

## Julia Kuhn: Vol. 1, Ravenhall Academy: Hidden Magic

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### Bd. 1: Ravenhall Academy: Verborgene Magie

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ENGLISH SAMPLE TRANSLATION

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**CHAPTER 1**

*A grimoire is a book of witches that contains magical knowledge. From the late Middle Ages onwards, everything about witches and their history was written down in it.*

- EXCERPT FROM THE GRIMOIRE, CHAPTER 1

There he was again, the raven that followed me everywhere. Pitch-black plumage, ominous gaze, piercing caw. It looked like any other bird of its species, were it not for the different colours of his eyes. Violet and green. I would recognise them among a hundred others. They had been with me for several weeks now. At night outside my window, when I was reading in our garden or meeting up with my best friend Anny. Everywhere I went, sooner or later, I discovered the raven. At home, I had almost got used to it, but here, after several hours on the train, far from my home town? That was really creepy.

Suppressing a shiver, I took out my headphones, selected my favourite playlist and tried to ignore the raven. The harmonious sounds of various Bands echoed through the in-ears one after the other, but it took a little while for my racing pulse to adapt to the beat of the music and calm down.

Thoughtfully, I let my gaze wander over the empty streets. So here I was sitting. Outside the abandoned railway station of Watford, a British town in the middle of nowhere. Maybe a little better than the backwater I came from, but at least there I would be sitting with a hot cup of cocoa inside the familiar squeaky yellow walls of our kitchen, and not under the makeshift canopy of a closed station kiosk that barely kept out the pouring rain. If something didn't happen soon, I would have to come up with a new plan. After all, I had been waiting for over half an hour. And I didn't even want to be here.

Just then, a loud honking jolted me out of my thoughts. Confused, I looked up. Directly in front of me on the street was a black taxi. One of the old kind. The

kind you saw everywhere in London. Unsure, I stood up and took off my headphones. The dirty window of the passenger door rolled down a bit. Behind it, an older man with a full beard emerged.

"To the Academy?" He stared at me questioningly and with a grim expression in his eyes.

Academy? What did he mean? Perplexed, I shook my head.

All of a sudden, a blonde girl stormed past me. As if automatically, my eyes fell on her murderously high and very expensive-looking shoes, which miraculously hadn't got a drop. She yanked open the passenger door and jumped into the taxi at breakneck speed. Then she bent over and stared out of the car into the open air.

"Pinky, come here!", I heard her hiss.

Expecting a lap dog, I looked left and right and was almost scared to death when something whizzed past me in mid-air and disappeared inside the car. While I was still wondering if I had really just seen something that bore a striking resemblance to a pink handbag, the door closed and the taxi roared away. Not without sending a truckload of cold water in my direction. A yelp sounded next to me.

"Oh no, Mrs Blueberry, did it get you?"

My golden retriever dog lady, who had been quietly dozing under the kiosk bench until just now, now crawled out from under it and shook herself. She looked deeply offended and stared accusingly in the direction of the van that had disappeared.

I could understand her only too well. What on earth had that just been? And had that bag really been floating in the air? Or had my vision been blurred by the heavy rain?

Shaking my head, I dropped back onto the wooden bench. While patting the wet dog's fur, I plugged in my headphones again and turned up the music.

The rhythmic sounds of my twin sister's favourite song reached my ears. Involuntarily, I thought of Mia and Mum. What I wouldn't give to be on a plane to Italy with them right now. Instead of pampas and rain, I would be surrounded by sun, beach and sea. But no, of course I, the untalented first-born, had to help out at my grandma's bookshop. In what is probably the rainiest city in England! Speaking of Grandma. Where the hell was she? I wonder if she'd forgotten about me. That would definitely fit in with this miserable day...

I grumpily snuggled tighter into my hoodie, but it didn't help. The cold crept deeper and deeper into my knees and I could already see myself sitting on this stupid bench with my teeth chattering.

*No, it won't come to that. Before that, I'll book the next train back to Wickham, I vowed to myself.*

Just as I was about to turn around and look at the station's big wooden clock, there was a piercing squeal and again a car appeared in front of us. But this time it looked familiar. When an older woman got out with a big grin on her lips, I knew why. Her unusual style of dress was definitely recognisable. Her long, dark red robe, covered with small, golden moons and stars, seemed to come straight out of a fantasy film. And yet somehow it suited her - just like the dark blue umbrella, more like a parasol in size, with which she now waved at me. A flood of memories flooded through me and with it a now familiar ache. *Take a deep breath, Lilly. You can do this.*

I counted to three, took out my headphones and took a few hesitant steps forward.

"My, how you've grown!" Grandma came up to us and looked me up and down, catching my hoodie.

I followed her gaze and discovered the familiar print: *Everything you can imagine, is real.*

My mum had insisted that I put on the jumper this morning. It was a mystery to me why this had been so important to her, as Mum and Grandma were anything

but close and Christmas presents from Watford were usually placed behind the Christmas tree in such a way that Mia and I only found it at the very last.

Actually, I had wanted to refuse to wear it, as I was still angry about having to help Grandma out in the bookshop while Mia and Mum wandered through dream cities like Venice and Florence. But there had been something in Mum's eyes that had made me wonder. doubt and a suppressed sadness. Very different from what I now saw flickering in Grandma's eyes and couldn't interpret. Was it realisation? A memory? I did not know.

"Hi, Grandma."

She took me tightly in her arms and I returned her embrace tentatively. Then she turned to my dog lady.

"Is that the famous Mrs Blueberry your mother told me about?" She stroked her fur and tickled her behind the ears.

"Um, yeah, I hope it's okay that I brought her. She's been with us for almost three years now. We're sort of inseparable."

A smirk played around Grandma's lips. "I heard that. I'm sure my cat Biscuit will be happy to have a little company. But come on, you're soaked!" She whirled around and motioned for us to follow her.

When we arrived at the car, she took my luggage and lifted my blue suitcase into the car. "What do you have in there? Stones?"

"If I have to be here, I can at least work off my pile of unread books," I replied a little too briskly.

When Grandma's smile slipped for a second, I felt sorry again for my tone. Deep down, I knew that Grandma couldn't help my misery. Nevertheless I took my mood out on her. But I just didn't want to be here. On this rainy Saturday in February. While Mum and Mia were having a great time. I heaved a sigh of relief. My mood was in the basement.

As we sat in the car, Grandma put a hand on my arm and looked at me with a playfully serious look.

"For books, a suitcase can never be heavy enough. Just think of all the worlds they hold."

A long forgotten feeling of familiarity rose up in me. It had been Grandma who had given me a love of books, how could I have forgotten?

As if she had read my thoughts, she nodded wisely at me. "By the way, I'm very sorry I'm late. But Biscuit dragged a dead mouse into the house unnoticed. Of course, he had to put it in one of my shoes. And when I went to put it on, I stepped right into it. I tell you, that was a mess!"

