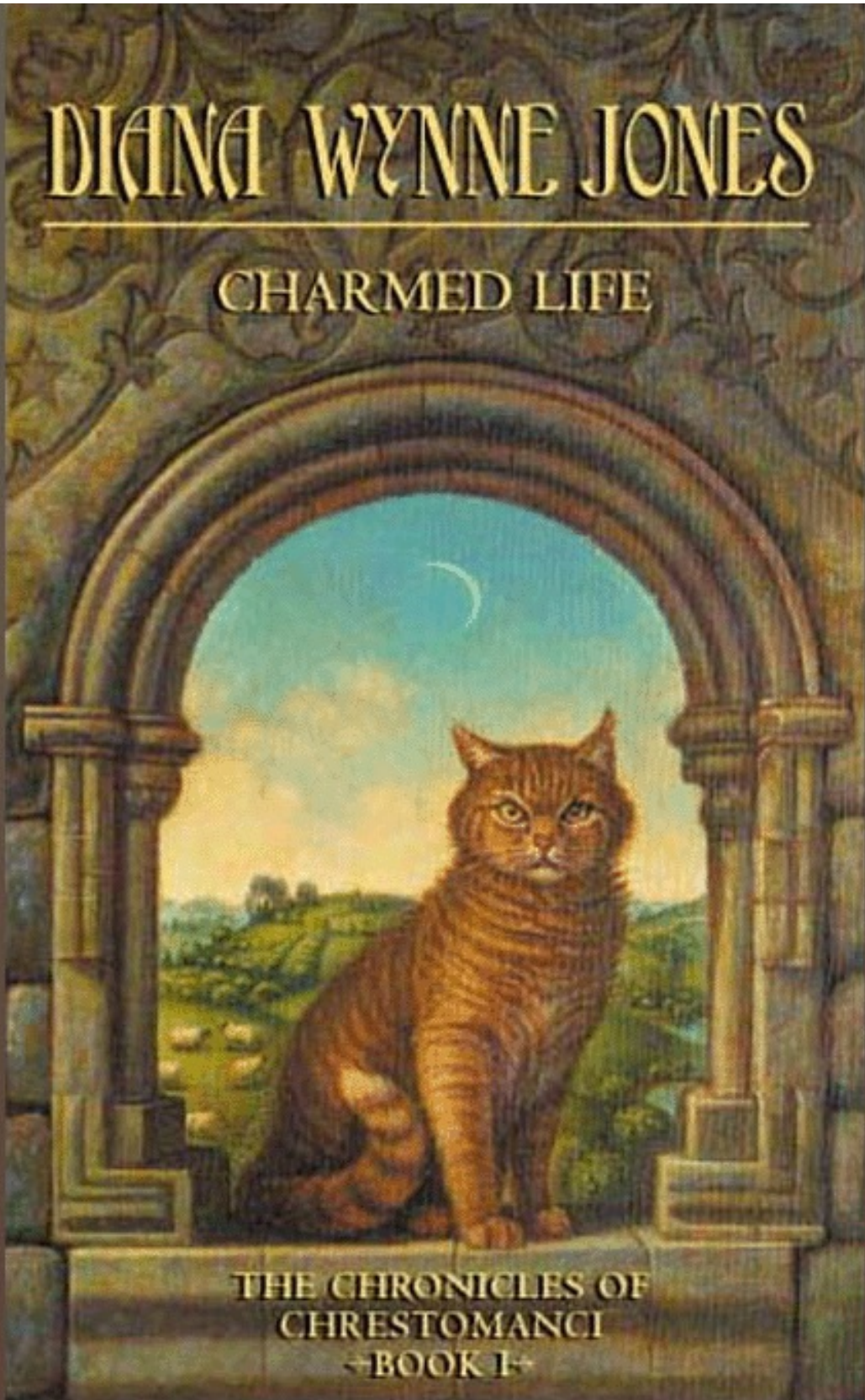


DIANA WYNNE JONES

CHARMED LIFE



THE CHRONICLES OF  
CHRESTOMANCI  
-BOOK I-

***DIANA WYNNE JONES***  
***THE CHRONICLES OF CHRESTOMANCI***

**CHARMED LIFE**

 HarperCollins e-books

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Note: THERE ARE THOUSANDS of worlds, all different from ours.

