

Across the Globes

(Meret Blume)

Part One: Mysterious Manor

Somewhere, in a city in England, at the corner of the street, there stands a abandoned mansion. There's an eerie air surrounding it, effectively attracting the attention of one very lonely, very curious girl—Emily Leigh.

Since the death of her parents 3 years ago, she's lived in Brighton with her aunt Aimee, a strict woman with more stress than she deserves, and no time for raising a child. But, she is Emily's relative, and as far as the government is concerned, the only option.

When exploring the neighborhood 2 years ago, Emily found the abandoned manor, drawing her in without fail. With metal gates surrounding the property, an illegible sign on the gate, and surprisingly sturdy looking yet greying roof, there's an unmistakable, mysterious charm about the place.

When Emily first asked about it, Aimee claimed it to be some long forgotten millionaires manor, long empty, but Emily could never learn so much as a name of the last owner.

So, on every Saturday for two years, she visited the house, reclining on a bench on the opposite side of the street, spending hours there, drawing and writing, sometimes simply looking at her phone.

Today, is different.

Today her curiosity overwhelms, and with little thought, she crosses the street, past the red phone booth at the corner of the sidewalk, and stands in front of the gates. She's never been this close to the property, and from here, she can tell she could pry the gates open with her bare hands, rust weakening the metal.

So she does.

She slips between the small space she's created, onto the stone pavement that's crumbling under her feet. She huffs, readjusting her backpack, checking that none of her clothing is caught on the gate, before turning towards the house.

The garden is littered with dying trees, and a rocky stone pathway leading to the front door. For all it's worth, the house definitely doesn't look as bad as the yard would lead you to believe, maybe a little worn from weather, but overall not falling apart.

She takes a deep breath, mustering more courage than she has.

"No turning back," she mutters, "it's now or never."

And with one last sigh, her hand wraps around the doorknob, and she pushes open the oak wood doors, stepping into the foyer.

Part Two: Curiosity Killed The Cat

The house is a wreck.

There are signs of struggle, or maybe simply the passage of time, as wallpaper is curling off the walls, furniture overturned, and the carpet torn, and spider webs nestled in every nook and cranny. She gags, quickly turning on her flashlight.

There's a pair of dressers in the foyer, under a cracked mirror, crawling with spiders and dust. The dressers have some kind of silvery, intricate bird pattern, and seems of high quality. They aren't ruined, and with a little soap and water could be resold quite nicely. As is the truth for most of the furniture. Looking into the living room, she can tell the only really ruined furniture are the sofas, torn up but still somewhat charming.

She hums, leaving the living room and heading into the kitchen at the end of the hall. Here she finds intricately designed dishes, and a blue tea pot that looks like her grandma could own it. there's a clock in the corner of the room that reads 1 PM.

The thing that weirds her out?

The hands have not stopped moving.

A shiver runs down her spine, and she decides to ignore it, as she ventures into the study next to the kitchen. There's a large oak desk, the papers on it decaying, the paintjob of the

globe that's on it surprisingly intact. She smiles, always finding globes such charming decorations.

She gently spins the globe, careful not to break the delicate build, and watches as it turns— blissfully unaware of how the world outside shifts from the stuffy Brighton air, to much more vibrant—and unknown—landscape.

She ventures upstairs next, passing a painting of a tiger and a flamingo, whose eyes seem to follow her around the tear of the paper.

At the top of the stairs are four doors, and one of them painted red, the only thing that seems to have been kept well. She decides that this is her door of choice, and wraps her hand around the handle.

And she opens the door.

Part Three: Stranger Danger

Immediately, she freezes.

The room she finds is in perfect condition, bookshelves reaching around the walls, lined with books, a plush sofa that looks a little lumpy, a desk, and floor to ceiling windows overlooking a glass lake, in the middle of a thick forest.

And amidst the books and furniture?

A boy, not much older than her, with dark hair and hazel eyes, and moles decorating his skin.

“Who in the hells—” he gasps, then glares raising his hand, suddenly engulfed in a green glow, “What are you doing here? Who are you? How did you get in—” he shakes his head, “No, nevermind. Who in the hells are you?!”

