

WITCH BEETLEBREATH

by
Ruth Silveira

Some time and some where there was a little village called Creek Bottom. It was built beside a creek at the bottom of a narrow valley which lay between two steep mountains. At first glance Creek Bottom looked like every other village in that some where and that some time, but Creek Bottom was NOT a normal village. For two reasons:

1. The inhabitants* loved to put on plays and theatricals.* Everyone got involved. Some of the shows were quite elaborate with kings and queens and talking animals and sea voyages and daring rescues from pirates. Other shows were simple ones, maybe songs about everyday events like “How to Squeeze an Orange.”*

Every story, every play, every song, got an audience. People from the neighboring villages loved coming to Creek Bottom to see the shows.

2. The second reason Creek Bottom was not normal was rather more serious. Creek Bottom had a witch. Or rather...the witch had them....

Witch Beetlebreath

Witch Beetlebreath was...I am sorry, this cannot be said nicely...she was ugly. Perhaps the ugliest witch you would ever want to meet, if, indeed, you would want to meet any witch at all. She had a very long and crooked nose and a long and pointy chin. Her nose bent down and her chin sort of bent up. Her skin had purple and green blotches, her hair was long and stringy. Her eyebrows were always in a scowl, one eye was large and one eye was squinty. And of course she had a huge wart on her cheek. And 7 hairs grew from her chin.

And she smelled bad. She ate two stink beetles with every meal so if only for that reason you wouldn't want to be close to her when she spoke.

And Witch Beetlebreath was mean. Her greatest pleasure was working her spells on the villagers, especially her new spells.

Witch Beetlebreath lived high up on the mountain side. From there she had a good view of the town. At least once or twice a week she would swoop over the town, flying on her broomstick, cackling and muttering her nasty tricky spells and the villagers would find themselves maybe covered in green spots or suddenly everyone would have a tail or be unable to say a word.*

You may be wondering why the people of Creek Bottom put up with this terrible behavior year after year? Why didn't they simply call in a wizard to get rid of her. Two reasons:

1. The spells did not last very long, sometimes as little as five minutes. The longest to date was three hours but that spell was put on the villagers while they were asleep. Only Agnes Trout was awake. She was still up at 2 a.m. putting the finishing touches on a dragon costume when her needle dropped from her hand because her hands were now hoofs and she, and everyone else in the town, was now a donkey. Not one of the villagers woke up and Agnes thought it best to let everyone continue sleeping. She timed that spell's duration as three hours, much to her annoyance, and she never did get all the dragon's spikes sewn on.

But spells of short duration were the rule. Now the witch didn't do this out of thoughtfulness or compassion for the villagers. Oh, no, no, no, no, no. She just didn't want to make the villagers so mad they would all move away. She needed them there as guinea pigs.*

2. The second reason the villagers put up with Witch Beetlebreath was that her antics brought money to the town. You see, the people in the near-by villages considered Witch Beetlebreath to be a charming curiosity, an amusement, especially at Halloween. They would come to Creek Bottom and stay at the hotel and eat at the couple of restaurants. They would visit the gift shops and buy Witch Beetlebreath hats. They hoped that they would be there when a spell was put on the town and they could have a

photograph taken. One Halloween there were a lot of photos of very purple people.

So the inhabitants of Creek Bottom put up with Witch Beetlebreath's idiosyncrasies* in return for money and renown.*

Until.....

The Fall Festival!! That afternoon the street was full of villagers and visitors from other towns. Music, dancing, food, games, contests, animals, everything you would want to find at a festival.

And then a shout! "Look up there!" A spiral of smoke was rising from a spot high up on the mountain. Witch Beetlebreath's house! She was creating a new spell! "Hooray", cried the visitors, "Get out the camera! We are going to be bewitched!" The visitors to Creek Bottom were excited, the villagers crossed their fingers and wished for a gentle spell.

Then they saw her! Witch Beetlebreath rose out of the smoke on her broom, a scary sight for those seeing her for the first time. She flew swiftly down the mountain towards the town. As she came closer her raucous cackle filled the air. She circled above the town laughing madly and muttering the words of her latest awful spell. Everyone stood staring up at her, some waved a friendly

hello. After circling the town twice she gave an ear-splitting screech and flew away.

