

I
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.