



Grimmtastic Girls

Gretel Pushes Back

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Rain, Rain, Go Away

Gretel sat atop her high canopy bed in her dorm room at Grimm Academy on Friday afternoon, thumbing through her favorite book, *A Guide to Trails and Hikes Around Grimmlandia*. School was out for the day and she'd hoped to go hiking in the forest. Because she had a goal. One she had been thinking of for a while and had finally decided to pursue. She planned to discover new trails on her own and write a supplement to her favorite guidebook!

However, it looked like that wasn't going to happen today because it was raining. *Again*.

Hearing a noise, she looked up to see her roommate, Red Riding Hood, come in through the pearl-studded white curtain that served as the door to their small room. Gretel snapped her dog-eared guidebook shut. "Mmm," she said, sniffing the air and eyeing the plate of freshly baked cookies Red held in her hands. "Those smell grimmyummy! What kind are they?"

“Oatmeal,” Red said. “Want some?” There was a twinkle in her brown eyes as she asked. Everyone at the Academy knew that Gretel was a total cookie monster. She’d never yet met a cookie she didn’t love.

“Ooh! Oatmeal is my favorite!” Gretel exclaimed. She scrambled down the ladder at the end of her bed and dropped the guidebook on her desk. The beds in the girls’ dorms at GA were each built like the top of a bunk bed. That way they were high enough off the floor that there was room for a desk and storage space below.

“Ha!” Red’s long, dark curly hair, which had glittery red streaks in it, fell forward as she held the plate out to Gretel. “Your *favorite* is whatever I happen to bake!”

Red’s tower-task assignment (all students got them — usually at the beginning of the school year) was Snackmaker. Cookies were her specialty. She made sure the cookie jar in the common room of Pearl Tower was always full, though it could be a real challenge with Gretel around!

“True,” Gretel admitted, wiggling her eyebrows up and down mischievously. She snatched a couple of cookies off the plate and bit into one of them. “Mmm. Definitely grimm-yummy!” she murmured.

“Watch the crumbs,” Red reminded her as bits of the cookie broke off and fell onto the brightly colored rug between their beds.

“Oops. Sorry,” Gretel mumbled. For some reason, she couldn’t seem to eat anything without making a mess, which drove her roommate crazy at times. She flipped her thick brown braid over one shoulder, then stooped. After scooping up the fallen crumbs, she tossed them into the trash can beside her built-in desk.

“I’ll have my basket fetch us some napkins,” Red said quickly. She stepped over to her desk and set the plate of cookies on top. Then she picked up a cute nut-brown wicker basket that also sat there. A bit bigger than a shoe box, the basket had a swirly design on either end, double handles, and a lid that hinged in the middle.

The basket was Red’s magic charm. One day after Drama class, it had chosen her — by chasing after her on its own! To be chosen by a charm was quite an honor. Some students waited *years* to get charms. Although several of Gretel’s friends had gotten theirs already, she was still waiting for hers.

Magic charms all had different powers. Usually it was up to the person they chose to discover just what their charm could do. Red’s basket, for example, could fetch things that were small enough to fit inside it if asked in just the right way. And only if *Red* did the asking.

“A tisket, a tasket,” Red said to her basket now. “Please fetch two big napkins, basket.” The request part of her

command always had to be phrased in six words. No more and no less.

A few seconds later, Red lifted her basket's lid and pulled out two large red-and-white-checkered cloth napkins. She handed one to Gretel.

After setting her basket down again, Red grabbed a cookie, too. She neatly tucked it halfway into her napkin and stepped over to the window on the far wall, between their beds. Nibbling at her cookie, she looked outside. "Still raining, I see," she commented.

"Mm-hmm," Gretel replied glumly as she ate. "This makes three rainy days in a row so far. I'm pretty sure Grimm Academy is going to be sitting in a swamp soon. I really wish it would stop pouring so I could go out hiking," she said wistfully.

She went to stand next to Red at the window. From there they could see that, because of all the rain, the Once Upon River was in danger of flooding its banks!

Red sighed. "I hear you. Staying indoors day in and day out makes me feel grimmgrumpy. Cinderella and I borrowed school umbrellas and tried going for a walk yesterday, but the wind was so fierce our umbrellas blew inside out before we could even get across the Pink Castle drawbridge."

Their dorm room was on the sixth floor and Gretel could see from the swaying trees below that the winds were still gusting. *Sigh.* Would this rain ever end?

Pearl Tower was one of three dorm towers that topped Pink Castle. The other two were Emerald Tower and Ruby Tower. All the girls who attended the Academy had most of their classes in Pink Castle. And except for a few girls like Rapunzel and Mermily, most of them slept in the dorms up top, too. The boys stayed mostly in Gray Castle on the opposite side of the river. Their dorm towers were named Onyx, Topaz, and Zircon.

Gretel finished her first cookie and began eating her second, being careful to catch crumbs in her napkin this time. A few still escaped somehow, though, and when Red wasn't looking, she scooted them under the rug between their beds.

