

# MELDY AND THE MAGIC BOOKS (by Mr and Mrs Sproulle)

## 1) Meldy Finds a Book

Meldy sat at the breakfast table eating her porridge.

“Looks like they’re clearing out Mrs Plockford’s house today,” said her father.

“That creepy place?” asked Popster.

“We all kept well away from there, especially at Halloween,” said Popster’s twin sister Kick.

“It was always so dark and gloomy,” said Meldy, “no one dared go near it! Will Harker ran away screaming when he went!”

Later that morning Meldy had a walk round their garden. The squirrels ran along a branch over her head and the birds twittered away in the bushes.

“I’ll sneak out and have a look at what they’re doing,” she said to herself as she crept through the shrubbery to the lane. She looked towards Mrs Plockford’s house and could see a van outside plus what looked like a skip full of rubbish nearby.

“I’ve heard people throw away all sorts of stuff,” she said to herself as she nipped down the lane to have a look. There were lots of bits and pieces piled up inside but right on top was a large leather-bound book.

She looked round. “Good! Nobody about. I’ll take this home since they don’t want it.” She grabbed the book and ran back down the lane to her own hedge.

Once inside the shrubbery Meldy sat down and had a look at her prize. She blew off some dust then opened it.

“Oh. It’s in a foreign language.” She was disappointed. She looked at some more pages.

“What a strange language! I wonder what it is? I could ask Mummy or Daddy.”

She thought for a bit. “No, they might take it away from me and I really like this book. I’ll hide it, then take it up to my room when no one’s looking.” She hid the book then went indoors.

“Hello, Meldy. Been exploring?” asked her father as she passed him in the hall.

“Oh, er - I was watching the squirrels!” she replied.

Meldy looked around the house. Her mother was busy in her office and the twins were nowhere to be seen so she retrieved the book and took it upstairs. She sat beside her bed with the book open on the floor. “If anyone comes, I can slide it underneath,” she thought while she had another look at it.

“It could be in code!” she cried. Yes, it definitely looked like a code.

Meldy went to her bookshelf and there was the book she’d been given by her best friend, Becca: “How to write your diary in code.” She opened it and looked at the simpler codes first. Then she looked again at her new treasure.

“It looks like a cook book,” she said to herself. The entries resembled recipes with lists of ingredients. She noticed that some words consisted of one letter only.

“Those words could be ‘a’ as in ‘a teaspoon’,” she thought. “I’ll try that.”

She looked at a ‘reverse split alphabet’ code as shown below:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M	N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
M L K J I H G F E D C B A	Z Y X W V U T S R Q P O N

“That might be it! They’ve written ‘M’ in place of ‘A’. Let’s try that.” She looked at the heading on one of the pages:

M UXIBB TY EAXVYRI OYSV KYyceZG

She then looked at the letters on the top line and matched them with the letters directly below them on the bottom line as shown above.

This is what she got: ‘A SPILL TO IMPROVE YOUR COOKING’. She looked at this decoded heading.

“It doesn’t make any sense!” she said to herself. “Maybe I made a mistake.”

She went through it again. Then it made more sense. She couldn’t believe her eyes! She stared at it for a minute.

This is what it really said: ‘A SPELL TO IMPROVE YOUR COOKING.’

“The old lady was a witch! No wonder Will Harker ran away screaming!”

Part of the next day was spent transcribing the instructions so she could try out the spell on her father. He was not a good cook and he would be cooking for them next week while her mother was away on business.

“I need to collect the ingredients,” Meldy said as she went round the garden picking grass, sweet chestnut leaves, cat mint, peanuts (from the bird feeder) rosemary and lavender. She crept into the kitchen and put the ingredients in the blender then pressed the button. When it was finished she spooned the mixture into an old jam jar, added some olive oil and put on the lid. She then hid the mixture upstairs in her room and waited.

Next week, her mother hugged them all and left. Later, Meldy went up to her room for the mixture. She stirred it up again then crept into the kitchen. No one was about so she secreted blobs of it around the room, then stood in the middle and chanted the incantation:

“Oh, kitchen spirit who left in haste  
All the food now lacks in taste  
Please come back, remove the blight  
Make all food from here taste right!

She then said the magic word, “Ab - ca - day - lee!”

Later at dinner she sat silently while her father handed out the plates of food. The twins examined it doubtfully then Kick was first to try it.

“Dad! This is wonderful! What went wrong?”

“You mean what went right, don’t you?” said their rather surprised father.

“Dad!” cried Popster. “This tastes so good!”

Only then did Meldy try it. The spell had worked. It really did taste good!

She smiled to herself.

“What are you smiling about, Meldy?” asked Popster.

She paused. She couldn't tell them that she was now a witch.

“Er - I'm glad that Daddy can cook,” she said.

