

MAIGA DOOCY

"Nothing short of masterful." —MEGAN BANNEN,  
author of *The Undertaking of Hart and Mercy*

SORCERY

and

SMALL

MAGICS



# SORCERY

*and*



# SMALL MAGICS

The Wildersongs: Book One

# MAIGA DOOCY



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for my mom, who taught me to see magic  
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## CHAPTER ONE

It was not my intention to cause mischief immediately upon arriving back at the Fount, despite what anyone else may tell you. And yet, by the time the night was over, I was drunk, my nose was bleeding, and Sebastian Grimm was furious with me.

It should be noted that only one of these things was unusual.

In order to understand these happenings, you must first understand the circumstances of my return to the Fount. Chiefly, that I was lucky to be there at all. My previous year of study had come to a close with an unfortunate incident involving a spell that caused one of my instructors to think she was a duck for a full hour, and no matter how much I argued that this was how the spell was *supposed to work*, no one seemed to agree that explanation made things better. I'd been allowed to come back, but it had involved quite a lot of hand-wringing and promises of good behavior (on my part), as well as some stern lectures and threats of immediate expulsion if I did not meet certain standards (on the part of the Fount's academic board).

In short: I was on thin ice before even stepping foot on the Fount grounds.

The sun was setting as I passed through the city gates, and I delayed further by grabbing my violin case and hopping out of the carriage, directing the driver to deliver the rest of my belongings without me. ("Care of Agnes Quest, if you please. She'll know where to put them.")

The Fount was situated in the city of Luxe's southern quarter, with towers of pale stone that rose high above the surrounding buildings and paper-choked depths that sank far below the city streets. Inside those walls existed

a separate world that revolved entirely around magic and discipline. Not being in the mood to subject myself to either of those things a moment sooner than necessary, I veered off course and made my way to the boisterous streets of the northern quarter, where I proceeded to distract myself with music and cards and good company.

The night air was mild when I stumbled out onto the street hours later, summer still clinging to it. I decided to take the long way back in order to enjoy both the breeze and my last few moments of freedom. Despite that, I'm certain I would have reached the Fount gates before the midnight bell struck were it not for two factors:

One: I was slightly tipsy. Only slightly, but that was enough for me to be distracted by the moon, peeking out from between the building spires above me, and I took a wrong turn.

Two: I was followed by two of my companions from that night's card table.

Perhaps they were upset by the amount of their coin I'd managed to walk away with, or perhaps the celebratory winner's song I'd played whilst perched on top of the bar had rubbed them the wrong way. Who's to say? Usually, I was better at spotting sore losers, but I'd entered the game already inebriated, which improved my opinion of most people.

I had just enough presence of mind to make a few quick turns and then scramble up a drainpipe before my followers could match my pace. Perhaps if I was a caster a more direct approach would have been possible, but there are two kinds of sorcerers: those who cast spells and those who write them. I was the latter—and not even an impressive scribe at that.

I held my breath as my two erstwhile gaming companions rounded the corner and looked around wildly.

"Lost him," the man with the deep voice said.

"Well, we know where he's going," the woman replied. She wore tall red boots that I had complimented her on, back when we'd been friends an hour ago. "The Fount is back in session tomorrow, and only a sorcerer would be seen about town in one of those hideous coats."

I bristled at this. My coat was midlength and black, with many pockets both on the outside and running along the inner lining. A sorcerer's coat is a wonderful thing to have, with spells on the pockets so you could carry far more than the space should have allowed for and more magic woven into the fabric to keep the wearer cool in summer and warm in winter. I also thought it happened to be an unquestionably stylish piece of clothing and that I looked quite dashing in it.

My would-be robbers, unaware of my outrage, continued on in the direction of the Fount. Once their footsteps had faded, I pulled myself from the gutter and onto the roof proper. It wasn't the first time I had avoided attention by scrambling over Luxe's rooftops, and it was a faster (if more dangerous) route.

The journey went mostly without incident, though I did lose several minutes untangling my boot from a wash-line full of someone's clothing. Nevertheless, when I finally caught sight of the Fount's grand front gate, my followers were still nowhere in sight.

