It is silly really, Birch thought as she lay under the large bright canopy that hung above her bed. There was no such thing as Nymphs and Dragons; nor were there such things as Kings and Queens and loyal knights who fought against these mystical creatures. The world was full of drab bleakness that simply consumed your soul day after day. Democracy ran the world as it always had, the closest thing to Royal you had were the Political Parties. And they were nothing but a bunch of old stuffy people talking about old stuffy topics.

*‘Then why does it feel as if my world has split into two?’* Birch barked at herself. This mystery had been plaguing her all day, which felt like years. She rolled onto her stomach and smothered her face into the scattered papers she left all over her bed. The smell of ink and Sharpies wafted through her nose making her head feel muzzy. Truth be told, you couldn’t step into her room without feeling a bit dizzy or disorianated. Birch’s room was a chaotic flurry of papers, writing utensiles, books, beheaded stuffed animals and assorted broken instruments. She enjoyed collecting things of interest, such as half a young child’s broken plastic crown or the dried up gold inkwell pens she had found down the street in the old hemlock.

It was like finding secret treasures. And most importantly her brothers never tried to take any of it away. They were always going on and hankering about how she was so odd collecting useless junk. Birch had learned, as each of her brothers were born, that if you had something of slight value, something too shiny or too cool to keep your mitts off then it was likely to be broken. It didn’t matter that she was the eldest of the seven. They had no respect for her because she was a girl. A weird girl who seemed to collect useless items and hoard them in her tiny room.

And to be perfectly honest, Birch liked to think of herself as different. Not nessecarily weird but different for sure. She was the only person she knew who had white hair at the tender age of sixteen. Kids who are born with white hair (like everyone in her family had been) normally grow normal colored hair by the time they are three. It seemed as if the world just wanted Birch to stick out and white hair was one of the many ways. She was gangily for her age. Not at all willowy like the models you see on TV. A mash of freckles dotted her cheeks. They stood out on her pale skin as if they were flecks of dirt. But most oddly of her looks were her eyes. They were just as pale as the rest of her with only the slightest tint of brown in them. People had often mistaken her for a blind person the way her watery eyes seems to vaguely look about all the time.

But as she propped herself up onto her elbows, ignoring the paper that stuck defiantely to her cheek, and glanced about her room she could see that everything she held her was of some kind of importance. The fiddle propped behind her door may have two broken strings and the back had fallen out but that didn’t mean it still didn’t make wonderful high-pitched shrills if you saw’d on the cords just hard enough.

But then again all this *stuff* was what made her think she was bonkers to begin with. It had been after she brought home her first artifact. It was a shattered music box that played a horrid tune whenever you cranked the peddle. It looked to have been tramped on by a flock of horses, the way the frame was bent. More then often she still found herself cranking the lever and hiding the broken box from her brothers. Torturing them until the tinkling melody came to a pittering stop.

It was always the next day that Birch found herself looking out her window and at a young man about her age across the street. From what she could see from her window, because she never did catch a glimse of him when she returned home, was the top of his shiny black nest of hair. It looked as if a batch of crows had nested and molted all of their feathers upon his head that poured into his eyes. The funny thing about him was that he always there without fail whenever she found something new. Always dressed smart as if he was going to head out for a wedding any second, even in the worst weather. And always holding a box that said: **‘Assorted Objects Return Box’.**

Birch had brought this guy to the attention of her brother, and second oldest of the household, Hickory. He had peered down at the boy one blissfully hot evening from the confinds of Birch’s room and studied the look of him.

“He’s probably just a person who works at one of the local clinics… Ya’ know those people who come around and collect money and toys every once in awhile for the less fortunate. It’s probably an old box they had laying around and that what he collects junk in, instead of a tin can,” Hickory shrugged away from the window and carefully began to pick his way around the mess.

