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Opening extract from

Fire Girl

Written by

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Published by

Macmillan Children's Books

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First published 2015 by Macmillan Children's Books
an imprint of Pan Macmillan
20 New Wharf Road, London N1 9RR
Associated companies throughout the world
www.panmacmillan.com

ISBN 978-1-4472-8355-3

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1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

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

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

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1
WITCH'S GLADE



Witches are wise, cunning folk, clever with herbs and healing. The most skilled – known as Wielders – harness magic to cast spells and charms.
Notes on Witchcraft and Demonology by Dr Neil Fallon



The Glade, Wychwood Forest, three days later . . .

Hazel Hooper strolled along the orchard path, whistling quietly and enjoying the sun on her back. Beams of light slanted through the trees, turning the floating cherry blossom into flakes of gold. It was a perfect summer's day in the Glade, the only home she had ever known.

She plucked an apple from her basket and took a huge bite, letting the juice dribble down her chin. *Just right for a pie*, she thought.

She froze, mid-munch, as something large and orange burst out on to the path in front of her. It was Ginger Tom, her mother's bad-tempered cat-familiar, with whom Hazel was in a perpetual state of war. Something small and furry dangled in his jaws.

'Tom!' Hazel shouted. 'What have you got there? Oh, you horrible creature – it's a poor little dormouse.'

Bursting with rage, she hurled her apple as hard as she



could. It flew over Tom's head and exploded against a nearby tree, showering him with sticky pulp.

'Pick on something your own size,' she said as he dropped the mouse and disappeared yowling into the undergrowth.

Dropping her basket, Hazel picked up the limp dormouse as gently as she could and enfolded his shaking body in her hands. She closed her eyes, searching for a spark of magic and muttered a healing spell painstakingly memorized from her mother's books.

'*Magia-mus-sanaret,*' she whispered. As usual, nothing happened.

'Hold on, little mouse,' she said, pushing her disappointment aside. 'Ma will set you right.' She scampered out of the orchard into a well-tended vegetable garden. At the end of the path was a cottage with a sagging thatch roof and flowers rambling around the door. Hazel dashed breathlessly into the kitchen. 'Ma, look what I—'

A foul smell stopped her dead. Barely visible through a veil of greasy steam stood Hazel's mother, Hecate. She was staring into a simmering cauldron with one hand on her hip and the other stroking her chin.

'What *is* that smell?' Hazel gasped, fighting the urge to choke. 'More Boggart repellent?'

'Mmm, it needs something to liven it up, doesn't it,' Hecate murmured. 'Be a love and pass me some briar-wort, would you?'

'In a minute, Ma. First, look at what Tom did.' Hazel



held out the dormouse. 'All your good-for-nothing familiar likes to do is torment animals smaller than him. He's such a bully.'

'He may be my familiar, but that doesn't mean he doesn't still have his animal instincts,' Hecate said. She frowned at the mouse. 'His leg's broken and he's had a shock, but I think I can help him.'

Hazel watched transfixed as her mother muttered an incantation – '*Magia-mus-sanaret*' – touched her lips to the mouse's nose and exhaled a silver mist. A few moments later, the dormouse opened his eyes and sat up, brushing his whiskers with a newly healed front paw.

'I tried that spell, but it didn't work,' Hazel said, carefully setting the mouse on the table-top.

'I'm sure you did your best,' Hecate said, putting a lid on the bubbling cauldron. 'Perhaps we should open the windows . . .'

'But shouldn't my magic have appeared by now? I'm old enough, aren't I?'

'Well, yes. But . . . we've talked about this, Hazel. The chances of you becoming a Wielder are very slim. We're a rare breed.'

'But I *want* to be like you,' Hazel said. 'To have my own familiar, and heal things and . . .'

'I know you do.' Hecate sighed. 'But believe me, it's much safer if you remain an ordinary, un-magical girl.' She patted down Hazel's tangled red hair. 'You could run a comb through this every so often. And I see you've been

climbing trees in your best dress again. Look, the stitching's coming undone.'

I wish you wouldn't treat me as if I was a little girl, Hazel thought, her temper flaring.

'Mary's coming to see us soon,' Hecate added, interrupting Hazel's thoughts. 'She's bringing that book on herb-lore I was telling you about.'

Hazel rolled her eyes. 'Great,' she muttered.

'It's got a very informative section on toadstools that I think you should read,' Hecate said with one eyebrow raised.

