Once there was a village where nothing much changed. The villagers milked their cows, churned the milk into butter and cheese, and sold it in the nearby market. In the evening they sat around a fire and told stories, dancing and singing late into the night. When they woke up they started the same thing all over again. No one ever went further than the market. People just went about their lives, just like they had always done.

That is, until the magician turned up.

Hilde was sitting watching the cows when she first appeared. A tall woman with dark skin, cropped black hair, and eyes that flashed as she walked confidently up the lane. She was wearing a well worn travelling coat and she had a backpack that was filled with mysteries. Hilde was so surprised to see someone new that she was almost too shocked to answer when the woman came up to her and started speaking, with an accent that made her words dance.

“Hello child. Is this the village of Gröditz?”

“It’s just down the lane, I can show you if you like?”

The woman’s dark eyes looked over Hilde with a hint of curiosity. “Please, go ahead.”

They set off down the lane, the strangers' heavy boots kicking up a cloud of dust behind them. Hilde was a little intimidated by her unusual appearance, but she had been brought up to be polite, so she tried to make her guest feel as at home as possible.

“My name is Hilde, I live in the village. What's your name?” “I am Khadija, I live on the road.”

Something suddenly clicked into place in Hilde’s mind.

“Oh you’re the magician that the Chief sent for! Because of all the sickness!”

The woman smiled. “They call me a magician, yes. But the power I use is far greater than magic.”

As they walked into the village Hilde noticed people stopping what they were doing and staring. Khadija didn’t seem concerned, striding on until they reached the biggest hut where the Chief lived.

The Chief was an elderly man, who had led the village wisely for the better part of his life. He was not happy to be getting outside help to solve his problems. But a number of the villagers had been falling ill, and their health and happiness was

his responsibility. The village doctor had not been able to help the sick people, so he had sent for a magician.

“You are the magician then?” He called out.

Khadija tilted her head forward, the way to show respect in these parts. “They call me that, yes.”

The Chief grunted. “Call yourself whatever you like, as long as you can solve my problem. I’ve got seven people struck down with disease, and no one can help them. Everyone on that street is ill except one person.”

Khadija glanced outside. “The sun is still up, and I am not too tired. Maybe someone could take me there now?”

Hilde piped up, desperate to spend more time with the stranger. “I can show her the way! Please let me take her!”

Khadija nodded, and Hilde led her excitedly out of the Chiefs hut.

Once they were outside in the sun, Khadija turned to her miniature tour guide. “So what do you think is the reason these people are falling sick?”

“Most people think that it’s ghosts or evil spirits.” “Has anyone seen these spirits?”

Hilde shook her head, “No. Everyone was perfectly healthy, then they all got sick at the same time. Except for big Jonas.”

“Tell me about big Jonas.”

“He’s the strongest man in the village. He eats eggs every day and only drinks milk to keep his strength up. What about you? Do you think that it’s spirits?”

Khadija smiled, “I have come to many villages like this, and people always believe that their problems are caused by spirits. In my experience they are never to blame. But I always try to keep my options open.”

Despite Khadija’s opinion there were no spirits, Hilde couldn’t help being a little scared as they crossed the road into Waldweg street. In the first house lived the Müllers, both husband and wife bedridden. Then the widowed Helga, already weak from age, now struggling to keep down the chicken soup the Chief had delivered to her house daily. Next the healthy big Jonas. The whole Schneider family were ill, even little Lena, and next to them their young nephew Stefan was struggling all by himself. The houses were small but clean, and the gardens tidy. At the end of the street was the well, providing water for the inhabitants of this street.

find.”

Khadija looked around. “This all seems normal, but let's see what we can

“Are you going to do a spell?”

“In a way. I have a ritual that I need to do. Once I am done, either the problem

is solved, or I need to repeat it again. Eventually I can move on. I can show you if you like?”

