



THE  
ENCHANTER  
HEIR



CINDA WILLIAMS CHIMA

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*Dedication TK*



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❧ PROLOGUE ❧  
THORN HILL, BRAZIL

Jonah awoke to suffocating heat and the sound of screaming.

He jerked upright, his sheets drenched with sweat, his head pounding. The screams came from outside, through windows that had been left open to capture the night breeze. A wan, gray light oozed between the shutters.

Inside the dormitory, the other Sevens were moaning and the sound foamed up from the beds all around Jonah. He squinted through the darkness, but his vision flickered and swam like one of the paintings in Mama's books.

"What's going on?" he whispered, his voice hoarse and strange. As he swung his legs over the side of the bed, the smell of sickness smacked him in the face.

He sat still until the churning in his middle settled a little. He would not throw up. He was nearly seven years old—old enough not to make work for other people. That's what Mama said, anyway. *People will always be willing to do things for you because you're an enchanter, because of your gifts of empathy,*

*charisma, and persuasion. But that's wrong, Jonah. You need to learn to do things for yourself.*

His chest burned, smoldering like someone had lit a fire inside him. He pressed his hands against his T-shirt, as if he could put it out. Somebody in one of the other beds was calling, "Daddy?" over and over.

Where was Jem, the dorm-master? He would know what to do.

Jonah slid off his bed, his bare feet hitting the floor with a thunk. For a moment, he stood, head swimming, as the flame in his chest burned hotter. Then, staggering, holding on to bed frames for support, he worked his way toward the door.

Just as he reached it, he nearly stumbled over a body sprawled across the threshold.

It was Jem, eyes rolled back in his head, his blackened tongue sticking out, his hands fisted. Like he was still fighting.

"Jem," Jonah whispered, kneeling beside him. Jonah could no longer sense the mingled love and exasperation that was Jem.

Jem was dead, but some of the Sevens were still alive. A healer. Jonah needed to find a healer. And Mama and Dad and Kenzie and Marcy.

Jonah pushed the door open, carefully stepped over Jem's body—and walked into a nightmare. People in nightclothes filled the *okara*, blundering around the square, running into things as if they were either blind or out of their heads. Bodies lay everywhere, like broken dolls flung aside. Some, he recognized. There was Foster, who worked in the metal shop and gave Jonah interesting bits of metal to play with. And Lilith, who helped make the medicines the healers used. She

lay, facedown, just outside the lab building, her pale hair spread around her head like a halo.

Somebody ran into him, nearly knocking him over. It was Patrice, who built the sets for the theater, still in her nightgown. She was the first grown-up he'd seen who wasn't dead.

"Patrice!" Jonah cried, snatching at her sleeve. "Have you seen Mama and Dad?"

Patrice swayed, holding on to Jonah to keep from falling over. Foam bubbled on her lips, dripped down her chin. She stared at him, wide-eyed, like she didn't recognize him, then floundered backward and wobbled on, heading for the lake.

People were running in all directions, some toward the lake, maybe hoping to cool themselves in its waters. Others toward the healing halls. Some ran, screaming, flailing their arms, like they were being chased by monsters. Jonah saw one man barrel into another. They both fell to the ground, punching and kicking each other.

Terrified, Jonah ran for the cluster of family homes, called *oka*, that housed those that worked in the performing arts. Until a month ago, Jonah had lived there with his parents, his younger brother, and baby sister. Then, since it was getting crowded and he was nearly seven, he'd moved into the Sevens dorm. All the seven-year-olds stayed there, regardless of what guild they came from.

Some of the *oka* were dark, ominously quiet. Others were ablaze with lights. Dogs barked at Jonah from open doorways as he followed the familiar path to his own family's dwelling. He had to stop once and throw up into the bushes.

The house was dark, but through the front windows, Jonah saw an odd flickering light. Like flame, but more bluish than orange and red.

He burst into the house, calling, “Mama? Dad?”

No answer.

He slid back the screen that divided his parents’ room from the main room.

They were still in bed. He could see their familiar shapes in their double hammock, but no reassuring rush of love came his way. Jonah inched closer. Mama lay on her back, a rag on her forehead, face milk white, her lips blue. There was a cup on the window ledge next to her. His father lay facedown beside her. They were dead.

