

1

Setting the stage

Time: 3 years ago

Place: 6 Pivot Drive

*Most people, thought Susan, quietly contemplating her bedroom, are born into the place they belong. This does not seem to be the case with me.* She was currently in a “time out” for having used magic, and had been sent to her room 10 minutes ago. Her cat, Sparkle, was currently keeping her company by curling up on her lap. Sparkle was a mostly black cat, long haired, with a starburst pattern in white on her chest. She was 8 years old, and born on the same day as Susan herself. This explained the “Companion” written on her *character sheet* under *Backgrounds*. As she gazed at her sheet she read over what she already knew. She was 8 years old and had long blond hair. She had a 5 in LOOKs, meaning she was neither pretty nor plain, and had green eyes. She was left handed, and her *Background Card* was “Lost Loved One(s)” which explained why her father had been tragically killed years earlier. She was also, as far she knew, the only *Natural Magician* on the planet, able to shape her own internal energies into magic and cast spells.

This was relevant because Susan had just learned the *Detect Lies* spell and went to go ask her mother if her father had really perished as she had been told. She wasn’t sure why exactly she had suddenly become curious about this, but nonetheless, she was. She sighed.

“I told you not use it on her,” admonished Sparkle, opening one eye and lifting her head from Susan’s lap. “Adults lie to kids all the time, it’s just something that’s done.”

“I couldn’t very well just take your word for it, now could I?” she replied rather peevishly.

“I suppose you do have *Curious*, after all, just like myself. Still, did you have to shout at her that she was lying? I doubt she appreciated it.”

“I agree, the shouting part might have been a little much. I blame my high RESolve.”

“Rather than using your high REASON to think about what a terrible idea that would be?”

“Humph.”

*The problem is no matter what I do, mom just dismisses my magic as being a kids game or a trick. She yelled at me for “printing out garbage” when I showed her my character sheet, and none of the kids at school seem to even know what they are. When I ask someone what backgrounds they have, or how much energy they can spend per action they just give me a blank look. Clearly something is going on here. Either I have been born into the wrong universe, or only some people get character sheets and spell books when they’re born. The question becomes how do I determine which is the correct answer without getting thrown in the loony bin?*

Susan glanced over at her bookcase, where sitting on top was an ancient looking book with a rough leather cover. She looked down at her character sheet at *Resources: Equipment* and shook her head, thinking about how many excuses her mother had made seeing it. It had always been in her room, since the day she was born, and as it was part of her character sheet, it kept coming back. Her mother had apparently thrown it away several times, but it always turned back up. Now her mother seemed to have a blind spot for it and pretended it didn’t exist.

*Thank goodness it does, thought Susan, or I would have no place to learn magic from! But why does she always seem to look sad whenever she sees it?*

Sparkle got up and stretched, heading to the window.

“He’s leaving again,” she said, looking out at the house next door.

“The opposite?” she asked. Her name for the skinny kid that lived next door, at 4 Pivot Drive, was “the opposite.” This was because he was the opposite of all the other people that lived there.

Sparkle nodded, and Susan bounced up off her bed to look down at him walking past. *He never seems very happy*, she thought. And despite going to her school she didn’t know much about him. He didn’t seem to have many friends, though this being due to a low PERsonality or some other weakness, like *Creepy*, she couldn’t be sure.

“There’s something wrong about him.” Sparkle remarked. “I just wish I could put my paw on what.”

“Oh, for just ten seconds of looking at his character sheet.”

“That would solve things.” They both watched him turn and go around the back of the house, kicking his feet and slumping over.

“You’ve been practicing your *Magic Sense* right?” Sparkle said, jerking her head back to look at Susan.

“Sure, even if you are the only thing that seems to be magical around here. Why?”

“Just a hunch. Let’s go check out that boy.”

“You think- him?”

“It makes sense. Maybe he’s in the same situation as you, and he gets in trouble for using magic as well? Or he can’t control it because he doesn’t have the *Resources* background you do. Not to mention your being a *Prodigy*, so your stats are probably higher than his.”

“I suppose it’s worth a try,” Susan agreed. “It can’t hurt, and maybe if I find out what’s bothering him I can have my book suggest a spell to try and help him out!”

“Now, if I’m right-”

“Susan!” yelled a voice from downstairs. “You can come out now!”

“Thanks mom!” Susan yelled back.

*So I was right*, Sparkle thought, *it was plot related. She needed to be in this room so she could see The Opposite leave and decide to see what was up with him.*

“Right about what?” Susan persisted, as Sparkle hadn’t finished her thought.

“Nothing. Don’t worry about it.” *You don’t show signs of being a full Paragon, just as your father thought, so you work that sort of thing out on your own or not at all. Just as he instructed.*

Once outside, Susan and Sparkle took off after The Opposite, and found him leaning against a tree as far from the house as he could but still be on the property.

“Hi!” she said to him, rolling a 12 on her PERsonality check. “I’m Susan from next door. I thought you might like to play or something!”

The Opposite seemed a bit startled and his eyes darted this way and that. They finally settled on her.

“Me? You want to play with me?”

“Well we do live next door to each other,” said Susan, fixing him with a gaze and rolling a *Magic Sense* on him. She rolled a 7, which was half her rating and got nothing. However, Sparkle rolled a 10, almost maximum, and nodded her head.

“Did that cat just nod at you?” said The Opposite, not missing a trick.

“I have a confession to make,” said Susan. “I actually came over here to see if you were a wizard, like me.”

“I wish, then I could- wait, you’re serious?”

“Just a second,” she said, rolling the check again, and taking the -1 penalty for retrying. This time she did much better, and felt something weird about him.

“You are a wizard!” she exclaimed. “But you feel weird compared to Sparkle.”

“Is this the game we’re playing?” The Opposite sounded unsure. “My Aunt and Uncle throw a fit if they catch me even thinking about magic for some reason.”

“I bet you were right!” Susan said to Sparkle. “Maybe he is a wizard and his- wait, those aren’t your parents?”

“No, they died in a car crash, at least according to them.” He said “them” with more than a trace of scorn while pointing at the house.

“That’s terrible! You must miss them something awful! My father may or may not have died in a similar way, so I know how you feel.”

“Really? I’m sorry to hear that. I was just a baby, apparently.”

“Still. Anyway, I bet you’re a wizard and they just don’t want you to find out about it and learn to use your powers! This is so great! I’ve got a huge book of spells at home, I can copy some out and you can see if you can learn them! Can I see your character sheet?”

“Slow down, what are you talking about? Book of spells? Character sheets?”

“You don’t have a character sheet?” Susan looked crestfallen. “Maybe you just don’t know how to call it out? But I didn’t really have to learn that, it just sort of happened.”

“Are you teasing me?” asked The Opposite, “Because I get enough of that at home. And at school. And in my dreams. Pretty much everywhere, actually.”

“I’m serious. Look, I’ll prove it! *Light!*” Susan held out a hand and a tiny ball of appeared, floating above it.

The Opposite’s eyes got wider. “That is so cool! It’s real- magic is real!”

“As real as I am. I can... teach you if you want.” Her cheeks colored a little.

The Opposite glanced over at the house. “We’ll have to do it in secret.”

Susan let the ball of light go and it winked out. “It’s more fun that way anyway, right?”

The two grinned at each other.

“I’m Harry. Harry Potter.” He held out his hand for Susan to shake, which she did.

“This is Sparkle, she’s my familiar.”

“Hello,” said Sparkle.

Harry fell over backwards. “Your cat can talk?”

It was now some time later, and both kids were in Susan’s room, where Harry spent as much time as he could, away from his adoptive family. “It was a letter, addressed to me,” said Harry to Susan. They had been friends for three years after their fateful meeting, and Susan, to her dismay, had yet to work out why Harry’s magic wasn’t working. It was obvious to anyone that spent any time around him that he was magical. That trip to the zoo with the snake incident proved it, if any more proof was needed. She and Harry had studied Susan’s book of spells for any clues, and while Harry was almost as knowledgeable as she was in *Magical Theory* and *Magical Scripture* he couldn’t perform a single spell from her book. Nor could he *Imbue* or *Fabricate* anything, despite years of trying. It was all very peculiar. He could make things happen, yes, but not with any accuracy. And when he did, her *Magic Sense* buzzed oddly, totally unlike watching Sparkle cast a spell. She had even leaned the *Research* spell, and tried looking things up, but everything there contradicted her own experience. Still, Harry was a good friend to her and seemed to be less sad these past few years. She didn’t realize it, but Sparkle had noticed

that once she started hanging out with Harry, she didn't get into as much trouble as she had before. Like he had calmed her down a little by acting as a sort of relief valve for her. They helped each other, in other words, and both were better for it.

"Was there a return address?" asked Sparkle. "I'm to understand they can be used to tell who sent a letter."

"That's the odd part, it just a funny symbol on the back. And get this- no stamp."

"What did The Others say?" The Others were her name for the Dursleys, of course.

"That's the strangest thing of all; They almost looked positively afraid- of a letter! And Other Senior" (as he was known) "said they swore to, and I quote 'stamp out that dangerous nonsense.' unquote."

"They know," Susan gasped. "That can be the only reason. We've never found any sort of curse or binding on you, but it would explain why you can't use magic. Maybe they just missed me?"

"Who is they?"

"Whoever sent the letter! They must be wizards too! That's why all the oddities surrounding it. You remember that spell I showed you that can materialize an object near someone? I bet they just did that when the regular mail came, though really it seems an odd way to go about things."

"Yeah, they could have contacted me in a dream or, I don't know, *come in person*? Given the nature of my situation? I suppose it was my fault, after all. I should have known they wouldn't let me keep it, slipped it into the cupboard as I passed by and read it latter." He got a horrified look. "What if it was some kind of test, that I just failed? Like they send one letter and that's it, if you aren't good enough to hold onto it without magic, how can you be trusted *with* magic?"

"Let's not get ahead of ourselves Harry, there must be a reason for it. They can't be ignorant about the attitudes of The Others, could they? My guess is young wizards get restricted somehow from using magic until they're old enough. It just so happened I got the book and everything, because even wizards aren't perfect. That's why your magic is so erratic, the block is breaking down."

"That would explain things," Harry said slowly. "My parents were wizards and something happened to them. My aunt, having lost her sister to a magical accident, became bitter about the whole thing and doesn't want me to meet the... same..." he trailed off. "No, it seems like they don't care if I live or die. Maybe my mother got magic but her sister didn't? So it was more jealousy than anything? Then something she was so proud of got her killed, and my aunt felt justified in her belief? I don't know."

"Well, one way to know for sure!" bubbled Susan. "Before your mail comes tomorrow, let me in. I'll be *Invisible*. I'll wait by the mail slot and hope everyone is in another room when the mail comes. That way I can grab it and hide it, and give it to you to read later! After all, they might search the place if they think you got another and are hiding it. After the first one they'll be more alert, right?"

"You're probably right, and that's a great plan! But wait, what if he's waiting for it? I mean he's pretty lazy around the house, but which will win out? His laziness or his desire to make sure I don't get another letter like that?"

"Humm..." Susan thought for a moment. "What did he do with the first one?"

"Burned it."

“Perfect. If he does the same, I’ll just follow along behind him. When he goes to throw it into the fire, I’ll cast *Retrieval*. As long as he’s not holding onto it, \*poof\*, it’ll be in my hand, and he can tear about the place looking for it all he likes. Wait a second...” She went over to her spell-book and started leafing through it. “You wouldn’t call *Retrieval* an ‘offensive spell’ would you?”

“I’m not offended,” answered Harry.

“I don’t think so,” said Sparkle, rolling her eyes.

“Then that’s the plan. Operation: *Get the Letter* is now underway.”

As luck would have it, the hallway was clear when the letter arrived, so Susan gleefully scooped it up before Other Junior came waddling by. Susan, taking no chances, had put all the energy she could into casting *Invisibility* making her roll very high indeed. She watched as Junior thumped his stupid stick (*I so want to Elemental Bolt (fire) that stick*, thought Susan) down the hall towards the mail slot. He checked carefully around the pile of letters, then peaked out the mail slot.

“Well?” Senior roared from the other room.

“Nothing for Harry,” replied Junior, scooping up the rest of the mail and heading back. Susan stuck her tongue out at him.

“Well, that’s sorted then,” said Senior. “Wonder if I should put you back in the cupboard, my boy?”

“I want my room back!” shouted Junior.

“Oh, leave it,” sighed Other’s Wife, “It’s all junk up there anyway.”

*Oh really?* thought Susan. *We’ll just see about that.*

She quietly headed up the stairs and looked in all the rooms until she found the one she was looking for. It was hard to miss, with the broken TV, video camera, bent air gun, and other junk lying about. A few quick castings of the *Repair* spell and she quietly snuck out, leaving everything in the room as pristine as the day it was made. *Let them work that one out.*

Later that afternoon, Harry came bursting into her house, his eyes shining with excitement.

“So did you get it, or did they not send another? I’m about to burst but I had to wait so they didn’t get suspicious. Do you have it?”

“Well...” she said, peering into her sleeve. “It’s not up this sleeve.”

“Come on!”

“And it’s not up this one...”

Sparkle sighed. “Really? You’re tormenting the poor boy now?”

“What’s this behind your ear,” she asked, reaching for him. She brushed his ear and cast *Retrieval*, pulling the letter out of her room where she had left it. “Is this what you’re looking for?”

“Can I have it please?”

“I guess it’s a felony to interfere with the mail...”

“Come on!”

“Okay, here.”

Harry tore the envelope open and Susan grabbed it from him, shocked. “Careful, it could have clues on it. That symbol, for one.”

“I’m just so nervous!” He started to read. “Get this, I’ve apparently been accepted to some school of witchcraft and wizardry. Also they shall ‘await my owl’ whatever that means.”

“Now wait just a second,” said Sparkle, springing up from the bed. “Who in this room has complete control of their magic? That’s right, us two. Who can do at least two dozen spells? Again, us! So where’s Susan’s letter inviting her to this so called magical school, that’s what I want to know.”

“I appreciate the thought,” said Susan, “but I’m sure there’s some explanation for it.”

“There had better be, and a darn good one.” *Of course I already know the answer, but better to fake some sort of outrage about this.*

“There’s also a list of books and some equipment I have to buy. Can’t see The Others springing for any of this stuff, even if I knew where to get it.”

“Books plural?”

“Yup. A standard book of spells (grade 1)-”

“Wait, they only teach you grade 1 spells in your first year? I’ve learned *pocket dimension*, that’s grade 6!”

Harry shrugged. “A history book, a book on Magical Theory, bet you I get top marks in that class, thanks to you, something called transfiguration, then herbs and potions. I also apparently need a wand, a telescope, of all things, and a set of scales. Hey, I could bring a cat! But I can’t own my own *broomstick*? Maybe they messed up and this really is your letter, I can’t see myself flying about on a broomstick. But you can already fly, can’t you? Weird.”

“I’ll say. I suppose the potions stuff could be *Imbuing*, but you tried and tried that and it wouldn’t work for you. None of this makes any sense.”

“Could I use a different *kind* of magic?”

“How many kinds of magics do you want on this planet?” Susan asked, a bit shocked.

“It would explain why your senses are off about me, and why I can’t do your magic at all.”

“Yeah, I guess. How are we ever going to reply to this letter?”

“Magic?”

“Oh yeah! Stupid of me. Just a second, that sounds like a Mercury based spell.” Susan looked through her book of magic. “Ah, *Send Object*, that sounds promising. I need to know the identity of the person to send it to, which I guess would be the person that signed the letter, but I also need to know their general location. Let me keep looking. You write a reply that they’re all mad or whatever and to come see you in person to explain things.”

“Right!” said Harry, grabbing a notebook and tearing a sheet out of it. He sat down at Susan’s desk and began to write.

“This might take a while…” muttered Susan.

Susan first had to read the spell of *Descry Creature*, making a *Magical Scripture* check to understand the writings. She exactly made the difficulty, which was a 12. She then used *Magical Theory* to understand it enough to cast it. She rolled an 18 on this check, more than enough. She then was able to cast the spell from the writing, and sacrificed a bunch of energy to make sure it worked, as she had no idea how far away this “deputy headmaster” was. She got a total of 16, meaning as long as she wasn’t 10,000,000 km away (and she wasn’t) Susan now knew exactly where this Hogwarts was and furthermore, where Mrs. McGonagall was. She then repeated the procedure for the *Send Object* spell, rolling a 16 and 17 respectively. She gave a sigh of relief, *nothing to it.*

By that time Harry had finished his letter and she read it over.

*Dear Mrs. McGonagall,*

*I hope you are not too startled by the appearance of this letter, I had my friend send it on to you because I don't own an owl. I am sure this was just an oversight on your part, given the great number of students you must send letters to every year. I am however anxious to attend your fine school, but I need to request more information. Where do I go to buy my books and supplies? How do I reach the school? I am unsure if my guardians, the Dursleys, will even let me attend, though I guess it would get me out of the house, which they might be happy about? They don't seem too keen on magic, however. If a representative from the school could find some time to come down and straighten these few things out, I would really appreciate it.*

*Thank you for your time, I know you're probably really busy, but it's sort of an emergency.*

*Yours,*

*Harry Potter*

*P.S. My neighbor, Susan Felton, wonders if she could be considered for your school as well. She is about a hundred times the wizard I currently am, and the one who sent this letter.*

“Sounds good to me!” said Susan, folding it up. “Just write ‘To Minerva McGonagall’ on the front and we’ll send it on its way.”

Harry did so, and watched with interest as Susan cast *Send Object* from her book. The letter disappeared.

“Well, that’s it,” said Susan, standing up again and closing the book. “The letter has, if everything went well and I think it did, just appeared right near her. Hopefully you’ll get a response by owl or whatever tomorrow. We’ll do the same thing, I’ll be *Invisible* to make sure I can grab it before anyone else does.”

This of course proved completely unnecessary because not five minutes later, a large number of people with severe expressions and wands showed up out of nowhere demanding to know how the letter got past the wards around Hogwarts.

2

Taking a Detour

Time: ten minutes later

Place: 4 Pivot Drive, living room

Cast: A group of Hogwarts professors (including Dumbledore), The Dursleys, Susan, Harry, Susan's mother

The wizards in the room were staring fixedly at the book Susan had brought over. The Dursleys, or at least Senior, looked like he was alternating between absolute fury at having his home invaded by wizards and terror at trying to do anything about it. His lip was twitching involuntarily whenever he looked at Harry, who was trying to cast the invisibility spell by sheer will, and not having any luck. Harry's aunt just looked resigned, and Junior kept peaking around the corner into the room. Susan's mother, Stacey, looked a bit nervous but was more confused than anything.

"I'm not getting anything from this," said the one with the long silvery beard and half moon glasses. "You say you can do magic from this book? That you have, in fact, learned magic from it?" he asked Susan.

She nodded.

"Now, now, don't be shy. You just rather surprised us, that's all. Nothing to worry about!"

"You all seemed rather angry before..."

The one with the greasy hair sneered in their general direction. "Already making trouble, Potter? You probably did this and are just trying to blame someone else!"

"There is no way a student, who doesn't even have his wand, could have breached the wards at Hogwarts, Severus," said the older woman. She looked quite sternly at both of them.

"But obviously it was done Minerva," sneered Severus. "Otherwise we would not be here now. How did you do it, Potter?"

"His name is Harry," Susan said angrily. "And I was the one who sent the letter, not him. He can't do magic yet, not reliably, anyway. Believe me, we've tried and tried."

"And you can, I suppose?" It seemed his face had a permanent sneer.

"If you hand me your so called wand I'll be happy to demonstrate."

"I will not."

"Oh, hand it over," said the guy with the turban on his head. "I'm interested to see what she has in mind."

"Then hand yours over, Quirinus."

"No chance."

"Then I don't see why I should-"

The bearded one looked sideways at him.

"Oh, very *well* Albus. Here, try not to drop it." Severus handed over his wand with great reluctance.

"Drop it? I wouldn't dream of it. Not when I was going to do this, anyway!"

She snapped the wand in half.

Every wizard's face changed to utter astonishment as she set the broken pieces of the wand down on the table in front of her.

“Do you realize what you’ve done? I’ll kill you for that girl!” Quirinus actually seemed to be smirking once the shock wore off, while Albus turned and went to physically restrain Severus.

Susan raised a hand. Then she waved it over the wand, and the familiar glowing circle appeared under it. “*Repair*,” she said simply, and the wand flowed back together again. She smiled smugly as Severus reached over for the wand and picked it up.

“Lumos,” he said nervously, and the tip of the wand lit up.

“You’re lucky that worked, girl.”

“My name is Susan,” said Susan. “Not girl. And you owe both Harry and myself an apology.”

“I believe that’s true,” said Albus. “Not that I would ever force you, of course.”

Severus ignored all of it. “I’ll need to run a few more tests. If any of them fail…” he ominously trailed off, then disappeared in a crack of air.

“That was a bit risky,” said Minerva, “I don’t know what he would have done if you hadn’t been able to repair that wand.”

“It is curious,” said Albus quietly. “Usually if a wand is snapped it can never be repaired. And to do magic without a wand of your own, of that level, is astonishing to me.”

“*Repair* is a grade five spell,” said Susan, “And I spent max energy, again, to make sure it would repair enough damage. Good thing my ENDurance and RESolve are so high, huh? But why would breaking it make it useless for magic? You must have a *repair* type spell yourself, right?”

The wizards stared blankly at her.

“Right. Anyway, are you convinced yet?”

“I’m convinced,” said Quirinus. “I like her style, and her spirit. I think she would make an excellent addition to the student body. Especially if we want to figure out her, ahem, unique style of magic.”

“I agree,” said Albus. “What we’ve witnessed today could be a totally new kind of magic making itself felt in this world. Or it could be something ancient, coming again from the mists of time. Who is to say? None of your ancestors exhibited abilities like this, I take it madam?” he asked Stacy.

She shook her head. “So she was telling the truth all along?” she said quietly.

“If by that you mean your daughter told you she could do magic, and you did not believe her? Yes, it seems she was telling the truth.”

“I’m sorry honey,” said Stacy.

“It’s okay mom. You didn’t know.”

*Well, of course she did!* thought Sparkle. *But I think she had hoped Susan wouldn’t follow in her father’s footsteps. Small chance of that now. She’s Paragon enough to need XP and that means the “call to adventure” sooner or later. No amount of wishing will make that untrue.*

“But I should have trusted you.”

Susan gave a little laugh. “We can argue that another time. I’m just glad it’s all out in the open.”

“Great. Leave!” shouted Senior. “Magic done in my house! I don’t believe this!”

“You!” shouted Susan, stalking over to him. He backed himself up against the wall. “You have both physically and mentally abused Harry for his entire life. But that ends *now*. Oh, it’s clear now why you did it- You knew, and you were afraid. Afraid of him, and of the power he will learn to use but which you can only dream of. You’ve let that-” she pointed to Junior, “push

Harry around since he was born. You gave him a cupboard to live in. You didn't show him an ounce of compassion despite the fact *he is family*. That ends. You don't have to like him, but you do have to acknowledge his existence. If I hear that he's been mistreated again, in even the slightest way, you and I are going to have words. And you know that my words have power. Are we clear?"

"I will not be spoken to like that in my own house! Especially not by some... some... witch!" shouted Senior.

Susan's voice quieted to a whisper, and she leaned in close. Senior flinched away. "I know at least four different ways to kill you where you stand. They wouldn't even have time to lift their wands. Think about that."

"You threaten-"

Albus' hand came down on Susan's shoulder. "Now now, let's not be hasty. I'm sure conditions around here will improve now that they are known..."

"And you!" said Susan. Albus' eyebrows went up. "You seem to be the highest ranking wizard around here, how could you let this go on? Just because they didn't use physical torture doesn't make what they did do any less repulsive. Did you just not care?"

Albus sighed a great sigh. "There are many forces at work here, Susan. I had to leave them alone to raise Harry because of who he is. If I had visited or made it known he was here... let's just say being given a cupboard to live in is really the least of his worries."

"Very well," said Susan. She turned back to Senior. "But there will be no more stealing of letters, no more physical abuse by that, none of it. Clear?"

Senior sputtered angrily, but Senior's Wife came to the rescue. "We'll see that he's not mistreated anymore."

"Splendid!" said Albus. "That's settled then. Now, just a few more things to tidy up before we take our leave. Susan, strictly speaking underage Witches are not allowed to do magic anywhere but school until they are of age. But apparently you have been doing so for quite a number of years without triggering the alarms that underage magic is being performed. Then this whole sending of letters into Hogwarts, well, it's obvious this is a very different magic than we're used to. So I will ask you to please, be responsible. I would hate to read that number 4 Pivot Drive burned to the ground two nights from now because someone said a cross word to Harry here. School will start soon and we'll get all this sorted out. I won't ask you to stop doing magic totally, and I know you've been careful around your mother, but please don't let Muggles, that is, people without magical abilities or who don't know about them, see you do magic. Unless it's life or death, of course."

"Yes, I realize the risks," Susan said.

"Of course you do! Now, we'll have someone sent round to take you both to buy your uniforms and things. I don't suppose you'll need a wand, will you? You might want to stop in anyway, just to see what happens. And I suppose our books of magic... well, I'll think about it anyway. Come everyone, we've intruded on this household enough for one day, I should think.

"Oh, and Harry, I must apologize. We should have sent someone around directly rather than using the standard letter service. It would have saved a lot of trouble, I think. Still, all is well that ends well, don't you find? And we're off!"

The wizards in the room disappeared, leaving the (mostly) mere mortals alone again.

"I think that's our cue to exit as well. It was nice meeting you both," said Stacy. "If you want to talk things over with me, you know where to find me."

“Come with me, Harry,” said Susan, pulling him along. “Let’s let your uncle cool down for a while, shall we?”

She put two fingers up to her eyes and swung them out at Senior as she was pulled out of the house, Harry in tow.

“What just happened?” asked Junior as they left.

The next day Susan was browsing the web for any information that might have leaked out about Hogwarts and the magical world when the doorbell rang.

*It’s never sounded so... surly before*, she thought. *That’s weird.*

“I’ll get it, mom!” she said, springing up out of her chair and running to the door. When she opened it her eyes narrowed.

“Didn’t expect to see you again so soon,” she said to the unkempt man standing there.

“Nor did I expect to return to this charming suburb, but yet here I stand.”

“Come to apologize?”

“I have come,” he said through clenched teeth, “to take you to buy your school supplies. Go and get Pot- Harry and be quick about it.”

“Okay, just a second.” She went to find her mother.

“Mom, one of the professors is here to take me to buy my school stuff.”

“Do you need money?”

“Honestly, I have no idea. I would have to assume they use the same currency as us, but I’m eleven and I’ve thought of several ways to create unlimited electricity with magic. Electricity is power. Power is money. So wizards either have a totally different way of doing business, like barter or something, or... I’ll go ask.”

She peaked her head out the door again. Severus was tapping his foot, irritated at this most irksome of tasks he had been assigned.

“Do I need money?”

“That will not be necessary.”

“Thank you.”

She ducked back inside again.

“I guess not. Man, this is so exciting!”

“Just be careful honey.” Stacy looked out the window. “Oh, it’s the angry one. Why did they send him?”

Susan shrugged. “Don’t know. But I was being serious when I said I knew four different ways to kill someone, if he does try anything.”

Stacy looked shocked. “You weren’t kidding about that?”

“No, I wasn’t. I only know one actual attack spell, which I learned just in case, but some other spells I know could be used creatively to kill someone if I really, absolutely had to.”

“Oh, I see. Well, take Sparkle with you.” She paused. “I can’t believe I just said to take the *cat* with you, and it made me feel better about your safety.”

(Naturally Susan had reintroduced Sparkle to her mother, and Sparkle had reintroduced herself back. That really blew Stacy’s mind, or at least she acted as though it did. Susan, of

course, had no idea Sparkle and her mother were well acquainted from the time her father had been around. This is how Sparkle had wanted it, and Stacy had played the part well.)

Susan ran up and shoved her book of magic, some emergency money (she wasn't stupid), a change of clothes, writing paper, flashlight, and various other odds and ends into her backpack. *If only I had some rope, like fifty feet of it. I don't know why, it just seems right to have tons of rope.* She gave a mental shrug, then opened her *Pocket Dimension* and shoved the backpack in.  
*All set!*

Sparkle, currently shape-shifted into the form of a fairy and riding on Susan's shoulder, looked Severus over. "He feels like Harry," she remarked.

"Can we please get a move on?"

"I'm ready to go."

"Splendid."

She and Severus walked over to Harry house, but Severus stopped just before entering the yard.

*Looks like he doesn't want to go one inch closer to Harry than he has to. What's his deal, anyway?*

Susan ran over and rang the bell, and it was Junior that answered.

"Oh. Uh, you want to see Harry?" he asked, keeping the door open just a crack.

"Yes, please."

"Just wait here, I'll get him."

There was a commotion in the house, and the door was thrown open.

"What's this about?" asked Senior.

"We're going to buy our school supplies."

"Well he's not getting... any... money- uh."

Susan stared at him.

"Sorry. Old habits die hard?"

"Yes. As a matter of fact I have been told we don't need money, so don't worry about it."

"Fine." His already beady eyes narrowed. "Were you the one who fixed all of Dudley's old stuff?"

"That was me."

"I guess magic does have some use then," he said, sounding like he was forcing the words out.

"Okay Harry?" she asked, as he appeared behind Senior.

"Never better. You?"

"The same. Come on, we're heading out."

"Awesome. See you later."

"We'll be... waiting."

The door closed and Harry looked around. "Him? Oh, hi Sparkle, didn't see you there."

"Hi Harry."

"My reaction exactly. Keep an eye on him, he seems to have some kind of grudge against you for some reason."

“Maybe my parents failed his classes or something? No wait, he’s about the age my parents would be now, if they were still alive. He must have known them growing up? I’ll ask him.”

They walked over to where he was.

“Good morning, Professor. Thank you for coming to escort us, I’m sure it’s not what you had in mind for today.”

Severus looked a bit surprised. “No, it was not. Professor Quirrell volunteered to come, but Albus thought I should, in his words, get to know Harry better.”

“You knew my parents, didn’t you?”

“All too well. Why?”

Harry and Susan looked at each other. “It’s the only reason I can think of that you didn’t like me, on sight. You’re transferring your dislike of my mother or father onto me, because you can’t hate them anymore. Because they’re dead, and I’m not.”

Severus stared at them a moment. “This is a waste of time.” He stuck his wand out, and a double decker bus zoomed into view and halted directly beside them, totally ignoring a little physical law called “inertia.”

“Get aboard.”

Wide eyed, the two young wizards climbed aboard and found several witches and wizards looking at them. “Diagon Alley,” drawled Severus to the ticket taker, sitting down and shooing the others to different seat with a wave of his hand. The bus accelerated back to its top speed in a single action, and the three were off.

Inside the bus was more like a cafe than a normal bus, and all the chatter stopped as the wizards and witches looked the pair over.

“Impossible!” said one.

“Merely improbable,” one clarified.

“Merlin’s beard,” said yet another.

“Harry Potter!” they all shouted, standing up. They clustered around him and grabbed his hand.

“As I live and breathe,” said the wizard in the green robes. “It really is you. It’s an honor to meet you!”

“Charmed,” said the witch, “I shall have a story to tell my grandchildren when I get home.”

At this point Severus was making quiet retching noises.

The ticket taker even came over. “Is it really him?”

“Let him sit down first!” Susan said, crossly.

“Do forgive us,” said the one in red. “It’s not every day you meet someone as famous as Harry Potter. I don’t think there has been anyone as famous, actually.”

“What are you all talking about?”

The four looked blankly at him.

“You can’t seriously say you don’t know?” said the witch.

“Pretend for the moment that we don’t. How can I possibly be famous?”

They told him.

“It’s becoming a bit clearer now, isn’t it?” Harry asked Susan.

“It sure is. He didn’t like your parents and then they had to go and get murdered by Voldemort. In effect, dying nobly. But then you survived, making him feel guilty about feeling smug about it.”

“No, I mean, yes, but I was talking about my foster family.”

“Oh them! Yeah, if his followers ever figured out where you were, they would have been in danger. But they would have only looked in the wizard world, given how separate they seem to keep themselves. Why do they do that, I wonder,” she said, mostly to herself. “Does technology not work well around magic? Or are they like the Amish?” She had used Google Maps to find Hogwarts, given that she now knew where it was. She had found it, but her mother said all she saw was an empty field.

“It’s going to be rough,” Harry sighed.

“What, being famous? I can imagine.”

“No, being *marked*. You say a lot of his followers didn’t get caught, or weaseled out of it? Or that *he himself* might still be out there, waiting to take revenge?” The wizards and witch nodded. “I’m going to have to live my life always looking over my shoulder. The man I pass on the street could be an old follower and \*zap\* right in the back. One dead Harry Potter. Because of something that happened to me before I was even old enough to talk.”

“You want my advice?” asked Susan.

Harry nodded enthusiastically.

“One, get yourself a powerful magic user or two as a friend. Check.” She made a check-mark motion in the air, and Harry smiled. “Two, don’t slack off in your classes. In fact, take more classes if they’ll let you. Practice all the time. Do extra homework, whatever. You’re coming back to the magical world now, and so the magical world is going to notice you again. You’re going to have to be ready.”

Harry nodded, serious.

“Diagon Alley!” announced the driver as the bus came to a halt again. Severus stood up.

“It was nice meeting you all,” Harry said. “Thank you for the story. I’m glad to finally know the truth of the matter.”

The others all shook his hand again, and they stepped off the bus, which roared away again. The two looked around in amazement, having basically just stepped back in time a few hundred years. Shops of every description lined the road, and witches and wizards of every shape, color and size milled about under conditions of obviously just near but never spilled over chaos.

“Let’s go,” said Severus by way of introduction, and stalked off.

Men love shopping... for hardware

Time: 30 seconds later

Place: Diagon Alley

“What’s our first stop, Professor?” said Harry, who seemed determined to be nice to this man even if it killed him.

“Bank,” Severus said simply, walking past shops full of wonders. Even Sparkle was standing up on Susan’s shoulder and looking around interestedly.

“I could spend years here!” Susan breathed. The signs moved, kids darted everywhere, and the things she glimpsed in the windows...

“I hear ya!” said Harry, impressed. He didn’t get out much, but even to his inexperienced eyes this seemed excessive. Like someone tried to pack the entire wizarding world into one narrow street. Then they came to the bank. The sign said Gringotts and there huge stone lions guarding the front. *Moving*, huge stone lions, that stared at everyone as they went past. She did a *Magic Sense* on them, and almost had the top of her head torn off. She staggered a little.

“You okay?” said Harry, steadying her.

“Here’s a tip, don’t use *Magic Sense*,” she said to Sparkle. “Because just about everything around here is steeped in wand magic (as they were calling it, to distinguish it from energy magic, the type Susan did). “And thanks, I’m fine.”

“Inside,” snarled Severus.

