

TERRY
PRATCHETT

WINTERSMITH

Discworld: A Tiffany Aching Novel



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INTRODUCTION

A FEEGLE GLOSSARY,
adjusted for those of a delicate disposition
(A Work In Progress By Miss Perspicacia Tick)

Bigjobs: human beings

Big Man: chief of the clan (usually the husband of the kelda)

Blethers: rubbish, nonsense

Boggin: to be desperate, as in 'I'm boggin for a cup of tea.'

Bunty: a weak person

Carlin: old woman

Cludgie: the privy

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Crivens!: a general exclamation that can mean anything from 'My goodness!' to 'I've just lost my temper and there is going to be trouble.'

Dree your/my/his/her weird: facing the fate that is in store for you/me/him/her

Een: eyes

Eldritch: weird, strange. Sometimes means oblong too, for some reason.

Fash: worry, upset

Geas: a very important obligation, backed up by tradition and magic. Not a bird.

Gonnagle: the bard of the clan, skilled in musical instruments, poems, stories and songs

Hag: a witch, of any age

Hag o' hags: a very important witch

Hagging/Hagging: anything a witch does

Hiddlins: secrets

Kelda: the female head of the clan, and eventually the mother of most of it. Feegle babies are very small, and a kelda will have hundreds in her lifetime.

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Lang syne: long ago

Last World: The Feegles believe that they are dead. This world is so nice, they argue, that they must have been really good in a past life and then died and ended up here. Appearing to die here means merely going back to the Last World, which they believe is rather dull.

Mudlin: useless person

Pished: I am assured that this means 'tired'.

Schemie: an unpleasant person

Scuggan: a really unpleasant person

Scunner: a generally unpleasant person

Ships: woolly things that eat grass and go baa. Easily confused with the other kind.

Spavie: see Mudlin

Special Sheep Liniment: probably moonshine whisky, I am very sorry to say. No one knows what it'd do to sheep, but it is said that a drop of it is good for shepherds on a cold winter's night and for Feegles at any time at all. Do not try to make this at home.

Spog: a leather pouch, worn on the front of his belt, where a Feegle keeps his valuables and uneaten food, interesting insects, useful bits of twig, lucky dirt and so on. It is not a good idea to fish around in a spog.

Steamie: only found in the big Feegle mounds in the mountains, where there's enough water to allow regular bathing; it's a kind of sauna. Feegles on the Chalk tend to rely on the fact that you can only get so much dirt on you before it starts to fall off of its own accord.

Waily: a general cry of despair

CHAPTER 1

The Big Snow

When the storm came, it hit the hills like a hammer. No sky should hold as much snow as this, and because no sky could, it fell; fell in a wall of white.

There was a small hill of snow where there had been, a few hours ago, a little cluster of thorn trees on an ancient mound. This time last year there had been a few early primroses; now there was just snow.

Part of the snow moved. A piece about the size of an apple rose up, with smoke pouring out around it. A hand no larger than a rabbit's paw waved the smoke away.

A very small, but very angry blue face, with the lump of snow still balanced on top of it, looked out at the sudden white wilderness.

'Ach, crivens!' it grumbled. 'Will ye no' look at this?'

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'Tis the work o' the wintersmith! Noo there's a scunner that willnae tak' "no" fra' a answer!

Other lumps of snow were pushed up. More heads peered out.

'Oh waily, waily, waily!' said one of them. 'He's found the big wee hag again!'

The first head turned towards this head, and said, 'Daft Wullie?'

'Yes, Rob?'

'Did I no' tell ye to lay off that waily business?'

'Aye, Rob, ye did that,' said the head addressed as Daft Wullie.

'So why did ye just do it?'

'Sorry, Rob. It kinda bursted oot.'

'It's so dispiritin.'

'Sorry, Rob.'

Rob Anybody sighed. 'But I fear ye're right, Wullie. He's come for the big wee hag, right enough. Who's watching' over her doon at the farm?'

