

GRIMM'S REFORMATORY: CASE NO. 442, CODE NAME: LIBRA

by

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Abstract

This thesis stands as the first part of the earliest novel in a series that will appeal to the mass public, utilizing well-celebrated fairy tale elements and introducing old elements of courtly romance from the medieval literature period. In doing so, I have worked to create a fantastical world with obvious parallels to historical and present notions of society, culture, and human interactions, but with a new and interesting twist on concepts readers are familiar with. The universe I've created is able to be introduced in this first installment and gradually broadened as the series progresses to prevent exhaustive detail which may distract the reader. Also, it is restricted by specific laws in terms of magical abilities and power in order to give the reader boundaries to react within and prevent the unhelpful limitlessness that causes a loss of interest. The main character, Emily Fenhorn, is a thirteen-year-old girl who is fairly average in her adolescence. She's neither the weakest nor the strongest character, leaving room for both growth and human frailty. The conflicts that affect Emily in this first installment center primarily on problems that teenagers deal with on a regular basis such as the need for acceptance, making new friends, making and dealing with enemies, popularity, and academic concerns. Unlike other thirteen-year-olds, Emily is plagued by a horrifying 'gift' that she doesn't know how to control; a gift which ends up earning her place at Grimm's Reformatory.

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CHAPTER 1 - Deep Wood Secrets

“Wait up Digo! You’re going the wrong way!” Emily called as the bushy green tail disappeared around one of the towering Fir trees. The tree wiggled, giggling as the wiry hair brushed against its bark.

“Sorry,” Emily said, patting the tree as she passed, “Digo’s just excited.” Emily peered through the nearby trees, expecting to see the earth fox’s bobbing head, or at least his pointed green ears, but the air was still.

“Digo?” She turned back to look at the tree, “Did you see which way he went?” The tree shifted its roots slightly as it twisted its trunk around to look.

“I don’t see him, but I think he was heading towards Bicker Clearing.” Emily froze. Was this what Digo had wanted to show her? He’d said her surprise was near the manor, but Bicker Clearing was in the opposite directions, at list five-hundred paces into the deep Fenhorn Forest. Emily’s skin crawled at the thought of the deep woods.

At night, lying in her bed, safe in the manor, she would sometimes hear the violent screams of pain, weeping, and angry roars that echoed from the woods. The first time she could remember hearing it, she was five winters old. Close to midnight, her windows had banged open as if pried by something trying to get in. The horrible noises that followed had hurt something deep inside Emily. As if a cold hand had put a finger through her heart. She had run screaming down the hall, bypassing her godmother, Helen’s room, and burst into her father’s chamber. Her sudden appearance and screams of terror had startled him awake and caused Digo to shoot off

the bed and hit the opposite wall. This had distracted Emily and she had stopped screaming long enough for her father, Gus to realize it was Emily that had woken him.

“What’s wrong little Libra?” he’d asked her.

“There’s something in the forest!” She had said, scarcely able to draw breath. Gus had pulled her into his big bear arms and kissed the top of her head.

“Don’t worry, they won’t hurt you.”

“What are they?”

“Just echoes; spirits that decided to stay in a clearing deep in the woods after they died there. Tonight is the beginning of the cycle of the moon they died under. Don’t worry; I’ll fix your window tomorrow so they won’t bother you.”

Gus’s explanation only created more questions in Emily’s head. How had they died? Had there been a battle? A sickness? A massacre? What made a spirit want to stay in the place they’d died? She had wanted to ask her father all these questions, but instead she had curled up next to Digo and her father and fallen back asleep.

Now as she stood in the woods looking into the perpetual mist that marked a barrier between the Deep Woods and the rest of the forest, she wished she’d thought to ask. She gripped the rough handle of the wumprat dagger on her belt and pushed a few tangled strands of hair behind her ear. She felt eyes upon her. She glanced up at the tree’s wizened face, barely visible between two branches and his unshed winter bark.

“Thanks Wendell,” she said, patting the tree again, “If you see Digo before I do, tell him I’ll meet him back home.” The tree’s trunk bent slightly, in a nod.

“And if you see any herds of Celts needing a good antler rubbing post, send them my way. I’ve got this itch that is driving me barking mad.”

Emily nodded and moved on, her bare feet gripping the loose soil that turned from a sandy brown to black ash as she crossed into the mist. She had never been into the Deep Woods before, but on occasion while playing too close to the edge, she had encountered the mist. The grayish-silver haze reached out to grab living things that grew or passed near it. Emily felt her heart banging in her chest as if it were trying to run away like the small creatures she could hear scurrying back the way she'd come. She took a few more steps toward the mist, which swirled where it hung in midair, making pictures in its wake; pictures of waves and shapes and symbols. Some were symbols that Emily had seen somewhere before, others were intricate and though she didn't know what they meant, they felt powerful. A Warybird call on a branch near her drew her attention. She could just go home and wait for Digo. His earth fox ancestors had evaded hunters and trappers for generations. Their long whiskery muzzles smelling danger before danger could smell them. He should be fine. But would he be? Digo was getting old. His eye sight wasn't as sharp, and his mind was going. Why else would he have led her the wrong way into the woods? What if the mist had taken him? She couldn't lose Digo. There was only one way to make sure he hadn't been taken by the woods.

Emily held her breath and closed her eyes. She drew her dagger and stepped resolutely into the mist. A cold wind hit her in the face, forcing her eyes open. There were whispers all around her, floating in the strange fog, saying things she couldn't understand. They were angry at first, but suddenly the cold wind died and was replaced by a warm breeze. The whispers became quieter and Emily felt a warm weight, like many hands on her back, guiding her forward. Instinctively, she sheathed her dagger, but kept her fingers lightly on the handle as she moved forward. After a few more paces, Emily stumbled out of the mist and into a clearing. She just stood for a moment, glancing around at what met her eyes. The trees here were dead and twisted

as if in the last moments before their deaths they had tried to look away from their killers. The ground was covered with the same black ash, scattered with a strange white wood that Emily had never seen before. She stooped down and picked up a large round piece at her feet and quickly dropped it when she realized it was a skull, like the ones her father kept on a shelf in his study. The whispers were here too. They hung in the air. Though Emily couldn't tell what they were saying, their tone was anger and sadness.

This must be the place the echoes live, Emily thought to herself as she cautiously stepped further into the clearing. More of the white wood crunched under her feet and she tried to walk on tip-toes to avoid the strange wooden bones. It was odd to Emily that nature hadn't absorbed them. She'd watched the plants in the forest busily working to fold dead wumprat bodies and bird bones into the soil. That was the law: nature returns to nature. So why had these bones been left here? How long had they been here?

