



# *The Tiny Witch*

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Magic

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Many know of the witches who cast dark spells and perform wicked deeds, and were thusly dunked and set aflame. But little know of the town at the base of a nondescript mountain, wherein witches got along quite well with humans.

The tallest amongst these witches could pass beneath a chair whilst barely grazing the hairs upon her head. The shortest was the length of a pinkie finger and could wear a ring as a crown. These witches were more docile than their full-sized sisters- more focused on their affinity to nature than their soul's craving for the dark arts. Indeed, they would use their magicks to summon life from the rocky soil, where before the townspeople could only coax the smallest sprout of green.

Thinking their salvation to be in these tiny witches, the townspeople allowed them to live in their gardens. The witches took shelter within bird nests, or rabbit dens, or potting sheds. They grew plants, banished weeds, and protected the animals who also sought shelter there.

The townspeople would leave small gifts behind in return for the witches' kindness. Spools of thread, cuts of cloth, and plates of pastries were the most highly coveted amongst the witches.

Most witches preferred to stay hidden whilst the humans were present. So naturally, the children made a game of looking behind every plant and rock in the gardens in an attempt to locate them. It was a lucky child indeed who saw the barest flash of small dark eyes, for no matter how the children searched, the witches would never allow themselves to be seen for longer.

After a few decades had passed, the novelty of having tiny witches tend to their gardens wore off. Gifts were still left, but less frequently. Children still searched for the witches, but not as often. The witches realized they would no longer be ogled by the townspeople, and so they allowed themselves to be seen more and more.

For the townspeople, witnessing a witch stroll along the top of a fence post became synonymous with watching

a stray cat do the same. Soon the human's gifts to the witches stopped coming altogether, but the gardens continued to be taken care of.

The witches were content to exist in this way. As long as they could tend to, and receive resources from the gardens, they need not want for anything else. All were content, except for Invidia, the smallest of them all. Invidia felt betrayed and belittled by the humans around her. Had the witches not provided for them the fruit of their salvation? Should the witches not garner even an ounce of respect from the creatures who would have starved without them?

Invidia requested an audience with the high witches: Alizon, Elizabeth, and Demdike. The three had been leaders since the beginning, and organized the witches' efforts in the gardens. Invidia voiced her concerns with respect, but they paid her no mind. They believed Invidia had grown spoiled by the humans' gifts, and she need only adjust to the lifestyle they now led. Months passed and still Invidia could not adjust. She despised the lazy, ungrateful townsfolk who took and took from the gardens and never once gave anything back. Invidia implored her other sisters to demand retribution from the townsfolk, or at the very least, to abandon the gardens in the village and begin their own garden somewhere else- somewhere they would not be taken advantage of. Invidia's sisters paid her no mind.

"Why do they refuse to listen?" Invidia fumed. She ripped the last adventitious root from the base of an orange tree and tossed it away. Invidia's longtime friend and frequent gardening partner, Leanne, picked up the root from where it landed at her feet. She leaned back against the tree. Leanne was taller than Invidia- as tall as a spoon was long. When she spoke, Invidia had to tilt her head up to look her in the eyes.

"We love to garden, and the humans create enough need for us to garden aplenty. They do not force us to do so, they do not keep us in cages, and they do not treat us the way our full-sized sisters are treated. Be grateful for what you have."

"Can the humans not do the same?" Invidia snapped.

Leanne sighed and tossed the root into the small basket. The basket was already full, and so the root bounced out and onto the ground once more.

"I am sorry," said Invidia. She walked over to where the root had fallen and placed it back into the basket. The basket had been woven for her taller sisters, so it came up to her waist.

Leanne's gaze softened.

"We are small, sister. We can be trampled upon by human feet quite easily." Leanne moved away from the tree, hoisted the basket into her arms, and strode towards the compost pile. Invidia followed along silently, but inside, her thoughts were a vortex.

Invidia wanted to teach the townsfolk a lesson. She wanted to be able to protect herself and give her sisters a better life as well. After a few days of contemplation, she came to the conclusion that to do so she would have to change.

Invidia would have to be big.

