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Opening extract from

# Archie Greene and the Magician's Instruction

Written by

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Published by

**Faber Children's Books**

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First published in 2014
by Faber & Faber Limited
Bloomsbury House,
74–77 Great Russell Street,
London WC1B 3DA

Printed in the UK by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

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A CIP record for this book
is available from the British Library

ISBN 978–0–571–30905–4




2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1



*Buried deep in caverns cold*
*A secret that remains untold*
*Two ancient sentries guard the prize*
*With lion heart and eagle eyes.*

*In stony silence shadows sleep*
*The final gift is safe to keep*
*To pass requires a simple test*
*Name the one whom I served best.*

# The Three Types of Magic:

1. Natural Magic: the purest kind of magic comes from magical creatures and plants and the elemental forces of nature, such as the sun, the stars, and the seas. (Symbol: Tree with lightening bolt)
2. Mortal Magic: is man-made magic. It includes the magical instruments and other devices created by magicians to channel magical power. (Symbol: Crystal Ball).
3. Supernatural Magic: the third and darkest type of magic uses the power of spirits and other supernatural beings. (Symbol: Smiling Skull)

# The Three Apprentice Skills:

1. Finding (Firemark: Eye)
2. Binding (Firemark: Needle & thread)
3. Minding. (Firemark: Ladder).

# The Five Lores of Magical Restraint:

In 1666, a magical accident caused the Great Fire of London. The Lores of Magical Restraint were agreed to prevent another magical disaster. (Lores is the magical spelling of laws.)

First Lore.
All magical books and artefacts must be returned to the Museum of Magical Miscellany for inspection and classification. (They are classified as level one, two, or three in magical power.)

Second Lore.
Magical books and artefacts may not be used, or bought and sold until properly identified and classified.

Third Lore.
The unauthorised use of magic outside of magical premises is prohibited.

Fourth Lore.
The hoarding of magical books and artefacts to accumulate personal power is not permitted.

Fifth Lore.
The exploitation of magical creatures is expressly forbidden.

# 1

# The Birthday Cake For No One

Sardines. That was the mystery ingredient in Loretta Foxe's chocolate cake, and both her children knew it. This particular cake was covered with blueberry icing and had twelve candles on it. It was sitting on the kitchen table in the Foxe family's house in Oxford.

As well as the cake, there were heaped piles of sandwiches, smothered with pickled spreads, bowls of colourful crisps and a number of small, unmarked glass pots, their contents uncertain because their labels had long since peeled off. In the middle of the table stood a large jug containing a bubbly, pink liquid.

Bramble and Thistle Foxe sat staring hungrily at the food laid out before them.

'Can we start now, Mum?' Bramble asked.

She was fourteen years old, with green eyes and long, dark hair that fell in thick curls down her

back, and even though it was warm summer, she wore a patterned woollen hat with a pom-pom hanging over one shoulder.

'Not yet Bramble,' called Loretta Foxe, from inside the walk-in larder. Her voice vibrated with energy.

'But we're starving,' groaned Thistle Foxe. He was eleven and had tousled brown hair and a smattering of dark freckles across his nose.

'Thistle, I told you to wait,' Loretta insisted.

Silence.

'Well, can we have a drink at least?' asked Thistle.

'A drink?' trilled his mother. 'Of course you may have a drink my darlings! The elderberry squash is very good, but use it sparingly. We're not made of elderberry squash, you know.'

Thistle Foxe rolled his eyes – the universal sign for annoying parents.

Bramble poured two glasses of elderberry squash from the large jug. The children slurped it down in one go. She picked up the jug to pour some more. At that moment Loretta emerged from the larder. A small woman with piercing turquoise eyes and a thick mane of dark hair, she wore a purple dress and was carrying another plate of sandwiches.

She caught sight of her daughter poised with the



jug. 'Now what did I tell you about the elderberry squash, Bramble? Do you think elderberries grow on trees?'

'No, Mum,' her daughter sighed, rolling her eyes as Thistle had done.

Bramble sniffed the cake and raised her eyebrows.

'Is it your usual recipe, Mum?' Thistle asked.

'Yes,' declared Loretta. 'Chocolate and marshmallow, with sardine filling.'

The children had guessed correctly. They knew their mother specialised in unusual combinations of food. In fact, she specialised in unusual just about everything, like the rest of the family. To the dismay of her rather stodgy neighbours, it included her taste in exterior decor. Loretta liked purple. The Foxes' front door was painted a fulsome fuscia and their window frames were a mellow magenta. But what really ruffled feathers and twitched curtains on Houndstooth Road, Oxford, was that the exterior of number thirty-two was painted a bright, juicy shade of plum.

'We are celebrating a birthday,' declared Loretta, placing the sandwiches on the table with a flourish.

'We can see that,' said Thistle, 'but whose?'

'Never you mind whose,' said Loretta. 'Just be glad that we are celebrating it at all.'

