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The Secret of the Dread Forest: The Faire Folk Trilogy

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Flux Press (June 2009)
Unknown $9.95 (288pp)
978-0-7387-1411-0

As if being new in town-or, more accurately, in the woods-isnt enough, Keelie Heartwood learns that shes been dumped by her sexy elven boyfriend at her own welcome party. Half-human, missing her mom, and still new to life with her father, an elven lord, shes also expected to take elven lore lessons from her old boyfriends creepy soon-to-be father-in-law and to tolerate the open disdain of the other elves who live in the Dread Forest. Her new charge, a sentient baby tree, keeps outgrowing its pot and whining for new “twinkles” to decorate its jewelry-laden leaves. Even her not-really-a-cat mentor has his own agenda, when he isnt out torturing bug fairies.

And if things arent already complicated enough, Keelie meets a mysterious boy in the woods. Her new lore teacher shows her a magical symbol that matches the one on her secret amulet-that used to be his-and her own powers start developing in surprising ways. Elia, who cursed Keelies hawk with blindness, is suddenly friendly, and it becomes clear that the Dread, the elven magic that keeps humans away from the elves home at the heart of the forest, is weakening enough to allow humans and their destructive all-terrain vehicles to enter. Even the distinction between good and evil magic becomes less obvious as Keelie struggles to understand an ancient way of life and the lengths to which some will go to protect it.

Keelie has a surprising group of allies, however, who assist her in moments of direst need as well at those times when a little retaliation would just feel good. When her ex-boyfriend interrupts her sword-fighting lesson to explain his betrayal, for example, a swarm of bug fairies descends, leaving his hair “tied in several hundred little itsy bitsy braids with flower-color ribbons tied at the end.” Add to this the friendship of a water sprite, a tattooed fairy, and some dwarves, and literally all the trees in the forest, and Keelie is a heroine with the assets she needs to get the job done.

Although a little more backstory would help this densely detailed tale make more sense to readers who have not yet read the first two books of the trilogy, *Into the Wildewood* and *The Tree Shepherds Daughter*, this finale will make them want to go back and start at the beginning. New and old characters combine in a breakneck plot that will have readers turning pages in class and long after bedtime.
ELIZABETH BREAU (June 12, 2009)

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