

**Norah**  
and the  
**Crow Witch**



*by*

**A. B. Hawthorne**

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Once upon a time, in the very middle of nowhere...



## About the Author

*Writing in isolation from her garden cottage in an undisclosed, remote New England village, A. B. (Antidote Beatrice) Hawthorne produces rare and unique stories that are more reminiscent of her literary ancestors than of contemporary writers. Rarely if ever seen in public, she never, as far as can be ascertained, attended any advanced literature programs, yet she has a natural talent for adventurous plots and exciting developments. Some reviewers speculate that she might be writing from personal experience. What we do know is that she was born and raised in rather unusual circumstances, close to nature in a garden dedicated primarily to medicinal herbs many of which were poisonous, and that she was schooled in magic from an early age (if rumors are to be believed). Beyond that we cannot say, and nor has she. The author prefers to let her work speak for itself, and, despite her publisher's repeated requests, assiduously avoids all social media.*

*It's almost as if she has a secret to protect.*



“No summer ever came back, and no two summers ever were alike.”

-

- Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance*

*Imagine...*

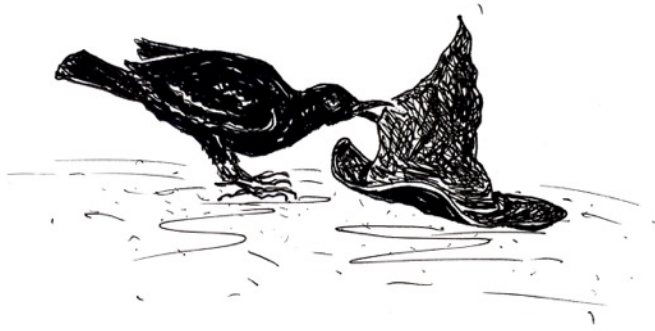


“A dark Cave. In the middle, a Caldron boiling. Thunder.  
Enter the three Witches.”

- William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

*Chapter 1*

**Arrival**



“Everything good, everything magical happens  
between the months of June and August.”

- Jenny Han

Norah was a girl on vacation. Summer vacation, to be precise, which she was to spend at her Great Aunt’s house in the countryside.

Her father dropped her off with a large trunk full of summer clothes and some of her favorite books. She did not bring her cell phone or tablet because the house was completely off grid.

It was mid-afternoon when she was left there with the stern old lady in a crisp summer dress, whose grey hair was curly and sticking up in every direction as if it hadn’t gotten the memo that the house, the dress, the everything else, was very, *very* neat and tidy, in an old-fashioned old-lady way.

“So, Norah,” the Great Aunt said, “I don’t suppose you remember me.”

“Uh, no.” Norah fidgeted. They were sitting in the front parlor, a room that had *definitely* gotten the memo about things being tidy and fancy and don’t-touch-anything-or-you’ll-break-it neat.

*"I remember you."* She leaned forward and popped an old-fashioned mono-what-do-you-call-it lens, thick glass on a gold chain, over her left eye to examine Norah. "You've grown."

"I should hope so," Norah said, then regretted it. It sounded fresh. "Uh, Ma'am," she added, hoping to recover her manners.

"You may call me Great Aunt Isobel," the old woman said, allowing her monocle to fall and swing on its chain. "Or," she added, smiling, "Aunt Izzi. That's what your older cousins call me. They used to summer here, you know."

"The older ones who live in England?" Norah asked. "I don't really know them. I only see them at weddings and, um, funerals." She wondered whether mentioning funerals was bad manners when speaking to someone that old.

Apparently not. Great Aunt Isobel broke into pleasant laughter. "Is that right!" she said. "Well, they used to enjoy exploring the countryside around here. Swimming holes, fox dens, gardens, ponies. You should go down the lane to Mr. Dartmoor's farm. You can't miss it. Ponies everywhere."

"Uh, am I supposed to ride them?" Norah asked, puzzled.

"Oh yes! He's a great friend of mine. Tell him I sent you and he'll soon have you all set up. It's a family farm, all his children work there too, and anyone can show you around."

"I've never ridden before," Norah admitted.

"What! That's terrible!! Well then, you can start exploring on foot. Do you like flowers? I grow a great many perennials out back. You can take a look after tea. And I'll chat with Todd, that's Mr. Dartmoor, and see if we can arrange a few lessons with his youngest daughter. She's only a year or two older than you, and her name is Shetland. Can you believe that? They're all named after types of ponies, you see."

"Uh, okay." Norah frowned. She was not sure what to say next.

A mournful whistle started up. It was low and soft at first and the old woman did not seem to notice, but it soon became shriller and Norah had to ask. “What’s that? Some kind of alarm?”

“Oh! My hearing isn’t what it used to be. The kettle’s hot, I should think. Come along to the kitchen. No, you can leave your luggage in the front hall for now. I’ll show you your room later. Come. The kitchen’s this way.”





*Chapter 2*  
**Tea and Beyond**



“...watch with glittering eyes the whole world around you because the greatest secrets are always hidden in the most unlikely places.”  
- Roald Dahl

Great Aunt Isobel served a mean tea. Norah, despite her misgivings about the general setup, had to admit to herself that the tea was impressive. A fresh pound cake, lemony and moist. Fresh baked cookies in flower shapes with delicate icing in all the colors of a summer garden. Roasted seeds and nuts, salty and aromatic, in little blue-and-white bowls. Real, old fashioned square sugar cubes, much too wonderful to waste by dissolving in your hot tea when you could roll one around on your tongue and let it melt there instead. And crackers which

Norah suspected might also be home made, along with smelly cheeses that she decided to skip in favor of more cake.

“You must be famished,” her great aunt remarked.

“Yes I am,” Norah admitted. “It was a long drive. You live in the middle of nowhere! Uh, if you don’t mind my saying so.” Norah regretted her comment, thinking it might seem to be an insult, but her aunt laughed again.

“Oh yes, I do! Truly nowhere. That’s the best place to be. You’ll see. Now, if you’re done? No room for a third piece of cake? Very well, I will clean up and you may go explore the garden. You’ve been cooped up in a car all day. No need to coop you up in the house here with me.”

“Shouldn’t I put my things away?”

“When you get back. No hurry. The garden’s out through those French doors and down the steps. But Norah?”

“Yes?” She stopped and turned back to see what her aunt wanted.

“The gate in the rear of the yard leads to a rather unfriendly neighbor’s. Best to give it a miss.” Then the old woman was off, carrying the tea tray toward the kitchen. Norah was surprised at how springy her step seemed to be. *Not quite as old as she seemed at first*, she thought. Then she stepped out into the warm sunlight of the rear yard.

The first thing she noticed was the scents of summer flowers. Her aunt truly did have a lot of plants in her garden. There were butterflies and bees too, and a hummingbird glittered like a jewel as it zipped from flower to flower.

The second thing Norah noticed was, across a long, green, well-trimmed lawn dotted with clumps of flowering plants a grim old stone wall. And in the center of it, slightly ajar, was an iron gate. Curious, she began to head that way. Wouldn’t you?

### Chapter 3

## A Small Adventure



The sky was a lovely, light blue. Beyond the walls enclosing Great Aunt Isobel's rear yard, gentle hills rolled off toward the horizon with, here and there, stout, long-tailed ponies grazing contentedly, heads down. There was a fresh, clean quality to the air that Norah was not accustomed to since she lived in a city. She took a deep, appreciative breath.

