

Setting the Trap

Time: Three Weeks Later

Place: Susan's Room

Susan's alarm clock softly went off, totally failing to awaken her, as expected. Sparkle, however, came awake at once and stretched her back.

"Awaken," she muttered, casting the spell on Susan, and making her eyes pop open.

"That time already?" she asked.

"You went to bed at 9:00, you've almost gotten a full eight hours sleep."

"I know, I know. Let's do this."

She sat up, and took a sheet of paper, which had been turned over, off her desk. It was a spell, and she read it over, then started to cast. Ten minutes later she thought "*Dream Link*" and closed her eyes.

When she opened them again, a second later, she was standing on a large chunk of rock, floating above a vast ocean of water. Other various sized chunks floated nearby, and the three moons above cast an odd reflection upon the water. While it seemed to be nighttime, and stars twinkled overhead, she could see perfectly, and looked around.

Harry smiled at her.

Albus Dumbledore looked around with interest.

"Good evening, Susan," he said cordially. "A most interesting method of communication, I must admit. You do know about owls, by now, yes?" He grinned.

"Good evening, Headmaster," she replied. "I wanted to speak to you privately, and this is about as private as it gets."

"I guessed that. Hello, Harry."

"Hello sir."

"So, what would you like to discuss?" Albus walked to the edge and looked over, then up at the triple moons.

"Voldemort," said Susan simply. "More specifically, capturing him."

"A bold move, if you can make it work. Do you plan to use your person summoning spell to whisk him from his hideout?" While he hadn't turned around, Susan found she could hear him perfectly.

She shook her head. "No, he's under some kind of protection." *And I can't be sure Severus is near him when I Descry Creature on him. Though his locations lately have been interesting.* "No, my plan has a few parts, but it will make him come to us. This way, even if he manages to wiggle out of it, the ministry will witness it."

"Not more than three parts, I hope."

"What?"

"Never mind. What is the first part?"

"Is there a place in the ministry, hopefully a courtroom, that they wouldn't mind cutting off from magic forever?"

"An odd question. I assume you can do it, or you wouldn't have asked. There are places they bring dangerous criminals to, for trials. To make sure they did no magic, even what little we can do without wands... yes, I might be able to convince them such a place would be in their best interests. If I had a compelling reason..."

“Good thing we can provide one. You are going to have the Minister call upon me to appear in that courtroom, so that my book of spells can be examined. They are very worried, you see, about reports of just how powerful it could be.”

“Ah, it is becoming clearer to me.” He spun to look at her. “You are offering your book as bait, in a trap.”

“Exactly right. It’s the only target he would conceivably risk coming in person for, after all. My book of magic? It would save him decades of magical research. The trouble is, how to catch him? There’s no problem if, when he walks into the place, all his magical protections go bye-bye.”

“Allowing him to be captured, because he would be relying on magic to make his escape. But would he risk everything to obtain it? That’s the question. And what of the risk to your book should he manage to grab it and make some sort of getaway?”

Susan laughed. “Why do you think we’re talking about this now, rather than weeks ago? Show him, Harry.”

Harry held out his hands, and a book appeared. It looked like Susan’s book, and when Albus looked it over it seemed to contain spell formula. “A fake?” he asked.

Harry and Susan both grinned at him excitedly. “Totally fake. I made the book with several casting of *Creation* and Harry’s been filling it with gibberish with his magic. In the *Dimension*, of course. We haven’t mentioned it outside there. Most of the names are legit, just so that they can actually go through and see what sort of spells I can cast, but the formulas and directions are all garbage. Some of the more dangerous ones I’ve actually gone ahead and copied in, but with wild inaccuracies. I hope he does try them, the backlash will destroy him. Oh, the beginnings work, enough to start the magical energies flowing, but after that it’s ‘oh dear I just had my head explode’ time.”

“So even if he got away, the book is more a danger to him than a help. I approve. Of course, our agent Severus will “find out” so to speak when you are stomping about the castle in a huff.”

“And he will report to his master. Of course if you think he hasn’t by the time the day rolls around, you’ll have to tell him to. It might help to see where his true loyalties lie.”

“I assure you they lie with us. But I don’t begrudge your skepticism. Perhaps I can request the hearing myself, tell them I suspect you of hiding more dangerous magic than you’ve told me. That way I can be present when Voldemort makes his appearance. Of course, even I will be without my magic, but it’s a price I’m willing to pay. I’ll find a way to make it work that seems reasonable and legitimate. When Voldemort shows, or doesn’t, we can explain what was really going on. After all, ministry agents may have already been compromised.”

“Not after they go in that room, any *Imperious* will wash off them. As will invisibility, *Polyjuice* shape-shift, truth poison, the works.”

“An unexpected bonus! Yes, a room such as that could be very useful. Could a werewolf spend the full moon there in safety?”

“You know, I think so! That’s got to be a magical transformation. I thought it might come in handy for the ministry. Just keep that room unused until I get there, so word doesn’t leak out. I’ll contact you in a few days then, as to which one to go and do this. It too will have to be done in secret. If you could get me a picture, that would be ideal. That way I could just stick my hand through a *Teleportal* and do it from home.”

“That’s possible. Once they verify it works, we can call you in.”

“I’ll be awaiting the letter then. Obviously I will not want to go, and protest quite strongly, but you’ll know it’s just an act.”

“Ah, that’s why this rather unique method of communicating was chosen.”

Susan nodded. “I have to make it look real, and if he’s got people watching me, or is scrying on me, the closer we come to reality the better.”

“A good plan, and with multiple fail-safe measures. You’ve put some thought into this. Well done.”

“It’s better than us trying to duel to the death. We get proven right, Voldemort gets a trial, my conscience is clean.”

“Yes, a battle between the two of you is a frightening thing to think about. I’ll get the wheels rolling in the morning.”

“I’ll see you soon, then.”

“Sooner than you might think, actually. I know you can take yourselves to the Burrows whenever you choose, but I would like to collect a new teacher for the year before you go. If you both don’t mind accompanying me?”

Susan and Harry looked at each other. “Sounds interesting,” said Harry.

“We’re in!” said Susan.

“Splendid. I will send you an owl with the details.”

“Until then!”

“Good night.”

Susan opened her eyes, breaking the spell as she did so. Sparkle looked over at her. She had used *shape-shift* to turn into something with hands and had carried the piece of paper back to the desk while Susan was out. It had no name, so one just looking at it wouldn’t know exactly what she had done unless they could read it exactly.

“How did it go?”

“How did what go? Thanks for taking care of the paper. Good night.” She flicked off the light, and lay down again. She had used the code for “it went well.” The code for “it went badly” was “I told you that wouldn’t work.”

She got back to sleep, a small smile on her face.

Two night later, Wednesday, Susan was again woken up by Sparkle, and went into the *Dream Link*. She had learned her latest spell in quite some time, *Destroy Magic*, which she planned to use on Voldemort when he was captured. Also she needed to use it on the room, and didn’t want to do it from writings. She was left with 9 XP.

Hope I have more opportunities this school year to get more, last year felt like I hardly got any.

With Albus taking her to the courtroom they wanted to use in “dream form,” Susan felt that was good enough for her magic to get to, and thanked him.

“I’ll do it tomorrow.”

“Very well. I’ll have the notice sent to you after school begins. After all, you’ll need to be seen complaining about it so that Severus can honestly say he learned about it by accident.”

“Okay, that’s not long to wait, and he doesn’t seem to be making any waves.”

“He’s researching more spells, do you think?”

“That seems reasonable. Even if he doesn’t have the XP to learn them, he can still cast from writings like I do. If left alone, I estimate another 10 years for him to have duplicated my spell-book. I assume he has the money, given most of his followers are rich?”

Albus nodded. “So short a time?”

“One day per difficulty. I made a spreadsheet at home with all the basic properties of each spell. That let me add up the difficulties. At one day per point of difficulty, that’s a little over 3500 days. And he’s already had 365. Of course, if he wants to be extra careful it could be as long as... twelve years? Unless he dies of backlash, anyway. But Sparkle said if he did that, he wouldn’t be a major villain, so I shouldn’t count on it. And he won’t research spells he can already do with wand magic, so the time to come up to speed will be much shorter.”

“He is intelligent, so I’m sure he’ll be meticulous in this as well.” He looked around at the new dreamscape, which seemed to be a city floating on the clouds while winged, colorful ponies flew and played nearby. “This spell... could you make me an *Imbuing* of it for me when you get back to school? It seems like it could be an invaluable tool for meetings like this.”

“Sure! It would only cost 5 energy to activate, and I’m sure you have a higher RESolve than 5.”

“Yes, I should hope,” he said, grinning.

“You can only get two other people besides yourself though.”

“I wonder why? It’s set that way in the spell?”

“Yup. Most spells specify things like that in terms of rating. Like my conjuring an element spell, which I only know for water, gets me a kilogram per rating. So a liter, in that case. This spell just says “two people” and that’s it.”

“Strange. Still, even with that limitation, the potential for a shared dream is astonishing.”

“I agree. Was there anything else at the moment?”

He shook his head. “So far, so good.”

“See you Friday!”

Breaking it off, Susan went into her *Personal Dimension* with Sparkle without saying anything.

“We’re doing this now,” she said. “Before I lose that image in my mind. After all, I haven’t seen it, I’ve seen what it looks like in a dream. I want to be sure it works.”

“How are you going to do it from here, though?”

“That’s why you came. Put *Energetic Accumulation* on me, and I’m putting 30 energy into *Teleportal*. With that much energy I can open a gateway between space and dimension, and just cast through that. He has no reason to be watching a random courtroom, after all.”

“I guess. Okay, *Energetic Accumulation*.”

Susan gathered energy, then opened a portal big enough to look through. “Okay, he said it was eleven meters, so I’ll need an 11 rating, and cast it right in the center. That’s 7 energy which I can spend easily, and away we go.” Susan cast the spell through the *Teleportal*, being careful to keep her hands from being caught as she completed the spell. The magic took hold, and her *Teleportal* vanished from the room. “I guess it worked,” she said. “Now that 11 meter radius is forever cut off from magical energies.”

“That’s kind of scary... no make that very, very scary,” said Sparkle. “In less than three seconds you can just make magic go away from someplace, forever. Or a person...”

“Hey, why do think I held off so long leaning something so dangerous? I backfire it somehow, there goes my *Spark of Magic* forever. But I know what you mean, one would think it would take hours, but no. Just *zap*. And a person at least gets a resistance check.”

“Not much chance of backfiring, throwing around as much energy as you do. And if it did take hours, you would just throw more energy at it.”

“True, it doesn’t hurt to be safe. Come on, let’s head back. I want to get some sleep to get that 40 energy back.”

“You got it.”

And so, Harry got a letter about collecting the soon to be Professor Slughorn. He accepted, and on the night, there was a knock on Susan’s door.

“Good evening, Headmaster,” she said, as Albus and Harry came inside at her invitation. Albus looked around at the new furniture, electronics and finishings in the room.

“I see your mother is doing well for herself giving lessons to the Order,” he said. “I am assuming it is safe to speak here?”

Susan nodded. “The same spell that protects The Burrows has been applied to my house.”

“Very good. And here is Stacy, good evening madam.”

“Good evening Albus. How are you?”

“Healthy, and whole, though for some reason I keep expecting to see some sort of damage to my wand hand every time I look at it. Curious, don’t you think?” He looked over at Susan, who was looking over at Harry with a grim determination.

“Very curious,” replied Susan.

“Still, we take such health for granted at our peril, do we not? You are also well, I hope?”

“Very well, thank you. I’ve been able to quit my job and start teaching martial arts full time thanks to the gold you provided. I’ve even got a place rented and I have over two hundred students. Most don’t realize the person standing next to them might be a wizard, of course!” She laughed. “Me, teaching Kung Fu! Who would have guessed when I first saw that creepy looking guy in the gaudy purple robe that my life would take this turn?”

“Life can indeed be full of surprises. I do hate to rush off, but we are on a schedule, so with your permission?”

“I appreciate the gesture, but she can step in and out of holes in the air. There’s no way I could keep her here if she wanted to go with you. Have a good term!” Stacy hugged her daughter, and the three left the house and started down the street.

“Are you handling our transportation this evening, sir?” asked Harry.

“Indeed I am, Harry. As Susan has probably never seen this particular location before, I shall take us there via *Apparition*. If you both will take one of my arms?”

They did so, and with a *snap* the street was empty again.

“I hate wanded teleportation, a curse on all forms of it!” said Susan, reforming some distance away and staggering a bit. Albus seemed as serene as ever.

“I agree, the sensation is unique,” he said. “Come then.”

Recruiting Effort

Time: Two seconds later

Place: Unknown Neighborhood

Albus led them through the streets to a normal looking house that looked like it had the door recently kicked in.

“That’s odd,” said Susan.

“What do you find odd about it?” asked Albus.

“Who abducts someone through the front door? If I was attacking someone I would use the back, so there was less chance of someone seeing me. Also, you guys don’t have *Phase* magic but I’m pretty sure knocking a door in is rather loud. There must be magics to let you sneak in or remove a door more quietly.”

“Interesting observations. What do you think, Harry?”

“I think it’s very coincidental that seemingly at the same time you came to pick me up, this was happening. I mean, the place isn’t crawling with cops so no one has noticed this door being smashed in yet.”

“Good thinking. Shall we go inside?”

“Wand,” said Harry, calling forth his wand.

“Yes, I think that-” Albus looked over at him. “Oh, you’re weren’t asking if you should take your wand out. I wondered where you were keeping it.”

“*Immunity*,” said Susan, touching her bracelet.

“Headmaster, if you could just hang back a moment,” said Harry. “There could be traps left behind and you are not immune to magic. Let Susan go first.”

Susan nodded and looked to Sparkle, who nodded back. “*Dimension Step*.” She vanished. Susan flattened herself to the wall by the door and peaked in. She made a *Gymnastics* check, getting a 6, and so her roll into the room wasn’t quite as impressive as she had hoped, but nothing leapt out at her or exploded. *This is a good sign, I guess.*

“Clear,” she said to Harry who was standing outside. Albus was looking amused as Harry slowly advanced, crouched down and wand out.

The room she found herself in was a sad remnant of luxury and decadence, having mostly been smashed to pieces. Glass was everywhere, and fine furniture was overturned and seemed to have huge gouges in it.

Why use cutting magic rather than fire? They obviously didn’t care about drawing attention to themselves. And wizards can teleport. If I heard my front door being kicked in I would... well, stand and fight, obviously, but if I was this guy, I would just teleport the heck out of Dodge.

Sparkle stepped out of nowhere. “House seems empty,” she remarked.

“Crap!” said Susan. “We better see what happened here.”

“Yes, it should be most interesting,” said Albus, poking his head through the door. “I assume I’m allowed to come in now? You do remember me, right? One of the most powerful and celebrated wizards in the whole world? I mean, what does it do to my reputation to let two school kids enter a potentially hostile situation before me?”

“There was less risk for Harry and me,” said Susan. “And I won’t tell anyone if you won’t.”

“Oh, I think I can take care of-”

“*Hypnotic Field*,” said Susan, taking the 2 seconds and using some energy to make the point. He stared at the shimmering field as Susan walked up to him, took his wand again, and went back to the other side of the room. “I’m sorry, what were you saying?” she asked as the *Field* dropped. Albus saw Susan, again twirling his wand in her hand, and Susan caught just a hint of fear in his eyes, quickly masked.

“Ah. Point taken. Somehow I never seem to take that into account for some reason. He could easily do that now, couldn’t he?”

“Yes,” she said, handing the wand back. “*Time Window*.”

The four watched with some amusement as a pudgy elderly man with wet hair ran downstairs, wand out, and started casting spells to mess the place up.

“Seriously?” asked Harry.

“Seriously,” answered Albus.

Horace went out of the *Frame* and Susan remarked she needed to remember to have her book make a better version of this spell. She winked the *Window* out and looked around.

“Why go through all the trouble?” she asked. “He could have just not answered the door.”

“But we could have been Death Eaters,” remarked Albus. “I did tell him some time ago Voldemort had returned.”

“There’s still something funny here,” said Harry.

“Yeah, I can’t put my finger on it,” said Susan. “But I bet if I did a *Magic Sense*,” which she did, getting an eleven. Despite the *Magic Sense* skill not actually listing how tough it was to sense out a magical creature, only “active spell effects,” an eleven seemed reasonable and she turned to an overstuffed chair that was laying on its side in the room. “That I might find something. And because I’m some wacky, random girl,” she did jazz hands at this point, “I’m going to set this chair on fire. For absolutely... no reason... at all. Are you with me, Harry?”

“Susan, I am with you.”

“On three then! ONE... TWO...”

“Wait! Wait!” said the chair, deflating into a person.

“My goodness!” said Susan with an air of surprise. “This chair is turning into a person, Harry! Why, it’s almost like magic.”

“Magic doesn’t exist,” counted Harry. “Stop trying to trick me. This is obviously some shape-shifting alien from another planet. It’ll kill us all and eat our brains! We have to stop it before it completes the transformation! Open fire!”

“FIRE!” yelled Susan, making a throwing motion.

“WAIT!” shouted Horace, his hands up. “It’s just me!”

Susan and Harry fell into gales of laughter, holding each other up while Horace looked around bewildered. “Albus, dear fellow! What on earth are these two going on about?”

“Good evening, Horace. I’m glad to see you are well. I feared... well, I didn’t really, that would be a lie.”

“What did I miss?”

“The fact that the Death Eaters aren’t really all that active right now, because Voldemort is currently studying Susan’s type of magic? So they’re just biding their time and not randomly attacking people?”

“Oh. I could have sworn... well, come in then, I guess.”

“You don’t mind if I clean up, do you?”

“No, no, be my guest,” said Horace, waving a hand.

Albus waved his wand, and the room started repairing itself. The furniture righted and became whole, glass went back to being unsmashed, and even bits of plaster that had flaked off the walls jumped back into place.

Showing off a bit, since I took your wand away? I do have to admit, there seems to be a huge gap in magical power between Harry and Albus. I can learn any spell and yeah, if I had a low rating in that planet I might always have to take extra time or it wouldn't work. But no spell I've seen Harry do comes close to what I just saw happening. I mean he has trouble Vanishing an iguana or whatever. Albus just put a whole room back, seemingly without effort. Or was he dispelling an illusion or something? Just how much do these people have to study to get that powerful?

"Was that some sort of temporal spell, returning the room to the way it was five minutes ago? Because even my grade 10 spell *Alleviation* can only do one object at a time."

"We can talk about it later, if you want."

"Or was it something like *Daytime* that receded time just for us? But on the other hand I think time magic is highly restricted, and limited to Time Turners. On the gripping hand, this is Albus Dumbledore so maybe he... just.. doesn't... later, right."

"Thank you. Anyway, I've come to appeal to you one last time, Horace, to come and teach with us."

"If what you say is true, your school could soon become a battleground."

"If what I say isn't true, you've spent a lot of time and energy hiding out. I think you believe me, so you know anyplace could soon become a battleground. At least at Hogwarts you would have thick, stone walls around you. Let's come to the real reason you're refusing."

"I'm retired! I put my time in, didn't I? Why drag an old man like me back into things?"

"I hire the best."

Horace didn't quite know how to respond to that, so he looked over at the two kids.

"How did you even find me... wait a second, I know who you two are!"

"Harry, this man says he knows who you are!" said Susan.

"That's never happened before. But he knows who you are too."

"And that's only to be expected, given my *Prodigy* background. Susan Felton, nice to meet you. And my companion, Sparkle."

"Meow," said Sparkle. "Purr. Meow."

"The cat does give it away at once. I should have known." He looked back over at Albus. "Dirty pool, Albus."

"I'm not sure what you mean," he replied sincerely. "I was just passing by to take Harry and Susan to stay with the Weasley family for the rest of the summer, and thought we would stop in. Susan, Harry, this is Horace Slughorn, an old professor from Hogwarts."

"Passing by. Humph! Do you even make potions like we do? Albus said something about your magic being different."

"Potions? Heck no. Spend XP for something I can only use once? Forget that. What does that have to do with anything though?"

"But you could make them?"

"I guess. I would rather just bind whatever spell it was into a permanent form. Yeah, it takes longer and costs more, but I'd never have to do it again. I still don't know what difference that makes."

"Just that I would enjoy seeing the process."

“Come teach then, I guess. I do enough *Imbuing* for the school and for gifts, I really should put more points into it, honestly.”

“You’ve been making waves in the magical world since before you started school, apparently?”

“Slightly before, I suppose. I intend to make a few more afterwards, too.”

“Yes, I can see why he brought you. And of course Harry Potter needs no introduction.”

“Naturally not,” said Albus.

“What would I even teach her, Albus? If she doesn’t make potions...”

“You, of course, read about what she did to Ms Umbrage?”

“Who didn’t? Throwing her out of the castle, floating her around the halls. Is that supposed to convince me?”

“No, what I’m saying is, maybe you could teach her a better way of solving her problems than the direct use of force.”

“Mad Eye Moody,” said Susan.

“Excuse me?” asked Horace.

“That’s who I am. When Professor Moody thought he was under attack, he sent curses flying every which way. It didn’t help, of course, but at least he tried. When you thought you were, you planted a distraction and hid. I think I see the point you’re trying to make, Headmaster.”

“Perhaps I do have something to teach you.”

“And think of it this way: where would you rather be? Out here, with no one to watch your back, or in the castle with me, and all of my advanced magic?”

As Horace began pondering this, Albus sat back on the couch and looked at him.

“Your mother is a Muggle, then?” asked Horace, sitting down himself on a smaller chair opposite Albus. Susan and Harry sat next to Albus on the sofa, and Sparkle jumped up on the back of the couch and draped herself over Susan’s shoulders. Susan made a face.

“She doesn’t have the *Spark of Magic* if that’s what you mean. I don’t really approve of the term ‘muggle’ myself. Seems a bit too close to ‘animal’ or ‘non-person’. She could still tear you apart if she had half a mind to. Why?”

“Oh, just curious, that’s all. You seem quite strong for a half-blood. I must have taught your father then, but I don’t recall any Feltons in my classes.”

“I don’t expect there would be. Obviously Headmaster Dumbledore hasn’t told you much about me. Felton is my mother’s name. My father has no legal existence on this plane, so I took her last name when I was born, instead.”

“On this... plane?”

“Yes. I can’t really say more to some random stranger, no offense. And as the first words out of your mouth were about bloodline, you must be a Slytherin.”

“I was head of Slytherin house, yes.”

Harry and Susan looked at each other knowingly. “You know,” said Susan, “if there is one thing, and I mean one thing that I am going to do after tearing down Azkaban and breaking the *contract* enchantment over elves, it’s going to be to convince the magical world that having magic is a *background*. Like always knowing what time it is or having a good sense of direction. That yes, those with the background pass it down more frequently than you find it in families without, but you do find it in families without a history of magic. So it must be random, and not some percentage of magical power. Wanded magic is a motion and a word- and one of my best friends has photographic reflexes and only has to see a spell performed once to duplicate it

exactly. Her parents both lack the *Spark of Magic*. So explain that one to me Mr. Stereotypical Slytherin.”

“One moment before you answer, Horace. Was she there with you when Severus was teaching Occlumency to Harry?” Albus asked.

“You mean ‘supposed to be teaching Occlumency to Harry?’ The thing we had to look up how to do because ‘professor’ Snape didn’t describe the technique at all? As a matter of fact she was.”

“I now see what you meant when you said you started your own lessons for Harry! I wondered if you had learned a mind reading spell, but thought it might be quite different than ours, given that’s how most of your spells are. And now she knows *Legilimens*. I’ll have to be careful what spells I use with Hermione watching, or she’ll know them too. Tell me, did Harry pass on his teachings to that group you can’t talk about?”

“You know I can’t answer that question.”

“She really needs to see a spell only once? I’d love to meet... oh no. I’m not coming back, Albus. And what’s this about a group?”

“So you say, but think of all the things you’re missing out on. Plus, of course, teaching Harry Potter all you know about potion making.”

“That would be a fine feather in my cap, wouldn’t it?”

“I think it would. As for the group, I don’t know a lot about it because Susan didn’t want members running off to tell Professor Umbridge anything, so she placed an enchantment over all of them that disallows her from discussing their activities with outsiders. I take it, given how clear the divide was during this year’s O.W.L exams it has something to do with Defense Against the Dark Arts. Though I suppose it could be a knitting group, but I doubt it.”

“You can do something as powerful as that?”

“Mr. Slughorn, you have absolutely no idea the forces of magic I can call upon.”

“So there’s truth to the rumors you can summon a squad of warriors and once stopped a giant from destroying the village near the castle?”

“Both are completely true. I only helped with the giant though. I didn’t know *shrink* at the time. Now I do.”

“She admits to being hot headed, however,” put in Albus. “She wants, no, she needs to learn a bit more discipline however, something perhaps you could instill upon her?”

“So you’re offering her, Harry Potter, this wonder girl who needs only see a spell once, and who knows what other wonders since I’ve been gone? Is that about right?”

“If you wanted to look at it that way, I suppose. We were just talking about goings on at the school lately, after all.”

“Oh, very well. You know I can’t resist that kind of lure, and it would be nice to stop running after all this time. Are you sure he’s back?”

The four of them nodded.

“Is that cat- never mind. Very well, count me in, then.”

“Splendid!” said Albus, rising to shake his hand. “I’m certain you won’t regret it!”

“I may already, but this many treasures even I can’t pass up. I’ll be along to the castle soon.”

“I’m very glad to hear it. Now, I really must get Harry and Susan to their ultimate destination for the evening. So I shall say goodnight, Horace, and welcome back.”

“I must be out of my mind. I’ll see you later.”

Susan and Harry said their goodbyes, and Albus asked Susan if she would prefer to use her magic to get them to The Burrows.

