

# WITCH HAZEL

AND THE

SCARLET SOCIETY



ASHLEY A. EPP

## CHAPTER 1

"Gran's going to kill you."

"Not if she doesn't find out."

Hazel Foxglove dashed around her grandmother's hat shop, lifting brightly-coloured fabrics, peeking into hatboxes, and sifting through drawers in search of long-forgotten coins and trinkets. She grinned, plunking a few scrounged-up coppers and a half-used spool of thread into her patchwork satchel.

"She'll ground you 'til the end of summer."

"Come on! Lighten up, Pekoe." Hazel hastily weaved around Pekoe the calico cat as he strutted carelessly into her path. "Gran just *had* to be out of town today of all days," Hazel sighed. "What punishment could be worse than having to manage the shop on my birthday?"

Pekoe hopped up onto the shop counter, landing as light as a feather on his delicate paws. He glared at his adoptive human sister, tail swaying and whiskers twitching. "Oh, I don't know," he mewled mockingly. "Maybe having to run the shop *alone* while you get to have fun on your fourteenth birthday without me!"

Hazel winced at the tone in Pekoe's voice. "Okay, okay." She slid an amber bracelet from a nearby display case over her wrist to complement her yellow-painted nails. "Thank you for doing me this huge favour." Hazel scratched the multicoloured fur on top of Pekoe's head, making him squirm away from her. "You're the best big brother ever!" she squealed.

Pekoe growled low in his throat, curling up on the counter. "Yeah, yeah, but you owe me big time for covering for you."

Hazel stepped up to the floor-length mirror at the front of the shop, smoothing out the creases in her floral-print skirt. "I'll get you the newest edition of Cuisine Magic from Mr. Awl," she said in a sing-song voice.

Pekoe's pointed ears perked right up. "If you do, tell Mr. Awl that Gran says 'hi.'" He snickered.

Hazel laughed with him. "You just want to set him up with Gran so you can get your books for free." She lifted herself up onto the counter next to Pekoe. "Do my hair for me?"

As Pekoe used levitation magic to twist sections of his sister's blue hair into a braid, Hazel spied their grandmother's finest handiwork at the top of the window display - a delicate orange beret adorned with the finest yellow lace and pearls from the distant Cerulean Kingdom.

The moment Pekoe finished tying a ribbon on the end of Hazel's braid, she sped towards the stepping stool next to the window display.

Pekoe scoffed. "What are you-?" His green eyes widened as Hazel scooted the stool up to the display and began reaching for the beret. "Hazel, don't! Gran will *actually* kill you if anything happens to that hat!"

"I'm just gonna wear it into town," she said, lifting the beret from its stand. "She'll never even know it was-"

A purple envelope slipped its way out of the hat, fluttering down to the floor, its silver stamp shimmering in the light. Hazel hopped down from the stool, stooping down to see the envelope. She froze as she read the elegant, swirling letters on the envelope: 'Hazel Foxglove of Fernwood.' Her breath caught as her eyes moved to the stamp at the corner, adorned with the silver emblem of Costellare Academy, the most esteemed magic school in the Three Kingdoms.

"What could Gran be hiding?" Pekoe asked teasingly, lifting the letter high above Hazel's head.

"It's from the academy," Hazel gasped, snatching the letter from Pekoe's magical grasp.

Pekoe cackled. "As if. Come on, who's it from?"

Pekoe's ears reeled back as Hazel suddenly tore open the letter. "What are you doing?!"

"It's written to me," Hazel said, tossing the torn envelope to the side. "And Gran thought she could hide it from me." She smiled bitterly as she unfolded the weightless, pearlescent parchment. Scrawled in silver ink, a lotus-like mandala stretched its petals to the edges of the paper.

"It's a sigil!" Pekoe squealed, nearly rolling off the counter.

"What's it do?" Hazel traced her finger along the mandala, its strokes of mirror-like ink shimmering in response.

Gravity flipped in reverse- or it seemed to as beads of molten silver rose from the parchment into the air. A cool, metallic scent enveloped Hazel and Pekoe as they watched in awe as each droplet of ink combined with the others to form a rippling mirror pool on the ceiling. A final droplet, larger than the rest, rose from the center of the sigil, colliding into the ceiling pool with a great splash that sent streams swirling around the room in a glistening dance. The ropes of ink combined and converged to paint a portrait of a young man that hung in the air, flowing and twinkling in the light. The portrait then spoke.

"Miss Hazel Foxglove." The portrait's gentle voice rang in the siblings' ears. "I, Evander Whimsy, Deputy Headmaster of the Costellare Academy of Magecraft, am delighted to invite you to attend our esteemed school, beginning this September."

