

STARFELL

Willow Moss and
the Lost Day

DOMINIQUE VALENTE

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‘So for tonight you will stay with a friend of mine. In the morning I will take you home myself.’

Willow’s mouth fell open. Why wouldn’t she just believe her? ‘No – please you must understand! We have to save Tuesday – I have to find Moreg’s house – you’re the only one who knows where she lives. That’s why we came here. Mum, I really need to do this. If we don’t, it could mean the end of the world.’

There was silence. Then Camille and Juniper burst out laughing again.

‘Can you believe this? “*The end of the world*”! She’s lost it, honestly,’ scoffed Camille.

Willow’s mother shook her head, muttering to her sisters. ‘I blame myself. Left her alone too much with your crazy grandmother, and now look . . .’ She broke off, looking a bit sad.

Ten minutes later, Willow found herself in the home of her mother’s friend Rubix, who seemed to take the craft a bit *too seriously*. The house was shaped like a pentagram, and everything in it from the stove to the sofa and the kitchen table was made to fit precisely

into each point and nook and cranny of the star-shaped house. The walls were a pleasing blue and sunset pink, a bit like a galaxy. There were even little speckles of stars all over the floors.

Sitting across from Willow was a rather short girl of around her own age, who was wearing a nightgown that was at least two sizes too big. She had very long curly hair, pretty skin the colour of a hazelnut, and large round glasses that rested on the edge of a small button nose. Next to her was a black cat, who was eyeing Willow's hairy suitcase with some interest.

Oswin was currently muttering '*Oh nooooo,*' though rather softly.

'This is Essential Jones,' introduced Rubix. 'I'm afraid I have to dash off – need to get some ratwort from the market – but Essential here will make up a bed for you. Mind you two go straight to sleep.' She gave Willow a kindly look as she continued. 'At your mother's request I've put a charm on the door – just in case you try to escape, you understand.' And with that she left.

The girl was eyeing Willow with interest, her brown eyes huge behind the frames. 'So, you're one of Raine Moss's children?'





Willow nodded, her face a bit glum. 'Yes. Not one of the ones you would have heard about, though.'

Essential shrugged. 'Still, to come from a family of witches, that's something. I was the first one in mine for ages . . . That's why I was sent to Rubix – the law, you know,' she said with a small shrug.

Willow looked puzzled, so Essential explained. 'Well, if no one in your family has a magical ability and one of your children develops a fizz of magic, the law is that they have to be sent to someone who can help them control it. So I was sent here just after I was born, to Rubix, as she was the closest witch. My mother was really upset – not only because I was sent away, but because after five boys I was the only girl. See, that's how I got my name. My mother said, "You can't take my girl, she's *essential*." And Rubix took it a bit literally.'

Willow grinned. Then frowned. Something Moreg had said before she was taken by the Brothers of Wol floated in her mind.

The witch had said, '*Remember, practical makes perfect . . . And, when you think of it, a little rain is essential for uncovering what you might need.*'

Willow jumped out of her chair. Unless she'd meant *Raine* and *Essential* – as in two people.



'I think I was meant to find you!'

Essential stared at her as if she'd gone mad.

Willow fished the StoryPass from within her pocket. The needle was currently pointed to '*One Might Have Suspected as Such*', and she grinned.

Essential blinked. 'You were meant to find me?'

She nodded. 'I think that's what Moreg Vaine wanted.'





Essential was still frowning, so Willow explained about everything and how they needed to find Moreg's house.

'Moreg said she knew my mother – Raine. Which is why I came here, because I thought my mother would be able to tell me where Moreg's house is – but maybe she also wanted me to find you – something *Essential*.'

Essential blinked. 'But . . . but I'm nothing special. I mean, I can't do much besides freeze things and that's only for about a second, if it's going slow enough.'

'Freeze things?'

Essential turned to the cat who was licking his paw and flung out her hand. The next second the cat froze, mid-lick, his tongue sticking out at them.



Essential gave a rueful sort of grin. 'It's a bit hit and miss to be honest. If I'm upset, it's a bit more powerful. Once I stopped a bucket of water from being thrown at me when I was walking



outside. I mean, it was just for a second; I still got drenched, and I got this,' she said, lifting her hair and showing Willow a scar, which was shiny and pale against her dark skin, on the side of her head where the bucket had hit her.

Willow shrugged. 'Maybe that's enough. I'm nobody special – I mean, all I do is find lost things – socks mostly, or wallets and keys. Maybe you don't need big magic to save the world? Maybe you've just got to be willing to try?'

Essential nodded, and then stood up. 'Okay.'

'So you'll help me?'

Essential nodded, pushing up her glasses, and grinned. 'Yes.' Then she stopped. 'Well, um, let me just get out of my nightgown first.'

When she returned she was dressed in a black dress with little gold moons and silver stars all over it that Willow couldn't help admiring.

'Ready.' Willow smiled.

'Ready.' Essential nodded.

But when they tried the door, just as Rubix had warned, it was charmed shut.

'Now what?' cried Willow.