And there was also that interesting rear wall with its iron gate. Behind it, overgrown gardens rose up, and there was just a glimpse of the roof of a crooked old house. Norah was curious about it. *That must be where the unfriendly neighbor lives, she thought. I wonder why they don't get along?*

Clouds were beginning to form in the distance, making shadows dance over the lawn.

Norah thought she saw something moving behind the gate, a flash of white, perhaps a cat, but it was gone before she could get a good look at it.

A crow cawed and was answered by another.

Norah's curiosity lead her on. Soon she was standing at the gate. There was indeed another house, a strange old house rising up on a lonely hillside. It

looked dark and deserted. *They're probably not home*, she told herself. *And I'm sure they won't mind if I do a little exploring*. People lived so far apart out here in the countryside that Norah thought there could be no harm in wandering around, so long as she kept her distance from the house.

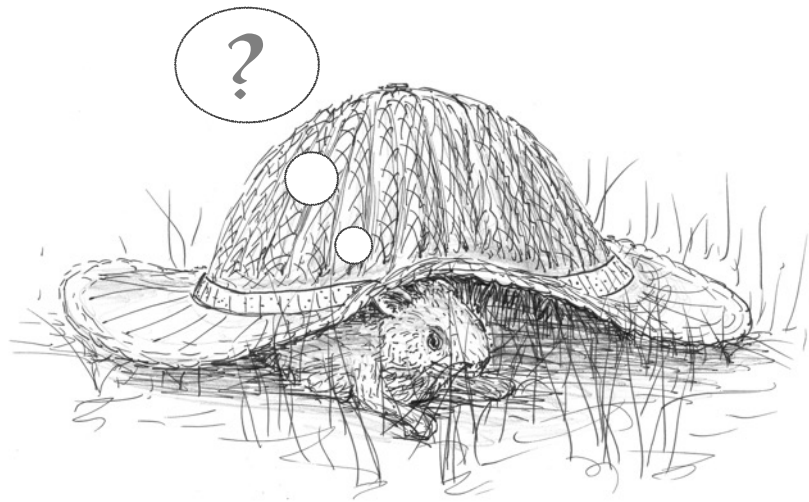
She grasped the old gate. Its metal was cold to the touch and its hinges creaked loudly, but it opened easily enough. She stepped through.

She was wearing, because her father had insisted on it, a summer dress and a straw hat. "Your aunt," her father had said, "will appreciate it if you dress for tea." He was usually wrong about fashion, but this time he might have been right. Anyway, she still had on her favorite pair of high-top sneakers. Fortunately she had grown out of her uncomfortable dress shoes. But now she was surprised to find that the sneakers seemed loose. In fact, *very* loose, as if they were much too big for her.

*I guess they've come undone*, she thought and started to lean over, but there was an odd ringing in her ears and she felt dizzy and her dress also seemed too large, so large that she accidentally stepped right out of it. And then she was breathing really rapidly and in something of a panic, because a cage had come down over her and she could only see little rectangles of sunlight through its criss-crossed bars.

It took a moment to realize that she was looking out through her own straw hat. Somehow it had become so hugely giant that it was arching up over her and trapping her on the neighbor's lawn. A lawn that really, really needed mowing because the grass was taller than she was.

She pushed her way out from beneath the hat, nosing forward toward freedom.



*Chapter 4*  
**Facing Reality**



She nosed her way through the lawn, taking in the rich smells of the soil and the occasional wildflower that grew there. Wildflowers were so large! Much taller than her. What the...?

She paused, confused. She scratched behind one ear. She licked her paw. She freaked out. “What, what, WHAT HAPPENED TO ME!” she shouted, but it came out as a sort of mild-mannered series of small squeaks.

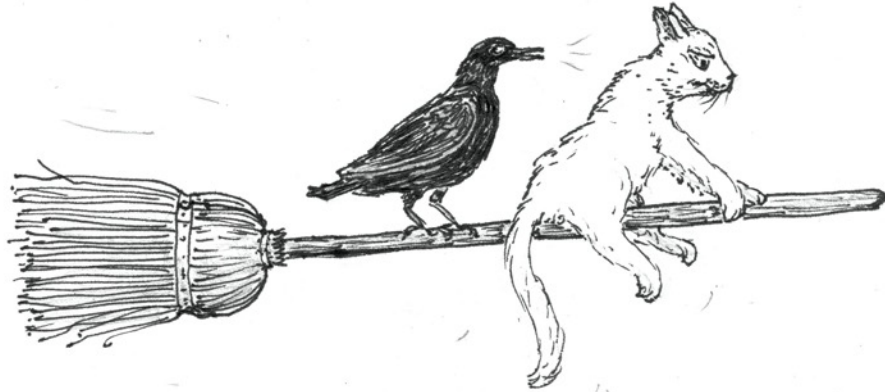
*Hold that thought.* Something was moving around just behind her. It felt... Like it was ATTACHED TO HER!!!

She turned, trying to get a good look at it. It twitched away. She turned again. Still out of sight. And then she realized, somehow, she was not sure how, that she could move it. With her brain. Just by thinking about it. *Move, will you!*

It came slowly around until it was in front of her.

A tail. A long, fur-covered brown tail with a dark brown, almost black, tip. There it lay across her arms. Correction, her paws. Right in front of her, in very plain sight.

She had to face facts. She seemed to have a tail.



*Chapter 5*  
**Exploring**



Norah was a practical girl and it did not take her long to accept the fact that, by stepping through that gate, she had somehow been transformed into a mouse. Furthermore, the solution seemed quite simple to her. She would just step back through the gate into her great aunt's yard.

No sooner thought than done. She scampered under the gate and found herself on a neater lawn.

However, she still had a tail.

She was still very small.

And she was still covered in brown fur.

Sighing, she turned around and went back into the neighbor's yard, pressing through the long grass. Whatever strange thing had made her a mouse, it must, she reasoned, be in there somewhere, and she would find it. She was



not planning to be a mouse for the rest of the summer. Certainly not! So she set off across the vast and tangled landscape toward the looming, gloomy house.

Now she knew why her great aunt didn't like the neighbors. Apparently they turned people into mice. But if they could turn her into one, then they could turn her back. She would find them and insist upon it.

And so off she went, scampering and sniffing along, her sensitive whiskers helping her duck and weave around obstacles and her long tail balancing her acrobatic progress. *I never knew how clever mice are!* she thought. *Small, but clever.*

*And we're such good climbers!* she added as she came upon a tree trunk and climbed up it a little way, just to make sure she was still heading toward the house.

Satisfied with her progress, she climbed down and set off across the lawn again. She was making quite good time when a shadow flickered overhead and her new-found animal instincts told her to hide. Darting beneath a small bush, her heart racing, she peaked out through the foliage and spotted a most peculiar sight.

A white cat was clinging awkwardly to an old broom and a black crow was perched jauntily just behind it. The crow seemed to be keeping a stern eye on the cat. As they swooped back over the lawn again, Norah heard the crow say, "You *better* find out who it was, or she'll put you in a jar like all the others!"

"I'm afraid of heights," the cat complained. "And, *meow*, I don't like hunting."

"Too bad. *Caw!* You have to do what she tells you or else. *Caw, caw!*" And then the broom wobbled away above the lawn with the frightened cat clinging to it and the crow perched behind. *Of course the crow isn't afraid of heights*, Norah thought. *It can fly.* Norah was not too keen on heights herself. She sympathized with the cat.

And then another thought occurred to her: *I understood them! I wonder why?* At first she imagined that, in this strange and enchanted place, all of the animals must be able to speak English. But then she recalled their vocalizations had been far from proper speech. Very far. The cat had been meowy, the crow had squawked. And yet she had understood.

