

"Full of dark wonders and magical delights. I ate up every scrap of this wonderful series and was hungry for more." —Sarah Prineas, author of *The Magic Thief*

THE INVISIBLE ORDER

— THE FIRE KING —

PAUL CRILLEY



THE
INVISIBLE
ORDER

THE
INVISIBLE
ORDER

—e~BOOK TWO~e—



THE FIRE KING



PAUL CRILLEY

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We bring stories to life

First published by egmont USA, 2011
1443 Park Avenue South, Suite 806
New York, NY 10016

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1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

www.egmontusa.com

www.paulcrilley.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available
LCCN number: 2011024161
ISBN 978-1-60684-032-0

Printed in the United States of America

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For Caroline,

*Without your constant support
none of this would be possible.*

*And for our children, who have
a whole life of dreaming ahead of them.*

With love.



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✦ CHAPTER ONE ✦

London, 1666. In which Emily and Co. find themselves in a spot of bother. A Murder of Ravens.



Emily woke up in darkness.

She yawned, her mind going through the usual checklist of hopes and fears that accompanied every awakening. Would there be snow today? Would she get to the market in time? Would she sell enough watercress to feed William and herself?

She rolled lazily onto her back. Motes of dust glowed in the sunlight that skewered through gaps in the wooden walls. Emily frowned, sleepily confused. Wooden walls? Their room in Cheapside didn't *have* wooden walls. And what on earth was that *smell*?

Then it all came back to her in a rush of disjointed images. The battle in Hyde Park. Grabbing the key from the Faerie Gate just in time to stop the Faerie Queen's soldiers from invading London. And in the process leaping through the gate and finding herself trapped here. In 1666. She quickly fell around beneath the old sacks that covered the dirt floor. The key was still there, safely hidden away.

It was only then that Emily realized how quiet it was. She sat up and looked around their hiding place—an old tanning shed on the north bank of the Thames. (Jack had suggested it. He said the smell of old animal hides would make sure no one bothered them.)

She was alone. The others had gone.

A wave of panic threatened to overwhelm her, but Emily struggled against it. Keep calm, she told herself. Obviously, they hadn't just deserted her. She had dozed off while they had all been talking about finding something to eat. The others must have simply slipped out to get some food.

But why had William gone? She had told him not to leave the shed. He was too young—only nine years old. The city would be far too dangerous for him.

He hadn't been happy with that. But then, he hadn't been happy with anything she had told him to do for a very long time. There had been a brief period of reconciliation after he, Corrigan, and Jack appeared through the gateway after defeating Queen Kelindria, but that hadn't lasted long, and he had quickly slipped back into his old ways of arguing with her whenever she tried to tell him what to do.

The door to the small shed opened slightly, then got stuck on the sacking that littered the ground. A mop of untidy hair appeared in the gap as Jack tried to see what was jamming the door. He shoved with his shoulder, pushing the gap wider, then slipped inside and pushed the door closed. He turned back with a grin.

"I come bearing gifts," he proclaimed. His grin faltered as he took in the interior of the shed.

"Where's Will?"

"What do you mean? Isn't he with you?"

"No." Jack held up a bundle of grubby paper. "I went out to get food. Meat pastries." He looked

dubiously at the paper. "At least, I *think* it's meat."

"Then where is he?"

Jack tore his gaze away from the pastries. "Probably wherever Corrigan is," he said darkly. "They seem to have taken quite a shine to each other. We need to watch that piskie, Snow. He's trouble."

Emily tended to agree. Corrigan *was* trouble, but not in the way Jack meant. He had a knack for getting into mischief, but that was about it. Yes, he had betrayed her to the Faerie Queen, but he also came back for her. He had rescued William and herself from the Queen's cells. That was what counted.

But that didn't matter to Jack. He and Corrigan had clashed from the moment they met, and they didn't look set to change anytime soon.

As to whose idea it was to sneak out of the shed while Emily slept—both Corrigan *and* William were capable of making such a rash decision.

"We should find them," she said. "Before they get into trouble."

"Agreed. But one of us should stay here. If they come back and find the shed empty, they'll just head right back into London again."

Jack was right. And as much as Emily wanted to feel as if she was doing something other than sitting around, Jack had already been into the city. She'd probably only get herself lost.

"Then you should go," she said. "But if you don't find them in an hour, come back so we can figure out what to do next."