The lions took a close look at her (or maybe Sparkle) as she passed, but didn’t move from their pedestals. Inside was a second set of doors guarded by some kind of squat humanoid creature with big ears. There were six of them, and they all had shining breastplates on. Each held a sword, point down, that was sized for them exactly. They seemed rather no-nonsense creatures, all in all. Two lined each wall, and two were against the far door.

“Good security,” breathed Harry.

“Uh huh,” answered Susan.

Severus swept past them all, and the doors opened without apparent effort on the part of the guards.

Inside was a long hallway, straight through, and Susan and Harry had to crane their necks to see above the top of the counters. Even Severus would have to stand on tiptoes to see over them. From down the hall they saw each... creature, performing a different activity, from weighing coins to writing up contracts. Severus ignored it all and went straight to the back, where he stood stiffly and waited to be acknowledged.

“Yes?” said the creature after a moment, looking up from his writing.

“Harry Potter’s vault. Key.” He slapped a key down on the counter, which the creature picked up. He looked from the key to Harry, then back again.

“That seems in order. Anything else?”

“Vault seven hundred and thirteen. My authorization.” A piece of paper was produced from somewhere and handed over. The creature spent a long time looking at it.

“Very well,” he said crisply. “Griphook!”

From the left part of the high counters a section disappeared, revealing another creature and a passageway leading off to a door. Severus took the key back and walked past the creature towards the door. The others followed.

They were led to an odd contraption that the creature told them to sit down on, and they zoomed off along a track, down into a cave that opened up before them. A waterfall cascaded over them, drenching them for a moment, but which quickly evaporated.

“That was an odd sensation,” said Sparkle. “I had to make a RESolve check to hold onto my spell just then.”

“What was that?” Susan shouted to the creature.

“Thief’s Downfall!” it shouted back over the wind. “Washes away enchantments!”

*Not all of them.*

“Not to be rude, but what species are you?”

“I’m a goblin. It’s a goblin bank, you know?”

“I’m from the non magical world, so no, actually.”

Griphook just nodded.

Without warning the strange vehicle came to a halt, bouncing everyone around. “Harry Potter’s vault,” said Griphook, stepping out. “Key please.” Severus handed it over, and Griphook got the vault open.

All three gasped as the door swung open to reveal...

An empty room.

“Huh,” said Harry. “I guess I wasted your time after all, Professor. Sorry about that.”

“I was under the impression that Harry had... considerable wealth at his disposal?” said Severus, striding into the vault and looking around.

“This is impossible!” said Griphook, looking around frantically. “Impossible! There was indeed a vast treasure here, though I admit this vault has not been opened in the eleven years since *his* death.”

“So I’ve been robbed?” said Harry, stepping into the vault himself. “And never knew it because it’s only now that I’ve come down to see it. I am disappointed, given all the security I saw upstairs.”

“It must have been done over the course of weeks. No one person could have carried all the money out of this vault in one go. It’s just not possible.”

Griphook seemed at a loss, and Susan stepped into the vault herself. Just on a hunch she did a *Magic Sense*, assisted by Sparkle.

“Professor, I think there’s some sort of enchantment on the walls.”

He looked at her for a moment, then grumbled something. He took out his wand.

“Finite Incantatem!”

Slowly, words began appearing on the sides of the vault’s walls.

*You may have broken our lord, but now we have broken you, Harry Potter.*

*Know that this is only the beginning of our vengeance.*

*The words seem to have been burned into the walls of the vault, thought Susan, then made invisible. With the spell of invisibility lifted, the words appear. Clever.*

“I guess we have our answer,” said Harry. “The next question is, what is the goblin bank going to do about this theft?”

“We will begin an investigation at once, of course! The reputation of our bank is on the line.”

“You really think that’s going to be good enough?” asked Susan. “Harry needs to buy school things right now. He has absolutely no money. What do you think you should do about that?”

“I’m sure a small loan could be arranged…” said Griphook hopefully.

“At zero interest, payable only when the bank finds and recovers every part of the missing fortune.”

“Yes, I’m sure something-” His eyes widened. “We need to check the other vault.”

“Indeed,” said Severus, climbing aboard the vehicle again. “Given how long this theft went unnoticed, I am hoping, for your sake, that the contents of vault seven hundred and thirteen are intact.”

“I’m sure they are. Positive. Yes, you’ll see. The bank does apologize, Mr. Potter. We will do our best to find those responsible.”

“Thank you.”

Up to speed again on the cart, Susan shouted to Harry. “Sorry about your vault.”

“I didn’t know I had any money anywhere, so really this doesn’t change much.”

“Still, being rich would have been nice.”

“You can say that again!”

“Being rich would have been nice,” she shouted louder.

“I heard- Very funny!”

“Thanks!”

Again the squealing and violent breaking, and Griphook positively leapt from the cart and started undoing complex locks on the vault door. It opened, and everyone looked inside. Susan thought it too was empty, but no, it looked like a small something wrapped in paper was sitting just inside.

“You see? Safe and sound,” said Griphook, seeming relieved.

“We’ll see,” said Snape, picking it up. He walked to the back of the vault, barking “Stay there,” to Susan and Harry. He unwrapped it slightly and took something out of a pouch, touching it to the thing. He was obviously satisfied, as he wrapped it up again. “It’s not a fake. Let’s go.”

Back at the upper level, Griphook tried to get away, but Susan grabbed him.

“I think you better see to the *loan* first, then report the theft. After all, it’s been this long, it can wait a few minutes longer.”

“Yes, very well. This way.”

Griphook led them down another passageway to where a goblin was working in what looked almost like a modern office. Just without modern office equipment- there were still shelves full of paper and books, filing cabinets, and a properly sized desk against a window. The two had a hushed conversation, and the other goblin got a more haunted look as the conversation continued.

“Come in Mr. Potter, come in. Steeltoe the goblin, at your service. Griphook here has told me about the grievous breach of our security, which I assure you the bank will get to the bottom of. Meanwhile, you need to buy supplies and such,” he went over to a corner of the room where he tapped on the wall. “We can accommodate you.”

The stone seemed to flow away and a rather modern looking safe slid out, which he put his hand on. The dial started spinning back and forth on its own, and the door popped open. He reached inside and pulled out a cloth bag that jingled.

“Would two hundred Galleons be enough, do you think?”

Harry looked over at Severus, who rolled his eyes and nodded.

“Excellent, most excellent,” said Steeltoe, handing the bag over. “I won’t even make you sign for them. Consider it a gift in good faith that your money will be returned. Though I would certainly appreciate it if you, ah, didn’t mention our little lapse to anyone?”

“I’ll consider it.”

“Ah, yes, well, we could hardly ask for more. It’s just, being who you are and all, uh. Our records show this young lady does not have a vault, perhaps another 200 for her as a starting member?”

“You want me to put my money in a bank I know that has just been robbed?”

“But that’s just what I mean! Our record thus far has been quite good. To spoil it now... perhaps 300? As a show of good faith? I’ll even wave the opening fee and the yearly fee for the next... shall we say ten years?”

“Very well. But I’ll take 50 with me right now.”

“Of course, of course. I’ll draw up the paperwork and get you a key right away!” He went over to a shelf and started pulling papers off. Harry of course was busy hefting his sack of coins.

*Haven’t they heard of paper money?*

Moments later Susan signed her name to a modified contract and put her key into her pocket dimension, which both goblins and Severus jumped at.

“My 50?”

“Of course!” Steeltoe rummaged around the safe some more and came out with a smaller bag for her. She opened it and peered inside. They seemed to be... gold.

“Huh,” she said, taking one out. She hefted it. “These are gold, aren’t they?”

“Goblin made! Only the purest gold, mixed with a bit of silver because gold is so soft, goes into making our coins.”

Susan knew gold was expensive, but how expensive, she wasn’t sure.

“If I had some non-magical currency I wanted changed into this magical currency, would the goblin bank handle that, as well?”

“Yes, we provide those sorts of services, for a small fee. I believe the going rate is about \$100 per Galleon. Susan worked hard to contain the excitement in her voice. “Very well. I may be making some transactions here in the future in that case. My allowance, of course, won’t spend in the magical world if this is what you use for money. But if I can convert it...”

“Not a problem. Anything we can do for the friend of Harry Potter!”

“Find his treasure.”

“We fully intend to.”

“Then I think we’re done here. Shall we go, Professor?”

“Finally.”

Susan resisted the urge to skip away from the bank for almost fifteen seconds. Then she started skipping and laughing.

“Restrain yourself,” intoned Severus.

“You get it, don’t you,” she asked Harry.

“Something about gold, I’m guessing?”

“I’m not sure, but I’m confident just one of these little coins has at least a thousand dollars worth of gold of it. I remember reading it was some bizarre amount per ounce, anyway. And an ounce isn’t that much when you’re talking a heavy metal like this!”

“What are you blathering about?” asked Severus.

“I send this coin to a place that scraps gold. They don’t even look at it, they just melt it down and weigh it. They send me, to use round numbers, a thousand dollars. I take that thousand dollars and go into the bank, which helpfully gives me 10 Galleons for it, a net gain of 9. I spend nine of them, then send the tenth one to the gold scrapper. I get back a thousand dollars, and the cycle repeats.”

“Gold is worth that much in the muggle world?”

“I am not liking that word, muggle. Anyway, I always wondered why gold seemed a bit scarce, but now I know. All you wizards snapped it all up so you could leave piles of it hanging around vaults. So no wonder the stuff is so rare outside. And they seem to not realize it, because the percentage is so low. Obviously I wouldn’t do hundreds of them at a time, someone would get suspicious. But it perfectly explains my *Resources: Money* background, which I had never been able to access before. It all fits!”

“Sometimes you say the most bizarre things,” said Harry. “But it does sound like it would work.”

“Of course it won’t,” Severus remarked sourly. “There are charms to prevent that sort of thing placed on the coins when they are made. After all, they could be melted down to make jewelry that would be worth far more than the coin itself. You must think us completely naive!”

“Oh, is that so?” *But he doesn’t understand exactly how I work. My character sheet says I can spend \$1000 a month so somehow, some way, I’ll be able to spend \$1000 a month. Now maybe I’ll have to cast Dead Magic on them on a precaution, but somehow my being a Paragon and having that noted on my sheet will make it come true. But I hate to argue with him and tell him how I would do it. Let him think he got the last word in on that. Sucker.*

“It is.” He began pointing. “Now, attend me. Robes, books, sundries, wands. I’ll be over there when you’re done, come find me.” He last pointed to what looked like a bar, then stalked off.

“You would think handing him wealth would perk him up a little,” remarked Harry. “Where do we go first?”

*Not that he can do it my-*

They looked at each other. “Wand!” They both smiled, grabbed hands, and ran towards the wand shop.

The shop was packed, floor to ceiling, with boxes, upon which measurements and such were written. It almost seemed they could all pitch over at any moment, but judging by the dust on some of the lower boxes, the stacks had stood the test of time.

“Hello?” said a voice, and a kind looking face stuck out from behind a stack. “Ah, more customers! Busy time of year, just before school begins. Yes, busy indeed- Oh my.” His eyes darted to Harry’s forehead. “Harry Potter. Of course. How the time does fly. Why it seems like

only yesterday your parents were here to find their wands. What wand will choose you today, I wonder? I must admit, I've thought about it a time or two, and I have my suspicions. And who is your friend?"

"This is Susan. She doesn't need a wand, strictly speaking. But we thought it might be interesting to see what happened if she came here."

"Not need a wand! Nonsense my boy! Every Witch needs a wand! Unless, perhaps, you have purchased a wand from one of my compatriots in the wand making business?"

"I'm a wizard, not a witch," said Susan. "I suppose technically you would call me a *Natural Magician*."

"Yes, I'm sure you'll be a natural," said the man, obviously not listening. He pulled a wand out from the stack. "Try this one!"

He handed it to Harry, but it was immediately snatched away again. He set it down on the counter and went to get another, and while he did, Susan picked it up.

"What do you make of it?" she asked Sparkle, doing a *Magic Sense*.

The fairy shrugged. "I don't see the appeal. It feels just like a stick of wood to me."

"Same here. Weird." She set it down again. By this time the man had tried several wands and was looking Harry over. "Yes, I think it's time to try *that one*," he said. He turned and went into the stacks, looking for one in particular.

"What do you think?" Harry asked, as Susan was holding two wands in her hand and hefting them carefully.

"I think your type of magic needs some kind of focus to work properly. You heard what he said, he's never considered a wizard that might not need a wand. The wand itself is not magical, at least not in the sense that you are. I think there's something magical inside it, but what that means-

"Here we are," said the man, returning. "Yes, wondered when I would sell this wand." He carefully took it out of the box. "See what you make of this, Mr. Potter."

As Harry took the wand a ribbon of light traveled from the tip, down his arm, and across his whole body. Susan had to admit that the wand did look, well, right, in his hand. Odd.

"I thought as much," said the man, whisking it back into the box and stepping behind the counter. He put the wand reverently in a small bag and rang up a 7 on his old fashioned register.

"Does it mean something?" Harry asked, fishing into his sack to grab the needed coins.

"Who can say," said the man. "But I will tell you one thing. The core of your wand is quite similar to his. So similar, I would say, as to be almost the same. After all, the phoenix that donated the feather that's in the center of that wand lost a second feather which I used. I think you know who I'm talking about when I say the twin to your wand came to his hand the day he stood in my shop."

"Voldemort."

He nodded gravely. "I will be quite interested to see what path your career takes Harry, yes, quite interested indeed."

The man handed him a receipt.

"And now for your friend!"

"Honest, I don't need one."

"No need to be shy," he said, going into the back again. "I'm sure I have a wand that will suit you!"

They slipped out.

Susan was quite interested in the books Harry bought, and bought her own copies as well, sticking them into her pocket dimension. As she figured this would be her only chance for a while to browse, she also picked up a few tattered copies of books that looked interesting. As worn as they were, she could buy a dozen for a single Galleon, and besides, she only needed one left at the end of this little shopping trip. She picked up “Hogwarts: A History” and anything having to do with what great wizards had done in the past. If it turned out some complex spell for wand users was easy for her, she would want to learn it quick. Her pocket dimension spell got her some strange looks after she paid for them all and shoved the bag in, but then people just shook their heads and went back to browsing. She barked a laugh.

“Even in the magical world, if people see something they can’t explain they just shake it off. Wild.”

“I guess you’re right.”

She looked at Harry’s copy of “Magical Theory” and sighed. “I hope you don’t have to unlearn too much. It seems like our methods of doing magic are so different, I’m not sure now that anything will transfer over.”

“We’ll see.”

Lastly was “robes,” which confused both of them. “Why can’t we just wear regular clothes? It’s almost like they’re going out of their way to separate magical and non-magical people.” asked Harry.

“I’m not sure, but I refuse to wear a pointy, black hat!”

Entering “Madam Malkin’s Robes for All Occasions” they saw who must be Madam Malkin bustling around the shop, making adjustments to her assistant’s measurements.

“Two more?” she asked. “Fine, just fine. There’s room in the back dears, someone will be with you shortly.”

They headed to the back, where a rather nervous looking boy was being fitted.

“You think they would have a spell to resize robes,” Harry remarked. “They all seemed to be doing the work by hand. Odd, that.”

“There’s a lot of things we don’t understand yet, I guess,” Susan answered. “Hello! How are you?”

“Fine,” said the boy. “You?”

“My head is about stuffed full of all it can take at the moment,” Susan answered, “And for me and my 7 KNOWledge, that’s saying something.”

The boy gave her a blank look. “Anyway, I’m Susan, and three guesses who this is.”

“I’m Neville, nice to- You’re Harry Potter!”

“One of these days you’ll meet someone who doesn’t know your name right off, and the Earth will stop spinning.”

“Gran!” shouted Neville, “Come and see, it’s Harry Potter!”

“No need to shout,” said a stern looking witch who walked into the back. “Even if it- it really is, isn’t it?”

“See, I told you.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Harry,” said Neville’s grandmother. “And I know you probably feel you don’t deserve it, but thank you, from our family to yours. The war was terrible for a lot of families but yours and ours suffered particularly, I think.”

“Gran!”

“I’ll say no more, don’t worry. But confidentially-” she pulled Harry over to the side and lowered her voice. “My grandson is a bit... timid. I know it’s horrible of me to ask a favor of you after we’ve just met, but if you could see fit to sort of, I don’t know, take him under your wing, so to speak? Toughen him up a little bit, that sort of thing? It would mean the world to me, honestly.”

“I’ll do my best,” said Harry, a bit put out.

“You have no idea how relieved that makes me. Well, I won’t take up any more of your time. It was nice to meet you both. Goodbye!”

*She seems like a woman with high RESolve. A very forceful PERsonality, too.*

The witch taking measurements was done, and Neville and his Grandmother slunk, and swept, respectively, out of the room. “See you at school!” said Neville over his shoulder, which caused him to almost trip himself. His grandmother *tut tutted* which Susan didn’t even think was possible.

“He seemed nice,” said Harry, climbing up on the stool to be measured next.

“He was with this grandmother, not his parents. I wonder if they got killed during the war?”

“Maybe. You know, I kind of hope Voldemort does come back, so I can take him out a second time. Properly this time, you know?”

The witch making measurements gave a little squeak and fell over backwards, passed out.

“Whoops?”

Meet the rest of the party

Time: The 36 days between the shopping trip and the departure

Place: Privet Drive

The last month before school was a curious one for both kids. With Harry now off limits to Junior and his guardians, life got a little smoother for him. After Susan finished her copy of the books she loaned them to Harry (and vice versa) and he leafed through them, picking up a little more history that kids raised by wizards would have just picked up naturally. The temptation to get his wand out was strong, but he knew that was probably a Bad Idea, so he contented himself with sticks out in the yard. He practiced the wand motions and intonation of spells as shown in his books endlessly, much to the embarrassment of the Dursley's. But Susan was never far away, and if she caught Senior staring out the door or window at him, she had but to glare and he went away.

Both were surprised about the difference in potion making they discovered. It seemed *Imbuing* was quite different than potion making, for a variety of reasons. But for once, wand magic seemed to have won out.

"It doesn't say anything in here about the XP costs for potions!" said Susan, throwing the *Magical Drafts and Potions* to the ground. "I don't think it costs you XP at all!"

"I still don't know what XP actually is," said Harry.

"When I make a magical item it costs me some of my potential. Like I could learn a spell, or bind a spell into an object, but not both. It seems you could brew potions all day long and still learn a spell or whatever at the end of the day!"

"Ah, but I can only make potions," countered Harry. "You could make me a pair of shoes with the fly spell on it."

"Yeah, I guess."

"You can't be better in every way, you know."

She laughed. "I guess you're right, I shouldn't complain. After all, I could do magic right now, and they would never know."

The first of the month Susan used *Teleport* from writings to head back to the bank and make her "deposit" of nine Galleons, which went smoothly. Having gotten a bit more than she expected for the gold she saved some as "normal" money and gave some to her mother. When asked where it came from, she just replied "Magic" with a laugh, and her mother just shook her head. She took the money though. Susan debated memorizing *Teleport* but it was a grade 8 spell, and she wanted to save her XP for school, just in case. She had earned a little in her adventures thus far, but not a lot, and if she decided she needed to learn something for a class, or *Imbue* something at the last minute, she better be able to do it!

They were half in and half out of the magical world, and both for once looking forward to school. Then, two days before they were scheduled to leave, Susan received an owl bearing a letter.

*Dear Miss Felton,*

*I hope that you are enjoying your last days of summer and are looking forward to attending Hogwarts. The staff here have been pouring through books on magical theory and history to see if anyone like you has ever been found before.*

*They have not, as far as we can determine. However, we must admit we don't know exactly how your magic works, so we have only looked for people who have primarily done wandless magic, and as expected there are none.*

*As such, we would request that you, for the moment, pretend that your magic is no different from your classmates. When you arrive at Hogwarts, go through the sorting ceremony as normal (which we hope works on you) and after dinner, find your way to the corridor marked on the map. You will find a statue of a phoenix which hides the office of Headmaster Dumbledore. Speak the words "Lemon Sour" (don't ask) and you will be able to enter.*

*At that time, the Headmaster requests (if you can) that you explain exactly how your magic works, and demonstrate what spells you know. If your magic is close enough to ours to fool the other students, we suggest you do so. It could be a tremendous advantage to take a wizard who thinks you are helpless without a wand by surprise, as I'm sure you can guess. If it is not, some other arrangement will have to be made.*

*We hope we can count on your cooperation in this matter.*

*Minerva McGonagall,  
Deputy Headmistress*

"Shoot, I don't have a wand!" exclaimed Susan, after reading the letter.

"You could just go get one quick, you've been back there before, right?" asked Harry.

"I don't know, the guy in the wand shop seemed to think the wand chose the wizard," said Sparkle. "And we all saw what happened to you when you touched yours."

"Could you prepare some sort of illusion?"

"Two problems. We don't know if it's the same for every person, so if I did the same and it's different-

"He'll know something's up right away. But if you did something different and it's the same- Got it. What's the other?"

"If wands really do choose their owners, I'll be taking some other poor person's wand. They'll go through the whole shop looking for it, but it'll be gone!"

"Oh. So what are you going to do?"

"Magic, of course!"

Harry groaned.

"There's a spell that'll make an object out of nothing. I'll just make my own, I saw some examples in the shop, I can fake one up."

So she did.

And so time passed, and the pair finally found themselves standing inches (or possibly miles) from where they were supposed to be to find the train which was about to take them to school.

"I'm stumped. Didn't think actually finding a train would be this hard," said Susan, scratching her head. "I mean, my *Magic Sense* shows there's something around here, but I can't figure out what."

The four, that would be Harry, Susan, Sparkle and Susan's mother, Stacy (who had driven them) stood between platform nine and ten.

"I had hoped it would be like the castle," said Harry. "That magic users could see it, but other people couldn't."

"Yeah, no such luck."

"Still, we have twenty minutes, no need to panic."

"I'm not panicked. Anyway, some other new student is bound to come along any minute, right? Just look for someone with a lot of luggage and an 'owl, cat or toad.' Honestly, a toad? I can see an owl or a cat being useful, there may be mice in the castle--"

"That would be nice!" said Sparkle.

"But a toad?"

Harry shrugged. Naturally, all of their luggage was safely stored out of the way, in Susan's *Pocket Dimension*. *On reflection*, thought Susan, *that had perhaps been a bad idea*. She had a cat, but no luggage, so no wizard would recognize them as being first year students and point them in the right direction.

"It will be quite embarrassing if we are all still stuck here when the train leaves," said Sparkle.

"Worst comes to worst, I can just send a letter to the school again. I'm sure I could find someplace pri- Wait a minute."

"What?"

"I think we have a winner!"

"What?"

"Owl."

"Ah! Vundabar!"

Coming down the platforms was a slightly obese woman trying to corral four boys and holding a younger girl by the hand. All of them had red hair, and two were twins. She sent a boy named Percy through first, and the two watched in amazement as, instead of smashing into the wall and killing himself, he seemed to disappear.

"Now that's something you don't see every day," remarked Harry.

Susan, however, was looking around. "Actually, it might be. Look around, no one is shouting that some boy just got vaporized. There goes one of the twins." Fred (or George) sailed through followed by George (or Fred). "See, no reaction at all. Weird."

The woman was looking back at them now, and looked down at Sparkle.

"You wouldn't be trying to get on the platform, now would you?" she asked kindly.

"Actually, we are, now that you mention it. It's our first time..."

"And of course that wasn't put into your letter either. That's Dumbledore for you. Well there's nothing to it. You just walk straight at the barrier and- where's your luggage? You don't have much time you know."

*Shoot*, thought Susan. *They probably won't have a Pocket Dimension spell, how are we going to get our stuff out later?*

"It's, uh, taken care of," said Harry, a bit lamely.

*Probably he realizes it too.*

"Well, if you say so. As I was saying, right at the wall and you'll find yourself on the platform. Go ahead dears, head on through. Ron is just starting this year too, he'll be right behind you."

"Thank you very much," said Harry.

“Yes, thanks,” said Susan.

“Shall we?” asked Harry, motioning Susan to go first.

“Indeed,” replied Susan, mirroring the motion.

“Honestly, you two,” said Sparkle, and ran through the barrier. The two followed suit.

“Did that cat just-” They didn’t hear the rest of the sentence because they all found themselves in front of an antique *steam engine* that seemed in pristine condition. Kids were running everywhere, and many eyes had tears.

“I don’t think you should talk for awhile,” Harry said to Sparkle. “At least until we learn if cats in the magical world can talk.”

Sparkle nodded, then started washing her face.

“Well, let’s not stand here and clog up the entrance, shall we? Wonder if we teleported or they just folded space there or something?”

“Good question.”

As they moved forward, Ron came through after them.

“Wicked,” he said, spying the train.

“I guess if you’re into 19th century technology,” Susan said. “Better find a seat, train leaves in just a few minutes. You want some help with your stuff?”

“Oh, uh, sure. Thanks!” said Ron.

“No problem!” said Susan, grabbing a suitcase. “Many hands equals light work and all.”

“Hey Neville,” said Harry, passing him and his grandmother on their way to board the train.

“Harry! You made it! Keep a lookout for my toad, would you? I’ve lost it.”

“Sure thing Neville,” he replied. Sparkle started sniffing around. “I’ll be along in a moment,” she whispered.

The three found an empty booth near the back of the train and loaded Ron’s luggage into it, then sat down themselves.

“I’m Ron, thanks for the help.”

“Susan,” said Susan.

“Harry,” said Harry.

“Potter?” asked Ron.

“Wait, you’re Harry Potter?” asked Susan, with mock amazement. Harry glared at her. “What, everyone else gets to say it.”

“You two know each other?”

“We were neighbors.”

“Blimy.”

“Have you really got...” Harry lifted his bangs. “I guess you do. Sorry about your parents.”

“Thanks.”

“Tell us about the wizard world!” said Susan as Sparkle to the door.

“Yeah, your whole family is wizards, right? We’ve both been reading about it, but honestly we have no clue what to expect. I mean, we’re going to school in a castle, for Pete’s sake.”

So Ron explained a bit about how wizards lived, and the time on the train flew by until lunch. A kindly looking woman pushing cart full of food went passed and knocked on their door.

“Anything off the cart then?” she asked.

Ron mumbled something about sandwiches, and pulled a paper wrapped bundle out from one of his bags.

“We have food,” started Susan, looking at Harry.

“In our luggage,” said Harry.

“Which is not exactly accessible right now,”

“Because we haven’t learned to think things through.”

“Of course we have lots of spare money.”

“In the luggage.”

They both paused.

“Thanks, nothing for us.”

The lady nodded and moved on.

“You want a sandwich,” asked Ron. “They’re corned beef, which I’m not exactly fond of. There’s seven of us at home, currently, and she always forgets.”

They both stared at him.

“You would share with us?” asked Harry.

“People can be kind,” said Susan.

Harry thought for a moment. “I say we trust him.”

They gazed at him for a moment. “You think?”

“You could always kill him later.”

“What?” squeaked Ron.

They both laughed. “See, Susan here knows a spell, not your typical spell, mind you.”

“Yeah?” They had Ron’s attention.

“Basically she can stick stuff into this weird, other space, and then call it out later. That’s where our luggage is.”

“Oh, that’s how they make those trunks that are bigger on the inside, right?”

“You know it then? Well, that’s a relief. We weren’t supposed to show it off, but you’re okay, right Ron?”

“I won’t tell anyone!”

“Okay, here goes then,” said Susan. She began to cast the spell, then froze.

*Crap, I forgot I have to pretend I’m a wandless wizard now.*

Luckily, her wand was close at hand, as she was trying to get used to carrying it everywhere (which was a huge pain, let me tell you).

She pulled it out, and Harry gave a small sigh of relief. She started again, and twirled the wand around, where a glowing circle appeared. “*Pocket Dimension*, retrieval, lunch-bag” she said, and from Ron’s point of view, reached into nothing and pulled out a sack with food in it. Ron’s eyes got wide.

“That was amazing! How did you ever practice it? Didn’t you say you had been raised by Muggles?”

“Her story is a little more complex than most,” explained Harry, as Susan got out their lunch. “That’s why Dumbledore didn’t want it spread around. I hope we can count on your silence?”

“Yeah, sure. But you must be bloody brilliant to do magic like that!”

They were interrupted by Neville, who slid their door open.

“Nice to see you again, Neville!” said Harry. “This is Ron. Ron, Neville. Did you find your toad?”

“Actually, that cat brought it back to me, but he’s somehow escaped again, so I wondered if I could borrow him again?”

“Her,” corrected Susan. “Borrow her. Feel up to it, Sparkle?”

Sparkle arched her back and stretched, then sat down by Neville and looked up at him.

“I think that means yes.”

“Thank you so much!”

“Hey, thank her.”

“Thank you,” he said down at his feet. “I’ll show you where we were, maybe you can sniff him out from there?”

Sparkle got up and walked back the way he came, and Neville trailed after him.

“He seems a bit hopeless,” said Susan sadly.

“Yeah, I can see why his grandmother wants me to ‘take him under my wing’.”

“Anyway, you were saying about how brilliant I was?”

Ron laughed. “Yeah, you must be. Fred and George told me a spell to turn my rat yellow, but it’s never worked.”

“You have a rat?”

“Yeah, his name is Scabbers. He’s a useless lump, mostly just sleeps.” He pulled a sleeping rat from his jacket pocket. “See what I mean? Oh, I should put him away before your cat comes back.”

“Don’t worry, we’re all friends here. And Sparkle isn’t one to eat a friend.”

“She did seem awfully smart. Almost like she understood what that Neville kid was saying.”

They both smirked. “Yeah, how about that?”

“Anyway,” said Harry, trying to change the subject, “Let’s see this spell to turn your rat yellow.”

“Wait, are we considered at school yet?” asked Susan. “I mean, I have my, uh, special dispensation about doing magic, but you don’t. You’re underage, won’t you get in trouble?”

They were once again interrupted, this time by a girl with incredibly frizzy hair. “Have you by any chance seen a toad? A boy called Neville has lost one.”

“Actually, I just sent my cat out to search for him. She found him once before, so it should be okay.”

However, the girl’s eyes were on the wand. “You aren’t doing magic, are you?”

*Crap, once I had it in my hand I forgot to put it away again. Stupid wand, she glared at it, I already hate you!*

“Actually, you just missed it. But Ron here was going to do some. We were just discussing if we would get in trouble though, being underage and all that.”

“Well,” said the girl, “I’ve tried some simple spells from the books and they’ve all worked for me. I’m not in trouble that I know of.”

“Are your parents wizards, then?”

“Dentists, actually.”

The three stared at her. “Really?” asked Susan. “Being a magic user can occur spontaneously?” Susan looked at Harry. He looked back. “I don’t know about that. What I do know is that he was quite adamant that magic not be performed outside of school,” Harry replied.

“Something about some sort of alarm for those that tried.”

“Could I have been doing magic all along?”

“What are you talking about?” asked the girl. “I’m Hermione Granger, by the way.”

“Ron Weasley.”

“Susan Felton.”

“The Earth- is it okay?” Harry rushed to look out the window.

Ron looked confused, but Susan just snorted. “Private joke.”

“Should I know...” Hermione said, then stared at the scar. “Oh, you’re Harry Potter, of course.”

“Whew, that was a close one.” Harry wiped his brow dramatically. “But- your parents- how did you know?”

“You’re in *Modern Magical History* and *The Rise and Fall of the Dark Arts*.”

“Oh, those. Yeah, I remember now. As I recall I screamed and threw the book across the room when I read ‘Harry’. I knew what was coming, you see.”

“I’ve never met someone who’s in books before.”

“Yes, well, how about that spell, Ron?”

“Sure, I’ll give it a try.” Ron got out his wand.

“Pudding, ketchup, now I bellow,  
I command this rat be yellow!”

Quite obviously for those paying attention, nothing happened.

“I’m not sure that is a spell,” remarked Hermione. “Mostly they’re some sort of quasi Latin phrase with a precise wand movement.”

Ron stared at her, but Harry and Susan got excited.

“I think she’s right!” said Harry.

“Do you have your schoolbooks handy?” asked Susan.

“I think they’re in that bag. Help yourselves.”

Harry and Susan looked at each other, then tore the book out of the bag and started paging through it.

“She’s right, she’s totally right,” remarked Susan. “Every spell in here is just a couple of words that are mostly gibberish, and directions for how to move your wand. You actually picked up on that? Hermione, you must be really smart!”

“Oh, well, uh. Maybe Ravenclaw wouldn’t be so bad, now that I think about. Anyway, I better get going. You should change, I think we’re almost there. See you later!”

She slid the door closed and left, but Harry hardly noticed.

“Oh, a quasi-Latin phrase with a precise wand movement,” Ron intoned. “La de da!”

“Really, Ron? That’s how you’re going to choose to react to her revelation?” asked Harry. “I’ve been pouring over these books for a month, and I didn’t catch it. Probably because the only magic I’ve seen- Ahem. Anyway, we know where to go when we need homework help, right?”

“Back up, what magic you’ve seen?”

“Never you mind.”

“If you say so mate. What house are you hoping for, anyway?”

“Well, I don’t plan on taking over the world, so not Slytherin. I’m nowhere near as smart as that girl must be, so probably not Ravenclaw. Hufflepuff is just sort of where the general people end up, so probably Gryffindor. You?”

“All my family’s been in Gryffindor, so I probably will too.”

“Ravenclaw for me,” said Susan. “Thanks.” She indicated the book, then started to put it back. “Hey, wizard news!”

“What’s that?” asked Harry.

“Oh, just an old paper from a week or two ago. I keep some around for Scabbers to do his, uh, business in.”

“Harry, take a look at this!” She pulled the paper out. “They’re actually publicizing that, wait, no, this is something else!”

“What? Oh, you mean Gringotts being broken into? Yeah, real head scratcher there. Apparently someone broke into an empty vault! How mad is that?”

“An empty vault number seven hundred and thirteen,” said Susan carefully.

Harry nodded. “I wonder if it was *them*? A little coincidental, don’t you think? That being broken into just days after I visit it?”

“Not everything’s about you, mate.”

“No, no, you’re right. But when I say *visit* I don’t mean ‘I went to the same bank days before’ I mean ‘I went to that exact vault days before.’”

Ron started to say something when the door whisked open again and a pale boy leaned in against the door frame.

“Well, well. It’s true then. Harry Potter is coming to Hogwarts.”

“Wait, you’re Harry Potter?” Harry said to Ron, pretending to be shocked.

Susan started howling with laughter and holding her sides. “That was *\*heave\** fantastic!”

The boy looked around the cabin like they had gone mad. “What’s wrong with her?”

“Oh, she’s just easily amused. Pay her no mind. Who said Harry Potter was here, anyway?”

“Whole train’s been buzzing about it. I guess some kid named Neville has been spreading around that Harry Potter said hello to him at the station. You really said hello to a *Longbottom*?”

“Is that his last name? It fits him, I suppose. We got fitted for our robes together by accident. Why shouldn’t I say hello to him?”