Nothing seemed to have happened. No one was purple. No one had the head of a dog. No one's clothes disappeared.* There was a big sigh of disappointment; the spell had failed. At a signal from the Mayor, the musicians started playing again so the dancing could continue. And that is when they found out what the spell was: no one could move from their spot. "I can't move." "Me neither!" "Quick take a picture" "Step out of your shoes." "I can't!"

Everyone was stuck.

Many photographs were taken, although there wasn't much to see, just regular looking people standing around. The interest in this not very interesting spell wore off pretty quickly. No one could dance, people couldn't walk around and play the games, no races could be run. Still people figured the spell would be lifted in a little while. "In, oh, say, 45 minutes. That's the average." the Mayor announced with what he hoped was a reassuring chuckle. So everyone made the best of it. They made up a game of tossing a melon around the town.

45 minutes came and went and everyone was still standing or sitting or lying in their spot.

Another 45 minutes passed. Then another. And another. That melon had long since been dropped and splattered on the ground.

People were getting grumpy, especially young George Batsman who had been on his way to the bathroom. Still, previous experience suggested that Witch Beetlebreath would soon lift the spell.

But time passed, the afternoon wore on, the sun began to set. People were hungry. Of course there was lots of food around and there were people near the food stalls and in the food stalls. So food got passed from person to person and everyone got something to eat, maybe not what they wanted but at least something. There was one boy up on a roof—he had been sent up there to retrieve a toy airplane—and his big brother managed to toss a couple of sandwiches up to him and an apple which he caught. He missed the dish of ice-cream, however, maybe not the best choice of food to toss, and the ice-cream slid down the roof and landed on Mrs. Candlesmith and slipped down the back of her dress. Mrs. Candlesmith had always been very shy and afraid to sing out but when the cold ice-cream slipped down her back she let out a loud and prolonged cry, a high C, much to her surprise and to the surprise of those around her who burst out in applause. However pleased she was with her high note, Mrs. Candlesmith's back was still wet and sticky. And cold.

In fact everyone was getting cold. The sun had gone down, the temperature was dropping. This was October and the street festival wasn't meant to go on into the evening. An historical theatrical was planned for the evening inside the large theater. But there they all were, stuck to their spots. People tried to amuse themselves as best they could. The musicians played. People sang songs, told stories, played catch with a variety of items.

The hours wore on and the night grew colder. Those few who were caught inside did what they could to throw out coats and blankets and towels and sofa cushions.

The people who had come to Creek Bottom for the festival, hoping to experience one of the witch's spells, just for a thrill, just for something to go home and talk about, were the most miserable and even scared. Children were crying. One man threatened to arrest the entire town for 'irresponsible behavior'. He was quickly reminded that every visitor upon entering Creek Bottom had signed a paper absolving the village of responsibility for Witch Beetlebreath's actions.

Five hours passed, six hours.

The townsfolk began to shout, "Witch Beetlebreath!! Lift the spell!" Louder and louder, over and over. Nothing happened and the night wore on.

Even under these miserable conditions people were so exhausted that most fell asleep, even Mr. Lee, the carpenter who had been caught sitting on a ladder while he repaired a banner. But then, about 3 in the morning, it began to drizzle and then rain. People covered themselves as best they could. No one got back to sleep.

“Certainly at dawn,” the people thought, “the witch will lift the spell.” Dawn arrived and they were still stuck. They were wet and cold and hungry and the food was all gone. They were furious.

Luckily the clouds were gone and the sun began to warm them and dry them somewhat.

10 a.m.. Time for any self-respecting witch to be up and about. Did they see Witch Beetlebreath? No.

11 a.m.. No witch.

Noon. It wasn't until noon, 12 o'clock, lunch time....and you know how hungry you are at lunch time if you haven't had your breakfast...that Witch Beetlebreath came swooping over the town cackling in her very annoying and maniacal manner. She screeched a few garbled magic words and finally the spell was lifted.

The visitors left vowing never to return and to warn every one else to stay away from Creek Bottom.

After a couple of days most villagers had recovered from this terrible experience, but not everyone. Some people had bad colds, and the boy, Curtis, who had been caught up on the roof developed pneumonia and was very sick for quite awhile.

The people of Creek Bottom had had enough, enough of Witch Beetlebreath's bad behavior.

The villagers knew that the witch kept a close eye on their town, so when they decided to have an All Village Meeting they knew they had to do it secretly. Instead of holding the meeting at the Town Hall, they met at the school and called it an Open House. Word of the meeting, scheduled for 7:30 on Thursday evening, was passed from person to person, by notes, by whispers, by messages baked into pies. That much caution was probably unnecessary but that is just how serious the villagers now were.

