

Lone Star Stories

Speculative Fiction and Poetry

A Treatise on Fewmets

by Sarah Prineas

Shortly after 7:30 in the morning, the phone rang, waking Assistant Professor Esme Quirk from a very uncomfortable nap. She peeled her face from the surface of her desk and looked blearily around the lab. *Ring*. On the desk sat her quantum thaum computer, a stack of photocopied journal articles, a mug of cold tea, a pile of Elemental Studies 101 midterms waiting to be graded, and the phone. *Ring*.

Too much to do. The tenure track was going to kill her; she just knew it. She bent over and rested her forehead on her desk. The phone stopped ringing. She gave it a look. Good. One less thing to worry about.

The phone began again to ring. Esme groaned and fumbled it off the hook.

"What," she mumbled. Her neck was stiff, and her mouth tasted like stale tea.

"I must speak with a professor," began a hurried voice on the other end of the wire. "Somebody who knows something about elemental magic."

Esme picked up the cup of cold tea, decided it looked all right. "I'm a professor in the Elemental Studies Department." Taking a sip of the tea, she grimaced but began to feel more lively. "Can I help you with anything?"

"Well, you might." He continued hesitantly, "You see, there's something very strange going on, and we thought--" Somebody on his end of the line interrupted the caller, and he paused. "Yes, yes, Aunt Maude, it is a woman professor, just as you wanted. All right, I'll tell her that, too," he said. "Sorry," he addressed Esme again. "My aunt. She thinks, well" He took a deep breath. "What's your name, by the way?"

"Esme. Professor Esme Quirk." Perhaps the 'Professor' would calm him down.

"I'm Ned Slithers. Here's the thing, Professor Quirk. There are monsters lurking in my aunt's back garden." Before she could comment, he continued quickly, "I know what you're going to say: she's old; she's batty; there are no monsters running about in Hertfordshire; but I-I'm fairly sure she knows what she's talking about."

As he spoke, Esme sat up straight in her chair, the crick in her neck and the nasty taste in her mouth forgotten. Monsters? In a Hertfordshire garden? "Oh, no, I believe you," she said hastily, interrupting Slithers's protestations.

Ha! One of her looming deadlines was to finish a presentation on nexuses for the upcoming Elemental Research Conference. Her colleagues had laughed at the idea, but all her calculations

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