“For the same reason you shouldn’t be sitting here with him.” He pointed to Ron. “Obviously this is a Weasley. Some families are just better than others, Potter, something you should learn quickly before you make enemies.”

“I’m afraid I already have enemies,” said Harry softly. “Any followers of Voldemort that are still alive, who may come looking for a little revenge for their fallen master.”

“Exactly- but it doesn’t have to be that way. You were just a kid. There’s talk in... certain circles, shall we say, that the reason you lived that night is because your magic was just stronger than his. That one day you’ll take his place, and become greater than he ever was.”

“I’ve read the stories about what he did. I wouldn’t count on it.”

The boy regarded him a moment, then looked at Ron and Susan. “If this is the company you keep, I suppose not. Still, my offer stands. My family can offer you wealth, power, and influence. The Weasley’s can offer you... what can they offer, actually?”

Ron stood up. “Leave. Right now.”

Two larger boys flowed behind the pale one, seemingly from out of nowhere. “Trouble, boss?” asked one.

Ron swallowed.

“No trouble, Crabbe. Crabbe, Goyle, let’s go. Just remember the name Draco Malfoy when you need a favor. My family has resources, should you need it.”

He left, and moments later Sparkle came back.

“Think we got any clues as to your little money problem?” asked Susan when he was gone.

“He did keep mentioning it, didn’t he? It’s a good bet, I’m afraid. Try to get me owing them something, that means holding power over Harry Potter? Oh, I’m sure anyone with ties to Voldemort would just love that.”

“Being around you is going to be very stressful, isn’t it?” asked Ron, sinking back down into his chair.

“I was impressed, actually,” said Susan. “You stood up to him, just like a Gryffindor should.”

“You think? Well, thanks.”

Suddenly a voice rang through the train. “Hogwarts stop, five minutes. Five minute warning, Hogwarts stop. Please leave your luggage on the train, it will be brought into the school.”

“We better put on our robes and get our luggage out,” said Susan.

“Yeah, it would look pretty suspicious if we didn’t have any at this point.”

So as the train pulled into Hogwarts station, Ron’s mind was blown again as Susan hauled a ton of luggage out of her *Pocket Dimension*. She had to use energy to get that much weight out, but she had it to burn.

*It’s not like I’m going to be attacked by something right off the train, right?*

## The Sorting

Time: Moments later

Place: Stepping off the train

Getting off the train, Susan, Ron and Harry were as stunned as the other first years as a giant of a man, his face mostly hidden by hair, was walking about.

“First years? Those that don’t know the way? By me please! All first years, gather round me please!”

“Did that guy get hit with some kind of growing curse when he was younger?” whispered Ron.

“Something happened to him. Can’t see him walking around normal society.”

He gathered the awed first years together and pointed down a rocky path, looking almost as though he was looking for someone.

“All right everyone, down to the lake, and we’ll enter the castle from there. Step lively now, right this way.”

The giant led them down to the water, where many boats bobbed and sloshed in the moonlight. Across the water, the enormous castle of Hogwarts rose up from the land like a sentinel, torch fires flickering in every window.

Harry smiled, at long last he felt he had finally come home.

As everyone boarded a boat, “Four to a boat, plenty for everyone, don’t be shy,” the giant peered into the face of everyone that went past. His eyes lit up when he saw Harry and Susan.

“Just one moment you two, I’d like a word, if that’s okay.”

They looked at each other and shrugged. “Fine with us.”

“Great, just great. Let me get everyone else in their boat... No pushing, they won’t start without ye!”

Ron of course waited, and Neville, wanting to prove he actually did know Harry Potter, hovered nearby. With everyone else in the water, the giant pulled Susan back up the path a bit.

“Name’s Rubeus Hagrid, I’m the groundskeeper around here. You are Susan, aren’t you?” he whispered in a gravelly tone.

“I am, what can I do for you?”

“I heard a rumor that you can fix wands?”

Susan smiled. “Do you need one repaired? I can probably accommodate you, but you won’t be able to tell anyone about it. My magic... well, Dumbledore and I are going to talk tonight about it.”

“I’d prefer to keep it on the down low anyway, if you take my meaning.”

“Then I shall find you before the weekend is out. I’m sure someone can direct me to where I can find you in the next few days?”

“You really can do it? Severus was stalking about here for days muttering about the insane girl who broke his wand, but I never dreamed!”

She took one of his hands in hers. “You will have your wand back, I promise.”

*Odd that it’s only one to a customer. Though I suppose if the wand chooses the wizard-*

“Oh, thank you!” he said, sweeping her up into a hug and interrupting her thought.

“Eep!” He set her down gently.

“Sorry bout that, got a little carried away there. Not usually so excitable, me. Right, off you go then. Wait, is that Harry Potter with you?”

“Yes, we’re neighbors.”

“Imagine that! Have him come along, I knew his parents you know, great people, the Potters. I wouldn’t mind seeing him again, now he’s all grown up.”

“I’m sure he won’t mind.”

“Best be off with you. Enjoy the feast!”

“Thanks.”

“And welcome to Hogwarts.”

Susan rejoined the group and carefully got on the last boat, which magically propelled itself forward.

“What was that all about?” asked Ron.

“A good deed, I think. Anyway, Harry and I need to go visit him once we get settled in. He knew your parents, Harry.”

“That huge guy? Wow, yeah, I’d love to talk to him.”

“That’s settled then.”

As their boat came to stop, Susan saw that Professor McGonagall was standing at the top of the stairs leading up to the castle entrance.

“All here then,” she asked crisply. “Excellent.”

Sparkle ran back, then hopped out of the boat again with a toad in her mouth, which she nuzzled up against Neville.

“Oh, thanks!” he whispered to her. Sparkle just shook her head, causing Neville to look quizzically at her.

The professor was about to lead them into the hall in the normal way, currently giving her spiel about the four houses. Harry, Susan, and Hermione, of course, knew all that from *Hogwarts: A History*. Sparkle had no interest and was looking around, and thanks to her high LUCk, happened to be glancing up at one of the windows.

“What the... *Deflection!*” she shouted, as a green bolt of light stabbed down towards the first years. The circle of magic caught the beam and deflected it harmlessly away, but the flash lit up the whole area.

“My word!” shouted Minerva, her wand appearing in her hand from somewhere. “That was a killing curse! Children, inside immediately!”

As she said those words there was chaos, as everyone tried to crowd into the castle all at once. Those that were close enough were remarking: “Did that cat just talk, and cast a spell?” Those that knew what a killing curse was, Neville included, were freaking out. Harry and Ron, destined for Gryffindor house, stepped in front of Susan from where they thought the light had come from until the way was clear.

“Quickly now, step lively, don’t panic,” Minerva was saying, eyes scanning the castle walls. “Susan dear, are you all right?”

“Shaken, but I’m okay. What was that?”

“Something meant to kill you or Mr. Potter, no doubt. At that range it’s hard to say which of you was the intended target. It seems there are two people who have had that curse aimed at them and lived. I’ll want to know how you did that, of course.”

“Tonight, headmaster’s office.”

“Agreed. I must tell Albus about this at once, before I let the students go any further.”  
With the students now inside the castle, she waved her wand and a glowing cat appeared, which ran through the wall.

“Are you okay?” whispered Sparkle.

“Didn’t even touch me. I owe you one, that’s for sure.”

“I thought Hogwarts was supposed to be safe,” hissed Harry. “This does not bode well.”  
Susan just nodded. *What would that bolt have done to me? She called it a killing curse...*  
Suddenly the door opened and Albus was standing there.

“Everyone accounted for?” he asked seriously.

“The girl wasn’t hurt, but the implications of this-”

“I know, Minerva. For now let us proceed. Our would be killer will not dare strike among so many, I think.”

“Yes, you’re probably right. Ah, my whole speech is ruined. I’ll explain on the way.  
Forward, children!”

As Minerva was explaining the sorting ceremony, Susan noticed that two professors, Severus and Quirrell, entered through different ends of the hall and started to sit down. They noticed the other doing the same thing and both glared as if to demand “what were you doing before?” Dumbledore finished speaking to the others at the head table, and wands were placed in easy reach. He motioned both late professors over to him.

*He’s going to tell them about the attack, maybe gauge their reactions, thought Susan. Yup, he’s told them. Mostly identical reaction, interesting. And now they’ve looked over at Harry and me, oh, very good performance, bravo. Is one of you my would be- Wait, now what?*

Albus had evidently demanded their wands, and was prodding them both with his own. She stood up on tiptoe and strained to see- it looked like a little hologram floating above each, showing a messy office being tidied up. *Is that the last spell they both cast?*

Suddenly she realized that everyone was staring at her, and Harry was poking her in the back and motioning with his head to get on with it.

*What? Oh, the Sorting, right.*

She stepped forward and sat down. “Are you sure you’re all right?” Minerva asked kindly.

“It’s not every day someone tries to assassinate you,” she said quietly back. “I was just watching our two late professors. Very interesting reactions there.”

“Yes, well, in any case...” She lowered the hat onto Susan’s head and waited. For Susan, time seemed to slow, and the hat spoke to her.

“And what might you be, my dear? Not a witch, that’s for sure.”

“You can tell?”

“It’s all in your head. There’s bravery, yes, no doubt about that. You didn’t flinch or hide from that bolt just now, did you? You were thinking of what spells you knew that could defend you, and your friends. Very noble.”

“I’m sure anyone would have done the same.”

“Everyone from a certain house, yes.” The hat chuckled. “But at the same time you’ve read all your schoolbooks, and you have a thirst to know things. A very good quality for another house I could name. But which is stronger in you, I wonder?”

“Does it really matter that much?”

“There are secrets in this castle that only members of one house or another would be able to find,” replied the hat.

“I want the house that has the most secrets!”

“And so my choice is made clear- Ravenclaw!” the hat shouted aloud.

Applause from the Ravenclaw table was loudest, and the hat was lifted from her head.

“It offered you Gryffindor though, didn’t it?” Minerva asked as Susan stood up.

She nodded.

“It offered me the same two,” she said with a wink. “But I chose Gryffindor. Go on then.”

Susan went to go sit at the Ravenclaw table, to be swiftly joined by Hermione. Neville got Hufflepuff, and of course Draco got Slytherin, which he looked smug about. Harry and Ron went to Gryffindor, which made Susan a little sad.

*I hope this doesn’t change things between us.*

With the sorting ceremony over, Albus stood to address everyone.

It looked like he was struggling with himself as to what to say, and kept looking back at Susan. “Go ahead and eat,” he finally said, sitting down. All the older students looked really confused, and food started appearing at all the tables.

“Okay, that was weird,” said a witch at the Ravenclaw table. “He doesn’t seem like himself at all.”

*That attack is really troubling him...*

Susan and Hermione made KNOWledge checks, (or at least Susan did. Hermione did whatever it was she did to remember things) to try and one up each other quoting from *Hogwarts: A history*. She began to like this girl a bit, though she did seem a bit snooty.

*I wonder if this is how other people see me?*

After the food had gone, Albus, having hardly touched anything as far as she could see, got up again.

Once again, the room fell silent.

“I have been debating with myself how much to tell you,” he began, “But as the entire first year class witnessed the attack, I feel honesty is best. Someone tried to murder a new student tonight.”

A muted roar of conversation started up, but Albus waved his hands for silence.

“I want you to know that person is fine, and extra precautions will be taken this very night to make sure it does not happen again. All of you, I am sure, know the story of Harry Potter, and you have seen him be sorted into Gryffindor this very evening. There are those wizards who would still wish him harm for what happened eleven years ago. So I ask all of you: practice well your lessons in Defense Against the Dark Arts. Report any suspicious happening around the castle. More suspicious than usual, I mean.”

That got a small laugh.

*He doesn’t know that attack was meant for Harry, but he’s making it out that way. Because it’s likely that Harry would be targeted, and he doesn’t want me singled out?*

“Finally, some specific warnings. The forest surrounding the castle is home to beasts both terrifying and powerful. Some both at once. I advise all students to stay within the grounds, where the only dangers they shall face are late homework assignments. There is one place in the castle you must never go, however. The third-floor corridor on the right-hand side. The magics found there will most likely kill you outright, should you attempt them. I would strongly suggest

not doing so. If it takes a few of you dying to get the point across, well, so be it. I did warn you, after all. That is all.”

“What’s that all about?” asked Hermione. “He might as well have just painted a target on the floor and said ‘don’t step here’ for all the good that warning will do. Every Ravenclaw here will be poking around that corridor now.”

“Just what I would want, if something valuable was hidden *someplace else* in the castle,” replied Susan.

Hermione thought about this a moment. “You realize you’re my rival from now on, right?”

“If by ‘rival’ you mean in the Ash Ketchum, Gary Oak sort of way or are you really asking me if we could be friends?”

“Could we be friends?” she asked quietly.

“Friends,” said Susan, sticking out a hand.

Hermione shook it solemnly. “Thanks.”

“Sure thing. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have to slip away and find the headmaster’s office.” She pulled the map she had been carrying out of a pocket. “Before I almost get murdered again.”

“You’re going to have to tell me why you think someone would target you.”

“I will. I’ll tell you everything, since we’re friends. But you have to promise not to tell *anyone* else. Okay?”

She nodded gravely, crossing her heart.

“Tomorrow morning, then. I don’t know how long this meeting is going to go. Come on Sparkle. See you!”

Hermione gave a little wave and followed the rest of the Ravenclaws up to their dormitory. Susan put energy into COOrdination but still only rolled an 8 on her *Sneaking* check, which she rolled untrained, so plenty of eyes saw her get away. Only one pair burned with hatred.

“Lemon Sour,” said Susan, standing before the great stone phoenix. It began to turn, and she had to admit the whole staircase thing was pretty impressive. She mounted the stairs and let herself be swept upwards. Sparkle followed close behind.

The door ahead of her swung open, and a grave looking Albus and Minerva were waiting for her. The office, of course, need not be described. Everyone knows what it looks like.

“Please, have a seat,” said Albus. “I hope you enjoyed the feast.”

“Nothing like a brush with death to begin to appreciate the finer things in life,” replied Susan. “I don’t suppose what you were doing to their wands proved anything?”

“You noticed that? Yes, I felt it was prudent, as they arrived late, to see what the last spell they both had cast was. Naturally, both are intelligent enough to have cast another spell before coming to dinner, so we have no leads at the moment. What I said was true, however, I will be looking further into it and checking the wards around the castle.

I am curious, however, how that particular curse was blocked.”

“As am I,” said Minerva, “the speed of the casting was, well, inhuman! I didn’t even see you move or speak a word. Are you really that powerful?”

Susan laughed. “It wasn’t me. Sparkle saved my life, she was the one that saw it coming.”

“Your *cat*?” said Minerva, unbelieving, staring down at her.

“She’s just as good a *Natural Magician* as I am. And she has an insane LUCk, like all cats. So she happened to see it in time. I’m glad my family found her. Of course, *Deflection* has a zero casting time anyway, so once she saw it coming, it was as good as deflected.”

“Astonishing. This brings us to the main reason why you were invited here tonight. To learn how similar and how different are the ways we do magic. Can you, will you, tell us how your magic works?”

“I trust you both. I don’t mind telling you, it could be important later on. Where to begin...”

Susan got up and started pacing, thinking about her magic.

“From what I read, and what Hermione said, your spells are all cast in the same way. A phrase and wand movements. My magic is cast very differently. It’s easier if I show you... with your permission?”

Albus leaned forward, nodding. His eyes shining with excitement.

“I’m going to pull my book of magic out of my *Pocket Dimension*. I’ll cast the spell as slowly as I can so you can see every part of it. Here we go.” She started casting, and the familiar circle of magic opened near her.

“*Pocket Dimension, retrieval, book of spells,*” she intoned, and the circle opened into a formless void. Susan stuck her hand in and pulled out her book. Both professors eyes were wide.

“Now,” she said, thumping it down on the desk, “let’s see the spell description for that one.” She paged through. “Ah, here we are. Take a look.”

Minerva moved closer and both took a look at the pages she had opened to.

“It’s the same symbols,” said Albus.

“Exactly,” said Susan. “Take a look at some other spells, you’ll see they’re all different.”

Albus did so, his eyes darting about the pages.

“That’s the first step in casting wandless magic, envisioning that symbol in my mind.

Then it’s projected from me with magical energies, creating that glowing representation you saw. The words I say describe what I want the magic to do, defining the task it will perform. Say I want to fly somewhere, right? As soon as I get there, even if I want to keep the magic going, its purpose is over and I would have to cast it again with new parameters. Then I make a stat check of some kind. Each type of spell falls into the domain of a planet, or the moon in the case of ‘Earth’ magic. I think because ‘Earth’ spells, being so close to home, so to speak, would be too much for a human body to handle. Anyway, Mars spells, for example, relate to fire or war and rely on STrength. Forcing the magic physically to do what you want. On the opposite end is Saturn, which relies on KNOwledge. The more I learn about the world and my place in it, the better my Saturn spells will work out. Obviously this means I’m much better at casting Saturn spells than Mars spells, because I’m way smarter than I am strong. If all that works out the magic goes off, and the spell is successful. This is a slight simplification, because as a *Natural Magician* I can expend some portion of my body’s natural energy to strengthen the magic and get a better result, but that’s the basics.

“Now again, from what I understand, some wand magic spells are instantaneous and some have a duration. Some just keep going unless dispelled. But you don’t have to maintain the spells yourself. You could cast a hundred petrify spells or whatever, and you could still cast a hundred more. I’m not so lucky- when I cast a spell that isn’t instantaneous I have to maintain it, and that drags me down a little. Also I expend a portion of my energies to cast the spell, so casting a hundred spells in succession would probably kill me. As far as trying to maintain that many: My body can only have so much magic going through it before I can’t even walk anymore

because I would just trip on my own feet. But that lets me fight off things like the Thief's Downfall in Gringots. Sparkle here was shape-shifted into the form of a fairy so she could ride on my shoulder, and when we got hit by that, she had to struggle to hold onto the spell. But she managed it. From what I understand, the spell of a wand user would have just washed away, because there was no connection between them and the magic."

"You are correct," said Albus, leaning back. "You have certainly done your homework about this."

"Well, I've been a magic user most of my life, and when I learned Harry was one too... I tried to teach him some of my spells but none would work for him. I wanted to know why, so once I got my schoolbooks I started researching it. Of course the *Research* spell helped too."

Albus thought for awhile, and Susan sat down again. Minerva kept paging through the book, fascinated.

"How did you come by this book?" she asked.

"It's always been with me. My mother said it just appeared one day in my room when I was a baby. She tried to get rid of it many times, but it always came back. It's connected to me because it appears on my *character sheet*. Cost me a fair number of points too, but after the points it cost me to get the *spark of magic* and *natural magician*, it was necessary. Without it, those other backgrounds were nearly worthless here. Not that I knew that at the time my *character sheet* came together, but it seems to have worked out for the best."

*Huh. Wonder if I should tell her the real story?* Sparkle asked herself. *I suppose her mother will tell her when she thinks the time is right.*

"Has it ever spoken to you? Or shown you things?"

"Spoken? No, not exactly. I can ask it for a new spell, and the next day the formula will be in the book. That's why it cost me 4 background points, as much as *natural magician* itself."

"I ask because I see some dangerous spells in here. I mean, *Silent Slayer*? That seems a bit worse, actually, than the spell cast at you tonight."

"It does seem to be a complete record of all magical things I can do, from making items to feeling out other sources of magic. So yes, many of the spells are dangerous, but even the most innocuous spell can kill somebody if cast at the right time, right? I've only learned one direct attack spell, *Elemental Bolt (fire)*, so you can put your mind at ease. About that, anyway."

"I guess we will just have to trust you. After all, if you wanted to learn those spells you already would have."

"There is that."

Albus spoke again. "The main issue I can see is that your magic is so different than ours. That magical circle appearing gives it away at the start, that you are doing something different than we do. Even if you pretended to use a wand during your stay here, it wouldn't matter."

"Am I to leave then? I can learn to suppress the circle to an extent, but it's all tied in with my magic, so someone is bound to see it."

He chuckled. "No, I don't mean to alarm you, of course. Merely pointing out the difficulty you'll face. We could keep you out of spell-casting classes, you wouldn't get anything out of them anyway."

"That would be terribly suspicious though."

"Indeed. I wonder..." He stared off into space for a moment. "What spells, exactly, do you have memorized from this?"

"You want the list? Let's see, I can make light, food and water. I can heal. I can make things slippery or dazzle someone. Oh, seeing in the dark, setting things on fire and telling if

someone is lying. I have a spell to tell me the time, follow where someone has gone, or make myself better at doing something, like throwing or playing the piano. I can repair stuff, oh you know about that one, and I can unlock doors.” Minerva was flabbergasted, and even Albus seemed impressed. She started ticking more off her fingers. “I can sculpt stone, become nearly invisible, and breathe underwater. And I can become out of phase with normal matter so I can pass through walls. Yeah, that’s about it I think. Of course Sparkle knows a bunch of those, but a bunch of different ones, too.”

“But how can a cat cast spells? Didn’t you say it required speech? She doesn’t seem like a normal cat, she’s too attentive.”

Sparkle looked up at Susan. “Go ahead.”

Sparkle cleared her throat. “Spells do require speech, professor, so it’s a good thing I can talk.”

Minerva glanced over at Albus. “What?” asked Susan. “That isn’t common in the magical world either?”

Suddenly, Minerva shrunk down and became a cat herself, and started sniffing around Sparkle. “You can do shape-shift? Neat! Wait, you didn’t have your wand out.”

“Actually,” said Albus, “She can turn into a cat, and that’s it. It’s something she had to work at doing, but now she can do it at will. Am I to understand your ‘shape-shift’ as you call it, can turn a creature into any other?”

Susan nodded, and Minerva was standing there again.

“It’s not an Animagus transformation, she really is a real cat.”

“Of course she’s a real- oh.”

“Yes, you see it, right? She could be a person pretending to be a cat to some unknown end.”

“That would be tricky with wandless magic, though of course spells can be made permanent.”

“It seems your magic is quite different, and possibly more versatile, than ours. And was this cat born this way, or did she become this way because she spent time with you? How did she learn human speech? How does a normal cat become a *wizard*? But the larger question remains, what do we do about it?”

“I hate to go to a magical school and swear off magic. That seems counterproductive.”

“What if,” said Minerva, “we just treat it as unremarkable? Or that perhaps she is testing a new kind of wand from Olivanders?”

“Could you, given advance notice, learn a spell that is close enough to what the other kids are going to learn to be able to fake it?”

“That depends on several things. How many I would be required to learn per year, and what level that spells are. I can only learn spells if I have the XP for it.”

“I don’t know what ex pea is.”

“It seems no-one does. My mother got very weirded out when I showed her my character sheet. It’s almost like I follow different physical laws than everyone else, to an extent. When I do things, like what I would call an ‘adventure,’ I get points. I use those points to get better at things. Don’t ask, it’ll take all night to try and explain.”

“As long as you understand it, I guess. One day I would like to learn more about that, but you’re right, that isn’t the issue here. The first magic you’ll learn in Charms class is the hover charm. What will we do about potions though?”

“I can make drinkable magic items, but again they cost me XP. In some cases a lot. I wonder though, I can make a potion *for* someone, and they pay the XP cost. But you don’t actually have XP, so what would happen? Would it just fail, or would it work and drain nothing? Would it work and take some kind of equivalent potential that you possess, but are unaware of because you don’t have *character sheets*? I would be interested to try.”

“Can you use our ingredients?”

“Let me see.” She flipped through the book. “I’ll need a specific object for each potion, and ‘materials costing 10 monetary units times its XP cost’. Now depending on the cost of the stuff normally used I might be able to get away with just using it for that part. But if I didn’t know the spell to be put into the potion I would have to refer to the spell-book during the process. I could just write the formula into a fake potions book...”

“In other words, there are ways you could ‘fake it’ so to speak.”

“With some work, that I am willing to put in, I might add, yes. As long as everyone buys the story about my ‘beta magic’.”

“Beta?”

“In the non-magical world, something that’s beta is not ready for public use, but is being tested by people other than the creators.”

“Then it sounds like we have a plan. I’ll get you a copy of what will be taught in classes relating directly to magic. As long as you don’t do any magic that, say, Hermione hasn’t mastered, you should be taken as just another witch. Ah, I will have to tell Severus your potions may be different than the ones he assigns, and may need different ingredients. He can sneak them to you, I’m sure. As far as grading them, as long they work properly... oh, they would have to be drunk to know that, right?”

“Oh, we’ll know if it doesn’t. They won’t explode or anything,” she added quickly. “But if they will not have the intended effect, the *imbuing* just won’t work.” *Unless of course I fail by less than five and create a cursed object instead, but let’s not go there.*

“Very well, we’ll see how it goes. Moving on, how did Sparkle nullify the killing curse?”

“The spell *Deflection* forms a magical barrier in the air. Basically, any attack that can be parried with a shield just bounces off of it. If he had used some kind of area attack fireball spell, *Deflection* wouldn’t have done anything. And it seems that spell would bounce off something that wasn’t alive, so here I am.”

“If only we could teach that spell to our students,” remarked Minerva.

“But wouldn’t you? I mean, it’s still magic, right? I’m creating a magical effect there in the air. I may do it differently than you do, but if I can do it with magic, shouldn’t you be able to do it with magic?”

“That’s an interesting theory,” said Albus. “If you’re willing, one I would like to explore in more detail some time.”

“Headmaster, I am at your disposal.”

“Thank you. You’ve given me a lot to think about, I’ll be interested to watch your progress and see how your magic really stacks up to ours in everyday usage.”

“I’m glad we could work something out. Now, if someone can tell me how to get to my dorm, it’s been a long day.”

“Of course. Minerva, if you would?”

6

Getting to know you

Time: Nearly lunchtime

Place: Ravenclaw common room

The students had arrived at Hogwarts on Friday night, because the professors realized it was best to get them used to the castle and being away from home for the first time over a weekend. And after waking up rather late Saturday and grabbing a bite to eat, Hermione cornered Susan and demanded her story. She was only too eager to tell it. Sparkle snoozed on her lap, having been up most of the night exploring the castle.

“You’ve had *adventures*?” breathed Hermione. “All I’ve done is read books, it’s so unfair.”

“I’m not sure that discovering an empty vault, watching Professor Snape retrieve a small package and then almost getting killed count as adventures.” *Though I did some XP, so someone must have thought so.*

“But you can teleport stuff into Hogwarts! You can fix wands! Could you teleport yourself into the castle? It’s supposed to be impossible but...”

“I don’t know. I’ve read the *Teleport* spell over so can cast it from writings. I’ll have to try it out sometime.”

“Can I see your magic?”

Susan looked around, everyone else was either off exploring the castle or reading, and thus paying no attention to them. However she did spot a very small man looking around, who caught her looking around.

“Excuse me,” he said, coming over to her. “Do you know where I can find Susan Felton?”

“Why yes... professor?”

“Professor Flitwick, charms.”

“Charmed- oh you *teach* charms. I can tell you exactly where to find Susan. Tadaa!” She threw her hands wide.

“Excellent! I have something here for you from Albus.”

“Ah, that will be my review notes for upcoming classes. Thank you.”

“Do you really-” he glanced over at Hermione.

“It’s all right, professor. We are officially friends, so I’ve taken her into my confidence.”

He lowered his voice (even more for such a short guy) “Do you really use a different kind of magic than we do?”

Susan nodded. “But I’ll be pretending to do the same kind. Hence the advance warning from the professors here. That way I can learn or create a spell that is similar enough to magic done here to get by without comment. That’s the hope, anyway.”

“Well, good luck! I’ll be interested to see how you do in my class then!”

“Looking forward to it, Professor.”

He left.

“Let’s see it!” said Hermione.

“What?” said Susan, pretending to be shocked. “Give you advance notice of what you should be studying? That’s cheating!”

“It’s only cheating if you get caught.”

“Oh, you’re a philosophy major! That’s different.” She smiled and opened the letter. Her face fell. “What?”

“What is it?”

“It seems we’re going to spend months learning one ‘charm,’ Wingardium Leviosa. Are wanded magic spells really that hard to get exactly right?”

“I didn’t have much trouble doing the practice ones listed in the front of the charms book.”

“Weird. Let’s see, in potions class we’ll be working on something to cure boils. Boils? That seems weird... you wanted to see my magic, right?”

Hermione vigorously nodded her head.

“Okay.” She looked around the room again. “Can you tell me where a huge, sort of old looking book is in our dorm, that’s owned by me?”

She thought a moment. “Right on your nightstand was a book, is that it?”

“That’s the one.” Susan envisioned it and the magical symbols needed to begin the spell. “*Retrieval, book of spells.*” she intoned. Her book plopped into Hermione’s lap. She put her hand over her mouth, eyes wide.

“That was amazing!”

“Eh, it’s a useful one, I admit. And slightly easier to cast than *Pocket Dimension*, so I figured I would just leave it out. Can you put it on the table there, I don’t want to disturb Sparkle. Thanks.”

She opened it and started leafing through, looking for healing magic. Hermione of course was enchanted.

“Don’t bother,” said Susan. “You won’t get anything out of it. Harry and I tried for a month, but it may as well have been gibberish for all the good it did him.”

“Still...”

“I know. Ravenclaw. Ah, here it is. Antigen, grade 5. That shouldn’t be too hard.”

*Cure any and all disease in or on the target.*

“Thought so. Can you get your potions book?”

“Sure.” She ran off to grab it, and came back, handing it over. “Yup, yup, yup.” Susan paged through it. “You wand users have it rough, let me tell you. You have to learn a different potion for *every kind of disease*. I only have to learn one, and it cures everything. Is there seriously no potion of ‘cure everything’ in the wizard world?”

“Maybe we just have to work up to it?”

“That’s stupid. Even if it’s insanely complex, it would be a far better use of time to study and learn to get it exactly right than learn two dozen lesser potions in the same amount of time. Seriously, when are you going to have the one you need, either made or on you at the time you need it? My potion cures anything, and I only need one bottle.”

“I don’t deny your logic.”

“As far as *sillyosa* is concerned, it seems I have two options. *Floating Fingers* or its big brother *Telekinesis*. One is grade one, and can lift a book, but that’s about it. Big brother, on the other hand, costs me 5 more to learn than that and could, in theory, lift a car. Especially given that I can put energy directly into my result. How much XP do I have?”

Hermione gasped as a piece of paper was in Susan's hands that wasn't there a second ago. "Where did you pull that from?" she demanded.

"You don't want to know," said Susan with a wink. "But seriously, you don't have a character sheet either?"

"A *what*?"

"Yeah, thought so. I don't think I've met anyone else who does except for Sparkle, but I do like to ask because how would I ever know otherwise? When I figure out how to explain it to the headmaster I'll explain it to you." She put the sheet "away" again. "Anyway, I have 17 at the moment, easily enough to learn *Telekinesis* and have a bunch left over. It's useful enough on its own, I would think. Okay, give me about... eleven minutes here."

Hermione sat and patiently waited, reviewing *Potion of Cure Boils* to make sure she could do it properly when the time came.

Susan made her KNOwledge check, a 13, to learn the spell, and snapped the book shut. Hermione looked up.

"*Telekinesis*," she intoned, imagining the circle she had now memorized around the book and making precise, quick, hand motions. The light faded and the book rose into the air. "Looks like I'm prepared for class."

"That was it? You just sat there looking at the formula and now you can cast it? You didn't have to practice at all?"

"Well, I already know how to cast Mercury spells. It's really just adapting that knowledge to cast this spell in particular."

"Wild."

"As far as my potion is concerned, I'll copy the formula for *Antigen* down into the potions book later so I can look like I'm looking at the same thing as everyone else. For now, let's go find Harry and grab some lunch. Then we need to find a man named Rubeus."

"Why?" she asked, standing up and heading up the stairs to put the books away again.

"There's another bit of magic I have to perform today," she said, touching the side of her nose. "And I shouldn't keep him waiting."

Four people went down to Rubeus's Hut, at the edge of the forest; Harry, Susan, Hermione, and Ron.

"So how's Hogwarts been to you so far?" Susan asked Harry. "I've made a friend, learned a new spell, and explained to two people how my magic works."

"What's this?" asked Ron.

Harry shot him a look. "Oh, right. Her mysterious past or whatever, right?"

"Exactly. Mainly I've just been trying to figure out the topology of this castle."

"Topology?" Ron asked. "Mate, are you sure you shouldn't be in Ravenclaw?"

"The Sorting Hat seemed to think I would make a good addition to any house. Even Slytherin, crazy as that sounds."

"Seriously?"

"I turned down that house, actually."

"I should think so! Why are we out here so near the forest again?"

"Because Rubeus knew Harry's parents, and he asked me for a favor."

"How does he even know you?"

“He knows me by reputation. There was some, uh, magic related hi-jinks after Harry got his letter that I won’t go into. Suffice to say I made an impression.”

Ron just scratched his head.

Now close enough, they found the enormous man sitting on a tree stump outside his Hut, playing a sort of recorder.

“Susan, and Harry!” he exclaimed, jumping up. “I didn’t mean you had to rush right down here, you know.”

“No trouble Rubeus. I figured you were anxious about your wand so it would be cruel to make you wait when a couple of energy and a slight effort of will can make things better.”

“Well come in, I’ll put on some tea!”

The five made conversation for a moment, and Ron noticed all the pictures and fangs and scales and claws of dragons hung about the place.

“Is that from a horntail?” he asked, pointing at a horn.

“It sure is! How did you know that? Have an interest in dragons, do you? Man, I’d love a dragon.”

“My bother Charlie works with them in Romania.”

“He’s a lucky guy.”

They started talking about dragon lore, seeming to get along well. Finally, Susan could take ‘wingspan ratio to fight power’ no more and stood up, hands flat on the table.

“All right, out with it, Rubeus. We all know why I’m here. Are you stalling for some reason?”

“I don’t,” muttered Ron.

“All right, fine.” Rubeus went and peeked out all his windows, then closed the curtains. He went over to his umbrella stand and pulled out one, then came and sat back down.

“The truth is, there was a bit of an incident a few years back,” he began. “And everyone thought I had set a dangerous creature called Aragog on people. Of course he never hurt anybody, did Aragog, but the ministry wasn’t convinced. To appease them, I was expelled from Hogwarts, and me wand, well...” He paused.

“It was snapped,” said Hermione. “Standard procedure for an expulsion.”

“Like you said. Well, Albus, the great man that he is, knew I was innocent so he convinced the current headmaster to hire me, there on the spot, to actually work here! A great man, Albus. But now of course I can’t do a lot of magic, and it often goes wrong when I try. Obviously until I find some way to clear my name I can’t just wave it about, the ministry would find out. But having it be reliable again-”

“Say no more,” said Susan. “Let’s see what you have left of it.”

Rubeus fearfully looked over at the windows again, then slowly drew two pieces of wand out of his umbrella. “It won’t matter it was so long ago, will it?”

“What? No, I could put ancient cities back together with enough time, that’s not a problem. Okay, here goes!”

