

Naming Day

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In the gentle and compassionate story that follows, she shows us that if names have Power—and they do—then you'd better make sure which one fits before you take it.

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A

VERIL stared dreamily into her oatmeal, contemplating herself. In two days it would be Naming Day at the Oglesby School of Thaumaturgy, the midpoint of the three-year course of study. Those students who had gotten through the first year and a half with satisfactory grades in such classes as Prestidigitation, Legendary Creatures, Latin, Magical Al-phabets, The Uses and Misuses of Elements, and The History of Sorcery were permitted to choose the secret names they would need to continue their studies. Averil had achieved the highest marks in every class, and she was eager to investigate more widely, more profoundly, the mysterious and wizardly arts of Thaumaturgy. But under what name? She couldn't decide. What would best express her gifts, her potential, the wellsprings of her magic? More importantly, what would she be happy calling this secret self for the rest of her life?

Think of a favorite tree, Miss Braeburn, her counselor, had

suggested. An animal, a bird. You might name yourself after one of those. Or one of the four elements of antiquity. Some aspect of fire, perhaps. Water.

Averil stretched her long, graceful spine, thought of her pale hair and coloring. Swan? she mused. Or something with wind in it? I'm more air than fire. Certainly not earth. Water?

"Mater," she began; she had to start practicing her Latin, in which half the ancient thaumaturges had written their spells. "What do you think about when you think about me?"

Her mother, turning bacon at the stove, flung her a haggard, incredulous glance. She was pregnant again, at her age, and prone to throwing up at odd times. An unfortunate situation, Averil thought privately, since they had moved from a house in the suburbs to a much smaller apartment in the city for Averil's sake, to be as close as possible to Oglesby. Where, she wondered, were her impractical parents planning to put a baby? In the laundry basket? In the walk-in closet with Felix, where it was likely to be shoved under his bed along with his toys and shoes? Her brother chose that moment to draw attention from her compelling question by banging his small fist on the tines of a fork to cause the spoon lying across the handle to go spinning into the air.

"Felix!" their mother cried. "Stop that."

"Bacon, bacon, I want bacon!" Felix shouted. The spoon bounced on his head, then clattered onto the floor. He squinted his eyes, opened his mouth wide. Averil got up hastily before he began to howl.

"Averil—wait. Stop."

"Mom, gotta go; I'll be late."

"I need you to come home right after your classes today." A banshee shriek came out of Felix; their mother raised her voice. "I want you to watch Felix."

Averil's violet eyes skewed in horror toward her squalling baby brother, whose tonsils were visible. He had just turned four, a skinny, noisy, mind-less bundle of mischief and energy whom Averil seriously doubted was quite right in the head.

"Sorry, Mom." She grabbed her book bag hastily. After all, her mother

had nothing else to do. “I have group study after school.”

“Averil—”

“Mom, it’s important! I’m good at my studies—one of the best in a decade, Miss Braeburn says. She thinks I can get a full scholarship to the University of Ancient Arts if I keep up my grades. That’s why we moved here, isn’t it? Anyway, my friends are waiting for me.” Something in her mother’s expression, not unlike the mingling of admiration and despair that Averil’s presence caused in less gifted students, made her round the table quickly, trying not to clout Felix with her book bag, and breathe a kiss on her mother’s cheek. “Ask me again after Naming Day. I might have time then.”

She discussed the situation with her friends Deirdre, Tamara, and Nicholaus, as they walked to school.

“My mother should understand. After all, she almost graduated from Oglesby herself. She knows how hard we have to work.”

“She did?” Nicholaus queried her with an inquisitive flash of rimless spectacles. “Why didn’t she graduate? Did she fail her classes?”

Averil shrugged. “She told me she left to get married.”

“Quaint.”

“Well, she couldn’t stay in school with me coming and all the students’ practice spells flying around. I might have come out as a wombat or something.”

Deirdre chuckled and made a minute adjustment to the butterfly pin in her wild red hair. “Baby brothers are the worst, aren’t they? Mine are such a torment. They put slugs in my shoes; they color in my books; they’re al-ways whining, and they smell like boiled broccoli.”

Tamara, who was taller than all of them and moved like a dancer, shook her sleek black hair out of her face, smiling. “I like my baby brother, but then he’s still a baby. They’re so sweet before they grow their teeth and start having opinions.”