Jack nodded and yanked the door all the way open. Hazy afternoon light spilled inside, illuminating moth-eaten pelts and three large barrels that had been shoved up against the sidewalk. Outside, a dusty avenue lined with more half-ruined sheds led down to the brown waters of the Thames, the sun glinting on small waves as they lapped against the muddy riverbank. Jack handed her the small package of pastries (Emily briefly thought about asking him where he got the money to buy them, but she wasn't sure she would like the answer, so decided against it), then he hurried along the weed-choked road.

Emily watched until he disappeared behind one of the tumbledown shacks, then sat down on a smooth boulder outside the shed.

She fished around in her jacket and once again pulled out the pocket watch the Dagda had given her. The metal was covered in patterns so delicate they were hard to see unless you tilted the watch to catch the light. Emily gently rubbed her fingers across the engravings, then pressed the gold button on the top. The lid clicked open, revealing a circle of plain, dark glass. What did it mean? Had the Dagda tricked her after all? Back in Hyde Park the watch had shown Emily her ma and da, sitting in a room in an old castle, dragons circling overhead. But ever since she'd come through the Faerie Gate, all it showed was a blank face. How could she tell if the images had even been real? She'd been tricked and lied to over and over since this whole thing began. It was hard to know what the truth was anymore.

A loud caw echoed forlornly through the ramshackle buildings. Emily looked up, startled by the sound. A large raven was perched on the rotting roof of one of the sheds. But it wasn't like any raven Emily had ever seen. Instead of the normal black color, this one was totally white, with eyes that were a bright, startling blue. The bird tilted its head to the side, staring down at the package of pies on Emily's lap. It cawed again. This time, the caw sounded demanding, as if the bird was giving her an order.

Emily hesitated, then put the watch away and unwrapped the flimsy paper. She broke off a chunk of crumbly pastry and threw it onto the path. The raven let out a triumphant caw and flapped down from the roof, its pale beak stabbing violently at the food, throwing it up into the air and catching it before it touched the ground. Emily watched the bird with a mixture of curiosity and nervousness. It was the biggest raven she had ever seen. Its beak alone was about the length of her middle finger.

The bird finished the morsel of pastry. Then it tilted its head again so it could stare at her with one pale blue eye.

“No more for you,” she said firmly. “Shoo.” Emily tried to wave the raven away, but the bird simply followed the movements of her hands, watching expectantly for more food. When nothing was forthcoming, it hopped closer, snapping its beak rapidly together, making a *click-click click-click* noise that Emily found vaguely threatening. “Shoo,” repeated Emily. “Away with you.”

The bird ignored her and hopped even closer, still clicking its beak. Emily searched around for something to throw at it, but as she was doing so, she saw Jack reappear at the end of the lane, followed closely by William and Corrigan.

Emily surged to her feet. The raven let out a startled cry and danced backward. It launched itself into the air and fluttered to the roof, all the while cawing its raucous displeasure. Emily ignored it and hurried toward the others. As she approached, she could hear Corrigan complaining loudly from his position on Will’s shoulders.

“I don’t see what all the fuss is about,” he snapped. “We went to look for food. What of it? Why if you hadn’t found anything for us? Then we’d all be starving.”

“I *did* find something,” replied Jack, grim-faced. “But *you* didn’t.”

Corrigan waved this observation away. “It was only a matter of time,” he said. “We only came back because William didn’t want Emily to worry.”

“Bit late for that,” said Jack.

Emily met up with them halfway along the avenue. One look at Will’s sullen face told her she shouldn’t say anything. She knew that. But she couldn’t help it. The words were out of her mouth before she had a chance to stop them.

“What were you thinking?” she snapped. “Oh, how silly of me. You *weren’t* thinking, were you? That is patently obvious.”

“It’s not my fault if you fell asleep,” responded William hotly. “Corrigan wanted to wake you up, but I said we should let you rest. I was doing you a favor!”

“Then don’t! Don’t do me any favors, William. Wandering off like that was a foolish thing to do. What if something had happened? We’d have had no idea where you were.”

“Nothing happ—,” started Corrigan, but Emily just turned her glare on the piskie, and he quickly clamped his mouth shut.

“Anyway,” said Jack uncomfortably. “We’re all here now, eh? No harm done. Let’s just eat our pastries, then we’ll decide what to do next—”

“I can tell you what you’ll be doing next,” said a voice. “And it won’t be eating. Less you can eat with a knife in your guts.”

Emily whirled around. A girl who looked about the same age as Jack was leaning against one of the unused sheds. She wore a dirty shirt that might once have been white but had been washed so many times it had faded to a dull yellow. The shirt was tucked into leather breeches, which were in turn tucked into a pair of well-worn boots. Her outfit was topped off by a wide-brimmed hat with a white feather sticking jauntily from the top.