'Wee Dangerous Spike, Rob.'

Rob looked up at clouds so full of snow that they sagged in the middle.

'OK,' he said, and sighed again. 'It's time fra' the Hero.'

He ducked out of sight, the plug of snow dropping neatly back into place, and slid down into the heart of the Feegle mound.

It was quite big inside. A human could just about stand up in the middle, but they would then bend double with coughing because the middle was where there was a hole to let smoke out.

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All around the inner wall were tiers of galleries, and every one of them was packed with Feegles. Usually the place was awash with noise, but now it was frighteningly quiet.

Rob Anybody walked across the floor to the fire, where his wife Jeannie was waiting. She stood up straight and proud, like a kelda should, but close up it seemed to him that she had been crying. He put his arm around her.

‘All right, ye probably ken what’s happenin’’, he told the blue and red audience looking down on him. ‘This is nae common storm. The wintersmith has found the big wee hag – now then, settle doon!’

He waited until the shouting and sword-rattling had died down, then went on:

‘We cannae fight the wintersmith for her! That’s her road! We cannae walk it for her! But the hag o’ hags has set us on another path! It’s a dark one, and dangerous!’

A cheer went up. Feegles liked the idea of this, at least.

‘Right!’ said Rob, satisfied at this. ‘Ah’m awa’ tae fetch the Hero!’

There was a lot of laughter at this, and Big Yan, the tallest of the Feegles, shouted, ‘It’s tae soon. We’ve only had time tae gi’e him a couple o’ heroing lessons! He’s still nae more than a big streak o’ nothin’!’

‘He’ll be a hero for the big wee hag and that’s an end o’ it’, said Rob sharply. ‘Noo, off ye go, the whole boilin’ o’ ye! Tae the chalk pit! Dig me a path tae the Underworld!’

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It had to be the wintersmith, Tiffany Aching told herself, standing in front of her father in the freezing farmhouse. She could feel it out there. This wasn't normal weather even for midwinter, and this was springtime. It was a challenge. Or perhaps it was just a game. It was hard to tell, with the wintersmith.

Only it can't be a game because the lambs are dying. I'm only just thirteen, and my father, and a lot of other people older than me, want me to do something. And I can't. The wintersmith has found me again. He is here now, and I'm too weak.

It would be easier if they were bullying me, but no, they're begging. My father's face is grey with worry and he's begging. *My father is begging me.*

Oh no, he's taking his hat off. He's *taking off his hat* to speak to me!

They think magic comes free, when I snap my fingers. But if I can't do this for them now, what good am I? I can't let them see I'm afraid. Witches aren't allowed to be afraid.

And this is my fault. I: I started all this. I must finish it.

Mr Aching cleared his throat.

'... And, er, if you could ... er, magic it away, uh, or something? For us ...?'

Everything in the room was grey, because the light from the windows was coming through snow. No one had wasted time digging the horrible stuff away from the houses. Every person who could hold a shovel was needed elsewhere, and still there were not enough of

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them. As it was, most people had been up all night, walking the flocks of yearlings, trying to keep the new lambs safe . . . in the dark, in the snow . . .

Her snow. It was a message to her. A challenge. A summons.

‘All right,’ she said. ‘I’ll see what I can do.’

‘Good girl,’ said her father, grinning with relief.

No, not a good girl, thought Tiffany. I brought this on us.

‘You’ll have to make a big fire, up by the sheds,’ she said aloud. ‘I mean a big fire, do you understand? Make it out of anything that will burn and you must keep it going. It’ll keep trying to go out, but you must keep it going. Keep piling on the fuel, whatever happens. *The fire must not go out!*’

She made sure that the ‘not!’ was loud and frightening. She didn’t want people’s minds to wander. She put on the heavy brown woollen cloak that Miss Treason had made for her and grabbed the black pointy hat that hung on the back of the farmhouse door. There was a sort of communal grunt from the people who’d crowded into the kitchen, and some of them backed away. We want a witch now, we need a witch now, but – we’ll back away now too.