“Did people once believe the world was flat? *Teleportal*.”

Horace stared in wonder at the hole that opened between the two places, and watched as the three (Sparkle was still riding Susan’s shoulders) stepped through.

“See you at school Professor!” said Susan.

“Meow!” said Sparkle, giving a little wave. Horace gave a weak wave as he examined the edge of the portal, which closed, making him jump back.

“Well done, both of you!” said Albus, beaming.

“Yes, who needs the *Imperius Curse* when you can just browbeat whoever you want into doing what you want.”

“Are you referring to me? I hardly said anything that could have been construed as browbeating!”

“I guess you’re just that good.”

“What an odd way of complementing people. Still, before I leave you, perhaps we could return to your fine *Personal Dimension* for a moment so we will not be overheard?”

“If it’s scrying you’re worried about, the house is proof against it. We could just go inside.”

“Ah yes. That magic you cast upon the house- I must say, some experts have been studying it, you know.”

“Really? Have they found anything out?”

“Only what you yourself told the Weasley family the magic would do. It would take a fair number of charms to duplicate all the functions of what you cast in a single spell. And the strength of it is, well, not to put too fine a point on it, fantastic. They couldn’t chip even a pane of glass no matter what spells they threw at it.”

“Naturally. But then, I can’t repair an entire room at once. So I guess we’re even.”

Albus laughed. “I suppose we are, at that. It is perhaps a failing in every wizard to wish to show off to other wizards. Or perhaps that is just human nature. But come, we shall have a few words inside, and I will depart.”

Albus and the others moved to the door, and he knocked.

The door cracked open, and Mrs. Weasley peered out.

“You’re early!” she said, throwing it open. “Come on in, kids! And Albus as well, welcome!”

Everyone said hello, and Albus begged a moment more with Susan and Harry privately. They got shown into a bedroom and Albus closed the door.

“Now, Susan. I believe you are of two minds where Voldemort is concerned?”

“I try to be of two minds where everything is concerned, Headmaster,” she replied. “I can easily attribute to stupidity what others would attribute to malice. Voldi can’t be as bad as people believe, nor can the ministry be as blameless as people believe.”

“And so you are unsure as to which side to fully support in what will no doubt be the upcoming battle with him?”

“Personally, if he hadn’t taken my magic I would have just left the ministry to sort it out. Quite frankly without that, it wouldn’t be my problem. I at least have to get that away from him. I won’t have my magic, passed down from my father, controlled by that man. Harry might have

gone off on some sort of revenge quest or something, but if he left me alone, I would have left him alone.”

“So if it came down to it, you would take his magic, not his life.”

Susan and Harry looked at each other, Harry’s prophesy echoing in their minds. “*Neither can live while the other survives.*”

“Are you asking me if I’ll become a murderer for you?”

“I’m asking if you’re willing to go all the way to see this situation though.”

“What does that mean?” asked Harry.

“Yeah. Killing him solves nothing. Now that the Death Eaters are back together, killing him will just make another rise to take his place.”

“The last time he was beaten they-”

“Went into hiding,” interrupted Harry. “And now they’re back. You didn’t solve anything, you only delayed it. There’s a difference.” The two looked at each other again, the thought between them clear. *Delayed it until Harry was old enough to fight Voldemort as per the original prophesy.*

“He’s right,” said Susan. “We have to destroy the very idea of Death Eaters if we’re going to keep this from happening again.”

“My dear,” said Albus, shocked. “Even you can’t destroy an idea!”

“Maybe,” allowed Susan. “But I can send a message to those who would participate in such a group. Act against the law and Susan will come for you. When she leaves, you won’t need a wand anymore, you’ll need a 9 to 5 and to learn how to drive a car. I know the spell now, and it’s only about two seconds to cast it.”

“I... see. So a fate worse than death, then, for a wizard, awaits those that follow him. Are you sure killing them wouldn’t be the more humane thing to do?”

“No, Headmaster, because I believe the punishment should fit the crime. You use magic to kill, you don’t deserve that magic anymore. That goes for me as well as them, you see. If I kill Voldi, as you suggest, I’m no better than he. First I stop him, then I break his followers, then I’ll see about getting some laws changed in the magical world, and weed out corruption in the Ministry.”

“So you will choose to stand apart, then? Not throw your weight behind the ministry, which for its faults at least tries to do the right thing.”

“And is all the more wicked for that trying. Voldi at least is self consistent. He knows what he wants and goes after it. That much I admire. The ministry claims one thing, does another, and everyone suffers for it.”

“We are getting a bit off track. I ask because I want to take a journey through time with you over the course of the next school year.”

“My time window magic?”

“That is my thought, yes. I have the memories stored away, and they could be viewed in that form, but memory of course can be modified or changed, even without magical interference. I thought we might take a brief tour through Tom Riddle’s history, and see how he became the man he is today.”

“So that I might have less compunctions about killing him for you?”

“So that you don’t take the same path. After all, you are gathering followers, the same way he did. You are very magically gifted, the same as him. You both seek changes at the ministry.”

I have my own prophesy that says I might...

“I seek to destroy every Dementor on earth, he would harness them to his own ends.”

“He couldn’t destroy them before, so he used them in the way he could. You’ll understand, I hope, as you see what he became.”

“Very well. I can hardly refuse, and my *Curiosity* is itching to find out more about this guy most people won’t even name. I’d be happy to visit the past with you. It’ll be another excuse to have my book come up with a better *Time Window*, which I keep forgetting to have it do.”

“Splendid. There is just one other thing. I intend to start hunting down the other pieces, should they exist, of his soul. Can I count on your aid, both of you, in that endeavor?”

Susan hesitated. “I suppose. Even my magic can’t make a backup copy of my soul in case my bodies dies. I guess he should have one body- one soul just like the rest of us. I’m just not sure now, though. I mean, isn’t that killing him just as much as a dagger through the chest?”

“Not if his chest is still up and walking around someplace completely different,” said Harry.

“I guess. One could argue it was just freeing an energy field from a prison, really. That’s what these objects are, essentially, right?”

“Essentially,” agreed Albus.

“Then I’ll at least help you find them. Help you destroy them? I’ll have to think about it. At the very least we can threaten him with them.”

“Very good. Enjoy the rest of your summer, then, and I will see you both back at school. Good night.”

Albus took his leave, and somewhat depressed looking Tonks left right after him.

“Thank you for having us again, Mrs. Weasley,” said Susan.

“Would you like a snack?” she asked.

“Oh, please don’t to go to any trouble on our account,” said Susan.

“Speak for yourself,” said Harry. “I wouldn’t mind a snack, Mrs. Weasley.”

“You are growing so fast, Ron is too. Soon he’ll be taller than his father.”

“Where is Mr. Weasley this evening?” asked Susan. “Out on patrol or something?”

“Yes, he’s- now that’s funny.” Molly glanced over at the clock hanging in the kitchen where most of the hands were on *Home*. The hand with the picture of Arthur was still on *Work*.
Wasn’t that clock in the living room before?

“Seems normal to me,” remarked Harry, looking over at it himself.

“No, it’s just that before you arrived, all the hands were pointing at *Mortal Peril*. But now that you’re here they’re back on *Home*.”

Probably because of your association with me, thought Susan sadly. After all, if you can’t strike directly at your enemies, strike out at their allies and contacts. Of course, if Voldi really wanted me on his side he wouldn’t dare, both to not show his hand or draw my ire. Now that I’m here, however, you’re back under my direct protection and thus out of ‘mortal peril.’

“You know I won’t allow anything to hurt your family, Mrs. Weasley,” said Susan.

“Oh, Susan!” said Molly, throwing her arms around Susan. Harry just gave them a look like *Am I still getting my snack?*

Being Graded

Time: The next morning

Place: The Burrows

The next morning, Susan came awake with a start as Sparkle cast *Awaken* on her, and looked around. Hermione was standing there, hands on her hips.

“Hi!” she said, smiling.

“Good morning,” said Susan, looking around.

Oh, right, no digital clocks around here...

“You must have gotten in late last night,” said Hermione, sitting down on the bed. “I was pretty surprised to wake up and find you in the room! Sparkle wasn’t kidding, you’re hard to wake up.”

“Yeah, don’t know why the Headmaster thought it would be a good idea to go visiting his old chums at midnight, but here you have it.”

“Old chums?”

“The old head of Slytherin house, Horace Bughorn or something. He was trying to goad him into teaching again, and we were the bait.”

“Teaching? That’s odd. Did our High Inquisitor not want to come back and teach this year?”

“Search me. He got talked into it though. I guess we’ll just have to see.”

“You won’t believe who’s here visiting!”

“It’s not Draco, is it?”

“What? No, Fleur!”

“Really? That’s amazing news! Now we just need Victor back and Team Susan will have most of its members in one place. What’s she doing here, not that I mind.”

“Apparently she and Bill are getting married sometime soon.”

“Really? Well that’s good, I guess. How about that.”

“For some reason Mrs. Weasley and Ginny aren’t too happy about it.”

“Really? Ginny can suck it up, they’re both in Team Susan. But why would Mrs. Weasley be against it? She’s not a pure blood wacko. Unless she doesn’t want a grandchild that’s like one eighth Veela? Which reminds me, I let slip to Bughorn you had photographic reflexes, and he was very interested. Don’t be surprised if he wants a demonstration. Oh, and Mr. Dumbledore said he would have to be careful about what spells he used around you.”

“Okay...”

“Just thought you should know. Anyway, what time is it?”

“About nine thirty. Harry got up a while ago, but we couldn’t wake you up until Sparkle here said she would.”

“Well then, let’s go see what my book has made for me, then, shall we?” Susan opened up her *Personal Dimension* from writings, outside the window to bypass the *Fortification*, and invited Hermione inside. They flew inside and Susan closed it, as she was going to be looking at her book in a moment. She got changed in her cabin (after a quick dip in the lake) and opened her book of magic. “I asked it for an improved spell last night, let’s see what it’s come up with.”

With a grade 8 spell able to actually *stop time* a spell like *Time Window* really should be grade 6, with *Time Area* being grade 7, but the spell list is the spell list, so Susan was pleased to see *Time Area* at the same grade, but at a 20 segment time to cast.

Doesn't matter, it's not a combat spell, is it? Of course, a longer time for spells that are not combat spells is actually beneficial, because I could only add 3 segments onto Time Window. But I can add 10 onto Time Area and never fail at casting it. So it is harder or easier with a longer time? It's supposed to be harder, but it works out easier. Magic is weird.

She “forgot” *Time Window* and learned *Time Area* in its place, at no additional XP cost, and it appeared on her character sheet.

“Super! That will come in handy, no doubt.”

Susan explained to Hermione about Albus’ wish to go hunting pieces of soul and showing her Voldemort’s “This is your life.”

“Are you really that clueless as to how evil he is? He murdered Harry’s parents in cold blood!”

“Ah, no, there’s no proof of that. I mean yes, they’re dead. But people said the same thing about Sirius, didn’t they? That he killed all those people in broad daylight, when really it was Peter who did that. I haven’t seen any evidence or any trial to determine if it really was Voldi and not someone shape-shifted into Voldi. I mean, seriously- the way he supposedly attacked the Potters makes no sense. Invisibility magic exists- If he wanted to kill a tiny baby, just wait, invisible, outside their house. They come out, he casts the killing curse on the kid, and there- no more Harry Potter problem. But no, he storms into the place, alerts both parents, giving them a chance, however slight, to stop him. I mean, *overconfident* is one thing, but that was just stupid. Why not poison their water or send them an owl bomb? Pump CO2 into the window at night, I don’t see a lot of battery powered smoke detectors in wizard’s houses, do you? This whole death curse thing just doesn’t add up for me.”

“I guess you’re right. The only evidence we have is that his parents died that night, and so did Voldi. But if someone was going to impersonate him, they could have stabbed him in the back, taken his hair, drank the potion, and went after Harry himself. For... some reason. No, the simplest explanation is that he was just stupid, didn’t think it through, and learned his lesson. Though to be fair to him, he was a powerful spell-caster and curses, especially that one, don’t normally rebound like it did.”

“But that isn’t proof. Nor is it proof that some other person above him isn’t manipulating events.”

Hermione sighed. “It’s never simple with you, is it?”

“It can’t be. Last night the Headmaster asked me if I was prepared to murder Voldi. This isn’t some, oops, I take it back situation here, Hermione. I take someone’s life or their magic or whatever and I can’t give it back. I have to be sure I’m doing the right thing.”

“I can’t fault you for that. We better be getting back through, they’ll be wondering where we are!”

And so, Hermione and Susan flew back to the ground and walked into the kitchen from the outside. Molly spun.

“Oh, it’s just you two. How in the world did you get... no, I don’t even want to know.”

“Hello, Susan!” said Fleur, coming over to hug her.

“I heard about your engagement, congratulations!” Molly rolled her eyes but Fleur was plainly excited.

“It’s all thanks to you,” she said. “With the, uh...” she mimed a bag of gold being lifted, “stuff you gave us, we can have a big ceremony and invite everyone.”

“I’m glad to see it being put to good use. You’ll make a beautiful bride.”

“I expect so,” she said, a little sadly for some reason. “But come, I brought Harry his breakfast, would you like something? We’re working on lunch, at the moment, it’s hard to feed so many people!”

“Sorry about that.”

“Don’t be silly,” said Molly. “We love having you, and you’ve done more for us than we can ever really repay.” She glanced at the clock again, which was still off *Mortal Peril*. “Plus a lot of our food comes from Ron’s *Create Food* item anyway. We just have to prepare it and use it up within the day.”

“Glad to hear it. I should ask my book for a higher grade version of that spell. *Create Feast* or something. You know, there’s a spell to *Equip Army* with swords and armor, as many people as you can see. But no spell to whip up a fabulous feast for a hundred guests? It’s odd.”

“Wasn’t your father more interested in spells to, you know, save the worlds he was visiting?” asked Hermione. “And he was only traveling with a couple of people, he would only need food for a couple at a time.”

“Sure, but my book is supposed to be a complete record of magic, in case their world fell before he got back, and he had no home to return to. Basically it was to be the legacy of their entire history of studying magic. Though I suppose if that were true, it might have been too big to even carry, so maybe it is just a subset? Either way the sacrifice he made giving it to me must have been enormous. I wouldn’t want to be without it, after all. He really loved me, even before I was born.”

“Do you think he did make it back?” asked Molly softly.

“I have to believe that. The only other option is that he died with his quest unfulfilled, and his world died with him. He’s not here with my mother, so he must either still be journeying, or back home.”

“After so long?” asked Hermione.

“Time doesn’t run the same between worlds, I guess. What could be years here might only be seconds on another world. It’s all very confusing, with a lot of high order math, I guess.”

“It would have to be. Where are Harry and Ron?”

“Ron said he wanted to get some practice in, so he and Harry are out in the yard, throwing spells at each other. It’s only a burst of light, but I had to stop watching. I’ve never seen anyone move like Ron moves now. You’ve turned him into some kind of fighting machine.”

“That was all his hard work, Mrs. Weasley. While I did provide him an item to help him move faster, I hope he isn’t cheesy enough to use it in practice.”

“He can move faster than that? You guys are really serious about fighting you know who, aren’t you?”

“Ron was serious about finding his special talent. He found it. I wouldn’t be surprised if he gets hired to train Aurors in Magic Fu when he graduates. It just so happens his talent lies in the area of battle spell-casting. When Voldi gets bored of researching magic and makes his move, I’m going to be glad to have him at my side.”

“Yes, I suppose it wouldn’t hurt. It probably wouldn’t hurt for us all to get some practice in.”

“That’s the spirit!” Susan grinned.

“By the way, your grades came while you were-”

Hermione shrieked. “You waited until *now* to tell us? Oh my gosh! Oh my gosh! Where are they? I can’t believe this, I know I failed everything. Oh, I don’t even want to look.”

Susan shook her head and went over to the table, where Harry and Ron's letters were. She glanced over and saw that Harry had:

Astronomy: A
Care of Magical Creatures: E
Charms: O
Defense Against the Dark Arts: O
Divination: P
Herbology: E
History of Magic: D
Potions: E
Transfiguration: E

Where Ron had:

Astronomy: A
Care of Magical Creatures: A
Charms: O
Defense Against the Dark Arts: O
Arithmancy: O
Herbology: E
History of Magic: D
Potions: E
Transfiguration: O

She whistled. "Wow, Ron really pulled it off, didn't he?"

"Yes," said Molly, pleased. "I can't really be too angry he's so into combat with grades like that. You must have really inspired him."

"Just doing what comes naturally," she replied with a chuckle. Hermione was trying to open her letter with shaking hands.

Does that girl have Parental Pressure or something? Wait, is that a standard Weakness? Oh well, who cares.* She opened her own letter.

Astronomy: E
Care of Magical Creatures: A
Charms: O
Defense Against the Dark Arts: O
Arithmancy: E
Herbology: E
History of Magic: E
Potions: O
Transfiguration: O

"How did you do, if you don't mind me asking?" asked Molly.

"Not at all. About as well as could be expected," she answered modestly, handing it over.

“I should say so. You even passed History of Magic, which I wasn’t even sure was possible with what Ron and Harry got.”

“I am ashamed to admit I re-rolled that one.”

“You did what?”

“Never mind. Let’s just say I knew I was getting an A, but I wanted an E so time sort of rewound for me and I did better the second time. It’s a... racial thing. It wasn’t magic, it’s just something we Paragon citizens can do. It’s hard to explain to non-natives.”

“If you say so, dear. Hermione?”

“I did okay,” she said, also showing Molly.

“Well done,” said Susan, looking over her column of O’s. “Looks like you have more than photographic reflexes after all.”

“What was I worried about?”

“Hermione, I have no idea.”

After breakfast, Susan and Hermione joined the others outside, and Harry was taking on Ginny and Ron at the same time. As Susan watched she wouldn’t have said he was holding his own without the *Barrier Against Spells* but he was doing all right. She noticed Ron obviously *Accelerated* and figured perhaps Harry had requested it, so it was like fighting three people at once.

“Hi Susan,” he called, and the others turned to wave to her.

“Hey, everyone! Looking good there, Ginny. You’ll be taking on two at once yourself in no time!”

“I borrowed Harry’s item, it was fun watching spells just bounce off me. Great for practicing blocking too, you don’t have to worry about missing.”

“Yeah, my magic is pretty awesome. Nice job on the grades, you two. Pity about History class though.”

“Ha, like we care,” said Ron, his *Acceleration* coming off as he absorbed his wand into his hand. “Glad to see you up, we thought you went into a coma.”

“No we didn’t,” said Ginny, shoving him. “We knew she got in late, mom told us.”

“Ah, Susan, you’re up,” said a new voice, coming around the house. It was Fred and George. They exchanged greetings, and asked to have the *Dimension* opened to check on their potions and other experiments. Susan agreed and let them inside.

“An hour okay?”

“Sure. Don’t forget us!”

“I’ll try not to. See you later.”

They disappeared.

“It’s weird, seeing them actually wanting to do work,” remarked Ginny.

“They’ve been coming up with some great stuff to use on enemies,” said Susan. “Even enchanting cloaks and things with shield charms, to approximate *Barrier*. The sad truth is, war can be profitable if you’re an arms dealer.”

“They haven’t given up on the joke shop though, have they?” asked Hermione. “Not that I would have approved of such a thing anyway.”

“Nah, but they need a lot of gold if they’re going to rent someplace. I think they figure on selling their stuff to the ministry once it comes out, you know, that Voldi is back,” answered Ron.

“That will be a booming business pretty soon,” Susan said sadly. “How long did they say they wanted? Two hours?”

“I’ll give you a Galleon if you keep them in there all day!” said Ginny.
“I don’t think your mother would approve.”
“Spoilsport.”

“You do remember,” said Molly at lunch, “that you, Ginny, are not supposed to be doing magic outside of school for several more years yet?”

“Neither is Ron,” she countered. “And I’m doing combat training, not messing around.”

“Yes, and I’m still not sure how I feel about that. I mean, practicing to hurt someone...”

“Mom, if being around Susan has taught me anything, it’s that nothing changes unless you can stand up and have your voice heard. When Voldi and his Death Eaters were around last time, everyone just cowered in their homes hoping someone else would do something. I mean, it was the whole of the magical world against, what, forty people? No one took a stand, and look what happened. That’s not going to happen this time if I can help up.”

“Yes, I know...” She looked over at Susan, who gave her back an *I’m proud of her, what do you want me to say?* look.

“It’s just if someone from the ministry came by and saw you, there would be consequences for you and your father and me.”

“I’ll be happy to open up the *Dimension* if that’s your only concern, Mrs. Weasley,” said Susan.

“I’m concerned she’ll go into a fight against a Death Eater thinking she’s better than she is and get killed!”

“Now, Molly,” said Arthur. “I think if Ginny was going up against Death Eaters the situation would be pretty desperate. We would have bigger problems at that point, is what I’m saying. You wouldn’t just run off and fight one, would you?”

“Of course not! That’s what I have Susan for.”

“You see?”

“Are you really okay with this, Arthur?”

He sighed. “Our lives have changed. We should be thankful she has a role model like Susan to look up to. We raised a daughter who isn’t relying on her bothers to keep her safe, she’s willing to practice and learn to defend herself. We should be encouraging that, not trying to hold rules over her that don’t make sense anymore. She’s in no danger, Harry only casts to help her get better at blocking, and no spell can hurt him, apparently. Even if something did happen, Susan is right there to take care of it.”

“I guess you’re right. I need to stop thinking of girls like they were in my day, I guess. I need to move with the times.”

“In your day? You should have seen Lilly slap James for picking on Severus. Guys just think we’re weaker, that doesn’t make it the truth. Do you really think Ginny shouldn’t be able to defend herself, and Ron should, just because she’s a girl?”

“Yeah,” said Ron. “I bet Hermione could learn Magic Fu with no problems, with grades like hers. I don’t think of her as weak. I think she’s good enough not to need it.”

“No, no, of course not. She’s just... uh, younger?” Molly looked to see if anyone bought this.

Shaking their heads, they indicated that they didn’t.

“Very well. Just be careful, okay?”

“Whatever, mom. It’ll be fine.”

**It's not, it's from Demongate High. It's a 3 background point weakness, and you have to spend XP to re-roll exams (at least 1) if you don't get an A grade on every one. Wonder how she knew about it? Weird!*

Surprises

Time: Two days later

Place: The river between The Burrows and the Lovegood House

“Are you sure I’m going the right way?” Susan asked Sparkle.

“We can’t get lost. We follow the stream south until it widens out, and then head east. The house sits in a field, we can’t miss it.”

“Okay.”

“You don’t need to ask every thirty seconds.”

“Of course I do! You know I have-”

“*No Sense of Direction*. Yes, I know.”

Susan and Sparkle were currently flying over the landscape, looking for Luna’s house. The Weasley’s said it was probably best if she didn’t, you know, give away magic by flying about, but she said she had it covered. She was currently *Unseen*, a grade 2 Neptune spell her book had created months ago that she had never had the occasion to use.

Okay, it might have come in handy when rescuing that president’s son but we couldn’t be sure they were all non-magical.

Unseen basically made it so normal people, those without any supernatural (like elves) or magical abilities, couldn’t perceive her. Hard to prove it works to a room full of wizards, but they believed her and let her go.

“Are you sure...”

“Yes!”

“Just staying in character!”

A few more moments of flying and the house came in sight. Susan hovered above the place, checking it out.

“No garage, no roads in and out. No telephone poles or electric lines- this must be the place!”

“Or just someone that wants to live way, way off the grid.”

Susan landed. “Dirigible plumbs? Yeah, this is the place.”

“Susan!” cried a voice from a window, and as she looked up, the door burst open and she was being hugged.

“Hi Luna, having a good summer?”

“Better now. Come meet my father!” Susan had a hand grabbed and was dragged inside. The house was cluttered, and smelled of fresh ink and parchment. Various odd devices were scattered about, and Luna was shouting for her father.

“Hello,” said a jovial voice from above, as the face of Mr. Lovegood poked down.

“Derpy!” said Susan with a grin, then get a horrified look on her face. “I’m so sorry, that just slipped out!”

“The what’s this now?” asked Xenophilus. He started down the central staircase.

“There’s a show called My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic and one of the background characters has Strabismus like you do. I could cure you, if you would like.”

“Friendship is Magic? Strab...what? Luna said talking to you might be interesting, but not this interesting. I’m already intrigued.”

“Uhm, yes. Could we start over?”

“Of course!” He made what was probably an excellent rendition of speaking backwards (being a man of rare and varied talents) and moved backwards up the stairs, disappearing again. His head poked down again. “Hello!”

Luna giggled, apparently unsurprised her father took the request literally.

“Good morning, Mr. Lovegood. I’m Susan, it’s nice to meet you.”

“And you as well,” said Xenophilius, coming down again and holding out a hand. “Luna has told me all about you and your wonderful magic. And of course I saw the tournament, well done there.”

“Ah, thank you. I hope the Quibbler is doing well?”

“Passably, not as well as when we printed your article, of course. But readership is slightly up. But now I find myself compelled from a previous *loop* to ask you something about equating friendship and magic.”

Wait, thought Sparkle. *The way he said that, is he a Loop- Nah, can’t be.*

Susan explained how the show was all about showing that working together and trusting your friends could allow one to accomplish feats normally impossible for one person.

“And you say they’re talking ponies?”

“Yes.”

“And they manipulate weather to such an extent that in the span of twenty four hours they turn winter into spring?”

“The ‘Winter Wrap Up’ yes. There’s a song and everything.”

“And they once fought an agent of chaos with near infinite control of local matter, energy and space-time, sealed him up again as a stone statue, then let him out again *on purpose* to rehabilitate him with friendship?”

“That happened.”

“Extraordinary. But what does this have to do with me? I’m not a pony, I don’t think.” He made a show of looking himself over. “Nope, still human.”

