

# The Silverwood Door

Saffron dreamt again of the door in the woods.

When she woke, she couldn't remember what had been behind it, just the burning need of her feet to take her there, and the gnarled, ancient door, seared into her brain.

There was nothing else, only the fleeting feeling of perfect lips against hers, magic she could still taste, smoke and sweetness.

She knew she had to find it. And as though this dream had unlocked something in her mind, she finally knew how. She *remembered*.

She knew every book in her aunts' library, had poured through them all as a child. The one they'd tried hardest to keep from her insatiable curiosity had been full of confusing illustrations penned in an unsteady hand, words unfurling in a cadence that wasn't quite English, not any version she recognized. The first image in the book, right on the title page, had been *that door*.

"Saffron! Are you up yet?" Aunt Juniper called up the stairwell.

Saffron jumped out of bed, threw on a sundress, hunting for her shoes. "Yes, coming!"

Saffron had hated her name as a child, had wanted more than anything to be *normal*, until she realized midway through high school that normal was boring, normal was predictable, and most of all it was an *illusion*, it was a great game of mass pretending played by adults — that wives were not cheating on husbands, that mental illnesses were not eating away at depressed children, that death was not slowly coming for them all.

And if she'd seen through the lies, trusted her own intuition, maybe her best friend might still be here.

Now, at nineteen, she embraced all that she was, was meant to be, dyed her near-colorless hair a bright goldenrod steeped from the spice that was her namesake. She wore unrelieved yellow, all day, every day, from pale springtime silk to dark mustard wool, wielding color in defiance of whatever black moods might try to steal her determined cheer.

She worked in the store owned by her aunts, preparing and selling herbal remedies, small charms, the occasional annoying but innocuous curse. Entry-level stuff. She was years away from the craft her elders worked, and honestly until her dream of the door she'd never had much interest in it — she was much more enamored of baking and the small benefits that could be worked into dough and batter, ways to nurture people, to care for what ailed their hearts while

feeding their bodies. Her secret dream was to one day buy the shop next door and open *The Sunflour Bakery*, decorated floor to ceiling with her favorite sunflowers.

But today, her thoughts were only of the silverwood door. She had a full day ahead in the charm shop, but once it closed the cauldrons would be all hers.

She would work the spell, and find the door, *tonight*.

---

The hours flew by and seemed to crawl, both at once. Saffron felt like at any moment she might jump free of her skin, waiting for it to be over.

“What’s with you today, Saffron?” Aunt Juniper asked, after she’d had to repeat a question three times to get an answer from her niece. Juniper had short hair she let fall into her eyes, brown with a streak of silver. She wore leather with lace, always, and rode a Harley lovingly named *Broomstick*.

“Yeah, you seem antsy,” Aunt Melia chimed in, from over her knitting. “A date tonight, maybe?” Melia was continually making something, weaving wards and wishes into each blanket, scarf, and mitten, but these were always gifts, never sold in the shop. Her hair was a cloud of differently-coiled spirals, an unusual spectrum of golds, reds, and browns, and as far as Saffron knew they just grew that way, and had never been dyed.

“No, nothing like that, Auntie,” Saffron said, preoccupied with stirring a batch of sleepytime brew on the stove. It was sweet and soft, valerian and velour, but she’d ruin it if it came to a full boil. “Just a project.”

“Ah, well, good luck with it. Just wash up when you’re done,” Juniper said, as if Saffron had ever left the industrial kitchen less than spotless.

Once they’d locked up, her aunts retired to their apartment over the store, squabbling about dinner and which show to watch off of the DVR.

An impatient creature meowed at her calves for his dinner, an iron-grey cat named Widdershins with one eye and fur that had seen better days. A feral kitten that had walked into the shop as though he’d owned it, and stayed ever since, he was older than Saffron and twice as canny.

He was unnaturally spry for his age, probably due to the concoctions her aunts stirred into his food and rubbed into his fur while he purred at the attention. Saffron was no better, baking longevity charms and wards against arthritis into tiny fish-shaped cat treats, with which she spoiled him, liberally.

“All *right*, Wids,” she said. “Hold on.”