

My friend Jessy swears Mrs Brown is a witch.

There's always something strange on her porch, today, a *dead crow* lay next to a *broomstick*. I wouldn't be here if it weren't for the cookies. No one would. Mum's probably her only friend.

Before I can knock, the door swings open, like she knows I'm there. She mutters, "Stupid cats," then sweeps the crow away with the broom. Last week, she got out of her car holding a *monster's head*. Now, the same head stares down at me from above her fireplace as she lets me in.

I sit on her lumpy, uncomfortable, brown couch. She must jump on it a lot. Mum says jumping on couches makes them lose their springiness.

Mrs Brown has so many strange things in her house. There's a *canoe she uses as a bookshelf*, and a furry thing hanging from it. "A *yak tail* from Tibet," she says, handing me a tray of cookies.

It's the same cookies Mum asked me to take to her. Mum didn't let me have any, but Mrs Brown says I can have two.

"Do you read much, dear?" she asks, sitting beside me.

I nod. I know about Tibet. Tin-Tin went there on his latest adventure.

"Do you?" I ask, but before she can answer, I blurt, "You must do. I always see you at the library."

Her house feels like a library too. There are *ancient books* everywhere, stacked high like towers, and a *statue of an elephant man*. "That's Ganesh," she says. "From India. He's the god of wisdom, so I keep him with my books."

I nod again, not sure what to say, and glance around. There are *floating candles* on the ceiling! She notices me staring and speaks to her *invisible maid*, or maybe it's a spell, "Alexa, candles on." The candles flicker on.

Wow. She *is* a witch!

Rain starts tapping at the windows. She goes to open the curtains, which hang from a *wooden oar*. It looks like hailstones. Her windowsill is covered in *crystals*.

"Won't someone steal them?" I ask because Mum keeps her special gems locked in a safe.

She laughs softly, 'What is the point of having beautiful things and keeping them hidden? Would you like to call your mother, and let her know you'll stay here until the hail passes?' She points to her phone.

I think that's a clever idea. Her phone has a twisty cord and a *dial* you have to turn one number at a time. I figure it out myself because I'm clever.

Mum says I should stay here until she picks me up. I'm fine with that, I like Mrs. Brown's house.

In the kitchen, a **black cauldron** bubbles on the stove. Mrs Brown sprinkles in pinches of things from her **colourful potion bottles** labelled "Paprika" and "Cumin."

"I'm making **goat stew**. Would you like some?"

Goat? I've never had goat meat before. They're ugly and scary. But now I'll be able to tell Jessy I ate one. I thank Mrs Brown and sit on the kitchen island while she cooks.

Her black cat jumps up beside me and purrs. That's another thing I like about Mrs Brown. She has **so many cats**.

"Can I have another cookie?" I try my luck.

"Only if you drink some milk with it."

Milk and cookies! "Yes, please," I say.

Her fridge is full of milk bottles with pictures on them, tulips, oats, almonds, bunnies, piglets, ducklings, and even KitKats. Mum drinks oat and almond milk. I love chocolate milk, but she grabs the one with a bunny. **Bunny milk?**

On the far end of the kitchen, there's a big, old, brown **globe**, all dusty and covered in bumpy maps. Mrs Brown lifts the top and takes out a bottle. Wow. A secret hiding place!

It must be her **special magic potion** because when I ask to try some, she says, "This one's just for me."

She pours some goat stew for me into a *Jack Skellington*-shaped bowl, and for her in a black bowl that says, **Bad Witch**.

Mum says if you can find at least twenty similar items in someone's home, it can tell you a lot about that person.

I take a deep breath. Maybe Mrs Brown really *is* a witch, but she must be a good witch if Mum is friends with her.