Pernickety BOO

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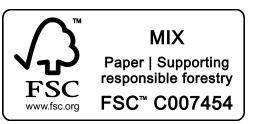

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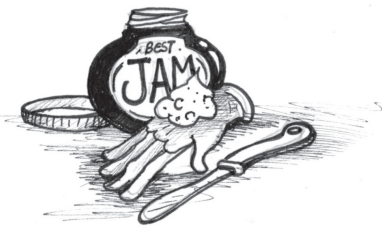

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CHAPTER 1

A sorcerer, finding himself caught in the rain, bought an umbrella – a non-folding, plain black stick umbrella. It was nothing out of the ordinary, and it might have stayed that way if it hadn't been bought by a sorcerer.

The sorcerer rushed home with it as fast as the wind and rain would let him. He'd just remembered he had left a spell on the boil, which was never a good idea. This particular spell came from *The Time Traveller's Book of Spells*, and the sorcerer was very excited when he saw it still bubbling away. The brew needed an urgent stir, but there was nothing handy to mix it with, except the umbrella.

It's only a cheap umbrella, he thought. But the second he put it in the cauldron it came to pieces and disappeared into the spell.

'Whoops,' said the sorcerer. 'But does it matter, I wonder?' And he went to look in *The Time Traveller's Book of Spells*.

At that moment, the doorbell rang. He had forgotten he'd invited his neighbour for tea. She had brought a sponge cake with raspberry jam and cream, and with her was Boo, her bouncy, hairy greyhound.

After they'd gone, the sorcerer went straight back to his spell. And so it was that cake crumbs and jam and dog hairs got muddled up in the mixture.

There was no sign of the umbrella.The sorcerer thought the spell was ruined.

'Oh bother,' he said, stamping his foot. 'Oh boohoo. It's gone wrong again.'

It was still raining the next morning, and the sorcerer was late for work in a magic shop near Embankment Station in London. He looked into the cauldron before he left, and to his surprise it was as clean as if brand-new. Resting by its side was the umbrella.

'Well, I never,' said the sorcerer. He picked the umbrella up without looking at it properly and rushed to catch an underground train on the Circle Line. At Embankment

Station, he jumped off, leaving the umbrella behind.

It went round and round and round the Circle Line all day. The only person who noticed it was a small boy.

'Hello,' said the umbrella.

'Gosh,' said the boy. The umbrella's handle was carved in the shape of a dog's head, with a very long snout and a shiny nose and ears that flopped back. 'You can talk.'

'I suppose I can,' said the umbrella.

'Do you have a name?' asked the boy.

'No,' said the umbrella. 'Do I need a name?'

'Yes,' said the small boy. 'You need one for someone to let you in at the front door, and another name to be let out of the back door.'

'Who are you talking to?' asked his mum.

'An umbrella,' said the boy.

'Don't be silly. Umbrellas can't talk,' she said.

And then they were gone.

Two ladies sat down, and the umbrella listened to them.

One lady said to her friend, 'You're so pernickety.'

PERNICKETY, thought the umbrella. What a

beautiful word. A magical word.

At Baker Street Station, the umbrella was handed in to the Lost Property Office, where it stayed for five years. The umbrella learned French, Spanish, German and Mandarin from other items of lost property.

At the end of five years, the umbrella knew who he was. He was Pernickety Boo, a well-educated umbrella with unexplored magical powers. And by then he knew what pernickety meant: finicky, finickety and particular. Which the umbrella thought described him perfectly.