'But a birthday cake for no one?' Bramble asked.

'I didn't say it was for no one!' Loretta sniffed, suddenly looking teary eyed.

Bramble and Thistle exchanged concerned glances.

'Now,' continued Loretta, 'we just need your father. Then we can light the candles and make a toast.'

'A toast to who?' asked Thistle, curiously.

'You mean a toast to *whom*,' corrected his mother.

'Who. Whom. Whatever,' shrugged Thistle.

Loretta gave her son a dark look – a look she had perfected over many years of parenting. Then she broke into a smile like a burglar might break into a jewellery shop.

'To absent relatives, that's to whom! And to special birthdays!'

# 2

## An Unexpected Parcel

A hundred miles away in a small seaside town called West Wittering, Horace Catchpole opened the gate to number three, Crabgate Cottages. Horace was in his mid-forties, and had the sort of face that wouldn't be noticed in a crowd. This was just as well because he had the sort of job that required discretion. Horace worked for Folly & Catchpole, the oldest and most secretive law firm in England, and today he was on important business.

Clutched in his right hand was a package wrapped in plain brown parchment and secured with several pieces of leather twine. A scroll tied with a scarlet ribbon went with the package and was tucked in Horace's inside pocket for safekeeping.

Horace had no idea what was in the package, but that was not abnormal in his line of work.

The London offices of Folly & Catchpole, just off Fleet Street, contained all sorts of secrets – many of them were unknown even to the longest-serving staff. The firm's reputation was built on minding its own business.

To say that Horace wasn't curious about what was in this particular package, though, would be untrue. For the last four hundred years it had been stored in the firm's cellars, waiting to be delivered on a certain date. Finally, that day had arrived and, Horace, to his great pride, had been entrusted with the job.

Horace knew the entry in the client logbook by heart. 'Arrived 10th May 1603, one medium-sized package with accompanying scroll. To be brought to Mr Archie Greene.' Yet who had left the instruction was a mystery. No matter how many times Horace stared at the logbook, the name was too smudged and faded to decipher.

Horace straightened the starched cuffs of his crisply pressed but tatty shirt and buttoned the jacket of his shabby three-piece suit. He tightened his faded navy blue tie a notch and tucked his freshly laundered handkerchief into his top pocket. Then he gave the door of number three, Crabtree Cottages two sharp knocks.

A young boy opened the door. He was small and wiry with mousey-brown hair. What Horace

noticed about him, though, was the colour of his eyes. One was emerald green, like the deepest lake, and the other was a silvered grey, the colour of weathered oak.

Horace smiled benignly at the boy. He had waited a long time for this moment. He was about to speak, when the boy looked up at him and said, 'No thanks, we don't want any.'

'Young man,' Horace said, in his most self-important voice, 'I am from Folly & Catchpole, the oldest law firm in England, and I am on important business.'

But his words were greeted by a loud thwack as the door closed in his face. Horace, feeling jilted out of what was to be his crowning achievement, banged on the door again. To his surprise, it opened with such force that he nearly tumbled inside.

'Look,' said the same slight boy Horace had encountered a moment ago, 'I don't mean to be rude or anything, but whatever it is you're selling, we've already got one.'

Horace felt his stomach twist in knots. He had thought about this moment many times. In his mind's eye, the incredulous recipient of the package would be overcome with emotion and declare that the name of Folly & Catchpole would live long in legend. But this young boy seemed

completely indifferent. His parents would know better. Horace cleared his throat.

'Now, young man,' he said, forcing a smile onto his lips, 'is your father at home?'

The boy shook his head.

'Er . . . mother?'

'No,' the boy replied. 'I haven't got a father or a mother, just a gran. And she says I'm not to talk to strangers.' The door closed again.

Horace wiped his brow with his handkerchief. He noticed that the handkerchief had begun to wilt.

He took a deep breath and counted to ten before knocking once more. This time the door opened only a crack.

'You again?'

'Now then,' Horace said. 'I am on important business – important *official* business,' he added for extra effect. 'I've got a parcel to deliver to this address.'

The boy's expression suddenly changed. 'Why didn't you say so?' he beamed. 'It's my birthday. I'm twelve today, so it must be for me.'

Horace blinked uncertainly. 'No, I don't think so. This package is of a very serious nature and certainly not meant for a child . . .'

But it was too late. The boy had already grabbed the package with both hands, given it a sharp

tug, and pulled it inside the house, while Horace, who was thrown off balance, fell into a clump of stinging nettles in the front garden.

By the time Horace re-emerged from the nettles he had been stung all over and the door was firmly closed. He straightened his tie and smoothed his thinning grey hair. Then seeing no other alternative, he bent down and shouted through the letterbox.

'That package is very old, so be careful with it. It's not meant for you. It's for someone called Archie Greene.'

The letterbox opened. 'That's me!' cried the boy. 'I'm Archie Greene!'