That was the magic of the pointy hat. It was what Miss Treason called ‘boffo’.

Tiffany Aching stepped out into the narrow corridor that had been cut through the snow-filled farmyard where the drifts were more than twice the height of a man. At least the deep snow kept off the worst of the wind, which was made of knives.

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A track had been cleared all the way to the paddock, but it had been heavy-going. When there is fifteen feet of snow everywhere, how can you clear it? Where can you clear it to?

She waited by the cart sheds while the men hacked and scraped at the snow banks. They were tired to the soul by now; they'd been digging for hours.

The important thing was—

But there were lots of important things. It was important to look calm and confident, it was important to keep your mind clear, it was important not to show how pants-wettingly scared you were . . .

She held out a hand, caught a snowflake and took a good look at it. It wasn't one of the normal ones, oh no. It was one of his special snowflakes. That was nasty. He was taunting her. Now, she could hate him. She'd never hated him before. But he was killing the lambs.

She shivered, and pulled the cloak around her.

'This I choose to do,' she croaked, her breath leaving little clouds in the air. She cleared her throat and started again. 'This I choose to do. If there is a price, this I choose to pay. If it is my death, then I choose to die. Where this takes me, there I choose to go. I choose. This I choose to do.'

It wasn't a spell, except in her own head, but if you couldn't make spells work in your own head you couldn't make them work at all.

Tiffany wrapped her cloak around her against the clawing wind and watched dully as the men brought straw and wood. The fire started slowly, as if frightened to show enthusiasm.

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She'd done this before, hadn't she? Dozens of times. The trick was not that hard when you got the feel of it, but she'd done it with time to get her mind right and, anyway, she'd never done it with anything more than a kitchen fire to warm her freezing feet. In theory it should be just as easy with a big fire and a field of snow, right?

Right?

The fire began to roar up. Her father put his hand on her shoulder. Tiffany jumped. She'd forgotten how quietly he could move.

'What was that about choosing?' he said. She'd forgotten what good hearing he had too.

'It's a . . . witch thing,' she answered, trying not to look at his face. 'So that if this . . . doesn't work, it's no one's fault but mine.' And this is my fault, she added to herself. It's unfair, but no one said it wasn't going to be.

Her father's hand caught her chin and gently turned her head round. How soft his hands are, Tiffany thought. Big man's hands but soft as a baby's, because of the grease on the sheep's fleeces.

'We shouldn't have asked you, should we . . .?' he said.

Yes, you should have asked me, Tiffany thought. The lambs are dying under the dreadful snow. And I should have said no, I should have said I'm not that good yet. But the lambs are dying under the dreadful snow!

There will be other lambs, said her Second Thoughts.

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But these aren't those lambs, are they? These are the lambs that are dying, here and now. And they're dying because I listened to my feet and dared to dance with the wintersmith.

'I can do it,' she said.

Her father held her chin and stared into her eyes.

'Are you sure, jiggit?' he said. It was the nickname her grandmother had had for her – Granny Aching, who never lost a lamb to the dreadful snow. He'd never used it before. Why had it risen up in his mind now?

'Yes!' She pushed his hand away, and broke his gaze before she burst into tears.

'I . . . haven't told your mother this yet,' said her father, very slowly, as if the words required enormous care, 'but I can't find your brother. I think he was trying to help. Abe Swindell said he saw him with his little shovel. Er . . . I'm sure he's all right, but . . . keep an eye open for him, will you? He's got his red coat on.'

His face, with no expression at all, was heart-breaking to see. Little Wentworth, nearly seven years old, always running after the men, always wanting to be one of them, always trying to help . . . how easily a small body could get overlooked . . . The snow was still coming fast. The horribly wrong snowflakes were white on her father's shoulders. It's these little things you remember when the bottom falls out of the world, and you're falling—

That wasn't just unfair; that was . . . cruel.

