

School for UNUSUAL MAGiC

THE EQUINOX TEST

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY

LIZ MONTAGUE



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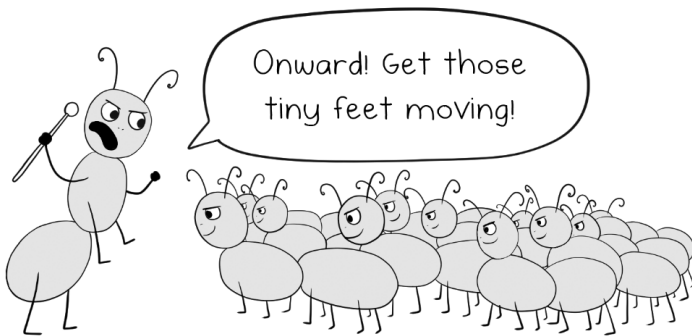


Chapter 1

ROSE

Rose Vera was certain an army of ants marched under her skin.

That must be the reason she felt nerves coursing through her body—it was their tiny feet. Her hands shook as she opened her school’s door, further proof of the ant army’s movement. The stress couldn’t possibly be coming from Rose herself or have anything to do with the meeting she was about to have with the principal. Ants were *much* more believable.



Rose lingered, one foot planted on the Brooklyn sidewalk, the other resting on marble floors. It was a bad habit. Doors

were for going in or out, not waffling in between. But she couldn't help it today. Not when the silhouette of her parents was getting smaller and smaller as they disappeared down the hallway ahead of her.

They hadn't waited for her. Rose knew she'd very colorfully demanded they go on without her just a few minutes earlier, but still, now she was nervous . . . and alone.

The door started to feel heavy against her hand. Rose gave it a shove and found that the normally cooperative door was refusing to move.

Typical. But then, this *was* the Brooklyn School of Magic. There was never a guarantee things would stay normal. From the outside the decayed wooden door of the old brownstone was barely holding on to its hinges, decorated only by the occasional spider. But on the inside it was elegant glass, the rest of Brooklyn on display through its frosted panes.

"Traitor!" Rose grumbled, leaning her full weight into it, her flip-flops beginning to slide under the pressure. "Nothing is on my side today," she declared with one last shove as the door clicked shut.

It was barely morning and Rose had already endured two betrayals: First, their annual end-of-summer Coney Island

trip, which was just days away, had been canceled for no good reason. Rose remembered her mom mentioning something about unsafe tides, but weren't tides and water kind of the whole point of the ocean? Second, her parents had actually listened to her for once and left her abandoned in the hallway battling the door all alone.

She forced her legs to move. The Brooklyn School of Magic had always reminded Rose of a glass castle, complete with its very own river that twisted through the halls. The school seemed too delicate for the weathered buildings that surrounded it. Well, sort of surrounded it. The campus was at least a few hundred acres, though no one could tell from the outside. Rose wasn't sure how that worked. Her classmate Chamomile Mills claimed she'd once stumbled onto a mountain range that could only be accessed through a secret door at the back of the gymnasium. Not that Rose trusted Chamomile Mills for one second.

As she walked to the principal's office, Rose was surprised so many students were here on a Saturday morning. She'd been forced to come and had scowled the entire four-block walk here past Fort Greene Park and up DeKalb Avenue. But her classmates, smiling and laughing among the flowers in the school's Meadowlark Courtyard, had no excuse.

These were the last days of summer and here they were, wasting it at school.

Granted, Rose was a day student—she came in the mornings and went home every afternoon. But plenty of students boarded at the school, and it seemed some had arrived a few weeks before the school year was set to begin. Students like Amethyst Vern, Rose’s best friend. Rose tried to spot Amethyst reading in front of one of the cozy tree houses that sat at the far side of the courtyard, although, knowing Amethyst, she was probably in her room color-coding tea leaves or getting a head start on all the homework they’d have to do in their fifth-year classes. All Elementary Magic boarders lived in the middle levels of the tree dorms, but next year, when they moved up to Middle Magic, Amethyst would get a room high in the leafy green canopy.

Middle Magic. Just the thought made Rose’s heart stutter.