Averil murmured absently, her eyes on the boy with the white-gold hair waiting for her at the school gates. She drew a deep, full breath; the air seemed to kindle and glow through her. “There’s Griffith,” she said, and stepped forward into her enchanted world, full of friends, and challenges

within the craggy, dark walls of the school, and Griffith, with his high cheekbones and broad shoulders, watching her come.

Someone else watched her, too: a motionless, silent figure on the grass within the wrought-iron fence. An intensity seemed to pour out of him like a spell, drawing at her until, surprised, she took her eyes off Griffith to see who the stranger was.

But it wasn't a stranger, only Fitch, who blinked at the touch of her eyes and drew back into himself like a turtle. She waved anyway, laughing a little, her attention already elsewhere.

In her classes, Averil got a perfect score conjugating Latin verbs, correctly pronounced a rune that made Dugan Lawler believe he was a parrot, and, with Griffith, was voted best in class for their history project, which traced the legendary land on which Oglesby stood back through time to the powerful forest of oak trees under which early students were taught their primitive magic. She and Griffith pretended to be teacher and student; they actually reproduced some of the ancient spells, one of which set fire to Mr. Addison's oak cane and turned on the overhead sprinklers. But Mr. Addison, after mending his cane and drying the puddles with some well-chosen words, complimented them on their imaginative interpretation of ancient history.

After school, she and Griffith, Nicholas, Tamara, and Deirdre went to Griffith's house to study. The place was huge, quiet, and tidy, full of leather-bound books and potted plants everywhere. Griffith had no siblings; his parents were both scholars and understood the importance of study. His mother left them alone in the dining room with a tray of iced herbal tea and brownies; they piled their books on the broad mahogany table and got to work.

Later, when they had finished homework and quizzed each other for tests, talk drifted to the all-important Naming Day.

"I can't decide." Averil sighed, sliding limply forward in her chair and enjoying the reflection of her long ivory hair on the dark, polished wood. "Has anyone chosen a name, yet?"

Tamara had, and Nicholas. Deirdre had narrowed it down to two, and Griffith said he had had a secret name since he was seven. So they could all give their attention to Averil.

"I thought something to do with air?" she began tentatively. "Wind?"

“Windflower,” Griffith said promptly, making her blush.

“Windhover,” Tamara offered. Averil looked blank; she added, “It’s a falcon.”

“I don’t think I’m a falcon. More like a—well, something white.”

“Snow goose?” Deirdre suggested practically. “Nobody would ever guess that.”

“Swan, of course,” Nicholaus said. “But that’d be too obvious. How about egret? Or I think there’s a snowy owl—”

Averil straightened. “Those aren’t really names, are they? Not some-thing really personal that defines me.”

“What about a jewel?” Tamara said. “A diamond?”

“Pearl,” Griffith said softly, smiling a little, making Averil smile back.

“Something,” she agreed, “more like that.”

It was all so interesting, trying to find the perfect name for Averil, that nobody remembered the time. Griffith’s mother reminded them; they broke up hastily, packing away books and pens, winding long silk scarves around their throats, prognosticating cold suppers and peeved parents.

“Stay,” Griffith said to Averil, making a spell with his caramel eyes so that Averil’s feet stuck to the threshold.

“Well—”

“Stay for supper. My parents are going out. I’ll cook something.”

“I should call—”

“Call your mother. Tell her we’re working on a project.”

“But we’re not,” Averil objected; true wizards did not need to lie.

“We are,” he said, with his bewitching smile. “Your name.”

Averil got home later than even she considered marginal for

excusable behavior. Fortunately, her father was already being taken to task for his own lateness, and Averil only got added to the general list of complaints. Still enchanted, she barely listened.

“You don’t realize—” her mother said, and, “No consideration—”

“Sorry, dear,” her father said soothingly. “I should have called, but I kept thinking we’d get the work finished earlier.”

“Stone-cold dinner—”

“Sorry, Mom,” Averil echoed dutifully.

“If I don’t get a moment to myself, I’m going to—”

“After Naming Day, I promise.”

“Now, dear, he’s barely four. He’ll settle down soon enough. Take him to the park or something.”

Her mother made a noise like cloth ripping, the beginning of tears. Her father opened his arms. Averil let her book bag fall to the floor and drifted away, thinking of Griffith’s farewell kiss.

She escaped out the door without breakfast the next morning after allowing her mother, who was on the phone pleading with a babysitting service, a brief glimpse of her face. At the table, Felix was upending a cereal box over his bowl.

“Bye, Mom.”

“Averil—”

“See you, but don’t know when. There might be a celebration later. It’s Naming Day.”