“It’s your eyes. Like I said, one of the ponies suffers from the same condition you do. In the non-magical world it probably would have been diagnosed and corrected with surgery when you were a baby. Here in the magical world, however, they seem to let things slide a lot more. Which is funny, because you would think magic would work out a lot better than surgery.”

“Ah yes, she told me about poor Neville and his family. You did a similar cure for him, as I understand it.”

“That’s right. I could fix your eyes, if you wanted.”

“Well, that’s very nice of you...” he said, scratching his head. “But my eyes being this way is sort of who I am now. But then, I’m not my eyes, am I? By changing them do I change myself? Possibly, because that would change how I see the world.”

“Ah, but is seeing the world seeing how the world really is?” countered Susan. “You aren’t even seeing the world, really. You’re seeing reflected energy, bounced off surfaces that are turned into electrical impulses and then into chemical impulses and then interpreted by the brain to have a certain meaning. Change the way your brain interprets those signals and the world is a totally different place. The eyes are just the portals.”

Xenophilius looked at her for a moment. “I can see why Luna likes you, you both think in similar ways. She’s always saying she can’t prove I exist because she could be delusional and just fooling herself into thinking she’s experiencing my presence.”

“Then we’re both under the same delusion, because you seem real to me.”

“Ah, but you could be a further part of her delusion, and of course we would both agree we were real.”

“It would be counter productive to say otherwise.”

“It would. So, would you like the cure? You don’t have to decide now, I’m just offering it should you want it at some time.”

“Would it take long? I hate to interrupt your time together.”

“That depends on if you want the full course, or the knife. The full spell takes ten minutes. The knife, well, it’s in and out, if you take my meaning.”

“Knife?”

“I’ve bound the spell into a knife, as it kills Dementors. Sort of a shortcut for the ten minute spell. They tend not to stick around while you’re trying to kill them, oddly.”

“I don’t mind,” said Luna. “I see her magic all the time, but you said you wanted to, dad. It’s the perfect excuse.”

“I guess if you really wasn’t too much trouble for you...”

“Not at all. Let’s sit somewhere and do this!”

So Susan, Luna and Xenophilius sat on cushions on the floor, and Susan took Xenophilius’ hands.

“Now remember, this takes ten minutes. Don’t let go or we’ll have to start over.”

“Right.”

Susan made her check, spending 9 energy in case she rolled minimum, and got 3 back with *Energy Boost*. She needed to spend either more time or nearly max energy because without it, she couldn’t possibly succeed at the spell. (Her difficulty being a 15 and a straight *Sun* check maxing out at 14.)

Thank goodness I’m a Natural Magician.

Magical energy swirled and built up around Xenophilius, and at the end of the spell (and a 20 result), he blinked and looked around.

“Oh, I see. Literally. My shoulder feels better too, how about that? Thank you very much, Susan. This is going to take some getting used to.”

“Not to worry, it won’t take long. I read about a guy who wore these special glasses that turned the world upside down for him. His brain adjusted in a few days. Then he took them off and had to readjust again. The brain truly is a marvel.”

“That it is. Well, thank you again. Both for the spell and the demonstration. I thought Luna might be exaggerating a bit, but it turns out she wasn’t. Could I just have a quick word?” He pulled Susan into the other room.

“You’ll protect her, won’t you?” he whispered. “It’s just, she’s the world to me. After my wife died, I would have been lost without her. And with, uh, You Know Who back on the loose, yes, she told me what she could, I worry about her safety.”

“Not to worry, Mr. Lovegood, Several families, like the Weasley’s and yourself, are under my personal protection. I will move time itself to make sure you all stay safe.”

“Thank you, that means a lot to me.”

They went back into the sitting room.

“So, what’s your plan for today, girls?” he asked.

“I thought I would show her the cave. Do you have a bathing suit handy?”

“I have one in the camping stuff in my *Pocket Dimension*, yes.”

“Think she can make it?” asked Xenophilius.

“You saw her at the tournament.”

“Oh yes, it did have an underwater portion, didn’t it? Come back for lunch when you’re ready!”

“Come on,” said Luna, grabbing Susan’s hand again. “Let’s go put our suits on, I can’t wait to show you this!”

“I’m not going underwater,” said Sparkle. “You can send me home at this point, right?”

Xenophilius fell over, perhaps partially from shock and partially his brain hadn’t adjusted to binocular vision yet. “That cat just spoke!”

“Are you okay? Didn’t I introduce you? I’m sorry. This is Sparkle, my *Companion*.”

“A talking cat? Or are you an Animagus?”

“I’m a special case.”

“I see that you must be. Please, if you don’t mind staying, I would very much like to interview you for the paper. Get a cat’s perspective on life, and such.”

Sparkle looked over at Susan.

“You can if you want. Given the, uh, nature of the publication, it’ll fit right in.”

“Very well. But I demand tuna, or possibly salmon, in compensation.”

“I’ll see what I can do.”

“I’ll send you back after lunch then.”

After changing, Luna and Susan went down to the stream, though Luna wouldn’t say exactly what they were going to see.

“You’ll see,” is all she should say about it.

They talked about Susan’s grades, and Fleur getting married and about Susan’s mother giving lessons now.

“Hey, think we should get your mom and my dad together?” asked Luna.

“We could introduce them at the wedding, see if they hit it off. I don’t know, though, leaving the non-magical world might be a bit tough for my mom. She likes technology. She doesn’t understand it half the time, but she likes it.”

“My dad would probably love to learn about the way non-magical people do stuff.”

“Yeah, but would he want to give up magic? Wizards live out here,” she indicated the sparsely populated landscape around them, “So that they can do magic and not worry about non-magical people seeing them. Though I suppose they could live on the border. In the country, but not have close neighbors.”

“So, hypothetically, where would we live, if, I don’t know, we wanted to be roommates or something when we graduated?”

“Depends on where we worked, I guess. My magic is powerful, but finite. You guys can heat your houses and do dishes and everything with magic. I can’t. I would have to go back and forth every day, and live in the technological world, because my magic can’t do all that stuff. Of course if I was living with someone who could take care of that sort of thing, it wouldn’t be so much of an issue.”

“I guess. I wouldn’t want to be tied down to one place. I was thinking of becoming a Naturalist, studying and discovering magical creatures in the world.”

“Oh, I was going to say, for a second there I thought you meant somehow making money by running around naked. I wasn’t going to try dissuading you, of course.”

Luna looked at her funny.

“What? That’s a naturalist, someone who doesn’t wear clothes.”

“Sounds like more a thing you do, rather than a career.”

“What about discovering magical creatures? Are there that many still left to find to make that a career?”

“I think so.”

How do you make money doing that, though? Not that I wouldn't make enough for both of us, given what people have said about how much my Imbued items might go for. I still like my idea better.

“That's still no problem then, right? My magic can send you wherever you want to go, and bring you back at night. It's not like you would need to travel for hours. Sure, we would need a room away from prying eyes to open the portal, but we could fix up a room to do that. It could work, if, like you said, we theoretically became roommates or whatever.”

“Would you, maybe, want to think about theoretically becoming roommates, or whatever?”

“Oh, I might consider possibly thinking about perhaps taking under consideration the idea of maybe having you as a roommate... or whatever. I don't know though, I saw your room. You're pretty messy.”

“And you're not? I've seen your cabin.”

“Hey, that whole structure is a workshop. They're supposed to be messy. Tell you what, I'll show you my actual room after lunch, how about that?”

“Deal.”

They walked in silence for a moment.

“I have to wonder...” said Susan.

“Yes?”

“I'm thinking like a wizard, aren't I? There's nothing that stops me from getting a shop, moving into the top of it, and putting up a big 'ol solar panel on the roof for power. Or, yeah, the *Animate Objects* spell. While I'm just chilling at home during the night, I could have a big old ball with a magnet inside racing around a track, charging batteries. And I could make some kind of object that serves as a two way antenna, and get the internet that way. Just stick half of it someplace I can get a signal and the other half wherever I need it. I think with a little ingenuity and some magic, I could have the best of both worlds. I'd have to wire the place myself, but I could use a spell to get the rating I needed for the duration.”

“It sounds like an exciting project to work on.”

“Yeah! I'll have to think about it. Should I, you know, need to move in with a witch or wizard at some point.”

“Just in case.”

“Right.”

“We'll, we're here.”

Luna stopped in front of the stream, which widened considerably as it meandered past them. They were about in the middle, the widest point, and Luna was already taking her clothes off.

Susan followed suit, sticking the bundle of clothes into her *Pocket Dimension* and casting *Breathe Water* on them both.

“Follow me!” said Luna, preparing to jump in. “Oh, can we talk to each other down there?”

“I don't see why not. The spell allows for “verbal spell casting” which means talking, right?”

“I guess we’ll see. Come on!” She dived in, and Susan followed. The water was cool, but it was summer, so it wasn’t bad, and relatively clear. The two struck out for the middle area, and Luna stopped after a moment and floated there. Susan came up behind her.

“Can you understand me?” Luna asked.

“Sure can!”

“This is amazing. I keep forgetting to breathe, my natural inclination underwater is to, you know, not be drowned. I think we’re in about the right place, so come on.”

She went further down and Susan followed, and it seemed Luna was looking for something. She spotted a cave and pointed, then started swimming towards it. She zipped inside, and Susan hesitated only a few seconds.

I guess it must be safe. What kind of guts does this girl have to willingly swim into some dark cave underwater? I mean, she can’t do magic outside of school so how did she even find out about this?

She followed, the area getting darker and colder as she went. The tunnel was pretty wide, and short, and as she moved through her eyes adjusted. Suddenly she was out the other side and looked around- there was an underwater cave here, but somehow the walls were studded with what looked like glowing gems.

“Tada!” said Luna, as Susan stared about in wonder. “How do you like it?”

“This is amazing! What makes them glow like that? Some kind of glowing moss? Are they magic? Have you worked one loose to see what it is?”

Luna shook her head. “Can’t you just enjoy something like this without wondering what makes it work?”

“Well, no, I have *Curious*. But I get the point. Sorry.”

“It’s okay.”

Luna swam over and took Susan’s hand, and they looked around. The cave wasn’t very large, maybe five meters across, and it seemed studded with different colored crystals at irregular points around the whole thing.

“Okay, I have to know how you found this place.”

“That I can tell you. It took about two years for me to work up the courage to head inside the tunnel and see what was inside. I made myself work up to about thirty seconds before I went in, so that I could go fifteen seconds in and fifteen seconds out in case it was really long. It turned out it wasn’t that long, but I still only managed about ten seconds inside. I really pushed myself one day and I think I managed twenty, but I almost didn’t make it back up so I made fifteen the limit.”

“Wait, are you telling me you swam down here for two years straight just to check out a tunnel?”

“No, not at first, anyway. I wanted to see how far I could go. So each time I went a little further. When I could stay down a good long time I checked the whole area out and found this. Then I worked up to staying down even longer so I could go inside, and tried to stay in there longer and longer.”

“Wow, Luna, I... I don’t know what to say. That’s amazing.”

“Not any more amazing than stuff you’ve done.”

“I haven’t done anything. Everything I’ve done, my magic accomplished for me. And I have *Overconfident* but even I’m not sure I could have done what you did, and found this cave.”

“It’s not actually as great as I thought.”

“What do you mean? This is a fantastic place! I love you for sharing it with me.”

“Then you better share your special place so we’re even. No, I think the charm was the fact I could only see it for a few seconds at a time. Being able to stay and look sort of makes it less special.”

“I guess people appreciate fleeting things more? Plus you must have had to work so hard to make it down here, and now one spell by me makes your hard work seem less worth it. Well it’s not. This is Luna’s Cave. You found it, you earned it. I think it’s great.”

But I still want to know what makes it work.

“Let’s see if it goes any further!”

“Okay!”

The girls checked the walls, and Luna found another passageway leading off one side, and called Susan over. “This one’s a tighter fit, still want to try it?”

“Darker too, no mystic gems in there. We can always *Phase* our way out if we get into trouble. You want to do the honors?”

“I would be happy to.” Luna wiggled inside, then stopped just after her feet disappeared into the wall.

“Pull me out!” she cried. “There’s something shoved in here!”

“Shoved in here? What?” Susan reached in and grabbed Luna’s ankles, pulling her out of the hole. She popped out trailing a large, black bag, about the size of a person.

“Treasure?” asked Susan.

“I have a bad feeling,” answered Luna. She reached for the zipper on the bag and gave a tug. It was all plastic, and started unzipping.

The pale, dead face of the corpse lifelessly stared up at them.

"Now what do we do?" asked Luna, and Susan was further impressed she didn't flinch away or freak out.

"Now we solve a murder," she replied. "Sorry about that. I've messed up your cave, I guess."

"You? This wasn't your fault!"

"I'll explain in a minute." She looked down at the woman floating in the bag and memorized the face. It wasn't pretty, after so long, but she figured she would recognize it in a missing persons report if she had to. "Zip it back up and put her back."

"Back?"

"Yeah. Kind of hard to explain how two girls with no diving equipment got down here and found this body, right? We need to find who did this, make them confess, and the police can get the evidence." She looked sadly about the cave, knowing when the police divers got down here, they would probably tear it apart. Both in their usual clumsy way of doing everything, (like calling out SWAT teams to visit what turns out to be an incorrect address) and when scientists showed up to study what made the crystals glow.

Why can't they just enjoy something without wondering what makes it work?

HAHAHAHAHAH.

"What are we going to do about your cave?"

"Let me handle that. Okay, help me lift her back then."

The two girls sadly put the body back where they found it and Luna went to the center of the cave. She floated there a moment, eyes closed. Slowly the light dimmed and went out, plunging the cave into darkness.

"How did you do that?" asked Susan. *And how am I going to get out of here with my No Sense of Direction? Oh, I could cast a light spell. Duh.*

"I just asked it to not shine for a while, that's all."

"You asked a cave? What?"

"Come on, the exit is over here." Susan felt Luna swim over and take her hand. She allowed herself to be led in the darkness, and Luna pushed her into the passageway. "You first, I'll follow."

Susan made her way through, and Luna followed, the water brightening as they did so.

"Now what did you mean about messing up my cave?"

"It just figures that I go into some random cave with someone, which should be a really special moment for us, and find something like that. It's just a thing that happens to me, you know?"

"You can't blame yourself for that."

“Sure I can! Look, I gain XP, right? It’s how I learn spells, and make items, and get better at my skill checks. But it has to come from somewhere, right?”

“I suppose most things do.”

“Well, it comes from me having adventures. Without adventures there’s no XP gain. Without XP I’m nothing. Ergo, Susan has adventures. This is obviously one of them, solving this murder. If you had brought anyone else down here they wouldn’t have found any bodies, and your cave wouldn’t be ruined by the memory of finding a body down there.”

Luna swam close. “I wouldn’t have brought anyone else down here, you know that. And my memory will always be of looking at your face when you saw it. Not finding that poor woman down there.”

“Yes, well, it’s the principle of the thing, isn’t it? I’m trying to apologize.”

Luna smiled, eyes downcast. “I’ll let you apologize tonight, how about that?”

“What’s tonight?”

“I don’t know.” Luna looked up, grinning wider. “How badly do you want to say you’re sorry?”

Susan started grinning too. “Pretty badly.”

“There’s your answer then.”

“But first we have to solve this murder.”

“I agree. Is there magic you can do to help?”

“I’m not sure. There is a spell of *Corpse Conversation* that I could use, but I only get 1 week per rating. Even with max energy thrown in, that’s about 80 weeks. That’s not even two years, and that body looked like it had been down here for some time.”

“What about *Time Window*?”

Susan shook her head, hair gently waving in the water. “We would be down there for hours, rewinding time. I can’t ask it to show me a certain time, like “when this woman was put here” only a specified one, like “three PM last Monday.” Not to mention whoever put her there must have been a diver. All we would see is their mask.”

“So what can we do?”

“I’ll have to look at my list of spells and see what seems most useful. Come on.”

And so Luna and Susan made their way back the Luna’s house, where Sparkle was sleeping on the step.

“What’s wrong?” she asked as they approached. “You two look miserable.”

“We are, we found a body,” replied Susan.

“Oh. Quest time?”

“Exactly.”

“Come on in. We’ll get changed again and see what my dad has to say.” (They had just walked back as they were and dried off on the way)

“So let me understand this,” said Xenophilus. “There’s a dead woman at the bottom of the stream, and you want to solve the murder?”

“That’s right,” replied Susan.

“But why? It doesn’t concern you, does it? I could just contact the ministry and have them deal with it.”

“But if she wasn’t killed by magic, and I doubt she was, what are they going to do?”

“What are you going to do?”

“Find out who did it. If they are walking free, get them to confess and pay their debt to society. And you’re wrong, it does concern us. Someone, probably a man, believes he’s gotten away with murder. We need to convince him otherwise.”

“This isn’t just a game you’re playing, is it Luna?”

“No, there really was someone down there!”

“Okay. I don’t know any magic that can help, but you have my support.”

“Thank you. We’re off to get my book of spells, see if there’s anything that can help us there. Otherwise I’ll head home and check for missing person’s reports on the internet.”

“On the what?”

“It’s the non-magical global information network.”

“You have one of those?”

“Oh yes...”

And so the three, (after lunch) went to look through Susan’s book of spells.

“Looks like *True Question* is our only magical option,” said Luna, when the book was closed.

“Yeah, great, a riddle about who killed her. We already have that, we don’t need another one on top of it.”

“So we head to your house?”

“I’m afraid so.”

“My mom is probably at work. Come on, my room is this way.”

“Non-magical houses sure are different,” remarked Luna. “What is all this stuff?”

“I’ll explain it all later, come on.”

Susan booted up the family computer and searched for missing persons reports from the area.

“Wow, this is depressing,” said Susan after a few minutes. “How can people just disappear like this? Here’s a guy that went missing, his keys, wallet, asthma inhaler, everything still left in his house. Where did he go? There’s cameras everywhere now, isn’t that what everyone complains about? How does anyone go missing?”

“You could find him, couldn’t you?”

“Yeah, I could, if he was still alive. All I would need is an object owned by him, and a few minutes with *Descry Owner*. Then pop him back with *Telesummon*.”

Which reminds me, I need to check on where our favorite potions master is, I haven’t looked in on him lately.

“Maybe you could open a detective agency that just happens to be a little more successful than most, and help people like this be found.”

“Sooner or later someone would wonder *why* I was so successful. Though maybe I could do it on the sly?”

“I’m sure some of these people were taken by vampires, or other magical creatures and their situation was just covered up. The ministry knows, but the non-magical population is kept ignorant.”

“That would fit what I know about them. Some of these people have been missing for years, you don’t think some of them are casualties of the first battle with Voldi, you do?”

“That’s entirely possible. I heard he didn’t confine himself to just making trouble for wizards to make his point.”

“Sadly, we must deal with facts, not things ‘everybody knows’ to be true.”

“True.”

More than three hours later, Susan and Luna stared into the face they had seen in that lonely cave.

“Missing in 2008,” said Susan. “She’s been gone a long time. Nadia Reshk, age 23.”

“This report is detailed though,” said Luna, touching the screen. “Left her workplace for lunch at 1:00 and never came back. Her car was found the next day, and three days later her purse was found discarded on some railroad tracks. It gives a city name!”

“Just a second. Huh, the place she worked at is closed now. There’s two reviews here, left several months later. How about that- life really does go on. Those people had no idea the waitress serving their food was a replacement for a dead woman.”

“I suppose in a certain sense, we’re all replacements for someone who has died.”

“Yeah, I guess. And then it closed. Man. Okay, let me look for these railroad tracks...” She zoomed around on the map, looking for tracks. “Yup, that’s got to be it. Look, there’s a stretch there, it goes away from the roads and there’s a big blank spot not near anything. Bet you anything that’s where our mystery man left the purse.”

“Why chuck the purse though? Why not just destroy it?”

“Non-magical people can’t just vanish stuff, you know. Oh, he could have thrown it away, but there was a chance it could have been found and traced back. Still, it was rather dangerous to leave it there too, if someone saw some strange person throwing stuff at the track they might have remembered. It’s a good question though, he took the body and hid it, why not take her purse with it?”

Luna shook her head.

“November third... where were we then?” Susan’s eyes widened. “We were at school! That would have been my first year. In fact I think that was around the time Harry had his first Quidditch match, a game he seems, thankfully, to have given up playing to focus on more important things. While we were beating up a helpless troll, this poor woman was being murdered.”

“You don’t think there’s some kind of connection, do you?”

“No, couldn’t be. I just thought it was strange.”

“So what’s our next move?”

“Feel like a little visit to the area?” Susan spun through the neighborhood in Street View, looking for a good place to put a *Teleportal*. The place was about an hour away from the lake, which was logical. *If I was going to get rid of a body, I wouldn’t do it in my backyard either.*

Not that I couldn’t just read Teleport, I used to do that all the time.

“No wonder you can’t live without this Internet stuff,” said Luna, watching her click down the street. “It’s pretty amazing, especially because you need to see a place before you can go there with your magic. As long as you have an address, it looks like you can make it!”

“That’s right.” Susan stopped on a side street. “There, behind that building there’s that white building there, and a bunch of trees. We can go right behind the trees there and walk up the street to see what we can see.”

“But what about that car? The person could come back at any second and see us stepping out of thin air!”

Susan laughed. "These were taken two years ago, that car is long gone."

"Oh. I guess it's not as impressive as I thought."

Susan snorted. "You coming, Sparkle?"

"Of course." She cast *shape-shift* on herself, turning into her usual fairy form and flying over to Susan's skirt pocket. Susan grabbed some money, turned off the computer, and started casting.

"This seems to be the place," said Luna, standing in front of the Salsarita's Fresh Cantina. "Looks like there's some new owners."

"That's fine. We can do it either way. Those windows are going to be a problem though. Or maybe not... come on."

"Hey, we're eating out together!" said Luna as they went inside. "Is this a date?"

"Could be, could be."

The two sat down and ordered, and Luna asked if this used to be the "Tria Market Cafe" which the boy, only a few years older than they were, said that he thought it was.

"Thanks!" she said with a smile.

Does Luna have a higher PERSONALITY than I do? She just seems so nice.

"So what's the plan, boss?" she asked when the boy went away again.

"Well," said Susan, wondering if she should be talking about this in broad daylight. *Eh, anyone that overhears will just think we're LARPer or something.* "We'll have to hang around until the place is closed. Either with *Unseen* or come back with *Phase*. *Unseen* will be boring, we could walk around town, see if there's anything interesting around here. After that, Sparkle casts *Illusion* to make it seem like the place is empty. I use *Time Area* to look back and see the day she disappeared, and see if any clues present themselves. We know approximately where her car was found, we can also check there and as a last resort, look for the purse. Our goal is to get an image of the person that caused all this, for *Descry Creature*."

"Certainly sounds reasonable. And once we find him?"

"As much as I would like to take the law into my own hands, we'll probably either have to alert the authorities somehow, or get him to confess. I have a few ideas about that."

"Nothing too painful for him, I hope!"

"Not unless memories are painful. I thought I might have Sparkle shape-shift me into her once she's seen her, and I'll pretend to be her ghost and guilt him into confessing."

"That's if he hasn't been caught already."

"There's that."

"And yes, memories can be the most painful thing. It's all we have, sometimes."

Susan thought about her father, and never having seen him. "Sometimes not even that."

"Exactly." Luna nodded. She knew. "I'll have to get a message to my dad if we're out too late."

"I can send him one with *Send Object*, that's no trouble."

So Luna and Susan talked, and ate, and wandered around the city hand in hand. (Susan let Luna steer) and finally it got dark and the place closed down.

"We could have just gone back home again," said Susan, exasperated. "Then we wouldn't have had to waste half a day! Sorry about that, Luna. I'm not sure what I'm thinking."

Luna squeezed Susan's hand. "Was it a waste, just spending time together?"

“Well, no, I guess not,” Susan admitted. *And maybe that’s exactly what I was thinking, and why I didn’t think about going back until just now, when it was too late.*

“Shall we put this plan into action?”

“I’m ready!”

And so, Susan stepped both of them through the back wall of the building with *Phase* and kept them that way, in case there were motion sensors in the place. She waited while Sparkle cast *Illusion* at the windows, and then went ahead with *Time Area*. She asked for 12:30, November 3, 2008, and the place came to life again as it had been in that time. The restaurant looked completely different, and both were able to follow Nadia around as she worked. The scene was overlaid onto the tables and chairs that were now there, but being *Phased* the three didn’t even pay any attention to them. Then, at about 12:50, Nadia brought the bill to the wizard.

The two knew he was a wizard because he had gotten his wand out, and was holding it under the table when she returned. “*Imperio*,” said the wizard. Nadia went limp. “When you take a lunch break, come to…” and he gave an address. “Come alone. Act normal now, and believe I have already paid.”

“Thank you sir,” she said in a bit of a daze. “Have a good afternoon.”

“I intend to.”

The wizard walked out.

“A wizard did it? I don’t believe this!” said Susan, now standing in the darkness again. “Oh, I’ll take his magic away for sure!”

“Now, now, let’s not jump to conclusions,” cautioned Luna. “You’re the one that goes on about proof, right? We need to gather more evidence.”

Susan sighed. “You’re right. We got the address, let’s go.”

“Hey, I just realized something. We heard all that!”

“You’re right, I didn’t even think of that. I suppose it’s more an illusion than anything else, not bringing the actual past back here for us to see. So it’s more like a ghost talking than us talking. I can hear them just fine *phased* or not.”

“There’s a lot of subtlety to your magic isn’t there? You use it, but do you really understand it?”

“It’s magic, I don’t know that it can *be* understood. Not like knowing what an atom is or anything like that.”

“I wonder…”

Using *Flight* they reached the house, and as she hadn’t dropped *Phased* they could easily get inside. Susan rolled a LUCK check, getting a minimum roll, a 5.

