larger than ever. That Lina is sitting through this interrogation in the minutes before the Singing draws out the differences between how Ember looks on the surface and what's going on below. It leaves little room to argue that there's no corruption going on.*



*Remember that for someone like Mayor Cole, who has lots of power and is sneaking around, curiosity in others is dangerous—it could, and it has, led to others figuring out that he's abusing his power. This is why he tries to insist that he's the only person smart enough to know what's going on; if he's the smartest person, nobody else will feel comfortable asking questions.*



Lina already knows where to go. She leaps up, knocks over the table to cover the sound of her footsteps, and dashes out the door. She takes the stairs up and knows that if she can get onto the roof, she can get down to the street. The lights come back on just as she bursts onto the roof. Carefully, Lina ducks down and listens to the clock chiming, announcing the start of the **Singing**. She pauses to look at the people below, all excited to sing their songs. As the first song, “The Song of the City,” begins, Lina feels a rush of joy and sadness. The song winds down and Lina looks out over the city she loves. She only has five minutes to meet Doon, but sadness in her chest makes her pause. She isn’t sure she can leave Poppy behind.

“The Song of the **River**” begins. It always makes Lina uneasy but this year, it seems to be urging her to go. Finally, “The Song of Darkness” begins. It’s the saddest and most majestic song. Suddenly, the lights go out again. Voices falter, but then rise more powerfully than before. Lina joins them and sings through the end of the song. After it ends, there’s nothing but silence. Lina considers telling everyone then and there about her and Doon’s discovery, but before she can say anything, she hears the crowd erupt in panic. She hopes for the lights to come back on but, in the distance, sees what she realizes is a candle. It must be Doon. The lights flicker and come back on, and Lina joins the crowd with a plan.

## CHAPTER 17

At 3:20 p.m., Doon grabs his pack and heads for the Pipeworks. He’s worried about Lina, but knows he has to run. When he sees a poster, Doon knows he’s only making Doon’s father worry. He falters, but thinks that he’s committed now. Quickly, Doon scribbles a message to his father and leaves it pinned to a kiosk. In the distance, he can hear the songs of the **Singing** and sings along. The lights go out and Doon stops to wait. He hears people at the Singing continue the song despite the darkness, and then he hears the screams after the song ends. Though Doon is afraid, he remembers he has a candle and lights it. It’s enough to see his way to the Pipeworks entrance.

Doon blows out his candle and sits down to wait. The lights come back on and Doon wonders if he should still go down the **river** without Lina. He paces a little and tries to decide if he could lift the boat without help, or get Lina out of the Prison Room without getting caught. Suddenly, Lina appears and dashes to him. Poppy is in her arms, and Doon is too relieved to care that she’s going to make the journey harder. They enter the Pipeworks and Doon replaces the borrowed key before they head down to the path by the river. At the ladder, Lina ties Poppy into a makeshift sling to climb down. Lina sets Poppy down in the back of the first room while she and Doon deal with the boat.

*What Lina is able to do while the lights are out indicates that if she has a plan and a goal, the dark doesn’t have to be so scary—she just has to commit and go for it. The emotions that run through Lina’s mind during “The Song of the City” make it clear that even as she’s trying to leave Ember, Lina is still absolutely a part of the city and of her small family unit. Singing about the city makes it clear to Lina that leaving Poppy is a strange and difficult proposition, as Poppy represents Lina’s only blood family now.*



*Joining in on “The Song of Darkness” in the dark shows clearly that Lina is still a part of Ember, even if she’s currently an outsider. Catching sight of the candle in the distance reminds Lina that though she may have connections to Ember as a whole, she also has a strong friendship with Doon that, if she chooses to lean into it, will give her the strength to do the right thing and leave Ember.*



*For Doon, the candle acts as a reminder that he has more knowledge of how the world works than he’s ever had in his life—unlike anyone before him in Ember, he has the power of a moveable light. Like Lina, as he joins in on the songs, it shows that he also feels like a valued and important part of Ember, despite the city’s faults and the fact that Doon is an enemy according to Mayor Cole. Leaving a note for his father allows Doon to maturely include others in his plan despite executing it on his own.*



