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Opening extract from

Witchmyth

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A NOTE TO ALL WITCHKIDS

Araknawitchery comes easy to some witchkids. They point their fingers, and – WHOOSH! – out shoots strong sticky thread, lots of it. And those witchkids can build neat, tidy webs – funnel webs, orb webs, tangle webs, all sorts.

Not me. My thread is always spindly, and my webs are a mess. But you know what? There are things I *am* good at. Like playing the firkelhorn, and keeping other witchkids' secrets.

And I suppose that's what this book is all about. About the horrible hairy Haggfiend and the book of mythical creatures that all turned out to be real – but also about accepting who you are as a witchkid. Being true to yourself.

Because, with all the tricky times I went through – with my friends, with the sneaky witchkid trying to turn them against me, with the Haggfiend – one thing I learnt was this.

I canNOT pretend to be a witchgirl I'm not, and I don't *want* to pretend. I'm me. And I try to be the best me I can.

And as for the Haggfiend, she's gone now. BUT – a word of warning, witchkids. There are *other* creatures in *Magical Myths of the Witchenlands*. All just as scary as the Haggfiend…

And as for you Shiverlands witchkids. Maybe you're chuckling as you read the *Shiverlands Sagas*. Chuckling at the Ogress of Gluggen batch-baking witchkids . Thinking she's not real, thinking you're safe.

But are you *sure* about that? REALLY sure?

Because if the *Magical Myths* all turned out to be true, then so could your *Sagas* – and the *Fables of the Farflungs,* and the *Narrowlands Narratives*…

Anyway, sleep tight, witchkids – wherever you are. But remember. Some of those creatures attack under cover of *darkness*. So maybe keep one ear open.

Just in case.

Florence Skritchett

Chapter 1

I'm Flo – Florence – Skritchett, and I live in Haggspit, capital of South Witchenland. The morning this story starts, I was woken up by loud shrieks. Mum-shrieks, coming from the kitchen.

And I had a good idea what might be making Mum shriek…

Grandma.

I was right. I ran into the kitchen and found Mum, clutching on to the breakfast bar, and gnashing her teeth at Grandma. 'No, Mother,' Mum was shrieking. 'NO!'

I didn't blame Mum for shrieking. Because, usually, Mum's kitchen is gleaming and shiny and neat. Well, except for Grandma's corner, which is full of spellbooks and cobwebs, and a big set of cauldrons.

But now Mum's kitchen was NOT gleaming and shiny and neat. Not at all.

Because Grandma has just come back from her holidays: a week in Frakkenwild, in the Narrowlands. And Grandma's suitcase – very big, very bulky – was unpacking itself in the middle of the kitchen.

Things were flying out of it. Dumping themselves on Mum's sparkling flagstone floor, on her worktops, wherever they felt like.

All sorts of things. A half-eaten sandwich. Three enormous rocks. A spotty beach ball. A big black swimming costume and a soggy towel. Flip-flops, books, Grandma's passport – and sand and pebbles. *Lots* of sand and pebbles, all skidding around Mum's kitchen floor.

'Mother!' Mum shrieked again. 'My kitchen!'

'Kristabel,' said Grandma sternly. 'Stop shrieking. I arrived back late last night. LATE. As you well know.'

Yes. We all knew. We all heard.

Because Grandma came back very late. Around two. She came in, singing the Frakkenwild colony anthem. Woke Mum to

tell her she was back, then told Mum – loudly – *all* about her holiday.

About the good bits – seeing the sound and light show at the Enchanted Glades, spotting a shoal of mergrindles in the Southern Wildwaters. About the bad bits – her nose getting sunburnt, being bitten by wizzels at night. Then Grandma went off and started crashing about in her bedroom.

Grandma is NOT a quiet sort of grandma. Not a docile grandma. Not a grandma who snoozes by the fire, and bakes, and knits scarves for forest pixies.

No.