Spending max energy and taking the most time, she envisioned the circle and cast *Repair* on the wand. Just as with the wand she herself broke, it flowed back together. Rubeus reverently picked it up.

Ron was flabbergasted. Hermione was impressed. Harry was looking around the hut some more.

“So give us a spell then!” encouraged Susan.

“Right, right. Spell.” He went over to the teapot. “*Aguamenti*,” he said, pointing the wand inside, and it started filling up with water.

“Not a bad piece of work, if I do say so myself,” said Susan, smiling.

“I can’t ever repay you,” said Rubeus, fat tears running down his face. “Not ever.”

Susan waved a dismissive hand. “Bah. It was nothing.”

“You don’t understand...” Rubeus tried to say, but had to grab a handkerchief out of his pocket and blow his nose.

“You made him a wizard again,” explained Hermione. “With his wand snapped, he was just a big man that worked at Hogwarts. Now he’s a wizard that works at Hogwarts.”

“She’s got it right enough. Means the world to me, you know? Whatever I can do for you, you just name it, Susan.”

“Well, just don’t get caught using it because everyone will know who did the repair job, won’t they?”

“Don’t worry, no chance of that!”

“Um...” said Ron, getting his wand out.

“Yes?” answered Susan.

“Would you mind casting that spell on my wand? It’s, well, it’s actually a hand me down. Wands are pretty expensive, and there’s still seven of us of living at home so my parents can’t, uh, actually afford, you know. It’s kind of beat up.”

“You can use a wand that belongs or belonged to another wizard?” asked Susan.

“Yeah, it just takes more skill or something, I guess. They don’t work as well, I don’t know.”

“This won’t make it yours, you know.”

“No, but at least the unicorn hair might stop poking out. As it isn’t my wand I’ll need all the help I can get just to do any magic with it at all.”

“Okay, set it down.” She prepared to cast the spell again.

It was several hours later that the four headed back to the castle.

“He’s a pretty nice guy, Rubeus,” remarked Hermione.

“He seemed to know my parents pretty well,” said Harry.

“He certainly has a dragon fetish,” remarked Ron.

“What I want to know,” said Susan, “Is how giants, and dragons, and werewolves and all the other stuff he was talking about can be just wandering around and the non-magical world is totally ignorant that they exist!”

“Magic?” said Hermione.

“You’re fired.”

They both laughed.

With most of Saturday gone the four explored the castle a bit, then turned in for the night.

Sunday was spent much the same, but Harry and Hermione wanted to practice the wand movements for *Wingardium Leviosa* so asked some older kids to demonstrate it for them. Susan was sure their motivations were quite different: Harry wanted to get as early a start on his training as possible in case Death Eaters attacked, and Susan was pretty sure Hermione was jealous of Susan mastering *Telekinesis* so easily. Ron reluctantly started practicing as well, so as to not be left out.

“How can you not be excited about *doing magic*?” asked Susan, as the three practiced. “I mean you can wave a bit of wood around and make something float through the air! Do you know how ecstatic I was after doing my first spell? I could do actual magic! That was huge!”

“I’ve seen that sort of stuff done all my life. Plenty of time in class to do this kind of stuff, we should be out enjoying our last day of freedom.”

“Ron, learning is fun,” said Hermione, “not a punishment.”

“So *you* say.”

In charms class the next day, Professor Flitwick gave them an introduction to magic and had them practice the “swish” and “flick” wand movements. Susan felt very silly swinging her pretend wand about, but that freed up her concentration to see how the others were doing. Ron’s wand-work was quite sloppy, she thought, obviously he had not grasped the concept of the “quasi Latin phrase with a *precise wand movement*.” Neville was concentrating totally on his own hand, his eyes tracking the wand with each “swish” and “flick,” which she thought was going a bit too far. Draco, who had deliberately bumped Harry when he went past, had pretty good wand movement, and Susan wondered if he had practicing previously as well.

With ten minutes to go Filius handed out feathers and cautioned that hardly any wizard, on their first try, got a result. He explained that failure here meant nothing, and it would take time for them to learn the forty five individual wand movements that, when strung together, produced magical results. This was just an exercise because he was sure they were anxious to get started trying to do magic.

Naturally, Hermione and Harry lifted the feather from the desk on the first try. Filius was delighted as well, when Draco’s feather also rose into the air, and Susan, figuring *Why the heck not, I’ll be in company now* cast her first spell using a different trigger word than normal.

She knew that should could cast without the words, as long as she thought them. It just made the spell +4 more difficult to pull off. So she thought *Telekinesis* but said *Wingardium Leviosa* and even with the penalty, the feather was so light as to not even exist and floated up with the others.

“Astonishing!” yelled Filius, falling off the stack of books he used to stand on. “Four people in one class? The first class? I don’t believe it!”

So Gryffindor got five points, Slytherin house got five, and Ravenclaw got ten. Hermione was quite pleased.

Ron, looking up at all the floating feathers, seemed to come to a conclusion.

“Hermione,” he asked, “how, *exactly*, does that wand movement go again?” She almost, but not quite, managed not to be smug about showing him.

Their first potions class went a bit differently.

Severus swept in, calling for quiet in a voice that brooked no delay, and he got it.

“Well, well, Harry Potter and Susan Felton,” he sneered. “Our newest celebrities. Heard you both were showing off in charms class, but I won’t have any of that here, understand?”

*Learning a spell successfully is “showing off?”* thought Susan. *This guy’s really reaching. Especially as a member of his own house did the same! Maybe I shouldn’t have broken his wand like that? Still, I would rather share the brunt of his bad attitude than make Harry shoulder all of it.*

He started going off about how grand potion making was, to which Susan thought, *Uh, no? Your potion making is crap. You can’t put spells into objects or creams, only liquids. You*

*have to learn potions for every little thing rather than more generic potions that do everything. Yes, I'll admit your "charm" ability to put a spell into an object is nice, but that's a far cry from putting any spell into any object, now isn't it?*

"Girl!" he suddenly said, looking at Susan.

*Oh, I'm still just 'girl' am I? Oh, your XP is going down mister. If you have any.*

Severus continued. "What potion would be produced using the ingredients asphodel and wormwood?"

Hermione's hand went up.

*What? He knows my Imbuing is different from his, the Headmaster told him. I could make any potion with those ingredients as long as they cost the right amount.*

"Sadly, I do not know, sir."

"I see. What about you, Potter? If I needed a bezoar, where would I go?"

"Your filling cabinet?" he said seriously.

Hermione's hand stayed up.

"I mean originally, of course, and one point from Gryffindor for cheek."

Harry looked over at Susan, who gave her head a little shake.

"The stomach of a goat," Harry replied.

Hermione's hand went down.

"Good guess," said Severus, "As I'm sure that's all it was."

*Actually, I could have told him that one. Hermione, Harry and I all read the same books before coming here, after all, and that one doesn't relate to potion making, strictly speaking. It's just a thing that cures poison, not a potion, so it was mentioned multiple times.*

"One more chance, girl. What is the difference between monkshood and wolfsbane?"

*Oh come on! There's no difference for- fine, he wants to play games, we'll play games. I earned five points today so far, if it falls to four, well, that's still more than most. I'll give him MY answer to that question, not the wanded magic answer.*

"For me there is no difference," she said confidently. Severus' lip twitched.

"Another good guess. I'll expect actual knowledge from you all on my exams."

*Wait, I was right? That backfired on him, didn't it? She suppressed a smile. Jerk.*

After handing out ingredients, Severus reluctantly called her over to his desk.

"I have been... instructed... by the headmaster to accommodate your freakish *Imbuing* or whatever you call it. What mystical delight will you be performing for us today, and what do you need?" he asked, razor blades dipped in acid, and set on fire cutting his every word.

"As we're working on a potion of Cure Boils, I thought I would make my version, that instead cures every disease. I'll need a piece of cloth that's been dipped in cold water and components costing 5 'monetary units'. With your odd coinage system I don't yet know if that's bronze or gold, but I'm excited to find out. I'll need five hours to finish it."

"For five Knuts you can make a single potion to cure-" he stopped, coming back to himself. "Fine. You can stay a bit later to finish it up. I'll go get you some leavings to make up the rest of the cost."

"Thank you."

With the components gathered, Susan set about *Imbuing* the potion, reading the formula from the page she had written the day before. Of course, a magical circle sprang up around her cauldron, diverting everyone's attention.

“Eyes on your own work!” Severus bellowed, and everyone hastily got back to it. While maintaining the magic and waiting for the “ingredients” to break down into magic to produce the potion, she again watched Neville, who seemed to be focusing on his hands as he carefully chopped up his ingredients.

*There’s something wrong with that boy, she thought. But I can’t seem to put my finger on what.* The others were focused on the knife, or on the directions, but Neville... He dropped some porcupine quills into the brew, which immediately started to smoke and melt through the cauldron. He jerked away, and his hand went flying into it, knocking it over and splashing the contents onto him. He cried out as it burned him.

Severus stalked over and made the whole thing vanish. “Can you not follow even simple directions?” he bellowed. “You can’t be heating it when you add the quills, that should be obvious to even you! Seamus, take him to the hospital wing. Back to work everyone. I suppose you should thank him, Potter, you were about to make the same mistake! Another point from Gryffindor and one from Hufflepuff for his screw up.”

Neville was lead out, looking at his feet as he walked. *Something wrong with that boy...*

“So girl, how goes it with you? You’re not about to blow up my classroom, are you?”

*What the? Man, he moves quietly!*

“I got a thirteen on my check, professor, it’s just a matter of allowing the ingredients to disincorporate.”

“A thirteen? What does that even- I don’t even want to know.” He stalked off again.

*Better switch to decaf, dude.*

As the class ended and everyone filed out, they gave Susan really funny looks. Her Imbued potion needed another hour to finish, and the magical circle around the fire glowed and sparkled happily. This being a double potions session, she already had four hours into it. *Good thing I can stop it at any time, she thought. This would have taken almost three sessions otherwise. Best to just finish it up now though, in case he pokes around and messes it up.*

Ron, Hermione and Harry offered to wait with her, but she said maybe Harry should go. There was no sense provoking the man, after all, who was now sitting at his desk writing up how everyone had done on their potions.

He agreed, and an hour later Susan left with an Imbued casting of Antigen tucked away in her *Pocket Dimension*.

*What a waste of time, but at least I know “stealing” XP works. Normally it wouldn’t, of course, as people can’t be forced to give it up, but he wanted a potion so I made him a potion. Quite devious of me, really. Though I doubt he had it to lose, something made it work. Ah well, who cares. Still, just casting it would be a million times easier. Making potions must compensate for spells wand users can’t do any other way. Rather silly of me to do it. Much better to make a reusable item with one charge, then at least I could recharge it way easier. Must keep up appearances though, I guess.*

Then came the class Hermione had said she was most dreading, because reading about flying about on a broomstick and actually doing it was akin to reading about swimming and actually being thrown in the water. Chairs, upon which one sat to read, hardly ever lifted off the floor.

## Problem Solving

Time: Broomstick Class

Place: A field outside the castle

Susan looked down at the broomstick she would shortly be “sitting” on to learn “broomstick flying”. For the thousandth time she shook her head. Seriously, in the thousands of years magic had existed, no one had figured out a *Flight* spell? But then, in thinking about it, her first year magical textbook didn’t list any spells that were cast upon oneself.

*No wonder they make healing potions, wanded wizards seem to have a major weakness in they can’t use their magic on themselves as easily as I could- if at all.*

It was a major revelation, and of course led to the next one rather directly.

*Why?*

All her magic was targeted. She could cast on herself, a group, an object- it didn’t matter. In a flash, she decided she probably already knew the answer. Magic flowed from a person, through the wand, and out. To have magic flow from a person, out the wand, and then back into the person might cause some kind of feedback loop. Her magic just appeared wherever she wanted it. She was the cause, but not strictly the conduit.

In any case, she had cast *Flight* on herself before class, with the intention of maintaining it “until broomstick class is over”. She would then just lock her legs around the broomstick and fly normally. As with trying to remember to use her wand to cast magic, it would be annoying, but passable. The problem was that Mrs. Hooch expected them to command the broom into their hands simply by saying “up” to it. As Susan stepped around the broom and put her hand out, she wondered if that would actually work for her. Was the broom enchanted to follow such orders? Would it, in fact, work for her as it did the others because the broom was enchanted to fly and even someone without magic could make it work?

No such luck. She did a quick *Magic Sense* of the others and felt some sort of weird interaction between the wizards and their nearby broomsticks. Almost as if the brooms were somehow draining magic from the wizards in order to do the minor movement the others were managing.

“Managing” being a strong word, with only Harry getting his broom into his hand on the first try. In the end she used *Telekinesis* on the broom’s bristles, which mostly hid the circle, then stepped away from it slightly and made them rise towards her, which made the rest of the broom follow. She grabbed it just under the bristles and caught Professor Hooch’s eye with a “that’s the best I can do” look. It satisfied her trying to fit in with the others, and soon everyone was mounting their brooms.

“Right,” said Professor Hooch. “Flying is quite easy. The broom goes where it is pointed, so if you want to turn, just steer it in that direction. So basically you’re going to lift it to fly up, and push it down to fly down. So here’s what I want you to do. When I blow my whistle I want you to pull up on your brooms just enough so your feet leave the ground. Stop pulling up and hover for a moment so I can see your feet, then push down and stand again. Everyone got that? And-” She put her whistle in her mouth.

Sadly, Neville, *something wrong with that boy* jerked his broom as she was inhaling and shot into the air.

“Push it down boy!” said Professor Hooch, “Down!” Those in Slytherin laughed, but Susan got a 13 on a REASON check and saw where this was going. She drew her wand, using an active action, and then used energy to reduce her *Active Delay* as much as she could. She started to say *Telekinesis*, but stopped, mentally groaned, and changed it to “Wingardium-”

\*THUD\*

Neville hit the ground. *Crap. Oh, Neville. Sorry about that, it's because I hesitated casting the spell.*

“Nice effort!” shouted the professor, running over to Neville. “Five points to Ravenclaw.”

Susan hurried over to them both. “Broken wrist,” said Professor Hooch. “We’ll have to get you to the hospital wing. You’ll be fixed right up.”

“I could fix it right here,” whispered Susan.

“Too suspicious. I’ll just take him down there, not a problem. Thank you for the offer though.”

She helped Neville up. “Right, I’m taking him to the hospital wing. I see a broom in the air-” she looked up to see Neville’s broom floating away. “I see *another* broom in the air, and you’ll have a bad time. Are we clear?”

*Humm, Severus sent someone with Neville so he could watch his class. Professor Hooch went with, and used a threat. Which is the better teacher? The compassionate one, or the jerk?*

After he had been led away, Draco came over to her.

“Did you really think you could lift a whole person?” he sneered.

“If I hadn’t been the only one to try, maybe,” she answered. *Of course I could, you idiot. I could lift both you and your muscle-head buddies at the same time.*

The others looked away, it was true they had just stood there and done nothing. Even Hermione looked ashamed.

“Hey boss, he dropped something.” Crabbe (or Goyle) said, throwing something to Draco. “It’s a Remembrall, he seems like it needs one.”

“What, it helps you remember stuff?”

“No, don’t be stupid. It just lights up if you’ve forgotten something.”

“Doesn’t seem very useful. The human brain forgets a million things in the course of a day.”

*Not to mention I’m pretty sure there’s a spell in my book to make you remember something if you know you’ve forgotten it. So even the enchanted objects they can make aren’t very useful, compared to me? But it’s magic, it should do the same things. Odd.*

“Obviously I mean something important, girl,” he sneered, following Severus’ convention.

“Professor Snape earned the right to call me girl,” she said. “You will apologize.”

It took Draco a moment to process this, but in the end he decided to ignore it as Harry stepped up.

“Hand it over, Draco,” he said. “I’m sure you don’t need it.”

“You’re quite correct, Potter. The question becomes, will Neville remember he had it without having it to remind him?” He grabbed his broom and pushed off. “I’ll leave it someplace so we can observe the result of the experiment. Like maybe up a tree.”

“I’m warning you,” Susan said, pointing her useless stick up at him.

“What, are you going to levitate me? I’m already flying, moron.”

*Aarg, using any magic but that will give me away, it's the only spell they've learned!*

However, Harry grabbed his broom and also pushed off the ground, and seemed quite amazed when it actually worked.

"You're going to get us all in trouble!" Hermione wailed. "You're only hurting yourself, Draco."

"Normal rules don't apply to me," he said. "Come catch it if you can."

He took off and Harry shot after him. Susan wondered if she should go help, but then realized she wasn't maintaining *Flight* anymore. It seemed with the disappearance of her teacher, the magic decided class was over and that was that. She could cast it again, but that would really draw suspicion. Of course, everyone was clapping for Harry (well, not Crabbe, or Goyle) so she might not be noticed. Suddenly Draco threw the ball as hard as he could, and Harry zoomed past him to catch it in midair.

"I have to admit, right now he looks pretty cool," Susan said to no one in particular.

"Oh, does someone have a little crush?" asked Hermione teasingly, poking her in the arm.

"Who doesn't?" she asked, as Harry was now floating in the air, while those still left on the ground where cheering and clapping.

As he landed, Minerva came storming out of the castle and swept Harry off to his destiny of Seeker, leaving the rest of the class excitedly talking about the whole thing.

*Yeah, class is over.*

It took the rest of the week, but Susan finally figured out what was wrong with Neville. It happened thanks to Hermione, as Professor Flitwick was delighting in having a student he only had to show something once. That's when it hit her.

"Hermione, you have some sort of photographic reflexes or something."

"I have what?"

"Some people have photographic memories, right? They can look at something and then call that image, so to speak, back later. But you see something done and you can mimic that movement exactly. That's why you're such a good spell-caster!"

"I don't know, I've never heard of such a thing as photographic reflexes."

"Neither have I, but it's the only explanation that fits, right? Draco would try to get you to believe that because you came from a non-magical family, you were somehow inferior to him. (He goes on and on about it often enough) But yet, he can't hover charm anything heavier than you can right now. It isn't blood, or exactness of movement that determines how powerful a person's spell is. It's something else. I have no idea what it would be for you, but we know a wizard gets more powerful as they age. So something is increasing."

"Could it be, I don't know, a magical muscle?"

Draco snorted. Any conversation that involved blood purity caught his attention.

"You have something to add, Draco?" asked Susan with false sweetness.

"It just sounds stupid. Magical muscle."

"So what would you call it? I'm sure your father could lift more casting the hover charm than you could, right?"

"Yeah, so?"

"So, is your blood any less 'pure' than his?"

"No!"

“Then what’s the explanation, hum? Obviously his magical strength increased as he got older. Is it because he got older, or just that he’s done magic longer? Because from where I sit, you and Hermione are equal in magical power, meaning your blood purity stuff is meaningless.”

“I don’t have to listen to this.”

“Yes, we would appreciate your staying out of conversations that don’t include you, wouldn’t we Hermione?”

“Yes we would.”

Draco went back to practicing his hover charm.

“Anyway, back to our original discussion, you can learn to perform spells faster, but that doesn’t mean you can do them any stronger than anyone else. You just lessen the learning curve. But there’s one thing I want you to pay special attention to.”

“What’s that?”

“See if you can tell what spell is being cast by just the wand movement. When you’re up against wizards that can skip the verbal part of the spell, you’re going to have to read their wands to know what’s coming. I bet you’ll have an edge because you can think ahead of them, complete the wand motion in your head, and come up with the counter charm before they finish.”

“You really think that’s possible?”

“If photographic reflexes is real, why not? It wouldn’t hurt to try, anyway. I guess we would have to get a basketball player in here, and see if you could mimic his getting baskets to know for sure. But I think I’m right, and that how you can learn spells so fast.” Then it hit her. “And why Neville has so much trouble.”

“What do you mean?”

“Look at him.” They turned to watch Neville trying to lift his feather.

“What about it?”

“See where he’s looking?”

*He’s still watching his hand, not the feather.*

“I still don’t get it.”

“Just stay here, I’ll be back shortly.”

Even Susan’s magic needed her to see the target in most cases. She couldn’t cast her *Telekinesis* spell on something hidden out of sight, even if it was in the same room as her. Obviously spells that found things or provided information targeted her, rather than the thing she was getting information about. She had to assume wanded magic worked the same way. Without looking at the target, she doubted he would ever succeed in casting anything, and she thought she knew why.

“Neville,” she said, going over to him, “I think I know why you haven’t been able to do this spell, while most people can. Would you be willing to try something for me?”

“Uh, sure?” he said doubtfully.

“That’s the spirit. Put your wand down, that’s it. Now, close your eyes.”

“What?” He sounded shocked.

“I’m not going to hurt you, just do it.”

“Okay...”

“Now, touch your nose with your pinky.”

“Is this really necessary?”

“Can you just do it?”

“Uh...” He tried, and failed, confirming Susan’s suspicions.  
“Yup, thought so. You can open your eyes, Neville. Professor?”  
“Yes Susan?”  
“We need to take a little trip to see Madam Pomfrey.”  
“Has Neville hurt himself ag- I mean, of course, go ahead.”  
“Is something-”  
“Shhh, I’ll tell you in a second.”

Once out of the classroom, Neville trudged along after Susan. She noticed he kept his eyes on his feet while he walked.

“You can’t look up when you walk, can you?” she asked kindly.

“I always trip on things when I do.”

“I’m not surprised. Neville, I’m not sure how to tell you this, but I think you have brain damage.”

“What?”

“Those here in the wand- in the wizarding world wouldn’t notice, of course. They’re all worried about curses and jinxes and whatnot. So a simple thing like a *boy not being able to touch his nose with his eyes closed* would sail right past them. That’s why you’re rubbish at everything.”

“There’s an actual reason for that?”

“Yup. And hopefully we can fix it. I don’t know what exactly the name of the condition is, but I remember reading about it once. We Ravenclaws and our books, you know?”

He gave a weak laugh. “Yeah. I wish I could have been in Gryffindor like Harry and Ron, but I’m just so useless!”

“Maybe we can get you re-sorted, I don’t know. The point is, you’re not useless, Neville. I’m sure that’s your grandmother talking, not you.”

“Yeah, she was always saying if I just concentrated on what I was doing more, everything would be fine.”

Susan shook her head. “Honestly, these wizards have their heads so far up their... robes, they completely neglect thousands of years of science, psychology, medicine, the works. Neville, on behalf of the wizarding world, I want to apologize. It did you wrong, and you deserve better.”

Neville stopped. “Thank you.” His eyes shone with tears.

“Don’t get all mushy on me now. Come on.”

They made it up to the hospital. “Wait here,” said Susan, pushing him down into a chair outside. “I want to ask her something first. I have a feeling she’s not going to know... anyway, just wait here.”

She went in.

“Can I help you?” Madam Pomfrey asked.

“It’s about Neville,” she answered.

“Oh dear, has he gone and hurt himself again?”

“No, I think... what would you say if a person couldn’t tell where their limbs were if they had their eyes closed?”

“Is the patient under some kind of curse?”

*Yup, that’s how they think. I was right on that score.*

“Nope, it’s a strictly physical thing.”

“Oh, then I really wouldn’t know. My medical training focused primarily on magical ailments.”

Susan sighed. “That’s what I was afraid of.”

“You believe Neville has this condition?”

“I know he does. I just tested him, and he couldn’t find his nose with his pinky finger when he had his eyes closed.”

“What an odd test.”

“I noticed him always looking at his feet when he walked, or at his wand hand when he was trying to cast a spell. I then REASONED he probably had some sort of brain damage and decided to test it.”

“Goodness! You’re very observant. Do you want to become a medi-witch when you grow up? I mean to know about such a rare condition...”

*Why should I? A couple of spells is all I need to fix just about anything. As far as knowing about this, that’s a good point. How did I-* “It’s always a possibility,” she said out loud. “In any case, if you don’t know the condition, you don’t have anything that will cure it, do you?”

She shook her head.

“Good thing I do. You’ve been appraised of my sup- the differences in our magic?”

She nodded.

“Super.” She pulled the potion out of her *Pocket Dimension* and handed it over.

“I made this in potions class. You can check with Professor Snape and Headmaster Dumbledore if you want. It’s an *Imbued* spell of Antigen. Basically it will cure any disease. Normally I would just cast the spell over him and be done with it, but we want to keep the nature of my magic secret as long as possible. So this is something he will accept, if it’s from you. He understands potions cure things, and he’s been given a potion to drink. Only one problem- is this ailment, strictly speaking, a disease or a neurological condition? I’m not sure, but this is the best chance he has.”

“Wait, this one little potion could replace...” she trailed off and looked at her medicine cabinet.

“Sorry. Our magic is very different. I would have to make those individually for the patient, were I to open a service of making them. A potions master like Professor Snape could probably brew up a dozen potions in a day and just sell them. It’s complicated.”

“Well, I trust it does what you claim. I’ll call him in here and get him to drink it.”

“Great! HEY NEVILLE!” she shouted.

He stuck his head in, and she motioned him to come forward.

Neville stood, looking down at himself after he drank the potion, as magical light played about him. It vanished.

“How do you feel?” asked Susan.

“Different,” said Neville. “Weird. Like I’ve just gotten a new sense.” He held his hand up and flexed it, then closed his eyes. They shot open again. “I can tell!” he said excitedly. “I think it worked. I can feel-” He closed his eyes again and took a step forward. “Yes, I can walk without looking at my feet. It worked, it really worked! I can’t even describe how this feels!”

Tears were flowing down his cheeks. “Thank you so much, both of you! If you hadn’t noticed I would have been like that forever!”

“It might take some getting used to,” said Pomfrey. “Most of us have that sense of body from the time we’re born, so you’ll have some catching up to do.”

“I don’t care. I don’t have to look at my hand to know what my wand hand is doing. Quick, do you have a feather?”

“A feather- oh, your charms class?”

He nodded.

“Go on back. I want to have a word with Susan here, she’ll join you shortly.”

“Okay. Thank you!” He grabbed Pomfrey in a big hug, then let go and blushed furiously. “I’m sorry. I just- Thank you.” He hugged Susan just as fiercely, then ran out.

Susan and Pomfrey watched him go, already he was walking upright, and seemed taller for it. More confident.

“That,” said Susan, “felt really, really good.”

“I have to admit, that was one of my easier cases. Especially since two minutes ago I didn’t know I had it.”

Susan took a deep breath. “Well, I’m headed back to class too I guess. Unless there was something else?”

“If you ever make another one of those, I’d like to keep it here, in case someone comes in with something my standard potions can’t cure.”

“Sure thing. Next double potions class, you’ll get the next one I make.”

“And what did you say it was called? A newro-”

“Neurological condition. Brain damage, nerve damage, that sort of thing.”

“It looks like my medical training has fallen a bit short. I’ll have to see what I can do to remedy that.”

“You’ll have to get some non-magical, that is to say *Muggle*,” she said the word with scorn, “textbooks on medicine. People study the field for years before they’re even allowed to treat a patient alone, but I’m sure if you can get through a magical medical training you can at least learn what to look for that’s not a magical condition, but is still curable with magic. The best wisdom is knowing what we don’t know, right?”

She smiled. “I guess. I wonder...” she seemed thoughtful for a moment. “Would this potion work on someone that had been driven mad, say by being tortured through pain?”

“That’s not strictly a disease...” She looked around the room, but none of the beds were occupied. Susan grabbed her book through space and started paging through it. “Sun spells. Sun spells. Wow, grade ten?” She silently read for a moment. “They aren’t currently under any magical afflictions or curses?”

“No.”

“I suppose if the madness was brought on by the loss of a mental stat, like REsolve or REAson. I don’t know, the spell says ‘Restore a creature to its whole, undamaged state.’ That would, I expect, include damage to the brain, basically taking it back to the state it was in before it was damaged. I honestly don’t know. It’s a grade ten spell, the toughest there is, and it takes ten minutes to cast. That means it could take me twenty to cast from writings. Difficulty 15, not that it matters. No, difficulty 19, because of the plus 4. What’s my rating in Sun?” Her character sheet appeared and Susan glanced at it. “A five. With my maximum energy spent that’s a 16 rating. Sparkle could assist, of course. There’s a very small chance I could fail, but not by five so it wouldn’t backfire.” Her character sheet went away again.

“What are you talking about? Where did that paper come from? Wha- Wheeee?”

“Just ignore me. I’m just thinking through the technical details of casting this spell. It would be tough, but I could do it. I couldn’t guarantee the spell would cure madness, because

I've never attempted the spell or cured madness. I would however be willing to make the attempt."

"Seriously?"

"I am always serious. Sometimes jovial. Occasionally whimsical. But always serious. Why?"

"You wouldn't be able to tell anyone, but of course you're already trying to keep your magic a secret, so... I had better ask the Headmaster's advice in this matter." She waved a wand, and a glowing buffalo appeared and raced through the ceiling.

"I saw professor McGonagall do that. Is it some sort of *Magical Ally* spell?"

"It's a Patronus. It protects against Dementors, but it can also be used to send messages very quickly."

Suddenly there was a flash of light and Albus stood there, a phoenix on his shoulder. *Neat trick. And hey, it looks like the Headmaster has his own Companion as well. Cool.*

"You said there was an urgent matter requiring my attention, Madam Pomfrey?" he asked.

"Headmaster, I need your advice on a delicate matter."

They moved off to the other end of the hospital wing, so Susan sat down on a bed.

A moment into the conversation he gave a jerk and stared at her. She smiled uncertainly. There was more urgent whispering, and he strode back to her.

"Madam Pomfrey tells me you have just cured Neville of some sort of brain damage that was holding him back from casting spells?"

"Yes Headmaster. He couldn't tell where his extremities were without looking. It's rare, I think, in the non-magical world, so I'm sure it's almost nonexistent here. But as it stood, he would never have been able to perform the wand movement and sight his target, and thus, perform magic."

"Admirable, to have picked up on it. But she further tells me you have a spell you believe might actually... cure madness?"

"The description is unclear. It's a grade ten spell, the most difficult I can ever cast, so it's on par with spells that can create legions of warriors out of nothing or make someone immortal. So I would have to-

"Your magic can bring immortality!?"

"Uh, yeah. It's called *Senescent Cessation*, and it takes a full twenty four hours to enact. If you get it wrong, you die. Let me guess, no such spell for wand-wielders?"

"There is only one means of living forever, and it is currently being guarded in this very castle. I may ask for your help in protecting it, if your magic is that powerful. But that is a matter for another time. Madam Pomfrey has called me here because the boy you have just helped, Neville Longbottom, has a secret. She wanted to ask me if it was all right to reveal this secret to you. I have decided that the chance of their recovery, even the remote chance, warrants telling that secret."

Suddenly, Susan had a vision of meeting Neville in the shop. *What did his grandmother say? Something about their family being hit hard, just like the Potters? And now Pomfrey is asking about madness, and Neville has a secret. Neville was with his grandmother!*

"Neville's parents were tortured into madness, weren't they?"

"You are quick," said Albus, impressed.

Susan shook her head. "No, it was something his grandmother said to me, when we met in Diagon Alley. What you told me was just the missing piece of the puzzle."

He nodded. “Still, I am impressed, and that doesn’t happen often. You are willing to make the attempt?”

“Of course! If my magic can help, I am honor bound to do so. I’ll need time, I want to spend extra time studying the spell so I get it right. Two days? Would that be okay?”

“More than you can know. Just to put the effort in, and make the attempt, there is no amount of house points I can give you, even if I gave you the house cup every year you’re here at Hogwarts.”

She dismissed it with a wave of her hand. “I’m not doing it for that. Neville has been kicked around by the universe long enough, it’s time for some payback.”

“Very well. Know that I personally will be in your debt. Not unlike a certain groundskeeper I might name?” He looked at her over his spectacles.

“Don’t miss much, do you?”

“You’ll find I do not, Miss Felton. Study your book of magic and let me know when you are ready to depart.”

“Don’t tell Neville, please. I would hate to raise his hopes and then dash them again. In fact, let *them* tell him they’ve recovered, and leave me out of it. Neville doesn’t know it was my potion, he doesn’t need to know it was me with his parents either. If he did, well, it would be uncomfortable, to say the least.”

Dumbledore stared at her. “Balance,” he finally said.

“I’m sorry?”

“In your history of magic class you will learn what went on before *the boy who lived* broke Voldemort’s power. It was a terrible war, which used terrible magics. I wonder, if to balance the scales the world has given us you, who will be as terribly good as he was terribly evil.”

“Ask me again in a hundred years, because only history will tell us for sure.”

“Indeed. But if they do recover, perhaps I could arrange for them to come here where you might see their reunion?”

“I will cry happy tears along with him on that day from the sidelines, Professor.”

“Excellent. I shall take my leave then. Come Fawkes.” There was another burst of fire, and he was gone.

“Looks like I’ve made some work for myself. I better go get started. Thanks for everything.”

“What? No, thank you!”

Susan was out of earshot when Madam Pomfrey said “Twenty five points to Ravenclaw, for being you.”

## Undoing Madness

Time: Three days later

Place: St Mungo's.

It was difficult for Susan to keep from Hermione the reason she was pouring over *Alleviation* so much in the days before she planned to try and cure Mr. and Mrs. Longbottom. The best she could say was "It's not my secret to tell. If it works out, you'll know why, and I would ask you keep it to yourself. If it doesn't it will be my greatest failure."

"Is it dangerous?"

"Not unless I'm interrupted for some reason. No, it's a healing spell. I just am using it to cure something I'm not sure can be cured with magic, that's all."

She finally accepted it.

Susan spent the next two days, whenever she had free time, pouring over the extremely long spell. She and Sparkle assisted each other in reading it over, and Susan was confident she could cast it when the time came. She approached the Headmaster.

"Headmaster, I believe we are ready to attempt the spell."

"Excellent. There are certain people I must inform, would tomorrow morning be acceptable?"

"Certainly. I must warn you, this spell cannot be interrupted. I will want at least a half an hour of time to work in, if not more. I tell you this so the Longbottoms can be restrained or sedated before I arrive, should their madness require it. I don't recommend any sleeping potions or anything like that, because I want them to be as free of wand magic as possible. If the spell works they'll be cleared of all poisons anyway, and wake up right away. Can you pass that along as well?"

"Of course. Will there be anything else you require?"

"Actually, yes. A drop of glue will enhance the spell."

"Pardon?"

"I can use physical objects as a kind of fuel for my spells. They get consumed in the casting, and usually aren't handy enough to bother with. But with something like this, every little bit will help."

"That's why you needed that wet cloth to make the healing potion?"

"Right. *Imbuing* requires the *Enhancer*, just casting the spell makes it optional."

"I see. I will have a glue bottle waiting for you there."

"Thank you."

And so the moment arrived. Susan and Sparkle nervously walked in with Albus, Fawkes on his shoulder.

