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opening extract from

Flax the Feral Fairy

written by

Tiffany Mandrake

illustrated by

Martin Chatterton

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A Note from Tiffany Mandrake



Psst, this is me, Tiffany Mandrake, speaking to you from my cosy, creepy cottage in the grounds of Hags' Abademy. This is the story of one bad fairy, named Flax Lilykicker. I promised not to tell anyone about Flax . . . but you can keep a secret, can't you?*

Sure you can.

Remember, not a word to anyone!

**An abademy is a place where bad fairies go to study Badness.*

1. Hags in the Glen



Two water hags* sat on a rotten log in a Scottish glen. Their names were Maggie Nabbie and Auld Anni. Scottish water hags wear a lot of shawls and long ragged skirts, and they always have bare feet. Their hair is a bit green, like waterweed.

**Water hags are fairy breed. The fairy breed are not human. There are many different kinds.*

They are not ugly but there is something about them that makes humans want to leave in a hurry.

Maggie and Anni tossed pebbles into the loch, half-hoping to disturb a loch-monster. They were both bored and discontented.

Maggie had once been called the Hag o' Loch Dread. She had ducked folk in her loch. Anni o' the Glen had danced young men into a swamp on their wedding day. But that was long ago.

'The humans have no respect,' said Maggie, rattling her rabbit-bone necklace.

'No wonder,' said Anni, 'when young fairies flit about, doing sweet deeds. Who can respect that?'

'Even boggarts and trolls scarcely bother humans today.' Maggie sighed. 'Maybe we should give up on humans



completely and go to live somewhere else.'

'Speak for yourself, Hag!' said a cranky little voice from down near Maggie's knee. The creature was a critter-fae.* It looked like a tiny winged dog.

'You can't give up on humans. Humans *need* the fairy breed!' the dog-fae snapped. 'Without us, they'll grow sour and mean.

A critter-fae is an imp with animal DNA. They are fairy breed.

They'll get fat and bored, and even sillier than they are now.'

Auld Anni sniffed. 'If a human saw you, it would call for Animal Control.'

'You've gone *soft*,' said the dog-fae. 'No wonder humans have no respect! You hags should set an example to young bad fairies.'

'There *are* no young bad fairies,' said Maggie.

'Nonsense!' said the dog-fae. 'Your old friend Kirsty Breeks has discovered a young bad fairy at Miss Kisses' Academy of Sweetness for Little Fairies.'

'What's our Kirsty doing *there*?' asked Maggie.

'Her loch was drained and now she works as a cleaner,' said the dog-fae.

'As a *what*?' gasped Anni. 'How *could* she?'

The dog-fae ignored this. 'Miss Kisses wants to turn this young bad fairy into a good fairy,' it continued. 'You hags must prevent her. We of the critter-fae will help, but *you* must lead the way.'

Before the hags could answer, the dog-fae scampered into the air and buzzed away.

'Well!' said Maggie. 'Why must *we* do it?'

'Someone has to,' pointed out Anni. 'Otherwise, this young bad fairy will be lost to us.' A faint skirling of bagpipes echoed around the glen. 'Can we let that happen?'

Maggie tightened her shawl. For the first time in years her necklace rattled with glee. 'No, Auld Anni, we cannot.'

The two hags left at once for Miss Kisses' Academy of Sweetness.

2. Miss Kisses' Academy of Sweetness for Little Fairies



Miss Kisses' Academy of Sweetness for Little Fairies stands on a hillside, above a human village. It probably isn't far from where you live, but you won't see it.*

The Academy had thirteen pupils. On one particular morning, twelve of them

**The fairy breed use special spells, called DNMs—or Don't Notice Me—spells, to make sure you don't.*

were putting on pink frocks with extra frills.

'What's going on?' asked Flax, the thirteenth fairy. She had not been at Miss Kisses' Academy for long.

Catkin Summerday smiled. 'There's a party in the Pink Pavilion. Butterfly has earned her Seal of Sweetness.'

Flax put on her hacked-feather skirt with caterpillar stockings and her rat-heeled boots. She hoped there would be food at the party.

'Bluebirds bring invitations to our window,' cooed Catkin.*

Petal Cherrypainter opened the casement windows of Daisy Dorm. 'Here they come!' A flock of pale blue birds swept down. Each held a pink invitation in its beak.

**Bluebirds often fly messages for good fairies.*

Flax snatched at the fanciest one, but the bird dodged and presented the card to Butterfly Cloudsinger.

Eleven fairies squealed with pleasure. 'Butterfly has her Seal of Sweetness!' they said. 'We love you, Butterfly!'

Smiling, Butterfly flitted away.

Flax elbowed Opal Forestbloom aside and snatched at another invitation. Again, the bluebird avoided her and gave the card to Pearl Shellseeker.

Fairy after fairy received a pink card and danced away to join the party. Off went Bliss Dewsipper and Heather Braeside, then Canary Finchfeather, Opal, Petal, Catkin and all the rest.

Flax was left alone in Daisy Dorm. As the bluebirds flittered towards the trees she leaned out the window. 'Hey, birdbrains! Where's *my* invitation?'



As Flax yelled out, the two hags* approached the Academy of Sweetness and paused outside the window.

'Out of the way!' bawled Flax as a fat, grumpy bluebird swooped towards her.

'Lassie, do you know—' the hags began.

Flax picked up Butterfly's second-best slipper and threw it at Maggie's head. 'Go away, you clackety slopper!'

**Scottish water hags can travel anywhere they like.*

The bluebird dropped the envelope, and flew away with an angry twitter. 'Come back!' howled Flax. 'Give me that invitation, or you'll regret it!'

Auld Anni picked up the envelope and opened it. '*Miss Kisses informs Flax Lilykicker that she is not*—'

Flax threw a hairbrush at Anni. 'That's my invitation, you tatty old haggis!' She jumped out the window, snatched the card from Anni and raced away.

Auld Anni grinned. 'Flax Lilykicker must be the bad fairy Kirsty discovered.'

Maggie Nabbie rattled her rabbit-bone necklace. 'We must find Kirsty and learn more.' She sniffed, almost choking at the smell of pink bubblegum. But yet . . . she could also smell a trace of pond-slime.

'This way!' said Maggie. The hags followed their noses down to the cellar.

3. Hags in the Cellar



In the dank cellar under the Academy, Kirsty tended her loch-monster, Vetch. She had rescued him when her loch was drained. She chuckled with delight when the other hags arrived, then exchanged bony hugs with them. Auld Anni got misty-eyed.

'What *are* you doing out *here*?' asked Maggie.