

Grim Hill The Secret Deepens

From the "Grim Hill" Series



written by

Linda DeMeulemeester

Grim Hill: The Secret Deepens
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CHAPTER 1

The Battle Begins

IT WAS A stupid argument, one better not to get involved in – except the new boy at school made my blood boil.

I leaned forward, but that only made Clive tower over me. So instead I drew myself up and put my hands on my hips. In my most menacing voice, I said, “What do you mean boys are better at soccer.”

“Girls are better at other things. Like, well, not sports, but you know ...” Clive said in an arrogant way. When I turned to shut my locker and leave, he continued. “Guys are faster, stronger ... more agile. Sorry,” he said with a smirk, “but you can’t argue with nature.”

“That’s ... that’s ... just crap.” Okay, maybe that wasn’t the cleverest reply, but it’s difficult to think of smart remarks when your blood is pumping so hard behind your eyes that you see spots. Besides, I didn’t like the way the sunlight came through the narrow hall window and pooled directly behind Clive. His black curly hair lit up like a halo, and his skin seemed to glow. Clive appeared as if he truly was a golden boy.

“‘Crap’ ... uh huh ... that’s telling him, Cat.” My friend Mia winced, twisting a strand of red hair around her finger. I didn’t notice her coming up with anything better.

“Nothing personal,” said Zach, the most popular boy in our grade. Once I had thought he liked me – that is, until I found out he had only liked me because he’d fallen under a

spell. Actually last month the whole town had been under the magical glamour of fairies – fairies that were up to nothing but nasty things.

Zach put his hand against my locker door and swung it back and forth. “It’s just that Darkmont High only has enough money in the budget to sponsor one soccer team and pay for the transportation and tournament costs. They are going to send their best team to the intramurals. That’s us.” Then he slammed my door shut with a clang to drive his point home.

He gave me that half-grin that should have made my heart beat faster, but it didn’t. I wouldn’t let it. Why did the guys think they were so great? I couldn’t understand why Zach agreed with this new boy. He had seen the girls play and he knew how good we were.

“Who says you’re the best team,” I muttered. Even though the girls had formed our own team only a few weeks ago, our skills were awesome. Every single girl on the team had been in the Halloween match – the game most of us hardly remembered, and those of us who did, tried to forget how close we came to a terrible fate. But one thing was sure – we didn’t forget all the skills we’d learned after hundreds of hours of soccer practice.

“Yeah,” Amarjeet joined in the argument. “We can out-play you guys any day of the week.”

“Right.” Clive rolled his eyes and all the boys laughed.

How did Clive get to be so popular so fast? He’d only started Darkmont a couple of weeks before and already he was the captain of the soccer team. He acted so sure of himself, and even some of the girls standing around us smiled at him while he mocked us. It didn’t help my opinion of him that I’d gotten off to such a rough start. I’d been the

new kid in September, and any friend I had in the eighth grade was hard earned – even though I was popular in my old town. Besides, nobody had made me captain of the girls’ team, and that was something I wanted more than anything.

I got an idea. “So you guys think your team’s the best? Prove it.”

The boys stopped laughing. Clive did a double take and asked, “What do you mean?”

“We’ll have a soccer match – girls against the boys. Whoever wins gets to sign up as Darkmont’s team for the intramurals.”

“But you’ll need a sponsor.” Zach wasn’t grinning anymore. Was he looking a little worried, perhaps?

“We’ll get a sponsor.” Amarjeet sounded as if she thought this was a great idea.

“Who?” asked Mitch, one of the school’s best athletes. “It has to be a teacher.” He ran his hand through the short stubble on his scalp. I couldn’t help notice Mia watch his every move. I guess I wasn’t the only one who missed the magical popularity we’d gained during the Halloween match.

Amarjeet shrugged her shoulders. Finding another teacher to sponsor us at Darkmont was as likely as kicking a ball and landing a goal two soccer fields away – while blindfolded. Teachers at Darkmont never seemed to have time to supervise extracurricular activities.

The bell rang and we scrambled to get to science class. Mia and I raced up the stairs along the dingy hallway with its yellowing linoleum and flickering lights. Mitch followed, nattering behind us. “Your girls’ team doesn’t have a chance. Don’t you know all the top athletes in the world are men?”

As we walked into the classroom, I’d had about enough and shouted, “That’s a load of crap!”

Mia rolled her eyes. I think she wished I'd expand my vocabulary. Worse, Ms. Dreeble had been writing on the board, and as her hand slid down, the black marker left a trail. She twisted around.

"Cat Peters, I beg your pardon. What kind of language is that?"

I meant to say "sorry" in a sincere way, but my temper flared. "The boys are saying that they deserve to be the soccer team Darkmont sponsors in the intramurals and that girls can't be the best athletes." And because it felt good to let this all out, I kept going. "It shouldn't be a given. All we want is a chance to prove it to them with a soccer match."

Ms. Dreeble peered over her glasses and said, "Come again? What's this all about?"

For once I made a wise choice and I didn't keep arguing. I told myself I should keep this whole silence thing in mind for future problems. "Ask Mitch," I said as innocently as possible. Then I quietly slipped away.

As Mitch and Ms. Dreeble got into it, I slid onto the lab stool wedged between Mia and Amanda. The classroom was super-crowded, but now it felt quite comfortable as I listened to Mitch seal his doom by saying, "But aren't there are a lot more famous male scientists?"

Science had never gone better. For the whole lab, Ms. Dreeble kept Mitch standing beside her desk as she recited a long list of female scientists. I ignored the lecture notes on the board about electrical charges. It seemed more important to scribble in my notebook as Ms. Dreeble rattled off famous women's names.

