

ANNIE ABBOTT
AND THE
RACE TO THE RED QUEEN

ISABELLE AND MICHAEL NELSON

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About the cover

This deliciously beautiful art, is the work of world-famous artist Raina Hopkins. Raina lives in Cornwall, England where she designs and produces some of the finest art of this kind. We are delighted that she has agreed to provide this one, originally titled the 'Sun Goddess', and for 'Annie Abbott and the Druid Stones' represents the 'Keeper of the Light'. Thank you Raina!

You may find more of her work on the website, [Deviant Art](#).

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Prologue

To see the life in all things and feel the life that surrounds you is to know real magic. Annie Abbott has begun to realize the true strength and power of magic. She has learned that magic is real, and it is in everything and everyone, and most of all, it is in her. Until recently, Annie was a junior high school student. She was a diligent student and got good grades. She was happy with her life and thought it was full enough, but then the world, her world shifted.

Living with her father, Michael Abbott, a college professor of medieval history, she discovers that not only is there magic in the world, but that she has somehow inherited great quantities of it from her women ancestors dating all the way back to the warrior-sorceress Morganna Pendragon, apprentice of Merlin the Magnificent.

All her life, her father kept the secret of her power and her identity. As her twelfth birthday approached, her magical self-began to assert itself and she began to realize that things would never be the same. As her ability to channel magic emerged, her father could no longer keep who she was and would become a secret. He reveals himself to her as also having many gifts himself and that he was sworn to protect her. Together with his two best friends, Rafer Tate and Gabe McDonald, they launch on a quest for a mysterious treasure of the ages.

But as they begin, the strength of Annie's gift also reveals her to evil ones, and they pursue her and the three protectors. It is a mad dash to stay ahead of the army of the unclean and find those that can teach Annie how to control the gifts she has inherited. There is danger at every turn, and battles are fought to protect her. All the while her powers continue to grow.

Finally Annie realizes that to be safe, she must go it alone. By her very presence she is endangering everyone around her. In an epic last battle, she summons the powers of the elements and raises an army of trees to defend herself. The demonstration of strength is terrifying both for her and her allies.

She knows that her education must continue but that she must try and do it alone. The great library of wisdom and lore has been sealed for ages beyond counting. It awaits the key to open the door and she is the key. Somehow, she must find the Keeper of the Books of Wisdom and unlock the secrets of the ages. But first, she has to survive.

FOREWARD

"How can I learn everything that I need to in such a short time teacher? There's just too much; I'll never remember all of it."

The druid looked up from stirring the small campfire at his apprentice.

"The knowledge, even the emotion that was gained in a lifetime does not die when the man does. To whatever extent possible, knowledge and wisdom continues beyond the grave. It is there to be accepted or denied by those that come after. Many do not try and find it within themselves as they become involved in an otherwise petty life. They do not seek wisdom but rather pursue pleasure. They never understand that by accepting the gift that lies just beyond their reach, they could have both.

For the few that wish to learn as deeply as they possibly can, they must first learn how to access that gift left behind by their fathers and their father's fathers. They must learn how to negotiate that maze of the hallways of memory and find that gift that was planted within them long before they drew their breath.

They can learn that they are both themselves and those they sprang from. They become them if they can relax enough to look within. But knowledge and wisdom bring with them great responsibility. It is that responsibility that most people do not wish to accept. It would divert them from the path of their own pleasure, possibly direct them toward a life of service.

The knowledge of the past is only as useful as those that wish to add to it, but it carries with it the memories and personalities of each individual that went before. The memories of our ancestors, each one individually, each one who contributed to this treasure trove of experience, who they were and what they did is there within, all the way back to the 'long fathers' at the very beginning of the new age."

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Red Queen

The Annie Abbott Adventures
Book Two

Isabelle & Michael
Nelson



The Lady of Vaughn House

A blanket of heavy fog hung just below streetlight level, creating bright glowing halos of white around each one and softening its surrounding light. At the foot of a long downhill slope, a grove of ancient magnolia trees dripped moisture in the cool still air, only their lowest branches visible below the canopy of fog. In the small hours beyond midnight no sounds disturbed the peace. The air was cool and the ground was soft and springy, as it swallowed the moisture from the trees above.

