

Table of Contents

1. Joining the Cause	1
2. The girls wear black hats	11
3. Kalahuta	23
4. Waking up to a dream	29
5. The girls find a friend	39
6. Meeting the DragonFlies	47
7. The girls find out about boars	59
8. Meeting the Rogs	75
9. The girls get to know the wildlife	83
10. Meeting Sir Luta	89
11. The Rock Room	99
12. Silvia runs off again	107
13. The girls learn to work together	113
14. Who is Alfio?	121
15. The girls learn who Alfio is	133

16. Into the heart of darkness	143
17. Silvia puts her hand in animal poop	151
18. The girls find the answer to the riddle	159
19. The magic library	165
20. Journey to the center of the earth.	171
21. Saving Hira	179
22. Really meeting the DragonFlies	185
23. Manuela discovers chang	191
24. Manuela steps off the path	201
25. Whisperers' Glen	209
26. Manuela gets very, very cold	213
27. Crystal Mountain	219
28. Meeting Shatru	227
29. The girls fight the battle which decides it all	235
30. Meeting Jiwan	241
31. The girls get some bowls	247
Appendix	253
About the Author	257

Chapter 1

Joining the Cause



“WHY DID YOU LET HIM OUT!” yelled Manuela as she tugged on her flip flops. “I don’t see why I have to help you get him.” She grabbed the leash and ran out the back door after Silvia who was already racing down North Barton, red flip flops flying and flapping.

Silvia hadn’t meant to leave the door open, but she had forgotten her library books out on the picnic table and had only run out for a second. Of course, a second was all Fritz was waiting for, as her mother had reminded her angrily. She had looked up to see him streaking like a tan cheetah around the house and out down the sidewalk. Now Manuela was going to really rub it in that mom had made her help get him back. Big sisters.

Fritz was a fast dog and he loved this game. Silvia kept getting two feet away from him, and then, as he sat there panting, almost grinning, whoosh! He bounded away.

Finally, Manuela tip-toed up in front of Fritz, and Silvia slid in from behind. *We’ve got him now*, thought Silvia. Then Silvia stepped into a mud puddle and slipped bottom-first

into the muck. Fritz ran around the bushes towards a gated garden.

“Now what do we do?” Silvia asked, pushing back her curls. It had been a hot July day and the evening wasn’t cooling off at all. She had just showered and put on pajamas, but by now was thoroughly miserable. “Should we go in there? I mean, it *is* getting dark.”

“I have a better idea,” Manuela said. She ran up to the rickety gate and slammed it shut. “Now all we have to do is ask whoever lives here to let us get Fritz, and we can go home. You owe me, Silvi.”

Silvia looked through the fence. The light was getting dim; it was almost nine. She couldn’t see much, but what she could see made her stomach tingle anxiously. What was supposed to be a garden was a chaotic tumble jumble of strange flowers, spiky weeds, gnarly trees and, in the middle, a giant peeling wooden pergola overrun with a big purple-leafed vine which ran throughout the entire garden. It could have been the dusk, but the house itself seemed darker and more disheveled than the surrounding houses. Small brown shutters covered all of the windows and the dark blue paint was smudgy and overshadowed by more of the mysterious purple vine. And where was Fritz? She couldn’t even hear his panting and nothing moved in the stillness beyond the peeling white fence. “You go, Manu. I’m all wet.”

“No, we both can go. You’re the one who let him out anyway. We’ll just ask if we can go around back. We don’t have to go in. But let me talk, Silvi,” Manuela said, turning toward the house. Silvia looked down. Her feet and flip-flops were all covered in damp, cut grass and she tried to rub off as much as she could. She rolled her eyes at Manuela’s

back as they walked slowly back around the bushes to the front of the house.

There was no front porch, only two concrete steps leading up to a landing with a twisted black iron hand rail. The windows were shuttered with ugly brown shutters here as well, and the bushes were so overgrown they practically engulfed the girls as they climbed the steps. There was so little space that Silvia had to stand behind Manuela as the older girl rapped on the door. After a few seconds, Manuela banged a little harder and then turned to go. "Come on, Silvi. No one lives here. Let's just go back there and get him."

But Silvia didn't move. She was staring at the glass pane in the middle of the door. Two golden eyes stared out at her. "Well, move, Silvi. I can't get down with you standing there. Let's go get him," Manuela said.