Remember the hat you wear! Remember the job

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that is in front of you! Balance! Balance is the thing. Hold balance in the centre, hold the balance . . .

Tiffany extended her numb hands to the fire, to draw out the warmth.

‘Remember, don’t let the fire go out,’ she said.

‘I’ve got men bringing up wood from all over,’ said her father. ‘I told ’em to bring all the coal from the forge too. It won’t run out of feeding, I promise you!’

The flame danced and curved towards Tiffany’s hands. The trick was, the trick, the trick . . . was to fold the heat somewhere close, draw it with you and . . . balance. Forget everything else!

‘I’ll come with—’ her father began.

‘No! Watch the fire!’ Tiffany shouted, too loud, frantic with fear. ‘You will do what I say!’

I am not your daughter today! her mind screamed. I am your witch! *I will protect you!*

She turned before he could see her face and ran through the flakes, along the track that had been cut towards the lower paddocks. The snow had been trodden down into a lumpy, hummocky path, made slippery with fresh snow. Exhausted men with shovels pressed themselves into the snow banks on either side rather than get in her way.

She reached the wider area where other shepherds were digging into the wall of snow. It tumbled in lumps around them.

‘Stop! Get back!’ her voice shouted, while her mind wept.

The men obeyed quickly. The mouth that had given

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that order had a pointy hat above it. You didn't argue with that.

Remember the heat, the heat, remember the heat, balance, balance . . .

This was witching cut to the bone. No toys, no wands, no boffo, no headology, no tricks. All that mattered was how good you were.

But sometimes you had to trick yourself. She wasn't the Summer Lady and she wasn't Granny Weatherwax. She needed to give herself all the help she could.

She pulled the little silver horse out of her pocket. It was greasy and stained, and she'd meant to clean it, but there had been no time, no time . . .

Like a knight putting on his helmet, she fastened the silver chain around her neck.

She should have practised more. She should have listened to people. She should have listened to herself.

She took a deep breath and held out her hands on either side of her, palms up. On her right hand, a white scar glowed.

'Thunder on my right hand,' she said. 'Lightning in my left hand. Fire behind me. Frost in front of me.'

She stepped forward until she was only a few inches away from the snow bank. She could feel its coldness already pulling the heat out of her. Well, so be it. She took a few deep breaths. This I choose to do . . .

'Frost to fire,' she whispered.

In the yard, the fire went white and roared like a furnace.

The snow wall spluttered, and then exploded into

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steam, sending chunks of snow into the air. Tiffany walked forward slowly. Snow pulled back from her hands like mist at sunrise. It melted in the heat of her, becoming a tunnel in the deep drift, fleeing from her, writhing around her in clouds of cold fog.

Yes! She smiled desperately. It was true. If you had the perfect centre, if you got your mind right, you could balance. In the middle of the see-saw is a place that never moves . . .

Her boots squelched over warm water. There was fresh green grass under the snow, because the awful storm had been so late in the year. She walked on, heading to where the lambing pens were buried.

Her father stared at the fire. It was burning white-hot, like a furnace, eating through the wood as if driven by a gale. It was collapsing into ashes in front of his eyes . . .

Water was pouring around Tiffany's boots.

Yes! But don't think about it! Hold the balance! More heat! Frost to fire!

There was a bleat.

Sheep could live under the snow, at least for a while. But as Granny Aching used to say, when the gods made sheep they must've left their brains in their other coat. In a panic, and sheep were always just an inch from panicking, they'd trample their own lambs.

Now ewes and lambs appeared, steaming and bewildered as the snow melted around them, as if they were sculptures left behind.

Tiffany moved on, staring straight ahead of her, only just aware of the excited cries of the men behind

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her. They were following her, pulling the ewes free, cradling the lambs . . .

Her father yelled at the other men. Some of them were hacking at a farm cart, throwing the wood down into the white-hot flames. Others were dragging furniture up from the house. Wheels, tables, straw bales, chairs – the fire took everything, gulped it down, and roared for more. And there wasn't any more.