Now I couldn't help myself and had to laugh out loud. "He didn't really do that!" "Oh yes he did." Grandma snorted in annoyance. "I've grounded him for now, at least until we get back."

"It's a good thing Mrs Blueberry doesn't like mice." I looked towards the back seat where my dog lady had made herself comfortable and was looking excitedly out of the window. She loved driving. In the past, she had even refused to get out of the car. She had always been curious and wanted to explore the big, wide dog world. Even now, as we drove past the huge Cassiobury Park in the middle of Watford, Mrs Blueberry was wagging her tail excitedly. Well, at least one of us was looking forward to this place.

At the time, I could hardly wait for us to visit Grandma. This was probably due to the fact that Grandma lived directly above her bookshop. What's more, her home resembled one of those witch's cottages you usually read about in fairy tales. The façade of light-coloured bricks, the ancient fence of white wooden boards, the spacious veranda with the old rocking chair and the dense, tall fir trees in front of the house had always had a special effect on me. But now that Grandma's house came into view, I had rather mixed feelings. And as soon as we parked in front of the Victorian building, my stomach started to growl.

"Are you hungry? I've prepared some delicious sandwiches. You used to like them so much." Grandma looked at me with a smile.

*Used to.* Two simple words. And yet for me there was so much more behind it. My last visit was years ago. Back then, Mia and I were children - and the world was still in order.

"Sandwiches sound good," I replied.

"Well, come on then," Grandma said before opening the car door and getting out. After getting my luggage out of the boot, we followed the lively Mrs Blueberry to the front door. It was amazing that my dog lady seemed to know exactly where we had to go. After all, she had never been here before.

To get into Grandma's flat, there was a separate side entrance, which seemed quite inconspicuous next to the imposing door to the bookshop. Behind it was a steep wooden staircase, the mere sight of which turned my stomach. For it was not only hunger that announced itself, but also Exhaustion. The cold of the wet clothes was really taking its toll.

When we finally climbed the steep steps with my heavy suitcase, Biscuit came to meet us. He was grumpy and grumbling. The auburn-striped tomcat eyed Mrs Blueberry suspiciously before taking a deliberate step towards her. My dog lady, suddenly very cowardly, whined softly and hid behind me in a flash.

"Biscuit, you already know Lilly and this is Mrs Blueberry. Please be nice to her."

In response, Grandma only received a hiss, which made my dog lady whimper right back. I rolled my eyes. Mrs Blueberry was at least twice as big as Biscuit. She shouldn't be afraid of Biscuit, the cat should be afraid of her.

And while I thought the still snarling Biscuit was about to attack my dog lady, he started purring and snuggled up to her leg. Mrs Blueberry returned the gesture gratefully.

Grandma didn't seem surprised. "There you go. You must know that all the pets in our family have been getting along famously for generations. Come on, let's go to the kitchen and eat something first." She disappeared into a side room.

Just as I was about to put my luggage down and follow her, I caught a glimpse of Biscuit's eyes. They were green and blue. As two-coloured as my dog's. And those



of the raven ... I quickly shook off the disturbing thought and rushed into the warm kitchen.

Grandma stood at the kitchen counter with her back to me and seemed to be completely in her element. Like my mum, she loved cooking and baking. They both had their own garden and planted all kinds of vegetables. But no one could compete with Grandma's herb garden.

She proved that she was also a master in sandwich preparation by presenting me with two delicious-looking sandwiches on a plate. My mouth watered and I devoured the first one standing up. I was really hungry. "These are really delicious!"

"Thank you, dear. Eat as much as you like."

I didn't need to be told twice. While I was still eating the second sandwich, Grandma made us hot chocolate, which she poured into two large cups and decorated with little marshmallows and cream. Together with a tin of homemade biscuits, we snuggled up on the large window seat in the living room. It was the last free seat in this quaint room. The sofa was already taken over by Mrs Blueberry and Biscuit and all the armchairs were piled high with books. I stroked one of the antiquarian covers on an old velvet armchair next to me with the flat of my hand and smiled pensively.

Grandma noticed my gesture and laughed. "I admit that I take my work home far too often. How good that you are here now. Tomorrow I'll give you time to settle in, but then I could really use your help in the shop." Grandma paused briefly before adding:

"Even though tomorrow is Sunday, I have to work. As so often at this time of year, many customers find their way to me."

I just nodded. For a moment I had almost forgotten why I was here and how dreary the coming weeks would be.

I thoughtfully let my gaze wander out of the window. Dusk fell like a shadow over Grandma's front garden and the wind whipped the rain through the air. Just



as I was about to turn away again, a hoarse croak pierced the silence. A queasy feeling rose in me and I looked in the direction from which the cawing had come. And sure enough, there it was. There, on the branch of an old chestnut tree, sat my observer. His head slightly tilted and his eyes narrowed. My heart began to race, but then Grandma reached for my hand. I tore myself away from the sight of the raven and looked into her warm brown eyes.

"Thank you so much for stepping in at such short notice. I can imagine how much you would have preferred to go to Italy."

"It's okay, Grandma. Really. It's just ..." Briefly, I faltered. Was I really going to inflict my frustrations on Grandma? Just because I thought it was unfair that Mia was travelling around as a successful pianist, enjoying Mum's full attention, while I had to help out here in Watford? No. That was not an option. It wasn't Grandma's fault.

I shook my head. "Then I'll take advantage of that and go to Cassiobury Park with Mrs Blueberry tomorrow," I deflected.

"As excited as Mrs Blueberry was watching the gate to the park earlier, I'm sure she'll be happy to go for a walk. Perhaps Biscuit will accompany you. He likes this park. Probably because of all the mice." A smirk flitted across Grandma's features, as if she knew exactly that I had deliberately changed the subject. Biscuit meowed in agreement, which Mrs Blueberry acknowledged with an excited wag of her tail. The two of them had cuddled up together, obviously enjoying the warmth of the fireplace. I couldn't blame them. The pleasant heat of the flames was a relief for my skin and the longer I stared into the crackling fire, the more my tension eased. But the sound of the rain drops also had a calming effect on me. In this weather, I was usually found in our conservatory with a good book. When the rain pattered incessantly on the glass roof and its drops had a race across the glass.

With the memory of my home, Mum and Mia came back to my mind. Did they miss me? Or had Mum forgotten her second daughter as soon as they landed in

Italy? After all, it wouldn't be the first time. Frustrated, I tried to concentrate on the here and now. And now I felt a leaden tiredness come over me.

"Grandma, where am I actually going to sleep for the next few weeks?" I tried not to yawn too obviously.

"In the guest room under the roof. I usually store my old books there, but there is also a bed."

I nodded sleepily. "And Mrs Blueberry?"

As if on command, my dog lady pricked up her ears, lifted her head and blinked at me under half-opened lids.

"Everything is prepared for them," Grandma replied with a knowing smile on her lips.

Frowning, I looked at her. "But how did you know..."