Hazel couldn't keep herself from shaking. This invitation was something she had dreamed of since she was old enough to understand magic- but it also filled her with unease. She turned to Pekoe to see him gazing wistfully past the portrait of Professor Whimsy. Hazel knew attending the academy was Pekoe's dream too, and that his magic skills and deep love of learning made him just as deserving of this invitation, if not more deserving than her- but she also knew that the same unease that nipped at her thoughts also pestered Pekoe.

Professor Whimsy's projection continued. "Myself and my fellow professors here at the academy look forward to your attendance, thanks to the precedent set by your late sister."

A bell tinkled throughout the hat shop, and Hazel and Pekoe whipped their heads to the entryway.

“Iris Foxglove was truly one of the brightest mages to ever attend the academy. We hope you will accept our invitation to honour her memory and continue her legacy.” The portrait melted away, leaving no trace except for the letter still in Hazel’s grasp.

Hazel’s stomach dropped as she locked eyes with none other than her adoptive grandmother, Rose Foxglove, who had returned home early with a package in her arms and despair in her eyes.

## PLOT OUTLINE

TITLE:           Witch Hazel and the Scarlet Society

GENRE:          Fantasy and Mystery

TARGET AUDIENCE:       Children/Young Adults

BLURB:          Seven years ago, Iris Foxglove vanished without a trace from the halls of Costellare Academy of Magecraft. Now, a hidden letter tucked inside her grandmother's hat shop pulls her younger siblings, Hazel and Pekoe, into the same world of secrets she left behind.

For Hazel, stepping through the academy gates is more than just starting school - it's a chance to uncover what really happened to her sister. But Costellare is no ordinary academy. Beneath the spellbound towers and enchanted forest lies a history that's been carefully buried. Whispers speak of the Crimson Kingdom, a fallen empire whose royal bloodline vanished- just like Iris.

As Hazel and Pekoe navigate magic lessons, cursed classmates, and well-concealed legends, they form unlikely alliances with fellow misfits and rivals alike. The deeper they dig, the clearer it becomes: the Scarlet Society, a secretive group hiding in plain sight, may be guarding the truth behind Iris' disappearance- and the rise of something far more dangerous.

### PART ONE: THE ACADEMY (Chapters 1-10)

- Hazel and Pekoe begin lessons at Costellare Academy and make new friends named Canto and Ana.
- They get into some trouble and learn of a secret society in the school called the Scarlet Society, that continues to follow the teachings of the Crimson Kingdom's queen, a power-hungry tyrant whose kingdom was eradicated 13 years ago. The queen and the rest of the royal family were never confirmed to be dead- having disappeared without a trace.
- The four friends hatch a plan to infiltrate the Scarlet Society to gain more information about the Crimson Queen, and possibly about Iris' disappearance.
- While cleaning an old storage room as a punishment, the group finds a mysterious red crystal that glows- but strangely, only Hazel can see the light emanating from it.
- As the first weeks of school pass by, the group begins their effort. Canto and Ana team up to gather information about the Scarlet Society from other students, while Hazel and Pekoe try to gather information from Professors. Canto and Ana only hear about various over-the-top rumours, and Pekoe is told to keep his nose out of such matters by the professors.

- Hazel asks Ms. Cressida about the Scarlet Society during a tutoring session, expecting another warning to keep her nose out of things, which she does receive- but Ms. Cressida also entertains Hazel's question, hinting that the society is not just a rumour to scare young students.

#### PART TWO: SCARLET SECRETS (Chapters 11-20)

- The next week, Hazel asks more, feigning genuine interest in the teachings of the Crimson Queen, to which Ms. Cressida seems too knowledgeable about.
- Hazel tells her group about Ms. Cressida, and they come to the conclusion that Headmistress Veyne must be involved as well, because Ms. Cressida is her apprentice. They decide to mention the crystal to Ms. Cressida next time, to see if she knows anything about it.
- When Hazel mentions the glowing crystal to her tutor, Ms. Cressida is terrified. She tells Hazel to hide "the Oracle" and speak of it to no one. She tells her to stop asking about the Crimson Kingdom and the Scarlet Society for good, because the society cannot find out that she has found the the Oracle, or else Hazel- and the entire school- will be in grave danger.
- Come monday morning, Headmistress Veyne makes an announcement: Ms. Cressida has been suspended until further notice, and Headmistress Veyne herself will cover the position as professor of Talent Studies.