Everyone came, except those who were still very ill. Mothers, fathers, children, old people, babies, grown-ups, teen-agers, dogs, cats, goldfish. Everyone was there.

Mayor Goldfinch addressed the group and expressed what everyone was feeling. "We've got to do something about Witch Beetlebreath! The time has come, we cannot put up with this any longer! What shall we do?"

After a long and sometimes heated discussion it was decided that two of the bravest and strongest of the men would climb up the mountain side the next morning and speak to Witch Beetlebreath and demand that she stop her activities, or go someplace else, or they would ‘take steps.’

“What would those steps be?” asked Mrs. Ramone, the school teacher, who liked to be precise in all things, much to the discomfort of many of her students.

“Uhm, well,” said the Mayor, “We might have to call in a wizard.”

“No!” shouted the villagers. Wizards were considered untrustworthy and almost as bad as witches.

“All right,” said the Mayor. “Then just scowl and look determined when you say it.” the Mayor instructed the two brave men.

The next morning, Lars and Jerry, brave and strong, started up the mountainside. It was a long way so they took sandwiches, apples, and water, flashlights, and a compass. Until about half way up, the mountain was very pleasant—fir and pine trees, some late wildflowers, some leafy trees were showing their autumn colors. Children played in this part of the forest, people went on walks, the Scouts went there on nature hikes. But past the halfway point the forest grew dim and dark. Obviously a Witch

Beetlebreath forest, with something magical and eerie* about it. Much darker than it should be, tangled undergrowth, hanging vines that weren't found anywhere else around the mountain. And crawly, creepy things. And strange sounds.

The two brave men stopped. The clear path they had been following dwindled into a single narrow track that seemed to disappear as they gazed into the dimness of the gloomy forest ahead. They knew Witch Beetlebreath's house was up there, they had seen it as they climbed. They knew if they headed straight through these woods, these dim dark woods, they would find the house. That was their task and they were going to do it. After they had a sandwich. Or two.

All the food was gone, they had to go on. Into the dim and dark they went. The path twisted and turned but seemed to be heading to the witch's house. They went as fast as they could, this was not a wood you would want to dawdle in. After about 20 minutes they came to a clearing. "Ah-ha!" thought Lars and Jerry. "We've made it." They stepped into the clearing but saw nothing. No house, nothing but more clearing.

"We must have gone the wrong way." said Lars. "Let's go back down a bit and try again." said Jerry. They went down to where they had stopped for their picnic. They looked up. There was the spooky house, just where they expected it to be. They took a careful compass

reading* and off they went climbing through the dim dark wood again. Following their compass they arrived at the very same clearing. Flummoxed and confused, they walked into the middle of the clearing and...BONK!!...hit their noses against something that was very hard but invisible. And then they heard.....

Heehahawheehewhewhehehehehe. That too familiar screechy cackle.

They had bumped into Witch Beetlebreath's house! She could make it invisible! That was a spell she had never used on the town. Lars and Jerry didn't want to be made invisible (or anything else) so they just shouted out their message, but so quickly that all the words ran together: "WitchBeetlebreath,ifyoudon'tleave usaloneWearegoingtogetsomeonetocomeandhelpusgetridofyouSotakethisasawarningandGoodbyeandhaveaniceday."

And they went running down the mountain leaving the witch cackling gleefully in her invisible house.

Everyone met at another 'Open House' in the school auditorium that night and heard the report. No one blamed Lars and Jerry for being scared of the possibility of becoming invisible.*

Old Ms Pilky, the local poet, suggested that maybe two women should go, Witch Beetlebreath being a woman, after all.

So, next morning two of the bravest and strongest women, Irene and Mags, started out. They also had sandwiches, apples, water, flashlights, and a compass. They got up to the dim dark wood. The trees seemed to glower at them, the hanging vines swayed in the wind....except there was no wind. Knowing they had to go in, the women each took a deep breath and plunged into the ominous* shadowy wood. Up the mountain they climbed, scrambling through the tangled undergrowth, pushing aside the drooping branches that more often than not swung back to hit them, until...in front of them, above them...spiders. Large spiders! The men hadn't said anything about spiders. Or bats! Yet there were large bats swooping down out of the trees. Swooping down and pulling at their clothes. Spiders and bats....and now owls, grabbing at them with their talons, pulling off their hats and pulling out their hairpins. Taking the compass. There were so many of them, they couldn't beat them off. The spiders seemed to be growing bigger and getting closer and when one dangled in front of Irene and snatched her glasses, that was enough. Brave and strong as they were, Irene and Mags screamed and turned around and ran all the way down the mountain.