The girl was holding what looked to be a very sharp knife. She tossed it into the air, letting it turn end over end a few times before catching it again. She repeated this over and over, never once taking her eyes from the group.

After a brief moment to recover from his surprise, Jack sauntered forward, the cocky grin Emily always found so annoying flashing across his features. “Good day to you, miss. Spring-Heeled Jack is the name,” he said. “And who do I have the honor of addressing?”

The girl snorted, and for a moment she and Emily locked gazes. Emily only just stopped herself

from rolling her eyes in commiseration.

~~“You have the honor of addressing Katerina Francesca. And most men bow when addressing me.”~~ She looked at him critically. “Although I see you are no more than a boy, so your lack of knowledge of polite etiquette is perhaps understandable.”

Jack’s smile slipped from his face. “Boy?” he spluttered. “You don’t look any older than me!”

“Maturity doesn’t come with age,” said Katerina. “Something most wise people already know. But again, allowances must be made for your obvious lack of upbringing.” For a moment the girl lost her haughty tones and frowned at Jack. “And what kind of a name is Spring-Heeled Jack? It’s silly.”

“It’s not silly. It’s what everyone calls me.”

“Why? Don’t they like you?”

Jack opened his mouth to respond, but Katerina raised a hand to stop him. “It doesn’t matter. You will all come with me now.”

Jack glanced over his shoulder at Emily. His look was half confused, half irritated, like he didn’t know quite how to respond. Emily thought that maybe she should take a turn.

“Why should we go anywhere with you?” she asked.

Katerina smiled. “Because if you don’t, you’ll be killed where you stand.”

“Oh, is that so?” snapped Jack. “And are you going to be the one doing this killing?”

He stepped forward, but before he had taken two steps, an army of children appeared from nowhere, stepping out of the shadows, emerging from between buildings, popping up on the broken roofs.

“Among others,” said Katerina.

Actually, it wasn’t quite an army, thought Emily, as she looked around for some means of escape. But it might as well have been. There were about thirty children, ranging from Will’s age to a year or two older than Jack. Their clothing was ragged. Torn and dirty. They all had the familiar hollowcheeked look that she was so used to seeing in London. A gang of street children.

Street children they may be, but they had blocked off all means of escape, surrounding them in a slowly constricting circle.

Jack was still standing a pace or two ahead of the others. Will tried to position himself in front of Emily, but she grabbed his arm and pushed him behind her, nearly knocking Corrigan off his shoulder in the process.

She studied the children as they approached. They were all armed, gripping knives and short swords. This surprised Emily. The swords looked like they were worth something. Why didn’t they sell them for money?

“What do you want with us?” asked Emily. “We haven’t harmed you.”

“You’re a traitor,” said Katerina. “And we hunt down traitors. It’s our job.”

“What are you talking about?” snapped Jack. “A traitor to who?”

Katerina blinked in surprise. “To the human race, of course.”

“The human ...” Jack looked around to see if anyone else knew what Katerina was talking about. Emily simply shrugged, her eyes scanning the ranks of children for a gap through which they could run. She caught sight of movement on one of the roofs. It was the white raven, perched on a broken chimney and watching them with its unsettling blue eyes.

There was a flutter of wings, and from out of the clear sky came a second white raven. It landed on the chimney next to the first. They leaned toward each other and bumped heads as if in greeting, then turned their attention back to what was happening below them.

Strange, thought Emily absently. She’d never seen a white raven before today, and here she was seeing two at the same time. *They must be from the same family, surely?*

“You seem pretty caught up on etiquette,” said Jack to Katerina. “So why don’t you explain to us”

exactly why you think we're traitors."

Katerina leveled her knife directly at William. "Because of him."

William's eyes widened in surprise. "Me? What have I done?"

"Stop playing the fools," snapped Katerina. "You know perfectly well who I'm talking about."

And then it struck Emily. She scanned the faces that surrounded them. The angry, fearful, hateful faces. They weren't looking at William. They were all looking at one thing, and one thing only.

Corrigan.

They were talking about Corrigan.

"You can see Corrigan?" exclaimed Emily. How was that possible? Humans couldn't see the fey unless they were given the second sight. A few, like Emily, had natural talents, but not so many as now surrounded them. It didn't make any sense.

"Why do you want to hurt him?" asked William, stepping out from behind Emily. "He's done nothing to harm you."