But how? The answers must lie with the humans, Invidia concluded. After all, they were born small and grew big. Surely they would know how to make witches bigger as well.

Beyond the borders of the village lay miles of forests and meadows which harbored no humans. The witches referred to this place as the Wild Lands, and they would occasionally send a few of their sisters there on holiday. Invidia told her sisters she was going out to the Wild Lands to clear her head. The other witches thought this to be a good idea, especially since Invidia had been so full of anger as of late.

Invidia bid farewell to Leanne the night prior to her departure. Before dawn the next morning, when all her sisters were still slumbering, Invidia set out on her quest. However, she did not go out to the Wild Lands. Instead, she scaled the fence lining the perimeter of one of the gardens she took care of. Once at the top, she jumped a short distance to the window ledge and walked along it until she reached the window.

The owner of this house, a man named Gregor, always had his windows open. Although he never gave the witches any gifts, he always smiled at them. Invidia decided she could tolerate his presence more than the others.

Invidia entered a neat beige kitchen, and looked about. She was not astonished at what she beheld- she had glimpsed the interior of houses before, and knew the general nature of their furniture. Although, she was not intimately familiar with this house in particular. Invidia was curious, and the townsfolk wouldn't rise till later yet, so she climbed down from the kitchen counter and walked about the house.

Invidia walked until she came to a small living room. The room was sparse of furniture, and the only decoration adorning the walls was a cuckoo clock.

The clock was fashioned after a house, with the clock face itself being an opulent bay window for the first floor. Directly below the clock face stretched a vibrantly painted green lawn. On either side of the lawn twin staircases twisted upwards, past the clock face to a little balcony directly above it. The balcony hosted a cluster of wooden potted plants and a singular door which most likely led to the clock's mechanisms.

Other minute details such as the thatched roof and small birds resting atop it made the clock appear as its own tiny dwelling. When Invidia laid her eyes upon it, she knew deep in her small heart that it had been made for her.

It was just at this moment that Gregor emerged from his bedroom. The man before Invidia had just exited

boyhood, and was perhaps trying to force himself into his new title, since his linen shirt lay too large and baggy over his shoulders. The sleeves dangled several inches beyond his fingertips, which added to the lanky look of his figure.

It was precisely for this reason that Invidia had sought him out instead of the others. He was likely old enough to have been taught all there was to know about the growing process, but still young enough to not grasp the implications of Invidia's request to become bigger. He had also most likely just exited a full household and lived alone, which would hopefully prompt him to be welcoming towards a small house guest.

He walked past Invidia and into the kitchen without noticing her.

Invidia followed after him. She waited patiently while he set about cutting a slice of bread from the loaf on the counter and slathered it with strawberry jam. Once he had seated himself at the small table, Invidia tried calling up to him.

He did not hear her.

It took her shouting before he started and looked down upon her.

"Oh! A witch. Is anything wrong with my garden?" The boy-turned-man glanced quickly out the open window, then back towards Invidia.

Invidia said something to him again, but he could just barely hear the thrum of her voice. He reached down a soft pink hand and hovered it in front of Invidia. She took the silent offer, stepping aboard his palm and hanging onto the front joint of his thumb like a guardrail.

He carefully lifted her to the table, and waited a good few moments after she stepped off before retracting his hand down to his side.

"Hello, Gregor," said Invidia in a loud voice.

"Oh, you know my name!"

Yes, and you most certainly do not know mine. But aloud Invidia said, "Yes, I know your name. Mine is Invidia. I have come here to ask for assistance."

"Whatever with?" Gregor took another large bite of bread.

"I need you to tell me how to become bigger, for I am much too small to be of much use to the other witches."

Gregor's brows creased and he set down the remaining bread on the table. "I am sorry, Invidia, but I do not know how to help you."

"But you are human, and all humans grow bigger."

"Yes, but that is how we were born."

"Then help me become born too."

Gregor cleared his throat in effort to keep the bemused smile from his face. "I...do not think 'becoming born' means what you believe it means."

"Then whatever does it mean?"

