

Witchcanery



Random Pages from the Novel

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Shelley Kesinkowsky wasn't your ordinary, everyday witch—she prided herself on being a modern, computerized witch. She had Internet access. Instead of using ravens, she received all her correspondence via email, including the weekly pronouncements from the Grand Council of Wizards. She liked this new way. Cleaning raven droppings from your doorstep was just a little disgusting... although come to think of it, you never had to reboot a raven.

The problem was, Shelley missed Brad. She didn't know if a witchly heart could break, but hers was giving a fair imitation. Brad had torn down the standard barriers of a witch and found his way into her heart, and now she could feel the pain.

It didn't matter a whit that Brad was a construct, a golem, created from the recipe that had been handed down by her ancestor, the redoubtable Goodie Maude Schlurr, circa A.D. 1429. Somehow, the end result was a construct remarkably like a golden-haired human child. Since it had been her very first attempt at a construct, Shelley wasn't sure if the substitution of a dove feather instead of the raven feather called for in the recipe had caused this un-golem-like appearance. Still, like every good cook, she knew that a touch of inspiration in a recipe could turn a ho-hum meal into a great one. She had thought about it a lot but finally dropped it. With Brad around, it didn't take long to simply go with the motto of *Love Now, Ponder Later*.

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Jason smiled. Shelley noticed his smile wasn't as evil as she had thought a hundred years ago. As a matter of fact, it was rather attractive...well, in an unlikable way, of course. Shelley didn't want to give up all those years of not liking this man...er...wizard ...especially now that Brad was gone.

"The Council will make it clear to you, Journeyman Kesinkowsy. Please step this way."

Shelley said, "Oh, just call me Shelley," a little crossly and followed Jason to another area of the Chamber. He pressed a crystal spike sticking out from the wall of the Chamber, and Shelley jumped as a gong sounded hollowly from the depths of the cavern. Slowly, the wall shimmered and dissolved, and Shelley found herself standing at the entrance to an enormous glowing blue room. She could feel the strong healing waves from where she stood but couldn't see much past the iridescent light streaming from the domed ceiling.

"Welcome, Journeyman Kesinkowsky," a male voice boomed from beyond the light. Shelley shaded her eyes and tried to peer into the room.

"Please enter," the voice continued, and Jason gently took her arm and drew her along with him. He maneuvered her into the spot directly under the light and stepped away from her. The light glowed, intensified, shimmered electrically, then dimmed. Shelley's body tingled as she felt the rays enter her body, much like the x-ray back at Hesselburg General Hospital when she had broken her ankle playing dodge ball with Brad.

"Thank you," the voice boomed again. "Please be seated."

Shelley blinked and noticed the chair pulled up to a small table in front of a rounded panel presided over by three very old men. For all their age, they emanated power from every pore, from the threads of their robes, from the tips of their white hair, and especially from their eyes—different colors, but all fiery with power. She sank into the chair, gulped, and turned her full attention to the speaker.

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Shelley had been particularly proud of her besom. When she had been very young, she had received, like all other young witches in their first century of life, the standard besom—the so-called witch's "Faerie Horse," dubbed by the sensitive Irish mortals because of the way witches rode them—ash shaft, birch brush, bound together by copper strappings.

However, it shed bristles all over the place, was particularly unreliable in high winds, and was not the most comfortable seat in the world.

She still remembered emailing the Sabben headquarters in New England for their latest online catalogue. Thrilled beyond words, she had pored over the various utility flying besoms available—from cushioned seats to sidesaddle slip-streamers, she had been plunged into an amazing variety. Her only trouble was finding something that truly suited her but wasn't above her energy means. Fortunately, because she had been frugal most of her life, she had a respectable energy store to draw on.

She had finally selected a mid-range besom—slimline, with retractable seat and various plug-in possibilities. It was in fact the basic module for the mid-range, and she had taken the seat option as well as the telescoping feature. It also had retractable handles and was encased in a shadow-rendering filament that appeared to her as a pale dusk blue, her favorite color. When telescoped, the besom was the size of a collapsible umbrella. When fully extended, it was about half her height again and could easily carry her and Brad, even when he was full-grown.

Drawing it out now, she inspected it in the faint pink light of the tunnel, wondering if she could actually ride it in these narrow passageways. Since the tunnels had been excavated to accommodate the much larger Earth golems, she was pretty sure there was enough headroom to accommodate a flying besom but not so sure about her riding the besom in her condition. She had just intended just using it as a walking stick for support, but if she could actually ride it, it would save a lot of time...and pain.