"Then you're going to have to go in *there* because, look!" Silvia pointed. Manuela turned around, and they saw Fritz's wagging tongue and goofy grin before he vanished inside. Silvia pushed Manuela aside and yanked open the door. "Come on, before he gets out again." Silvia whispered. Manuela bit her lip and frowned, her dark eyebrows lowering into a piercing glare. But Silvia smiled and turned back inside.

The first thing that hit her was the smell. It wasn't bad, just different. It was as if someone had spilled cinnamon and apple cider and had not bothered to clean it up. It was even darker inside, and when her eyes finally adjusted, Silvia saw a room overflowing with, well, things. She couldn't think of any other way of grouping the eccentric mish-mash arranged on an old table and dark, oily wooden floor and shelves all along the wall. Silvia started walking,

dripping all over and making squishy sounds. Manuela caught her arm. "I can't believe you just walked in here. You can't just do that."

"Well Fritz did, and we need to get him out. Look at those bowls over there." Silvia said, shaking Manuela's hand off and squish-squashing over to the table. Her white T-shirt was mud-spattered and her blue boxers clung to her legs. But the bowls on the table fascinated her. There were dozens of them lined up in what seemed a random order. Silvia reached out to touch a particularly bright smooth pink bowl which looked like taffy when she saw movement out of the corner of her eye. Something softly swished past the partly opened door. She looked at Manuela and then slowly creaked open the door by pushing on its glass doorknob.

The smell intensified as the girls stepped into what Silvia soon realized was the kitchen. The floor was tiled in black and white and a lamp was turned on in the corner. Fritz sat there wagging his tail with his sloppy grin and next to him, with her back turned towards them, was a small hunch-backed woman. Her hair was gray and came out all over her head in curly cues. She wore a shapeless brown dress with a dark purple shawl around her shoulders. Curling up from the stove in front of her were wisps of steam which carried the strange smell over to the girls. "Hello, girls," she said without turning around. "I've been expecting you."



A few minutes later, the three of them were standing around a very small round table with a smooth, royal blue marble top. Even though it was a hot Cleveland summer

night, and the windows were shut up, the house was cool. The girls were seated on top of pale blue kitchen towels to keep the wooden seats from getting wet. After some speechless hesitation, the old woman hobbled over smiling and put steaming mugs down on the table. Fritz followed her and stood next to her side when the woman stopped and looked up at Manuela and Silvia, for she was almost a foot shorter than even Silvia, who was tall for eight. "Girls," she said with a strange accent, "Fritz brought you to me, you know, now sit down and warm up, and I'll tell you everything."

"How did you know Fritz's name?" Silvia had her hands wrapped around her mug for she really was beginning to get cold now. She studied the gold flecks in the marble table top, but eventually looked up at the stranger.

"He told me, of course," the old woman said with a dry laugh. She winked at Silvia who wished she hadn't. The old woman's face wasn't so much wrinkled as it was full of crevices. Her skin was a smoky caramel color and her head seemed to pop up right out of her bosomy body. But Silvia couldn't look away from those eyes. They were the lightest blue she had ever seen. It was almost as if they were two glass portals misted over. She decided to believe the old lady right away.

"Oh, ... kay. Well. Thank you for the, um, hot drink, but we have to get Fritz home. Our mom will be wondering where we are." Silvia felt Manuela kick her under the table, and she looked up to see the old lady winking again.

For the second time Silvia thought she glimpsed clouds roll by the woman's eyes when she did that. "Manu, I don't know why, but I believe her," she said, not taking her eyes away from the woman's face.

Silvia caught Manuela's glare, but looked away quickly. "Thank you, Silvia," the old woman said, and turned to Manuela. She reached out and placed her gnarled papery hand on Manuela's wrist. "Manuela, there is still time for you to believe, too. I need you both you know."

Manuela's mouth dropped open, but she didn't say anything. Silvia suppressed a smile. She could tell things were really not going the way Manuela had planned. "Alright. You know our names. Fritz seems to know you ..."

