



Deep in the Dark Forest, near Hidden Falls, there is a group of witches.

They meet to practice magic. They meet to get stronger. They meet to stay safe—and to keep others safe.

Jane. Grady. James. Tamsin. Emily. They are the Coven.

The Coven knows that the Dark Ones are out there. The Dark Ones are witches, too. They want power—and they will kill to get it.

CONTENTS

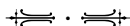
1	Birthday	1
2	The Coven	8
3	The Present	14
4	The Map	20
5	The Cave	26
6	The Fight	30
7	Family	36

CHAPTER 1

Birthday

I didn't ask to be a witch. I didn't know I was a witch. That is, until I turned 12.

My name is Emily, and this is my story.



It was the day before I turned 12, and I was walking home from school. When I got home, I checked the mailbox. There was something in it. It was a box, covered in red paper.

Maybe it's a birthday present, I thought. Maybe it's from David!

I took it out of the mailbox. It *was* a present! My name was on it, with a note. The note said, *Open on your 12th birthday.*

The present wasn't from David, though. I know my brother's writing. David writes fast, like he's in a hurry. This writing was careful.

I took the present into the house.

My mom was home. I could hear her in the kitchen. I was going to show her the present.

Then I got a really funny feeling. It was like there was a voice in my head. *Don't show your mother*, it said.

Why not? I thought.

All of a sudden the present got very hot. It started to burn me! I tried to let go of it, but the red paper stuck to my hands.

Don't show your mother, the voice said again.

I decided not to show my mom the present. As soon as I decided that, it stopped burning me.



All of a sudden the present got very hot.

It started to burn me!

I took the present upstairs to my room. I was a little scared of it. I hid it under my bed.

I went downstairs to the kitchen. "Hi, Mom!" I said. I gave her a hug. "It's almost my birthday!"

"Really?" Mom asked. "I mean, that's nice!" she said. She had a funny look on her face.

I should tell you about my mom. She always gets weird this time of year.

Mom *tries* to make my birthdays fun. Last year, she was going to take me shopping for my birthday. In the morning, I got dressed to go. I went downstairs, but she wasn't home. She forgot all about the shopping plan.

Then there are the presents. One year Mom gave me a sock. Not a *pair* of socks, just *one* sock.

Another year Mom gave me a pet rat. I hate rats. Mom knows that, but she seemed to forget.

The birthday cakes are always weird, too. Last year my cake looked like a dead fish. Mom didn't want it to look like that. It just turned out that way. "Isn't that funny!" she said in a surprised voice.

It's not that Mom *wants* me to have a bad birthday. It's like something is in her head, mixing things up.

So I'm used to Mom being weird on my birthday. Until this year, I was used to another thing. My big brother, David, was always home to make it better.

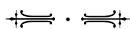
David always took me to a fun place on my birthday. Last year we went to a water park. It was great!

It's different now. David moved away to go to college. So did his friend Lilly. I

liked her, too. Now it's just Mom and me at home. Not much of a family.

Where's my father, you ask? He's been gone for years. He left the day I was born. He just walked out of the house and never came back.

Maybe that's why Mom always acts weird on my birthday. Maybe she just can't forget the bad things that happened the day I was born.



Anyway, it was hard to get to sleep the night before I turned 12. I was thinking about my birthday. There was also that weird present. It was still under my bed.

I got to sleep at last, but I woke up in the middle of the night. The stars above me were so bright!

Wait, I thought. Why are there stars above

me? I'm in my bedroom! So how can I see the sky at all?

I looked around. I wasn't in my bedroom.
I wasn't in my house at all.

I was in the middle of a forest.