When she woke up that morning she discovered something different about herself- there was something written in the "Cards" box on her character sheet. Despite not ever seeing anything there, she instinctively knew how to use these cards. Sadly, the fates were not with her, and only card 5, *What a Rush!* seemed to have any relevance. To make matters worse, Sparkle had it. Not that it wasn't easy enough for her to play it on Susan's behalf, of course, every little bit would help.

She wondered why now, suddenly, she and Sparkle had received cards, but Sparkle could only guess.

“Maybe it’s because we could actually fail this, and whatever entity gives out cards knows it?”

“I don’t know. In any case I’m turning in my two cards for the 3XP. They’re both combat cards, and I don’t plan on beating the madness to death. That’ll at least give me a success if we really screw something up. You turning in your other one?”

“A *missed me*? Yeah, I don’t expect to be attacked at the-”

“Best not complete that sentence.”

“Uh, you’re right. Let’s go.”

“Animals inside my hospital!” a medical wizard exclaimed. “Who let these- Oh, good morning Headmaster.”

“Good morning. We are here to see the Longbottoms, as I believe you’ve been told?”

“I understand about a phoenix, but is the cat really necessary?”

“Yes, the cat is essential.”

The man shook his head. “Fine. Whatever. This way.”

Susan noticed that the man had a “this guy is crazy” expression on his face, but Albus ignored it.

The four were led to a sort of operating room, with a glass wall dividing two beds from an observation area. This area was full of people.

“Uum,” said Susan.

“I apologize, but I had to inform the Ministry of Magic about your plan. As I have been informing them of your progress at Hogwarts. They are quite anxious about the whole thing, though I have assured them of my confidence in you.”

“Headmaster,” said a portly man in a black hat, “I wasn’t aware that your student was quite so... young?”

“I’m sure I listed her age in my missive to you,” replied Albus. “If I did not, it was a mere oversight on my part.”

“Hem-Hem,” said a witch dressed all in pink. Susan took an immediate dislike to her. “Is it your belief, Headmaster, that this young girl will succeed where witches and wizards much older and wiser than her have failed?”

“That is exactly my belief, Dolores. I have seen her do several impossible things with her magic in these few short weeks at Hogwarts, this will merely be the latest. And if I may be blunt, it can hardly get any worse for the Longbottoms, can it?”

Dolores scowled at Susan. “And why has she brought her cat into a hospital?”

“Go and get ready, Susan.” Albus said to her. “Leave them to me. By the way, these are Gilbert Wimple, Broderik Bode, Cornelius Fudge, Malfalda Hopkirk and Dolores Umbridge. They are heads of various departs of the Ministry of Magic.” Also present were Professor Quirrell, of all people, and several other hospital staff.

“Nice to meet you,” Susan said politely. She nodded respectfully and went into the other room, where upon two beds, side by side, slept a middle aged man and woman. They were pale and gaunt, but breathed easily.

Albus stuck his head into the room. “Everything satisfactory?”

“I’ll need to move the beds, but I can handle it. Can you cast a charm that will keep noise from that side out of this side? Unless this place starts burning down in the next half hour, *I must*

*not be disturbed.*” After all, the most powerful healing spell I know? Backlash that and at best, I’ll just die outright. At worst, I’ll take Sparkle and my two “patients” with me. So let’s not do that.

“Of course.” Albus waved his wand around and Susan nodded her thanks, setting her book down by the glue on the table over by one wall. She didn’t bother with getting her wand out, she just cast *Telekinesis* on the one bed, gently lifting it and shoving it over a few feet. Grabbing the glue and her book Susan sat cross legged on the floor, and opened it to the start of the spell. She put a drop of glue on the floor, and looked at Sparkle.

“Ready?” she asked.

Sparkle nodded.

“Here we go.” Susan began to read.

Having already made her *Magical Theory* check to understand the spell, Susan only had to re-read the spell again to fix it in her mind. She did, rolling a 21. Taking a deep breath she touched both Longbottoms and focused on the first set of magical symbols. They enveloped the room under the two beds and a column of light illuminated them all. She and Sparkle had talked about it, and decided to take the further -2 penalty, offset by the glue, and get them both at once. As it took a half hour to fully cast the spell she thought one casting at a -6 would be better than two castings at a -4. Time would prove this decision wise or not.

With the length of this spell, several circles had to be placed very precisely, and over the next twenty minutes Susan and Sparkle added magical energies, building them up. When the final circle was in place, both said “*Alleviation*” and the magic rushed through both Longbottoms. She made her *Sun* check, assisted by both the *What a Rush!* card and Sparkle’s magic. She rolled a 15 total, exactly what she needed, making her sigh with relief. Both groaned, and Susan hastily closed her book and ran out of the room.

“Well?” asked everyone.

“They’re waking up, so the spell obviously worked. Are they sane or not? Only time will tell. But they can’t see here me, so I’m just going to go hide. I don’t feel like doing any more magic at the moment, or I would just go *Invisible*. Let me know how it turned out.”

She ran out and turned the corner, followed by Sparkle.

“She really doesn’t want the credit?” asked Fudge.

“I believe she thinks it would cause the Longbottoms to feel tremendously indebted to her. So much so they could never repay her, in fact. This would cause tension, which would promote disharmony between her and Neville. Personally I-”

Susan heard no more, now being down the hall and spotting some chairs she sank down into.

“We almost didn’t make it,” she said to Sparkle, who took the chair next to her.

“But we did, and that’s the point,” she replied, looking to make sure no one in particular was paying attention to them. “And you did have that extra XP.”

“Yes, but what if they ask me to cure more people around here? I can’t just refuse, can I?”

“Don’t try two at once, next time. Anyway, It’s not your responsibility to cure every person here, you know?”

“But if the magic works, I think it does become my responsibility.”

“I don’t know. Remember, their magic works differently. They just wave a wand about and poof, the result is there. I don’t think they have magic that takes more than a few seconds to cast. They saw you maintain that magic circle for twenty minutes. They know they can’t just start

wheeling people past you to cure. And you spent maximum energy on it, right? You could do that, what, eight times a day? So even if they wanted you to, you would be physically unable to cure that many people here in a day.”

“I just feel like if I can do more, I should.”

Sparkle sighed. “I’m just a cat, so maybe my perspective is skewed, but let’s take Bill Gates, right?”

“Okay?” *Where’s she going with this?*

“How many billions of dollars did he make in his life?”

“I have no idea.”

“That’s just the thing, maybe he doesn’t either. So there sits Billy, in the middle of his cash pile, right? He won’t miss a billion or so here or there- So why doesn’t he just start handing out thousands of dollars to homeless people every day? I mean, he’s got the money. He can do some good- why isn’t he?”

“You’re saying my magic is my money?”

“Exactly. You were doing a favor to a boy in your class. Nothing wrong with that. But it’s unreasonable for them to expect you to become a healing machine, because that’s not your job. You’re just a student. Now if you want to train *Sun* up to a 10 rating, and learn the spell, and take fifteen minutes to cast it instead of ten, you wouldn’t be able to fail it. Then you wouldn’t need to put the insane amount of energy in that you did, and could do the spell 80 times a day rather than 8. For now, just be happy in the knowledge you probably did some good today- here’s the Headmaster, let’s see what he has to say.”

Susan turned to greet him, and got up.

“No, no, relax. We all saw you putting tremendous effort into that spell, and that wandless hover charm, or whatever you call it, to move the bed also impressed them. They won’t be questioning your magic anymore, I would think.”

“How are they?”

Albus seemed to ignore the question. “Would you like something to drink? I myself become quite parched just watching you create all those magic rings around the room. Quite astonishing, really.”

“Headmaster!”

“Yes, a butterbeer for the both of us, I think. Nice and cold. Yes, that’s just what I need right now.”

“He’s doing this deliberately you know,” Susan said to Sparkle.

“He probably thinks we’re cute when we’re angry.”

“I think we’re cute at any time.”

“You’re right. We’re more dangerous when angry.”

“You think if we set his beard on fire...”

Fawkes gave a cry, but more of a shout of joy than of frustration. She could almost understand it- *You did well today*. He even brushed a wingtip against her cheek, and warmth spread into her.

“Oh,” she said, surprised. “Thank you.”

“Enough,” said Albus with a laugh. “Enough. You’ll be pleased to know that for the first time in ten years, the Longbottoms are lucid again. After being told they spent the last decade or so totally out of it are now asking about their miraculous recovery.”

Susan grinned widely. “That’s excellent news!” Her face fell. “And you told them...”

“That a new type of magic had been tried. I did not, however, tell them it was *wandless* magic. So technically, I told the absolute truth. They are asking to see their son, but the hospital staff wishes to keep them here for at least a day to make sure there are no complications. Perhaps tomorrow at lunch you will see a happy reunion if you are present around 12:30.”

Susan thought a moment. “Make it closer to 1:00. Neville seeing his parents again is sure to be emotional for them all, and he gets teased enough. So the fewer kids, no make that the fewer Slytherin kids around, the better.”

“You show an uncommon wisdom. Very well. If they are released tomorrow as I expect, that will be the time I bring them to the school.”

“Thank you, Headmaster. I do have a question though- why was Professor Quirrell here? He didn’t expect me to use some dark ritual to heal them, did he?”

“I confess, I find his interest in healing magic most curious. But I saw no reason not to allow him to be here, and so there you are. Shall we return to school? After the ministry finishes exclaiming over the Longbottoms they will undoubtedly turn their attentions to you, which I think you would rather avoid.”

“Right you are, Headmaster. Let’s go!”

Susan picked up Sparkle and Albus laid a hand on her shoulder, and the four of them became fire.

At almost one the next day, as promised, Albus and Neville’s parents walked into Hogwarts. They were shaky, even though *Alleviation* had replaced their muscle mass, they still hadn’t walked purposefully in quite some time. They made their way to the cafeteria, where Neville, now standing tall and walking more proudly- totally dribbled his drink all over himself when he saw who it was.

As predicted, the room was much emptier than it had been a half hour ago, and Susan, Ron, Harry and Hermione watched their tearful reunion.

*How would I have felt, thought Susan, to be able to visit my parents any time I liked, but to know they didn’t recognize me or even know I was there?*

“That’s right,” said Ron, snapping his fingers. “I heard something bad happened to their family right before the war ended. I guess they weren’t dead then.”

“No Ron,” Susan said sadly, “The dark wizards who broke the Longbottom family did something far worse than just killing. They left a scar upon the family. If they had just outright murdered his parents that would have been closure. This was far more evil.”

“And they were your secret project?” asked Hermione.

Susan nodded. “Neville didn’t want it to get out his parents were driven mad by torture. I don’t know why, they were resisting Voldemort, after all. But I’m sure he had his reasons. He can never be told I was the one that fixed them. I want that clear to you, Ron.”

“Why just me?”

“Because Harry knew me from before, he understands me. Hermione I can trust because we’re friends, and she’s already deduced the reason it must be kept secret. So I’m just making sure you understand.”

“Fine. But how did-”

“Hem-Hem!” Susan held up a finger. “Never you mind.”

Ron gave her a quizzical look. “Okay, okay.”

“What’s wrong, Harry?” asked Hermione.

“What? Oh, nothing. Just thinking about family, and dark wizards, and all of it.”

“I’m sorry Harry. Even my magic can’t bring back the dead. There will be no happy reunion for you, I’m afraid.”

“Don’t get me wrong, I am pleased for Neville. I’m just worried- are the people that did this to them still out there? Could they try again? If I have to fight off dark witches and wizards that followed Voldemort, I still have no clue how. And that attack on you or me at the start of the year, then nothing. What was that about? What if a new dark lord rises? Will I be ready to fight?”

“What can we do?” asked Ron, shoving a tart into his mouth. “We’re just kids.”

Harry stood up. “I’ll show you what we can do.”

“Harry?”

“Come on. We’re going to see Professor Quirrell.”

“We are?”

“Come on, Ron. Hermione, you should come too. You probably won’t get much out of it, Susan, but maybe some practice, and you can always use that, right?”

“What’s gotten into you?” asked Hermione.

“When I started here I promised myself I would work hard, and make sure the next dark wizard that challenges me finds he’s bitten off more than he can chew. Something saved me last time, but I can’t rely on that. And as powerful as you are, Susan, you can’t always be around to protect me or fight my battles. But what do we learn? We haven’t cast a single spell in Quirrell’s class yet, but that’s going to change. And if it doesn’t I’ll go to someone else that can teach me. He was always afraid of Headmaster Dumbledore, right? Maybe I can take lessons from him. I have to do something. I won’t allow that to happen again.” He pointed to Neville. “No more broken families because one person starts ruling the world through fear. Come on.”

Hermione was staring at him as he stalked off. “Oh, does someone have a little crush?” asked Susan, poking her in the arm.

Ron was protesting, saying looking for more homework was futile, and to be reasonable.

“Come on, you want to get better at magic, don’t you?” Susan asked.

“But, is that really the way?”

“If it really is a magical muscle like you said, exercise it all you can, I would say.”

“What about you?”

“Me? I need to learn about wandless wizard fights if I’m going to protect the... people I care about... when the time comes.”

Hermione got up. “I- I won’t lose to you. In magic or in love!” Her face turned red and she scurried after the boys.

Susan rose to join them, shaking her head a bit sadly. “Ah, Hermione. How little you understand.”

Moments later, Harry intercepted Professor Quirrell in the hallway.

“Ah, Mr. Potter! Shouldn’t you be getting to class?”

“This is more important than that!”

“More important than class? Why, it must be, as I see Hermione and Susan trailing behind you. Neither of them would be so crass, so disrespectful, so... *naughty* as to skip a class. What can I do for you all? Oh, and Ron, of course.”

“Hello Professor.”

“Our class, it is entitled Defense against the Dark Arts, is it not?”

Quirinus almost smiled. “That it is, what of it?”

“That implies learning to defend against, presumably, Dark Arts. Arts implies wizards. Dark spells. Curses. Evil objects.”

Susan totally missed her perception check with a 7 to notice Quirinus start stroking the ring he was wearing. The ring had a large, dark stone, and would have felt very interesting had she done a *Magic Sense* on it. Too bad she missed it.

Harry continued. “But thus far, our class should be more properly called Defense against some Mildly Annoying Creatures I Could Probably Look Up How to Deal With in any Wizard Library.”

“You feel that your time in my class is not being well spent, in other words.”

“I feel like my time at Hogwarts is not being well spent, Professor. I’m a marked man. The minute I set foot outside these walls the followers of Voldemort will be there to try and take revenge for their fallen master. I’m sure of it!”

“Those sniveling cowards? They had no true loyalty- I mean, yes, you could be right.”

*Uh, what just happened? Did Harry wince just then?*

“Sorry about that, I was just wondering what the dark lord, I mean Vol- I mean he who must not be named, what he would have thought about them abandoning the cause after he was destroyed.”

“Uh,” Harry seemed to have lost the thread of the conversation. “So is there something we can do about it?”

“You want to get stronger, do you?”

“That’s right.”

“A noble goal. Quite Slytherin, in fact. Though of course a Gryffindor would just call that bravery. Congratulations, Mr. Potter, you’ve just earned your house 20 points.”

Harry was taken aback. “I did?”

“That’s right. You’re the first person to come to me and ask what the heck it was I thought I was doing. Even the Headmaster didn’t question my classes, oddly enough. I suppose he was happy to have someone to assign to the post. But you did. Bravo. One has to wonder, as he came to power, if even a single person had asked him “are you sure this is the right thing to do?” would it worked out the way it did? I do have a plan on how to make my classes a bit more interesting, now that you have brought it up. I’ll speak to Albus and get things set up. Your next Defense class may be the most important one of your life. Run along, you don’t want to be late!”

As Quirinus made his way to his classroom, Harry and the others made their way back to theirs.

“It’s going to be *awesome!*” said Harry.

“It’s going to be a lot of work,” grumped Ron.

## Battle Magic

Time: Two days later

Place: A field outside Hogwarts

The castle was buzzing with the announcement that Professor Quirrell's class schedule had been revised, and also that the classroom wasn't to be used anymore. Instead, a portion of the field outside the castle had been roped off in a rectangular shape. Further adding to the confusion was the fact that the schedule seemed to rotate, and various years overlapped. For example, this week the first year students and the third year students had the class together. This combined class was also twice as long as normal. No one knew exactly what the professor had in mind, but Susan and the others couldn't wait to find out. As they approached the field they saw some odd metal poles with glowing orbs atop them, one in each corner of an area that had been marked off. Susan did a *Magic Sense* on them, as finally getting away from the castle would allow this check without giving her a headache, but she only got a 9 so she didn't get anything.

*I am going to have to improve that skill group*, she thought.

Quirinus gathered everyone around him from both years, and looked everyone over.

"Welcome to your first true Defense Against the Dark Arts class. You stand here because one of your number, young Mr. Potter here, asked me several days ago when exactly we would start learning to defend ourselves from dark wizards. Because in all honesty, learning a charm to keep pixies away from your tomatoes is hardly useful when a death eater is standing on your doorstep, isn't it?"

There was a general assent.

"But you'll notice that I didn't even bother to set all this up until he asked me. This is to show an important lesson- *speak up*. If you see something wrong, don't just look away. If you see a wrong being committed, inform someone. Would he who must not be named have risen to power if someone had stepped up, before he went too far, and said something to him? Who can say? The fact remains that all of you just meekly accepted my so called classes without complaint. Question! Challenge! Do you understand?"

There was a nodding of heads.

"Do you understand?"

"Yes professor!" everyone shouted.

"That's better. So, exactly what are you to do out in this field? And what are those strange devices at each corner I hear you asking yourself. Excellent questions! Everyone in first year, pull a number from this box over here." He indicated a box set on a small table outside the markings on the ground. "Third years, your number will come from this box. Form a line, quickly now."

They each did what they were told. He stopped Susan. "Not you my dear," he whispered. "I'll explain your role in a moment."

"Everyone has a number? Good. Find your opposite number and stand together, if you would."

They did so, confused.

"So here's the deal. Your task right now will be to hit your opponent with a spell of any kind. Don't worry, it doesn't matter which spell you use, those glowing orbs there have been enchanted to nullify the spell down to a harmless splotch of color. I'll tell you why in a moment. Now for the scoreboard."

He pointed his wand, and at the end of the field, a board started magically displaying all the names of the people within the rectangle. "If you get hit, stop. Later on we'll modify the charm to paralyze that part of your body, so you can fight on even after you get hit. The point will be awarded, and you may return to the starting position and begin again. Now, why any spell? Anyone?"

Several hands went up.

"Yes, you," he said, pointing to an older student.

"So we can practice a variety of spells, but still pose no danger to our partners."

"Correct. Whoever gets the most points at the end of the round gets 5 house points. Any questions?"

Hermione's hand went up. "Yes, Miss Granger?"

"We're to fight *third year* students?"

"You have a problem with that?"

"But," she sputtered, "that won't be fair!"

"Fair?" said Quirinus. "Fair. Fair? No, not getting it. Hands up, all of you, that believe the first real battle you'll be in will be... fair."

Not a hand was raised.

"You see, Miss Granger? You will always be outmatched, or outnumbered, or outclassed. Always. The key is to adapt to the situation that presents itself. Every week the battlefield will change. Sometimes there will be cover. Maybe you will have a small team instead of being apart. Maybe it will be two on one. The point is that dark wizards will probably be stronger than you, without fail, because no weak wizards would become dark!"

He paused to let that sink in.

"So yes, the battle here will be a bit one sided, to start. Without an opponent that is superior to yourself, how will you ever grow as a magic user? Observe what the older children do. What works for them? What doesn't? What spells do they use? Are some faster to say? Do they travel faster? Can you block them? Those that score high enough will be asked to demonstrate their techniques in the second half of this class, and then duel each other until all but one are eliminated. Mr. Potter has asked for an education in fighting dark wizards, and that is what each of you is being given. Perhaps before Christmas break I'll even allow a small group, made up of high scoring individuals to take me on, to see what you're really up against. Does that answer your question, Miss Granger?"

She nodded.

"Any other questions?"

"Yeah, why didn't she get a partner?" asked Draco, pointing to Susan.

"Ah, would you believe because she could already take all of you at once if she put her mind to it?"

"What?" Everyone was staring at her.

*Professor, what are you doing?*

"It's true. She may look like a normal first year witch, but she's actually the reincarnation of a famous witch from hundreds, if not thousands, of years ago. The details from that far back are a bit fuzzy. You may have seen the ancient looking book she's always reading from? Well, you might not believe this, but magic was quite different that long ago, before being refined into what you know as magic today. We were lucky to have found her that book, as she can't use the kind of magic we use, and vice versa. She has magic that has been lost to time, and knows many

difficult to cast spells. If she entered this little exercise, her opponent would have no chance at all.”

*Huh, an interesting explanation, she thought. Why didn't we think of that?* Everyone was staring at her, and several that were near her took a step back.

He continued. “That’s why some of you have noticed her cat seems to be much more intelligent than a normal cat should be. That cat is actually the soul of another witch who was friends with her in this past life. It’s just rather unfortunate she wound up in a non-human body.”

Everyone was nodding and she heard several “that makes so much sense” and the like.

*Professor, I could kiss you. This is the perfect cover story, and they even seem to be buying it!*

“Perhaps I’ll let a select group have a crack at her sometime. How would that be, Miss Felton?”

“My fighting skills are a bit rusty, but I think I could accommodate you. Maybe I’ll even take you on before Christmas break, and really give them a show.”

“OOOOOOOhhhhhhhh,” everyone said, while Quirinus laughed. “I said I liked her spirit the very first time we met. I haven’t changed my position. Enough talk. She’ll serve as another referee for these games. If she sees anything physical, well, let’s just hope she doesn’t. Her magic won’t be nullified by the charms. Any more questions?”

There weren’t any.

“Then move to the opposite end of the rectangle, facing your partner, and spread out. Await the sound of the bell, which will mean to begin, and to stop.”

\*BONG\*

After a half hour Quirinus called a break and handed out drinks and snacks to everyone, and made them select new partners. He motioned Susan over.

“I hope you didn’t mind me taking you out of this little exercise,” he said. “You said, I believe, that every spell you cast drains your energy?”

She nodded.

“A liability in a protracted fight, even an exercise like this one.”

“I have a slight edge,” Susan explained. “I just have to see my target, and my magic does the rest. I don’t have to aim, and most of my spells would be geared towards stopping a fight with my first spell.”

“I figured. How did you like my explanation? I made that up right on the spot. I was just going to say you were going to be the referee, but then it just popped into my head.”

“It’s brilliant, I wish I had thought of it, to be honest. It totally negates any oddity people would see with my magic, and explains how Sparkle can talk. She doesn’t have to hide her abilities anymore!”

“I thought you might be pleased.”

“I am. I owe you one, honestly. If someone asks about the circle I just say, I don’t know, that’s how I remember it working. Or my magic is different now that I came back. Something like that.”

“You can work out a full cover story later, as I’m sure you’ll get asked questions about your past. I’ve given you a nice framework to work with, anyway.”

“Thank you. I do appreciate it.”

He smiled. “Quite all right. Now, let’s get back to work, shall we?”

At the end of the class, everyone was a bit exhausted, but exhilarated. Hermione had managed to use her photographic reflexes to figure out how to block spells, and had done so with two or three. Knowing how to block them and actually being able to hit them were two different things. Wands were, after all, a size -3 “weapon” and thus difficult to parry with. Neville had made a decent showing, his confidence growing as the class went on, and he was far from the bottom in points. Harry was about in the middle, and Ron had staged a comeback in the last half hour, but was hardly the best. Still, he wasn’t complaining.

“You were right,” he said to Harry. “That was better than sitting in that stuffy classroom and hearing about pixies.”

“So you aren’t sorry I asked?”

“No, I never realized how hard it was to actually hit something with a spell when it’s way over there. And then fire off another that’s closer but still dodge what’s being aimed at you. It’s almost as good as Quidditch. How about you Hermione? You did pretty well in points, didn’t you?”

“Not as good as I hoped. Books didn’t prepare me for that! But I did see several things he was talking about, like using a shorter jinx than your opponent, so you can beat them to the casting. And some he didn’t, like turning so you weren’t showing your whole body to your opponent.”

Then Draco stomped over to them. He was flanked, as always, by Crabbe and Goyle, who had done better than average in the game. Susan suspected that they and Draco had started learning magic earlier than they were supposed to.

“So let’s see this great magic of yours,” he sneered at Susan. “I think he was just making some story up because you can’t do magic at all!”

“Come on, Draco. You’ve seen me do magic in Charms class, and make potions in Potions class.”

“I don’t know what you’re doing in Potions, with those weird circles around your cauldron.”

“That’s just how it used to happen in my day,” she said with a shrug. “I guess the technique changed or something.”

“Whatever. That still doesn’t prove anything.”

Susan mentally reviewed the list of her spells, *Could I show him something impressive? Should I? It would get him off my back, I suppose. Most stuff I know targets me though, like Darksight or Detect Lies. Wait a minute...*

Susan looked around, then snapped her fingers. “There’s some loose rocks around Rubeus’s Hut, right?”

“I guess,” said Draco. “I certainly don’t spend time there.”

“Wasn’t asking you. Hermione?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

“Great, let’s go.”

Once in front of the Hut, Susan selected a large piece of stone to work with, and cast *Augment Skill* on herself, with *Sculpting* as the target. Draco looked at the ground as the spell went off. “What’s all this?”

“My magic does that. Don’t know why.”

“But what did you do?”

“Oh, you’ll see.”

She then targeted the stone with *Sculpt*, and with her new rating of 10 in *Sculpting*, she quickly created a small statue of a dragon, wings unfurled, and roaring as though it was belching flame. She got a 12 on that check, so it looked pretty good. Draco was watching with disgust.

“That’s it? I could do that with Transfiguration.”

“Really, Draco? You’ve gone from not being able to change a matchstick into a pin to matching me turn a chunk of stone into a statue of a dragon?” She held out her hands. “I’d love to see that, especially given I’m not holding a wand in my hand at the moment.” She spread her hands out in front of him.

“You did that *wandless*?” He seemed shaken. “No, you must have put it away when I was distracted. You’re nothing special. Come on.”

“I like it,” said Crabbe (or Goyle).

“Move!” He turned to catch up.

“That was bloody amazing,” said Ron. “If I got you a smaller piece of stone, could you make me one?”

“Sure, find a nice piece in the color you want and I’ll be happy to.”

“Thanks!”

“I think Rubeus will really like it too. Draco was full of it though, there’s no way he could have done that in a million years.”

“Come on, let’s get back. Though I would love to see his face when he sees it.”

They all laughed.

Two days later, Susan, Sparkle and Hermione were walking from their last class back to their dorm room when an older boy hissed at her.

“Susan?”

She looked over, down the corridor. “Yes?” She didn’t recognize him, but he wore robes with the Slytherin house logo on the front. He looked to be in his sixth or seventh year.

“Look,” he said, looking around nervously. “I need your help. A friend of mine stupidly tried to get into that forbidden room on the third floor and burned his hand. I don’t want to take him to the nurse, he’ll get in trouble. You know healing magic, right?”

*How did he know? I’ve never actually healed anyone. Or is he just guessing because of that story that’s going around about me now thanks to Professor Quirrell?*

“I can certainly heal a burn, that’s no trouble at all.”

He seemed relieved. “So you’ll come?”

Susan shrugged. “Why not? Hermione, you want to head back to the room? No sense in us both being seen hanging around that place, even if it is to help someone.”

“Okay, I’ll see you later.”

“Per- I mean great, just great. Thank you so much!”

“Sure. Lead on.”

The boy led her, followed by Sparkle, upstairs and through hallways, over to the forbidden corridor. There was no one around, this place was avoided now, after several incidents much like this one. No one had been seriously hurt, but people had learned it wasn’t to be taken lightly.

“So where is he?”

The boy looked around. “He was here when I left. Maybe he got caught by a professor going past while he was waiting?”

“So what do you want to do?”

“I want you to *grab her!*” he shouted, and three more figures appeared from out of nowhere, one of them directly behind her. He reached around to grab her, and she shook her head. In her mind, she envisioned the needed circle for her Pluto spell, and it appeared at her feet.

“*Phase,*” she said, spending max energy, as the boy’s arms wrapped around her, trying to pin her arms at her sides. The spell went off with an 18 total, even with her -4 penalty for casting it instantly. Her difficulty was a 9, so she phased out of reality and his arms passed right through her. She rolled *Energy Boost* as a free action, and got two energy back, then smiled as the boy stumbled through her.

He looked back, horrified.

“Let me guess,” she said. “Draco sent you. As you can’t use magic in the halls without setting off the wards, you figured you would sneak up on me and grab me so I couldn’t get to my wand. Then you would just beat me up physically while I was helpless. Am I close?”

“...!” shouted the original boy.

“...!” shouted back the grabby one, trying again and again passing through them.

“You thought maybe because I was a girl I would panic, or not be strong enough to resist, is that it?”

“...!”

“...?”

“Are you even listening to me?”

All of them got out their wands, but Susan just shook her head. “Really?” She looked over at Sparkle. “If you wouldn’t mind?”

Sparkle stopped washing herself and looked at her. Her mouth opened, but Susan didn’t catch what she said. *My hearing isn’t that bad. I mean I know I have a Poor Sense: Hearing weakness at one point, but... Wait, is it possible I can’t hear or be heard while I’m like this?*

The boys raised their wands, and Sparkle seemed to consider for a moment. Circles appeared underneath them, and she spoke a single word: “*Thrust.*”

All four went flying away from her, as though a line had been drawn between them all. One blasted seven meters down the hallway and crashed into the wall at the far end, while the others were not fortunate enough to have that much room to fly. They crashed into the walls, and Susan imagined she heard bones snap. They collapsed to the floor.

“Did you have to use maximum energy?” Susan asked, dropping *Phase*.

“There were four of them. Casting instantly meant a -6 penalty. I wanted the spell to go off.”

*Looks like I was right, I can hear again. Have to make a note of that in the book.*

She looked the boys over, making a 13 on her First Aid check. One was clearly unconscious, another struggling to rise and holding his sides. One boy’s right arm was held at a crooked angle, and the boy down the hallway was already up.

“I think my arm is broken man. She broke my arm...” he looked over at everyone else, and realized it could have been a lot worse. “We’ve got to get out of here!”

He helped the guy holding his sides up with his left arm, and they hobbled off. She noticed he was favoring his left leg as well, so he must have hit his leg too. The one boy picked up his unconscious companion and glared at her.

“Tell your master what happened. Four big, strong boys like yourself didn’t stand a chance against me. And much worse will await him if you try something this stupid again.”

The boy didn’t reply, just limped off, dragging his friend.

“That was incredibly stupid of them,” said Sparkle, watching them go.

“Yeah. Even if they didn’t use magic, they would have had to kill me. Anything else, and I would be able to identify them and get them expelled.”

“I was thinking more along the lines of facing an opponent with an unknown set of spells at their disposal.”

“There is that. But remember, Draco doesn’t believe the story, so he still thinks the only magic I know is *Sillyosa*, like him.”

“I guess. Are you still phased?”

“Actually, no. I couldn’t hear anything when I was.”

“Really? I wondered what the heck you were doing. It looked like you were talking but not saying anything. I guess I could see that happening, given what the spell does.”

“It does make sense. Still, I’m putting it back on, so if you wanted to say something to me, better say it now. Oh, and thanks for taking care of them.”

“You’re welcome, I guess. I hated to hurt them, but they were all going to cast something and even *Phased*, I didn’t want the magics to interact and maybe do something weird. But why are you *Phasing* again?”

“I’m just going to take a quick peek through that door, see what all the fuss is about.”

“Is that wise?”

“Nothing can touch me like this, even defensive spells if there’s any on the door. And they don’t have *Phase* magic that I can tell, it’s a personal spell. So they can’t ward against it. I’ll be fine.”

“You and your *curiosity*.”

“Hey, you have it too, Miss Cat. You’re dying to know what’s in there, aren’t you?”

“Actually, I already know. It was the first thing I did once we got here. I couldn’t let that whole mystery go unsolved, you know?”

“What? And you were lecturing me?”

“That’s my job.”

“Oh, you.”

Susan cast the spell again and stuck her head through the door, noting the huge three headed dog lying there. One of the heads blinked at her, and stretched forward, sniffing, and straining against the chain that held it back.

“Don’t mind me, I’m just a dream,” Susan said, looking around. The chamber was pretty bare, but there was a ring that screamed “trap door” beneath the creature.

“Plus three size modifier?” Susan asked, looking the dog over. “Yeah, probably.” She could hop down the door, see what was under there, but she figured she wouldn’t antagonize the creature. There may be alarms that would go off if it started barking. She pulled her head back.

“Still just a big dog?” asked Sparkle once Susan dropped the spell again.

“Big, three headed dog,” answered Susan.

“His name is Fluffy,” said a voice, and Susan spun around. Standing there was Albus, looking interested.

“I wasn’t going to go in!” Susan said. “I was just lured here by four bullies and-” He held up a hand.

“I know, Miss Felton. I know. You handled yourself well, I watched the whole thing.”

“You were here the whole time?”

“Indeed. As soon as anyone enters this corridor, I am made aware of it. I knew the three were waiting for someone, I never dreamed it would be you.”

“I think Draco has taken a dislike to me, since I was singled out in the Defense class. He wanted me to prove my magic to him, and when I did, I think it made things worse.”

“That lovely dragon statue you made Rubeus?”

Susan colored.

“He’s still talking about it. He hasn’t figured out it was you, so he’s baffled as to where it came from. A few more days and I might tell him. As far as your attackers, perhaps it was Draco’s doing, but perhaps not. Have you forgotten about the attempt on your life when you first came here?”

*I haven’t forgotten, thought Susan. In fact I could have used my magic to show me who did it at any time. I’m just afraid that, once cast, someone regretted it, and that’s why there hasn’t been another attempt. To see the would be killer’s face might doom them forever.*

“I haven’t forgotten,” said Susan. “But going from a powerful killing curse to a couple of upperclassmen is quite a stretch, isn’t it?”

“I wonder. Still, our meeting is fortuitous. You’ll recall I wished to talk to you about further guarding something here at the school?”

“What Professor Snape took from that vault when Harry found out his treasure had been stolen?”

His eyes twinkled. “It sometimes scares me that the two most intelligent girls of their class become friends right away. I think the world had better watch out when they graduate.”

“You’re dodging the question.”

“But not for long under your penetrating gaze, I think. Yes, it is to that object I speak. Come with me to my office and we can talk about it some more.”

“Very well.”

In the office, Susan sat staring at all the contraptions that whizzed and sparkled as he cast charm after charm around the room. She had nodded respectfully to Fawkes, who nodded back, and Sparkle had surprised her by casting *Animal Speech* on it and was having a quiet conversation. After Albus was done (further?) securing his office, he glanced over them.

“You can talk to my phoenix?” he asked Sparkle.

“I have a spell that allows me to talk to animals.”

“Oh my. It seems my magic looks more and more inadequate by the day.”

“Don’t say that, Professor. Without something to compare it against, wanded magic would still be worthwhile. Did I say that right?”

“I know what you meant to say. I wonder, can you tell with your magical senses if someone is in this room now, as we speak?”