The place was packed with people.

“What, are they having some kind of party?” asked Luna.

“Looks like it. Crap! Why wouldn’t Sparkle have made the LUCK check?”

Probably because I would have had a better chance of making it, Sparkle thought.

“You think that wizard lives here?” Luna was skeptical.

“Couldn’t be, right? We have to check it out though. We can get in *Unseen* but the *Time Area* is going to be visible, even to them.”

“Yes,” said Luna slowly, “But unless I miss my guess, that wizard is going to order her into a bedroom. He didn’t order her to this house to have her do some light cleaning for him, right? I doubt the party will be there.”

“You never know! But we can check the bedrooms. That room is dark, come on.”

Susan rolled maximum this time, a 12, and the room was a bedroom, and it was empty. She cast *Time Area* again, specifying a time a few minutes after Nadia had left the restaurant. Oddly, there was a man just standing there against one wall.

“Now what in the world?” asked Luna, but was cut off as the door opened and the wizard came into the room. Nadia followed.

“Now, my dear,” said the wizard, rubbing his hands together. “I could make you do it like that, but that’s no fun. I want you to mean it.” He turned to the man. “Can you believe it? Work and pleasure combined?”

The man said nothing, and continued staring straight ahead. The wizard laughed, and got a vial of liquid out of his pocket. “Here you are, Nadia. Drink up!”

She did as commanded, and Susan was not surprised to discover it was a so called “love potion” which, after being released from the curse, caused her to basically attack the wizard and tear his clothes off.

The resulting... experiences... went on for some time, and when they were concluded, the wizard took up his wand again and cast the killing curse on Nadia.

“No! No, why did you have to do that?” Susan sobbed. “I’ll tear you apart for that. I’ll leave you in a gutter, in China, with no magic to your name. I’ll drop you in the middle of the ocean. I’ll feed you to a Dementor!”

Luna rocked her, stroking her hair. “Shhh, it’s all in the past. It won’t bring her back.”

“I want to hurt him!”

“I know. I do too, but we can’t. We can only get the evidence we need to make sure the Aurors catch him.”

“I know, Luna. It just hurts so much. What’s he doing now?”

The man that had been standing there now was called into action. He was ordered to strip, and place his hands around the Nadia’s neck. The wizard calmly dressed, then pointed his wand at the man. “*Obliviate*.” He then started the man choking her, then released him from the *Imperious Curse* as he sauntered out.

The man, as he came out of it, freaked out. He started talking to himself, and how he had to hide the body and get away. He got out his scuba gear, put her into the bag they had seen, and dragged her out of the room. He didn’t return, and Susan let the *Time Area* go.

Both girls stood in silence, horrified.

“He framed that man,” said Luna at last. “Destroyed his life. Made him think he had... done those horrible things to poor Nadia. Why? For fun? Blackmail? I don’t get it.”

“Neither do I, but I know what our next step is.”

“What’s that?”

“*Descry Creature*. We have to give that man his life back.”

And so, Susan got out her sheet of paper with *Descry Creature* and cast it, specifying the man well enough to identify him for the spell. “*The innocent man who fled this room, magically believing he had killed Nadia, that I just saw using my time magic.*”

“Oh, great, more than 600 kilometers that way,” she said, pointing. “Even at a speed of 50, that would be twelve hours to get there.”

“Can’t we do the same trick?” asked Luna. “We know where we are, and we know the direction.”

“Just a second. *Compass*. Okay, it’s south west of this address. We’ll head home and look it up from there.”

“How are you doing on energy?” asked Sparkle.

“I got some back doing my “light activity” just walking around the city. I’m good.”

“Okay.”

So the girls went back to Susan’s house, and she introduced Luna to her mother.

“And you’re on the trail of a murder?” asked Stacy.

“An innocent man who thinks he’s a murderer. The real criminal is that wizard I’ll have to deal with sometime. We just need to figure out what happened to this guy and get him his original memory back.”

“To think someone could just come in and modify memory like that...”

“Yeah, magic is scary. Don’t know why that one isn’t unforgivable too. Anyway, shouldn’t take long.”

“Be careful.”

So Luna and Susan went to the approximate location, and Susan spent another ten minutes using *Descry Creature* to narrow it further.

“Shouldn’t you learn that spell already?” asked Sparkle.

“I have 8XP at the moment. That would be most of it, it’s 7 to learn. I’ll take the extra five minutes.”

“Okay.”

Finally they stood in front of a rundown trailer, in a rundown trailer park. The man they had seen, now looking older, was sitting slumped over with a beer, watching TV.

“That’s the guy,” said Luna. “He was never caught I guess.”

“And look where he’s living now! That wizard has a lot to answer for. As does the ministry, apparently, as this was a magical attack which they did nothing about.”

“I agree. Now what?”

“Now we get his attention.”

One more *Illusion* spell later, and Susan rapped on the window. The man blearily looked over, squinting at the neon sign he now believed was inside his living room, blazing away with:

WE KNOW YOU ARE INNOCENT.
WE CAN PROVE IT.
LET US IN.

He stared at it in confusion for a moment, then jumped up, spilling the rest of his beer. He swore, kicking trash out of the way as he went to the door. Flinging it open he stared down at Susan and Luna.

“Five years ago you believed you raped and murdered a girl,” said Susan without preamble. “We can prove it wasn’t you. Interested?”

The man looked around nervously. “Who are you? How did you... I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

“You put the body in a stream, in an underwater cave. The cave was lit up with some kind of glowing rocks. You put her body in a niche on the far wall. You never knew her name, or even how she came to be there. Then you moved and have been beating yourself up about it ever since. Let us help you.”

Susan waited.

“That’s impossible! No, this is some kind of trick! You’re working with the cops or something, trying to get me to confess. I have nothing to say to you! Go away!”

He went to slam the door, and Sparkle, still looking like a fairy, flew up into his face. “She’s trying to be nice, you dope! She could have just kicked your door in and made you remember, and I admire her restraint. Now let us help you before even I lose my temper!”

The man stared at the diminutive form a moment. He seemed to come to a conclusion.

“I’ve gone mad!” he exclaimed happily. “I didn’t think it would be like this, though.”

“You’re not mad,” said Susan. “Now do you want to be exonerated or not?”

The man stared at her. “You’re serious?”

“Oh yeah. Can we come in?”

“Why not?” the man threw the door and his hands wide. “I’m probably only talking to myself anyway.”

The three went inside and the man, who introduced himself as Daniel Barthreman, bade them sit down. “Sorry about all the mess,” he said, knocking a bunch of stuff off the couch. “Uh, can you turn that off, or what?” He pointed to the sign. Sparkle flew up in front of it. “Sure.” She snapped her fingers and the “sign” vanished.

“Ahhh.”

“Yeah. The first thing you’re going to have to accept is something I’m not supposed to even tell you. In fact, I could get in big trouble for it. But I think in this situation, the ministry can shove their law-book up their bums. Magic is real.”

“Of course it is!” said the man. “Why wouldn’t it be?”

“He took that really well,” remarked Luna.

Susan sighed. “Just a second.” She got out a piece of paper and read it over. “*Antidote*,” she cast, and Daniel staggered.

“You wrote that one down?”

“I’m getting them all. One day I hope to thank my father for the book and give it back to him. Barring that, you never know what spell you’re going to need, as this proves. This way I can get them individually and keep the book safe.”

“Oh.”

“What’s going on?” asked Daniel. “What did you do?”

“Back with us, then?” asked Susan sweetly. “We’re trying to help you out here, being drunk isn’t going to help matters.”

“Who are you? How did you get in here?”

Susan sighed again. "You let us in, Mr. Barthreman. Just a moment ago. We're with the fairy, remember? I'm Susan, and this is Luna. That's Sparkle."

"Hi" said Sparkle, doing a little turn in the air.

"Right, right, Sparkle. Good name for a fairy."

"I'm actually a cat. See the starburst pattern on my belly? I have that in cat form too."

"Cat, right. Of course you are. So you said something about the girl?"

"You remember the incident, I take it?"

"Remember it? I've thought of nothing else since it happened! How can I not?"

Susan and Luna looked at each other. "Well, as we said, we're here to help you remember what really happened that day."

"What do you mean?"

"Your memory was tampered with, using magic. For reasons yet unknown you were framed for that murder. We can help you."

"Magic, right."

"What, the fairy isn't proof enough? The fact we know exactly where the body is isn't enough? Me sobering you in an instant isn't enough? Maybe this will convince you." Susan wordlessly cast *Light* and a ball of light appeared above her hand. She made it circle her head and fly over to Daniel, stopping and bobbing in front of him.

"Okay, I think you better start from the beginning." He sat down.

Susan explained how they had come to be there, and he listened intently. Finally she made it up to finding where he lived, and coming to see him.

"So you say this wizard, he forced her to do... what he did... and then made me think I had done it? But how can you prove it?"

"To the police? Tricky, if not impossible, I admit. To you? Easy-Peasy, lemon squeezy. I know the spell *Remember*. That'll bust through the memory charm," *I hope*, "and get you the original memory of that time back."

"Wait, how do I know *this* won't be the false memory?"

Hey, this guy is actually a bit quick on the uptake.

"Good point, but to what end? You can plainly see a couple of teenagers and a fairy are not with the police. To what end would we want to *now* manipulate your memory?"

"Good point. So what do I have to do?"

"Do? Nothing. Sit there a few minutes while I read the spell over, and don't fight me when I cast it. That's why I just didn't bust in here, hold you down, and make you remember. You would have resisted the spell, and that would make it harder."

He smirked. "Even drunk, do you think a couple of little girls could hold me down?"

"Maybe, maybe not. Care to try me?"

He looked over at the still bobbing ball of light, that Susan had been making flit about the room as though a bug through that whole explanation. "Uh, on second thought, I'll just take your word for it."

"Good man." Susan got out *Remember* and started reading it over. She pumped some energy into it (*Thank goodness this is almost over, even my energy isn't limitless*) so she could get enough years for the "1 year per Saturn Rating" the spell required, and cast.

Daniel blinked. "Oh."

"Did it work?" asked Luna.

“Yeah. I remember now. Some strange guy came and pointed a wand at me. Then I wanted to do everything he said. Then I stood there and watched as he... uh, you know. Then he left, and I thought I... I’m innocent, aren’t I? I didn’t kill that girl!” Tears started falling down his face as he broke down. “Thank you so much. Thank you.”

Susan and Luna stood up. “Look, I’ll speak to someone in the ministry. This is a magical matter now, and hopefully I can get your name cleared somehow. You won’t have to hide anymore. I’ll let you know.”

He nodded, still unable to speak.

“Good night, Mr. Barthreman.”

The girls went back to Luna’s place, and after their exhausting day, too tired to enact the “apology,” fell into bed without even getting undressed. Xenophilus sent Arthur an owl that the girls were back safe, and were now sound asleep. He said he didn’t mind watching her for a day or two while they recovered, and promised more details the next day when they were awake.

Getting his life back

Time: The next day

Place: Ministry of Magic

“So let me get this straight,” said the guard sitting at the desk in front of the passageway leading into the building. “You have found a plot by an evil wizard years ago to frame some Muggle named Barthreman. He was put under the *Imperius Curse* and then memory charmed to make him think he was a murderer. You discovered the plot, undid the memory charm, and now want the wizard responsible to be brought in for justice. To that end you want to see whoever is in charge of stuff like that?”

“Excellent summary!” said Susan. “Wasn’t that an excellent summary, Luna?”

“Oh, I have to say, the listening, comprehension, and recitation of facts is strong with this one. I bet you got a lot of O.W.Ls at Hogwarts, didn’t you?”

“I got my share- what difference does that make? You can’t just come in here and start demanding stuff!”

“I see,” said Susan, a dangerous glint in her eye.

“He’s probably telling the truth,” said Luna. “It is rather unconventional for this to happen. And he just sees us as a couple of kids.”

“I suppose you’re actually adult wizards that accidentally got turned into kids and decided to stay that way rather than taking some aging potion and returning to your former jobs, right?” He laughed.

Susan put her hands on the desk and leaned over, taking a deep breath. *He’s just doing his job. Starting something here will only be counterproductive. I cannot just smash through everyone, especially with Luna right here next to me. She’s counting on me to do the right thing, and I will not let her down.*

“No, she supposes she’s Susan Felton,” said Luna, also bending over and putting her hands flat on the desk.

“Holy-” the rest of the comment was lost as the man *jumped* back in his chair, knocking it over. He scrambled around, while both Susan and Luna watched interestedly. He quickly got back up and righted his chair, then rifled through some papers on his desk. Susan got a glimpse of a drawing of her own face, and the man also looked around the desk to see Sparkle sitting there, looking up at him. “Right, uh, I’ve been instructed to make sure it’s you, first, though. Do you have any proof of identity?”

Susan looked over at Luna, who shrugged. “Normally a wizard’s wand can identify them.”

“Because they’re all unique,” Susan said, nodding. “Well, there’s only three people in the world that could do this. Two of them are right here in front of you. Hope you never see the third. *Flight.*” She rose into the air.

The man stared at her as she drew her legs up and appeared to be “sitting” on air. “That’ll do it. Why didn’t you say so? What did you say you wanted? Auror Office? Second floor! Elevator just through there. Have a pleasant day! Goodbye!”

“Thank you,” said Susan, dropping to the ground again and walking past.

“Don’t you have to check in my wand?” said Luna.

“Not if you’re with her,” said the man, dropping into his chair again. “Susan is way above my pay grade. I have specific orders, you just head right on through.”

Susan smiled in a rather self-satisfied way, and headed to the elevator. Luna followed, amused.

“Probably orders to be as helpful as possible so you didn’t start trashing the place,” remarked Sparkle.

“Would I do that?” she asked innocently.

Sparkle just looked up at her.

“They probably want to seem extra helpful,” said Luna.

“Yeah, even though that guy doesn’t know why. The guy that gives him his orders does, and that guy wants me on his side when the situation starts rapidly deteriorating, as we know it will.”

“You almost sound eager.”

“For it to be over? Yeah, you could say that.”

“*Auror Office*,” said a pleasant female voice in the elevator as it came to a stop.

“Hey, you know why female voices are used and not male voices in things like this?” Susan asked as they stepped out.

“No, why?”

“Scientifically easier to listen to and understand. They are also found to be more pleasing. True facts.” *Just wish I knew how I knew that.*

“I believe you.”

Susan and Luna walked down the row of offices. “Do we find someone we know, to make it easier?” Luna asked.

“I want justice for this poor guy because it’s the right thing to do, not because it’s me asking.”

“I guess we pick an open office at random then.”

“Susan?” asked a very pleasing female voice from the office they just passed. Both stopped and leaned back.

“Tonks!” said Susan at the same time Luna said “Nymphadora!”

They looked at each other.

“Nymphadora!” said Susan, while Luna switched over and said “Tonks!”

They looked over at each other again.

“It’s you!” they both shouted.

“What,” said Tonks, “are you two auditioning to be Fred and George’s replacements?”

“No, them being hilarious comes naturally. Are you free?” asked Sparkle.

“I guess. Oh, and call me Tonks, please,” she said to Luna. “I hate my first name.”

“Nymphadora? Why? I think it’s a lovely name,” said Luna.

“You... really?” Tonks was skeptical.

“Tonks, this is Luna, a friend of mine from school. And I like your name too, so it’s two against one, motion passes.”

Tonks laughed. “Come in. What are you even *doing* here? It’s this... you know?”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” said Susan a little louder than she otherwise would have. “But no, it’s about something else.”

“Oh. Because it’s kind of, I wouldn’t say dangerous for you to be here, but...”

“What? That guard upstairs was quite helpful when he learned who I was.”

“He fell all over himself,” said Luna, “in his rush to be as helpful as possible.”

“I can imagine. You’re to be given every courtesy but watched very closely if you ever come here.”

“Still, it was better than just whisking the minister away from whatever he was doing. It’s not that urgent, after all.”

“Have a seat. What is the reason then?”

Susan and Luna told the story about what they had found out.

“Very interesting,” said Tonks. “And you can replay this with your time magic?”

“I sure could.”

“Let’s take a little trip, then,” she said, standing up.

“Whoa, wait a second. I want to follow all standard procedures here,” said Susan. “You know me, and what I can do, and that’s fine. But you have to pretend you don’t!”

“Trust me, official procedure would take weeks or months. And I have been ordered to extend every courtesy to you, after all. Honestly, I just want to see the guy’s face, as maybe he’s already in prison or dead or whatever. It has been five years, you said. A person like that, they don’t do this sort of thing just once, so we may have already caught him.”

“Oh, okay, I guess that’s reasonable enough.”

Susan created a *Teleportal* outside the apartment she had visited the night before, and as the cost was clear, one inside. She left it open (in case they needed to leave quickly) and spent the extra time casting *Time Area*. Tonks watched for only a second.

“Yeah, it fits. I know who that is, we can go back.”

“So he’s already in jail?” Luna asked hopefully.

“No,” said Tonks sadly, sitting down again. “But he was a Death Eater sympathizer the last time you know who was running around. He apparently hires himself out to blackmail people. This guy was probably the son of a politician or someone rich or something. As you probably saw he, uh, thoroughly enjoys his work.”

“And usually that would be commendable. What do I have to do to get him here and strip him of all magical power?”

“Well, oddly enough people have been sent to prison for less-”

“Sirius,” said Luna.

Tonks nodded. “So this is proof enough, demonstrated to an on duty Auror, that we should take him in for... well, imprisonment, really.”

“Yes, you guys aren’t that big on trials where it’s actually really, really, really important that you actually have them.”

“Noticed that, did you? Anyway, we could bring him in, and my word would be enough to put him away. Only one problem.”

“Don’t tell me.”

“You guessed it. He disappeared shortly after you know who came back. A lot of people did, actually. And not in the ‘we have to go look for them’ way, but rather in the ‘I should have known all along he was one of them’ way. We’ve been getting reports daily so I’ve been making sure to study them carefully for no particular reason whatsoever.”

“So he’s out of reach?”

“Not at all. All you have to do is beat up you know who, his followers, any magical creatures hanging around, and he’ll probably be somewhere close by. Grab them all and bring them back here.”

“Great! I’ll be back before lunch!”

“You... won’t really, will you?”

Susan sadly shook her head. “No, not really. I guess that’s all we could hope for. I guess in the course of taking care of the whole Death Eater cult he’ll get his, one way or the other. Thanks for the information, Tonks.”

“Don’t mention it. There is one other matter, I’m afraid.”

“Oh?”

“This Mr. Barthreman.”

“Yes, he needs to get his life back, I agree.”

“Ah, there’s the snag, you see?”

“No, I don’t.” Susan scowled.

“You told him about magic, and demonstrated it for him, yes?”

“Oh, come on!” *I know what’s coming.*

“I know, but the law is the law! Obviously he wouldn’t have believed it otherwise, but you really should have come to us first. You know what happened to Harry when he did the same, and that was in defense of two lives.”

“That was a ministry *setup!* And what would you have said I do otherwise? Let him rot in that trailer park forever?”

“Officially, yeah, probably. Sorry. Now we have to go there and take care of the situation.”

“And when you say ‘take care of’ you mean erase his memory of me getting back his real memory.” Tonks looked embarrassed. “But that means taking him back to thinking he’s guilty again! I said I would help clear his name totally, so he could stop jumping at shadows and being depressed over thinking he’s a murderer! You can’t just pop back in and make him think so again. Hasn’t this poor guy suffered enough?”

“We might be able to implant the memory you convinced him some other way?” Tonks sounded like she was trying to convince herself as well as Susan.

“To what end? Even if you do that, the woman is still in that underwater cave. The non-magical police still would consider him the prime suspect, even though he’s completely innocent. See, this is why keeping magic secret is stupid. When something like this happens you can’t explain it to them.”

“I don’t make the rules,” Tonks pleaded.

“No, wizards thousands of years ago did, and then they became part of the collective psyche of magic kind, that one non-magical person out of billions has to live a lie to protect your little secret.”

“Look, I agree it’s a special case. I’ll talk it over within the department and see what everyone thinks. Maybe we can work something else out.”

“A *Contract!*” Susan snapped her fingers.

“What?”

“Would the department accept a *Contract* specifying he can’t discuss the existence of magic with anyone he knows not to be an actual magic user or other supernatural creature, like an elf?”

“That is the main issue, I guess. And coming from you... quite possibly. I will present that as an option. I heard about your not being able to talk about certain school activities, and that it was a spell. It’s similar to something we have, so that’s not too much of a stretch. And there are some, admittedly narrow channels, where a magical crime can be removed from Muggle society. I will recommend they be used in this case, so he can start living his life again. At the very least

we can look into the minimum amount of magic needed to make this issue go away. Of course there's telling the victim's family what actually happened, and compensating the wronged individual for magic having been used on him... you've brought me a lot of paperwork, you know what?"

"Sorry. And thank you. That's all I can ask. And if someone does wind up memory charming him I'll just-"

Luna put her hand on Susan's, and Susan looked over at her. Susan sighed. "You're right, I can't go around making threats. I know, I know. Honestly, do you have any idea how frustrating it is not to just use a spell, or threaten some action, to make this right? I'm trying to help this guy!"

"I know," said Luna. "But until the system changes, it is what it is. They do things for a reason, not because they are trying to be petty or vindictive. Especially given who you are talking to- this isn't the run around, Tonks wouldn't do that, would she?"

"No, she wouldn't. But you can't honestly..."

Luna said nothing.

"And that means I have to as well, because that's the right thing to do in this case. We should have brought it here first, and we didn't. So part of the blame is ours. Even if I don't like it, the current procedure is the current procedure. I just have to accept it. And I did use magic in front of the guy, knowing it was so called 'illegal' so they would be within their rights to issue me a warning. I have always said even I'm not above the law."

Luna smiled.

"That makes it worth it. A little!"

"What, are you two telepathic or something now?" asked Tonks, looking between them.

Susan shook her head. "No, but I can still imagine what she's thinking." She turned back to Luna. "I am trying."

"I can see that you are. And what's it costing you. Maybe it won't go unrewarded... if you ever get around to apologizing for the cave."

"Well, I have an apology to enact- make, an apology to make," said Susan, getting up. "I'll just leave you to it then, shall I?"

Tonks looked at them suspiciously. "If you can wait a little while I'll see what everyone thinks. We could get this taken care of today."

"Oh, that fast? Okay, we can wait." She sat back down again.

"And officially, as you said, you should be served with a warning for using magic in front of a Muggle, but apparently your magic doesn't register. As long as you promise to come to us the next time you stumble into something like this, I won't mention in my report that it was you. I'll just put that the memory charm broke down after a while and he started telling people he was innocent, and it came to my attention. We can say I knew about your *Contract* from before and suggested it, so he doesn't tell people about the act five years ago."

"I will do my best, as long as the situation is not life threatening, to come to the department with any further concerns."

Have I just been deputized?

"I guess that will have to do. Wait here. Oh, you can get him a message on the sly to pretend he doesn't know you, if we go there, right?"

"Give me a pen and some paper and I'll do it right now!"

And so, later that evening, Susan and Luna returned to Luna's house believing everything was at least as taken care of as it could be. Mr. Barthreman was now under a *Contract* of silence, and the pair had shown the wizards where the body was. They didn't ask too many awkward questions about how they had discovered it, because Susan just kept saying "Magic" when asked things like "How did you create that hole in the air?" and "How did you do <thing> at the Tournament?"

It was the truth, after all.

Tonks said the various ministry departments would take care of the rest, and thanked her for bringing this to their attention. Susan then spent another night at Luna's house (not so exhausted this time, until afterwards) and went back the next day.

She told Harry and the others about her adventure, and the rest of the summer passed quickly. Susan spent more time transcribing her book, and the others dueled each other in the *Dimension*, usually Harry and Hermione against Ron, where it was still a bit uneven. When not actively working on things Fred and George would join in, and then it was.

They went to buy their books and things from Diagon Alley, which turned out uneventfully. There were fewer people on the streets, as some could put two and two together, like Susan's article in the *Quibbler* and breakouts from Azkaban. They weren't taking any chances, but others willfully or ignorantly went about their business as normal. She saw several S.T.F.U members who asked how her summer was going and if she was going to continue *you know what* when everyone went back to school.

She was.

They did not stop and Fred and George's joke shop, because Fred and George had no joke shop. They had not gotten the Triwizard Winnings, after all, and were content, for the moment, to finish their last year of school and continue making weapons for S.T.F.U. Of course they also believed that, when it got out that Voldemort was indeed back orders for things like their *Shield Cloaks* would start rolling in. Susan was quite impressed when they demonstrated them for her.

"We know it's not as good as your items," said Fred.

"They will wear off, after all," said George.

"But we can make plenty of them in a day."

"Hey," said Susan, "You had me at *Shield Cloaks*. Carry on, boys."

They did, however, still see Draco getting his robes fitted.

"Hello, Draco," said Susan. "You're looking well."

"Susan? Oh, hi. Have you met my mother?"

"I haven't. Nice to meet you, Mrs. Malfoy."

"Yes," she said simply. "Let's finish this quickly, Draco."

"Yes, mother," he said, resigned.

"Draco," said Susan after a moment, "Is everything..." she glanced over at his mother.

"Okay at home? Are you okay?"

"Why wouldn't he be?" demanded his mother.

"We have, in the past, had some philosophical discussions about the nature of magic," Susan replied carefully. "Which might put him at odds with certain beliefs you and your husband hold." *Not to mention the rest of Slytherin house.*

"What's this, Draco? You've been talking to her?"

“That was years ago, mother. I had quite honestly forgotten about it.”

“I should think so. Please don’t go filling my son’s head with any of your nonsense.”

Or as I would call it, the fundamental truths of the universe, but to each their own, I guess.

“I just don’t want your son on the wrong side, that’s all.”

“I suppose you think your side is the right one.”

