

# *Haddam Enchantments*

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North American

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When witchcraft went rampant through New England the Connecticut town of Haddam owned its share of ugly old women, whom it tried to reform by lectures and ducking, instead of killing. It was averred that Goody So-and-So had a black cat for a familiar, that Dame Thus-and-Thus rode on a broomstick on stormy nights and screeched and gibbered down the farm-house chimneys, and there were dances of old crones at Devils' Hop Yard, Witch Woods, Witch Meadows, Giant's Chair, Devil's Footprint, and Dragon's Rock. Farmers were especially fearful of a bent old hag in a red hood, who seldom appeared before dusk, but who was apt to be found crouched on their door-steps if they reached home late, her mole-covered cheeks wrinkled with a grin, two yellow fangs projecting between her lips, and a light shining from her eyes that numbed all on whom she looked. On stormy nights she would drum and rattle at windows, and by firelight and candle-light her face was seen peering through the panes.

At Chapman Falls, where the attrition of a stream had worn pot-holes in the rocks, there were meetings of Haddam witches, to the number of a dozen. They brewed poisons in those holes, cast spells, and talked in harsh tongues with the arch fiend, who sat on the brink of the ravine with his tail laid against his shoulder, like a sceptre, and a red glow emanating from his body.

In Devils' Hop Yard was a massive oak that never bears leaves or acorns, for it has been enchanted since the

time that one of the witches, in the form of a crow, perched on the topmost branch, looked to the four points of the compass, and flew away. That night the leaves fell off, the twigs shrivelled, sap ceased to run, and moss began to beard its skeleton limbs.

The appearance of witches in the guise of birds was no unusual thing, indeed, and a farmer named Blakesley shot one of them in that form. He was hunting in a meadow when a rush of wings was heard and he saw pass overhead a bird with long neck, blue feathers, and feet like scrawny hands. It uttered a cry so weird, so shrill, so like mocking laughter that it made him shudder. This bird alighted on a dead tree and he shot at it. With another laughing yell it circled around his head. Three times he fired with the same result. Then he resolved to see if it were uncanny, for nothing evil can withstand silver—except Congress. Having no bullets of that metal he cut two silver buttons from his shirt and rammed them home with a piece of cloth and a prayer. This time the bird screamed in terror, and tried, but vainly, to rise from the limb. He fired. The creature dropped, with a button in its body, and fell on its right side. At that moment an old woman living in a cabin five miles distant arose from her spinning-wheel, gasped, and fell on her right side-dead.

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