

LOIS LOWRY

messenger

A COMPANION TO THE NEWBERY AWARD WINNER
THE GIVER AND TO *GATHERING BLUE*

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Matty was impatient to have the supper preparations over and done with. He wanted to cook, eat, and be gone. He wished he were grown so that he could decide when to eat, or whether to bother eating at all. There was something he needed to do, a thing that scared him. Waiting just made it worse.

Matty was no longer a boy, but not yet a man. Sometimes, standing outside the homeplace, he measured himself against the window. Once he had stood only to its sill, his forehead there, pressing into the wood, but now he was so tall he could see inside without effort. Or, moving back in the high grass, he could see himself reflected in the glass pane. His face was becoming manly, he thought, though childishly he still enjoyed making scowls and frowns at his own reflection. His voice was deepening.

He lived with the blind man, the one they called Seer, and helped him. He cleaned the homeplace, though cleaning bored him. The man said it was necessary. So Matty swept the wooden floor each day

and straightened the bedcovers: neatly on the man's bed, with haphazard indifference on his own, in the room next to the kitchen. They shared the cooking. The man laughed at Matty's concoctions and tried to teach him, but Matty was impatient and didn't care about the subtlety of herbs.

"We can just put it all together in the pot," Matty insisted. "It all goes together in our bellies anyway."

It was a long-standing and friendly argument. Seer chuckled. "Smell this," he said, and held out the pale green shoot that he'd been chopping.

Matty sniffed dutifully. "Onion," he said, and shrugged. "We can just throw it in."

"Or," he added, "we don't even need to cook it. But then our breath stinks. There's a girl promised she'd kiss me if I have sweet breath. But I think she's teasing."

The blind man smiled in the boy's direction. "Teasing's part of the fun that comes before kissing," he told Matty, whose face had flushed pink with embarrassment.

"You could trade for a kiss," the blind man suggested with a chuckle. "What would you give? Your fishing pole?"

"Don't. Don't joke about the trading."

"You're right, I shouldn't. It used to be a light-hearted thing. But now—you're right, Matty. It's not to be laughed at anymore."

"My friend Ramon went to the last Trade Mart, with his parents. But he won't talk about it."

"We won't then, either. Is the butter melted in the pan?"

Matty looked. The butter was bubbling slightly and golden brown. "Yes."

"Add the onion, then. Stir it so it doesn't burn."

Matty obeyed.

"Now smell *that*," the blind man said. Matty sniffed. The gently sautéing onion released an aroma that made his mouth water.

"Better than raw?" Seer asked.

"But a bother," Matty replied impatiently. "Cooking's a bother."

"Add some sugar. Just a pinch or two. Let it cook for a minute and then we'll put the rabbit in. Don't be so impatient, Matty. You always want to rush things, and there's no need."

"I want to go out before night comes. I have something to check. I need to eat supper and get out there to the clearing before it's dark."

The blind man laughed. He picked up the rabbit parts from the table, and as always, Matty was amazed at how sure his hands were, how he knew just where things had been left. He watched while the man deftly patted flour onto the pieces of meat and then added the rabbit to the pan. The aroma changed when the meat sizzled next to the softened onion. The man added a handful of herbs.

"It doesn't matter to *you* if it's dark or light outside," Matty told him, scowling, "but I need the daylight to look at something."

For the past six years, Matty has lived in Village and flourished under the guidance of Seer, a blind man known for his special sight. Once, Village was a place that welcomed newcomers and offered hope and homes to people fleeing poverty and cruelty. But something sinister has seeped into Village, and the people have voted to close it to outsiders. All along, Matty has been invaluable as a messenger between Village and other communities. He hopes someday to earn the name of Messenger. Now he must make one last journey through the treacherous Forest to spread the message of Village's closing and convince Kira, Seer's daughter, to return with him. Matty's only weapon against his increasingly dangerous surroundings is a secret power he unexpectedly discovers within himself. He wants to heal the people who have nourished his body and spirit and is willing to offer the greatest gift and pay the ultimate price.

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