Emily's hands fly to a 'don't shoot' position on either side of her head, “I'm sorry! I didn't know someone still lived here! I've—I've never seen anyone in the yard, and there's no car parking on the street, and it looked abandoned—”

“Car?” he repeats, “what the bloody hell is a car?”

Emily pales, eyes widening, “What?” she rushes to the window, looking outside, horror stretching over her face, “oh my god. Where am I?”

“Auren,” the boy answers, “how do you not know that?”

Emily turns around, “just a second ago I was in *Brighton*,” she shakes her head, “Where the fuck is *Auren*?”

The boy’s eyes widen, “Brighton?” he frowns, pauses, then murmurs, “who would enchant...” he shakes his head and addresses Emily, “Which world do you hail from?”

“World?” she echoes, “uh, Earth?”

The boy pauses, then the glow on his hand fades, and he sighs, “such a complicated Enchantment should not be performed so carelessly.”

“Wait what?” Emily shakes her head, “what’s going on? *Enchantment*?” she huffs, crossing her arms, “and I still don’t have a name, mister.”

“Nor do I,” he claps back, then holds his breath, before sighing, shoulders slumping. A moment later he’s taking in a deep breath, posture straightening. “I am Oliver Raine,” he bows deeply, “Magician.”

“Magici--?” Emily shakes her head, turning her body to him, “I’m Emily Leigh. Uh, Artist. Librarian?”

Oliver huffs, “Well. Emily, you happened to find an enchanted object. Apparently enchanted with a teleportation spell.”

Emily frowns, “why would someone enchant a globe? To teleport?”

Oliver shrugs, “Someone clearly wanted to cross between our worlds, is it not obvious?”

Emily crosses her arms, quirking a brow, “Clearly, not.”

Oliver rolls his eyes, "Fine. I need to return home anyway. We will look into this there."

She quirks a brow, "What? Why? Can't I just use the Globe to get back?"

Oliver sighs, "if you're lucky, maybe, but I doubt it's still there, seeing at how powerful magic was involved."

"But I can go check?"

He hums, "if you so desire."

Emily puffs out her chest, stalking past Oliver, down the stairs again. He watches her leave, pauses to blink, then sighs, beginning to follow her lead.

"Wait for me, Earthling," he sighs.

Part Four: Journey's Begin

"I don't understand!" Emily groans, gesturing to the now empty space, "it was right here!"

Oliver rolls his eyes, "Well, it's clearly no longer here."

"Why!"

He groans, "Well, clearly it was either destroyed after it fulfilled it's use or..."

Emily leans forward, eyebrows raised, "Or???"

"Stolen."

Emily's mouth snaps shut, she pauses, blinks, then groans, slumping against the wall.

“Do not despair, Earthling,” he says, turning to the door, “there are ways to return you to your world.”

“Really?” she perks up, then pushes off the wall, “I thought the spell was hard?”

“It’s not hard,” he rolls his eyes, “simply a nuisance. However, if the globe was destroyed, that means it is highly outdated.”

“And if it’s stolen?”

Oliver looks at Emily, “then we must simply locate it.”

She huffs, “Simply.” He nods.

“Sooo...” Emily drawls, “our first stop is....figuring out if it’s destroyed or not.” Oliver nods.

“A simple memory spell should do the trick,” he says, swiping some dust off a shelf, “the last 30 minutes will be shown to us. You’ve been here for maybe 15.”

He says a chant in a language Emily can’t decipher, tossing the dust into the room. For a second, nothing happens, then, a soft golden glow covers the room, and Emily feels far, far away, like in a galaxy made of gold.

A starry outline of the globe appears, right where she left it, and for several minutes, that is all they see. Then, she appears, walking away from it, seemingly appearing from thin air. A few seconds after her spectral form leaves the room, a swirling hole in the air appears, and a person hops into the room. They have long silver hair, and black eyes. Their eyes dart around before they snatch the globe, then jump through the portal again.

“Spirits,” Oliver hisses as the spell dissolves, “of course it was her.”

“Do you know her?” Emily asks.

