

THE REBELLIOUS EARTHLING by Andi Hayes

CHAPTER 1

WHAT LIES UNDERNEATH

As the praying mantises slogged and bashed away on their various musical instruments, the trolls began shuffling their feet awkwardly, as if trying to locate the beat. Some grabbed their dance partner by the hair, pulling hard and yanking out tangled oily chunks by the roots. They aggressively shoved each other while swaying unsteadily on their gnarled tree-trunk feet. Bending forward, they let their long, spindly arms graze the floor while violently butting the top of their heads against their partner's forehead. It wasn't long before the floor was covered in a greasy black slime, which I realized to my disgust was their blood.

This is utter depravity! I thought to myself. Although completely repulsed, I was unable to tear my eyes away from the theater of violence unfolding before me.

Several yards away, Fairuzo was engaged in what appeared to be a heated discussion with the one known as Darceva. She was angrily gesturing and pointing in my direction. Try as I might, I could not make out what they were arguing about over the noise of the band.

After a few moments, Fairuzo abruptly reached out and wrapped his large, powerful hands around her throat in a vice-like grip. He began vigorously throttling her until her face began to turn various shades of red, mauve, then dark purple. Finally, he released his hold on her and she crumpled to the ground like a discarded burlap sack, lying there motionless.

He then reared his right foot back and delivered a well-aimed kick to her lumpy backside with the pointed tip of his stiletto-heeled boot. The impact made such a loud crunching sound that it could be heard even over the music.

He stood there looking down on her with the most satisfied grin on his face, as if he'd been wanting to do that for the longest time.

Fairuzo strode away then, leaving Darceva in a moaning, defeated heap on

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the floor. Positioning himself beside me in the center of the room, he made a motion for the band to stop playing. He then called for everyone to gather around. They jostled and pushed each other, competing for the space nearest Fairuzo.

He then yelled, “Varlet! It is time!”

The trolls all turned to look expectantly at a small door panel to the right of the Mirror. After just a few moments, an albino-looking creature appeared. He had pale skin the color and texture of white corn and the rubbery amphibious body of an aquatic salamander, with a shovel-shaped head and little frilly pink gills in the place of ears.

He was walking upright on poorly-developed hind legs, balancing himself with his finned tail, while delicately holding on to a round silver serving tray with his tiny front paws. I could tell by the way he cautiously moved forward that he was blind, his eyes regressed and undeveloped in their sockets. He was apparently using some sort of sonar to make his way towards us.

Around his neck was a black box contraption attached to a wide red collar. Every so often the salamander would stiffen up and come to a full stop, tilting his head to one side while trembling. When he began moving again, it was in a different direction. I noticed that each time, right before this happened, a troll following closely behind him would jab a knotted finger at something being held in the palm of his hand.

It soon became clear that a remote control device was being employed to send little jolts of electricity through to the salamander’s neck collar. A loud buzzing sound could be heard, and then the creature would nearly drop his tray in painful reaction to the shock. The trolls watching would then all laugh uproariously, as if this was the funniest thing they’d seen all day. I was sickened by not only this display of cruelty but that they found the blind salamander’s distress to be fodder for hilarity.

Fairuzo turned to me and said, “Here comes one of our cave-slaves now with some of those delicious refreshments I promised you. You’ll notice he’s blind as a dust mop and needs a little buzz now and then to help him find his way

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around.”

He gave a wicked chortle and the trolls standing close by all guffawed right along with him. The realization that Fairuzo found the suffering of the blind creature to be in any way humorous left me with a queasy feeling in the pit of my stomach.

In fact, the more he revealed this ugly streak of mean-spiritedness and sadism, the less desirable he became. I was now beginning to see past the seductive charisma and striking good looks that had so bedazzled me before. Up until now, he had managed to submerge and keep well-hidden this monstrously deviant side of his character; but now it was becoming far too obvious to ignore.

At least there's nothing deceptive about these trolls, I thought. They are just as ugly on the outside as they are on the inside. Not so with Fairuzo, though; for it was becoming clear that he had only been showing me his most beguiling side while deliberately keeping his true self hidden. But he was certainly no longer making any effort to conceal it now.