The air felt thin and toxic as Emily walked a slow circle around the clearing. There were no plants here. The dead trees hadn't begun to deteriorate, but their leaves hung from them like strips of old parchment. She reached out a hand to touch the trunk of the one nearest her and a strange cold, rushed up her arm. The same cold she had felt in the mist. She pulled her hand away only to see her palm had left a mossy-green smudge on the trunk. She looked at her palm and was surprised to see it was clean. She was still staring at it when a familiar and irresistible tingle began tugging at her feet. Digo was calling her. His underground call reached her feet like her father's call reached her ears, though with Digo's call she had no choice but to obey. She reluctantly allowed her feet to pull her back towards the edge of the mist. She kept her eyes on the clearing, walking backwards as the soles of her feet glowed green. The mist surrounded her

again briefly and then she was back in the familiar woods, running now, an invisible leash pulling her back towards the manor.

She leapt over stones and slid down tree roots, swinging across the river on Medusa's snake-like rope vines, the old tree refusing to let go of Emily's hands until she was squarely on the opposite bank.

"Thanks Medusa," She had time to shout over her shoulder as her feet sped up, Emily barely managing to keep up with her own frantic limbs. She burst out of the woods, coming to rest inches from Digo's anxiously pacing paws.

"Where have you been?" Digo snapped. His normally smooth voice was huffy, "I told you to follow me to the manor because I had a surprise for you. Where did you go?"

"I did follow you, but you went the wrong way. You were headed for the Deep Woods when I lost track of you," she said, crossing her arms, "Wendell said that he saw you heading for Bicker Clearing, so I went after you."

At Emily's explanation, Digo sat down, his emerald eyes fixed, unblinking, staring straight into Emily's brown ones. She knew that he was seeing what she had. She waited patiently for him to finish and when he finally blinked, she was surprised to see him glance behind her into the woods, the fur on his back at attention.

"What is it?" Emily asked turning to follow Digo's gaze. His soft paw patted her foot and she turned back to look at him. He smiled reassuringly, and turned back to the manor.

"My apologies, I am getting to be a very old fox and sometimes I lose myself." Emily wanted to ask him what he had seen that made him uneasy, but her thoughts were interrupted by his now bouncing voice as he frolicked ahead of her,

“Don’t you want to see what your surprise is? Your father just brought it home for you.”

At these words, Emily picked up her pace, not because of the surprise, but because her father hadn’t been home from sea in three moons. She sprinted past Digo and her feet barely seemed to make contact with the ground as she rounded the front of the manor, changing course only when she saw the familiar hulking figure, bent over a crate on the ground.

“Dad!” Emily squealed, scrambling up the man’s back and wrapping her arms around his neck.

“There’s my little libra! Did you miss me?” His barrel chest vibrated with his booming deep voice.

“Not for a second,” Emily said, burying her face in his ponytail, breathing in the salty sea smell. She peered over his shoulder to look down at the crate sitting at his feet, “What’s that?”

“That is a surprise for you. If you climb down, you can open it.” Reluctantly she slid back to the ground and bent over the crate, which was making snuffling sounds and shaking. A little hesitantly, Emily gripped the lid and tugged it off. Inside were two bulbous eyes, staring at her. As she watched a dark green body began to materialize. It stood on its hind legs; its little front legs folded nervously, paws together. It had a long tail that thumped the bottom of the crate hopefully, and it stared back at Emily with those large eyes, looking politely puzzled.

“Dad, what is it?” She asked, but before Gus could answer her, the little creature spoke.

“I am a ‘he’, young lady. My name is Nob. I’m a Guidelacer, a guard lizard, if you will.”

“Well Nob, it’s nice to meet you.” Emily said, extending a finger into the crate. Nob rubbed his little paw against his chest before taking her finger and shaking it.

“I thought Nob would be the perfect companion for you on your upcoming journey.” Dad said. Emily ignored this.

“Where did you find him?” She asked, helping the lizard out of the crate.

“On Virto Island. He was currently unemployed, so I hired him.”

“Oh yes,” Nob interrupted, “a Guidelacer without someone to guide is truly a man without a country.”

“Well Nob, I’m sorry you had to come so far, but I won’t need your services because I’ve decided I’m not going away to school.”

“Emily, this is not open for discussion. You’re going.” Gus’s firm voice was final on the matter. With a final look into her father’s face, Emily grudgingly escorted Nob across the yard and into the manor, Digo and Gus following behind her.

“Sire,” Digo said, as the four made their way through the manor’s entryway. The room was overgrown with vines that had pushed their way through the plaster and stone walls and draped themselves around picture frames and bookcases, resting on end tables. The walls were painted with pictures of the creatures Emily had discovered in the forest and murals of tales told to her by her father.

“Sire,” he repeated, his voice dropping in volume as he glanced at Emily who had paused to point out for Nob’s benefit, her earliest drawings on the walls, “it has been quiet since you left, but I believe the time is fast approaching when you must have the Deep Woods, taken care of.” Gus waved a hand at Digo’s comment as if batting away an irksome snapdragon.

“In less than a cycle, Emily will be safely at school, so it won’t matter anyway,” Gus said, patting the fox’s back, “Don’t think on it anymore my friend, let’s eat. It smells like Helen has dinner ready.”

Digo opened his mouth to answer, but obediently nodded and turned to watch Emily lead Nob into the dining room. He knew that he was going to miss that little girl, just as the forest and

all of Fenhorn would. On the other hand, Emily would be safe away at school, far from the Deep Woods.

Gus and Digo joined Nob and Emily just in time for Helen to bustle out of the kitchen, a steaming pot of meat stew in her hands, a basket of rolls, balanced gracefully on her head.

“The chow’s a-blazin’ hot and there’s lots to go ‘round, so your belly’s betta be empty,” she sang, her rough-voice contradicting all the poise and grace evident in her posture and appearance.

The odd little family filled bowls, slurped stew, and chewed quietly for awhile; Digo, with his front paws braced on either side of his bowl, his low stool pushed up to the table to make the task easier, and Nob, standing on his chair, head deep in his bowl, lapping up the soup with his sticky tongue. Emily slurped her stew loudly, thinking about the day. So many thoughts chased themselves through her head that she wondered when she opened her mouth, which one would make it out first.

“So Dad, I went into the Deep Woods today.” Emily said, surprising even herself with her daring. The sounds of eating stopped, except for Nob, whose head was so deep inside his bowl, his back legs had left the chair seat, and were kicking at the air, now balanced there only by his tail. Helen and Gus exchanged a dark look and Digo only glanced at Emily before returning his attention to his stew.