"Well," said Gregor as his face reddened. He looked around wildly for an excuse to not have that particular conversation. His eyes landed on a small stack of books on the counter. "Why don't I take you to the library on my way to work? You can probably learn all you need to learn there, and I can come pick you back up after my shift. You...can read, yes?"

"Yes, I can read."

"Excellent, then I will take you to the library. It is bound to have what you seek there." Gregor stood and broke off a small piece of bread, slathered it in jam, and offered it to Invidia. Even though it was much too large a piece for her to consume, Invidia took it. As Invidia ate what she could of the bread, Gregor said, "Did you know the library was here before the village was? The village was actually built up around it a couple centuries ago."

Gregor continued to talk about how old the library was as he cleaned up breakfast and combed his hair. Then he offered his hand to Invidia again, but Invidia declined. Instead, she asked if he had a paintbrush.

"I do not," he admitted. "However, there is a painter who lives a block away from here." He disappeared out the door and returned a few minutes later with a paintbrush. The bristles were stiff with paint that had not washed out, rendering it almost useless for the painter. But not so for Invidia.

Invidia dredged up the small amount of dark magic that slept in her veins and raged through her full-sized sisters. She used it to spell the paintbrush to fly.

Gregor watched in wonder as Invidia mounted her brush and flew up to look him in the eye. He seemed about to say something to her, but then the cuckoo clock began to chime. Gregor started and rushed for the door. Invidia followed closely behind.

Invidia looked around curiously as they traveled down one street then another. She had only ever helped her sisters tend to five gardens in total. Because the gardens provided all that the witches needed, she had never bothered to venture further than the block of houses they all resided in. The only exception was Duty Night, the weekly meeting where all of the witches would gather in the park at the center of town. There they received orders from the high witches and communicated any lack of gardening supplies needed to get them through the week.

She had never seen these streets, or the majority of these people, before.

Perhaps Gregor somehow suspected this, because he would occasionally greet this or that person by name.

Afterwards, he would lean towards her and whisper the latest bit of gossip about them.

“Good morning, Truman!” Gregor leaned closer to Invidia as Truman echoed the sentiment.

“Truman and his wife just celebrated the birth of their third child, but my opinion is all three of them look like the next door neighbor, Welford.”

Gregor seemed unconcerned with the many surprised and sometimes confused looks the sight of Invidia elicited, so Invidia decided she would pay them no mind either.

Once they reached the library, Gregor held the door open for Invidia to fly through, then bid her farewell. As soon as she was inside, he hurried off to his job at the bakery.

Invidia was unsure how to locate the books she needed, so she flew up to a librarian sitting behind a large desk. When the librarian saw her, he was so astonished he dropped the book he had been checking out. The librarian hurriedly apologized to the woman he had been helping, handed her the book, and turned to Invidia.

“Is there something wrong with my garden?”

“No, I need help finding a book.”

“Ah, of course. The wildlife and gardening section resides at the end of the third shelf on your right.”

“I am not here for a gardening book.”

The librarian’s brow creased in bewilderment. “Then whatever book do you need?”

Invidia throttled her broom in frustration. “I need a book explaining how to become born.”

“The...birthing process? Good lord, are you expecting?”

Expecting? Expecting what? “Perhaps I am,” said Invidia indignantly.

“I...yes of course. I will bring you to them straight away.” The librarian stood and led Invidia further into the library. They walked for several minutes before entering a long hallway. Pictures hung at intervals between a multitude of doorways. The pictures contained stern, pale, men and women.

“Who are they?” Invidia inquired.

“They are all of the head librarians who have ever served here.” The librarian stopped before the desired door and pulled it open. Invidia glanced once down the hallway before entering behind him, the pictures continued on for quite a ways.

Invidia flew into a moderate sized chamber lined with bookshelves. Several vacant tables sat in the center of the room. The librarian lit some candles, selected a few books from the shelves, and propped them up on the tables for Invidia to read. Before he departed, the librarian said, “My apologies for the small chamber and poor lighting. We had these books moved here because the topic tends to make people...uncomfortable.” Then he was gone.

Invidia landed her broom on the table, and stood before the first book. She read all day, and by the time she was done she was so thoroughly embarrassed that she contemplated living in the library instead of going back with Gregor. But if she spared herself the embarrassment of facing him again, he might get suspicious.

