



TALES OF
WITCHES
AND WYVERNS

S. RAMSEY

Tales of Witches and Wyverns

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S Ramsey

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Prologue: Buried Secrets

Nine years ago

THE NIGHTMARE HAD RETURNED. In it, her mother lay still in a dark forest, skin pale and cold as if all warmth had been sapped away.

Strange shadows danced among the leaves, cast by an unseen light. The thick moist air made it hard to breathe. Every nerve felt electrified as an unnatural chill crept up her spine.

She reached for her mother's hand, hoping for warmth, for any sign of life, but her fingers met only frigid stone. She had to wake up. *Wake up!* But no matter how hard she tried, the nightmare persisted, trapping her in its dark embrace.

Finally, she jolted awake, her heart racing with fear and confusion. Enid rubbed at the tears streaming down her cheeks. Her body relaxed when she saw the sun had finally risen. The dream was a reminder of the haunting loss that lingered in her waking moments.

Enid rose and crossed to her window to view the garden and noticed a small crowd had gathered. *Who are all those people?* Something uncomfortable fluttered in her stomach, and she thought, *Where is Dadi?*

After throwing on some clothes, she left to investigate. Enid stepped out of her house to a chaotic scene.

She found her father standing out front with hands on his hips and a face etched with worry. Rowland Davies' scruffy outfit of an old sweat-shirt and jeans was spattered with droplets of mud as he inspected the fallen remains of a once mighty yew, brought down in the previous night's raging storm.

The Blaney brothers stood nearby, their faces grim, while a strange car sat parked near the curb.

Enid's eyes widened as she took in the sight before her - the roots of the centuries-old tree had been ripped from the ground, leaving a gaping

hole that led deep into the earth. A shiver ran down Enid's spine as she half-remembered her dreams.

An unfamiliar man and a boy about her age stood beside her father. The boy had curly hair and amber eyes that seemed to be filled with fear and anticipation at the same time.

She caught herself wondering what he would look like if he smiled. *I wonder if we can be friends*, she thought, but reluctantly dismissed it. The boy glanced up at her, and for a moment their gazes locked.

The small crowd gathered around the gaping pit in the ground, huddled together in a half-moon shape. Her father's rough hand squeezed hers in affection as he spoke with a tall gentleman dressed in a natty vest. Without interrupting the conversation, her father scooped Enid up in his powerful arms, giving her a quick hug.

"This is my daughter, Enid Davies. Enid, this is Mr. Nigel Roberts and his son, Dylan. They have moved from London into the old manor house and are our new neighbors." The boy stood still behind his dad's legs, watching but not speaking.

Just then, the elder Blaney, Owen, shouted from the hole. "There is something strange here at the opening!" Everyone crowded around to see what caught his attention.

Mr. Davies—wearing his work boots—jumped down into the crevice and disappeared for a few moments. Dirt scattered everywhere as he and the Blaney brothers frantically dug through the earth. Her father finally climbed out. In his arms, he carried an old wooden box.

Enid's father laid the chest on a musty horse blanket and brushed debris from his shirt as he sat back to survey it. The seals were unbroken and had the appearance of coiled snakes.

Her father removed his wire-rimmed glasses and polished them against a shirttail before placing them back on his nose. Reaching for a set of tools retrieved from their garden shed, he crouched over the lock and manipulated it.

The onlookers hushed as the seals gave way with a gentle creak. The lid opened. Jasper Blaney, eager for any photo opportunity, took out his cell phone and captured each moment with a series of clicks. Enid and Dylan wriggled through the spectators until they could see inside the box. The children scrunched up their faces at the sight of cups, some dirty old coins, and an unremarkable plate rotting away to nothingness. *What*

was so special about that?

At the bottom of the chest, something caught Enid's father's eye - a leather-wrapped object, which he pulled free and opened to reveal a stunning silver ring with an unusual stone flashing like the Northern Lights in the winter sky. *Finally, there was something worth all this fuss.*



THE FOLLOWING DAY WAS Monday, and Enid headed back to school. She made it to the bus stop early and was trying to stay hidden until it arrived. She climbed a nearby pine tree to wait. She got the idea from one of her dad's many stories about ancient Celtic battle tactics.

