

## The Gauntlet

Rain pattered against the windows. The girl had sat there for thirty minutes... only ten to go.

A backpack weighed on her lap brimming with knowledge. A maroon sweater and a black uniform skirt marked her as a high-school student, on her way home. A delicate chain hung from the girl's neck, a silver pendant of two overlapping triangles - in today's London, a badge of courage.

An angry mutter broke through her daze, but her eyes remained glued to the window. They had been glaring at her since they boarded at stop 'H,' the three teenage boys sitting at the back of the bus. Blazing eyes burned holes through the back of her neck as these strangers sent their hate her way. From daily experience, she knew: the real danger is in acknowledging them, giving them importance they do not deserve. So, unseeing, her eyes blandly registered the stops.

Buildings blurred by, soon replaced by small white and brown cottages, painted watery shades of grey by the mottled cloudy sky. The 'ding' of the bus announced the stops as they passed by, but still the boys remained. A screen up ahead of her displayed the security cameras, providing her a clear view of the seething teens, puffed up with hot gas and self-righteous anger.

*The Vale*, proclaimed the bus's computerised voice. At the last minute, the girl stood up, hooking her backpack over one shoulder and darting out of the doors, barely avoiding the snick as they closed. Through the cheap see-through plastic, their glowers seemed to follow her home.

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The bus arrived the next morning, waiting as the girl rushed out of her house, head held high as her silver pendant swung around her neck.