So when Gregor returned at the end of the day, Invidia went with him.

“Did you find what you needed?” asked Gregor.

“Not yet,” said Invidia.

They were silent for a few minutes before Gregor asked, “How are witches born?”

Invidia felt her face heating in embarrassment, but took a deep breath and willed the feeling to abate. She had nothing to be embarrassed about.

“We were not born, we were made.”

“Made? Whatever do you mean?”

Invidia sighed, and took a few moments to gather her thoughts. “Many decades ago, a malevolent king ruled his kingdom through fear. No one dared challenge him, just as no one dared stay in his company for longer than necessary.”

“After a while, the king grew lonely. He wanted a wife, not only to bare his children, but to rule by his side. His equal in every way. Although no matter how far he searched, he could find no one whose soul was as dark as his own. Since he could not find a wife, he resolved to make one. He conscripted a wizard to do his bidding. The wizard used his dark power and other unknown forces to make a woman. She was beautiful, cunning, and wholly a creature of her own. The wizard called her a witch. Unfortunately, the witch soon became too consumed by bloodlust and power.”

“My first born sister was deemed a failure. She was locked up deep inside the king’s dungeons. Through much experimentation, the wizard found that smaller witches had less dark magic and less bloodlust. The wizard made hundreds of witches through his quest to find the perfect queen. Soon the castle dungeons could not house us all, and the smallest of us were made into castle servants. Including myself.”

“Gods! You are really that old? Do witches ever die?”

“We do not die of old age, at least not that I have seen.”

Gregor was quiet for a moment. “So you were servants for the king? What all did you do?”

“We worked in the kitchen, cleaned in places only we could reach. Occasionally we were allowed out into the gardens, but only a few of us at a time and we were always carefully watched. However, it was still our favorite chore. Our full-sized sisters were not allowed out of the dungeons. At night, when we were herded back into the birdcages that served as our cells, we would tell them of all we had seen.”

“If he kept even the smallest of you locked away, how did you manage to escape?”

Invidia smiled at the question. “Eventually the wizard made the perfect witch for the king. My youngest sister, Sola. She was charmed by the king, and enjoyed ruling with him. Even so, she saw what he was doing to the rest of us. One day, she discreetly slipped the keys to our cells to our sisters Alizon, Elizabeth, and Demdike. Then she whispered to them instructions on how to escape.”

“That night while Sola distracted the king Alizon, Elizabeth, and Demdike unlocked our cages. The smaller witches slipped away undetected, but some of our full-sized sisters chose to unleash themselves upon the castle. When the king heard the chaos being wrought and learned who was causing it, he was furious. We could hear him screaming his rage as we ran for the nearby woods.”

“He sent his soldiers after us- the very first witch hunt. It is unclear what became of Sola. I assume he killed her, for none of us ever laid eyes upon her again.”

Gregor took a moment to contemplate Invidia’s tale. His brow creased in confusion. “You have lived for a very long time. Centuries, it seems. How were you unaware of our birthing process?”

Invidia frowned. “We lived for many years isolated in the woods. It was only when a desperate hunter stumbled upon us and asked us to come grow food for his village that we were reintroduced to humanity. Afterwards, no one bothered to explain, so we made our own assumptions.”

Gregor seemed ready to ask another slew of questions, but sensed Invidia’s mood darkening, and wisely left it alone.

They walked the rest of the way home in silence. That night, Gregor shared his dinner with Invidia and he told her all about the people and things he had seen during the day. Invidia forced a smile at first, watching as he consumed coffee cake leftovers from the bakery as if they were nothing. Although, after a few more easy minutes of talking, she found herself smiling in earnest at Gregor’s stories.

Later, she asked Gregor if she could sleep in the cuckoo clock. Gregor shrugged and said as long as she didn’t mind the noise, she was allowed to sleep wherever she wished.

Invidia flew her brush up to the clock and landed on the lawn. She left it there and ascended the stairs. At the top, she paused before the closed doorway. The door was just the right size to allow her to enter without stooping over or jumping to reach the handle. It was perhaps the first door that ever allowed her to do so. She entered the clock.