Now Grandma was frowning at Mum. 'I *must* unpack my suitcase, Kristabel,' she said. 'I couldn't possibly unpack it last night – it was far too late. Which is why I am unpacking it NOW.'

'But not here, Mother,' shrieked Mum. 'Not *here*!'

It was no good. Now big black robes came flying out of Grandma's suitcase. Long black robes – olden days robes – which is what Grandma always wears.

Muddy robes. *Very* muddy.

I gaped. So did Mum. She stopped shrieking, and staggerered backwards on to a breakfast stool. ‘Mother,’ she said, faintly, ‘what did you *do* in Frakkenwild?’

‘Nothing much, Kristabel,’ Grandma said. ‘Just a little relaxing hiking.’ Then she grinned her gappy grin at Mum, and did her innocent old witchlady look…

Which meant Grandma had been up to something.

Mum was looking alarmed now, and suspicious – both at once. ‘Mother,’ she said. ‘Did you remember what you promised? No law breaking? Did you remember?’

Because breaking laws is something Grandma does a LOT.

Grandma pretended to be deaf, which is also something Grandma does a lot. Especially when Mum asks her questions she doesn’t want to answer.

Then Grandma waved her wand – because, yes, she has a wand. An old-style wand… Grandma will NOT use a spellstick.

'*Abrakkida Porrit, Vestirikkon Arrik,*' she said. '*Akwattik, Lavattik, Redune*.' A sprinkle of stardust whooshed out of her wand – and off the robes shot, into the sink, scattering mud as they went.

Boiling hot water came spurting from the taps. Big foaming bubbles filled the sink, and the robes began to swoosh about. Washing themselves, slopping suds and bubbles and water all over Mum's floor.

Mum was slumped now, head in hands, as the robes busied themselves washing and rinsing. Then they hurled themselves out of the sink, and started wringing themselves out. Whizzing themselves round and round and round, spraying water drops all over the kitchen.

Mum's teeth started to grind. 'Mother,' she hissed. 'There is no *need* to wandwash your robes.'

Then she strode across the kitchen, dodging the robes, still spinning, still spraying. She pointed. 'See this, Mother?' she said – and her voice was getting very high and very loud now.

‘This machine is a witchwasher. A *witchwasher*! As I have explained to you before, Mother. *Before*. Quite a few times!’

Then Mum flung the door open. ‘Your robes go in here, Mother. *Here*,’ she said. ‘Just as mine are about to.’

Then Mum’s fingers went flying on her spellstick – and a whole lot of robes zoomed through the kitchen doorway and into the witchwasher.

‘See, Mother?’ said Mum. ‘The door shuts. And the witchwasher starts. Like this. THIS! No mess. No fuss. And NO SUDS!’

Grandma snorted. ‘My robes are wandwash *only*, Kristabel,’ she said proudly. Then she glared at Mum. ‘And Kristabel,’ she said. ‘My magic mirror is no longer in the sitting room. Why on earth not?’

‘Because…’ said Mum, through gritted teeth, ‘it is *illegal* to have a magic mirror. You’ll be arrested.’

Grandma puffed up her chest. ‘Me? Arrested? No, no, no, Kristabel – I am *far* too important to be arrested. I am a

Government Adviser! I have my own office in Argument House. I have a team! I have *staff*!'

Well, yes, Grandma *is* a government adviser. About ghouls.

Because, not long ago, Grandma spotted ghouls were about to attack Haggspit. And that gave us time to get rid of them. Which was a VERY good thing because otherwise every single one of you witchkids reading this would be a ghoul by now.

But ever since then, Grandma has been Government Adviser on ghouls – and also got a bit big for her boots, if you ask me.

'Kristabel,' Grandma said firmly, 'I shall return my magic mirror to its rightful place. Which is ON THE SITTING ROOM WALL.'

Just then, a huge thunderclap boomed out. It shook the whole house, the back door flew open – and a big green box shot in.

The box landed with a thud on the kitchen worktop. It was all dark green leather, with a gold coat of arms stamped on the front. The Hovelhagg coat of arms – the royal rulers of United Witchenlands for hundreds of years.