“My name is Norah,” she said, just to see what her own voice sounded like. It came out, alas, more like this: “Squee eak eesqueaka Neesquee.” *Oh no!* she thought. *I sound like a mouse!* And so she did. But animals can speak to each other, and the magic that had made her a mouse had also given her the ability to understand the creatures around her.

Would she be able to talk to the neighbors and ask them to help her return to her own body?

*That might be a problem, she thought. But first things first. I've got to find someone who knows what was done to me.*

And so she set off on her journey toward the crooked old house. It was a long way for a little mouse to go, but she was determined.

She would have gone there without stopping, except that when she was nearing the steps, she came across a long, shiny black feather laying on the grass as if it had just recently landed there. Of course she was curious about it. If she had still been in girl form, she would have picked it up and tucked it into her hat band to bring home as a souvenir.

She did not realize that someone was watching.





Chapter 6  
**Crow Magic**



Norah was fascinated by the shiny black feather with its ever so delicate thin barbs lined up perfectly on each side of the shaft. A light breeze puffed across the lawn and, for a moment, lifted the big feather. It quivered in the air as if full of magic. (*And perhaps, she thought, it really is magical, or else how can crows fly?*) Then it settled back onto the grass.

She reached a little, furry paw out to touch it.

That was when the Crow Witch swooped low on her long broomstick followed by her angry flock of crows, all of them cawing and screaming and shrieking at Norah.

The cacophony of caws would have been quite terrible, even if Norah had not been able to understand. It was far worse because she knew what they were saying. “Burn her! Melt her! Crush her under stones! Bottle her up for a hundred years! Turn her into a frog and throw her in a cauldron of boiling oil!” And so on. All crows are highly imaginative, and those crows were not in the

least bit kindly or forgiving. They seemed to feel that Norah had done something awful enough to deserve all those horrid things.

The Crow Witch landed. She had a narrow, long-nosed face and deep-set, beady eyes. She wore a tall, pointed witch's hat and, tossed over her sharp shoulders, an elegant, wing-like grey cloak or cape of some sort. It had the darkest of deep black linings.

Her boots were sharply pointed and shiny black, and they were mostly what Norah saw, since she was too short to see much else.

The witch leaned over to stare at Norah. Then she pointed a bony finger and said, "You! Mouse! What do you think you're doing?"

"Um, I, I just... Nothing at all, Ma'am. Sorry!" And then she turned and was about to scamper away, but one of the crows landed behind her.

Norah turned back, only to find that the witch had taken several steps forward. Her big boots were now uncomfortably close. *What if she tries to step on me?* Norah worried.

"You must be the one who tripped the spell," the witch said. "What are you, a girl from town sneaking around trying to steal something?"

"Me? No! I'm, I'm here for summer vacation."

"Hah! Another bothersome niece, I suppose. That old witch had better stay out of my way. She's meddled one too many times!"

"Caw. Caw-cawwwcah-caaw!" The crow had offered its opinion, which, Norah knew (because of her recently acquired ability) was that she, Norah, would make a tasty snack for the witch's cat.

"I agree. Let's feed her to the cat. I'll immobilize her while you go fetch it."

As the crow flew off, the witch leaned over and aimed a long forefinger at Norah. “Fange og holde og fryse og binde opp dette ubrukelig unnskyldning for en gnager!”<sup>1</sup>

Norah knew it was magic, powerful magic, because it made her feel tingly and dizzy and nauseated and hot and cold at the same time, and, worst of all, when she tried to run away, she could not seem to lift her furry feet off the ground.

“Release her!” someone cried in a high, thin little voice, and then, with a flutter of delicate wings, a plump brown sparrow flew in and took up position in front of her. Although small, it stood bravely, its little brown eyes filled with fierce intention as it glared up at the Crow Witch.

“Release her? Hah! I shall do no such thing. And since when does a Sparrow Witch dare to stand in my way?”

“Moder Jord favoriserer den lille og den søte,”<sup>2</sup> the sparrow said. “Do not anger Mother Nature.” And then it held a little flower up, waving it in the direction of the Crow Witch, who, startled, took a step back.

“An anemone!<sup>3</sup> Where did you get that?” she demanded, screening her face from the flower, which seemed to pain her.

“Your neighbor grows it,” the sparrow announced. “And there’s plenty more where this came from, so release the girl now!”

“Yours is only a brief victory,” the Crow Witch hissed as she mounted her broomstick. “The mouse is still on my property, and I will make good my claim on her as soon as your silly little flower-spell wears off!” And then she was taking to the air and swooping away, her long cloak flapping and her flock of crows wheeling after her.

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<sup>1</sup> Grab and hold and freeze and bind this useless excuse for a rodent!

<sup>2</sup> Mother Earth favors the small and the sweet.

<sup>3</sup> Pronounced Ah-**nem**-oh-**nee**, this little wildflower is a traditional ward against evil spells.

Norah felt her feet coming unstuck and the chills and dizziness lifting. “Am I turning back to me? Thank you!” she exclaimed.

The sparrow shook its little head. “No, you are only saved from her immobilization spell. I couldn’t let her feed you to a cat, could I?”

“Uh, no, that wouldn’t be good,” Norah agreed. “But I’m still a mouse.” She didn’t want to seem ungrateful, but in truth she was quite disappointed.

“To free yourself from that spell,” the sparrow said, “you’ll have to free others first.”

“I will?” Norah frowned.

“Yes, I think you’ll find that by being of service to others, you will also become stronger and better able to take care of yourself. That is often how life works. You got yourself into this, now see if you can get yourself out of it.”

“By freeing someone?” Norah repeated. “Uh, who? How?”

“And don’t forget the crow feather! Its magic may prove useful,” the sparrow witch said as she flapped up and circled away.

“Wait a minute, *where?*” But the sparrow witch was gone and Norah found herself alone again, and still very much a mouse.





Chapter 7

**Breaking & Entering**



“I learnt that the only way to get a thing done is to start to do it,  
then keep on doing it, and finally you’ll finish it, even if  
in the beginning you think you can’t do it at all.”

- Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea*

Norah wished the Sparrow Witch had told her more, but at least she was able to continue on her trip. She recalled the streak of cat-like white she’d seen on the old stone wall, and shivered at the thought of becoming someone’s dinner.

Holding the feather over her shoulder because it was so long she couldn’t think how else to carry it, she began to hop slowly toward the crooked old house again. She felt ridiculous as she hopped along on three feet, the plume waving above her.

She came to a set of wooden steps leading upward. They were like a small mountain to her, but she found she was pretty good at leaping and scrambling

up them, even with the feather. The porch at the top of the steps was covered in dust and dry leaves. The Crow Witch did not seem to take an interest in housekeeping. There was no welcome mat, but there was definitely a door. A tall, solid oak door looming up and up, securely shut.

Norah sighed. It was beginning to feel like a difficult afternoon.

“Use the feather to pick the lock,” came a little twitting voice as a sparrow flapped past.

Norah nodded. It made sense, somehow; but the doorknob was a long way above her.

She began to climb.

The wood of the door was aged and rough enough that, with care, she could just get her nails to grip it. She almost fell more than once, but she kept climbing until she reached a metal plate and scrambled up beside it. Holding her breath, she stretched out and eased herself onto the doorknob. It was slippery metal, but she worked her way over it until she could see the dark keyhole down below.

Carefully, ever so carefully, she adjusted her grip on the feather and pushed the tip downward. She missed on her first try. And on her second. Finally, she got the shaft of the feather into the keyhole and gave it a push.