No red coat. No red coat! Balance, balance. Tiffany waded on, water and sheep pouring past her. The tunnel ceiling fell in a splashing and slithering of slush. She ignored it. Fresh snowflakes fell down through the hole and boiled in the air above her head. She ignored that too. And then, ahead of her . . . a glimpse of red.

Frost to fire! The snow fled, and there he was. She picked him up, held him close, sent some of her heat into him, felt him stir, whispered: 'It weighed at least forty pounds! At least forty pounds!'

He coughed, and opened his eyes. Tears falling like melting snow, she ran over to a shepherd and thrust the boy into his arms.

'Take him to his mother! *Do it now!*' The man grabbed the boy and ran, frightened of her fierceness. Today she was their witch!

Tiffany turned back. There were more lambs to be saved.

Her father's coat landed on the starving flames, glowed for a moment, then fell into grey ashes. The other men were ready; they grabbed the man as he went to jump after it and pulled him back, kicking and shouting.

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The flint cobbles had melted like butter. They spluttered for a moment, then froze.

The fire went out.

Tiffany Aching looked up, into the eyes of the wintersmith.

And up on the roof of the cart shed the small voice belonging to Wee Dangerous Spike said, ‘Ach, crivens!’

All this hasn’t happened yet. It might not happen at all. The future is always a bit wobbly. Any little thing, like the fall of a snowflake or the dropping of the wrong kind of spoon, can send it spinning off along a new path. Or perhaps not.

Where it all *began* was last autumn, on the day with a cat in it . . .

CHAPTER 2

Miss Treason

This is Tiffany Aching, riding a broomstick though the mountain forests a hundred miles away. It's a very old broomstick and she's flying it just above the ground; it's got two smaller broomsticks stuck on the back like trainer wheels, to stop it tipping up. It belongs, appropriately, to a very old witch called Miss Treason, who's even worse at flying than Tiffany and is 113 years old.

Tiffany is slightly more than one hundred years younger than that, taller than she was even a month ago, and not as certain of anything at all as she was a year ago.

She is training to be a witch. Witches usually wear black, but as far as she could tell the only reason that witches wore black was because they'd always worn black. This did not seem a good enough reason, so she

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tended to wear blue or green. She didn't laugh with scorn at finery, because she'd never seen any.

You couldn't escape the pointy hat, though. There was nothing magical about a pointy hat except that it said that the person underneath it was a witch. People paid attention to a pointy hat.

Even so, it was hard to be a witch in the village where you'd grown up. It was hard to be a witch to people who knew you as 'Joe Aching's girl' and had seen you running around with only your vest on when you were two years old.

Going away had helped. Most people Tiffany knew hadn't been more than ten miles away from the spot where they were born, so if you'd gone to mysterious foreign parts, that made you a bit mysterious too. You came back slightly different. A witch needed to be different.

Witching was turning out to be mostly hard work and really short on magic of the 'zap! gingle-gingle-gingle' variety. There was no school and nothing that was exactly like a lesson. But it wasn't wise to try to learn witching all by yourself, especially if you had a natural talent. If you got it wrong you could go from ignorant to cackling in a week . . .

When you got right down to it, it was all about cackling. No one ever talked about this, though. Witches said things like 'You can never be too old, too skinny or too warty', but they never mentioned the cackling. Not properly. They watched out for it, though, all the time.

It was all too easy to become a cackler. Most witches

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lived by themselves (cat optional) and might go for weeks without ever seeing another witch. In those times when people hated witches, they were often accused of talking to their cats. Of course they talked to their cats. After three weeks without an intelligent conversation that wasn't about cows, you'd talk to the *wall*. And that was an early sign of cackling.