I shimmied down another drainpipe with more haste than grace, clutching my violin case awkwardly, then darted across the road. It wasn't until I slid to a stop in front of the gate that I realized something that should have been clear to me from first glance—it was shut.

This was a fairly new development. Until recently, the Fount's doors had been open all hours of the day, but the previous year a troop of Coterie members had gone rogue and broken into one of the library's locked vaults, stealing an undisclosed number of extremely rare spells. Needless to say, security measures had been heightened in the wake of the robbery. These measures included closing the gates at midnight, as I now belatedly recalled.

I swore softly and looked over my shoulder.

"You missed the midnight bell by twenty minutes at least."

The voice was flat, remarkable only for its deep tenor and the unmistakable disapproval lacing each word. I flinched in surprise and looked back toward the door just as a figure stepped forward from the collected gloom of the gate's arch.

“Oh. Hello, Grimm,” I said with little enthusiasm.

Sebastian Grimm lived up to his name in every way imaginable, like a thundercloud in human form. His hair was a shockingly pale gray and had been that way even when we first met at seventeen. A permanent line of displeasure was etched between his dark brows, and his mouth had a habit of settling into a thin line, turning his expression sour. Or at least, that was the expression he wore whenever he caught sight of me.

Grimm’s usually immaculate sorcerer’s coat was covered in a thin layer of dust, and the indigo caster’s sash wrapped around his waist was creased. A bag hung from his shoulder, packed so tightly the seams were straining. It looked heavy. Grimm looked tired.

Grimm was always easiest to annoy when he was tired, and I have always been unable to resist low-hanging fruit.

I shook my head and made a tutting sound with my tongue. “Sebastian Grimm, out cavorting the night before our final tier commences. What is the world coming to?”

Grimm’s lips tugged down at the corners. “My return was delayed when a stream decided to forge itself a new path directly across one of the main roads. It took the Coterie nearly two hours to spell it back in place.” He gave me a once-over, making note of my rumpled clothes and flushed face. “What’s your excuse?”

“Lost track of time,” I said, and winked for good measure. “What are you waiting here for?”

Grimm looked down his nose at me like I was a particularly stupid bug he was thinking about stepping on. “No one answered when I knocked.”

I laughed. “Do you mean to say, in nearly five years of attending the Fount, you’ve never bothered to find another way in besides the front gate?”

Grimm, tellingly, said nothing. It was not so surprising, considering what I knew of his habits. No reveling with friends in the streets of Luxe for Sebastian Grimm. I could not imagine he had ever found himself in a situation that demanded sneaking back into the Fount after hours.

It was tempting, very tempting, to turn around and leave him there

without another word. It's undoubtedly what Grimm would have done to me, had our positions been reversed. But I couldn't help but think what would happen if my pursuers arrived and found Grimm outside the gate instead of me. I wasn't concerned for his safety, understand, but the last thing I needed was for Grimm to discover I'd been gambling. I was sure he'd be only too eager to share my transgressions with the Fount's board of sorcerers, and I'd already received a very clearly worded letter from them detailing exactly what would happen if I so much as thought about breaking a rule this year.

I sighed heavily. "Come along, then. Or do you intend to sleep in the dust of the street tonight, simply to avoid following me?"

Then I turned on my heel and started walking, not bothering to wait for an answer.

After a moment I was rewarded by the sound of Grimm's footsteps, leaving the gate to trail reluctantly after me down the road.



Around the eastern side of the Fount, there is a particularly pretty stretch of wall where trees border the walkway and their branches stretch up and outward, leaning over to kiss leaves with the trees overflowing from the Fount's garden within. By day, this area is a popular place to stroll because of the shade and the view. By night, it's the perfect place to sneak over the wall, making use of the natural handholds provided by greenery.

There were, of course, spells in place to prevent outsiders from doing this, but Grimm and I were not outsiders; we were simply residents resorting to inconvenient measures. I'd climbed these trees many times on my own since the midnight bell's implementation, when I'd been unwilling to let the Fount's rules deprive me of a full night of fun.