I began to feel trapped, as if I were standing in a rapidly-sinking pit of quicksand surrounded by minefields in every direction. I felt almost ashamed to have been so gullible, so naïve, so trusting, to have actually believed that Fairuzo would protect me from these nasty creatures, when he himself was one of them.

I knew then that somehow I had to escape this hellish place and find my way back home. Indeed, it was my only hope of survival.

And this was even before I saw what was on the tray the salamander was carrying.

CHAPTER 2

THE GOBLINS OF DARK HOLLOW

Far from the pervasive evil that had once plagued and ruled their lives, the Dark Hollow Goblins were now safe – or so they thought. Forced to flee their beloved temple on the summit of Mount Hermon, they had managed to find refuge in a cluster of caverns on the other side of Earth. They believed that such a

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great distance would surely protect them from the tyrannical tentacles of the Cabal of Nations, the elite coven of Luciferians who had risen swiftly to power in their homeland.

As their former mountaintop home had been awash in the perpetual sunshine found above the clouds at such lofty altitudes, it had not been easy to adapt to their new lives underground. But the goblins were grateful they'd had the prescience to escape when they did – for the rest of their fellow countrymen were now trapped there, enduring dreary lives of shackled enslavement with no possibility of liberation.

The Dark Hollowians were a cheerful and benevolent clan, beloved by all who came to know them. A handsome, graceful people of noble countenance, they were of average height with dark, luxuriant hair. With so much of their time now being spent in torch-lit caves, their once-deep-olive complexions had faded gradually to an attractive greenish-alabaster, virtually the same color as the limestone slab markers they used in their burial grounds. Overall, they were a striking tribe of people, possessing both inner and outer beauty.

Never once had they ever been involved in war or in the bloodshed of any living creature, choosing instead to live and abide by strict ethical codes. They lived solely off of the vegetation that grew on the surrounding hillsides of Culpepper County, Virginia, the small mining community they now called home. They were so charming and endearing, in fact, that the copper miners working in the adjacent Azurite Mines shared their morning bowls of porridge with them. They also brought them apples and peaches from their bountiful orchards back home, leaving them outside the goblins' portal holes in little tin canisters.

Nearly every evening, the goblins would go on treasure-seeking missions outside the entrances to the mines, collecting the tiny chunks of quartz, malachite and azurite that had fallen out of the miners' wheelbarrows. They especially cherished the azurite, which they referred to as "The Stone of Heaven" for its magical healing properties and its ability to open celestial gateways. They believed the powerful energy that emanated from the azure-blue stones enhanced telepathic communication while aiding in extracting insight and wisdom from

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nightly dreams.

The goblins would place several chunks of azurite carefully in a circle just inside the opening to their caverns, with great faith that this would help protect any entering souls from demonic influences. They also believed the sacred stones would guide those souls departing from the Earthly realm into the Afterlife.

As gratitude for the food that the miners shared with them, the goblins would carry bowlfuls of pristine water from the nearby Dark Hollow Falls over to the Azurite Mines. They would also fashion intricate, hand-crafted jewelry out of the glittering quartz-stones, malachite and copper chips for the miners to take home to their wives, lady-friends and daughters. So pleased were the miners with these favors and gifts that they encouraged the goblins to keep any chunks of azurite they found for their own personal delight and spiritual rites.

The goblins also had close-knit relationships with the many animals that inhabited the hillsides and who wandered freely in and out of their caverns. On their journey over from their motherland, the goblins had brought with them a family of beloved rock badgers. These hyraxes were treasured for their companionship as well as their wisdom in securing safe housing and arranging elaborate sentry systems warning others of danger. Upon their arrival in the new land, the rock-dwelling creatures had adapted spectacularly to the sandstone cliffs while getting along surprisingly well with the local Trout Cave voles and Artic shrews.

But there were many other fascinating species here: Cumberland Cave pocket gophers, flying squirrels, lemmings, sloths, hares and caribou, as well as saber-toothed cats, cougars, jaguars, tapirs and dire wolves, all co-existing peacefully together.

Not generally known for mingling socially with others outside their genus, the big-eared fruit bats from the nearby limestone caverns would swoop down to eat slices of pears right out of the goblins' outstretched hands. In return for these treats, the bats protected them from the swarms of mosquitoes that fluttered uninvited into their cave openings on the humid summer nights, swatting them away with their massive and impressive wings.