“With all the magical devices and such in this room? No thank you, Headmaster, I don’t enjoy searing pain stabbing into my head. Everything around here is magical, it would overload me if I tried.”

“I see. Pity. I would love to study what sort of ‘inner eye’ you possess that can feel magic. Now, to our purpose!”

“You want to know what spells I could cast to help protect that tiny object Professor Snape retrieved.” She set her book, having gone to get it before heading to the office, on the desk. Retrieving it with magic was fine and all, but sometimes you could do things physically.

“Correct. I only tell you this because, one, apparently your magic can easily make some immortal itself, and two, being of a different kind, it would be harder for a wandless wizard to get past.”

“I wouldn’t call a 24 hour ritual ‘easy,’ Headmaster. You saw how worried I was about just the half hour spell that cured the Longbottoms. And trying to use it without spending the XP to learn it means the ritual is 48 hours. You call that easy?”

“Easy in relation to our way of doing it, that has only been done once.”

“Ah. In that case, yes. It does have another flaw, however.”

“Oh?”

“If I make myself and, for example, three other people immortal, I become the weakest link in that chain. The spell is *Permanent* but at some level, I maintain it. If I were to be killed in a duel or something, all those people that I had cast it on would immediately begin aging.”

“I see.”

“Of course, I could work for a few years, making myself immune to magic, physical attacks, aging, dimensional prisons, etc, then the others I made immortal would have less to fear. But that only means someone would have to get creative to kill me. But that’s not why I’m here. Let me see what my book has in terms of immediate spells.”

Susan spent several minutes looking through the index of her book.

“If you wanted to trap the person who touched the object, I could make it react by *Petrifying* them or even splashing them with acid. I could put *Lost* on the corridor leading to the object. I could make it too scary to touch with *Terror*. Wait, this is already a magical object?”

“Very much so.”

“That’s no good. I could *Imbue* the box it was in, but I don’t know about doing this to the object itself. The magic might react in some unknown way, or just make it impossible to *Imbue*. Let me keep looking. It’s tough, because anything I make around the object can just be blasted apart without even getting close.”

“Pretend I wanted only to slow someone down long enough for other forces to arrive.”

“Is that why the no doubt fake obstacle course under that trap door?”

“Fake? What do you mean?”

“Obviously you’re not going to hide the object in the place you’ve told the whole school to look, right? That’s just a distraction. The real object is either back in Gringots, with would be thieves now thinking it’s here, or you carry it around with you. Because what could be safer than that?”

“I fear I do not have your devious mind. The object is, in fact, at the end of a very elaborate set of traps under that door.”

Susan regarded him a moment. “I see. As long as there were a couple of doors down there I could spell trap them, make them explode with one element or another when opened. Wandless magic users probably wouldn’t be able to detect it. If they survived the first one, though, the element of surprise would be gone.”

“I said delay them, not kill them!”

“I see. So it’s really a trap, not exactly about guarding what can only be the most coveted object in the magical world, as you claim it is the only way you know of that grants immortality. I would think you would want the most lethal traps I can devise guarding it.”

Albus stared at her a moment. “I suspect certain forces are moving in this world, now that Harry Potter has returned to us. One way these forces can be strengthened is with the object that lies below in the castle. But I only suspect this, it is not something I know. I want to know who goes for the object, and to what end. If possible I want to capture them and question them, perhaps save them if I can.”

“Save them?”

“There are curses that can direct another’s behavior. What I fear is far more evil, actual possession by a piece of Voldemort’s soul.”

Susan turned a few pages and read the description of a spell. *Exorcise- Force a spirit or creature possessing the body of another to leave its host. Grade 6, Sun. Note to self, possession is real in the magical world, learn Exorcise spell at earliest opportunity.*

“One element, governed by Neptune is called *Knockout*. It might knock someone out, but then again it might not. Especially if I was a dark wizard after something this rare, I would have many potions of healing and strength and whatnot already drunk or ready to drink when I went down there.”

“It is a tricky puzzle, I admit.”

Susan thought a moment more, then smiled. “Of course! I was thinking too big. It would only need two charges.”

“Charges?”

“I need a piece of paper. I built a spreadsheet to do this calculation for me back home, but without computers around here... Ah, thank you.”

She started figuring, “Yeah, that’s doable. Would only cost 1XP to make, too, but of course I’m making it for him, maybe I can get away with doing the same thing...”

“You have an idea?” Albus prompted.

“Yup. I’ll make you a bag of pocket dimension. It’ll have two charges in it, enough to open the bag twice. Once to put the object in, once to take the object out again. The bag will be keyed to a password only you will know, and only your hand will be able to retrieve the object. It’ll take me, ugh, eleven total hours to make, but it’ll be nearly perfect.”

“That is strangely reminiscent of the protection I myself placed around the object. How interesting our minds should run along nearly parallel lines. Very well. I will need to be present while you work?”

“I would rather not lose the one XP on this, negligible as that seems. I don’t know at what rate I earn them back, so they are a finite resource.”

“And what else would you need?”

“Let’s see, a silk or satin bag, no, two of them. One to *Imbue* and one to use as the *enhancer*. Unless you would prefer the object to be something else, in which case it can be anything. Plus materials costing 60 Sickles.” She had realized when making the potion, when not all of her ingredients had been used up, that her magic considered Sickles the “monitory units” rather than Galleons. As it was 17 of them to one Galleon, rather than something sane like 10 or 20, the conversion was a bit tricky. Best to just think in Sickles then, and let the magic figure it out.

“A small price to pay, I think, to protect the object that much more thoroughly. My office will be made available to you over the weekend, if you don’t mind giving it up to finish the project?”

“I could work six hours one day and five the next, that’s not too big a sacrifice.”

“Then I must thank you again. What would we have done without you and your amazing book of magic, I wonder?”

“I’m sure Harry would have saved the day somehow, in that case,” she said, winking.

“Or perhaps Neville Longbottom.”

Both shared a hearty laugh.

In the weeks following the Headmaster's request Susan had successfully created the requested item and spent a lot of time playing referee to Professor Quirrell's little war games.

As far as the bag went, she insisted Albus cast a charm over her when the time came to determine the trigger word or "some action" that would allow the pocket dimension to be opened. She explained that, even if she were to open it, she would only gain access to her own pocket dimension that was already stuffed with various odds and ends, not his pristine one. She just didn't feel comfortable knowing the words, just in case. He complied, and went off to further protect the object.

The war games continued, rotating through second years to seventh. After each one Quirinus asked what people had learned, observed, or concluded, and some interesting things came out of it.

Susan spent some of her XP on classes, much as she hated to "waste" them in that way instead of learning more spells. She did, however, have to pass Magical History and Herbology class, so XP went into them. Headmaster Dumbledore said that her curing of Neville (who was doing much better now, and had lost his clumsiness and some of his low self esteem) earned her a passing grade in Potions whatever Severus said. She could just continue to make what potions she wanted, and perhaps even *Imbue* some other objects. After all, the Sorting Hat was basically some sort of *Imbuing* of "Magical Ally" with some form of mental communication, right? And as she was supposedly a reincarnation she would know how the founders had done it, that had been lost to wandless wizards for some time.

She argued quite strongly against Astronomy, which she considered to be useless for any person, and weakly against Transfiguration. She only won against Transfiguration, and only because two spells, which she promised to learn by the end of the year, were so superior. *Shape-shift* and *Creation*. After all, she argued, why turn something into something else when you can just wave a hand and wish that object you needed into existence? As for turning animals into other animals? It was useful for Sparkle when she wanted hands, and maybe as a disguise, but who cared otherwise?

So she didn't get out of Astronomy, but decided just to raise that skill to a 1, and then rely on *Augment Skill* for any tests. Because seriously, Astronomy?

Charms class she had also passed, the Longbottoms having moved back into their home and were trying to put their lives back together.

*Just be glad you don't live in the technological world, Susan thought grimly. In ten years we saw the birth of 3D printing, smartphones, GPS, 3D TV... you would be quite behind the times. Magic hasn't changed that much.*

Defense against the Dark Arts had a written portion Professor Quirrell said he cared nothing for, and would probably skip making them take anyway. So that class was secure, especially if she could beat him before everyone went home for Christmas break.

And that was her classes taken care of. She spent some time deciding between *Barrier Against Spells*, *Magic Immunity*, and *Magic Reflection*. She wasn't sure what a wandless wizard's "casting check" would be, but facing a dark wizard, probably pretty high. *Magic Immunity* and *Barrier against Spells* seemed only subtly different, *Immunity* probably protecting against

potions and the like. She settled on *Barrier*, given the slightly lower cost, and the fact was that if someone was forcing her to drink a potion, she was already in trouble.

As she planned, she also picked up *Exorcise* and seeing how effective it was when Sparkle used it, *Thrust* with her last two XP. Sparkle learned *Acceleration*. She thought as the *companion* it was her place to know more support spells, like *Armor of Magic* and *Deflection*, than direct attack magic. Also, she hadn't planned on it when learning *Silence* but Susan was willing to bet it would instantly nullify any wand-wielding wizard that hadn't practiced casting spells wordlessly.

The whole school had turned out for the Halloween feast, but Susan noticed both Professor Snape and Quirrell were going to be late again. Snape hadn't relented in being generally disagreeable to her and Harry, but at least Neville was doing better. He even seemed less afraid of Severus than before, which pleased her.

The bigger surprise was that Ron was missing. Harry told them he said he had a potion to finish up for class and that he would be up shortly.

*Maybe some of Hermione's work ethic is rubbing off on him?*

Suddenly the main doors burst open, and everyone gave a gasp as Professor Quirrell stumbled in, almost falling to the ground. His wand arm hung limply, and he was breathing heavily. His clothes were torn and bloody, and he was swaying on his feet, a bruise nearly swelling shut one eye. Nearby, a Hufflepuff boy got up and steadied him.

"Thank you," he said to the boy. "Must get to the Headmaster."

Albus was already rushing towards him.

"What happened?" he demanded.

"The troll- got loose somehow. It's in the dungeons now, headed this way. Tried to strop him alone. Too strong. Headmaster, I'm sor-" he passed out.

That that, pandemonium erupted. Girls started screaming, strong men wept, and those that scorned the very gods themselves began to whisper a quiet prayer for their blackened souls.

"Quiet!" Albus' voice rang through the hall. Everyone stopped.

"Prefects, please lead your houses back to your common rooms. Heads of houses will secure them from entry once you are inside. Then we will deal with this troll."

Orders given, everyone sprang into action and soon there orderly lines of students walking back to their dorms. Harry, Susan, and Hermione hung back.

"Ron, isn't he down in the dungeons doing potion work?" she hissed.

"Yeah, we better tell the headmaster," said Harry.

"There's no time, we have to go get him. You heard him, their priority right now is keeping the students safe."

"Do you really think we know enough magic to-" he glanced at Susan. "Can you..."

"Sparkle is the one with the buffing spells," she said. "Are they good enough to let us take on a troll if it comes to that? I don't know. And you guys have been working on stunning spells, but only a few weeks-"

"We have to try," said Hermione fiercely. "You remember what Professor Quirrell said? We'll always be outmatched when we go to fight. Always. To win we have to look for openings, and be smart! If we can't outsmart a troll, we aren't worth our wands."

Harry looked around. "All right, let's go. Sparkle can do magic on us while we make our way down there, right?"

The four made their way down to the dungeons, which, for plot reasons, didn't get them caught by teachers. Along the way Sparkle put *Armor of Magic* (DTR 10, AR 10, DC 30) and *Acceleration* (Speed +10, REF bonus +10, Active Delay -5) making her total penalty because of magic a -3. Susan slapped an *Augment Skill* (wand magic +10) on the others, not sure if that would work or not. She also checked her character sheet, and yes, she had cards again, thank goodness. Sparkle turned in her *Endless Ammo*, shaking her head, but kept her *Lucky Break*. Susan kept both her *Bonus* and *It's Not as Bad as it Looks*.

The three, now enjoying their newfound speed, raced downstairs to the dungeons, where they hoped to dramatically arrive in time to Save Ron's Life.

All they found was a bloody corpse.

"Oh NOOOOOOOO- Wait, that's not a body," remarked Susan, looking closer. "It looks like a bunch of spell ingredients were knocked over, and the darkness and our own fears of what we would find let our imaginations run away with us."

"Looks like you're right," said Harry, looking around relieved. The place was pretty trashed, he hoped it was the troll that had done it, not Ron.

"So where is he?" asked Hermione.

They turned to search other rooms and turned into a hallway with a bathroom one might recognize from a different timeline. However, the four had no time to ponder quantum theory because the collapsed waveform of a troll was down the hall, grinning an evil grin at them.

*It's easily a +1 size modifier, thought Susan. And I wouldn't be surprised if it had Tough as well. It knocked Quirrell around, do we have a chance?*

"Ah, crap," said Harry.

"I haven't studied enough for this," whined Hermione.

"XP time!" said Susan, rubbing her hands together. This was her first real battle, and against something this tough? It was sure to gain her lots of it.

"Humans," said Sparkle, casting *Leap*. The battle was on.

The hastily conceived plan was to try and surrounded the creature if they met it, so it wouldn't know which of them to focus on. Susan and Sparkle rolled *Initiative*, and they assumed the others did something similar, and Sparkle beat Susan out, *Leaping* onto the face of the troll and casting *Elemental Touch* (Magic) as she swung at its face. The troll was too stupid to get out

of the way, trying to reason out how a cat (*tiny morsel* in troll language, though just about everything carried that name) just flew through the air. Sparkle felt her attack do a fantastic-

1 damage, to the *No Unusual Effect*.

And she fell to the ground, taking her free movement to scurry between the troll's legs. Her delay increased by 2.

"Ugh rawagh ra!" said the troll. (Why hurt me?)

Susan and Hermione both went next, Susan going for the expediency of *Dazzle* while Hermione tried to also get past it. The *Dazzle* went off with a 14, meaning the Troll gained 10 delay and was blinded by a flickering lights all around its head. It had seen Hermione rushing it and tried a reactive action to club her, but as it was now at a penalty of -12 (-2 for the reactive action), and got a 4 total, which wouldn't hit the broad side of a barn. It wouldn't hit the narrower end either, so Hermione didn't even bother to duck.

Susan's delay also went up by two.

Harry did a called shot with a stunning spell, getting an 18 with his bonus, which the narrator will treat as *Elemental Bolt (Knockout)* with a 4 rating. Sadly, the bonus which Susan applied was to *hitting things with spells* not to *making spells work better* which she had forgotten in the rush were separate things for wand using wizards. The troll went "Ugh raugha mua rugga!" (What are you doing?) and tried to wave the lights away from its face.

Sparkle leapt to one side, holding her action. She realized she probably wasn't going to be able to hurt this creature, and was going to concentrate on *Deflection* for her friends.

Susan was up again, and decided that club needed to go, so she thought of some new magical symbols which appeared beneath the troll. "*Lubricate*," she shouted, targeting him. The affect was twofold, as it would cause the troll to slip and loose grip on the club simultaneously. She got a 16 total, while the troll got whatever RESolve check he could against it, which of course failed. The club slithered out of his hand as though it had been greased, and its legs went out from under it, causing it to sit down, hard.

"Raugha mua muhga ra!" (Are you attack me?) screamed the troll in obvious frustration, still dazzled by the earlier spell.

Harry tried another stunner, getting a 14 this time and again hitting. The stunner did another 13 damage.

"Ugh raugha mua muhga ra!" (Why are you attack me?)

"*Elemental Bolt:(Fire!)*" shouted Susan, targeting the club. However, with her penalty for casting it so fast and the -1 she was already at, it fizzled by 2.

Both Harry and Hermione cast stunners at the same time, getting a 20 and 19, respectively, getting 7 and 5 damage, for a total of 25 non-lethal damage to the troll.

It bellowed "Aargua! Ra blu algua jug bark! Ikua luna muhga ra!" (Help! Me lost inside crazy castle! Mean kids attack me!)

"He really sounds enraged!" Hermione shouted.

"Keep it up!" Harry replied.

"Wait a minute!" shouted Susan.

"What?" asked Harry.

"We're hurting him!"

"That's kind of the point!"

"But I think he's crying."

And he was. Harry and Hermione both lowered their wands as the flickering lights around the troll's head vanished, and he shook it to try and clear his vision. He stared at them.

Without warning, all four of them stopped blurring and the world sped up again, and like a soap bubble popping their *Magic Armor* went away.

"Guess the magic knew the battle was over," said Sparkle.

"Yeah, I couldn't maintain *Augment Skill*."

"So now what do we do?" asked Hermione. The troll kept sadly trying to recover his club, but it kept slipping out of his fingers. Susan had cast it for "as long as she could see this troll," so it could be maintained.

"Well, Ron obviously isn't down here," said Harry. "But I hate to just leave it wandering around."

"Wish I knew *Immobilize*," said Susan. "I suppose I could just *Telekinesis* it after us, but it looks pretty heavy."

The three stood and stared at the troll, who was now babbling at them.

"What do you think he's saying?" whispered Hermione.

The others shook their heads. "I don't think *Animal Speech* would work, this creature obviously has a language. We would need the *Communication* spell, which I don't know."

"Let's just go get someone, Susan can stay here, I doubt he'll try anything, and honestly I'm not sure we were doing all that much good anyway," said Harry.

"What's all this then?" said a familiar voice. They turned around, and a group of teachers, led by Rubeus, no less, came down the corridor.

"We thought Ron was down here so we had to come get him," said Harry.

"He said he would be down here, have you seen him?" said Hermione.

"You've hurt him!" said Rubeus, pushing past them. "There, there, it's all right, I'm here."

They looked dumfounded at him.

"Just because he's big and a bit clumsy and maybe likes to swing his club around a bit doesn't make him a bad person, you know. You didn't have to come down here and attack the poor creature!"

"Rubeus, he's a troll!" shrieked Hermione.

"Misunderstood creatures, trolls," said Rubeus, checking the troll over.

"Are you children hurt?" asked Minerva.

"No, professor. We had enough enchantments on us, even if he had attacked I doubt he could have touched us," said Harry.

"Yeah, it was like he was moving in slow motion. That acceleration spell is really something," said Hermione.

"And Susan dazzled him, and got his club away from him," Harry started.

"Enough, children. This troll could easily have fought back..." Minerva looked over at Susan and Sparkle, who were both shaking their heads. "Well, anyway, it was quite brave, and rather foolish of you to go *seeking danger*. However, you did survive, so I shall both take and give five points to each of your houses."

Susan put up a finger, but Minerva raised an eyebrow and she thought better of it.

"Now, back to your dorms, and we'll see if we can't track down young Mr. Weasley, who is probably shivering under a desk somewhere, because he has an ounce of sense!"

“Wait,” said Susan. “I feel really bad now, attacking the troll. I didn’t think it would just sit down and start crying. At least let me heal it.”

“Very well, Susan.”

She finally dropped *Lubricate* and cast *Healing* a few times until the troll looked better.

“Please apologize for us, Rubeus. We did just rush down here without thinking, and it is a troll, you know.”

“Ah, he’s already forgotten, don’t you worry your pretty little head. Now go on with you.”

“That was really, really, weird,” said Hermione.

“You want to know what’s weird? Why was professor Quirrell all beat up if that troll wasn’t interested in attacking whatever it saw in the castle?” asked Susan.

“How did it get in the castle?” asked Harry.

“I can answer that,” said Susan. “Remember that package professor Snape picked up that day? It’s still here, in the castle. It’s guarded by stuff, and you heard professor Quirrell. He said it ‘got loose somehow’ so I bet that creature is one of the guardians. He probably got bored, wandered away from his post and couldn’t get back. Of course if Quirrell was after the object and it chased him away... But that’s a scary thought.”

“How do you know about it?” asked Hermione.

“Headmaster Dumbledore had me create an additional protection for it with my kind of magic.”

“Smart,” said Hermione.

“What is it?” asked Harry.

“He just called it ‘the object’ and said he could tell me because my magic could already make someone immortal. So it must have something to do with that.”

“Immortality, huh? I’ll have to go to the library.”

Susan was about to say “Who cares what it is?” but then her *curiosity* kicked in again. “I’ll join you. After we find Ron.”

“Yeah, where is that guy?” asked Harry.

Preparing for the Holidays

Time: About half an hour later

Place: A quiet corner of the castle

“There you are, Ron!” said Harry, coming up behind Ron, who jumped.

“What are you- You’re hurt!” said Hermione, pushing Harry out of the way and bending down to look at Ron’s leg. He had been rather unsuccessfully trying to bandage it, and there was a lot of blood on the floor around him. “You’re really badly hurt!”

“It’s nothing,” said Ron, trying to pull his pant leg down again.

“Nothing? You’re bleeding! What happened?”

Susan looked Ron over with a *First Aid* check of 15. He was pale and shaky, obviously he had lost a lot of blood. Also, the wound was obviously done by an *Edged* type weapon rather than *Blunt*. Almost like giant claws...

“That can wait,” she said smartly. “Let the person with actual healing magic through, please,” she said, giving Hermione a gentle shove. “This won’t help with the blood loss, but at least I can heal you up,” she said.

She started casting.

It took two castings, but the wound closed up before their eyes, and Ron visibly relaxed.

“Now let’s take care of the mess,” said Sparkle, casting *Hygiene*.

“And the clothes,” said Susan, casting *Repair*.

“Now you can interrogate him,” Susan said, stepping away.

“Thank you,” said Hermione. “Well?”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Let me guess,” said Hermione. “You saw the troll, panicked, and ran. You tripped over something and cut your leg up. The troll smashed the potions room up while you went and bravely ran away, away.”

“Troll? I mean, yeah, what else could have happened?”

“Why did you hide?” asked Harry. “We had to have Susan bust out her *Descry Creature* spell again. You know how long that spell takes to cast from writings? Ten minutes!”

“Sorry! I didn’t want to go to the nurse’s office because I knew it would get out that... I... was scared of the troll.”

“That’s a weird reason,” remarked Hermione.

“Maybe it’s a boy thing?” said Susan.

“I get enough of it from Draco for who my family is, I don’t need to give him any more things to tease me about.”

“Boy thing,” said Hermione. Susan nodded. “Next time, silly boy, just go find Susan. You must have known she knew healing magic.”

“Just leave me alone.”

“Okay, fine, just trying to be a friend and everything. Sorry. Come on, Susan.” She pulled Susan down the hall again. “Oh,” she shouted back, “If I had just been saved from *dying* by a friend of mine, I would have said *thank you!* But that’s just me.” She stalked off, and Susan trailed behind her.

“Honestly, that boy,” said Hermione.

“Something odd about that wound,” said Sparkle. “I’m not sure I buy his story, but what else can we do?”

“There’s always the *Detect lies spell*,” said Susan. “But using that against a friend? I don’t know. Something’s odd, but I can’t imagine why he would...”

“Would what?” asked Hermione, concerned.

Susan shook her head. “No, it’s impossible. Never mind.”

“Okay.”

A few weeks later the whole incident had blown over, and Professor Quirrell was healed up. He couldn’t explain the difference in how the troll acted between when he saw it and when they saw it, and they let the matter drop. Susan and Hermione still thought it was odd, but odd stuff happened around the castle all the time. Soon it was time to see Harry play his first game of Quidditch as the team Seeker. Harry had wanted some “Susan Magic” to help, but Hermione said that wouldn’t be fair.

“Fair?” said Harry, trying to imitate professor Quirrell. “Fair? No, not getting it.”

“Then think of it as practice,” Hermione said, throwing Quirrell back at him. “You’re up against opponents who are better than you. What do you do? Evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, discard what doesn’t work, and get stronger.”

“I guess you’re right.”

“I usually am.”

“So explain this game to me again?” Susan said to Ron.

“You didn’t read about it?” said Hermione, shocked.

“Oh, I did. I still don’t get it. A sport where the balls *actually attack* the players? When they are flying *through the air* on a stick of wood and any fall will be lethal? The ground doesn’t even have some kind of spell on it to catch people who fall, and the whole thing ends when one player catches one ball. How does that make sense?”

“You aren’t knocking Quidditch, are you?” asked Ron.

“With the entirety of the magical spectrum to draw from, this is the game wizards chose to throw their passions behind?”

“What’s wrong with it?”

“You mean besides all the stuff I just mentioned? This game could go on for days or be over in ten seconds depending on the fickle nature of a flying ball. The work the other players do is totally worthless because the ending points are so high. *There is no actual magic involved!*”

“You mean like spell-casting? Because flying about seems like magic to me.”

“Yes, exactly like spell-casting. You are wizards, and this was the best you could come up with? I just hope it’s better than baseball, that game puts me to sleep.”

“Oh, you’ll see.”

Rubeus came to join them, making Ron and Hermione squish together to fit him. They both looked away from each other. Every time either side scored, Susan just shook her head, because it didn’t matter. It was like all the other players were just there as a distraction, while people waited for the two Seekers to head after the tiny ball. It was like a race, only with some uninteresting stuff going on in the beginning and middle. Then the end came in two seconds flat, at random.

“What is Harry doing with his broom?” asked Rubeus. “Looks like he’s about to be shaken off!”

“What?” said Susan, looking where he was. Harry did seem to be having trouble, his broomstick jerking back and forth like it was out of control.

“Where is he?” said Hermione, grabbing the binoculars from Rubeus and scanning the crowd. “All the way over there?” she moaned. “Can your magic reach that far?” She handed them over to Susan.

“Who am I looking- Snape.”

“Yes, look what he’s doing!”

“Muttering, perhaps casting a spell? Crap!” *What spells do I know that can help? Barrier Against Spells is touch, so is Flight, darn it!*

“Do something!” said Hermione. “It’s too far to go over and stop him, he’ll fall any second.”

“I’m thinking!” *Wait a minute... too far? “That’s it!”*

Susan focused on Professor Snape, and started thinking about symbols. Before her a circle appeared, and she put a bit of energy into the spell of “*Retrieval!*”

She was rewarded with Professor Snape’s robes fluttering down in front of her, making him stand up in surprise and shock as he found himself nearly naked in a stand full of people. Naturally, everyone turned to look, and Susan watched him mouth her name, then stalk off towards the exit. Susan swung the binoculars over to Harry again and was relieved to see him climbing back on his broom. It seemed to be under his control again, and she handed the binoculars back to Rubeus.

“Is that what I think it is?” Ron said, trying to edge away from the robes.

“What *do* you think it is, Ron?” Susan asked sweetly, trying not to laugh hysterically. Oh, Snape was going to kill her, that was certain, but it was so worth it.

“I think it’s what saved Harry’s life just now,” said Hermione. “Well done.”

“A use that spell was never intended for, I’m sure. Still, it did prove effective.”

“He’s going to murder you!” said Ron, looking at her with horror.

“Oh, I don’t think so. Because I’m going straight to Headmaster Dumbledore after this to tell him what happened. And I’ll send the good professor back his robe right now.”

She got her book out from her *Pocket Dimension* and started reviewing *Send Object*, which returned the robe several minutes later, just as Harry was coughing up the golden ball.

“Well,” Susan said, snapping her book closed. “I have to admit, Ron, the game does have a certain appeal.”

“You’re crazy.”

“Maybe. Come on, let’s go.”

Susan made her way through the crowd, but not before casting *Barrier Against Magic* on herself. *If never pays to be too careful*, she thought.

“And you say he was trying to kill Harry?” asked Albus seriously.

“Hermione?” said Susan, turning to her.

“Yes Headmaster. He was using some kind of spell. I saw him looking straight at Harry the whole time, and he was muttering to himself as the broomstick went out of control. Exactly as I’ve read about.”

“I see. So you, Susan, stopped him?”

“Yes, it was the first thing that popped into my mind that wasn’t a touch spell and could reach across the distance between us. Even setting him on fire with *Combust* at maximum energy wouldn’t have worked. He was just too far away.”

“This is a very serious accusation-” Albus started, when his door burst open and Severus stormed in.

“Albus I insist that girl be expelled imm- YOU!”

“Me,” said Susan. “I’m surprised you’re still here after what you pulled.”

“Insolent girl, you have the gall to sit there, after humiliating me in the stands-”

“Severus,” said Albus, steel in his voice. “These children have just come to me with a very serious allegation concerning you. I would like to hear your side of it.”

“You know full well I mean the boy no harm. I was trying to protect him!”

“Strange, how that spell that was messing up Harry’s broomstick ended the minute you got up and walked off. Coincidence, you would argue?”

“Yes.”

“I see,” she said, turning back to the Headmaster. “And so it’s his word against ours. We know someone tried to kill Harry or myself the night we arrived. Both Severus-”

“Professor Snape,” corrected Albus.

“Excuse me, *Professor* Snape and *Professor* Quirrell were late to the feast that night. *Professor* Snape has been nothing but rude and unjust to both Harry and myself. *Professor* Quirrell on the other hand treats us both well. Which is the more likely murder suspect, I might ask?”

Severus was gritting his teeth.

“I trust Severus over all others,” said Albus. “Though I cannot explain to you why. If he says he was not out to harm Harry then I believe him. We will have to look elsewhere for answers to this puzzle, I’m afraid.”

“And the girl?”

“I’m sitting right here, and my name IS SUSAN.”

“I must agree, if you are still holding a grudge because of the wand incident...”

“She is reckless with her magic. She knows and can learn spells that we can’t counter or even understand. She is dangerous! You must see that!”

Albus looked over at her, studying her for a time. She didn’t lower her gaze. “She does not strike me as reckless,” he said at last. “She knows her magic, and she knows her limits. Possibly better than any of us do, given this strange ‘character sheet’ she can pull from nowhere. I admit her magic is astonishing, but thus far it has only done good. The Longbottom family would drop to its knees in thanks if I were to tell them this young child solved all of their problems. But she wishes no credit, no glory. She studies Herbology and History of Magic with a similar diligence to other students though she has no use for them. She has taken it upon herself to study the differences in our magic, that perhaps one day others like her might be found, or that our spells might be adapted. Reckless? No, I think not.

“She saw her friend was in trouble, and she reacted. One might almost think her a Gryffindor. That action, it must be argued, did save her friend’s life. No matter how it happened, I think she can be excused for her... exuberance and unconventional thinking. You yourself did say something was wrong with Harry’s broom, after all.”

“Fine. I can see you are entranced with this girl. Nothing I say will make any difference. She is not to set foot in my potions class again, is that clear?”

Albus sighed. “If that is your wish, Severus.”

“It is. And mark this well, girl. You do not have a wand to break, but if it were up to me, I would not rest until I found a way to strip you of your magic, permanently.”

Susan stared into his eyes, then began to laugh.

“You find that amusing?”

“I find you amusing. My magic could do it quite easily, actually. I admit, *Destroy Magic* is a grade ten spell, the most difficult I can cast, but possible. You want me to stay away from you? Fine. Stay away from Harry, or you might wake up one day to find your magic gone-forever.”

“You see what I mean?” he said to Albus.

“You threatened her with the same, I see no difference.”

“She’s a child!”

“And you are an adult!” Albus said, rising from his chair with a look of fury on his face. “You should know better. Now get out of my office!”

Severus paled, then turned and stalked out.

“As for you-”

“Yes?” said Susan, matching his stare. He took a deep breath, lowering himself to his chair again. Hermione was pressed back against hers, and Ron had somehow gotten behind his, and was peeking out from behind it.

“There was only one person that could stare me down,” he said quietly, rubbing his forehead. “And in the end I couldn’t beat him, either. I just hope your magic takes you down a different path than his did.”

“So is that it? What about the attempt on Harry’s life? And the one from before? Is he not safe here?”

“He is as safe as I can make him,” sighed Albus. “I wonder if that will prove to be inadequate?”

“I hope not. Harry is my friend, and woe to any who would hurt him.”

Albus looked at her a moment. “I believe you. I will look into the matter further, but I suggest you do not attend potions class anymore.”

“Unacceptable,” said Susan. “He will then turn his full attention on Harry. At least with me there, there’s two of us he hates, so he goes back and forth between us. Without me to act as a buffer, I’m afraid Harry will suffer for it.”

“Hufflepuff as well?” he chuckled quietly. “And you stood up to Severus, so there we find Slytherin. The hat must have had a hard time placing you.” He gestured to the hat, sitting upon a shelf by the wall.

“I did,” it replied. “That I did. She actually choose, in the end. I simply announced the choice.”

“In any case, I’ll see what I can do.”

“Thank you.”

There was a long pause.

“Can you really do it? Strip the magic out of someone so they can no longer cast spells?”

“Oh, yes. I could stop all magic from working in this entire castle, given a few days. One small man would be no problem at all.”

“I see. I am glad, then, that you turn your talents to healing and protecting, and not to these more, shall we say, darker arts.”

“Is there anything else, Headmaster?”

“No. Thank you for bringing this to my attention. It seems events swirl around Harry Potter even now. He is lucky to have such an ally at his side.”

“I’m there to stay, Headmaster. Have a pleasant evening.”

They filed out.

“I’m really glad you’re on our side,” said Ron, looking at her with new respect. “Making Snape back off? Staring down *Dumbledore*? You are crazy!”

“It’s my *Overconfident* weakness and my 10 RESolve, I’m afraid. I just can’t seem to back down from a challenge.”

“There you guys are,” said Harry, walking up to them. “I had to slip away from my own party to try and find you. Are you coming back from the Headmaster’s office?”

“Oh yeah, we won!” said Ron. “It totally slipped my mind with one of my friends going insane.”

“Something I should know about?”

“I won’t be coming to potions anymore, Harry. I want you to tell me if Snape is more mean to you than normal, okay?”

“Uh, okay? Why?”

“That’s a long story. Let’s go back to this party of yours and I’ll tell you all about it.”

Things went back to some sense of normalcy after that, Susan now spending the time she would have spent in potions class making *Imbued* objects for her friends. She got her ingredients from Albus, but in exchange she had to tell him what she was making- he didn’t want dangerous magical items loose in his castle, after all. She stretched the *Imbuing* rules to the breaking point, as the person she was making the item for had to be “present throughout the *Imbuing*,” which they were, technically. They were in the castle, weren’t they? Of course by that logic they were on the planet, and she wondered if she could make something for her mother that way too, but didn’t want to push it.

Susan was going to go home for Christmas, and have Harry over too (as she figured the Dursley’s didn’t want to see him) but then it turned out Ron wasn’t going home either. So she just decided to teleport herself back home on Christmas day, but spend the rest of the time at the castle. This also allowed her to leave her gifts for Harry and Ron, just in case they hadn’t gotten her anything. After all, Harry was penniless now, and Ron, well, his family might actually be in debt. Best to avoid any awkwardness, she thought.

Hermione’s gift she sent via *Send Object* on Christmas morning, smiling. She hadn’t actually included any instructions, so she doubted Hermione would figure it out, but that was okay. It was like two gifts that way.

“Morning fellows,” she said good-naturedly, coming up the stairs to the Gryffindor common room. “Merry Christmas!”

“Merry Christmas,” they both replied, surrounded by wrapping paper.

