

Sample Translation
By Sarah Rimmington

pp. 6-9

1 The Girl with the Fire Extinguisher

Adelina Lighttower

Annoyingly, Aunt Corentine got it into her head yet again this morning that it would be a good idea to try and kill me. In my own best interests, of course. And in the best interests of the Lighttower family.

Her original plan was to tie me to a busy railway line, but my mother put a stop to that because she thought it was too dangerous.

“But that’s the whole point. Adelina has to be in a real panic. Her powers will only reveal themselves if she’s facing certain death. If she’s not, it won’t work.”

My aunt thought putting my life at risk at regular intervals was a good way of coaxing my magic out of me. So far she had sunk me into a bog, thrown me into the sea and left me out in a snowstorm. Barefoot.

My magic had not revealed itself yet, but I had proved remarkably inventive when it came to not dying. It was possible I had just been lucky, but I liked to think it was all down to my brilliant mind.

Now we were in the car, on the way to Howling Oak Park. I had to admit I felt uneasy, though I was grateful to have been spared the railway tracks. I clutched nervously at the hem of my skirt and looked into the darkness that stretched out in all directions around the car.

My mother drummed her fingers anxiously on the steering wheel, looking intently straight ahead. My aunt, who was in the passenger seat, sipped her peppermint tea. She was the only person I knew who took a china teacup with her when she left the house. It wasn’t that she was thinking of the environment. No. She thought china was classier than some disgusting paper cup. And as the aunt of the future Queen of the Witches, you had to maintain a certain standard. Yes. I was the next Queen of the Witches.

If I survived Corentine’s latest plan to kill me, that was. And if my powers finally revealed themselves. Two pretty big ifs, but I was working on cultivating a more positive mental attitude. “We’re nearly there,” Mum announced. She had offered to drive us, probably to be sure Aunt Corentine didn’t chain me to the railway line after all. “Do you really think this is a good idea?” “Of course. Why not?” Aunt Corentine took a slurp from her teacup. “Adelina is no normal child. She’s a Queen.”

The disapproval in her slurp was audible.

“Even Queens can lose it,” muttered my mother.

The last Queen had become known as Rita the Dragon, after she had tried to burn down London. But that was a long time ago and since then the throne had stood empty.

We stopped at a small parking area close to the sign showing the name of the park. Someone had fixed a smaller sign underneath, with “private property” scrawled on it.

Beyond a half-open gate, a narrow path wound through scraggy oak trees. There were no lamps. Not even the light of the moon could find its way in. It was as if the park was swallowing up all the light.

I sank back deeper into my seat, my heart pounding.

“Are you ready, Adel?” asked my mother. She turned around and gave me an encouraging smile.

“Don’t worry. You can do it.”

“She’d better. The other times were extremely disappointing,” my aunt said sharply from the passenger seat.

“Corentine! That’s not helpful.”

“But it’s true. The Witches are losing their belief in the prophecy, and their respect for us. Frida Salem didn’t even say hello to me yesterday.”

“Frida Salem is over ninety and half blind...”

“They don’t take us seriously any more. Even the Alchemists are laughing at us. Adelina must take up her role as saviour, or we’ll lose the battle!”

“We already lost. Three hundred and fifty years ago...”

Three hundred and fifty years ago, Rita the Dragon had had a very bad day. And after she had set fire to London, the Alchemists decided that Witches were too dangerous to be allowed to live. The Head Alchemist, from the House of Blackheart – a name that struck fear into the heart of all Witches – invented the ‘curse’, an elixir that blocked Witch magic.

They mixed it into the drinking water of all the cities in England and very soon the majority of the population had lost their magic. By the time people realised what was going on, it was too late. The Witch People no longer existed and the Alchemists, self-proclaimed protectors of humanity, reigned England.

Until the day of my birth.

A prophecy had predicted that a Queen would come who would break the curse and ascend to the Throne of the Witches again.

When the hospital I had just been born in was struck six times by lightning, most Witches were in no doubt that I was the Queen in question.

