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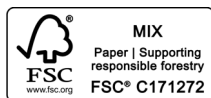
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# Keedie

ELLE MCNICOLL

**KO**  
KNIGHTS OF

*To Eishar: the best editor and Lauren: the greatest agent.*

*To Lola, Georgia and Caitlin.*

*My grandmother, who faced the worst witch-hunters  
in history and survived.*

*Once again, to the children with happy, flapping hands.*

# Chapter One

Welcome to Juniper.

We are a small, Scottish town and we have centuries of history.

We also have bullies.

The bullies are just ahead by the river. There are three that I can see. It's easy enough to watch them from my spot in the tree. High up, disguised in the dying green of autumn. Leaves fall to the ground, easily dislodged and cast down. Ready to die.

I'm not going to fall.

I've got a good grip on the tree branch but I need two hands to operate the water gun. It's a large, heavy thing. The Al Capone of plastic pistols. It's full of ice cold water and I've been waiting. Their laughter is forced and eerily high; they are all pretenders. It makes my hands tighten and my focus laser in.

I don't like pretenders. Plus, they were rude to Bonnie.

We're in the woods by the Water of Leith, hidden in shade and silence but only a short walk from the bustling village of Juniper. Everyone in Juniper is preparing for the Founders Fair, which is why the shopkeeper was too distracted by other customers to worry about me purchasing his largest water gun.

I take aim and, just as Spence McLauchlan barks out another obnoxious laugh, I fire.

The cold liquid hits him square in the face, causing him to choke on the laugh. He yelps in confusion, while the rest of his little gang look up to the trees. They spot me instantly.

"Darrow?" Spence's best friend Jack squints up at me in surprise. I don't recognise the other boy with them.

Still. I hate a follower. So, I blast him next.

Then, they are all are soaked in freezing cold water. They sputter and gasp, but I do not relent.

"Where is the need?" shrieks Spence, throwing his arms up to protect himself.

I don't answer. I leap from the tree, landing with ease upon the woodland path. For a moment, it seems that the earth moves beneath me. I stare them down

and it feels like part of a Western movie. I always liked those scenes. When the gunslinger rides into town one last time to seek revenge. Bonnie said it was three of them who jumped out at her in the market, deliberately trying to make her scream. I don't know if New Guy to Juniper was one of the three, but he can still learn a lesson today regardless.

“You go near Bonnie again,” I say calmly, “and nowhere in this village is safe for you.”

The water gun is empty, so I dump it at their feet. I turn to leave, heading towards the small uphill path that leads back to the main village. Back to Juniper. The woods always feel like an in-between, where more things are possible.

Not a lot of things feel possible in Juniper.

“Who is that?” I hear the unknown boy say to Jack, as Spence kicks the plastic toy with his shoe.

“Call me Keedie,” I shout over my shoulder, not looking back and speaking before they can. “I don't like bullies.”