“I went through the mist today Dad,” Emily said in response to the silence, “I went all the way into Bicker Clearing.” Gus’s face had turned pale, almost as white as the wood bones.

“Why?” he asked simply, “Why would you go where you know I’ve told you never to go?”

“What happened there, Dad? Where did all those bones come from? And there were all these voices, they were whispering, I couldn’t understand what they were saying. Everything is dead there, Dad. Why?” Emily’s voice had turned from curiosity to pleading, the questions tumbling from her lips like water over a fall, begging her father to explain why there were bones and angry whispers in her beautiful Fenhorn forest.

“Emily, we’re not talking about this. Now finish your dinner.” The playful tone he always talked to her in when he called her his ‘little libra’ was gone. His voice had returned to the harsh sea captain’s voice she had heard him use so many times when addressing his men whenever they accompanied him to the manor. Helen looked from Gus to Emily before speaking,

“Well Emily, you got another acceptance post today,” she said brightly, “This one was from Briar Hill. Excellent girls’ academy. They only turn out the smartest and most refined young ladies, you know. Lady Wirks went to Briar Hill. I could set up an interview with her if you want ...”

Helen trailed off when she turned to look at Emily who was now drawing lines on her cheeks and forehead with the dregs of her stew, and holding her spoon as if it were a spear.

“I already told you Helen,” Emily said, turning to glare at her, “I’m not going. I’m staying here.” Helen’s face changed rapidly. She seemed to swell where she was sitting, and a shadow seemed to cross Helen’s face like storm clouds.

“You are going Emily, if I have to drag you there myself, kicking and screaming.” Her voice seemed to fill the dining room and force its occupants’ backs against their chairs. No one spoke for a minute and Helen seemed to be deflating, returning to her regularly cheerful appearance.

“Now Miss Emily, I will give you the choice. You may go to bed or you may stay here and go through all these brochures for schools with me.” Helen said.

“Goodnight,” Emily said, getting to her feet. Nob glanced up at her, unsure of what to do.

“Nob, would you like to sleep in my room?” He nodded and Emily scooped him up and placed him on her shoulder. She pecked her father on the cheek, patted Digo’s back, and turned on her heel without any acknowledgement to Helen. As she climbed the stairs, Emily could feel herself getting angrier with each step.

Who was Helen to tell her what she had to do? She wasn’t Emily’s mother. She wasn’t even related to the family by blood. Helen had just been a close friend to Emily’s mother. At Emily’s birth, her mother had named Helen as Emily’s godmother.

Still, that didn’t give Helen the right to tell Emily that she had to do anything. And why hadn’t Emily’s father stood up for her? Always before, he had been the one protesting Emily’s entrance into one of the national schools. He had constantly insisted Emily stay at Fenhorn. What had changed? He had simply stared into his stew when Helen told Emily that she was going to school.

“Here we are Nob,” Emily said with a flourish as she pushed open the sliding wall panel, exposing what could be considered more of a nest than a room. The floor was stacked with piles of books. Papers and charts of the stars, maps of the seas, and childish drawings done in charcoal were scattered across the floor. Emily’s bed was a simple four poster which was perfectly made and tidy in stark comparison to the rest of the room. Noticing Nob’s curiosity at the bed’s appearance, Emily grinned. Stooping down beside the bed, she pulled from under it, a sailor’s bedroll.

“I sleep down here, so I don’t mess up the bed. I made a deal with Helen that as long as I keep my bed made; she won’t send the maids in here to clean. Sometimes she comes in here, so I have to make sure the bed’s always perfect so the rest of my room can be just like this.”

Nob nodded and climbed onto the window sill above Emily’s head.

“I normally like to sleep with a breeze if that’s agreeable to you Miss Emily.” He said cautiously.

“Of course Nob, probably reminds you of home, doesn’t it?” She stood to open the window while Nob settled onto the window cushion.

“Don’t worry,” Emily said as she laid back down, “Dad’s always bringing me guard pets. He doesn’t like Helen and me being alone. You’re free though, Nob. I can send you back tomorrow if you want.” A contented little sigh escaped the lizard’s throat.

“Oh thank you Miss Emily, my mate is expecting our fifth egg and I really should be there. I’ve missed the others hatching, because I’ve always been...”

“In service?” Emily finished, “owned by men?”

There was a pause and Nob said, “Goodnight Miss Emily. Sleep under the stars of Libra.”

“You know that’s what my dad calls me,” Emily said on a yawn.

“I noticed that,” Nob said, “why does he?”

“He says because Libra is a balance between dark and light...” Sleep claimed her and she was free in the forest once more, dreaming of dark shadows and white mist.

CHAPTER 2 - White Wood and Splintered Lies

The forest was thicker than Emily remembered it, and more humid. Sweat dripped from her and she could feel a pulse in the ground under her bare feet, and hear it beating in the trees that surrounded her. The intensity of life around her gave the impression that she was in the belly of a great living beast rather than walking through the familiar open forest. Though the ground itself seemed to be living, the usual forest-dwellers were not out. The sky above her was dark, but beginning to lighten at the edges, as day began to break. She felt anxious, as if she should be running from something. Turning in a circle, she saw nothing, but the urge to run and hide only grew stronger the longer she stood still. So she ran.

She turned into a familiar clearing and leapt over the gully where the family of Dragons lived, their lizard bodies in a pile, tough scaly hides all rising and falling in unison as they slept on. Emily paused, perched on the hollow fallen log that she would often climb inside as a child, because it told the best stories. She wasn't sure where to run next. As if waiting for this cue from Emily, the pushed her from the log and seemed to point her in the direction of the Deep Woods. She followed the impulse, crashing through this less familiar brush. She climbed the last slope of trees which marked the division between the Deep Woods and the rest of Fenhorn forest and was met by the mist, swirling symbols and shapes. Then her father was standing next to the mist, arms crossed, an unfamiliar scowl on his face.

“Dad, what are you doing here?” Her voice asked, slightly muffled.

“Didn't I tell you not to come in here?”

“Well, you did, but Dad, I think something's chasing me. What else is in here?”

“You don’t need to know, Emily. Why won’t you just stop asking?”

“Why won’t you tell me?” Emily felt herself pleading. A silver-gray hand reached from the mist grabbed her father around the throat, pulling him into the mist.

“Dad!” she screamed. And then she was diving headfirst through the stirring fog, fighting off the cold squeezing her on all sides.

She broke through the clearing, and fell on all fours, panting.