“Nice sweaters. They look like +3 resistance to cold, if you ask me.”

“Very funny,” said Ron. “Thanks for the... what is it?” he asked, holding up his present. It looked like a key-chain with a cornucopia at the end of it. Harry held up his, which was similar, but a shield.

“That,” she answered, a twinkle in her eye, “is a very special object. As is Harry’s. Come on, I’ll show you how it works.”

She cleared off the table with a sweep of her arm. “Put it there on the table, but keep touching it.”

“Okay,” said Ron, confused.

“Now say ‘food’.”

“Food.” said Ron.

A magical circle shot out and glowed, and when it was gone, there was a pile of food on the table. It was simple fare, just bread, cheese, dried meat, but she had learned wandless magic couldn’t create food for some reason. Her magic had no problem with doing so, and she thought Ron would appreciate it.

“Wow!” said Ron, reaching out to touch it.

“Nice huh? It’s totally real, try some.”

He picked up a hunk of cheese and bit into it. “It’s okay.”

“Yeah, it’s kind of bland, I admit. But you’ll never have to worry about going hungry, anyway.”

“Thanks, this is great!”

“There’s some limitations.”

His face fell. “Oh?”

“It costs you some energy to activate, and I have no idea how much you have, because apparently you don’t have a character sheet. But from what I’ve observed, you have an average RESolve and ENDurance, so you should probably be able to activate it eight times a day. Of course you can always pass it to someone else if you’re feeding an army, the magic doesn’t care who does it. Also, the food will only last twenty four hours. Then it just sort of evaporates. That’s about it!”

“Oh, that’s not so bad. Thanks.”

“You’re welcome. Now for Harry’s.”

He held up his shield. “I wanted something flashy for you too, but I looked and looked at my spell-book and kept coming back to that. It’s the same thing as Ron’s, a spell in solid form, basically. The one that Sparkle used to save my life the first night here. Your trigger word is shield.”

“Does it have the same limitations?”

“Yes. It costs energy, but a third of what Ron’s costs. You have to see the attack coming and activate it, it’s not automatic. And it won’t do any good against anything you couldn’t knock away with a shield. But it’ll keep most spells from hitting you that I can see, so I figured it had to be that.”

“Thank you. You made these the same way as that dragon, didn’t you? That stone sculpting spell?”

She nodded.

“I don’t deserve a friend as good as you.”

“Bah, none of that.”

“Show her what you got,” said Ron.

“Oh yeah, look at this!”

Harry pulled a cloak from under a sweater. "Watch this!" He swirled it around his shoulders and disappeared.

"Huh." said Susan. "Looks like my gift was outclassed after all."

His head reappeared. "Don't say that. Look how bulky this is compared to what you made."

"True, I could make anything make you invisible, it wouldn't need to be a cloak. Can I see it?"

"Sure," he said, handing it over. The cloth became visible again, and she felt the fabric between her fingers. "What is this actually made of?"

Both boys shrugged.

"I don't dare do a *Magic Sense* on it, with all the magic that floats around this castle. But it seems well made. Who gave it to you?"

"We don't know," said Harry. "There was a strange note, but that's it. It's not signed."

"And really, why should it be?"

At that moment the rest of the Weasley family came in, wearing similar sweaters to what the boys had received.

"Morning Fred, morning George."

"Where'd the food come from?" said Fred (or George), grabbing a loaf and tearing a hunk off with his teeth. "Did you guys learn how to get into the kitchens already?"

"Would you believe... magic? Anyway, I'm off to see my mother, have fun today you guys!"

"Merry Christmas," said everyone.

Harry didn't bother too much with the cloak, that Susan could see. She said she was happy to make him invisible whenever he wanted. But if he did want to go exploring, to count her in. She also wanted to get it away from the castle sometime, so she could *magic sense* it properly. Items like this were rare in the wanded world, and she wanted to figure out why.

Soon Hermione came back, with a book on a key-chain and a puzzled look.

"Knowing you, it's more than what it seems," she said good naturally.

"What if I told you it was just a small key-chain with a book on the end?"

Her face fell a little.

"And then told you I was lying?"

"Come on, out with it!" They both laughed. "Okay," said Susan. "Think about some topic you would like to research, okay?"

"Okay."

"Now, say the word, 'research' and hold out your other hand."

"*Research.*" She was shocked to see a book in her other hand appear, and started leafing through it.

"This is amazing!" she breathed. "And I can research anything with this?"

"I haven't found anything it can't provide information on. It won't answer questions, mind you, but it's like having a portable library at your disposal."

"This is wonderful," she said, hugging Susan.

"Glad you like it. I knew it would be perfect for you."

"Oh, it is, this is amazing. How do I turn it off though?"

"Just consider your research complete for the moment."

The book vanished.

“Amazing.”

“Just like the ones I made for the boys, this one takes energy, the most, actually. You’ll be able to do it a couple of times a day, at least, but keep that in mind. You could use it to death. If you feel tired after using it a couple of times, wait a few hours or the next day.”

“Okay, I’ll keep that in mind. Your magic is just so... fantastic.”

“Yeah, I learned a few things about it over the break when I went back home. I finally know where my magic comes from.”

“You do? Where?”

“Let’s go get Harry and I’ll tell you, I’d rather not repeat myself, it’s a pretty long story.”

Susan's Story

Time: Just after Christmas break

Place: The great hall

"You really found out where your magic comes from?" said Harry. "How?"

"My mother gave me a Christmas present, of sorts. She said I was old enough now to know the truth, and gave me a letter my father wrote me before he left."

"Left? You mean he's still alive?" asked Hermione. "I thought you said he was dead."

"I said my magic told me she was lying when she said he was dead, but that's not really the whole story. I'll just read you the letter, it'll be easier."

Susan got out a few sheets of paper and took a deep breath.

*My Dearest Daughter,*

*When you read these words I shall be far away from you, and for that I apologize. I know you have many questions, and hopefully this will answer them. To understand where your power comes from you must understand me, and to understand me you must learn why I journey.*

*It begins with my very world, which is not your own. I'm sure your book of spells has told you that other worlds exist, other timelines, other choices made by those around you. My world is very much like yours in form, but different in substance. We have both a high level of magic and technological power at our disposal, more than what your world seems to possess, as of yet. You may one day match us for technology, but I find the magic here strange. In any case, my world was imperiled. Not by dark magic, or the greed of man, but by some outside force. This force was draining the life out of my world, almost too slowly to notice. Every year the world around us got a little darker, the people a little less cheerful. Doing even the simplest of tasks became a little bit harder to justify. It was as though our entire world was just giving up. By the time we realized it, we feared it would be too late. Through a supreme effort my world created the Book of Magic and the Staff of Power. They selected their most powerful mage (that would be me) and presented these items to him, telling him to go forth and discover the cause of our world's fading.*

*Our magic had already told us the answer would be found on another world, and so I journeyed to a place quite unlike my home. Arriving there I was stuck by how colorful and bright the world was. For a moment the bright sun overhead blinded me, and I thought about how far gone my world really must be. I hastened to meet the "Lady Inari" who was said to be a powerful force for good, and who would further lead me to the answer. What I found was a white haired child full of mischief. She introduced me to those who would be my traveling companions, as it seemed other worlds were imperiled as well, each uniquely, but with a common thread for those who could travel it.*

*The first was what you might call a half-elf, complete with pointed ears. The second a youth with strange eyes I learned was a "breath stealer," someone who could live forever, as long as he could feed on the life energy of another. The third was an intelligent dog, who was a wizard not unlike myself. From that place we went on to have many adventures, and save many worlds.*

*Then I found your world, and met your mother.*

*I had always tried to maintain a distance between myself and those I met, because I knew my presence there was only temporary. But your mother was somehow different. I won't tell you of the great shadow that nearly covered your world, it is unimportant. Know that during my time here your mother and I fell in love.*

*It is hard to speak ill of that union when the result was your life, but I was foolish. All too soon the danger was past, and I had to move on. I had not yet found the answer to the shadow that covered my world, and reluctantly left her side. Of course I promised to return when my task was ended, but we both knew I belonged on my world, and she on hers. I did however give her a way to contact me, one time only, should some emergency arise.*

*What she called me about was not exactly what I expected.  
She was pregnant, with you.*

*This caused me a dilemma. There would be no one to explain to you how you knew, more accurately, about yourself through your character sheet. None in my travels seemed to possess this ability, it seems unique to my world where we Paragon existed. All indications were that you would be a powerful wizard such as myself, but you would have no way to learn magic. None from this world could teach you, after all. With some reluctance I petitioned Lady Inari to allow me to return to your world to rectify at least part of this problem. With Inari's help I gave up a portion of my soul to strengthen the Book of Magic, allowing it to create spells for you by itself, should you need them. (I learned the Staff of Power was created in a similar way, to my surprise.) Then I left it in your mother's care until you should show signs of needing it. Do not worry that I am left without my Resources Background, Inari was kind enough to make me a duplicate of it which is not as sturdy or nice looking, but which I can continue to get spells from.*

*Ah, my daughter. Never have I held you in my arms, or even seen your face. Yet I love you still. Know that you come from a long line of powerful wizards who have dedicated their lives to using their powers for good. Know that the Book of Magic has a part of me inside it, a part that will always be near you. Know that you are unique in this world and your magic can be the stuff of legends. But know this too, the Book was created with the hope of a world inside it. Every time you learn a spell from it, every time you cast a spell from its pages, know that it may be the last remnant of my world. Know that you may be the last child of my world ever born.*

*If I have not returned by the time you read this, I may have fallen. Or my world has fallen. Or Inari has forbidden me travel back to your world a third time. Perhaps one day you will learn such magics to answer that question, if you wish to. I do not regret my appointment to this task. I have seen many wonders, and spoken to many creatures, like dragons and aliens from worlds within the same universe as the world I saved. I would not have traded it, or you, for anything.*

*I am certain you are a daughter to be proud of. Study and perfect your magic. Should you choose to have children, perhaps in seven generations the world will have two different kinds of wizards that call it home. All that can be traced back to you- the child of a world now passed into legend, consumed by Darkness. But from that darkness a child of light.*

*Good luck, my daughter. My thoughts are with you.*

*Love always,  
Elysian Tarsisis*

Susan wiped a tear from her eye. “So there you have it. That’s why I’m so different, my father came from another world. It’s why I seem to follow different physical laws than you, like having a *Combat Delay* and a *Health Level*. My mother also explained why, growing up, she didn’t like to see my character sheet. It reminded her of my father, who she would probably never see again. She even threw out his picture, it was too painful for her. Also my father brought the kitten Sparkle with him, who he had rescued in his travels but really couldn’t take care of.”

The three sat, stunned. They hadn’t expected this.

“But I know my legacy now, and why I can’t turn away from evil when I see it. My father was Elysian Tarsisis, and I am proud of his courage. He left his whole world behind to try and save them, I can do no less. It’s like he said: every spell I cast carries the hope of his world inside it.”

“Thank you for telling us,” said Hermione softly.

“I thought, as my friends, you had the right to know. I’ll be telling the Headmaster as well, I’m sure it will take a weight off his mind that an army of wizards armed with *Destroy Magic* is not about to descend on this world and enslave the wizard population.”

“That was some story,” said Ron. “Can you even imagine it? Leaving your world, traveling to other ones with a bunch of people you don’t even know, but who hold your survival in your hands? What stories he would be able to tell, I wonder?”

“Yeah, he only hits at it in the letter. Talking to dragons! Dragons here are just animals, can you imagine them being smart enough to talk?” asked Harry.

“If you ever want to, you know, talk about it,” said Hermione, laying a hand on Susan’s arm. “I’m here. You know that, right?”

Susan smiled. “Thanks.”

It was now some time later, and classes had started up again. Susan was watching the sparing practice the Defense class was doing when a sudden thought struck her. “You know, professor,” she remarked, turning to Quirinus, “we never did have our little sparing match.”

“You were serious about that?” His eyes widened a bit.

“Of course. I don’t know much offensive magic, but if you’ll allow Sparkle to support me, I might be okay. After all, I’m just a helpless first year student, you wouldn’t want it to be too one sided, would you?” She batted her eyelashes at him. “And I do want to see how a pro fights. If I’m going to help Harry hold off Death Eaters, I need to be prepared.”

“A wise precaution! Very well. I’ll enchant up some new barrier posts and we can do it at the end of this week. How does that sound?”

“Perfect.”

It turned out news of this event had spread, so many older kids with no classes at the time came to watch. The field had been made into a circle, but still had four pillars with glowing orbs atop them around the edge. They were a different color, and Professor Quirrell, who Susan noticed was acting a little strange, explained what they were all about.

“These will create a magical barrier, so any spells that go wide will dissipate harmlessly. I do take it you want to fight me at my full strength?”

“Of course, there’s no point otherwise.”

His eyes seem to twinkle. “Excellent.”

Both “teams” entered the circle and Quirinus activated the pillars, which caused a slight shimmering in the air around the circle. Neither had their wands out, which Susan was counting on to give her a slight edge, as she wouldn’t need to draw hers. She was going to, so that should could keep up appearances, but not right away. As with his exercises in class, the bell would ring at some random point in the next two minutes, signaling they should begin. The match was over when one couldn’t fight anymore. She had checked on the way down and found cards on her sheet again, which she hoped she didn’t need. This time she turned in *Endless Ammo* with disgust. *Why does that card keep popping up, anyway?* Sparkle turned in her *Skill* card. *Weird, another one that’s popped up twice.*

All three waited for the bell, and a hush descended upon the crowd.

\*DING\*

“Declare, card 30!” shouted Susan, taking a meta-action to use her card of *Power Overwhelming*. She could now spend as much energy as she wanted per action, just in case. Sparkle checked her *Initiative* against Susan’s and found she actually went second, and said “Declare, card 39.” Time seemed to stop as Sparkle cast *Acceleration* on them both instantly, negating Susan’s higher *Initiative* roll. She rolled exactly an eleven after spending max energy, then rolled *Energy Boost* for free, gaining 3 back. Her delay was now a 2, so she went up to a 3. Maintaining that spell put her at a -2 to all actions.

Susan, knowing the difficulty of the spell she was about to cast and unsure if Professor Quirrell had *Quick Draw*, used 16 energy to instantly cast *Barrier Against Spells* on herself, rolling more than enough and now taking a -3 to all actions. She wasn’t worried. Her delay went up by 2, and she also rolled *Energy Boost* to get 2 energy back.

All three now acted at the same time, so Susan went for her wand at the same time Quirinus did. She had asked Sparkle to support her and not act for a bit, she wanted to see what he would do before they blew him away. Quirinus did indeed have *Quick Draw*, and used it now, pulling his wand. He did not attack instantly, but got his wand into position.

*Who needs skill when you have Acceleration on?* Susan thought to herself, also doing a *Quick Draw*, but untrained. With her +10 bonus to REFlex based skills, she got max, a 19, and had her wand in her hand with no additional delay. She held her action, but did hold up a hand dramatically.

Quirinus attacked, seemingly without mercy, a red bolt of energy sizzling out of his wand and striking Susan. *Accelerated* to the level that she was, it moved slowly enough for her to get her hand into position. The bolt struck her and harmlessly dissipated. There was a gasp from everyone outside the barrier.

Susan now struck, calling out “*Elemental Attack (Fire)*” and rolling a 10 total. Quirinus saw a bolt of fire now heading for him, and waved his wand, shooting out a stream of water. The water and fire met, and annihilated each other. Susan grinned, but Quirinus seemed to scowl.

*Weird, I thought he would enjoy this more. Let’s see what he does next.*

He again shot the red bolt of energy out of his wand, which Susan figured she would allow to miss her, this time, and made a dodge check. She got a 16 with her -3, and easily dodged, the spell slamming into the magical barrier surrounding them. It crackled and sparked, and the people near it pulled back, alarmed.

She cast *Elemental Attack* again, but this time Quirinus waved his wand and sent it flying back at her, again harmlessly dissipating.

*Good idea, but I'm immune to my own magic now as well. Let's see what you do with this?*

"*Dazzle!*" she shouted, branding her wand dramatically. Lights appeared around Quirinus' face, but Susan had rolled minimum so he was able to shake it off.

He had the initiative, so he struck out with ropes this time, making them appear around Susan and go to grab her. She rolled a dodge, jumping up out of them, getting a 21, and easily slipping out of them. She made a *Gymnastics* check, and spent 4 energy, getting a 15, and easily rolled to her feet again with a reactive action, putting her delay up by a total of 3.

Several people clapped.

*I'm running out of different things to do, better end this with a "Lubricate!"* she cast, targeting Quirinus' wand. She didn't instantly cast it this time, instead taking the normal 2 delay, meaning his next spell went off at exactly the same time, or at least he tried to. Just in case he held onto it (she got a 13 on her check) she cast *Elemental Conjunction (water)* around his head, so as he tried to cast, he found himself unable to breathe. Two and half gallons of water appeared and started falling, but Quirinus was casting on the same action and tried to jerk away from the water that had appeared around him. His wand hand jerked as well, sending whatever spell he was casting wild, where it again crashed into the magical barrier around the field.

His wand left his hand and flew in an arc away from them both, landing in the grass some distance away. Susan lowered her wand.

"Guess I win," she said brightly, but noticed only her spell of *Lubricate*, which she wanted to maintain "until he lost his wand" had gone away, while her *Barrier against Spells* had remained on. *This fight isn't over according to my magic.*

"You haven't won yet. If I can't use magic I'll just have to do things the old fashioned way." He fanned his robes and Susan saw a knife hanging there. Quirinus couldn't go for it yet, he had just used a free action to speak, Susan still had the initiative.

"Knife!" she shouted to Sparkle, dispelling her *Barrier against Spells* as a reactive action. Sparkle saw the magical energies dissipate and knew what Susan wanted.

Susan struck a dramatic pose, hands pressed together as they both shouted "*Armor of Magic!*"

With her penalties she rolled only one more the she needed (casting it instantly and maintaining *Acceleration*) but magical energy surrounded Susan, momentarily taking the form of a suit of armor before becoming invisible again. However, that was Sparkle's action, not Susan's, she had merely used a free action to speak a few words, not cast a spell, and now used her action to cast "*Creation!*" as she held up a hand, dropping her wand.

Of course, she had to spend 25 energy to make sure it went off because *Creation* usually took 15 turns, but a glittering sword dropped into her waiting hand from thin air. There were gasps of surprise behind her.

*Oh yeah! Gaze upon the last daughter of Paragon, oh mortals, and tremble. I really wish someone had been video taping all this...*

With *Acceleration* still up, she saw Quirinus' hand going for the knife, and knew she still had time to cast "*Augment Skill*" on herself, taking the full time. She immediately knew how to use the sword she had just created with a skill of 8. Quirinus used *Quick Draw* again, this time not doing quite as well, and now had his knife his hand. His eyes blazed.

"Mine's bigger," said Susan, giving it an experimental twirl and holding her action. Quirinus started spiriting towards her.

Susan mentally checked her energy level, which was still a respectable 28, even after all that. *Thank you Energy Boost* she silently thought, dropping to a guard position.

The two clashed, Susan rolling a 9 (ugh) but Quirinus didn't seem too good with the dagger (*That makes sense, how often does he go around stabbing people?*) so Susan parried him. She didn't actually want to hurt her professor so she held her action again to see what he would do.

Suddenly a voice rang out over the field. "Stop this fight at once!" Susan looked over to see Headmaster Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall striding towards them, wands at the ready. Fawkes was on the Headmaster's shoulder.

"It's okay," she shouted. "We're just giving them a show."

Distracted, she didn't notice Quirinus make one last attempt at stabbing her in the gut, which harmlessly scraped off her *Armor of Magic*.

"Professor, what-" she started to ask, but Quirinus made a break for it, grabbing his wand and plunging through the magical barrier. He shouted something about a broom and from behind a tree a broomstick zipped out towards him, which he jumped onto and flew away.

"Oh dear, we'll never catch him now," said Minerva, running over to Susan. "Are you hurt, dear?"

"He didn't touch me. What's going on? I could catch him if you wanted. It was just an exercise, he meant no harm."

"I fear that was not who you thought," said Albus seriously. "A student found the real professor Quirrell knocked out in his office and ran to tell me. Knowing you were supposed to be performing your dual at this time, naturally I hurried here."

"Snape!" said Susan. "Headmaster, we must search for professor Snape at once."

"I wish I didn't agree with you," he replied. "Let us away to the dungeons immediately."

Susan grabbed his sleeve, and they became fire, appearing in the potions classroom.

Where Severus Snape looked up from his desk, as the potion making went on around his classroom.

"Never mind," said Susan angrily.

"I thought I said I didn't want to see her back in this classroom, Headmaster," said Severus, standing up.

"I apologize, but Susan's life was in danger a moment ago so I had to be sure."

"I'm glad your faith in me has not eroded to the point where I am made your first suspect in every attempt on Susan's life. Or wait, was I, in fact, your first suspect?"

"I had to *know*," said Albus. "I will leave you to your class."

"Thank you," he said, sitting down.

"To the field again, Fawkes."

Once again they were fire.

They did not see Severus take a swig of liquid from the flask at his hip.

Everyone was milling around, as Minerva was getting the story about what happened for the 6 or so seconds that the combat between Fake Quirrell and Susan went on for. Everyone couldn't agree on exactly what they had just witnessed, apart from Susan taking repeated bolts of destructive magic like it was nothing and handling professor Quirrell like he was a third grader. Sound effects were often included in the description.

"Headmaster," said Minerva, seeing them arrive again. "I take it he was there?"

He nodded. "It seems our would be killer has struck again, once more hiding in the shadows where our eyes cannot see. Are you certain you are all right, Susan?"

"Not to worry, I was immune to everything he threw at me from the beginning, and my *Armor of Magic* stopped his tiny knife from getting near me."

"That sword of yours is impressive."

Susan looked down. "Oh, I totally forgot! I'm actually rather proud of myself, that usually takes about a minute to cast, and I just did it instantly. Of course, without that card... anyway, is Professor Quirrell, the real one, going to be all right?"

"Yes, he was not killed, simply knocked out. Fortunate that he was found, and that you were more than a match for your attacker."

"I know. I would have ended it much sooner if I knew I was actually fighting for my life just then."

Draco pushed through the crowd of people.

"Susan..." he trailed off.

"Draco?"

"I wanted to... apologize."

"What?" said Albus, Minerva and Susan simultaneously.

"I know, I know. Just, seeing you fight just then. That was, well it was beyond words, and I just wanted to say that you were okay in my book. That's all."

He turned and pushed past a stunned wall of students, back to where Crabbe and Goyle were standing.

"Will wonders never cease?" asked Minerva.

"I hope not," answered Albus. "If you are okay, I am going to watch the grounds for who comes back, that may give us a clue as to who our murderer is. For now, class is dismissed."

Harry, Ron and Hermione walked Susan back to the dorms so she could put her sword away. They were impressed, and Ron just kept making sound effects. "I thought Quidditch was exciting, but that was the most heart pounding ten seconds of my life!"

"Knock it off," said Hermione finally. "She knows how good she is."

"It'll be talked about for years, that battle," said Harry. "Maybe they'll stop talking about me for two minutes," he grumbled.

"Why don't you just put that in your pocket dimension?" asked Ron.

"This? Are you kidding? I'm hanging it on my wall, this little baby is a *trophy*. Maybe I'll even do some *Fabrication* on it, make it self healing and higher DTR. Have to learn *Augment STrength* first, though. Put a spell or two on it, you know, the works."

"What's it made of?" asked Hermione, touching it.

"Titanium, of course. I only have a 3 *STrength*, after all. So I wanted it to be light. That's why if I'm ever actually going to use it in a fight, and I very much doubt I am, making it

magically harder and sharper would be a must. And I've never actually *fabricated* anything before, so it might be fun to try. Especially if I can get someone else to pay the XP cost."

"I still don't know what half those words you used mean..." pouted Ron.

"Don't worry about it Ron, it's just my little idiosyncrasies. Let's go get something to eat, all that jumping around made me hungry."

"Now you're talking my language!"

"After that we'll go see how professor Quirrell is doing. You know, the real one?"

"Let's go!"

Wizard Blood

Time: Two days later

Place: The great hall

Two days later Susan was sitting and reading her book of magic in the great hall, alone. Her friends were off doing various things at the moment, and she was idly flipping through her book, wondering what spells her father had learned and used. Various people, who had seen or only heard about her magical duel with the fake Quirinus were more friendly to her, though some just walked a little further away.

Quirinus himself was doing fine, having received little more than a knock on the head. Not, she thought, out of some desire to hurt him as little as possible but rather to make sure the attack wasn't magically detected. Quirinus himself could give no description of his attacker, waking up with no memory of even that he had been knocked out. Also everyone seemed accounted for, so her attacker still ran free. It was troubling, but Susan wasn't going to hide in the face of danger!

She had decided to donate the titanium sword to the school, so Headmaster Dumbledore agreed to pay the "XP cost", whatever that meant for him. She had been working on it a few days, using the *Augment STrength* spell from writing. It just didn't seem worth it to spend the 5 XP to learn the spell herself when she was only going to need it for this activity. She also planned to imbue it with *Augment Skill (sword)* when she was done, so that whoever picked it up could use it better. She figured she would up the TR on the sword only by one, it was more important that it stay sharp and pristine than be able to cut rocks apart or whatever.

She was surprised, then, when Draco came over to her and asked if he could sit down. He was alone, Crabbe and Goyle nowhere to be seen. He seemed a little like a bike without training wheels; a bit uncertain.

"What's on your mind?" she asked.

"This may sound weird, but can you tell me about your family?"

Susan rolled her eyes. "I see. Slytherin house is wondering how a first year student overcame the guy teaching Defense, right? So you think, oh, she must have had really powerful magical parents. There's something I learned in life, Draco. Don't ask a question you don't want an honest answer to. So I'll tell you about my parents, that's no problem. But before I do, I have to know- are you sure you want to know? You might learn something you wish you hadn't."

"This isn't about my house, though people are wondering who your family is, because your name isn't one of the old wizard families, that's for sure. I wanted to know, myself."

"Really? It's odd timing, because I just found out myself, over winter break. My mother didn't want to talk about it, but she finally said I was old enough. You're certain you want to know?"

Draco nodded.

"Okay. My mother is a plain old non-magic user. As far as she knows, there's been no magic users in her family ever. My father, however, was special. I'm not sure how true it is, but he called himself the most powerful wizard in the... area he came from. Given what I've learned to do already, I am inclined to believe it."

"You're from a family that was half Muggle?"

She sighed. "Is that so hard to believe, Draco?"

“If you listen to the way my father talks, yes.”

“I see. It’s something I’ve wondered about myself, maybe it’s time to put it to the test.”

“What do you mean?”

She eyed him. “Are you sure you want to know?”

“Yes.”

“Okay. Go find me a seventh year student who has only one magical parent and meet me... out by where Rubeus lives.”

“What’s he got to do with this?”

“Directly? Nothing. But he does have a rock in front of his place I know is the correct size for the experiment I want to perform.”

“Oh. Fine, I’ll see you there.”

“Great!”

So Susan closed up her book and went to find some 7th year students she knew from fighting in her Defense class, and they agreed to help her perform an experiment. One boy named Matt, and one girl named Liz.

Once there, she got out her wand (for appearances sake) and lifted the statue she had made, to make sure it was movable.

“Right then!” she announced. “Draco, you don’t know anything about these two people, do you?”

He shook his head no.

“Great. We’re going to perform a little exercise. I want you all to use *Wingardium Leviosa* and see how high you can lift this rock. Then I’ll tell you all what this all means.”

So each person, in turn, lifted the rock. As she expected, they didn’t all get it up to the same height.

“Excellent!” she said, rubbing her hands together. “Of course this isn’t a large sample size and there could be more variables at work here, but it’ll do for now. Draco, based on your upbringing, which of these two people would you say had both parents as wizards, and which had neither?”

“I would say the one that got the statue up the highest was the pure blood wizard.”

“Okay, but neither of these two got it up the highest. That was Sam, remember? But of the two, you got it up the second highest Liz, are your parents both wizards?”

“No, neither of my parents is,” answered Liz.

“I see. What about you, Matt? You did the worst in our little game here, I’m sad to say.”

“I have two wizard parents,” said Matt.

“And Sam here, you got it up the highest, yes? You are half and half, yes? Draco didn’t lie about who he was looking for, or anything like that, right?”

“No, I’m half,” said Sam.

“Interesting,” said Susan. “What do we make of this result, Draco? Is it actually half wizards that are the most powerful? As I said, we would need more tests to be sure. But one thing we do know is that those like Matt here, with both parents being magical, are not universally stronger than others. That’s why I picked all seventh year students. Baring any *Talents* or *Ineptitudes*, they’ve all had the same amount of time to practice and so should be at the same magical strength. But we have seen they are not. That suggests that it really is practice, not who your parents were, that determine your strength as a wizard.”

“But to really know,” countered Draco, “you would have to carefully monitor a bunch of people from when they got their wands until they graduate. Tally up the number of hours each spent practicing, and which spells they practiced. If the results were all over the place, we could say it was some random factor we haven’t considered that determined strength in magic. If it was universally one or the other, like all half bloods were stronger, then we would know if it was blood or not. But if it was just hours of practice that made you stronger, well, then I would admit to being wrong.”

“I agree, we would need way more data than this to say one way or the other. I just thought it would be interesting to see the results. My theory is that, coming from a half wizard family, Sam here practiced the most to avoid anyone questioning his parentage. Liz has parents that don’t understand the magical world at all, and wouldn’t push her to succeed in that area, so she probably practiced second longest. Matt, thinking his two wizard parents made him superior practiced least. In any case, we can’t know for sure as you probably didn’t keep detailed notes on exactly how many hours you spent studying, just for fun?”

They all shook their heads.

“Kinda figured. It was a long shot, but who knows? Thanks for your time, you can all head back now.”

They left.

“So what you’re trying to tell me is that my father may have lied to me?” asked Draco.

“No, I’m trying to figure out what makes one wizard stronger than another. Not everything is about you, Draco. But it’s true that your father may have passed down an erroneous belief that he thinks is true. If I had any lesson here it would be to use your own eyes and make your own conclusions rather than accepting what others tell you as being absolute. Even if it’s your father.”

“What about you then? Why are you so much more powerful than even teachers?”

“I can’t tell you exactly, sorry. My ability with magic is something I inherited from my father, and let’s just say he wasn’t from around here.”

Draco gave her a questioning look.

“Susan!” a voice shouted, and both turned to look. Heading out from the castle were Harry, Ron and Hermione, who was waving to her.

“I’d better go,” said Draco. “But if it’s okay with you, I’d like to talk some more sometime. Maybe we can think up some more experiments to do?”

“That would be great!”

“Okay. Thanks, I guess. See you.”

Draco walked away as the others joined Susan.

“Was that who I think it was?” asked Ron.

“If you thought it was Harry Potter, you’re wrong, he’s standing right next to you.”

“You know who I mean!”

“I do? How did you know I spontaneously became a mind reader? Oh wait, I didn’t.”

“I’m talking about Draco!”

“Oh him. Yeah, it was. Is that a problem?”

“You were talking to Draco?”

“We were doing an experiment. Apparently a seventh year student with non-magical parents can lift a stone higher than one with both parents being magical. Who knew? I do, because I asked the question and then answered it.”

“That’s what you were doing out here?” asked Hermione.

“What did you think I was doing?”

“We had no idea,” said Harry. “We just got told you left with an older boy and girl after talking to Draco. We didn’t know what to think.”

“Well, thanks for coming to my rescue, or whatever.”

“Actually, we were coming to rescue them,” said Hermione.

“You say the nicest things.”

“Are they gone?” asked a voice from behind them all, and they looked up and to the right. Rubeus was standing over them.

“If you’re talking about Susan, Harry, Ron and Hermione,” said Susan, “no, we’re still right here.”

“Knock it off,” said Hermione. “Sometimes I think you’ve been taking lessons from Ron.”

“What are you doing, hanging around here, anyway?”

“I needed your dragon statue. It was the perfect size for my lifting experiment. Why?” asked Susan.

“You just shouldn’t be hanging around,” he answered nervously, glancing around.

“Spill it, Rubeus, what’s going on?” asked Harry. “You’re not usually what I would call ‘jumpy’.”

He looked down at them. “I guess as it’s you four there’s no harm. Come in and have a look.”

They went inside, Rubeus pulling the door tightly closed behind him. It was roasting hot in the tiny room, and there in the fire was a large black egg.

“No wonder you were so jumpy!” said Ron, looking it over. “I would be too, with a dragon egg in my kitchen. Is it, you know, fertile?”

“I think so,” answered Rubeus.

“I suppose it would have been a bit of a stretch to hope you were just fixing yourself a very expensive snack.”

“What’s the deal?” asked Elizabeth. “So it’s a dragon’s egg, who cares.”

“You know what hatches from these things? Dragons, that’s what!”

“Really? I never would have guessed.”

“The point is dragon breeding is illegal!”

“Well funnily enough, I haven’t seen any huge lizard like creatures around lately, have you? So unless he’s got them in his pocket, I’m pretty sure Rubeus hasn’t been breeding any dragons. Have you?”

“No, won the egg down at pub. Odd bloke, seemed glad to be rid of it, if you ask me.”

“The point being, is it illegal to hatch a dragon egg? To own a dragon? Or just to breed them?”

“I’m not really sure...”

“There you are then. This egg could have been produced by wild dragons, for all we know. I would question the wisdom of actually hatching the thing, of course.”

“Yes, he lives in a wooden house,” said Hermione.

“Are they all fire breathers then?” asked Susan.

“I actually have no idea,” she replied.

“You can’t really own a dragon,” said Ron. “They’re too wild.”

“A baby one wouldn’t make that much trouble, would it?” asked Harry.

They all looked over at the egg, then back at Rubeus.  
“I know what I’m doing!” he insisted.  
“I hope so,” said Susan quietly.

However, in the weeks that passed once the dragon hatched, it didn’t really seem that he did. The baby dragon grew quickly, from the size of a large lizard to the size of a newborn horse. This didn’t deter Rubeus, who continued to insist everything was fine.

The four had agreed to help him out of friendship (not pity) and while the dragon got along with them, especially Susan, he was still a baby dragon. They pleaded repeatedly with Rubeus to start thinking about where it was going to live, but he would have none of it. Because the dragon was on their mind, they didn’t pay much attention on Quirinus who, after recovering from the attack, started to look pale and worn out. He also started being late to class, or not around when people wanted to ask him questions, which did worry them a bit. However, they all had to rush off to dragon sitting in their free time, so they didn’t press the issue when he said he was fine.

It was during one of his classes that Ron suddenly stopped trying to tag his opponent and pointed, a horrified look on his face. Everyone turned to look, and there was the dragon, happily running towards the group.

“Oh, giggles,” said Harry.

“Yeah, that about covers it,” Susan replied, as a hundred pound of dragon bounded up to her and started licking her face. “At least he’s still in his happy-puppy stage.”