Another 'Open House' at the school that evening. The villagers heard the sad report of the two women. No one blamed them and Dr. Kim who made glasses promised Irene a free replacement.

Silence in the auditorium. No one knew what to do. They might have to call in a wizard. But a wizard can be worse than a witch. The wizard might not want to leave town either. Who knows what a wizard might do?

So they all just sat there.

Then a little hand went up in the back of the room. Finally the little hand waved around so much that it caught the Mayor's eye and the Mayor said, "Yes? Who is that?"

A little girl stood up. "Me, Jessie Gladstone."

"Oh, yes, Jessie, uh, yes, do you have to go to the restroom? Just go ahead, no need to ask."

"No," Jessie said, "I have something to say."

"Oh! You do? How old are you?" asked the Mayor.

"Eight. Almost eight."

The Mayor hesitated. Children didn't usually speak up at these meetings. Actually, it had never happened. But letting Jessie speak put off the decision to call in a wizard so the Mayor said, "Yes, Jessie, go ahead and speak. What do you have to say to us?"

Jessie had a loud clear voice so everyone could hear her. She said, “If we can’t get up to the witch, maybe we should get the witch down to us and then talk to her.”

There was silence after this remark and Jessie sat down quickly and tried to look as invisible as the witch’s house had been.

After about 10 seconds the sense of Jessie’s suggestion sunk into the brains of all the people gathered and at once everyone was shouting and cheering. “Yes!” “Hooray!” “That’s what we’ll do!” “What a relief.”

The Mayor was happy and he pounded his gavel with little hope of restoring order and was just about to call the meeting to an end when someone shouted, “How? How do we do that?” It was the high school football coach, Mr Scoring, asking; he liked to have a game plan for everything.

Silence fell once again. How, indeed? No one knew. They all looked at each other, they looked at the Mayor, the Mayor looked at them. Finally they all turned to Jessie.

Jessie took a deep breath and stood up again. “I was thinking, we can pretend we have another witch and Witch Beetlebreath will be jealous and she’ll come down to get rid of her.” And Jessie sat down.

“Yes!” shouted the villagers right away. “Hooray, we’ve done it, we’ve solved the problem!” “Hooray!”

And once again the Mayor was about to end the meeting when Coach Scoring stood up and once again said, “How? How do we do that?”

Everyone looked at Jessie.

She stood up and said, “We play tricks on ourselves.”

“Terrific!”

“Excellent idea.” said the Mayor, and then hopefully, “Is this the end of the meeting?”

“No,” said Jessie.

“Oh,” said the Mayor and he sat down again.

“Let’s make a list of things we could do that look like witch tricks. Like painting the horses white with purple spots, like tying feathers on to dogs.”

And the villagers joined in, calling out suggestions. The Mayor scribbled them all down.

Now Jessie had really thought a lot about their predicament* and had done quite a bit of research* in the village library, so she had another suggestion.

“There is an empty house on Potts Road. I think we should turn it into a witch’s house. It is behind tall trees so Witch Beetlebreath can’t see it from her house. Paint it black, make it look shabby, bring in a lot of spiders and bats so it looks like a witch has moved in.”

Armand the village carpenter said, “I’ll take care of that.”

Then Professor Highbacker, the village scientist, spoke up as he was used to asking questions*. “Once we are face to face with WB, let’s use that as code for Witch Beetebreath, what’s to prevent her from turning us into spiders and bats? What if she doesn’t want to talk to us? And she’ll be angry and maybe won’t take the spells off.”

Everyone gasped. “Oh, no,” they were all thinking, “this is a terrible plan after all.”

But Jessie had an answer. “Most of a witch’s power is held in her broom so I suggest we capture her broom before we talk to her.”

This suggestion was quickly adopted. A small committee was formed (the Mayor was good at forming

committees) to plan the details and finally Mayor Goldfinch got to pound his gavel and adjourn the meeting.

As the villagers left the building they made a point of mentioning, loudly, what a great school meeting this had been, just in case WB was paying attention.