Later, she went back to her room and looked at the book. Then she decoded some more of the headings. It took awhile but there was a spell to scare away birds, a spell to scare away squirrels, a spell to scare away children at Hallowe'en - “That one worked on Will Harker!” she thought.

There was also a spell to make your enemies make animal noises when trying to be serious. None of these appealed to her. She didn't have any enemies anyway.

Then she saw a useful spell: “A spell to clean up a room”

“That's the one!” she said to herself.

She decoded the instructions then collected the ingredients. She found laurel leaves, rose petals, hollyhock buds, sugar and orange juice then put them in the blender.

Back in her room she placed spoonfuls of the mixture around the room on small pieces of plastic then stood in the middle. She recited the incantation:

“This room's a mess so clean it do  
Work your magic swift and true  
Order, tidy, fold and dust  
When I return be done it must!”

She then said the magic word: “Dar - bin - bla - kino!”

She spent the next hour in the garden putting out more food for the birds and squirrels then returned to see what had happened. She hardly dared to open the door of her room but when she did, it was amazing. It was so tidy!

The twins went past and looked in. “Meldy! Whatever have you done to your room? It looks fantastic!! You couldn't clean ours as well, could you?”

They were really surprised when Meldy said, "I'll do it if you like."

"Would you like us to give you something in exchange?"

"Well, you can give me those lovely bird books. You never look at them now."

The deal was made and the twins went downstairs to play badminton.

Meldy went to each of their bedrooms in turn to cast the spell then returned to her room. Luckily she had made lots of the magic mixture.

She was really enjoying this new power. How would she use it in future? Unfortunately she hadn't translated the first page of the book and on that page was an important message to anyone who thought they owned it.

What was it? She would soon find out what it would mean to her.

The twins returned to their rooms after an hour. They gasped in amazement.

"She's done a wonderful job! My room's never been so tidy!" said one.

"Neither has mine!" said the other. They gave Meldy the bird books as promised.

Meldy continued with her decoding then went outside for a bit. The next spell she was planning to use would grow flowers overnight rather than the usual weeks and weeks.

"It'll help the bees," she thought. "I'll get the ingredients tomorrow. Mummy will be so pleased when she comes back!"

Meldy should have decoded that message on the first page. This is what it said:

### TO THE KEEPER OF THIS BOOK

You have fifteen days before you must follow these instructions:

To keep the magic in this book  
At this spell you have to look  
Turn three times round and three times back  
Arrange three conkers in a stack  
Place your thumbs on bottom and top  
Then round and round the book do hop

Say "et - ar - ba - te" forward twice  
Then reverse the letters and say it thrice  
If you fail, the book will go  
Then no more spells will you get to know.

She went back to her room to see what looked like a tornado. Whatever it was whooshed and circled round before leaving through the window. The window had been closed but it opened to let whatever it was out. Then it closed itself again.

Meldy turned to look for the book. It wasn't there! She hunted high and low but the book had gone. Then she remembered she had written down some of the spells but she couldn't find her notes. They'd gone as well, she was so miserable.

"What happened? Did I do something wrong?" she cried. Would she ever know the answer to that question?

A week later the twins asked if she could clean their rooms again.

"No. I'm busy. I've got homework to do."

"Homework? We thought you'd finished it all."

"I found some I hadn't done!"

"Oh, alright then."

Off they went to clean their rooms. Once out of earshot they said to each other, "We'll have to be nice to her or she'll never do it again!"

That evening at dinner their father's cooking was back to normal. They ate it in silence.

"Thank goodness Mum's coming back tomorrow!" they all thought.

They were in for a surprise. Their mother had no intention of cooking anything for awhile. She would be far too busy.

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## To the reader

Because you don't have the magic book you must not try these spells at home. However, here are some words you can decode:-

This is the 'Reverse split alphabet code' from the story:-

A B C D E F G H I J K L M	N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
M L K J I H G F E D C B A	Z Y X W V U T S R Q P O N

J Y G	=	_ _ _ _
F I B B Y	=	_ _ _ _ _
G Y Y J L O I	=	_ _ _ _ _ _ _
U W S E V V I B	=	_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _
L V I M C H M U T	=	_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

You will know all of these words. Now see if you can write your name in code!

## 2) The Book Returns

Meldy was depressed. The book of magic spells had gone away. She had seen it fly out of her window in some sort of whirlwind.

"I wonder where it went?" she asked herself.

Two days later she went to see her neighbour Nicky. He had been very ill and had spent a lot of time in hospital but now he was much better.

"Hello Meldy! What's wrong?" he asked.

"Can we go up to your tree house?"

"Yes, I've got something to show you!" he said.

They climbed up the ladder. When they were inside he shut the trap door, then showed her his prize possession. It was "The Big Book of Witchcraft".

“That’s just what I need!” cried Meldy.

“Why?”

