



For the rest of the day, Felix hardly heard a word of what the teachers said. He could think of nothing but the message.

Monday 10:00pm Bridge of Dreams

BRING SEEDS

The Bridge of Dreams was less than ten minutes from his flat; Dad would never notice if he slipped out. Who would be going to the meeting he wondered? Would it really be someone involved with the Resistance?

When the end of day buzzer finally sounded, Felix bounded out of class, eager to get home and show Dad the seeds he'd collected. He sprinted down the steps, the warm message stone clenched tightly in his fist. He leapt high over the pink puddles dotted around the playground and swung out of the gate. Excitement rose in him like the roar of a football crowd. He settled into an even jog, his long legs carrying him quickly past a Corporation check point; people transporters were backed up down the entire length of the road.

He jumped off the pavement, splashing through a deep puddle, silently cursing the pink splashes on his boots. He glanced up at the sky and frowned. The afternoon light was dim, and the clouds were tinged with pink. The sprayers must have had a busy day for the haze to be so thick already. Dad would be in a bad mood; he always was when the Corporation stepped up its spraying activity. Only yesterday, the President had announced a new zero tolerance policy: *No illegal seeds shall be tolerated. Gardens suspected of growing unauthorised seeds will be sprayed immediately.*

Felix stumbled, a stab of worry jabbing at him. What if someone had reported Dad's garden? Increasing his pace, he pounded along the street, pushing these thoughts aside.

His feet skidded across the surface of the pavement, splashing through puddle after puddle of the pink liquid. As he drew closer to his own street, he slowed to a walk. His eyes scanned the area, searching for anything out of the ordinary. He paused and stepped into the shadows; leaning back against a wall as the chill of concrete blocks crept through his thin jacket.

His dad had trained him well. Years of living on the fringes of normality had taught him to respect his sixth sense and feelings of uncertainty. His eyes scoured the shadows, inspecting and analysing. What did they hide? Was anyone watching? Was it safe?

He tiptoed quietly along the pavement until he was almost opposite his building. The kitchen light was visible through a chink in the curtains. Felix hesitated. Dad never closed them until after Felix had arrived home from the Academy. It was one of those routines they'd got into since Mum had gone. He could hear Dad, "Leave the light on. Curtains open. Wait until we are both home." It was like a mantra. The glow from the light would illuminate the front path and keep them safe.

He tried to calm his breathing as panic edged through him. Without shifting his gaze from the front of his building he reached out and placed a hand over Clara's garden gate next door. The latch was rough with rust, but he pushed hard and the gate swung open. Lightly, he side stepped onto the grass, exactly two and a half centimetres of Corporation standard, springy, green growth beneath his feet. He stayed off the gravel path; any watchers would hear the crunch of his feet.

Thoughts crowded into his mind. It was way too quiet. Had Corporation sprayers come to destroy the garden? Where was Dad? Pushing the questions aside, Felix edged towards the metal fire-escape winding up the side of the building.

His hands and feet instinctively moved upwards, familiar with every part of the construction. He avoided the squeaky, third step and climbed steadily up towards the roof. Silently he thanked Clara for years of moonlit adventures, for the escapades that always began with the silent climbs on this very fire escape. If only Clara were with him now. With a tinge of hope, he glanced over at her bedroom window but there was no sign of light.

Two steps from the top, Felix paused and crouched against the coarse bricks. He sniffed the air, his head nodding slightly, like a cat searching for a scent. The evening air was strong with smells, but something was missing. Where were the roasted coffee beans of Number 24 and the burnt toast of 26? These aromas formed the nightscape. What had interfered with the evening rituals of the street's inhabitants?

Felix slid his body up over the edge of the roof and began to worm his way across the flat surface. The height of this vantage point gave him a 360-degree view of the Green Quarter and all the surrounding roads.

A pink mist hung over the street. There had to be sprayers close by. He had seen them in action before, arriving with tanks on their backs, turning the air pink. He stretched out a hand and pale pink drizzle quickly dampened his arm. He tugged up the hood of his waterproof jacket, determined to shelter from the Corporation chemicals. They claimed spraying was harmless but if it was killing the plants what might it do to him?

He listened intently; his ears straining to filter out the ordinary noises. He turned his head, homing in on the sound of dogs barking. Could it be Corporation search dogs or simply strays gathering for their evening forage? The light still shone out through the chink in the partially closed curtain, but he could not see inside.

Felix lay there for a few more minutes, his heart racing as adrenaline pulsed through his veins. For a few brief moments his thoughts settled on Mum. He shook his head, as if to clear his mind. There was no point in thinking about her. She was gone. Angrily, he forced

himself to focus on the flat. Apart from the curtain, everything else *looked* normal. It just didn't *feel* normal. The fire escape was the only route down to the road. He knew what he had to do but the voice of reason whispered in his head: DON'T GO DOWN.

Suddenly, through the roof he felt a slight trembling, the sensation of gentle vibrations running through his body. Felix hugged the surface of the roof. He smelt them long before they arrived. He grimaced at the sticky, rubbery smell of hot Corporation trucks. He could hear the thundering of their power packs, which helped to propel them through the streets. The stillness and silence of fear gripped his street.

Silently he witnessed the vehicles disgorging their load of Corporation personnel. He shrank back as they climbed the steps to his front door. The door opened soundlessly as they approached, and it remained silent as it closed. Instantly, the vehicles slid away from the front of his house and disappeared into the murk of the evening.

If anyone arrived at the building now, there was no outward sign that the Corporation was in residence; it was the perfect trap.