Two days later the trick schedule was delivered to everyone. It was titled, “News about our next Theatrical”, because, in a way, that’s just what this was.

And two days after that the tricks began. Here are some examples from the list:

Walking backwards
 All the dogs were feathered
 White horses with purple spots
 Everyone spoke in gobbledygook
 Mushrooms growing out of their cheeks
 Everyone stayed in bed (They needed this day.)
 Bright orange hair and green skin
 No one could talk but had to sing every word,
 even Mrs. Candlesmith

This went on for a week and the villagers were getting very tired, they were getting cranky and grumpy and grouchy. They began to mutter to each other thoughts like, “How could we possibly follow the plan of an eight year old? We must be crazy.”

And on the ninth day, Coach Scoring and Professor Hightower and several others marched down the main street on their way to talk to the Mayor. (They had to march because that was the ‘trick’ for that day. There was marching music blaring and everyone had to walk in straight lines and make sharp turns. No curving, no running around. (The toddlers couldn’t play outside that day.) But before they got to the Mayor, Witch Beetlebreath came speeding over the town on her broom cackling and shouting, “All right, I know you’re down there! You got another witch down there doncha? Well, come out, whoever you are. I’m Witch Beetlebreath and I’m stronger than you.”

Of course no witch came out because there was no witch to come out. WB continued to fly around cackling and screeching. The group that was on it’s way to the Mayor’s office kept their heads. They all wanted to run into the nearest building but this was Marching Day and in order to convince WB there was another witch in town they had to stick to the plan and march everywhere. They did a very precise 90 degree turn* and marched into Patsy’s Coffee Shop where they collapsed into chairs and covered their ears. Patsy gave them free coffee and complimented them on keeping their heads.

The next day WB came again. The trick this day was no one could hear anything. This day was more fun. The villagers had stuffed wax into their ears and just went about their regular business, gesticulating* broadly as they tried

to communicate. When WB came swooping and screeching, they just ignored her, pretending they didn't know she was there.

Now the villagers were sure that WB would take their bait and that one day soon she would be landing in town and trying to find the new witch. They posted a lookout in the clock tower with a spyglass. When WB left her house, the lookout would signal and everyone would rush to their hiding places.

The next day....nothing. But they all were wearing clown shoes.

The next day...they had run out of tricks and went back to the top of the list, walking backwards. And then... the signal!! The lookout dropped a bucket of tennis balls out of the tower window. They bounced down the streets every which way. The word spread instantly, "Here she comes!"

Everyone rushed inside, which isn't easy to do walking backwards. Those who were stationed in the fake witch house took their positions. Everyone was hoping that this would be the day that WB landed in town.

And she did! Right in the town square, screaming and cackling. "Come out. I know you're here whoever you are!"

No answer.

WB walked up and down the streets, screeching and calling, until at last she saw the fake witch house.

“Ah hah!” she screeched. “There you are. Scared of me, are ya? You know who’s stronger, do ya? Well, come out!”

No one came out.

“All right, then I’ll come in!”

Everyone held their breath. This is exactly what they were hoping would happen.

Witch Beetlebreath mounted the steps. She put a magic spell on the door so it would open. The door wasn’t locked but WB didn’t know that. She came bursting through the door. Out went a little leg and down went the witch and a little arm snatched up the broom and a little person zipped out of the house and around the corner. The door slammed shut and there was WB, spluttering and muttering. The Mayor, Lars, Jerry, Ms Ramone, and Mrs. Pilky came out from where they were hiding.

“Ahem, ahem.” The Mayor cleared his throat. “Witch Beetlebreath we would like to talk with you.”

WB was in no mood to listen to anybody. “I’ll fix you. I’ll fix you all, and your new witch. Where is she? I’ll get it out of you. Where’s my broom?”

“There is no other witch, just you,” said Mrs. Pilky, who besides being a poet was also a Deputy Constable. “We want to talk with you.”

“My broom, where is it? All right, which of you worms took my broom?”

Jessie had snuck back into the room and she answered this question. “I took your broom and you’re not going to get it back until you promise to stop playing tricks on us. We’re fed up. Right, Mr. Mayor?”

“Uhm, uhm, ahem, yes. That’s...uhm, that’s right, uh, as Jessie, succinctly* expressed, we are fed up.”

