

ALRAUNE

A Story of Witches, by Dreyer

“So, Dorey... this is weird, right?” said Lucy as she floated along astride her shovel, her little turtle familiar perched on her shoulder.

“How so?” asked Dorey, hovering along the mountain path on her long wooden stirring paddle, right beside her partner. She asked, but in truth she felt the same way: usually when there were rumors of an unregistered witch in an area, they either turned out to be so baseless that they would quickly find the wild animal causing the strange disturbances, or the hapless woman being falsely accused by a jealous neighbor or a greedy landowner; or they would be so spot on that the village was half in shambles by the time help arrived.

Rarer was a case like the one that the Blackbriar Tower has assigned to the two of them: where they touched down in the village of Bellbrook, about two hours' flight east from the Tower, to find everything perfectly normal, houses standing, people going about their business unharmed and unafflicted, happily greeting them and offering them their hospitality. Many of the people there had heard smatterings of the rumors, but of all of them, the proprietor of the public house knew the most: that along the mountain pass between Bellbrook and the town of Widdershire further to the east, a witch had apparently set up shop, selling potions and foodstuffs out of her little cottage; that she had raised up a little army of minions from the dirt to help her with her practice. The barkeep was surprised to learn that the Tower had no knowledge of her: many had thought she'd been *sent* by the Tower, to provide relief to people making the trip over the wooded mountain. He was generous with all the information he had that would help them find her, and with promises to pray for their safe journey — and of course, with the offer to steady their spirits from all of the magic they'd used to make the trip from the Tower. Their bottoms were still a little warm from the clap of his firm hand.

“Well, if it were two of them, like you and me — or one living with her family — that would be one thing, right?” said Lucy. “That would be easy: Mom's giving out the spankings, or they're spanking each other; we'd just have to take their names and tell 'em to pop over to the Tower when they can. But one witch, living all by herself, up in the mountains? Using animating magic, on top of that? And she hasn't been causing any problems for the people down below? Something odd is going on, don't you think?”

“I reckon that's why they sent us to investigate,” said Dorey. “They can't all be easy ones — and we've got enough experience to deal with the hard ones.” Indeed, they had packed for a hard one: Dorey's leather bag was filled not just with beddings and clothes and rations, but all the tools she would need to deal with a rampaging witch — antivenoms and purgatives, stimulants and sedatives, pills to resist the heat or the cold, algesic oils made from nettles to intensify the impact of a much-needed spanking. She'd made sure to stick some of her concoctions into Lucy's pack, too, along with the pouches of dirt and stones and carved arrowheads that she used in her own art. Dorey's familiar, a mandrake, sat in a clay pot in a sling across her chest — she was sleeping now, but at a moment's notice she could wriggle out of her pot and turn into a rod for Dorey to swing across a restrained witch's behind until she snapped out of her mania. And Gene the turtle was well awake, and could be ready even quicker, curling himself into the form of a paddle with but a snap of Lucy's fingers.

A wry smile spread across Dorey's face as a funny thought entered her head. “Maybe she gets her own minions to spank her?”

Lucy scoffed and rolled her eyes. “We all know that doesn’t work,” she said. “Your magic is you, and you can’t spank yourself good. If it were that easy, witches would never turn!”

“Hey, you don’t know!” said Dorey. “Way back when, they didn’t know that spanking witches helped *at all*. For all we know, she’s found a new secret!”

Lucy huffed and cracked a little smirk. She knew when her Dorey was just being silly. “Well. *If* she has, I just hope we find her in a mood to share it with the rest of us! But the first step is finding her at all.”

“Yeah, about that, love,” said Dorey, pointing forward. “Look over there.”

The road through the forest continued on, but to the left, just ahead, an animal trail had been stomped into the earth. And at the intersection, there stood a wooden sign: on either side there was a little painting of an uprooted mandrake, both gesturing with their root arms at a big bold message in the middle:

← ← ←
ATELIER PHILOMENE
🍄
FOOD – DRINK – MEDICINE
🍄
VEGETABLES & HERBS
PICKED FRESH FROM
OUR OWN GARDEN
🍄
DINE IN OR TAKE AWAY
🍄
OPEN MOST DAYS UNTIL SUNSET
← ← ←

The pair sat floating in front of the sign for a moment, blinking. Lucy was the first to speak: “Are we still sure this is gonna be a hard one, honey?”

“I... don’t know,” said Dorey. “But you know what? I do know that I’m getting a little hungry.”

The wild trail cut a narrow path through the trees and the brush, and the witches soon found it easier to get off of their sticks and walk than to center themselves while floating. After a few minutes of marching, the wood gave way to a wide clearing, and the rough trail smoothed into a proper path that winded through it. At the end of the path, there sat a little thatch-roof cottage wrought from stone, a thick plume billowing from the chimney. And all along the path on either side, there were rows and rows of herbs and vegetables, which filled the mountain air with a melange of sweet and savory scents.

Dorey could tell them all: Lavender and sage, rosemary and thyme, mustard and dill, celery and fennel, lettuce and cabbage, kale and chard, beans and peas, onions and shallots, carrots and radishes, turnips and beets... There was a little plot for wheat, and another for barley, and a mill stood beside a nearby river, slowly turning to grind flour for bread. In the distance they could hear the occasional cluck of chickens. Lucy could feel it in her feet, even through her leather boots: The earth was rich here, impossibly rich, and with proper care absolutely any kind of crop could flourish on this land.

