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Opening extract from

Pongwiffy and the Spell of the Year

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CHAPTER ONE

An Interesting Find

'Well now, just look at this! Hey, Hugo, look what. I've found!' called Witch Pongwiffy from the murky depths of an ancient chest.

At the time, they were in the middle of spring-cleaning – yes, *spring-cleaning* – Number One, Dump Edge, which is the name of Pongwiffy's hovel. Well, if you want to be strictly accurate, Hugo and the Broom were spring-cleaning and Pongwiffy was getting in the way.

'Oh my. Now vat she got? Old bird's nest? Anuzzer overdue library book?' sighed Hugo to the Broom, who was wildly rooting about under the kitchen table.

The Broom gave a disinterested shrug. It had never

been allowed to sweep up before, and was terribly over-excited. It had just built its first ever pile of dirt, and right now all it could think about was adding to it.

'No, really!' insisted Pongwiffy. 'This is interesting! Come on down and see for yourself.'

'No. I spring-cleanink,' said Hugo firmly.

He was standing on the top step of a rickety stepladder, swiping at cobwebs with a feather duster. He had declared war on the Spiders, and nothing was going to stop him.

'Spring-cleaning, my foot! I'm talking *Magic* here. Look at this! It might well be the discovery of the century!'

Pongwiffy emerged red-faced from the chest and scuttled across the hovel, scattering the Broom's beautiful dirt-pile in all directions. In her hand, she held a large, mouldering book.

'Look! Granny Malodour's old Spell Book! I've often wondered where it got to. She gave it to me for my eighty-first birthday. Of course, I was just a youngster then. Thought it was old-fashioned sort of stuff, never really bothered to look at it. And it's been at the bottom, of the chest all these years. Oh, stop it, Broom!'

The Broom was enthusiastically trying to sweep her out of the door. Being so new to this spring-cleaning business, it hadn't quite got the hang of things yet.

Pongwiffy gave it a brisk kick which sent it zooming off into a sordid corner, where it worked away humming to itself, not being the type to bear a grudge.

'Well, well, well. Just fancy. Old Granny Malodour. It's ages since I thought of her.'

'Who Granny Malodour?' asked Hugo.

'You've never heard me talk of Granny Malodour? If you think *I'm* smelly, you should have got a whiff of Granny. Lived by herself in an underground cave. Shared it with a skunk for a while, but even he had to come-up for air eventually. She was an expert on cave fungus, you know. There were at least six varieties growing on her sofa. And as for Magic! There was no one to touch her. She kept at it, you see, down in that old cave of hers. She only came up for important family gatherings. When there was cake. She was a Serious Witch. You wouldn't catch her wasting time doing stupid *spring-cleaning*!'

Pongwiffy glared scornfully at Hugo, who shrugged and continued with his dusting.

'I'll never forget her famous Wishing Water,' went on Pongwiffy nostalgically. 'Wonderful stuff, that was. She used to send up a bottle every Hallowe'en, I remember, and we'd all get a sip, even us little kids. Tasted disgusting, but it was worth it.'

'Vy? Vat 'appen?'

'Why, we'd all get a wish, of course. And it always

came true. Granny's potions were like that. Very reliable.'

'Vat you vish for?' asked Hugo.

'A little Sweet House all of my own,' said Pongwiffy dreamily.

'Vat 'appen to it?'

'It melted in the heat and flies got stuck to it. In the end I had to throw it away. But it was lovely when it was new. I can taste that chocolate guttering now.'

'Vishing Vater sound good stuff,' said Hugo. 'Vy ve not make some?'

'I wish we could,' said Pongwiffy regretfully. 'Granny Malodour always kept the recipe a secret. Probably thought it wasn't good for us to get too much of a good thing. Oh, do stop flicking that duster about, Hugo, you're driving me mad. Leave the stupid old spring-cleaning. So what if there's a crumb or two on the floor? I couldn't care less.'

'That because you not 'Amster,' Hugo pointed out. 'Me, I live close to ze ground. It awful down zere.'

It was true. For anyone hamster-sized, the hovel floor was a minefield. If the toast crumbs didn't get you, the smelly socks would. If by some miracle you avoided both, the chances were you'd slip and drown in a puddle of skunk stew.

But if it was bad at ground level, it was even worse higher up – because higher up were the Spiders.

Ooh, those cocky Spiders. They were really getting above themselves these days, acting as though the place belonged to them. Just recently they'd taken to practising daredevil trapeze acts on the trailing cobwebs looping from the ceiling.

'Hoop-la!' they yelled to each other in Spider language. 'OK, Stan, now the triple roll, after three! Don't worry, I'll catch yer!'

Hugo had put up with it all for as long as he could. But when high diving into his bedside glass of water became the latest Spider craze, he had dug his paws in and declared that Pongwiffy must choose between him and the dirt, for one of them had to go.

After careful thought, Pongwiffy had decided to part with the dirt. After all, dirt could be replaced, whereas a good Familiar was hard to find. Besides, he owed her eleven pence.

'You're supposed to be my Familiar, remember?' Pongwiffy reminded him, picking bits of cobweb from her mouth. 'I do think you could show a bit more interest. After all, it is a family heirloom.'

Crossly, she opened the ancient book and gave a wail of disappointment.

