

## **Honorable Mention: Splitrock** *by Jack Harris*

Edith suspected it wouldn't be a fun night when the quarterback started crumpling beer cans with his forehead.

The entire football team and half the school had driven out to the hills for a party. Technically it was a rally for the homecoming game, but technically Dalton Schneider's dad shouldn't have bought teenagers two kegs of beer.

A high-pitched voice pierced through the whoops and cheers. "Edith! I'm *so* glad you could make it!"

She froze in her tracks; the voice belonged to Genevieve, Queen of the Cheer Team, currently materializing from the crowd armed with two red cups and a dazzling pink smile.

"Hey, Genevieve."

"It's Genna. You know that, silly!" Genevieve squealed like all she had wanted in the entire world was for Edith to come to this party.

Edith might have been at Splitrock for only a few months, but she had moved around enough to recognize Genevieve's species: most likely born in a sorority house, veins filled with alcohol and glitter instead of blood.

Acting along was painful, but Edith had to if she wanted to stick around to check out this site. Highschoolers partied up in the hills because police didn't bother patrolling out there, but Edith had done her research. This area was dotted with ruins, crumbling walls and strange stone formations built by some forgotten people. Not that any of these jocks would know what they were trampling on. To them, getting drunk here was probably just a good-luck ritual for the next game.

Genevieve giggled and drained one of her cups. "You wanna help Dalton and the guys start a fire?"

"Uh, totally."

Edith was introduced to Dalton—Genevieve's boyfriend—and a few others whose names she instantly forgot. The ruins were far more interesting. The walls up here glowed a pale, peculiar shade of white, as if they had absorbed the moonlight itself.

Edith followed the guys as they ducked through an arch and into a small clearing. Here stood a ring of a dozen or so obelisks of white stone, in the middle of which was a flat, cracked boulder surrounded by a pile of wood. Goosebumps rippled down Edith's arms. This space felt different. Sacred.

"What is—" Edith was cut off when hands grabbed her wrists. She twisted her neck but saw only Dalton, looming behind her like a beefy mountain. "Hey! What are you doing?"

More people filed through the archway.

"What the hell? Let go!" But Dalton just squeezed tighter, and a spike of fear drove itself through her chest. People crowded all around her, drinking and laughing, parting to make way as Edith was shoved forward.

She tried to twist her hands, but Dalton's grip was like cement. When she looked back up, she saw the boulder, the wood, and Genevieve, dazzling smile replaced with a sneer.

Edith cried out as she was shoved forward again. Nothing was making sense. She wasn't sure if she was being kidnapped or forced into some weird drinking game.

Genevieve rolled her eyes. "Tie her up."

More football guys appeared with rope. The panic swelled to bursting as Edith was lifted off her feet and unceremoniously dumped onto the boulder, directly over the split in its smooth face. "Let me go, you animals! What the hell!"

Laughter in the crowd; everyone was watching her now, eager and hungry.

Genevieve shushed them with a raised hand.

"See, that's your problem, Edith. You don't know us at all, but you've already decided who we are. The sweaty football players. The slutty, stupid cheerleaders."

Some boos and jeers from the crowd.

"I guess you consider it beneath you, but Splitrock High has been the state champion in football ten years running. You think that's luck?" She snorted. "Please. Only idiots rely on luck. If you're smart, you make your own."

Edith wriggled against the ropes. A creeping, terrible thought whispered in the back of her head. "Let me go, Genna. Please. I don't know what you're talking about."

"You're the one who's been obsessed with this place ever since you moved here. That's why you think you're better than us, right?"

"These are just old ruins."

"Ruins that used to belong to the Green People, or the Hidden Children, or whatever you want to call them. In fact, they still do."

"You're crazy."

Genevieve shrugged. "I'm a winner. I'm getting a full ride to Stanford on cheer because I made sure to dance in front of their recruiter every year at the State game. Oh, and because I'm class valedictorian, asshole. But why did we make it to State in the first place?"

The dread was whispering louder now. Edith's mouth was too dry to answer.

"The Fairy Folk demand sacrifice in return for miracles. And these boys need all the miracles we can get."

"Hey," Dalton whined, but Genevieve kissed him on the cheek.

"Bring me the gas, babe."

The spike of fear twisted in Edith's chest. "What? No, Genna, you can't. Please. Please let me go."

"Oh, calm down. You're not going to die, just ... go somewhere else. We think. You know, Edith," Genevieve said, fishing a pink lighter from her jeans shorts, "in a way, your being such a bitch made our choice easier. At least we didn't have to give them one of our friends this year."

It didn't matter then how much Edith cried, how keenly she felt her world ending, how loudly she screamed at them to stop. It didn't matter, because the dancing light of the yellow and blue and green fire swallowed her vision and drowned out her sobs with the

glimmer of bells and the smell of never-ending summer and burbling creeks. Twisting, swirling eddies pulled her down, down into the dark of the split in the rock filled with the wind of the voices of the Fairy Folk who still sang.

When her voice joined them, it sounded like eternity.

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