They walked slowly along the path, taking in the sights and the smells. Something caught Lucy's attention, and she held Dorey back by the shoulder so she can point it out to her: squatting among the cabbages, reaching in with slender fingers to inspect the leaves, was a little green man — skin the color of a winter melon, shoulder-length hair the color of pine needles, and on top of its head, a red blossom with curled petals speckled with white dots, surrounded by a crown of pinnatisect leaves. It wore no clothes; it had no modesty to cover. They might have mistaken it for an elf, if not for the flower. It turned to look their way, blinking at them with two beady black eyes — and then it smiled amiably, gave them a little wave, and went right back to its work.

Dorey and Lucy smiled sheepishly and waved back to the creature, then proceeded along the path toward the cottage. When they arrived on the porch, another little green man popped out before them, and greeted them with a wordless smile. It opened the door and waved them in, and with some small trepidation the two of them stepped inside, into a cozy dining room decorated with quilts and trinkets and good-luck charms weaved from sticks and straw. Yet another flower-man was waiting inside, standing beside a coat rack, and it greeted them with a little bow and a shake of its leaves. It helped Dorey and Lucy take off their pointed hats and hempen robes, and it gestured for them to set their packs down by the window while it hung their effects up on wooden pegs.

The one flower-man guided the two witches to a table, then walked away for a moment while they took their seats. It returned holding up a black chalkboard, with two columns drawn upon it. One contained names of various drinks: WATER, TEA, ORANGE JUICE, LEMONADE, ALE — and the other was blank. The flower-man handed them each a little piece of white chalk, and held the board out a little further for them.

The two witches looked at each other with a controlled grin: they could both agree that this was adorable. Dorey scratched out a line next to TEA, and Lucy did the same. The flower-man gave a little bow, its petals and leaves rustling softly, and then it quickly scuttled away into the kitchen.

"I've got to say," Lucy spoke softly once they were alone, "this is not what I was expecting at all when we took this job."

"Yeah, I'm starting to think we might have overpacked," said Dorey. "Though I guess we'll see once we've met the mistress of this establishment."

Only a few minutes later, the flower man came back out holding a ceramic tray with two empty tea cups and a silver tea pot in the middle. It set down the tray in the middle of the table, then passed them each a cup and filled them up. It gestured toward two little dishes on the tray, where they could find little brown clumps of sugar and slices of fresh lemon, and then it set the pot down between them and retreated back to the kitchen. Lucy plopped a clump of sugar into her tea and stirred it up with a spritz of lemon; Dorey opted for just the lemon. They sipped from their cups and admired the décor, until they heard a new set of footsteps coming from the kitchen.

“Hello, hello! Welcome! How are we—”

Dorey and Lucy turned to see the woman, who had stopped in place just outside the kitchen door, fingers pressed to the wall. Her pink lips stayed parted, her hazel eyes were locked upon them. She wore a ruffled white shirt with a green dress over it, a black stripe drawn around the skirt just below the waist and spotted with pictures of white daisies; and over that, a white apron, lightly spotted with stains. Her hair was so light that it was nearly white, and it was tied into a thick ponytail, save for a few stray locks that stuck out at crooked angles around her head.

After a long silence, her mouth closed, and she took on a serious expression. “...Well.” She straightened herself up and marched over to the table. “I was wondering when your lot might show up.”

“Good afternoon, miss,” said Dorey, putting on a warm smile despite the less-than-warm reception. “Dorothea, Hearth Witch of Blackbriar.” She lifted her chin to show off the silver chain around her neck, adorned with a small amber jewel in the shape of a cauldron. “And this is my partner...”

“Lucille, Earth Witch,” Lucy said with a smile, showing off her own silver chain, with a smoky brown jewel shaped into a hexagon. “And you’re Philomene, I presume?”

“The very same,” said the woman, dipping her hips down in a halfhearted curtsy. “Welcome to my shop. I’m sure you have questions for me — is there anything I can make for you, before then?”

“We could do with some food,” Dorey answered. “What do you recommend?”

“We’ve ingredients enough for quarrier’s noodles,” Philomene suggested. “I could throw in some snap peas and button mushrooms, and a salad of lettuce and eruca on the side.”

“That sounds lovely!” said Lucy. “I’ll have just that.”

“Me too,” said Dorey.

“Splendid. Can I mix any drugs in there for you? Our elixir of deep breathing is a customer favorite; it helps travelers make better time along the trail. I’ve also recently distilled a potion for cleaning pores and softening complexion. Or will the tea suffice for now?”

“The tea will be fine, thank you,” said Lucy, her polite smile turning slightly crooked.

“Yes, same,” said Dorey. “Oh—! Before you go to make it — we’ve brought you a gift.” She bent down to reach into her pack — as much as she’d prepared for a hard case, she’d prepared for an easy one, too! She unraveled a crumpled-up cloth to reveal a silken bag, cinched closed with a golden cord, and she held it up in both hands for Philomene to take.

“A batch of quince tarts, baked by yours truly,” said Dorey. “With quinces from our own tree, and honey from the Tower apiary.”