She was tired of being picked on for being different. Her mother, Lillian, was murdered three years prior. The neighboring families had kept their distance ever since, and the other children decided Lillian Davies must have been a witch, making Enid an easy target.

Enid's current strategy was working so far. She arrived long before the other kids, and no one had spotted her yet. *This might be the solution.*

But then Tommy Brighton, her chief antagonist, glanced up and his gaze met hers. His eyes widened with recognition and surprise at finding her in such a precarious situation. "Guys," he called out, pointing his finger at her before saying, "It's the witch's brat."

Every drop of saliva went dry in her mouth as those kids collected stones. When they started tossing them, relief rushed through her when the first few flew far off their mark. However, the reprieve was short-lived.

Each throw became more accurate, and sharp stings ran down Enid's arms in response. With increasing dread, the size of their projectiles had grown too - now stings became more like punishing punches with every strike.

To her dismay, the new kid, Dylan, arrived in time to witness it all. *Will he join them?*

Her head snapped up when Dylan said something extraordinary. "Hey, stop throwing stuff at her."

"Oh, you're the new kid. Haven't you heard? Her mom was a witch, and her family is cursed," Tommy said.

A wave of heat burned her cheeks at those words.

“Don’t be daft. And if you don’t cut it out, I’ll make sure you’re the one who is cursed.” Dylan’s eyes narrowed.

“Go away, new kid. This is none of your concern.” Tommy gestured wildly with his hands full of pebbles and made to throw another projectile.

Dylan shoved Tommy away from the tree. The bully fell hard and skidded across the wet grass. One of Tommy’s friends swung at Dylan, but he still knocked the rocks out of the other kid’s hands.

An unfamiliar buoyancy traveled through Enid’s veins, filling her with a bubbling hope she hadn’t experienced since her mother’s death.



Chapter I

Reflections

Present Day

THE BRIGHT AUGUST SUN burned overhead, nine years after the infamous bus stop incident. Dylan Roberts arrived early at the Davies' cottage. Now that school was out for the summer, he and his best friend, Enid Davies, were taking full advantage of the fine weather.

"It would be a great day for a picnic, don't you think?" Dylan asked. As Enid absently nodded her agreement, a rumbling sound emanated from Dylan's stomach. After a moment of silence, both teens burst into laughter.

"It's as if your folks don't feed you, but we both know that's *not* true." Enid's eyes twinkled as she teased him. Dylan had changed from the shy boy who got his nose bloodied defending her from the neighborhood bullies.

Dylan had shot up and filled out with muscle since then. *He is attractive*, Enid decided.

Dylan was almost a year older than Enid, but that didn't affect their friendship. Since that day at the bus stop, Enid's world had permanently altered by making a friend. They walked to catch the bus together and were almost inseparable.

"My mom claimed that since the school's been on break, we never have any milk." Dylan retrieved a glass from the cupboard.

Enid laughed at Dylan's comment. He then asked, "Is your dad going prospecting this afternoon?"

"Yes, I believe that's his plan. Discovering one Celtic treasure hoard should be enough for a lifetime, but I guess he's an over-achiever." Enid shook her head, recalling that long-ago day. From then on, her father, an amateur archeologist, was like a man possessed.

“Just think, if those moldy old riches hadn’t been found, we might never have met,” Dylan frowned a little, as if he found that thought upsetting.

“Oh, I’m not so sure about that. We are neighbors after all, and you would’ve shown up here to raid our fridge if nothing else.” Enid’s giggle brought Dylan’s grin back, as intended.

She preferred for her friend to smile. He deserved to smile more, after all the heartache he’d experienced. Dylan was the adopted son of the Roberts, who doted on him. Both of his birth parents perished in a motorcar accident when he was four, but he had somehow miraculously survived.

Enid empathized with Dylan’s situation, as she had no clear memories of her mother, killed when she was just a toddler. She had only vague recollections and the many stories her dad would share, and she would often pour through photos.

They bonded over their misfortunes and the infamous bus stop incident. Dylan was very protective of Enid.

“You mean I can raid your fridge like a pirate?” Dylan’s tone was hopeful.