*Through his friendship with Lina, Doon has learned to set aside his individualistic thoughts about being smarter than everyone else—now, he understands that he’s part of a community and needs help to do things, hence why he struggles so much as he considers whether he could handle a boat singlehandedly. Meanwhile, it’s possible to read bringing Poppy as either selfish or selfless. Either Lina is saving Poppy from the struggle of traveling with strangers, or she’s potentially dooming her own journey out of Ember.*



They're pretty sure the pointed end is the front, and they discover that the boxes of candles and matches fit in the back. Lina and Doon decide to leave the paddles in the bottom. They're surprised to discover that the boat is light and easy to lift, and they realize that the ropes are to tie the boat while it sits in the **river**. Doon finds rods by the water's edge and as Poppy wails, Doon and Lina tie the boat. Lina tries to comfort Poppy in an excited voice. Doon and Lina lower the boat into the water. They climb in one at a time and untie it.

## CHAPTER 18

The boat streaks into the tunnel, plunging Lina, Doon, and Poppy into complete darkness. The **river** is rough, so Doon and Lina roll into each other. Lina closes her eyes and clings to Poppy. The current slows after a while, so Doon lights a candle. The boat lurches, making it difficult, but his candle illuminates a wide tunnel. He lights another and they jam several in at the edge of the boat. Eventually, the boat moves into a huge room with columns of rock coming out of the water and down from the ceiling. They use the paddles to knock the boat free from the columns.

On the other side of the huge room, the current picks up again. Lina and Doon place Poppy between them and huddle together. Lina can't tell how long they travel, but eventually they reach another pool. Doon lights more candles, but they can't see where they're supposed to go. When they see a flat rock expanse on one side, Lina climbs out to investigate and discovers a path. Doon and Lina pull the boat out and Poppy, thrilled to be on land, stomps around. Lina settles Poppy in a safe spot so they can retrieve Doon's pack, the candles, and the matches.

Doon notices that Poppy has something. Startled by Lina's shout, Poppy drops it. It's a packet of some kind. While they eat, they pull off the packet's wrapping and realize it's a book. The first line reads, "They tell us we leave tonight." Doon and Lina are confused, but they decide to save it and read it later. As they eat, Lina says that she told Mrs. Murdo the truth when she took Poppy: that she's taking Poppy to safety. Lina says she knows now that Ember isn't safe for anyone. With horror, Lina realizes she forgot to give Mrs. Murdo the note intended for Clary. There's no way to go back to tell them. Lina laments that because they wanted to announce their find dramatically, no one knows. There's nothing else to do, so Lina and Doon fill their water bottles and begin to hike up the path.

*At this point, Lina and Doon aren't working off of the Instructions. Instead, they're using the information they find around them and thinking logically to figure out how to get the boat from point A to point B, safely and successfully. Being able to do this is indicative of the major leaps in maturity they've made over the course of the novel—and these leaps will help them overcome the Builders' censorship.*



*Though the river runs through complete darkness, which once meant nothing but terror for them, the candles allow Lina and Doon to deal with their fears and commit to their journey. Further, at this point Lina and Doon are truly on their own—in addition to finding themselves in a parenting role to Poppy, in the absence of other adults.*



*Though Lina has generally seemed competent in her ability to care for Poppy throughout the novel, it's even more important now that she keep an eye on the toddler, since Lina and Doon are Poppy's only caregivers now. This does mean that Lina has forced her and Doon to become even more adult, since they don't just have to care for themselves over the course of this journey.*



*Realizing that Ember is wholly unsafe is Lina's final coming-of-age moment, as it shows that she no longer believes any of what she grew up believing. Though Ember worked well for a long time, Lina is able to recognize that it's no longer functioning as it should or safely, and the only course of action is to leave. Now, they also discover the consequences of trying to orchestrate sharing their news at the Singing: no one else knows where they are. This makes it clear that selfishness like they experienced has dire, and potentially life-threatening, consequences.*



## CHAPTER 19

A few yards up the path, Doon discovers a framed sign on the wall. It welcomes Ember's refugees and warns of a several hour climb ahead. It's from the Builders. Lina says that she knows the Builders who wrote it are dead now, but it makes her feel like the Builders are watching over them. Lina and Doon continue up the wide path. It's steep and they take turns carrying Poppy, who's exhausted and cranky. After a few hours, they notice that the tunnel smells different. They round a corner and see faint light ahead. When they reach the end, a lovely smell greets them. Lina, Doon, and Poppy hold hands.