He sighs, “regrettably. She is a court mage, like I am, at the Krisworth Palace.”

“You’re a court mage?” Emily asks.

“well, more like a retainer,” he corrects, “but yes. Now, come, we must head back to said palace. We must find Thalia.”

“Who’s that?”

“The one who stole your ticket home,” he replies, “she is not evil, simply...enjoys experimenting on unsuspecting subjects.”

Oliver turns, leading the way out of the manor, as Emily nearly trips as she follows. As they leave, she realizes the manor here, was in fact ruins of a palace, with black stone and red accents.

“How will we find her?” Emily asks.

“There’s a party tonight,” Oliver replies, “to find the Princess a suitable partner, but the court is required to be there. Some will be sent to other kingdoms, but it is mainly a formality.”

“I see...” Emily hums, then looks up, “does the partner have to be a prince?”

“No?” Oliver says, mildly confused, “a princess would do just as well.”

Emily smiles to herself, “and a commoner?”

“It is not unheard of,” he nods, “but would be far more complicated to arrange.”

Emily hums.

“we’ll head in through the servants’ gate,” he explains, “we must find you suitable attire to blend in for the party.”

“I’m going?” Emily asks. He rolls his eyes.

“I can’t let you wander around alone,” he shakes his head, “royals cannot be trusted.”

“So you’re not interested in the Princess.”

He scoffs, “I’m not interested in anyone, Earthling.”

Emily scowls, “okay. What are you interested in, then?”

“Magic,” Oliver shrugs, “justice, I think.”

“You think?”

He sighs, “I have an interest in human rights, yes.”

Emily hums, a smile creeping onto her lips, “are you close with anyone?”

Oliver shrugs, “Zari isn’t a bad person.”

“Zari?”

Oliver meets her gaze, “the Princess.”

Part Five: Palace Pals

The two new friends slip into the palace through the servants’ gates, heading straight for the winding passageways, meant for said servants to pass through the palace undetected, heading straight for Zari’s quarters.

“Why are we heading to the Princess’ room?” Emily asks. “Am I not only supposed to blend in?”

“Yes,” Oliver nods, “but to allow you to the party tonight, you need to at least look the part of a noble.”

“So...what? I’m dressing up as a...?”

“a Princess,” he hums, “simply from the visiting kingdom of...what did you say? Brighton?”

Emily blushes, “you think I can pull that off?”

He pauses, looking at her over his shoulder, “I don’t know. Do you?”

“What?”

“It’s all a question of confidence, my dear Emilia,” he says, pressing forward again, “if you think you can pull it off, you can.”

She pauses.

“My name is Emily.”

When the two finally stop, it is behind a painting leading to the Princess’ chambers. Through the paper, they hear a voice speak.

“Tell the Lord of Stiles to make sure his weapons are left at the armory this time,” the voice says, “we’d hate to have a repeat of last year. I do not want to have to prove his innocence once more.”

There's a short hum, shuffling of feet, and the door closes. A second passes, before a sigh can be heard, and after a beat, the voice speaks up:

"I know you're there, Oliver. The coast is clear, so come out already."

Oliver huffs, easing the portrait door open and stepping into the room, "why so grumpy, Princess?"

She rolls her eyes, and as she claps back "planning a party isn't as easy as my parents made it out to be", Emily is captivated by her.

She has pitch black hair, cut in a pixie cut style, brown skin, and freckles spotting her entire body, though the amount grows at her hands, and exposed shoulders. Jewelry adorns her ears, fingers, wrists and neck, and a circlet rests on her head.

She's...*stunning*.

"who is your friend?" the Princess asks.

Oliver hums, and as he steps aside, Emily is extremely aware of how warm her face feels, "Zari, this is Emily, an earthling."

The effect is immediate, and the tension melts from Zari's shoulders, "Earth? You're from the human realms?" she asks, approaching Emily. She is slightly taller than Emily, towering over her, but not in an intimidating way.

"Um," Emily stutters, "I...yes?"

"Fascinating!" Zari beams, then, addressing Oliver, "I've always wanted to meet an Earthling!"

"Well she isn't here by choice," Oliver sighs, "one of Thalia's experiments brought her here."

