

Martine No More

By Coranna Adams

Martine stood stranded in the middle of the Black Forest. Lost. Not an easy thing to do, getting lost, because Martine lived in Bleblen, an Alsace village with one road that tracked straight down the middle between the blacksmith and baker. Other half-timbered houses clustered nearby, including Martine's house, all done in the same gingerbread style. Her father, one of the village councilman, often sent Martine to visit villagers who lived further afield, so she was accustomed to crossing the grasslands and even, on occasion using one of the well-worn forest trails in order to track down an errant shepherd or, today, her aging grandmother.

As the village's oldest witch, Yaya, Martine's grandmother, taught her that the wild was the source of all witches' power, but Martine had never liked the Black Forest. Its twisty trails took you places you didn't intend to go, as now when she stared at the stream before her, searching the undergrowth for the trail back to Bleblen that should be there. The sky overhead thundered and under the trees there was barely any light, so she cast her palm upward and called a simple flame. Holding the flickering light above her head, Martine tried to figure out exactly where she was and where she needed to be.

The ferns sighed in the wind, a regretful sigh. Martine echoed the sound. She had started the argument she'd had with her best friend Blanche that morning. The new shipment of fabric to the village included one ream of perfect burgundy brocade. Martine needed it for a new dress, but Blanche, daughter of the Duke of Lorraine, the wealthiest man in the whole region, bought it first for drapes.

Drapes!

A shadow moved in the trees. The other shadows made it impossible to read who or what the shape was, but Blanche felt more than saw a large something slinking quietly through the brown gray foliage.

“Stay back!” she shouted and looked around for a stick. Silly, really, because magic was her best weapon, especially here, or so Yaya told her. Still, Martine grabbed the closest stick she could find, which ended up being no thicker than her pinky finger, and shook it at the shadows.

Where was the thing now? She’d lost her sense of it.

A very soft sound hit her ears, a few leaves shifting behind her, nothing more. Martine swung around, a shot of panic pinching her throat. Étienne, the brewer’s ten year old son, swore that he had seen something like a large wolf prowling the forest alone last week. It couldn’t be true, wolves traveled in packs, but Martine knew that whatever was out there wasn’t good.

“I don’t need a stick,” she said aloud. She repeated herself, trying to sound sure, knowing that she couldn’t outrun whatever was stalking her, not in skirts and the tight stomacher laced over her blouse. She would have to fight then. Even worse. Martine’s most basic magic refused to work the right way.

She could fly short distances, call the wind or a flame, but her only true skill was with a glamour. She wove aether so well that her father was fond of saying that she could turn a pigeon into a cardinal, which wasn’t even hard—after all they were both birds. The truth was that Martine could do much more. She could make a cardinal appear to be a fox, if the mood struck her.

Blanche didn't need such magic, just like she didn't need the brocade. Blanche's beauty was self-evident to any man in the next thirty villages. Blanche was so pretty that her stepmother resented her for it, which was why Martine let Blanche sleep over whenever she wanted to, despite the fact that their stations were so far apart. Martine's own small, stick-thin figure drew no one's glance on its own, but Martine wasn't mad about the difference in their appearances, not truly, because beautiful Blanche was just made like that. Martine made herself just as beautiful, but it took work. Magic. Aether. No one knew how flat-chested she truly was. Or short. Not even her own father remembered the gap between her two front teeth, not anymore. It had been years since Martine had let anyone see her true face.

The forest's sudden silence stunned her, drew Martine out of her drifting thoughts. Normally the forest squawked and chattered, the animals feeling at home with her, but right now, in the moment, Martine heard nothing. There were very few things in the forest that silenced even the field mice and none of them were good. Martine put her thoughts aside and forced herself to look into the shadows with her witch's sight.

Nothing to her right. Her gaze swung in a circle. Nothing. Nothing. There, on her left, nearly behind her. Not a wolf. Something sat so still on the large low boulders that it almost became one of them. Almost. She made out large, triangular ears and intelligent eyes. Not a lynx, the beast was too big. It shifted, eyeing her. Black fur with... was that a white dot on its chest. Something about that dot tugged at a memory of a story. It was some kind of magical creature. The name and categorization failed her mind in the moment.

The situation grew worse and worse.

“I have magic too,” she said, in a normal tone now that she knew the creature was strange.

“Yes, I smelled it on you, little witch. Very alluring,” the cat spoke back to her in a lilting voice that made Martine freeze.

