## The Old Grey Lady’s House

The Old Grey Lady’s house had many amenities for Mousekind.

-

The old woman bristled at the suggestion, as though she were made of a thousand tacks.

“It’s not about jobs, or what you have been given, young lady– it is about what kind of job you do with what you have been given, I think. No, I believe. Good humour helps too”, she promptly added.

*This style requires less preachy, more teachy! 2017-07-30-MM*

## Books of Magic

Nesturna Turnoctus : Theories on Interactions ‘twixt Fivefold Weavelings.

The Uncrafty Stitch : A short guide on weathering your first spell, and other Things.

## Oakely and Moremice, at the Head of the Elfwood Path

Younger Oakely travelled the Westfarian Isles extensively in those days, as a young engineer, posing as an amateur herbalist. This was not so hard, since herbalism was a hobby of sorts, and the cover story provided him many opportunities to wander about in the wilderness, and also poke around property lines and generally anywhere he needed to go. He was looking for the mechanisms that kept the Fabric aligned and intact, and assembled extensive field notes on the locations and conditions of seams, holes, patches and tears. These he would record dutifully, disguised as observations regarding leaves, flowers, pollen, and so forth. As he was not a particularly good herbalist, any herbalist worth their salt would have thought him a bit mad, based on the odd conclusions and suppositions presented in his notes, but he kept his books close at hand, and let no one read them. It was his habit in those days to transcribe his notes once in a safe location, and send them in pieces by crow, to his employers back home.

One bright afternoon, Oakely reached a line of trees at the periphery of the town of Nodgins Hill. He had been led there by stories of disappearing farm cats, and believed that he would find a seam in need of repair. The road he had followed to get there was in truth no more than a pair of cart wheel impressions in the tall field grass, faded from years of disuse. He had followed it for nearly a day, having started out on the edge of a fallow field owned by an old farmer called Solace Biggs. His older barn, which still stood (barely) at the north-west corner of the family property, had housed countless feral cats over the decades since it had last been used, and though the old man had not seemed to care much about the comings and goings of the individual cats, or their stories, or their tangled family tree, he did notice when they began to disappear in large numbers. Rumour soon began to circulate that predators (wolves, forest gnomes, giant mice of the Unseelie kind, or some such thing) must have begun living closer to the town’s borders. The townsfolk posted a reward in the neighbouring areas for anyone willing to investigate, and track down the cause of the disappearing - though still largely unwanted - cats.

Oakely felt more than thought that there were no predators involved in this case; he had by that point observed the movements of animals – cats in particular, and ants and mice of varying sizes as well – in the regions surrounding Fabric anomalies, and had come to suspect that changes in their populations, especially related to geographic location, could signify the presence of unravelling seams, since these animals appeared to use them when given the opportunity to do so. Anyone who has spent enough time around cats certainly has come to notice their ability to travel extra-dimensionally, from time to time. Engineers, unlike most, are inclined to take extensive notes on the topic.

At the treeline, where the nearly faded road disappeared into the dark wood, stood a signpost, and atop it perched a crow. This one, unlike most he had encountered, had a small white feather above its left eye. It looked as though it had gotten into a bit of paint. The crow regarded him sternly as he approached, but did not fly off. The signpost read, in crudely carved script, “The Elfwood Path – turn back or go on, but do not tarry in this spot for long”. Judging by the irregular spacing of the letters, Oakely imagined the signmaker had miscalculated the room needed to carve the whole message out. The “for long” tilted upward at the sign’s bottom right, flowing up the side.

[Adult Oakely becomes obsessed with finding the Elfwood Path]

## Of Mice and Rats

Barnaby was a rarity, because he was a Rat, who had been raised as a Mouse, both by Mice and by Men. This made him uniquely bred, which became most apparent to his foster family on his third birthday. As was the custom in the Mouse Quarters of Rooster Hollows, his town of birth, third birthdays are a Big Thing. Mother Mouse had pulled out all the stops, had the cats chased from the premises, and forbidden anyone from treating Barnaby as anything but the rat and mouse that he was, because as far as she was concerned – and she was somewhat on her own in this regard – he was their family and they his.

Giant Rats

Some families of rats grew to enormous size, and began to mingle with the world of Humans. They took to using tools, wearing clothes (in varying degrees), wielding weapons and armor, and valuing keepsakes. Giant Rats are their cousins.

## The incident of the Wagon Wheel

The shortest-ever horse and cart chase

A wagon wheel hanging from a tree. The birds use it as a perch. When strung a different way, the squirrels use it as a whirlygig ride. When strung up a third way, they hung pots and spoons and drying linens on it, and use potential energy to make them whip-dry. He had about eleven separate uses for wheel, rope, and short ladder combination. So he counted each of them as lighter, using a formula had had been working on to perfection for some time, in his mind. It was difficult to keep track of what he was thinking for himself, at times.

One of its many configurations turned out to create a problem – Quid had modified the wagon wheel spokes and hub to be removable from the metal-banded, wooden rim, so that it could be hung up from a tree or beam and used as a target through which one could attempt to throw a tightly wound, roughly spherical bundle of rope (he had to come up with some clever knot techniques to get the thing fairly smooth, so that it could leave the thrower’s hands and move through the air predictably). He called this shared activity Hoop Knot. The basic version of the game involved a single hoop hanging from a tree or beam (as I mentioned before), and left to spin and twist in the wind as whimsy would dictate. One side of the wheel was painted a variety of colours – this was the side the colourful team (The player who were wearing the brightest, most colourful things) would attempt to throw the knot bundle through. The non-painted side was the side the other, more drably clothed (or skinned) players would throw at.