"A little birdie told me." She winked at me over her glasses.

She must have meant Mum, right? After all, they had only spoken on the phone a few days ago.

Grandma looked at her wristwatch for a moment. "I should go to the bookshop for a moment. And you look like you should go to bed extra early tonight." She put an arm around me and I hesitantly snuggled up to her.

Grandma's familiar scent of lavender rose to my nose. She smelled like my childhood and suddenly I regretted having spent so little time with her. I swore to myself that I would make up for it now.

"Why don't you go upstairs, unpack your suitcase and lie down for a while. I'll be back soon too."

I nodded. "All right, Grandma."

Stifling another yawn, I stood up and looked once more at Mrs Blueberry and Biscuit. Both had already fallen asleep. Not wanting to wake them, I crept into the hallway and spotted the green and white beaded handle of the attic hatch almost immediately. Cautiously, I pulled on it. The hatch opened and an old-looking wooden ladder folded down. Before I could think in detail about how

unstable it looked, I quickly climbed up and after only a few steps I saw a quaint room under the roof. It was much bigger than I had imagined and had a large window set into the ceiling above the bed. There was also a desk, a grey wing chair with a floor lamp and an old, ornate wooden chest of drawers. Old and new books, in good and bad condition, were piled up underneath the slope. The bed was freshly made and small pink flowers were embroidered on the blanket. In short, it was an absolute dream room.

I climbed the last step and entered the room, my eyes immediately falling on the blue suitcase right next to the bed. Grandma had obviously already carried it upstairs. The question was when? After all, she had been near me the whole time. I would have noticed if she had lifted the heavy suitcase up the narrow ladder, wouldn't I?

Shrugging my shoulders, I pushed the thought aside and set about putting the clothes in the chest of drawers opposite the bed. When I took my dad's three handwritten books out of the suitcase, I wistfully stroked the empty covers. By now they were faded and dented in places. But the books and every single word in them were my anchor. My most precious possession. They held unique worlds that my dad had created. Worlds he would never travel to. And worlds he had wanted to travel with me. Tears gathered in my eyes. I tried in vain to blink them away and for a brief moment I allowed the pain. Then I took a deep breath and grabbed my mobile phone. In these moments of loneliness only one thing helped. Anny.

I quickly dialled her number. After the third ring, she answered.

"Best friend speaking, how can I be of assistance?" her cheerful voice echoed through the receiver.

"Hi, Anny." Unintentionally, sadness resonated in my voice. "Did you get back to your grandma okay?"

At first I nodded, exhausted, until I realised that Anny couldn't see this gesture through the phone.

"Yes, I have just booked my room for the coming week. I've moved into the house. It's nice to see Grandma again, but I hope the time will pass quickly. Thoughtfully, I stroked my finger over the squiggly bedpost, kicking up a small layer of dust.

"For sure! And we'll be at college faster than you can blink!" squealed Anny excitedly.

I could see the sparkle in her blue eyes. We had been looking forward to our college days for months. And when the acceptance letter had fluttered into the house, we had started making plans right away. A smile briefly flitted across my lips.

"I can't wait," I replied.

"Have you heard from your mum or Mia yet?"

"Mum wrote to tell me they landed safely. But I haven't replied yet." Mentally, I added that I wouldn't do that any time soon either.

Anny heaved a sigh of relief. "You know your mum is just throwing herself into your sister's manager role because she's trying to block out the last few years."

A stab ran through my heart. "That's your theory."

"You can't miss that, Lilly."

I bit my lower lip. Dad's death had pulled the rug out from under our feet. But I still needed my mum. Only she wasn't there, at least not for me.

"I'm going to lie down now. Nicholas Sparks' new book is out and I want to read it a bit more," I said, exhausted, and a yawn slipped out.

"Give Mrs Blueberry a cuddle for me. How can she go for weeks without Auntie Anny's homemade treats? I really should have made more."

"My whole jacket pocket and backpack are full of your dog biscuits. She's had enough." I grinned. Anny just always managed to cheer me up.

"There's no such thing as too many dog biscuits, ask Mrs Blueberry," Anny announced, playfully indignant.

"That's unfair, you've got them wrapped around your little finger."

A laugh sounded on the other end of the line. "Sleep well, Lilly."

"You too, Anny."

I put the mobile phone on the bedside table and pulled the Nicholas Sparks book out of my rucksack. Before I made myself comfortable in bed, I took a look out of the skylight. Since the raven had been following me, this had become a ritual. To my great relief, only the increasingly dark sky was visible. I sighed and snuggled into the soft sheets.

What could be better for a head full of thoughts than a good book?

## CHAPTER 2

*In the world of supernatural beings, there are places whose special power can be felt by every living being. Cassiobury Park in Watford, in particular, carries this power. The ancient park is home to good goblins who live in tree hollows and watch over the countless plants.*

- EXCERPT FROM THE GRIMOIRE, CHAPTER 144

I was woken by a loud bang. I yawned sleepily and opened my eyelids slightly. Once again, a bang echoed through the darkness. Confused, I blinked a few times until my eyes adjusted to the darkness and I remembered that I was with Grandma. The open book lay next to me and I was still wearing my clothes from before. Obviously I had fallen asleep while reading. This never happened to me when I was reading a good story.

There was another bang. I winced and looked up through the skylight. A glow lit up the night sky. Was that fireworks? I sat up to see better. And the next moment I asked myself whether I was not still asleep after all. For what was emblazoned above me was far more than a pyrotechnical display. I pinched the back of my hand in disbelief, but the symbol of a thousand tiny lights sparkling in the sky above me did not disappear. On the contrary. It became clearer and clearer and now I could see what it represented: a raven in the middle of a crescent of stars. How was that possible? I blinked a few times. The symbol was still shining in the night sky.

Suddenly something heavy landed on me.

"Shit!", I cursed as my heart skipped a beat.

Grandma's cat had landed ungently on my legs. He tilted his head to the side before he let out an inviting "Meeeeoooww".

I carefully stroked his fur. I did not trust Biscuit's moods.

"What are you doing up here?", I whispered, eyeing him carefully.

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My gaze was captured by his eyes, which shone unnaturally brightly into the darkness. The resemblance to those of my dog lady was frightening. Before I could think about it further, I was jolted out of my thoughts by another bang.

"Do you know what it is about those lights?" I lifted Biscuit up so that he could see better out of the window.

"Meeoow," he replied before licking one of his paws.

"Very helpful."

Thoughtfully, I cuddled him behind his small, pointed ears and watched the spectacle in the night sky. How could such a detailed version of a symbol light up the sky? But the most important question was: What did this symbol stand for? While I searched for answers, the points of light blurred. Little by little they trickled to the ground like snow. Only the silhouette of the raven came to life, raised its wings and flew away until it was completely swallowed up by the night. Confused, I got up, put Biscuit down, put on my pyjamas and sank back into bed. In the meantime, the cat had curled up at the end of the bed and was purring softly to himself.