“Av—Felix!”

Averil closed the door to the sound of a gentle rain of Fruitie Flakes all over the floor.

She was halfway down the block, already searching the flowing current of students for Griffith’s white-gold hair, when she remembered her book bag. It was still on the living-room floor where she had dropped it;

escap-ing the morning drama in the kitchen had taken up all her attention. She turned back quickly, trying to make herself invisible so that her mother wouldn't start in again at the sight of her. I am wind, she told herself, pulling open the apartment building door. I am . . . spindrift.

Spindrift! There was a name, she realized triumphantly, running up the two flights of stairs rather than wait for the elevator. White as swans' feathers, a braid of wind and wave and foam, always graceful, never predictable . . . She flung the door open, leaving it wide for a hasty escape, and as she rushed in, something shot past her so fast it left only a vague impression of gnarly limbs and light in her eyes before it vanished out the door.

"My wand!"

The screech hit Averil like a spell; she skidded to a stop. This wasn't her apartment, she saw, appalled. She had barged through the wrong door. And there was this—this huge, ancient and incredibly ugly thaumaturge-thing, a witch or crazed wizard, seething at her from behind a cauldron bubbling over a firebed on her living-room floor.

"You let my greyling out!"

"I'm sorry," Averil gasped. Plants crawling up the walls, across the ceiling, whispered with their enormous leaves and seemed to quiver with horror.

"Well, don't just stand there like a gape-jawed booby, get it back!"

Averil closed her mouth, tried to retrieve some dignity. "I'm sorry," she repeated. Her voice wobbled in spite of herself. "I have to get to school. I just came back for my book bag, and I must have gone up an extra floor." She took a step, edging back toward the door. "I'll just—your greyling is probably downstairs; I'll just go see. I won't let it get out the front door. I promise."

Up the stairwell behind her came the distinct rattle of a heavy door fitting its locks and hinges and frame back into place as it closed. The old witch seemed to fill like a balloon behind her cauldron. Her tattered white hair stiffened; her eyes, like thumbprints of tar in her wrinkled skin, slewed and glinted.

"You get my greyling. You get my wand."

“I haven’t time!”

“You let them out. You bring them back.”

“I have classes! It’s my Naming Day!” Even a senile old bag like that must have anticipated her own Naming Day once. If things had names that long ago. “You must remember how important that is.”

“You. Get. My. Wand.”

“All right, okay,” Averil gabbled; anything to get out the door.

The witch’s murky eyes narrowed into slits. “Until you bring me back my wand and my greyling, you will be invisible. No one will see you. No one will hear your voice. Until you bring me my greyling and my wand, even your own name will be useless to you.”

“I don’t have time.” Averil’s voice had gone somewhere; she could barely whisper. “I have to get to school.”

“Then you’d better start looking.”

“You can’t do that!” Her voice was back suddenly, high and shrill, like a whistling teakettle. “I’m at the top of my class! My teachers will come look-ing for me! Griffith will rescue me!”

“Go!”

She couldn’t tell if she moved, or if the word itself blew her out the door; it slammed behind her, echoing the witch’s voice. She stood in the hall a moment, trembling and thoughtless. Then she took a sharp breath—“The greyling!”—and precipitated herself down the stairs two at a time, on the off chance that the witch’s familiar still lurked in the hallway below. Of course it was nowhere in sight.

Averil plunged out the door, trying wildly to look in every direction at once. What exactly was a greyling? She racked her brains; nothing leaped to mind from her Legendary Creatures class. Did it like water? High tree limbs? Caves? Could it speak? She hadn’t a clue. A jumble of pallid, root-like limbs and a sort of greeny yellow light were all she remembered. The one must be the greyling, the other the pilfered wand. She hoped desper-ately that the greyling wouldn’t have the power to use it.

A familiar figure crossed the street toward the school. “Tamara!”

Averil shouted with relief. Tamara's long stride didn't falter. She called out to someone herself; her voice seemed small, distorted, like words heard from underwater. Ahead of her, a dark head turned; spectacles flashed. "Nicholaus!" Averil cried, hurrying toward them. "Tamara!"

Neither of them turned. They greeted one another, and then Deirdre caught up with them, red hair flying. They chattered excitedly, finally turning to survey the street where surely they would see, they must see Averil running toward them, yelling and waving her arms.