“I haven’t forgotten about your weird pirate obsession,” Enid laughed again.

“So, you keep saying, Davies—constantly,” Dylan rolled his eyes and leaned towards Enid to muss up her hair. She swatted him away half-heartedly.

Enid’s father entering the kitchen interrupted their banter. “If you two plan to hike, don’t stray too far, and be sure to stay together. I’ve heard reports of an enormous animal spotted in the woods. I’d hate to see either of you get hurt, since the authorities aren’t sure what it is.”

“Yes, Mr. Davies. My dad gave me the same warning before I left the house. I’ll make sure Enid stays safe.” Dylan always seemed a little intimidated by Enid’s father.

“Hey. I can take care of myself,” Enid protested.

“Both of you, just watch out for each other,” Mr. Davies left in search of lost relics.

“You be careful too,” Enid called after her dad.

“I’m bored,” Enid turned back to her friend. “Let’s spend the day exploring like we used to. Should we wait on Zoe?” Zoe Floyd was the

third member of their group, who became friends shortly after Dylan's arrival.

Enid had been more than happy to share a lunch period with not one but two friends. Zoe had befriended Dylan over shared crayons and someday planned to become a scientist. Enid adored her. In school, the trio often hung out together at lunch and during free periods.

"Yup. She should get here soon." Dylan glanced at his cell phone.

Enid placed warm apple tarts, still steaming in their wax paper wraps, into the well-worn wicker basket. Her eyes met Dylan's, and they shared a smile at the memories of all the summer days that had been spent exploring the countryside together. Zoe still hadn't arrived, but Enid knew she would get there soon enough.

As they waited, Enid couldn't help but reminisce about their childhood adventures. They used to spend hours exploring every inch of the woods, chasing butterflies, and catching frogs in the nearby pond. But things have changed since then. They were older now and their explorations had become more mature. Enid couldn't help but wonder what kind of adventure awaited them today.

Just as she was lost in thought, a car pulled up outside her house and Zoe hopped out, pulling her bike down from the bike rack. She waved at Enid and Dylan as she hurried towards them. "Sorry I'm late!" she called out.

Enid grinned and greeted her with a hug. "No worries. Are you ready for some exploring?"

"Absolutely!" Zoe grinned from ear to ear.

With that, the trio set off towards the lake near the manor — it was one of their favorite places to relax and enjoy some swimming. As they went, Enid felt a surge of excitement knowing they would spend one last day together. The sun was high in the sky and the birds chirped all around them as they walked. Enid felt a wave of nostalgia wash over her. It seemed like only yesterday they were chasing each other through these same woods.

But something was different today. As they biked deeper into the woods, Enid could feel a sense of unease growing within her.

She thought about how everything would be so different once Dylan left for London. In the back of her mind was always the fear of becoming an outsider again, but Enid willed herself not to dwell too much on it as

she pedaled faster to keep up.

When they arrived at the lake, they left their bikes on the grass and walked to the water's edge to skip rocks. The surface of the lake appeared calm today, a deep blue. The only ripples were from the friends' stones.

Soon, they sprawled on a checked horse blanket, munching on apple tarts.

"Do you think things will change between us when you're at school?" Enid asked Dylan as she stared up at the sky.

"Of course not," Dylan said. "Why would they?"

"Everything is changing so fast, and I'm not sure I like it," Enid said with a slight frown.

Dylan fell quiet for a moment before he spoke. "Nothing will change for us, Enid. You, me, and Zoe will always be friends."

Enid smiled at Dylan, and her fears receded a little.

"Maybe you could study for your A-levels a little closer to home? Can't you tell your parents that you want to stay?" Zoe said, because she did not want Dylan to leave either.

"I think it's probably too late to change plans now," he said, frowning.

"You'll be so far away. You won't be able to visit often." Enid blinked to stop the tears from forming.

"You know my dad has always planned that I attend his old school," Dylan reminded them both.

"Do you want to go?" Zoe asked. "Did your dad even ask what you wanted?"

"I can't disappoint him. He and Mom have done so much for me. I'm sure I'll learn to like it, but I will miss you guys a lot," Dylan said.

