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Advance Praise for
The Nature of Witches

“The forces of nature and magic blend perfectly in this masterfully told story. *The Nature of Witches* is one of the most well-developed magical worlds I’ve read in a long time. I couldn’t love this book more.”

—Shea Ernshaw, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Wicked Deep* and *Winterwood*

“*The Nature of Witches* is unlike anything I’ve read before. With its wholly original take on witches, thought-provoking commentary on climate change, and a swoony romance I would die for, Griffin has crafted a magnificent debut that will have readers on the edge of their seats. To put it simply—I’m obsessed with this book!”

—Adalyn Grace, *New York Times* bestselling author of *All the Stars and Teeth*

“*The Nature of Witches* is a timely, thoughtful tale of the responsibilities we have to our planet and to one another. Griffin’s well-developed worldbuilding and complex main character make for a read that will resonate deeply.”

—Christine Lynn Herman, author of the Devouring Gray duology

“*The Nature of Witches* is a love letter to the earth. This lush, atmospheric book charmed me with its magic system, captured my heart with its swoony romance, and stole my breath with its gorgeous words. I want to wallpaper my home with Rachel Griffin’s sentences.”

—Rachel Lynn Solomon, author
of *Today Tonight Tomorrow*

“Vibrant and magical. This book is a ray of sunshine.”

—Rosiee Thor, author of
Tarnished Are the Stars

“I could have stayed lost in the pages and magic of *The Nature of Witches* forever. Griffin’s lush prose and evocative imagery adorns and compliments the thoughtfully designed world, and the well-drawn characters triumphantly carry the story from beginning to end. A stunning and timely debut.”

—Isabel Ibañez, author of *Woven in Moonlight* and *Written in Starlight*

“Seasonal magic abounds in this addictively thought-provoking tale of love, loss, and self-identity.”

—Dawn Kurtagich, award-winning
author of *The Dead House*

The
NATURE
of
WITCHES

RACHEL GRIFFIN

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*For Tyler.
You are my sun.*



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summer



C H A P T E R

one

“Being an Everwitch means two things: you are powerful, and you are dangerous.”

—A Season for Everything

Everything is burning, so many flames it looks as if we set the sky on fire. The sun has long since vanished, hidden behind a haze of smoke and ash, but its magic still rushes through me.

The fire has been raging for six days. It started with the smallest spark and became all-consuming in the span of a breath, flames spreading chaotic and fast, as if they were being chased.

Starting the fire was easy. But putting it out is something else entirely.

It’s our last wildfire training of the season, and it’s more intense than all the other training sessions combined. The fire is larger. The flames are higher. And the earth is drier.

But wildfires are a threat we now have to deal with, so we must learn. There are more than one hundred witches from all over the world here on campus to take this training.

The other witches help. The springs provide fuel, growing acres and acres of trees to sustain the fire. The winters pull moisture from the trees before stripping them bare, and the autumns stand along the perimeter of the training field, ensuring the fire doesn't spread beyond it.

We have to learn, but that doesn't mean we're going to burn down our entire campus in the process.

The rest is up to the summers, and we have one job: make it rain.

It's not easy. The winters pulled so much water from the ground that it feels more like sawdust than dirt.

My eyes sting, and a layer of ash clings to the sweat on my face. My head is tipped back, hands outstretched, energy flowing through my veins. Summer magic is a constant rush, strong and powerful, and I push it toward the woods, where water soaks the earth and a lazy stream moves through the trees. The power of the witches around me follows, and I send it further into the forest.

It weaves around trees and skims the forest floor until it finds a particularly wet stretch of earth. Goose bumps rise along my skin as the heat of my magic collides with the cold moisture. There's enough water here to coax from the ground and into the clouds, enough to vanquish the fire and clear the air of smoke.

This is the first time I've been involved in a group training session since I was on this same field last year, practicing with my best friend. Since the magic inside me rushed toward her in a flash of light, as bright as the fire in front of me. Since she screamed so loudly the sound still echoes in my ears.

I try to push the memory away, but my whole body trembles with it.

“Keep your focus, Clara.” Mr. Hart’s voice is steady and sure, coming from behind me. “You can do this.”

I take a deep breath and refocus. My eyes are closed, but it isn’t enough to erase the red and orange of the fire, a dull glow I’ll continue to see long after the flames are out.

“Now,” Mr. Hart says.

The rest of the summers release their magic to me, weaving it into my own. I tense under the weight of it. Our combined power is far stronger than individual streams flitting around the forest, the way a tapestry is stronger than the individual threads within it.

But it’s so heavy.

Most witches could never support the weight of it. Only a witch tied to all four seasons can control that much magic. Evers are rare, though, and our teachers didn’t have one in their generation—I’m the first in over a hundred years—so this is a learning process for us all. But it doesn’t feel right, holding the magic of so many witches.

It never does.

“Deep breaths, Clara,” Mr. Hart says. “You’ve got this.”

My hands shake. It’s so hot, heat from the fire mixing with heat from the sun. The magic around me hangs heavy on my own, and I focus all my energy on pulling moisture from the ground.