And, in big gold lettering on the front, it said this:

TOP SECRET

GOVERNMENT PROPERTY

THUNDERBOLT DELIVERY

Grandma strutted over to the worktop. ‘My government green box,’ she said, importantly. ‘Full of vital information for a Government Adviser on ghouls.’

She picked up the green box. ‘And now, Kristabel, I have work to do,’ she said. ‘Reports to study. Meetings to prepare for. Staff to instruct. Ghoul-traps to approve. If I am needed, I shall be in my room.’

Then she strutted out of the kitchen.

Chapter 2

‘Flo,’ said Mum. ‘I shall be out this morning. I am off to the grand opening of the Hurlstruk Happy Home.’

Hurlstruk Happy Home… I saw it on the local *Haggnews* yesterday. It’s something to do with Mr Potions2Go, Meristo Hurlstruk. He’s setting up orphanages all over the witchglobe. All called Hurlstruk Happy Homes. Giving the little orphans lovely rooms, and the Hurlstruk surname, and opportunities like his own witchchildren. And now he was opening one right here in Haggspit.

Mum was dabbing her eyes. ‘Happy Homes... Such a moving idea. And today, those lucky *lucky* little orphans will move in, and I will be there to see it!’

Just then her skychatter rang. Mum snatched it up. ‘Miranda,’ she said. ‘What news? What news?’

Mum is a businesswitch. Runs a magazine called *Hocus Pocus*. She’s rich, powerful, and successful, and Miranda

works for her. But whatever Miranda was telling her, Mum looked fed up.

'No,' Mum hissed. 'How did *Scoop!* find out, Miranda? How?'

Oh. Problems with *Scoop!* – again.

Scoop! is Mum's biggest rival. And right now, it's selling more copies than *Hocus Pocus*.

Mum was swirling round the kitchen – which is how Mum moves. She swirls. She strides. She marches. She hardly EVER just walks.

'Leave no stone unturned, Miranda!' Mum was saying. 'Send out more witchpaps. Dig, Miranda. Dig! This time it must be us – US – who gets the exclusive!'

Mum is *always* trying to get an exclusive. Which – I think – means finding out a bit of celebrity gossip before *Scoop!* does.

Now Mum threw herself down at the kitchen table. '*Scoop!* did it AGAIN,' she hissed. 'An exclusive! Eleven of the top-secret *Celebrity WitchWatch* names!'

Oh.

Maybe you know about *Celebrity WitchWatch.* It's on in lots of colonies. A witchscreen show – a very boring one, in my opinion – that happens once every year.

Twelve witchcelebs all living together in a big cave-style house. Filmed day and night for two weeks, and then, in week three, the public start voting witchcelebs off the show – biggest idiot first – until there's a winner.

The new series of *Celebrity WitchWatch* is on very soon, here in South Witchenland. And usually the names of the witchcelebs taking part are kept top secret right up to the first show – but not this time. This time it looked like *Scoop!* had the exclusive. All but one of the names…

And Mum was NOT happy.

'Flo,' she said. 'We must get that final name! An exclusive! Before *Scoop!* does!'

Then I heard wailing. Wailing from across the hallway. Loud wailing. Which could only be one thing.

Hetty.

My sister. A witchteen.

Sure enough, Hetty stomped into the kitchen, wailing.

‘It is over!’ she wailed. ‘I have to face it! My time as Hero Hetty, celebrity witchteen, is OVER!’

She flung herself on a breakfast stool. Sat there, gnashing her teeth at me and Mum. ‘For the last two weeks I have opened my curtains,’ she wailed, ‘and do you know how many witchpaps have been outside? Trying to get a picture of me? None! NONE!’

I had no idea why Hetty was so upset. Because witchpaps, lots of them, have been hiding in the bushes around our house for weeks. And witchpaps are annoying. They lurk – all with big witchpappers slung round their necks – all waiting, all trying to get pictures of Skritchetts. And they go snooping through our bins, and shouting through our letterbox. One even chased me down the road, shouting questions at me about ghouls.