“Oh! How lovely.” Philomene took the cloth bag from Dorey’s hands, and opened it up to take a big whiff. “Mmmmm! They smell *amazing*. I’ll set these aside and we’ll have them for dessert.”

“We...?” said Dorey. “Oh, no, Philomene, those are all for you, you need not—”

“That sounds *wonderful*,” Lucy quickly interjected, placing a hand on top of Dorey’s. “My Dorey makes the most scrumptious desserts — they’ll go great with our conversation!” Still smiling, she turned to Dorey and gave her a pointed look.

Dorey’s cheeks reddened, as much as her olive skin could. Right. Philomene was surely suspicious of them — why wouldn’t she be? Eating the tarts along with her would show that their overtures of friendship were genuine — or at the very least, that they didn’t mean to drug her and transport her to the Tower unconscious. She cringed a little, realizing she’d remembered the tarts just as Philomene finished talking about drugs. Dumb, dumb, dumb!

It was not a long wait before Philomene brought out their food. Before each of them she set a plate of quarrier’s noodles — tossed in a sauce of egg and hard cheese, mixed with little bits of fried sausage, topped with little sauteed mushroom slices, and framed with a ring of peas steamed in their pods. The meal was delicious: the noodles were just soft enough to be chewy, the sauce was creamy and savory, the sausage was just crunchy enough and gave the dish that little extra salty punch, the mushrooms were perfectly cooked and added an interesting texture to the dish, and the peas were crisp and flavorful. The greens were crisp and tender with just the tiniest bit of spice, and they served as the perfect palate cleanser in between bites.

They took their time savoring the dish, and by the time their plates were empty, their bellies were quite full — but not so full that they couldn’t enjoy a nice dessert! A flower-man came to take their dishes away, and then Philomene came back with the bag of quince tarts in hand. She took her own seat at the table, and she passed a tart each to her visitors, and took one for herself. She admired the tart in her hand, turned it this way and that, took in the smell of baked quince — and glanced at her two guests. Lucy and Dorey suppressed the urge to roll their eyes as they each took a bite, and then Philomene bit into hers. While they enjoyed their dessert, another flower-man came to the table with a fresh pot of tea, and a clean cup for each of them.

“These creatures are awfully helpful, aren’t they?” Lucy remarked.

“Oh, yes. Bound to the land, they are,” said Philomene with a smile. “And they consider this house as much a part of the land as the gardens out there.”

“Interesting,” said Dorey. “I’m curious: Do they have any... *other* responsibilities?” Lucy cast her a quick sidelong glance, just long enough for Dorey to pick up on her exasperation. Dorey smiled and gave a tiny shrug.

“Other responsibilities... I’m not entirely sure what you mean,” Philomene answered. “They keep the pests away from the crops, they help with the cooking and the cleaning as much as they can... sometimes they carry the laundry...” She shrugged her shoulders.

“Do you get a lot of customers?” asked Lucy. “What do they think of all these flower-people walking around the place?”

“I do well enough for myself. There’s enough traffic between Bellbrook and Widdershire that there’s someone looking for a nice meal along the way. The sign out by the main road helps.” She gestured toward the door with her chin. “As for the help, they put some people off for sure. But they do

a good enough job of making themselves not look threatening.” She took another quick sip from her cup. “I think I’m happy with the amount of business I get, honestly. Too much, and I’m not sure my garden could keep up with the demand.”

“Understandable,” said Lucy. She pursed her lips and drummed her fingers against her leg, thinking about the right way to ask what she wanted to ask. “I’ve got a bit of a strange question,” she began, “and I hope you don’t mistake what I mean by asking it. But... when a customer comes into your store, and asks for a meal... do you ever get the urge to... play mischief on them?”

Philomene stopped mid-sip, and she lowered her cup just a little to peer at Lucy over it. “Mischief,” she repeated. “Such as?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Lucy with a little wave of her fingers. “Maybe something silly like, giving them the wrong order on purpose, and pretending that you really thought that’s what they ordered? Or something worse, like slipping a single worm into their noodles and seeing if they notice? Or serving them a live frog on a platter? I’m sure you’d never *do* any of those things, god forbid, but do you ever *think* about it?”

Philomene let out a long sigh, took a careful sip from her tea cup, then set it down on the saucer with a soft but pointed *clink*.

“If you’re asking me if I am a *witch*, Lucille,” said Philomene, “then the answer is yes.” She sat back in her chair and set her hands in her lap, lacing her fingers together. “I first heard the devil’s call about two years ago, shortly before I moved here. It was a dream, a vivid one. I was at the head of a sumptuous feast, and all my family and friends were gathered around the table. Even the dead ones. They were gorging themselves, growing fat on the meals I had provided them, and all of them were praising my name... Soon after, I came to realize that I had ken of plants and foods and medicines far beyond my teaching. That blighted crops would heal at my touch. That I could cook meals from recipes I’ve never read, and they were tastier and more filling than anything I ever could have made before.”

A Hearth Witch, Dorey thought. *Just like me.*

“I was a little too proud of my new knowledge; I couldn’t help but to show off. I just thought I was being helpful — but people started to become wary of me. They started to call me witch when they thought I wasn’t listening. I overheard my neighbor say they would call for someone from the Blackbriar Tower to examine me... I got scared. I’d heard awful things about the Tower, you see. Imprisonment, forced labor, daily spankings... That night, I ran away from my village, and I haven’t been back since.