"Give me a chance," muttered Corrigan. "I've only just met them."

"He doesn't need to *do* anything," said Katerina. "His existence is crime enough. Our fight is against *all* the fey. And against those who associate with them," she added pointedly. "That is our charter."

Emily was about to ask about this charter when an odd sound distracted her. It was like a sheet billowing and rippling in the wind. She looked up to where the noise was coming from and took a fearful step back.

The sound wasn't a sheet rippling in the wind. It was the sound of wings. White ravens, hundreds of them, were descending from the sky to settle on the roofs of the dilapidated structures all around them. As soon as they landed, they furled their wings and gazed at the confrontation taking place below them, their blue eyes alert.

Katerina followed Emily's gaze. As soon as the girl spotted the ravens (and as soon as the ravens had *seen* her spot them), they started snapping their beaks as the first one had done when trying to grab Emily's pastry. *Click-click. Click-click. Click-click.*

Emily shivered. It was an unsettling experience, to say the least. The white ravens staring down at them while the clicking and snapping eddied through the ranks of the birds like a wave in the ocean.

"Oh, that can't bode well," said Corrigan, staring up at the birds.

Katerina whirled back to face her gang. "The enemy is upon us!" she shouted. "Ready yourselves."

The order was hardly necessary. As soon as the birds had been spotted, Katerina's gang broke away from the circle they held around Emily and the others to find positions that weren't so exposed. And while they readied themselves, the *click-click* sound rained down on them from above, getting louder and louder as more and more white ravens descended from the sky.

"I don't know what's going on here," Jack said, "but now would be the perfect time to leave. Don't you think?"

Emily nodded. Jack pointed to a gap between two of the old sheds and was just about to cross the dusty lane when the clacking noise suddenly stopped. The abrupt silence seemed to echo around them, the absence of sound louder than anything that had come before.

Emily looked up at the ravens.

They had all turned to stare toward the end of the avenue, where the lane turned aside and followed the muddy banks of the Thames.

Slowly, ever so slowly, Emily followed their gaze.

A dark figure was rising from the water, a figure draped in a black, sodden cloak. The figure rose to its full height and pulled the hood back to reveal the wrinkled face of an old crone, her eyes the

cold, uncaring black of the deep ocean.

~~The murky river water dribbled from her mouth and nose as a second figure rose up behind her,~~
its slimy, lank hair framing a skeletal, pale green face.

Emily felt her breath catch in her throat.

Black Annis and Jenny Greenteeth.

✚ CHAPTER TWO ✚

In which Emily discovers that the enemy of her enemy is not necessarily her friend. Enemies old and enemies new.



Black Annis and Jenny Greenteeth waded slowly out of the Thames, the brackish water dripping from their rotting clothing. Jenny smiled, baring her sharp black teeth as she stared hungrily at Katerina's gang.

Strangely, the sight of them gave Emily a brief surge of hope. How had they managed to follow her here from 1861? Was there another way besides the Faerie Gate in Hyde Park? And more important, did that mean she could use the same method to get them all back home?

But her hope was short-lived. Black Annis carefully patted down the slimy, decaying hood of her cloak, her oily black eyes passing over Emily without a hint of recognition. That was when Emily realized that this Black Annis and Jenny Greenteeth belonged here, in 1666. They hadn't even met her yet.

"Hello, my poppets," called Annis.

Emily turned to see Katerina's response. There was no surprise in the girl's face. Fear, yes. But no surprise. Which meant Katerina had seen Black Annis and Jenny Greenteeth before. None of them was new to her.

Yet another puzzle to add to an already long list.

The street children formed into a line across the lane, their knives held ready before them. That meant Emily and the others were caught in a slowly constricting vice, with Black Annis and Jenny Greenteeth approaching along the path from the right, and Katerina's gang unmoving to their left. Emily glanced at Jack and William. On an unspoken signal they all took a few steps back, leaving the lane altogether and sheltering between two of the deserted shacks.

"What's going on here?" Emily whispered to Corrigan. "How can they all see you?"

"What are you asking me for?" replied the piskie. "I have no idea."

Jack frowned at him. "How can you not know? This is your history, isn't it?"

"Not mine. I only came to London in the eighteen hundreds."

"Where were you then—now, I mean?" asked Emily.

Corrigan shrugged. "All over. Eire. The mainland. Doing the bidding of the Cornwall Spinstress Queen. There were other battles to fight."

"Stay back, Annis!" called Katerina. "You know we can hurt you."

