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Opening extract from

Oliver Moon and the Spider Spell

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For Hannah Powell,
who had lots of great ideas for this story.

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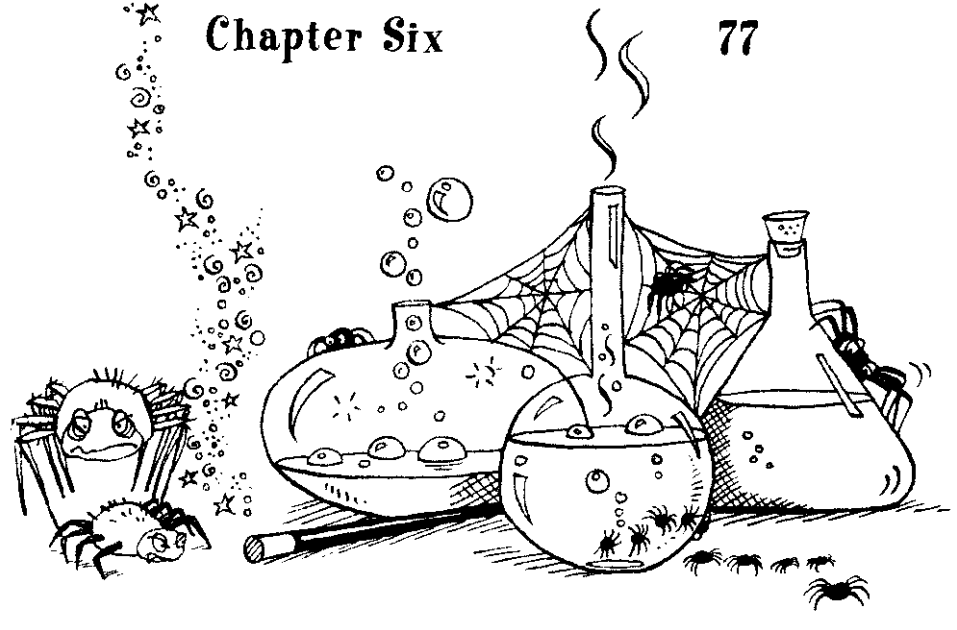
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Oliver Moon opened his eyes and sat up in his spiderweb hammock, yawning and stretching. Then he smiled. It was Saturday today – the best day of the week. No Magic School, no lessons, no bossy teachers...just lots of fun doing whatever he felt like.

Maybe he'd phone his best friend Jake

Frogfreckle and they'd play skull football in the park.

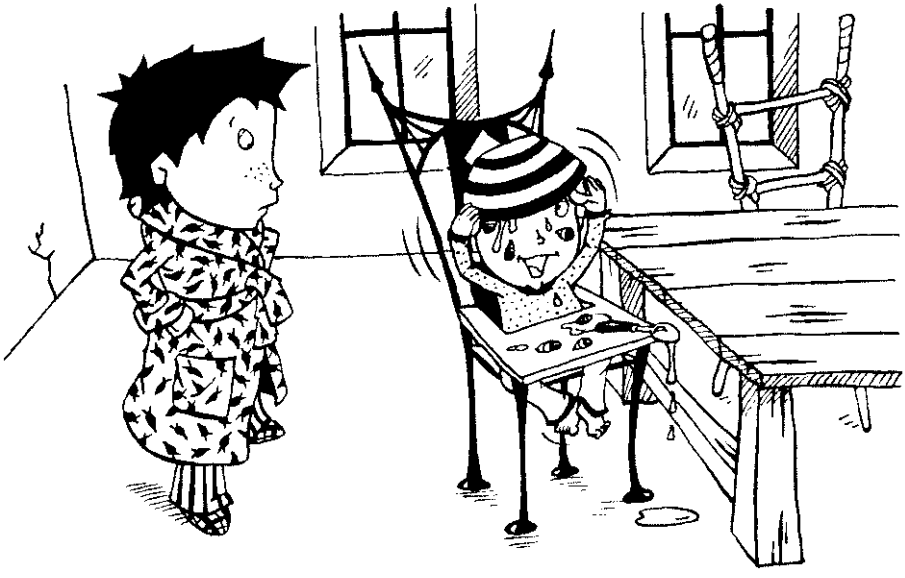
Maybe they'd go pond-dipping with their fishing nets. The last time they'd done that, Oliver had caught a real nettle-newt and seventeen sludge-snails.

Or maybe, if it was raining, Oliver could make cockroach cookies with his parents. Yum!

Oliver got out of bed, his mind spinning with ideas. Oh, how he loved Saturdays! He pulled on his dressing gown and ran downstairs for breakfast.

