



Witch-in- Training

Charming
or
What?

Maeve Friel

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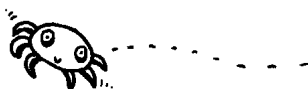
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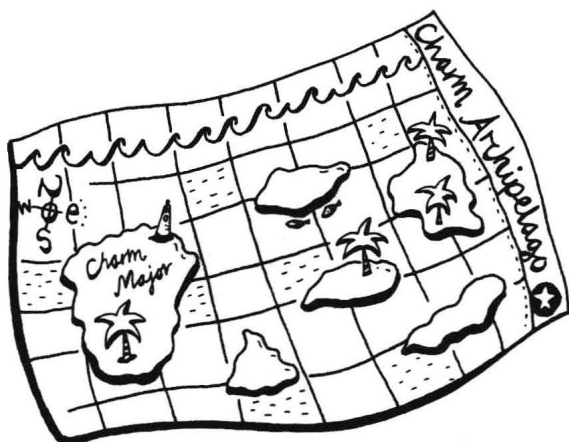
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Chapter One

A cold raindrop slid down Jessica's nose.

"Bother," she grumbled. "I hate flying in the rain."

Jessica was on her way to Miss Strega's shop on the High Street where she was



about to begin her third course of lessons as a witch-in-training. She had already learnt to fly a broomstick (the right way up) and had even vaulted over the moon. She was

pretty good at Spelling (with and without a wand) and knew how to make a basic brew. She had a terrific flying helmet and a Super-Duper De-Luxe Guaranteed-Invisibility-When-You-Need-It cape. Unfortunately, both the cape and the helmet were letting in water.

“Bother and double bother,” she repeated as she wiped her nose. “I should have taken the bus.”

Berkeley, Jessica’s night-in-gale mascot, poked her head out of Jessica’s pocket. “Hu-eet, hu-eet,” she chirruped sweetly and cocked an eye at the broom’s *Fast-Forward* twig.

“We *are* Fast Forwarding, silly,” Jessica sniffed. “And stop singing. It’s not singing weather.”

Berkeley quickly snuggled back into her warm pocket fluff and they flew on without

another tweet. Jessica buried her chin in her cape, pulled her flying helmet down over her eyes and grimly steered her broom forward until she was directly above Miss Strega's hardware shop. She dropped down, dismounted and immediately stepped into a deep puddle. As she lifted the latch of the shop door, a huge drop of water fell off the

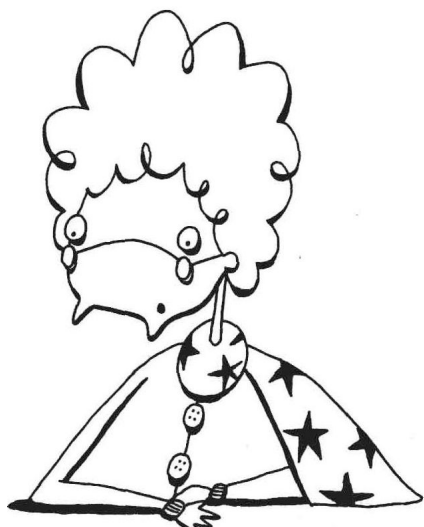


creaking shop sign and trickled down the back of her neck. She stomped inside.

Old Miss Strega was sitting as usual on her high stool behind the counter. She had her long chin cupped comfortably in one hand and held a book in the other. Felicity, Miss Strega's ginger cat, was sitting in her usual place on top of a pile of Spell Books.



As Jessica dripped across the shop floor, Miss Strega looked up and peered at her over her glasses. "You're making puddles, Jessica."



Jessica pulled out her wand. She frowned with concentration as she tried to think of a suitable Wash 'n' Wipe Spell.

"NO Spelling," Miss Strega warned. "I don't want you flooding my shop by mistake and holding up our flight. There's a mop under the stairs."

Jessica scowled as she fetched the mop. "What flight?"

Miss Strega tapped the cover of the *Witches World Wide Rule Book*. "It says

here that witches-in-training should spend some time abroad so I've booked—"

"A holiday?" Jessica stopped mopping and spun around. "What a brilliant idea."

"Well, not exactly a holiday." Miss Strega cleared her throat. "At least, not for you. I've put your name down for a summer school."

Jessica raised a damp eyebrow. "A summer school? To learn what?"

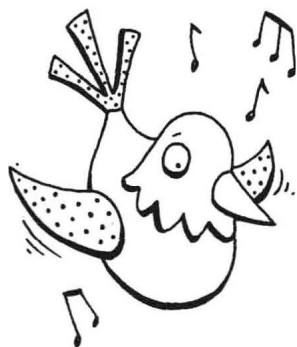
"Why, Charming of course," declared Miss Strega, hopping down from her stool.

"You certainly need some Charm skills and Pelagia's Academy in the Charm Archipelago is the very best. Felicity and I will come too. And Berkeley."

"Felicity and Berkeley and *you* are going to school too?"

"Moonrays and marrowbones!" Miss Strega cackled. "Of course not. We three

already know everything there is to know about Charming. We shall be on holiday."



At the mention of her name, Berkeley fluttered out of Jessica's pocket and enthusiastically trilled thank you in her lovely silvery voice.

Felicity winked an orange eye at Jessica.

Jessica stuck her tongue out at the cat and turned to Miss Strega who was noisily emptying a drawer full of her own wands on to the counter. "Who is this Pelagia anyway?"

"Pelagia is rather an unusual witch. She used to be a



pirate, but had a change of heart for some reason and decided to be good. She's a lighthouse keeper now and teaches Charming part-time."

"Do I have to do Charming? Isn't Spelling enough?"

Miss Strega stroked her long chin. "Personally, I suggest you try both. You see, Charming is not something everybody can pick up, like flying a broomstick or typing without looking at the keyboard or making a basic brew. Charming is more a way of *being*, it's something you *become*."

Jessica looked confused.

"And then again," Miss Strega continued, "you will need to know about Charms. They can be *incantations* but they can also be *things*. Like a lucky horseshoe or a magic crystal."



Jessica looked more confused than ever. Was Pelagia going to make her *become a horseshoe*, rather like *being a tree* at drama lessons?

Miss Strega stuck a wand behind her ear and gathered the rest into a bundle with a rubber band. "Look, don't worry your bewitching little head about it for the moment, Jess. Pelagia will explain all this much better than I can. So let's shut up the shop and take to the sky."

Felicity and Berkeley sat on the counter and watched with interest as Jessica and Miss Strega prepared for their trip. First of all, Jessica put away the mop and filed the bundle of Miss Strega's own wands in a drawer marked *My Swansdown*. (This was an example of Noquan – Not Quite An Anagram – one of Miss Strega's highly secret codes to hide what

she really had for sale if non-witches blundered into the shop.) Then while Miss Strega made up a flask of her favourite brew, Cold Smelly Voles, for the journey, Jessica carefully sprayed her broomstick with goblin deterrent. (She still got the heebie-jeebies when she remembered the night that she had had to eject a goblin that had cheekily clambered on to her broomstick.)



Miss Strega counted all the groats and maravedis in the till and tipped them into her saddle bag. Jessica topped up the bird seed in her pocket. Finally, Miss Strega riffled through a box of cards beside the door.



"No good, no good, no good. Ah-ha, this one will be perfect," she said, selecting a