Restlessly, I crumpled up the soft pillow and closed my eyes. Within seconds, all the experiences and thoughts of the day came crashing down on me. Great. It was going to be a long night.

Sunbeams tickled my nose when I woke up the next morning. I stretched extensively while a lukewarm yawn slipped out. The events of the previous night had left me no peace. Even Biscuit had had enough of my restless tossing and turning and had disappeared back downstairs. I couldn't blame him.

Completely exhausted, I peeled myself out of the soft sheets. I would have preferred to lie there all day, reading and catching up on the sleep I had missed. But my growling stomach had other plans. So I shuffled to the dresser and dug out a grey t-shirt and black jeans. With a shudder, I remembered yesterday's temperatures and quickly grabbed a long cardigan as well. My gaze wandered to



the small wall mirror hanging above the dresser. My long hair was sticking out in all directions. Hastily, I ran my fingers through the reddish waves and tried to tame my mane.

Just as I turned away from my reflection, my mobile phone started vibrating on the bedside table. I wondered who wanted something from me so early in the morning. No sooner had this thought crossed my mind than I knew the answer. Mum. Annoyed, I groaned, took the mobile phone, pushed it away and switched it off. I wasn't in the mood for an ideal world. With heavy limbs, I climbed down the attic ladder and was magically drawn in by a wonderful smell of scrambled eggs and scones coming from the kitchen. As I stepped over the threshold, I caught my dog lady bracing herself with two paws on the kitchen counter and grabbed the last scone.

"Mrs Blueberry!" I hurried over to her, squatted down and motioned for her to give me the drool-covered scone. Of course, my little glutton ignored me and devoured the pastry in one bite. As she did so, she put on her perfectly posed innocent face and looked at me out of her big, round eyes.

I sighed. "You could have at least left me the last scone." By way of apology, she bowed her head and began to pant. "Where's Grandma anyway?" I stood up and let my eyes wander over the small, crowded kitchen. Next to the remains of the scrambled eggs, I discovered a small note.

*Lilly,*

*I'm already at the bookshop and then I go to see Mrs Ravenwood, a neighbour.*

*PS: The scrambled eggs and scones are for you, enjoy.*

*PPS: Biscuit and Mrs Blueberry have already had breakfast.*

With a raised eyebrow, I looked at my dog, who was looking at me apologetically with her head tilted as if she knew exactly what was on the note.

Shaking my head, I grabbed the plate with the scrambled eggs and dropped onto one of the chairs. Involuntarily, my thoughts drifted back to last night. What kind of symbol had that been? And why a raven? Was there a connection to the raven that was chasing me? I poked thoughtfully at my scrambled eggs, but found no answers to all my questions.

"Let's go for a walk," I said. Fresh air would certainly do my muddled thoughts some good.

"Woof," she replied happily and dashed into the hallway.

I followed her and briefly peered out of the window. The sight of the low-hanging, dark clouds gave me goose bumps and I quickly grabbed my olive green parka. Which turned out to be exactly the right decision as soon as we were standing in front of Grandma's house. Shivering, I zipped the jacket all the way up and started moving. Fortunately, it wasn't too long before we reached Cassiobury Park.

A large iron gate marked the entrance and Mrs Blueberry ran through, tail wagging. Smiling, I followed her past various ponds with ducks and swans floating gracefully over the clear water.

I had often been here as a child. Mia and I had chased over the bridges, hid behind the little houses and played by the stream. Our favourite thing to do was to climb. We had sat giggling on the branches of the tall oak trees and watched the people walking by. A smile stole onto my lips as my gaze wandered back and forth between the densely overgrown trees. In some places snowdrops were in bloom, their white shining with delicate beauty. There had been times when Mia and I had sat for hours in front of these blossoms, hoping that a leprechaun would show itself to us. Grandma and all her fantasy stories were probably responsible for that.

Mia and I used to be so close and now we only looked alike on the outside. We both had my mum's green eyes, just like her long red hair. But inside we were as different as day and night.

Speaking of night. Only now did I notice that the path was getting stonier and the trees hardly let any sunlight through. Obviously we had ended up in a wood.

However, Mrs Blueberry didn't seem to mind. She watched the birds enthusiastically and kept an eye out for squirrels, which scurried through the leaves and over branches from time to time. I let her go for a while, but the increasing cold became noticeable as time went by. Shivering, I pulled my parka tighter around me and started to whistle back at Mrs Blueberry. But there was a sound of cursing nearby. My dog lady's ears pricked up in alarm and before I could react, she gave a loud bark and ran away.

"Mrs Blueberry, come back," I called after my dog lady.

However, she skilfully ignored me and disappeared behind a wilted rose bush. Great. I also started moving and sprinted after her. This turned out to be not so easy, because the deeper I ran into the dark part of the forest, the denser the branches became and I had to constantly avoid trees. To make matters worse, during one of these evasive manoeuvres, I got caught on a branch with my trousers, which dug uncomfortably into my thigh. I sighed in frustration as I pushed it aside. At least Mrs Blueberry reappeared beside me. However, she paid no attention to me. Instead, her attention was on a stranger a few metres away from us.

Reflexively, I backed away and only stopped when a chestnut tree covered me a little. I told my dog to stay behind me and watched curiously. The black-haired boy, who I now realised must be about my age, just stood there and didn't move. Careful not to make a sound, I eyed him, my gaze lingering on his clothes. Or rather, his dark green sweatshirt. The same symbol was emblazoned there as in the night sky last night. A raven with a moon made of stars.

Instinctively, I took a step in the boy's direction. But something kept me from getting any closer to him. Maybe it was his charisma. It was gloomy and dismissive.

With a stiff expression and closed eyes, he slowly raised his arms - and I suddenly felt cold. Goose bumps ran all over my body and I began to shiver. Then I suddenly saw how leaves and small branches rose around the boy and formed a small whirlwind. This grew bigger and bigger. The boy could hardly be seen any more, the leaves and branches whirling around took him over so much.

Confused, I blinked a few times and took a step backwards. However, I lost my balance and landed backwards on a rotten branch, which then cracked loudly. Mrs Blueberry was startled and gave a loud "woof", which must have escaped the boy's attention, because he turned around and looked in my direction. The leaves around him promptly fell to the ground. But before I could think clearly, a raven with pitch-black plumage suddenly landed on a tree stump directly in front of me. Its loud cawing made me shriek in fright. However, my shrill cry did not seem to impress the raven. Quite the opposite. Curiously, he began to examine me.

After I had calmed down a bit, I was surprised to see that he also had two different eye colours. One eye was green and the other violet. But something about him was different from my observer.

It all became too much for me.

"Shoo, shoo." I waved my arms in the direction of the raven, but it remained sitting calmly in front of me.

"That's no way to get rid of Jason's mate."

A guy with purple hair appeared in front of me. Calmly, he sat down with the bird. While I tried to escape his amused look I noticed his sweatshirt with the raven-moon-star symbol, which the black-haired boy was also wearing. I feverishly searched for a quick-witted answer, but failed all along the line.