She expected to hear the whisperings surround her, but instead a strange music permeated the air, and laughing. She stood slowly and walked towards the empty spot in the clearing where the music was the loudest. On her way there, she could hear voices having a conversation on her left. The tones were low, like men, but the language was one she’d never heard before. To her right, she heard the same unfamiliar sounds from voices with a higher register, like a group of women gossiping, but the clearing was empty. She blinked and when she opened her eyes the sun was shining on a huddle of huts right in front of her. Women sat around a cooking fire, now giving bodies to the voices she’d heard. Men studied charts to her left. In the center of the music a man sat with two carved pipes in his mouth, running slender fingers over holes carved in their surfaces, while three mossy-haired children played on the ground in front of him.

She blinked, and the clearing was empty again, except for the voices. The white bones on the ground were shaking as the earth vibrated under her feet. She looked around the clearing, frantically.

“Dad!” She called, but he wasn’t there. The ground in the middle of the clearing was beginning to swirl, a hole opened in the middle, and began to suck in the white wood bones that scattered the ground. Emily tried to climb one of the charred trees to escape the pull of the earth, but the tree began to crumble beneath her. She lost her footing and fell to the ground, just as the

earth closed and the rumbling stopped. She lay with her eyes closed for a minute. She heard wings fluttering over her and looked up to see a giant crow land next to the few remaining bones near her, pecking at their surface. Emily didn't know why, but she felt strangely protective of those bones. She got to her feet and ran at the crow, who seemed to grow in size as she neared him, becoming the size of a man by the time she came eye-to-eye with him.

“Shoo!” She said, flapping her arms. The crow fixed its cold black gaze on her. Then it attacked. Wings cut her face like knives, its clawed feet sunk talons into her chest and its razor sharp beak stabbed her face.

Emily sat bolt upright in bed, screaming.

The only physical evidence of the night's imagined violence was the ripped window cushion and smeared blood stain, but Nob's body was gone.

“He was probably carried off by a screecher, Emily,” her father told her, “Guidelacers do look a lot like burrow lizards.” His voice was quiet.

“But it's my fault Dad,” Emily said, choking down the sob she knew was clawing its way up her throat.

“How could you have possibly caused this Emily? You shouldn't have left the window open, but nature is hardly your fault.” he said, sitting down on the floor next to her.

“I don't know how, but I feel like I caused it. Last night I had this dream. It was so real. It was about what I saw in the Deep Woods yesterday.” She paused and looked at him, hoping he might let something slip, because she was so upset. His expression was indecision.

“Tell me what you saw Emily,” he said finally.

“I went into Bicker Clearing, and everything was dead, but it wasn't going back into the ground, the way it does in the rest of the forest,” She said, studying his face, “there were also

these pieces of wood, white wood. They looked like bones, like the ones you have in the study. And there were all these whispers, like people all around me, but I couldn't see them." Her father sighed,

"I guess now that you've seen the place, I have to tell you about your mother and what happened here." Emily felt the skin on her arms prickle at the mention of her mother.

"You've never even told me her name, Dad." She tried not to sound accusing, but she had wanted to know everything about her mother, and her father refused to talk about her.

"Her name was Renata. She was the Eleaven ambassador to the Counsel of Man." He began.

"Eleaven?" Emily interrupted.

"The Eleavens were a race of forest-dwellers. You've seen pictures of them on the walls downstairs. The one playing the pan flute is an Eleaven." It only took a moment for Emily to recall the image. When she nodded, her father continued.

"The Eleavens are, for the most part, a peaceful race. They have only fought in two wars in the past fifty life-spans. They are also very wise, which is part of the reason we were so pleased to have an Eleaven member on the Counsel of Man."

"We?" Emily interrupted again.

"I served on the Counsel too. That's how I met your mother. She was the ambassador for her race, back when Eleavens were considered equals to humans." he said, "Anyway, whenever there is someone different in a group, and that person turns out to be exceptionally good at what the group is trying to do, they are almost always hated by other members. Your mother was no different. She not only was fair-minded and wise, but she was also the Oracle of her tribe and had the gift of futuresight. This naturally evoked jealousy from other Counsel members who

were unfortunately in a place to make laws for the land. Our votes didn't quite measure enough pull to prevent the Wood Purge act."

"What was the Wood Purge act?" Emily asked.

"It was a piece of law which made it legal to kill anyone of the Eleaven bloodline. The media in the Barrens stood behind the Counsel, painting the Eleavens as doomsayers and savages because they drew their powers of futuresight, terrableness, that is earth-healing, and transformation from their high levels of Naturalia. Do you remember when I taught you about Naturalia?"

"It's nature's life-force," Emily said nodding, "Everybody has it. Some people have more than others because of where they grew up and some races have more than others." Emily recited.

"Very good. Well, Eleavens have the highest levels of Naturalia besides trees. The Counsel members were afraid that because of their powers, if the Eleavens ever decided to turn on the humans, they could wipe us out. So, they decided to dispose of the race that could threaten them." Emily felt her jaw drop.

"By this time, your mother and I had fallen in love and we married a fortnight before the law went into effect. We had both been ostracized from the Counsel but because I was titled and held control of the country of Fenhorn, Renata was spared from being immediately killed. We smuggled her tribe into Fenhorn forest and they were able to build their village in the clearing in the Deep Woods." Her father looked at Emily, and he could tell by her expression that she was beginning to fill in the missing pieces.

"Your mother and I were happy for the first year. At least as happy as an out-cast human and a fugitive whose race was being systematically annihilated could be. We found out your

mother was pregnant with you at the beginning of the second year of our marriage. We were both so excited. Then, days before you were to be born, word got out that Renata's tribe was living in the forest. The Barren Raiders came with their weaponry, forged in the furnaces of the Barrens, and the fire that water can't put out and they murdered and burned the Deep Woods to the ground. Your mother had heard the screams from the house and she was so scared, she accidentally went into the labor of birthing you. I wasn't there or I never would have let her go."

"Go?" Emily asked, confused.

"I was at the dock, signing for a shipment of saplings from Eleaves for Renata's family. They're a special kind of tree that all Eleaven babies are born under because it will supposedly ensure their immortality. I was told by the maid who helped birth you that Renata wasn't even able to make it to the bed. You were born in the entryway. As soon as Renata saw that you were alive and breathing and safe, she kissed you and stumbled outside, into the forest. I never saw her again. As soon as I got home from the dock, I was met by the maid, still carrying you and at the door. Smoke was rising from the forest and I didn't have to ask what had happened. I just ran into the forest to the place where the tribe had been, but the place was surrounded by the mist you've seen. I tried to fight my way through it, but it was so cold, my muscles froze and I was trapped in the mist."