“Great squatta scats!” said WB. (No one knew what that meant but now was not the time to ask.) “You took my broom, did you, you little brat. Now you’ll wish you hadn’t.” Her beady eyes flashing and pointing her long knobbly finger at Jessie, the witch began to chant, “Scribble scrabble babble bog, you are now a great big frog!”

And to the horrified eyes of the villagers, Jessie indeed seemed to be turning into a frog. Her skin began to turn green, her knees began to point out, she began to

crouch, her eyes began to get bigger. For a moment she was very scared. But she remembered what to do. She shouted, “You can’t turn me into a frog. I’m Jessie! I am Jessie. I am not a frog! I am an eight year old girl named Jessie!”

And POP! There she was, herself again.

Well, Witch Beetlebreath had never been more surprised. And angry. She said, “Biggle wiggle wiggle bog, you will be a great green frog.”

Once again Jessie started to turn green and once again she said, “I am not a frog. I am an eight year old girl named Jessie.”

And POP! There she was again.

“You see? You need your broom, don’t you? And you’re not going to get it back!” Jessie shouted. Being almost turned into a frog can make a person want to shout.

The Mayor said in his mayor voice, calm but stern, “You are not going to get it back unless you promise to stop playing tricks on us.”

This did not have the effect the Mayor wanted and the witch, who was now so furious she was spitting beetles, turned on the Mayor and maliciously chanted “Igggle biggle wiggle bizzard, you will be a creepy lizard!”

Oh, no! The Mayor suddenly fell to his knees and he began to grow a tail. His head began to change, it was terrible to see. Jessie got down beside him close to his ear and urged him, “Say you’re the Mayor! Say you’re the Mayor!”

While he could still say words, the Mayor managed to hiss out, “I am not a lizard. I am the Mayor. I am Mayor Gregory Goldfinch of Creek Bottom. Not a lizard, the Mayor!”

And POP! There he was the Mayor again.

By now the villagers, who were crowding into the room and peeking in the windows began to feel a little bit happier and not so frightened of Witch Beetlebreath however ugly and mean she was, and they began to laugh. If there is one thing a witch doesn’t like, it’s being laughed at. Hardly anybody likes that, really, but for a witch it’s terrible.

And she went a little crazy. She had a tantrum. She fell on the floor, she kicked and screamed and pounded and cried and wailed. It was really pitiful.

And Jessie began to feel sorry for her.

Jessie shouted to WB over her wailing, “Witch Beetlebreath, you’ll get your broom back when you swear to stop playing tricks on us.” WB quieted down a little.

Jessie continued, “Or on anybody. No more bad tricks! Little Curtis Mayhew got very very sick, he had to go to the hospital.”

Witch Beetlebreath mumbled something.

“What?” said Jessie.

WB said a little louder, “OK, I swear. Now where’s my broom?”

Jessie wasn’t taken in by that. Oh, no. Jessie had read a few books about witches in the town library and she knew that a witch’s promise is no good unless it is written down on a piece of paper and then the witch signs it in ink with a hair from her chin.

Jessie reached out and yanked a hair from Witch Beetlebreath’s chin.

“Oooowwww!” howled WB.

The Mayor’s chief clerk brought out the Promise (already written out) and a bottle of ink and laid them carefully on a table.

“Sign the paper.” directed the Mayor.

“I won’t! What good is it being a witch if I can’t do anything bad?” Witch Beetlebreath pouted, folding her arms and glaring at the Mayor defiantly.

“Sign the paper.” repeated the Mayor.

“The other witches won’t want me around anymore. I won’t be allowed in the witchy seminars*,” WB whined.

“Sign the paper.” said the Mayor.

“No one will even sell me toad slime.” sniffled the witch.

“Sign the paper or no broom,” everyone said.

She had no choice. She signed the paper.

Jessie went and got the broom and handed it to her. Witch Beetlebreath grabbed it and glared at Jessie. She raised her spell casting finger and....couldn’t get a word out. She had signed her promise with a chin hair. She just wilted. She sat down on a chair and began to whimper, and even looked a little scared. “I won’t be able to take part in the witchy chorus. I’ll be shunned and ostracized.* I might as well be a regular person.” And a tear rolled down her cheek. “Hooohoo.” (That’s what WB sounded like when she cried.

Jessie felt bad for her. It is hard to see anyone so unhappy. Then Jessie had another one of her ideas. She said, “Witch Beetlebreath, I have a wonderful idea. Will you let me tell you?”

The unhappy witch shrugged, which Jessie took to mean WB wouldn't bite her if she got close.