Because although it was Grandma who first spotted the ghouls, it was all of us Skritchetts, working together, who stopped them. Including me and Hetty.

In fact, me and Hetty were headlines. Including this one: FEARLESS FLO AND HERO HETTY FOIL GHOUL ATTACK!

But that headline was wrong. Because maybe Hetty was a hero – but I was *not* fearless. I was full of fear. And I do NOT like being headlines, and I do NOT like witchpaps. So I was glad they were gone…

Unlike Hetty.

Hetty slumped, still gnashing her teeth and wailing. ‘Fame!’ she wailed. ‘I was *born* to be famous. My life is *pointless* if I am not famous! My life is OVER!’

Then her skychatter beeped, and she checked it. ‘Gigi,’ she said, eyes lighting up. ‘Gigi has *News*!’

Gigi… Hetty’s best friend. But whatever Gigi’s news was – it was NOT good news. Because Hetty took one look, and she started wailing again.

‘Calamity!’ she wailed. ‘Calamity! The government has CHANGED the law! Look! Look!’ Then she showed me the headline:

NOSE-JOB POTIONS BANNED FOR UNDER-19s

‘TOO MUCH PRESSURE ON YOUNG WITCHES TO LOOK GOOD,’ SAY GOVERNMENT.

Oh. A nose-job potion is, for some reason, Hetty’s dearest wish for her sixteenth birthday.

‘Nineteen,’ she wailed. ‘THAT’s how old I have to be – nineteen! But how can I wait? How can I? With a nose like this? THIS! So tiny, so neat, so straight! How *can* I?’

Smoke started pouring out of Hetty’s ears now, in big sudden bursts, which always happens when she’s upset.

‘Stupid government!’ she wailed. ‘Saying there’s too much pressure on young witches to look good. There’s no pressure. NONE! I just *need* a better nose! A truly witchy nose! One with lovely big lumps and bumps!’

Then Mum swirled over. ‘Hetty, shush, I have something for you,’ she said. Then she waved a ticket in Hetty’s face…

THE WARTS

ADMIT ONE

The Warts – the Witchscreen Arts awards ceremony. Where hundreds of celebrity stars all gather together, wearing posh robes, then eat some dinner, and give out lots of prizes.

And it was happening tonight.

Hetty stopped wailing. Snatched the ticket off Mum, stared – and started screeching. ‘It’s for the Pen,’ she screeched. ‘The *Pen*!’

The Pen is a closed-off bit at the front of the Warts. Full of witchteens, standing and screaming up at the stars on stage.

‘I used my contacts,’ beamed Mum. ‘Got you a ticket. So tonight, darling,’ she said, patting Hetty on the head, ‘you have a chance of finding a boyfriend. Possibly even a *celebrity* boyfriend!’

Then Mum swirled off.

Hetty's eyes were shining. Because a boyfriend is one of the things Hetty longs for most in life.

'This is it, Flo,' she gasped. 'My big chance. The Pen! A good place to find a boyfriend! An excellent place!'

Then her fingers went flying on her witchfixer. She gasped more. 'And maybe Mum is right. Maybe a *celebrity* boyfriend!' she said. 'Because Kakkle Kru are playing!'

I looked. Kakkle Kru. Witchboys – five of them – all with floppy hair and big mouths. Hetty jabbed a finger at one of them. 'Jekyll,' she screeched. 'Maybe it will be Jekyll.'

Then she started nodding confidently. 'Yes,' she said. 'Most probably it will be Jekyll. After all, we have a LOT in common. Because the witchpaps may be gone but I am *still* Hero Hetty – a celebrity myself. And us witchcelebs should stick together. We understand the *pressures* of fame!'

Then she charged out of the kitchen, across the hallway, and off to her bedroom. I heard the door slam shut – and then, the front doorbell rang.