Black Annis smiled. "I don't think so, poppet," she said. "Times are changing. We're taking London back."

"Not if we have anything to say about it," snapped Katerina—rather bravely, Emily thought.

"Oh, but you don't have anything to say about it. You and your little gangs are finished. I'm

going feed you all to young Jenny here. She needs a good meal, don't you, Jenny?"

~~"I do, Black Annis. Their fear makes me all shivery. I like to eat their screams."~~

Black Annis fondly stroked Jenny's seaweedlike hair. "Of course you do, poppet. That's a they're good for."

Emily looked over her shoulder, searching for a way out. But their hiding place backed straight onto a wall of earth. If they wanted to get away, they would have to leave their cover and head back onto the lane. Emily turned back ...

... and saw something that made her blood run cold.

"Behind you!" she screamed without thinking.

Katerina and the others whirled around.

Stalking out from a small lane that ran between the sheds on the other side of the road were three ... Emily wanted to call them dogs, but they were too big to be dogs. They were the size of small ponies, black wolflike creatures with eyes the color of congealed blood. They slunk out from the alleys, huge muscles bulging and rippling beneath dark, matted fur. Heavy black chains were wrapped around their necks, the chains disappearing back into the dark lane from which they had appeared.

"What are they?" whispered William fearfully.

"The Hounds of the Great Hunt," said Corrigan, in a worried voice.

As he talked, one of the hounds tried to leap ahead, but there was a sharp tug on the chain and it jerked back, snarling into the air.

"Who's holding—," began Emily. But she didn't get a chance to finish, because following the hounds were three massive horses. One was white, one was black, and the other was a deep crimson. Sitting on the backs of these horses were three knights, each wearing armor matching the color of his steed. The Crimson Knight held the chains that were attached to the hounds. The Black Knight held a long metal lance, while the White Knight held a massive spiked ball hanging from the end of a chain. He swung the chain in lazy circles, the spiked ball whistling through the air.

"Corrigan?" said Emily in a trembling voice, unable to tear her gaze away from the massive horses and the knights. "Who are they?"

Corrigan nervously licked his thin lips. "The Three Riders," said the piskie. "Huntsmen. And they're here, then

she isn't far away."

"She? Who are you talking about?" asked Jack.

"The Morrigan," said Corrigan quietly, his voice filled with foreboding. "The Phantom Queen."

As he spoke her name, a cold wind gusted through the deserted sheds, whipping dry earth and dust into the air. The wind formed tiny tornados that danced and skittered across the ground. One of the whirlwinds passed in front of them, and from inside it, Emily thought she could hear a high pitched howling and shrieking. The white ravens cawed their displeasure, ruffling their feathers and gripping the roofs tight with their claws to prevent being blown into the sky. One of the shacks started to creak, then collapsed in on itself with the rumble and crack of splintering wood. The Three Riders moved to the side of the lane. They waited, silent, as the wind grew stronger. Another shack collapsed. The hounds strained against their chains, howling and snarling, but the Crimson Knight effortlessly held them in check.

Then the wind suddenly stopped, debris pattering to the ground in the sudden silence.

A tall figure emerged from the lane. She wore a dark red cloak, the hood drawn up over her face. She walked forward until she had passed the Riders, then paused and looked slowly around, taking in the scene before her.

"Children," she said in a quiet and menacing voice, "should be boiled alive at birth and fed to the crows. You are like little fleas, always biting, always there, an itch that never goes away."

She reached up and lowered her hood. Emily stifled a gasp as her face was revealed. It was ~~though someone had taken every storybook witch, every terrifying painting created to scare a child~~ and combined them to form the woman who stood before them. Her nose was long and curved, covered in red veins, the nostrils flared in a way that reminded Emily of Ravenhill. At the same time, her chin was long and misshapen, curving upward so that the tips of her nose and chin almost touched. Her skin was wrinkled and creamy white, giving her the coloring of a week-old corpse. Her eyes were black and set against her anemic skin, they burned with feverish light.

“We should leave,” said Corrigan firmly. “Now. This is going to be a slaughter.”

“They’ve still got their weapons,” said Emily. “They’re made of iron, aren’t they?”

“Doesn’t matter. The hounds can only be killed by witchbane. Their knives won’t make a lick of difference.”

Katerina and her gang were still standing defiantly, their weapons held defensively before them. They obviously had no idea that their knives and swords wouldn’t work against the hounds. Without another thought, Emily stepped out of concealment and cupped her hands around her mouth. “Run!” she shouted. She was vaguely aware of Black Annis turning sharply in her direction. “Your knives won’t—” she started to shout, but at a sharp signal from Black Annis, every single white raven cried out at once, cawing and flapping their wings, creating such a racket that Emily’s words were swallowed by the din.

