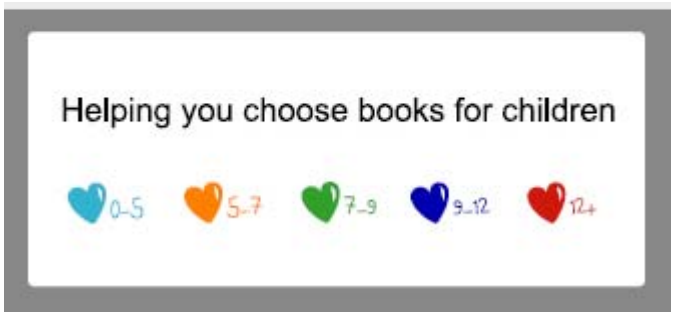
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Watch out for Witches

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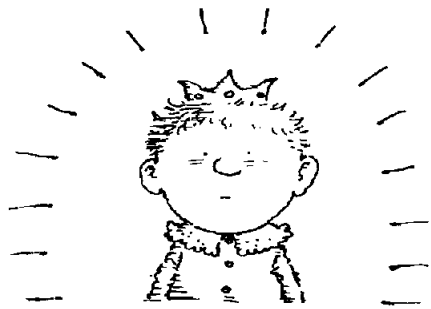
Hilda Offen

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The Fairy Godmother's Advice

The King of Little Twittelburg threw open the window.

"A new prince is born!" he cried. "Send for the Fairy Godmother!"

All day long invitations sped to the four corners of the kingdom. Carrier pigeons thronged the air. The telephone lines buzzed. Bells rang out. And all day long a steady stream of well-wishers flowed into the palace.

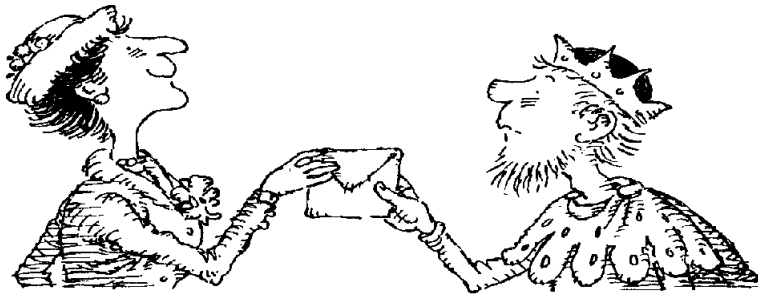
"Where's she got to?" grumbled the King, looking at his watch.

Towards evening a loud fanfare of trumpets sounded, and in strode a tall woman with a briefcase. She wore a smart business suit and there was a green orchid in her button-hole.



"Better late than never!" muttered the King. Aloud he said, "Welcome, welcome, dear Fairy Godmother!"

"Never mind all that!" she snapped. "Time's money. Where's my fee?"



The King handed her an envelope. "I think you'll find it's all there," he said.

"It had better be!" said the Fairy Godmother. "Now – where's the baby?"

"Over here," said the King, waving at the royal cradle. "Er – what are you going to wish him?"

"Oh – the usual!" said the Fairy Godmother. She unsnapped her briefcase. "Good Looks, Good Manners and Common Sense. What's his name?"

"Florian Dorian," said the King.

"Peregrine Pom –" added the Queen. She was going to say "Pomroy" but the Fairy Godmother cut her short.

"Florian Dorian Peregrine Pom!" she cried, waving her wand. "I wish you Good Looks –"

But now it was her turn to be interrupted. The curtains billowed in a sudden draught and the candles began to flicker. Blinding lights flashed in the air and a terrible smell filled the room. There was a scratching and a rumbling – and then a voice boomed out from the floor. It was as loud and as sudden as a foghorn and it made everybody jump.



"We'll make you sorry!" hissed another, softer voice.

"Your child is doomed!" cried a third.

"Wait till he's eight years old!" yelled a fourth. "He'll go into the wood!"

The smell got stronger and stronger.

"And he won't come out!" cried a fifth voice. Scratch! Scratch! Scratch! "He'll be ours for ever and ever!"

There was a horrid cackling sound and the curtains billowed once more. Then a silence filled the room; all that was left was the smell.

"Witches!" said the Fairy Godmother. She was already fastening her briefcase.

Pandemonium broke out. People rushed backwards and forwards. The baby started to howl.

"Help us!" cried the King, clutching the Fairy Godmother's arm. "Aren't you meant to know about this sort of thing?"



"What do you expect me to do?" asked the Fairy Godmother.

"Lift the spell!" said the King.

"Sorry!" said the Fairy Godmother. She looked at her watch. "I have to be at the next palace in twenty minutes."

The King threw himself at her feet.

"Please!" he cried. "Please, please, please!"



"Get up!" snapped the Fairy Godmother. "Don't grovel. The spell cannot be changed – what is done is done."

Prince Florian Dorian Peregrine Pom howled louder than ever.



"None the less," said the Fairy Godmother, "I can give you some advice – for a small fee, of course."



The King handed her a five-pound note.

"Well – what is it?" he cried.

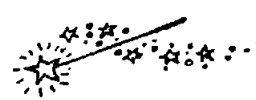
Everyone waited with baited breath. Even the young prince stopped crying.

"Never let Prince Florian go into the wood," said the Fairy Godmother and she hurried off to a waiting taxi. "And watch out for witches," she called as her taxi sped away.

"What a cheek!" said the King. "That was a complete waste of money!"

"Anyone could have told us that!" said the Queen. "That's common sense!"

You may have noticed that the Fairy Godmother had forgotten to finish her three wishes. We'll hear more about that later.



While all this was happening, a baby girl was born to an ordinary family called Jones. They lived in an ordinary house

in an ordinary street just beneath the palace walls.

"What shall we call her?" asked Mr Jones, peeping at his new daughter, who was sleeping peacefully in her cot.



The King spent a sleepless night. When morning came he sat up in bed.

"I know – we'll cut down the wood!" he cried.

"What a good idea, my dear!" said the Queen.



The King sent for an army of woodcutters and gave them their orders. Off they marched, through the town and into the wood beyond. In no time at all they were back again.

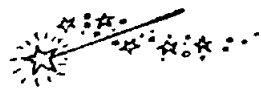
"It's no good," said the foreman. "It can't be done. The trees are like iron – our axes just bounce off them."

"A fence!" cried the King. "That's what we need – a fence all around the wood!"

But that was no good either. No sooner had the workmen set the posts in the ground than invisible hands wrenched them up and threw them away.

"Our son must never go into the wood," said the King.

"We must tell him," said the Queen. "Over and over again until he gets the message."



The young prince started to grow. No one called him Florian any more – they called him "Pompom" instead. It seemed to suit him better.

"Don't go into the wood!" said his nurse as the prince sat on his potty.



"Don't go into the wood!" said the cook, as she served the prince his boiled egg.



Prince Pompom made a rude face and threw his buttered "soldiers" on the floor.

He was a beautiful child. He had big blue eyes and a cloud of golden hair. But he had no manners. And he had no common sense.

"Don't go into the wood!" wrote his tutor on the blackboard.

Prince Pompom stuck out his tongue and scribbled all over his worksheet.

"Don't go into the wood!" whispered his parents as they kissed him goodnight.

But Prince Pompom put his fingers in his ears. "Da-dee-da-dee-da-da!" he chanted. "I can't hear you!"