'Cackling', to a witch, didn't just mean nasty laughter. It meant your mind drifting away from its anchor. It meant you losing your grip. It meant loneliness and hard work and responsibility and other people's problems driving you crazy a little bit at a time, each bit so small that you'd hardly notice it, until you thought that it was normal to stop washing and wear a kettle on your head. It meant you thinking that the fact you knew more than anyone else in your village made you better than them. It meant thinking that right and wrong were negotiable. And, in the end, it meant you 'going to the dark', as the witches said. That was a bad road. At the end of that road were poisoned spinning-wheels and gingerbread cottages.

What stopped this was the habit of visiting. Witches visited other witches all the time, sometimes travelling quite a long way for a cup of tea and a bun. Partly this was for gossip, of course, because witches love gossip, especially if it's more exciting than truthful. But mostly it was to keep an eye on one another.

Today, Tiffany was visiting Granny Weatherwax, who was in the opinion of most witches (including Granny's own) the most powerful witch in the

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mountains. It was all very polite. No one said, 'Not gone bats, then?' or, 'Certainly not! I'm as sharp as a spoon!' They didn't need to. They understood what it was all about, so they talked of other things. But when she was in a mood, Granny Weatherwax could be hard work.

She sat silently in her rocking chair. Some people are good at talking, but Granny Weatherwax was good at silence. She could sit so quiet and still that she faded. You forgot she was there. The room became empty.

It upset people. It was probably meant to. But Tiffany had learned silence too, from Granny Aching, her real grandmother. Now she was learning that if you made yourself really quiet you could become almost invisible.

Granny Weatherwax was an expert.

Tiffany thought of it as the 'I'm not here' spell, if it was a spell. She reasoned that everyone had something inside them that told the world they were there. That was why you could often sense when someone was behind you, even if they were making no sound at all. You were receiving their 'I am here!' signal.

Some people had a very strong one. They were the people who got served first in shops. Granny Weatherwax had an 'I am here' signal that bounced off the mountains when she wanted it to; when she walked into a forest, all the wolves and bears ran out the other side.

She could turn it off too.

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She was doing that now. Tiffany was having to concentrate to see her. Most of her mind was telling her that there was no one there at all.

Well, she thought, that's about enough of that. She coughed. Suddenly, Granny Weatherwax had always been there.

'Miss Treason is very well,' said Tiffany.

'A fine woman,' said Granny. 'Oh, yes.'

'She has her funny ways,' said Tiffany.

'We're none of us perfect,' said Granny.

'She's trying some new eyes,' said Tiffany.

'That's good.'

'They're a couple of ravens . . .'

'It's just as well,' said Granny.

'Better than the mouse she usually uses,' said Tiffany.

'I expect they are.'

There was a bit more of this, until Tiffany began to get annoyed at doing all the work. There was such a thing as common politeness, after all. Oh well, she knew what to do about it now.

'Mrs Earwig's written another book,' she said.

'I heard,' said Granny. The shadows in the room maybe grew a little darker.

Well, that explained the sulk. Even thinking about Mrs Earwig made Granny Weatherwax angry. Mrs Earwig was all wrong to Granny Weatherwax. She wasn't born locally, which was almost a crime to begin with. She wrote books, and Granny Weatherwax didn't trust books. And Mrs Earwig (pronounced 'Ah-wij'), at least by Mrs Earwig) believed in shiny wands

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and magical amulets and mystic runes and the power of the stars, while Granny Weatherwax believed in cups of tea, dry biscuits, washing every morning in cold water and, well, she believed mostly in Granny Weatherwax.

Mrs Earwig was popular among the younger witches, because if you did witchcraft her way you could wear so much jewellery that you could barely walk. Granny Weatherwax wasn't popular with anyone much—

– except when they needed her. When Death was standing by the cradle or the axe slipped in the woods and blood was soaking into the moss, you sent someone hurrying to the cold, gnarly little cottage in the clearing. When all hope was gone, you called for Granny Weatherwax, because she was the best.

And she always came. Always. But popular? No. Need is not the same as like. Granny Weatherwax was for when things were *serious*.

