

# Chapter 1



Elergard University

# FICTION

*Rawly Rawls*

## Glergandr University 1

*Illustrations by CreamCadet*

*Written by RawlyRawls*

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“Welcome to the incoming class. I see some familiar faces. Congratulations on making it this far.” Ophi’s gaze swept over the hundred or so first-years. They were all fresh-faced eighteen-year-olds. And one of them was particularly special. She tried to catch the eye of her son, Corzin, but he made sure he was studying the statues in the front lobby every time her eyes found him. “All of you have a solid grounding in the magical arts. Your four years here, should you survive, will give you the ability to grow with your sorcery for the rest of your life.” She laughed as several faces noticeably paled. One redheaded girl kept her freckled face stoic, trying not to show her distress. Ophi had to keep her own face still so as not to laugh at the poor girl’s veneer. “Fear not, our goal isn’t to cull the herd. Most of you will survive. But make no mistake, this degree that you undertake is full of hazards. Always treat our art with respect.”

Corzin listened to his mother drone on and on. He cringed at how the others must have been perceiving her. He

prayed she wouldn’t bore too many of his classmates. He prayed she wouldn’t single him out. The décor in his mother’s school was mostly Art Nouveau. The statues around them were beautiful, solemn, and somewhat pretentious. He studied them avidly rather than acknowledge his mother. The statues seemed to frown at him. They were both women and men, their chiseled robes flowing around them. Even with stone eyes, they peered into his soul. Corzin looked away, finding that his mother was looking right at him.

“And as many of you know, my younger son is in your class.” Ophi’s smile was slight and lopsided. “A very promising wizard indeed.” She held her spine straight and kept her words slow. She didn’t want to seem to be boasting. “He’s looking forward to following in his brother’s footsteps. My older son, Uxium, is two years ahead of you and the top of his class.” She tightened her face so as not to grin.

*Oh, shit. Another Blackbridge? Zara had heard of Uxium Blackbridge. She figured everyone applying to Glergandr had heard of Uxium and his older sister, Genn. But she didn’t know there was a third Blackbridge child. She pushed her copper hair behind her ear and followed Ophi’s gaze to her son. The boy looked small, awkward, and shy. Nothing like what she’d expect from one of his family. His father was a conductor in the United Services, his mother was, of course, the dean at Glergandr, his siblings were highly accomplished. They were all tall, beautiful people. And here was the runt of the litter, looking like a heavy wind might blow him away. She had been nervous to learn of a Blackbridge in her class for only a moment, but now she doubted she would have much competition at the top.*

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“Gavin Glenstrom.” Gavin held out his hand. He was flanked by friends who were quite a bit larger than he. He always picked his friends for their imposing abilities. “I hear your mother runs the place.” He tried to keep a smile on his face, looking at the runt in front of him. It would be easy to manipulate little Corzin. And then he’d have a Blackbridge in his back pocket. “It’s polite to shake a fellow’s hand when offered.” He left his hand up for Corzin to clasp.



"You heard that she was my mother from the horse's mouth. She told everyone. For that, I'll have to thank her later." Corzin didn't shake the other boy's hand. "I've heard of you too, Glenstrom." Corzin frowned. "I'd prefer to be left alone." He turned to walk away. The hairs on his back prickled. He hadn't thought that anyone would use magic in the dormitory's shared living area. He had been wrong. He grasped the stone around his neck and tried for his strongest warding spell. Instead, his clothes tore themselves off his scrawny body and flew out the nearest window.

Gavin let out a bellowing laugh, joined by his crew. He let the spell he'd been calling fade away. The fool had self-inflicted a spell worse than anything Gavin had planned. He pointed to the long, hanging appendage

dangling between Corzin's legs. "Look at that freak! It must be true what they say about the dean stepping out on the conductor for a horse."

The guffaws spread throughout the room. This was a boys-only part of the school, so the laughter was male and cruel. Corzin mustered his magic for a spell of physical force on Gavin. But all he managed to do was animate one of the paintings above the hearth into dancing a jig. He turned and ran up the stairs to his dorm room, his long penis swaying awkwardly, giving the audience a circus-freak show. He knew he had another uniform in the closet. But the damage was already done.



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"I thought everyone would be in the dorms, making friends. I'm surprised to find anyone in the library." Zara tucked the skirt of her uniform under her and sat on the opposite side of the reading table from Corzin. She regarded him. "You do look miserable, don't you?"

"You haven't heard?" Corzin was glad he'd been containing his tears. He didn't want to be seen crying by this stern, pretty girl.

"Heard what?" She shrugged. "I came here to study."

"But ... we haven't had any lessons yet." He relaxed a little. She wasn't here to mock him. He could see that plainly on her serious expression. "What are you studying?"

"I plan to study what I expect to be in the lessons, of course." Zara pressed her lips into a thin line. "Did someone do something to you? If so, you shouldn't stand for it. Give an inch, and people will take a mile."