'I said I was sorry about picking the wrong sort,' Hazel bristled. 'I didn't mean to poison us with that pie.'

'I know,' Hecate smiled. 'I'm only teasing.'

Hazel watched the dormouse waddle towards the fruit bowl and tried to calm her angry mood. It was too nice a day to spoil with an argument. 'Is it true Mary's familiar died last month?'

'It was Gander's time to pass on,' Hecate said.

'So she's all alone?'

'Well, she has us.'

'But she *lives* alone. She must be so lonely.' The dormouse was struggling to climb into the fruit bowl so Hazel gave his portly bottom a lift and he tumbled inside.

'Mary's a tough old bird and used to her own company.'

'But she's blind and getting old, Ma. I think it's sad – no one should be alone *all* the time.'

Hecate sat down at the table and took Hazel's hand. 'I'm



sure you have a suggestion to remedy this, as usual?'

'Well . . . why don't I go and stay with her – keep her company? Just for a day or two? When she comes to visit I could go back with her and—'

'You know you can't leave the Glade,' Hecate said.

'But it'd just be for a couple of days . . .'

'No, Hazel. No. We can't go beyond the Border Hedge. We've talked about this.'

'We haven't, not properly.' Hazel pulled her hand away. 'You've told me we can't leave, but never explained *why*.'

'You're too young to—'

'I'm nearly twelve!'

Hecate jabbed her finger on to the table. '*Exactly*.'

'I just want to know why you're keeping me here like a *prisoner*.'

'But . . . this is our home.' Hecate's face fell. 'I thought you loved the Glade?'

'I *do*,' Hazel said. 'But I've been stuck here my whole life. I want to see the rest of England. I want to meet other people apart from you and Mary. Why don't you understand that?' She yanked at her red curls in frustration. 'I mean, are you really going to keep me here *forever*?'

Hecate looked down at her clasped hands. 'You don't know what it's like out there.'

'Then tell me. I just want the truth. I deserve to know.'

'My little girl's growing up.' Hecate smiled sadly and ran her hand down Hazel's cheek.

'That's what I'm trying to tell you, Ma.'



'Perhaps it is time you knew.' Hecate plucked the startled dormouse from the fruit bowl. 'I'm going to let this fellow go, then take a dip in the pool to clear my head. We'll talk when I get back.'



2
A DEMON AT THE DOOR



Demons are unholy creatures in endless forms most foul.
Glimpses of the Demon Underworld
by Grand Magus David Ellefson



Hazel watched through the doorway as Hecate skirted the pool and put the dormouse down by a willow tree. *What is it about England that frightens Ma so much?* she wondered. The prospect of finally knowing was as exciting as it was terrifying.

Dandelion seeds sailed on the breeze and hunting swallows swooped and dived over the glittering water. Hecate, her hair burnished in the sun, waded waist deep into the water. The scent of honeysuckle drifted into the kitchen, carrying with it a faint coppery undertone that Hazel couldn't quite identify.

As the smell got stronger, it awoke a feeling of dread in the pit of her stomach. She stood up, banging her leg on the table and upsetting the fruit bowl. Apples rolled and fell to the floor with heavy thumps. Hazel reached the door in time to see something under the water break away from the bank and glide up behind her mother.

A creature with a domed, eyeless, bone-white head



slipped through the surface of the pool. Higher it rose – tense, poised, its clawed fingers folded like a praying mantis ready to strike.

At last Hazel's throat loosened and she cried out, but before Hecate even had a chance to look around, the creature pounced, grabbing her throat and waist and lifting her clear out of the pool. She thrashed and struggled as it dragged her towards the far bank, her legs kicking up silver arcs of water.

For an electrifying moment, Hecate locked eyes with her daughter. 'Run, Hazel – *run*!'

But Hazel didn't move. Rage such as she had never felt before exploded in her, boiling away her fear. 'Leave my mother alone,' she screamed as the world turned red.

The air around her crackled as her heart pumped so much magic through her veins she thought it would crack her skull in two. With a shriek, Hazel threw out her arms and unleashed a boiling wave of fire across the garden towards the pool.

The creature twisted on the spot, shielding Hecate as the firestorm broke across its back and staying silent even as its flesh burned and peeled away.

Hazel's ferocious magic spluttered and died. She crumpled to the ground like a dropped puppet, raising her head just in time to see the demon disappear through the trees, cradling her mother as gently as a new-born baby.