Quidbury was extremely proud of this invented game, and often imaged stadiums full of fans watching it, and wanting to play it at home. He hadn’t actually managed to convince anybody to try it with him yet. Thor thankfully got a pass, owing to his lack of hands, and Brom had flat out said no before Quid had finished asking, before walking away to sleep in the boughs of a tree, somewhere.

Quid had not thought to ask Wimsel, because, well, his impression was that women did not enjoy physical sport and the danger of injuries. Had she been asked, Wimsel in fact certainly would have wanted to play Hoop Knot with Quidbury– she loved Quidbury’s ideas – but since the young man hadn’t thought of her to ask, she did not feel like asking for him. She would sometimes steal secret glances at the wheel and imagine herself playing Hoop Knot and did have a dream or two about she and her new friends – even Thor - playing some kind of Knot Hoop game on a couple of occasions (professionally, in the second dream), and she knew that if Quidbury ever managed to figure out his particular issues, he would have great success in almost anything he chose to do. Choosing is often one of the harder parts of getting on with things.

The Tavern becomes connected to the Old House, via the final hoop, when Quid places the broken wagon wheel upon the wall.

but Humans could not commonly through it, being mostly too big. The Mice, on the other hand, used it all the time, as did a cat or two, here and there. Crows had no use for the thing, and rare was the other small creature who was willing to draw close to it, though it did happen, from time to time.

One lithe fellow, a human, as it happens, later almost ruined the portal entirely, in his efforts to squeeze himself through it - without clothes (naturally) and slathered in vegetable oils - only to get his beard snagged on a thick splinter of wood from the outer rim, which prevented him getting much farther through than his waist, or thereabouts. Having concluded beforehand that he would pose the most compact head-first silhouette to the wheel with his arms stretched down along his sides, and slightly behind, he almost immediately became quite firmly trapped, once his beard betrayed him.

His was found by mid-afternoon, when the …

Thor had settled into the idea that Quidbury and he would be staying at this Inn with the arrow in the sign placard for perhaps several days, while they planned their next move and Thor listened to Quidbury’s opinions on things, while futilely trying to supress his own. He refused to invoke the tavern’s Human-given name in his mind, because, as a lifelong outside observer of language-based conversation, he knew how easily words tended to eventually invoke their own meanings on folk.

He had tried the stables for a while – the horses more or less ignored him, and subtly used their size and demeanors to hog most of the carrots from Wimsel’s bucket. After a day of that, Thor chewed through his bridle and found some shade out back of the small structure, and eventually, found the barrel where the carrots were kept. Smaller than horses, Mules are generally known by Mulekind to be of superior intellect and resourcefulness, and Thor, it must be said, was a mule among mules. Having unlimited, edible tubers at his disposal was not completely new to him - he had worked his entire life around turnips, after all – but he overate nonetheless, being as he was and still is, a mule, as I’ve mentioned.

By the third day, Thor was feeling a little picid, and his poop, to be frank, had a troubling orange tinge to it, so he moved his relief spot a bit further into the treeline behind the tavern’s kitchen, to best conceal the evidence. He had just returned in fact from one of these, when he spied an unfamiliar man crouching behind the stables, peering out across the tavern’s small courtyard, at the tavern’s front door. The man was dressed as though he lived in the woods, and Thor noted a number of brambles and burrs stuck to the back of the man’s head, indicating he had either taken a fall recently or just woke up in a bush somewhere. The man had a fighting tool (one of several types of tools humans enjoyed carrying around with them) hanging from his waist, and Thor immediately did not trust him much after he saw that.

Thor was not named Thor because Thor was a common name to give a mule, I should point out. Thor was named Thor because that was the ancient name of a forgotten people’s god of thunder and war, and the mule had earned the name one day when his owner’s ill-tempered neighbour attempted to set their chicken coop on fire during a dispute over a broken fencepost. Thor was not easily triggered as a rule, but once he had a dislike-on for a person, it could become dangerous to give him a reason to express it.

Thor wondered often about the wisdom of saddling a living, evolving, growing creature with a static word, intended to mean *them*. Perhaps his tendency to want to kick people he didn’t trust was the direct result of the name he was given, rather the immutable reason he had to carry with him for all of his days?

Names could be changed to suit a change in the one bearing the name. Quidbury had shown him that, in fact. Perhaps the fellow was just waiting for the mule to do something extraordinary, before offering him a new one? That was a possibility.

## Bee’s Knees

Older Bee has an issue with her knees, largely in service of some cheeky wordplay.

Maeve ends up seeing Bee walking around naked in her backyard. Bee is used to living alone and it takes a few days for her to adjust to the company, and the company to adjust to her.

"The point of putting tea on, is to have something to do while the tea is becoming tea.

Not so that you can have tea in 90 seconds. Nobody *needs* tea in 90 seconds."   
  
She paused, and she thought. "At least nobody that *I've*ever heard of, anyway."

## The Coin Toss

When Ani departs for Nunavut via Winnipeg, Maeve and her flip a coin to see who gets Dooley, and Ani wins. Maeve convinces her that Dooley won’t fly well, and doesn’t like cold weather anyway, and they agree to switch, Ani taking Norm instead.

## Maeve meets Uncle Normand

Maeve noted the faded, Force Awakens t-shirt Normand had managed to fit himself into.