Finally, a small cloud forms above the trees.

“That’s it. Nice and easy,” Mr. Hart says.

The cloud gets bigger, darker. Magic swells inside me, ready

to be released, and the sheer power of it makes me dizzy. It's a terrible feeling, like I'm on the brink of losing control.

I've lost control twice before. The terror that haunts my dreams is enough to ensure it will never happen again.

Sweat beads on my skin, and I have to work hard for each shallow breath, as if I'm breathing atop Mount Everest instead of in a field in Pennsylvania.

I temper the flow and give myself three good breaths. Just three.

Then I start again.

Ash falls from the sky instead of rain, flames leaping toward the heavens as if they're taunting me.

I find my thread of magic hovering above the forest floor. I let enough energy flow from my fingertips to keep it going, but no more than that.

"Rain," I whisper.

Water rises from the ground and cools. Tiny droplets form, and all I have to do is combine them until they're too heavy to stay in the air.

That's it. I can do this.

I pull the cloud away from the trees, closer and closer to the flames until it hovers above the heart of the fire.

Power moves all around me like a cyclone, and I send it spiraling into the air, toward the droplets that are so close to being rain.

More magic surges inside me, desperate to get out, stealing my breath. There's a deep well of it, but I'm terrified of letting go, terrified of what could happen if I do. I send out a small stream of

magic that does nothing to ease the pressure building inside me, and I force the rest back down.

It isn't enough.

The rain cloud flickers, threatening to undo all the progress I've made. It needs more energy.

"Stop fighting it," Mr. Hart says behind me. "Just let it happen. You're in control."

But he's wrong. Letting go would be like breaking a dam and hoping the water knows where to go. I know better than that. I know the devastation my power can cause.

There are so many sets of eyes on me, on the rain cloud churning above the fire. I split my focus between controlling the flow of my own magic and commanding everyone else's, but it doesn't feel right.

I can't do it anymore.

I won't.

The thread of magic collapses, energy thrashing every which way like a loose fire hose.

A collective groan moves through the witches around me. My arms fall to my sides, and my legs buckle beneath me, the pressure no longer holding me up. I sink to the ground, and heavy exhaustion replaces everything else. I could sleep right here, on the sawdust earth, surrounded by witches and fire.

I close my eyes as Mr. Hart's steady voice begins directing the other witches.

"Okay, everyone in the northeast corner, you're with Emily. Northwest, Josh. Southeast, Lee, and southwest, Grace. Let's get

this fire out.” Mr. Hart keeps his tone even, but after working with him for over a year, I know he’s disappointed.

After several minutes, four strong threads of magic are restored, and the cloud above the fire gets larger and darker. Emily, Josh, Lee, and Grace make upward motions with their hands, and all the water they’ve extracted from the ground rises into the atmosphere, going up, up, up.

They clap in unison, and the droplets of water combine, too heavy to remain in the air.

I look up. When the first raindrop lands on my cheek, a sick feeling moves through my body. It took four of our strongest witches to do what should have been natural for me. Easy, even.

Another raindrop falls.

And another.

Then the sky opens up.

Cheers rise all around me, the sound mixing with that of the rain. People clap each other on the back and hug. Josh pulls me up from the ground and wraps his arms around my waist, twirling me through the air as if I didn’t just fail in front of the entire school.

My hair is soaked, and my clothes cling to my skin. Josh sets me down and high-fives the other witches around him.

“We did it,” he says, wrapping his arm around my shoulder and kissing my temple.

But a training exercise is nothing compared to the unrestrained wildfires burning through California. We’re going to graduate this year, and then it’ll be up to us to fight the real fires. And they’re getting worse.

Witches have controlled the atmosphere for hundreds of years, keeping everything steady and calm. We've always succeeded. We've always been strong enough.

But the shaders—those without magic—were swept away by the possibilities of a world protected by magic, of a world where every square inch could be used for gain. They began to push the limits of our power and our atmosphere. At first, we went along with it, caught up in their excitement. Then their excitement turned to greed, and they refused to slow down, ignoring our warnings and charging ahead, behaving as if magic were infinite. As if this planet were infinite. Now they've overplayed their hand.

We've tried to adapt and handle the shifting atmosphere on our own, but we can't keep up; it's as if we're blowing out candles when the whole house is on fire. When we realized that what the world needed was rest, we pleaded with the shaders and pleaded for our home. But we were outnumbered. The shaders couldn't see past their desire for more, developing land that humans were never meant to touch, requiring control in areas that were only ever meant to be wild.

There isn't enough magic to support it all.

And now the atmosphere is collapsing around us.

Three years ago, we didn't train this hard for wildfires. They spread and caused damage, but the witches were always able to put them out before they became devastating. Now there aren't enough of us to manage all the ways the Earth is pushing back. I think about the acres of land that burned this year in California

and Canada, Australia and South Africa, and it's so clear. It's so painfully clear.

We aren't strong enough anymore, and the administration is relying on me to make a difference, to make *the* difference.

But they really shouldn't.

By the time graduation comes, I won't be able to make any difference at all.



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