Zari backs away, the excitement dimming, "let me guess. No proof?"

Oliver shakes his head, “again, she’s escaped before I could catch her in the act.”

Zari sighs, “Very well. I’m assuming you will confront her at the party, tonight?”

Oliver nods, “Yes.”

Zari smiles, addressing Emily, “so you will need to blend in.”

Emily flinches, then forcing herself to nod, “Yes....yes, Ma’am.”

Zari blinks, expression blank, then laughs, “oh, please, call me Zari! Ma’am makes me seem so old.”

Finally, Emily’s shoulders relax, “Oh...okay.”

Zari claps her hands, “ooh, this is great! Tell me, Emily, can you dance?”

“Ballroom?” Emily inquires, then after a frantic nod of Zari’s, “uhh...I waltz. That’s it.”

“That’s all I need!” Zari says, “in exchange for helping you home, I request you save a dance for me.”

Emily flushes, flustered and shocked, “I—What? Why...why me?”

“So she doesn’t have to duke it out with some selfish low-life,” Oliver deadpans, earning a elbow to the ribs from the Princess.

“What?” Emily asks, “do you not want to get married?”

Zari tenses up, then sighs. “No. I do not.” She straightens, “I will be crowned queen soon, and the council insists I need to at least try to find a spouse. The truth is, I’m doing fine ruling of my own accord, but...it is a public thing.”

Emily frowns, “I see.”

“In any case,” she says, brightening as she claps her hands, “let’s find you a dress, hmm?”

Part Six: A Masquerade

The castle looked beautiful in daylight, but as the sun sets, and the torches flicker on, and wagons roll through the courtyard, Emily finds herself unable to decide what is more beautiful—the view by day, or night.

She’s sitting on the wall of Zari’s balcony, watching people fill the courtyard and great hall.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?”

The voice behind her shocks her, and she turns to see Zari, now dressed in a regal violet, a golden tiara replacing her circlet on her head. Emily smiles, looking away from her as she strides towards the edge of the balcony.

“It is,” she nods, “there’s nothing like this on earth.”

Zari nods, “I’ve read that Earth is quite lacking in magic power,” her eyes meet Emily’s, “is this true?”

Emily shrugs, “I mean, we don’t have the levitation and stuff, but we have gods, and stuff. We have crystals and spells. They’re just not, you know, obvious and their effects not immediate.”

Zari nods, “...you said you touched a globe and were sent here,” she observes, “are you a scholar?”

Emily grins, throwing her a look, “what? Can only scholars touch globes?”

Zari stutters, cheeks flushing crimson, “Well, no—but! But it had to appear somewhere, and I doubt a globe suddenly appeared in your kitchen and raised no suspicions.”

“Well, no,” Emily says, shrugging again, “there’s this old abandoned manor in my neighborhood. I finally decided to explore, and found the globe.”

Zari nods, "I see. You're a curious person, I presume?"

Emily moves her head from side to side, "So, so. Something about the manor just drew me in, I guess. I'm by no means an adventurer."

"You looked like you could be."

Emily whips her head to Zari, who has now turned her back to the crowd below.

"Once we've found Thalia," Zari says with a smirk, "and sort things out after the party, I hope I will see you again, Emily."

Emily pauses, words dying on her tongue as her eyes meet Zari's deep brown eyes. Immediately feeling underdressed, and so out of her league, she flushes, averting her gaze.

Zari is far too bright for Emily.

"Yeah," she mutters, "me too, Princess..."

Zari giggles, but when Emily spares a glance, she's closing the doors as she returns to her room.

Emily slowly turns her head back to the courtyard, but as her eyes draw to the scene below, her view is obscured—

"Smooth, Leigh."

Emily lets out a shout, flinching as she nearly falls off the wall at the sudden sight of Oliver, floating in mid-air.

"Bloody hell, Oliver!" she hisses, brows furrowing, "where the bleeding hells did you come from! Hasn't no one told you, you shouldn't eavesdrop?"

Oliver scoffs, "Oh, plenty have," he sits down beside her, "I just never listen."

Emily rolls her eyes, “insufferable mage. What do you want?”