Unfortunately despite the lightning, my powers had not yet revealed themselves. And prophecies could be terribly vague. Even if I was unquestionably the saviour, the prophecy did not say *when* my hour of glory would come. I hoped it would not take sixty years to come true.

[...]

7 Blood Never Lies

Adelina Lighttower

[...]

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“I wish to ask you to drink the blood of my niece,” my aunt went on. I had to get a grip on myself to make sure I didn’t throw up again.

Elves drank blood, a detail most books failed to mention. They didn’t feed on it like vampires. It was more like an eccentric hobby; they could read certain things from it.

“Is she pregnant?” Sybille eyed us curiously. “Do you want to know if it will be a boy or a girl?”

“I’m not pregnant,” I protested.

“My niece’s powers have not yet revealed themselves.”

“That’s not surprising. The Alchemists did a good job of it with their curse. No Witch has been able to overcome the potion for generations.”

“Yes, I know, but my niece could change all that. She’s supposed to be the Chosen One. Really.” Sybille clapped a hand to her mouth and gave a squeal. “The new Queen?”

“You’ve heard of the prophecy?”

“Yes, but I should warn you, prophecies are nasty little beasts that never mean what people think they mean. In the end everything gets so twisted, you’d have been better off without one.”

“You may be right. Because contrary to the prophecy, Adelina has not developed any magic. Worse than that, the Alchemists tested her with curse leeches and now they’re claiming she’s just a human. Without a single drop of magic in her blood.”

“Really?” Sybille regarded me with a touch more interest.

“I like humans.”

“We don’t. That’s why we need a second opinion.”

“Curse leeches are very reliable. They don’t make mistakes.”

“Then please, help us understand how it could have happened,” my aunt entreated. She stretched out her arm and handed Sybille a small velvet bag. “Crystals that have been in our possession for generations. They help you charm the spirits of the air,” she added, by way of explanation.

“And they work?” the elf asked.

“Well, we Witches can’t access the spirits because of the curse, but ...”

“So they don’t work.” Sybille gave the little bag back to Corentine, looking bored. “Sorry, but it seems you’ve been palmed off with some worthless tat.”

“Our crystals are not ta ...” Aunt Corentine stopped mid-sentence and made an effort to be civil.

“How can we pay you, then?”

“Might you need some clothes?” I asked.

“Clothes?” Sybille looked at me irritably.

“You’re naked,” I explained. Well, someone had to say it!

“Oh.” She looked down at herself. “Why are you only just telling me now?”

“I have a hat I can give you,” I offered generously. My aunt threw me a furious glance.

“No, I’d rather have your shoes.” Sybille pointed at my new sneakers, her eyes wide.

“No way!”

“Adel! Give them to her.”

“It’s so unfair.” First my over-the-knee boots and now my trainers. I took them off and passed them to the elf, who seized on them as if they were treasure.

“And now?” I asked. “I’m not going to let her bite me. Just to be clear.”

“There’s no need for that these days.” My aunt pulled a case from her handbag, which she opened and spread out on a table. It contained antiseptic, a needle and a test tube. Everything you needed to take blood.

“Sit down.” She pointed to a chair. Grudgingly, I obeyed, rolling up the sleeve of my blouse. As my aunt inserted the needle, I clasped my free hand around my lapis lazuli. I watched the blood gushing from my vein into the test tube. It looked completely normal. Neither magic nor the curse could be seen with the naked eye.

“Is that all?” Sybille asked, still clutching my sneakers.

“Not quite, honoured elf.” My aunt fished two more tubes from the case. One of them was labelled ‘Erona Lighttower’ and the other ‘Corentine Lighttower’. “We ask that you drink from all of them. Just to be on the safe side.”

“If a job’s worth doing, it’s worth doing well.” Sybille put the first tube of blood to her lips and took a mouthful. She closed her eyes, rolling the liquid around her mouth and then swallowing a few gulps, as if she were at a wine tasting.

“Well?” asked my aunt, her fingers drumming impatiently on the edge of the table.

