

The wind roared like a wild beast, ferociously whipping tree branches at the small cottage. A tall, slender figure stood before its door, waited for a peal of thunder to die down, then raised a hand and knocked. Light spilled out of the hut and into the pouring rain, and a tiny woman looked up to the stranger at her door. "Can I help you?" she asked. The traveler was pleasantly surprised by her attitude. Not many were so well disposed to finding a stranger on their doorstep. "I have been traveling a long time," the visitor began, "and this storm is truly taking its toll on me-" They did not have time to finish their plea, for the little woman immediately exclaimed, "of course! You poor thing, you're soaked!" She ushered them in with an endless stream of chatter and the door closed on the brutal weather.

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The inside of the cottage was delightfully warm and, although the visitor could not stand in it at their full height, they found the place rather comforting. "Now I've just started some soup, I'm sure I can throw in a few more things and it'll be a meal for two no problem! Why don't you put your coat up and go dry yourself by the fire," said the woman, and the visitor did as she said, stretching out in front of the crackling flames like a cat basking in sunlight. "Oh, I'm Irma, by the way," their host added, throwing a handful of vegetables into a huge pot, "what's your name?" With a nonchalant smile, the traveler replied, "I have had many names, Irma. You may call me... Cam. Yes, Cam will do." This hesitation, strange as it was, did not seem to bother Irma. She merrily stirred her soup, which soon filled the small space with a multitude of wonderful smells.

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The meal preoccupied her so that she paid no mind as Cam idly waved their fingers and made tiny people dance in the flames. Or, perhaps, she did notice, but simply did not care. Finally, the soup was ready, and Irma cut slices of a thick loaf of bread and buttered them well, and she and her visitor sat down to eat. "The bread is from this morning," she said, "which is rather fresh but not quite as good as a nice warm loaf." Cam might have taken the time to reassure her that the bread was lovely, but they were too busy practically licking the bowl to reach the last drops of soup. Once satisfied that no stray broth had escaped their notice, the traveler turned to Irma. "You are a witch," they said with confidence. It was a bold accusation to throw at such a generous host, but Cam did not seem to mean any harm by it. Rather, they continued, "you have cast a spell on me with this broth of yours, Irma, or you have used some other manner of magic, for in all my many millennia of existence I have never had such a meal as this one!"

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Irma was not a witch. She was simply an old woman who made a damned good soup. Cam, of course, was anything but human, and they were so transfixed by this ordinary bit of hospitality that they repaid their host as only a faerie could. "I give you my boon," they declared, "that you may wield the powers of the fae and that if need be, you may call on me for aid, and I will come to you." They rose to their full height, towering above a rather confused looking Irma. Light seemed to descend onto them as if filtered by a canopy of trees and a delicate crown of ivy sat on Cam's head. As they placed a hand on the woman's head, a flash of green traveled down their fingers and Irma's eyes shone. Then, the light returned to normal and the pair sat down. "What will you do with your vast new powers?" asked the fae. Irma pondered this for a moment. Finally, she said, "I believe I am going to do the dishes. And you had better help!"