Now it was sticking out of the lock looking quite ridiculous, and the door was still firmly closed. *What next*, she wondered.

The Sparrow Witch did not come. That was, of course, what Norah was hoping for. Instead, Norah just clung onto the doorknob, staring at the black feather below her and also at the empty yard beyond the porch steps. *The Crow Witch is going to come back and she'll catch me for sure!* It was a depressing thought. “I can’t believe this!” she squeaked out loud. “Would you just *open!*”

The feather began to vibrate. Then the door began to vibrate, too.

A humming came from somewhere inside the hardware.

The feather shook madly, then it blew out of the keyhole. The doorknob rotated, forcing Norah to scramble just to stay on top. And then the door swung inward.

It was darker inside and very quiet, as if the house were holding its breath to see what would happen next.

What *did* happen next? Nothing clever. Nothing magical. Just this: Norah, confused by the sudden movements of doorknob and door, lost her footing and fell.

She landed with a thump on an old oriental carpet. She had spun around in the air and landed feet first, braced for impact. *Wow*, she thought. *Mice are really athletic!* She was a bit sore but not injured, despite having fallen from many times her own height. *Now what?* she thought, looking around.

The door swung closed again with an ominous click. *Locked*, she decided. *Which is really too bad, because...*

She had spotted a white cat coming down a set of stairs, taking them three and four at a time. And from the way it was leaping across the front hall, it had obviously spotted her, too.





Chapter 8

How



“There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens  
and lets the future in.”

- Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory*

Norah gasped as she took in the sight of the large, white cat leaping across the threadbare carpet toward her, its eyes golden and eager and its mouth partway open, revealing a sharp and very large set of feline teeth. “Ahhh!” she cried as she backed up against the oak door.

The cat braked, rumpling the carpet and nearly colliding with her. It fetched up just an inch or two from her face. Its nose wiggled curiously as it sniffed her. “You smell like a girl,” it announced. It sat down, tail twitching. “Explain.”

“You’re n-n-not going to eat me?” she stammered.

The cat licked the back of a paw.

“Um, uh, h-how are you, sir? I-I am sorry to intrude, but, but...” She could not think of a plausible explanation for why she had broken in. Not one likely to gain the sympathy of a cat. *Perhaps, she thought, if I introduce myself, he’ll see that I’m not just any old snack, but an actual individual who doesn’t want to be eaten.* “I’m, uh, Norah. Good to m-meet you, I g-g-guess. Uh, who are you?” She tried a smile, although she suspected it was not very convincing.

“How.”

“Oh, sorry, *how* are you?” she said, not wanting to displease it.

“Fine.”

“And, um, who?” she added hopefully, thinking that if she could strike up a conversation, it might delay the eating phase.

“How.”

“Sorry, uh, *how* are you. Didn’t I just ask you that?”

“How!”

“Yes, sorry! How *are* you?”

The cat stopped licking its paw and stared at her. “I’m fine. I already said that.”

“S-so sorry. Are you g-going to eat me now?”

The cat laughed.

“It’s not funny! I don’t want to be eaten!”

The cat tipped its head to the side as it studied her. “No. I don’t suppose anyone does. As I was saying, *meeow*, I’m How. My *name* is How. Got it? And I’m not a he. I prefer to be called she.”

“Oh! Sorry, How. I don’t know how to tell with, um, with cats.”

“Try asking.” She went back to licking her paw.

“So, about eating mice. D-do you?”

“I’m supposed to. Especially you. The crow said so. But...”

“But?” she repeated hopefully.

“But I don’t like mice. Not to eat, nor to chase. I’m not really...” She leaned over, her long white whiskers tickling Norah’s shorter brown ones. “I’m not a hunter,” she whispered. “But don’t tell the Crow Witch. She’d put me in one of her bottles, or worse.”

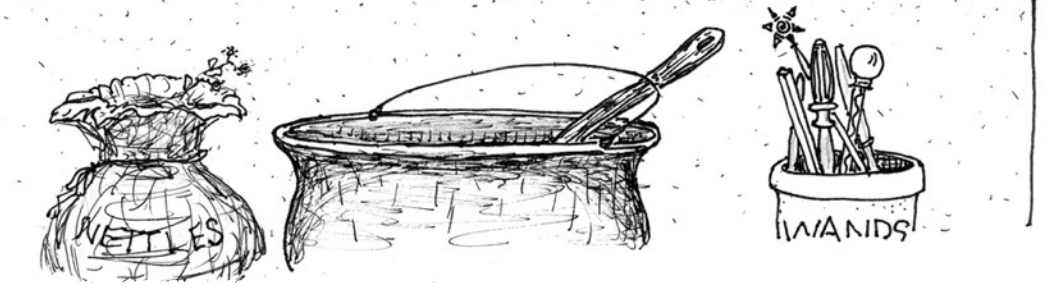
“Bottles?” Norah was puzzled by that.

“Want to see?” The cat was on her feet in an instant and padding silently across the carpet. “Come on.”

How lead Norah to the rear of the first floor, where, instead of a normal kitchen, there was a workshop full of witch’s stuff. Spare brooms, some of them broken, leaned against one wall. Tall shelves held jars full of ingredients, none of them the sort of thing you’d find in a normal kitchen. Craning her neck to look up at the labels, Norah soon spotted a bottle full of snakes (they were writhing around in it), another full of spiders (spinning their webs), and yet another that was very full of bats.

“Come on, I’ll show you,” How said, and leapt onto a shelf. Working her way up nimbly, the way cats do, she was soon near the ceiling, where she sat and stared into a big glass jar.

It took Norah longer to climb. She went up the side, then came part way out along the shelf. She stopped at a large tin labeled ‘Butterflies, Mixed’. “Why does she have all of these?” she asked.





The cat pawed at the mouse jar, making the poor creatures within it scamper and run around in fear. “Some of these are for spells, some are for plaguing her enemies, and some *are* her enemies,” she explained. “The Crow Witch is not very nice.”

“Certainly not to mice,” Norah agreed as she came over to peer inside the mouse jar. “They’re terrified! Can we get them out?”

“Can’t. Jars don’t open unless you know a powerful spell.” How said. “Are you a witch?”

“Who, me? No. Just an ordinary girl.”

“From next door?” How eyed Norah.

“I just arrived. This is the first day of my summer vacation.”

I hope you’re wrong about being ordinary,” How said.

“What if she comes back and catches us here?” Norah asked.

How leaned out, craning her neck to look up at the topmost shelf. “See that wand? It’s in a mug. She stuck it up there because it won’t behave. She keeps her own wands on a lower shelf where she can reach them, but this one kept sparking and making the others turn on, so she had to move it away.”

“I can’t see,” Norah said.

“It’s up there, trust me. She took it from another witch.” How looked at Norah meaningfully.

“Another... Wait, how many witches *are* there around here? It’s the middle of nowhere!”

“Nowhere is where witches live. But *this* witch, she lives next door. Don’t you know her?”

“What, my great... No way! She’s an old lady! She drinks tea every day at three! There’s no way she’s a witch.”

“The Crow Witch doesn’t like her because she stops bad things from happening. She’s a good witch, see? And so the Crow Witch takes things from her when she can. Wands. Cats. All sorts of things.”

“You?”

How nodded.

“Are you a captive?”

“Just as much as if I were in a bottle. I can’t leave the grounds. Not without a powerful witch to help me get away from her spells.”

“Wait, do you know the Sparrow Witch?”