"How did you get out?" Emily asked, leaning towards him.

"Digo pulled me out. I tried a few years ago, on the same day it happened, to go back through the mist. I wore your mother's cloak, you know, the green one that hangs in the hall wardrobe. When I was wearing it, the cold wasn't unbearable and I could make it through. From what you've told me, it looked the same then as it does now; ash covering the ground, everything is dead, white wood bones everywhere."

“So Eleaven bones look like wood?” Emily asked.

“They are wood,” her father said, “Eleavens are the purest form of nature’s children. In legends, they say the first Eleavens were trees who cut off their roots because they wanted to see the rest of the land.”

Emily sat for a moment, thinking about all her father had just told her. Her mother had been Eleaven, not just Eleaven, but an Oracle who could see the future.

“So that makes me...” Emily said, looking at her father.

“Half-Eleaven, yes. I guess it was about time to tell you all of this, as you’re about to leave Fenhorn and have to mix with a bunch of Barreners who turn up their nose at anything that isn’t as pale and weak as they are.” Emily was surprised at the bitterness in her father’s voice.

“You keep talking about the Barrens, Barreners, what do you mean?” She asked.

Her father shook his head, smiling.

“I keep forgetting how young you are, little Libra,” her father said, shaking his head and smiling, “Outside of our country of Fenhorn, there are seven other countries like ours. The eight of us make up what we call, “The Vale”. In the Reformed Counsel of Man, I was able to again serve as ambassador from Fenhorn, because we’re the only noble family here. The eight countries in the Vale all decided that we wanted to keep our lands as they were; forests, farmland, mountains, and rivers. In doing so, we gave up any claim to the weaponry and industry being developed in the thirty-seven other countries which we call “The Barrens”. They cut down their forests to feed fires in the factories where they make machinery to grow their food in bottles and jars for them. They hacked at their mountains with more machinery, using the stone to build monasteries and schools dedicated to recording and learning all the ‘glory’ it is to be pure human and now the wisest creatures in the land.” For the first time in her life, she could picture her

father serving as an ambassador for Fenhorn. He spoke with such passion, it almost made her ashamed of her human half. But then she looked at the man who had given it to her, and she couldn't be ashamed.

Emily and her father took the blood-stained window cushion into the forest and buried it near the roots of a Pyre Fern. They had had no body to bury in memory of Nob, but thought maybe the cushion would do.

"It's sad," Emily said, taking her father's hand, "I was going to send him home today. He had a family and everything."

"I'm sailing that way again. I'll stop by the place I found him and tell his family, if you want me to Libra." Her father said. Emily turned to face him.

"Dad, I just want you to stop bringing me pets to protect me. If you weren't so busy looking for pets to guard me, you might have more time to be here, protecting me and Helen yourself." She didn't know where this sudden burst of anger was coming from, but she couldn't stop it. She let go of his hand and turned back to the forest, heading straight for the Deep Woods. Her father called after her, but she didn't answer or slow down. She burst through the mist and fell to her knees, crying.

The whispers around her seemed more concerned now. She tried to ignore them, and turn the attention on herself. What was happening to her? She knew she was sad over Nob's death, and sad for what had happened to her mother. She was also mad. Mad enough to hurt something, and she couldn't shake the thought that her dream the night before was somehow connected to Nob's death.

CHAPTER 3- The Banishing Bell

The acrid smell of burning flesh distracted Faldor from his scouting and drew him to the edge of the wood. As he crossed the sunken terrain of the thinning Fenhorn Forest, he could hear the whispers of his bow growing steadily louder, reciting stories of old and the histories of his people, but in a tone of great mourning. His bow was formed from the wood of the Tree-of-Tales, the legendary symbol of the Eleaven whose whispering tones were always one with the spirit of his people. At the clearing, he drew out the tribal root from beneath his cloak and hung it around his neck to ensure continued protection outside of Fenhorn. The black billowing clouds rising from the broken bodies weakened Faldor's knees. They lined the ditches of the high road. Faldor squatted next to the nearest corpse and reached out a long finger to touch the charred face. Her skin had lost the healthy autumn tinge of gold and orange, and the burning glow of the naturalia had left her eyes. A single tear of mourning was all Faldor, as an Eleaven warrior, was allowed to shed. He turned her head gently to let his tear fall upon the mark of her tribe set on her left cheek, but he stopped when his gaze fell upon the symbol.

This was the body of the Oracle. The winged key, half burned away from her pale cheek marked her as the last of her tribe for many seasons, the daughter of warriors and goddesses. Now she had been slain by men.

The sound of snapping twigs moved Faldor's fingers from the Oracle's face to his belt. He unsheathed his stone blade and waited.

"Looks like we missed one," a harsh voice drawled, "There's still a filthy root-vein alive." Slowly, Faldor stood.

“You humans are quick to forget that from which you came,” said Faldor calmly. “And quick to cut yourself free from the roots which gave you life. But even the mightiest tree will fall when it is uprooted from its origin.”

“You know, you should be proud of your people, ranger,” the man said with a chuckle, “not one of them screamed for mercy. Come to think of it, not one of them screamed at all, even in the fire.” Faldor’s grip on his blade tightened as he turned.

The man’s face was ruddy and fat, and he wore peasant’s garb under a kingdom tunic. Of course, the royalty wouldn’t want to do their own dirty work. This man was obviously a mercenary. Another, thinner man stood a few yards behind the first. His face was drawn and his eyes weary. Faldor’s true quarrel was not with these men. Though they cared nothing for the sufferings of his people, they were not the ones who had ordered this act.

The man motioned to the body of the Oracle at Faldor’s feet.

“That one there, she was a pretty little thing to put down. We would have had some fun with her but she had just birthed a new little savage fungus. She was still dirty from the sight of her.” Faldor glanced back down at her body and like heaping dry kindling on a brushfire, his anger outstretched his reason.

He fell upon the man. His hands gripped the mercenary’s throat, feeling the man’s flesh and bones contort in desperation. Faldor stared into the man’s eyes as he died. The hard visage of a mercenary was quickly replaced by a scared peasant, pleading under Faldor’s grip. Still Faldor did not look away. He wanted to make sure that the last face this ruddy peasant saw would be that of retribution.

“Stop it Emily, you’re killing her!”

The shrill voice startled Emily Fenhorn from her sleep, and she sat up with a jolt and searched the dormitory frantically for the source. Two dozen girls in matching pink nightgowns, were huddled around Liza Mendle's bed, across the room.

"What's happened?" asked Emily. The girls turned to look at her, fear-stricken.