“I don’t really like Star Wars. It’s not science fiction, it’s fantasy in space, like with wizards except they’re Jedi and there are monsters, but they’re just aliens. Star Trek is science fiction.”

Normand nodded, more or less in agreement. “*Just* aliens, eh? What, you don’t like aliens?”

Maeve shook her head quickly “What? No. I mean, yeah I like aliens I guess. I mean, I think they’re real. Don’t you?”

“You mean, do I think they’re here, *among* us?” Normand made his eyes go slightly crazy, for comedic effect. Maeve changed the subject.

“Do you go by Normand, Norman, or Norm? Does anybody ever call you Normy? Do they shout your name when you enter a room?” Maeve handed him the Question Sandwich (Ani had warned him about it already).

“I usually go with Normand, but you can call me Norm if you like. Don’t shout it in a bar though, OK?”

Maeve took a moment to parse his deadpan response. He sounded like he was talking to a coworker, and they were both working at a call center. She worried at once about the possibility she might be a closet Star Wars fan.

“Mom called the turtle Norm.”

“Of course she did. Your mother hasn’t changed since she was ten, you know”. He thought and added, “I probably shouldn’t tell you that”.

The firefly had summoned a friend, and they were blinking about in pursuit of each other, higher up in the tree. Maeve and her uncle both watched them go, as she considered his words. “That explains a lot about the last three years though”, Maeve offered, eager for the opportunity to have her opinion of her mother’s mom skills on record.

Normand had an interesting ability to let only one side of his face smile when he needed to not let on he had just been amused by something. He could do either side equally well, and kept the side facing the girl fairly slack. After a moment, he turned to cock and eyebrow at his niece.

“Ani explains a lot about a lot of things.”, Normand winked mysteriously at Maeve, then stood with a grunt, grabbed his hat, and took his leave while he still felt he might be ahead.

Maeve blinked. Where was she, and how had she ended up here?

## Just Dave

The splinter of wood was placed there by ANDORTECH.employee.Dave.0100, otherwise known as Just Dave, by his five friends, Node the First, Node the Second, ThirdNode, MiddleNode, Node.5 and Just Dale. Just Dave also had an iDog, which technically counted as his child, and his parental units, which he heard from only sporadically.]

## The Mad Scribble, Chapter 7

## Edits

“Some time in the making”, not “many years”

## Bardlii

..

“I don’t see skin color”

Bardlii did not to see skin colour, in fact. He couldn’t say this to most people, of course, as they often mistook it for a kind of over-compensation or bragging (strangely) on his part, which tended to unnerve their sensibilities. In his particular case, however, it was actually, scientifically true; his mind’s discernment of most colours\* had been cruelly snatched from him during his second year at Wixarthur, by a jealous, curse-hurling colleague during an impolite dispute over social protocol. This act led to the classmate’s tribunal before the Grand Coven, and eventual expulsion from the academy. That man was now known far and wide as Undrumkin the Fowl, a title first coined by Bardlii’s college roommate Mortimurm Nodegate, whose loyalty and sense of humour mostly made up for his lack of attention and scholastic prowess. Mostly.

## Maevis and Bee

Maeve and Gran would both attest sometime later that neither could remember the first few hours in which they first met, because they had (apparently) one of those meeting-someone-for-the-first-time-and-feeling-like-you’ve-known-them-forever moments. Except they had known each other for so long, they were with old hearts and minds by the time they re-met, and inclined to forget great stretches of time when around one another, out of habit and comfort.

“Weavelings’ stories, however, do not move in straight, parallel lines, They are woven. We are all woven, in fact.”

“We are all Weavelings, you mean.”

“Yes, Maeve, I believe that to be true. I believe we are all Weavelings. Every living thing. To become unwoven from the rest, is to become unwound. Or unravelled. They are both apt metaphors.”

“You like metaphors, I’m noticing.”

“We are awash in them, dear. It’s the language of the gods and godesses.”

“Belief, theory, or opinion?”, Maeve’s more dubious eyebrow raised slightly

Bee chuckled, in love with the young girl’s mind. “Those things are different words meaning the same thing, to me. You’re precise, like your father.”

Maeve didn’t make a point of thinking about her father, always three steps behind Ani and her, wherever they went.

“He loves you, you know.”

“Not sure that matters much”, Maeve closed the door on that line of discussion, and, trying in vain to dust the cat hair off her pants, gave an odd smile to the old woman. “I have to go, Gram”.

“It’s Grandmother, or Bee, Maevis dear.”

“Maeve. Or Maevis- whatever. Ok.” Maeve shook her head slightly, half-smiled, and disappeared into the house.

## Chapter Names / Themes

The Warlock and the Crow

## Random Dialogue

“I have found, over the years, that the best Wizards and Witches all tend to talk outwardly in expressions of belief and experience, rather than certainties and truth.”

“You’re using other people’s safety as your playground.”

“A degree of precision is necessary. So is a degree of inspiration, and also a degree of imprecision.

“Wouldn’t you agree?”, he meant to add, and then did.

“A sliding scale of precision, you mean to say?”

“I suppose I do.”

---

“We are shepherds of this planet.”

“What do you mean?”

“Just that our role is that of guardian and friend to the creatures here. Many of them have trouble even giving their own backs a good scratch. Can you imagine how frustrating that would be? The trees have trouble guarding themselves against the spread of fire. These are things we can help with. We have the hands to do so.” Mother Mouse had always had a fine opinion of the capabilities of Mousekind, however small. They could invent and carry around back-scratchers, after all. Teams of them – sometimes working in secret with the most trusted humans – could in fact do many things, and more and more often these days, in fact did.