"I, uh ..." Confused, I looked back and forth between the boy and Raven.

"Secret audiences are still the best audiences, aren't they?" Another guy with a pointed nose and high cheekbones came into view next to me. Just like the other

two guys, he was wearing the dark green sweatshirt. Laughing, he nodded to the boy with the black hair.

"Or how do you see it, Jason?" Then he crossed his arms and grinned wryly at me, his dark eyes boring right into my soul.

"I wasn't watching anyone," I replied in a firm voice before getting to my feet.

"Aha, who is my secret spectator?" the black-haired boy called Jason interjected.

To my horror, he came towards us quickly. He fixed me with his luminous turquoise eyes, which were narrowed to narrow slits. Goosebumps covered my body once again and I could hardly pull myself away from his captivating gaze.

"It was nice chatting with you, but I have to go now." I hurriedly fished out Mrs Blueberry's leash and put it around her. Once again, I didn't risk her just disappearing. Then I turned around and made a run for it.

"See you at the Academy!", Jason called after me in a low, insistent voice.

"You really think she's one of us?" A peal of laughter echoed over to me.

"Sure, don't you have eyes in your head? Look at her dog!" What did they mean by that? I slowed down briefly and turned to them once more. But the three of them had disappeared. Where had they gone? My heart pounding, I started running and only stopped when I arrived back at the large green area by one of the park's ponds. Out of breath, I gasped for air before looking at Mrs Blueberry. "Come on, let's get out of here for good," I gasped between two deep breaths and as we made our way home, I went over what I had seen in the forest again in my mind. There had been no wind, so why were those leaves whirling through the air? Just like that? I searched for an explanation, but found none. Unless... well.

Unless it was a simple trick. Or a school project in physics. That would at least be a plausible solution.

**CHAPTER 3**

*Since the beginning of time, witches and sorcerers have had their own realm of magic, also called the witch's room, where they not only keep their Book of Shadows, but also brew potions, gather supplies and practise the art of witchcraft.*

- EXCERPT FROM THE GRIMOIRE, CHAPTER 19

After my adventurous outing with Mrs Blueberry, I used the rest of the day to curl up in bed with a book. Unfortunately, I hardly managed to concentrate on it. My thoughts kept wandering to what had happened in the park. Who were those three boys? And above all, who was the guy with the turquoise eyes? I thought about calling Anny to tell her about all this, but something kept me from doing so. Instead, my mum kept trying to reach me. But I ignored her calls. After the turbulent day, I didn't feel like dealing with her put-upon motherly care.

Eventually I switched off my mobile and hoped that my first shift as a temp in Grandma's bookshop would be more enjoyable than the strange walk.

Fortunately, the universe seemed to want to grant my wish, because the start the next morning went smoothly and without any strange occurrences. After a hearty breakfast and a short excursion with Mrs Blueberry, during which she did not miss the opportunity to chase birds, we opened Grandma's bookshop at just after nine o'clock. The large, ornate wooden door leading into the shop had always held a special attraction for me. As a child, I had played in front of that door for hours. And now, too, my fingers tingled to run over the fine scrollwork and appreciate the beautiful ornaments.

But before I could reach out my hand, it swung open and I was immediately greeted by a wonderful smell of books. I inhaled it deeply. Was there anything more beautiful than the smell of old and new books? I reverently let my gaze wander over the quaint room. The bookshop seemed quite small, which was

probably due to the angled floor plan and the wooden beams that stood between the high shelves and ran across the ceiling.

Reverently, I approached one of the high shelves and carefully stroked the covers with my fingers. Grandma didn't sort her books by genre. Nevertheless, she always knew where each work was. She was of the opinion that as a book lover, you only found the real treasures when you weren't looking for them. Grandma only had a separate section for herbology. As far as I knew, customers especially appreciated Grandma's expertise in this field.

"A delivery of new books arrived a few days ago. Would you like to sort them?" Grandma smiled at me questioningly.

I nodded and while Mrs Blueberry curled up in an old blue velvet armchair and dozed off, I set to work. The box filled with books that Grandma had fetched from the back room turned out to be a real treasure trove. There was everything from fantasy and romance novels to crime and thrillers. With some copies, I couldn't resist and simply had to read the blurb. Nevertheless, the occasional gaps in the book shelves gradually filled up - even though I kept suppressing the urge to sort the books by genre, as I did at home. But the fact that Grandma's special order worked was evident from the many customers who came in. Many of them disappeared with Grandma into one of the other departments and came back a little later with stacks of books.

Just as I was balancing on the high ladder to place one of the new books on the top shelf, Grandma turned the corner.

"Lilly, I'm afraid I have to interrupt your work and ask you to do something. Would it be all right if you helped Mrs Ravenwood? She has some books that need to go to the bookshop."

I climbed down the ladder and looked at the empty book box whose contents I had already sorted.

"Okay," I replied somewhat timidly.



"Thank you, my child. Mrs Ravenwood's house is at the other end of the street. It's covered in ivy and you can't miss it. I'll keep an eye on Mrs Blueberry while you're there." Grandma put a hand on my shoulder for a moment. There was a twinkle in her eyes that I couldn't quite interpret.

But I just nodded silently and reached for my parka, which I put on, and dug out an umbrella, with which I then set off. Today there was a cold that went through me. The wind whistled around the houses, sweeping scattered branches through the air, while raindrops pelted down incessantly. When a rumble of thunder rolled over me, I clung tighter to the umbrella. However, it only barely kept the rain from soaking my clothes.

Again there was a rumble of thunder and I quickened my pace. But the closer I got to the house, the more uncomfortable I felt. Again and again I had the impression that I was being watched. It didn't let up when I opened the squeaky, rust-covered garden gate to Mrs Ravenwood's house. With its half overgrown front garden and moss-covered paving stones, it didn't look very inviting. This impression was reinforced many times over when I couldn't see a doorbell. Instead, I was confronted by an old-fashioned door knocker in the shape of a large, real-looking raven's head with wide eyes and a pointed snout. Memories of films in which such door knockers were usually attached to haunted houses flashed through my mind.

I tried not to stare too obviously at the raven's head, gathered my courage and knocked timidly on the door. As if I was already expected, it opened in a flash and with a loud creak. I was about to say hello, but there was no one there. I frowned in confusion. Had the door opened by itself? I entered the house uncertainly, but as soon as I had crossed the threshold, a queasy feeling spread through the pit of my stomach.

Cautiously, I ventured further and let my gaze wander over the old furniture. On the wall to my left hung an ancient wooden cuckoo clock. Involuntarily, I approached it. But while I was examining the filigree flower decorations on the

dial, the large silver hand jumped to the hour. A small door opened and a miniature raven emerged. It cawed shrilly with its small beak. I flinched in shock and pressed my hand to my chest. I closed my eyes briefly and took a deep breath.

