

Bella Donna



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Chapter 3



As soon as my friends left Coven Road, it turned back into its usual magical self, ready for my next birthday party. It was nice to get to stay up so late – Lilith is usually very strict about bedtimes. As the stars and moon came out, all

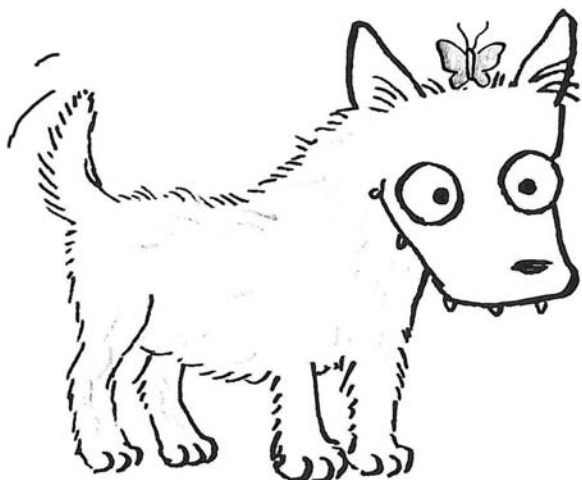


the houses looked different and exciting in their own ways. Lilith and I live in a thatched cottage with roses that are always changing colour around the door. Verity and her mum have six twirling turrets on their house and a window made from rubies. Zorelda, the grand sorceress, lives in an Ice Palace that never melts. Our next-

door neighbour, Mr Robson, has recently added a statue of a giant spider on top of his house and the roof even looks a bit like a spider's web.

When he is being his magical self, Mr Robson likes wearing a cloak made of real, live, running-about spiders. Luckily Mr and Mrs Robson's dog, Waggy, seems to like spiders too –

or at least he's always wagging his tail when they're around. And Waggy never seems to mind when a butterfly flies off Mrs Robson's magical butterfly cloak and lands on him.



There's Redbeard, whose beard is so long it almost reaches his knees. He lives with thirteen cats in a house that looks like a pirate's ship, complete with a skull and crossbones flag. Maybe it actually was a pirate's ship once.

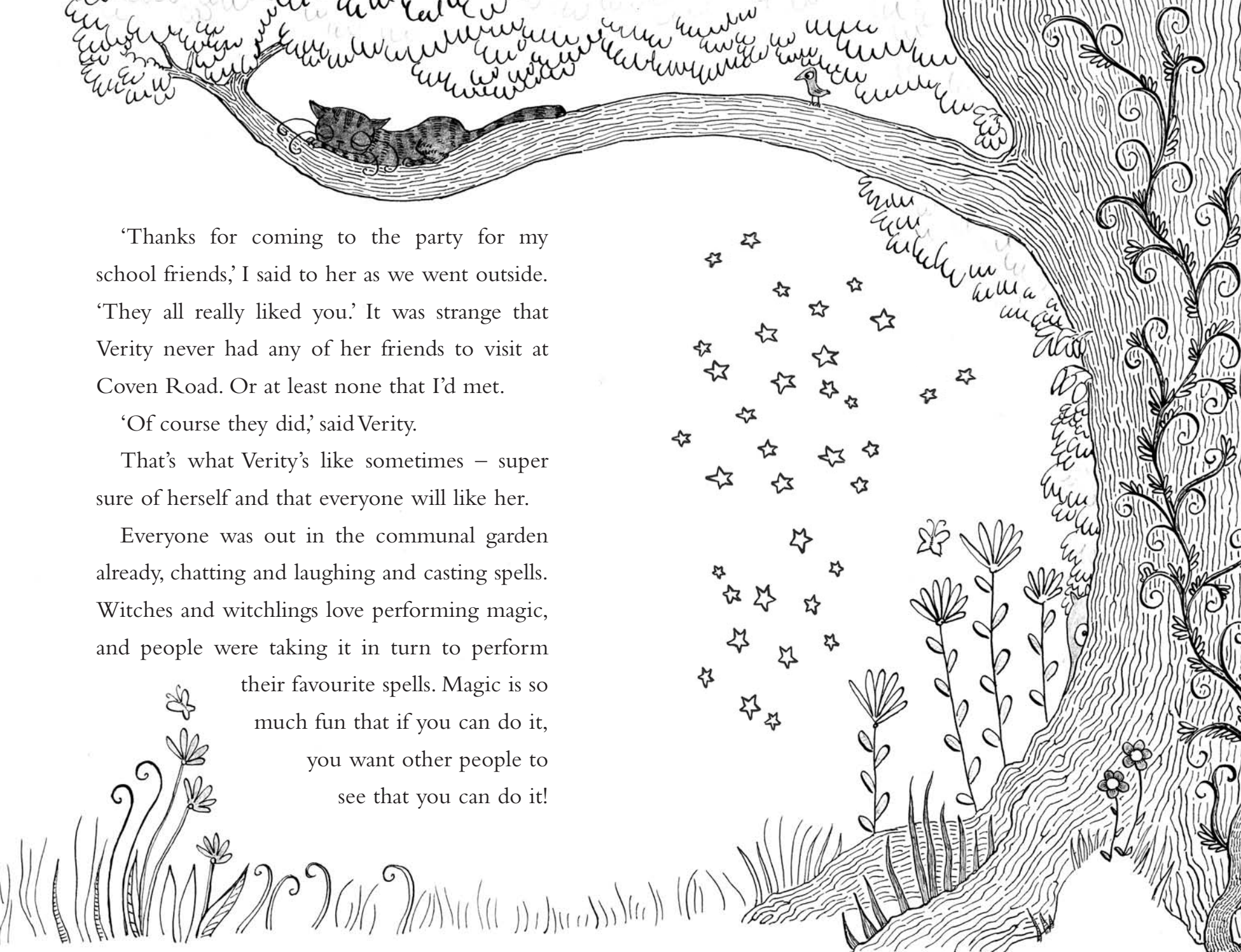
And then there's Kelda who lives with her