1 CAT CHANT ADMIRED his elder sister Gwendolen. She was a witch.

2 CAT WAS ALARMED by Miss Larkins. She was the daughter of Mr. Larkins at the junk shop.

3 THE TRAIN JOURNEY lasted about an hour, before the train puffed into Bowbridge. . .

4 THE SAME SOFTNESS and silence were there when the red-haired Mary woke Cat. . .

5 GWENDOLEN REFUSED TO tell Cat what she was going to do.

6 GWENDOLEN GAVE VENT to her fury in her room after dinner.

7 IT RAINED ON Saturday afternoon. Gwendolen shut herself into her room. . .

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9 BY THIS TIME, Cat was as bewildered as the strange girl seemed to be. Chant?

10 CAT WATCHED HIS moment and, when Mr. Saunders called them to

lessons. . .

[11](#) BY THE TIME Janet had laced both her boots, Cat was sure it was lunchtime.

[12](#) CHRESTOMANCI'S STUDY WAS a large, sun-filled room with books in shelves. . .

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[15](#) IT WAS A GLORIOUS start-of-autumn day, with everything green and gold, hot and still.

[16](#) "CAT," SAID CHRESTOMANCI, from almost behind Cat's head. "Cat!"

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# Introduction

THERE ARE THOUSANDS of worlds, all different from ours. Chrestomanci's world is the one next door to us, and the difference here is that magic is as common as music is with us. It is full of people working magic—warlocks, witches, thaumaturges, sorcerers, fakirs, conjurors, hexers, magicians, mages, shamans, diviners and many more—from the lowest Certified witch right up to the most powerful of enchanter. Enchanters are strange as well as powerful. Their magic is different and stronger and many of them have more than one life.

Now, if someone did not control all these busy magic-users, ordinary people would have a horrible time and probably end up as slaves. So the government appoints the very strongest enchanter there is to make sure no one misuses magic. This enchanter has nine lives and is known as “the Chrestomanci.” You pronounce it KREST-OH-MAN-SEE. He has to have a strong personality as well as strong magic.

DIANA WYNNE JONES

# 1



C AT CHANT ADMIRED his elder sister Gwendolen. She was a witch. He admired her and he clung to her. Great changes came about in their lives and left him no one else to cling to.

The first great change came about when their parents took them out for a day trip down the river in a paddle steamer. They set out in great style, Gwendolen and her mother in white dresses with ribbons, Cat and his father in prickly blue-serge Sunday suits. It was a hot day. The steamer was crammed with other people in holiday clothes, talking, laughing, eating whelks with thin slices of white bread and butter, while the paddleboat steam organ wheezed out popular tunes so that no one could hear themselves talk.

In fact the steamer was too crowded and too old. Something went wrong with the steering. The whole laughing, whelk-eating, Sunday-dressed crowd was swept away in the current from the dam. They hit one of the posts which were supposed to stop people being swept away, and the paddle steamer, being old, simply broke into pieces. Cat remembered the organ playing and the paddles beating the blue sky. Clouds of steam screamed from broken pipes and drowned the screams from the crowd, as every single person aboard was swept away through the dam. It was a terrible accident. The papers called it the *Saucy Nancy* Disaster. The ladies in their clinging skirts were quite unable to swim. The men in tight blue serge were very little better off. But Gwendolen was a witch, so she could not drown. And Cat, who flung his arms around Gwendolen when the boat hit the post, survived too. There were very few other survivors.

The whole country was shocked by it. The paddleboat company and the

town of Wolvercote between them paid for the funerals. Gwendolen and Cat were given heavy black clothes at public expense, and rode behind the procession of hearses in a carriage pulled by black horses with black plumes on their heads. The other survivors rode with them. Cat looked at them and wondered if they were witches and warlocks, but he never found out. The Mayor of Wolvercote had set up a Fund for the survivors. Money poured in from all over the country. All the other survivors took their share and went away to start new lives elsewhere. Only Cat and Gwendolen were left and, since nobody could discover any of their relations, they stayed in Wolvercote.

They became celebrities for a time. Everyone was very kind. Everyone said what beautiful little orphans they were. It was true. They were both fair and pale, with blue eyes, and looked good in black. Gwendolen was very pretty, and tall for her age. Cat was small for his age. Gwendolen was very motherly to Cat, and people were touched. Cat did not mind. It made up a little for the empty, lost way he was feeling. Ladies gave him cake and toys. Town Councillors came and asked how he was getting on; and the Mayor called and patted him on the head. The Mayor explained that the money from the Fund was being put into a Trust for them until they were grown up. Meanwhile, the town would pay for their education and upbringing.

“And where would you little people like to live?” he asked kindly.

Gwendolen at once said that old Mrs. Sharp downstairs had offered to take them in. “She’s been ever so kind to us,” she explained. “We’d love to live with her.”