“Everyone does, in the beginning. It’s who remains standing at the end that’s proven right.”

“And you think that will be you?”

“Pretty sure, yeah.”

“You’ve been lucky so far, I admit. Luck never lasts though.”

Good thing I have massive quantities of energy, magic, and friends at my command as well, isn’t it?

“I just don’t want anyone getting hurt in the near future, your son included.”

“How very thoughtful. Are you finished yet?” she demanded of Madam Malkin.

“Uh, yes?”

“Very well. Let’s go, Draco.”

Susan sadly watched the pair pay and leave.

“You’re not going to change Slytherin ideas without a lot of hard work,” said Hermione.

“You may have it easy, with your character sheet and everything, but the rest of us aren’t so... discrete.”

“Wait, isn’t Susan the opposite of discreet?” asked Ron. “Rambunctious even.”

“I mean she does everything by the numbers,” Hermione explained. “She knows exactly how much skill she has at everything, how much energy, all of it. We’re more of a sliding scale kind of people.”

“Oh, like a discrete function in Arithmancy! Why didn’t you say so!” Everyone looked at him. “What? Only Hermione is allowed to be smart?”

“No, no, proceed,” said Susan.

“So is one of you going to get fitted, or what?” asked Madam Malkin.

Slipping the Noose

Time: Several days later

Place: Train Platform

Susan, once again whisking everyone to the train station, stepped through her usual quiet spot and looked around. Everything seemed normal here, and she motioned everyone through. Luna had joined them this year, now that Susan knew where she lived, and the rest of the Weasley family joined her.

“I’ve gotten rather used to this,” said Arthur. “Just stepping through holes in the air. It’ll be a shame when you graduate and we lose you.”

“Come see me at my shop, I’ll give you a good deal on an *Imbued* item of *Teleportal*. Thanks again for having me.”

“With everything you’ve done for us, and the way you pitch in to help around the house? How can we not? Have a good year,” said Molly.

It will be if Voldemort is in chains by the end of the week.

The group boarded the train and waved goodbye to those staying behind, who used their own form of instantaneous travel to return to their house. They met up with Neville and Ron and Hermione went about their prefect duties.

“Want to go find Cho?” Susan asked Harry.

“No, since she refused to go to the cave with us, I’ve been wondering if she’s really the kind of girl I want.”

“Don’t judge all girls by me! Honestly, going was sort of the dumb thing to do. She just isn’t used to how I do things, you can’t hold that against her.”

“I do, though. Actually, more like judging them against Ginny, if you want to know the truth.”

Ginny colored and looked down.

“Oh. I’ll say no more then.”

And she didn’t, for a few minutes at least. The train ride was uneventful, and the group made their way to the castle as normal. Then there was the feast, and Dolores Umbridge still at the table, apparently still teaching Defense. Missing was Professor Slughorn, as his services were not yet required, and it would seem suspicious to have him wandering about the castle with no classes to teach. Then the owl showed up, and then the feast was over-

Wait, owl?

Susan looked up and saw the owl swooping towards her as everyone was eating. She put her arm up, and this time managed a 12 on her *Animal Handling* to not get torn up by its claws when it alighted. She took the letter from its beak and it flew off again.

“What’s that?” asked Hermione.

I think I know. Clever, Headmaster. You expect me to make a scene, right? I suppose that is my PERSONALITY, after all? And I did so want to try and rein it in this year. Oh well.

“Not sure,” she said aloud, looking at the address. “Says it’s from the ministry.”

“Better open it,” said Harry.

Susan shrugged and slipped her knife under the seal, breaking it off the paper. She scanned the letter.

“Oh, come on!” she said. “Look at this!” she thrust the letter at Harry.

He took it and read it over. “You’re being asked to come in and show the extent of your magic for the ministry?”

“What?” said Hermione and Ron.

“Asked? More like demanded.” She snatched the letter away from Harry and got up. “I’ll be back.” She quickly cast *Augment Skill: Acting* on herself as she walked, and the circle attracted little attention. Most were now accustomed to her bizarre manifestation and antics, so they just went back to eating.

She marched up to the head table, then slammed the letter down on the table. She felt herself rolling *Acting* and with her new rating, got a 17-1, so figured she should be able to give a great performance.

“Did you know about this, Headmaster?” she asked Albus.

“Know about what?” he asked, the very picture portrait of innocence.

“This... this demand of the ministry,” she sputtered, “to have me appear before them in two day’s time, in courtroom 36.”

Was that too specific? Ah well.

“Allow me,” he said, picking it up. “Interesting,” he said, looking it over. “What do you think, Severus?” He handed it over.

“So, finally going to curtail your magic, is that it? Something that should have been done long ago, as I’ve often said, Albus.”

“Probably because she’s getting close to graduating,” said Albus. “They want to know what sort of magic will soon be loose in the world.”

“So they can fortify bridges and such, no doubt.” He handed the letter back.

“I’ll, of course, exempt you from classes during your court time. And I’ll assign someone who’s free to accompany you there.”

“Wait, you’re saying I should just go along with this? Hand my book of magic over to them? Do you know how dangerous that is with him lurking around? With that book he could shave years off his spell research! Is it really worth that risk?”

“I do, certainly, know how dangerous that book is. I know how dangerous you are because of it. But come now, he’s not likely to be prowling around there, is he? And I’m sure extra precautions can be taken. We don’t want to antagonize the ministry, now do we? A show of good faith might be good for our credibility. In fact, they might be more inclined to believe us, when they see the kind of truth magic you have available.”

“So that’s it? Just hand it over and let them read through it? Apart from the titles of the spells and their description, they won’t be able to understand the formula.”

“According to this letter just the descriptions are all that is required. They know you can cast the spells within, they don’t need to understand exactly how each spell works.”

“That’s not the point!”

“The point is, you have been summoned, and the summons is official. Unless you wish to leave school and go on the run, something I don’t exactly recommend, I think you should comply with this request. You have been heard to remark that you are not above the law?”

“Of course I’m not. It’s just... it’s my book! What if they decide the world would be better off if they just set it on fire right in front of me?”

“I will do everything in my power should they decide to keep you from it, I promise. Or set it on fire, for that matter, which would be destruction of property so you can’t expect actual judges to sit there and break the-” He held up a hand, forestalling Susan’s intake of breath to cut in with that’s exactly what she expected. “And I will stress to them the danger it poses, and to have extra guards posted while you are there.”

Susan glared at him a moment. “All right. I guess I can’t ask for more than that.” She grabbed the letter back. “But if they try to keep my book, your services will not be required. I am perfectly capable of getting it back myself.”

“I’m sure they realize that as well. Or will soon, at any rate. Enjoy the rest of the feast.”
“HA! As if.”

Susan stomped her way back to the table, her *Augment Skill* spell going away. Inside, she was grinning broadly at how well that went.

“What did he say?” asked Hermione.

“He sided with them! I’ve got to appear at the ministry, he’s not even going to try and talk them out of it.”

“What brought this on, do you think?” asked Ron.

“The Headmaster thinks they want advance notice of what magic I’ll be using out in the world once I graduate. Maybe so they can keep tabs on me? I don’t know. They can’t track my movements because I don’t use their Floo network or *Apparition* so...” *Wait, that seems to imply they do keep tabs on everyone’s movements? That would be way worse than anything the non-magical government has done, and I thought it was bad!*

“But you’ve been so careful about only opening it in the *Dimension*. Don’t they realize the risk of having it open for hours, and going through each spell?”

“No, they don’t. Remember, they don’t believe Voldi is back.” *But if he takes the bait as I hope, they will soon!*

The others nodded. “If we can come, for moral support or whatever, we’ll be happy to. Right?” asked Ron.

“Of course!” said Harry.

“Naturally,” said Hermione.

Actually, having Ron around might not be such a bad idea. No one will be able to use magic, after all, and he’s the only one practiced in non-magical combat.

“I’d really appreciate that. Thanks guys.”

The next morning at breakfast, the group was looking over their schedules for the next year. Susan had gone to say hello to Myrtle and catch up, then gone down to breakfast with the others.

“Wait, you guys aren’t taking *Care of Magical Creatures*? I thought you guys liked Professor Hagrid!”

“We do,” protested Harry. “But really, the class is not... you know... all that...”

“All that what? It’s one of the only classes I figure I’ll ever get any use out of. Given how out of nine classes last year four of them used your kind of magic. Of what’s left, I’ve always thought Astronomy was useless, History of Magic- boring, Herbology- HA, who needs it when you have *Alleviation* and Arithmancy, okay, possibly useful, maybe? At least in COMC we got to see unicorns.”

“Once,” said Hermione.

“And possibly again for more advanced lessons. Plus there was always excitement to be had with those Skrewts, my magic always got a workout trying to keep them under control. Come on guys, don’t leave me there all by myself.”

“You could just, I don’t know, not take it,” said Ron.

“And have all of Professor Hagrid’s favorite students drop the class at once? How do you think he’ll feel about that?”

“At least we would show a united front?” said Hermione cautiously.

“Oh, great message, ‘we hate your class’ then? That’s what we’re going for here? Honestly.”

“Mr. Potter!” called Minerva.

She looked over his proposed schedule. “You’re not taking potions? I thought it was your desire to become an Auror?”

“It still is, but I can’t. Professor Snape won’t let me with just an Outstanding, right?”

“Ah, I see. She really has taken precautions, hasn’t she?” Harry just looked blankly at her. She leaned in close and whispered. “Very well. Let me just say that if things go to plan, Professor Snape will soon be teaching Defense, rather than Potions, as he has always wanted. The replacement Potions teacher will be more than happy to accept you into his class. I’ll mark you down for it, and you will know when the time is right to begin attending.”

“Oh, uh, okay, thanks?”

“Of course. Send Susan next, if you please.”

“You didn’t even tell your friends?” she whispered.

“Tell them what?” Susan whispered back.

“You know... about Professor Slughorn coming back.”

“Professor, Harry was there. The Headmaster brought both of us there, remember?”

“Yes, he did. So then why...” she trailed off.

“I’m surprised he told you. I went to great pains to make sure we were the only ones that knew about it. I’ll have to have a word with him about that.”

“He could hardly hide the fact he hired another teacher. Though how he expects to get rid of Professor Umbridge I don’t know.”

Susan stared at her a moment. *Ah ha, she doesn’t actually know, does she? And Harry didn’t let anything slip either. She’s working off incomplete knowledge, thinking it’s the whole story. Well, sadly I can’t enlighten her.* “Yes, that is a problem isn’t it?”

Minerva stared at her a moment, Susan’s face a mask of angelic innocence.

“I see,” she said at last. “Well, be that as it may, let’s see your courses.”

Susan handed them over.

“So you’ve dropped all the pure magical classes, not that you really took them in the first place. I’m pleased to see you making up for it by continuing Care of Magical Creatures and taking some other non-magical electives.”

“I have to make some effort, even if I do plan to go into business for myself.”

“And there is always the possibility of discovering some new talent within yourself by pushing your own boundaries. I approve.”

“Actually, there isn’t much possibility of that, Professor.” She got out her character sheet. “Remember? These are my talents, nothing hidden about them.” She indicated her Backgrounds.

“I forgot, you do things by numbers. Anyway, here is your schedule, so send up Miss Granger, if you would.”

“Certainly.”

And so everyone got through the first day of classes without issue, and Susan started making the *Dream* item as Albus had requested. She asked if the Core (that being, the core of Team Susan, Ron, Hermione and Harry) could attend the “so called” hearing about her magic.

“I would rather have as few people there as possible, in case, er, something were to go wrong,” he said carefully.

“Ron, at least, then. He could hold me back should my temper flare a bit, he is trained in Kung Fu, after all.”

Albus thought a moment. “I see what you mean. Very well, they may attend. I will send notes to their teachers.”

“Thank you.”

The day arrived, and the Core, Susan and Albus stepped through to the Ministry building. Susan was clutching her “book of magic” and looking dour, and Albus led the way to the courtroom. Of course, inside she was trembling with anticipation. She hoped any of it that showed through would just seem like rage. She did have a certain reputation to uphold, after all.

Walking into the courtroom she felt her spell of *Shrink* go away, and the coin she had shrunk became normal sized in her pocket.

Good, it's the right room, and we can't be viewed with magic. She passed two guards at the door, burly guys with hard eyes, that she looked over. *Yes, they seem capable. Hopefully, stripped of his magic and facing physical restraint from them, he'll come quietly. If he takes the bait, and he better after all this.*

The people up on the high bench, which included Professor Umbridge and most others she had seen at Harry's “trial” looked down at her. *Good. We need all the witnesses we can get.*

“You know why you're here,” said the Minister. “Let's have it.” Another guard held out his hand, and Susan handed over the book. He handed it up to the Minister, who looked it over. “This is it? We have whole libraries dedicated to magic, how does such a small book of magic concern us?”

“It's bigger on the inside,” said Susan. *At least, the original seems to be.* “What I mean is, it seems to contain more pages than you might otherwise expect. And it's not the quantity of spells that worries you, as I understand it. It's the fact my magic does things so differently, and more importantly, that your magic seems unable to do.”

“I'm not so sure about that,” said one wizard off to the side. “Don't think that because you've had a few years of schooling that you know what our magic can and cannot do.”

“So your magic can make people immortal then? Turn them into wind? Let them walk the boundary between Heaven and Earth? Rain fire down upon a city? Stop me if I get to one you, personally, can do.”

“How about we just see for ourselves,” suggested the minister, and began to read.

As they poured over it for the next half hour, there were more gasps of surprise and demands to know if such and such a spell was really possible, which Susan continuously said yes to. *Come on, where are you?*

As if on cue, a figure, covered in a cloak, stepped through the wall and into the courtroom. They were focusing on Susan's explanation of how exactly *Contract* worked, so they didn't immediately notice. The figure smiled and looked around interestedly, then stepped up to the bench and made to grab the book.

Everyone looked up at him.

“No... impossible!” said the minister, his eyes widening.

Voldemort froze, and looked down at his cloak. “Susan!” he hissed.

“Hiiiiiii.” said Susan in a Kirby voice, giving a wave.

Voldemort looked around, as if seeking an avenue of escape, but not with the desperation of a cornered animal. He seemed quite collected as he looked around the room. Ron stepped in front of Susan, taking a fighting stance. Those on the higher level with higher REFlexes, *Quick Reaction* or just rolling high on their *Initiative* got out their wands, and pointed them at the pale skinned, snakelike faced figure of Voldemort.

“Oh, put those away,” he said, “She obviously has suppressed all magic in the area, that’s what made my cloak fail. Is that correct, Susan?”

She shrugged. “Who can say what a wild and crazy child like myself has or has not done? You have bigger problems, Tom.”

“We’ll see.”

“You’re, uh, he who must not be named!” said the minister at last, finding his voice.

“Brilliant deduction. I suppose the book is a fake as well?”

“Of course it is. I still invite you to try the spells though, I’d love to see what would happen.”

“No doubt you would.”

“Aurors, take this man into custody!” said the minister. The two guarding the door looked at each other, not wanting to be the first to move.

“What do you mean, custody?” snapped Susan. “This is a courtroom, isn’t it? You’re the minister, and I see we have a majority of seats filled. Get the man a lawyer and start his trial, this very minute! He can’t escape, this room is proof against magic. You’ll never have an opportunity like this one! And you’re welcome for capturing him, by the way.”

“I can’t believe you would go so far!” said Dolores. “Dressing someone up and making them pretend to be you know who! This is some kind of illusion! *Finite Incantatem!*”

Naturally, nothing happened.

“Is she normally this thick?” Voldemort asked Susan.

“Yes,” she replied sadly. “But then, denial is the most predictable of all human responses.”

Dolores was, meanwhile, trying various spells.

“My magic doesn’t work! She’s done something, I know she has. Arrest her!”

The two Aurors now didn’t know what to do. The others, ashen faced, were also swinging their wands uselessly.

I guess I would be scared if I was in a room with Voldemort and didn’t have any mag- oh wait, I am. Well, I’ve got Ron.

“You’ll be fine, it’s just the courtroom, I made it so magic doesn’t work here anymore. To trap Voldemort, you know, this guy?”

“So turn it off!” shrieked Dolores.

“Oh, no, I’m just an illusion,” said Voldemort. “You heard her. I’m not here. I don’t know what you’re seeing, but it’s not me.”

“I can’t. I would have to use magic, and as you can see, magic doesn’t work in here anymore.”

Everyone was now shouting at once, or crying spells at the top of their lungs. Susan shook her head.

“Hello, Tom,” said Albus.

“You never would use the name I took for myself. Why is that?”

“Because I call things what they are. And you are Tom Riddle, and you always will be.”

“I think I’ve gone a bit past that, actually. But I can see why an old, worn out wizard such as yourself might think that. You really hold no fear for me anymore, you know that?”

“Even here?”

“Especially here. What are you going to do? Tackle me to the ground?”

“You seem to be taking the loss of your magic quite well.”

“You displayed a great deal of courage walking in here knowing your wand would be useless. And you don’t have Susan to hide behind. Though I see she’s hiding behind someone at the moment.”

“I like to think of it as being prudent.”

The minister was shouting for order, and finally the courtroom quieted.

“Are you, or are you not, the so called dark lord?” he called down to Voldemort.

“You are going to have to decide that for yourself. I’m certainly not going to just tell you.”

“Fine. Take him down to a cell, we’ll get to the bottom of this one way or the other.”

“Yes, by all means,” said Voldemort, holding his arms out at his sides and walking towards the Aurors. “Take me into custody, gentleman, as is your duty.”

“Stay away from him!” shouted Susan, “He’s up to something! Don’t let him out of this room or his magic will return!”

But her warning went unheeded, as the two men reached for Voldemort he suddenly struck out, his right leg aiming for the leg of the man on his right, while his right palm went for the nose of the man on his left. He connected with both, and the one man went down in a howl of agony, his knee being torn out of joint, while the other went down in a spray of blood, his nose crushed.

He threw the door open and shouted “Better luck next time!” and sprinted down the corridor. As he did he took out a coin and said “escape” and vanished.

“Stop him!” shouted the minister uselessly.

“He’s already gone,” said Susan sadly, going over to the two, both obviously in great pain. “Help me get them out of the null magic area and I’ll heal them.”

“I want to know what’s going on!” demanded the minister.

“You screwed up, that’s what’s going on.” The kids dragged the men, one at a time, out into the hall, where onlookers were starting to gather to see what was going on. Albus watched passively. She stabbed both of them with her *Alleviation* knife, and they both relaxed, and shakily got to their feet.

“I thought you were supposed to be capable!” she said to them. “So what was that?”

“We are, in magic. I didn’t expect him to use Muggle brawling on us.”

“Well, that’s revealed a weakness in your training program, hasn’t it?” she asked sweetly. “I would rectify that as soon as I could, if I were you. You just let the most wanted man alive run past you.”

“Yeah, well, we weren’t told magic wasn’t going to work, were we?”

“You weren’t? I guess the blame isn’t totally yours. I thought that much was going to be obvious. Never mind. Just feel bad for an hour.”

She walked back into the courtroom.

“Can I get an explanation, please?” said the minister.

“Sure,” said Susan angrily. “This whole situation was set up by me. Step one: lure Voldemort into this room using bait he couldn’t resist. Step two: Capture Voldemort, put him on trial, and take his magic away so he isn’t a danger anymore. Step three: Oh right, there was no step three.”

“No, I got a letter from Albus requesting...” He looked over at Albus, who was shaking his head. “Oh.”

“We couldn’t be sure if any of you were under the *Imperius Curse* so we couldn’t tell you about it. But you knew magic wouldn’t work in this room, that’s why we set it up this way! So he could be captured. That’s why they should have had swords or something!” She pointed to the two Aurors, now back in the room and whole again.

“So that really was you know who?”

“You mean Voldemort? Come on, say his name with me! Voldemort. Try again. Voldemort. No? By the lengthy, woody staff of my father, you people disgust me. Call him Tom then. Or Mr. Riddle. Or the Riddler. Or Pale Face.” She paused. “No, not that one. It might still be too soon for that one.” They stared at her. “Never mind. Yes, it was Voldi. Moldy Voldi. Of the seven veils. And you let him slip through your fingers, and now this trick will never work again, because he’ll be expecting it. Nice. Job.”

“Well, I guess this changes things then,” said the minister.

“You can’t honestly believe her!” said Dolores.

“What choice do I have?” snapped Cornelius. “You saw. Magic doesn’t work in this room. He can’t have been disguised, or some kind of illusion. Yes, what is it?”

Looking over, a witch had put her hand up. “I think I was under the *Imperius Curse* before I walked in here. I felt something break off me, and I remember doing some things I wouldn’t normally have done...”

A wizard on the other side put his hand up too. “The same goes for me. I didn’t want to say anything in case I was just imagining it, but I’m thinking more clearly than I was before.”

“At least it wasn’t a total waste then,” remarked Susan. “I guess if you lose a million Galleons at the track and find a Knut on the way home, you can’t say you’re totally broke.”

“This changes things,” said Cornelius. “It seems you were right all along, Albus.”

“I won’t ask for any specific apologies directed to me, though that would be nice. You can make it up to me by having Professor Umbridge step down as defense professor, and allowing me the freedom, once again, to teach my classes as I see fit. I believe you will see the need, at long last, to have students that are actually allowed to use spells in the class?”

“We’ll have to find you another teacher for the post-”

“That has already been arranged.”

“I figured. Dolores, you’re going to resign, citing the increased workload here, now that we have to prepare for his eventual attack. Now that we know he’s back, he’ll have to assume we’ll start looking for him in earnest.”

“Good. I’m glad that’s settled,” said Susan. “Let’s go. I have classes I’m missing.”

“We’re not done,” said Cornelius, lifting up the book.

“Oh, we’re done,” said Susan, with steel in her voice. “I handed you public enemy number one on a platter, and now he’s gone again. Typical ministry efficiency at work. You have

more important concerns, yes? This so called hearing was just the excuse for me to be here, as bait.”

“Don’t you at least want your book- it’s a fake, isn’t it?”

“*DING DING DING* The names and descriptions of the spells are real, the formulas are not. They’ll backfire and kill anyone that tries to use them. Burn it for all I care.”

“Then you really can do all this stuff?” He looked back down at it.

“I made it so magic will permanently never function in this courtroom. Why are you surprised at anything I do at this point?”

“I thought Albus did that, and it was only temporary. He knows a lot of magic most normal people don’t.”

“Nope, all me. That’s why I suggest you get your act together and start not pissing me off all the time. Good DAY sir!”

She walked out, trailing the rest of the people who came with her.

“You didn’t really expect it to be that easy, did you?” Sparkle asked later that evening.

“A girl can dream, can’t she? Why not? I certainly didn’t expect him to whip out martial arts and escape through an unlocked courtroom door!”

“Remember, he just has to put XP into things, just like you. He probably figured he should stick a couple of points into it, just to be safe. And I did tell you about bad guys probably knowing what they needed to in order to make your life miserable.”

“I know, I know. He was right there, though!”

“Why was the door unlocked? I would have thought the Headmaster, at least, would have told them to lock it even if he didn’t tell them why.”

“They probably figured he would walk through the door, like a peasant. I couldn’t tell them more, not without alerting him, but I would have thought locking a courtroom door was standard procedure. Maybe they magically locked it, didn’t think to check because they believe their magic is infallible, he just opened it without even making a LUCk check because it was never locked in the first place.”

“Maybe he used a card, like WTF or spent XP for a *Moment of Luck* or something? We can’t tell when he does that sort of thing, we’re not in his party.”

“Yeah, we don’t know how much XP he had. Maybe he spent 3 each for hitting those guys and put energy into STrength. Or used *Took a Night Class* to instantly learn martial arts to a high rating. Ah, I hate my own laws of reality being used against me!”

“Think how everyone in this world feels. They don’t even get the luxury of a re-roll, that I can see.”

“I admit, it’s good being us.”

“But you would rather it be us and a powerless Voldi than us and an alerted Voldi.”

“You can say that again.”

“So what now?”

Susan shook her head. “I really have no idea.”

First visit to the past

Time: The next day

Place: Great Hall

And so, with a great deal of finger pointing as to who was to blame for not believing Susan and Harry earlier, the paper printed the story of Voldemort's return. Also how Professor Umbridge was "regretfully stepping down from teaching to focus on her duties at the ministry" and how the "educational decrees" were being rescinded. Naturally, everyone in the castle was talking about it. Susan had gotten everyone in S.T.F.U together to sign another *Contract*, freeing them from the first, which they did. Both vanished, and she could finally answer questions about her activities the year before. Of course, a lot of people now wanted to join up, to which Susan said: "Tough cookies.

"For one, even though I have unlimited space in the *Dimension* I only have one practice area. Secondly I have other things to do than open and close my *Personal Dimension* all day long. Third we have somewhat of a competent teacher now? Maybe? So study hard in class if you want to learn things. Forth, where were you when I was signing people up originally? Right, out with the other sheep in the fields. You had your chance when I was standing, alone, in the Umbridge class, to speak up in my defense. You did not. So now you can just take what Professor Snape gives you. And given what I've seen of his *Teaching* checks, you're probably not going to learn all that much more than if you had just sat and read quietly for Umbridge. But whatever, I wish you luck."

Naturally the papers didn't have the full story of how he had resurrected with Susan's blood, she felt that might have led to an itty-bitty bit of panic, and there was going to be enough of that just knowing he was back. But she told the members of S.T.F.U she would be opening the *Dimension* at a certain time and place every night, and anyone was welcome to join her and practice inside. Old copies of the Quibbler surfaced with Susan's original article, and she started the paper up again with the story of what they had been doing and what the current situation was where Voldemort was concerned. Fred and George put in ads for *Shield* <object> as they could now charm hats, shirts, cloaks, gloves, almost anything, really. They also had a fair stocks of other useful potions or candies, like their original *Canary Cream*.