There's no city. Strangely, the land is spacious and lit by a shiny silver circle in a black sky. Soft hairy stuff covers the ground, and Lina points to more tiny lights in the sky. The air is sweet. They all hold their hands out to feel the hair that comes out of the ground, and they hear odd singing sounds. Lina and Doon agree that they're not afraid. They walk until they reach tall, hard plants with leaves above their heads. They sit down and wonder if there's a city nearby. Lina suggests that with the lamp in the sky these people might not need lights, but Doon points out that the lamp isn't enough to grow plants. He doesn't know what they'll do if there's no city and no people. He and Lina are tired of figuring things out.

Lina pulls Poppy onto her lap and they sit in silence. After a while, Lina realizes that the silver lamp is moving. A while later, she realizes she can see light getting brighter. Gradually, the edge of the sky turns orange and then bright red. A huge colored orb rises over the land and becomes too bright to look at. Everything is green, and the sky is a clear blue. Lina and Doon cry at the warmth, the beauty, and the light. They point at singing, flying creatures that flit through the trees and Doon notices insects all over the ground. After a while of exploring, they return to the entrance to the path to eat and remember they have the book. They decide to read it out loud.

## CHAPTER 20

The woman writes that they leave tonight. It feels like a shock, and she wonders why she agreed to this—she's too old to start a new life. She writes that though they told her to not bring books or photographs, and to never speak of this place again, she's determined to record what happens to her. The next day, she writes about taking a train and saying goodbye to the fields and houses she calls home. Three men met her at the train station and now, she's in a room of other elderly people. The plan is supposed to ensure that there will always be humans on Earth. Some people aren't sure that will ever happen, but the woman writes that disaster seems close. She also notes that this plan is proof that people think the world is doomed.

*Finding this note from the Builders is proof for Lina and Doon that they weren't breaking any rules or doing a bad thing by solving this mystery—the Builders wanted them to figure it out and come here. This makes it clear that while the Builders included a great deal of censorship in their plans for Ember, they never intended that censorship to last forever—or for individuals like Mayor Cole to make it even worse.*



*Lina and Doon have never seen open land before—a city is all they've ever known. In this sense, the hilly meadow they find here is the exact opposite of Ember. It functions as a continuation of the river and will connect Lina and Doon to the natural world they've never experienced before. It's also significant that they emerge from the cave at night—coming from Ember, the moonlight doesn't seem all that bad. In this situation, they don't know what they don't know.*



*Seeing the sunrise for the first time is surely an awesome experience for Lina and Doon, having never lived anywhere where light didn't come from bulbs. Especially when the sky turns blue, Lina must feel like all her dreams have come true. Given Lina's dreams of a bright city with a blue sky, this suggests that to a degree, the natural world (as represented by the river in Ember) is something intrinsically connected to all humans.*



*The way in which the woman talks about a potential coming disaster, and who believes it, is significant. It's likely that the world she lives in functions much as Ember does right now: some are willing to believe Mayor Cole that things are fine, despite all the evidence to the contrary. This suggests that the complacency and willful ignorance the reader saw in Ember is something that can happen everywhere, not just in a city like Ember.*



The woman says that scientists and engineers have made an incredible effort on this project, but she's certain their efforts would've been better spent elsewhere. She thinks this is the wrong answer, and she's not sure why she agreed to join. She's one of 100 people over 60 who will start this project. They're all strangers and will be paired up and given two babies to care for. The babies can't know of this world. The woman writes that the babies are arriving and being passed out. Later, she resumes her account and says that she's on a bus with boarded windows, next to a man named Stanley. They named their babies Star and Forest. By the time Star and Forest are about 20, the woman and Stanley will be dead.