The space inside was half full of cogs that turned and ticked in a pleasing rhythm. Invidia watched the moving mass of parts in awe, unable to move her small dark eyes away for a good long minute. When at last she tore her gaze away, her eyes landed on the two wooden figures waiting by the door. They were on a track that would



lead them out the door and in a little dance around the balcony every hour.

Invidia immediately disliked the eldritch figures, and decided to ignore them.

She lay down in the corner of the room, and fell asleep to the comforting sounds of the clock. The next morning, she shared a meal with Gregor, and again set out for the library.

Invidia spent all that day scouring the shelves for books on how to grow or become bigger. Whenever she found anything promising, she called the librarian over. He would prop up the book and leave to help someone else. Invidia, unfortunately, found only a couple of books that seemed promising. Although, upon skimming them, they proved to be unhelpful.

Gregor returned to her at the end of the day.

“Did you find what you needed?” he asked.

“Not yet,” said Invidia.

Before they went home, Gregor had Invidia visit a textile shop with him. They asked the owner, whom Gregor knew personally, if she had any scraps of cloth to spare. She did, and so Invidia now had bedding to sleep upon in her clock.

The next day, Invidia ventured deeper into the library. She spent all that day flying around the shelves looking for anything helpful, but found none.

Gregor returned to her at the end of the day.

“Did you find what you needed?” Gregor asked.

“Not yet,” said Invidia.

That night, Gregor put a bowl in the bathroom. When Invidia asked, he explained that it was so she could take baths like him if she so wished.

“Is there a reason why you are being so generous?” Invidia asked as she inspected her new tub.

“Well I...I enjoy your company, is all.”

Invidia looked up at Gregor and inclined her head in silent request for him to continue.

“Ah, well, before I lived here I shared a dwelling with my father and two older sisters. My father generated money through wood carving; he is actually the one who created the cuckoo clock you sleep in.” Gregor leaned back against the edge of his tub.

“As my father grew older, his fingers became horribly knobbed and swollen. He could no longer carve. My sisters and I took on the responsibility of work, I took my job at the bakery and my sisters went elsewhere. When my father passed away shortly thereafter, my sisters both got married and moved to other towns. I moved into this smaller house. Although I am glad my sisters have found happiness, it became rather quiet

here in the evenings. So, yes, I enjoy your company. And since you are staying in my home, I feel obligated to give you all the things I would offer other guests.”

Invidia smiled and thanked Gregor, but inside she was disappointed. She had hoped he would say it was a thank you for how hard the witches worked in his gardens. She was growing fond of him and did not relish the thought of breaking his trust.

Invidia continued her search over the next few days, venturing deeper and deeper into the library. At night, Gregor would show her another part of the village that she had not explored before. They would share dinner, often leftovers from the bakery, and then Invidia would sleep in her clock on her scraps of cloth.

One day, at the very end of the week, Invidia was flying past a portion of the library when something caught her eye. At the bottom of the wall there was a small hole through which no outside air blew. Invidia landed her broom by the hole. The hole was so miniscule that Invidia had to crouch on hands and knees to peer through it. A very faint glow of sunlight emanated from within; though no sounds of the outside world, or the now familiar rustle of turning pages, accompanied it.

Invidia crawled through to the other side, but as she did so, a flurry of dust rose up and blinded her. She emerged hacking and blind into a small chamber. When Invidia had cleared the dust from her eyes, she saw that the small chamber was lined with bookshelves. A small table stood in the corner with an accompanying pair of chairs. Every surface sported a layer of dust. Thick cobwebs hung like drapery over the solitary window, which only allowed in a faint ray of sunlight.

It was through this light that Invidia brushed the dust off the nearest book and read its title. “Banishing Spells in Accordance with the Four Elements” by Sola.

Invidia reeled back in shock. If Sola was indeed the author of these books, then she must have somehow escaped the king. But how? And was she the author of all of these books? Invidia walked along the bottom shelf, brushing years of dust away. All the books she checked were by her youngest sister, and every book covered some element of witchcraft.

One of these books is bound to have what I need.

