

THE DISCOVERIES OF ARTHUR GREY

CHAPTER 1 ROTTEN AIR

“Arthur.” The fuzzy voice broke past the image of the lady’s piercing green eyes. “Hey, lazybones—Arthur. Wake up.”

The dream melted away, and, heart hammering, Arthur Grey clutched at his neck for the chain that was supposed to be there. When he felt it, his grip relaxed and a shaky breath blew his lips apart.

“Wake up, sleepyhead.”

Arthur finally peeled open one eye and then the other, trying to focus on the face hovering over his. It was furry with a long white muzzle, had two pointy black ears, and peered at him with one eye the color of a murky pond and one of a bright blue sky. Arthur yawned. “What do you want, Griffin?”

The Siberian husky cocked his head. “You were hurting my paw. What were you dreaming about?”

“Sorry. I must’ve twisted my arm funny in my sleep.” As Arthur’s Fetch, Griffin shared thoughts and a physical interconnection with Arthur. Sometimes that wasn’t as cool as it sounded.

Arthur sat up and rubbed one hand through his already tousled hair, then glanced down at his other hand, which still grasped the locket hanging from the chain around his neck. “I had that dream again.”

“The one about the medieval Guardian kid?”

“I don’t know about medieval, but yeah.”

Griffin hesitated, then murmured, “Today’s the December solstice.”

“I know.” Arthur frowned at the locket. “I really need to figure out why I keep having these dreams every Solstice. It’s been four years in a row now. Where are they coming from and why?” He stuffed the locket back beneath his shirt collar. “This dream was even more real than the others, like I was *in* it instead of just watching, like she could see me.” He shuddered. “I wish I could remember the names. But all I remember is what happened—the faces and the action, not what anyone’s called. Except the king. He’s...Artur or Artir...or something like that.” *Something that sounds like my own name*, he couldn’t help thinking. He blew out a frustrated sigh. “I’ll try looking it up when I get back to the Historia Society—the library there is sure to have something, right?”

“I don’t see how you’d be able to find anything useful just going off of ‘Artur or Artir.’ Doesn’t seem like much, does it? Besides, your next year of lessons doesn’t start for a while yet.”

“In ten more days.”

Griffin cocked his head. “Actually, what surprises me is that you weren’t having dreams about your mom—after all that information Gamble sprang on us a few days ago.”

Arthur moved to slide open the slatted balcony door and shrugged as if the subject of his mother wasn’t important, even though he’d spent most of his recent free time running over just that.

With the door open, Griffin bolted past to leap into the hammock, nearly knocking the entire frame over.

“Hey! I was gonna sit there.”

“Too bad, slowpoke. Four legs win over two legs.”

Arthur snorted. “If you turn into any more of a pig, somebody’s going to make pork chops out of you.”

“Only if they can get me out of this comfy hammock.”

Arthur leaned against the wooden railing and stared down—four stories down—at a puddle-shaped pool surrounded by piles of bright pink flowers, a small artificial waterfall rushing into it, and several people sunbathing on the lounge chairs. Beyond that glittered the Pacific Ocean, seagulls gliding above it and boats bobbing in its waves.

As usual, Arthur and Griffin were spending their winter break at a hotel. They hadn’t been home for three years now, because Arthur’s dad liked taking them to a new country every year instead. This year, the hotel of choice ended up being on the western coast of Mexico. Not that Arthur liked to complain about being in an expensive resort—a warm one, this time—but he was beginning to feel like he didn’t have a home anymore. Especially since he had written a few letters to his grandma in Wisconsin but she had never replied. It was like she had forgotten he even existed.

“I wonder what Gree did with that treasure back at Ivor Manor,” Arthur said glumly.

“Gave it to the museums, I thought.” Griffin cocked his head. “You’re not still mad at Penelope about that, are you? I told you a hundred times, it wasn’t her fault you left without finding the treasure. I liked her. She gave good ear-scratches.”

Penelope Riffert had been Arthur’s best friend once—until she deserted him that one Christmas Eve. Before that, they had gotten into the best sorts of trouble at the old manor, where Arthur had lived with Gree. But that had been ages ago.