From beneath the shadows of the spreading magnolia trees three shadows were in motion, darting from tree to tree, barely visible, the shadow at the corner of your eye. The three figures were moving quickly. Then separating, they spread out into the open space ahead of them. Moving forward in a crouching run their demeanor one of caution and haste as they hunted up the long incline ahead of them. Moving soundlessly, the hunters searched and listened ahead into the fog alert for any danger. Aware of each other, they moved separately but in the same direction, working their way up the vast expanse of lawn. Objects beyond the fog could not be seen but were felt, as the stealthy hunters melted into the cold mist and their shadows disappeared.

As they faded from sight another dark shape, another moving shadow flowed forward from the deeper darkness beneath the trees. The shadow, darkness against the darker space of the surrounding tree trunks, appeared huge, moving slowly, flowing forward. At the edge of the shadows, it stopped—waiting. A figure more imagined than seen, its presence malevolent, the subject of a children’s nightmare. It waited for the three to return.

A wailing police car, its flashing lights reflecting off of the overhead vapor howled by on a nearby street. As it did, the dark shadow disappeared, dropping to the ground, just another shadow beneath the massive trees.

Within moments, all was silence again.

Annie rose from behind the massive dark form of the monstrous dire wolf.

“It’s okay; this happens a lot around here.”

“I have not walked among the mortals for an age. They have multiplied.” Bracken’s rumbled voice echoed in her brain.

“Yes, and with each generation, they grow more detached from others and increasingly ignorant.” Annie knew that the words were true, even if they were not hers. The voice went on, “But their doom is our doom.”

“The elves have moved far forward. Should we follow?” Bracken was wary.

“One last sprint Bracken. We’re so close, I can feel it. Should we fight or should we flee? Tonight, if we must, we fight! Let’s sprint my friend and catch up to the elves.” Annie pulled the hood of her serape over her head and loosened the sword at her belt that she had worn since leaving her father. Leaping astride the great wolf she leaned forward and whispered in his ear, “let’s sprint!”

As Bracken crouched to leap into the open space three shadows appeared rushing down the sloped lawn. The three elves slid to a stop on the wet ground, their glowing eyes ablaze.

“Something of power approaches. It is cloaked and we cannot assess the danger.” Micah whispered as he and the other two drew their weapons and took a position in front of the dire wolf.

Annie threw a leg over and slid off of the wolf as his hackles rose and he crouched in readiness directly behind the three capable warriors. She took a position at his right shoulder and threw her hood back.

She whispered, “Fight or Flee?”

Bracken’s voice rumbled, “Fight first, flee if we must. Spread out. No one can know that we are here. Let none of us be taken... do not allow yourselves to be taken.”

She spread her legs and took a fighting stance, she drew the sword and held it at the ready, not sure if she could conjure a warrior to wield it. The four who had sworn to protect her now stood ready to do just that. Their lives and hers, perhaps, hanging in the balance. Patch hovered near her left shoulder, sword at the ready.

Out in front of them a dark spot appeared in the dense fog and grew steadily darker, parting the fog as it approached. The spot grew wider and taller, the closer it approached, moving slowly but directly toward them. No fog surrounded it as it flowed soundlessly down the long grassy slope. As it neared them the last of the surrounding fog disappeared and the shadow was lost in the blackness of the night.

Finally, the elves were not fooled. They knew what it was now and Micah spoke in a hiss.

“Come no further demon!”

“Hahahaha, quiet foolish elf! You have no power over me.” The

shadow moved within a few feet of the group and spoke again. “Greetings travelers.”

“Who are you?” Annie did not relax one muscle, still in her stance of defense. “Friend or foe?”

“I am neither friend nor foe.” The haunting voice spoke from the deep shadow in front of them. “For now, I am your guide to safe passage. There are those near that lurk in the fog and watch. They mean harm for those that they seek. I will take you to Vaughn House.”

“Are you a spirit then?” Mink asked, for the elves do not fear the dead.

“I was once Kathleen Arbogast. I am guardian of the Keeper of Vaughn House. We must hurry please.”

“You are taking us Vaughn House?” Annie slid the sword away and within seconds once again was a thirteen-year-old teenager.

“Yes, you must meet the Keeper. Now, as quietly as possible mortals, you must follow me; we must hurry; daylight approaches.”

“What?!”

“You must meet the Keeper, she awaits.”

With that the spirit surrounded by darkness amid the fog began to drift away.

“Follow.” It spoke as it drifted up the hill. “Follow.”