Invidia retrieved her broom from the other side of the hole, and spent the rest of the day pouring over her sister’s works. When the sun begun to disappear behind the mountain, she found the spell she needed.

Just as Invidia was about to exit the library, spell fully memorized, she remembered the hall full of pictures she had seen during her first day there. She flew down that hallway, past the point where she had stopped before. The pictures kept getting older. Finally, she confirmed what she had suspected. There, on the wall, was a portrait of Sola. She had been a head librarian here two centuries ago.

That night when Gregor returned to the library he had to wait several minutes for Invidia to emerge.

“Did you find what you needed?” he asked.

“Yes,” Invidia said.

Gregor and Invidia stopped back by the bakery to grab a few fresh pastries to celebrate. After he went to sleep that night, Invidia snuck through the open window in the kitchen and down into the garden. She spent all that night finding the ingredients she needed. The next morning, she began to make the potion.

She filled two thimbles up with water. In one she deposited the various herbs and spices she had gathered. She then reached for a match and struck it upon the coarse interior walls of the clock. Afterwards, she lowered the match into the thimble full of herbs.

The more buoyant herbs, which floated atop the surface of water with their faces still dry, caught fire immediately. Invidia plunged the match into the first thimble, which held only water. As the match hissed its death, Invidia thrust a pin into the other thimble and mixed till the charred herbs were blended well.

Once she was done, Invidia tucked the pin into her belt and balanced the potion on her hip. She paused for a moment, listening to the clock’s familiar and comforting tick, then threw her shoulders back and walked out. Out past the still wooden figures, out the little door, down the little stairs, and onto the wooden lawn where her paintbrush waited. She mounted the brush, the potion still balanced on her hip, and flew towards the kitchen. Gregor was just sitting down for breakfast. He smiled when he saw her, and for a moment Invidia almost had a change of heart. Could it really be fair to catch him unawares? Such tricks were reserved for her full-sized sisters. But then Invidia spied the tomato slices sitting alongside eggs cooked with herbs. Tomatoes and herbs Invidia might have grown with her own hands. Anger flared until Invidia’s whole body was tense with it. She smiled a wicked smile, but she was so small that Gregor could only register it as a friendly baring of teeth. Then Invidia rotated the brush so that he may see the thimble she held.

“What do you have?” he inquired before he took a large bite of egg. He swallowed almost immediately, neglecting to admire the taste.

Each household had its own garden, and almost every plant in each garden was grown for the needs of the houses’ occupants. There were a few spaces set aside for the witches’ use, of course, but the majority was for the humans. That is how Invidia knew Gregor suffered from allergies around this time of year, and why her lie came so easily.

“A health tonic, to help ward against allergies. I do not want you sneezing in the bakery,” she replied in a loud, teasing, voice. Still, Gregor barely heard her, but he inclined his head anyways and motioned to the steaming cup of tea at his side. Invidia steered her broom till she was just hovering over the cup, before tipping the

thimble's contents into the murky waters below.

Gregor obligingly reached over and stirred the tea until the "tonic" had become fully blended. Then he ate another bite of eggs and tomato before washing it all down with a long dreg from his tea. Invidia landed her brush and happily helped herself to some of the eggs on Gregor's plate. Gregor set his tea down on the table then propped his chin up on his hands.

"Thank you for the health tonic, Invidia. You are very kind."

When Invidia made no further comment, Gregor plowed on. "I do not have to work today, so I thought I could take you to a little creek outside the village, then perhaps we could visit the library till noon. Afterwards, I could take you to one of the taverns for lunch. Does that sound good?"

Invidia nodded her head once, and said no more.

Pleased, Gregor drank more of his tea. Invidia waited. Gregor blinked, a bit sluggishly, but then shook his head as if to drive away a daze.

Not long now.

Once they had both finished breakfast, Gregor stood to wash the dishes. He paused, swaying slightly. Gregor brought a hand slowly to his head. "Invidia," he said with great effort, then collapsed.

Invidia mounted her brush and flew down to Gregor's side. He groaned. Invidia lifted up one of his eyelids. His pupils were almost fully dilated.