Mrs. Sharp had been very kind. She was a witch too—the printed sign in her parlor window said *Certified Witch*—and interested in Gwendolen. The Mayor was a little dubious. Like all people who had no talent for witchcraft, he did not approve of those who had. He asked Cat how he felt about Gwendolen’s plan. Cat did not mind. He preferred living in the house he was used to, even if it was downstairs. Since the Mayor felt that the two orphans ought to be made as happy as possible, he agreed. Gwendolen and Cat moved in with Mrs. Sharp.

Looking back on it, Cat supposed that it was from this time on that he was certain Gwendolen was a witch. He had not been sure before. When he had asked his parents, they had shaken their heads, sighed, and looked unhappy. Cat had been puzzled, because he remembered the terrible trouble there had been when Gwendolen gave him cramps. He could not see how his parents could blame Gwendolen for it unless she truly was a witch. But all that was changed now. Mrs. Sharp made no secret of it.

“You’ve a real talent for magic, dearie,” she said, beaming at Gwendolen, “and I wouldn’t be doing my duty by you if I let it go to waste. We must see about a teacher for you right away. You could do worse than go to Mr. Nostrum next door for a start. He may be the worst necromancer in town, but he knows how to teach. He’ll give you a good grounding, my love.”

Mr. Nostrum’s charges for teaching magic turned out to be £1 an hour for the Elementary Grades, and a guinea an hour for the Advanced Grades beyond. Rather expensive, as Mrs. Sharp said. She put on her best hat with black beads and ran around to the Town Hall to see if the Fund would pay for Gwendolen’s lessons.

To her annoyance, the Mayor refused. He told Mrs. Sharp that witchcraft was not part of an ordinary education. Mrs. Sharp came back rattling the beads on her hat with irritation, and carrying a flat cardboard box the Mayor had given her, full of the odds and ends the kind ladies had cleared out of Gwendolen’s parents’ bedroom.

“Blind prejudice!” Mrs. Sharp said, dumping the box on the kitchen table. “If a person has a gift, they have a right to have it developed—and so I told him! But don’t worry, dearie,” she said, seeing that Gwendolen was looking decidedly stormy. “There’s a way around everything. Mr. Nostrum would teach you for nothing, if we found the right thing to tempt him with. Let’s have a look in this box. Your poor ma and pa may have left something that might be just the thing.”

Accordingly, Mrs. Sharp turned the box out onto the table. It was a queer collection of things—letters and lace and souvenirs. Cat did not remember

having seen half of them before. There was a marriage certificate, saying that Francis John Chant had married Caroline Mary Chant twelve years ago at St. Margaret's Church, Wolvercote, and a withered nosegay his mother must have carried at the wedding. Underneath that, he found some glittery earrings he had never seen his mother wear.

Mrs. Sharp's hat rattled as she bent swiftly over these. "Those are diamond earrings!" she said. "Your ma must have had money! Now, if I took those to Mr. Nostrum—But we'd get more for them if I took them around to Mr. Larkins." Mr. Larkins kept the junk shop on the corner of the street—except that it was not always exactly junk. Among the brass fenders and chipped crockery you could find quite valuable things, and also a discreet notice saying *Exotic Supplies*—which meant that Mr. Larkins also stocked bats' wings, dried newts, and other ingredients of magic. There was no question that Mr. Larkins would be very interested in a pair of diamond earrings. Mrs. Sharp's eyes pouched up, greedy and beady, as she put out her hand to pick up the earrings.

Gwendolen put out her hand for them at the same moment. She did not say anything. Neither did Mrs. Sharp. Both their hands stood still in the air. There was a feeling of fierce invisible struggle. Then Mrs. Sharp took her hand away. "Thank you," Gwendolen said coldly, and put the earrings away in the pocket of her black dress.

"You see what I mean?" Mrs. Sharp said, making the best of it. "You have real talent, dearie!" She went back to sorting the other things in the box. She turned over an old pipe, ribbons, a spray of white heather, menus, concert tickets, and picked up a bundle of old letters. She ran her thumb down the edge of it. "Love letters," she said. "His to her." She put the bundle down without looking at it and picked up another. "Hers to him. No use." Cat, watching Mrs. Sharp's broad mauve thumb whirring down a third bundle of letters, thought that being a witch must save a great deal of time. "Business letters," said Mrs. Sharp. Her thumb paused, and went slowly back up the pile again. "Now what have we here?" she said. She untied the pink tape from around the bundle and carefully took out three letters. She unfolded them.