Tiffany did like her, though, in an odd kind of way. She thought Granny Weatherwax liked her too. She let Tiffany call her Granny to her face, when all the other young witches had to call her Mistress Weatherwax. Sometimes Tiffany thought that if you were friendly to Granny Weatherwax she tested you to see how friendly you would stay. Everything about Granny Weatherwax was a test.

'The new book is called *First Flights in Witchcraft*,' she went on, watching the old witch carefully.

Granny Weatherwax smiled. That is, her mouth went up at the corners.

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‘Hah!’ she said. ‘I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again, you can’t learn witchin’ from books. Leticie Earwig thinks you can become a witch by goin’ shoppin’.’ She gave Tiffany a piercing look, as if she was making up her mind about something. Then she said: ‘An’ I’ll wager she don’t know how to do *this*.’

She picked up her cup of hot tea, curling her hand around it. Then she reached out with her other hand and took Tiffany’s hand.

‘Ready?’ said Granny.

‘For wha—?’ Tiffany began, and then she felt her hand get hot. The heat spread up her arm, warming it to the bone.

‘Feelin’ it?’

‘Yes!’

The warmth died away. And Granny Weatherwax, still watching Tiffany’s face, turned the teacup upside down.

The tea dropped out in one lump. It was frozen solid.

Tiffany was old enough not to say, ‘How did you do that?’ Granny Weatherwax didn’t answer silly questions or, for that matter, many questions at all.

‘You moved the heat,’ she said. ‘You took the heat out of the tea and moved it through you to me, yes?’

‘Yes, but it never touched me,’ said Granny triumphantly. ‘It’s all about balance, do you see? Balance is the trick. Keep the balance and—’ She stopped. ‘You’ve ridden on a see-saw? One end goes up, one end goes down. But the bit in the middle, right in the middle, that stays where it is. Up-ness and

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down-ness go right through it. Don't matter how high or low the ends go, it keeps the balance.' She sniffed. 'Magic is mostly movin' stuff around.'

'Can I learn that?'

'I dare say. It's not hard, if you get your mind right.'

'Can you teach me?'

'I just have. I showed you.'

'No, Granny, you just showed me how to do it, not . . . *how* to do it!'

'Can't tell you that. I know how I do it. How you do it'll be different. You've just got to get your mind right.'

'How do I do that?'

'How should I know? It's your mind,' snapped Granny. 'Put the kettle on again, will you? My tea's gone cold.'

There was something almost spiteful about all this, but that was Granny. She took the view that if you were capable of learning, you'd work it out. There was no point in making it easy for people. Life wasn't easy, she said.

'An' I see you're still wearing that trinket,' said Granny. And she didn't like trinkets, a word she used to mean anything metal a witch wore that wasn't there to hold up, shut or fasten. That was 'shoppin'.

Tiffany touched the little silver horse she wore around her neck. It was small, simple and meant a lot to her.

'Yes,' she said calmly. 'I still am.'

'What have you got in that basket?' Granny said now, which was unusually rude. Tiffany's basket was

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on the table. It had a present in it, of course. Everyone knew you took a small present along when you went visiting, but you were supposed to be surprised when you were given it, and say things like, 'Ooo, you shouldn't have.'

'I brought you something,' said Tiffany, swinging the big black kettle onto the fire.

'You've got no call to be bringing me presents, I'm sure,' said Granny sternly.

'Yes, well,' said Tiffany, and left it at that.

Behind her, she heard Granny lift the lid of the basket. There was a kitten in it.

'Her mother is Pinky, the Widow Cable's cat,' said Tiffany, to fill the silence.

'*You shouldn't have,*' growled the voice of Granny Weatherwax.

'It was no trouble.' Tiffany smiled at the fire.

'I can't be havin' with cats.'

'She'll keep the mice down,' said Tiffany, still not turning round.

'Don't have mice.'