The grown-ups are dying, he thought. We’re all sick, but the grown-ups are dying. How come?

Shaking his head no, he backed out of the room, hands raised in front of him. Once in the main room, he smelled smoke. Something was definitely burning, and the smell seemed to be coming from the space that Kenzie and Marcy now shared. Jonah eased open the screen to his old room.

Marcy was standing in her crib, giggling and pointing, the light from the flames painting her face an odd color of blue. Kenzie’s side of the room was ablaze, and now and then a flame arced out from the inferno as if someone were shooting off rockets. At the center of the fire, Jonah’s five-year-old brother, Kenzie, burned brightest of all, like a human sacrifice to the old gods one of the healers, Jeanette, sometimes talked about. Burning and burning, yet not burning *up*.

Dizzy, sick, and confused, Jonah wanted to lie down on the floor, close his eyes, and go back to sleep. He wanted Mama to wake him from this nightmare and stroke his hair and tell him it was all a dream. He wanted a grown-up to figure out what to do.

But there was only Jonah, and he was almost seven years old, and if he didn’t do something, nobody would. Blotting the tears from his eyes, he snatched up a blanket draped over the side of the crib and wrapped Marcy up in it. Dropping the side of the crib, he lifted her out.

Marcy pointed over Jonah’s shoulder and cried, “Kee!,” which was her word for Kenzie.

“Come on, Marcy,” Jonah said. “Let’s get out of here before this place burns up.”

She struggled in his arms as he crossed the threshold. “Kee!” she cried. “Kee!”

She continued to kick and squirm, and Jonah’s strength was dwindling fast.

“Marcy,” he pleaded as they left the shelter of the trees. “Hold still. I can’t carry you if you’re wiggling.”

“Kee!” she said again.

“I know,” he said. “I didn’t forget him. I just can’t carry both of you at once.”

Two of the Twelves were plodding toward him, girls who’d helped out in the healing halls. They looked half dead themselves, moving like they were sleepwalking through a nightmare. One girl’s skin was covered in blisters. Jonah tried not to stare.

“We’re meeting in the *okara*,” one of them said dully. “Go there.”

“Take my sister,” Jonah said. “I’m going back after my brother.”

“Jonah!” Marcy cried, clutching on to his nightshirt.

“It’s all right,” Jonah said. “I’ll be back.” He bent his head and kissed her on the cheek.

Marcy’s blue eyes opened wide, then closed. A smile

curved her lips. Her color faded like a winter-blasted rose as she died.

Jonah didn't know how long he drifted between waking and sleeping. He was strapped down, so he couldn't move, and there were tubes and needles poking him everywhere, and thick mittens covering his hands so he couldn't rip them out. Hardly anyone came in, and when they did, they left in a hurry. He slept most of the time, anyway.

Then one day he woke up, drowning in his own vomit. When the healers finally came in, they seemed angry, like it was his fault. After that, they unstrapped him so he could use the basin by his bedside. They unhooked all the tubes, but they left the mittens and a big clanking chain attached to his ankle. It was long enough for him to get to the bathroom and walk around the room, but that was it.

He knew a few things. For instance, he knew where he was—in one of the classrooms at school. But why was he here, all by himself, instead of in the healing hall?

They must have been giving him something that made him sleep most of the time, because now he was more awake. Now that he was awake, he saw who came in. There were two in particular—strangers who must have been healers, but they were unlike any healers Jonah had ever known. Not at all like Jeanette, who'd cared for him since he was a baby.

These healers never touched him unless they had to, and then only with gloved hands. Whenever they came close, their fear slopped over him like a cold fog. Often, they stood by the door and talked in low voices. He guessed they were talking about him.

Jonah called them Thing One and Thing Two.

Jonah wasn't used to being feared. He was used to affection. He wished Jeanette had stayed—she always knew how to make him feel better when he was sick. She'd left Thorn Hill before any of this happened. But, if she'd stayed, then she'd probably be dead, like all the other grown-ups.