“I think I should be asking you that,” he hums.

She quirks a brow, “what?”

“Do you really want to go home?”

Emily freezes, pausing.

“you could just...stay.”

She smirks at him, quirking a brow again, “what? You saying you’ll miss me?”

He scoffs, rolling his eyes, “don’t flatter yourself, librarian.”

Emily spins, and hops off the wall, onto the balcony, “you promised to bring me home. I intend to hold you to that.”

As she opens the doors, and he watches her back, he ignores how she avoids the question.

“Wait for me,” he sighs, “we need to get you ready, *Princess*.”

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Part Seven: Ballroom Dancing

“Are all ballgowns this uncomfortable?” Emily asks, struggling not to tug at her sleeves as she and Oliver approach the ballroom entrance.

Oliver snorts, “Yes. According to Zari, in any case.”

Emily huffs, redirecting her attention to her mask, decorated with music notes and golden edges, as she ties it to her face.

“A masquerade? To find a spouse? Really?” she asks. Oliver shrugs.

“Yeah, kind of like, what’s it called...false courtship?”

“You mean fake dating.”

“Yeah,” he claps, then points to her, “that.”

The two slow to a stop at the doors and Emily rolls her eyes, crossing her arms, “I don’t think the two are comparable,” she huffs, quirking a brow at her companion.

Oliver shrugs, striding past her, “I’m not the authority on that one, librarian.”

Emily pouts, then smirks, calling after him as he strides into the ballroom, “it’s *Princess*, tonight, mage!”

From behind her, soft laughter alerts her of Zari’s presence, and she looks over her shoulder to see the Princess cover her smile with a delicate hand. Emily huffs, turning to face her.

“Do you fancy sneaking up on me, your highness?” she jokes, and Zari rolls her eyes.

“You flatter yourself,” she rolls her shoulders back, straightening her back, “you are simply at the right place at the right time.”

Zari walks to the doors, and Emily turns back to the ballroom below them. Countless nobles are gathered below, all hoping for a chance to become royalty.

“once I walk through these doors, I will no longer be Zari,” Emily looks at her, as she keeps her gaze on the scene below, “and you will no longer be an inter-realm traveler. We have roles that have been assigned to us, and we must play them, whether we want to or not.”

The way she talks, and the frown on her lips have Emily thinking that Zari may be good at her job, but it doesn’t mean she enjoys it.

“we can choose who to be,” Emily says, turning her gaze to the ballroom as Zari shifts her gaze to her, “nothing’s set in stone. Destiny isn’t...written for us. It’s a book we write ourselves so,” she meets Zari’s gaze with a smile, “pick up the pen, or the quill, or whatever and just. Write yours.”

For a moment, there is silence, as Zari’s eyes widen, Emily’s words sinking into her bones, to her very soul, shifting Zari’s view of her world.

“I—” Zari starts, but before her voice can reach Emily, the Earthling reaches out her hand to the Princess.

“if I remember correctly,” Emily says, cheekily as she tilts her head to the side, eyes averted before they return to Zari, “you promised me a dance, Princess.”

Zari huffs a laugh, taking Emily’s hand.

Zari addresses Emily, but doesn’t meet her gaze, eyes focused on the scene below her.

“Your move, Earthling.”

Emily flushes, before she leads Zari into the fray.

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Part Eight: Ballroom Chase

Zari, Oliver and Emily are standing on the balcony over the gardens, laughing as they exchange stories of their lives, when Oliver sees her.

He gasps, and runs to vault over the railing, shouting, “It’s Thalia!”

Emily and Zari share a panicked look, before following Oliver, as he chases Thalia into the labyrinth.

Oliver is fast, but Zari has practice in chasing him while wearing ballgowns, and Emily was purposely given a lighter dress, and only mildly struggles to keep up as they chase the mages through the winding garden.

They turn a corner, and Thalia is stuck between the trio and a wall. Oliver lets out a triumphant laugh, and declares:

“Hah! Dead end, mage! End of the line!”

Thalia smirks, “is that so?”

“Y-yes?” Oliver replies, somewhat quizzically, “it is so.”