The next day, the woman writes that the buses are stopped. It smells like the countryside outside. She thinks they must be going underground, but that prospect fills her with dread. Later, she writes that they called everyone off the buses. She silently said goodbye to the grass, the animals, and the moon. Then, they herded everyone down a long path that opened out onto a pool where motorboats were waiting. The woman asked her pilots if people will return this way. The pilot explained that the people will have instructions, and he suggested that people always find a way through.

The account ends there. Lina and Doon wonder if the woman left her book on purpose, or if someone made her leave it. They note that they wouldn't have found it—and discovered that they came from this beautiful place—if it weren't for Poppy. As the light moves up in the sky, Doon muses that this land doesn't look like it's experienced a disaster. They wonder if there are people around and Lina thinks that the city the woman came from must've been a lot like Ember: dying and dangerous, with people arguing over solutions. Lina and Doon wonder if there's another way back to Ember, so they spend their day searching for another way into the ground.

When the circle is high in the sky, Lina and Doon sit down in the shade while Poppy naps. They can see a gray line in the distance and wonder if it's a road. They hear something in the brush and hold their breath as a rust-red creature about Poppy's size steps out. It studies Lina and Doon like it knows them, and then the creature wanders toward the bushes and picks up something round and purple. It runs away. Lina exhales that the creature was amazing. Doon says that he knows now that this is where they belong.

*While not fractured in the same sense that Lina and Doon's families are fractured, the family structures begun by the Builders suggest that it's not actually so out of the ordinary for people in Ember to live in these multi-generational family units. It's also clear, given the way that Lina has thus far experienced Ember's sense of community spirit, that these strangers who populated Ember were able to come together and form a strong sense of community to pass on to these babies.*



*Though the woman has no real way of knowing if it would turn out that way or not, she did one of the most selfless things that it sounds like a person could do in her time by choosing to go to Ember. This, more than anything, begins to explain the strong sense of community and the desire to make things better in Ember: that ethos has been a part of the city since before it even existed.*



*The woman's account helps Lina and Doon connect to their history and their ancestors and, in this sense, is one of the greatest resources they have to continue to move away from the censorship they grew up with. Now, they understand that it isn't actually the year 241—that's the year in Ember, but there's far more outside of Ember that's probably not on the same calendar. When Lina connects that the woman's city must've been a lot like Ember, it shows that she now understands the consequences of desperation and danger.*



*This animal is a fox, and Doon's sense that he belongs here after this encounter shows how cathartic it can be to connect with one's history. Doon's ancestors probably coexisted with foxes when they lived aboveground; in this sense, it's in his blood to be aboveground, with these animals and with the bright sun.*





Poppy wakes up, so Lina feeds her the last peas. Lina and Doon discuss what the creature had and note that it looked like an oddly colored peach. Doon picks one, cuts it open, and discovers a stone inside. He, Lina, and Poppy eat several and resume their exploration. They find a crack in the hillside and squeeze through. They creep forward until they reach a sheer drop. Down below, they can see lights—it's Ember. Lina can hardly believe that Ember is at the bottom of a hole. They wonder how to communicate with Ember, but they realize they can send their message. At the top, they scribble a note saying that they made it and it's okay. They then tie it to a rock and hurl it down. As Mrs. Murdo walks across the square, something hits the ground in front of her. She picks it up.

*Seeing Ember from above confirms emphatically for Lina and Doon that the Builders purposefully withheld information from them in an attempt to keep them—and humanity at large—safe. Now, it's Lina and Doon's duty to help dissolve the system of censorship in Ember by passing on what they know to others so that they too can leave Ember and figure out who they actually are. Having Mrs. Murdo find the note drives home, finally, that Lina can count on her—not just to care for Lina and Poppy, but now to care for all of Ember by spreading their message.*





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