"Liza was choking in her sleep," said little Rina Trill "She was gasping for air as if someone were strangling her. And you...you had your hands around your bed post, squeezing it, like you were trying to kill it."

"Emily," this voice came from Thella, an older girl who served as the dorm monitor. "What the hell were you thinking? You could have killed her!" Her voice was shaking. She was holding Liza, trying to calm her.

"I don't understand," Liza coughed, "how did Emily? How could she have...?"

"I don't know how, Liza, but she's been doing it since she got here." Thella said, looking anywhere but at Emily.

"Now wait a minute," Rina said, glancing from Emily to Thella, "just what has Emily been doing since she got here?"

"The fallen chandeliers, the portraits with their eyes scratched out, the unexplainable fire in the headmistress' office," Thella listed off, "were caused by Emily."

"But how?" Rina asked.

"Look at her," Thella spat, "she's glowing. Doesn't that give you a clue? When was the last time you were siphoned, Emily? A month?"

"Thella," Emily whispered, "I'm sorry. I don't have..."

"What you 'don't have' Emily, is any business being here." Thella's voice was hard, but there was sympathy in her eyes.

“I know. I’ll try to control...” Emily started but she broke off when she saw Thella shaking her head.

“I can’t lend you any more patience or give you another chance to attempt controlling whatever this is that controls you. This...this is it.” Thella’s voice carried an awful finality.

With a last look of resolve, Thella left the dormitory and with her went any lingering hope Emily held of remaining at Rosebud Academy. With a sigh, Emily fell back on her pillows, her head swimming with the dream she’d been having. It was the same one she’d had for the past week, but this was the first night it had gone on long enough for the Eleaven called Faldor to actually strangle the man. It was so vivid, Emily was sure it had to be real, but why was she seeing it?

“I’m sorry Liza, I didn’t mean to.” Emily said to the ceiling.

“Liar,” Liza spat, “you’re pathetic. What was it? Didn’t have the grass to kill me when I was conscious?”

“Listen,” Emily said, sitting up, “I have no beef with you Liza. It was an accident. Let’s keep it that way.”

“What I’m wondering,” Liza said coldly, still massaging her neck as she climbed out of bed, “is why they let you in here in the first place.”

“What are you on about, Mendle?” Emily growled, climbing from her own bed and advancing on Liza until the two were toe-to-toe.

“This is a school for the daughters of nobility. Well, I just got a letter from Daddy. Your father is wanted by our king for all sorts of crimes at sea. Hardly a nobleman is he.” Liza whispered wickedly into Emily’s ear. Emily resisted the urge to punch her and instead whispered back,

“Well that’s your king’s problem, isn’t it? What’s the king of a land-locked, dunghill country like yours going to do about it?” At Emily’s reply, Liza let loose a harsh girlish giggle.

“Well it seems your king has vowed to help ours and he’s taken my father as his new ambassador to Fenhorn. Wait, that’s your dad’s old job, isn’t it?”

“Next time,” Emily said coolly, but loud enough for the girls nearest them to hear, “I’ll make sure I don’t wake up before the job’s done.”

Emily saw the terror register on Liza’s face before she turned on her heel and headed for the latrine. The other girls scurried to get out of her way, but she could hear them whispering as she passed.

Emily was used to the whispering. The reaction had been the same at every school after every strange incident involving her dreams. They were always so real and violent. She would wake either in uncontrollable anger or suffocating anxiety, only to find that her subconscious in her sleep had committed some terrible deed, leaving the evidence on her hands, though her body had never left her bed. These dreams had gotten her kicked out of the last dozen academies. This was the first time the dreams had turned her against a person. Always before it had caused exploding chandeliers, carriage Rosebud had been the final school on the list and now, after only two weeks here, she would surely be expelled. Making an attempt to kill a fellow student was certainly an act worthy of expulsion.

Therefore, Emily wasn’t surprised to see Lady Hildere, the headmistress, standing with Thella at the foot of her bed when she returned from the latrine. Lady Hildere fixed Emily with a cold stare and then turned to face the rest of the room.

“Ladies, finish dressing quickly and move to the Daisy Hall for breakfast!” The girls kept their heads down, tugging on matching gowns bearing the Rosebud crest, pulling ribbons

through their hair, and searching under beds for matching pink slippers. When the last girl had gone, Thella closed the door behind her and turned back to face Emily and Lady Hildere.

“Well Miss Emily, Thella has told me about what happened this morning and frankly, I don’t know what to say. You have broken the vows of this institute by using your savagery against another student.”

“I didn’t mean to, Headmistress,” Emily said dully. She had had to explain this so many times, it felt like the script of a bad play, “I shall write you lines, apologize and carry out Liza’s chores, and go at once to the Extractor to have my naturalia drawn.”

A cruel smile curled Lady Hildere’s wrinkled lips.

“Miss Emily, you may be used to the soft-fingered touch of the headmistresses at your former academies, but here at Rosebud, we do not believe in treating disobedience with a mere wrist-slap and an expulsion to pass you onto the next unfortunate school who will receive you. No, Miss Emily your punishment will not be soon forgotten by a willful mind. You will have ten minutes to pack your belongings, and then you are to report to the courtyard. Thella will assist you in your packing.”

Emily didn’t have much in the way of belongings. Her school uniforms and supplies made up the majority of her belongings. Her only other possessions were her father’s looking glass and Sven’s tome which she kept under her pillow. She couldn’t bring herself to write in it, but she liked to have it near her. She set these last two items in her carriage bag before closing the lid of her trunk on her other possessions.

Thella stood near her but didn’t offer to help Emily pack.

“I’m sorry,” Thella whispered.

“It’s alright,” Emily said, raising a hand to quiet Thella, “I don’t belong here Thella. Or really in any place like this for that matter. I’ve always known it, I think.”

Emily’s trunk and carriage bag were handed off to a pair of servants to take to the courtyard, and Emily followed Thella to the courtyard.

When they arrived outdoors, the crisp air was filled with what seemed to be every maiden and professor at the school. Emily was handed off from Thella to the tall, severe, Professor of Manners, Lady Gandra whose faint mustache seemed to glisten in the early light. Lady Gandra led Emily to the platform where the water well stood in the center by Lady Hildere.