Still munching, she went over to her desk and randomly opened her Grimmlandia hiking guidebook again. It fell open to a map and description of a trail called Mossy Cartwheels. She'd been on that trail and knew that its name came from the magical silvery moss that tumbled head over heels along it.

There were actually very few trails in this book that she hadn't already hiked multiple times. The only ones she

avoided were those that ran through Neverwood Forest. Because, as a boy in her Grimm History class named Prince Awesome had once said, anyone with half a brain *never would* go there.

“I’m *soo* ready to hike,” she told Red. “I think I’d even tramp through Neverwood Forest or into the Dark Nothingterror, just to get out of here for a while.”

Red turned from the window and grinned at her. “Well, don’t let Mr. Hump-Dumpty hear you say that. Or you’ll get a lecture for sure.” Their Grimm History teacher was always warning students of the dangers of Neverwood Forest and the Dark Nothingterror beyond it, which was filled with Barbarians and Dastardlies. He imagined that danger lurked pretty much everywhere, so he warned them about practically any other place they might want to wander as well.

Gretel sighed again and flung herself into the chair at her desk. “I’ve got cabin fever . . . er . . . make that *castle* fever, and it’s only going to get worse each day this *grimmyucky* weather keeps us inside!”

“Why don’t you come help me bake?” Red suggested, cocking her head at Gretel. “I’ve got another batch of cookies in the dorm oven I need to check on.”

“No, that’s okay. Baking’s not my thing, as you know.” She grinned. “Eating the results is, though!” She eyed the remaining cookies on the plate and licked her lips.

“Okay, I can take a hint,” Red told her, grinning back. “I’ll leave the rest of them here for you, but don’t go crazy. Dinner’s just a couple of hours away.” She set the plate on her desk, then headed for their curtain door. “See you later, Cookie-nator.”

“Later,” Gretel echoed. Then Red was gone.

Feeling like a lion in a cage probably feels, Gretel began to pace up and down the small room. Twelve steps to the door and twelve steps returning to the window, back and forth. Along the way, she recited a nursery rhyme from one of the books in the Grimmstone Library to the beat of her footsteps. “Rain, rain, go away. Come again another day. Little Johnny wants to play.” Frowning, she muttered to herself, “Make that little *Gretel* wants to play, or hike, anyway!”

Speaking of nursery rhymes, she wondered what her best friends, twins named Jack and Jill, were up to. Gretel and her brother Hansel often went hiking with the twins, whose favorite hikes were the hilly ones, going up one hill and down again.

She hadn’t seen Jack or Jill since lunch. Just when she was thinking she’d go find them and see if they wanted to play a board game or something, she heard a familiar voice at the door. “Knock, knock.” Gretel stopped pacing as Jill poked her curly blond head around the pearly curtain.

“Perfect timing!” Gretel exclaimed to her friend, happily waving her inside. “I was just thinking about you and wondering if you and Jack might want to hang out. Maybe play a game of Grimmopoly or that game Grimm of Thrones, since the rain’s still coming down?”

Jill ventured a few more steps into the room. “Actually, I was just coming to tell you that Jack took a spill going downstairs after fourth period today. He’s in the infirmary.”

“Oh, no!” said Gretel. Jack was the klutziest person she knew and was always falling down or getting scrapes or bruises somehow or another. The infirmary was practically his second home. Still, she felt bad for him each time he wound up there. Truth was, she’d had a secret crush on that boy for some time now. It was a double-triple-super secret, though. Not even Jill knew!

“Yeah,” Jill went on. “The Doctor, the Nurse, and the Lady with the Alligator Purse all had to be called in to figure out if he needed stitches for a cut on his forehead.”

“Poor Jack,” Gretel said. But then she perked up. “Let’s go visit him! He could still play a board game with us. Might make him feel better.”

Jill shook her head. “I can’t right now. I’ve got to go get my pail from the library. I’m conducting a fire drill in Emerald Tower.”

Jack and Jill had a magic pail that was kept in the Academy's library whenever they weren't using it. The pail could expand till it was as large as a small boat and scoop up enormous amounts of water to dump on fires.

"You should go, though," Jill added quickly. "I'm sure hanging out with you would really cheer him up."

Was Jill hinting that her brother liked Gretel, too? Gretel found herself blushing. But then Jill pointed at the plate of cookies on top of Red's desk and added, "Especially if you brought him a few of those cookies."

"Oh, sure. Good idea," Gretel told her friend. She stepped over to Red's desk and picked up the plate. There were still about a half dozen cookies on it. "They're oatmeal. Want one?" she asked, holding out the plate to Jill.

Jill took one and crunched into it. "Mm. Phanks. Thah's goo. See woo," she said with her mouth full. Then she whisked back out through the curtain.

Cheered at the thought of seeing Jack soon, Gretel shook the crumbs from her napkin into her trash can. Then she wrapped the remaining cookies in the cloth napkin, tying its four corners together so the cookies couldn't fall out. After pulling her GA Handbook from her schoolbag to make space, she dropped the napkin of cookies inside and slung the bag's straps over one shoulder. Then she was off to visit Jack.