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All in all, it was a very harmonious and congenial atmosphere between all living creatures, and life was good... that is, until the Day of the Explosion, when nothing was ever the same again.

It was late summer, and the leaves had not yet begun turning autumn colors. It was a little before high noon, and the miners were just about to put down their pickaxes and step outside for their lunch break. The goblins were returning from their Falls water errand when the ground beneath their feet began to rumble and shake. First, they heard a muffled boom and then an incredibly loud blast, throwing them all violently to the ground, the water drenching them as it sloshed out of the buckets.

After a moment's confusion -- *had there just been an earthquake?* – the goblins all looked at each other in terror, simultaneously realizing the horrible truth: the mine had just exploded. They all scrambled to their feet and rushed down to the scene of the disaster. But it was too late: the entire mine had been demolished and flattened by the blast. There was not much left other than scattered piles of dust and rubble. There did not initially appear to be any survivors.

The goblins scurried home to grab their shovels, then ran back to dig frantically through the debris, hoping to find at least one miner still alive that could be saved. They did come upon a few who had managed to survive the blast, but they were on their last breaths, bleeding profusely from missing limbs or fingers. Most had horribly charred and unrecognizable faces.

A couple of days after the tragedy, the Mining Authority came to clear out the rubble, cart away the dozens of decaying bodies, and officially board up the Azurite Mines.

The goblins fell into various states of shock, mourning and grief. Desolation and gloom settled over the entire community. Not only did they miss the camaraderie with their miner friends, but life suddenly seemed empty and purposeless without the daily excursions to the mine to bring water and collect stones. The pleasurable, productive evenings they'd spent lovingly crafting unique gifts of jewelry were now spent moping listlessly about the caverns and

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wistfully reminiscing about the good times that they now believed were gone forever.

They had also grown quite accustomed to the tin canisters of fruit the miners had so generously supplied them with, and now would have to go back to foraging for themselves. Although the pomegranate and prickly pear trees were plentiful, picking the fruit among the thorns made their hands bleed. They did not relish the resumption of this task.

Then one day a mysterious stranger arrived at the Dark Hollow Caverns. He had wavy coal-black hair that fell past his shoulders; sharp, aristocratic features; a wisp of a mustache and a tufted, neatly-trimmed beard. His eyes were bottomless pits of black that glittered in the sun like those of a wolf spider's. He was dressed in the type of flowing garb that implied a representation of papacy, with the standard embroidered pallium over the white chasuble. His shoes were of the finest bark and cloth, artfully adorned with glistening gems and beads that formed esoteric symbols.

He went directly to the cavern home of Azazyel, the eldest and most respected goblin, forcefully pushing the portal door open and stepping in without the courtesy of ringing the entry bell. Inside, the family was gathered around the dining table. They were just about to sit down to their evening meal of freshly-picked arugula and watercress, rhubarb pie, prickly pear sauce and sun-dried figs.

The stranger aggressively pushed his way past Azazyel into the cavern's living quarters, loudly announcing that he represented the Board of the Mining Authority and was here on official business.

For a moment, Azazyel felt a sense of impending doom and genuine foreboding that the man might actually have been sent by the Mount Hermon Cabal of Nations, come all this way to deport the wayward, disobedient goblins back home for certain punishment and imprisonment. But whomever he was, it was apparent he had not come for any sort of pleasant chat and visit, but was here for an ulterior and most likely nefarious purpose.

The stranger brusquely informed Azazyel that he had come to inspect all of

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the goblins' quarters for contraband and to confiscate any items belonging to the Mines. To prove he had the authority to do so, he reached into his pocket and extracted a wrinkled piece of hemp paper, throwing it casually onto the dinner table for inspection.

Azazyel peered at it, and it looked to be some sort of official decree. The words "Order to Search and Seize" were written in bold, heavy lettering at the top and embossed with what appeared to be an official seal of gold.

When Azazyel reached out to pick up the paper for a closer examination, the man swiftly grabbed hold of his arm, twisted it behind his back, and then shoved him hard against the cavern wall, knocking the breath out of him.

"You will not be touching my things," hissed the man, a menacing look on his face, which was just inches away from Azazyel's.

