

# Chapter One



I sort of knew I'd put too much tea in the cup as soon as I'd poured it out, but it isn't very far from the kitchen to the living room and I told myself I could manage. I very nearly did. I got as far as my great-aunt's armchair – but then – OUCH! A tingle in my elbow. It was *really* sharp. And OOPS! – there was tea everywhere.

Great-aunt Acidity went green with fury. Her knitting needles flew in the air and Sweetypie yelped. It was awful. My stomach went cold and I felt sick. I was in SUCH trouble.

"Stupid child! Just look at the mess you've made!" Great-aunt Acidity grabbed





my wrist. Her skinny old fingers look dried-up and thin, but it really, really hurt. “That’s your free time gone for weeks and weeks and weeks, and don’t you—”

And then she stopped.

She was staring at something outside the window, so I looked to see what she was staring at ... and I couldn’t help gasping. An



enormous white cloud was floating by, just above the rooftops. It was definitely a cloud – but it looked exactly like a misty castle! A castle with hundreds of twisty turrets...

I rubbed my eyes. What made it even more odd was not the cloud being so low, but the fact that it was moving steadily along the high street, even though there wasn't any wind. Not even the tiniest of breezes.

My great-aunt let go of me and blinked. She pulled her glasses off her nose, polished them on the edge of my skirt, and we both looked again ... but the cloud was gone.

"Humph!" Great-aunt Acidity swung round. "What are you gawping at? Stupid girl! Can't even carry a cup of tea!"

"Stupid girl!" yelled Polly from her cage in the corner. "Stupid girl!"



I stood on one foot and began to stammer. When I'm scared I can't talk properly. "I'm sorry, Great-aunt ... I really am ... I'm sorry ... I really, really, REALLY didn't mean to—"

"Shut up!" Great-aunt Acidity banged her stick on the floor. "Fetch a mop right now this minute! And make more tea. With extra sugar. I've had a shock, and I'm a poor old lady who ought to be looked after. Not that YOU care. Little worm. Slug. Creepy crawly tiddly widdly Lily..."

I scuttled off to the kitchen. As I was filling the kettle, my elbow did that tingling thing again, and I stopped to rub it. It was like having a pin stuck into me, or maybe a tiny electric shock. I wondered what it could be. Did it mean something?



