

Chester and the Wondrous Witch

By Jerry W. Petermann, 2010

It was a cold, dark and stormy night with the wind howling like a sad and lonely wolf in the distant highlands,,well, **it should have been** thought Chester.

Chester was walking home again, alone. He had been told several times by his father, Mr. Finny, that he had the biggest imagination of any nine year old ever. Well...maybe, just maybe it was true: he had seen an entire herd of elephants in the park when he was six and there was the time when two large dinosaurs had eaten part of Park Crest School and of course, the famous submarine in the river when he was seven and a half. Chester's dad might be right, thought Chester.

Then again....

It was the witch who lived on Thorny Briar circle. Well, Chester was sure she must be a witch and besides today he had to walk past her spooky old house again. And, there was that really old, 1930's Packard. Shiny, black and long with big front fenders that slid down the sides and really strange curtains in the rear side windows. What was a Packard anyway? His dad had said it was one of the most cool cars of that time but who wanted one now? "A witch!" thought Chester to himself! "That's who!"

But, Chester had a little problem with this story. No one had ever seen this witch of Thorny Briar Circle. Not one single person that Chester knew. He did know that the woman was really, really old...maybe 40 or 50 or a 100. He was sure she was knarley and had at least two warts. He had told several of his friends and THEY had believed him. They knew what witches look like...knarley!

Well, nothing happened that day. But, thought Chester as he walked into the kitchen and greeted his mom, he had been extremely lucky. After all, he HAD made it past the witch's house and the witch's spooky street!

"How was your day, Chester?" asked his mom.

What would he say? It had been pretty great, especially in science class when Mr. Muddle had blown the top right of his model volcano and prayed the whole class with "lava". But, then nothing would equal the suspense of the walk home. The sheer terror, the dark and lonely howling and the certain danger of Thorny Briar Circle! He thought for another moment, then answered his mom: "Really great except for the witch!"

His mom's eyes narrowed...."Chester!" Then she said quietly, "What witch?"

"The Wondrous Witch of Thorny Briar Circle....that one....", his voice dropped off toward the end.

"Oh, so now she has a name! And, who have you told of this witch and all her strange and scary goings on?" asked his mom.

Chester was trapped. If he said "no one" it would be a lie and if he told her he had told practically the whole school....well, grounding for sure!

"Well Mom, you see....I" he began.

"Chester, is there even one person here in Stone Hill that you haven't told?" she asked quietly.

"Aaaa...not exactly...but, Mom...that place is really spooky and that car is haunted for sure," he said with absolute certainty. He had just realized that and was sure it was true.

"Chester Arnold Finny!!!!" said his mom loudly....."It's time to stop this...NOW! We are just going to have to go over to Miss Rainer's house and let you see she is not a witch!"

"My own mom...in the spell of the witch...and she wants me to meet her...and she has a name....it can't be!" he said to himself a little out loud.

“What was that, Chester?”

“I, aaaa, well, are you sure it’s safe?”

“Chester, have you ever ask me about the lady living there? No! You just started a lot of rumors and tall tales and now the whole town thinks Miss Ranier is strange. Trouble is, no one has ever met her. How can you think that is the right thing to do?”

“Trouble was,” thought Chester to himself. . . .”Mom does have a point. Then again, how does she really know for sure?”

“Answer me, Chester. . . .is that right?”

“No Mom, . . .guess not. But do we have to meet her?”

“Yes, tomorrow after school. Come home first, then we will go over and have some cookies. Okay?”

Chester was horror stricken. He had worked it out. . . .The WONDROUS WITCH of THORNY BRIAR CIRCLE! And, cookies! Did the witch bake them in an oven where she had tried to cook Hansel and Greddel? He knew the story. . . .how could he sleep and how could he concentrate at school tomorrow? How could his own mother do such a thing?

By the end of the next day, Chester had forgotten the whole thing about the visit to the witch. . . .that is until he began to walk home. As he shuffled up the hill he suddenly saw a beautiful woman of about thirty opening the mailbox IN FRONT OF THE WITCH’S HOUSE! It couldn’t be. . . .a lady about his mom’s age. . . .at the witch’s house.

“Hi. How are you? I’m Miss Kelly. What’s your name?” asked the lady.

“Aaaa, I’m Chester. . . .Chester Finny.”