### The Greater Society

Initially founded by an ant, a troll, and a Dreaming Tree, joined then by a warlock (in secret), and two mice. A crow was added next. The debate about admitting Humans is ongoing. The Greater Society is a relatively new movement in the Isles, with local chapters just beginning to appear here and there, often forced to meet in secret or in backrooms, because of speciesism and general mistrust.

The Greater Society meets with mutual respect, health, and collaboration in mind. T

Trolls of the Greater Society agree (in principle, they have hard natures) to catch-and-release hunting and trapping of mankind. This is both more Humane (Troll-mane?), and also somewhat humiliating for the human adventurer who gets caught. It is certainly better than being pulverized by club and made into a stew however, the way old Trolls used to do it.

## Ernesto / Barnaby

He guards Whimsy on her quest? Are they delivering a message for Mother Mouse?

## Moremice and Young Oakely

At the edge of the Elfwood Path, Moremice confronts the young engineer, warning him that the Elfwood Path is not an easy one to return from. Oakely emerges from the Elfwood as Quidbury? Perhaps the Elfwood is a nexus, and he is split within it.

*Oakely travelled the Westfarian Isles extensively as a younger man, in or around that time.*

## The North and South Peaks

The College consists of two siblings, the North Peak and the South Peak. Both were created from magic, and are now riddled with tunnels. Those in the South Peak are wizards, entrenched in research and tradition. Those on the North Peak are Witches and some Warlocks, and are primarily concerned with the Isles’ slowly rising water levels. They are forced into action, social, and political.

When the magic left Westfar, off on a journey of self-discovery, the water levels in the area began to rise, giving rise to theories about why the magic had been gathered in the College to begin with, how, and why. The wizards began to disappear into the four corners of the land, in an increasingly desperate search for where the Source had gone to. Some of them brought unusual magic-trapping contraptions with them, some nets, some bottles, some other things.

Many of these wizards never returned, having either wandered off (or fleeing) into neighbouring lands, others falling prey to roadside and wilderness adventures, and still others settling down to practice subtle magic or mundane professions at the periphery of the societies of Man. Some got married and started families.

During this general exodus, the Witches began to appear, leading wary caravans of displaced folk, looking for shelter and protection from the rising tide and chaos, and, finding the North Peak abandoned and locked up, decided to break in and make themselves at home. They left the South Peak – the shorter of the two peaks, incidentally – for the Wizards who did decide to return, or who never left, to stay in, until they got their collective act together.

## The Westfarian Isles

Once the kingdom of Westfar, in the valley known as the Everlunds, the Westfarian Isles are now a loose affiliation of independent fiefdoms, cities, castles, and territories, separated from one another by water channels and marshlands. The Hedge Wilds are strong here, both routes of travel are largely maintained, though travel itself is a business that must be approached with care.

## Niall and Maeve

Niall’s “see you soon” is prophetic. The next scene should be he and Maeve’s weavelings meeting.

## Elders Falls / Alder Falls

No name for the town yet.

There is a SevenFold in the township. Only three of her Weavelings are in the books. She has many inexplicable things happen to her constantly.

This was a nexus town, a place where the fabric is old and worn, and things tended to seep through, especially in dreams, fears, and inspirations. Many of the townsfolk moved their homes there.

[Study Kings Landing?]

## Spirited Humans

Some Humans in the Isles were of the spirited variety, which could mean many things, but often meant, at least, that they travelled extensively in dreams. The dream realm was not unknown to common folk. Some adventurers with a knack for such things would find employment guarding the dreams of their clientele, which was a lucrative and sometimes dangerous business. Dream travel was made possible through conventional and unconventional magic – often potions, salves, lanterns, or enchanted pillows.

## Characters

Bex (Bleue? Blueberry) Spirit?

Liz Bright

Elmur

Oakely

Bardlii

Maeve Morgan

Ani Morgan

Onefoot Down

Brom Rohgan

Niall / Quidbury /

Laine / Sophia?

Wimsel (Spirited Human)

Ernesto

## Oakely and Bee

Oakely had a moment, looking up at Bea. *I’ve had dreams like this.* There were good and bad ones both, belonging to the genre that was Bea towering over him, calm, controlled, with the upper hand

Bee, like some crows, exists in two worlds?

She and Oakely have a history, it has played out in two worlds already, and concludes when their timelines meet.

## Wimsel and Quid

The dancing lesson.

Wimsel is aging backward. Quid has an awkward moment of realization that he cannot fall in love with a woman who is aging backward, but during his adventures in the Isles, he becomes like a foster parent to her. He unknowingly left Bee (as Oakely) when he followed the Elfwood Path, in search of adventure. Oakely returned older, and Quid meets Wimsel. Wimsel becomes younger and more childlike, as Bee ages and does the same. When brought together, Bee moves on, and Wimsel becomes a Human child on Earth. Quid can’t travel through the loop – it is simply too small. He passes her through, to Oakely, he raises her as his own grandchild.

Quid’s opus is the Westfarian Isles Conflict Resolution Modeling System. Brom and he and Wimsel talk about it and convince him to change the name. They decide it’s about playing roles, so it must be about role-playing. Quid bristles at calling it a “game”, but hasn’t had much luck selling it to local governments as a project modeller?

-this doesn’t sound like the Quid I wrote. Perhaps he’s already been wandering around for a while.