“And yes, I do get mischievous thoughts from time to time. I choose to ignore them, though, because acting upon them would obviously be bad for business.”

Dorey and Lucy shot each other a skeptical look. No one *chooses to ignore* the devil’s whispers. They either get louder and louder till you fall to them despite your best efforts, or someone takes you over their knee and beats them into silence.

“Well. As a witch who lived in the Tower,” said Dorey with a smile, “I can tell you it’s not nearly the terrible thing you might have imagined back then. There’s no one living there but witches and their familiars, and they all do their best to take care of each other. They have proper rooms with

comfortable beds, they eat three times a day. In the day they do honest work, and they get paid for it. Yes, there is a lot of spanking — but that’s just part of being a good witch, you know?”

“They even have their own celebrations,” Lucy interjected. “Have you ever been to a Walpurgis festival, Philomene? We just had one a few weeks ago; it was a wonderful time! And our Halloween festivals are even—”

Philomene held her hand out to silence her. She held it there for a moment before bringing it back to her lap.

“Allow me to be perfectly clear,” she said, her voice taking on an edge. “I will not leave this land. I will not be made to wear a chain, and I will not be boarded in the Tower against my will. *This* is my home, and I will not quit it, on your counsel or anyone else’s.”

The room became terribly quiet. Dorey and Lucy only had to look around to see why: the flower-men that were gathering up the dishes, sweeping up the floors, taking out the garbage — all of them had stopped what they were doing, and they all stood motionless, every one of their beady black eyes trained on the two of them.

Under the table, Lucy’s hand drifted slowly toward her haunch, to reach for a pouch of stone arrowheads that she kept at her waist. Dorey’s hand gently wrapped around her wrist to stop her, and gave her an assuring squeeze.

“We understand, Philomene,” said Dorey. “We don’t want to do anything to distress you, and we don’t want to take you anywhere you don’t want to go. Lucy and I — we don’t live in the Tower either. We live together in a cottage in the woods, much like this one — we grow our own crops in our garden, we make our own meals, and we take care of each other. The coven affords us that trust, because we’ve shown we can handle the responsibility.”

“...I see,” said Philomene. Her demeanor had softened, but she still seemed rather annoyed. “And what of my case, then? My garden, my business, this conversation we’re having right now... my complete lack of interest in poisoning you... are these not sufficient evidence of my responsibility?”

“To me? Absolutely,” said Dorey. “To any of my colleagues with half an eye in their head? No question. To the people at large...?” She sighed. “There are still many who are wary of us, you know. Show them a woman like yourself, making a humble and honest living in the mountains, and they’ll show you a witch scheming in secret. Show them your staff of diligent and helpful minions, and they’ll show you a standing army awaiting orders. All the worse if they have no idea if anyone’s keeping an eye on you, making sure that your magic isn’t slowly driving you crazy. Suspicions can grow and spread... and best case, we get a letter asking us to look into the matter.

“I can see you’re not a danger to anyone, Philomene. But what I don’t know, and what I don’t know if *you* know, is *how* you keep yourself from being one. And if *I* can’t tell what’s doing the trick...” She gestured with her hands downward, in the general direction of Bellbrook. “Well, you can see my point, can’t you?”

Philomene looked down at her cup, and she bit her lip and thought for a moment. “I see,” she muttered. “I see where the confusion lies.” She relaxed her posture a little, and let herself lean back a little into her chair, hands folded in her lap. The moment that she did, the flower-men turned their

attention back to their business. “So, if I can answer that question to your liking — how I’m keeping from going mad, living here by myself — will the Tower leave me alone?”

“...All we really want is to make sure the witches of this land remain healthy and happy,” Lucy assured Philomene. “We’ll be putting your name in our books, and we’ll most likely be sending someone to check up on you briefly, every now and again. But if you’re happiest staying here and running your shop, and you’re getting the discipline that you need — then I don’t see a reason the Tower would intrude upon you any more than that.”

Philomene furrowed her brow and tightened her lips, her gaze falling down to her lap as she gently nodded her head. It seemed like it wasn’t quite the answer she wanted to hear — but at the very least, she was thinking about it.

“...Very well.” She rose up to her feet and marched away from the table, and went to peer out of a nearby window. “The light’s low enough. It’ll be twilight by the time we get there.” She turned away from the window, and she marched toward a room in the back. “We’ll be taking a hike into the woods behind this house. Let me change out of this dress and get my robe and boots on, and then we can go. Feel free to leave your packs where they are; they’ll be safe.”

“Ah, sure, thank you,” said Dorey, as she started to get up from her seat. “What was that you were saying a moment ago? Something about confusion?”

“Mm? Ah, yes, the confusion. The confusion.” Philomene pointed with her thumb at a flowerman that had approached the table then, to gather up the tea cups and the saucers.

“You think *I’m* controlling those things, don’t you?”



The sky was slowly changing from the deep blue of midday to the violet of twilight, as the three witches marched along a wild trail in their pointed hats and hemp robes and leather boots, going deeper and deeper into the woods behind Philomene’s atelier. There was still just enough sunlight to light their way, but Philomene had brought an iron lantern and tinder with her to light the way back.