“I’ve got a secret! You must promise not to tell anyone ever!”

“I promise! What is it?”

“I had a book of spells and they actually worked!”

Nicky’s jaw dropped. He knew Meldy well enough to know she wouldn’t make it up.

“What did you do with them?”

“I cleaned my room while I wasn’t there.”

“Can you clean mine?” asked Nicky.

“No, I can’t. It’s gone!” She then explained what had happened to the book.

Nicky thought for a bit. “There must have been a master spell somewhere.”

“What’s that?”

“When a new person gets a book like that they have to tell its spirit that they are the new owner. Did you do it?”

“No, I didn’t know. It was all in code.”

“Well, let’s look in my book. It might help us to find your book and get it back.”

They looked through ‘The Big Book of Witchcraft’ for clues.

“What’s that?” asked Meldy. “There’s someone coming up the ladder!”

There was. It was Meldy’s best friend, Becca. “I thought you’d be up here,” she said.

“Becca! Come in!” said Nicky.

“Becca! We’ve got a secret! You must promise not to tell,” said Meldy.

Becca was amazed when she heard. “We’ve got to get it back!” she cried.

“Yes, but how?”

“Maybe the book went back where it came from?”

“That’s it!” cried Meldy. “We’ll go over to the old house and get it back.”

Soon, the children were creeping round the back of Mrs Marchant’s old house.

“Someone else has moved in,” whispered Meldy.

“Surely nobody can live there, it looks like a real dump,” commented Becca.

But there was someone there. Their car was outside and a cat was eyeing them suspiciously.

“Let’s knock and ask for it!” said Nicky.

“What would we say?” asked Meldy.

“Leave it to me!” said Nicky and before they could stop him, he was knocking on the door.

A young woman answered. “Hello,” she said as she looked at them with just a bit of suspicion.

“Hello! I’m Nicky. This is Meldy and this is Becca.” They all smiled sweetly at her.

“Nice to meet you. I’m Mrs Marchant. Do you live next door?”

“We live up the lane. I’ve spent a lot of time in hospital. I nearly died.”

“You poor boy! I’m so sorry. But you look much better now.”

“Thank you. You’re very kind.” He gave her his most angelic smile.

“We were so worried about him!” chorused the girls.

“While I was there,” continued Nicky, “I kept thinking of the old leather-covered book that Mrs Plockford promised to give me. Is she at home?”

“Oh, I’m sorry, she doesn’t live here anymore.”

Meldy watched and listened with interest. Nicky knew full well that Mrs Plockford didn’t live there anymore.

“Becca’s father is a ling - a linguist and he is interested in studying my book when I get it.”

Becca kept quiet. Her father wasn’t a linguist.

“Well, if she promised it to you, I’ll have a look for it. Can you come back tomorrow?”

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Meldy, Nicky and Becca returned the very next morning. Mrs Marchant had found the book in the basement and decided it was of no interest so she handed it over.

“Thank you very much, Mrs Marchant!” they chorused.

They could barely conceal their excitement as they walked casually to the gate. Once out of sight they raced back to Meldy’s house.

When they arrived, they hid in the shrubbery. “We can hide it in your tree house,” suggested Meldy. They crept through the fence into Nicky’s garden, then climbed the ladder.

“We can put it in my steel trunk,” said Nicky. “It’s got a lock on it so the book can’t escape.”

“We’ll have a board game ready just in case someone comes. We can pretend we’re playing it. They mustn’t see the book!” said Nicky.

“We need a secret signal as well!” said Meldy, “When you came, Becca, we didn’t know who you were!”

The three friends now had to translate the coded words into English.

“It’s written in the reverse split alphabet code,” said Meldy.

“That should make it straightforward,” said Becca as she looked at the first page.

“What kind of code is that?” asked Nicky.

Meldy had used this code to write her diary while Nicky was still in hospital.

“That’s odd. Are you sure that code was the one you used, Meldy?” asked a confused Becca.

“Yes! I decoded some spells and used them.”

“Well, the code’s changed to something else now.”

“I don’t understand. How could it?”

“Ah,” said Nicky. “It’s possible that the spirit of the book has added another level of security to protect its contents. Meldy, did you speak out loud while you were decoding those spells?”

“Er - I might have done.”

“If you did, the spirit knows you have cracked the code so it could have changed it.”

“That makes sense,” agreed Becca.

“We mustn’t tell the book we know what code it’s using! Otherwise it will try and change the code again!”

“Why don’t we write out sections of the book and take them away?” suggested Meldy. “Then it won’t know what we’re doing.”

“We still need to find the master spell to establish ownership. How long did you have the book last time, Meldy?”

“Two weeks.”

“Then we’d better get moving! Mrs Marchant might not hand it over, if it goes back there again like it did before.”

Next morning, as Meldy was leaving her house to go to Nicky’s tree house, she saw the twins.