Enid sighed because she didn't want Dylan to leave, but she could do nothing about it. Enid would miss Dylan but decided not to make it any worse. "I guess you're right, but don't forget about us, okay?"

"How could I forget my best friends?" Dylan asked. Both girls laughed.

The trio got ready for their swim. Zoe had her usual bikini with a bright floral print, and Enid suddenly felt a bit self-conscious in her one-piece tangerine swimming suit. Dylan wore just swim trunks and had a deep tan from days spent in the sun.

Enid remembered Zoe had once confessed to her she had a crush on Dylan. "Dylan is so cute and funny. I think he could be the most popular

boy in school if he tried. But I like that he is not obsessed with all that.”

Enid agreed Dylan was crush-worthy, but she never confessed it to Zoe. Enid didn't want anyone to guess her feelings, especially Dylan. She realized he thought of her just as a friend and nothing else. Enid never viewed herself as interesting or smart as Zoe. Dylan already knew all Enid's secrets, except how she felt about him. *Would Dylan consider dating Zoe?* If that happened, Enid would have to be happy for them, no matter how her heart ached. Enid shrugged off her worries, and the three of them raced to the lake, laughing.

Zoe and Dylan jumped into the cool water right away, but Enid hesitated a bit. She sensed eyes on her. Enid was still so painfully aware of how she looked compared to her friends. She slowly waded in until the water was waist high before submerging herself to her shoulders.

The cool water was refreshing against Enid's skin. The friends splashed around for a bit before Zoe challenged Dylan to a race. Enid didn't bother to compete with the two best swimmers in school, so she busied herself diving to look for any fish.

Enid dove for a while but had seen nothing. She had decided she might need to dive deeper when she saw it, a glimmer of gold below. It dazzled against the murky pond water and reminded her of a goldfish. *How odd.* She followed the bright color further down below the surface.

Though the lake was shallow, the surface seemed far away to Enid, making her heart race with creeping dread.

Driven by instinct, she forgot the glimpse of gold and tried to swim toward the surface. However, the pond's bottom was overrun by weeds, and her ankle was ensnared by something. She struggled to break free.

Her friends' legs were kicking in the water just above her, but they might as well have been a million miles away. Enid knew they wouldn't be able to help her in time. Her lungs screamed for air as Enid thrashed around, trying to escape the pond's grasp.

She was running out of strength. How was she going to escape? *Think!* She had to focus on freeing herself before it was too late. Enid reached down and pulled at the weeds with all her might, but their grip on her did not budge.

Enid tried swimming towards the surface again, desperate to free herself from the slimy grasp, but she was held fast at the bottom of the pond.

As her chest burned with the urgent need for air, panic threatened

to consume her as her strength waned with each passing moment. Just when she thought she couldn't hold on any longer, a strange sensation rippled through her body.

The weeds that ensnared her ankle began to writhe and shift, their slimy tendrils transforming before her very eyes.

Enid's heart thundered in her ears as she watched in disbelief as the murky green tendrils became glistening golden scales, coalescing into the form of a strange amphibious creature. With piercing gold eyes and razor-sharp teeth glinting, it seemed to see right through her in the dim pond light.

Enid's mind raced with fear and confusion. It was a shocking sight - a strange animal lurking in the depths of the lake. What kind of beast was this? Why was it holding onto her so tightly? Panic surged through her veins as she struggled against the creature's grip, feeling its slimy skin against hers.

Just as Enid's vision dimmed from lack of oxygen and her struggles weakened, a sudden shadow darted past her. The grip around her ankle loosened, and she felt herself being propelled upward through the water with surprising speed. Enid's head broke the surface as she gasped for air, and she coughed and sputtered in an attempt to fill her burning lungs with precious oxygen.

As she blinked the water from her eyes, Enid saw Dylan's concerned face hovering over her. His powerful arms held her afloat as he swam expertly, like a fish, through the water. With each stroke, he propelled them closer to the shore.

Zoe had seen Dylan swimming with Enid and raced over to help them get back to shore, and together the trio made it out of the water.

The friends were relieved that Enid was okay. "You had me scared half to death!" Dylan ran a shaky hand through his dripping hair, before giving his friend a suffocating hug.