## Oakely’s Clockwork Heart

Oakely acquired during his Fabrical journeys a number of conditions common to Loop Engineers in those early days, when the trade was still rather new. One of these conditions became severe enough to require an emergency installation of a clockwork heart - the Ironclad VII model, made by master clocksmith / surgeon Rumbetter P. Hornswazzle, in Old Glassworks. It had ticked away precisely and reliably for many years, but he could feel the buzzing vibration of a loosening coil, slipping almost imperceptibly every dozen ticks or so, and this had been getting noticeably worse for the past several weeks.

He needed to wind it back up again, but had lost the key somewhere. He first thought perhaps he had been pickpocketed in Paris, when he was there last, or simply dropped it on the trail, somewhere he might never be able to return to.

Then he remembered Bee’s junk drawer. After he had begun to sleep under her roof more than under the stars. His belongings, what few there were, all seemed to have their place somewhere in Bee’s small and confusing little house. In spite of his practiced need to stay ready to move, with all things in tow, it became so easy to stop carrying it all around, and just let things settle in among the gardening tools, and plants, and cookbooks, and quilting …. equipment. The junk drawer was a swirl of incomprehensible madness to him, and represented everything he thought he knew how to avoid. But therein lay the key, he was certain of it.

For a time, he wrestled with the idea of breaking into her house when she wasn’t around, and stealing it back. It was his, after all – it hardly made sense to let his heart stop simply because they had parted on less than ideal terms, with their belongings all mixed together because he didn’t bother to read what she would write on the labels she would slap onto the boxes, as she unpacked and re-packed each one in turn, from Season to Season, attempting to, he presumed, perfect the system.

He had left in haste one early Thursday morning with a variety of sewing bobs, some old vinyl music storage devices, and a bag of fabric swatches in a box he thought contained oil and bolts to repair his Engine – Bee had taken the contents out of the box – where they had ended up was anybody’s guess – and used the battered and grease-stained old box for her own things, and had placed one of her labels with too-tiny printing on it, that read, “Oakely and Bee’s things”. They were not his things though, they were only hers. And in this same weird way, she had managed to keep the key to his heart. He did not find that particular funny, but imagined, somewhere deep down, that Bee surely did, though would never admit to it.

He dismissed the robbery idea however. It was just not his strength, to skulk about in the shadows, avoid house animals and creaky floorboards, grab the goods (the junk draw made more noise than he thought reasonable, also) and slip off into the night, as though nothing had occurred. Oakely left a trail wherever he went; a trail of clues, slightly displaced objects, frustrated sounds, and, on some days, the subtle odor of earth, wood and machine oil, mixed in equal measures. There would be no stealing the key from Bee’s kitchen – it would not end well for him.

Trickery was equally out of the question; Bee was not a woman Oakely had ever once considered trying to trick. The same thing applied to hiring somebody to steal or trick it back from her; these were merely more desperate versions of the same plans he would never embark upon alone, with additional points of failure and possible betrayal thrown in.

No, Oakely knew, if the key to his clockwork heart was anywhere in Bee’s home – or under it, or in the walls or pretty much anywhere on the property – she would know, and the best and quickest way for him to get it back was to, as hard as it was for him to accept it, ask her. His pride could not, for several days, accept that he would have to go back on the very last, and mildly inexplicable words he shouted in her general direction as he stormed off with his boxes of Bee’s belongings: “I will be dead and buried the day I set foot on this property again!”.

He wondered if it would work out that way, somehow. One had to be careful of what words they just went shouting into the wind. He knew the power of them as much as the next wizard, as did Bee. His heart buzzed for a beat, and his skin tingled briefly with a slight chill.

Bee did not, in fact, know that she had the key to Oakely’s Ironclad Heart in her junk drawer, though it was in fact there. Faeries put it there, I believe, but only the Crow knows if that is true.

Maeve found that key in her first week back on the homestead, as well as Oakely’s field notes in the junk drawer, once she had found the key to the junk drawer. *That* key was in a tin can in the old barn, on a beam running along the north wall, where other things like nails, old bottles, dead bugs, and empty ribbon spools seemed to enjoy congregating in the dusty sunlight filtering in through an old window. Maeve had had to push an old lawnmower over to it so she could reach, but after that, the shelf’s contents were hers to do with what she willed.

Bee had forgotten there was a junk drawer key still on the property – she had long ago rid herself of the need to have a key for the drawer. Locking and unlocking it was something she used magic for, to keep her skills sharp, without endangering anybody.

The key, incidentally, had been Oakely’s idea. He had copies of all the house’s various (and inexplicably numerous) keys made once it had become clear his belongings had been suitably absorbed into the house’s various cupboards, crawlspaces, boxes and bags. He of course lost most of these within a year of making them, and decided it might be best if Bee did not know there were missing keys to her house left in various places (some around town), in case it would make her worry about break-ins. This was the extent to which the wizard did not understand the woman at all. The only copied key the Faeries did not take (in my opinion) was the junk drawer key in the old can in the barn– it was buried at the bottom of the can, surrounded by old nails and hex bolts.

Oakely suspected the key was in the junk drawer, but had not yet discovered that his field notebook was missing. Mr. Boots had found it at the edge of the property that morning, and brought it to exchange with the Old Grey Lady for salmon. It had some notes written in English, and many in other symbolic script that Maeve had – quite to her excitement – never seen before.