"I embarrassed myself in the dorm living room. I'm not ... great with magic." He sighed.

"But ... you're a Blackbridge." Zara raised an eyebrow. "I wouldn't ... well ..." She thought better of what she'd been about to say. "Want to study with me?"

"Yeah, sure." If it meant not going back to the dorm, he was all for it. "Where do we start?"

"Well, it's a full moon, so I was thinking lupinology. Come, let's find the books." She stood, wrinkling her freckled nose with an awkward smile.

"Couldn't we just ask the MI to summarize the books for us?" Corzin stood, a real grin on his face for the first time since he'd set foot in Glergandr.

"Not if we want to learn to think for ourselves. Come on." She led him into the stacks. Zara hadn't expected to make any friends at the university, but here she was on the very first day doing just that. She found she kind of liked the idea.



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“He did what?” Uxium nearly fell off his chair he was laughing so hard. “In front of everybody?”



“Oh, my.” Raven laughed along with her boyfriend. She was considered by most to be the prettiest in her class, maybe the whole school. But even so, she felt lucky to have Uxium by her side. He was a catch. And if he was going to laugh at his poor, younger brother shaming himself, then Raven was, too. She forced more giggles out between her lips, letting her black hair fall over her pale face to hide a smile that wasn't altogether genuine.

“Wait until Mother hears of this. What a classic misfire.” Uxium clasped the messenger on his shoulder. He was a first-year trying to make a good impression. And Uxium thought he had, although he couldn't be bothered to remember the boy's name. “Raven, would you have still dated me if I had undressed myself in

front of everyone on the first day?”

“Of course I would. I see you naked regardless.” Raven let her laughter die away.

“I doubt it ... I doubt it.” Uxium wiped tears of joy from his eyes. He couldn't wait to see his brother to tease him about the incident.

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Zara snapped her fingers and a flaming clock appeared before her for about as long as it took her to catch the hour. "It's almost time for us to go to the dining hall." She stood and stretched, looking at all the open books on the study table. Her eyes roved over the page that Corzin was reading. It was sex magic, because, of course it was. Boys would be boys. She didn't think they were going to be tested on that anytime soon, but the lad could read what he wanted, she supposed. "Let's put our books away."

"I think I'll stay here." Corzin realized she was reading his book, even though it was upside down to her. His cheeks flushed, and he slammed the book closed. "I'm not hungry."

"Dinner isn't optional." Zara cocked her head at him. "You know you can't hide from them, right? You're a Blackbridge. The only option you have is to hold your head high and make them forget you did something silly."

"Easy for you to say." Corzin sighed. "Maybe I'll drop out."

"It's your first day." Zara closed the books and ordered them in neat stacks.

"When you made that clock appear, you didn't touch your stone." He pointed to the pretty stone dangling from a chain around her neck. "I've seen my mother do that. But not even Uxium ..." He shrugged and held his hands palms up.

"I suppose if you drop out, you won't be around to learn that trick." Zara liked the way he was smiling at her. She liked this small, awkward boy. She scowled so as not to smile back. "Come on, help me put these books away."



Corzin stood and helped her. They had been the only two in the library all afternoon. When they left, the place was quiet and spotless. They walked the overly grand, Art Nouveau halls together. The teenagers were almost shoulder to shoulder, moving closer together as they passed a series of creepy statues showing wise members from different species, including a goblin with a short sword, an elf with a scepter, and a fossegrim with a fiddle.



The dining hall was large, with high ceilings, elaborate chandeliers, and long tables. At the head of the room, the faculty had their own semi-circle table facing the students.

Corzin could see his mother up there, standing tall, her dark hair pinned high on her head. She was chastising some students who were misbehaving. "Should we ... sit together?" Corzin tried to keep his voice calm, but he could see some boys pointing at him and laughing. Some girls, too. He wondered how far the news of his self-humiliation had spread.

"If we're going to be friends, you're going to have to wallow less." Zara eyed the laughing students. "What exactly did you do to have everyone in such a tizzy?"

Corzin straightened his spine. She was right. And he didn't want her to change her mind about him. "As I mentioned before, I'm terrible with spells." He leaned over and whispered in her ear, telling her all about tearing away his own clothes.



When he was done with his story, Zara nodded matter-of-factly. "You know, when you think about it, botching a warding spell that badly is impressive. You have a flair for catastrophe, Corzin Blackbridge."

"Well ... um ... thanks?" Corzin kept a stiff upper lip. "Let's get some grub."

"Indeed." Zara nodded. They grabbed trays and got into line. "Want to study some more after supper?"

"Um ... yeah ..." Corzin spotted his brother, but thankfully Uxium didn't notice him. "Hey ... Zara ... thanks," Corzin said.

"Whatever." Zara served herself and strolled to the first-year table to find them a spot far enough away from the mocking boys. It was obvious that a friendship with Corzin would make her life harder at Glergandr. But she liked him, and she'd never run from hard work before.