Nothing for them to eat, thought Tiffany. Aloud, she said, 'Mrs Earwig's got six big black cats.' In the basket, the white kitten would be staring up at Granny Weatherwax with the sad, shocked expression of all kittens. You test me, I test you, Tiffany thought.

'I don't know what I shall do with it, I'm sure. It'll have to sleep in the goat shed,' said Granny Weatherwax. Most witches had goats.

The kitten rubbed up against Granny's legs and went 'meep'.

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When she left, later on, Granny Weatherwax said goodbye at the door and very carefully shut the kitten outside.

Tiffany went across the clearing to where she'd tied up Miss Treason's broomstick.

But she didn't get on, not yet. She stepped back up against a holly bush, and went quiet until she wasn't there any more, until everything about her said: I'm not here.

Everyone could see pictures in the fire and in clouds. You just turned that the other way around. You turned off that bit of yourself that said you were there. You dissolved. Anyone looking at you would find you very hard to see. Your face became a bit of leaf and shadow, your body a piece of tree and bush. The other person's mind would fill in the gaps.

Looking like just another piece of holly bush, she watched the door. The wind had got up, warm but worrisome, shaking the yellow and red leaves off the sycamore trees and whirring them around the clearing. The kitten tried to bat a few of them out of the air and then sat there, making sad little mewling noises. Any minute now, Granny Weatherwax would think Tiffany had gone and would open the door and—

'Forgot something?' said Granny, by her ear.

She *was* the bush.

'Er . . . it's very sweet. I just thought you might, you know, grow to like it,' said Tiffany, but she was thinking: Well, she could have got there if she ran, but

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why didn't I see her? Can you run and hide at the same time?

'Never you mind about me, my girl,' said the witch. 'You run along back to Miss Treason and give her my best wishes, right now. But' – and her voice softened a little – 'that was good hiding you did just then. There's many as would not have seen you. Why, I hardly heard your hair growin'!

When Tiffany's stick had left the clearing, and Granny Weatherwax had satisfied herself in other little ways that she had really gone, she went back inside, carefully ignoring the kitten again.

After a few minutes, the door creaked open a little. It may have been just a draught. The kitten trotted inside . . .

All witches were a bit odd. Tiffany had got used to odd, so that odd seemed quite normal. There was Miss Level, for example, who had two bodies, although one of them was imaginary. Mistress Pullunder, who bred pedigree earthworms and gave them all names . . . well, she was hardly odd at all, just a bit peculiar, and anyway earthworms were quite interesting in a basically uninteresting kind of way. And there had been Old Mother Dismass, who suffered from bouts of temporal confusion, which can be quite strange when it happens to a witch; her mouth never moved in time with her words, and sometimes her footsteps came down the stairs ten minutes before she did.

But when it came to odd, Miss Treason didn't just

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take the cake, but a packet of biscuits too, with sprinkles on the top, and also a candle.

Where to start, when things were wall to wall odd . . .

Miss Eumenides Treason had gone blind when she was sixty years old. To most people that would have been a misfortune, but Miss Treason was skilled at Borrowing, a particular witch talent.

She could use the eyes of animals, reading what they saw right out of their minds.

She'd gone deaf too, when she was seventy-five, but she'd got the hang of it by now and used any ears she could find running around.

When Tiffany had first gone to stay with her, Miss Treason had used a mouse for seeing and hearing, because her old jackdaw had died. It was a bit worrying to see an old woman striding around the cottage with a mouse in her outstretched hand, and very worrying if you said something and the mouse was swung around to face you. It was amazing how creepy a little pink wriggly nose could be.

The new ravens were a lot better. Someone in one of the local villages had made the old woman a perch that fitted across her shoulders, one bird on each side, and with her long white hair the effect was very, well, witchy, although a bit messy down the back of her cloak by the end of the day.

Then there was her clock. It was heavy and made of rusty iron by someone who was more blacksmith than watchmaker, which was why it went *clonk-clank* instead of *tick-tock*. She wore it on her belt and

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