snakes and alligators in a house in the trees that I call the Tarzan house.

The communal garden in the centre of Coven Road is always pretty with flowers and trees, but when it's being its magical self, it's a place where you could spot just about anything – from unicorns to miniature elephants, to pink and blue flying penguins. There's even supposed to be a dragon or two there, according to Mr Robson, although I've never seen any myself.

I changed into a long turquoise dress for my magical birthday party and Lilith put on her white witch's outfit. All thirty-nine of the witches who live in Coven Road were invited and everyone had said they would come.

Verity changed into her favourite red ballgown and black top hat for this birthday party. She'd also put on lots of black eyeliner and mascara to make her eyes look really big.

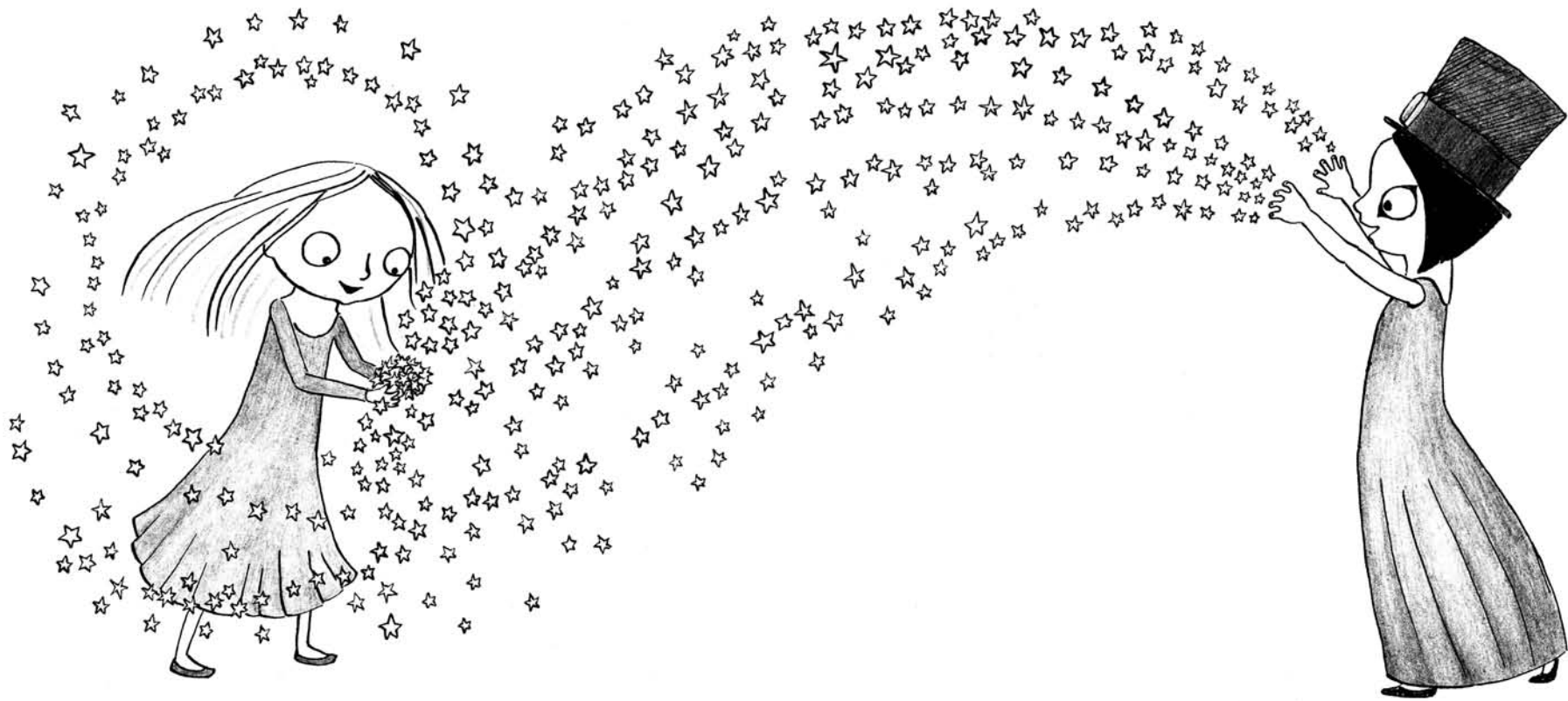


‘Thanks for coming to the party for my school friends,’ I said to her as we went outside. ‘They all really liked you.’ It was strange that Verity never had any of her friends to visit at Coven Road. Or at least none that I’d met.

‘Of course they did,’ said Verity.

That’s what Verity’s like sometimes – super sure of herself and that everyone will like her.