Black Annis was now staring directly at Emily. The old hag smirked at her and wagged her right index finger in a no-no gesture.

Emily ground her teeth in frustration. There was nothing else for it. She wasn’t about to let Black Annis and her stupid birds get the better of her.

She ran straight for Katerina.

“Snow!” shouted Jack, but Emily ignored him and kept going. She sprinted forward and grabbed the wrist of Katerina’s arm. The girl whirled around, knife raised to strike. Emily held her hands up to show they were empty.

“You have to run!” she gasped. “Iron doesn’t work against the hounds. Only witchbane can kill them.”

Katerina narrowed her eyes, then turned back to face the creatures. Their heads jerked and twitched, lips pulling back in snarls and growls. They were terrifying to look at, but it was the eyes that got to Emily. They were frenzied, insane, hungry for death.

Katerina hesitated, then stared hard at Emily. “Why are you helping us?” she asked.

“Because I think we’re on the same side,” said Emily.

Katerina pursed her lips, then nodded abruptly. “Fine. You’d better stick with me then. Things are about to get confused.” Then she cupped her hands around her mouth. “*Scatter!*” she shouted.

Her command was obeyed instantly. The street children abandoned their line and ran in every direction. As soon as they moved, Jenny Greenteeth was after them, reaching out to grab any who came within reach of her clawed hands. At the same time, the Crimson Knight released the chains, letting the metal trail noisily through his gauntlet. The hounds tilted back their heads and howled into the sky, then leapt forward to attack. They moved with a speed that stunned Emily, lunging forward into the chaos. She sprinted back to the others. “We have to follow Katerina,” she said. “She’ll take us to safety.”

“What are you talking about?” snapped William, casting fearful glances at the avenue, where cries and shouts filled the air. “She was going to kill Corrigan! We should just get away from her. Away from all of them.”

“No,” said Emily firmly. “We need someone who can tell us what’s going on. We follow her.” Emily felt a brief pang of regret at the look of anger on William’s face. But there was no time to talk.

him round to her thinking. How could she explain it anyway? She didn't even know why she was following Katerina. William would just have to deal with his hurt feelings on his own.

She turned to ask Jack how he felt, even though she thought she knew the answer to that. Jack was always proud of his quick mouth, and Katerina had easily matched him in that department. Which meant he probably hated Katerina already.

But Jack wasn't even looking at her. He was gripping the ruined wood of the shed, his knuckles white as he stared out into the street.

Emily followed his gaze.

Despite Katerina's command, some of her gang—Katerina included—were actually facing up Jenny Greenteeth and Black Annis, trying to rescue one of their own whom Annis held by the neck. The street children had surrounded the two hags as they tried to drag their victim into the Thames.

But doing this left their backs exposed to the attacking hounds. Some of the other street children were attempting to hold off the massive dogs, and while the iron did not have any magical effects, their weapons still managed to draw blood. But it was a lost cause. As Emily watched, one of the hounds leapt forward and bit the arm of a small boy who had strayed too close. He struggled, screaming for help. The others tried to grab hold of him, but the hound was too strong, too quick. It turned and disappeared between the sheds, dragging the boy across the ground like a rag doll.

His screams soon stopped.

Katerina had seen this. She shouted something to those closest to her. On her words, they all moved away from Black Annis, fleeing the scene of battle. Katerina caught Emily's eye and gestured for her to follow.

Emily faced the others. "We have no choice. We follow her at least until we're safe. Then we can go our own way if we have to." She looked to Jack, waiting for him to contradict her. But she was rather surprised when he simply nodded and clapped a hand on William's shoulder.

"Come on, squire. Let's move."

They darted from their hiding place and headed for Katerina. The hounds had all vanished, chasing Katerina's gang between the sheds. The knights and the Morrigan had disappeared as well, moving through the dark lanes as if hunting animals.

That left only Black Annis and Jenny Greenteeth, but they were both occupied. As Emily threw a quick glance in their direction, she saw them disappearing beneath the water with the girl Katerina. The gang had failed to rescue.

Emily, Jack, Will, and Corrigan hurried across the road. Emily could see Katerina up ahead, a few of her gang following close behind as they sprinted through the narrow spaces between the ramshackle structures. There was no sign of the hounds or the knights, though she could hear a furious snarling somewhere off to her right.