Mitch paled as he heard about Annie J. Cannon, an early astronomer, or Sophie Germain, who discovered an equation almost three hundred years ago that was still used in

constructing today's skyscrapers. Most of what Ms. Dreeble was saying was news to me. That got me going even more.

Ms. Dreeble told the class that many of those scientists couldn't even publish their work under their own names because they were women. I swear, I could see a tear in her eye. It was all I could do not to stick my tongue out at Mitch. I'll admit I looked kind of smug.

When the bell rang and Mia and I filed out, Ms. Dreeble said, "Cat, Mia, please come see me."

I should have known she'd finally gotten around to me. I thought she forgot about my inappropriate language. Nervously, we walked back. First Ms. Dreeble frowned, and I began calculating how I'd pick up my little sister from school *and* serve detention. Then she said, "I'll be happy to sponsor the girls' soccer team."

I stood there with my mouth open, mostly because what was going through my mind was that I always felt as if she unfairly picked on me. Finally, I managed to chime in with Mia. "Wow, thank you ... that's ... great."

Then Mia and I rushed off to the cafeteria to tell Amarjeet and the other girls the good news. I was so impressed with Ms. Dreeble that I vowed to play the best soccer anyone had ever seen. Maybe I would even pay more attention in science.

Smells of onions and grease hit me as I entered the lunchroom. Darkmont wasn't exactly known for its gourmet cuisine. We circled the tables and told everyone about our sponsor. Mitch was updating the guys. I noticed a lot of the popular boys and girls sitting at his table, and when Clive's clear laughter rang around the room, I could guess what he thought was so amusing – that the girls weren't going to give him any competition. I got up and walked

toward their table, determined to tell Clive just how wrong he was, but I lost some confidence when I spotted Emily sitting next to him.

Sure, Emily was a popular girl, but I'd come to think of her as one of us – meaning the group of girls who'd pulled together and fought the fairies on Grim Hill. We'd all worked together then. Besides, Emily was our team captain. How could she be such a sell-out sitting with the guys?

"As Mitch told you, Ms. Dreeble is sponsoring our team," I said to Clive. "Guess you're worried now."

"We're all good," said Clive glancing over his shoulder as the boys nodded in agreement. "We'll keep our end of the bargain. Whoever wins the match becomes the team Darkmont sponsors for the intramurals."

Then he held out his hand for me to shake. As if. But Mia came up behind me and whispered, "No point in being a bad sport." Was she falling under his charms as well? Even though I knew she had a point, I smiled when I said to him, "Let's hold off and shake hands on the soccer field when the girls are the winning team."

Then Emily stood up and crossed over to my side. She didn't seem the least bit angry. She giggled as she said to the boys, "We are going to mop you guys up on the soccer field. Cat's an awesome player, and so are Mia and Amarjeet."

"I'm sure they are. And I know you all play well," said Clive. Then he added with a grin, "For girls."

Everyone started to laugh. What was so funny? Didn't they see through this jerk? Didn't they know it wasn't just a game at stake? That we had to prove ourselves to these boys once and for all? I couldn't help but look around at everyone and shake my head.

"What's the matter, Cat?" Emily said. "It's all in fun,

right?"

"Right," I lied. I managed a nod. There was nothing that I wanted more than to score the winning goal. And only then would I walk up to Clive and say with a little smile, "Good game." Only then would we shake hands. I let that scene play over in my mind for most of the afternoon as I thought about how unfair things were sometimes.

Later in history class when Mr. Morrows discussed important inventions in the Industrial Revolution, I stuck my hand up.

"Yes, Cat?" Mr. Morrows looked kind of surprised. "You have a comment?"

Yes, I did – even though I usually tried to hide behind my textbook. "Ada Lovelace, the daughter of Lord Byron, invented the first software for the 'difference engine,' the great grandfather of the computer," I said checking my notes from Ms. Dreeble's lecture.

"That was late 1800s," said Clive who always stuck his hand up, "which wasn't the time of the Industrial Revolution."

"Um ... that's correct, Clive," said Mr. Morrows. Oh yeah, Clive always had the right answer, too. I seethed.

"Okay," I said. "Um ..." I scanned the notes. "Well how about Caroline Herschel who helped discover Saturn's rings in the late 1700s."

"The right time, but that's not exactly an invention," Clive said in such a pompous way. "Besides, those women were only assistants or daughters of famous people."

I began ranting. "So what?" I said, but Mr. Morrows interrupted.

"Let's not get too sidetracked." Mr. Morrow's mustache twitched as if he was hiding a smile. What was so funny?

He cleared his throat. "And science is a collaborative field, Clive."

I wasn't exactly sure what that meant. Before I could decide if Mr. Morrows was on my side, he sprang a pop quiz. It only made me a lot angrier when Clive got the highest mark in the class, beating my own score by five marks. Who cared about steam engines anyway?

All the way home I imagined soccer plays while I dribbled every rock I could find and shot stones off my foot, pretending to score a goal. I had to beat Clive's ... uh ... the boys' team. As I turned down my street, I looked up at Grim Hill. It was all forest now, with no spooky school or soccer fields left. Instead, a green hill sat under a gray November sky, safe as could be ...

Except, no one ever walked up the hill anymore. No one. And right now, when I looked very carefully at the evergreen trees near the top of the hill, I thought I could see strange green and yellow lights flickering between them. I quickly looked away.

This is what it must feel like to be a villager looking up every day at the island volcano and wondering if it was going to erupt.

There were wicked fairies locked up inside that hill.