Everyone was out in the communal garden already, chatting and laughing and casting spells. Witches and witchlings love performing magic, and people were taking it in turn to perform their favourite spells. Magic is so much fun that if you can do it, you want other people to see that you can do it!

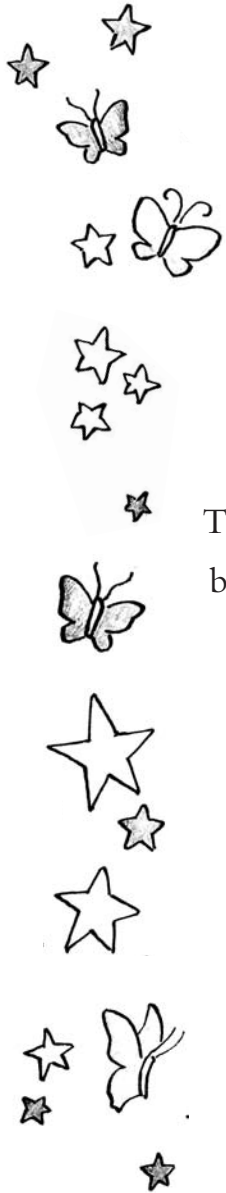


Verity performed a spell that made thousands of tiny coloured stars come sprinkling out of her fingertips when she pointed.

‘*Sazarandi mowlerimo zaldina zesar marar,*’ she chanted, over and over, as she pointed this way and that.

It was a great spell. Not hard to do – but very dramatic.

Mrs Robson, from next door, did something even more dramatic – she cast a spell so that the butterflies flew off her cloak and started chasing after the magical stars. When they caught one,



the butterflies flashed silver or gold, just for a second. Then the butterflies

flew back together into a cloak falling from Mrs Robson's shoulders. Meanwhile the stars turned into gold doubloons and dropped into a treasure chest that appeared beside Redbeard.

Then Kelda shrank the chest until it was bite-sized and one of her pythons ate it!

Zorelda made a grand entrance arriving in a carriage that flew through the air and was drawn by a silver dragon called Spike who let me pat his nose and stroke his back.

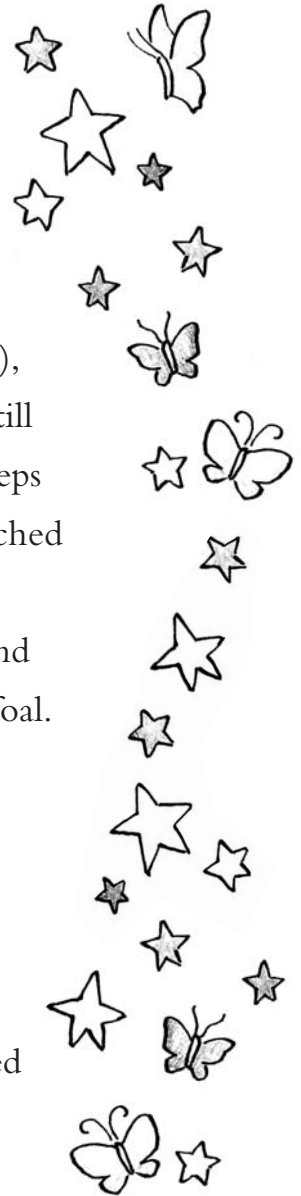
'I wish I could have a pet dragon,' I told Lilith, but Lilith just rolled her eyes, so I knew it wasn't very likely.