“Flits around? Small and brown? Sure. She’s my favorite.”

“She said I had to free someone. Maybe... Can you help me get that wand?”

“The one on the top shelf? Happy to, but if you take it you’ve got to use it. *Really* use it, Norah. Because the Crow Witch will know, and she’ll be terribly mad.”

“Here, let me just...” Norah crept cautiously up How’s back and onto her head. “Okay, now, give me a boost. Careful!” she added as she nearly slipped off. It was a lot farther down to the floor this time than when she’d fallen from the doorknob. She doubted even a mouse’s reflexes could save her from a fall like that.

“Can you get it?” How asked.

“Don’t wiggle!” Norah stood on her rear legs and stretched. The wand was still out of reach. “Come here, you!” she muttered.

By some happy coincidence, the wand rolled around in the old mug until it was leaning toward her instead of away. “Got you!” she said as she grabbed it and climbed back between How’s furry ears.

As How was cautiously backing down, the wand did something Norah had not expected. It burst into bright white light and began to hum. “Oh no!” she squeaked. “Now what?”

“Free the captives while the magic’s working,” How said. “And *do* hurry up!”



Chapter 9  
**Pursued!**



The wand quivered with excitement, nearly twitching right out of Norah’s paws as she held it high and studied the shelves full of jars. “Uh, if I open them, a lot of stuff’s going to come out. Some of it might be unpleasant. Like ‘stale air’ and ‘sniffles’ and, ‘farts’ and, um...” She tried to read the other labels, but the writing was small and high up.

“I’d be more worried about the jar of cats,” How pointed out. “You’re a mouse, after all.”

“Oh! Do you think they like to hunt?”

“Most cats do.”

“True, but it’s mean to keep them there. This shelf’s like a magical prison.” Norah frowned (but it tickled, so she had to stop; her forehead was covered with short little hairs.) “What do you... Wait, what’s *that*?”

It was the rusty screeching of door hinges. “She’s coming!” How cried. “Quick, open the bottles and unlock the kitchen door so we can escape!”

“Um, I, I command Wait, how do we get away?”

“I’ll carry you on my back. You can ride, can’t you? All her nieces and nephews do.”

“No, but I guess it’s time to learn. Here goes,” Norah said, feeling determined. “I command the magic of this wand to open the containers and free all the captives, and to allow How to go back home and me too!”

The wand lit up and flashed bright darts of light all around the strange workshop. Jars and tins shook madly and lids popped and twisted free. Norah got a quick glimpse of mice scrambling out of the mouse jar, bats flitting around the room, snakes slithering along the shelf, and

“Grab the fur on the back of my neck!” How shouted as cats began to leap down the shelving toward them and a big container on the nearest workbench burst open to loud cawing.

Large black crows began to flap overhead.



They took off at incredible speed, Norah screaming and holding on for dear life as How raced straight toward a door in the rear of the room. It popped open at the very last moment, and then they were leaping down a short flight of steps and racing off through the long grass.

“Circle the house and go through the gate!” Norah cried. A glance over her shoulder had shown a large cloud of all sorts of winged creatures and who knew what else coming after them. “I think the wall might stop them.” (She remembered that How had told her she couldn’t leave the grounds.)

How raced past overgrown, lumpy shrubs and sprinted across the lawn, passing close by Norah’s summer hat where she had abandoned it.

And then they were at the gate, where How stopped so abruptly that Norah tumbled over her ears and landed in the grass.

“Why’d you stop?” Norah demanded.

“I don’t dare. There’s always an invisible wall.”

“Come on,” Norah said, regaining her feet and grasping a pawful of white hair. Giving How a gentle tug, she guided her up to the gate, which was still ajar.

How winced, but they were able to pass through unhindered. “Hurray!” Norah said. “You’re free!”

“So I am!” How looked very pleased with herself. “I think I’ll just...” She sat down and began to lick a front paw.

“Not now. There’s a lot of things coming this way.” A mixed flock of bats, crows, and bees was heading toward the gate. “I think they’re trying to catch us.”

How remained seated.

“We’ve got to go. It’s not safe!” But the cat was a lot bigger and Norah couldn’t budge her.

The flock was upon them with a flapping and cawing and buzzing as all sorts of winged things circled them. But nothing stung, pecked, or bit them.

Instead, a hundred voices, some small and thin, some loud and caw-like, others buzzy, were repeating two simple words: “Thank you!”

And then the flock wheeled upward and spread out. Bees wandered off toward the wildflower covered hills beyond the garden walls, bats flitted toward various hollow trees and old chimneys, and crows headed off over the hilltops, cawing “Thanks, Norah!” until they were out of sight.

“Whew!” Norah said. “I really thought they were going to get us.”

“The cats still might,” How pointed out, “if they find you here.”.

Norah sighed. “I’m still a mouse, aren’t I. Why?”

“I don’t know, but hop on my back if you want a ride to the house,” How said, bending down to allow Norah to climb on.

Chapter 10

**Little, but Fierce**



Great Aunt Isobel's French doors were closed when they got to the back porch. How rose up on her hind legs and scratched to be let in (with Norah gripping tightly to her fur so as not to fall). When that failed to produce a result, she tried a loud "I'm home at last!" which sounded rather like "*Meeeoowwww!*" Norah only understood the words because she was in mouse form.

Footsteps came tapping toward the door.

The knob began to turn.

Norah slipped off of How's back and hurried out of sight behind a flower pot. She had noticed through the glass door that the footsteps were made by shiny black boots that looked a *lot* like the Crow Witch's.



How had not noticed because she was scratching her back as if happy to be home and able to rub on a familiar door. She looked quite surprised when the Crow Witch's bony hand reached out and grabbed her by the scruff of the neck.

The door slammed shut again before Norah could even shout a warning.

*The Crow Witch is here!* Norah's thought was accompanied by a frantic beating of her heart and a strong desire to run very fast. However, her new friend was trapped in there, and so, Norah assumed, was her great aunt. It was apparently up to her. Little, furry her.

But what could one mouse do?

*Too bad I dropped the wand,* she thought. *Where did I drop it?*

She realized she'd let go of it when the containers in the crow witch's workshop began to open and they had to run away. "Oh no!" she said, and this time the thought emerged out loud in her squeaky mouse voice. That's how upset she was, because she could still see a host of wasps and bees and bats and crows (along with butterflies but those didn't scare her) just over the old stone wall. She wasn't so sure that the bees and wasps would be friendly, at least not all of them. And something was making the grass move over there, too. Probably snakes, she decided with a growing lump in her throat.

To retrieve the wand, she would have to go there again. Without How's help.

Desperation often leads to despair, but sometimes it produces a mad sort of courage instead. That was what, quite to her surprise, Norah felt. *What was that quote?* she asked herself. They had been reading Shakespeare's play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in school. Being on the smaller side, she identified with one of the two teen girls in it, Hermia. The bigger one, Helena, says about Hermia, "Though she be but little, she is fierce."

“That’s me,” Norah squeaked, feeling inspired. “Fierce, even though I’m little!” And then she scurried across the porch, down her great aunt’s back steps, and out onto the lawn again.

She continued to feel quite fierce until she got to the iron gate. Across the unkempt lawn, past her abandoned clothing and hat, rose the crooked old house. Several cats (a black one, a gray, and an orange striped tiger) were sitting on the back steps, staring across at her. They all licked their lips eagerly as if to let her know what would happen if she dared enter their yard.



She almost turned back, but then she remembered that the cats had been imprisoned and that *she* had set them free. “You owe me one!” she squeaked. “I freed you!”