Upon seeing this act of brutality, the children became afraid and began to cry. They had never before witnessed any display of violence, and were not at all accustomed to it.

"Shut those children up now, or else!" yelled the man with ferocious intensity.

Azazyel looked toward his wife, Lamia, who was standing close by and shivering in fear. He quietly besought her to take the children out of the way so that he could speak privately with the man. She did so slowly and with hesitancy, expecting the man to stop her at any moment with another show of force.

"What name shall I be addressing you by, sir?" the elder goblin asked politely, in his most respectful voice, hoping this might calm the man down some.

"Call me Phegor," the man replied curtly.

"And how may I be of assistance then? If you would kindly tell me --" began Azazyel, when Phegor rudely cut him off.

"Let's get straight down to business, shall we?" he said. "I haven't any time to waste with your useless pleasantries. I'm here about the treasures."

"What treasures are you speaking of?" Azazyel asked, truly puzzled.

"Don't play simpleton with me," Phegor sneered. "You know exactly what I'm talking about. These very baubles that you have lying all about here – where

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have you got all the rest stashed?” And with this, he grabbed a small pile of azurite stones from a nearby copper bowl, letting them slip through his fingers to clatter noisily upon the table.

Before Azazyel could even fashion an answer, Phegor barked out the order that he was to have every single goblin in the village gather up every bit of azurite, copper and quartz they had within their possessions. These all belonged to the Mine landowners now – not the goblins. He then informed Azazyel that he would be returning with several officers of the Authority to perform a thorough search of every dwelling on the premises.

Phegor then rudely reached onto the dinner table and grabbed a large piece of the rhubarb pie, shoving it into his mouth and chewing loudly. After making a show of swallowing, he said, “I’ll be back within a fortnight’s time to collect every stone your little village has in its possession. And it will do you no good at all to hold out, as we will be sure to dig up every single gem you try to hide.”

All during this exchange, Azazyel’s wife had been standing meekly over by the portal door with the children, slumping down as if she were trying to shrink herself into invisibility. Phegor strode briskly over to her, grabbed ahold of her shoulders, then pressed his lips roughly against her neck for a couple of moments. She reacted with a startled cry of surprise and pain.

Azazyel gasped and leapt forward to intervene, but Phegor had already released her. She fell back, cradling the palm of her hand over her neck, tears welling up in her eyes.

Phegor turned around to leer at Azazyel, daring him to make a move, then said, “And remember, my weak and insignificant little goblins: no longer will life be a bed of roses for you as it has been in the past. You will no longer have the protection of your little miner friends, for we have seen to it that they won’t be returning.

“Oh, and that little mining explosion?” he added. “Did you really think that was accidental?” Here he gave a wicked, high-pitched cackle, reveling in their shocked expressions.

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“Mark my words,” he continued nastily, “from this day onward, you will touch nothing but thorns. And don’t waste effort wishing to go back in time; for what once was yours will soon be all mine!”

And here he threw his head back and laughed diabolically, then cupped his hand under his chin to blow a vulgar kiss at Lamia. She shuddered in repulsion, still holding her hand protectively over her neck, which was now beginning to bleed.

He made a show of swishing his capelet then and walked to the door of the cavern. He deliberately kicked the protective circle of azurite stones out of his way. He took two steps out into the bright sunlight and then just seemed to vanish. It was as if a vortex had swept him up, for he was simply no longer there.

The goblin family wordlessly exchanged glances. Azazyel went to comfort his wife, who was now quietly sobbing. “What will happen to us now?” she cried.

“Don’t worry, Lamia,” he said soothingly. “We have two weeks with which to gather the stones he wants and then he should leave us alone.”

“But what if he doesn’t?” Lamia sobbed. “What if he keeps coming back and is never satisfied?”

“We will deal with that when the time comes,” Azazyel replied firmly, although not without his own lingering doubts.

News of the ominous visit spread quickly throughout the caverns. The entire village of goblins met that evening to decide upon a proper course of action. They discussed the various positive and negative aspects for and against complying. They finally unanimously agreed it would be best just to placate the brutish and intimidating man. It was apparent he was more than capable of causing some very grim things to happen if they chose to defy him.