They brought him food to eat, leaving it on the bedside table, even though half the time he was too sick to eat. Every time one of them came in, Jonah asked a question, collecting information like puzzle pieces. The wells had gone bad, they said. Mama and Dad and Kenzie and Marcy were all dead. No, he didn't have anything catching. No, he couldn't take the mittens off.

His seventh birthday came and went without anyone noticing. Meaning two months had passed since everyone died. Jonah rested, and ate, and kept the mittens on, and wondered why he was still alive. The more he rested, the stronger he got, and the more he saw and heard, whether he wanted to or not. His ears seemed to hear better than they ever had before. And if he looked out the window, through the bars, he could see all the way across the lake, to where white tents had sprouted, like mushrooms after a rain.

Most importantly, now he could hear those muttered conversations between Thing One and Thing Two. Thing One did most of the talking. Thing Two didn't say much.

"He's not paying us enough to do this work," said Thing One. "Nobody told us they'd need twenty-four-hour nursing care."

"Mm-hmm," Thing Two said.

"They brought this on themselves, you know." Thing One scratched his neck. "Did they think the Wizard Guild was going to stand by and let them build an arsenal?"

“But that’s not the kids’ fault. Besides, Mandrake claims they weren’t making weapons.”

“And you believe that?” Thing One snorted. “Guess the Wizard Houses didn’t. Now their parents are all dead, and nobody knows what kind of monsters they’ll grow up to be. They’re in agony, most of them, and they’ll probably die anyway. More die every day. It seems to me that the kindest thing to do would be to put them out of their misery.”

“What are you suggesting?” Thing Two said sharply. “I need this job. I don’t plan on leaving until the mine’s played out. A few more months in Brazil, and I’ll never have to work again. I consider it combat pay.”

“I’m just saying that it’d be easier if there weren’t so many.”

“Mutant kids or diamonds?”

Their laughter faded as they walked on down the hallway.

Fear prickled the back of Jonah’s neck. Were Jonah and the others going to die? He touched his chest, which still burned sometimes, enough to wake him from sleep. Sometimes he still had to use the basin they left beside the bed. Sometimes he sweated blood.

But at least now he was strong. Strong enough to explore.

As he slid to the floor, he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror over the sink. He didn’t look like a monster. He looked the same as always—shaggy black hair, blue eyes, the tattoo of a flower on his arm, like everyone else’s. Maybe thinner and sadder than before.

Jonah gripped the cuff around his ankle, trying to slide his foot through. It wouldn’t fit. All he did was scrape off some skin. Frustrated, he yanked at the ankle band, and it came apart in his hands. Startled, he let the pieces fall onto

the coverlet and looked around, but of course nobody was watching.

If he’d known it would be so easy, he’d have done it before now.

He snuck to the door, only to find that it was locked. Frustrated, he wrenched at the handle, and managed to pull the door right off its hinges. He tumbled backward on his rear, the door on top.

He scrambled to his feet in a panic. I didn’t mean to, he thought. I didn’t mean to break the door.

*They shouldn’t have locked me in.*

At the end of the hallway, in what had been the gym, he found dozens of children lying in row after row of beds. Some he recognized, and some he couldn’t. Some were covered in wounds and blisters, others in scales and feathers. Some were beautiful, frail, pulsing with light, like the fairy children in Jeanette’s stories. Some didn’t look like children at all. All were hooked up to machines and bags of fluids that dripped into them. It was a horrible place. A horrible room.

“Jonah?”

Jonah flinched, startled. The voice came from a nearby bed. It was Alison Shaw, another Seven. She looked thinner than he remembered, and pale, with dark circles under her eyes.

“Alison!” he said, thrilled to finally find someone he knew. “Are you—?”

“Shhh!” Alison put her finger to her lips. “Don’t let them hear.” She held up her hands, and Jonah saw that she had mittens on, too. And chains that bound her to the bed frame. “How did you get out? They said you were locked up.”

“I broke the door,” Jonah said, to keep it simple. “Why do they have you chained up?”

“Never mind. Can you get me loose?”

Jonah took hold of the chain and broke it.

“How did you do that?” Alison asked, squinting at him, looking impressed. “Show me.”

Jonah shrugged. “These chains aren’t very good, I guess. Where is everyone else? What about Rudy? And Miranda?”