With the elves leading the way, their vision in the darkness priceless, the small troupe followed the shadow as it drifted up the long slope into the darkness. The fog parted around it as it navigated the fogged, almost invisible campus of Vanderbilt University. Their progress cloaked, muffled in the surrounding damp they cautiously followed the spirit of Kathleen Arbogast. Within minutes, a building took shape in the darkness muted by the foggy air. Ahead, streetlights winked out in the surrounding areas as they approached each.

As they approached the shadowy house, no lights shown. The windows were black to the outside world. As they approached, they made out the large wooden porch that covered half of the front of a two-story brick house.

“Well that’s kinda creepy.” Annie betrayed her age as she looked up at the ancient house. “But that’s exactly what I would imagine when I think of a haunted house. Dad told me there are more than one or two spirits within, even one of a small child? Dad always laughed about these old ladies who swore there were baby footprints in the dust on the floors. But I’ve got to say, it does look like that might be possible.”

“There is no danger,” Bracken rumbled. “There are no enemies nearby, we are cloaked by the spirit that leads us.”

As he finished, the front door opened silently; a stately woman, her hair in a tight bun and dressed in an ankle length dress of indeterminate color, emerged and flowed to the front of the porch. She appeared beyond middle age as she addressed them.

“Greetings, travelers. Please come in and take your rest. I am Stella Vaughn, Keeper of the books of Wisdom, long the spirit and soul of Vaughn House. I offer most especially my heartfelt greetings to the Queen of the Fey and our hopes of the Key. I am the Keeper and finally, I meet the Key. The prophesies are fulfilled, and history, legend and fate have arrived at the crossroad. Enter to learn.”

A Balance of Strengths

“You are incredibly late. I’ve been expecting you for a week or more. Did you stop at Dollywood or something? The voice spoke from the darkness within the open door. “Naughty, naughty.”

There was no mistaking the voice but there was a collective gasp as Colm McQuinn, the Druid master, stepped out of the front door and strode across the broad front porch. He leaned on the railing, a broad smile on his face holding a delicate teacup in his hand.

“Shame on you for making us wait. I for one am pleased to see you, welcome Bracken my ancient friend, and Micah and you guardians. I’ll bet you’re all tired and hungry. We began preparations as soon as Kathleen sensed your approach.” Then he intensified his stare and focused it directly at Annie, “I think we could all use a nice cup of tea don’t you?”

The elves would not enter the house. They much preferred the sky instead of a roof over their heads. Instead, they took positions in the shadows, on guard, facing outward toward possible danger, together a fearsome hedge against those that would do harm. As the sky began to brighten into a grey morning, they became one with the landscape, melting into the surrounding background that surrounded Vaughn House, invisible—lethal.

The dire wolf would not have fit into any of the small rooms of the old house. There was some question as to whether he could have even fit through the wide front door. Instead, as the light continued to grow in the hazy hue of fog, he stationed himself beneath the wooden porch and under the front steps, his great glowing yellow eyes the only thing visible in the darkness cast beneath the slats above. He was perfectly situated to become the subject of any person’s worst nightmare should the protection of the elves fail.

Annie, after assuring that all were satisfied with the chosen places of concealment, entered the homely house following the shadows that were Lady Vaughn and Kathleen Arbogast. Inside, in spite of the black appearance of the windows from outside, the house was brightly lit, with lights in every corner and chandeliers blazing gaily. The house appeared immaculate to Annie. There was no dust on the woodwork, no creaking

floorboards; the house went against anything she had envisioned when she thought of a haunted house. There was not a single cobweb anywhere in sight. The place looked like it was ‘move-in’ ready, as realtors are fond of saying, and it was nothing like she had imagined.

Behind her, Colm McQuinn hesitated on the porch, then walked to the front steps, watchful. Satisfied, he sat down on the top step cradling his teacup but still looking into the fog. Then as if speaking into the darkness and fog he addressed the dire wolf beneath the porch.

“Old friend?”

“She is the one. Her power grows as does she.”

“The time grows short Bracken.”

“She is remarkably resilient; her strength is growing, can she grow in wisdom wise one?”

“The limit of learning is the desire of the student, not the skill of the teacher.”

“She desires learning.”

“Learning and wisdom are miles from each other.”

“I bear the scars of learning; with each scar the lesson of it marks my soul.”

“And so it is old friend, and so it is. Shall we roll the dice then? There is much to be gained and much to be lost.”

“Gain and loss do not often balance on the scale.”

“Yes, of course, for us, gain would be incremental but loss on almost any level would be devastating.”

