

The Botanist

“Do you admit, Alice Warren, that you are practicing witchcraft?” the judge said from his bench, his powdered wig slipping slightly down his bald head.

Alice smiled sweetly, determined to find the best of the situation. “No, I am merely a botanist and a healer.” The crowd gasped, and a woman in the back fainted.

“Lies! She’s a witch! She just admitted to it!” they shouted.

Alice frowned slightly, trying to be patient. “You don’t believe me? It’s okay, it’s not very common for girls to have this profession, I understand. But you can ask me about any plant and I can tell you its latin name, how much water it needs, and if it is used in poison or ointments.”

“Poison?! Witch!” Everyone screamed.

The judge banged his gavel down, silencing them all. “Miss Warren, you have been accused of witchcraft, and this is the evidence being used against you. Singing to plants...”

“It helps them grow!”

“Having a birthmark on your arm...”

“I’m sorry, but what does that have to do with anything?”

“Walking by Mrs. Smith’s house while she was mending a petticoat, and Mrs. Smith pricked herself with a needle...”

“I think that was her own fault then.”

“Understanding too much about plants and herbs...”

“I read and paid attention to my studies.”

“And finally, being able to predict the weather.”

“Anyone can do that! Like right now, the air is humid and it’s cloudy, so it might rain soon.”

Just then a crack of thunder split the sky and rain came pouring down. Everyone began to scream, and three more people passed out. “She really is a witch!”

And that is when everything dissolved into chaos. People shouted over each other, trying to stack up more evidence against Alice and how she should be punished. But Alice had had enough. She was trying so hard to forgive them, but it wasn't working very well. So she sat back in her chair, drifted off into her own thoughts, reciting the plant names that she had recorded the morning before she was dragged off to the jailhouse. *Mayflower (Epigaea repens): preferring dappled sunlight, with three to four flasks of water a week. Petals can be eaten in small amounts; stems and leaves poisonous to animals, maybe humans as well. Mint (Mentha): preferring some shade or full sun. Needs to be watered every 2-4 days. Safe to eat, and can be used in teas for stomach unease. Rue (Ruta): preferring full sun, needs to be watered once or twice every seven days. Poisonous in large amounts.*

Alice stopped to look at the storm outside. Everyone was still arguing, and the storm outside was *almost* as loud as the din in the courthouse. The pounding rain and howling wind bent the trees and made the leaves sway in a tumultuous rhythm. Alice imagined she was in the forest instead, the wet moss soft beneath her feet as she took cover underneath a giant oak tree. And when the storm was over, the sweet smell of wet soil would waft up around her, and the sound of dripping leaves would create a gentle harmony in the background. Everything would be shiny and fresh, and she wouldn't have to worry about anything.

Another crack of thunder invaded her thoughts, and this time, Alice screamed along with everyone else as a bolt of lightning struck the courthouse, and the ceiling caught on fire.

"It's the witch's doing!" a woman screamed.

"Oh, tush!" Alice muttered. What bad luck she had. Everyone ran around, trying to get out of the burning building. *This is my chance*, Alice thought. She bolted from her place by the judge and into the swarm of people. She pushed and shoved and was finally met by a blast of icy rain. As soon as she was out of the courthouse, she ran. Alice ran and didn't stop until reached the forest. She took cover under an oak, just like she had in her daydreams. The wind whipped her hair around, and the rain was brutally sharp against her skin, but she was far away from the town, and the storm would be over soon. Alice rested her head against the rough trunk of the tree and closed her eyes, trying to sleep.

She must have, because the next time she opened her eyes, the clouds were gone, stars were out, sprinkled across the sky like powdered sugar over seedcakes. Alice stood up, and wiped away the dirt on her skirt. Then she began to walk away. Away from the town, away from the horrible people she had tried to forgive. She was done trusting them. Instead, she would go and live far away from civilization. *Oh well*, Alice thought. *The trees are better company anyway.*