In the kitchen, he stopped and stared at the scene of chaos that greeted him. The Witch Baby, Oliver's little sister, had just put her bowl of beetle-crunch cereal on her head, and streams of bat milk

were running down her face and hair. "Hee hee! Look at me!" she chirruped cheerfully.



Meanwhile, Oliver's dad, Mr. Moon, was standing on a chair, wiping splattered baby food off the ceiling. "Oliver, thank goodness you're awake!" he cried. "Madam here is being very messy this morning, and—" He broke off

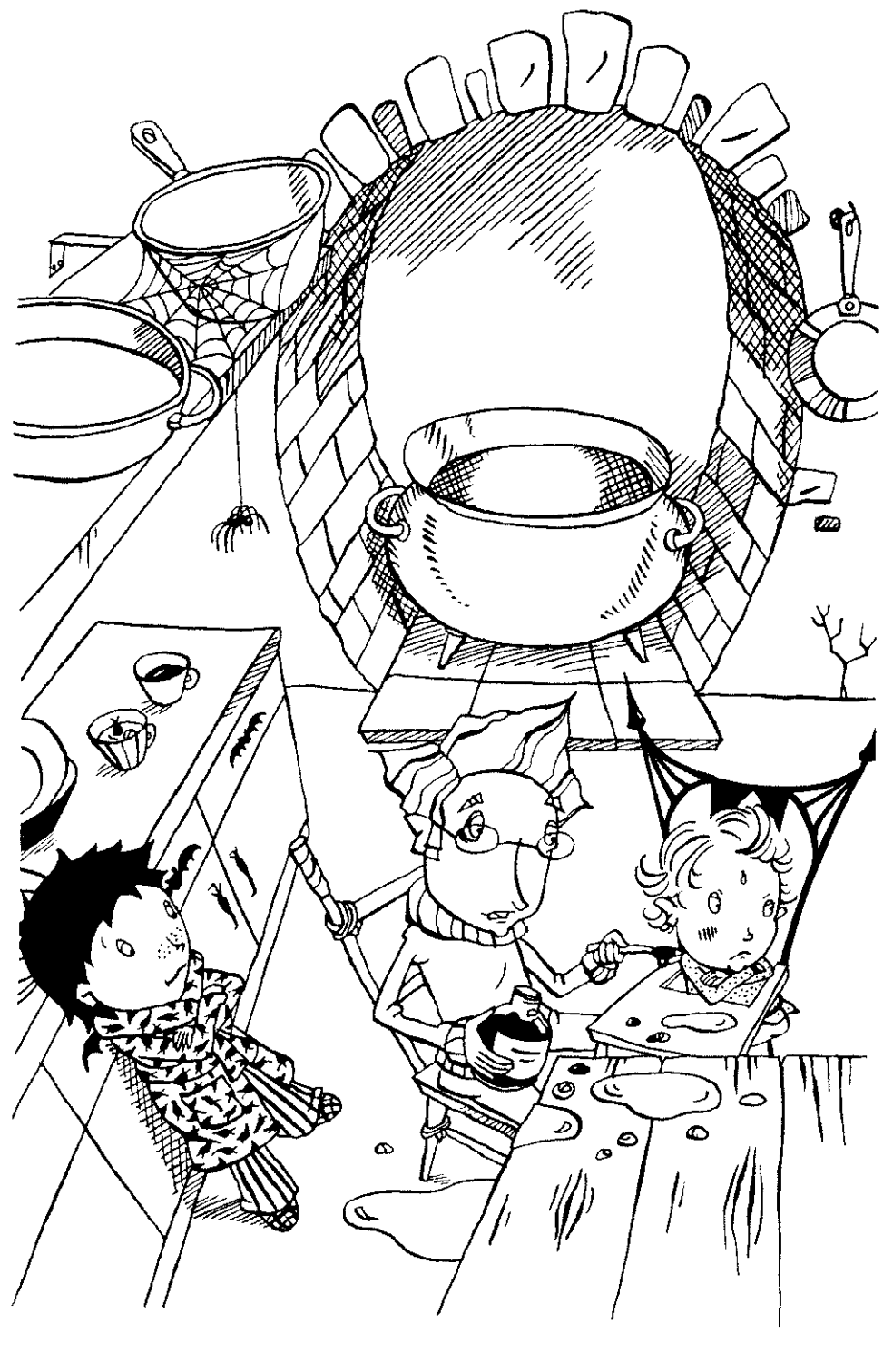
as he turned and caught sight of his daughter with cereal and milk all over her head. "What have you done *now*?" he said with a sigh.

"Me MORE messy!" the Witch Baby replied with a big grin.