# 3

## An Honest Mistake

Archie sat in his small sitting room and stared at the package. Until that moment, he had been dreading the long and very lonely summer that lay ahead. His birthday always coincided with the start of the school holidays and that usually meant six weeks of boredom. He had no brothers or sisters to play with and the few friends he had at school would be going on expensive foreign holidays while he was stuck at home. But a mystery package – now that was exciting!

But his initial enthusiasm began to wane as he contemplated the strange looking box. It looked old. It felt old. And, worst of all, it smelled old – of dust and cobwebs. In Archie's experience, that probably meant it was old. Unfortunately, most of Archie's brief life so far had been spent trying to get away from old things.

He yearned for the smell of something new. Something bought from a proper shop. It wasn't that he was greedy or spoilt. In fact it was the exact opposite. He had never owned anything brand new.

The clothes he wore, the bed he slept in, and the plates he ate his food off were all old. Even the bicycle he'd got for Christmas last year was old. He loved it anyway. His gran had saved up all her money and bought it from an advert in the *West Wittering News*. She had made a great effort to do it up, but the chips in the red paint were unmistakable, and the gears clunked and rattled from a hard life.

Gran – her real name was Gardenia Greene – was the only thing in his life that Archie didn't mind being old. Her face was lined with the wear of seventy years, but her eyes still sparkled with life.

And it wasn't Gran's fault they had so little money. She hadn't asked to raise her grandson, after all. It had just happened that way. And even though Archie loved his gran very much, that didn't stop him from wondering what his life would be like if his parents had not left him as a baby with her to go on holiday with his older sister. If they had not boarded that doomed ferry boat to France. Or if the Captain hadn't dozed off at the

wheel. Archie didn't really remember his mother and father. Nor did he remember his sister, who would have been fifteen now, but it was always harder thinking about them on his birthday.

'Archibald!' His thoughts were interrupted by Gran calling from upstairs. 'Who was that?'

'A man. He brought a parcel for me.'

Gran's head appeared round the door. She had a pretty good idea what was in the package. She had spent the last twelve years dreading this moment. But now that it had arrived she felt strangely relieved, as if a great weight had been lifted from her shoulders.

'Yes, I can see that,' she said, trying to sound casual. 'Do you know who it's from?'

Archie had no idea who had sent the package. He hesitated. Gran had brought him up to be cautious, but there was a part of him that longed for adventure. As he stared at the package, he could feel his curiosity stirring. He glanced at Gran.

She shrugged her boney shoulders. 'Well, we can either sit here all night wondering what's inside that box or you can open it and find out. It's up to you.'

Archie raised his eyebrows. He had never heard her speak like this before. He wondered if Gran knew more than she was letting on, but he didn't need any more encouragement.

He tugged at the twine but the knots were so tightly tied that he could not loosen them. He held the parcel up to his mouth and tried to bite his way in. His lips brushed the parchment. It even tasted old – of dust and fire smoke and something sweet, like honey, with a bitter tang. There was another flavour, too, something sharp and unpleasantly acidic, like vinegar. He wiped his lips trying to get rid of the taste.

'Here, try these,' Gran said, passing him the kitchen scissors.

Archie quickly cut through the twine. The parchment slackened, and slithered to the floor. In his hand, he now held a wooden box stained with age. Archie eased it open, grinning.

*

As Horace Catchpole tramped back to the station it started to rain. He felt utterly deflated – and now, to make matters worse, he was getting wet. He wiped his face with his now soggy handkerchief. When he had imagined what might be in the package, it had never occurred to him that it might be a boy's birthday present – and such a young boy, too. To think that it had been waiting in the firm's cellar all those years. Horace shook his head.

It was only when he was on the train back to



London that Horace found the scroll. It was still in his pocket where he had put it for safekeeping. In all the confusion, he had forgotten to deliver it with the package. This was a disaster! He had made a mistake, and a mistake of epic proportions!

As well as minding its own business, Folly & Catchpole's reputation was based on not making mistakes. Prudence Folly, the firm's senior partner would be furious with him if she found out. But what could he do about it now?

The train he had boarded was an express train and it didn't stop until it reached the outskirts of London over an hour and a half away. It would take him the same again to get back to West Wittering – even if there was another train straight away. He couldn't wait that long. What if the boy opened the package without knowing what the message said?

Sitting and fretting on the train, Horace had no way of knowing how serious his error was, or how costly it might prove, but he knew he had to make amends, and had better do so immediately.

He looked at the scroll in his hands and weighed up his options. It was strictly against Folly & Catchpole's policy to open clients' packages or read their letters unless specifically instructed to do so. But Horace decided to take matters into his own hands. If the message was urgent then he

would have to turn around and go straight back. A lesser firm might try to contact the boy on the telephone, but Folly & Catchpole valued secrecy above all and only delivered messages in person. Horace took a deep breath and slipped the scroll from its ribbon.