It was at that moment that Emily remembered the key to the Faerie Gate. She had left it back at the tannery, hidden beneath the moldy sacking. She staggered to a halt, watching as the others disappeared around a corner. She had to go back for it. She couldn't just leave it there.

She wondered whether she should try to catch up with Jack and tell him what she was doing, but she quickly decided against it. There was no time. Emily moved off the path, squeezing between a narrow passage formed by the walls of two sheds standing back to back. She edged along in the general direction of the tannery shed. Every now and then she could see the avenue through missing slats in the wood. The first time she saw nothing. But the second time she had to freeze as the White Knight passed by not ten paces from her.

She waited till she was sure he had gone, then peered into the open. A grass-covered path lay beyond, and on the other side of the path was a rocky bank that dropped away to the river. If she could get down the bank, she should be able to move around to the rear of the shed they'd been resting

earlier and work her way inside without being seen.

~~Emily peered along the path to the left. She could see the back legs of the black horse, but the Rider's attention was focused elsewhere. Emily took a nervous breath, then ran across the path and over the rise.~~

As soon as her feet hit the grass, she slipped. She went down onto her back and slid down the hill, barely managing to stop herself from rolling into the brown water.

She waited, lying flat on her stomach, but it didn't seem as if she had been heard. Emily pushed herself into a crouch. She could see their shed from her position. It was only about thirty paces away. She hurried along the shoreline at a low run.

Emily arrived at the rear of their shed and dropped to her knees. She pulled at one of the rotting planks, but it creaked and groaned alarmingly, so she gave that up and started digging the soft earth around the base of the structure instead. After a few minutes she had dug a hole big enough to admit her. She got down on her back and pulled herself through, wincing as the wood scraped against her back.

Emily threw aside the moldy sacking, breathing a sigh of relief when she saw the tangled branches of the circular key sitting exactly where she had left it. She had half feared Black Annis or one of the others would be able to sense its presence, much the same as the Dagda had done back in Hyde Park.

Emily scooped up the key and hurried back to the hole. She wriggled through on her stomach. The dry earth got up her nose and into her mouth as she did so. She wrinkled her nose and spat the dirt out as she tried to free her ankle, which had become wedged beneath the wooden planks.

"Look at that, Jenny. Disgusting is what it is. Expectoratin' all over the ground. No manners at all."

Emily yanked her foot free and rolled onto her back. Black Annis and Jenny Greenteeth were standing over her, their hideous faces framed against the blue sky.

Black Annis reached down to grab hold of her. Emily lifted her hands up to ward the hag off, forgetting that she still held the key.

Annis's black eyes widened in amazement. They darted to the key, then to Emily, then back to the key again, as if she couldn't believe what she was seeing.

"The key, Jenny," she said in a shocked voice. "She has the key."

"Can't do, Miss Annis. Titania holds it tight, she does."

"I know that, cretin! But what do you think that is? Chopped children's liver? I can feel the power. It's the real thing."

Emily took advantage of their confusion to whirl around and dive back into the hole, thinking perhaps she could escape through the front door. She got halfway through before she felt clawlike hands grab hold of her ankles. Emily kicked and struggled with all her strength, but it was no use. She was pulled slowly backward. She grabbed at the wooden slats, her fingers scrambling for purchase. She managed to get a grip, her backward movement stopping. Then her eyes fell upon something on the dirt floor. A nail. An iron nail. She could use it as a weapon. But if she let go of the slats, she would be yanked back through the hole. And the nail looked like it was just out of reach.

Emily took a deep breath. Well, she couldn't just lie here forever, could she? There was nothing else for it.

She let go of the wooden slat with one hand and stretched out for the nail. Her fingertips brushed against the cold metal, but then she slid backward.

"No!" she screamed, and kicked behind her with a sudden burst of anger. She must have been connected with something, because she heard a grunt of pain, and the pressure on her legs lessened. Emily quickly pushed forward, grabbing the end of the nail just before the hands took hold of her legs.

once again and jerked her from the hole with a violent yank that sent pain shooting up her legs.

~~She rolled over and tried to scramble away, but Black Annis grabbed her by the neck and lifted her into the air. She brought Emily close, studying her face curiously. Emily could smell stagnant water and rotten fish on the crone's breath.~~

“Now where did someone like you get that key?” Black Annis’s hand tightened around Emily’s neck. She couldn’t answer even if she had wanted to.

“Not talking? Ah well. I’m sure Kelindria will get the truth from you. Isn’t that right, Jenny?”