“The blood of a Witch,” she said. “I taste powerful, sparkling storm magic, but also the bitter flavour of the curse. It burns and scratches the tongue like acid.”

She staggered over to a washbasin and spat out the rest. “That curse tastes truly disgusting,” she announced.

“Did you taste anything else in my sister’s blood?”

“Well, she’s got a slight iron deficiency.”

The elf went reluctantly over to my aunt’s tube, pulled a face and placed it to her lips. Soon she was leaning over the sink again, gasping and complaining about the curse.

“Another Storm Witch. Cursed. This Witch is closely related to the first Witch.”

My tube was next. My heart was racing, and I was clutching the gemstone so tightly the knuckles on my hand were sticking out.

A nauseated expression on her face, Sybille took a mouthful. This time she didn’t rush over to the sink. Quite the opposite. She almost looked like she was enjoying it. She even took another sip.

“Ooooh, I taste sweet pheromones. Have you been on a date?”

All of a sudden I thought of dark blue eyes, curved cheekbones, full lips. “Me? No!”

Curse and confound it!

The last thing I needed was for Corentine to suspect I was attracted to Tristan Blackheart.

My aunt looked at me through narrowed eyes, and I tried to put on as innocent an air as possible.

“Adel, I don’t think you’re taking this seriously enough.”

“I haven’t been on a date,” I protested.

“Sybille is highly reliable ...”

“The only males I’ve had anything to do with are the guys in the park and the Alchemists. And all of them wanted me dead, one way or another. When would I have time to go on a date?” I turned to the elf. “What else do you see?”

She took another sip. And froze. Her eyes turned as round as plates. Then she whipped her head around and looked at me, as if seeing me for the first time.

“You ...” She ran her tongue over her lips. “You are ...”

“The Chosen One?” I prompted.

She shook her head. “No ...”

“The Queen of the Witches?”

“No. Not the Chosen One. Not a Witch. No magic at all ... you are a human.”

My heart sank. Now my last hope had been dashed too, because of another mistake. “Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

“But my mother’s a Witch ...”

“I don’t know who your mother is, but you’re not related to the people who gave the previous samples.”

“What?”

Corentine shook her head. “Of course we are. My sister is her mother.”

“She definitely isn’t,” replied Sybille.

My head felt like an empty shell. I staggered backwards, bumping into the table in the middle of the room. My body deflated like a balloon that had had all the air let out of it.

“She’s a human?” my aunt probed.

“Yes.” The elf nodded.

“Not a single drop of Witch blood?”

“Not one.”

“Not a Lighttower?”

“Correct.”

Aunt Corentine gave a loud groan. “All these years ...” she mumbled, pulling at her hair. “All these years, I was training the wrong one.”

“What do you mean, the wrong one?” I was going alternately hot and cold. I must be having a nightmare.

“Weren’t you listening, Adel? It all makes sense now.”

It didn’t make any sense at all.

Corentine massaged her temples. “There can only be one explanation. You must have been switched.”

My thoughts were whirling so fast I felt dizzy. “Switched?”

She was staring at me. “It’s the only possibility. The only explanation for this chaos. Someone switched you and fobbed us off with the wrong brat. We’ve been believing in the wrong one all these years. How humiliating!”

My legs felt wobbly.

“As I said,” Sybille giggled. “Prophecies are nasty little beasts. They never do what you expect. And just when you think you’ve finally understood them, they change the rules.”

[...]

10 In the Eye of the Storm

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Echoline Everglade

“Quick, Willi. Show the Ghost-Seer how to get out of here,” whispered Lilli, shuffling with deliberate slowness towards the door.

Willi led me through the back door to a greenhouse as the Alchemists elbowed their way into the house.

“*Better not touch anything in here,*” he warned, pointing at the flowers. “*Good luck!*”

“Thanks!” I passed through the glasshouse. It was filled with plants that all looked highly poisonous.

Outside in the grass, Mischief was waiting, his tummy as round as a ball.

“There you are!” I grumbled. “I’ve been almost poisoned, beaten with a broomstick and arrested. But I’m glad you’re enjoying yourself.”