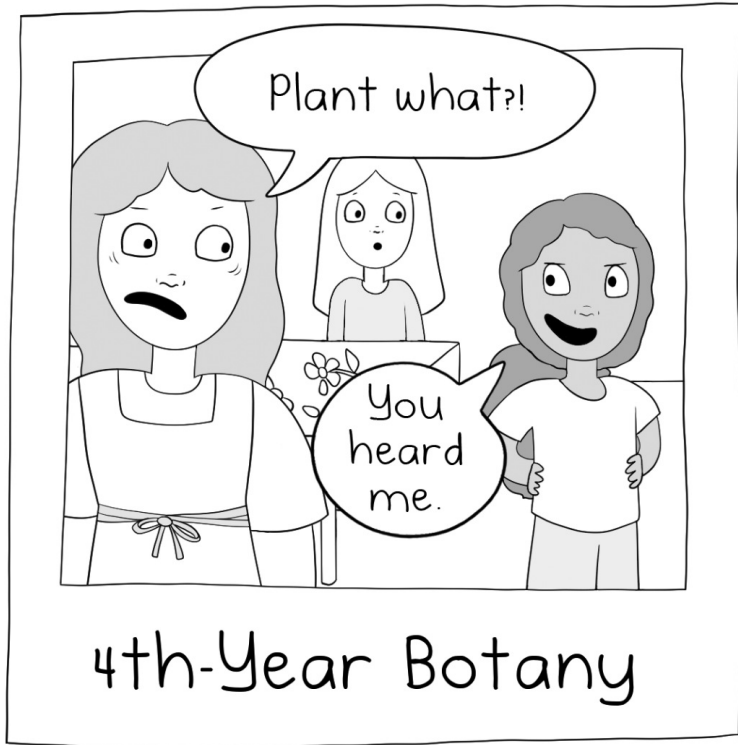
Swallowing down the burning in her chest, she waved to Jasmine Ward and Magnolia Bartlett, then shielded her eyes from the ruthless sun. It beamed through a massive skylight that stretched the length of the courtyard. From what Rose could make out, Jasmine and Magnolia were huddled on a patch of grass soaking in the rays. Jasmine seemed to be charming a daisy petal, her eyes closed and her lips

muttering softly as the petal on her palm swelled to the size of a pillow.

That was a popular spell from their fourth-year Enchantments class. Daisy petals were perfect to lean against or rest on when chatting with friends, not to mention soft as silk. Plus, the daisies never seemed to mind. They had so many petals that taking one here and there wasn't damaging—not like plucking one from an orchid, which would put up a real fuss.

Jasmine gave Rose a warm smile and a wave, but Magnolia only offered a half-hearted grimace. Magnolia had been in Rose's Botany class last year and must have remembered her outburst—Rose had almost failed the class because of it. They'd been doing dissections for a lesson on flower arrangements, which Rose had said looked like a crime scene. Picking a flower killed it. But Ms. Blossom, the head gardener who taught Botany, had not been pleased to be accused of plant murder.

More than once Rose wished she could be like Amethyst, able to give school her full attention and care. To not say every thought that popped into her mind. It was because of Amethyst that Rose understood the basics of Elementary Magic at all: easy spells to change the makeup of things,



charms that manipulated appearance, and potions that affected thoughts and feelings. Still, Rose struggled to keep it all straight sometimes, using spells to charm and charms to spell.

But even if the “school” part of school wasn’t entirely her thing, Rose loved being part of this community. The magic of stumbling across a door that took you, allegedly, to a mountain range; thousand-year-old trees that could be home to ten-year-old students; and daisies that offered up their petals like people gave smiles at the corner store. Those were

the moments Rose didn't want to lose. She just couldn't.

Because even before Rose arrived at the principal's office, before she heard the hushed tones of her parents talking or saw Principal Ivy look up at her with a concerned smile, Rose knew what this Saturday meeting was about. She could feel it. Her outburst in Ms. Blossom's class hadn't been the only time she'd gotten in trouble during the past four years. And, despite Amethyst's best efforts, Rose was barely keeping up in class.

So as much as she wanted to remain part of the Brooklyn School of Magic, Rose wasn't sure the Brooklyn School of Magic wanted her back.