

The Witch and the Weathermage

Granny Poot is a witch. In fact, at one hundred and ninety eight years old, she is the oldest witch in Hobland ... although, with witches everywhere being generally blamed for adverse changes in the weather and thrown into jail, she is not likely to admit it. Instead, she decides to enlist the help of a Weathermage and do something about it. But what with her age and the rheumatics in her knees, she is bound to admit she needs help. Not Oikbur, the emigrant dwarf who lives next door ... Granny Poot cannot abide dwarfs. And not Slobinia Crumshawl, another member of the Gittsburg coven ... Granny Poot cannot abide her either. The time has come for Granny to do as she has been advised to do for the past half century ... take on an apprentice.

The girl she selects is Cara Bunkle, plump and squinty-eyed and physically unattractive. Cara, with a small group of luckless companions, has travelled from hiring fair to hiring fair in search of a job and, by the time she reaches Gittsburg, she is willing to accept anything. Thanks to Granny Poot's connivance, her friends find employment at the Royal Residence ... ideally placed to enlist the services of one of King Ooter's weathermages ... whilst Cara, not knowing her employer is a witch, becomes Granny's home help. She finds out, of course, and the two air their differences. But being a kindly, caring, capable girl, Cara agrees to assist in the old woman's plan.

On the opposite side of the Great Lake in the dwarfen homeland of High Frazzle, the royal weathermages and Cara, too, during an out-of-body-experience, have witnessed a strange phenomenon. Something among the northern mountains shines like clear glass reflecting the sun's heat. A glacial aurora, the weathermages decide, perfectly natural. But to Granny Poot's mind, whatever it is needs to be investigated and could be the cause of global warming. Thus, in the moonless middle of the night, Cara and her friends Picket Gaits and Ninnilinda Fritch, hustle one of the weathermages aboard Clowbert Addock's fishing boat. With Granny Poot already on board, and a couple of stowaways beside, they set out for High Frazzle in search of answers.