“I don’t know. They never let me out of this room. Have you seen Kenzie?”

“He’s dead,” Jonah said around the lump in his throat. “Didn’t you know?”

“No, he isn’t,” Alison said. “They have him locked up, too.”

Jonah’s heart stuttered. Then started up again, beating hard and fast. “Where? Where is he?”

Alison slid off her bed and onto the floor. “I think it’s this way.”

They crept out of the Horrible Room and down the hallway. They turned a corner and practically collided with Thing One and Thing Two. Two of the nursing assistants were with them. Jonah might have run back the way he came, but now they stood between him and Kenzie.

“Jonah!” Thing One said, taking a quick step back. It was the first time he’d called Jonah by name. “How’d you get out of your room?”

“Where’s Kenzie?” Jonah demanded, fisting his hands.

“We were just coming to get you,” Thing One said, glancing at Thing Two. “Would you like to see him?”

Alison and Jonah looked at each other. “Why’d you tell me he was dead?” Jonah said.

“We didn’t want to get your hopes up,” Thing Two said, his eyes flicking down to Jonah’s mittened hands. “He’s been very ill, and so have you. We thought it was better to wait.” He gestured down the corridor. “It’s this way.”

Thing One blocked Alison’s way as she tried to follow. “Not you. You need to go back to bed.”

“I want to go with Jonah.”

Thing Two nodded to the nursing assistants. Each took one of Alison’s arms and dragged her, still protesting, in the other direction.

“Why can’t Alison come, too?” Jonah asked.

“Your brother’s too sick. One visitor at a time. You’ll see.”

Fear quivered through Jonah. He’d just gotten Kenzie back, and now he might lose him again.

They made several twists and turns, and Jonah realized they were on their way to the dining hall. Why the dining hall?

They passed through it and crossed the yard toward the kitchen, which was in a separate building. Jonah heard helicopters, at a distance, but coming fast. That was odd. Helicopters often came and went, bringing medicine and supplies, but never at this time of day.

Thing One and Thing Two didn’t seem to hear them. Jonah scanned the slice of murky sky overhead, but the Things hurried him along, into the kitchen building, and back to the storerooms and freezers.

“Kenzie’s *here*?”

“It’s the safest place,” Thing Two said, unlocking the door to a huge, stainless-steel freezer.

“He’s in the *freezer*?” Jonah’s voice came out in a terrified squeak.

“It’s not turned *on*,” Thing Two said, impatiently, pushing open the door.

He switched on the light, but it wasn’t necessary, because Kenzie himself lit up the entire room. He sat on the floor in the corner, knees drawn up to his chin, his arms wrapped around his knees. Flames flickered across his skin—the same blue-white flames Jonah remembered from the night his parents and Marcy had died.

“He’s still on fire!” Jonah cried. “Why don’t you put it out!”

“We can’t,” Thing One said. “He makes the flame himself. He’s been burning since the night of the massacre.”

Kenzie didn’t have any clothes on. Maybe that was why Alison hadn’t been allowed to come.

Jonah crept closer. Though Kenzie was burning, he shivered and shook constantly, his teeth chattering, his eyes rolling back in his head. Now and then his head banged against the wall.

“You should give him a helmet,” Jonah said, because he couldn’t think of anything else to say.

“We’d *like* to help him,” Thing Two said, shrugging his shoulders. “I mean, we’ve been leaving him food and water. But, unfortunately, we can’t get near him.”

“Kenzie,” Jonah said. “It’s me, Jonah.”

The sound of Jonah’s voice seemed to catch Kenzie’s attention. The shaking eased, and his little brother leaned forward, hands on his knees, eyes wide with fright. “Jonah? Help me! Please help me! I’m so c-cold. And hungry.”

Jonah was desperate to help. “Can’t you at least get him a blanket?” he said.

“They just burn up,” Thing One said. The two Things

looked at each other, then Thing One continued. “You *can* help him, though.”

“Me?” Jonah blinked up at the tall man beside him. “How?”

“You can put the fire out, Jonah,” Thing Two said softly. “There are so many children here you can help. Will you?”

“I guess so,” Jonah said warily, looking up into Thing Two’s face. “I do want to help.”