"What happened to you, Enid?" Zoe asked.

"I saw something in the water," Enid said, still a little winded.

"What?" Dylan asked.

"I'm not sure. It looked like some kind of weird cross between goldfish or frog... a large one, with horrible teeth." Enid shook her head, a little confused, and Dylan's gaze snapped back toward the water's edge, his eyes narrowing with concern.

“Oh, it couldn’t have been a goldfish. They would not survive when the lake grew cold and froze over,” Zoe said.

“Whatever you were following, you’ve got to be more careful. You scared me.” Dylan’s voice trembled as he pulled Enid into another tight embrace, his heart still racing from the near-fatal events of their picnic. The friends share a heavy silence, each one haunted by thoughts of what could have been a tragic end to their day together.



Chapter 2

The Fairy Hound

AS THEY DRIED OFF, Enid noted the shore around the lake felt deserted. Even the bird song sounded muted, which was odd given the trees and dense foliage surrounding the place.

Getting bored, the friends hiked around the lake. Dylan scouted ahead, but Enid and Zoe took a more leisurely pace. Several times, Dylan circled and snuck back to give the girls a jump scare. Their mingled laughter rang out in the stillness. Enid, Zoe, and Dylan might have been the only humans left on the planet today.

Enid's trainers kept her footsteps silent as she crept from tree to tree. She tugged on her jeans when they snagged on a blackberry bush. *Where might Dylan and Zoe be hiding now?* It was almost time to leave.

The silence caught Enid's attention again. She glanced around and realized the light under the trees was fading. In the eerie silence, Enid became certain there was something in the trees watching her.

She meant to call out to her friends, but their names froze in her throat when she heard something moving in the bushes, something big, something that made the hairs on her neck stand up.

She stood still under the trees and held her breath. Just then, a cracked twig sounded like a gunshot. Enid's heart skipped a beat as she focused her eyes on the dark shadows where she heard the noise.

She moved as quietly as she dared to take shelter under the pine-scented canopy of a giant tree whose lower branches drooped to the ground and obscured her from view.

Enid hugged the trunk of the ancient conifer, heedless of rough bark. Her head pounded with tension, and she wished she had listened to her dad and stayed closer to home. *Oh, where was Dylan? And where was Zoe?* This was like a scene from one of her nightmares.

Enid's eyes acclimated to the surrounding gloom. She sensed a presence in the forest and tried to conceal herself more, but with each quiet breath, she imagined she was shouting her position.

In the unnatural stillness, she noted a menacing shape gliding through the trees. The giant figure moved on all fours, fast and deadly, like a wolf. The dark shadow paused near Enid's tree. Enid's pulse thrummed in terror. She hoped her friends had spotted the animal's shadow in the trees. She hoped they had the sense to hide until the potential danger passed.

Another sound came from a snapping twig. The dark shadow got distracted and slid away from Enid's position. Enid held her breath until it moved away.

A vicious snarl snapped the silence. Enid peered through the tree branches and made out the outline of Dylan's bright red, ringer T-shirt, and a flash of Zoe's turquoise top. The loud snapping sound synced in time with her friends' movements as they stepped away from the tree. Enid's gaze widened as the inky silhouette moved closer to her friends. The menacing growl rumbled from the creature's throat.

The creature might kill them because of Enid's reckless insistence on exploring the woods far from the safety of their homes.

What should I do? She was torn and her instincts told her to remain hidden. But what about her friends? Would they get hurt, or worse? Could she just hide?

What would Dylan do if our positions were reversed? Suddenly, she had her answer.

No one had spotted her yet, and she searched for a weapon. Out of the corner of her eye, she located a sturdy tree branch. Enid was unsure how to defend them against a ravenous beast with only a stick, but she had to try.

She stepped out of her hiding place, brandishing the tree branch. The beast had Dylan and Zoe cornered. Its fangs bared. Enid glimpsed the largest, most ferocious wolf hound she had ever seen. The growling canine had a midnight coat, and the only gleam came from the beast's enormous fangs. She swallowed past the sudden dryness in her throat.