'Oh no! The bookworms have been at it. Look, they've chewed up nearly every page!'

'Typical,' said Hugo. 'All zat fuss about nussink. Typical.'

'Oh, wait a minute! There's something written on the inside of the cover. It looks like Granny Malodour's writing. It's faded, but I think I can make it out. Where are my reading glasses?'

'Zem I sling out.'

'You threw out my *reading glasses*? How dare you!' Pongwiffy was outraged.

'Zey got no glass. Zey not glasses, zey frameses.'

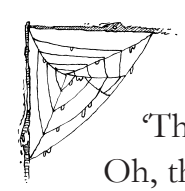
'I know, but that's beside the point. I always saw better with them.'

Huffily, Pongwiffy carried the disintegrating book to a window so that she could see better. Hugo was still concentrating on cobwebs and hadn't got to the window-cleaning stage yet. The cracked pane was so encrusted with dirt that it let in marginally less light than the wall. Pongwiffy briefly considered cleaning it, then smashed it with a poker to save time.

The Broom did a double take at the sound of falling glass and came rushing up, keen as mustard. The sun, long a stranger to the inside of Pongwiffy's hovel, burst in curiously, lighting first on the opened book with Granny Malodour's spidery writing scrawled mysteriously all over the inside cover.

'Well, I never did! Would you believe it! Just fancy that. Hugo, guess what Granny's written inside the cover?'

''Ow I know?' said Hugo with a shrug. 'Vat?'



'The recipe! The *recipe*, Hugo! For Wishing Water! Oh, this is the most amazing piece of luck! Just think, Hugo, Granny's secret recipe, and it's been passed down to me! Ooh, I simply can't wait to try it out. You don't get spells like this nowadays. There are some very interesting ingredients. It'll be quite a challenge getting hold of some of these, I can tell you. Hey! I've just had a thought! I could enter it for the Spell of the Year Competition!'

'Ze vat?' asked Hugo.

'Spell of the Year Competition. As advertised in *The Daily Miracle*. The winner gets a big silver cup, and all sorts of brilliant prizes. Where's yesterday's paper?'

'I sling out. I sling out all ze papers.'

'You threw it *out*? Idiot!'

Furiously, Pongwiffy ran out of the hovel. There was a scrabbling noise, followed by the sort of slithering crash that might be made by a very tall pile of old newspapers falling from a very great height. Then she was back.

'Found it. Look!'

Eagerly, she waved. *The Daily Miracle* under Hugo's nose. Hugo looked. Sure enough, the Spell of the Year Competition took up most of the front page.

'Vat make you sink ve vin?' said Hugo.

'Win? Of course we'll win. What chance has a common old Cure For Warts or a stupid old Frog

Transformation Spell against a bottle of Granny Malodour's Wishing Water? I tell you, Hugo, with a superior potion like this, we can't fail. Anyway, it's time a Witch won for a change. Last year it was won by some daft conjuror with pigeons up his jumper. Batty Bob and his Boring Birds or something. We'll have to keep it terribly secret, of course. I don't want the other Witches knowing. If they know I've got Granny's recipe, they'll all want it. We'll have to work undercover. Ooh, I simply can't *wait* to get started, can you?'

'Ya,' said Hugo firmly. 'I can. Right now, I do spring-cleanink. You vanna do Magic? Get your Vand and mend zat broken vindow.'

'I shall do no such thing,' said Pongwiffy. She snatched up her Wand, threw it on a chair and sat on it, sulking. Hugo and the Broom ignored her, and quite right too.



CHAPTER TWO

The Spell

Late that night, sitting in her rocking chair, in a spanking-clean hovel, nose buried in a hanky, Pongwiffy brooded over Granny Malodour's spell.

All was quiet. Hugo had flaked out on top of a pile of ironing. His cheek pouches sagged with exhaustion and he was snoring loudly.

Outside the hovel, the Broom was soaking its sore bristles in a bucket of water. On the doorstep, a multitude of evicted Spiders were preparing to leave with bitter little cries of 'Come on, boys, we know when we're not wanted', 'Don't forget the flies, Gerald, we'll be peckish later', and things like that.

Pongwiffy peered at the ancient writing by the light

of a single candle. She couldn't stand it any brighter in the hovel, because everywhere was so blindingly clean it hurt her eyes.

She hated it. She loathed the way the pots and pans glittered and the way the floor winked at her, daring her to walk on it in muddy boots. She liked her cardigans how they were before, all comfortably matted up and dirty brown with those special holes for her elbows. Pink and blue they were now, with a sissy smell that came from something that Hugo had poured in the water.

In fact, everything smelt all wrong, even the air, which Hugo had sprayed with something out of a can called *Reeka Reeka Roses*. The only way she could breathe was with a hanky over her nose. The hovel just didn't feel like home any more. Pongwiffy hardly dared move without the Broom following her about in case she dropped a crumb. And the fuss Hugo had made when she attempted to climb into bed without washing her feet.

'Oi! Vat zis you do?'

'I'm going to bed, if you must know.'

'Not vizzout vashink ze foots.'

'Wash my *feet*? *Me*? Have you gone *mad*? Why?'

'Cos zose is clean sheets.'

'Uggh! So they are!'

Pongwiffy jumped away from the bed as if scalded.