#### PART THREE: THE LOST GODDESS (Chapters 21-30)

- Hazel tells her group about what had happened during her meeting with Ms. Cressida, and they agree that her sudden suspension is suspicious, especially because she disappeared overnight without a trace- much like Iris did 7 years ago. They wonder if the two disappearances are related and what the true power of the crystal- or, "the Oracle"- might be.
- Talent Studies is very different with Headmisstress Veyne teaching. Everyone is afraid to raise their hands, let alone make eye contact with the headmistress. Strangely, her first lesson is on the rare talents bestowed by the Deities of the Three Kingdoms: the talent of healing, bestowed by the Goddess of the Mind, Aquaria- the talent of scrying, bestowed by the Goddess of the Afterlife, Mela- the talent of strength, bestowed by the God of Cultivation, Telluro- and the talent of creation, bestowed by the Goddess of the Forge, Hesta.
- After class, Hazel and her friends are stopped by Headmistress Veyne, who asks them to help the Events Committee with organizing the upcoming Harvest Ball, since they did so well organizing the storage room earlier in the term.
- Their suspicions of the Scarlet Society being involved are confirmed when Hazel and Ana return after meeting with the Events Committee to find their dorm ransacked, as if it had been searched top-to-bottom. Thankfully, Ana had hidden the crystal at the bottom of Onyx Lake as soon as Hazel mentioned the danger it could bring. A

mysterious note is on Hazel's bed. It states to meet at midnight during the Harvest Ball at the gate to Wisteria Wood, and says to bring the Oracle- alone.

#### PART FOUR: THE ORACLE (Chapter 31-40)

- Hazel and her friends return to the storage room hoping to find something- anything- about the Goddess of the Forge, Hesta, the patron deity of the Crimson Kingdom. But they have little luck.
- They continue to help with the preparations for the Harvest Ball, using that time to hide Ana's sigils of protection and sealing in the decorations to prepare in case of an attack of some kind.
- The day of the Harvest Ball, the friends decide to check the storage room one last time, and they find an unmarked notebook that they hadn't checked before, because it just looked like a student's lost notebook- until they see the name "Iris Foxglove" written on the inside of the cover. Iris' notebook holds various entries about magical artifacts- one being about the Oracle, a crystal rumoured to be made from the combined blood of the twin Goddesses, Aquaria and Mela. The notebook says the fabled artifact can answer nearly any question, but can only be used by individuals from blessed bloodlines. How Iris obtained this knowledge, they didn't know, but Hazel and Pekoe were glad to have their sister's help one last time.
- Only Hazel had seen the Oracle's glow- maybe she can use it. That night, before the ball, Ana goes to retrieve the Oracle from the lake, but is ambushed by hooded figures.
- Believing Ana to be busy retrieving the Oracle, the rest of the group carries on with their plan for Hazel's meeting with the Scarlet Society: Pekoe will use his brewing talent to create two invisibility potions so he and Canto can follow Hazel into the meeting and ensure everything goes well, Canto will use his transmutation talent to create a fake Oracle crystal, and Ana will use her sigil talent to create one-use teleportation sigils in case they need to make a quick escape.
- Hazel, Pekoe, and Canto are prepared, and they head to the Wisteria Wood gate with the fake Oracle. At first, everything goes as planned, until Hazel offers the hooded leader the false Oracle.
- The leader- who Hazel and her friends had believed would be Headmistress Veyne- reveals herself to be Ms. Cressida. The hooded figures behind her reveal that they are holding Ana captive, and that they already possess the true Oracle. If Hazel wants to save Ana, she must use the Oracle to answer the Scarlet Society's questions.
- Hazel holds the oracle crystal in her hands, and she asks the first two questions. Images flash in the crystal, and she describes them to Ms. Cressida. She then asks the third question: What is the key to resurrecting the Goddess of the Forge? Hazel pauses- the crystal does not show her any image- all it shows is her own reflection.
- Pekoe and Canto strike the hooded figures holding Ana captive, freeing her. Still being invisible, the hooded figures have difficulty fighting them off. Ana grabs Hazel in the



commotion, telling her to run to the ballroom- where they had set a trap of sigils for the Scarlet Society members. Ms. Cressida and the remaining members chase after them, right into the busy ballroom filled with students and professors dancing and socializing. In the chaos of the dancefloor, Hazel and Ana perform the sigil ritual they had practiced while setting up for the ball: a large sealing sigil capable of trapping a dozen people.

- The dance works, and their enemies are trapped. Ms. Cressida calls out to them that its too late for them- for the school and the remaining three kingdoms. The Crimson Queen lives, and her followers now know the key to the Hesta's resurrection. The members vanish, presumably having teleportation sigils more powerful than Ana's sealing sigil.
- Hazel and Ana stand alone at the center of the dancefloor, surrounded by confused students and staff. Canto and Pekoe, no longer invisible, rush to them, followed by Headmistress Veyne. After ensuring that everyone is alright, and that there are no remaining society members, the ball continues. The friends laugh and dance together, glad to have succeeded in thwarting the Scarlet Society, even if just temporarily.

Hazel and her friends!