"What are you doing? I had this under control." Dylan sounded frantic as she placed herself between them and harm.

"I-It will take all of us to get away." She kept her eye on the hound

and tried to make herself appear larger and more menacing, which was difficult being slightly over five feet tall.

Dylan and Zoe scrounged quickly for branches of their own. The teens faced off with the creature pressed shoulder to shoulder. The terrifying beast circled them at a distance and bared his fangs. While the dog snarled, Enid noted the raised body hair and tense posture of the canine.

They shouted and swung their branches at their tormentor, but the beast stayed outside their reach. The hound circled, and it stopped occasionally and scented the air while growling. The barking became almost continuous, and Enid was certain someone would die. "I can hold him off while you go for help. You both run so much faster than I do," she said.

"I'm not leaving you behind. We're getting out of this together," Zoe said, sounding offended by Enid's suggestion.

"Don't be daft. We aren't leaving you," Dylan echoed.

The teens stopped turning in a circle and stood shoulder to shoulder, facing their adversary with grim faces. The dog continued to scent the air and looked from one to the next as if trying to decide who to eat first.

Enid didn't know where her next impulse came from. It occurred to her that the dog appeared frightened, and she thought back to the many times before friends came into her life when she had run-ins with the neighborhood bullies. Dogs were intelligent animals, and she hoped kindness might work.

Without taking her eyes off the beast, she said, "I'm going to try something. If the dog attacks, get some help. It may be our only chance."

Before the friends realized what Enid planned, she placed her stick on the ground in front of her. She spoke to the beast, "Hi. My name is Enid. Are you lost? We won't hurt you." She gestured between herself and her friends.

The hound stopped snarling and sat staring at them. Enid spoke to it again. "Are you out here all alone? My friends and I could help you if you're in trouble."

The dog lay down on its belly but kept its wary eyes focused on her.

Enid moved forward to be nearer to their tormentor and held out her hand for the dog to sniff. "No, don't," Dylan said. He held his breath, though he remained ready to pounce if the dog made any move to eat her.

The dog inched forward on its belly to meet Enid halfway. Inexplicably, the snarling and growling stopped. Enid imagined a curious expression on the hound's face. The petite teen and the giant dog inched even closer. Enid's hand was within reach. Dylan held his breath. His palms were slick with sweat, and he worried he might drop his only weapon. At that moment, he appeared ready to throw himself between Enid and certain doom.

"You're not as vicious as you would like us to think," Enid spoke with mocking sternness. The hound sniffed her entire hand and then took a quick lick. Both girl and dog eyed each other with suspicion. "Guys, please put down your sticks and slowly come over to make friends."

Dylan was about to object, but then he witnessed Enid reach out to give the big dog a cautious pat on the head. Slowly, he and Zoe laid down their weapons and made their way over to their unpredictable friend. Zoe grinned in relief when the dog allowed pats from her as well. "Do you think he belongs to somebody?" she asked.

"What do you say? Are you lost? Do you belong to somebody?" The dog maneuvered his head to be petted by Enid.

Zoe sensed what that meant. "I think he's trying to tell you he now belongs with you."

"What sort of dog do you think he is?" Enid studied the now friendly hound with a critical eye.

"I'd say he's a fairy hound. He's huge, mean, and he looks like he just escaped from the wild hunt." For once, Dylan beamed because Enid wasn't familiar with the reference.

"A fairy hound? You're not seriously suggesting a fairy king may come to collect him? You know I don't believe in that stuff." Enid's eyes lit with mischief as they patted their new friend.

"This beast might only pretend to be friendly so he can eat you in your sleep." The dog raised his head and huffed as if offended by Dylan's suggestion.

"Ha. Once I take him home, I'll ask him to stay as my new friend—fairy hound or no fairy hound," Enid said.

"What's a proper name for him?" Zoe studied the dog with a critical eye.

"Let's see if he comes home first, but I want to call him Bendith," Enid said. "Do you like it?" She addressed the last remark to the hound, who

gave a happy yip in response.

“A blessing, huh? I would have called him Bezerker or Fangs.” Laughing with Enid after all that tension was a relief for Dylan. “I guess we’ll soon learn if finding him in the haunted forest was good fortune or ill.”