"There's no need to climb with me here," Grimm said impatiently, once

I'd explained this. "A lightfoot charm will see us over the wall easily." He looked at me expectantly.

"Oh," I said, surprised. "You want me to write it?"

"It's only a charm, Loveage," Grimm said. "You should be capable of that much, yes?"

Yes, I could write charms. Cantrips too. I could even transcribe other scribes' Grandmagic spells without issue. It was when I wrote my own that things went wrong—that was what Grimm was hinting at. Grandmagic had a habit of turning out so poorly for me that I avoided writing it altogether. My last brush with it had been an accident in second tier, when I'd unintentionally written a wind spell with a bit too much power built into it. The demonstration of said spell had destroyed an entire classroom, knocked one person out a first-story window (Grimm), and resulted in the cracking of three ribs (my own). This had earned me a bit of a reputation, as well as a fair amount of laughter and whispers behind my back. A Fount-trained scribe who couldn't write Grandmagic? What was the point?

I had said something very similar to my father when he insisted I enroll. In fact, I believe my exact words were "Why would I want to spend five years as a laughingstock?" I'd been considered a scribing prodigy when I was young, but that talent had withered on the vine. I'd held more promise as a child than I ever would again, but my father had yet to accept this.

"You've had a place at the Fount since you were born," he'd said.

"Well, I don't want it," I told him, which had led to a week of heated arguments and ended with him making it clear that, if I didn't attend the Fount and become a fifth-tier sorcerer like my older brother had, I could kiss my portion of the inheritance goodbye. The money, the title, the land holdings, all of it.

I didn't much like to think about that confrontation, but sometimes my father's parting words still echoed in my ears.

*You will learn to control your magic and your attitude and become a fully trained sorcerer, or you will become nothing at all.*

After four years at the Fount, I rather thought my father had overlooked



the possibility that I could become a fully trained sorcerer and *still* amount to nothing at all. But Grimm was right; I could write charms, at least.

I reached into my pocket to retrieve paper and quill. The words of the lightfoot charm Grimm mentioned were lost to me—I was shit at memorization—but it was the work of a moment to come up with my own version of the spell, combining what words in the old language I remembered with a few more I found fitting. When it was done, I blew the ink dry and handed the spell to Grimm.

“Your penmanship is awful” was the first thing he said. There was plenty of light from the street for him to read by, so I thought the show he made of squinting and frowning down at the paper was a bit much. “This is incorrect.”

“It’s not,” I said. “I just couldn’t remember the words to the lightfoot spell so I wrote my own. It should work the same. Mostly.”

Grimm stared at me. “Surely you’ve memorized something as basic as that by now?”

I shrugged. “Didn’t stick.”

Grimm looked horrified by this admission. He took ages reading over the spell again, probably searching it for traps. This was insulting but perhaps not entirely unwarranted. Grimm and I had been collecting grievances against each other since first tier, like honey catches flies. I’d once tricked him into casting a charm that turned his pale hair a delightful shade of pink. I’d thought it rather fetching, but he vehemently disagreed. That incident had been the launching point for the enmity that had stuck like a thorn between us ever since.

Once he’d assured himself the spell was as I said, Grimm motioned me closer and gingerly grabbed my left arm with one hand. With the other, he held the spell paper between thumb and forefinger and began to cast. His brow furrowed in concentration. Smoke gathered in his hand and rose up into the air as magic ate the words I’d written, burning away the paper as it went. He didn’t even have to speak the words of the spell aloud.

I will passionately deny admitting this if asked, but Grimm is a brilliant

caster. Most sorcerers can't cast silently, but he did it as a matter of course. If he'd been even a little bit better-natured, this kind of careless display of power might have been attractive. As it was, I found Grimm about as appealing as the austere marble statues that graced the Fount's hallways—just as haughty and twice as cold. Most of our tiermates disagreed with me on that front. Grimm had plenty of admirers who were willing to overlook his personality in favor of his talent. Little good it did them. Grimm had just given more attention to studying my spell than I'd seen him devote to any of his followers over the years.