She pressed against the sense, but no, she could not move a muscle. Her back spasmed with effort, as she tried to force herself to take a step forward. To lift her hand and throw at least a wave of flame toward the beast.

The giant cat stepped off of the stone and began padding its way toward her. It slid past a tree trunk and paced around her in a tight circle, muscles rippling under that beautiful cloak of fur. “What an ugly little thing you are,” it said.

Martine felt her glamour being ripped away, but she couldn’t even squeak in anger.

The cat-sith, that was its name, a creature that Martine had only heard her Yaya mention twice, half in jest, as a dream or nightmare, tilted its head and gazed into her soul.

Of course it would smell her illusions. She kept her false face up at all times, but worse, her father made Martine use the aether in any number of unsavory ways. She could convince a man to lie to his mother, with a startling vision of what would happen if he refused, and several times had done such a thing to make a sale of property go through. Or make a guilty man see a ghost of the child his wife lost, also not a random example of her magic.

A whistle rose on the wind, interrupting Martine’s fevered reflection and causing the cat-sith to freeze. The melody sounded calm and measured. It kept up, and as it got closer stopped. Then the song started again, even jauntier than before.

“Who goes there?” A man’s voice filtered into the small clearing. He, whoever *he* was, was close.

Martine tried to scream, but the cat-sith’s magic kept her bound.

“Not a word, little witch,” the creature whispered.

Footsteps.

The cat-sith reached for her outstretched hand and punched a hole through the soft flesh between Martine’s thumb and forefinger with its claw. Martine watched as blood welled and slowly dripped onto the ground, but she still could not scream. She felt vomitous with the force of her anger, but her magic was too weak to break free.

The cat-sith licked her hand, tasting her blood. “We will meet again,” it promised and disappeared just as the woodsman stepped in the clearing.

Martine recognized him immediately. Antoine served the Duke, Blanche’s father, since his own father, a woodsman as well, died several years ago. All Martine could remember in this moment was that Blanche said that her stepmother, the Duchess Léontine, had taken a liking to Antoine’s fine figure, and now that she saw Antoine for the first time in a while, Martine agreed with the odious woman. He *was* lovely.

In his hand, Antoine hefted an ax, capped with a gleaming iron blade.

Maybe the stories were true. Most of the old tales held a seed of some truth. The cat-sith was a creature made of magic, and iron burned such beings—or so the tales told. Martine had never believed them before, because she was a witch, a creature of magic too. “What a mighty axe that is,” she said and then turned red, as she realized that that was the first and only thing she’d said aloud to this handsome, strong, very handsome man.

“You may hold it,” he said and swung it off his shoulder, handing the weapon to her. He strode around the clearing, peering past Martine to gaze down the trail that should have been there before.

“I have never held an axe,” she admitted. “But I am pretty good with a hatchet.”

Antoine looked at his weapon in her hands. “It’s very sharp. Don’t run your hand along the blade like that.”

Her fingers were on the sharp edge, as he said. Martine realized then that iron did not burn her at all, even though she felt the sensation of something catching fire within her when she looked into this man’s eyes.

Antoine smiled. “You are very pretty,” he said.

She smiled back at his directness. Neither of them were doing well with polite conversation, but she appreciated the fact that he had been willing to arm her so quickly and without question.

And then she frowned.

Could he be teasing her? The thought came unbidden, as Martine realized she wasn’t wearing her glamour. “Thank you,” she said, sounding a little testy even to her own ears, and turned away, pulling veils of magic quickly over her, the way a woman rearranges an errant tuck in her blouse.

“Something was here with you,” Antoine said, not a question. “Something dangerous.”

“Yes, but you’ve scared it away. Thank you,” she repeated herself.

Antoine nodded. He looked her over again, as if checking to make sure she was all there, noting the blood but not saying anything about it. When their eyes met again, he frowned.

“You look different now. Not like yourself,” he said.

“This is how I look almost all of the time,” Martine answered, keeping her tone curt.

“You’ll find it is better this way.”

“Not to me,” he said. “I like you without all the frills.”

Martine did not know how to answer him, so they walked back to the village together in silence.



After meeting the cat-sith, Martine redoubled her efforts to use her witches’ powers. Soon she could call each of the elements with ease: earth, air, and yes, aether, Martine’s original affinity. She practiced flinging fire and pulling water from wherever she could to shock and surprise, using them as another would use a sword or axe.