Mischief yawned, as if to say I was exaggerating wildly.

“I’m serious. I had the poisoned tea at my lips.”

Raised voices were coming from the Nightshade house. I lost no time and climbed over the fence. Then I ran until I was out of breath ... So, not very far.

My sides began to burn after just a few metres, my lungs did too, and I felt my strength draining away.

On this point the Browns were completely right. I could do with being a bit fitter.

As I passed the bus stop, I risked a glance over my shoulder and was relieved to see no-one was following me.

So I dropped down onto the bench to get my breath back. I had scarcely been sitting there five

seconds when Mischief nipped me on the foot.

“What...?” I broke off mid-sentence, my heart stopping in shock.

A guy in a black uniform, probably a couple of years older than me, came into the shelter.

Something about his eyes wasn't right. They were yellow, like a snake's.

At the same time, a girl came around the other corner, blocking my path in both directions.

“Who do we have here, then?” asked Snake Eyes, looking me up and down. “Do you live round here? I've never seen you before.”

“No. It's my first time.”

“Why are you here?” The question shot out like it had been fired from a pistol.

“Buying tea. I heard they had good stuff here.”

The boy frowned. “You never hear anything good about this place. That's why they never get any visitors.”

No wonder, when you immediately get trailed by the self-proclaimed community police ...

“Well, I think it looks very nice.”

Neither of them reacted. “Do you have relatives here? Friends?”

“No.” I wasn't sure where this line of questioning was leading.

“Does that racoon belong to you?”

“You could say that. He's a friend of mine.”

The Alchemists looked at each other meaningfully. “Do you realise how suspicious it makes you look?”

“Suspicious?”

“You know how you can tell if someone's a Wild Witch? One of the signs is animal companions.”

“A witch?” A nervous laugh escaped me. “There's no such thing.”

The boy's eyes narrowed.

“Is it because of the name of the town?” I chatted on. “Little Witchington? You're pretending to be witches to get tourists to come here.”

The girl gasped, shocked. “We are certainly not Witches.”

“So why does your friend have yellow snake eyes?”

“Those are basilisk lenses, made from the cornea of a serpent monster.”

Better and better. First witches, then basilisks? If I told Ms Murphy about this, she'd think I actually had gone crazy this time.

“What should we do with her, Gerrit?” whispered the girl uncertainly.

“We'll test her. If she really is a human, we'll use Forget-Me-Not spray on her and put her on the next bus out.”

Forget-Me-Not spray?

That must be it! The atomiser thing that had made Ms Murphy forget everything. My heart rate sped up. There was no way I could let them wipe what I had found out in the last few hours.

The boy turned to his partner. “Pass me a leech.”

The girl opened a container with holes in it that was fastened to her belt and pulled something out. It looked like a shiny black slug with several suckers on the underside.

“Awww! Who are you then?” I cried delightedly. I loved animals, whether they were small or large, poisonous or cuddly.

Unfortunately so did Mischief ...

Just as the Alchemists were about to place the little slug on my arm, Mischief sprang onto the bench and snapped it up. He swallowed it in one rapid motion.

“What the...?” Outraged, the Alchemists stared at the racoon, who belched happily. “I’m sorry. I hope you’re not the kind of people who think of pets as members of your family.” Clearly they were, because they were taking the matter very personally. The boy grabbed Mischief by the scruff of the neck and held the squirming raccoon, while the girl took a bag from her belt. She shook it, and it grew to five times the size. The boy stuffed Mischief unceremoniously into it and pulled the fastening tight.

“Animal secured.”

“Hey! What are you doing? Let him go!” I tried to get the sack off them, but the boy barred my way.

“Your companion animal resisted an alchemical procedure and stole alchemical property.”

“He ate a slug.”

“A curse leech that was the property of the Order of the Alchemists.”

“But he didn’t mean any harm. He’s just very greedy.”

“He’s coming with us.”

“He certainly is not.” I clenched my fists, ready to fight for Mischief’s freedom. In the same instant, the boy placed a hand under my chin and looked deep into my eyes. “And you’re coming too.”