“What are you doing over there?” asked Kick. “You’re hardly ever here now!”

“Er - Nicky’s teaching us to play chess! He’s really good!”

“When’s Eustace coming back? You should play him!” suggested Popster. Eustace, Nicky’s older brother, had gone away on a music course.

“He’ll be back soon, I think”, said Meldy.

She left them and walked over to the tree house. “How are we going to stop him finding out what we’re up to?” she asked herself.

It took Becca two days to crack the code. They left the tree house and went down the end of the garden. They put the book in the steel trunk and locked it.

“It’s a four-main-part-reverse-divided alphabet code,” she said “The alphabet is divided into groups of 8 letters, 6 letters, 6 more letters, 4 letters and 2 letters. Then these groups are reversed. I’ll show you.”

She had drawn the code up like this:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
H	G	F	E	D	C	B	A	N	M	L	K	J	I	T	S	R	Q	P	O	X	W	V	U	Z	Y

The friends went back to their own homes to decode the sections of the book they had copied out.

Meldy sat in her room and decoded the following:

ATV OT POTS SDTSKD JNPGDAHWNIB

This is what she got:

HOW TO STOP PEOPLE MISBEHAVING

“I’ll use this in art! Some of the students mess about in the class. I really like our art teacher and they’re very rude!” she said to herself.

Becca sat in her house and decoded the following:

H P S D K K O T J H L D Z T X Q X I C H P O D Q

This is what she got:

A S P E L L T O M A K E Y O U R U N F A S T E R

“I’m fed up with coming last when we run races!” she said. “I’ll use this to win a race at least once!”

Nicky sat in his room and thought of the Magic Book locked in the steel trunk in his tree house. He had found the perfect spell:

A T V O T J H L D G X K K N D P G D A H W D K N L D F A N F L D I P

This is what he got:

H O W T O M A K E B U L L I E S B E H A V E L I K E C H I C K E N S

“I’m fed up with Ozzie Oafley picking on the smaller boys,” he thought. “I’ll teach him!”

The next time the friends met up they told each other about their spells. They all agreed that they had chosen good uses of magic and these particular spells wouldn’t attract too much attention. However, they still hadn’t found the master spell so they had to keep decoding until they’d discovered it.

Nicky was the first to try his spell. He’d collected the ingredients for the required potion and had it ready in a small water pistol. He followed Ozzie while he looked for his next victim, then crept up behind him.

He whispered the incantation: “Stop right now your behaviour mad  
You’re acting like a person bad  
Start to cluck and flap your wings  
Do this till the school bell rings!”

Then he sprayed Ozzie with some potion and whispered the magic word.  
‘Poul - fait - cluk - com!’

The effect was immediate. Ozzie started flapping his arms and crowing like a demented cockerel.

“Cock-a-doodle do! Cock-a-doodle-do!”

Ozzie strutted round in a circle while more and more students crept up to have a look. Was this a trick to get them close enough to pounce on them? It can't have been as they started to laugh and he didn't react. Normally you couldn't laugh at Ozzie without running a long way away. This behaviour continued for ten minutes until the bell rang. Ozzie stopped and looked a bit dazed. He rubbed his eyes and looked around to see lots of laughing students scattering in all directions.

“What - er - how - er - I - er,” he mumbled.

Nicky went up to him. He never picked on Nicky as he knew how ill Nicky had been.

“Ozzie, some sort of bad spirit possessed you! You must stop bullying students or ...”

“What? Me bullying? They look at me funny and I have to teach them not to, don't I?”

“You can never do that again! If you do, you will act like a cockerel every time. The bell seemed to stop it. Without the bell you would still be flapping your arms and scratching with your feet!”

“What can I do?”

“Why not stop other people bullying? If you pick on bullies, you might be alright.”

So Ozzie became anti-bully. Small children soon came to trust him and he rather enjoyed his new role.

Becca's spell was next. She had prepared the potion previously. When she went up to the start line she put some on the soles of her shoes.

Becca whispered the incantation: “When signal’s given I must run fast  
Please ensure I don’t come last  
If I win, I will be pleased  
Then will I no more be teased!”

She whispered the magic word. ‘Ren - vite - gagne - ment!’

The starter’s signal was given and off they went. Becca had to hold back to stop herself making it look too easy! She decided that she would let someone else win. That particular student lived for her sport while Becca didn’t really mind coming second.

“Well done, Becca!” cried the other students. “Why don’t you join the relay team?”

“Thanks, but I just wanted to show what I could do if I really tried. In future, I’ll just let everybody else avoid coming last!”

So in future races students whispered, “She’s so nice! She lets other students beat her so they don’t come last!”

The friends continued to look for the master code. Time was running out. Meldy was next to try her spell. She mixed up the potion then crept into the Art room before class. She knew where the trouble-makers sat so she put some of her potion under their chairs.

