

Chapter One

It's quite comfortable here in the woodshed. With the door open it's not dark. And I found a nice log to sit on. I lean back on the dusty wall and look at the ceiling. Okay, there are a couple of spiders up there. That's not great. Outside, back at the house, I hear the screen door slam open.

“Blue! Blue? Where are you? I need help with the twins!”

The twins. My brother and sister. They are nearly ten. Their names are Indigo (a boy) and Violet (a girl). And they are, in my mother's words, "holy terrors." I don't see how that's my problem.

It is nearly dinnertime. I've spent most of the day chasing after the twins in the yard. I am over it. Over them and their antics. Indigo filled his pockets with beetles. I think he might have eaten one. Violet got sap in her hair and a pine needle in her eye. They both lost their socks. How do you lose socks in your own yard? I'll tell you. Somehow you throw them up into the tallest tree. If I lean out the woodshed door, I can still see them up there. Indigo's mismatched blue and white socks. Violet's red socks, one with a hole in the toe. I have no idea how they got them up there. Neither does Mom, even though she watched us all day from where she was building a chair on the porch.

"Blue, get back here! Indigo is in the rafters again!"

Mom never lets the twins out of her sight. She even homeschools them! I take the bus to the school

in town. But the twins get to stay here in our cabin at the edge of the woods. I'm pretty sure they just run around all day. I don't think they learn much. But they don't need to. They're both weirdly smart. Unlike me. I'm weirdly average.

The twins are weirdly *weird*, actually. I know it's normal for little kids to have active imaginations but...wow. Indigo and Violet take it to new levels. They claim they're royalty. They tell me their real last name is Nash Panash Buckthorn Briar. It's not. It's Jasper, same as mine. They talk to fireflies. Only not in English. Not in any language I recognize. They speak it to each other too. Mom says that's normal for twins. But nothing is normal about Indigo and Violet. They drive me crazy.

"BLUE! Get in here NOW!"

I'm fourteen. I'm starting high school at the end of this summer. Ninth grade. I'm going to have enough stress. I'll have to take a new bus to a different town. I'll have to get up earlier. I'll probably have a ton more

homework. I'm not going to have as much time to help with the twins. Mom is going to have to get used to that. I've tried to convince her to let Indigo and Violet go to school. But she won't listen. If they went to school, at least she'd have some time to herself. As it is, the only time she gets is after the twins go to sleep. And they only do that after being read about a hundred fairy tales.

I help out around the house. I sweep every day and wash the dishes. I even chop wood for our woodstove. Yep, we have a woodstove. Our little cabin is like something from another time. Sure, we have a proper toilet and electric lights, but that's about it. The woodstove is for cooking and heating. Our fridge runs off a solar battery. For entertainment we have books. No TV, no internet. To make a phone call Mom sends me up to the highway, where I can get a weak signal on her cell phone. A ten-minute walk. Five minutes if I run.

"Off-grid," Mom calls it. *Off-planet* is more like it.

It's just the four of us. Mom, the twins and me. No dad. My dad left when I was a baby. And the twins' dad...well, I don't even remember Mom being pregnant, so that shows how much I know.

I look up at the spiders again. They seem to judge me.

"I'm tired," I tell them. "I just needed a break."

The spiders are unimpressed. But so what? Spiders have hundreds of kids, and they usually get eaten by them. So they're not really a model of childcare I want to be aiming for.

Suddenly Mom screeches from the house. "No! Violet! Get down. Stop!" There's a huge crash. And another yell. Before I even think, I'm on my feet, out of the woodshed and running for the house.

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Violet jumps when I burst through the back door. I mean, she really jumps. Somehow she ends up on