When the trio arrived back at the cottage with the enormous hound trailing behind them, Enid’s dad greeted them. Enid had never seen her father’s face so flushed. “Where have you been? I told you to stay in the woods near the house.”

The friends and Enid all spoke at once, either to apologize or to defend her friends. Mr. Davies put up both of his hands. “Kids, I know you would protect Enid, and I know she would do the same for you. But, as parents, we can’t help but worry about you. I was ready to call the constable. I thought something awful had happened.”

Enid realized with a sudden pang that this situation had reminded her father of the trauma of when her mother died, which was a sobering thought. All her excuses and justifications evaporated when she considered how the day might have ended. “I’m so sorry, *Dadi*.”

Her father nodded in understanding and gave her a quick hug. “Now, you two, I suggest you head home. Your parents were just as frantic.” With a lingering glance toward Enid and a second apology to Mr. Davies, Dylan and Zoe left.

“Now, Enid, I...” but she never got to hear what he was going to say next, because at that moment her dad spied the hulking beast, who, until then, was trying to look inconspicuous, by hiding behind a chair. “What is *that*?” He asked, gesturing towards the canine.

The hound’s size shocked Enid’s dad, and Enid quickly stepped in. “Dad, this is Bendith. Bendith, this is my father, who is the most wonderful, kind, understanding, and patient man in all of Wales.”

Bendith acted as if he realized he was on probation. He slunk forward, sat down at Enid’s feet, and cocked his head to the side with his tongue lolling.

The dog then did an amazing thing and raised his giant paw to be shaken by Mr. Davies, who opened and closed his mouth several times, before finally reaching out to take the giant paw and shake it. “How did you... Where did you... This dog is huge and *must* belong to someone.”

“I don’t think he belongs to anyone. Can he stay here until we find his people... Please?” Enid held her breath, waiting for his response.

“I don’t know, Enid. How can you control a dog of this size? What if he misbehaves? He’s as big as a pony.”

“I’ll take full responsibility. He won’t be a nuisance. I swear. He’s well-behaved and friendly,” Enid said.

“Hmm... I take it that Bendith is the large animal that was reported prowling about?” he asked.

“Most likely, but if not, I’d be so much safer with him around.” She winced at this statement, but crossed her fingers and hoped it was true. *If I run into trouble without Dylan, Bendith could protect me.*

In the end, Bendith stayed and became part of the family. Her father worried the dog would be challenging to train, but Bendith proved him wrong on that score. The faithful hound was stuck by Enid’s side and almost always shared her many adventures following Dylan’s departure.



Chapter 3

A Surprise Gift

DEAR DYLAN,

Hi. Your classes sound amazing, and I wouldn't worry about that quiz. I'm sure you aced it.

Everybody here is fine. Dad is always cooking up a storm, and he's working on writing a paper for that fancy archeologist's journal. And before you ask, yes, he is still treasure hunting on the weekends. He calls it his research (ha, ha).

Bendith is the best thing that ever happened to me (well, second best, besides meeting you and Zoe). It's hard to feel lonely with him stuck to me like glue, though I still miss you (don't worry).

Zoe misses you a lot, too. Lunchtime is not as exciting without you around to give us your expert running commentary on the quality of our cafeteria choices... (sigh!)

I've been having some weird dreams since you've been gone. They have me worried. I hope you are taking good care of yourself and staying safe.

These nightmares are gross. Sometimes they are about finding my mom, but mostly they feature wasting bodies and stuff. In them, I am invisible, but it's like I'm there to be a witness to their suffering. The only person who acknowledges me is someone that looks an awful lot like you. I guess I miss you more than I thought, right?

I mean, it's no surprise you're in my dreams because you are my best friend. I just wish I could have pleasant ones like everybody else, at least occasionally. Don't people usually have a mix of good and bad? Why does mine have to be so terrifying?

It's getting so bad that I wonder if there is something wrong with me.

Anyway, don't worry about that last sentence. I'm fine.

Please write back soon, but not about your test schedule, okay? Give me

some juicy details about your new friends and adventures, please? I need some distractions.

Your bestie,

Enid