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After a long period of time, Jason was pushed into a large chamber with high vaulted ceilings. Risking another push, he stopped, shaded his eyes and gazed around, open-mouthed, at the gigantic cavern. He had thought the Grand Council Chamber was the ultimate in rock caverns, since it was magically carved straight out of blue crystal. But this Earth Legionnaire stronghold beneath the earth was immense...an astounding creation.

Torchlike staffs were embedded in the walls, which were actually more like cliffs than walls. However, the torches gave off, not flame, but sunlight—or so it seemed. Each staff supported a miniature sun that gleamed with the light of a million candles. The walls reflected the light and the entire cavern was awash with the golden glow.

The ground was not just rock, but huge patches of grass and meadow-like terrain. In the distance, he thought he saw gardens as well, but it was hard to tell for sure. The rough expanse must have stretched for a mile, maybe more. The far end of the expanse shimmered in a haze but, despite the relative flatness of the surface of the cavern, he couldn't really see that far.

Every so often, at seemingly random points, stood pillars of stone that appeared to be load-bearing columns. Jason nodded. It made sense that an area this vast, with tons of rock crushing down on it, would need sturdy supports at several points.

In the center of this huge domain, a solitary structure soared into the air. Its graceful lines were clean and delicate, giving visions of wide-open space and the limitless of the sky, except of course there was no sky, only the vaulted arch of the cavern ceiling. The building seemed carved out of some lighter stone material, perhaps limestone, and reflected the golden glow of the hundred suns.

What the Story Is About

This is a story about a young witch named Shelley Kesinkowsky. It is a love story and an adventure story. Most of all, it is a story about the power of love in a sometimes unloving world. The theme running through this book is what happens when a being supposedly incapable of love, develops the capacity. The witches and wizards of Earth are not just gifted mortals, as everyone supposes, but star travelers who came to Earth many centuries ago, tasked by *the Maker* to help the people of Earth in their growing pains.

With a mission spanning centuries, these star travelers had to live long lives in order to complete their undertaking efficiently. Thus, their lives spanned as much as 700 or more Earth years. The female segment (witches) of the star travelers originally settled in England during the 10th century. From there they emigrated outwards to all parts of the civilized world. One of the many covens arrived in the New World aboard the *Mayflower*. Their leaders, collectively called the Sabben, established their headquarters in Salem, Massachusetts, and the migration spread throughout the Americas from there.

With the use of *witchcanery*, the witches set up shop as agents in such a way that the residents were none the wiser. These quasi-immortals worked with the people to help them understand more about their own nature and to use their innate abilities for world stability and peace. They soon found that the most effective way to work with the people was to live among them, working with them, teaching them, setting good practices by example, and reporting back to the Sabben.

The wizards, on the other hand, remained aloof from Earth, having their headquarters on a large asteroid beyond the Earth's influence. They made the asteroid habitable for themselves and directed operations for Earth from space. The wizards were more concerned with the big picture...intervening in wars, working with destructive weather patterns, helping in areas of global concern. They too sent operatives to work on Earth from time to time, but their main participation in this effort to save Earth from the peoples of Earth was from their spatial headquarters.

Story Background

As the story opens, Shelley is pining away over the loss of her beloved Brad. Brad was the first golem she ever made on her 212th birthday. For some reason, possibly the substitution of a white feather Shelley had found, instead of the prescribed raven's feather the recipe called for, Brad was ushered into the world, not as a mud golem like the product of the other witches, but as a golden-haired little boy. It stunned the Sabben administrators as much as it surprised Shelley.

However, Shelley followed her duty as she saw it and undertook the rearing of the boy. The Sabben put it down to Shelley's having human blood in her. Her witchly mother had married a Polish laborer from Boston and Shelley was the result. The Sabben frowned upon marriages between quasi-immortals and mortals because it was thought that the issue of such unions would produce children with shorter lifespans. The Sabben kept a close eye on Shelley but, since it didn't seem to make her different from any other witch, the leaders decided there was no basis for concern...at least not until she created Brad.