After the class started it wasn’t long before the same four students began to giggle and throw paint at each other. The teacher was beginning to look stressed, then Meldy swung into action.

She whispered: “You must stop your messing around!  
Concentrate! The teacher astound!  
Do your best to do good work  
Sit up straight and do not shirk!”

She said the magic word. ‘Arbeit - farbe - kunst!’

Suddenly, all was quiet. The troublesome students applied themselves to their work and even asked the teacher for help. One surprised student even apologised to the teacher for having been bad and promised to do better in future.

The teacher looked really pleased as she surveyed the work being done by her students.

That evening Meldy's father was watching the local news. "Meldy, come and look at this! A woman in the town has got hundreds of birds in her garden."

Meldy and her twin sisters went over to have a look.

"How creepy!" chorused the twins. "Why would she do that? Imagine the mess!"

"I wonder how she did it," mused Meldy. "I would love to have all those birds in our garden."

"Meldy," said Popster, "let's play chess later on."

"But I don't know how to play chess," Meldy replied.

"But you said Nicky was teaching you!"

"Oh - er - yes. But I can't play yet."

Popster and Kick were becoming suspicious. What were they doing over there in the tree house?

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Later, Meldy went to see Nicky.

"Meldy! I've just decoded a passage that says there's another book!" said Nicky.

Meldy's jaw dropped. "Of course! And I know where it is! This bird lady on the television's got it! I saw a spell to scare away birds in our book. She must have one in her book to attract them."

The two friends looked at each other. They were sure Becca would agree, they had to have that book.

## To the reader

Because you don't have the magic book you must not try these spells at home. However, here are some words you can decode:-

This is the 'Four main part reverse divided alphabet code' from part 2:-

A B C D E F G H	I J K L M N	O P Q R S T	U V W X	Y Z
H G F E D C B A	N M L K J I	T S R Q P O	X W V U	Z Y

Now see if you can decode these words:-

GNQE	=	_ _ _ _ _
BQHPP	=	_ _ _ _ _
BQDDONIBP	=	_ _ _ _ _
OQDDATXPD	=	_ _ _ _ _
FKHPPQTTJ	=	_ _ _ _ _

You will know all of them. Now see if you can write your name in code!

### 3) The Second Book Arrives

The existence of the second book of magic came as a surprise. What other explanation could there be? The television news report had clearly shown huge numbers of birds descending on one house and garden. That doesn't just happen on its own. Surely magic must have been involved.

Also, their book stated that there was a second book. They had decoded that section and now they redoubled their efforts to find two further spells. They needed to take ownership of their book with the ownership spell. Then they had to acquire the second volume using the acquisition spell which they thought must exist. Would the owner of the second book beat them to it? They could possibly lose their book!

The three friends continued their decoding work but were careful not to say anything out loud. They didn't want the spirit of their book to hear what they were doing.

“Let’s go down the ladder for a bit,” said Meldy. She made a hand signal to encourage the others to follow her.

Once well away from the book in the tree house she whispered, “I’ve found the ownership spell! Let’s collect the ingredients then we can take ownership of the book. We will need three conkers.”

Nicky disappeared into his house then returned with the conkers. His mother used them to scare away spiders.

“We need to place them one on top of the other,” said Meldy.

“But they won’t sit on top of each other, they’re the wrong shape!” said Nicky.

“Get some plasticine,” suggested Becca.

This was done and the book was brought down from the tree house. Meldy was to follow the instructions:

“Turn three times round and three times back. Then arrange three conkers in a stack.” This she did.

“Place your thumbs on the bottom and the top of the book. Then hop round and round it.” This she did next.

Finally she had to say the magic word - “Etarbate” - twice. Then she had to say “Etabrate” three times. This she did.

The friends looked at the book. What would it do now? Had it accepted the spell? Nothing happened so they all breathed a sigh of relief.

“Good thing you didn’t hop around in the tree house, Meldy. It might have attracted too much attention!” said Nicky.

“You could have shaken it to bits!” laughed Becca.

They returned to the tree house taking the book with them. Then they continued their decoding work.

Later Nicky’s mother called out from the bottom of the ladder, “Nicky! Becca’s mother has come to collect her and you need to come down for supper.”

They locked the book in the steel trunk. Afterwards the friends descended the ladder one by one.

“Did you have a good time?” she asked.

“Yes, thank you!” they chorused.

Nicky followed his mother back into the house.

“Nicky, you’re so lucky to have such nice friends,” she said.

“If only she knew what we were doing!” he thought.

It took them two more days to find the acquisition spell. They collected the ingredients from the house and garden. They found mint, thyme, sage, lemon balm and marjoram outside but Nicky had to ask about some of the other ingredients.

“Mummy, do we have any marshmallow, borage and dill?”