The cats stared at her, impassive.

“And I’m coming to the house whether you want me to or not, so don’t bother me!” And then she slipped under the gate and began to weave through the long grass.

When she reached the starchy cotton cloth of her abandoned summer dress (it was a giant tent held up by grass stalks now), she nosed beneath it for cover and scurried to the other side.

As she emerged back out into the daylight, she was horrified to find herself face to face with all three of the cats! They must have snuck across the lawn while she was sneaking beneath the dress.

Before she could react, a shadow flapped over them and a large black crow came swooping down. *Even worse!* she thought as she turned and tried to hide beneath the tent of her dress again.

Too late. The crow's pointy toes caught her by the loose, furry skin of her back (ow!) and bore her up and out of reach of the leaping, angry cats.

And then she was swaying and circling up and up, and everything was a blur of dizzy motion. "Put me down!" she squeaked in desperation, but the crow ignored her and continued on in the direction of the witch's house.

They swooped through an open upper-story window and landed on a bare wood floor covered with dust. The crow let go of her and she rushed away,



turning only when she came upon a closed door. “What do you want with me?” she demanded, out of breath and on the verge of complete panic.

“Hi,” the crow said.

She stared. *Was it trying to be friendly?*

“Hi,” it repeated, looking at her rather shyly.

“Wait, I know. Your name must be Hi!”

“What? No! I’m Corey. Are you Norah?”

“Oh, sorry. Yes, that’s me. In a mouse’s body. Why did you grab me?”

“To save you from the cats. They are ungrateful.”

“And are *you* grateful? I thought...”

“Everyone thinks we crows are bad because of you know who.”

“Wait, so, some crows are good?”

“And some bad,” Corey said. “Just like people, right?” The crow came toward her, leaving big three-pointed footprints in the dust. “Some of us crows didn’t like it when you-know-who took over. We tried to stop her from causing trouble, but she recruited other crows and they chased us. Some of us got away, but most of us were stuck inside magical jars.”

“Sounds bad,” Norah said.

“It is! You can see out but you can’t move, only wiggle a tiny bit. You’re stuffed in so tight that... Actually, I’d rather not discuss it if you don’t mind.”

“Are your friends free?” Norah asked, coming closer. Corey seemed about to cry if crows could cry; Norah wasn’t sure.

“It was awful! But we’re okay now, thanks to you,” Corey said, perking up a bit. “The others flew away, but I stayed to make sure you were all right. Good thing, too!”

“Thanks! Cats are, what, all bad?” Norah asked.

“For mice, pretty much,” Corey agreed. “Except Elizabeth.”

“Who?”

“No, How. Elizabeth How. But she doesn’t use her first name. Too long, I guess.”

“Hey! What’s that?” A snake, little and green, had just stuck its head under the door. It paused to dart a thin tongue in Norah’s direction, then it wiggled off across the floor. “I need to find that wand,” Norah continued. “Can you open the door?”

Corey cocked her head. “I don’t think so, but I can try to peck a hole in it. Can you help?”

“By chewing on the door?” Norah was horrified.

“Don’t mice do that? You’ve got long front teeth,” Corey pointed out.

“I guess I can try.”

The crow began pecking low down on one of the door panels. In a little while, she had punched a nail-sized hole through it. Stepping aside, she nodded her encouragement and Norah stepped up.

The old, dry wood tasted awful, but her sharp front teeth were indeed good at chipping it. Soon the hole was bigger, but still too small to get through.

“Rest. I’ll take a turn,” Corey said and went back to pecking at it. Chips flew in all directions.

After a while Corey grew tired, too. “This is harder than I thought,” she said. “I wish I were smaller.”

“*I’m* smaller,” Norah said. “I hear mice can slip through very small holes.”

“If it’s big enough for your head, the rest of you can get through. That’s what *I’ve* heard,” Corey said. “I’ll wait here in case you need another ride. Good luck.”

Norah squeezed through the hole in the door, dropped to the floor on the other side, and found herself on a narrow hallway running to a steep set of stairs. It was a bit scary, but she found she could leap off each stair and land on the stair beneath it. Soon she had jumped all the way down and was in another

hall, this one wider and with a carpet down the middle. *Second floor*, she thought, and ran down the hall until she found more stairs.

The stairs wound down to the front hall. She recognized the carpet and the big oak door she had first come through. Bees were circling around, but otherwise it seemed deserted. No sign of the witch or any of her cats.

At the bottom of the stairs, Norah followed the wall into the corner and, turning, followed the next wall until it opened onto the back room where the workshop was located. Sniffing nervously, she crept into the dim space, expecting at any moment to meet a snake or cat with an appetite for mice. But the room was silent.

On the shelves, jars were sitting empty, their lids off to the side or fallen all the way to the floor. Nothing moved. Then something sparkled up on the very top of a cupboard, in the darkest corner of the room.

“Is that you, wand?” she asked. “How did you get way up there?”

Brighter light flickered.

“I’ll come get you again,” she continued. It seemed natural to speak to the wand as if it were alive, after having felt it leap and spark in her paws before. It was alive with magic, if nothing else.

There was a scratching noise and then two large, yellow eyes were studying her from the gloom. *Something* was looking down at her.

At first she thought it must be a cat.

Then it launched itself toward her with an unfurling of wide, silent brown wings. As it dove toward her it came out into brighter light and she could see what it really was: A huge brown owl with an impressive wingspan and even more impressive talons that were viciously pointed and curved. In one foot, the talons were tightly closed around the wand, which was trailing glowing sparks as the owl swooped down.

*Norah was caught and skewered and eaten.*

*Norah was never heard from again.*

*Norah's father could not understand how her aunt lost her on the first day of vacation.*

*Norah's classmates attended a brief and somber memorial service in the school's assembly hall and then went back to life as usual—without Norah.*

*No!!* she thought. *I won't be eaten by anyone, especially not an owl!!!* Pushing the horrible *I'm-as-good-as-dead-already* thoughts from her mind, she rolled to the side just in time to miss the slicing grasp of those viciously long and pointy talons.

The owl had dropped toward her so silently that it was shocking to hear the loud *thhhunk* of talons striking floorboards. It landed so hard that several of its talons got embedded in the wood and it was momentarily distracted as it struggled to pull them free.

Norah leapt to her furry feet and faced her new enemy. *The wand!* she thought. *It's my only hope!* And so she forced herself to stop staring into those huge, bottomless eyes and turned her attention to the wand, which the owl had dropped nearby. “Uh, I hope you remember me. You must remember my Great Aunt. You were her's, right? And you wouldn't want anything horrible to happen to her niece, would you?”

The wand sparked brightly. Norah took that as a yes.

The owl glared at the wand as if annoyed with it. Then it jerked its talons free and spread its wings again, eyeing Norah hungrily.

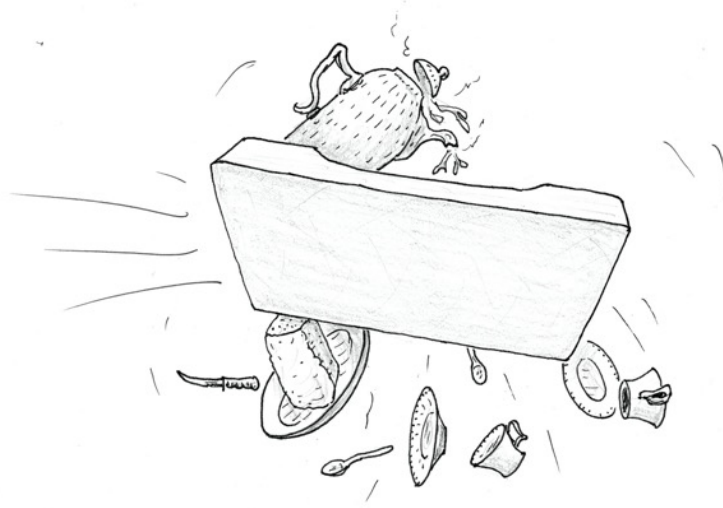
“Wand! Turn me back to me!” Norah screamed just as the owl gave a strong flap and stepped into the air, coming straight toward her.