And now, with the stranger’s boastful admission that the explosion had not been an accident after all – even insinuating that he had been behind its planning and execution – they certainly had every valid reason to fear that the same destructive action could easily be taken against their own cavern homes.

CHAPTER 3

THE POISON SPREADS

All that night, Lamia continued to weep uncontrollably. She kept wiping her mouth over and over, as if attempting to clear her tongue and saliva of something vile. In the middle of the night she had a coughing fit and sat up, whereupon a dark stream of rancid-smelling liquid came spewing out of her mouth. As Azazyel helplessly witnessed his wife's torment, he smelled something foul and evil permeating the air, like a slowly leaking cesspool.

The next morning, Lamia complained of a severe headache and nausea. Her normally pleasant and cheerful temperament was noticeably absent. Instead, she was irritable and short-tempered, and nothing at all seemed to agree with her.

She began cursing and muttering ireful threats under her breath when the children did not obey her quickly enough. It was not long before she took to hitting them when she felt they misbehaved. At first, it was just swats with the palm of her hand against their backs; then she took to shoving them roughly and for no reason. Finally, she began picking up heavy plates and cups to throw viciously at their heads as they ran away from her in terror.

In fact, her hateful, baleful attitude quickly became her perpetual disposition. There was now constant strife and disharmony within the household where once there had been nothing but cheeriness and laughter. Soon, it was as if the entire village had become infected with the same ugliness in spirit. They all now began constantly bickering and quarreling with each other over the pettiest of grievances.

Although they had meticulously gathered every gemstone in the entire village per the stranger's instruction, they were still filled with a nameless dread, uncertain as to what would happen when he did finally return to collect. This sense of imminent doom only exacerbated the tension and discord already prevalent.

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Once so upbeat and industrious, the goblins now developed attitudes of laziness and resentment towards doing chores. They especially loathed having to do anything that caused them any extra work. They grumbled, grouched and complained, feeling pity for themselves. They squabbled over who would make the daily excursions to the Dark Hollow Falls to bring back the buckets of water. No longer did they enjoy bathing in the waterfalls. They seemed to have developed an aversion to cleanliness, preferring instead to be slovenly and live among filth, as it involved the least amount of effort expended.

The children were heavily affected by the tense, unhappy atmosphere that now prevailed throughout the entire community. Not quite yet able to comprehend the concept of death or understand exactly why the miners would never be returning, they continued to badger their parents for the porridge and apples they had grown accustomed to eating. They whined when they were told they would now have to do without.

Instead of being grateful and appreciative of each meal as they had before, they now picked at their plates and sulked at the dinner table. They grumbled that the figs or berries were not ripe enough or that they wanted something different to eat. It soon became common for one or both parents to slap the children when they began complaining, which then led to crying and tantrums and all-around unpleasantness.

Early one evening, when Azazyel returned home from a trip to the Falls, he came upon his wife crouched on the floor by the dining table, ravenously feeding upon what appeared to be the remains of an animal. She looked up at him wildly, her eyes glowing red in the dusk, as if she'd gone feral and mad. She then went back to her voracious gnawing and chewing as he stood there in horror – for he immediately recognized the carcass as being one of their precious hyraxes.

“What on Earth is it that you are eating?” he cried in horror and revulsion, although he already knew.

“Come, taste it for yourself, and stop being such a whining prig,” she snarled with her mouth still full. “It is much tastier than those boring twigs and leaves you’ve been bringing home lately,” she added, sneering.

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With only a small amount of hesitancy – for it did look rather enticing, and he was quite hungry – Azazyel leaned over and gingerly took a severed piece of leg off of the plate on the floor. The blood was still warm and trickling as he stuffed the freshly-killed, once-beloved animal’s flesh quickly into his mouth.

“This is delicious!” he cried in surprised delight, in between bites. “Why have we never thought of having this as a meal before?”

Lamia just leered at him, too busy dipping her fingers ravenously into the pools of blood and flesh, and eagerly scooping up more entrails. “Wait until you taste the innards,” she said with a sly cackle, after she’d swallowed another mouthful.

It was quite obvious to Azazyel then that this was not Lamia’s first time eating the corpse of an animal. He could not help wondering then just what other secrets she’d been keeping from him.

It would not be long before he found out just what.

