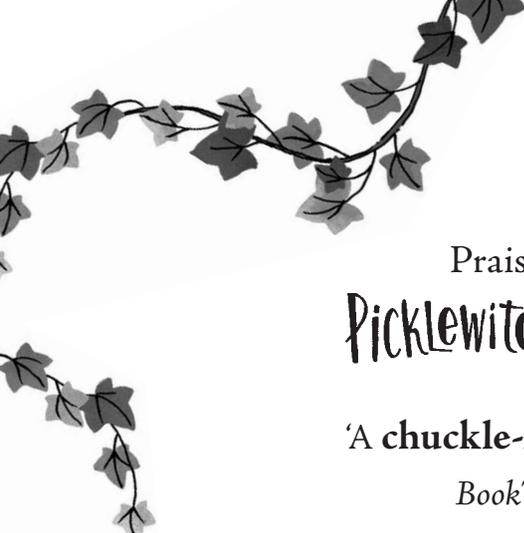




'Well ...' Jack turned to Picklewitch, bit his lip and said, 'I suppose you don't get to visit a Sea Wizard's cave every day, do you? It might be very educational.'

'I KNEW it!' Picklewitch grinned and shovelled down the last scraps of his pudding. 'You is my best friend and the kipper's knickers too, Jack! We is the best team ever! Midnight picnic here we come!'





Praise for
PickleWitch & Jack

‘A **chuckle-filled** story.’

BookTrust

‘Couldn’t put it down . . . **100% must read.**’

Ame, age 10, *Toppsta*

‘Everything about this book is **a joy!**’

Book Lover Jo

‘Absolutely **whizz-cracking!**’

The Reader Teacher

‘A **great** book to share at bedtime.’

Jemt, age 8, *Toppsta*

‘A joy to read aloud.’

Andy Shepherd,
author of *The Boy Who Grew Dragons*



‘It’s absolutely great. **Very funny.**’

The Teaching Booth

‘Absolutely loved this story. **5* from us.**’

Amie, age 9, *Toppsta*

‘Full of heart and giggles.’

My Book Corner

‘A joy to read.’

Leon James, age 11, *Toppsta*

‘Love this book . . . full of **fun and mayhem.**’

Poppy, age 6, *Toppsta*

‘Funny and quirky.’

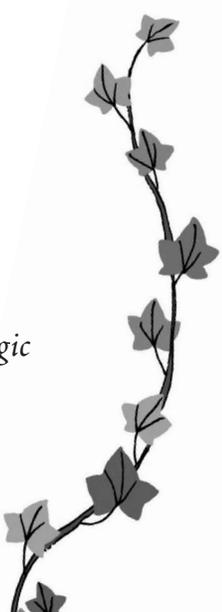
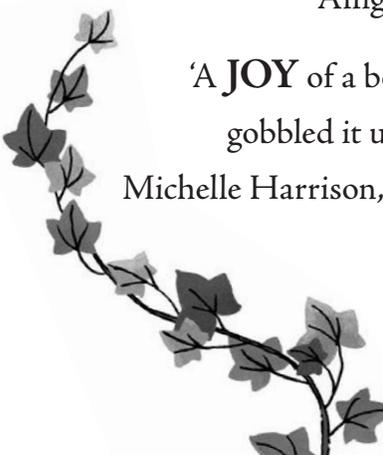
Books for Keeps

‘Very **entertaining** indeed.’

Alligator’s Mouth

‘A **JOY** of a book. Loved every page,
gobbled it up in one afternoon.’

Michelle Harrison, author of *A Pinch of Magic*



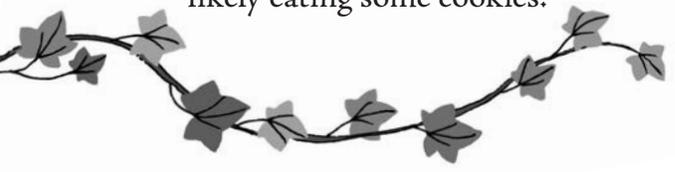


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Claire Barker is an author and illustrator. When she's not busy doing this she spends her days wrestling sheep, battling through nettle patches and catching rogue chickens. She lives with her delightful family on a small, untidy farm in deepest, darkest Devon. She is a regular helper at her local school and loves nothing more than a good story. Claire is the author of animal fantasy series Knitbone Pepper as well as the Picklewitch & Jack series.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Teemu Juhani is a Finnish illustrator, comic artist and graphic designer. Born and raised in a land of snow and northern lights, he grew up holding his pencil and dreaming of superheroes. Teemu has studied graphic design and illustration in both Finland and the Netherlands. Currently he's most likely eating some cookies.



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CLAIRE BARKER
Picklewitch & Jack
and the
Sea Wizard's Secret

Illustrated by
Teemu Juhani



faber



Hot News

The classroom windows of St Immaculate's School for the Gifted were propped wide open in the summer heat. Golden sunbeams streamed in and draped themselves lazily across the wooden floorboards. Outside, honeybees buzzed, roses bloomed and lawnmowers pattered up and down the perfectly striped lawns.