*It's just a raven made of wood. Not a real raven.*

When my racing heart calmed down and I opened my eyes again, the raven had disappeared. Astonished, I looked around the room and froze. There, sitting on the living room table, was a real raven. And not just any raven. It was *the raven*. With its piercing gaze, its two different eye colours. Violet and green. And with its eerie caw and pitch-black plumage.

As if automatically, I held my breath and hardly dared to move. And the raven? Well, he didn't move either. He didn't make a sound. But he watched me.

Attentively. Lurking. Knowing. And then he tilted his head, spread his wings and cawed loudly. Startled, I took a step backwards - knocking over a small statue of an angel that stood right next to the entrance door. There was a loud crash as the figure hit the floor. The head broke off and rolled a few metres across the floor.

Shit! I had an angel on my conscience! How was I supposed to explain that?

But a loud flapping of wings distracted me. My gaze went again to the raven, which was now preparing to take off. As it did so, it gracefully lifted its wide wings and pushed itself away from the living room.

carpenter's table. Faster than I could react, he flew past me, right through the open front door.

Stunned, I looked after him. What was going on here? Why had this raven been in this house? And the most important question - why was he following me?

"Lilly, how nice to meet you," a voice suddenly sounded behind me, making me wince again. I felt caught and turned

around a little too quickly, blacking out for a moment. In the process I got I started to stagger, but just managed to catch myself.

"I'm Mrs Ravenwood." An elderly lady smiled kindly at me. With her long dress covered in silver ravens and lace at the hem, she reminded me so- fort of Grandma. Apparently this style of dress, which took some getting used to, was not only popular with her.

"You really do look like a younger version of Charlotte! I baked some ginger biscuits. Would you like some? Oh, and something to drink. Tea? Coffee? Or would you prefer a juice?"

A little taken aback, I stared at Mrs Ravenwood. Even though she had to be about the same age as Grandma, one thing stood out. Her eyes. Amidst the many wrinkles in her face, they looked young. As if everything about her had aged except her eyes. And that intense turquoise blue had a hypnotic effect on me. Besides... they looked familiar. I just didn't know where I had seen them before.

"Child, are you all right?" asked Mrs Ravenwood, tilting her head slightly. As she did so, some of the silver strands of hair came loose from her high chignon.

I cleared my throat. "Um, well, hello, Mrs, uh Ravenwood. It's nice to meet you. I'm sorry I'm just here I barged in like that, but the... the door! It opened by itself!" A little embarrassed, I gestured vaguely into the room.

"Besides, there was a raven sitting on your living room table just now. I was so startled that I accidentally decapitated your angel ... er, knocked over the statue," I corrected myself and pointed to the fiasco at our feet.

"It doesn't matter, child. The main thing is that nothing has happened to you. And I'm very sorry that you got to know my raven Murray in this way. He's a very curious fellow. But come on, let's have some tea and biscuits. Baked fresh this morning, of course. You're welcome to sit down." Smiling, she gestured to the sofa and then disappeared through a door that must lead into the kitchen.

With a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach, I let myself fall onto the leather sofa. My gaze slid uneasily to the front door. What if the raven came back? And he had a name to boot! Murray. These dark creatures of the night weren't pets, were they?

"A fresh herbal tea and a portion of ginger biscuits makes it easier to work, doesn't it?" Mrs Ravenwood placed a silver tray with two white porcelain cups and a glass bowl full of biscuits on the living room table. She took a seat in an armchair opposite and interlaced her fingers, which had several rings on them.

"Help yourself." With a nod, she pointed to the tray.

I tentatively reached for one of the cups. As I did so, my eyes fell on a black something lying underneath a vase of flowers. A raven's feather.

"Is something the matter, dear?" Mrs Ravenwood eyed me anxiously, with her turquoise eyes literally boring into my soul.

I quickly took a sip of the scalding hot tea. "Uh, no. The tea is delicious," I deflected from the subject.

"I understand you're here to support Charlotte in the bookshop for the next few weeks. That's sweet of you." Mrs Ravenwood smiled at me benevolently.

"Yes, that's right. I haven't been to Grandma's bookshop for ages." Cautiously, I bit into one of the biscuits, but quickly realised it was rock hard. Out of politeness, I tried to get it down anyway.

"It's good that you're picking up these old books. I should have given them away long ago."

"May I ask what kind of books they are?"

"Oh, mostly old, long-forgotten works. But Charlotte has a soft spot for those kinds of stories." Mrs Ravenwood waved it off. "The books are in the cellar and should be sorted first."

This sentence hovered between us until we had drunk the tea and Mrs Ravenwood stood up. With an inviting hand gesture, she motioned for me to follow her. After only a few steps down the cellar stairs, however, a hint of fear unintentionally sprouted in me. It creaked loudly with every step and the rotten wood beneath me did not look trustworthy. In addition, there were cobwebs in every corner, bad light and musty air. The perfect setting for a haunted house. I

had never liked basements. For me, they were the epitome of a nightmare. Go into a basement at night? Over my dead body.

When we finally reached a long corridor with several doors leading off on each side, I breathed a sigh of relief.

up. After I had relaxed a bit, I looked around curiously. One door in particular caught my eye. With its pitch-black colour and the raven's head attached to a ring, it was very different from the other rooms.

"This room is off limits to you. Is that clear?" Mrs Raven- wood gave me a stern look.

"Uh, yeah, sure, no problem," I replied, stammering.

But as quickly as Mrs Ravenwood's mood had changed, it returned to normal. With a big smile on her lips, she clapped her hands.

"But now come, the books are a few doors down." She headed for a room at the end of the hall.

As soon as we entered, I noticed a lot of cardboard boxes tucked away on three high shelves against the wall. Mrs Ravenwood came out from behind the door with a ladder and brought the top boxes down.

"All books that are in very bad condition, whether yellowed or dog-eared, you put in a pile. Books in good condition you leave in the box," she explained to me.

"Oh, and you can leave the boxes with the books in good condition. I'll bring them to Charlotte in the next few days. If you need me, I'll be upstairs." Without waiting for my answer, Mrs Ravenwood turned and left the room.

I inhaled and exhaled deeply, the musty smell of the cellar coming straight back to my nose. Then I pulled one of the boxes towards me and set to work. It was old, rancid and covered with cobwebs. Disgusted, I pushed them aside. The contents looked as old as the box. One by one I took out the books and wiped them clean.

with my sleeve over the dusty covers. Interestingly, they were all fantasy books. Some of the writing was in Latin and I could only decipher what kind of story it must be by looking at a few drawings.

I regularly caught myself flicking through the old pages, spellbound. I had always been fascinated by fantasy novels. For me, they meant dreaming. Dreaming of a world that was so very different and yet fascinating at the same time.

Once more I reached into the box and pulled out the last book. When my eyes fell on the ancient work with its brown, leather cover, my heart suddenly began to beat faster. As with the other books, I brushed the dust off the squiggly book title. The word "Grimoire" literally jumped out at me. As far as I knew from several series, it stood for a kind of witch book.