Invidia landed her brush by Gregor's arm and dedicated a few moments to rolling up his too long sleeves. She took out the pin from her belt, and stabbed Gregor's skin several times. The blood that flowed from the multitude of small wounds was thin and had a slightly yellow hue to it.

Invidia planted her lips over the holes and drank deeply, taking in several mouthfuls.

When her belly was full, Invidia crawled into the warm crook of Gregor's arm. She lay there and waited. After several minutes, she began to feel a tingle in her core. It worked its way outwards to the very tips of her fingers, toes, and the top of her head.

Pressure began to build there.

Pressure till she was clawing at her own skin, pressure till she thought she would burst from it, but then with a sudden satisfying release, she began to grow. She grew bigger and bigger till she was as tall as the tallest witch, then bigger till she was almost as tall as Gregor himself.

With a gasp, Invidia gazed down upon the scraps of her small clothing that lay discarded about her feet. She stood, legs trembling like a newborn foal, and shifted her attention to her new body. Invidia felt powerful, and not just because of her new size. The dark magic that had before been a trickle in her veins, was now a raging

stream.

The sheer force of it made her hands shake and made it harder to think. It demanded to be used. She would use it. Now.

Invidia let her power flow from her fingertips like black wells of ink come to life. This dark power helixed around her arms, then coiled itself around her naked body until she was dressed in darkness from the base of her throat to the midpoint of her calves.

She strode to the closet door and flung it open. She took out the broom and used a small drop of her power to spell it to fly.

Out, her power demanded. Let us out.

Invidia mounted her broom and flew towards the perpetually opened window. And though she might not have looked it, there was still some goodness in her. A single star suspended in the blackness of her soul. Invidia paused at the lip of the window and looked back at Gregor. His once ruddy complexion had become sallow, his breaths came in short bursts that whistled through the gap in his front teeth.

Invidia knew he would die soon.

Her power surged through her system, making her light headed, making it almost impossible to think above the urge to let her power out. With that last star of goodness, Invidia pushed the power down. She could still feel it grappling with her there, just beneath the surface of her skin, but for the moment her mind was clear. She would do this, for Gregor, as a thank you for all he had done to aid her. Invidia left her broom in the kitchen and ran out to Gregor's garden. She ignored the startled cries of her sisters and grabbed the various herbs needed to make the antidote. On her way back inside, she paused to grab a pail she knew would be full of rain water.

There was no time to boil the herbs into a potion. Gregor would not survive that long, and Invidia could not keep her power in check for much longer either.

Invidia used a knife to chop up the herbs, then she propped Gregor up against the counter. His head lolled to the side. His brow was damp with sour smelling sweat. She placed the herbs onto his tongue, then she poured water into his mouth. Invidia pinched his lips shut and tilted his head back. Once Invidia was satisfied he had swallowed it all, she strode to her broom and mounted it.

A few of her sister witches, including Leanne, had climbed up to the window.

"Invidia! What has happened to you! How have you grown so?" cried Leanne.

"It matters not how I have grown, only that I have done so to better your lives."

"Our lives are rich and full, sister. Do not seek what you do not need," said Leanne.

Invidia gritted her teeth and used her power to blow a gust of wind into the garden. It picked up the witches harmlessly and held them aloft. Invidia raised her hands and cast similar winds throughout the town. Quiet squeaks of terror could be heard as she lifted all of her small sisters. Then she urged the wind to carry them far away, somewhere they could be safe and happy with those who would appreciate them.

The wind obliged, herding the flock of witches over the mountain peaks and out of sight. Invidia rose on her broom. She swept down on the town and used her power to obliterate each and every garden. Some were scorched with fire. Some were ripped up by the roots by terrible winds that smelled of sulfur and rotting flesh. Some were drowned. Some simply withered and died. It was true that Invidia loved the gardens, but she loved her sisters more.

As the townspeople ran and screamed, Invidia howled right back at them, "Let us see if you can survive now!" When Invidia was done, there was hardly any power left in her veins. She looked down upon the havoc she had born. As she did so, she caught sight of Gregor leaning up against the doorway of his home.

His shirtsleeves had been rolled up to his forearms, his once easy smile was now set in a firm line, and there was steel in his eyes as he looked at her.