“Oh yes, Mistress Annis. Kelindria will poke things into her till she talks.”

Kelindria? Emily couldn’t let the key fall into her hands. Not after all she had been through to keep it from the Faerie Queen in the first place. If she got her hands on it now, everything they had done would be for nothing. Kelindria would be able to open the gate and summon her armies, and the next time Emily might not be able to stop her.

Emily stabbed the iron nail hard into Black Annis’s hand. The crone shrieked in pain and released Emily. She dropped to the ground and scrambled backward, gasping for breath. Black Annis’s hand was spewing oily smoke and black blood. Jenny Greenteeth lunged toward her, but Emily slashed out with the nail, and she jerked backward out of reach.

Emily didn’t wait to see what they did next. She turned and ran back along the shore. Black Annis raised her voice and shrieked for help. Emily forced herself to run faster, dashing across the small path and back between the sheds. She could hear the sound of running feet somewhere behind her. She pushed on through the tight space and into the lane where she had been separated from the others. She ran on. A stitch stabbed into her side, but she ignored it, concentrating on getting every bit of speed she could from her legs. She could still hear Black Annis’s wailing in the distance, but thankfully the sound didn’t seem to be coming any closer.

She rounded a corner and collided with someone coming the other way. She fell onto her backside and looked up, ready to use her nail once again.

But it was only Jack. Emily almost sobbed with relief.

“Where have you been?” he snapped, yanking her to her feet.

“Don’t speak to me like that,” said Emily. “I had to go back for this.” She brandished the key in front of his face. “Seeing as no one else was going to remember it.”

Jack looked confused. “But you were the one in charge of it,” he said. “Remember? You said you didn’t trust any of us to look after it.”

“So what are you complaining about? I went back and got it, didn’t I?”

“I’m not complaining—” Jack stopped, mid-argument. He shook his head. “It doesn’t matter. We have to hurry. Corrigan says those hounds will be hunting us. Katerina wants to take us to some place called the Warren.”

Emily quickly walked on ahead. She glanced back over her shoulder. “Come on then. What are you waiting for?”

✦ CHAPTER THREE ✦

In which Emily and Co. travel through a city that is almost, but not quite, familiar. Ancient tunnels. A surprise awaits.



This wasn't Emily's London. She *knew* this, obviously, but the truth of the statement became more and more apparent as they fled through the cobbled alleys and dirty streets of the city. Everything was much smaller than she was used to, more stifling. The roads were narrower, filled to bursting with Londoners and horses and boys driving sheep and cows from one side of the town to the other.

Instead of brick, most of the buildings were made from timber and shoved right up against one another. As a result of this, the only way to make houses larger was to build upwards, each precariously built floor larger than the one beneath and jutting farther and farther out over the street until only a small section of sky was visible from the shadowy road.

But despite these differences, there was still a lot that was similar. For instance, there were the carriages of all sizes and types that jostled for position on the heaving streets, some rickety, some elaborately carved and painted. (Although, the clothing of the people inside these carriages was odd to her. Men wore frock jackets and curly, shoulder-length wigs, and women held scented kerchiefs to their noses to block out the stench.)

When Emily first saw this, she felt a sharp stab of envy, because the stench was another thing that was familiar to her. Everyone she passed stank of stale sweat or bad breath. There was nowhere she could turn to escape it. The smell of vomit wafted from dark alleys, the stink of burned food from an open door, the revolting smell of rotting meat from an abattoir.

And added to this was the stink that came from having all kinds of animals walking through the streets. The inevitable buildup left by the animals either buzzed with flies or crawled with writhing maggots. Back home, there were people whose job it was to clean up this type of mess. Obviously, the simple idea hadn't occurred to anyone here, though Emily fervently wished it had.

She stepped over a pile of something she would rather not identify, following Katerina as she slipped into a dark alley. The buildings that formed the two sides of the narrow lane were linked by a plank of wood resting on windowsills high above them. As Emily watched, someone climbed out of one of these windows and clomped over the plank to the house opposite. The wood creaked alarmingly, a fine dust sifting down through the air. Emily blinked the dust away and lowered her eyes. Katerina stood at the entrance to the alley, checking back over their route. The other members of her gang had disappeared as soon as they had left the river. It was just the four of them and Katerina now.

"Where are we going?" Emily asked.

Katerina glanced quickly over her shoulder. "To see Rob Goodfellow," she said. Her eyes lingered on Corrigan. "I can't figure you lot out. Maybe he can."

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