One day shortly thereafter, having just been out on the hillside for a short while to gather some rhubarb, Azazyel stepped back inside the cavern and heard loud grunting noises. He followed the sounds to the room where he and Lamia slept, and there in the bed lay his wife with the stranger from the Mining Authority heaving himself on top of her.

“What is going on here!” he shouted, and Phegor spun his head around to look at him with a lascivious grin. Lamia gave a wide smile, as if pleased he had caught them together.

“How long has this been going on?” Azazyel cried.

“Long enough for it to be obvious you are a village idiot for not knowing about it,” retorted Phegor with a snicker.

He rolled off of Lamia then and slithered past Azazyel into the hallway like a worm wiggling out of a half-eaten apple. Lamia showed no remorse or shame, not even attempting to cover herself as she got up out of the bed and nonchalantly put back on her clothing.

That night she casually confided to Azazyel that it had been Phegor who had suggested the idea of killing animals and consuming their flesh. She said it

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hadn't taken much convincing after he had showed her how easy it was to accomplish, and how rewardingly tasty it was.

First, he had taught her how to snap the neck of a baby hare – that being one of the quickest ways to kill – although the first time she'd attempted it, she did not do it properly, and the poor animal writhed around on the floor in agony, whimpering and crying pitifully for several long minutes until, finally, he lay still.

While watching the death throes of the animal, Phegor had laughed with great hilarity, making it apparent that he immensely enjoyed the animal's discomfort and pain. Lamia had quickly joined in with peals of her own derisive laughter. She felt an odd sense of pleasure intermingled with exhilaration at the sudden power that such a vile and cruel act filled her with. It felt good to have such undisputed dominion over such a small, helpless creature. She began to look forward to participating in future kills with her new lover.

Phegor then also taught her how to sink her teeth into the animal's neck and move her tongue and lips in the most efficient manner so as to create enough suction to siphon out the blood.

“Much more effective than letting the animal bleed out,” he'd advised. “You see, this way, you don't waste any of the beneficial life's blood in some meaningless purifying ritual. When you directly drink the blood, you obtain all of the animal's dreams and their last dying emotions, which you can then absorb and utilize for enhanced mental powers and strength.”

The very first time Azazyel killed an animal was in front of the children. It was one of their beloved hyraxes, and they had wailed and cried, begging him to stop. Just as it had carnally affected Lamia, it had also filled him with a perverted lust. As he licked the blood off of his hands, he began having twisted visions of all sorts of vulgarities. This wickedness excited him so much that he fell lewdly upon Lamia in the bed immediately afterwards in full view of the children.

But soon the children, too, could not help but be curious what the taste of flesh was like. After their first plateful, they quickly lost their initial aversion as well as any innate feelings of tenderness towards the creatures they had once cared so deeply about.

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They gradually began exhibiting cruelty towards any bird or animal they came across, throwing stones and kicking them. They now thought of them as no more than objects to be abused and killed. They even grew to enjoy the pain they inflicted upon the poor creatures.

It wasn't long at all before the entire village began to consume animal flesh, especially after realizing how effortlessly the smaller, more docile animals could be overtaken and killed, and how quickly the meat filled their growling bellies. It was certainly much easier and less tiring than picking fruit all day out in the hot Virginia sun. They soon learned to ignore any twinges of guilt or remorse whenever the animal struggled frantically to escape or gave out desperate cries of terror and pain.

It was also not long before meat had become their sole diet. In fact, they could not seem to get enough of it, always wanting more, never sated. It was as if they had all fallen prey to some type of infectious and uncontrollable carnal lust, releasing an avalanche of gluttony and perverted pleasures that only the touching and eating of flesh would satisfy.

Not only were all the goblins now affected but also the bats they had once enjoyed sharing slices of pears with. They now could be seen swooping down to feed upon the blood of grazing animals, sometimes taking chunks of skin. Even the sweet songbirds joined in the depravity, dipping down to pounce on voles and shrews, piercing them with their sharp talons. They were no longer content with eating seeds and herbs.

As now even the animals had begun to devour one another, it had become commonplace for the goblins to come upon piles of carcass bones outside the caverns and all over the hillside. Wicked was the rancid blood that ran through the veins of every creature, their former way of life now completely corrupted.