With an annoyed sigh, Arthur pushed away from the railing. As he did, his hand caught on a piece of splintered wood, which sliced into his skin. “Harpies!” he cried. At the first searing pain from the cut in his hand, a pulse began pounding in his left eye. In a rush, he stumbled inside to the

mirror above the dresser and tried to focus through the throbbing of his eye on his reflection. To his dismay, his left eye had taken on an unnatural, amber glow. “Gorgons,” he muttered, staring into the mirror while both the throbbing and the glow began to decrease. “So, Pernille was right.”

Griffin stared too, his ears back. “Not good.”

For the last few years—since he’d found the locket, incidentally—whenever Arthur cut or scraped himself, his eye would pulse as the injuries healed. He knew about the uncanny process of his body healing itself, but he hadn’t realized his eye actually changed color when this happened. One of his best friends, Pernille Hanly, had told him about it, and this was the first time he had seen it for himself. He groaned. “Do you think it’s the locket that makes it do that?”

“I guess it must—the locket’s what makes you heal, right?”

Arthur blew out a frustrated breath. “I just have to make sure I cover my eye whenever I get hurt. Otherwise everybody’s gonna notice there’s something weird about me.”

He watched his reflection with mixed feelings until his eye returned to its normal greenish-brown. As for the rest of him, there wasn’t anything interesting. His hair was brown—it seemed to be growing in a bit darker than it used to, but it was still as rebellious as ever, making his head look rather like something in the porcupine family at the moment. He didn’t have any cool scars or ill-healed wounds. In fact, his skin looked like it had never suffered a single injury, which was obviously due to his peculiar healing reaction. He wasn’t sure if he liked that or not. Not having any scars felt kind of babyish. Another thing he wasn’t ecstatic about was his height. He had always been on the small side compared to the rest of his peers, but that was no surprise—his mom had been small. At least she

looked it from her photograph. Arthur couldn't actually remember her, since he had been only two years old when she died.

Griffin's ears perked. "Hey, did you forget what else today is? It's our birthday!"

"Oh, yeah." Arthur's heartbeat quickened. He was fourteen now. *I wonder if Dad got me anything cool for my birthday.*

Griffin heard that thought. "Don't count on it. He's been keeping himself closed up in his room the last two days, pretending we don't exist."

Arthur turned to dig through the heap of clothes on the chair. "Yeah, well. He said he had some work to catch up on."

"Work, schmurk." Griffin snuffled at the shirt Arthur pulled out of the pile. "Blurgh—that one smells like week-old enchiladas. You'd better pick a different one." He scratched at his ear while Arthur went back to digging. "So, what should we do today? Swim at the pool? Play tennis? Throw pebbles down on the beach umbrellas and scare the sunbathing people?"

Arthur sniffed at another shirt and decided it was clean enough. "I'm not planning anything past *wolf down a mammoth breakfast*," he said, grabbing a pair of shorts and his adventure belt. "Hopefully, Dad's got something fun planned."

Griffin said nothing. But the wrinkle of his nose and flattening of his ears spoke loudly enough.

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With a plate of fruit and eggs in front of him, Arthur sat in a pillowed wicker chair beneath the orange umbrella that shaded the patio table from the glaring sun. No matter where they sat, they had a view of endless water and bathing-suited vacationers.

Across from Arthur, Etson Grey rubbed his hand over his smoothly shaven chin and adjusted his sunglasses up his forehead before cutting a bite of his fried egg and tortilla. “What’re you gonna do today, kiddo?”

Arthur ignored Griffin’s blatant I-told-you-he-forgot eye roll. “Uh, well, whatever’s fun to do for birthdays, I guess.”

The startled look that froze Etson’s egg-filled mouth open told Arthur that Griffin had been right. “Oh.” He swallowed his bite. “Yikes—is it that day already? Wow. And you’re thirteen now?”

“Fourteen.”

“That’s right. Fourteen.” Etson stabbed a piece of pineapple. “I remember fourteen,” he said, waving his fork so drips of pineapple juice splattered down—and hit Griffin on the nose. “I was in the ninth grade and had a crush on Andrea Fillmore. That’s the year I set fire to the chemistry room, too. On purpose, of course.” He grinned. “But that’s because I was in boring high school. You’re lucky you get to be an Initiate at the Historia Society. It’s way more fun than school. So what do you want to do for your birthday? We can go anywhere in the world you want. I mean it. Disney? Cedar Point? Paris would be cool—I bet you’d find something fun there.”