"And he likes her." Silvia said, rubbing the golden retriever's head affectionately. "Manu, let's just listen to her. She did help us get Fritz back after all." Silvia took a sip of her drink and sighed. Manuela rolled her eyes and then let out a huge sigh. Then she, too, drank from the fragrant apple-cinnamon drink. Silvia couldn't believe how wonderful the cider was. It was like a hot drinkable version of all her favorite desserts (and she had a lot of favorites) combined. The old woman's eyes were so entrancingly calm that, within a few minutes of silence, she felt that she had known her for a very long time. And she could see that Manuela was relaxing too. After all, as the elder girl at eleven, Manuela probably felt responsible for whatever happened. But Silvia knew that Manuela always liked a good adventure as much as she did, and this was turning out to be quite an adventure.

Soon the old woman broke the silence with her dry laugh. "I see you girls are ready to hear my story. A nice cup of sweet samudra always loosens up the magic in everyone." She scratched the end of her nose and then folded her knotty hands over her billowy bosom. "I am Miss Sasha Tingleroot, and you, my dears, are going to help save the magic in this sad world. For if the last of the magic DragonFlies are taken, and the DragonFly Keeper

is not protected, well, then the world as we know it will no longer be.

“You see, people go to work; they cut their grass; they play football and soccer and talk on the phone. People go shopping or out to eat or stay in bed, and all along they think that it is their hard work, their government, their figures on paper which are keeping the neighborhood, the country, the planet together.” Miss Sasha paused and took a sip of her own samudra. “But what only a few of us know, now you two included, is that it is the magic in us, in our minds, which keeps the world together. When a child picks a flower for her mother, the magic is blooming. When an artist has a vision of a cathedral, the magic is flowing. When a mathematician wakes up at two in the morning to finish his equation, the magic is churning. These things which make humans what they are, come from a special spice in the imagination which is the magic that is now threatened.”

Miss Sasha got up from her chair and shuffled over to the cupboard. Reaching up as far as possible, she opened a smooth dark-paneled door and let out a quiet whistle. Suddenly a cat with the same smoky caramel coloring as Miss Sasha leapt up onto the counter and jumped into the cupboard. Fritz did a little half jog in place but sat down again when Silvia gripped his red collar. Then the cat jumped out again and dropped a little bag into Miss Sasha’s hand. The old woman clasped the bag to her and shuffled back to the table. She didn’t sit down again but, instead, leaned over the little table and placed the bag in the middle of the marble top. It was dark velvet green and was tied with an intricate black cord. She looked first at Silvia and then Manuela.

“What is that?” asked Manuela. She reached out to touch the bag, but Miss Sasha’s hand shot out and caught her wrist.

“That is what you need to start your journey. But before I let you do that, I need to know you are committed. We don’t have much time left,” Miss Sasha said as she casually let go of Manuela and eased herself into her chair.

“But, committed to what? I still don’t understand what is wrong, and what we have to do with it.” Manuela said. “If you know so much about this magic, why do you even need us?”

“Fair enough question,” said Miss Sasha with her dry laugh. “The younger we are, the more magic flows in our veins. It is just the way. Even though I am one of the few privileged older ones to still hold on to the belief in the DragonFly Keeper, I am not suited to take the journey as you two are. And, of course, Fritz.”

“Fritz?” Silvia looked down at the now sleeping canine. “Fritz is going to help us?”

“Of course. He is an animal after all. Animals live within the magic naturally. Fritz will be a perfect help-mate along the way,” said Miss Sasha. “And as for what is wrong, ah, well. For the answer to that, I need to know you believe enough to care.” Miss Sasha took the girls’ empty mugs to the sink and came back with some square buttery shortbread.

“Is this some magical cookie or something?” asked Silvia accepting the biscuit eagerly.

“No, dear, it is just shortbread. However, I do make good shortbread.” Miss Sasha eased herself back into her chair and saw Manuela eyeing the green bag on the table. “So, are you two committed before I go any further? If you are

worried about what your parents will think, don't. Time doesn't pass during this journey. When you are through, you can go home and tell your ma and pa all about it, but only a few minutes will have passed since you left your house."

Silvia looked at her watch. Already, a half an hour had passed.

"I want to save the magic." Silvia said calmly. She looked at Manuela and saw her smiling.

"Yes, Miss Sasha," Manuela said slowly. "I believe you can finish your tale. I am ready to help," and with that she grabbed a handful of shortbread cookies and settled back.