## Chapter 11

### Ravens and Tea Trays



Norah and the owl collided. Not Norah the mouse but Norah the almost girl. She was still tingling and swirling and bursting up and out into a much larger body when the owl's trajectory met hers. The owl, alarmed by the strange and sudden enlargement of its prey, tried to turn away, but was too late. Its soft, fluffy back and wings smacked into Norah's legs and it tumbled awkwardly to the floor.

It let out a *hoot* that sounded rather like it had the wind knocked out of it as it fetched up in a dusty corner of the workshop, where it struggled to its feet, shook its head, and teetered away on unsteady legs.

"Serves you right for trying to eat defenseless little mice!" Norah snapped. Norah leaned over and picked the wand up. "Thanks!" she said.

The wand gave a little twitch in her hand, then it lapsed into immobility.

"I hope you have more magic in you," she said. "We have a rescue to perform."

As she left the workshop and entered the front hall, she paused. Someone was banging and tapping overhead. "Corey! We better let her out first." She hurried up the two flights of stairs, feeling much stronger and bolder

now that she had her human body back. (She no longer felt small or young. Funny how being a mouse can change your perspective.)

Norah stopped at the door with the little hole in it. “Corey? Are you still in there?”

“Caw!”

“I’ll take that as a yes.” She turned the knob and swung the door open. There was the crow, looking up at her in surprise. “Uh, it’s me. Norah. I know I look different, but you don’t need to be afraid.”

“Caw?” The crow backed away, eyeing the open window.

“Let’s still be friends. Please? Wait, I know! Um, wand?” She held it up and pointed it toward herself. “I don’t want to be a mouse again, I’m happy to be me, but I *do* wish I could still talk with animals. Can you *Oh!*” She stumbled back in response to a *bang* and a flash of brilliant white. Her ears rang and her eyes were filled with light. “Wow. Uh, did it work?”

“So it *is* you!” Corey was there, looking up at her happily. “But you seem to have gotten bigger. I’m sorry, but my the offer of a ride is rescinded. Maybe *you* could give *me* one.”

Norah smiled and held her arm out and the crow flapped up and perched there.

“Now to rescue How and Aunt Izzy,” Norah announced, feeling much bolder as she swept downstairs, the wand gripped firmly in her hand and the crow perched proudly on her shoulder.

She hurried across the witch’s lawn, waved the wand to force the gate to swing wide open, and jogged across the neater lawn of her great aunt’s back yard. Taking the steps two at a time, wand held out in front, she forced the French doors to swing open (there was a burst of sparks from the wand, which seemed to understand just what she wanted it to do). And then she was

standing, slightly out of breath, in the middle of the parlor where she'd sat down to tea just a couple hours earlier.

As if to insure that her entrance was as dramatic as it possibly could be, Corey flapped her wings and let out a loud *caw caw caw!* from her perch on Norah's shoulder.

Their sudden arrival was met at first with silence, but then someone began to clap. Another person added their applause. Someone said, "Bravo!" and was answered with a "Very good!" and a loud "*Meeowww!!*"

How, Great Aunt Isobel, and then the Crow Witch came into the room, still applauding (or meowing, depending on species), their faces lit with pleased smiles. The Crow Witch (except her nose seemed less pointy and beak-like and her eyes more kindly) had removed her hat and let her long hair down. However, the tiny little pointy brown hat Norah had last seen on the Sparrow Witch was now for some reason wedged in Great Aunt Isobel's hair.

"Wait, what is going *on?*" Norah demanded, pointing the wand at the Crow Witch. "I've come to, um, to rescue you, and, and fight *you!*"

The Crow Witch held her hands up. "Easy with that," she said. "No one's going to need rescuing or fighting. Thank you, though, for all you've done."

"Come, do sit down in a comfy chair, dear," her great aunt said. "You must tell us what it was like to be temporarily rodenticized and I'll explain our side of the story too. You see, that wasn't the real Crow Witch you were dealing with. She'd been taken captive several years ago and forced into a jar in the form of a crow. It seems that a particularly evil and clever crow took over and changed itself to look like her. I'm awfully glad to have her back! She's like a sister to me. I used to spend summers with her when we were young."

"I don't understand."

“Summers in Norway, to be specific. My mother’s family is from there and I used to go back and stay next door to my best friend. We spent all our time together, exploring and practicing.”

“Practicing?” Norah repeated, trying to follow what her aunt was saying.

“Practicing our spells, of course! Not everyone can do magic as intuitively as you seem to. Anyway, when she decided to come to this country, she chose the house next door.” The two witches exchanged a happy smile. “But that was before things took a turn for the worse. I didn’t realize she’d been replaced by an evil look-alike. I was afraid she’d truly gone over to the bad side. I’m *so* happy you solved the mystery, Norah. A celebration is definitely in order. Shall we break precedent and have another round of tea and cake?”

“*Caw!* Cake for me, please,” Corey said, flapping off Norah’s shoulder and landing on the mantle where she strutted back and forth, admiring herself in the mirror there.

“I guess so,” Norah said. “Are *you* all right, How?”

The white cat had been studying her from a distance, but now she came across the carpet and rubbed her furry back against Norah’s shins. “*Purr.* Much better, thank you. Why do you smell like owl?”

“Wait a second,” Norah said, turning to study the Crow Witch. “If I’d just freed you, then why did you grab How and slam the door on me?”

“I grabbed the cat to protect her. The sky was full of crows and I was afraid my old enemies might be out there. I’m sorry I closed the door on you but I didn’t see you. In fact, I didn’t know why I was freed or who did it until Elizabeth told us her story.”

“*Howww,*” meowed the cat.

“She prefers to be known as How,” Norah explained, taking a seat at last. “Do you want to sit on my lap?” she asked How.

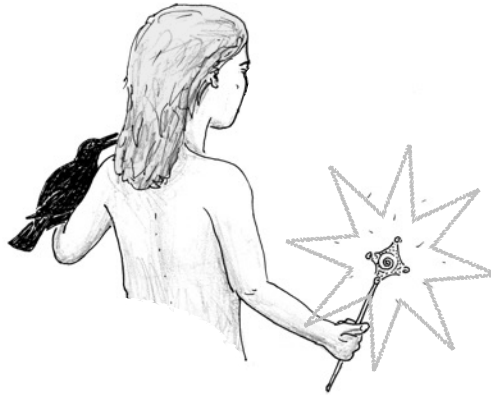
How seemed to be laughing.

“What’s so funny?” Norah demanded.

“You! You’re human now, *meow*. Didn’t you notice?”

“So?”

“And humans don’t have fur.”



Norah jumped up and used a pillow to cover herself. “Oh *no!* I didn’t realize! Why didn’t someone *say* something?!”

“It *is* a hot day, and you *are* among family and friends,” her aunt said with a shrug. “Besides, now you’ve found yourself a wand, you could’ve fixed the problem instantly if you’d wanted to. So we just assumed...”