So Jessie sat next to her. She wrinkled her nose at the stink beetle aroma but luckily WB didn't see that. Jessie whispered into her ear. For a long time. Finally WB's scowl faded and her mouth twitched upwards. Then she smiled. An actual smile! Not a wicked sneer, a real smile. That grew into a big smile. She looked at Jessie and nodded.

It occurred to the villagers, some of them anyway, that maybe Witch Beetlebreath wasn't quite as ugly as they had thought. But then maybe that was just because they weren't so scared of her anymore.

What was Jessie's idea? Can you guess? That WB would help them with their plays and theatricals. She would be able to use all of her magic and all her spells but she wouldn't be playing a trick on anybody. She could make storms when there was supposed to be a storm; when they did Cinderella, she could actually turn a pumpkin into a coach, she could turn mice into horses. When they did The Frog Prince she could turn an actor into a frog and back again. (Many years passed before any

man trusted WB enough to allow himself to be turned into a frog.)

WB thought, “This might even be fun.”

With Witch Beetlebreath’s help, the plays and theatricals of Creek Bottom became famous throughout the whole country. And every time WB sat in the audience and watched people enjoying all her tricks and spells she would smile and laugh a bit. Really smile and really laugh. No cackling. Each time she really smiled and really laughed, she changed a tiny bit. People noticed the changes after a few months.

“Didn’t WB used to have purple and green blotches on her face? And a terribly long nose?” “I think so. And a long pointy chin? It looks shorter now.”

And indeed it did. Witch Beetlebreath’s nose was shorter, her chin not as pointy. As time went on her skin became rather nice, her hair less stringy, and she smelled better. In fact, she became rather pleasant looking.

One day Jessie said to her, “Witch Beetlebreath, look at yourself in the mirror. You are a happy good witch now, and you haven’t eaten a stink beetle in months. Don’t you think you should change your name from Beetlebreath to....well, something else?”

WB hadn't looked in a mirror for years but Jessie held up a handmirror so WB could see herself. "Who is that?" said WB in surprise.

"You, silly," laughed Jessie.

WB felt her nose and her chin and for that wart that wasn't there anymore.

"Well, skritch and skratch," said WB, "This is me! Who did this?"

"You did!"

"Ha! I am the best witch ever! Hehehe!" WB giggled. (Giggling is a combination of cackling and giggling.) "And I think you are right about my name. Any suggestions?"

"Uhm...." Jessie was surprised by the question. "Uhm...Barbara?"

"Perfect. Call me Witch Barbara. Or WB, that still works."

And from then on the signs read, 'Plays and Theatricals by the People of Creek Bottom. Special Effects by Witch Barbara.

The End

Footnotes

Page 1:

Inhabitants: These are the people who live in Creek Bottom, not those who come to visit from other villages.

Plays and Theatricals: Both are performances done for the enjoyment of other people, the audience. A Play tells a story; a Theatrical is every other kind of show—maybe townsfolk singing or dancing, telling jokes, playing music, acting out scenes of historical significance, they even did a baking show once.

“How To Squeeze an Orange”: (sung by Jared and Marie Keys, 9 year old twins. The melody has been lost.)

What a pretty orange ball, what does it do?
It gives something that’s good to drink to you.

How does it do that, I don’t see a spout?
You cut it open to get the juice out.

Not from top to bottom, across the middle,
Here’s fair warning, it may leak a little.

Then you take one of these. (Hold up a hand
juicer.)

Put it over a container. (Do this.)
Or the juice will fall through,
What could be plainer?
And you take half the orange ball. (Holding up
half an orange.)
And I'm sure you've guessed,
Put the cut side to the point (Do this)
Give it a press.

And twist twist twist. And twist twist twist.
(Do this. With exaggeration.)

And repeat. (Squeeze the other half)
(Add in more 'twists' if necessary)
Until juicing is complete.

Squeezing is a success, is what I'm thinking.
And yummy orange juice is what I'm drinking.

This song and demonstration was performed only once
and to very mild applause. But audience members did
appreciate the free cup of orange juice each received when
leaving the show.

Page 2:

Very short list of other spells the people of Creek Bottom have endured:

All the food in town turned into rocks. That might sound funny but two people chipped teeth as the food changed just when they were biting into a pizza. Spell lasted a half hour.