Gregor had finally grown up.

Invidia tore her gaze from his and used the last of her remaining power to fling herself up into the mountains. She rested there for days, allowing her power to build back up. Then she ventured out into the world.

Invidia went on similar rampages in villages known for murdering her sisters and women accused of being them. She often used up all of her magic in one fell swoop, and had to spend days at a time recharging before she could rampage again. This time spent waiting left Invidia to ponder about all she had done. She eventually found herself thinking of her old gardens more and more, and sometimes even of Gregor and the small kindnesses he had shown her.

Whenever she razed a town or village she always got a small sense of satisfaction, however it never stayed with her long.

After a few years had passed, Invidia could fight her longing no longer. She flew back to where the village had sat at the bottom of the mountain. But where life had thrummed under the hands of witches, and laughter had rung from the throats of humans, nothing remained.

The gardens had withered and died and now lay rotting. The houses were unkept and falling in on themselves. Invidia wept with regret over the ruins of Gregor's old home. It was the first time she had allowed herself to cry in centuries. As she did so, the blood she had drank flushed from her system. She continued to cry as the dark magic in her veins lessened from a raging stream to a trickle, and she slowly shrank. She shrank till she was as

tall as the tallest witch, then smaller till she was the length of a pinkie finger, and could wear a ring as a crown. It was with no small relief that Invidia realized she was tiny again and she stopped crying. When the last of her tears had fallen, Invidia was able to see someone flying towards her. As the figure drew nearer, Invidia could see that it was her youngest sister.

When at last she reached her, Sola landed her broom next to Invidia, and smiled down at her.

“Sola, why are you here?” Invidia called up in disbelief.

Sola laughed and sat down on a piece of moss covered debris. “I am here because the other small witches sent me.”

When Invidia cocked her head in confusion, Sola asked, “Were you not aware that your magic wind carried our small sisters to me?”

“I...was not. I only asked the wind to carry them somewhere they would be safe, happy, and appreciated. I had not known where you were, and I had just recently before realized you were alive. Where are our sisters? How did you find me? I have so many questions, including how you escaped the king.”

“After the small witches blew in on the wind, I journeyed back here and laid out some crystals. They were spelled to summon me if ever you arrived.” Sola sighed and tucked a jagged piece of hair behind her ear. She looked out at the desolated landscape and said, “As for your other question...as soon as my husband began screaming and ordering his guards after you all, I knew he would kill me. He was standing in the door to our bedroom, so I ran out onto the balcony. Our sister, Hilda, was flying past on her broom. She spared a few precious moments of escape to circle back and save me. We parted ways a few days afterwards.”

“I eventually found my way here and established myself in the library. I hid here for many years, but I was eventually discovered by the other librarians. I fled before I could be caught. I have lived in a small valley in the mountains ever since. A few of our full-sized sisters have found me there, and now all of our smaller ones.”

“So you have come here to take me to them? So they may punish me?” Invidia inquired.

“No, I am here to tell you goodbye.”

Invidia took in a sharp breath. They were banishing her. She knew they would have been angry, but she had hoped they would understand why she had done it. She had hoped they would forgive her.

“Your friend Leanne wanted to come, but the high witches forbade her. She wished me to tell you that she valued your friendship, and will miss you terribly.”

“So I will never be allowed to come home? There is no hope?”

Sola smiled sadly at her older sister. “I will do my best to change their minds, for I understand why you did what you did. I believe Leanne will try as well.” Sola rose from where she rested, and began her journey back

through the mountains. Invidia sat, and waited.

Travelers say she waits there still. She spends her time tending to a large garden that encompasses every ruinous house. She will tell her story to those who do not yet know, and when she allows them to take the food she grows, they always say thank you. When it is time for the travelers to go, Invidia walks them to the edge of town. She asks them to tell Gregor, if ever they meet, that she is sorry, and thank you. When the travelers ask what she is thanking him for, Invidia tells them that he left his cuckoo clock behind. Although it no longer ticks, she lives in it still.

She bades the travelers farewell, goes back into the village, and waits for her sisters to welcome her home.

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