Something stalking you in the night?

Not feeling safe?

*One lemon treat in your mouth, and you can
simply fly away on feathered wings.*

She asked if they could do other animals, like wolves or elephants, if someone wanted to protect themselves rather than just fly away. They said they would look into it. She sent samples to the ministry at their insistence, and later that day they had a bit of a shocked look on their face and were going around buying all the up spare cloaks and hats they could put their hands on.

It also seemed like various wizards and witches had been hired by the headmaster to fortify or create new protection charms around the castle, as they were seen by late morning to be doing complicated wand-work both outside and inside the walls.

Why would he attack a school, though? One quarter of the kids here are Slytherin, he wouldn't want any harm to come to them, would he?

“He didn’t waste any time getting people here to strengthen the castle’s defenses, did he?” remarked Hermione on their way to their first Professor Snape Defense class.

“Probably had them on standby, given how fast Professor Slughorn also arrived in time to start teaching today.”

“So Harry and Ron will be joining me today in Potions, then?”

“Yup. I *Teleported* them back to get supplies after the debacle yesterday, so they’re all set. They’re looking forward to a potions class not taught by a death eater, though there is an equal dread that now Harry’s favorite class will be ruined. I guess we’ll have to see.”

“Still, we shouldn’t have many problems, should we? We’ve all practiced spell-casting, much more than anyone else our age I would guess, and Ron... well, you know.”

“Oh, do I detect a trace more pride than would normally be heard in your voice?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You can lie to me, Hermione, but you can’t lie to your own heart.”

“I very much know my own heart, thank you very much.”

“I hope so. Here we are, let’s get this over with.”

“Try to be nice.”

“HA! He’ll probably be dead before the day is out.”

“Susan!”

“Joking!”

Hermione sighed.

Snape hadn’t had much time to change the classroom, but he brought his trademark sneer and swagger into the room with him. He stopped dead when he saw Susan.

“Well, well, the girl who it turns out didn’t cry wolf after all. I’m surprised to see you here. Can it be that you need further training in Defense?”

“There’s always more to learn,” replied Susan. “Sir.”

“Yes, there is. Please try not to make trouble. Our topic today is nonverbal spell-casting. How many of you have experience in this area?”

He waited.

I have done it a few times, that’s experience, right?

She put her hand up.

“But of course. Perhaps you could show us how it’s done?”

“I would be delighted, professor,” she replied, standing. She folded her arms across her chest and started casting *Invisibility*, a non-physical spell, so she didn’t need to gesture either. Magical energy swirled around her, (for less than a second) and she vanished from sight. Everyone started looking around, but with a 15 total *Hiding* check (she was at -2 for not saying the incantation, and then a further -1 to the *Hiding* for holding onto the spell), only those with a pretty high LUCk or INSight were likely to spot her. She sat down again.

“I suppose you are still here, rather than having transported yourself elsewhere?”

“I am here,” Susan said, ending the spell.

“As it has now been demonstrated, perhaps someone could tell me the main benefit of such a method of spell-casting.?”

Hermione’s hand went up, as did Susan’s, Harry’s and Ron’s.

He chose Ron, of all people.

“Well, professor,” said Ron, “if I didn’t hear the incantation, all I would have to go on is the wand movement of my opponent. Unless I’m very familiar with the spell, I might not be able to counter it in time.”

“A surprisingly accurate description,” he said, seeming a bit shocked. He glared at Susan again. “Those circles that tend to appear when you do magic- are they the same every time?”

“They are specific to the spell, if that’s what you mean, professor. Each time I cast *Invisibility* they will be the same.”

“Ah, so someone that fought you enough times could anticipate your spells from watching for the circles.”

“That is true, professor, but with respect, if they’re looking at the circles and not me, I’m nailing them with a spell from a direction they aren’t looking in.”

“No doubt you would. Still, it seems you have no trouble casting without speaking, can these circles be suppressed as well?”

Susan sadly shook her head. “They can be dimmed down a bit, but the circle for me is what the wand motion is for you. It’s how the magic is brought into existence.”

“I see.”

“If I may ask a question, professor?”

“I suppose, if it’s relevant.”

“Can a wand-wielder practice a further obfuscation of their intent by saying the incantation for a spell, but performing another?”

“That...” he paused, looking thoughtful. “Would be on a very different level than just not speaking the words. But yes, I suppose that could be done with sufficient practice. What a clever idea.”

“Thank you.”

“Ah, yes.” Snape seemed to remember who he was talking to and cleared his throat. “You will now divide into pairs and attempt, alternatively, to jinx and counter-jinx, in silence.”

Susan and Harry got together, figuring Susan could become *Immune* anyway, she may as well just let Harry bounce a few spells off her, if he could do it without the incantation.

“How do you do it?” he asked, after several failed attempts.

“I decide to take a -2 penalty to the casting check, and I don’t say the words. I can still speak though, so that’s why I asked about you guys saying a different spell than you were casting. I can say a couple of words and make them sound like an incantation, so if someone is expecting *Elemental Bolt (Fire)* and they actually get *Elemental Burst (Knockout)*—”

“You did hear me say something about silence, correct?” asked Severus.

“Sorry professor. I’ll tell you later.”

“Right.”

He went back to trying to fire a spell at Susan, and a moment later Severus looked over at them again.

“You also heard me say I wanted you to proceed alternatively. That means back and forth.” Draco snickered.

“You more specifically said jinx, professor. I do not jinx.”

“Really?”

“Uh, no? All my spells are either lethal, area effect, or unblockable. By you guys, anyway.”

“But this denies poor Mr. Potter here the chance to learn to block hostile magic properly.”

Has he forgotten I made Harry a Barrier Against Spells item? He did once call it a toy, or whatever.

“I agree, professor. I will have to switch out with someone so he can practice that. My new partner will then be able to focus on casting exclusively.”

“I can see classes with you are going to be an endless source of delight for me. Very well. Keep track of your time and switch in ten minutes.”

“Yes, sir.”

And so, with Susan being super polite to him and helpful, she made it through the first class without detention or blowing anything up. She figured it was safer to be on the side of politeness, and honestly, unless you're actually in Japan, and roughly the same age, and become friends, and the other person tells you to stop using *kegio*, it's difficult to justify the punishment reason of “she's too polite to me.” But Susan was an adventurer, and no frontier, for her, would be left unexplored. If she could bash Professor Snape in the face with the mallet of politeness, then by goodness she was going to try!

But then she had to say goodbye to her friends, who were off to their first potions class with Professor Slughorn.

“Good luck,” she said. “He seemed a cheerful enough fellow, but don't let your guard down. Any new professor is suspect, remember Quirrell.”

“I'll keep an eye out for any suspicious jewelry,” said Harry.

Susan went back to the Headmaster's office to do some *Imbuing*, and quietly went to work as he spoke to various people popping in and out of his office through the fireplace. When he had a moment, he came over to her and told her, if it was all right, to come see him that Saturday at 8:00 for their first trip down memory lane.

“And by memory lane, I mean your excellent *Time Window* spell,” he explained.

“It's been upgraded. It's *Time Area* now. But we'll be there.”

“And may I congratulate you for getting through a class with Severus and managing to not go for each other's throats? No detentions, no fires, quite beyond my expectations.”

“I just hope it can keep on that way.”

“Yes, that would be nice, wouldn't it? Carry on then.”

After class, the Core met up with Susan for lunch.

“How did potions go?” asked Susan, plopping down next to them.

“I won a prize,” said Hermione smartly.

“A prize?” said Susan, surprised. “He actually turned his class into a competition?”

“It seemed to have focused her attentions,” said Ron.

“What was it?”

Hermione brought a small bottle out of her *Pocket Dimension*, which held a liquid not unlike gold.

“That tells me nothing, you know.”

“Felix Felicis, if you must know.”

“Okay, if you say so.”

“It's a luck potion,” said Harry.

“Wait, a luck potion as in *Augment Stat (LUck)* or a luck potion as in *Devil’s Own Luck?*”

“What’s the difference?” asked Ron, biting into his sandwich.

“One won’t retaliate when it wears off.”

“Retaliate?” said Harry, moving away from the potion.

“Yup. You become so lucky you can pretty much do anything, but afterwards your LUCk goes down by four. And if you cast it too often you start to lose any luck you might normally have with the spell not going.”

“But the first time is okay, right?” asked Hermione, worried.

“Oh, sure, the first time is great, according to my book. Until it wears off. Then you go find a nice open field someplace and sit there for as long as you had the spell going for until the -4 wears off.”

“I see.” She hastily put it back.

“I doubt he would have given it to you if it was all that dangerous,” said Ron. “Our magic works differently, remember?”

“I suppose. But I’m going to be careful about using it, that’s for sure.”

“Good plan. And here’s another- The headmaster wants to see us at 8:00 this Saturday night.”

“Great!”

“You did see him breaking that guy’s leg, right? And almost killing that other guy by smashing his nose into his brain?” asked Hermione. “You can’t possibly believe he isn’t evil at this point.”

“Maybe he is, and maybe he isn’t,” she replied. “But one thing is for sure. Know your enemy. I admit, he’s not cute and cuddly like I am,” Ron had to quickly stop drinking or choke, “but he knew I could heal them, and he wanted to get away. So he took the most direct course to make that happen.”

“But he caused others pain! He attacked without warning and took them down in the most brutal way possible.”

“Yes, and banks kick people out of their homes for being late on their mortgage payments. Does that make them evil?”

“It sort of does!”

“Don’t worry, after what he said in the cave, and him attacking those guys, I know he’s no saint. I still don’t think I could just kill him though, but take his magic away? Sure.”

“Unless he gets you, first,” said Ron.

“Don’t even joke about that.”

“Sorry.”

And so that Saturday night came, and Susan, Sparkle and Harry went up to see Albus in his office.

“Right on time,” he said. “I do admire punctuality. You have both, I hope, been enjoying your first week back?”

“Passable,” said Susan.

“Not bad,” said Harry.

“Boring as ever,” said Sparkle.

“We could always find something for you to do,” Albus said, looking down at the cat, “If you wanted a bit more excitement in your life.”

“Thanks, but I’ll have excitement aplenty when Voldemort comes hunting. I’m saving up for that.”

“I’m not sure... anyway, are we prepared?”

“Am I taking us there or are you?”

“In fact, Fawkes is going to take us there, as even I cannot Apparate out of the grounds and I have no recent picture for Susan to study.”

“Sorry for the trouble, Fawkes,” said Susan.

He cawed.

Albus handed Susan the *Communication* item she had made the school. “Put this on, I think you’ll get a lot more out of this with it, than without.” Susan accepted it and fitted it over her ear, and Albus went over to where Fawkes was perching. “Hold on to me now, and we...”

“Go!” Susan, Harry, and Sparkle looked around the empty countryside, and their eyes came to rest on an old, broken down house. “Now then, how wide can this *Time Area* be, exactly?”

“My rating in meters. If you don’t think we’re going to be attacked tonight, I’ll have Sparkle slap *Energetic Accumulation* on me and I can get 30 meters or more.”

“That would be helpful, then we wouldn’t need to keep moving it as the action moved.”

“Sure thing.”

Sparkle went ahead and did so, and as Susan gathered the energy, Albus told her the exact time and date to look for. She nodded, cast, and turned the darkness light as time started replaying itself in this area. The four watched as Bob Ogden went into the Gaunt house, and had her pause the action while Harry explained what he was hearing.

“So that item works even on snakes, huh?”

“I don’t know, they aren’t snakes. They’re people speaking a language which snakes happen to understand. I have no idea if snakes speak to each other in this language, but if they do, all people that eat snake are murdering sentient creatures, so I certainly hope not.”

“As the gift is very rare, it’s not been studied very extensively,” explained Albus. “You may continue the playback.”

Naturally Mr. Gaunt went on about his “blood status” making Susan hiss and spit at him like a cat. Albus seemed amused.

But Susan and Harry were not amused as Mr. Gaunt and his son exhibited signs of madness and hysteria. Susan again paused the playback.

“Are there still people like this in the world today?” she asked, concerned. “These people needed help. Real help, not just a lone ministry operative stopping by and making ineffective mewling noises at them.”

Albus sighed. “Probably. But that is not the point of my showing you this.”

“No, it’s supposed to be about Voldi, and how he’s such a terrible person I should kill him on sight. I don’t see him around, though.”

“But you are seeing- well, I’ll allow you to see for yourself.”

“Very well.”

Playback continued until the ring was shown.

“The very ring!” said Susan. “Well, well, that’s where you came from, is it?”

“No wonder he put a piece of himself inside,” said Harry. “But who is this man?”

“Family,” said Albus simply.

“So old Tom Riddle was a sentimental guy, was he? Doesn’t make me want to chop his head off. At least we’ve already taken care of that little bauble.”

Playback resumed until the locket was shown.

“The heck?” asked Sparkle.

“What?” asked Susan, pausing it again.

“We’ve seen that locket,” said Sparkle. “When we cleaned the house for the Order, remember? We chucked it. Well, you chucked it.”

Susan had a feeling of ice in her stomach. “We did, didn’t we?” she asked Harry in a quiet voice.

“We sure did!” replied Harry with a forced grin fixed on his face.

“We’ve already seen one soul container in this house, and remember how I said it had some funky Pluto feeling about it?”

“I do. I do!”

“That’s why I remember,” said Sparkle. “I looked up when you said it was magical.”

“And we tossed it right in the garbage can!”

“We did. That we did!”

“Like idiots!”

“Huge idiots.”

“We made a terrible mistake.”

“Dang me. Dang me! Why don’t you take a rope and hang me? High from the highest tree. Woman, would you weep for me?”

“I’m crying now.”

“Uh, what’s going on?” asked Albus.

“Oh nothing. Just another piece of Voldi we’ll never see again. By the way, what happens to magical trash when magical people in magical hideouts magically throw it away?”

“I would have to guess Order members would have taken it and snuck it into different locations around the world to avoid anyone finding it. Probably into Mug- that is to say non-magical locations.”

“We could still scry it, couldn’t we?” asked Sparkle.

“Wait now, let me think about this. *Descry Object* is the one that gives you a mental picture, right? No, that’s *Creature*. *Object* gives you a direction and distance. But my *Retrieval* needs an exact location, and we won’t be able to get it.”

“But *Accio* could,” said Harry. “That just summons the object pictured in your mind. It can be just nearby, you don’t need to know the exact location.”

“That’s right!” Susan said excitedly. “If we got close enough and went *Unseen* we could poke around wherever it was and you could just summon it!”

“Whew.”

“Yeah. Anyway, carrying on.”

They watched the carriage approach, and saw the two tittering over the snake that had been nailed to the door. Then Mr. Gaunt tried to murder his daughter, and things rapidly went downhill. Bob left the house at speed, and Albus had her fast forward to fifteen minutes later as more ministry personnel arrived and carted him off. Albus said that was all they needed to see, and Susan let go of the spell.

“Charming people,” said Sparkle. “And obviously the magical community takes care of its own, so they got the help they needed.”

Susan shook her head sadly. "I'm guessing no. That probably worked out exactly as it would have in the non-magical world. No one cared enough, and they got lost in the system. They obviously had no money, and who would pay for their treatment? They were basically the bums of the magical world, which seems impossible for people that can do magic. But just like in the non-magical world, their kind is ignored, and the problem goes on."

"Sadly, you are right," said Albus. "That is a characteristic our two worlds share. Still, this journey was more fruitful than I expected, if we've glimpsed another possible vessel for Soul Shards."

"Is that what they're called?"

"No, I just made that up on the spot. You have to realize, and you'll see this as we visit more points in Tom's life, that the magic he used to create these objects is of the darkest kind. Not many people know the technique exists, and I mean to keep it that way."

"I see. Not a complex ritual lasting 24 hours and you're immortal, then?"

"Is that what you need? No, nothing like that."

"I see."

"Was the girl charged with anything? She seemed more a victim than anything else," said Harry.

"In this case, yes. However, once her father and brother were severing their sentences in Azkaban, she became a rather different person. And in many ways, worse than either of them."

"How could she be worse than them?" asked Susan.

"How do you feel about love potions?" asked Albus with a grin.

"I would consider them a form of the *Imperius Curse*, because you're messing with someone's volition. Please tell me they are banned."

"Uh, no, but I suppose if you think about them that way..."

"What other way can you think about them? You're messing with someone's mind, same as with *Imperius*. Wow you have some messed up laws, and just when I think I've hit bottom and they can't possibly get worse-."

"Leaving that aside, the man we saw earlier plays his part in all this, too."

"Oh no. Don't tell me. Love potions, that guy, no, it's too horrible to contemplate."

"And yet we must, for that is what happened."

"She made love potion and got that guy to fall for her, didn't she?" asked Harry.

"I would not say 'fall for' was the right term. Perhaps 'be infatuated by' would be- but never mind. The result is the same. Yes, and from this unhappy union came Tom, who was then brought to the orphanage we shall soon visit."

"I realize you can't possibly police people making potions in their spare time, but why are things like that not outright banned? Why is the knowledge of how to brew that potion not locked away with the wand motions for *Imperius*? It makes no sense!"

"Too late, I fear. Too many books detail the making of those kinds of potions."

"Wait, those *kinds* of potions? There's even more wonderful things I can be angry about in the magical world? It's my lucky day!"

"Now, now, there's no cause for sarcasm. I will say, curiously, that your reaction mirrored Tom's when he came to school. He must have found out at some point, because after that he began to call for bans on certain types of magic, love potions included."

"So are you trying to get me on his side or what? If we agree..."

“I’m trying to show you how, in his zeal, he went too far and became the monster we know him to be today. Come, we shall return to the school so you can mull over what you have seen.”

“All right.” *And I’ll want to Descry Object a bit as well, just to get a sense of where that locked ended up.*

That night, Susan did just as she said, and got a result.

However, not knowing exactly where the castle is, and not having an Internet mapping application to immediately look at, it’s impossible to say where that location is. But at least we know it’s not under any protection magic, so I can go home and see what I can find out about where it is later.

Love potions.

Honestly!

Harm None

Time: The next day

Place: Headmaster's Office

"Minister! What a lovely surprise!" said Susan when she went for her daily *Imbuing* session in the Headmaster's office. She even almost managed to say it without too much sarcasm.

"And there are more in store," said Albus, his eyes twinkling.

"Oh?"

"Yes, I've, well, come to first offer my apology in person for your mistreatment while you tried to get us to realize he was back. Obviously it wasn't just a bid for attention or whatever, like some believed."

"Yes, if I wanted attention I would just go to your hospital and cure everyone in a day."

"Ah, that is possible for you, isn't it? Secondly, we need your magic to secure the ministry building."

"That's odd, I don't see you on your knees, begging."

Cornelius looked slightly worried. "Is that being required?"

"It couldn't hurt, is all I'm saying. So let me understand this. For years, presumably, the Headmaster has tried to tell you Voldemort is still kicking around in one form or another, yes?"

"Uh, no?"

"No?" Susan looked over at Albus.

"We don't talk about what he did, normally, you recall."

"Not even with the minister of magic? That seems an odd policy. Okay, well, we did tell you he was back at the end of the tournament, and that was quite a while ago. Now you come actually seeking my aid, when I told you time and time again all you needed to do was believe me, and ask."

"And now we're asking."

"Asking? Funny, it sounded more like a demand to me. Maybe I have some water in my ear." Susan started shaking her head and tapping her ear. "Don't think so though."

"Will you please help us secure the ministry building?"

"Maybe. What do you want me for?"

"We've been talking to those people at the, uh, failed capture, and how the enchantments over them broke while walking into the room. We had the idea if you could do the same to the main entrance, no one would be able to get in without having all magic washed away from them. It would revert people who have taken Polyjuice, the *Imperius Curse*, whatever."

"Except that Voldi can teleport his followers in, same as I can. He would bypass that protection easily."

"Oh."

"There is a solution to that problem, though it will take some excellent charming skills," put in Albus.

"Yes?" Cornelius asked, looking more hopeful.

"Simply maintain a list of who has passed into the building through the front doors. Anyone not on the list must therefore be an intruder."

"Brilliant!"

"You mean like a *Protean Charm*," asked Susan.

“Why yes, I did mean that. You know about those?”

“Hermione mentioned them once. I can see several flaws in that plan, by the way.”

“Please, don’t hold back. We can work around them, perhaps.”

“Someone passes through the front gate, right? Then they get grabbed through a *Teleportal* and knocked out. A few minutes later, they return through the portal but it’s really someone else shape-shifted into them. They’re on the list, so they get access to everything.”

“Yes, that could be a problem.”

“Plus, if it wasn’t automated, after the first few weeks or so people would stop paying so much attention. Also keeping track of the fact you’ve seen someone on the list or not when you walk by them would be impossible.”

“So what would you recommend?”

“Go back in time and punch yourself in the face until you see reason, then get on this a year ago so it doesn’t come to this.”

Cornelius glared at her.

“Oh, you meant useful solutions? I don’t know, the ministry building is pretty large, what with all those levels. *Planar Deflection* is the spell we want to keep him from teleporting in, but sadly the range is pretty limited. It won’t cover the whole of the ministry, and plus it’s maintained, not like *Destroy Magic* that’s instantaneous. I would have to hold it all day, every day. Not going to happen, the ministry is too big to cover, and I don’t need a -2 penalty for something not even nearby.”

“If you would submit to allowing us to study your teleportation magic, perhaps we could improve the wards around the building.”

“Couple of things wrong with that. One, that would block me off, so... no. Secondly, there’s a few different ways I can get into places. First is plain old *Teleport* which exchanges the space I currently occupy with another space. The other is *Teleportal* where I just tear a hole in space and step through. Could your magic tell the difference? And teleporting a dozen times an hour for you to try stuff is just not feasible. Unless you want to bring me lots of victims I can drain the energy out of. Heheheh. Next up is turning into wind, or shrinking myself and sneaking in. Then there’s the old ‘step into the astral’ trick and then step back. Or just phasing through the wall like he did into the courtroom. Unless you can defend against all of those, and any other way you could think of to get someplace with magic, he’ll just keep trying stuff until something works.”

“The world was a lot simpler,” Cornelius said to Albus, “When all we had to defend against was Apparition.”

“Is that the case, though?” asked Susan. “I mean, I seem to more easily cast magic upon myself, it’s true. But you guys can do it, it’s called potion making. Are you sure there’s no potion to turn you into wind, or displace you a bit so you can walk through walls? One hundred percent sure?”

Cornelius hardly blinked, his expression frozen.

“Sorry, didn’t mean to make you paranoid there. In any case, I think you’ve forgotten. I’m not really all that pleased with the ministry for various reasons. You want my help? Fine. Start changing laws and holding real trials and such, and we’ll talk.”

He seemed to gain a bit of courage back. “We will not be dictated to by an underage girl!”

“The ‘underage girl’ you’re currently asking for the help of, may I remind you. You can’t force me to cast magic for you. Still, you could take a few minutes if you wanted to think about-”

He was shaking his head. “No? Then you’re on your own, I’m afraid. I will not be seen supporting a ministry that did not support me when I needed it.”

“I would suggest at least seeing what she had to say,” said Albus. “I’m curious myself how she would change wizard law.”

“Oh, fine, what is your proposal? I assume you’ve written one up, you go on and on about it every time I see you.”

“Yeah, it almost seems an important issue to me. How about that? If I might have a piece of paper, Headmaster?”

“You don’t? I can come back later, I’m very busy at the moment.”

“Not to worry, it’ll only take a second,” she replied, clicking a pen. She wrote two words and handed it over.

Both men looked at the two words.

“That’s it?” Cornelius asked in disbelief. “Harm None.”

“That’s all you need,” said Susan lightly. “It’s the ultimate law. Easy to learn and understand, hard to argue around.”

“Elegant,” said Albus with a chuckle.

“Two words? You want to replace all of wizard law with these two words?”

“What, you think three would be better? *Please* Harm None? Don’t Hurt Anybody? Cause No Harm? I could go as high as four but that’s my final offer.”

“Do you know how complex law is? You can’t just... I can’t believe... this is a waste of my time.”

“Is it? Tell me, what law do you have that can’t be boiled down to “Does this activity I’m doing hurt someone else?” If the answer is yes, you’ve broken the law. If no, then carry on.”

“And what about these trials you’re so keen on?”

“What about them?”

“How would punishment be handed out if there was no law-book to make it plain?”

“You’re talking about two different issues. I’m talking about law. You’re talking about punishment. They are two separate things. Breaking the law is clear- you’ve caused some kind of harm to another. Punishment is for the court to decide.”

“You really think that would work?”

“Why not? Oh, I understand the need for a billion separate laws on the books. It’s the same in the non-magical world. You need laws so that everyone, at some point in the day, breaks a law. Then if they need to be taken in, they can be brought in on whatever charges you need until whatever you want to stick to them can be made to stick. With my new, ‘one law’ you would have a much harder time with that.”

“It would be chaos!”

“I don’t think so. The majority of people don’t want to hurt others, after all, I think.”

“Ah, but how do you define harm?”

“I think that definition is pretty clear. Causing pain, loss of material wealth, emotional distress, just ask a five year old. If a little kid can say “they shouldn’t have done that” then harm has been done. Maybe a ten year old, five is probably still too young.”

“It could be quite interesting to live in a society with only one law,” said Albus.

“Don’t tell me you’re taking this... request... seriously?”

“As a theoretical exercise it has a lot going for it. What would happen if you threw law-books away and just told people not to hurt one other? Of course, given that ‘freedom’ so to

speak from those one billion laws Susan mentioned, penalties for breaking the one law would have to be correspondingly larger.”

“I can’t believe I’m hearing this.”

“It has a lot going for it,” said Susan. “Take current law. You have to keep adding laws to the books because the world keeps spinning and changing every day. A new technology comes along, sorry, I mean a new spell, you have to regulate it separately because you hadn’t thought of it before. Under the one law, if that new thing doesn’t hurt anyone, great! If it does, the law already makes it illegal!”