'FRAZZLIN' FUDGENUTS,' panted Picklewitch. She was sitting with her boots propped up on the desk, fanning herself with a

crow feather. 'I'm as hot as a boiled beetroot.'

Jack tried not to stare, but it was true – Picklewitch's face *was* very red and shiny. He wanted to say that she looked much more like a tomato than a beetroot, but he thought better of it. Instead he said, 'Maybe your outfit is the problem.'

Picklewitch looked down at her dungarees and boots. 'What do you mean?'

'Well,' he said, 'you always dress like it's the middle of autumn.'

Picklewitch thought about this for a moment. 'I see,' she said. 'Thank you, Jack.'

Thank you? Was she feeling unwell? Or was she actually listening to his advice for the first time ever?

'What we need here,' declared Picklewitch, groping around in her tatty rucksack for her book of magic, 'is a switchy-witchy change of seasons!

I've got a whizz-cracking spell in my Grim somewhere. Mayhaps a chilly wind,' she said, browsing through the stained pages, 'or some thunder clouds right over the school, like a lovely shady sunhat. Maybe even a thick fog. Then I'll be much more comfortable.'

She sat up, her voice bright. 'I know – I'll call the Stormbeast. He'll freeze the pond and then we can all go skating!'

'No,' sighed Jack, putting his head in his hands. 'That's *not* what I meant at all.'

'Well then, what DO you mean?' she muttered, not bothering to look up, still flicking through the sticky pages of her Grim.



'I mean,' said Jack, feeling exasperated, 'why don't you just take your hat off if you're so hot? Or maybe even your boots?'

'Take my boots off?' Picklewitch turned to look at him in horror. 'WOT a thing to say! I know Boxies have got some strange ideas, Jack, but really! *How dares you?* As IF a witch would EVER take her boots off! Only a stinkfungus would suggest such a thing. Maybe a grubbler or mayhaps a dozypox ...'

'*All right, all right,* keep your voice down, Picklewitch,' whispered Jack, looking to see if anyone was watching. 'You don't *always* have to use magic, you know. You could just use common sense. You know the rule: *no more spells in school.* We don't want anyone knowing you're a real witch, do we? I'm only trying to help.'

Picklewitch pointed a dirty finger at him. 'Yes,

well, *don't*, because Boxies don't know nothing about the correct temperature for a witch. Just you mind your own beeswax.'

Snorting in disgust, she folded her arms tightly across her chest and a field mouse leapt out of her dungarees pocket. 'What a rude boy. NOBODY tells ME what to do BECUZ ...' said Picklewitch, beginning her familiar rant, 'I DUZ what I LIKES and I LIKES what I DUZ. So there.' She stuck out her tongue and blew a wet raspberry in his face.

Jack wiped the spit from his eye. Picklewitch, a wild little girl who lived in the walnut tree at the end of his garden, never did what she was told, so why should this time be any different? Whether she was dancing on the roof with the magpies or tangling him up in her magic, she always



did exactly what she wanted and it got him in endless trouble.

But even though she stole his cakes, had bird-nest hair and smelled of mushrooms, Jack was very fond of her. Being such a sensible and well-behaved boy, he really couldn't explain why he liked her so much. But then it was also a mystery as to why she had chosen *him* as a best friend – a boy who had only ever spent the long playtimes alone. The truth was, that for all her faults, she was loyal and fun – not to mention as popular as pudding. And he couldn't deny that when Picklewitch was around, exciting things always seemed to happen. After all, how many children could say they were best friends with a little witch?

On cue, Picklewitch opened her grubby fist to reveal a shiny handful of ladybirds. She leaned in close to them and whispered:



*Ladybird ladybird
Rise up and roam,
flutter and putter,
fly away home!*



Jack watched the little bugs unfurl their spotty wings and whirr like tiny clockwork buttons out of the window, bound for the garden at Rookery Heights. His – or rather, Picklewitch's – garden was a tangled paradise, buzzing, humming and swishing with life. Birds sang in the trees, frogs plopped into the pond and shimmering dragonflies rose up from the overgrown grass. Tucked safely away behind high brick walls, it was a magical rambling kingdom with moods that changed like the wind. The garden was Picklewitch's true home and sometimes, looking into her leafy-green eyes, Jack had the uncomfortable feeling that it was



looking straight back at him.

In light of this, perhaps it wasn't surprising that Picklewitch's wildness had wooshed down the corridors of St Immaculate's School for the Gifted since their very first day. Nature had followed Picklewitch to school like an obedient pet. These days nobody raised an eyebrow at the ivy curling through the keyholes and snails munching their way through the books on the shelves.

Jack was counting the caterpillars marching up the curtains when Professor Bright swept into the room. The class, deep in study, sprang immediately to attention.

'Good afternoon, everyone,' said Professor Bright, watering the marigold in his inkwell. 'Goodness, it's hot in here, isn't it? Never mind – I have some *cool* news, ha ha!'