“Ladies of Rosebud Academy,” Lady Hildere said, her voice echoing and bouncing off the high stone walls, “Emily Fenhorn is no longer welcome here as a maiden seeking training for a position of royalty. She has committed a grievous wrong against this institution and the civilized maidens who attend it. She has been expelled and will endure a punishment fitting her crime. Lady Gandra, my lash please.” Lady Gandra’s mustache quivered slightly as she produced a large whip from a leather bag sitting on the edge of the platform. She handed it to Lady Hildere and then she, and another girl from the front row each took one of Emily’s arms and held her over the low wall of the well, her back exposed to Lady Hildere. Before the beating began, Lady Hildere leaned down so her voice was right next to Emily’s ear,

“You’re really going to hate this. My lash has pieces of Eleaven bone tethered to its ends. Eleavens have the sharpest bones, but light as a feather; maximum pain with minimum exertion. But then you should know that, being half root-vein yourself. You are an abomination Emily Fenhorn, and I want you to know the deep satisfaction I will be getting from making you suffer.”

Emily stared into the water at the well’s depth during the beating, watching her tears fall the length of the well and join the water creating ripples that distorted her reflection more than

the pain. This wasn't her first school beating. In fact, every one of her terms at the elite schools had ended in this stance; back exposed, lash across it, humiliation assumed by a beating in front of the rest of the school. But it didn't work; Emily never felt the intended humiliation. She knew that many of the headmistresses and professors and even the students at the past academies had hated her because of her parentage. If her father hadn't been such an important member of court for so long, she would have been murdered at birth. These headmistresses and professors were members of the nobility that had been in power at the time of the genocide. The students were children of humans with the same beliefs, so it wasn't terribly surprising they hated her as well.

Her first beating had been at Briar Hill Academy, six months ago. It stood out in Emily's memory more strongly than the ones following it. She had been used to Helen lecturing her for her misdeeds and actions, but she'd never seen anyone who openly hated her for what she was. Helen, had loved her because she was her best friend's daughter. But here, outside the loving comfort of family, she had gotten her first bitter taste of the hatred the rest of the land held for those of bi-special birth. Her first headmistress had pounced on the very first of Emily's misdeeds, when in her dream she had apparently screamed and broken all the glass in the chandeliers throughout the castle. That beating had taken place in the dining hall where she was simply jerked off the stool she sat upon and flogged with the cane the old headmistress Lady Durkis had carried. She had called Emily 'root-vein' too.

This beating seemed to take an eternity, but thirty-seven lashes, (one for each of the countries in The Barrens which she had symbolically betrayed) were soon accomplished and she was being dragged back to her feet by her hair. Her thumbs were bound behind her back before Lady Hildere spoke again.

“Let this stand as an example, ladies of what savagery can cause one to do if allowed to remain unchecked.” Lady Hildere said, as she motioned for the gate at the courtyard entrance to be opened. The heavy groan of oak and iron was almost a welcoming sound. She felt like something wild, being released from captivity and returning to nature. She had to suppress a smile because she knew this thought must come from her Eleaven blood.

A roughly-spun rope was produced and Lady Hildere pulled a noose over Emily’s head, making sure it was small enough to cut at her unnatural ears and skin which still emitted a faint glow. Lady Hildere’s hatred for the girl was evident when she tightened the rope around Emily’s neck until Emily was forced to bend at the waist to draw air. What Lady Hildere didn’t know was that Emily was acting.

She had learned how to hold her breath at the bottom of Fenhorn Pond, and in her mind she was remembering the cool water and lily pads skating overhead, instead of the heat from her torn skin and the hateful glares of those surrounding her. Her eyes followed the path they would take, through the sea of students and they came to rest on the familiar black carriage, waiting beyond the gates. It was driven by goblins, one of the only forms of employment the humans in The Barrens would grant the poor creatures. The rope around her neck would be tied to the carriage’s footman post and they would lead her home through the streets, a sign of shame for being different. This act was so familiar to Emily that she knew the goblins by name as well as their horses, and she knew where to stand in the carriage’s wake so she wouldn’t be pelted by the sand and rocks dislodged by the carriage’s wheels. In fact, the scene was only missing one thing, she thought as Lady Hildere yanked on the rope, pulling Emily down from the platform, like a stubborn pack animal. But, as she followed Lady Hildere through the crowd, she heard it: the loud clanging which could be perceived as far as the center of the surrounding towns, the ringing

of the banishment bell. She thought of pausing to tell Lady Gandra, whose beefy arms were pushing her towards the gate from behind, that this was her first banishment where a woman with a mustache was involved, but thought better of it. As she passed her fellow students, one by one, they turned their backs to her, facing the walls of the courtyard, lining the pathway to the carriage with slender pink trees topped with leaves of russet and blonde curls piled high in bird nests.

Emily knew she should feel shame, regret, and sorrow at her humiliation, but even as the rope was secured to the post and her trunk thrown haphazardly onto the coach's roof, even as she heard the goblin's growl their commands to the black horses who pulled the carriage, and the gate slam shut behind her, all Emily could feel was relief that this was the last time she would have to do this.

CHAPTER 4- The Last Twig

The goblin carriage was less than well-received at Fenhorn Manor. Emily had only been gone a fortnight. Emily, had walked, tied to the carriage for show, until they had reached the outskirts of the village. Then, Mirk and Grudwick, the Crest of Crows indentured goblin slaves, had untied her, and after giving her a quick hug and some goblin-made salve for skin irritations to dab on the rope burn around her neck, had handed her into the carriage where she had rode comfortably, except for the sinking feeling of what Helen might do to her when she got home.

As the carriage descended the final hill, Emily peeked out of a slit in the lush curtains and let out a groan when she saw Helen standing outside the front door, hands on hips.

Mirk brought the carriage to a slow halt in front of the doors and Grudwick had scrambled onto the carriage's roof to throw down the trunk. Emily sat up, grimacing as she disturbed the green scabs on her back, which were now little oozing reminders of the fight she was about to have with Helen. She clambered out of the carriage and turned to get her bag. Two maids were already taking the trunk from Grudwick. When Emily turned back to face Helen she was surprised to see Helen's face had changed from the annoyed exasperation she had been wearing when the carriage had pulled up to what now appeared to be sad understanding. Emily cautiously approached Helen.

"Is that everything?" Helen asked quietly pointing at her trunk which the maids were now attempting to negotiate through the narrow door. Emily raised her carriage bag slightly and nodded.

Helen turned and followed the maids inside. Emily approached the pair of black horses and patted them each on the muzzle, before looking back at the goblins,

“Thanks again Sir Mirk and Sir Grudwick. Hopefully the next time I see you both, it will be under better circumstances.”

“Aye Miss,” the pair said in unison. Then, with a crack from Mirk’s whip, the pair moved back down the driveway and over the hill, out of sight. Emily turned back to face the manor, and with a deep breath, went in.

