SEAWITCH

SKYE MCKENNA

Illustrated by Tomislav Tomic

WELBECK
CHILDREN'S BOOKS

The Hedgewitch series:
Hedgewitch
Woodwitch
Seawitch

WELBECK CHILDREN'S BOOKS

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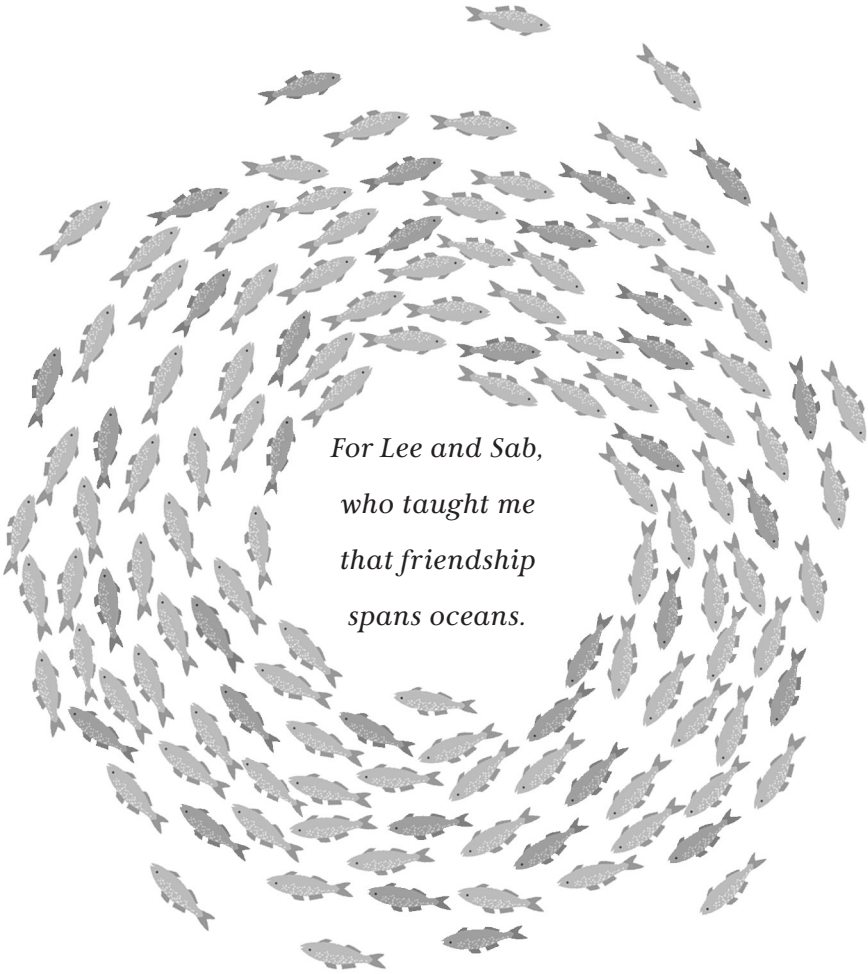
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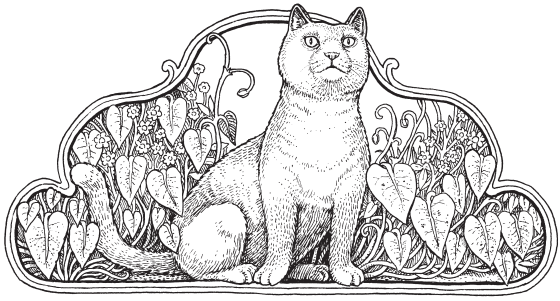
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For Lee and Sab,
who taught me
that friendship
spans oceans.



Chapter One

A Trail of Biscuit Crumbs

Cassandra Morgan was hunting for a book. She had been chasing it for the better part of the afternoon and had managed to track it down to the Cookery section, where it had taken refuge amongst goblin recipes for toenail pie and pondweed soup, and faery syllabubs of moonshine and may blossom. With a candlestick in one hand and a butterfly net in the other, she stalked between the shelves, peering over the dusty spines of the volumes that sat in ordered rows and were, for the most part, behaving themselves.

A flutter of pages on one of the higher shelves caught her attention and Cassie scrambled up a wobbly stack of books to get a closer look.

'Cassandra, would you come down from there before you break your neck?' called a voice from below her. 'It's giving me vertigo just looking at you.'

'You're a cat, Montague, you're meant to be good at climbing. Perhaps you could lift a paw to help me catch it?'

'I'm a familiar, not a common mouser, thank you very much,' said the grey cat, licking a spot on his shoulder. 'If you wish to endanger your life looking for the . . . what was it again?'