“What do you want those for?”

He showed her a drawing he had done. “I drew this nettle and I wanted to draw the other plants as well.” Obviously, he didn’t want her to know the truth.

“That’s really good! Let’s see what we can find.” Off they went into the garden to look for the plants.

Nicky thanked his mother then returned to the tree house. All they needed now was pepper and sunflower oil. Meldy crept into her kitchen and nipped out again with these two ingredients.

“Becca, what do we do now?” asked Meldy.

“Here are the instructions:

To unite the books  
These steps do take,  
A special potion you must make.  
Spread it round in small amount,  
Every part of it will count.  
A magic word you must recite,  
Make quite sure you get it right!”

They mixed the potion then spread it around as instructed. Then Becca said the magic word: “Ven-livre-ici-jetzt”.

“Keep away from the trap door!” said Nicky. “It’ll come in that way!”

They all retreated across to the other side of the tree house.

They didn’t have to wait long. There was a whistling noise and a whooshing then the second book was lowered onto the steel trunk as if by some unseen hand.

They pounced on it and started to analyse the code used.

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Phedra Hubtrouble was in her garden. She hummed as she collected some herbs.

“Finally!” she said to herself. “I’ve found the acquisition spell. I must have that other book!”

She had no idea where the other book was but had managed to decode enough of her own to know that it existed. She had found her book at a garage sale. She had noticed a small symbol on the leather binding which looked like a secret witch’s symbol. Then she knew she had to have it. You see, she really was a witch.

Phedra turned to go back to the house. Suddenly the window of her study flew open and a jet that looked like smoke shot across the garden with a roar and a whoosh.

She was very angry. She screamed loud enough to frighten all the birds in the area. “They must have got there first!” she hissed.

Phedra looked after the disappearing book and noticed it was heading towards a distant church. That could be an important clue! She went back into her house and got out a map of the area.

“It probably flew to it’s destination in a straight line,” she mused as she placed a ruler between her house and that distant church. She drew a line between the two. This line was continued until it reached the edge of her map.

Next day Phedra started knocking on doors. She knew the direction the book had taken so she followed its probable route and asked people if they had seen anything out of the ordinary.

“Good morning!” she would say, “I’m Doctor Hubtrouble and I’m doing research into psychic phenomena. Have you seen anything unusual around here lately?”

It wasn’t long before she got some encouraging answers.

“Yes! Something strange flew over here yesterday!”

“What do you think it was?”

“I don’t know but it went that way.”

She checked her map. It was closely following the course she had predicted.

Eventually Phedra couldn’t find anyone who had seen anything.

“It must have stopped somewhere in that area over there!” she said triumphantly. She drew a circle on her map. The three friends in Nicky’s tree house had no idea that they were very near the centre of Phedra Hubtrouble’s circle.

A few days later Meldy’s father was watching the local news. There was a woman doing research into psychic phenomena.

“Meldy! Come and look at this! We should get in touch with her! Maybe that could explain why my cooking improved so much a few weeks ago!” he joked.

Meldy gulped. She looked at the screen and there stood a smartly dressed woman with green eyes.

“Have you seen anything unusual that can’t be explained by any other means?” she asked as she eyed the camera in a confident manner. “If you have then get in touch with Doctor Hubtrouble at the Psychic Research and Assessment Team (PRAT). You can find us on the internet!”

The twins caught the last part of the piece.

“It could explain how Meldy cleaned our rooms so incredibly well! Would she be interested in that?” they laughed.

Popster looked at Meldy expecting her to share in the joke. Instead her little sister looked ashen-faced.

“What is going on in that tree house?” Popster asked herself. Later she spoke to Kick about it.

“Did you notice the way Meldy responded to that piece on psychic research? There’s something going on and I’d like to know what it is!”

“I didn’t but she is spending most of her free time over there! Eustace comes back soon, we can ask him what they’re up to!” Eustace, Nicky’s older brother was still on a music course. He would want to socialise with the twins on his return.

Doctor Hubtrouble’s broadcast received a number of responses from mothers with children at two schools in the area.

“The school bully acted like a demented cockerel.”

“A trouble-maker in my daughter’s art class has been as good as gold for over a week.”

“A girl at our school shot round the running track and nearly beat the fastest girl in the school. Normally she’s at the back of the field!”

“I’m getting warmer!” she said to herself. “Teachers wouldn’t cast these spells so it looks like some kids have got hold of the other book and now they’ve got mine as well! This is going to be easier than I thought!” She chuckled to herself as she planned her next move.

A few days later a strange woman with green eyes appeared in a street near Meldy’s lane. She went from house to house with the same story but she had decided not to use her real name.

“Good day! I’m Phedra Hartmill and I’m moving to this area. I’m really interested in the local schools. I think a good education for our children is so important, don’t you?”