Hilde’s eyes were like saucers. She was going to learn magic! She nodded quickly, too excited and nervous to say anything.

“First we have to ask a question. For us the question is ‘What is causing this sickness’. Then we have to perform research. We need to know the facts about what’s happening.”

Khadija went around every house, her miniature assistant in tow. She asked questions to all the people, even little Lena, finding out about their day to day lives. She paid particular attention to big Jonas, asking him about his special diet and exercise regime. Whenever she heard something interesting she would write it in a little notebook. After she had talked to all the people she walked up and down the street, looking around the houses and peering into the bottom of the well. Once she was satisfied she had found everything she needed, Hilde took her to the local inn to rent a room for the night. Afterwards they sat in front of the fire and drank mugs of hot elderflower tea.

“So we have completed the second step of the ritual.” Khadija said, taking a sip of the steaming tea. “First we asked a question. Then we investigated and found out facts. Now we have to make a hypothesis.”

Hilde shivered despite the warm tea. Hypothesis! Now there was a word that screamed magic! “What is a hypothesis?”

“A hypothesis is an educated guess that might answer our question. You walked around with me today, what do you think the problem is? Our key clue is big Jonas. If we can think why only he is healthy, then we will get a strong hypothesis.”

Hilde thought. What clues did they find today? Suddenly she had an idea. “The milk! Big Jonas drinks milk all day! Maybe it's protecting him from the disease!”

Khadija nodded seriously. “He does, yes. But I noticed that there was a big jug of milk at the Schneiders, and Helga says the Mayor sends her a glass a day to help

keep her strength up. I think that maybe the real culprit is something else. If Jonas only drinks milk, what do all the others have in common that he doesn’t?”

Hilde gasped. “They all drink the water from the well! Even the others that drink milk drink the water too!”

Khadija smiled. “Exactly! But for now we only have a hypothesis. We need to do another ritual. An experiment. Let's get the residents to stop drinking the water and see if they get better.”

The next morning Khadija told the Chief her plan, and he agreed to have someone bring water from another well for the residents of Waldweg street.

“Now we are doing the experiment, we need to make more observations. Let's see if the results confirm our hypothesis - if the residents are getting better.” Khadija handed Hilde a little notebook. “This time you can make the notes.”

Over the next week, Hilde checked in with each of the residents daily, noticing how every time they seemed a little stronger. By the end of the week everyone was back to normal.

“So let's recap.” Khadija said, Hilde and her once again sitting in the inn, drinking their now traditional post-interview elderflower tea. “We asked a question - ‘What is making these people sick’ and we researched about the people that were sick. Then we made a hypothesis - that it was the well that was making them ill. Next we did an experiment and observed what happened. Now let's analyse the results. I think you will agree with me that they seem good.”

Hilde nodded in agreement, amazed at how effective this magic was. “Then let's present our findings to the Chief tonight.”

The Chief agreed immediately to their requests. A new well was planned a short distance away, and the old one had a sign hung over it warning of the danger. Khadija received a large purse of gold, and as they walked out of the village Hilde noticed all the villages they passed tilting their heads respectfully towards Khadija.

Hilde was almost in tears when they reached the path out of the village. She had grown to love learning with Khadija over the last week. When it was finally time to go she hugged her tightly. “Can’t you take me with you? I want to be a travelling magician too!”

Khadija hugged her back. “Think about your poor parents.” She said gently. “They would miss you so much. But I have a present for you, to thank you for your help.” Reaching into her bag she pulled out a book titled ‘The Scientific Method’.

Hilde’s eyes widened. Books were expensive in these parts. Handing the book over, Khadija dipped her head towards Hilde, and Hilde did the same. Khadija swung her bag over her shoulder, but before she left, she turned to say one final thing. “Just remember, we’re not magicians. Any result a magician gets is pure luck. We’re scientists.”

Once she had disappeared into the distance, Hilde wiped away her tears, settled into the shade of a large oak tree and began to read.