Their faces grew puzzled. A bell tolled once, reverberations overlapping with exaggerated slowness. It was the warning bell; those outside the gates at First Bell would be locked out. The three moved again, quickly. In the distance, Averil could see Griffith, just within the gates, waiting for them, for her.

However fast she followed, they were always faster. As though, she thought, breathlessly sprinting, they were always in the next moment, a slightly different beat in time; she could never quite catch up. She stopped finally with a despairing cry as her friends passed through the gates; they seemed farther away than ever. They spoke to Griffith; he shrugged a little, then pointed toward a high window, where their first class would begin. Maybe Averil's there, his gesture said. First Bell tolled three times. The gates began to close. As the last students jostled inside, Averil noticed one face still peering through the bars, searching the streets. Fitch, she recognized glumly. And then even he turned away, went up the broad stone steps into the school.

Behind her, something crashed. She jumped, then turned in time to see the greyling balanced on the side of the garbage can it had overturned. Amid the litter, a cat puffed itself up twice its size and hissed furiously. The greyling opened its mouth and hissed back. Averil finally saw it clearly: a grotesque imp with big ears and a body so narrow it seemed all skinny limbs and head, like a starfish. It held a stick with a dandelion of light at one end. A cartoon wand, Averil thought disgustedly. More for the goopy Tinkerbell fairy than for an evil-tempered, snag-toothed old hag who had stopped Averil's world.

The greyling leaped, clearing the spilled garbage and the cat. Averil moved then, faster than she had ever moved in her life.

The greyling rolled a huge, silvery eye at her as she gained on it, seeming to realize finally that something was after it. It increased its pace, blowing down the sidewalks and alleyways like a tumbleweed. Averil

followed grimly. Nobody else saw it. Other people walked in a tranquil world where bus brakes and car horns made noises in miniature, and the shrieks of kids in the school playground sounded like the distant chirping of well-behaved birds.

Averil pursued the greyling across the park. It skittered up a tree and made faces at her until she drove it out with some well-placed pinecones. It led her up one side of the jungle gym and down the other, then disappeared completely. She found it in the rose garden, with roses stuffed in both ears and its mouth, trying to disguise itself as a bush. It waved the wand at her, shaking a sprinkle of light between them that Averil ran through before she could stop. But nothing happened. She heard several deep, familiar booms, then; the sounds echoed and rippled through the air with viscous slowness, melting into Averil's heart, which grew iron with despair. Second Bell. The Naming Hour itself. And where was she? Chasing an imp through a world where nobody who knew her name could even see her.

A thought struck her. She missed a step, stumbling a little, so that the greyling leaped ahead. It veered into a small forest of giant ferns and vanished.

You're a student of magical arts, the thought said. Do some magic.

She slowed, panting. Eyes narrowed, she searched the stand of ferns for a single quivering leaf, the slightest movement among the shadows and shafts of mellow light. Nothing. She listened, tuning her ears the way she had been taught, to hear the patter of a millipede's feet across a leaf, the bump of a beetle's back against a clod of dirt. She heard the faintest of breaths. Or was it a butterfly's wings, opening and closing in the light?

She drew the rich, dusty light into her eyes and into her mind, where she focused and shaped it into a brilliant, sharply pointed letter of an ancient, magical alphabet, and let it loose in a sudden shout, hoping she was pronouncing it correctly.

The fern grove lit up as though someone had set off fireworks in it. Within the glittering, spinning wheels and sprays of light, the greyling exploded from behind a trunk and scrambled to the very top of a fern tree. It dangled there precariously, wailing at her, its eyes as huge as saucers.

She yelled back at it, "Ha!" and ran to get the wand.

She found it easily as her own fires died: the only glowing thing left on the ground. She studied it puzzledly, carefully touched the puff of light. It

didn't burn her, or change in any way; she didn't even feel it. She smelled something, though, that seemed peculiar in the middle of a fern grove.

Vanilla?

She looked up in time to see the greyling gather its spidery limbs and rocket off the fern head in a desperate leap that sent it smack into someone who had emerged out of nowhere to stare up at it. They both tumbled to the ground. The greyling wriggled to its feet, but not quickly enough. A hand shot out to grab its skinny ankle; a voice shouted breathlessly, "Gotcha!"

Averil blinked. The newcomer transferred his grip to the greyling's wrist as he got up off the ground. He smiled crookedly at Averil, who finally found her voice.

"Fitch!"

"Hey."