## Blueberry and Maeve

The 8-bit quilt

More Maeve

The school house was a fairly plain looking thing, with a painted wooden sign above the front door which read, in white stenciled letters, “Elders Falls All-Ages School”. The building was rectangular, single-storied, and had a tall, sloped roof. Several small dormer windows suggested a useable attic (Maeve loved attics), and the bottom level sported a number of large windows as well. The entire thing was painted forest green, and the roof was a shiny black. There appeared to be some sort of rain-collecting barrel-and-pipe arrangement hanging off one end of the roof, and a wind turbine, perhaps barely large enough to charge a cellphone (discouraged technology, in this backward place) spun lazily on the other end of the building.

There were two front doors, set only feet apart (an odd distance), both painted brown. The door on the left was painted light brown. A small plaque hung from a nail upon it, and on the plaque somebody had painted a smiley face. The door on the left was a slightly different brown (it had some orange in it), and it also had a plaque hung from it, with a painted frowny face. Maeve was already dreading the moment some adult would corner her to explain the significance of this, so she decided she would pick the frowny face door before that could happen, and if asked, would pretend to have not noticed it. She made like she was adjusting the straps on her satchel as she climbed the short, three-stepped stoop up to the door, and went on through.

## Laine and Brom

Lane had turned back to adjusting the saddle on her horse, who was trying to ignore Thor’s odd ear displays and sideways, come-hiter-ish glances.

Brom hesitated, then ventured, “So, the father… is he around?”

Laine spun and locked eyes with the man at once. “I’m not so certain that is your business, but I am quite sure that he is, somewhere – ‘around’.” She stared at him, waiting for his next question, or comment.

“My apologies, Sister, I just wanted to – “ Brom suddenly wanted the woman to deftly cut him off again, before he could put his foot in his mouth, but she patiently did not.

Brom exhaled, and shifted his footing. “Sometimes, it’s just- I mean to say… sometimes men follow when they’ve not been asked to. Or when they’ve been told not to. My mother had that problem for many years. I have trained myself to look for it, I suppose.” He ended it with a small shrug, attempting to stuff a tin of beans into his saddlebag, already overflowing with the blankets he had pushed roughly into it earlier, while thinking idly about something else, the point of which he had now forgotten.

The lines around Lane’s eyes softened for a moment, in spite of her wish to remain mistrustful, but she kept her eyes on the barding at hand. She felt her edge suddenly dull, which angered her more. It was the pregnancy hormones – they were already beginning to affect her, to force her to drop her guard for stupid reasons. What if that happened in battle? What if, in a sudden moment of hormone-induced weakness, she caught sight of a beautiful flower, or a cloud shaped like a unicorn, or a reflection of a perfect tree in a shapely stream – and, in that moment, could not deliver the Hammer of Aidan to her enemies’ skulls? What if people suffered or died because of her, and her momentary hesitation - people who trusted her, who needed her?

She was a paladin, and she had a job to do. She could not become soft. It was not an option she could entertain.

What if she lost the child, because she grew too soft?

She felt suddenly very ill. This infuriated her even more, because it was happening in front of *this* man.

To Brom, no time had passed since his last words had left his lips, save for a brief moment when he thought, trying to read the woman’s face, he might have said the right thing. It was a fleeting thought.

Lane vaulted herself with one fluid motion into the saddle, glaring down at Brom, who had stepped back in surprise.

“Do you think I am not completely, utterly capable of caring for myself and my as-yet-to-be-born child from the many, many hazards of the world, Sir Woodsman? That I need *your* protection and help?”

Brom shook his head, slightly and absently, “No, I did not – “

“You *are* not, and will never be *my* protector. I am *yours*, and theirs” she waved her mailed fist in the general direction of the others, who had by this point begun to back slowly away from the engagement, not knowing precisely where to look. “You’re simply here to guide us through the Hedgewilds, and also perhaps to drink all of the company’s cider. That is what my eyes and my ears lead me to believe. Don’t dare presume to know what I need.” That last bit was perhaps unnecessary, but it felt good to say, for some reason. Her horse began to fidget somewhat beneath her, sensing that she had assumed a posture for battle.

That last thing hit Brom’s pride right in the armpit. “Whoa, Sister – hold your horses. I’m *not* going to –“

“No, you’re not.”, Lane agreed, deftly, wondering immediately what he was about to say that he was not going to do, all while attempting to quell the rising sense of panic she suddenly, terribly felt at the overwhelming gravity of what she had done with her life. Nobody puts a child – an *unborn child* – in this sort of danger. No sane person does that. She must be a lunatic.

That was it – her transgression against the guiding wisdom of the Commandments of Aidin House had been as High Mother Gwenvel had told her : of the Highest Order. She did not deserve to wear the tabard and wield the MotherFinger. And that *was* a good name for a blessed sword, and how *dare* this man – this giant, essentially uneducated brute with too-large hands, and a ridiculously angled nose, like he was carved out of some kind of hardened wood… her thought just ended itself right there. She couldn’t think anymore. It was all too much. She felt sick.

Brom’s mouth had begun to swing open – Lane saw it happening in slow motion – his face looking up at her, reacting to words she’d said and already put away, his own eyes shimmering with mild and mannered outrage at her sharp words , and she would normally have been sad in that moment that he hadn’t simply understood none of it was about her lack of confidence in his worth, but just then, her body decided she would throw up on him instead, and end the whole thing right there, which it promptly did, while she had the better height advantage.

