

Bella Donna

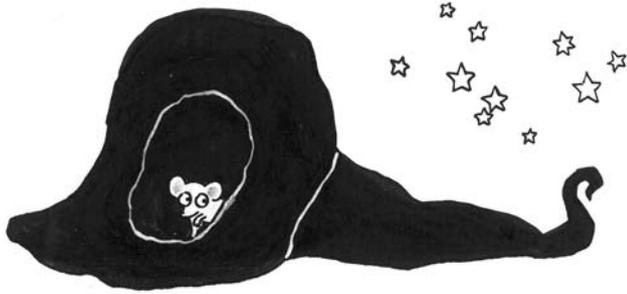


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Illustrated by Marion Lindsay

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Chapter 1



Some people might think that being a witch is easy-peasy, but that's where they'd be wrong. And I should know – I *am* a witch. Well, strictly speaking, I'm a witchling, which is a young, trainee witch.

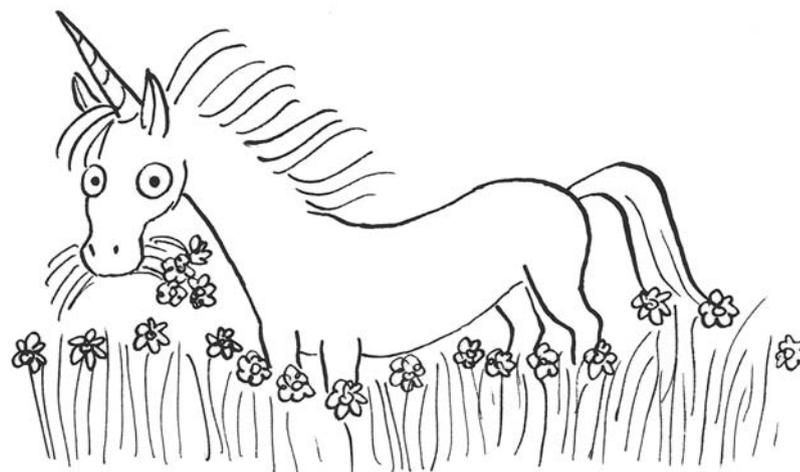
Being a witchling can get very confusing. Before school and after school, every weekend and school holidays, I spend my time in the magic world of Coven Road, but the rest of the time I have to go to school in the ordinary world.

I've only lived in Coven Road for a few months. I used to live at Templeton Children's Home – I was left on the doorstep there when I was a baby. I dreamt that one day I'd be adopted by someone who didn't mind that I wanted to be a witch – it was all that I've ever wanted to be. Then one day Lilith came to the children's home. I just knew she was special and I had to be adopted by her. Matron Harrigan, who is in charge of the children's home, said I could have a trial adoption to see how we got on, and that's when Lilith whisked me off to Coven Road.

I'd never have guessed, not for one second, when I was living at Templeton Children's Home,

that somewhere like Coven Road was so close. I say 'road' but it's more of a crescent-shaped cul-de-sac with a garden in the centre.

When it's being its magical self, none of the houses in Coven Road look the same. One house looks like a miniature Taj Mahal, another is balanced in a tree. Lilith and I live in a thatched cottage with roses that continually change colour around the door. Zorelda, the Grand Sorceress, lives in a magnificent Ice Palace where we all go for parties and ceremonies. And there are unicorns in the garden at the centre.





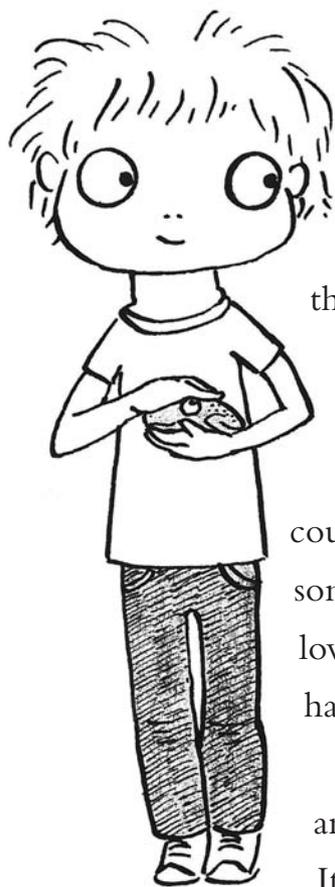
Coven Road is the most amazing place. Everyone who lives there is a witch – and it turned out that I didn't just want to be a witch, I actually *was* one, too! Lilith had realised this as soon as she met me.

It's very important that all this remains a closely guarded secret from the outside world, so a spell is cast every month to protect Coven Road from harm. The spell makes sure Coven Road will look normal when non-witches

come and visit, and means that non-witch passers-by can't even see the entrance to it.

Everyone who lives in Coven Road has to make three promises. We have to promise never to use magic in the ordinary world. We have to promise never to bring anyone who isn't a witch into Coven Road without permission. And we have to promise that we will never ever tell anyone outside Coven Road the truth about Coven Road – and that is *sooooo* hard! I live in

the most exciting, magical place in the world and I can't even tell anyone at school about it. Apart from Sam, of course.



