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Bookbinding for Beginners

Down in the mending workshop, Old Zeb was perched on a wooden stool at the workbench, his cheeks flushed red. His lips puckered and creased as he whistled a jaunty tune. When he saw Archie, he smiled.

‘You’re late. Never mind, you’re here now. Try to be on time tomorrow. We’ve got a lot to do.’

Archie looked around him. The workshop was larger than he remembered, and the smell of old parchment was even stronger. He noticed a vice on the side of the bench and a large book press beside it.

‘First things first,’ Old Zeb said, holding up a finger to get his attention. ‘You’ll be needing your own tool kit. I’ll get you started and then you’ll have to acquire the other bits as you go along. Have a word with one of the apprentices in Natural Magic – they might be able to help.’

He winked and reached under the bench. ‘One pair of gloves – for the handling of dangerous books,’ he said, producing what looked like a pair of scaly green oven mitts. Archie wondered what they were made from. It looked like alligator skin, only much thicker. Could it be dragon skin?

‘One magical needle, very hard to come by – this one is made from a werewolf’s claw,’ said the old bookbinder, holding up a large, black, hooked object.

‘One reel of thread – finest yeti hair.

‘One binder’s knife – forged in the Flame of Pharos. And finally,’ he said, placing a brown pouch-like bag on the bench, ‘your very own magic tool bag. It’s resistant to magic so it will stop all but the very strongest spells leaking out – ideal for carrying damaged books and unknown magical objects.’

The old man smiled at Archie. ‘Oh, almost forgot, you might need this.’ He put a small brass key-shaped object on the bench.

‘What is it?’ asked Archie, hoping it might also be magical.

‘It’s a key to the shop – so you can let yourself in if you need to.’

Archie smiled and put the key in his pocket.

‘Now then,’ the old bookbinder continued, ‘this morning we’ll cover the basics.’

He hopped off his stool and took down a large book. He laid it on the bench. Archie saw that it was entitled *A Beginner's Guide to Magic*.

'Is this a . . . magic book?' Archie asked, his eyes wide in awe.

'Good heavens, no,' said the old man. 'It's just a magic reference book.'

He opened the book to a page divided into three sections. 'First,' he said, 'what do you know about the different types of magic?'

Archie's face fell. 'Er, not a lot,' he said. 'I only found out there was magic yesterday.'

'You didn't know about magic!' exclaimed Old Zeb. He shook his head, sadly. 'What do they teach children in schools these days?'

'Well, never mind, you'll soon catch up,' he added more brightly. 'All you need to know for now is that there are three types of magic.'

He tapped the page with his finger. 'The first is natural magic. That's the purest kind and comes from magical plants and creatures – unicorns, dragons, etc., etc. – and the elemental forces of nature – the sun, the stars, and so on. The symbol for natural magic is a lightning bolt in a tree,' he added, tapping the page.

'Mortal magic is the second kind of magic and is man-made magic. It includes the magical instruments and other devices used by magicians

to channel magical power. It is usually represented by a crystal ball,' he said pointing at the symbol on the open page.

'And, finally,' he said, gesturing to a smiling skull, 'there is supernatural magic, which uses the power of supernatural beings. That includes the use of good and bad spirits, genies, demons and anything else that's not of this world.'

The old bookbinder paused. 'Supernatural magic is usually regarded as the darkest of the three. But any one of them can be dangerous.'

Archie stared at the three symbols. He had seen them somewhere before, but where? With a start, he remembered. They had appeared in the window of the clasp on his book. The clasp had another symbol, too, of a matchstick figure with a crescent crown. He wondered what that symbol meant.

Old Zeb moved on quickly. 'Each of the three branches of magic has its own department in the museum. Dr Motley Brown is the current head of Natural Magic.' He pointed at a photograph of a short man in a tweed suit. 'Vincent von Herring is head of Mortal Magic,' he added, indicating another photograph of a tall man wearing a pink bow tie. 'And that,' he said, pointing to a third photograph of a slender woman with long, silver hair, 'is Feodora Graves, head of Supernatural Magic.'

'Every apprentice learns the three basic skills