When at Yaya’s, she looked through the oldest spellbooks for unusual enchantments that would catch her opponent unaware. Most of them required rare treasure, objects that she did not have, but she learned the framework for them anyway. Martine never wanted to be trapped by the cat-sith’s power again. She never wanted to be surprised by anything she could not control.

But the forest obeyed its own wisdom and ways. One day Martine was searching for some marshmallow root for her herbal stores, trying to find the grove of oak trees that she knew stood near the crook of the south stream, when she turned left on a trail that should have only quirked right and found herself deposited at the mouth of a rocky overhang she had never seen before.

What to do? Martine stayed stuck to her spot on the trail, sure that there must be a reason that she was being shown this place and just as sure that she did not have the

courage to discover it. She came close to convincing herself to just turn around and go back home, when she was startled by a voice at her back.

“It’s you again, hovering in the air like a little forest fairy,” Antoine teased. He wore a different coat today, some kind of waxed linen over a heavy knit, but the layers did nothing to hide his fine figure.

“I am not hovering,” she huffed.

“Your feet are not even touching the ground,” he said.

Martine looked down and realized that he was right. She dropped two hands-breadths to stand again on the earth.

“Why aren’t you afraid of my magic?” she asked.

“Witches are women first,” he said. “Most of them don’t harm anyone. I should know, my mother was one.” Saying what should have been a secret out like that, just as she had done, was a sign that he trusted her.

“I didn’t know that.” Yaya knew most of the witches in their villages, but she had never mentioned Antoine’s mother to Martine.

“No, you wouldn’t. She died in a fire, a long time ago,” he said softly.

“I’m sorry,” Martine meant it. More women were being burned at the stake, whether or not they had magic like hers. The priests said they were evil and even her own father sometimes said that it was good to get rid of her kind, when he was mad and wanted to hurt her.

“It was when I was a babe,” he confided.

“It must be hard that you never really knew her,” Martine said, thinking of how Yaya held her with a strength that seemed to keep the whole world intact. She was sad that he had never known such strength.

“Your heart must be bigger than your body, little fairy. It stretches past your edges so that you feel everything everyone else does, I think.” Antoine reached over, as if to touch her cheek, but when she turned toward him, he let his hand fall away.

“Let me see you,” he whispered. “The real you.”

He wanted her to drop her disguise.

Looking back into the darkness, Martine released the glamour and felt, more than saw, his answering smile. She turned warm inside and started to sweat as if her own heart had burst into flame.

Courage. She needed the courage of that fire now. Martine took a step forward and peered into the shadows.

“Don’t go in there alone,” she heard Antoine say beside her.

“Then hold my hand,” she instructed, and he tucked his axe into his belt and guided her under the rocky overhang.

The inside wasn’t large, just two or three feet deep, but the walls shimmered with a light that seemed alive. They stood there together, holding hands in awe. Finally Martine took Antoine’s axe and chipped away at the treasure until she held a small piece of it in her palm. Cat’s eye, it was called, a powerful stone for healing and prosperity, a stone for protection against evil influences.

Now the cat-sith would not be able to track her again.



Falling in love was like being found. Antoine always knew where Martine was. She didn't know if he asked her father where she went each day, or if he just spent so much time on the trails that he could sense whenever she walked within the forest's border. Either way, they found each other too often to be coincidence. Their courtship started simply with sandwiches and small beer that she brought into the forest for them both and very quickly progressed into long, lingering walks at twilight, Antoine accompanying Martine on her father's business through the forest.

This meant that she didn't have to be alone with the trees or even worry about the cat-sith finding her as it had promised. When Martine was in the woods with Antoine, nothing seemed to bother her. Even the animals stayed away, probably because of the things the woodsman did with his axe when she wasn't around, but Martine didn't want to think about that part. So she didn't.

Her happiness grew and spread until even her small world seemed to expand with the strength of it.

She and Blanche repaired their relationship.

Bleblen was becoming a haven of sorts. A Jewess fled a witch trial south of Paris, and even though Martine's father wanted to force the woman out of town because of her faith, Martine refused to help. She made sure that a spare room was found, just as another woman arrived, this time with a horse and two children, fleeing from east of Rouen. Martine found the small family an unoccupied cottage, abandoned when her father's last tenant had

died. Neither woman had true magic, more's the pity, but they brought business, which meant money, which in turn kept Martine's father happy.