“Oi! Hickory! But don’t you think it’s the slightest bit queer that he’s always there whenever I find something new? I’ve been watching for almost a year now… And it’s every time I bring home something he’s there!” Birch couldn’t fathom what he possibly wanted from her or why he might want her broken objects if that was what he really was after….

He gave a roaring laugh as he reached the door.

“Now there’s a thought! I’ve got an idea. How about you give him some of your crap laying around! You know you have too much junk in here and will have to throw it out eventually. Maybe someone will want…” Hickory’s eyes roamed about the room and landed on a half buried flute, “That! Someone with talent could make a real living off that flute there. It’d be in better hands with anyone but you really,” He stretched his arm as far as he could in the room and snatched up the flute, revealing that the buried half had some how managed to be flattened like a pancake.

“Honestly, what’s the point of keeping broken junk? That’s why people throw it away. It’s useless!” Hickory tossed the metal pipe in the air and caught it deafly a few times. Birch’s cheeks felt hot as blood rose to her face. She stormed across her room as menicellingly as she could through piles of things and snatched the flute from Hickory’s hands.

“DON’T! Get OUT! Get OUT! GET OUT!” Birch gripped at the frame of her door and pushed as hard as she could. The door gave a grinding lurch as it dragged across the floor and snapped in her brothers face. Not the big bang she was hoping for but it worked none the less. She could hear her brother mutter something about being off a rocker and his heavy thumps as he made his way downstairs and out the front door.

Birch couldn’t resist going to her window to watch her brother pass the strange boy. Maybe he would approach him and tell the boy his sister was bonkers and to leave to another street. *Maybe* he would find out that this man really was after her strange assortment of objects because they meant something special. They didn’t just mean something special to Birch but they did special things too. They didn’t just play a broken cord or let out puffs of dried ink. Whenever Birch played with them they always did something… Dare she say magical? There wasn’t anything else that could really describe it but magical. Her dried pens managed to draw elegant seneries every time they were touched to a piece of paper. Her instruments piped out musical estascy when they were all set up in a line as if they were actually in an orchestra group about the play at Madison Square Garden.

But as Birch watched her brother trudge down the street she could find no trace of the mysterious boy with the big cardboard box.

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Two months had passed and the heat of the summer was at its peak. Birch had refused to bring home anything new she found laying about. No matter how tempting it was she decisively turned her back to it and walked in a different direction. And during these two months the boy had yet to appear across the street.

It was the middle of August when Birch saw the boy again. As it happened she had been out and about when she spotted in a store window his reflection. He was half way hidden behind a bush on the other side of the street. What gave him away was the mop of black that stuck out of the bush. Looking a little closer at the window, Birch watched him peep out from behind the bush to make sure he hadn’t lost sight of her. It was then that Birch decided to gather up her nerves. Once the boy stuck his head back into the bush Birch made long hopefully silent strides to the bush across the road. By the time the boy realized Birch had seen him he shot up to run but a firm hand clutched his ear and held him still.

“Ow! Ow! Ow! Really that’s unneccacary! Please do stop!” The boy tired to pry her fingers off him. He bowed his head and grimanced as Birch grabbed his other ear and planted her feet firmly on the ground.

“I’ll let go when you tell me why you’re stalking me!” She cried in indigently.

Piercing green eyes looked up at her from his bowed possesion Anger leaked from his black ringed eyes. “I’m following you because you have a LOT of stuff that doesn’t belong to you. They need to go back to their original owners! It’s a mistake that they are here! Now let go you crazy old bat!” He clutched at her wrists and squeezed until Birch let out a shrill yelp and snatched her hands back.

* Nonconforming
* Creative
* Strongly motivated by curiosity
* Aware from early childhood that he is different
* Intelligent
* Opinionated and outspoken, convinced that he is right and that the rest of the world is out of step
* Noncompetitive, not in need of reassurance or reinforcement from society
* Unusual in his eating habits and living arrangements
* Not particularly interested in the opinions or company of other people
* Possessed of a mischievous sense of humor
* Usually the eldest or an only child