Phegor had brazenly taken up permanent residence in the Dark Hollow Caverns, relegating the male goblins to the smaller back-caves while claiming the largest and roomiest caves for himself. By now, he had seduced all of the goblins' wives, leaving his beastly mark on each of their necks with a territorial branding, so they could be identified as property belonging exclusively to him.

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Several female goblins lived with him in his spacious cavern quarters. They constantly bickered and fought over whose turn it was to sleep with him. Their husbands did not seem to mind at all, as they sometimes stopped by to watch the steady stream of bedroom intimacies. Sometimes they even joined in, if given the signal to do so by Phegor. After each session, the men came away with the same tell-tale puncture wounds on their necks as their wives had.

There was now a select group of goblins designated as the colony's hunters and providers of flesh. They had been hand-picked specifically by Phegor for their swiftness and craftiness in the stalking of prey. Their job was to bring home as many carcasses as possible to create a stockpile.

Soon, they had amassed so many animal corpses that they found it necessary to begin storing them in the cooling waters of the Dark Hollow Falls. This would help to decelerate the inevitable process of putrefaction. Unfortunately, this resulted in the contamination of the once pure water they also used for drinking; but this did not seem to concern them.

Phegor taught them how to effectively start long-burning bonfires, so that they could utilize the ever-growing pile of bodies more efficiently. In this way, the goblins developed a taste for the cooked flesh, even though they still enjoyed tearing into the raw, bloody meat and gnawing on the bones of a fresh kill.

In this atmosphere of blood, death and wanton debauchery, the goblins soon began to distrust one another. They now found it necessary to add bolts and latches to their doors to maintain privacy and hamper pilfering. They held grudges, they told lies, and they gossiped cruelly behind each others' backs. Any semblance of loyalty, integrity or piety ceased to exist; these were now undesirable and unnecessary traits that no longer mattered.

They began choosing sides against one another, and the hatred and resentment grew to such a fevered pitch that, soon, a full-scale battle broke out between them all. Now, instead of using the copper pieces for creating beautiful artifacts of jewelry, the goblins utilized them to make swords, knives and breastplates for war. This was done under the tutelage and supervision of Azazyel, who seemed to have a special knack and adeptness for such things.

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The women were eager to join in, using their long fingernails as claws to scratch out eyes and leave deep grooves upon their rivals' faces. Rifts grew between all of the goblins, with brothers pitted against brothers. Nothing was sacred any more, not even the blood being spilled between families.

And Phegor never did collect the treasured stones he claimed he'd come for on that initial visit. Rather, it had become quite clear he'd had a much more sinister intention in mind all along: for he'd managed to turn the entire clan of sweet, kind-hearted goblins into a hateful, vicious, warring mob constantly at each other's throats. He'd also introduced them to the idea of killing and consuming the innocent animals whom the goblins once cherished and considered friends.

The holy azurite stone rituals had been replaced with bloody sacrifices of young animals, where the goblins rabidly feasted upon the body parts and entrails afterwards. They began to engage in all manner of iniquities, including incestuous relationships between brothers and sisters, and even nonconsenting ones between father and child.

After a year of these perversions, and a diet now comprised solely of animal carcasses and blood, the women goblins began bearing children with a multitude of deformities: stunted limbs, crooked torsos, round and lumpy backs. Their heads were oversized and misshapen, and their bodies were covered with unsightly warts and growths. Their features were now coarse and gruesome, their ears saggy and pendulous. Their skin was a dull, lifeless gray, and their once-luxurious hair was now sparse and brittle.

And so the goblins, once pure of heart, noble and joyous, had transmuted into an unholy, hideous and repulsive breed, full of hate and maliciousness, and devoid of all joy.

Before, when their community had been harmonious and trusting, they'd had no need of a leader. But now, they required constant monitoring of the thievery and fiendish acts that ran rampant, and mediation of the daily fights and battles that continuously broke out. And so it was now accepted and undisputed that Phegor was their new leader and ruler. He was the one whom they now all

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looked to for every permission and decision. No one dared question his absolute authority.

But what the goblins did not realize was that Phegor was actually from the Mount Hermon Cabal, and he had followed them here. And what he had in mind for them next would be far drearier and more oppressive than what they had fled from.