I wanted to push his hand away, but my arms hung uselessly by my sides. His eyes ... they were so ... *yellow!*

Yellow like corn on the cob. Yellow like a rubber duck. Yellow like a New York taxi. Yellow like ...

“We’re going to test you now. Sit down and stop struggling.” His voice was far away and yet it took hold of my whole mind. Just like his eyes.

Yellow like butter. Yellow like a canary. Yellow like ...

I sank back onto the bench. My body felt so heavy. I fought the weariness in my limbs and the sudden cotton-wool feeling in my head. “Stop struggling.”

I nodded.

As if in a trance, I watched as they placed another slug on my arm. Its suckers felt for my skin.

Yellow like a banana. Yellow like lemon cake. Yellow like ...

Suddenly the place where the little animal was sitting began to burn. “Ow!” The yellowness in my head cleared a little. I blinked and stared furiously at the animal, which was losing its black colour and turning violet, from the head downwards.

“By the Curse!” the boy exclaimed. In that same instant the slug spasmed and dropped off my arm, landing lifelessly on the ground.

“I’m sorry. Have I killed another of your pets?” I asked woozily.

Yellow like a mango smoothie ...

“It can’t be true.” The two of them bent over the dead slug. “Her blood killed it. That means ...”

The Alchemists stared at each other. Then the boy reached for his radio. “Hello? HQ? Gerrit Javelin here. We need reinforcements. Code: Wild Witch.”

Yellow like a ... Wild Witch?

I blinked.

“Apparently Stage Three. Her blood killed the curse leech.”

A witch ...

“We’ll keep her contained until reinforcements arrive.”

Reinforcements ...

Mischief barked in panic, drawing my attention. He was trying in vain to break free, but the fabric of the sack would not give way.

I shook my head until every last trace of yellow was gone. The heaviness left my mind and I felt my strength returning.

Let's go, Echoline! Get moving.

I staggered forwards, gasping, but my legs tangled in each other and my knees hit the grey asphalt.

“Look out! She’s coming round,” warned the girl.

The boy seized my chin again, forcing me to look into his eyes.

[...]

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A tingling feeling shot all the way to my fingertips, and I felt the air around me thickening and becoming electrically charged. Shudders ran through my body like lightning. A cold wind tugged at my hair.

“What’s that?” the boy shouted in horror, jumping back as if I had burned him.

“Magic,” gasped the girl, fumbling at her belt.

“She’s going to use her magic.”

Magic?

Was that what my so-called problems with aggression were really all about?

“Stop her.” They both leapt forward, but this time I didn’t try to push the pressure back down. It erupted from me like a long-awaited sneeze. A squall of wind pinned the two Alchemists against the bus shelter, but that wasn’t all.

An icy wind arose out of nowhere. It whipped through the street and tore at the trees. Dustbins and their contents whirled through the air.

I looked up at the sky, which moments before had been a clear, bright blue. Thick clouds were now sliding over the sun. Heavy drops of rain were hammering down onto the asphalt. They washed away all colour and plunged the world into greyness. A deep thunder rumbled in the distance, like a premonition of doom.

“We have to stop her!” shouted the girl into the storm. She drew a dagger and pointed it at me, but it was instantly ripped out of her hand. “Gerrit! Quick!”

One second later she too was seized by a gust, which tumbled her down the street. I saw her grabbing desperately at a lamppost, trying to catch hold of it.

“Just you wait!” The boy with the snake eyes dived towards me, but I threw my arm upward. The storm immediately dragged him away. He rolled across the street, his hands raised protectively to his head, and the storm raged higher.

It was more than a spectacular wonder of nature. It was the external expression of my innermost being. All my fear, all my panic, roaring around me.

The wind howled like a wild animal, ripping up everything in its path. I felt the houses trembling and cracking, as if they might break apart at any moment. Roof tiles flew through the air, trees were dragged groaning out of the ground. Suddenly I felt like a tiny speck in a huge maelstrom. Mischief gave a frightened yowl. I snatched up the sack and ripped it open. The relieved raccoon sprang into my arms and pressed his face against mine.