Arthur didn’t know why, but the thought of returning to Ivor Manor and seeing Gree and Penelope snuck through his mind, and a hollow feeling burrowed itself in his chest. He cleared his throat to loosen it away. “Actually, I was thinking...I’ve been going a lot of places lately. I think I just want to hang out this time. Maybe...you know...we could just go kayaking or something.”

Etson narrowed an eye. “You don’t want to do a party somewhere? No amusement park?”

“Nah.”

Etson made a perplexed face. “Well, if you’re sure.” He glanced at the Telecator watch on his wrist and stuffed such a large helping of egg into his mouth that he could barely close it. Then he gulped the last of his coffee as he stood, his legs bumping his chair back. “Okay, I’ve got some work to finish up, kiddo. But I’ll see you for dinner.” With a white-toothed grin, he ruffled Arthur’s hair and then left the table—giving zero attention to Arthur’s annoyed glare.

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After an afternoon of swimming and mini-golf that involved more of Griffin’s grumbling about Etson than it did actual swimming or golf, Arthur meandered along the stone path, in and out of the hot sunshine and shady adobe hallways, toward their room. The sun designs in the flagstone floor and on the wall hangings reminded Arthur a little of Peru, where he’d spent his first year as a Historia Initiate.

“Plus,” Griffin was in the middle of grouching again, “your dad never talks about important stuff. I mean, you hardly know anything about your mom or about that locket or—”

“Yeah, yeah. Well, I keep meaning to ask Dad if he ever saw Mom with this locket and if he knows about a key for it. And if he’s the one who gave her that magic box I have. But...”

Griffin snorted. “But then he’d know you have them, and he might take them away.”

“He wouldn’t take them.”

“Well, you’d better not chance it. You don’t want to lose the only keepsakes you have left of your mom.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right.”

“Of course I am.” The dog lifted his nose superiorly. “And what about that Gypsy lady who told you all that weird stuff the other year, huh? Something about getting betrayed by your dad.”

“There,” Arthur growled, his fists clenched, “is *no* proof she was talking about Dad. So just—” But before he could finish his sentence, a sudden heat in his shorts’ pocket made him jump, and he clapped his hand over his leg.

Griffin eyed him and sniffed at his shorts. “What was that for? Did you wet yourself or something?”

“Not funny. No. It’s my Spyglass Squad card.” Arthur tugged the orange-glowing card out of his pocket and stared at the nonsense scribbles scrawled on it. However, the instant he pressed his thumb against the card, the marks rearranged themselves into words. He glanced at the bottom of the card to see the signature—a small set of gears. “Hey, it’s from Pernille!”

Howya, Arthur! My da’s come home for Winter Solstice break and wants to invite you and your da to stay with us for the Christmas holiday startin’ on Friday. If it’s alright with you, oh and your da for certain. If you don’t yet have plans.

“We’ve never been to any of your friends’ houses,” Griffin said after Arthur had read the message aloud. “That might be fun. Think your dad will say yes?”

“He’d better. He told me we could go anywhere I want, didn’t he?”

When they flung open the door to Etson’s room and tumbled inside, they found Etson in a craze, scribbling on various papers from the multiple stacks covering the table by the window. With his loosened tie and hand-raked hair, he looked a bit demented. The westing sun blared light over the

table, lighting up the gold trophy of a staff with two winged snakes entwined around it—Etson’s GEM award. And since his dad managed to bring it up about ten times a day, Arthur knew that GEM stood for “Gifted Engineering Mastermind” and that Etson had earned it last year for some complicated project.

“Uh...Dad?”

Etson’s finger shot out and wagged at him, his other hand still writing.

What’s that supposed to mean? Griffin thought with a growl. *Go away till winter break is over?*

Just when Arthur was about to give up and leave, Etson made a final sweeping flourish and slammed his pen onto the table. “Finished!” he announced with a gleeful rub of his hands that made him look even more like a mad professor. “If that doesn’t make publication, then I don’t know what will! Now, what’s up?”

Arthur held up his Spyglass Squad card. “I got a message from one of my friends, Pernille Hanly. You know her dad—he’s the Minister of Conservation.”

“Eliot Hanly? Sure, yeah, I know him.”

“Well, they’ve invited us over for Christmas. Can we go?”