She felt the familiar sensation of going back in time. The intricately painted walls reminded her of the times when she was little and would simply lie on the floor in the entryway making up stories for all the characters painted on the walls. There were thin figured goblins dancing with beautiful Eleaven women, Manglers and Alovees telling stories to each other under a wide oak tree, and tall, handsome Dwarves having tea with Grunyons, their long forked tongues making their imagined bewitching silvery voices slip into the square ears of their Dwarf companions.

Helen hated the paintings. She had been hinting lately that she wanted to have them repainted, but Emily flatly refused. Her father had painted many of the illustrations and every time she saw them, it was like a little reassuring nod from him that she was not an abomination, even if all members of the nobility believed she was. The pictures told her that she was his daughter and he loved her.

While Gus wasn’t at home, Emily, his heir was in control of any changes to the manor, so if she said she didn’t want the entryway repainted, it wasn’t repainted. Helen had no choice. Emily touched the painted face of Argos, a Vixere, and her favorite character. His tall red ears and the smile on his long red muzzle gave him a friendly expression but his eyes were those of her father; dark green and kind.

“Emily, dinner is being served.” Helen’s voice was not angry, but there was a bite of impatience that snapped Emily out of her reminiscence and prompted her nod of acknowledgement. She kissed Argos before entering the dining room, her bag still in hand. She took her place across from Helen at one end of the long table. After sitting, she pulled her writing tome from her bag and set it beside her plate. She wasn’t sure why, but she liked having it close to her.

They were joined only by old Geller, the family butler. Helen had told her Geller was allowed to join them because he had been with the family for so long, but the last time she had dropped something under the table at dinner, Emily had seen Helen’s foot rubbing the old man’s leg when she bent to pick it up. Emily guessed it wasn’t so strange, Helen being her father’s older sister and old Geller probably only five or six winters older than Helen.

Geller took his seat next to Helen after pouring stew from the tureen for both ladies. Emily picked up her spoon and began rapidly slurping her stew but slowed when Helen let out a resigned sigh.

“Well, I suppose it would be a fool’s errand to ask if you learned anything at this last school.” Her voice was tired and Emily felt a small stab of annoyance at Helen’s words.

“I did learn that women can grow mustaches just as men do,” Emily said, “though not so handsome.”

Geller snorted into his stew.

“S-sorry, M’ladies,” he gasped.

“It’s quite alright Geller,” Helen said, glaring at Emily. “Certain persons at this table are better-behaved than others.”

Now it was Emily's turn to choke on the meal. Luckily, her coughing was covered by the sounds of wheels grinding and hoof falls signifying an approaching carriage.

"Emily, am I going to go to the door and find an irate post from Lady Hildere or some disgruntled parent about some infraction you have committed against their child?"

With an inward groan, Emily remembered the threat she had leveled against Liza. Her silence caused Helen to replace her spoon upon her napkin; with such force that Emily thought she saw it sink into the table. She was so annoyed at Emily that she didn't even notice Geller half-rising to his feet to answer the door. Emily put a hand on the old butler's arm.

"It's no use Geller, if it's about me; she wants to be the first to receive it." Emily had been through this drill before and could do nothing but wait for the explosion.

She sat listening to the commotion in the hall and was surprised to hear Helen's voice reach a delighted register.

"Oh, do come in Sir," She was saying as the voice grew closer to the dining hall.

The door reopened and Helen was preceded by an elderly man who was dressed in a tailored tunic and trousers, with a matching coat bearing the Crest of Crows.

"This is Mr. Grimm," Helen said as if introducing him to an assembly, though it was only to Emily and old Geller. Emily stood to curtsy and old Geller got shakily to his feet to offer a slow bow.

"Please," Mr. Grimm said, "call me William. I didn't mean to interrupt your meal."

"Oh we were finished sir," Helen said quickly, "please sit down." William nodded obligingly and seated himself on Helen's other side, at the head of the table.

"What brings you to Fenhorn this evening sir?" Helen asked quickly, "Is this with tidings from Rosebud Academy?"

“Oh no,” William chuckled, “I’m from another institute. One for, well, troubled youth. That is to say, youth who find themselves having trouble fitting in at the other academies. You see, my brother and I are the headmasters of Grimm’s Reformatory, in Wicket. Emily is a very special case that we think we might be able to help.”

“Now when you say special sir,” Emily said, “do you mean ‘eating the doxy gel’ special or...”

“Special Miss Emily,” William interrupted, “you come from a bi-special birth meaning that you are treated differently. A difference we can overcome at Grimm’s.”

Silence fell around the table. Though everyone who knew the family of Fenhorn, was aware of Emily’s situation, they never had the gall to say it out loud to her. In the interim of speech Emily felt her defiance radiating from her eyes, trying to pierce the old man who sat across from her, his gaze returning hers but in a relaxed, almost lazy expression, as if the pair were discussing the best way to bake Wayfarer apples.

“It sounds wonderful,” Helen said quickly to cover the awkward silence, “Grimm’s Reformatory is a member of the Crest of Crows education board, correct?”

“Oh yes,” William nodded, “Grimm’s was one of the first academies granted entrance to the Crest of Crows. It was originally the premiere institute of education for generations of nobility.”

“When could she start?” Helen asked hastily, leaning closer to William. Emily had the feeling that Helen viewed her as a piece of meat that would spoil if not disposed of quickly. She hadn’t even had time to unpack her bag, and already Helen was scheming of a way to get rid of her again.

“Well, I’m glad to see that you’re so willing to send Emily to us, but shouldn’t we consult Lord Fenhorn on the matter?” William asked. Emily opened her mouth to answer him but Helen cut across her,

“Gus is at sea so much these days that we rarely see him home. I am Emily’s godmother, so I can give consent for him.”

“Well, as that’s the case, we could feel out the necessary paperwork tonight. I brought the forms with me, just in case.” William pulled a number of books and papers from the bag he’d brought with him and spread them on the table. Emily realized she was not going to have a choice in the matter. She shifted a few of the sheaves of paper and books which had spread across the table and fished out her tome before leaving the table.

The paperwork didn’t take long to sort out between Helen and William. Emily’s information was entered with a flourish by an ecstatic Helen seeing William Grimm as a rare golden goose.

“This is the last form, and Emily will be officially an official Grimm’s Goblin.”

Helen signed the last form quickly and passed it back to William.

“Oh thank you sir. I’m sure Emily will be just thrilled.” Helen said.

William got to his feet and after politely declining her offer of cake and tea, he gathered his books, and returned them to his bag. With a nod to the old gentleman, he returned to the door, Helen trailing him.

“I shall expect to see Emily at school in two days time,” William said, bowing to her, “Goodnight.” With that, he left the manor and climbed into his white carriage which started with a jolt, heading back to Wicket.