Bracken dropped to the ground with a long exhale as the druid sat down on the top step.

“Perhaps we will not live to see the other side as I expect old friend. I have died before, both in my heart and in my spirit if not in body. She has awakened me. If it is in my power, none shall pass me to do her harm.”

“But will she be ready?”

“To fight or to gain wisdom?”

The question hung in the still air as McQuinn reflected on the depth of the question and the silence stretched into minutes. Finally, the druid rose to his feet and put one foot on the top step.

“For all of our sakes, both”.

Turning his gaze into the fog for a long moment, then with a sigh he raised his hand and snapped his fingers. One by one the streetlights blazed back to life, marching off into the morning fog. Then putting his tongue between his teeth, he loosed a piercing whistle into the night.

Almost immediately, out of the fog, a silent shadow dropped below

their haloed light. Growing larger and larger as it approached through the air a frightening specter of black against grey. With the silence of its race a huge owl spread its taloned feet and its great wings almost in the face of the druid. Then turning at the last second, it perched upon the newel post at the top of the stairs and fluttered its wings.

The great owl rotated its head in every direction, including behind it. Its great yellow eyes bright in the dim morning light. Then ruffling its feathers again, which made it appear twice its already huge size, it regarded the druid and spoke.

“She has arrived?”

“Yes, she has gone inside Archimedes. I’m glad to see you’ve decided to join the party. How are you old friend?”

“As well as can be expected. There are far too many people around here for my tastes. They’ve managed to stunt the rodent population to the point where I’m a mere shadow of my former self.”

“You don’t look too bad to me.”

“Harrumph. I can’t just order pizza whenever I feel like it as you can Wizard. People would react rather conversely, I suspect.”

“I guess. Well Archimedes? How many?”

“I have counted only eight. They are banded in twos. They are watching the roads to the west.”

“Are they a threat then?” Colm asked, trying to assess the danger.

“They might have been, but no longer; the elven hunters have dispatched them. They are returned to the depths. It is good that they keep watch. The elves are fearsome—and silent.”

“Greetings wise one.” Bracken’s rumbled voice vibrated the floorboards of the porch beneath the druid’s feet.

“Greetings True Brother. I saw that you had arrived. You bring with you an important package. You and the silent hunters. How was the journey?”

“It was not without strife. The elves are helpful allies.”

“So I have seen. Is there word from any more of your kin?”

“Not for many long years.”

“If the need is great, will they come?”

“If the need is great, they will already know of it. Although I was once leader of the True Brothers, they may do as they wish. If indeed there are any of my kin remaining after the long purge of our kind. The need grows by the day. The enemy seems emboldened, and their numbers have grown.”

“Will you join us inside Archimedes?”

“I prefer to taste the morning air. Will she be able to open the door?”

“The Key has arrived; we can only hope.”

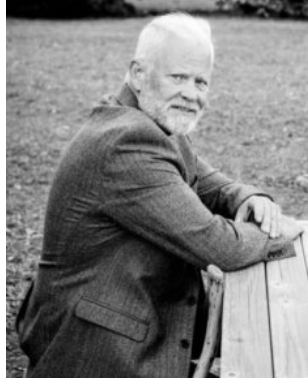
“She is the One. I serve the one. She will prevail.” Again, the rumble erupted from below the floor.

“For now, rest old friend. All our hopes and all our fears will be there for us when the sun rises, at least for one more day.” Colm spoke to the dire wolf as he met the ancient owl’s eyes. “The Grimoire might prove illusive; no matter how illusive that may become, we must above all—show her patience.”

About the Authors



Isabelle Nelson is currently at Saint Ambrose University double majoring in English and Secondary Education with a minor in ESL (English as a Second Language). Her plans are to become a high school English teacher and later teach English abroad. She hopes to pursue her master's degree following a few years of teaching. She has always loved to read and recently discovered her passion for writing. She credits her love of it to her parents and many educators who have supported her endeavors with the craft.



Michael Nelson is a retired physician who also writes under the pen name Michael Deeze. After thirty-eight years in a rural house-call practice, he retired to pursue hobbies, and be near his adult children and grandchildren. In his spare time, he decided to write down some of the deeply personal memories of his life before practice, and the wonderful experiences of a house-to-house practice with he and his team in the Amish communities of northern Wisconsin.

This is the fourth novel for him, and in his opinion the most fun because he shared the work with his young daughter. “Imagine the treasure of working with your treasure to produce treasure. What a gift.”