“You think I want to be a *nudist* on my summer vacation!?” Norah was furious to have embarrassed herself so thoroughly in front of two women, a crow and a cat she hardly even knew.

“Wish yourself some clothes, then,” her aunt suggested. “Perhaps something comfortable out of your trunk. No need to wear a dress just for my benefit,” she added with a kindly smile.

Norah waved the wand toward her trunk. There was a brief blur of something whizzing across the room and then she was in jeans and a T-shirt. She sat down. “There won’t *be* a next time, but in case there is, tell me. I guess I got used to not being in my dress after all that time as a mouse. Uh, how about

that tea?” she added, eager to change the topic. Then she held the wand up and pointed it toward the door to the kitchen. It was easy to visualize the tray, cups, and everything else needed since she’d helped her aunt prepare tea earlier that day.

“Better wait until I teach you,” her aunt suggested. “The tray has to be kept level during transport or... Oops.”

A tea tray arrived, tipped part-way over, with teacups and a steaming teapot and cookies and pound cake all tumbling toward the carpet.

“I’m sorry!” Norah cried. “I didn’t realize! I’ll go get some rags and ”

“No need,” her aunt said, waving her hand. “There. As good as new. May I pour? Three cubes, isn’t it, Norah. Two for the cup and one to suck on?”

“You noticed.”

Her aunt smiled and the Crow Witch chuckled.

Once everyone had a cup or saucer, depending on species, Great Aunt Isobel cleared her throat and said, “Now, shall we begin again? Norah, I’m *very* pleased you’ve come to visit. I ought to have told you straight away that, here in the middle of nowhere, many of us are witches. Even Todd, the pony man, is a warlock. I’ll introduce you to him tomorrow. This,” she said, turning to smile at the tall, thin woman with the jet black hair in the next armchair over, “is my friend and neighbor, Krake. And you’ve met my cat, Elizabeth How.”

How jumped into Norah’s lap.

“However, I don’t think the crow and I have met.” Her aunt glanced toward the mantle.

“Oh! Sorry. This is my new friend, Corey. She helped. So did How. A lot!”

“How? Very well. I’m sorry I used to call you Elizabeth. I just thought you were meowing, I didn’t realize you were trying to correct me.” Aunt Isabel turned toward Norah again and added, “She’s named after a famous witch from Salem, Massachusetts.”

Norah nodded. She'd studied the Salem Witch Trials in school. "But Elizabeth How wasn't really a witch. She was super nice and she took care of people."

"A good witch, actually, and a distant ancestor of ours. But not a mean bone in her body, you're right about that. Same as our cat, you see. I thought of the name when I saw that she wouldn't hunt."

"How fitting," Norah agreed with a grin.

"Not funny," How muttered from where she was curled up on Norah's lap.

"What does *your* name mean, Krake?" Norah asked. "Or is it just like, um, like mine, you know. A name."

The Crow Witch raised a long, expressive black eyebrow. "Actually, it means 'crow.' A rather unusual name in any language, and not commonly given to girls in Norway, but you see, crows took quite a fancy to me when I was a newborn baby. They used to perch on my cradle. I leaned to speak to crows before I could speak to humans. Sometimes things like that happen in witching families."

"Oh. And the, um, bad crow who mimicked you?" Norah asked.

Krake frowned. "It was a raven, actually. Bigger and more powerful than a crow. It stole that very wand from your aunt and used it to change me to a crow and put me in a bottle, then it took my form. Although I must say, someone ought to have noticed that its nose was a lot longer and more pointy than mine."

"It'ss amazing how much it looked like you," Norah said; a comment she at once regretted because Krake looked offended.

"Well!" Great Aunt Isobel smiled. "Isn't this cozy! More sugar, perhaps, my dear Krake? Good. And I'd like to point out that you, Norah, have demonstrated convincingly that you'll make a very fine witch. May I suggest a slight change of plans for your summer vacation?"

"What did you have in mind, Aunt Izzie?"

“Rigorous training, my dear. You can study with both of us and Corey and How can help. It’s high time another witch came along in our family to carry the wand. What do you say? It didn’t seem like you were very eager to go riding.”

“As a matter of fact, I’ve learned a thing or two about riding today and I’d be willing to give it a try,” Norah said, glancing at How, who appeared to be asleep in her lap. “But I’d also like to study with you,” she added, smiling. “When can we start?”





**“The world is full of magic things,  
patiently waiting for our senses to  
grow sharper.”**

**- W. B. Yeats**



"Question yourself, yes, but don't doubt yourself. There is a difference."

- Charmaine Wilkerson, *Black Cake*



## What's Going to Happen Next?

The prospect of a whole summer in the middle of nowhere is beginning to take on a more positive glow for Norah. She wonders what a warlock who raises ponies might be able to do, and whether How and Corey would like to go exploring with her. But especially, she looks forward to her lessons with her aunt (*she's got to be the Sparrow Witch*, she thinks) and their neighbor, the mysterious and still a bit frightening Crow Witch.

But now it's time to settle into her cozy, old-fashioned bedroom with the little tassels hanging from the lampshade and the big mirror in its ornate gold frame. The glass is faded and spotted with age and the gold of the frame has tarnished in places to a pale, dusty green, giving it a distinctly magical appearance. *I wonder if there's a world on the other side?* Norah thinks as she struggles to run a brush through her hair in preparation for bed.

She yawns and sets the brush down. It was a long and unexpected day. She smiles as she checks that the wand is still laying where she put it on the little dressing table. Then she snaps off the light with a click of her fingers (it's fun to discover you have magic!) and gets into the tall but soft old bed. "I can't wait for tomorrow," she mumbles. With another yawn, her head falls back on the pillow and her eyes close.

"Good night," whispers a shadowy figure; the crow is perched on a tall bed post and she tucks her head under one wing and settles down to sleep too.

"Shhh," warns How, who is curled up in a warm spot on the bed near Norah. "She's already asleep."

\*

If *you* have any ideas about what further adventures might befall Norah on her vacation, please send them along to Miss Hawthorne. She resides at *Chateau Aubépine*, a remote cottage surrounded by extensive gardens, but she does not receive mail there. Post your ideas to her care of Webster Press (an email option is offered on their Web site). If Miss Hawthorne likes an idea, she might just incorporate it into a new book about Norah's adventures.

In the meantime, keep an ear cocked for flocks of crows. You can hear them talking to each other in the distance. One of those flocks might just be talking about the Crow Witch and her annoying new neighbor, the girl who goes around breaking their nasty spells. (Let's just hope it's not a flock of ravens instead...)

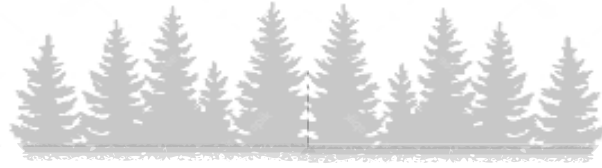


“In my garden it is always late spring, almost summer,  
and the berries are full of juice and magic.

Unfortunately, it is not safe for ordinary people to eat them.”

- From A. B. Hawthorne’s epic novel, *Poison Ivy in the Garden of Eden*





As for the raven who pretended to be a crow witch,  
she fled the middle of nowhere and ended up somewhere else,  
where much to her surprise she met another raven and they became  
friends. Now she spends her days like ravens ought to, soaring overhead  
looking for tasty things to eat, and then going to sleep in a thick spruce  
tree until the sun rises and she can go out foraging again.