Thing Two brought out a shiny pair of scissors. Thing One held Jonah’s wrists while Thing Two carefully cut Jonah’s mittens off. Then stepped back quickly.

Jonah flexed his fingers, glad to have the mittens off, but puzzled at the same time.

The freezer door was slightly ajar. Outside, Jonah could hear people talking and footsteps coming closer. Thing One and Thing Two didn’t seem to hear, maybe because Jonah’s hearing was better than theirs.

“I’ll wait outside,” Thing Two said, turning away.

“You’ll stay right here,” Thing One growled under his breath. “You agreed to this, now man up.” He turned to Jonah. “Now, Jonah. Just take Kenzie’s hand. It will put the fire out.”

“Why would that put the fire out?” When they didn’t answer right away, Jonah said, “Won’t I get burned?”

“We think the fire will go right out. Give it a try,” Thing One coaxed.

Why were they coaxing him? He wasn’t a healer. Jonah looked up at Thing One and saw the lies behind his eyes.

“No,” he said, turning his back on Kenzie and facing the two Things.

“Look at him,” Thing Two said. “You think he’s happy the way he is?”

He took a step toward Jonah, and Jonah raised both hands in defense. To his surprise, Thing Two flinched back, his face going fish-belly pale.

Thing Two was afraid of Jonah. Why? They wanted him to touch Kenzie. Why?

“We can’t help Kenzie,” Thing One said to Jonah, his voice roughening from silk to burlap. “We need to focus on the ones that might actually survive.”

“No,” Jonah said.

“Would you want to live like that? This is the kindest thing you can do for him now.”

“No,” Jonah said.

“I told you this wouldn’t work!” Thing Two said.

“He’ll come around,” Thing One said. “He’s a smart boy. He’ll figure it out.”

“That’s the problem. He *has* figured it out,” Thing Two spat. “Why don’t you—”

The door to the freezer banged open. In the doorway stood one of Jonah’s music teachers, a man named Gabriel, who only stayed at Thorn Hill part of the year. Who’d been away the night everybody died.

“Who do you think you are?” Thing One spluttered, blocking Gabriel’s path. “This is private property, and if you think you—”

“I’m Gabriel Mandrake, I own this property, and I pay your salary, I believe.”

“Mandrake!” Thing One seemed to shrink, right before Jonah’s eyes. “You should have told us you were coming. We could have prepared—”

“That was the idea,” Gabriel said. “A surprise visit. It looks to me like you’ve been spending more time working the mines than doing the work I’m paying you for.”

Thing One licked his lips. “Well, you know, we thought it was important to keep it going, to raise funds for the kids—for their future and all.”

Gabriel pushed past the Things and on into the freezer, followed by Alison and—

“Jeanette!” Jonah cried.

But Jeanette didn’t answer. Her eyes were fixed on Kenzie, her face displaying disbelief and then growing horror.

When Gabriel saw Kenzie—when he saw him naked on the floor in the freezer—he flinched, his face first going pale as milk, then dark with fury. “Good God,” he said, turning on the Things. “What were you thinking? They’re children.”

“That’s easy for you to say,” Thing One said. “They’re dangerous. If you’d seen what we’ve seen, you—”

“I’ve seen enough,” Gabriel said, his voice low and hoarse. He looked different than Jonah remembered, thin and scruffy and sad.

Jeanette crossed to Kenzie and knelt beside him, talking to him soothingly. She wasn’t afraid. As Jonah watched, she reached into her carry bag and pulled out a brown bottle.

Jonah squatted next to Jeanette, as close as he dared come. “What’s that?” he said as she poured some of the sludgy brown contents into a spoon.

“It’s a medicine that might relieve his symptoms some by dampening down the magic.” That was one thing Jonah always liked about Jeanette: she always told the truth.

Jeanette tried to guide the spoon to Kenzie’s mouth, but he flailed around so much she couldn’t hit her target.

“Kenzie,” Jonah said. “What’s that song you like? That John Lennon song?”

Kenzie blinked up at him. “Imagine,” he whispered through cracked lips.

Jonah began to sing, softly. Kenzie’s body relaxed and his movements slowed enough that Jeanette was able to slide the spoon between his lips.