“When I first set foot into these woods,” Philomene explained as they went, “I was in a kind of fugue. I came here looking for a certain kind of mandrake, rumored to grow on this land. I wanted to gather them up and bake them into biscuits, and give them out to the people of Bellbrook — without telling them what they were made of.” She pursed her lips, as if embarrassed by the memory. “I thought... I thought that if I could make people share in my madness, they would be more sympathetic to me.”

“You were going to *drug them*?” Lucille gasped.

“Is it that shocking?” Philomene asked. “I hear you Tower witches drug each other up for fun all the time.”

“Not *all the time*,” Dorey insisted. “Certainly not outside of holy days, and not without—”

“What I didn’t know at the time,” Philomene interrupted, “was that there are actually two kinds of mandrakes in this area. One of them, the one I was looking to dig up, is very much like the one you’ve got in that pot, Dorothea.” She turned to look back at the clay pot in a sling over Dorey’s shoulder, in which Mandy sat dozing. “The other,” Philomene went on, “is the kind you saw working in the gardens and the atelier.”

Dorey blinked several times, and her eyes widened. “Those were *mandrakes*?!” She should have been able to tell from the shape of their leaves and flowers, in hindsight — perhaps she was more focused on the ‘man-sized plant walking around and doing menial labor’ part!

“Indeed. And while I was out here digging up one, I got snatched up and dragged off by the other. *Alraune*, the medicine books call them. The ones you saw are the males. They all answer to a single female — who only blooms when it starts to get dark.”

“...Is that what you’re taking us to see?” Lucy asked. “The female?”

“...I was raving and thrashing when they dragged me to her,” said Philomene. “Cursing and spitting... I was a sorry sight. She saw me for what I am... she brought me back to my senses. She held me as I cried, told me that everything would be all right...” She swallowed. “In the day, her children arrived at the abandoned cottage I was squatting in. They helped me to fix it up, make it more livable. She’s done so much for me — and all she’s ever asked is that, when the whispers get too loud, I come to see her.”

Gradually, the trail started to grow over with green grass, and Dorey and Lucy could smell the perfume of flowers. The smell grew stronger and stronger with each couple of steps, until at last they reached their destination: another large clearing, overgrown with flowers of all colors and shapes — and in the middle, a giant green bulb with stripes of red peeking out from its covering, surrounded by spiky leaves.

For several minutes the witches waited, while Philomene kept checking the color of the sky. Once the sun was just barely peeking over the horizon and the woods were lit only by the faintest orange glow, they watched as the bulb began to take on a glow of its own. Slowly, gently, it spread open. Red petals streaked with white folded out like frills of a ballgown, and in the middle, there sat a figure: like that of a woman, starting just below the waist; skin pale green like a melon, mossy green hair long and flowing, falling like water over her shoulders, breasts large and heavy, eyes big and black as the night. She stretched her arms over her head and yawned, the petals around her falling as she relaxed. Her eyes fluttered, and fell directly upon Philomene.

“Ahhh... there you are, my sweet Philomene,” she spoke in a sultry voice. “And your guests, behind you?” She looked to the two witches and spread her arms wide. “Welcome to my garden, children.”

Philomene took a step forward. “These are witches from the Tower,” she explained. “They came to find me, and to ask if I would go back with them.”

The *alraune*’s eyes fluttered, and she turned her attention back to Philomene, her face heavy with concern. “...And what did you say?”

"I'm not going anywhere, Mother," Philomene assured her. "They say they'll let me be if... er..." She tightened her hands around her staff and looked down at the grass.

The alraune tilted her head curiously. "If?"

Philomene shuffled her feet and cleared her throat. "...If we show them how you 'take care' of me."

The monster blinked, and then her lips spread into a sweet smile. "...Oh, is that all?" she sang. "Well, that's no problem at all, is it! It would be my *pleasure* to show you." Her petals seemed to spread open a little more, and her tendrils began to move as she held her arms open wide. "Come here, my little wyrdling."

Bowing her head, Philomene carefully set her staff and her lantern down onto the grass. She approached the alraune with deliberate steps, and she clambered over the flower's thick petal on her hands and knees, to join the body in the middle. The alraune pulled her in and held her close, one arm supporting her back, the other hand holding onto her haunch. She smiled down sweetly at the witch, as a leafy tendril reached over her shoulder from behind her, with a bright red flower covered in white speckles on the end. The flower opened up and drew closer to Philomene's face.

"Oh, uh, Mother—!" Philomene flinched and held a hand up, a bright blush on her cheeks. "I, I don't think I need to be poofed...!"

"No, no. They want to see how Mommy takes care of you, don't they? So we're going to show them everything. And that includes...!" The flower drew closer and closer, and then dabbed against Philomene's nose like a giant powder puff. "*Poof poof!*"

A crimson haze puffed up around her face, sparkling in the dim light. The witch scrunched up her face, then relaxed it, and her eyelids started to flutter. Her lips parted slightly, and she stared into the middle distance, as the alraune dragged a finger down her cheek.

"That's it. There you go," she purred. "Breathe in, breathe out. Let it spread through you. So soft, so warm... Just like Mommy holding you. Breathe. Breathe, and relax, and listen to the sound of Mommy's voice..."