“I can accept this sort of broad strokes, rosy picture from a young girl, but to think you would go along with such a plan, Albus.”

“Perhaps I just like to see you flustered.”

Cornelius sputtered something unintelligible.

“Please, sir, there are children present,” said Susan.

“You understood that? I didn’t think anyone spoke-” He looked over at her. “You were just joking, weren’t you? Anyway, what can I seriously do to get you on our side?”

“I’ve told you. Reduce corruption. Let me destroy all Dementors in Azkaban, those that are still left, anyway. Start holding more trials. Give Sirius his 10 years of life back. *Harm. None.*”

“All of those are quite impossible.”

“Then so is my helping you.”

“Then that brings me to my third-”

Susan held up a hand. “Helping you... in an evident manner.”

“What do you mean?”

“If you mark off some places you would like rendered cut off from magic, like the space right before the elevator or something, I will sneak in and make that happen. That will at least make sure an intruder will be caught if they try to change floors at all. My requirements are this: You cannot publicize I have done so. You cannot have your paper write ‘last night, Susan, at the request of the ministry, did such and such.’ Nothing like that. In return: Publish your plans to capture Voldi. Hire more security forces, and send Aurors to the school to do extra training, if people would like it. I’ve seen the letters in the paper calling for your resignation. Instead, start giving people what you should have given them in the first place- a reason you hold the office you do. You are now the minister of magic at the start of a new magical war. Step up your game.”

Albus clapped. “Very well said, Susan.”

“Thank you.”

“I’ll do what I can, and I’ll have a map sent over with good locations. Thank you. If I may move on to the third point?”

“There’s more?”

“Just the one. You know who has been-”

Susan put up her hand again. “No, you are going to say his name. Voldemort. Honestly. Say it, or leave right now. I’m tired of this crap. Grow a backbone, man! You know who... No, I don’t. Spell it out, I’m not a mind reader for crying out loud.”

He seemed to steel himself. “Voldemort has been seen.”

“You didn’t catch fire! Bravo. What about it?”

“What is his goal now? According to the people broken out of the *Imperius* his goal at the moment is simply to gather information. They were instructed to watch and report, rather than sew chaos. When he first declared himself, he attacked in force, with all manner of dark creatures

and dark magic. This time, well, he's been back quite a while from what you said, but there have been no attacks, no disappearances. What's he doing?"

"Researching my kind of magic. Expect him to have spells that do things your magic can't easily do. He took a new toy from me, and he's testing it out. Expect him to finally emerge in a big way. Be ready, even if it seems Death Eater activity is nonexistent, they're out there. Getting ready for the day their master declares himself ready with *Natural Magician* magic."

"Any ideas for tracking down where he's hiding?"

Susan thought a moment. "Follow the money."

"What?"

"Magical research is sort of expensive. Don't ask me why, but the scant notes my father has on the subject reference 'considerable materials, costing around 100 monetary units per day.' He didn't feel he would have time, on the way to saving the variety of worlds he saved, to do any spell research. Or the money, probably. I think this is why he put a piece of his magic into the book, so it could come up with new spells for me, negating the time and cost requirement. If the '100 monetary units' works the same way as it does for *Imbuing* that means 100 silver, or about 7 Galleons a day worth of... I have no idea. Stuff. Find a ton of potion ingredients or something that are always being delivered someplace, and you've got a good chance it's him."

"That's something, at least. Anything else?"

"Sure, get better scrying magic that can bust through his magical defenses."

"We don't do a lot of that, actually."

"Yes, I noticed. Harry's *Divination* class had nothing whatsoever to do with what I would call divination. Seeing at a distance, for one. It seemed to focus only on the future, and never on the present. Like the simple question of "where is my friend Harry right now?" My magic could tell me, your magic, as of yet, doesn't seem to be able to do so."

"A weakness in the curriculum we may need to rectify," said Albus. "After all, we know magic *itself* can do it, or Susan would not be able to. Perhaps after this crisis is over, a team could be put together to study that branch of magic in more detail, as it relates to events happening in the present."

"It couldn't hurt," said Susan.

"That's everything," said Cornelius. "At least for the moment. Thank you for speaking to me, I know I'm not your favorite person in the world right now."

"Don't worry, I can name a few who are lower than you at the moment. Just... don't screw it up again, okay? Is that too much to ask?"

"I'll do my best. Albus."

"See you later."

"At least he is doing something, at last," Susan remarked to Albus when he was gone.

"It was nice of you to offer to build in more protections into the ministry building. I wonder if points around the castle should be similarly protected?"

"The front doors, maybe? I don't know, tell me what you want, and I'll do it. I've memorized the spell for a reason, I can cast it quickly enough."

"Just how fast can you strip someone of their ability to do magic?"

Susan looked at him a moment before answering. "Less than five seconds," she said at last.

"That quickly? Astonishing."

“At least they’ll be alive at the end, and they could negate it with a high enough RESolve check. Your death curse spell seems to offer no resistance save one- don’t get hit by it.”

“It is interesting your magic offers the possibility of simply mentally willing the spell to not work. I take it even someone with no magical ability could do so? Not against that spell, I mean, but others?”

“You are correct. It comes with the increased versatility of my magic, I guess. There has to be some limitations.”

“True, though you seem to find ways around them with regularity.”

“Of course! Limits are just progress markers on your way past them.”

“I think that is the scariest sentence anyone has ever said to me. By the way, were you serious about the whole ‘harm none’ thing?”

“Of course I was. Having all sorts of byzantine laws only helps lawyers and cops. Make the law simple and clear, so everyone can understand it. Don’t make laws that apply only to certain groups of people (like gays) and that change based on where you are on the planet. Don’t make them so complex you can’t be certain you’re breaking the law or not when you do something. I think things would be much better for one, simple law.”

“Perhaps one day, humans will reach the point they don’t even need that, because harming another would be unthinkable to them.”

“Until then, we have people like Voldi to worry about. Good thing you have people like me that you don’t, right?”

The narrowing of Albus’ eyes betrayed his answer, even if his reply did not.

Next Trip to the Village

Time: One Week Later

Place: Susan's Personal Dimension

"Hey Susan," said Hermione, walking up to the cabin. "Haven't you memorized that book by now?"

Susan looked up from the book of magic she was paging through. "Hi Hermione. I do have it pretty well memorized, at least in a general sense. But specifics, now that's the tricky bit."

"What are you looking for?"

"A way to figure out where the rest of Voldi's *Soul Shards* are located. But I just can't think of a way to do it."

"Is that now the official name?"

"Might as well be. The Headmaster asked me to look into it, and I asked the book to look into it, but so far, no luck. I thought maybe that was because there was something I was missing, but I guess not. There aren't many spells that deal directly with the soul, which makes sense. But we do know it exists, as Voldi can place bits of it into objects. And if it exists, magic should be able to touch it. The trouble is that my *Descry* spells hinge upon identifying the thing I'm looking for in some way. Have you ever seen a soul?"

Hermione shook her head.

"Exactly. What if all souls are actually part of a greater whole? A soul quilt or tapestry as it were? That tiny pieces get plucked off to become people, and then return to the quilt when their time as a person is done. In that case, I could never find a specific one. I mean, try finding a specific thread in a tapestry."

"Why don't you go get the locket? Maybe you can study the soul that way?"

"I'm afraid if I do anything to it, the soul will migrate or disappear. Plus, I don't exactly know where that is. I want the spell I cast to tell me where those *Shards* are, and if one of them matches up with the location of the locket, we know the spell works."

"Good plan."

"Course it is! Too bad it isn't working out very well. I've done some scrying on it this week, and it hasn't moved. So it's not possessing someone, meaning it's not critical we go after it immediately. Of course there's every possibility it's not a *Soul Shard* container, and just had some weird magic on it, like the rest of the junk in that house."

"I'm sorry to hear all of this."

"It's not the end of the world. Apparently Albus is looking for them himself, and he's gone from his office most of the time now, with Fawkes. But if my magic could help narrow it down, that would be tremendous. Assuming Voldi doesn't move them into his own *Pocket Dimension* now... that he probably... has access... to one."

The girls stared at each other in horror.

"He could, too, couldn't he?" asked Hermione.

"Oh yeah. I didn't even think about that. I am so not used to fighting *myself*."

"Could you break into his *Dimension*?"

"I certainly hope not, because that would mean he could break into mine. No, things like *Dimension Step* that Sparkle knows move you between planes, but there's nothing to target trying to break into a *Dimension*. I'm not even sure it exists if it's not being accessed. I guess we could

stick a camera in one and see what it recorded? The problem is, what if we watched the footage and *actually saw something?*” She shivered.

“Yeah, some multi-tentacled thing from between dimensions. We wouldn’t be able to unsee it!”

“Right. Best leave it as a mystery for now. Of course if he does put them into a *Dimension* of some sort, and he does get killed, one of two things will happen.”

“Okay?”

“One, the spell will break and everything in his *Dimension* will pop out where he died.”

“Sounds dangerous if he’s shoved something huge in there. And two?”

“Two is the magic will be maintained because his soul still exists, even if it is still inside the dimension. He’ll then be locked in limbo forever, because he wouldn’t be able to magic himself out. It’s win-win for us. Don’t worry about something huge, the weight that can be put in depends on the rating... which he can raise with energy. CRAP!”

“Also it means killing the most feared wizard in all of history.”

“I’m making sure I have that angle covered,” said Susan, glancing over at her table. There was a lump under a white towel, surrounded by magical energy, obviously an *Imbuing* in progress.

“What is it?”

“My secret weapon. I don’t want to say any more than that, I’m afraid. Please don’t mess with it, the *Imbuing* isn’t done. Anyway, I don’t think it falls, just that it appears. I’ve never died, so I wouldn’t know.”

“Couldn’t it be a million knives, with some kind of charm on them to fly out in all directions when they appear?”

“I love talking to you, Hermione, you know that, right?”

“Aw, you’re so sweet. I love talking to you too!”

“That was... ah, so was yours. Right. Of course, it’s his body that has Paragon stats now, not his soul. All connection to that magic might end when that body no longer can sustain life. I don’t know, there’s a lot of things to take into account.”

“I suppose so. Anyway, I love chatting, but if I’m going to get anything done, I better get started. If that’s okay with you?”

“Started?”

“Making potions. This is a potion making lab, isn’t it?”

“Hermione, my potion making lab is your potion making lab. Please feel free.”

“Thank you.” She walked into the other room. “Wow, they really did a lot of work in here, didn’t they? The twins, I mean?”

“Yeah, they labeled all the jars and everything. I really have to hand it to them, when they’re serious about something, they go all the way. Even if it is a joke product.”

“That’s just the trouble. Anyway, I’m going to get to work. Good luck with the spell.”

“Yeah, thanks.”

I forgot to tell her I even tried True Question in desperation. “Elf of black stole the first. Second is lestrangely cursed. Third one sits upon her head. Stone statue seek instead.” Is that really a help? I’ve never seen a black elf, and strangely cursed? Then one upon the head of a statue, I guess? Maybe I should have asked about a specific one rather than just their locations in general, but phrasing that question would be tough. Maybe “tell me the closest location of Voldemort’s soul?” I don’t know.

Susan turned back to her book.

Maybe I'll pick up something, I have 8xp left. I need 21 or 18 to raise my spell skill group. Blast, putting Dead Magic on that thing is going to be expensive. What level 8 or lower spell would I like to learn?

Ah, nothing jumps out at me. I guess I'll just save it, for now.

So Susan worked on *Imbuing* things for her friends as usual, and the time passed. Albus was hardly ever in his office, which was actually rather a relief for her because then she didn't have to tell him about her failure to create a spell to help him track down Soul Shards. She, Hermione and Harry attended several dinners held by Professor Slughorn, where she explained what she could about her magic. He really did seem interested, but the number of Slytherin students there did strain things a bit. Finally, it was mid October, and the first trip to the village was allowed.

"Are you going to come?" asked Harry the night before.

"Maybe."

"You can't just work all the time, you know."

"It's not about work, it's about avoiding any complications."

"It's tomorrow, no one could set something up that soon."

"No, but something could be set to happen and be triggered by my going or not."

"Nothing's happened to you in ages. Maybe they finally gave up."

Susan shook her head. "No, I haven't bought off the weakness, I still have an enemy out there someplace. Oh, all right, I'll go with you guys."

"You're just saying that because you're not going to go, right?"

"That's what I'd like you to believe."

But she did go, and rather than make everyone walk there, she helpfully opened a *Teleportal* for everyone to go through. Some of the younger kids were excited, but the older kids took it in stride.

"It's just Susan," she heard one say. "She's always doing stuff like that."

Once everyone was through she stepped through herself, and looked around with the others.

"I get the strangest feeling you need to be somewhere," Luna said to her. She spun around, then pointed. "Yes, this way. I think we should go this way."

"I guess we're going this way," Susan said to the others.

"That can't be an echo, it relates to you directly," said Ron.

Hermione started pulling his arm. "Did you ever think they just might want to be alone for a little while?" she hissed at him. "See you later!"

Harry, Neville and Ginny waved as Luna and Susan took off the other way.

"So, did you just want me alone, or is there something we need to do this way?" asked Susan.

"There really is something we need to do to this way," replied Luna.

"Okay, I'll take your word for it. Say, what do you want for Christmas? I usually just surprise people, but I haven't started on anything for you, and I thought you might like something specific."

“Hummmmm. What I would really like is to see my mother again. You have magic that can repeat time in a certain area, right?”

“Yes I do. Are you sure that’s all you want? I mean, I can make you a magical object that could do almost anything.”

“I have a magical object that can do almost anything,” she replied with a smile, bumping up to her. “What do I need another one for?”

Susan grinned back. “Okay, you got it.” *But I think I’ll bring my digital camera along and get some pictures, too. They’ll be the real gift. They might not move like wizard pictures, but they’ll be in color, at least. I could take them to a photo place the next day and get them printed, then leave them for her. Yeah, that’s what I’ll-*

Whump A small something ran into Susan’s leg and grabbed on. “Susan!” she said, looking up at Susan.

Susan looked down, and attached to her leg was a small girl, maybe six years old.

“Hello,” she said, wondering if this was some kind of attack by a Death Eater. *Create a doll that looks like a human, enchant it to move, put some explosives inside, have it run up to someone... yeah, that’s what I’d do if I couldn’t attack them directly. Catch them completely off guard.* She reached for her bracelet to *Phase* at the first sign of trouble, when a woman ran up yelling “Kelly, let that poor girl go!”

“It’s okay,” said Susan, as the woman came to a halt. “I am who she said.”

Luna had quietly summoned her wand, and was holding it down at her side in case this was also a threat, and Susan gave her a quick nod.

“I’m really sorry about this,” said the woman, trying to pry Kelly off of Susan’s leg. “She just took off running.”

“Susan!” said Kelly.

“Yes,” said the woman. “That’s Susan, but we shouldn’t bother her.”

“Save my sister!” said Kelly as she was pulled away.

Luna and Susan looked at each other, then Susan knelt down.

“What do you mean?”

“My sister got stole by the monster under the bed. You can save her, right?”

Susan looked up questioningly at the woman.

“I’m terribly sorry about this. Let’s go, Kelly.”

“Wait, what’s this about a monster?” asked Luna.

“It’s nothing, really,” said the woman. “Come on Kelly, *now*.”

“But Susan can help!” cried Kelly. “I know she can, mom. Please!”

“I can help,” Susan said to her. “And I will if you want. What’s she talking about?”

“You can’t do anything, I’ve already reported it and the authorities didn’t find anything,” said the woman sadly.

“I don’t think she knows who she’s talking to,” said Luna.

“Susan mom, it’s Susan!” cried Kelly, pointing.

“Okay,” she said to her. “It’s Susan, so what?” The woman really looked at who her daughter had grabbed onto to. “Wait, you couldn’t be... that Susan, could you?”

“The one and only, at your service.”

“I’ve read about you. And what you did at the tournament, and there were rumors about your involvement in almost catching he who must not be named.”

“Almost being the operative word. Sadly the ministry can’t plan things very well. Now what’s this about her sister needing to be rescued?”

“Do you really think you can help?”

“All I think is that I can try. I have means not normally available to even the most learned of wizards. I don’t mind hearing the story.”

“Oh, all right. I suppose it can’t hurt. I guess our shopping will have to wait. Come on, Kelly, we’re heading back home.”

“Yay, Susan is going to find Emily! Yay! Yay!”

The group made their way back down the street, and the woman invited them in.

“Oh, my name is Rachel, by the way.”

“Honey?” called a voice from within the house. “Did you forget something?”

“I ran into someone,” she called back.

“I’m Susan, as you already know, and this is my friend Luna.”

Luna cleared her throat.

“Sorry, my *girlfriend* Luna.”

“Thank you. Nice to meet you.”

“Oh, yes.” It looked like Rachel wasn’t quite sure how to process this information.

“Who are these people?” asked a man coming into view from the kitchen.

“Bryan, this is Susan and Luna. They’ve agreed to help us find Emily.”

“How are a couple of kids going to- hold on, Susan... uh, uh, don’t tell me.” He was snapping his fingers. “Belton?”

“Close. Felton. Nice to meet you.”

“Seriously? You’re Susan Felton? *The Susan Felton*? You’re famous!”

Susan snorted. “Hardly. But the *Daily Prophet* does love a good, sensationalist story.”

“I found her!” said Kelly proudly.

“Did you?” asked Bryan with a smile. “My daughters, they’ve been talking about nothing else since they saw you in the papers. I read them the stories of what you’ve been up to, or at least what the papers say you’re up to.”

“Two very different things, actually, but they do get some details right.”

“Did you really see, you know who, resurrect himself? And fought him, and escaped?”

“That much is true, yes.”

“Wow. I guess if you think you can help...”

“I’m willing to try. So what’s the story?”

“Come on up,” said Rachel, “You can see for yourself.”

The group went up the stairs and into a bedroom at the top of the stairs. It was a typical very young girl’s bedroom, with lots of stuffed toys and such. There were two beds, at opposite sides of the room, and the family seemed to get more sad as they entered.

“This is where Emily sleeps,” said Rachel, indicating the bed on the right side of the room. “She’s three years old-”

“I’m six!” said Kelly.

“Don’t interrupt,” said Bryan.

“And two nights ago she vanished completely,” finished Rachel.

Luna and Susan looked at each other grimly.

“When you say vanished...” asked Susan.

“We put the girls to bed as normal. Several hours later Kelly came into our room saying she couldn’t find Emily anywhere. We searched the house, but there was... there was...” Rachel blinked away tears. “I’m sorry.”

“There was no sign of her,” finished Bryan, also looking upset. “Obviously we immediately contacted the ministry and they sent someone, but there was no trace.”

Immediately? By owl, no doubt. That would mean at least a twenty minute delay, right?

“It was the monster!” said Kelly.

“What’s this about a monster?” asked Susan. “She said that before.”

“Oh, you know kids, always going on about things,” said Rachel. “Pay her no mind.”

“Monsters are real,” said Luna simply.

“Don’t say that!” said Bryan.

Luna ignored him, kneeling down in front of Kelly. “Monsters *are* real,” she repeated. “And I believe you. One day, you’ll go to school and learn all about them, and then you can protect your little sister like I know you want to. But for now, the way you can help protect her is telling us about it. Can you do that? Can you tell me about this monster?”

“It only came at night,” said Kelly. “It was scary.”

“The girls had been complaining about it for several days, you know, the whole ‘monster under the bed’ routine,” said Bryan, forcing a laugh.

“What did it look like?” continued Luna.

“I don’t know. Scary things. And I heard noises too, and saw weird things.”

“You see, she can’t even describe it,” said Bryan.

“Still, there are creatures in the world that try to illicit a fear response,” said Susan.

“Bogey, you think?” asked Luna.

“It can’t be a Bogey, they always hide in something,” protested Rachel. “And why would one steal our daughter?”

“Good question, but we can’t discount it,” said Susan. “All right, I’m going to take this room back to that night. If you don’t want to see this, you can wait downstairs, Kelly.”

She grabbed Susan’s hand. “I can be brave too!”

Susan smiled. “I know you can. Okay, about what time was this that you noticed her gone? And two nights ago, you said?”

“It was about two thirty in the morning. What do you mean ‘take this room back’ if you don’t mind my asking?”

“It’s a spell I know, it will repeat time in this room so we can see what happened.” A glowing circle appeared on the floor in the middle of the room, then expanded to touch all the walls. “Here we go- *Time Area*.”

Susan watched as the two parents came in and out of the room backwards, then Kelly came back in and got back into bed. They watched as a weird, shape-shifting creature appeared with Emily, who kicked and screamed as the creature put her back into bed as well. It then went back and forth between the two girls, alternately scaring them and causing them to hide under their covers. The monster then vanished. They only caught glimpses of all this activity as it was being rewound, but after everything went peaceful again, Susan started playback.

“I don’t get it,” said Kelly. “There was this scary looking man in the room before Emily disappeared. And she said she was covered in dogs.”

“Dogs?” asked Luna.

“She’s terrified of dogs,” replied Bryan.

“But you didn’t see any dogs?” asked Luna.

Kelly shook her head.

“Sounds more like an ESPer *Illusion* than magic,” remarked Susan, watching each girl become more terrified.

“I’m sorry, the what?” asked Rachel.

“I’m going to need to bring someone else in,” said Susan in answer. “If that’s okay with you?”

“If you think it’ll help,” said Bryan helplessly.

Susan paused the *Time Area* and opened a *Teleportal* into the Hogwarts kitchens. She stuck her head through.

The two adults could hardly believe their eyes. They were looking through a hole in the air to *Hogwarts*.

“Hello, Susan!” chorused the elves.

“Hello everyone,” she answered. *My cult grows!* “Is Winky around?”

“Winky is right here, miss!” said Winky, coming into view. “You are needing Winky’s help, Winky dreamed it last night! Winky is improving her skills, just as miss ordered.”

“That’s great news, Winky. I’m happy to hear it. And yes, I certainly could use your help, if you can spare a few minutes.”

“For you, of course!”

“Come through then, and tell me what you think. Oh, and can someone please fetch my cat?”

“I can do this, miss!” said another elf, and scurried off.

“Thank you!” she called after it.

“A house elf?” asked Bryan as Winky stepped through.

“An elf, yes, I don’t know about *house* as even if that was her actual species name, she works in a castle at the moment. Thanks for coming, Winky. This is Bryan and Rachel and Kelly.”

“Winky is glad to make your acquaintance. Oh, this room has known fear,” said Winky, looking around. “Now Winky is knowing why Susan came to get her.” She started walking about the room, touching things.

“We’re the same size,” said Kelly.

Not for much longer, kid.

“Winky does not know what she can tell you that you can’t see for yourself,” she said at last.

“The question I had for you, Winky, was if someone like you made an *Illusion* then only the person you targeted would see it, right?”

“That is right. It would be projected into the mind of the person Winky wanted to see something.”

“That fits then,” said Luna, crossing her arms.

“I’m sorry,” said Bryan, “But what does this all mean?”

“Well, keep watching it forward,” said Susan, resuming ‘*playback*’ of the scene. They watched as a creature, its form always blurring into things a small child might find scary, rose up from under the bed. It grabbed Emily and vanished. A few minutes later, (Susan fast forwarded the *playback*) Kelly got up the courage to run out of the room and get her parents. Susan paused it again.

“So, what do we know from the visual record of that night? Some kind of creature that induces fear in people came here two nights ago. For whatever reason, maybe to feed, it created *Illusions* of scary things and the girls reacted. As you can see, when they went under the covers it turned its attention onto the other girl. Very odd, that, but whatever. Finally it got tired of that

little game, and decided it would take the younger child, who was probably more afraid, and grabbed her.”

“So our daughter has been spirited away by some weird fear creature?” asked Bryan incredulous.

“That is what the evidence suggests. Now, we’ll wait for my cat to show up so I don’t have to cast *Teleportal* again and we’ll see about finding her.”

“There is hope, then?” asked Rachel.

“There’s always hope.”

“Wait, did you say your cat?” asked Bryan. “First a house elf, then a cat?”

“Yes, I keep some non-standard company. Winky, anything else you can tell us about this?”

She closed her eyes and concentrated. “Winky cannot,” she answered sadly. She opened her eyes again. “But Winky would like to come with you when you go to rescue the girl.”

“Are you sure? It could be dangerous.”

“More so for you, Winky is thinking. You will need someone like me if this creature has more in common with me than with you.”

Meaning, if it’s an ESPer it will be easier for another ESPer to counter it rather than a magic user. Good point.

“Okay, I see your point. You can come.”

Suddenly Sparkle jumped through the portal. “Meow?”

“Oh, it’s fine, I think they can handle it,” said Susan. “You staying, Winky? I’ll close the portal here if you are. I don’t need the minuses from a grade 10 spell.”

“Winky will stay if the owners permit. Perhaps Winky can do chores while I wait for you to find where we need to go to rescue the girl.”

“You don’t have to do that!” protested Rachel.

“Winky insists,” insisted Winky. “Show Winky what work is to be done.”

“She’s really improved,” whispered Luna, “from what you told me before.”

“She really has.”

Blinking, Rachel led the elf out of the room to find some work for her to do.

“Anyway,” said Sparkle, “What’s up with the weird monster?”

“That’s what we’re trying to determine,” said Susan. “I wanted your opinion on something when it vanished.”

“Okay, play it, Sam.”

“It’s talking. That cat is talking!” said Bryan.

“Nice kitty!” said Kelly. “Can I pet your kitty?”

“Her name is Sparkle, and you can ask her yourself.”

“Can I pet you?”

“I suppose I could put up with it a few minutes.”

“Yay!”

“Uh, are there going to be any other surprises?” asked Bryan.

