

"Who's the fat girl on now?" she asked. "Got a backside on her like a bowling ball on a short seesaw."

"That's Agnes Nitt."

"That's a good cursin' voice she's got there. You know you've been cursed with a voice like that."

"Oh yes, she's been blessed with a good voice for cursin'," said Nanny politely. "Esme Weatherwax an' me gave her a few tips," she added.

Clarity's head turned.

At the far edge of the field, a small pink shape sat alone behind the Lucky Dip. It did not seem to be drawing a big crowd.

Clarity leaned closer.

"What's she...er...doing?"

"I don't know," said Nanny. "I think she's decided to be nice about it."

"Esme? *Nice* about it?"

"Er...yes," said Nanny. It didn't sound any better now she was telling someone.

Clarity stared at her. Nanny saw her make a little sign with her left hand, and then hurry off.

The pointy hats were bunching up now. There were little groups of three or four. You could see the points come together, cluster in animated conversation, and then open out again like a flower, and turn toward the distant blob of pinkness. Then a hat would leave that group and head off purposefully to another one, where the process would start all over again. It was a bit like watching very slow nuclear fission. There was a lot of excitement, and soon there would be an explosion.

Every so often someone would turn and look at Nanny, so she hurried away among the sideshows until she fetched up beside the stall of the dwarf Zakzak Stronginthearm, maker and purveyor of occult knickknackery to the more impressive. He nodded at her cheerfully over the top of a display saying LUCKY HORSESHOES \$2 EACH.

"Hello, Mrs. Ogg," he said.

Nanny realized she was flustered.

"What's lucky about 'em?" she said, picking up a horseshoe.

"Well, I get two dollars each for them," said Stronginthearm.

"And that makes them lucky?"

"Lucky for me," said Stronginthearm. "I expect you'll be wanting one, too, Mrs. Ogg? I'd have fetched along another box if I'd known they'd be so popular. Some of the ladies've bought two."

There was an inflection to the word "ladies".

"*Witches* have been buying lucky horseshoes?" said Nanny.

"Like there's no tomorrow," said Zakzak. He frowned for a moment. They *had* been witches, after all. "Er...there will be...won't there?" he added.