Once they had replied, she either made her excuses and left or lingered to talk about the schools. Phedra was particularly interested in two in the locality. She was looking for families who had connections with each. These schools were attended by Meldy, Becca and Nicky but she didn't know that yet.

“So your children go to St Hildegard's? Do you know anyone at St George's?”

You might think this would be very time-consuming. It would have been if she didn't have a special spell to fall back on. She could make clones of herself. Once safely behind a hedge, some potion was produced and an incantation was murmured:

‘Four more Phedras now do make,  
Produce them now for goodness sake!  
They must have my so green eyes,  
Then they'll be my special spies!’

Up in the tree house a few hundred metres away, Meldy shivered.

“What was that?” she asked.

“What?” said the others. They hadn't felt anything.

Phedra Hubtrouble dabbed some of the special potion on her hands and feet. Soon, five identical women emerged from the hedge and fanned out into the neighbourhood. It wasn't long before one of these green-eyed women stood outside Meldy's house ready to knock.

#### 4) Phedra Makes Her Move

Meldy, Becca and Nicky had been working on decoding the second book of magic. They met in Nicky's tree house as often as they could and examined their new acquisition.

“It's not the same code as the first book,” said Becca. “Maybe it changed before we got it!”

They needed to decode it to find the ownership spell. If they didn't make it theirs, it would go back to the 'bird lady' who they assumed had owned it before.

"The spirit of the book thinks we've borrowed it," said Nicky. "It'll go back if we can't find the ownership spell."

The friends communicated by notes on pieces of paper. If the book found out that they knew what code it was using it might change it.

It wasn't long before Becca suggested they went for a walk. They locked the books in the trunk and descended the ladder.

Once they reached the end of the garden Becca whispered, "I've cracked the code! It was a lucky guess. This is what it looks like."

She produced a piece of paper showing the following arrangement of letters:

A B C D E F G H      I J K L M N O P      Q R S T U V W X      Y Z  
G H E F C D A B      O P M N K L I J      W X U V S T Q R      Z Y

"It's split the alphabet into 3 main groups of 8 letters each. Each group of 8 letters has been reversed. Each pair of letters has been reversed again except for Y and Z."

They congratulated Becca on her effort then they raced back to the tree house to start their decoding work.

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Phedra Hubtrouble and her four clones had been knocking on doors and asking questions about the local schools. They all had green eyes and were identically dressed. No one had suspected what they were up to.

One of those women was now knocking on Meldy's door. Mr Wagley answered it.

"Hello! I'm Ms Hartmill and I'm looking at local schools for my children. I want them to have the best available education. It's so important, don't you agree?" she gave Mr Wagley her most charming smile.

“Hello, I’m Desmond Wagley. Welcome to our neighbourhood. Our girls all go to St Hildegard’s. We think it’s an excellent school.”

“ I’ve heard the same thing from other parents. Do you know anyone who goes to St George’s?”

‘Yes, our neighbours’ two sons go there. It’s also an excellent school by all accounts.’

“Are there good relations between the two schools?”

“Well, our daughters all get on really well with our neighbours’ sons.”

Phedra Hubtrouble - or Ms Hartmill - smiled to herself. This sounded promising.

“How old are your daughters, if you don’t mind me asking?”

Mr Wagley told her then she produced a mobile phone. The phone had picked up the ages of his girls and instantly provided suitable images of children to show him.

“This is my youngest girl, Britella. She’s really good at maths and she’s interested in codes. She even writes her diary in code.”

“Our Meldy’s written her diary in code as well. Her best friend is really clever at things like that.”

“Well, I do hope Britella goes to their school! They could be such good friends! It’s been so nice meeting you Mr Wagley.” She turned and walked back up the drive.

Mrs Wagley had heard the conversation. “Who was that?” she asked.

“She’s moving into the neighbourhood and wanted to know about local schools.”

“She didn’t ask you much about the schools! She seemed to want to know more about Meldy.”

“Oh, she has a daughter who’s Meldy’s age.”

“I don’t know. I don’t quite trust her.”

The Phedra Hubtrouble clone disappeared into the bushes and soon the others joined her. They fused back together again and one woman emerged.

Up in the tree house, the two magic books were side by side on the floor. Suddenly, Meldy cried out, “Look!”

The others looked. The books had opened by themselves, the pages fluttered and turned while the letters on those pages seemed to dissolve in front of their eyes. A mist was swirling but they could still see letters lifting off the pages. These letters did a sort of dance before settling down in random order. Some were in the same book but others had shifted to the neighbouring book.

When the mist cleared, nothing was the same as it had been.

“What on earth?” cried Nicky.

“They’re being re-formatted!” cried Meldy.

“They must be doing it themselves! But what if someone or something else is doing it!” cried Becca.

Finally both books closed with a load thump.