Etson glanced warily at the card being waved in his face. “Christmas? Oh, sure. Sure, that’ll be fun. But let’s focus on today, huh? I’ve got something for you.” He reached for his suitcase on the floor and yanked out two square packages, one large and one smaller. “Happy birthday, kiddo.”

“I thought you forgot!” With a relieved grin, Arthur shoved his card back into his pocket and accepted the heavy package first.

“Gimme a break. When have I ever forgotten your birthday? I was only pullin’ your leg earlier.”

Griffin snorted. *I'd like to pull his leg...*

Arthur finished unwrapping what turned out to be a book and read the title. "Fifty Totally Deadly Uses for Herbs."

"I hope you like it. It's a pretty fun read, and it might even be helpful for some of your lessons this year. Open the other one."

When Arthur opened the smaller box, he found an octagonal egg that was made up of shiny, colored triangles. He looked up, scratching at his head. "Uh..."

"And that," Etson said with a grin, "is a Mystere Egg. It's a puzzle—something between a Rubik's Cube and a Simon Says. I know how much you like solving mysteries, so I thought that might give you a run for your money. They're incredibly tough. I've only solved one once."

"Hey, thanks, Dad."

"So how about you get changed and I'll take my favorite kid and dog out for dinner? And tomorrow we'll go water skiing as proper celebration. Whaddya say?"

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The following day definitely improved Arthur's outlook on his holidays. After an afternoon of water skiing, swimming, ice cream sundaes, and a Segway ride along the coast, they found a place for late dinner and ate tacos on the veranda.

"This is what your mom would've done." Etson stared out toward the dark water and absently swirled his margarita glass. "Helena liked things quiet too. She would rather sit with one close friend than mingle at a big party. She was weird that way."

I'm pretty sure he's trying to say you're weird, Griffin complained.

But Arthur waited, holding his breath, afraid to break whatever spell Etson was under. His dad rarely spoke about Helena—and he definitely never *volunteered* information.

“Did I ever tell you how we met? It was Homer Siegfried who matched us up, really. You know, the founder of Historia.” Etson chuckled. “We were both favorites of his.”

When Etson fell silent, Arthur ventured, “So, he got you to go on a date with Mom?”

“More or less. He liked to find special jobs for us to do so we’d have to work together. He even stationed me in Peru—that’s where Helena worked—so I’d see more of her. Crazy Homer. Always had an agenda.”

“An agenda?”

Etson blinked hard. “W-what?” he stammered, as if just realizing he had been speaking.

Okay, maybe that’s not a good route. But I need to keep him talking. Arthur tried to act nonchalant. “You didn’t start at Historia till you were grown up, right? What about Mom—how did she get into the Society?”

“Oh. Well. She started as an Initiate and then worked for the Society when she finished the program.”

Arthur realized he had a perfect opening to one of his questions. “So, if she was there for so long, she must’ve had lots of cool gadgets, right?”

“Gadgets? Oh, not too many. Her thing was Conservation—so animals and stuff. But I remember she *did* have this ingenious wooden box. It could change size.”

Arthur leaned forward, hardly able to believe his luck that Etson had latched on to that. “Yeah?”

“Uh-huh. I can’t recall ever seeing anything like it before or after, so I assume it was an original—maybe an old Celtic piece she found off a black

market peddler or something. I once tried to replicate it, but it wasn't like anything I'd dealt with before. I wonder what ever happened to it."

Arthur knew exactly what had happened to that box. It had ended up in his grandmother's attic with a bunch of Etson's old things, and now Arthur had it. He didn't want to say so though—in case Griffin was right and Etson wanted it back.

Don't mention the locket, Griffin warned, ears back. Don't you dare.

Uncertainly, Arthur clenched his hands together. The box was one thing, but the locket...? Etson wouldn't care about an old locket. That would be safer to ask about. Should he or shouldn't he? *Okay, look, this is one thing I've gotta find out*, he thought, and before Griffin could retort, Arthur blurted, "What about a locket on a necklace? Did Mom have anything like that?"

Etson pursed his lips. "A necklace? I'm sure she had necklaces. She had a few pieces of jewelry. But she sold most of them after you were born."

Arthur felt frustration piling up in him like sand filling an hourglass. *This locket was my mom's—it has to have been!* "But what about a locket?" he pressed. "A silver one? With ancient markings?"

Etson's politely curious expression began to dip into irritation. "You sound like you have something very specific in mind."