Involuntarily, I flipped through the yellowed pages. How old could this book be? I opened the last page, hoping to find an answer. And indeed I did. On closer inspection, I saw a date: 1896. Wow, no wonder it was in such good condition. I flipped the leather cover closed and gently stroked the spine. It was far too beautiful to be thrown away. Nevertheless, the condition was poor. The book had obviously been through years of adventures.

Just as I was about to put it on the pile of badly received books, I felt a gnawing sensation. As if the book sensed that I was giving up on it. On the other hand, that was a surreal thought, wasn't it? Thoughtfully, I studied the dog-eared cover with several dents. Even if Although it was stupid to believe that this book had a connection to me, I couldn't shake this feeling. So I made a decision and carefully put the grimoire aside. The end of this book had not yet been written.

I got up, took more boxes from the shelves with the ladder and turned my attention to the next books. The good ones into the potty, the bad ones into the jar. I worked my way along in the manner of a cinderella and completely forgot the time. When I finally reached the last box, I heard a chime. First one, then two, then three. It didn't stop until the thirteenth chime. After that, an eerie silence fell over the musty room.

Slowly, that uneasy feeling came up in me again. So I hastily set about sorting the rest. In the end, there were three piles of poorly preserved books. Next to them lay the grimoire. I grabbed the ancient work, pressed the leather cover tightly against me and stood up. It was about time that this book finally saw daylight again. As soon as I stepped into the hallway, the light in the room went out automatically. Darkness enveloped me, causing slight panic in me. Normally, gloom did not bother me. Quite the opposite. *"Man is not afraid of being alone in the dark, but of not being alone in the dark."* This sentence from one of my dad's books has been with me since childhood. It, and so many other words from my dad, had helped me to see the night and its darkness from a different perspective when I was young. Besides, Dad had preferred to write his novels at night. There was no one to disturb at that time of day, no appointments, no school. At night everything was quiet, then the world was asleep. At some point I had also started reading my books at late hours into the night. So I was definitely used to the dark, but this one in the basement was different. Eerie, engaging and oppressive. Shivering, I felt my way along the wall and looked for a light switch. When I found it, I sighed with relief and flicked it on quickly. As soon as the light came on, I was startled. Only a few centimetres in front of me was the pitch-black door with the raven's head. And as if it had been waiting for me, it creaked loudly and opened a crack wide. I stood rooted to the spot. Shortly afterwards, another chime sounded. It came directly from the forbidden room.

An inner voice whispered to me that I should get out of here as soon as possible. On the other hand, there was this curious voice inside me that urged me to look behind the door. And of course, how could it be otherwise, unreason prevailed. Although I knew it was a bad idea, I took a step towards the door and pushed it open a little further. Torn, I stopped at the threshold and peered into the room. At first I couldn't see anything. After a while, however, my eyes got used to the darkness, which was only broken by the sparse light from the corridor. The warning voice inside me grew louder. I should not be here. And yet, as if by



magic, I was driven into this room. Perhaps it was because a few metres in front of me stood a large black cauldron with an iron raven's head. Green smoke rose from it and enveloped the room in a sea of herbs.

Uncertainly, I took another step towards the cauldron. I wondered what it was good for. Cautiously, I peered over its rim and into the liquid bubbling inside. Little by little, a blurred image formed out of the bubbling whirlpool. And the longer I concentrated on it, the clearer it became. Was that a building made of bricks? And a woman's statue surrounded by animals? Confused, I bit my lower lip. More and more bubbles rose from the concoction and the smoke thickened so much that I shrieked in fright when suddenly a black raven-like creature flew into view. at the same time I put my hand over my mouth. I should get out of here as soon as possible.

"You again! Do you like sticking your nose where it doesn't belong?"

I whirled around and banged my head directly against a body. Perplexed, I stumbled backwards. The cold iron of the cauldron bored into my overheated skin, but I was only peripherally aware of this. I was horrified to realise that I had bumped into the chest of a boy. A tall, muscular guy. My gaze fell on his face and I froze. No, no, no, it couldn't be! It was the boy from the forest. The boy who had conjured up a whirlwind. The boy who had caught me watching him. What was his name? Jason? Uncertainly, I stared at him and couldn't make a sound, which was perhaps also due to my throat, which felt dry as dust.

"Have you lost your tongue or could you finally explain to me what you are doing here?" He crossed his arms and scowled at me.

And although I was actually feverishly searching for an excuse I couldn't stop myself from looking at him closely. He had prominent cheekbones and full lips. His nose, on the other hand, looked slightly crooked, as if it had been broken before. And his eyes bore a striking resemblance to Mrs Ravenwood's.

Embarrassed, I cleared my throat. "I, I ... the door opened by itself and I, uh, just happened to be standing in front of it!" Great, great excuse, it flashed through my mind.

"Of course!" Annoyed, he rolled his eyes. "Come on now, we're going upstairs." He turned and marched away.

As I also started to move, a chime sounded again. I winced once more and turned around. The sound came from another cuckoo clock, which I had obviously not noticed earlier. It was mounted directly behind the kettle above a wooden table on which an open book rested. And it was no less terrifying than the one hanging upstairs in the living room.

I quickly turned away and followed Jason.

"There you are! Lilly, you've obviously met my grandson already." Mrs Ravenwood came out of the kitchen with a red checked cooking apron tied around her. A smile briefly flitted across her features. "I was just about to make dinner. Are you hungry?"

Jason looked at me. Now it was clear to me why their eyes were so similar. Apart from that, I couldn't quite interpret his look. A slight panic flared up in me. If only I had taken the stairs up right away and not let my curiosity guide me. I knew that this characteristic would one day be my undoing. I held my breath tensely.

"You could say that," Jason growled.

I breathed a sigh of relief. Obviously he wasn't going to tell Mrs Ravenwood about my trip to the forbidden room.

"So, are you hungry? After all, you were busy down there for hours, Lilly."

"Er, thank you for the kind invitation. However, I would like to go home. My dog Mrs Blueberry is waiting for me." Only now did I realise that I was holding the gri-moire in my hand. "However, I wanted to ask you if it would be all right to borrow this book. It really belongs in the pile of poorly preserved copies, but I found the title interesting." I held out the book to Mrs Ravenwood.

"You are welcome to keep it, child. I thank you for your help. Jason will be here a lot next week. I'm sure he'll be glad of some company of his own age. Don't you, Jason?" Mrs. Ravenwood looked at her grandson.

"I don't think so," he murmured as he eyed me dismissively.

What was his problem with me? Of course, he had caught me in unfavourable situations, yet he didn't know me and still seemed to judge me. Annoyed, I pushed the thought aside, tried to ignore his mood, thanked Mrs Ravenwood for the book and said goodbye. As I stepped out of the door, my eyes fell once more on the cuckoo clock in the living room. But it had disappeared. In its place hung a picture of a raven. More precisely, the raven. I frowned in confusion, turned away and left this strange house.