Quidbury and Wimsel both gave startled gasp in unison – Wimsel worried for Lane’s health but she did not want to further upset the woman with more unbridled concern. At least, not while she was holding a sword, astride a warhorse. Quid half-wondered if the two swordsmen wouldn’t draw their blades and attempt to slay each other right then and there. That was a measure of how much he presumed about things, over actually knowing. Thor decided he would carry only Lane’s belongings from that point forward, for a variety of complex reasons the mule only half understood, though the rest of the group wouldn’t find that out until the following morning.

Brom’s anger had vanished in a moment, replaced with surprise and mild horror, as he looked down at Lane’s last meal spread across his freshly dried tunic, and feeling at least some of it in his hair and on his forehead. He could not decide upon a reaction that made any sense whatsoever, and so just slowly raised his hands shoulder height, unsure what to do with them, disarmed. “Okay, then”, was all he offered, and slowly backed away.

Lane, wiping her mouth with her sleeve, was flushed with too many emotions. Her horse began to trot her down the trail, knowing it was what she probably needed at that moment – to just get away.

[…]

Bardlii does not travel with the heroes regularly, but meets them at stops along the way. He believes he has to keep them in the dark about his motives, but in fact they would all likely work for him if he bothered to let them in. Bardlii makes up a ruse about a witch, but it turns out to be true, because a witch has enchanted him to believe she is a fabrication of his. It’s all very complicated.

Bardlii is carrying a Flaming Scroll of Aggregated Opinion, given to him by his uncle Feztas. What Bardlii does not know is that Feztas has contacted Earth, and hired a coder to write a service to send data through the conduit he created in order to scry upon it.

Bee and Dooley

From that day onward, throughout that summer and into Autumn, Bee was awoken between five-thirty and five-fifty-seven by the sound of a part-basset hound, part-something else eating potato chips out of a large plastic bowl, pushing it to and fro as it went, from here and there across the linoleum of her kitchen floor. *Her* potato chips – the ones she had hidden all over her house, to save for special occasions, when she was left alone. There was no place in the house, in fact, after that first week, where she could hide her sour cream and onion potato chips whatsoever, where the grandniece would not find them within an afternoon, and replace them with *half-salted* imposters from the dollar store down the lane, Too-Toonie’s.

Too-Toonie’s’ sign had a picture of two toonies in place of both pairs of consecutive oh’s, with crossed and crazy cartoon eyeballs looking at one another, as though it were a place where only madmen would wish to shop. It had been designed by the store owner’s nephew, who last Summer wanted to be a famous illustrator, and who this year, after high school graduation, was planning to become an Internet entrepreneur, so the crows told her. Or was that Heather Munns, from three doors up? She could not recall. The Too-Toonie’s had terrible potato chips. She did not care for them at all.

Plus, two sets of two toonies is four toonies, not two toonies. None of it made any sense.

Where Maevis was acquiring the two-dollar coins for the dollar store potato chips, she could only hazard a guess. It actually came to Four dollars and thirty-nine cents after tax, which rounded up to four dollars and fourty cents anyway, so she imagined her dimes were disappearing too. She was correct, on later inspection of her coin sock.

Maeve in any event had intentions of working off the debt, which she kept in her notebook, among various other records and observations.

[…]

## Laine’s Faith, Belief, and Greater Hope

Laine had self-confidence, and she also had a thing she simply called confidence in others, or just other-confidence, which many of her belief persuasion liked to call faith. It all amounted somewhat to the same thing, in her experience, which was considerable, in many, but not all, respects. She is Liz’s Weaveling.

## Chud Saunders

Charles, Charlie, Chuck, Chuckles, and Chuckless – Chud has has many names over the years, but none of them have affected who he is inside, which is an amazing young man. He has always gravitated toward those whom he can learn from, and those who need his protection and subtle, unspoken guidance. He’s on the football team, but isn’t a football jock. He is a loner at times but doesn’t mind it. He’s in love with Liz, and has been his entire life, but would never say it to anybody. He is Brom’s Weaveling.

The sadsack story of Chud Saunders trying to win Liz’s heart?

Chud and Maeve were good friends when they were younger, now they’re in middle school and he is studying hard because be believes if he works hard enough, he can be allowed to skip two grades and catch up with Liz. He enlists Maeve’s help first, since they go way back, and perhaps also Blueberry’s help with math and statistics.

He does not succeed completely, but at some point Liz decides to hold herself back, in grade 12, when she learns this has been going on for years, for by that point, she gets what kind of fellow he has become.

Chud is rather large and athletic, with a few learning disabilities, and a solid, good heart. His mother is odd, and leaves his father on Chud’s 16th birthday, after the young man finally throws the older man out of the family home (more or less literally), for being abusive.

---

Folk in the Isles value cider generally more than beer or wine, believing apples are the wisest of those particular crops.

## Dr K., AI Interpreter

Dr K. is a Mathematician, speech language pathologist, computer scientist, and interpreter of AI’s. She is actually one of the first licensed to council them. Of course, she has been counselling Maeve, but it is because she is trying to glean insights from the way kids at various points along the spectrum choose to communicate, through inspiration, aspiration, and action.

This book takes place at the Edge of the Singularity. It must, because here we are. It is a fantasy book trying to be a science fiction book.

* Contract-based actions
* Faithful actions, actions in good faith
* Aspirations, events, and public faces
* Hope -> Belief -> Action -> Faith -> Experience ->

Dooley was a dog among dogs. Smart as a tack - half basset hound, half Husky, and one-third something else. He was getting on in dog years now, so sitting tied loosely to a tree all day in early Autumn felt quite fine to him. He had been spending his time watching the fine and curious people of Elder Falls walk unhurriedly from building to building, treed path to community garden, artificial duck pond to watchtower. It was admittedly on odd assortment of structures and human constructs he had not had the opportunity to observe before. The people here smelled much different than people elsewhere. They seemed to get involved in more things, and tended to get a lot of it on them.

