

CHAPTER II
THE WITCHES

Nadia must have dozed off, for when she awoke, she forgot where she was, and there were great poundings against the cabin. While trying to wrestle herself out of sleep to discern the noise, she realized the booming sounds were coming from above. A reverberating commotion of bangs, dragging noises and many hard steps sounded on the roof. Nadia arose quickly; she thought she had entered a story from Man's land and reindeer were landing, and she hid under the kitchen table. The noises scampered to the edges of the ceiling, stopped, and soon there was movement outside the windows.

The door handle rattled and turned, and in burst several middle-aged and elder women, larger than life in dark hats, some wearing skirts, some wearing leggings and robes. Nadia would have remained under the table if the woman in the front did not look exactly like Mabel.

Only, her skin wasn't silver.

Slowly Nadia crept out from under the table as nine women filled the room. The one who looked like Mabel smiled generously

at Nadia. She wore similar skirts and fabrics to Mabel, but there was something different about her, so much so that Nadia realized she was a wholly different person. Maybe it was her tanned skin, her dark eyebrows, the distance between her eyes, the curve of her nose, or the bold personality that told her this was not Mabel.

The woman smiled. "I am Mabel's twin sister, Agatha," she said. "And you must be Nadia. She has sent you here to meet us."

"Hello," said Nadia shyly, looking at the other women, approaching Agatha and extending her hand. "But how did you.."

Agatha took Nadia's hand into her soft large ones, and it was very strange to see Mabel's twin—so much like her, yet so different.

"You must come with us now," said another elder woman, tall, bespectacled, with wrinkled tan features which betrayed her vigorous manner.

"But what about Priscilla?" asked Nadia.

"Priscilla will be fine," said a stout woman with a lace collar. "She's one of our kind," she said.

"But the machine—" countered Nadia.

"We know," said another woman, lanky and thin with curly blond hair and spectacles. "She knows how to heal from it. She

has chosen to be here.”

“Okay,” said Nadia reluctantly.

“Let’s be off, then,” said Agatha.

When they exited the cabin, the women retrieved brooms that had been lain against the side of it. They each mounted the brooms as Agatha snapped her fingers and a small quilt unfolded to float in the air. Agatha nodded, and Nadia climbed up onto it and held its sides as it floated next to Agatha’s broom like a sidecar. They all rose into the air and began to ascend.

No one could have prepared Nadia for this: that she would be travelling with a whole fleet of witches, to what task she did not know.

They had ascended to a high mountaintop where the air was clean and thin and cold, to pass through another Air Door. It was strange to see the two trees standing there as they approached, but Nadia had become accustomed to seeing strange things when it came to magick.

Nadia got to glimpse underneath the quilt when they landed briefly to pass through the Door. The quilt felt solid and

cushioned, as if it were laid out on a bed, yet there was nothing underneath. This wasn’t the first time she had flown on one, yet the magick still intrigued her. But she did not have time to look. She was ushered through the portal, wind rushing, between two middle-aged women, with Agatha directly behind her. They emerged onto a similar mountaintop with a different sky and horizon line, and it felt like late afternoon. Again they started off, flying lower and lower, towards the valleys of the mountains, and smoke from fires could be seen in quaint dwellings in a hamlet surrounded by caves. Further and further they flew, occasionally passing a settlement, until they reached a pleasant grouping of cottages and gardens bordering a forest.

The witches lived in a community of quaint structures they had built themselves. They took Nadia in and for the next several days allowed her to rest. Nadia did not know she was tired until she was put into a guest room in one of the cottages. Before long, she would get to learn all of the witches’ names. Over the next few days, Nadia got to know the wisewomen, their ways, their familiars, their individual personalities, and their powers.