Arthur cringed. If his dad got fed up, he would stop talking—and then Arthur would never get answers. He cast a glance at Griffin's annoyed face, and then reached to the back of his neck to unclasp the chain and lift it off. He let it slither down onto the table between them.

Etson looked at the locket, then at Arthur, his brows scrunched. "Is this it?"

"Yeah. I found it at Ivor Manor before you took me away. It was in the attic, and that's where Gree kept all your old stuff."

“May I?” When Arthur nodded, Etson picked up the locket and turned it over and around in his hand. At last, he set it back down. “I’m afraid I’ve never seen that before. I’m pretty sure it wasn’t your mom’s.”

Part of Arthur felt a spark of relief at finally having shown the locket to his dad. It was like taking off a mask. The rest of him, however, felt like a beast had just slashed its claws through his last bit of hope. *If Dad doesn’t know about that locket, then how could it have been my mom’s?*

“Maybe your grandma knows something?” offered Etson. “You said you found it in the attic there?”

“Yeah. But I doubt Gree will know anything.”

“Me too. Still, it wouldn’t hurt to ask.”

Arthur shrugged and swept the locket into his palm. “I guess I’ll write her another letter.”

“Sure. If you do that soon, I’ll take it to her when I go over there next.”

“Thanks.” Arthur forced a smile. As he re-clasped the locket around his neck, he heard Etson’s Telecator buzz. “What was that?”

“Message.” When Etson glanced down at his Telecator, his untroubled expression vanished, swallowed by a tense frown.

Arthur cocked his head. “Did something happen?”

“What? No, no. It’s nothing.” He stuffed the last honey-drizzled *sopapilla* into his mouth and focused on the ceiling while he chewed, until the waiter passed near enough to be flagged down for the bill.

“Do we have to go already?”

“Yeah. We should get back.”

Griffin scowled. *I guess that message wasn’t actually nothing, huh?*

Arthur gave him a shushing look. *How do you know? Maybe he just got an upset stomach.*

Griffin’s loud huff expressed his opinion on that.

The walk back to the resort was quiet, Etson constantly glancing at his Telecator or peering over his shoulder. Once inside the resort's lit gates, he halted. "Hey, why don't you go on ahead to our rooms, okay? I'll catch up to you. I just need a bit of fresh air."

Arthur scratched his head. "Uh..." And before he could utter another sound, Etson had rushed back out.

"Well, isn't that suspicious?" Griffin grumbled. "What kind of air does he think he just got on our walk here? Rotten air? What's he really doing?"

"Don't be stupid. What could he have to do?"

Griffin rolled his eyes. "Well, there's only one way to find out, isn't there?"

Arthur struggled against the thought for only a few seconds. "Oh fine," he grunted. "You'll just see how stupid you're being."

And they took off after Etson.

They didn't have to go very far along the flagstone sidewalk to catch up to him, and then they trailed at a safe distance until he abruptly stopped. Arthur hesitated in the shadow of the brick wall they had been walking alongside, a large bush concealing them from view. He could just see Etson standing beneath a clump of palm trees, looking lost. *This is stupid*, he thought angrily to Griffin. *He's just—*

When a shadowed figure stepped into the light to join Etson, Arthur tucked himself further into the shadows and Griffin dove into the shrub.

"Well?" Etson's voice sounded rough.

Arthur couldn't hear the other person's quiet reply, so, heart pumping throbbing blood into his neck, he peered around the bush to see Etson, who was reaching into his bag to pull out a large envelope. "There it is, then."

The stranger accepted the envelope and bent over it, checking the contents. Satisfied, the gloved hand pulled the dark jacket aside and slid out a slightly smaller envelope. Etson grabbed it and looked inside. “It’s all here?”

The figure gave a slow nod and said something else that Arthur couldn’t catch, but the voice carried just enough that he was positive it was female.

Etson shoved the packet into his bag. “Then we’re done here.” Then he spun around so fast that Arthur had to slam himself back against the wall to avoid being seen. Holding his breath, Arthur listened to his dad rush past him, inches from his hiding place.

“The things I have to do sometimes,” Etson muttered. And then he was around the corner.

Arthur let out a shaky breath before slowly peeking past the bush to look for the stranger.

But the figure—whoever she was—had already gone.

Griffin’s head popped up from the bush, his ears back. *Well, he humphed, I’d like to hear you excuse him out of that one.*