The Things were still arguing with Gabriel. “I have the baseline numbers,” Gabriel said, his voice low and tight. “Two thousand adults and three thousand children dead. There were a thousand children who survived. Where are they? How many have died since you took over?”

Thing One and Thing Two looked at each other. “Maybe a couple hundred?” Thing One ventured.

“No,” Gabriel said. His entire body slumped, and he covered his face with his hands. Tears leaked between his fingers. “I never thought—I never even guessed it would be this bad.”

“Yeah, well, now you know,” Thing One said. Like usual, Thing Two wasn’t saying much. He slid to the floor in the corner, and put his head in his hands.

Kenzie’s fire had finally gone out, and he sagged back against Jeanette’s shoulder, exhausted. Jonah would have thought he’d be covered in blisters, but he wasn’t. Maybe the flames he made himself didn’t burn him.

“Alison,” Jeanette said, rocking Kenzie back and forth, rubbing his back, her voice calm as ever. As if she took care of flaming boys every day. “Can you bring Kenzie some water and some of those animal crackers he likes? And a box of chicken broth.”

Jonah could tell Alison wanted to stay and listen, but she left anyway.

“Jonah,” Jeanette said, giving him a tired smile. “I’m so glad to see you up and walking around. Do you think you can find your brother a blanket?”

As Jonah ducked through the door, Thing One said, “So, I guess now you can see what we’re dealing with here. It hasn’t been easy, believe me.”

“Is that why you’ve been chaining children to their beds?” Jeanette’s voice stung like a whip.

There was a new nervousness in Thing One’s voice as he replied. “You have to understand, there’s been too much to do, too little manpower, not enough—”

“Yes, it’s no wonder you’re shorthanded, when I found ten people working in the mines,” Gabriel put in. “Ten people I’m paying to take care of children.”

Jonah found a blanket back in the Horrible Room, where newly arrived healers were busy unchaining children and examining them, questioning them in gentle voices. Some of the healers were weeping.

When Jonah returned with Kenzie’s blanket, Thing One was scowling, his voice rising in protest. “Listen, some of these kids haven’t stopped heaving since we came here. Others are so deformed they make *us* want to throw up. And that’s just the tip of the iceberg. You fire us, we leave Brazil for good. Then good luck finding other healers to come out here to this godforsaken place and take care of *that*.” He pointed at Kenzie as Jonah wrapped the blanket around his brother’s shoulders. “Do you even understand what you’re dealing with? See his big brother here? Cute kid. Only thing is, his touch is lethal. He killed his own sister.”

Thing One kept talking, but Jonah wasn’t listening. Marcy? He’d killed Marcy? He extended his hands, studying

them. Turned them over and looked at the backs. They didn't look any different than they always had.

"Don't worry, Jonah," Jeanette said, softly, brushing his hair out of his eyes. Leaning down to kiss his forehead. "Whatever happened, it wasn't your fault."

Tears came to Jonah's eyes. Nobody had kissed him—hardly anyone had touched him for two months.

"The point is," Thing One said, "most sorcerers wouldn't set foot in here after what happened. They don't want to risk the Wizard Guild coming after them."

"Maybe some people are braver than you," Gabriel said. "Now get out, before I have you arrested."

## ☞ CHAPTER ONE ☞ MEAN OLD WORLD

By the time she woke up in the booth at Mickey's, Emma Claire Greenwood hadn't been home in three days. She knew it was wrong, that Sonny Lee would be worried, even though she'd called him every day. They'd agreed on that the last time they'd had a sit-down about her wild ways.

But it was sweet summertime in Memphis, and the call of the streets was like a siren song—impossible to resist. School was out, and there was no place she had to be.

Sleep all day, then stay out all night, walking pavement still breathing heat at midnight. Passing open doorways, letting the delicious music sluice over her from all the little clubs. Music that picked your heart apart and put it back together again. She was just sixteen, but she had a ticket into every club in Memphis. She'd sit in with bands all over town, big names and unknowns. Mickey put it this way: "That girl Emma? She's an old soul. That girl can play the blues."

It sure didn't hurt that she was Sonny Lee Greenwood's