'Maybe for my birthday next year?'

I suggested.

As well as the magical tricks, there were all my usual favourite things at the party – the buffet table that can produce any food you can think of (I like fizzy, blue ice cream best, and had lots of that), the magical daisy chain swings (I still haven't worked out which spell keeps them in the air without being attached to anything but people took it in turns to push me high on them) and of course the unicorns with their foal. I never imagined such things even existed before I came to live in Coven Road but now I loved them all.

'This is the best birthday party ever!' I said to Verity. I never wanted it to end.



But Verity wasn't listening to me – she was looking upwards. Then I realised that all the witches were looking up at the sky and so I looked up too.

Something was flying towards us . . .

'It's the Broomstick Riders!' shouted Verity.



The Coven Road witches cheered. I couldn't believe it. Of course I know witches are often portrayed riding broomsticks, but I'd never seen a witch riding one before, although I've seen lots of witches on magic carpets and I like riding on my bedroom rug. It's not the same as a broomstick, though!



Thirty witches on broomsticks flew in formation and swooshed in between each other and did loop the loops and zoomed up and down, spun and twisted and did all sorts of acrobatics before forming themselves into the shape of letters:

☆☆
☆ HAPPY ☆

BIRTHDAY

☆☆
☆ BELLA ☆
☆☆

‘They’re amazing,’ I gasped.

Lilith squeezed my hand. ‘Good, aren’t they?’ she said.



I could only nod my head. I was speechless.

‘Happy birthday to our newest witchling, Bella Donna,’ said Zorelda, and everyone clapped and said ‘Happy birthday’ and ‘Hear, hear!’

Redbeard said, ‘Many happy returns to the landlubber.’

Kelda’s snake opened its mouth very wide and hissed, ‘Birthday kisses.’

‘Time for your special present,’ Lilith said, smiling.

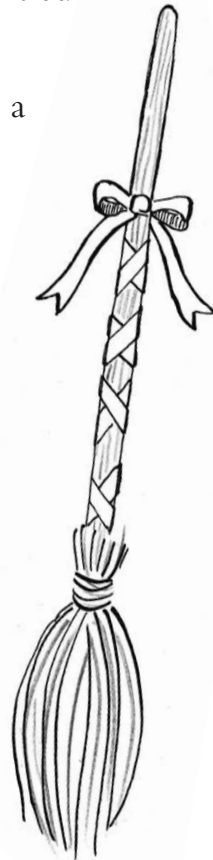
How brilliant that I was finally going to get my own grimoire!

Lilith reached behind a tree and handed me a broomstick with a purple ribbon tied round it.

I was so surprised that it wasn’t a grimoire that for a moment I was completely still. My face felt frozen. Then I noticed everyone looking at me and I realised I hadn’t said anything. ‘Thank you. Thank you so much!’ I said, smiling at Lilith.

She gave me a huge smile back.

It was a good present, it just wasn’t what I had been



expecting. I thought that flying on it might be fun, though. ‘Do you think I might be able to fly like the Broomstick Riders?’

The Broomstick Riders were just black specks in the distant sky now. It would be so wonderful to be able to fly like them one day.

‘I’m sure you could, if you practised really hard,’ Lilith said.

‘And hold on tight!’ Verity laughed.

‘Have *you* got a broomstick, then?’ I asked Verity. She sounded like she knew about flying one.

‘Of course I have.’

‘Why didn’t you tell me before? I’d have loved to have seen it.’

‘You’d only have wanted to try flying on it.’

Yes, I would have.

‘And witchlings aren’t allowed to fly until they’re eleven.’

Still, I thought it was a bit mean of her not to have told me.

‘And do you have a broomstick, too?’ I asked Lilith.

‘Yes.’ She smiled. ‘Although I haven’t used it in years. It’s old magic and most grown-up witches don’t use them much any more. They’ve rather gone out of fashion.’

But I didn’t care about that. ‘I’m going to fly mine all the time!’ I said.

I was so excited thinking about flying like the Broomstick Riders that I *almost* forgot about how much I’d been hoping for a grimoire.

Then I heard a clock striking midnight and the party came to an end.

‘Better put an L-plate on that broomstick,’ Verity joked as she waved goodbye. ‘They’re a lot harder to ride than you’d think.’

But I was sure I’d be able to manage. After all,

I could ride a bike. A broomstick couldn’t be that different, could it?

I went to sleep thinking about how wonderful my first two birthday parties had been, and how lucky I was to live in Coven Road with Lilith and be a witchling, and how great it had been to do all my favourite things. I dreamed all night of flying loop the loop on my new broomstick.

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