“That’s right. . . .you’re Chester. I spoke to your mom yesterday. Nice to meet you. We’ll see you at about four for cookies and milk. . . .okay? Bye.” And she was gone behind the large iron gate.

“We?” thought Chester. “There are more of them? And, they can change into people like Mom!” he shuddered.

As Chester came into the kitchen his Mom greeted him, “Well, Miss Kelly thinks you are quite the young gentleman.” she complimented.

“What? The young witch had called MOM?!!! This is worse than I thought. What can I do?” he turned pale and slumped into a chair.

“Chester, are you okay? You look worn out. Play too hard today?”

“Aaaaa, yeah Mom, too hard.” He just couldn’t take much more.

“Get your coat, it’s a bit chilly.”

“Witch’s houses are always cold”, he said out loud without thinking, This time his mom ignored him. She knew all would work out in just a little while.

As they climbed in the car, Chester begged just one last time, “But Mom, do we have too?”

Again, his mom ignored him.

Slowly, around the bend and into Thorny Briar Circle their car glided quietly. “Doom....just doom,” muttered Chester to himself.

Before they could ring the doorbell, the ancient wooden door creaked open and there stood Miss Kelly. “Chester, Mrs. Finny....please come in.”

Chester swallowed hard. It would take all the courage he could muster and then some. He was now INSIDE the witch’s house!

“Please, have a seat. There is someone I want you both to meet...my great aunt Miss Emma Bernard Raines,” said Miss Kelly proudly.

“Your aunt is Emma Raines? That’s really something!” said Chester’s mom.

Chester just stared ahead. “Who is Emma Raines?” he asked his mom.

“Chester, it seems you are rather good at judging people after all!” said his mom. “Miss Emma Bernard Raines WAS a witch....”

Chester nearly fell out of the chair. He quickly glanced at his mom, then at the door! He tried to move but his legs would not do anything. He tried to speak but words hung in his throat! He grew pale again....

“Chester....It’s just pretend!”

Suddenly, a door swept open and a small, bent woman in a white and sparkling witch’s costume and tall sequined hat glided into the room and stopped directly in front of Chester. Chester’s mouth dropped open.

“I’m the Good Fairy Witch of the Crystal Castle and you must be Chester. Thank you for coming. It’s been sixty years since I’ve had a chance to dress up again. Thank you for still believing in witches...but just the good ones!”

Then she sat down in a chair next to Chester.

“Are you a movie star? asked Chester.

“I was. But, most kids sixty years ago knew me from early television. It was a little bit silly, but kids loved the idea of a Good Witch. Every week on my television show, I would do something good and leave a gold coin behind for the person I helped. It would help that person to remember me and remember that they could do good things too.”

“That’s a little silly,” said Chester truthfully.

“Chester, apologize to Miss Raines immediately.”

“No, no Mrs. Finny...I said it was silly and it was...well, just a little,” she said softly, “And, besides I would never have ever gotten to wear that costume again if it hadn’t been for Chester.” She bent down and reached into her “Witch’s Bag” and produced a gold coin. “And, this is for you Chester for doing good even without knowing it! Thank you so much.”

Chester stared at the sight. Here was a real witch sitting beside him and he liked her. And, she even gave him a gift...a magic gold coin! Nobody, but nobody, would ever believe him!

He would never tell anyone. Not now, not ever. It would be his secret forever and ever.....

After a moment Chester began to reconsider. "Well," he reasoned to himself, "She is a real witch...sort of...and I do have a gold coin she gave me...and I did get out of the situation alive....."

The temptation was just too much.

Mrs. Finny thanked Miss Kelly and Miss Raines. Then, Chester and his mom went home. Chester did not say one word the whole trip. As they turned into the drive Chester's dad walked from the house to greet them.

"Well, where have you two been? I've been home over an hour. I was worried."

"Dad!" blurted out Chester, "We went to a witch's house and..."

"Chester!!! That's enough. Go to your room, now!" said his dad.

"Just a second Walter," said Chester's mom. "This time he IS telling the truth!"

"What? What's that you said, Betty?"

Chester just looked down at the golden coin in his palm. He stared carefully at the picture of the Good Witch pressed deeply into the gold surface.

Chester suddenly dropped the coin! He was absolutely sure the Good Witch had winked at him. Well, he was almost sure.