Two Moors moved onto land further down the road, extending the edge of their village. Martine had never met someone with Black skin but she found them to be good neighbors. One of them wanted to open a small tavern, so they contracted a carpenter from the closest city. Martine made sure Papa collected his taxes and that he got his officious way much of the time, but she did her best to trick him into giving away more than he had before.

And Antoine kissed and cosseted her in secret. He loved Martine's long wheat-colored hair and her small, slim figure, the same one she had thought shapeless before. Martine wore her glamour all other times, but when they were alone together, she always let the veil of magic fall. Antoine gave her the nickname Mab, calling her his fairy queen, and Martine let him say such silly things because she knew now that her magic grew stronger when she was happy.

Now she was happy most of the time.

Until Blanche fell ill—beautiful Blanche with porcelain white skin and lips the color of chaste berries began to lose weight. She bruised easily and cried often, when she thought no one was aware. She lost so much weight that the curves that had once made men look at her (an effect that Blanche wasn't too happy about, truth be told) began to straighten and then finally fall away.

"What has happened?" Martine finally asked her friend.

"I think my stepmother is trying to kill me."

Martine laughed. "No. Such things don't happen, not in good families. It shouldn't matter. She is your father's wife. *She is your family.*"

“We share no blood,” Blanche argued back, which Martine supposed was true, once she thought about it. “And all families are made in their own shape. There is no good and bad, just who people truly are, and my stepmother is truly a murderous bitch. I don’t know why my father doesn’t see it.”

“It shouldn’t matter that they aren’t related,” Martine repeated the thought to Antoine that evening, as they watched the sunset from the treetops curled around each other like two wolves. Antoine had built a platform in the trees, far above the forest floor, and Martine loved lounging here where she wouldn’t get dirty or be surprised by bears or badgers while making love. This was one of their favorite places to hide away together.

“But it does,” Antoine said, his tone more serious than it had ever been before. “She is right to be scared. Blanche knows what her stepmother doesn’t say, which is that she is so jealous she will do anything to have the girl gone.”

“Anything?” Martine asked, surprised by the sureness in his voice.

“She’s asked me to take the girl in the woods and kill her. I am to bury the body, after I cut out her heart as proof.” Antoine admitted, turning away to watch the sky with such seriousness that Martine thought her own heart was being cut free from her chest.

“But you can’t,” Martine said.

Antoine did not answer her.

“You can’t!” Martine repeated herself, standing up and putting her hands on her naked hips. “It’s wrong, and you know it.”

“What will I do then, my queen?” he asked, finally turning back to her, his features set in stone like a knight of old. “If I don’t obey the Duchess’ orders, she will make sure the Duke

releases me from my post. And if we are ever to wed, I must do well enough that he offers me a crofters cabin.”

Privately Martine thought that she could help them do far better than a crofters cabin on the Duke’s land. She had been dreaming lately of leaving Bleblen and going to Strasbourg or even Paris beyond, but the realization that Antoine wanted to marry her was the only thing she could think of right now. That and keeping her friend’s heart still beating and alive.

She lay down beside Antoine again and propped her head up on her elbows, thinking.

There was a way. Martine’s magic often helped her find solutions where others saw only problems. “You will pretend to do as she asked. Then you will smuggle Blanche to my grandmother’s house on the other side of the forest. She can live there for a time. No one will ever know that she survived.”

Antoine shook his head no. “I must take something back. The Duchess will know that I’ve lied if I don’t have a heart in my bloody hands.”

“What will you tell the Duke?”

“That Blanche was ripped apart by wild animals,” he said.

Martine shivered, remembering the cat-smith’s claw as it punctured the soft skin of her hand. The Duke would believe the story because it was possible. In the Black forest, anything was possible.

The Duchess could be fooled by the same logic though. “You will kill a hind and keep its heart.” Martine made it up as she went along, thinking the plan through to find any flaws. “It can’t be so different from what beats inside a human chest. And I will meet you and Blanche halfway and take her to my grandmother’s house myself, while you go back to deliver the

proof. I will spend the night there, and we can meet back here the next day, when you are free.”

Antoine lay his cheek against hers. “It might work, Mab, my love,” he whispered in Martine’s ear and bit her earlobe, nuzzling her until she could barely breathe. “It just might work.”

“How will I know where to find you?” Martine asked, pulling back after another kiss. This was the one part of the plan that she worried about. Finding Antoine in the forest would not be easy for her. That deep the paths twisted and diverged and never followed the way they were supposed to walk. Her grandmother lived far enough away that she could get lost again.