Dooley knew how to read, phonetically. Had somebody told him this was probably not at all normal for a dog, he might have found that interesting, but since dogs did not really have a way of discussing the topic of phonetics in their own language, he never had the chance to learn this was an unusual thing. He knew thousands of English and French words, also something he might have been informed was a bit unusual, but he always preferred to keep his own abilities under wraps. He liked laying about and didn’t need the responsibility of a real human job. He sometimes had nightmares about having to wear a tie, or attempt to “upsell” somebody, a concept he only partially understood, but fully disapproved of.

Dooley’s favourite English word was *anthropomorphism*, because hearing it spoken in his mind made him think of chewing on something delicious and gooey, and not entirely healthy. He had no idea what it meant- he had seen it written in a magazine somewhere, and had snuck off with the magazine so that he could spend time staring at the word and working out to himself how it would probably sound, if a human were to say it aloud. He had learned this trick because his human brother Bull used to read the paper to him all the time, sometimes in different voices.

That was before Ani left Bull, and took them all with her on her next adventure.

Dooley now and then tried to speak the words he could hear so clearly in his mind – so that he could ask for the Turkey and Rice flavour and NOT the beef (what dog ate beef?), or tell Maevis that he loved her, or that he needed to do #2 so please just this one time could he be let off his leash to poop in private in the neighbour’s sunflower patch instead of the middle of their backyard, where children play – but his tongue and lips just would not cooperate. He always just made people smile when he tried to talk English or French. They called him Chewie sometimes. That wasn’t the worst thing, he supposed.

In the speckled Autumn shade of the poplar stand near the center of the “town” (or whatever the humans called this particular style of building arrangement), the old dog had been left loosely tied by his human daughter Maevis, while she went to her first day of school in their new town. They had shown up about 3 weeks after the first day of school, which he knew was rather bad timing on Ani’s part. Ani did not understand kids very well. Bull had loved kids but drank too much to be of much use to them. The turtle / tortoise they called Norm was fairly incapable of looking after anything other than himself, given all the precarious circumstances the girl tended to put her in. Dooley knew the tortoise was a she, and was not surprised that nobody else seemed to know, or much care.

Maeve had disappeared into the long, low building with the vaulted roof. Dooley could tell she was nervous about making new friends. He had licked her on the side of her face to get her going. Sending the kid off to a new school every single year was a job that had always, coincidentally, fallen on him. He did not mind.

In front of the school was a most unusual sign painted on a large wood square, posted between two unpainted wooden poles. Dooley had slowly read it aloud to himself several times before he we sure he had gotten the words right. He wasn’t used to seeing them composed together in such a configuration, and he had been spending the past twenty minutes laying in the dusty shade, trying to make sense of them.

The

Elder Falls

Multigenerational

School of Community

Architecture Studies

He was having too much trouble pronouncing the word on the third line, and he had already guessed the place they were now in was probably called The Elder Falls. The word School was well-known to him, so he knew he had delivered Maeve to the correct place. Plus, he could hear and smell the teachers and students inside.

The remaining words were vaguely familiar to him and made him think it was perhaps a gardening school or maybe a science school. Dooley associated the word science to rocket ships and medicine, so he found himself hoping Maeve had finally found a school that could keep up with her curious mind.

The word *Architecture* was completely new to him. It was this one he kept looking at. Passerby reasonably assumed he was dutifully waiting for his owner inside, which was partially true, though Maevis was his human daughter, not his owner. Some humans, had they been able to speak dog, might have told him that they felt there was not much difference between the two. To Dooley, they were as different as night and day.

Was architecture something scientists studied? When people studied things, they often looked at them, then found pictures of them, then sometimes wrote things about them. Occasionally, they might think to pick them up, or at least touch them if they were too heavy to carry. Only children and the most dedicated scientists typically thought to put the things they were studying in their mouths – this did not seem to be a thing most scientists agreed was a good idea.

Would Maeve study architecture? What kind of science was that? Was it about rocket ships, or about medicine? Maybe it was science about gardening? He could not guess. It wasn’t a word he relished trying to say out loud, given his natural speech impediments.

Maeve had also noticed the sign, before going in. Dooley had watched her after she left him under the trees. She had said “Dooley…” in her embarrassed way while wiping his tongue spit off her face, before turning from him toward the school building. She had walked, looking at her feet, across the gravel lane between the trees and the school, and when she had looked up toward the sign, it had caused her steps to slow somewhat. By the time she stood in front of the building’s front doors (there were two), she had come to a complete stop, trying to make sense of the words, just as he was doing now.

When Maeve finally chose to go in, looking back at him briefly for assurance, and being old enough to feel self-conscious about it, Dooley had decided that Ani and he had made the right call to bring her here.

Wherever *here* was.

Solar-powered steam engine

The Big Red Whistle - Dart Tuesdays

Old Foggy's - Axe-Throwing Wednesdays - used to be Mel's Diner. That used to be a kind of ironic, back in the eighties, so some argued it had a long history of being a progressive bar, while just as many others - mostly the older folk - took offense to that.

Elder Falls Middle School of Community Architecture

/TOBE/PatientInCommunications

/NOTE/Writing something out is equivalent to reading it seven times.

Dooley Goes to School