A thick layer of fog had settled over the streets and the light drizzle made me shiver. It was already the end of February, but this year it felt like autumn was welcoming us rather than spring.

I hurried to get to Grandma. So many inexplicable things had happened in the last few days that took over my mind completely. For which I was rewarded with a nascent headache. I took a deep breath of the clear evening air, noticing the eerie silence that surrounded me. The pavement was sparsely lit. There was not a soul on the road and no cars approaching. One of the lanterns flickered slightly as I passed. And I thought the day couldn't get any creepier. Yet today wasn't even Friday the thirteenth. I wouldn't have thought I was superstitious, but all I needed was a black cat to cross my path and I would change my mind.

While I hurried along the pavement as quickly as possible, something flitted past me in the corner of my eye. Perhaps a bird? I stopped for a moment and stared up at the treetops. Then I heard a squawk. It was coming from one of the tall firs that stood by the side of the path. I listened in style, clearly aware of my heavy breathing. Was this cawing coming from a raven? I had already seen enough of these creatures today. A shiver ran through me again at the thought of it.

When the cawing echoed through the treetops one more time, I recognised it. between the branches were two glowing dots. One purple and one green. Eyes. The same eyes as Mrs Ravenwood's raven. My whole body shivered. I quickly started moving again, getting faster and faster, and was almost running when I heard another croak. This time it seemed closer. And louder. More urgent. Although I could already see Grandma's house, I was overcome with panic. Maybe I was getting carried away. But at that moment I felt like I was in a bad horror movie.

Just a few metres and I would be at the front door. Another croak. Take a deep breath. I was almost there. Only a few more metres. When I finally reached the front door, I dug out my key and opened it with shaky fingers. As soon as I entered, I frantically threw the door shut behind me. That raven was getting on my last nerve. Why was he following me?

I looked at the grimoire in my hands and thought back to the cellar room at Mrs Ravenwood's house. Why did Mrs Ravenwood have a kettle in the cellar? And what was it about the building in the picture? And all those ravens? So many questions that my incipient headache wouldn't allow me to answer. Exhausted, I rubbed my temples. Sleep. That sounded good. I briefly considered telling Grandma about the raven and the room, but decided against it. After all, I had no business in the latter and could only hope that Jason wouldn't betray me. Jason. My thoughts wandered to the guy whose mere presence had had far too much influence on me. But how could I forget him? I had never seen anyone like him at my former school. He was the kind of boy they wrote about in books. Arrogant. Secretive. Handsome. Stop. I didn't want to think about him, I swear. I could not rave about him. Something told me I'd better stay away from him. So I tried to put Jason out of my mind and went upstairs to Grandma's flat. As soon as I opened the door, Mrs Blueberry greeted me. Biscuit was strutting behind her, grumbling to herself in a bad mood. Apart from the light in the

hallway, the flat was dark. Apparently Grandma wasn't home. I crouched down and nestled my face against Mrs Blueberry's fur.

"Well, my sweetheart, have you settled in well here? Was Bis- cuit good to you today? My afternoon was strange. I just want to go to bed! Before that, though, I really must eat something, I'm afraid Mrs Ravenwood's ginger biscuits weren't suitable for human teeth."

Mrs Blueberry looked at me questioningly. Sometimes I wondered how much she really understood about what I told her every day.

As I detached myself from her, my stomach began to growl loudly, as if on com- mando. I hurried into the kitchen and headed for the fridge. There was a small note stuck on the bright red door.

*Lilly,*

*I'm in the bookshop again for a moment. There is a slice of pizza in the fridge. Do I remember correctly that Margeritha is your favourite?*

*I hope so!*

The word pizza made my mouth water. I quickly took off the piece of paper and put it aside. For a moment, my gaze lingered on the countless magnets on the fridge door. One in particular caught my eye. On it was the symbol with the moon made of stars and the raven in the middle. Carefully, I took the magnet and let it slide into my hand. Thoughtfully, I stroked it with my fingertips. The stars were raised and felt rough. I wondered what this symbol stood for and why I saw it everywhere. But I was too hungry to think about it any more. And too tired. I pinned the magnet back on the fridge and yawned loudly. The day was taking its toll. I took the piz- za out of the fridge and devoured it while still standing. I sighed happily. Cold pizza was a poem in itself.

Mrs Blueberry's soft whine sounded behind me. I turned to her and watched my dog lady as she plodded into the kitchen and looked tiredly at me out of her big

eyes. She was dragging a blanket behind her with her muzzle, on which small, colourful dogs with witch hats were depicted.

"Did Grandma give you that blanket?" Touched by so much attention and love, I smiled.

With a wag of her tail, she agreed with me before disappearing back into the living room onto the windowsill with her blanket.

Exhausted, I took a shower, put on my favourite pyjamas and climbed up the attic ladder. With the grimoire in my hand, I snuggled into the soft duvet. And while the raindrops pattered on the large attic window above me, I opened the book and flipped through the pages.

ancient, fragile pages. My gaze lingered on the chapter heading History of Witches. I began to read with interest:

*The story of the origin of witches began as early as the fourteenth century. According to popular belief, there were thirteen women at that time for whom the well-being of their families was of paramount importance in times of plague. They decided to make a pact with the darkest creature that mankind has always feared. The devil. So that they could care for the health of those they loved, he gave the women powers. Although they did not heal people with them, they protected their loved ones. These powers were popularly called magic. The price the women paid for it was their souls. Magic in exchange for a piece of their soul, as soon as the misery in this world was over.*

*When the plague was over and the families were safe, the devil took his reward. The piece of soul that was now missing drove the women out of their minds, which they did not want to accept. Their magic had become stronger and had developed over the years. They had long been able to protect more than just their loved ones. The women decided to trick the devil. To do this, they lured him with a newborn child to a grotto deep under the earth on Walpurgis Night, as we know it today. As soon as the devil appeared to them to receive the child, they worked their magic.*

*They put the devil in thirteen iron chains. Each of the women put the same curse on one of the chains. The magic of the thirteen women was strong, but the devil's words also had an unimaginable power. Therefore, he cursed the thirteen women, so that they and all their descendants as well as their descendants would be eternally bound to him and to magic ...*

I didn't get any further because a piece of the book page was missing. It almost seemed as if it had been torn out. But why? I turned a page, hoping that the chapter would continue. But nothing of the sort. The end of the chapter was indeed missing. I closed the grimoire and stroked the golden writing. This book was so much more exciting than I would have thought possible. I wondered if there was any truth to the story. Fascinated and repulsed at the same time, I pondered over the written words. However, they raised many more questions and I was too exhausted to think about them further. With a yawn, I put the book down on my bedside table and checked the window, as I did every night. Tired, I let myself sink onto the soft pillow. Hopefully tomorrow would be a normal day.