Story Opening

Brad has been gone exactly one year ago that day. Shelley decides that living without Brad is not in the least appealing, so she starts looking up the *Deconstruction* spell for witches. While she is leafing through her *Witches' Handbook of Spells*, her computer's email notifier dings a couple of times. Curious in spite of herself, she stops what she is doing and reads the emails. As she suspected, one is junk mail...but, astonishingly, one is a personal email from the Wizard's Grand Council...and there is also one from the Sabben dated a couple of days ago, that she had missed previously. Shelley reads the Sabben email, which assigns her to a new project in a small border town in Montana. This looks exciting, and she feels a quickening of interest in her future.

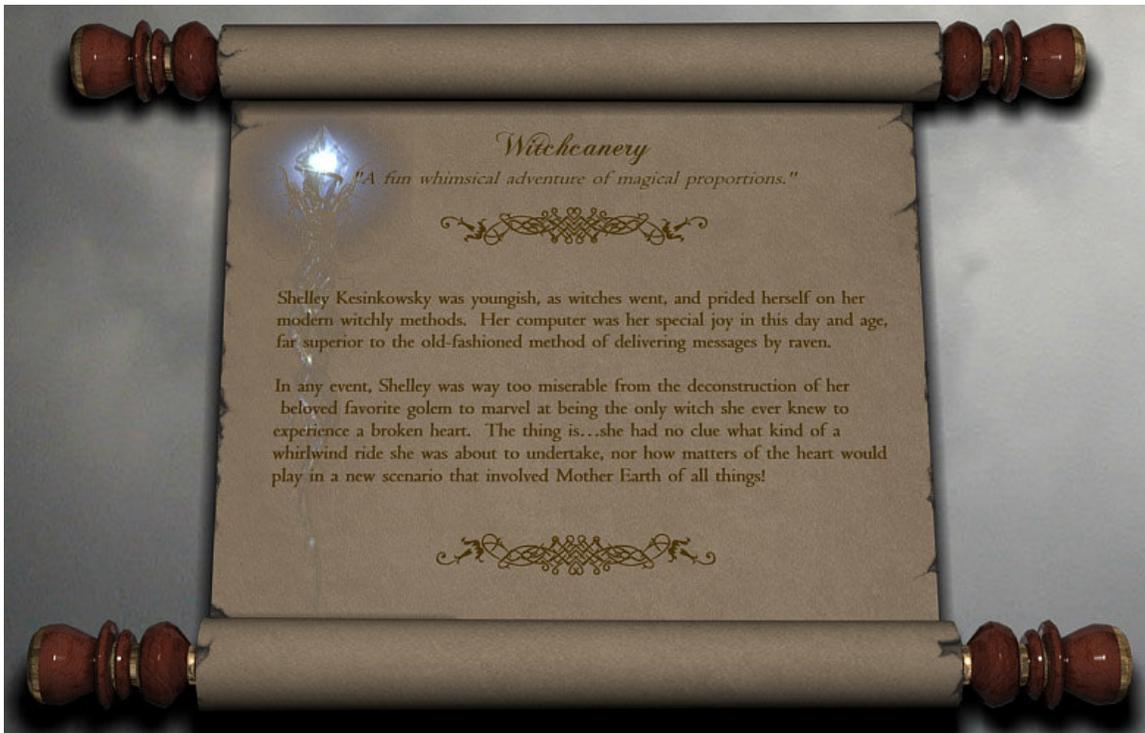
Then she reads the email from the Willodell, the Grand Wizard himself. This email orders her to report to the same portal as one hundred years ago when she was taken by High Wizard Jason Trydellian, along with Brad and the golem recipe, to Brad's "trial." It's *déjà vu* as, once again, she is ordered to bring the recipe and present herself to the Grand Council immediately.

The Quest

The Grand Council, headed up by Willodell Faughtonevre (Grand Wizard), Harth Lessnon (The Enforcer), and Kesman Sheewandah (Vice-Grand Wizard), command Shelley to accompany Jason to Earth. There, she will construct another golem...the three of them will then travel beneath the Earth to contend with a legion of rock golems that apparently have been brought into being by someone with a lot of power. At a random, but educated guess, the Council suspects Mother Earth, there being few quasi-immortals or even immortals with that kind of control to create such a multitude of destructive forces.

This new mud golem will be imbued with special power through Jason's wizardry. Shelley's and Jason's task is to infiltrate below the Earth where there is a large concentration of these hostile golems, then use the special power of the new golem to destroy the legions.

The urgency is extreme. Unless Shelley and Jason can immobilize the golem host, the possibility is considerable that the entire planet will be destroyed.



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