“What do we do now?” asked Nicky. “First, let’s lock them in the trunk.”

“We’ll have to start all over again!” wailed Becca.

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Nicky’s brother, Eustace, had returned from his music course. He was sitting with the twins on their patio when Kick looked over towards Eustace’s house and saw some smoke.

“Has your mother got a bonfire?” she asked.

Eustace looked round. “It’s coming from the treehouse!” he cried.

They all raced over to the fence, squeezed through and ran to the treehouse.

A woman was standing below it with her arms outstretched. She was looking up, mumbling something. Smoke seemed to be appearing from above her head. It rose to envelop the treehouse.

“What are you doing?” shouted Eustace.

“I was ....” she started to explain, then saw the identical twins standing there. She looked alarmed and quickly disappeared into the bushes. The smoke vanished with her.

“That was a seriously scary woman!” said Eustace. “Did you see the way she looked at you two?”

“Yes, she seemed almost frightened of us!” said Popster.

“Wait! She had green eyes like that psychic research woman on the news the other evening!” exclaimed Kick.

They called out to the three friends in the treehouse. “Are you alright?”

“I think so. Where did all that smoke come from?” asked Nicky.

“It’s gone now. Can we come up?”

Once they had climbed the ladder Eustace asked, “What did she want?”

“Who?”

“That seriously scary woman with the smoke!”

“What seriously scary woman with the smoke?” asked Meldy.

Nicky, Becca and Meldy tried their hardest to look equally puzzled.

“Meldy,” said Kick. “You’re haven’t been playing chess, have you.”

Still no answer.

“What’s in the trunk?” asked Eustace, “and why has it got a padlock on it?”

At that precise moment they all heard a knocking noise.

“What’s that?” asked Kick.

“It’s coming from the trunk!” cried Eustace.

They all looked at the trunk. It had started to creep across the floor every time a knock was heard.

Nicky and the girls jumped onto the trunk to stop it moving. They sat in a row looking sheepishly up at the three teenagers.

“Alright, Nicky! What have you got in there?” asked his older brother.

“Nothing!” said Nicky in his most innocent-sounding voice.

“Right, I’ll go and get Mother. She needs to see this!” Eustace said.

“Don’t! It’s — it’s two books of magic.”

“What? Are you serious?”

“Yes! We cast some spells and they worked!”

“What did you do?”

“Nicky made a bully act like a cockerel, I got some naughty kids to behave in my art class and Becca managed to run like the wind,” explained Meldy. “And I cleaned your rooms!”

“That was magic?” chorused the twins. “That figures!”

“That scary woman wanted those books, didn’t she?” asked Eustace.

“How did you get rid of her?” asked Meldy.

“She seemed frightened by the twins.”

“Well, I’m not surprised!” laughed their little sister.

“Well, some people think identical twins have magical powers,” explained Nicky.

“Us? I don’t think so!” exclaimed Popster.

“Well, she thought you did so that worked well for us,” said Eustace.

“What are you going to do?” asked Becca. “Are you going to tell your parents?”

Eustace thought for a minute. The knocking noise had ceased but nobody had yet noticed.

“Let’s not do anything hasty,” he said.

“They could be very useful if we’re careful,” said Popster.

“I can think of some really good uses for magic!” said Kick.

Suddenly Becca asked. “What’s that smoke? Has she come back?”

“It’s coming from the trunk!” shouted Meldy.

The three friends jumped off and retreated to where the teenagers were standing. Six pairs of eyes watched as a small, bright, focussed flame cut it’s way out from inside the trunk. It roared it’s way slowly down towards the floor. It changed direction and travelled horizontally for awhile before rising vertically. Finally it moved back towards it’s starting point. There was a loud pop as the flame extinguished itself. The front of the metal trunk had been cut in a neat rectangular shape.

The resulting piece fell onto the floor with a clatter. A roaring and a whooshing noise erupted from inside the trunk which had started to shake.

“Get away from the trap door!” cried Nicky.

The trap door opened by itself, the books emerged from the trunk and disappeared.

When the noise had died away they all looked at each other.

“Well, that’s that! No more magic.” said a disappointed Eustace.

Meldy, Becca and Nicky were silent. They had a plan.

To the reader

The code used in the part 4 was as follows:-

A B C D	E F G H	I J K L	M N O P	Q R S T	U V W X	Y Z
G H E F	C D A B	O P M N	K L I J	W X U V	S T Q R	Z Y

Here are some words for you to decode:-

XGOL	=	_ _ _ _
VCGEBCX	=	_ _ _ _ _ _
TONNGAC	=	_ _ _ _ _ _
BINOFGZ	=	_ _ _ _ _ _
HSONFOLA	=	_ _ _ _ _ _

You will know all these words. Now write your name using the above code.

We hope you have enjoyed this story.

Part 2 will follow soon!