“Hand over the globe, Thalia,” Zari threatens, moving to stand in front of Oliver and Emily.

Thalia squints at her, then huffs, “if you can find me, it’s yours!”

Then, she snaps, and in a puff of green smoke—

“She’s gone!” Emily gasps.

Oliver stomps, “that little—”

“We split up,” Zari decides, “in an hour, Oliver will come find you, Emily,” she tells the Earthling, “and we will see how to proceed.”

Emily, despite being a foreigner to the gardens, nods. If Oliver is the one searching, she knows he’ll find her.

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She removes her mask as she slowly slips through the gardens, eyes and ears open for the cackling voice of Thalia.

Eventually, she steps into what she assumes is the heart of the maze, where stand a white gazebo, a tree with low hanging branches, a fountain, and—

Thalia.

Standing on the edge of the fountain, holding the globe, she stands. She's not aware of Emily yet, and Emily knows it. Carefully, as to not make a sound, Emily strips down, to her shirt and shorts, sneaking into the clearing.

When she is few feet away from Thalia, the mage notices her, flinching, and Emily, reacting fast, tackles her, and they tumble into the fountain.

"AHAH!" Emily cackles, grabbing the wooden pedestal of the globe, "This—" she says, then yanking it away, "is mine now!"

Emily scrambles away from Thalia, who hisses, "brat! It's your fault for touching it in the first place!"

Thalia gets up, but before she can approach Emily, in a flash of color—

"Oliver!" Emily gasps, as Oliver materializes behind Thalia, and grabs her wrists, pinning them to her back with a quick spell.

"That's enough from you," Oliver snarls, "Witch!" and with a kick to the back of her knees, Thalia crumples to the ground—still inside the fountain.

From around the corner of the maze, Zari emerges.

"Thalia West," she announces, walking to the fountain with even strides, "of Thembie, I arrest you, for misuse of magic, and unauthorized magical experiments."

Thalia scowls, cursing a storm, as Zari looks to Emily, over her shoulder, and winks.

You did good, Earthling.

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Part Nine: Returning Home

The three unlikely friends stand in the heart of the maze, as guards escort Thalia. Oliver has been checking the globe, assuring it's the real deal, before smiling, nodding, and handing it to Zari.

Zari smiles at Emily, holding it to her.

"Once you touch this, you will be transported to a place in your realm of your choice," she explains. Emily nods, reaching out to it, but before she can make contact, Zari pulls it away.

Emily looks up, meeting the Princess' gaze.

"Take care of yourself," Zari says, softly, "and...I hope we meet again, Emily."

Emily smiles, "me too, Zari."

"Stay out of trouble," Oliver grunts, "you seem to attract it, Librarian."

Emily giggles, "I'll miss you too, Oliver."

Emily looks to the globe, then glances at Zari. Zari smiles, giving her a curt nod.

Emily smiles, as she presses her palm to the globe.

Emily's vision blurs, the world shifting around her in vivid colors, spinning and causing her to lose her balance slightly—

Before it abruptly stops.

And she looks around, realizing she's standing in her bedroom. She lets out a shocked, nonetheless relieved laugh, before she hears the front door open.

She drops the globe on her bed, and rushes out her door, down the stairs, finding her aunt closing the door to the house. Before her caretaker can say anything, Emily wraps her in a bear-hug.

“Oof-“ Aimee grunts, stumbling, shocked by Emily’s greeting, “What’s gotten into you, child?”

“Nothing,” Emily reassures, looking up to her with a grin, “I’m simply glad to see you, is all.”

Aimee huffs, patting Emily’s head, “well, that’s a first. But...I’m glad to see you as well.”

Emily hums, nuzzling into her shoulder, smiling, as she closes her eyes, and sees the familiar faces of Oliver and Zari in her mind’s eye.

Her new, strange, friends.

Friends.

She giggles, praying to every god that she will see them again, as she releases her aunt. Aimee takes off her coat and shoes, then heads to the kitchen, calling to Emily:

“Is spaghetti alright for dinner?”

Emily nods, though she cannot see, following her into the kitchen, “Yes, Ma’am!”