“I will give you a map,” Antoine said, and he pulled a crumpled, aged piece of paper from the pouch that he always carried at his side. He spread it out on the platform before her, and Martine noted the trees and streams and the rise of mountains. She saw symbols right on the ridge where this platform sat and noticed that there were two symbols there, a triangle and a small heart. Far across the page, another circle started at the edge and then slowly began moving in their direction. Several triangles moved at one far corner of the map, which she knew to be near Bleblen.

“This is made of magic,” she gasped.

Antoine nodded.

“Where did you get this?”

“It was a gift from my mother to my father. Meant to keep him safe. Do you see how far the forest stretches and how far it once went?” He pointed and Martine nodded.

“Who is that?” She pointed to the heart, and Antoine smiled at her.

“You are my heart,” he said easily.

Tears welled in her eyes at the words. Martine wiped them away. This was not the time to be emotional. Not when they had so much they had to do.

“Can I touch it?” she asked. “Our hands have oil on them. I do not want to damage it.”

“Don’t worry—it is pretty durable. I know the woods so well now that I no longer need it, and you are always afraid without me. You can have it. With the map, you will have no need to fear.”

Martine took the map with trembling hands. She couldn’t stop staring at it. All the forest’s secrets laid out before her. She would never be in danger again.

“The map is a tool, nothing more,” Antoine warned, as if he could hear her thoughts.

“Don’t expect it to remain the same, Mab. And don’t let your guard down, even for a minute.”

Martine nodded, not really listening. She had a leather pouch her father had given her ages ago. It fit on her best belt and was exactly the right size to hold the map folded up inside.



The plan worked perfectly. Martine met Antoine and Blanche in the forest, just as they had planned. He showed them the hind heart, wrapped as it was in a dirty bit of linen. They all agreed it looked human enough to the untrained eye. He and Martine parted with a kiss, Martine reminding him that tomorrow all of this would be over.

But Blanche brought too many skirts in her rucksack, so many that they kept falling out. The two women got halfway to Martine’s grandmother’s house and agreed to abandon a

few under a pile of leaves. Blanche could come back later for them, once she felt more comfortable in her new home. Or the mice would make homes from the fabric.

Martine spent the night staying up with Blanche til the wee hours of the morning talking and laughing so loud that her grandmother yelled at them both for waking her up. They'd settled down then and finally fallen asleep as the sun nearly rose in the sky.

It was late morning by the time Martine had woken to a cup of steeped mint and a yeasty roll. Then her grandmother needed her to stack wood before leaving, a task Blanche would have to learn how to do if she was going to stay for long. Being a Duke's daughter had not adequately prepared her friend for rustic forest life.

So Martine got a late start going home. No matter. She kept the map in her hand the whole time on the way back, watching the sun drop closer to the lip of the horizon. The shadows lengthened before she was back in the part of the forest she knew best, but Martine saw the moment that Antoine entered the wood. She started walking faster, excited to see her man again.

He took the fastest route to their secret spot, as she had known he would. She traced his path forward with her finger, surprised when the dot on the paper paused behind her fingertip and did a slow half circle, as if Antoine wanted to get around something but could not.

There should be nothing there but trees.

Antoine went one way and then the other, seesawing, but the movement took him farther from where they were supposed to meet.

Something stopped him.

Martine growled. The map showed her where he was, but it was infuriating not to know what was happening.

Martine changed course, following a trail she had never been on before that lay tandem to the one that he was taking, their paths divided by a deep stream. She caught sight of a bridge ahead just over the next rise, where she would cross.

On the map, Antoine's triangle stopped moving entirely.

Martine ran to be by his side, her feet pounding across the wooden bridge and then sinking into the damp earth on the other side. She paid the mud no mind.

"Antoine," she called as she got close, feeling the trees loom over her as if they wanted to say something. To warn her. "Antoine, where are you? My love!" She called, but no one answered. She looked down to the parchment; she was not where she thought she was. Damn. Martine turned back, hiked over a hill she would swear was not there before. There he was, just ahead and then...

His triangle disappeared.

It came back, wavering, the magical lines that drew it blurring as if water washed over its surface.

What did that mean?

Martine entered the clearing from the east and saw at once that she was too late. Antoine lay on the forest floor, his body mauled by a beast. His breast lay rent from shoulder to hip, and the wound still bled freely, soaking his shirt and even the waxed linen of his coat.

