





## **CHAPTER 1**

“Are you both ready?”

Their librarian, Ms. Crowley, wore her usual pointy, clicky high heels, but everything else about her outfit was out of the ordinary. She was wearing a pink vest and a curly tail. On her face, she wore a rubber pig nose.

“Ready for what?” Cleo asked, looking around their school library. “To huff and puff and blow a house down?”

Ms. Crowley blushed and pulled off the

costume. “First graders pay attention better when I dress up during read-aloud.”

Evan and Cleo followed Ms. Crowley to the darkest corner of the library. It felt strange to trust the woman who had stood in their way on their last three adventures. But they had the same goal—to find their old librarian, Ms. Hilliard, who had mysteriously disappeared into one of the magical books in the secret library beneath their school. For Ms. Crowley, the stakes were higher. Ms. Hilliard was her sister.

Ms. Crowley reached up and tugged on a huge, dusty, boring-looking book titled *Literature: Elements and Genre from Antiquity to Modern-Day*.

The bookcase swung open to reveal a dark stairway.

When they reached the bottom, the fireplace at the rear of the hidden library poofed to life. Evan looked around. It was the same as he remembered. Shelves, sliding ladders, and spiral staircases stretched into the darkness above them. Catwalks and balconies reached around corners and across gaps to let readers explore every nook. Above the fireplace hung a tapestry that showed an image of an open book with people swirling into it among a sea of colorful letters.

Cleo held up the brass key they had gotten on their last adventure. “How do we know which book this unlocks?”

“With enough searching, you can find anything in a library,” Ms. Crowley said. She led them up a spiral staircase and across a narrow bridge.

“Watch your heads,” she said, ducking into a dark passageway. They crossed to another catwalk, slid down a brass pole, and wound behind a maze of shelves. Hanging oil lamps lit their way.

At the end of an aisle stood a pedestal that held a thick book. The cover was made of reptile skin and was fastened shut by a large chain and a lock. The title read: *The Dragon’s Eye*.

“Does that heavy chain mean . . .” Evan trailed off.

Ms. Crowley nodded. “Whatever is hiding inside this book is pretty dangerous.”

Evan looked worried. “Do we have to unlock it?”

“We do if we want to find my sister,” Ms. Crowley said.

“Then what are we waiting for?” Cleo slid the key into the lock and twisted.