Philomene's eyes fluttered a few more times. A dopey smile spread across her face, as if she were drunk, and her head rolled to the side and flopped onto the alraune's bosom.

"*Good girl,*" said the alraune. "You had such a busy day today, didn't you, Filly? Working so hard in the gardens, making a nice meal for your new friends."

Philomene — Filly — nestled up close against Mother's belly, and she bobbed her head up and down. "Mm-hmm...!"

"Did you do anything naughty today?" Mother asked. "Did you play any pranks on people? Did you say any nasty words?"

Filly decisively shook her head, a proud smile on her face. "Uh-uh...!" She sounded like a little girl.

“Very good. Did you do any magic? Any clever tricks?”

Filly furrowed her brow, groaning softly as she struggled to think. Finally, her face lit up and she nodded her head.

“You did? What kind of magic did you do?”

“Mmmmh... we were almost outta sugar for the tea,” Filly answered, speaking slowly. “So I took a beetroot, an’ I pulled the sugar out of it.”

“Very impressive!” Mother chirped. She smoothed her hand up and down Filly’s side. “Now, Filly: do you remember that really important thing, that Mommy always told you to keep in mind?”

Filly opened her mouth, then stopped, a flash of recognition passing her eyes. Her cheeks flushed red and she averted her eyes, letting out a frustrated moan as she squirmed. “But... but I had to have sugar for the tea...!”

“I understand, Filly, and that’s okay. But you do remember that important thing Mommy told you, right? Say it nice and loud, so your friends can hear it too.”

Filly groaned and wriggled in the crook of Mother’s arm. “...That... That ‘doing magic’ and ‘being naughty’ should mean the same thing to me.”

“That’s right. And you told me that you didn’t do anything naughty today — but then you told me that you did some magic. Didn’t you?”

Filly squirmed, and nodded her head. “Mm-hmm...”

“So you weren’t telling Mommy the truth before, were you, Filly?”

Filly’s face scrunched up again, and she wriggled her shoulders in a fuss. She shook her head.

“So you were naughty once by doing magic, and you were naughty again by lying to Mommy,” said the alraune. “So what does Mommy have to do now?”

Filly pulled down on the rim of her hat to hide her face, and she mumbled something. One of the alraune’s tendrils plucked the hat up off of her head and held it up in the air so she couldn’t reach it.

“Speak up, sweetie. They have to hear, remember? What does Mommy have to do now?”

Filly whined and started to bounce and buck, blushing back to her ears! “Mommy’s gotta spank meeeee...!”

“That’s right. Mommy has to spank you. And where does Mommy spank you?”

Filly swallowed and awkwardly pointed to her own haunch. “...On my butt...!”

“Such a smart girl,” Mother cooed. “So let’s get you all ready for a good, sound spanking.”

More tendrils reached in, grabbing at her breeches and yanking them down while Mother held her fast against her belly. Her breeches and undergarments when flying away, along with her boots, and they landed in a pile in the grass. The witch gave no fight whatsoever the whole while, even as Mother tucked her under her arm, showing off her naked bottom to her guests! She let out an embarrassed whine and wiggled her pale hiney from side to side.

“Much better,” said Mother. She lay her palm on Filly’s rump and rubbed in loving circles, making her little witch whine and squirm even more. Mother’s black eyes focused on Dorey and Lucy, and she gave them a warm smile. “You two watch closely, now,” she said. “You want to know how Mommy keeps her little wyrdling in line? Well, this is how she does it!”

Her hand snapped up in the air and started smartly, briskly, sharply popping Filly’s naked bottom all over, working in erratic circles to cover each cheek in hard but loving spanks! *Whap, whap, whap, whap, whap, whap, whap!* “With a spank, and a spank, and a spank-spank-spank, and another and another till her butt’s all red!”

“Ohhhh-ho-ho-ho-hohhhh!” Filly bounced her bottom up and down and shamefully moaned, her rump turning more and more pink with each hearty slap! “Mommeeeeeeee!”

“That’s right, sweetie! It’s Mommy! It’s Mommy who spanks your naughty little tushie!” Mother cheerfully scolded as she smacked and slapped away! “And why does Mommy do that?”

Filly responded with nothing more than a fussy moan and a pumping of her bare feet. Mother frowned, and she raised her hand up high to land some hard spanks, loud as thunder claps, against Filly’s sit spot! “Why! Does! Mommy! Do! That?!”

“Aaaaooowwww! Ssss-so I can be goo-hoooood!”

“That’s, my, good, little, girl!” Mother praised her, punctuating each word with another slap! “Mommy, spanks, all, those, nasty, little, thoughts, right, out, of her, head, so, she, can be, the best, little, witch, that, she, can, *be!*”

The giant mandrake spanked and spanked and spanked, squeezing Filly snug against her side to keep her still while she wiggled and twisted and squirmed! Her bottom turned redder and redder, and her whining gave way to sniffing which gave way to bawling! By the time Mother stopped spanking, Filly’s hiney was as red as Mother’s own petals — but she still wasn’t done.

“You there. Dorey, your name was?”

Dorey snapped up at attention, her cheeks flushed with warmth! “Y-yes ma’am?”

“You’re keeping one of my kin in that pot of yours, are you not? May I borrow her for a moment?”