Of course, everyone else had pulled back when they saw a dragon running towards the field, Quirinus included.

“Not to worry,” sighed Susan. “He won’t hurt you, at least on purpose. It takes them a couple of months to start getting all grumpy and mean.”

Quirinus finally decided he should, as the responsible adult, take some action. “Why is there a baby dragon on my practice field?” He looked up as Rubeus, holding a broken leash, jogged up.

“Norbert! There you are. Went to see your friends, did you? Little guy got away from me, doesn’t know his own strength yet, I guess.”

“You were talking him for a walk?” shrieked Ron.

“He shouldn’t be all cooped up, now should he?”

“Rubeus...” said Hermione. “This isn’t good.”

Half an hour later, with Norbert staked outside Rubeus’s Hut, the four withered under the gaze of the headmaster. The fifth towered over him.

“At least no one was hurt,” said Albus looking the dragon over.

“Norbert wouldn’t hurt a soul!” Rubeus protested.

“It is not the soul, but rather the body of which I speak, Rubeus. Obviously we cannot allow a dragon to live near the school.”

“I know, Headmaster.”

“And you four, I assume you knew about this from the beginning?”

“I wonder that you did not,” said Susan, “as you seem to know most everything else that goes on around here.”

Albus’ eyes twinkled. “That’s not really the issue, is it? Why did you not tell me? Ron, you at the very least should know the dangers of dragons, am I not correct?”

“I’m-” Ron started.

“Hem-hem!” Susan interrupted. Albus raised an eyebrow as if to say “*Really? You’re channeling Umbrage now?*” Susan continued. “Rubeus, I seem to have forgotten. So silly of me, can’t imagine how it’s slipped my mind. What is your title again?”

“I’m Keeper of Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts?”

“That you are. Like I said, how dreadful for it to have slipped my mind. In other words you are the Gameskeeper, right?”

“Yeah.”

“In other words, in charge of animals around the castle, correct?”

“Yes.”

“Headmaster, if a student tried to hatch a dragon, then I’m assuming Rubeus here would be the one to turn to when that fact was discovered?”

“Yes, I think that’s probably correct,” said Albus thoughtfully.

“So if the person we would have gone to anyway is the one telling us that he has everything under control, can we really gainsay him?”

Albus chuckled. “Your logic never ceases to inspire me, young Susan. Very well, no points will be taken from your houses. The fact remains, however, that the dragon cannot stay. You must make other arrangements, Rubeus. Quickly.”

“I can’t just release him into the forest, but I have no idea where he should go.”

“Perhaps Ron can be of some assistance in this case?”

“You mean Charlie? Yeah, we could have him come and pick it up.”

“It’s settled then. Come Ron, an owl will take too long to reach him, we shall use the Floo network to speak to him directly.”

“All right. Be back in a bit,” he said the others, trailing behind Albus.

Albus led Ron away.

“Flu?” asked Susan.

“Don’t look at me, I’m not from the magical world,” said Harry.

“I always thought the name was rather silly. It’s a kind of teleportation web, activated through fireplaces,” said Hermione.

“Fireplaces? Finally, something sensible out of the wizard world. Hey, think Santa’s an immortal wizard and people just think he climbs down chimneys when he’s really just appearing in them?” asked Susan as Rubeus and Norbert played fetch with a branch.

Two nights later the dragon, having been crated up and levitated with *Telekinesis*, was taken up to the astronomy tower. Hagrid said he couldn’t bear to watch Norbert go, and had said his goodbyes beforehand. Susan didn’t mind, the less fuss the better, in her opinion. *Stupid astronomy*, she thought, waiting for Charlie to arrive on broomstick. Susan “hem-hem”ed over their various burns and took care of them with *Healing*, which the four that came to get Norbert exclaimed over. They loaded the crate up into a harness and said their goodbyes, and Norbert was gone for good.

“And good riddance,” said Ron. “Dragons are brutal, you know?”

“He seemed kind of cute, actually. Maybe I’ll make Rubeus a *Magical Ally: Major* imbuing that’s a dragon to make up for it.”

“That would be nice of you, but will you have time with exams coming up?” asked Hermione.

“I have a KNOWledge of 7 and an undetectable spell that makes me better at stuff. What do you think?”

“You would cheat?” Hermione seemed scandalized.

“Hermione, I can do magic. It’s part of my very soul. Using it to help pass a stupid exam in a subject I’ll never need again isn’t cheating, it’s inspired resource management. The resource being XP and time.”

She just shook her head.

As they came down the stairs, they saw Argus Filch, the caretaker, coming out of the darkness.

“Well, well, well,” he drawled. “We *are* in trouble.”

The four just looked at him.

“No we aren’t, Mr. Filch, it’s us. Headmaster Dumbledore has already given us permission to be up to send the dragon away. I’m pretty sure he mentioned it to you,” said Susan. “As you were right there when he said it.”

Argus’ face fell. “Oh, right. Off you go then.”

“Thank you.”

There was another meeting on the way back down to the dorms, and a rather unexpected one, at that. Quirinus was coming out of the forbidden corridor on the third floor. He spotted them and froze.

“Ah,” he said, seemingly at a loss for words.

“Checking on the troll?” asked Susan.

“You, uh, know about that?”

“We know about that?” asked Ron.

“Try to keep up Ron. The thing that’s being guarded under the trapdoor? That night of the troll attack, Professor Quirrell said it had gotten loose somehow, remember?”

*Though we never did figure out why he looked so beat up.*

“Right you are,” said Quirinus, seizing the topic a little too strongly in Susan’s mind. “I like to check on him at random times, keeps him guessing. I also bring him little treats now and then, keeps him appeased, sort of thing.”

“Sensible. Don’t want a repeat of Halloween, do we professor?”

“Quite right, though I’m sure I could count on you four, forgive me, five, I didn’t see you there Sparkle, to catch him again if that happened.”

“Not a problem.”

“So the headmaster told you about what was hidden down there, then?”

“Not what it was, exactly,” admitted Susan. “Just that it’s a small object that has some incredible magic power.”

“It does, at that. Still, why would he trust you with that knowledge?”

“Easy, I’m the one that made the final protection.”

“*You* made that-?!” Quirinus broke off, looking at her intently. “I mean, that’s amazing, that he would trust your magic so much. Not that anyone would get by my troll, of course. Well, it’s late, I should be going back to bed. See you all tomorrow.”

“See you professor,” cursed the four as he walked away.

“Okay, someone want to explain that little exchange?” asked Ron.

“It’s obvious,” said Hermione. “Professor Quirrell is trying to steal the object.”

Ron looked shocked.

“But I assume your protection will be sufficient?”

“That doesn’t even deserve an answer.”

“What is the final protection?” asked Harry.

“That’s easy. A *Pocket Dimension Imbuing* that will only function one more time. And only Headmaster Dumbledore knows the password to open it. Though I suppose if he were to die, the contents of his pocket dimension would be released. But I’m sure he’s got years left, so don’t worry about it.”

“But you can open those things, you do it all the time,” protested Ron.

“I can open my own, not someone else’s. Trust me Ron, that thing is as safe as a brick built pig house.”

“That’s from *The Tenth Kingdom!*” snorted Hermione.

“From what?”

“Don’t try to tell me you haven’t seen it, that was a direct quote. Good night!”

*Direct quote from what? I have no idea what she’s talking about. I made that up myself, just now. Weird.*

## Madman's Thinking

Time: Just after exams

Place: Ravenclaw Common Room

It was now weeks later. After the dragon incident everything was pretty quiet, and everyone was studying for exams. Draco had talked to Susan twice more about things, and had promised to keep his eyes open a little more while around his father. Susan was about to make a necklace with *Barrier Against Spells* in it, activated with energy, using her last 10 XP. *It's just too much to maintain myself*, she reasoned, *if I was going into a real fight*. Then she remembered reading about a useful little ditty called *Spell Symbol*. She looked it up and mulled it over in her head. For 8XP she could learn a Neptune spell that allowed her to place a spell into a tiny marking on an object. That object would then allow her to activate the spell and have it going for a specific task, just as though she had cast it herself at the time. The kicker was she wouldn't have to maintain it! She read the description of the spell over and over to make sure she wasn't missing something, but it seemed fairly straightforward.

Step 1: Create a charm bracelet with tiny, removable charms. Out of stone, naturally. She really needed to learn a spell to allow her to reshape metal like that.

Step 0.5: Ask spell-book to research spell to reshape metal.

Step 2: Cast useful spells into *Spell Symbol* and put the symbol on the back of the charm.

Step 3: Activate charms when needed, effectively casting a variety of spells in a single action, and *pay no maintenance penalty for doing so for the duration of the current task*.

Step 4: Take over the world.

*Okay, maybe not that last one*, she thought, *but creating an item like that in a few minutes is way better, and more flexible, than giving up 10 xp for an item that only does one thing, and takes my energy besides. Sure, I would have to "reload" it each time, a trivial bother, really. And as I learn more useful spells, I can just replace the less useful one on the charm, or make more charms.*

It was a few minutes until she could breathe again, for laughing, and several of her classmates in the common room where she was reading were a little concerned. Not terribly concerned, mind you. It was Ravenclaw house, after all, and plans to take over the world were a common occurrence. (It wasn't Slytherin house, where they would actually be put into practice, or anything... All just a theoretical exorcise.)

So she did that instead, putting *Barrier Against Spells*, *Flight*, *Detect Lies* and *Darksight* on the four charms she made for the bracelet, and made the trigger for all of them touching the chain of the bracelet and saying "four spell."

This didn't work, and Susan made a pouty face. Magic was, after all, somewhat aware of your intentions when casting which is why it worked the way it did, for a scene/task. It was not going to let her get away with activating so much magic all at once without penalty despite anyone's feelings on the matter.

She found she had to activate each one separately, which was still fine. They could all have the same trigger word, but she had to touch each one in turn. She still used stone though, no sense duplicating the effort, right?

Susan and Hermione sat chatting about how their exams went, and promising to keep in touch (using the *Internet*, \*giggle\*) over the break when a glowing phoenix swooped in between them.

“Susan,” said the headmaster’s voice, “I have just been summoned to the ministry of magic building. No doubt this will keep me away for hours, and the *trap will close*. I hope I can rely upon you and your friends to see to the matter.”

It vanished.

“Crusty old goat,” said Susan. “If you know that already, why leave?”

“Wait, what?” asked Hermione. “What’s going on?”

“Professor Quirrell is making his move, apparently. I need to get down to the trapdoor and stop him.”

“You? I mean, you stood up to him during your duel, so I guess that would be okay- did you just call Headmaster Dumbledore a *crusty old goat*?”

“You must have been hearing things. Wish me luck.”

“Oh no, you’re not going alone!”

“I won’t be alone. Sparkle!”

“Coming,” said Sparkle, stretching.

“You are not just leaving me here after that!”

“It’ll be dangerous, are you sure you don’t want to sit this one out?”

“I do know my share of magic, you know. Even if it is wanded.”

“Okay, it’s your choice. Thanks.”

“Of course!”

“Do you want to find Ron and Harry?”

“Nah, they’re useless.”

“I agree. Let’s go.”

However, on the way, Harry ran up holding a sheet of paper.

“Thank goodness I found you! I had an idea that the stranger that gave Rubeus that dragon egg might have been after a way to get past Fluffy. But he seemed a bit insulted that I suspected him of just blabbing that sort of thing to just anyone, and I came back here. When I got back, I found this in the dorm.”

He handed Susan the paper, and she unfolded it. She read:

*I have taken your friend. I will trade his life for the stone.*

“We were just on our way there- to come and get you,” amended Hermione. “Headmaster Dumbledore sent a message that he would probably try something.”

“What are we waiting for, then?”

As they approached the doorway hiding Fluffy, Susan activated the buffing spells on her bracelet. They stood in front of the door, Susan with some anticipation of the XP she would no doubt soon be receiving.

“Want me to open it?” asked Sparkle. “I know the *Unlock* spell.”

“I do too,” said Hermione. “It’s *Alohomora*. Which I learned completely as a theoretical exercise, of course,” she hastened to add.

“I don’t actually think it’s locked anymore,” said Harry, giving it a light push. It opened. The sight of a dead three headed dog met their eyes.

“Yeah, I don’t think he had any trouble getting past Fluffy,” Susan sighed.

“Think it was that killing curse?”

“Probably. If you can cast that, why bother with anything else? Especially if you’re evil. Which I guess Professor Quirrell is?”

“Good question. It might not have been him that stole Ron though. Come on.”

After lifting the trapdoor, Susan cast *Light* and sent the glowing ball down, noting how deep it was.

“I’ll cast *Flight* on you guys, we’ll just float down, okay?”

The others nodded. Susan cast it on them, having already effectively cast it on herself, and they flew down the hole, hovering above a huge plant that stretched from all to wall. Sparkle she carried.

“Any ideas?” asked Harry.

“I’m trying to remember what kind of plant that is,” replied Hermione.

“I could just set it on fire with *Elemental Attack* but the smoke might be a problem.”

“Of course, Devil’s Snare, that’s what this is! I know a fire spell that won’t burn it.”

Hermione waved her wand about, and some pleasant blue flames were produced that made the plant cringe back.

“Through the hole, quick!” All three flew through and landed.

“Seems to be a noise coming from that way,” said Susan, pointing. “Let’s go.”

They walked into a chamber full of what seemed to be birds, but which were, in fact, keys. It didn’t matter, as the door at the other end of the room had just been busted down by force.

“Seems silly to have had these pointless traps, given how easily our mystery man bypassed them,” said Harry. “It’s like they forgot the person after it would probably be pretty good with magic. Or there would be a team, I mean it’s fairly valuable, yes?”

“I don’t expect... no, actually I do expect Dumbledore knew how powerful someone would be to get in here. Strange. He called this a delaying tactic, but this does seem awfully weak. Come on.”

The next room held the remains of a giant chess board. “What do you suppose this was supposed to be?” asked Susan.

“We probably would have had to play our way across. I don’t know about you, but I’m rubbish at chess. Ron’s good though, he could have done it,” said Harry.

“Whoever did this didn’t know a thing about subtlety,” said Hermione, looking at the smashed chess pieces everywhere. “I mean, if they could do all this, couldn’t they have just removed the enchantment on the pieces?”

“Maybe this is all a sort of bragging,” said Harry. “You know, for us. To impress us how powerful he is?”

“You could be right.”

The next room had a dead troll, which Hermione and Susan felt bad about.

“At least he didn’t suffer, in the end,” said Susan, half hugging Hermione.

“Why put a creature down here if you’re just going to kill it?” she asked sadly.

Further on they were met with flames, and a logic puzzle.

“Huh,” said Susan. “I now appreciate the difference between *Barrier against Spells* and *Magic Immunity*. This isn’t a magic spell, it’s a magic fire. I won’t be able to resist it like I do with a spell cast directly on me.”

“Can we just solve the puzzle and get through?” asked Harry.

“Already did,” said Hermione. “There’s not enough of the potion.”

“Guess it’s up to you, Sparkle,” said Susan, picking her up again.

“What, does she know some kind of fire immunity spell?”

“No, something a little different. Look, I can explain later, just each of you take my arm and hang on. We’re going to go into a rather weird place. When we’re past the fire, we’ll come back out of it again. Okay?”

Harry and Hermione looked at each other. “You’re going to have to trust me on this.”

“We do,” said Harry, taking her left arm.

“Of course,” said Hermione, taking the other.

“Okay,” Susan said to Sparkle, who started casting.

“*Dimension Step, Astral,*” said Sparkle, and the world around them shimmered and changed.

“This is really freaky,” remarked Hermione.

“Just stay close, the fire isn’t that deep.”

They stepped through, and Sparkle stopped maintaining the spell, dropping them back into the real world.

“Your spells do some weird things,” remarked Harry, as they stepped into the final chamber, drew their wands, and stood face to face with...

Some upper class kid they had never seen. His robes seemed a little out of date though.

“All three of you?” the kid remarked. “Odd, I’m sure I only left enough of the potion for one, which I hoped would be Harry. Facing all three of you, well, the mudblood is of no concern, but Susan... no, I must have you to open the pouch. This boy tells me you can’t, but somehow I don’t believe him. So it’s good that you are all here. Boy!”

They looked, and hiding behind a large mirror in the center of the room was Ron, and professor Quirrell lay next to it, still. Ron came out, holding-

“That’s the bag I made for the Headmaster!” blurted Susan. “You actually got past his protection?”

“It wasn’t that hard, actually,” said the boy. “I saw myself getting the stone and destroying it, and out popped this bag. I commanded this boy to open it for me, thinking he was your friend, so you must have told him the secret. But he maintains he knows nothing. So with the Headmaster gone I brought him here, to lure you down so you could get it yourself.”

“Wait, did you say destroy it? What it is?” asked Hermione.

“Ugh, a mudblood is talking to me, how tedious.”

“*Thrust!*” yelled Susan, flinging the figure back. He crashed into the wall behind him, but it seemed professor Quirrell was the one who jerked like he was hurt, instead.

“Temper, temper,” said the boy, brushing himself off. “You can’t really hurt me, you know. Though I like that spirit of yours. Where was I? Oh yes, he didn’t tell you what it was? A philosopher’s stone. The road to immortality.”

“And you want to smash it?” asked Harry, confused.

“Of course! Only I, who went through such trials, should be allowed the gift of eternal life. So, please open it so the stone can be destroyed, and then we can get on with our fight to the death.”

“Like Ron said, only Headmaster Dumbledore can access his own *pocket dimension*. The bag isn’t even where the stone is, technically. I could make him another *Imbued* object with *Pocket Dimension* on it, and a thousand miles from that bag, Albus could take the stone out.”

The boy shook his head. “Somehow I don’t believe you. Ron here has told me about the wondrous magic he’s seen you do, and your fight with Quirinus was inspired. I think that somewhere in that magical book of yours is a spell to open someone else’s *Pocket Dimension* as you call it.”

“Well I’m telling you there isn’t.”

“I see we must do this the hard way. Boy, Potter’s wand.”

“Ron, what-” Harry started to say, but Ron said “*Expelliarmus*” while the boy flicked Quirinus’ wand, making Hermione lose hers.

”-are you doing?” Harry finished.

“Yes, faithful Ron,” said the boy, shaking his head. “You never suspected him, did you? He’s been a sort of double agent you might say. Quite useful to me, telling me of the things you did, and all about your magic. He’s been with me from the beginning, haven’t you boy?”

Ron nodded, sullenly.

“You see?”

“But who are you? Are you the one that tried to kill me those times? Obviously you were the one that took Quirinus’ place when we fought.”

“No, that wasn’t me. I don’t know who tried to kill you, and sadly not even I know who took our place in that match. I would love to get my hands on them, though.”

*Our place?* thought Susan, looking over at Quirinus.

Suddenly she could tell she made a *Perception* check, with a 12 result, and saw two fingers moving like he was beckoning her over. She walked over, keeping her eyes on the boy.

“What have you done to him, anyway? I see you’ve stolen his wand, don’t you have one of your own?”

“Enough questions! *Crucio!*” The spell splashed against her *Barrier* and splintered away. Susan crossed her arms. “Is that all you’ve got?”

“I figured you would be immune, I heard about your fight. The question is, did you make them immune? *Crucio!*” he yelled again, while Sparkle tried a “*Barrier*” spell but sadly, this spell wasn’t something you could block with a shield. Hermione screamed, dropping to the floor.

“Stop it, I’ll look, I’ll look!”

The boy kept it going a moment, then sliced his wand, ending the spell. “See that you do.” Hermione gasped and started crying, curled up into a ball on the floor. Harry edged towards her.

“Go ahead, Harry, you may go to her. I am not heartless, after all. Okay, maybe I am.”

Susan got her book out of her *Pocket Dimension* and sat down next to Quirinus. She started paging through, knowing full well it was impossible but hoping to buy time. Quirinus croaked out a word: "Ring." She nodded a little bit and started to think. She glanced at the ring, it had a large black stone and seemed to be made of gold. *Okay, so what about the ring?*

Her thoughts went back to something Albus had told her, when she first started making her protection for the stone.

*"What I fear is far more evil, actual possession by a piece of Voldemort's soul."*

*Of course!* thought Susan. *That would explain it.*

"You're Voldemort, aren't you?" she asked, looking up.

He gave a little bow. "At your service."

Harry gaped, holding Hermione tightly. "You?"

"Don't look like much now, do I? Not to worry. With this new lease on life the dear professor has given me, I'll be back to my old self in no time."

"Let me ask you one thing," said Susan. "Why did you go bad? Why did you try to destroy the magical world?"

"Bad? Destroy?" he turned to her. "Is that what they tell you about me? Of course, the truth is a bit more painful, isn't it? Tell me, have they taught you about Azkaban?"

"I've never heard of the place," replied Susan.

"I have," said Ron.

"Tell them, then."

"Wizard prison. Full of creatures called Dementors."

"Yes, terrible creatures of death and insanity. And fully sanctioned by the ministry of magic!"

"What's that got to do with anything?"

"Don't you see, Susan? For them to allow such a place to exist is a thousand times worse than anything I could have done, in my time. Those creatures suck the happiness right out of you, leaving you a useless husk. Many have performed 'the kiss,' sucking the soul of a person right out of them. The place must be brought down, and the Dementors destroyed. When I found out about that terrible place I knew I had to act. I knew that I had to take power, because they wouldn't listen otherwise. So I gathered followers, yes, men who could be controlled. Women who enjoyed power. We tried to overthrow the government because *the ministry of magic is corrupt*. No crime, no matter how serious, should result in the kind of torture the ministry has created. Kill those that use curses if you must, but to leave them to slowly rot, the joy and love of life ripped from their very minds? That I cannot, will not, allow for one more day if I can help it.

"You, Susan, see the truth of my words, do you not? Together we could destroy that place, I'm sure of it! I can take you to see one of the creatures for yourself, and your book of magic can create a spell to destroy them. Look past the petty minded thinking of those that came before you. Know that my cause is just, and that the ends will justify the means. I swear that!"

"You... make a good argument," said Susan, slowly. Her spell of *Detect Lies* hadn't told her that what Voldemort was lying. "If there is such a place, with creatures like that..." she looked at Ron, who was nodding his head.

“Yes, yes! Now that you know, how can you not be called to action? How could you sleep at night, knowing that men and women cry out in agony each day, that they have not yet died in the night, as they so desperately wish?”

“Okay,” said Susan.

“No!” shouted Harry. “Don’t listen to him!”

“If he’s telling the truth, no place like that should be allowed to exist!”

“Then forget the stone, Susan. Destroy the bag, and never allow Dumbledore access to that *Pocket Dimension* again. It shall be as good as destroyed in any case. Come, we shall leave this school behind and plot the destruction of Azkaban. You and I. We will punish those who allowed such a place to exist, and remake the magical world in our image.” He held out a hand. “Come!”

“I guess I can use the *Exorcise*,” Susan shouted, bringing her hand down on Quirinus. A magic circle appeared around him, and the spell of *Exorcise* went off, fueled by a meta-action of spending card 7, *Success*.

*After all, why take chances?*

“NOOOOOOOO,” yelled Voldemort, as the ring was ripped off Quirinus’ finger and went spinning away. He vanished, and Ron fell to the floor beside Quirinus.

“The thing is,” said Susan, getting up and standing over the ring, “You were willing to let someone else die so you could come back yourself. Destroying a place like Azkaban is all well and good, but sacrificing even a single person to do it? No, I’ll find another way.”

“Well done,” Quirinus weakly said.

“Is everyone all right?” Susan asked.

“I’ll live,” replied Hermione.

“What have I been doing?” asked Ron.

“Imperius Curse, I’m afraid,” said Quirinus, struggling to get up on one elbow. “I may have just cast it on you before you got on the train for Hogwarts for the first time. I then, well, he then, commanded you to befriend Harry Potter and Susan, and report their secrets. It’s a bit fuzzy, you know, when he took control of me.”

“So our friendship was a lie?”

“Only time will reveal that. In any case, we both need to put our lives back together, I think. Thank you Susan. You’ve saved me, you know?”

“What exactly was that?” Susan looked over at the ring.

“Even now I’m not completely sure. I went in search of Voldemort, thinking I could learn the magic that made him so powerful. I found that ring, and it offered me those secrets. I accepted, but little did I know that as I reached inside the ring for power, he was reaching inside me. I realized too late exactly what was going on, and couldn’t take the ring off, myself. I was such a fool.”

“Be that as it may, we need to get you out of here and back to the healer’s office. You’ve been through a lot.”

“Perhaps nothing I didn’t deserve,” he said quietly.

“Nonsense,” a voice rang from the room with the fire. Albus, Minerva and Severus strode into the room, but Albus didn’t have his wand out. “While I might fault your methods, losing knowledge is a terrible thing. And how Voldemort learned what he learned... well, that is possibly a story for another time. Everyone accounted for, then?”

“No problems here, Headmaster,” replied Susan. “All in a day’s work, you might say.”

“I should hope not, that would be quite tiring. I see my fears were correct,” he said, stopping before the ring.

“That should probably be destroyed,” said Susan.

“I fear my magic may be insufficient, I may need to call upon you to do so,” he said, carefully not touching it as he whisked it into a bag he pulled from his sleeve.

“I don’t think that will be a problem. For now, however, someone should look at Professor Quirrell, though if his soul has been damaged, I doubt even I could do anything.”

“Not to worry, I’m sure that with a bit of rest, our Defense Professor will be up and about in no time. Minerva, if you please?”

She waved her wand and Quirinus began to levitate, and she walked back with him down the hallway. Harry helped Hermione up and Severus took her hand, steadying her as she walked out. He cast an odd glance back at Susan, and then was gone.

“My traps didn’t give him too much trouble, and I was so proud of the mirror, too. I didn’t expect him to actually get the bag out.”

“Yeah, what was that all about? He seemed like it was no trouble at all,” said Harry.

“My folly was to instruct the mirror to give the stone to any that wanted to find it. Find it, but not use it. Of course, we know now that he wanted to destroy the stone, not use it, so the mirror happily gave it up. Strange how these things work, don’t you think?”

“Good thing another layer of protection was put on it,” Susan said slyly.

Harry was frowning. “There are more pieces out there, aren’t there?”

“Perhaps, Harry, perhaps. We can hope that this ring was one of a kind, but I think that is a faint hope.”

“He looked so young, not much older than me.”

“Yes, he began his terrible journey towards power fairly young in life, I’m afraid. But think no more of this, Harry. You were victorious, and you have saved a life. Tomorrow, yes, that will be the day of contemplation. But today, live knowing you have done well, Harry Potter.”

“She was the one that did all the hard work.”

“But did you not come down to rescue your friend, Ron?”

Everyone turned to look at him. “I’m not going to be punished, am I?”

“Whatever for?” Albus was shocked. “Because you were selected to be a tool of Voldemort’s? I fear all he has are tools, not friends, young Ron.”

“So tell me about that gash on your leg, how did you get that?” asked Susan.

“That? Oh he, you know who, he didn’t know what else was guarding the stone, so he had me try to find out. Of course I didn’t get past the first room, but I don’t know why he bothered. You saw what he did out there.” He shuddered. “I’ve never seen anything like it. I wanted to run but he told me to stay, so I had to.”

“Even he knows that a lot of foreknowledge and a little magic goes much further than a little foreknowledge and a lot of magic. But come, this is no place to be. We shall return the stone to the rightful owners and allow them to decide what to do next. A few days of rest for all of you, and it’s home for the summer.”

“Is what he said true? Does a place as terrible as Azkaban exist?”

“Sadly, yes. The ministry gathered the Dementors there and put them to work, lest they wander the world causing havoc. This keeps them contained, and as long as they are fed, they are... satisfied to remain there.”

“They can’t be destroyed? Such creatures cannot be natural!”

“They can be protected against, but not destroyed.”

*We'll see about that.*

"Fine. Let's get out of here."

"We're still okay, right?" Ron asked Harry and Susan.

"Course we are. You were still you when we became friends, he didn't change your personality, did he?"

"No. I'm just afraid I wouldn't have tried to be friends with you if he hadn't commanded it."

"Let's just take it one day at a time from here, and not worry too much about it. I'm sure things will work out," said Harry.

"We have surprisingly similar philosophies," said Albus as they went back through the chambers. All were empty, and they came to the hole they had "flown" down. "Lemon Drop?"

There's another train, there always is

Time: Just after boarding the train

Place: Riding the train home

"You seem depressed, Harry," said Susan. She and her three friends sat with each other on the train home with various levels of emotion. Harry's new owl, bought for him by Rubeus as an early birthday present and which he was calling Hedwig, sat on the seat next to him in his cage.

"Wouldn't you be, going home to them?"

"Hey, you'll have me."

"That's the only thing keeping me going, actually."

"They can't be that bad, can they?" asked Ron.

"You have absolutely no idea."

"You could always come hide out with us, mate. Just have Susan whip you up a spell to shape-shift you into one of the twins, and just never be seen in the same room with both of them. They'll think of 20 pranks to pull in just the first minute of them learning this, so they would be all for it."

Harry chuckled. "Thanks, I wish I could. But for some strange reason Headmaster Dumbledore insisted I return home."

"He was rather strongly insistent on that point, for some reason," said Susan thoughtfully. "Nearly as much as he insisted that the restriction on underage magic couldn't be lifted for just Harry."

"You actually asked him that?" asked Hermione. "Wish I had thought of it."

"Of course. If people are going to wandering around trying to kill me during the summer, I don't want to have to try and defend myself without magic. Oh sure, I could use magic, but then there would be a trial, and I would have to explain things. Losing months of practice just because some wizard, hundreds of years ago, thought kids shouldn't use magic at home is stupid."

"Magic can be dangerous," said Ron. "You saw how many times Seamus set fire to stuff or blew something up."

"Yes, his wand work and pronunciation were both atrocious. Harry, however, seems more exacting in that regard. It brings up a point," said Hermione. "We never did figure out who tried to kill you at the beginning of the year, did we?"

Susan shook her head. "Voldemort said it wasn't him, which means only one other suspect exists. Severus. If you believe a word he said, which I'm not sure I recommend, anyway."

"They did get back to the table at the same time. Odd that," said Ron.

"Quirinus was probably already testing the defenses on the stone, he doesn't have that excuse."

"And you didn't tell anyone?" Hermione asked.

"Our suspicions aren't proof, you know. Still, I did break his wand, so in his mind his actions were probably justified."

"Nothing would justify that!"

"If I snapped your wand, here and now, you wouldn't want me dead?"

"I... well... that is..."

“Uh huh.”

“I still think you should have told someone.”

“Wouldn’t have helped. A 3-point enemy is a 3-point enemy, after all.”

“You’re talking gibberish again, you know that right?” asked Ron.

“No, I think I know what she’s talking about. Living next to her all this time has given me a little insight into her character. She’s right. She’s saying he would be an enemy no matter where he was, so even if he lost his job, or whatever, it wouldn’t change anything.”

“I guess.”

“Trust me, it makes sense from my perspective.”

Ron shrugged.

“I can still use the *Research* item you made for me outside school, right?”

“Oh yeah, your little gifts. They can’t detect my sort of magic, so use them as much as you like over the break.” Susan leaned a little closer to them. “In fact, that’s why I plan on learning a spell like *Conceal Magic*, or at least *Imbuing* it for Harry over the summer. Shouldn’t take too long, and he’ll be able to practice just fine. He can even activate it himself, it’s only a grade 4 spell, and Harry Potter better have a RESolve higher than four.”

“If they even let me keep my wand the second I walk through the door.”

“Oh, I don’t think Other Senior has forgotten my threat. If he has, well, I’ll just have to remind him, now won’t I?”

“Don’t do anything rash!” said Hermione, concerned.

“I’m sure a few hours as a toad or something would change his tune quite nicely. Perhaps a mouse? I’m sure Sparkle would be ever so gentle playing with him, wouldn’t you?”

“Certainly,” answered Sparkle.

“You’re terrible,” said Hermione with mock disapproval.

“I think Fred and George would approve.”

Ron nodded.

“Honestly, I don’t know any of you.”

There was silence for a moment.

“Pity about us losing the house cup,” remarked Hermione. “Between us we scored quite a few points.”

“Yes, who knew that Quidditch points were actually house points,” said Susan, glaring at Harry. “I mean, honestly, curing the Longbottom family, protecting the stone from being destroyed, saving professor Quirrell’s life, getting the cursed ring off him- that doesn’t mean much compared to catching a gilded, flying, ping pong ball.”

“To be fair, your magic did all of those things. You were just there to, sort of direct it?”

Susan was glaring harder at him. “I suppose you were then going to say that you actually worked for all those points, flying about on your *broomstick*.”

“Yes?” asked Harry in a small voice.

“Remind me to find a spell to destroy Quidditch over the summer.”

“You wouldn’t!” said Ron.

“I wonder,” said Susan, taking an interest in her nails. “Still, like the Headmaster said, if they gave me millions of house points, as they should have, it would have been quite suspicious.”

“Tell you what,” said Harry. “When we get back, I’ll ask them to enchant the cup from this year so it says *Ravenclaw* every third Saturday of the month. How would that be?”

The all laughed. *It's was good to be among friends.*

"You know what else we never got word about?" asked Susan.

"What's that?" answered Harry.

"Your vault. I would have hoped a bank run by goblins would be more proactive about that sort of thing."

"If I need more we can go back and bully them. Besides, I can use your trick if I really need cash."

"What's this now?" Ron asked, interested.

"Never you mind," said Susan.

"You always say that."

"Anyway, the trail is years cold. Maybe when I'm older I'll put a bounty on the head of whoever stole it and let magical bounty hunters do the rest. After all, 25% of what they said I should have is nothing to sneeze at."

"It just bothers me they got away so clean. Too bad it was coins, I could track it if it was just a single thing. But if they've broken it up and spent some of it, my magic would never track down the whole mess."

"It's no big deal."

"If you say so."

After changing back into normal clothes and exiting the train, the four said goodbye.

"Thanks for getting me free of that madman's control," said Ron. "I hope we can start over next year, maybe become friends properly."

"I'll look forward to it. Write me, okay?"

"Of course!"

Stepping through the barrier back into the technological world, Susan and Harry found Stacy waiting for them.

"Hi Mom!" said Susan.

"Hello Susan, glad to see you're well. And Harry, of course. I've just been talking to the Weasley's, they're Ron's parents, aren't they? Strange questions that man asked me. I'm sorry about your, uh, guardians, Harry. They refused to come and get you. Said I could drive you home myself."

"I didn't expect them here, honestly. In fact I'm glad they're not here. That would just have been awkward."

"Yes, well. Come on then. Where is your luggage?"

"With Susan."

"Oh, magic, right. Going to have to get used to that, I expect."

"You can at least come visit, right?" asked Ron, running after him.

"Send me a picture, Susan can *Teleport* us there. Same with you Hermione, distance means nothing to us, after all."

The other two promised to keep in touch, and Harry and Susan chatted with Stacy, telling her about all the wonderful things they had seen at school on the way to their car.

She, of course, didn't believe half of what they told her.