

## Chapter 3: Gris

I felt loads better. Mum and Dad didn't say anything, but they must have noticed. I came downstairs more, even went shopping with Mum. I kept thinking about Geronwy and Wagger and the Well and all that, and I even went down past Mrs Cranch's to see if the tower was there, or the green door in the wall, but they weren't. I didn't talk about them though, and after a couple of days I began to think none of it had really happened.

Then Gris came round.

I've known Gris ever since we were small, because her Mum, Phoebe, is my Mum's best friend and we always played together. When she was little she was really naughty. Mum used to call her "the wild child". She used to get us into trouble all the time, but I didn't mind that much because it was exciting trouble. But about a year ago she changed. She started to wear really short skirts and loads of make-up, and act like she's about sixteen. Most of the time she wears black lipstick and purple nail varnish, like she's at some permanent hallowe'en party. Plus she's grown one of her fingernails so it curls round, and it's disgusting.

This time, she'd dyed her hair green. She looked really stupid.

"Why don't you take Gris upstairs?" said Mum. She wanted us out of the way so she could talk to Phoebe. I felt irritated, but I went up to my room anyway, and Gris followed me. She flipped off her shoes and stretched herself out on the bed. I sat on the floor.

"So how's things with you, then? Been getting out and about?"

I didn't bother to answer.

"There's this new club I've started going to. It's ace. You ever been clubbing Kai?"

I still didn't say anything. She knew I hadn't.

"It's really great. I wanted to stay all night, but Mum forced me to be back by midnight. Parents! Yuk!"

She paused.

"I met a boy there too."

She glanced across at me smiling with slanted eyes, trying to be friendly, I suppose. Her face was spotty under her make-up, but she was quite pretty in a way.

I grunted. She laughed.

"You should get some new clothes, Kai. And a new hair cut. It's not cool like that. Then I might take you clubbing. Wouldn't you like to go out with me?"

"No, I wouldn't," I said.

“Just as well, then.” She sounded a bit miffed. “I don't think I'd want to be seen with a fatty.”

She giggled. I felt myself turning red and stared hard at the floor. She was watching me, but I wasn't going to say anything. I just wanted her to get out of my room and leave me alone.

Gris didn't say anything either. Then after a while she sighed, rolled onto her back and stared up at the ceiling.

“You know what, you've got a weird ceiling. All those blotches and cracks. It looks a bit like one of those fantasy pictures. Look, there's a dragon! Or is it a Rasta guy smoking a spliff? Hey, it's like walking down a path....”

I took a deep breath. This was bad. My ceiling was mine, and for me alone. The last thing I wanted was for Gris to go into it. I had to stop her. Now.

I stood up.

“Want to come for a walk?” I said.

She flicked her eyes away from the ceiling and looked at me.

“A walk?” she said, disbelieving. “What for?”

“It's not far. Just something I want to show you. A place.”

I still don't know why I took her there. I only wanted to get her out of my room, and it was just the first place that came into my head. I suppose I wanted to go back there in a way because I wasn't sure if any of what I thought had happened was real. After all, the tower and the green door had just disappeared, so maybe the Well wasn't there either, or not like I thought it was. But maybe there was something else going on too, some force pulling me back towards the Shadow.

Anyway the Old Well was still there, with its litter and dog poo. It didn't look particularly scary.

“So what's this supposed to be?” Gris asked.

“It's a well. You know - where they got water from in the old days.”

“I can see that,” said Gris. “Why did you want to show it me?”

“The water's meant to cure you of skin diseases. I thought it might help your spots.”

She gave me a look.

“Last time I was here there was a dead frog,” I said.

I picked up a stick and stirred the leaves, but the dead frog wasn't there any more. Pity. I might have freaked her out with it. I felt like I wanted to annoy her. Something about the sound of the water trickling into the trough was getting on my nerves.

“It's a bit creepy,” said Gris, looking through the grille into the cave where the water bubbled. “It's like there's a kind of shadow in there... ”

Suddenly my legs went wobbly. I'd made a mistake. I shouldn't have come back. My head felt like it was misting up, and I was breathless. I didn't want to annoy Gris any more, I just wanted to go.

"Let's get back," I said weakly.

She didn't seem to hear me. She untied an old ribbon from the grille and pulled it round her green hair. Then she turned to me, opening her eyes wide and stretching out her finger with the long nail.

"I am the Witch of the Well," she croaked dramatically. "Look out Kai, I'm coming to get you!"

"Shut up and don't be so stupid!"

I turned away. I had to get out of there.

That was when Wagger appeared. He didn't say anything, but I knew him immediately by the floppy ear dropping over his eye. He trotted down the lane, looked up at Gris, grunted and went on.

"Where did that come from?" asked Gris.

"It's just a dog, isn't it?" I said. And then I looked at the Well again, the water bubbling out through the ancient spout. Which was a mistake, because my legs went weak. It was still there, whatever it was, deep inside. Even Gris had seen it. And I could feel it moving out, coming to claim me.

My legs went and I fell.

Gris caught me.

"Are you all right?" She was suddenly different. Like she cared. But it felt weird that she was holding me like that. I pulled away and sat down on the stone seat.

"Yeah, I... I was a bit faint suddenly. I get that sometimes. No I'm all right."

I managed to stand up. I was shaky, but I could walk. I'd have to.

"Come on let's go home," I said.

"Yeah, it's really creepy ..."

She looked back at the well, but I didn't. I struggled up the lane, panting with the effort, till I got to the top, back among the houses, and I could breathe again.

A bird was sitting on the wall. A jackdaw, cocking its head at me.

"*Gold of the moon. Don't forget!*" it said, and flew off.

"It sounded like that bird was talking to you," said Gris. "Weird! What did it say?"

I turned to her, looking her straight in the eyes. She has nice eyes. Hazel. Though they'd look better without all the purple stuff she puts round them.

"If you really want to know, he's called Jack, and he brought me a message from a wizard.

I've got to go up to the moors and get some gold from the fairies and bring it back to him so that he can make the Rebis, which is the Philosopher's Stone. Then he can get the bad spirit out of the well.”

Her mouth dropped for a moment, and then she laughed.

“You know what, you've got a great imagination, Kai. You got superpowers as well, then?”

“Yup,” I said, walking on. “As a matter of fact I have.”