Mr. Moon looked worn out. "Honestly, I don't know how your mum manages it," he said to Oliver. Then he grabbed a cloth and went over to the Witch Baby. "Let's clean you up," he said wearily. "Then it's time for your vitamins."

"YUCK!" said the Witch Baby as he wiped a wet flannel over her face.

Mr. Moon got a bottle of treacly-looking black liquid from the cupboard and poured some onto a spoon. "Open wide!" he told her.



The Witch Baby shook her head, her lips clamped together.

"I said—" Mr. Moon began, but Oliver interrupted.

"She won't have it like that," he whispered. "Mum sneaks it onto a biscuit, so that she doesn't know she's swallowing it." He looked around. "Where *is* Mum anyway?" he asked.

"She's not very well," Mr. Moon replied, opening the biscuit tin. "She's got a nasty case of the green flu, so—"

"Green flu?" Oliver echoed. "Is that where you turn green?"

Mr. Moon nodded. "Bright frog-green, yes," he said, dribbling the vitamin liquid onto a beetle biscuit. "Even her hair is green. And her teeth. She feels awful,

poor thing. She'll have to stay in bed until she's better. Green flu takes a while to recover from. Which means there are a few chores we'll have to share today, Oliver. And of course your sister needs looking after."



Oliver's heart sank. Chores? Looking after his sister? On a *Saturday*? "But..." he began.

"Who wants a yummy scrummy bicky, then?" Mr. Moon asked the Witch Baby, and she opened her mouth wide at once. "Brilliant, Ol," he said, as he posted the beetle biscuit in.

"Now, there's a list of chores here," he went on, passing a piece of paper over. "As you'll see, I've divided the work up between us, so..."

Oliver scanned through the list, tuning out his dad's voice as he did so.



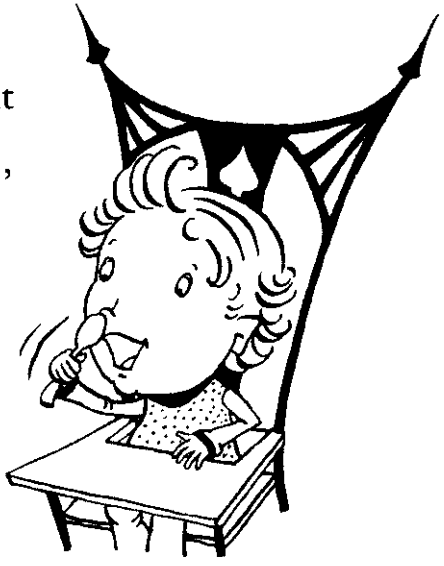
Putting away breakfast things – Oliver
Washing cloaks – Oliver
Recharging wands – Oliver
Looking after the Witch Baby – Oliver
Taking cauldron for servicing – Dad

Oliver gaped as he read. Chore after chore after chore – and nearly all with his name on them! Suddenly, his plans for pond-dipping and skull football seemed a million miles away. "That's not fair! I've got to do everything!" he complained.

Mr. Moon shrugged. "Ahh, but it'll take a while to get the cauldron serviced," he replied. "You know what they're like at Kwik-Fix. I could be there hours! And it must be done today, too. It's been booked in for ages, and if I cancel we'll have to

wait months before we can get it seen again."

"Well, can't you take the Witch Baby with you?" Oliver suggested.



They both turned to look at the Witch Baby, who was now trying to wedge her cereal spoon up her nose.

Mr. Moon yanked it out, causing her to break into howls of dismay.

"No, sorry," Mr. Moon told Oliver. "You know what she's like. She'll meddle with everything, and trash the place. It's just

not possible. She'll be much better off here with you. Now, I'd better get the cauldron and go on my way. I'll be as quick as I can."

"What – that's it? You're leaving me in charge, just like that?" Oliver asked.

"Juss like dat, juss like dat," the Witch Baby chanted. She had the annoying habit of copying everything Oliver and his parents said at the moment; it was her new game.

"I'll be back as soon as I can," Mr. Moon said. "Mum's upstairs if you really need her. Oh, and try to keep your sister quiet. You know we'll only have Mrs. B next door complaining if she makes a racket. The last thing we want is that old grouch – I mean—" He



clapped his hand over his mouth. "I didn't say that, all right?"

Oliver grinned, despite himself. He knew his dad wasn't very keen on Mrs. Beardbristle, the Moons' neighbour. Mind you, neither was Oliver. She was the most bad-tempered, mean old witch he'd ever met. "See you later, then, Dad," he said.

He sighed as he went to the kitchen to make some batwing toast. To think that, just a few minutes ago, he'd been looking forward to today. Now he was starting

to wish he was at school. Anything would be more exciting than chores and babysitting!