“It’s all right.” I scratched behind his ears reassuringly. “I won’t let you go, do you hear?”

Although outside the bus stop the world seemed to be ending, inside it was utterly calm. I lifted my head and saw that the sky above me was still blue, a minute patch of blue in a churning sea of cloud. We were in the eye of the storm.

A storm I had summoned.

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13 The Reluctant Sisters

Adelina Lighttower

I stopped in the doorway, staring at the dining table where my mother and Corentine were sitting. But they were not alone. With them was a girl, on whom all their attention was focused. They were so transfixed they hadn't even noticed me come in.

That must be her.

The real Chosen One.

What else would make Corentine's eyes light up like that? One thing was certain. It couldn't be the girl's dress sense.

She was wearing green tights, battered sneakers and a jumper full of holes. Her hair was a nightmare of blue and pink strands and it was sticking out in all directions.

Like Mum when she gets worked up. The thought shot across my mind, but I suppressed it immediately.

She might look like a Lighttower, but she was nothing like I had pictured the real Chosen One and future Queen of the Coven. Next to me she was clearly a downgrade. But there was no doubt she was the Storm Witch that had just called up the greatest thunderstorm of the last few years. I had seen with my own eyes what she could do, and it had floored me.

“It's like a dream,” said the girl.

“I always wanted to find a family.”

“And now we've found each other,” sobbed Mum – *my Mum* – and rose to give the girl a hug. They stood close, holding each other.

I couldn't bear it. So I slipped back into the hallway, where I leaned against the wall, breathing heavily. My chest tightened and I tasted bitterness on my tongue.

What I really wanted to do was jump between them and drag this girl out of our house by her coloured hair. She was sitting in my place and hugging my Mum!

How could I not hate her?

“What you did exceeded all our expectations,” said Aunt Corentine. “We always knew the Lighttower family Storm Witches were powerful, but that ... we could never in our wildest dreams have imagined that. You should have seen it, Erona. The Alchemists will never laugh at our prophecy again.”

“But I didn't mean to do any of it,” said the girl sheepishly. “I was just scared and ... I thought it was the only way to escape.”

“You're safe now,” my mother reassured her.

“Yes. We will teach you and then no-one will be able to stop you, ever again. You are the one who was foretold, the one we have waited three hundred years for, and I cannot wait to show the other families what you are capable of.”

I had never heard my aunt sound so ecstatic. Which wasn't all that surprising; what did startle me, though, was the girl's reaction. She seemed, to put it mildly, less than enthusiastic about replacing me.

“I'd rather forget about the storm thing. It was ... really awful.”

Great ... The Chosen One was a sissy.

“Awful? It was unbelievable! No-one will doubt that you ...”

My mother interrupted Corentine. “One thing at a time. Let her settle in first. It’s a lot to take in.”

I couldn’t take it any longer. I was just about to slink out of the house again when out of the corner of my eye, I saw a movement. Bristling in front of me was the dirtiest, most mangy-looking cat I had ever seen. It raised its tail, snarling.

I went to chase it away, but it snapped at me. Furious, I went around it and as I did so, I stumbled into the dining room.

“Adelina, where did you come from?” my aunt demanded.

“There’s a rabid cat out there!”

“It’s a raccoon.”

“That’s a raccoon?” I stared dumbfounded at the dirty ball of fur and teeth, and yes – you could just make out stripes under the encrusted mud.

“How could we ever think she was a Witch, Erona?” sighed my aunt. “She has no familiar, she doesn’t even like animals and she can’t sense when she’s in the presence of magic.”

“Neither can you, or you wouldn’t have thought I was the Chosen One for so long.”

“I won’t be making that mistake again.”

“That’s enough.” My mother shot Corentine a warning look. Then she turned to me. “Adel. Why don’t you sit with us and get to know your sister Echoline?”

“*Sister?*” all three of us asked. But while Corentine and I sounded incredulous, Echoline seemed over the moon.