"Antoine!" She fell on her knees, shaking him, getting blood on her hands, her skirt. She couldn't feel anything but how cold her hands were. She wanted to touch him but held back. Didn't want his last memory to be of discomfort. Didn't want it to be his last memory at all.

“Mab...” her lover gasped. “I knew you would find me.”

“Too late,” she cried, realizing he had no weapon. “Where is your axe?”

“I forgot it at the Duke’s. I was in too much of a hurry to get back to you,” he coughed.

“You told me to always be on my guard,” she cried. “Can you stand?” She looked around, trying to remember which herbs would stop the blood from flowing and not knowing such things. She had not studied healing magic yet, being focused only on growing stronger. Now she couldn’t keep Antoine alive, the man with whom she meant to have children.

Now there would be no children. No future.

“I knew a bit of bait would bring you out of hiding,” the sly words came from behind her.

Martine whirled around to see the cat-sith perched on a downed tree. The creature licked its paws, the white spot on its chest turned pink with Antoine’s blood.

Martine felt the creature’s magic before it struck her, but this time she was ready. “No,” she drew out a steel dagger from her belt and slashed the air in front of her. She looked foolish, but no matter. It had taken experimentation, but she had finally learned why the fae and other magical creatures feared iron and all metals. With such a blade, she could cut through any binding of will that the creature tried to cast around her.

Martine summoned the flames she had reached for so many months ago and this time her magic didn’t fail her. She flung a wall of fire at the cat and was satisfied when it yelped and leapt down from its log.

“The little kitten has grown claws,” the cat-sith purred, drawing closer.

She needed to keep out of its reach, or she would lie on the forest floor, gutted as Antoine was.

“I do not need steel to cut you,” she said, picking up several branches and using the wind to drive them at the creature.

“You cannot cut me at all,” the cat-sith crooned, and soon she was pelted with a barrage of stones. A large one struck her head so hard that Martine’s ears began ringing.

“No!” Martine shouted, and she used the wind to flatten the rocks back to the ground. She summoned a vision of Antoine’s axe and pretended to hold the blade aloft.

“Everything about you is false.” The cat-sith leapt at her, clawing, and sliced her cheek open from Martine’s eye to her lip.

If she could not drive it away, then she must draw it closer. Remembering one of the more esoteric spells from Yaya’s books, Martine fished the tiger’s eye out of her bag and held its smooth weight in her palm.

“See this stone,
which you will call home/” she began chanting.

“No,” the cat-sith roared, lunging at Martine again.

She fell back, struggling to keep the stone in her palm. Throwing her free hand up, Martine called the wind to whip against the cat-sith. She forced air back across the stream’s surface first, pulling it forward again until she felt the cold spray of water on her face. In the hand that held the stone, a flame flowered around the golden mass, heating it until the skin on her palm burned at its touch.

“The elements three bind you to thee,” she spoke the next words.

“Water, wind, and flame/
Four, earth to tame/” – the stone signified earth.

“Five, aether to cage/” – she felt the Stillness release its silent magic to her care.

“In this cats-eye for a dragon’s age.”

It was an old phrase, dragon’s age, that meant an indeterminate amount of time. Centuries for certain. The spell would fail long after Martine was gone.

The cat-sith flung itself at her a final time, screaming even as the creature became translucent and shrank, finally disappearing into the stone.

Blood welled into Martine’s eye. She collapsed near Antoine’s still body. The map lay on the ground between them, showing his heart transformed into a lonely circle.

With Antoine, Martine showed her true face, but now she had lost it all, no family, no future. Uglier than before.

“I die here with you,” she said, closing Antoine’s eyes and kissing his cheek one last time.

But it was only a half truth, for now Martine knew her own strength. She had fought a cat-sith and prevailed. She didn’t need a map to find—or save—herself.

“From now on, I will only be known by the name that you called me. Mab, Martine no more,” she said, closing Antoine’s eyes and kissing his cheek one last time.

She used her magic to cover the body with twigs and branches and finally soil. Antoine would be at peace in the forest he loved, his body hidden in a mausoleum made by magic. She nearly left the map behind, but at the last moment, Mab picked it up again. His grave was marked on it with a small symbol that no one else would ever see, her own heart lost along with her true love. Mab put the gift in her pocket and turned to make her way back to the Bleblen and beyond to find her fate.