'*Skald's Glossary of Faery Poetry*,' said Cassie, teetering on the pile of books and steadying herself against the dusty shelf. There, in the shadows, she glimpsed a fat yellow spine. With her face pressed against a row of books, she stretched her arm towards it. Her fingers brushed the book's cover just as it was whisked away from her, vanishing down the back of the shelf.

'Cabbages and codfish!' Cassie swore, borrowing a favourite expression of Mrs Briggs, the Hartwood housekeeper. She was beginning to wonder if the book was cursed – enchanted somehow to evade her. Then

again, it wasn't the first book that had given her trouble lately. In fact, every book she had wanted that week had gone missing, even those she'd seen just hours before.

Widdershin's Bookshop was chaotic at the best of times. There were far more books than could fit on the shelves and many were heaped on desks and chairs, arranged in haphazard rows, or stacked in towers and piles like the one Cassie was currently teetering on top of. This made finding the book you wanted something of a challenge under ordinary circumstances, but Cassie had been visiting the bookshop and browsing these shelves for over a year now, ever since she'd arrived in the village of Hedgely. It was her favourite shop on Loft Street, and she had recently begun working there part-time, helping Widdershin with deliveries of new books after school and coming in on Saturdays to catalogue the stock. She was saving every penny she earned to buy a set of the *Encyclopaedia Enchantia* from Mercator's Magical Mail Order catalogue. These volumes promised to concisely cover every subject a young witch needed to know, all alphabetically arranged and carefully indexed. Cassie was sure that it would help speed up her training – there were still so many things she had to learn to get her Sapling and Sterling pins and prepare

for the Witch's Licence examination. But it wasn't just about passing tests and earning badges, Cassie needed to become a fully trained witch so that she could find her parents.

Her mother, Rose Morgan, had gone missing eight years ago. Cassie now knew that Rose had travelled through the Hedge, the vast enchanted forest that marked the border between Britain and the land of Faerie. She also knew why Rose had gone – she'd been searching for Cassie's father, a man called Toby Harper, whom Cassie had never met. Cassie had no idea what had happened to her parents in that enchanted land, whether they were still alive, trapped and unable to get back to her, but she was determined to find out. To do so meant crossing the border herself, and for that she needed to master the practical arts of witchcraft and prove herself capable of facing the dangers of Faerie.

This was the first time that Cassie had been left in charge of Widdershin's shop on her own. It was the May half-term and Widdershin had gone to Rutland to attend the estate sale of a rather famous witch who had died, leaving behind a collection of rare and valuable grimoires which the hob shopkeeper was eager to get his hands on. Cassie wanted to show him that she could

be trusted to manage the shop while he was away, and that meant catching this annoying book and figuring out who or what was behind its disappearing act.

'Can you smell anything, Montague?' called Cassie.

'While my senses may be far more acute than your paltry human ones, that does not mean I can detect one book among thousands,' said the cat. 'They all smell the same, anyway, of dust and mouldering paper.'

'This book is new,' said Cassie, peering down the back of the shelf where the book had disappeared. 'It still smells of printer's ink and binders glue and—'

'There, behind you!' called Montague.

Turning carefully on the spot, the pile of books wobbling beneath her, Cassie scanned the shelves. 'Where did you see it?'

'Over there, on the shelf across from you, amongst the history books.'

Cassie raised her candle, the light glittering on three fat volumes about the Spriggan Revolt and a biography of Queen Mab. There, on the top shelf, facing out – bold as brass – was *Skald's Glossary*.

Cassie frowned. It was just out of reach. If only she had her broom! Clutching the Cookery bookcase for balance, she leaned out into the aisle, reaching towards

the history books and trying to angle her butterfly net just-so. It hovered above the yellow glossary when there was an ominous creaking sound.

A second later, Cassie found herself hanging in mid-air as the pile of books collapsed beneath her. A dark shadow loomed over her and the bookcase she'd been clinging to fell towards her, raining recipes. Before she could cry out, she was buried under a pile of books.

'Are you alright?' asked a voice, as Cassie pushed aside a heavy cookbook and pulled herself out from beneath the bookcase which had, thankfully, come to rest against its neighbour, saving Cassie from being squashed completely flat.

'Yes, no thanks to you, Montague, you could have warned—' she broke off mid-sentence as she saw it was not her cat familiar who had spoken, but a boy. She did not recognise him. He was a little shorter than Cassie, with curling wisps of brown hair that stuck up at the back, and dark, serious eyes. He had not offered her a hand but seemed rather to be hiding something behind his back. A book, she guessed. Something he didn't want her to know he was reading.