Dorey didn’t even need to grant permission — Mandy had already wiggled her way out of the dirt, and she hopped out and landed on the grass at Dorey’s feet. She gave a shake of her leaves, then hopped and toddled her way over to Mother on the tips of her roots. A gentle tendril wrapped around

Mandy's stem and lifted her up into the air, and her root twisted and thinned and stretched, until she had transformed into a stiff wooden rod!

"My, how handy!" Mother said. "I'll have to find out how to do this with my own boys, someday. But for now..." She slipped an arm under Filly's tummy and hoisted her up, lifting her reddened bottom higher, so the tendril could crack the rod right across both cheeks, again and again and again! "I'll just, have, to borrow, your, helpful, little, friend, to, whack, some, goodness, into, my, silly, Filly's, naughty, rump!" *Whack, crack, whack, thwack, whop!*

"Owwwww! Owwwh! Owwwww!" Filly kicked her feet frantically, her cries turning shrill and raspy, then wet and snotty, as the rod cut bold red lines across her bouncing bottom!

"Good, girl, good, girl, good, girl!" Mother cheered, bouncing her body up and down in her arms as the tendril kept caning her! "You are *such* a good girl, Filly! And do you know why that is?"

Filly sucked in a deep, wet breath and let out a crackling moan! "*BECAUSE MOMMY SPANKS MEEEEEEEE!*"

"That's right!" Mother sang as the cane cracked across her hiney once again! "The only, thing, keeping, this, silly, little, witch, so, good, is, that, Mommy, gives, her, so, many, spank, spank, SPANKS!" She lifted the cane away, leaving Filly's bottom all criss-crossed with dark welts — and then she raised her hand once more, to top her off with two dozen spanks right on top of them, hard and loud and *fast!* By the time she was done, Filly was wailing like a baby, face wet with tears and snot, her words incomprehensible, if she was trying to speak at all. Mother sat her up and wrapped her arms around her, holding her snug against her bosom, stroking her hair and rocking her, purring soft words into her ear as she soothed her.

Eyes wide and cheeks flushed red, Lucy reached over to tug on her partner's sleeve. "I think hearing about this should satisfy the Matron, don't you?"

"Absolutely," said Dorey, her face equally as warm. "Thank you for the demonstration, ma'am," she said to the alraune, dipping into a curtsy. "I'm certain the Tower will be happy to leave Philomene in your excellent care. And thank you very much, Philomene, for cooperating with our investigation. Come along, Mandy." She crouched down so Mandy could hop back into her pot, and the two witches turned to leave back down the trail whence they came.

Only to each feel a thick tendril wrapping around their forearm.

"Ah, ah, ah," Mother purred. "Where do you two think you're going?"

Lucy turned around first, and gave Mother a sheepish smile. "Oh... O-Our investigation is over, ma'am. We don't need to trouble you any longer..."

"And you expect me just to let you leave little Filly behind? And wander off into the dark all by yourselves? Oh, no, no, no. You should know better than that. Come here." The soles of their boots skidded across the grass as Mother pulled them in closer, and over her shoulders, two big red flowers stretched out towards them and opened up wide.

“You’re going to stay right here with us, until morning breaks. And until then, Mommy’s going to take *such* good care of you...”



WHAP! “Oh!”

SLAP! “Ohhh!”

SPANK! “Owww!”

Three little wyrdlings, tucked under Mother’s arm, each taking turns getting spanked on their naked bottoms by her strong and loving hand! Dorey and Lucy lay side by side, hip to hip, and Filly lay on her back on top of them, legs pulled back! Tendrils wrapped around the lot of them, holding them tightly but comfortably in this complicated, humiliating configuration, keeping them still so none could get away from Mother’s spanking hand!

Dorey and Lucy squirmed and wriggled, but it was no use: their heads were all fuzzy from the smell of that flower, and it felt like their arms and legs were stuffed with cotton. But their bottoms, their bottoms they could feel more clearly than they ever had in their lives — and that made every spank all the more intense! And to make it worse, they had an audience: a crowd of male alraunes sat in front of Mother now, all come back from tending to the garden so they could watch their partner and their new guests get the treatment that they need!

“Spank, spank, spank! That’s what little witches get!” Mother crooned as she slapped their jiggling, wiggling buns! “And it doesn’t even matter if you’re naughty or you’re nice! Oh, no! Either way, you’re a witch, and that’s enough! *You* get a spank—” She clapped Dorey’s olive bottom — “*You* get a spank—” she slapped Lucy’s pink buns — “And you *definitely* get a spank!” She swatted Filly’s hiney, heedless of how sore and red it had already gotten, or how much she fussed and whined about it!

“Spank, spank, spank! Witches get spanked! And Mommy just *loves* spanking naughty witch bottoms! ...In fact, you know what I want you to do, Filly?”

Filly sucked in a deep, snotty breath so she could speak. “*What, Mommy?!*”

“One of these days, I want you to go visit that Tower. I want you to make a whole lot of new friends — and then bring them all back here! I wanna spank-spank-spank each and every one of their little hiniies! Ohhh, I’m getting tingles just thinking about it!” *Spank, spank, spank, spank, spank...!*



Dorey’s mouth pulled away from the soft, almost skin-like plant tissue with a wet pop. Her mouth was filled with some kind of fluid, thick and syrupy; it tasted vaguely like watermelon. She swallowed without thinking, and only after did she realize where it had come from: Mother’s pale green breast sat right in front of her face, a dark-green nipple dribbling fragrant nectar.