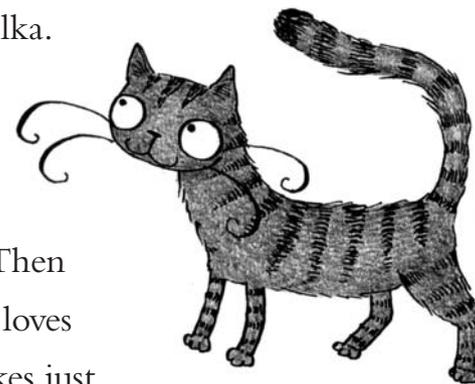
Sam is the closest I've got to a brother. He used to live at Templeton Children's Home like me, but then he was adopted by Tracey and Trevor, the owners of our local Woodland Wildlife Centre. Luckily they're just as mad about wildlife and mini-beasts as Sam is because he could never have gone to live with someone who wasn't an animal lover. It would have been just too hard for him.

Recently there was an accident and Sam discovered Coven Road. It was awful, but it all got sorted

out and now Sam knows about me being a witchling, and about the magic on Coven Road. He's promised not to tell anyone and I know he will keep it a secret, and not just because Zorelda said something bad would happen if he ever did. Although knowing Sam, he'd probably quite like it if she turned him into a toad or something!

I like animals as well. We have five cats at our house in Coven Road. Four of them live mainly on the bookshelves in the living room and don't like going outside. They're all Siamese cats and their names are Mystica, Bazeeta, Brimalkin and Amelka.

They do a lot of staring at people and don't like being stroked very much. Then there's Pegatha who loves being stroked and likes just



about everyone, apart from Lilith's niece, Verity and next door's dog, Waggy. Pegatha sleeps on my bed at night and I think she is the best cat in the whole world.

My other friend at school is Angela. She's mad about the colour pink and I know she would so love to see the new pink unicorn foal that's been born on Coven Road, but I can't bring her there to show it to her.

I sit next to Angela in class and she's always trying to get me to wear pink like her. I, however, prefer to wear black.

'Some day you'll realise pink is your colour,' Angela keeps telling me.

I don't think I will. Whoever heard of a *pink* witch? Not that I can say that to her, of course.

One of the best things about being a witchling is learning how to cast spells. I wish regular schoolwork was as straightforward, but it



isn't. I seem to have a mental block when it comes to maths – especially algebra. One day I drew a giant X over my test paper because I couldn't understand it and it made my teacher, Mrs Pearce, really angry.

'Well,' said Mrs Pearce, when she saw what I'd done, 'you'll have to try harder than that, won't you, Bella Donna?'

I wasn't sure if I should nod my head, because I agreed I would have to try harder, or shake my head because I had been trying very hard indeed.

'You can retake the test tomorrow during lunch break,' Mrs Pearce said.

If only I was able to do magic at school, everything would be so much easier. There must be a spell I could learn for making a test fill in its own correct answers.



'You OK, Bella Donna?' Lilith asked me, when I got home.

Lilith is the most fantastic mum ever, at least as far as I'm concerned. She's always got time



for me and is interested in what I do and she's fantastic at spells and makes the most delicious food ever.

We recently had a talk about how I could tell her anything, even things I thought she might not want to hear. I do try, but when you haven't been used to having anyone to tell, it can be hard. I try to be the best daughter I can and make her proud of me and not give her too much to worry about.

'Fine,' I said. But I



wasn't really fine. Not fine at all. I was worrying about the next day and the test I was going to have to retake. I'd have told Lilith if I'd thought she'd be able to help, but I didn't really see how she could – other than making Mrs Pearce disappear, of course. I didn't think Lilith would agree to do that. No witch would ever use magic outside Coven Road unless it was for a really, really good reason – a life and death sort of reason. Even I had to admit my algebra test wasn't a life and death situation.

I expect there was a spell to make Mrs Pearce vanish. There's a spell for just about everything. I'm a very new witchling and I didn't know a spell that did that, even if I was allowed to use it – which I knew I wasn't. It didn't stop me thinking about it though. I didn't need Mrs Pearce to vanish for long – a few days, or a week, or maybe two weeks at the most. Just long

enough for her to have forgotten about the test. Even if I did make her vanish I wouldn't make her invisible so she'd be wandering around all scared and ghostlike. She only had to disappear from school, so I could magic her off for a little holiday somewhere.

I went into my room and opened my maths book. I knew I should be studying it, but instead I tried to imagine the sort of holiday Mrs Pearce might like. A holiday on the beach? I tried to imagine Mrs Pearce surfing through the waves but it didn't feel quite right. Maybe she'd like to visit the pyramids or go on a safari and meet baby elephants. But what if she didn't forget about the test and still expected me to do it when she came back?

In fact, I didn't even need to make her vanish, just forgetful, and I knew there was a spell for that.