

Chapter 3

The Garden at Six Druid Lane

With the notion of this much more pleasant future, ElsBeth began to cheer up.

She turned down Druid Lane toward the rambling, old Victorian house that was home. And by the time she arrived at the front yard, she was smiling again and skipping along as she often did.

ElsBeth was most usually a cheerful witch.

And she soon found her grandmother out back in the herb garden.

ElsBeth's grandmother was a well-respected Cape Cod witch. Nevertheless, Hannah Goodspell was not a grand figure.

Plump, with fluffy grey hair pulled up into a bun and delicate wire-rimmed glasses, most people assumed the older witch was just another helpless, dear, sweet old lady. Hah!





Hannah in the Garden

ElsBeth, however, was well aware that Hannah Prudence Goodspell was not a witch to be trifled with.

ElsBeth was not really afraid of her grandmother. Truly, she loved her to pieces. But she did want her grandmother to always be proud of her.

The young witch hadn't quite figured out how to explain today's events at school in exactly the best light -- so that Grandmother would have the whole picture without ElsBeth looking bad, or worse still, childish.

ElsBeth did not wish to be viewed as childish. She knew she had important things she had to learn and to do in life -- if she could just figure out what those things were.

Her grandmother quickly solved the need for creating a suitable account. "Sylvanas says you got into a bit of bother at school today."

ElsBeth could not see her grandmother's face, as Hannah was bent over the troublesome catnip patch at that moment.

"He said something about arithmetic, and things being at 'sixes and sevens.'" Grandmother's ample figure began to shake. "How I love a good play on words!

"Oh, dear, I should explain. 'At sixes and sevens' is an expression from the old country, meaning that things are jumbled up and confused. Sylvanas told me all about it.

"Also, was there something about blind mice? Or was it 'blind' students seeing mice?"

Hannah's giggles could not be contained and she fell over flat -- right into the cabbages.

"Oh, my!" She popped back up, the cabbages no worse for wear.

"Well, ElsBeth, my dear, what do you have to say for yourself?" her grandmother asked.

"I don't know who is worse, that annoying Robert Hillman-Jones or that toad Ms. Finch."

ElsBeth couldn't hold her feelings in any longer. She kicked the ground as if it were one of her two enemies.

Then she began to smile again when she spied an enormous bullfrog.

He leapt up and landed on the garden stool, and uttered a disapproving "harrumph."

"Please don't insult the honor of my close relatives," he croaked in his deep, froggy voice. Toads may be a little slow, and sometimes lack a developed sense of humor. But I'm quite sure, in all my years, I've never known one to be cruel."

"Well, that's true enough," said ElsBeth. "But I did still want to turn Ms. Finch into a toad."

Both her grandmother and Bartholomew the frog looked at her disapprovingly.

ElsBeth knew that many centuries ago Bartholomew had been a handsome Native American prince named “He Who Beats Bears” (which is its own story, for another time). But he had made a powerful witch of his tribe terribly angry when he rejected her attentions.



Bartholomew Before He Was a Frog

The witch had cast a spell on him, and thus his greenness -- he'd been a frog ever since.

So this subject was not a laughing matter. ElsBeth had been quite insensitive to mention turning people into amphibians.

ElsBeth hung her head in shame. She had been carried away by her anger at school and had completely forgotten her manners.

"I'm so sorry, Bartholomew." Tears suddenly appeared when she realized what she had done.

Bartholomew said, "It's OK, little one. Actually, being a frog has its moments.

"I used to be extremely good looking as an Indian prince, but I was unbearably vain and empty-headed.

"A couple of centuries as a bullfrog have given me time to look at things differently.

"True, the first hundred years or so weren't so good. I was pretty upset and obsessed with thoughts of revenge. But the last century has been quite interesting.

"And my friendship with Hannah has been truly special."

At that, he smiled and hopped closer. Hannah bent down for a kiss. And for just a split second, ElsBeth saw the most handsome, tall, dark Native American brave where the bullfrog had been.

She blinked, and there was the familiar, old, green Bartholomew, sitting comfortably on the garden stool. ElsBeth shook her head.

HANNAH PRUDENCE GOODSPELL

Hannah Prudence Goodspell reflected that she and the bullfrog had indeed become dear friends.

The witch taught Bartholomew magical charms most mornings. And Bartholomew taught her native plant lore in the afternoons.

That subject contained some of the most important and necessary knowledge for a witch engaged in caring for her community.

The Goodspell witches had only come to the New World in the late 1600's. They had been well schooled for many centuries in the medicinal and magical uses of all European plants.

But the New World was different, and this knowledge had to be gained bit by bit.

It was certainly helpful to have the friendship of a former Native American prince, whose tribal knowledge dated back thousands of years, to gain an understanding of the local plant life and all its important uses.

Sylvanas, who had been missing during the earlier conversations, interrupted Hannah's pleasant remembrances.

The huge cat made a typically grand entrance, appearing out of thin air and landing solidly (as he was a little overweight) -- but with an impressive and dramatic pose -- right beside Bartholomew on the garden stool.



Sylvanas the Cat and Bartholomew the Frog

Hannah Goodspell looked into the cat's brilliant green eyes and knew he was up to something, once again.

"What is it, sir? You look like the cat that ate the cream."

Despite the trouble he frequently caused, Sylvanas never failed to be interesting -- for one thing, he was a terrible gossip.

He purred. "Yes. I've got a surprise lined up for that prune-faced teacher.

"I do believe the boys in the class will be unusually pleased tomorrow."

Ignoring all questions from ElsBeth, Bartholomew and Hannah, the cat would say no more about his plans.

He struck a new pose, looking like a statue of the sphinx, remaining silent and completely mysterious. (He loved being theatrical like this.)

Grandmother ended all continued pleading from ElsBeth and Bartholomew saying, "It is no use. He's made up his mind. Let's go in.

"I have an apple pie in the oven, which should be done now."

ElsBeth smiled.

"We have some tasty Cape Cod witch's stew to start. And to go with the apple pie, I made some beach plum ice cream for dessert."

They headed inside, except the frog, who could not eat that kind of food anymore -- much to his regret.