None of the doors would open. Everyone had to climb in and out of windows. Spell lasted 7 hours. A minor annoyance. Except for Granny Lumbar who used a wheel chair and who therefore couldn't leave her house and missed the show at which 'How to Squeeze an Orange' was performed. Jared and Marie later sang the song just for her. She clapped long and enthusiastically because she was their granny, after all, but secretly now was not unhappy she had missed the show.

Everyone's hair fell out all at once. Some people were extremely upset about this one. The spell was not reversible and everyone's hair had to just grow back in. The hair did grow very fast but there was

time for Boris and Bea Comber who ran the town's barber shop/hair salon to take a week's vacation at a near-by hot spring. Everyone became half their normal size. This led to a lot of hilarity, the villagers had fun with this one. Spell lasted 1 1/2 hours. Arms frozen in whatever position they were in when the spell was cast. This proved to be very dangerous. As it was cast at 7:13 in the morning, just when many small children were being dressed by a parent and many were stuck with a shirt over their face. Patsy at the cafe was pouring very hot coffee into the Mayor's cup and couldn't stop pouring and he was scalded and his shirt ruined. As one, the outcry from the villagers was so quick and so loud and so outraged that Witch Beetlebreath must have realized she had gone too far and she flew back and lifted the spell almost immediately. It lasted about 4 minutes.

Personal rain clouds. As soon as anyone went out doors a small rain cloud appeared over them, raining. Umbrellas did not help, the cloud would just slip in under the umbrella. If you went outside during that spell, you were going to get wet. Spell lasted 5 hours.

That is just a small sampling of the witch's tricks.

Page 3:

Guinea Pig: A small furry rodent. Sometimes kept as pets and also they are helpful in scientific research as their immune system has similarities to that of human's. In 1907, vitamin C was discovered using guinea pigs (like humans they cannot produce the vitamin and need it supplied in their diet). Witch Beetlebreath seemed to consider the villagers of Creek Bottom as her own research 'guinea pigs'. Of course she could have turned them all into actual guinea pigs but she never did that.

Page 4:

Idiosyncrasies: An idiosyncrasy is a quality or characteristic that is particular to a certain person or thing, something not shared in general. For example: Eating apples would not be an idiosyncrasy because a lot of people eat apples. If a person ate only apples that would be unusual and could be called an idiosyncrasy. Witch Beetlebreath's idiosyncrasy was her habit of casting spells of short duration on the village of Creek Bottom and only the village of Creek Bottom. And never

taking advantage of her spells. When everyone's arms were pinned to their sides, for example, she did not take that opportunity to land in town and make off with the two strawberry-rhubarb pies that Clarice the Baker had just put out to cool. Also, Witch Beetlebreath ate stink beetles. She was the only witch who did that.

Renown: Being widely known in a good way.

Page 5:

Oh, yes. There was the time when everyone's clothes disappeared. This was the shortest recorded spell—4 seconds. But it did provide Witch Beetlebreath with hours of amusement. Her awful laugh could be heard throughout the valley until finally her cackle diminished to sporadic outbursts and then faded as the sun went down.

Page 10:

Eerie: Strange in a scary and mysterious way.

Page 12:

The only villager who gave the possibility of invisibility a positive thought was Daniel Treader, a reformed thief, now working as an animal trainer.

He couldn't help but consider how invisibility would have been helpful in his former profession.

Page 16:

Predicament: A troublesome, embarrassing, or ridiculous situation.

Research: Trying to find out information about a subject, a thing, or a question you are interested in.

Page 17:

Professor Hightower, as a scientist, did a lot of research but apparently he wasn't interested in witches. One of his more popular research campaigns resulted in the perfect recipe for that strawberry/rhubarb pie mentioned above.

Page 19:

90 degrees is one quarter of a circle. If you are standing in the center of a clock face, 90 degrees would be the distance between 12 and 3, and also between 3 and 6, and also between 6 and 9, and also between 9 and 12. If you are walking, say, in a straight line and you then turn left, you have turned 90 degrees.

Gesticulating: Making gestures, especially arm and hand movements, to help express thoughts, ideas, information, or feelings.

Page 22:

Succinctly: Expressing an idea clearly and in a few words.

Page 26:

The fact that there was such a thing as Witchy Seminars was news to everyone. A seminar is when a group of people get together to learn from a teacher about a certain subject. Jessie figured that Witch Beetlebreath probably reported on her spell experiments at these seminars.

Ostracized: Excluded from a group. Shut out.