“My, *my!* What a hungry little thing you are. I’d almost think that Filly forgot to feed you!” the alraune laughed. “Well, don’t be shy, sweetling. You go on and drink your fill!”

She almost took her up on the invitation, right there and then. But in the briefest flash of clarity, she thought to look for her partner first. Lucy was right beside her on her left, naked as a babe, bending backwards over Mother's arm, a dazed look in her eyes and a drunken smile on her ruddy face as she stared up at the sky. Her mouth was sticky with nectar. To her right, Filly was curled up snug against Mother's belly, just as nude, her lips clasped against her other teat, eyes closed and looking contented as she suckled. And then she looked down at herself — and of course, not a stitch of cloth covered her own body, either.

“Look at you. Look at you three! Where did those grown-up witches go? Having such serious talks about big, important witchy business! And now you're barely more than babes! What happened? Did you all get your heads all full of silly-blossoms? I think you've got heads full of silly-blossoms!”

Dorey opened her mouth to speak, but she didn't even know what she was going to say. Her gaze drifted up, to see a red speckled flower dangling over her head, and she let out a little gurgle as she reached up for it with both hands.

“Mmmh? What's the matter, baby? Did you want another poof-poof? All you have to do is ask!” And before Dorey could say or do another thing, the flower thumped gently against her face, tickling her nose — *poof, poof!*

A fresh wave of warmth washed down from her nose across her whole body, longer, slower, more intense than even the first. It felt like her whole body was dissolving — everything except her butt, the only part of her that needed to exist. Her butt, her butt, her hot sore naughty naked witchy butt! She gurgled and moaned and rocked in a fuss. Words dribbled out of her mouth without a thought behind them. “I wanna spankiiiiing...!”

“Another spanking?” Mother cooed, her eyes lighting up. “But Mommy just gave you one, sweetie! Don't tell me you need another so soon?”

“*I wanna spankiiiiiiing!*” Dorey cried out again, bouncing up and down hard!

“All right, all right! That's what you want?” Tendrils snaked around Dorey's naked body and lifted her up, draping her over Mother's shoulder! “Then that's just what you get!” And without a moment's pause, the crack of a mandrake rod met Dorey's hot bottom, and she howled and wailed!

Lucy's eyes fluttered, and she looked up to see Dorey's bottom getting whacked once again. She cracked a big silly grin and giggled! “Dorey's gettin' spaaaaaanked!”

“Yes, she is,” Mother said. “And so are you!” Before Lucy could even think to protest, the tendrils were wrapping around her and pulling her over Mother's other shoulder! And then *whap, whap, whap*, came the smack of a turtle-shell paddle against her silly spanked hiney, and she moaned and groaned and giggled and whined! And all the while Filly sat under them, peacefully suckling, a slight smile on her face as she looked up at her guests' plight.

“You two had better come back someday, you understand?” Mother happily chided. “You come back and keep my little Filly company! She gets so *lonely* up here, you know? And when it gets dark, you remember to march your little witchy-butts over to me! And I'll spank you and cuddle you and poof you and tickle you and feed you and adore you all night long...”

CASE REPORT

On the Resolution of the Case numbered 3759, and named “Rumours of an Unregistered Witch in the Woods of the Widdershire Mountain Pass,” as told by Dorothea, Hearth Witch of Blackbriar Tower.

Lucille, Earth Witch of Blackbriar Tower, also witnessing.

The Tower heard of Rumours telling of a Witch living in the Woods on the Widdershire Mountain Pass, who is attended by a Mass of unknown Creatures. Being that no such Witch appears in our Books, the Tower sent us as an Investigation.

We confirmed the Rumours with the Wights of Bellbrook Village, and received good Treatment for Magick used in our Travelling. We then travelled to the Mountain Pass, and came upon the Dwelling of the Witch, and there we met the Witch herself, who is named PHILOMENE.

PHILOMENE appeared to us of sound Mind and pleasant Demeanour, and was of good Dress and Grooming, and lacked not in Health or Nourishment. She runs a Restaurant and Apothecary from her Cottage in the Wood, which she calls her Atelier. She expressed great Displeasure to leave her Atelier for the Tower.

We determined that the Creatures in PHILOMENE’s Company are not Minions of her Make, but a Kind of Mandrake native to the Wood, this Kind being named “Al-Row-Ne.”

PHILOMENE introduced us to a female Al-Row-Ne living in the Woods behind her Atelier, which she names “Mother.” PHILOMENE then made Mother to demonstrate her Treatment Methods. We witnessed Mother’s Treatment Methods and deemed them good and plenty for the Care and Attendance of a Witch.

It is the Opinion of the Investigation that PHILOMENE may safely be left to her Devices and at most needs Checking-Up every Month to ensure her Health and Safety. PHILOMENE expressed Interest in visiting the Tower herself, but will not be made to live therein. We may expect to see her at a Festival in the Summer.

We affirm that the Preceding is a true and accurate Telling of the Events of the Case, and furthermore that the Matter is RESOLVED and the Case may be CLOSED.

Dorothea of the Hearth

Lucille of the Earth