Well, he was still a *customer*, Cassie reminded herself, scrambling to her feet and dusting her clothes. 'I'm sorry

about this, I'll be with you in just a moment.'

She raised her net and saw, with a sense of triumph, that she had managed to catch the glossary after all.

'You've got a bogle in here, you know,' said the boy.

'Pardon?'

'A bogle. I saw a trail of biscuit crumbs when I came in – that's always a clue. We had one in my *tad's* office last year, it used to steal chocolate digestives and change the dates on the desk calendars to confuse everyone. They like to play tricks – hide things you're looking for. I suspect this one is having a good laugh about this,' he gestured to the avalanche of books from which Cassie had emerged.

'I know what a bogle is,' said Cassie, although to be fair, she had not noticed the biscuit crumbs. She would have to make some faery traps and try to catch it before Widdershin got back. 'Were you looking for something?' she asked, changing the subject.

The boy flushed, and the colour went all the way to his ears. 'I was . . . that is . . . Have you got anything on ancient witches?'

Cassie turned to the mixed mountain of history and cookery books with dismay. 'Yes, but it might take me a while to dig it out.'



‘Never mind,’ said the boy. ‘What’s that you’re reading?’ he pointed to the yellow book Cassie was clutching.

‘It’s a glossary, you don’t read it exactly, you use it to look things up.’

‘What sort of things?’

‘Here, I’ll show you.’ Cassie led the boy around the collapsed bookshelves to Widdershin’s desk, an item of furniture which was perpetually buried under open books, scrolls, receipts, letters, broken pens, pots of ink and assorted papers. Cassie picked up a little green chapbook titled *The Wanderers*. She handed it to him.

The boy tucked whatever he was hiding into the back of his belt, freeing his hands to take the book.

‘Poems?’ he said, thumbing through the pages.

‘Just one poem, actually. There’s a verse on each page but I’m pretty sure they all go together.’

‘What’s it about?’

‘That’s what I’m trying to find out. See this verse here...’ She took the book back and flipped to the first page, reading aloud:

‘Seven rode over the starlit hills,
From the land of youth they came,

Bearing each their grammarye
From the halls of fair Elfhame.'

'*Grammarye* means magic,' Cassie explained. 'It's related to *grimoire* – that's what we witches call our spell books. And I think Elfhame is another name for the land of Faerie, but I wanted to be sure.' She handed *The Wanderers* back to him and picked up *Skald's Glossary* to check.

The boy flipped through a couple of pages and read out another verse:

'The Healer of the gentle heart
raised aloft the wishing cup,
From whose brim the waters flowed
that every dying soul would sup.'

He frowned. 'Each verse seems to describe an item... a treasure.'

'Yes, ancient faery treasures. I found it in the library at Hartwood Hall, where I live with my aunt. I think my father was reading it, researching the treasures, before he... left.' Cassie wasn't quite ready to explain her family history to this stranger. 'The first two – the key and

the spear – I've already seen, but there's more: a cup, a ring—'

'—but who are the Wanderers?'

Cassie shrugged. 'That's the mystery. I haven't been able to find anything else about them.'

'Except there's obviously seven,' said the boy. 'And each is associated with one of these treasures.'

'I'm still trying to decipher all the archaic words,' said Cassie.

A grandfather clock sounded from the depths of the shop, breaking their conversation with five deep chimes. It was closing time.

'I have to go,' said the boy.

'All right, well if you come back tomorrow afternoon I should have excavated the history section by then...'

But the boy shook his head. 'I'm only visiting for the day.' He gave *The Wanderers* back to Cassie and rushed away between the bookcases, heading for the door without so much as a 'goodbye'. Just before he left, he stopped and placed something on a little table.

'No manners at all,' said Montague, leaving his place by the pot-bellied stove. 'Not so much as a by-your-leave, why, a young gentleman should...'

But Cassie wasn't listening to the cat. She went

straight to the little table and picked up the book the boy had left. It was a slim black volume with a swirling silver triskele on the cover. She knew it immediately because she'd bought her own copy on her first visit to Widdershin's. It was *The Witch's Handbook*.



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Skye McKenna

Skye McKenna grew up in the iron ore mining town of Newman in the Australian outback. Surrounded by the red dust of the Pilbara, she developed a healthy respect for wild things and wild places at a young age. Longing for adventures of her own, she travelled to the UK and fell in love with the British countryside.

Skye now lives in Scotland, where she enjoys exploring the woods, hills and castles of her new home. She works in heritage, supporting rural communities to tell their own stories about the history of their land.