

whom she thought should be spared a life of martyrdom to sickness and pain, except perhaps a couple of times, but they were merely trifles and didn't count against her. She'd only acted that way to make sure that her powers didn't stagnate.

Now, at long last, her time of doing penance was over.

So she hadn't wanted to ride through the forest. She wanted to feel the wind against her face and the earth under her feet and to know that all this was hers. She wanted to listen to the storm as it engulfed her and to laugh at the moon.

"I'm free, Hanna," she whispered. "I'm free! Now our era begins!"

Her own plans for the journey to Denmark were markedly different from those of the family ...

She'd enquired here and there and had been told that the authorities were hunting witches incessantly in Denmark. However, most often these were just normal women with no knowledge of the black arts whom spiteful neighbours had branded as witches. Sol, on the contrary, knew where the real witches and wizards were to be found. Hanna had once spoken the name of the place with great reverence.

This was where she wanted to go – this was where she *had to* go!

There weren't many real witches left.

There couldn't be when one thought of the zeal with which the authorities persecuted them. But those who had managed to survive were real enough.

And she was one of them. One of the very few, she and Tengel. But Tengel had always been unwilling to practice the true craft, wasting his powers instead on "good" deeds. How could he be bothered? Five years of goodness and decency had been more than enough for her!

She just *had* to stop for a moment and gaze at her precious objects, which she'd missed for so long. She smiled with glee and anticipation. There was the skull of a poor child found buried under the floor of a barn one hundred

years ago. There was the finger of a hanged criminal. A heart of a black dog. Earth from a graveyard. Snakes' tongues ...

And there it was. The most prized of them all: The mandrake – an heirloom discovered in a Mediterranean country, long, long ago, pulled out of the earth beneath a gallows tree where a murderer had spilled his semen at the moment of death. This was where the mandrake had grown, and this root, which so resembled a human form, had screamed so piercingly when it was pulled from the earth. As a result, the master sorcerer, who had unearthed it one Thursday night under a full moon, had been driven insane.

This was the story as Hanna had told it to her and she knew that she must take great care of the mandrake – it was priceless!

Sol felt the weight of the grotesque dried root in her hand. It was big – longer than her hand – and there were marks where someone had cut small pieces from the ends of the root. Could it have been her much feared ancestor, Tengel the Evil, who'd done this? They said that the mandrake had belonged to him. It was certainly true that the pieces had been used in black magic. Sol knew very well the power of the mandrake and how it could be used in so many ways – as a love potion or perhaps to destroy an enemy or even to