The paper wasn't even completely finished burning when Grimm tugged me forward and our feet left the ground. This spell was undoubtedly more exciting than a lightfoot charm, which floated you upward with all the urgency of dandelion fluff drifting on a light breeze. *My* version hit with the same adrenaline as a gutless drop, only in reverse. A sort of falling upward, if you like. We had nearly cleared the wall when Grimm's free hand shot out and grabbed the nearest tree limb, halting our progress before we could descend on the other side. I was hardly tipsy anymore, but our landing was awkward enough that only Grimm's unsteady grip on my arm kept me from tumbling down. I wobbled on top of the wall like a toddler, laughing and giddy, buzzing from the rush.

"That was brilliant. Why did you stop us?"

"We were going too fast," Grimm said, scowling. "Your spell likely would have catapulted us headfirst into the ground had I let it continue."

A little of my rush faded, replaced by annoyance. It was one thing to have everyone turn their noses up at me for something I was admittedly bad at, but my charms worked just fine. I wouldn't have dared let anyone use them otherwise.

"Climb down on your own then, if you don't trust my scrying." I pulled my arm away with a quick tug, intending to move toward the nearest tree and away from Grimm. But *hardly tipsy* is not quite the same thing as absolutely sober, especially when one is standing on a narrow bit of stone ten feet above the ground.

I leaned.

First one way, then the other. My balance was further thrown off by my violin case, heavier than usual thanks to the winnings I'd stashed there. My free arm flailed for something, anything, to hold on to, and the only thing within reach was Grimm.

My fingers caught on the sash at his waist, causing Grimm to cling even tighter to the branch he held, rather than offering me any assistance.

"Let go," he snarled, but I clutched that sash like a lifeline, silk twisting in my grasp. Briefly, I thought it would hold, but the fabric was too delicate. It gave way under my fingers with a hushed *riiip*, and I tumbled over the wall.

It was fortunate that there was grass beneath me, rather than stone, but the impact still rattled my bones and sent the case in my grasp bouncing forward to connect with my face, hard enough to leave me seeing stars. I lay there, dazed, as something wet trickled down from my nose and the metallic tang of blood bloomed at the back of my throat.

By the time I managed to sit up, Grimm was just finishing making his way down one of the trees, landing with an elegant hop. He slowly leaned over to pick up the pieces of his sash. It had been torn neatly in two.

Sorcerers decorate their sashes, you know, or at least most of us do. I'd never bothered, but Grimm's sash was covered in careful stitches that depicted droplets of water and waves. Now the threads trailed through the air, ripped down the middle of the design.

Grimm folded the pieces carefully and put them in his pocket. Then he looked down at me, coldly furious, and said, "I don't know how you manage to keep your place here. You're useless, Loveage."

There were many things I had argued with Grimm about over the years, but this was not one of them. I didn't say anything now, either, as he walked away. My own uselessness was something I'd spent years perfecting. Not all sorcerers could be like Grimm. Some of us had powers best left untouched.

## CHAPTER TWO

Beginning my last year at the Fount with a blackened eye wasn't ideal, but at least it gave me an air of mystery. Though I caught several people looking at me curiously the next day, it wasn't until I was eating lunch in the refectory, book propped open in front of me, that anyone asked me about it outright.

"Your face looks like shit. Did you walk into a door?" This question was accompanied by Agnes Quest plopping herself down onto the bench beside me and stealing a piece of fruit from my plate.

"No," I said, lowering my book. "I walked into Sebastian Grimm."

Agnes's eyes widened comically behind her gold-rimmed spectacles. "You fought? *Already*, Leo?"

I told her the story of my evening, not bothering to hold back the details of my less-than-legal activities. Agnes didn't exactly support my lack of regard for rules, but she never condemned me for it either. Our lives had been intertwined since long before the Fount, through both the friendship and the politics of our parents. The number of people with a seat in the Citadel, Miendor's department of magical governance, formed a very small circle, and their children an even smaller one, which meant Agnes and I had shared near identical childhoods full of high expectations and too many fancy parties. We had emerged from the experience bonded. This bond was cemented during the time after my mother's death, when I lived at her family estate for several months. We knew each other's best and worst qualities, and in general supported or forgave them, but this time Agnes's forehead creased in a frown.