"What are you—why on earth did you—" The color was pushing so brightly into his face it seemed to tinge the air around him, she saw with fascination; he would have glowed in the dark. Only his fingers, wound around the hissing, whimpering, struggling greyling, hadn't forgotten what he was doing there. Averil's brows leaped up as high as they could go; so did her voice.

"What did you do? Did you follow me?"

"Well." He swallowed with a visible effort. "I could see you, but I couldn't reach you until you made that magic. Then that weird spell forcing the jog in time pushed our moments back together, at least long enough so that—so—"

"Here you are."

"Yeah."

"On your Naming Day."

"Well," he said again, his face growing impossibly redder. "You were in trouble. I don't think real wizards get to choose a convenient time and place to do what they think they have to."

Averil studied him speechlessly. He was taller than she expected; he always seemed to shrink into himself when she was around. His brown, floppy hair did a good job of hiding his face; what she could see of it looked interesting enough. Between his hair and woodsy skin, she'd just assumed his eyes were dark, too. But he'd scarcely let her meet his eyes before, and now she saw the glints of blue within his hair.

Her voice leaped up a few notches again. "You saw me!" He gave a brief nod, dodging the kick the greyling aimed at his shin. "Nobody else could see me! That was part of the spell."

"That's what I thought, when I saw you calling your friends and they didn't notice you."

"Then how could you see me?"

His mouth curled in a little, slantwise smile. "It's one of the things I happen to be good at. Recognizing magic when it's around. Also..." He stuck there, picking at words, ignoring the greyling jumping up and down on his toes. "You might have noticed. I watch you."

"Lots of people do," Averil said hastily, afraid that if he blushed any harder, he might hurt himself.

His eyes came back to her. "You know what I'm saying. I've always wanted to talk to you. But I never thought you'd be interested."

"So you snuck out of school on Naming Day just to talk to me while I was alone for once?"

His smile flashed out at that, changing his entire face, she saw with surprise; it looked open, now, and unafraid. "Right. I thought we might have a conversation while you were chasing this little goblin around garbage cans and up trees."

"Then why didn't you just tell one of the teachers?" she demanded bewilderedly. "You wouldn't have missed your Naming."

"I know my name," he said simply. "I don't need to write it in ancient letters on a piece of tree bark and burn it in an oak fire. That's just a ritual."

Averil opened her mouth; nothing came out. The greyling showed teeth suddenly, aiming for Fitch's fingers. She rapped it sharply on its head with the witch's wand. "I'd better take this thing back before it gets away

from me again,” she said, as the yellow-green fairy light shaken off the wand dazzled and twinkled in the air around them.

“Where does it belong?”

“To a gnarly old warthog of a witch who put a spell on me when I accidentally let her greyling out.”

Fitch grunted, watched the sparkles sail past his nose. “Funny light. Doesn’t seem to do much, does it?”

“No. And it smells odd. Like—”

“Vanilla.”

Averil shook her head. “Bizarre ...”

“Do you want me to help you take it back?”

She considered that, tempted, then shook her head again; no sense in introducing the witch to more opportunities for mischief. “No. It’s my problem . . . But now you won’t be able to get back into the school.”

She saw his slanted smile again. “I have my ways.”

“Really?”

“Doesn’t everyone?”

“No,” she said, amazed. “I always follow all the rules. At least at school.”

“Well, of course, there’s something to be said for that.” He paused; she waited. “I just said it.”

“You made a joke,” she exclaimed. “I didn’t even know you could smile.” She took the greyling’s skinny wrist out of his hold, wondering suddenly what else went on in that obscure realm under Fitch’s untidy hair. “I always get perfect grades. How can you know things I don’t?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know. You’re brilliant. Everyone notices what you do. So you have to watch yourself. I get to do things nobody notices.”

She mulled that over, while the greyling tried to run circles around her.

“Maybe we could talk?” she suggested. “Sometime soon?”

He blushed again, but not so much. “I’d like that.”

“I think I would, too.” The greyling nearly spun her off her feet, then tangled itself around the foot she stuck in its path. “I’d better finish what I started with the witch,” she said grimly, hauling the greyling up. “Thanks for helping me. That was really nice of you.”

“You’re sure—” Fitch said doubtfully, walking backward away from her.

“I’d like to think all my studying is worth something.”

“Okay, then. Good luck with the witch.”

“Thanks,” she said between her teeth, and dragged the furious greyling in the opposite direction.