'I hope it's about a new language teacher,'

whispered Aamir Patel, pushing his spectacles up the bridge of his nose and ignoring the joke, 'because I don't think lessons in twenty-four languages is enough.'

Astrid Olsen, Junior Astrophysicist of the year, replied, 'I hope it's new data from the Hubble telescope.'

Fenella gave a wistful sigh: 'Perhaps it's some new Shakespearian texts for the library.'

'*We know what it is!*' chorused the telepathic Wilson twins, fingers pressed on each other's temples in concentration. 'It's a ... it's a ... IT'S A TRIP!'

'Excellent mind work, Wilson twins! Well done!' beamed Professor Bright. 'Your gifts get better and better! You are correct – we are going on a trip to the seaside!'

The whole class beamed, except for Picklewitch

who was far too busy tickling an earwig.

‘We are very lucky,’ continued Professor Bright, his voice rising over the tide of thrilled whisperings, ‘that world-renowned scientist, author *and* ex-pupil of St Immaculate’s – Dr Firenza Sharptooth – has extended her yearly invitation to Draconis Hall, her cliff-top home and study centre in Dorset. As I’m sure you all know, Dorset is on the Jurassic Coast, an area famous for remarkable fossil finds.’

Jack almost leapt out of his chair in excitement. Firstly, he was a huge fan of fossils – even having his own collection in his bedroom. Secondly, *of course* he’d heard of the famous Firenza Sharptooth. She had written his favourite book on the subject. She was an adventurer, a scientist and brilliantly clever – she was his hero! This was the best news ever.

‘Sir, sir!’ he asked, his hand reaching for the sky

and his words tumbling over each other in a rush.

‘Will we get the chance to meet her in person? Will she sign my copy of *Fabulous Fossils*? Will we be allowed to dig for fossils of our own and show them to her?’

‘Yes, yes, Jack,’ chuckled Professor Bright. ‘Settle down. We will be looking at how the cliffs on this coastline hold the key to millions of years of history, and there will be plenty of opportunity to discover your own treasures. In fact, there is to be a competition, with a prize for the most remarkable find.’

The whole class sat up at the word ‘competition’. Accustomed to being the best in their chosen subject, they *loved* a chance to compete.

‘This year’s prize is truly remarkable,’ continued Professor Bright. ‘The winner will receive a *Bonestar* – a top-of-the-range steel fossil hammer.



Not only this, the handle will be signed by Dr Firenza Sharptooth herself.'

Jack had to steady himself. 'Picklewitch,' he said, 'did you hear that?' He was hardly able to contain his delight. 'A *Bonestar hammer signed by Dr Firenza Sharptooth!* It's a dream come true. A field trip, a competition and a prize. Aren't you excited?'

Picklewitch yawned and scratched her nose. 'Well, not really, Jack, 'cos you see I've already been in lots of fields.'

'No, a *field trip*,' laughed Jack. 'It's like a study holiday.' There was a long silence as he realised she didn't know what he was talking about. 'Picklewitch, you *have* been on holiday before, haven't you?'

'Yes.' Picklewitch gave an awkward snort and smirk. 'A-course I has. What a silly thing to ask.'

'Where?'



'Places.'

'What places?'

'Lossa places. Anyway,' she sighed, slipping her boots off the desk top, 'I don't see the point. The birds go away every year and you know what? They only end up coming back again, like they are all giddy widdershins and can't make up their mind. As it happens, *I* is far too busy to go a-gallivanting off on some *holiday*. Some of us have got work to do.'

'Oh come on, Picklewitch! Fossils are wonders of Nature! The air is much cooler by the seaside too.' he added, looking at her red face.

'No. It's out of the question,' she said. 'I am far too busy with important garden business.' She began to reel off a long list of excuses on her grubby fingertips, one by one. 'For example, only the other day there was all sorts of fudgenuttery

among the robins. Then there's Basher Crunch. He'll be out of badger jail any day now. Plus, what if I leave my tree and the leaves go all droopy and sad? Also, the most important of these twelve Very Important Facts is that my garden is the best place in the world, so why would I want to leave it? No, it makes no sense at all. No. My brain would have to be made of jelly. No.'

Jack pleaded. 'But it'll be brilliant! Why not try something new? I'm sure the garden can look after itself for a few days.'

Picklewitch puffed herself up like a pigeon. 'Oh, it *can*, can it? Well, that just shows what *you* know.' She picked up her rucksack, slung it onto her back in a huff and climbed up onto the windowsill. 'Witches have got rezpondabilities. If you want to go an' grubble in the dirt, far away from bestest friends and sparrows and Ladyyum's cakes, you're

more of a fopdoodle than I thought.'

'Hey! Where are you going?' cried Jack. 'It's not even home time yet!'

Picklewitch jumped straight out of the classroom window and stomped off across the school fields without so much as a backwards glance, squirrels scampering at her boot heels.