The greyling finally stopped struggling when the door to the apartment building closed behind them. It quietly trudged upstairs beside Averil, only muttering a little now and then, its ribbony arm dangling limply in her grasp. She scarcely heard it; she was trying to figure out how Fitch was getting back into the school without being caught. Did he already know how to turn invisible? What other things might he have learned on his own, while she was only learning what was required? Would breaking rules make him a better wizard? Better than, say, Griffith, who would surely have skipped his Naming Day to come and help her, if he had been able to see her. Or would he? More likely, he would have done the practical thing and simply told one of their teachers that she seemed to be in trouble. Try as she might, she couldn’t imagine Griffith missing his Naming to sneak out of school and help her catch some witch’s demented familiar.

She was thinking so intently that she had opened the door of her own apartment out of habit. Her mother, sitting on the couch and reading, lifted her head to smile at Averil, who remembered, horrified, what she was holding.

“Hi, Mom,” she said hastily, backing out before she had to explain the greyling. “Oops. I’ll just be a moment—”

“Thanks, Averil.” Her mother sighed. “That’s the most peaceful morning I’ve had in years.”

The greyling broke free of Averil, ran to the couch, and climbed up beside their mother. "I'm tired," Felix groaned, falling sideways onto her lap. "Really, really, really—"

"Oh, that's wonderful, sweetie."

Averil, frozen in the doorway, remembered finally how to breathe. Her eyes felt gritty, as though fairy dust had blown into them. With great effort, she swiveled them toward the witch's wand in her hand.

Wooden mixing spoon.

"Mom—" Her voice croaked like a frog; she still couldn't move. "How did you—how could you—"

"Well, you saw what I was turning into. Nobody was listening to me."

"But how—"

"I learned a few things at the school before I left to have you." She stroked Felix's hair gently; he was already asleep. "Peace," she breathed contentedly.

"Mom. It was my Naming Day."

Her mother just looked at her. Averil saw the witch in her eyes, then, shadowy, shrewd, filled with remnants of magic. "And did you finally choose a name?"

Averil looked back at the Averil who had been so blithely trying on lovely names and discarding them just that morning. She moved finally, closing the door behind her. She dropped down on the couch next to Felix.

"No," she admitted, twining the spoon handle through her hair. "And now, nothing seems to fit me."

Her mother said after a moment, "I have a name that I haven't used since I left Oglesby, until today. You can have it, if you want."

"Really?" Averil studied her mother, suddenly curious. "What is it?"

Her mother leaned over Felix, whispered it into Averil's ear. The name seemed to flow through her like air and light. Her eyes grew wide; visions and enchantments swirled in her head. "Mom, that's brilliant," she

exclaimed, straightening with a bounce. "That's amazing!" Felix stirred; they both pat-ted him until he quieted again. "How did you think of it?" Averil whispered.

"It was just there, when I looked for it. Do you want it?"

"Are you sure? You really want me to have it?"

Her mother smiled wryly. "I really don't want to be tempted to use magic on my children again. Anyway, ever since you became interested in the wizardly arts, I dreamed of giving it to you. Of it meaning all the won-derful magic you could do." She paused, shifted a strand of Averil's shining hair back from her face. "Lately, I haven't been sure that you'd want it."

"I want it," Averil said softly. "I want it more than any other name. I never would have thought of it, but it's perfect. It feels like me."

"Good." Her mother rose then, took the spoon from her. "I'm glad you brought this back; it's my favorite mixing spoon."

"You didn't give me much choice." Averil watched her walk into the kitchen to drop the spoon into the utensils jar. "You make a pretty fierce witch."

"Thanks, sweetie. Are you hungry? Do you want a sandwich before you go back to school?"

"You know they won't let me in after First Bell."

"That's what they say," her mother said with a chuckle. "But once you find your way in, they always let you stay."

Averil stared at her. She glimpsed something then, in the corner of her mind's eye; it grew clearer as she turned her thoughts to contemplate it. Her mother, giving up all the knowledge she had acquired at Oglesby, all that potential, just to go and have Averil and take care of her. And now that incredible name ...

She drew a sudden breath, whispered, "I didn't miss it."

Her mother, who had stuck her head in the refrigerator and was searching through jars, said, "What?"

“My Naming. You just named me.”

Her mother turned, embracing mayonnaise, mustard, pickles, cold cuts and a head of lettuce. “What, sweetie? I didn’t hear you.”

“Never mind,” Averil said, and summoned all her powers to speak words of most arduous and dire magic.

“I’ll-watch-Felix-for-the-rest-of-the-day-if-you-want-to-go-out.”

Her mother heard that just fine.

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