“We’re just getting started here,” answered Susan. “You wanted your daughter back, we’re going to get her back. Is a talking cat or two really that difficult to accept?”

“No, I suppose not. Is she an animagus?”

Susan laughed. “Nope, just a person that happens to be cat shaped.” She started the playback, and Sparkle watched as the creature grabbed Emily and vanished.

“What do you think? Teleport?”

Sparkle tilted her head. "Let me see it again."
"Of course."

"No," Sparkle said, after watching it three times. "I don't think so."
"That's what I thought. It doesn't look quite right for a teleport. I'll still do a *Descry* but I don't think we'll find her."

"What's this?" asked Bryan.

"There's a subtle difference between *Teleport* and *Dimension Step*. You wouldn't notice if you hadn't seen it a bunch, but we both have. I'm going to try finding her on Earth now that I've seen what she looks like, but I'm pretty sure I'm not going to."

"You mean she's dead?"

"No, no, no!" said Susan hastily, waving her hands. "I mean she's just elsewhere. Don't worry yet."

"I... okay, whatever you say."

Susan got out her *Descry Creature* paper, and settled on the floor to cast it. "Make yourselves comfortable," she said. "This is going to take a few minutes. Oh, do you have something of hers you don't mind losing? Wait, Luna, get her brush." Luna nodded, and went over to the dresser. "Wait, do they share a brush?"

Bryan shook his head.

"Ah, good, that'll work then."

Luna brought the brush over, and Susan pulled some hairs from it. Then she started casting.

Kelly was interested for a few minutes, then wandered away as the magical energies built up.

I could have learned this spell. Is saving 5 minutes worth 7 XP though? I could have used 5 energy too, but if this creature puts up a fight, I want to be ready.

It went off, and as Susan suspected, she got no result.

"She's not on this plane anymore," she said, "Just as I thought."

"But she's not dead, right?"

"I don't want to get your hopes up. We'll go after her, but after this long... I don't know. She's probably be okay but there really isn't any time to lose."

"What do you need me to do?"

"There isn't much- wait, you could donate some energy. Your wife, too."

"Energy?"

"Trust me on this one. My magic depends on energy. I don't know how tough that thing is, but if it decides to fight us, I'll want all the energy I possibly can."

"Well, whatever."

"Thanks."

Susan used *Energy Drain* to get as much energy from the man as she thought she safely could, and then did the same with the Rachel.

If only I had some kind of... I don't know... Spirit Sense skill that could tell me how much energy a person had. Then I could drain more accurately. Oh well.

"We'll be back soon, and with good news, I hope."

"I hope so too. Good luck."

"Thanks." She picked up Sparkle, who started to cast. "Grab hold Winky, and you too, Luna."

“Up or down?” asked Sparkle.

“You don’t think a fear creature lives close to Heaven, do you?” replied Susan.

“Probably not. Okay, down it is.”

“Don’t you want to go get the others?” asked Luna, as magical energies started swirling around them.

“Pah, the four of us can handle one little fear creature, don’t you think? What have you been training for, anyway?”

“*Dimension Step*,” said Sparkle, and it was too late anyway.

Nest of Fear

Time: Seconds later

Place: Purgatory

“Nice place,” remarked Luna, looking around. Purgatory showed both the real world, and the Demon World, just as the Astral showed both Earth and Heaven overlapping. The result was a gray, dingy, awful looking place to behold.

“Winky doesn’t like it,” said Winky.

“Who does? Perfect place for a fear creature to live, though. Okay, watch my back, I’m casting *Descry* again so we can get a sense which direction she went in.”

And find out if she’s still alive.

Ten minutes later, Susan breathed a sigh of relief as the spell reported she was in that direction, and not too far.

“All right then, we’re going to fly,” she said, casting *Flight* on everyone.

“Winky is not sure about this!” said Winky, hovering just inches from the ground.

“Come on, it’s easy, and we don’t have the time to waste!” said Susan, gesturing for her to join them in the air.

“The things Winky does for Susan,” she muttered, rising into the air.

“You know, this could be fun if we weren’t about to battle some unknown creature to try and rescue a child,” remarked Luna.

“Maybe during break I can bring you back and have some fun flying around outside the castle. Or maybe we can form our own Quidditch team with no broomsticks.” She laughed.

“What?”

“I just realized the perfect gift for Harry. Put *Descry Object* into his glasses.”

“I think that would be cheating.”

Like having the fastest broom on the field isn’t? “Yeah, probably. We should be getting close!”

“There!” said Sparkle, after about twenty minutes of full speed flying. Her high *perception* let her see a bunch of black blobs surrounding what looked like a bunch of kids before the others.

“Oh no, there’s more than one!” said Luna, meaning there was more than one child there.

“It looks like a whole nest. Are these things breeding here?” asked Susan, taking it to mean more than one creature.

“No, I mean... never mind. What do we do?”

“What else? We attack!”

As they swooped down, they saw there were at least a dozen of the flickering forms, all changing between things kids might find scary. One of the creatures looked up and turned into a dead Mr. Crouch.

“NO!” shouted Winky, taking off in the other direction.

“Winky, it’s just an illusion!” shouted Susan. The creature then looked at Luna and became a dead Susan, making her avert her eyes, but not run away.

“Come on, Luna, they can’t be that tough if they prey on little kids.”

Another looked up and suddenly it was Voldemort, crackling with magical power and about to cast a spell. Susan got a 29 on her RESolve check, and glared down at it.

“Is that all you’ve got?” she said, streaking downwards and landing in the middle of the kids. Most were unconscious, and those not were huddled together in fear.

“Don’t you worry, I’m here to save you,” said Susan, raising her left hand high. “For sacrifices made.”

Immediately twenty five soldiers appeared in a ring around the kids, and Susan shouted “Legion, destroy those inhuman creatures and protect these children!”

The *Legion* went to work.

To make a long story short, the *Legion* made cutting them all down look easy. They were not only tougher, faster, and armored, but they were also totally fearless, so the creatures didn’t have much to “lock unto.” Also they glowed, which seemed to cause the creatures to shrink back. Luna also helped, but her hands were shaking so her aim wasn’t that great.

The bad news was, when they died, the creatures seemed to vanish, causing Susan some concern they would not get the chance to study them.

“Keep one alive for study!” Susan shouted once most of them were dead. “Just knock the last one out.”

They managed it, and the last one, still in a man sized, twisted form with strange protuberances and blades sticking out of him, lay sprawled out on the “floor” of purgatory. The kids, those that were still conscious, clustered around Susan and were all talking at once.

“Luna, check the others,” said Susan, and tried to reassure the kids and get them quieted down.

“One’s breathing is really shallow, but I think the others are all okay. I don’t see any wounds.”

“So it’s just needing a good meal, I hope. Okay kids, I’m taking you to a hospital directly, and you can get checked over, then contact your parents from there.” Many of them started dancing around and... basically acting like little kids.

“Oh, is there a girl named Emily here? Would have been brought 2 days ago?”

“I think her name is Emily,” said one, pointing to an unconscious girl.

“Okay, thanks. Sparkle, give me *Accumulation*, we’re going there directly.”

“You got it.”

Susan put 25 energy into her *Teleportal* spell and the kids that could rushed through it. Most of them gazed around in wonder, as several healers rushed forward to see what was going on. “I’ll need some help, there are several here that we can’t wake up, one of them in critical condition.”

“What is this place?” asked a man, stepping through and levitating an unconscious boy through.

“Purgatory. I’ll explain later.”

“That’s the one that needs immediate attention,” Luna said to another healer that came through.

“What is this place?” asked the oldest boy there, who looked to be about 7. “Why are all these people swinging wands around, and making them float? What were those creatures? Who are you?”

“One question at a time!” said Susan. “They can explain. Wait, you don’t come from a wizard family?”

“Wizard? Magic doesn’t exist.” He spoke with the conviction of someone with 70 years rather than 7, which was typical.

“Woo boy, the ministry is going to love this.”

“Just go through and have them check you out. Your parents will be called and they can come get you,” said Luna.

Another unconscious victim was floated out, and more healers were arriving to take care of the situation. “It really is magic!” said the boy, watching all this, and being ushered through the portal.

“It really is.”

“So what happened here?” demanded a newcomer.

“You in charge?” demand Susan back.

“I’m in charge of the Spell Damage department, if that’s what you mean.”

“You might want to have the Creature-Induced Injury specialists look them over,” said Susan, remembering her previous visit with Mr. Weasley. “It was a hoard of these creatures that caused the whole thing. About twelve of them. They vanished when killed, so we tried to save one for study. I don’t think they had poison, or hurt the kids physically, but you never know.”

“I’m not sure we’re equipped for that.” He caught sight of the thing. “What is that thing!?”

“Don’t go by its shape currently, they seem to take the form of whatever scares the person they’re looking at most, like a Bogart.”

“I’ve never heard of a Bogart working in a team, or kidnapping people like this!”

“I know, it’s troubling.”

“And what are those?” He pointed to the soldiers.

“Oh, those are mine, pay them no mind. I left them out just in case more showed up, but it’s been quiet thus far.”

“The children didn’t seem physically hurt, why are they unconscious, do you know?”

“Some of them may have been here for days, with no food and water. They’ve all been traumatized by fear, and I think most of them aren’t actually from wizard families. So they would be even less prepared to deal with something like this. Just mind wiping them might be the best thing to do, and give them a fake story about getting lost or something instead. It’s a matter of finding where they live that’s going to be the tricky part.”

“Well, come thorough and you can give us a full report. We’ll take the creature for study too, get some experts here.”

“Don’t let it wake up! If you can, put it someplace dimensionally locked so it can’t step through back here. Oh, and keep it in bright light, it seems to not like that at all.”

“Dimensionally- You’re going to have to explain more what you mean.”

“I will, but it’ll be a few minutes.”

“Why?”

“I have to go find the house elf I brought with me. She ran off when we spotted the creatures. I can’t leave her *here*, now can I?”

“No, I suppose not. But you’ll come after that, right?”

“I promise. Get them treated and I’ll be along shortly.”

“Okay. Thanks.”

“Not a problem.”

The man stepped back through, and took the creature with him, leaving Susan alone with Sparkle and Luna. She closed the *Teleportal*.

“I could have gone through,” said Luna. “I can tell them what happened just as easily as you.”

“Only trouble is, once the spell that keeps us here ends, we get shifted back up one plane. If you were there, you would find yourself in the Astral- with no way to get back. So we have to go back to where we were, end the spell, then get there again.”

“Oh. A bit complex, isn’t it?”

“It keeps you from being trapped if you get knocked out or something. You’ll go back to Earth automatically rather than getting stuck here, helpless. It’s a safety measure.”

“Logical. At least we won’t have long to wait.”

“What do you-”

“Susan!” shouted Winky, coming into view again. She landed. “Winky is so sorry she fled,” she blubbered, fat tears running down her face. “Winky doesn’t know what came over her.”

“I do. Those things had some kind of fear power. I felt myself making a RESolve check when I looked at that one that turned into Voldi. My guess is, you failed yours, that’s all. Nothing to be ashamed of.”

“But Winky was supposed to help!”

“Well, we, uh, managed somehow. Don’t feel too bad. Come on, we’re heading back.”

“Winky is- Winky is-”

“Please, Winky, don’t worry. You’re not a combatant, I understand that. We’ve been through combat exercises and everything, and I’ve had a ton of stuff try to kill me. It’s old hat for me. You’re not used to it, and there were way more than I expected. Don’t think it reflects on you, it doesn’t. Honestly.”

“Winky will get better. Winky will someday help Susan.”

“I know you will. Come on. Uh, which direction did we come from, anyway?”

And so the four got back and Sparkle ended *Dimension Step* and popped back into the room. Kelly was there waiting for them.

“Oh, you didn’t find her?” she said, about to break into tears.

“We took her right to St Mungo’s, she’ll be fine. I just wanted her checked out, that’s all.”

“Okay! I’ll go get my mom!” she said, reversing and breaking into a wide grin. She skipped out of the room.

Susan shook her head. “Was I ever that volatile?”

“Ah, youth,” said Luna. “Were we ever that young?”

“Yeah, not that long ago,” said Sparkle. “Like ten years or less?”

“Spoilsport,” said Susan with a grin. Another magical circle appeared as feet were heard on the stairs. Bryan and Rachel burst into the room as the *Teleportal* opened back to the hospital.

“Come on, let’s go,” said Susan, stepping through, and the others followed.

Bryan looked around, as the hole behind him closed and he realized he was miles and miles from where he had been. “What an interesting way to travel,” he remarked.

“Oh, you’re back. Thank goodness. It’s chaos here now, thanks to you!”

“Good, it’s a nice little drill for you. You think this is bad? Once Voldi starts trying to take over the world, you’re going to see a lot worse.”

The man stared at her. “Yes, that one. Don’t you read the paper?”

“Where’s Emily?” demanded Rachel. “Where’s my little girl?”

“Several little girls came through, can you be more specific?” the healer asked.

“Several? Well, she would be wearing...” She went off with one of the staff.

“Several?” echoed Bryan.

“Yours wasn’t the only child taken by those creatures,” said Susan. “We found a whole bunch of kids there, herded into one area and watched over by about a dozen of those things.”

“We need to know what to do with that creature, and where it came from,” said the healer. “If you don’t mind, can we head to my office and you can give me the full story? We’ve sent owls to the ministry for experts in magical creatures, they should be along shortly.”

“Very well, I’m at your disposal.”

“When do we have to get back to the castle?” asked Luna.

“Oh, yes, they might get concerned if we aren’t there for roll call. Look, can you send an owl to Professor Flitwick, Head of Ravenclaw House, Hogwarts castle that Susan and Luna are here?”

“Winky will return to the castle and deliver the message directly,” said Winky.

“Good plan, Winky. Thanks for agreeing to come with us. And keep training, okay?”

“Winky promises.” With a crack, she was gone.

“Never mind,” said Susan. “Lead on.”

So Bryan, Kelly, Susan, Sparkle, Luna and the healer went to his office, where Susan told the story about how she had been approached by Kelly and the subsequent rescue of the children.

“If I hadn’t seen the place you said you found them with my own eyes, I wouldn’t have believed it,” the healer said.

“Yeah, you guys seem not to have done much with the other planes for some reason. I find them to be very handy. But if creatures are starting to call them home, you better start.”

“I agree. Do you have any idea what those creatures were?”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t. I’ll ask my friend Hermione but we both read about the same amount, though I suspect she has *Photographic Memory* so she retains a lot more. Like I said before, closest creature I know of is a Bogart.”

“Could it be some kind of evolved Bogart?” asked Luna.

“Can they do that?”

“I don’t know what’s possible? Do you?”

“Sure. With magic, just about anything. The problem is, did they evolve naturally or were they manipulated with magic?”

“Tough to say. We didn’t see any bones, and none of the children had died, so they hadn’t been there long.”

“But they could move from place to place. Steal a couple of kids, suck them dry, then move on. In a small group they could have been operating for a long time, as no one could have reached them. And the parents of the kids didn’t believe there were actual creatures.”

“We’ll have to look into area disappearances of kids, at night. That should give us some clues as to how long those things have been doing what they did.”

“You two are both in Ravenclaw, aren’t you?” the healer asked with a chuckle.

“Susan Felton and Luna Lovegood, at your service,” said Susan.

“Nice to meet you- wait a second, didn’t you cure the Longbottoms a few years ago?”

“Still talking about that around here, huh?”

“I just happened to remember it. So you’re still out there fighting the good fight, huh?”

“She came to our aid easily enough. And we can’t thank you enough for rescuing our daughter. Thank you.”

“No trouble. I’ll probably get some XP for it, so it’ll balance out.”

“Expee?”

“Never mind. So, like I said, can you seal a room off from other dimensions with charms? Because otherwise once that creature wakes up it’ll just vanish back there again and that’ll be that.”

“We would need someone from, I don’t even know, some theoretical branch of magic. I’ll go to the ministry via the floo and ask there. But honestly I don’t think we can hold that creature.”

“I see.”

“Could your magic do it?” asked Luna.

Susan thought a moment. “Show me where it is,” she said, getting a scroll out of her *Pocket Dimension*. “This is probably our best bet for now.”

The healer led them through the hospital, and down to a sealed room with two guards standing in front of the door.

“Can you levitate it so it’s upright?” Susan asked.

One of them nodded and did, after opening the door.

Several minutes later, a large chunk of ice surrounded the creature, freezing it solid.

“There,” she said, putting the pages back. “You’ve got time to work something out. While it’s in the ice you can consider it in suspended animation, and it can’t escape. When you’ve got a locked down room ready you can just let it defrost. The ice will melt normally though, so keep a cooling charm on the room until then.”

“Amazing,” said the healer. “At the very least we can study its form and gather information about it magically. Thank you.”

“No problem. I want to find out more about that thing myself. If it’s some new threat or something someone is experimenting with, we need to know and put a stop to it.”

“I agree. The main danger is it can retreat to someplace we can’t go.”

“Can we see Emily now?” asked Kelly.

“Yes,” said the healer, bending down. “Now that I know the story and the danger to the hospital is gone, let’s go find your sister, okay?”

“Yay!” Kelly clapped her hands.

“Keep that frozen,” the healer said to the two guarding the door.

“No problem,” said the one, casting a charm into the room. Susan felt cold air coming out and smiled. *No need to provide further motivation for them, I guess.*

And so the family was reunited, and thanked Susan over and over for risking her life for their daughter.

I should probably tell them I wasn’t really in much danger, but those things could have been smarter, or stronger, or whatever, so there was some risk.

The hospital agreed to send any findings about the creature to the school, and promised to take care of the other kids as best they could. They said they were all suffering from dehydration, but that all would be fine in a day or two. With everything taken care of, Susan, Luna, and Sparkle stepped through another *Teleportal* to get back to the castle.

“Being with you is never boring, is it?” Luna said with a smile.

“Are you sorry?”

“No way! You attract all kinds of interesting things, and I wish I was older so I could study that creature myself. They didn’t seem all that bright, and they didn’t talk or try to retreat.

So it seemed like an animal, but no animal I know feeds off fear and can step into another dimension like your magic can allow us to do. It's amazing."

Susan was remembering her earlier conversation with Luna. "I guess you were right, there are still creatures to discover in the world. Huh."

"I just hope they don't get smarter or stronger. We got lucky that time, that little girl seeing and recognizing you."

"But like the guy said, if this happens again will I even hear about it? Wanded wizards certainly can't deal with this sort of issue."

"It is a problem. Still, you did good today."

"Thanks. Hey, you helped."

"Not much. I kind of freaked out when I saw 'you' dead. I could hardly aim my spells."

"You must not have failed your RESolve check by as much as Winky did. Seems like the amount of fear you feel from them is based upon how much you fail your check by. Weird."

"What other strange creatures are out there, I wonder?"

"Hopefully none as dangerous as that one."

"Professor Flitwick wanted to see you," said a painting as Susan and Luna walked into the classroom. "We were told to tell you."

"Oh, thanks. Better go see what he wants," said Susan. They headed off to his office, wondering if they were going to get praised or yelled at.

Guess which one it was.

"You can't just run off with people like that!" Filius said to them.

"I don't think the Death Eaters have started recruiting six year olds into their ranks, professor, if that's what you're worried about," Susan countered.

"That's not the point, and they could have used Polyjuice to just turn into that little girl."

"Then what is the point? I judged them to have a legitimate need, and heard what they had to say. It turned out they had lost their daughter to the creature, and we brought her back. What's the big deal?"

"That you just rushed off without thinking. You didn't tell anyone where you were going, and you could have been in serious danger!"

That's what we do, thought Sparkle. We're the PCs so it's expected of us. Of course, Susan doesn't realize that like I do, but the instinct for plot involvement is there. She couldn't hear about something like that and not go running off, it's not really her fault. It's the way Paragon people are built.

"The village is supposed to be safe, that's why we're allowed to go there. Are you saying I shouldn't talk to anyone? Maybe I should take it one step further and just go invisibly. No, maybe I should be invisible all the time. Maybe I should be invisible and create magical doubles that walk around so no one knows where I am at any given time."

"You're still missing the point."

"Then I ask again: what is the point? The only way I can be harmed is by being taken out in one shot, by surprise. If I get a single combat action I'm turning my *Immunity* on or calling out my *Legion*. I've gone up against *giants*, well a giant, and been fine. There's only one person I'm concerned about, professor, and he's still researching my magic, not prowling around the village in hopes of catching me unaware."

“And she did go for her bracelet when the little girl ran up to us. I don’t know what it means but I’ve seen her use it to activate her spells without casting them somehow. She isn’t stupid, sir,” said Luna.

“Plus Luna was with me, and yes, she’s not at Ron’s level for combat magic, but I still wouldn’t turn down her help in a fight.”

“Don’t forget me,” said Sparkle. “I’m a fighter as well, you know.”

“I’m not getting through to you. You can’t just run off.”

“Technically we didn’t. They weren’t that far away, we were probably just on the outskirts of the village. Yes, we were in another dimension, but we hadn’t left the area.”

“But you went to the hospital.”

“Oh, yes, tell me about the dangers inherent to a place of healing!”

“Just don’t do it again. I’m taking ten points from Ravenclaw from each of you. Not you, Sparkle, obviously as you were not sorted into Ravenclaw, and you’re a cat.”

“Excuse me?” said Susan, hotly. “I just saved a dozen lives today, and possibly hundreds more, as those creatures never even would have been known about otherwise. And you’re taking points away from me? Unbelievable.”

“Well, believe it.”

“Fine, I’ll just let a bunch of three to eight years olds die next time, shall I? Hey Luna, if I get points taken away by saving people, think I could make some back by killing them instead? I mean, you reward good behavior and punish bad, right? Obviously saving them was bad, as I’ve just been punished.”

“Running off on your own was bad, why can’t you understand that?”

“Why can’t you understand I’m in no danger? You’re treating me like I’m a little girl, and I’m the most powerful-”

Filius whipped his wand out and Susan felt herself roll *Initiative*. She spent max energy on REFlexes, being back to her natural maximum since she had taken energy from Bryan and Rachel. She got a 27, and threw a bunch of energy into “*Thrust*.” on her first action of combat this round. Filius went flying backwards, knocking books, paperwork, and various objects off of his desk as he flew past, into a bookcase at the other side of the room. He went down in a heap.

Or perhaps only action of combat this round.

“Okay, that didn’t work out so well,” he said, struggling to get up again. “Also, ouch.”

“What are you doing?” shrieked Susan. “I could just as easily have taken your magic away as throw you across a room. Do *not* point a wand at me, is that understood? Do you know how many things have attacked me around here? I have to be careful!”

“I was just trying to demonstrate you aren’t as good as you think, but I guess my old dueling reflexes aren’t what they used to be. I don’t suppose you could spare a little healing magic? I think my back could very well be broken.”

“I don’t know, you could be someone else who has taken polyjuice. Maybe I should get the Headmaster down here and you can explain to him why you’re lying there in a heap.”

“I was just trying to make a point.”

“Yeah, and it looks like I made mine instead. If someone asks me for help, I’m going to give it. You may be paranoid but I’ll content myself with just being careful. Luna, get his wand.” She gestured to where it at flown out of his hand when he smacked into the wall.

“What?”

“Luna, get his wand, please.”

“Oh, all right. I’m sorry about this professor.”

“It’s my own fault,” he said, as he watched her walk across the room and pick up the wand from where it had been flung as Filius hit the bookcase.

Now Susan walked over to him and touched his arm. “*Magic Immunity*,” she cast, making sure he wasn’t under any magical effects.

They looked at each other.

“I guess you’re clean. You honestly believed pointing a wand at me was a good idea. You’re supposed to be a Ravenclaw. That means not stupid. Where are you hurt?”

“Just my back. Slammed up against the bookcase here.”

“*Healing*,” cast Susan, getting all the damage.

“Thank you,” he said, getting up.

“Oh, don’t mention it. Ever. Come on.” She grabbed the wand from Luna and tossed it into the room as she walked out.

“And he took points away from our house?” asked Hermione that evening in their dorm.

“Yeah, can you believe it?”

“Does he think you can’t handle yourself? I mean, you’re the most capable person I know, I think.”

“I don’t know. He made a big deal out of it. Yes, on one hand I probably shouldn’t have run off, but it seemed like a problem I could solve pretty easily, so why involve others? Or take the time to go back myself and get someone, if they even believed me.”

“And you checked him out?”

“Yeah, he didn’t seem to come out of *Imperius* or turn into someone else, he was totally himself.”

“I guess he could have just been really worried about you.”

“I haven’t really taken any classes taught by him, maybe he doesn’t exactly know what I can and can’t do.”

“That could be it. He knows a little more now though, doesn’t he?”

“Yup. Imagine pulling a wand on me like that! Those things are dangerous!”

“You wouldn’t have hurt him, you would have just used that hypnotic thing you do now.”

“Probably. Still, he should have known better. With all the attacks I’ve been through at this school, I can’t be too careful. So you’ve never heard of that sort of creature either?”

“Sorry, I wish I had. We could ask our illustrious Defense teacher.”

“I could also chop my own arm off a million times with *regeneration* going to see how many arms it would take to fill up a swimming pool. But even I’m not that *Curious* to know. I don’t think I’m going to do either. I’ll just look it up.”

Hermione mouthed “chop off...” She shook herself. “Couldn’t you just calculate the volume of your arm, the volume of the average swimming pool, then-”

Susan looked bemused.

“Anyway, putting that gruesome imagery aside, I think you did good. We just wandered around and tried to keep warm. No excitement whatsoever.”

“Yeah, I took it all.”

“We did see an echo though, I think.”

“Really?”

“Something about Katie Bell. Professor Hagrid ran up all flustered, he was positive something was wrong with her. But we found her, she was just walking around with her friend Leanne. Odd, huh?”

“Yeah. I was nowhere near there, how could I have changed something around her?”

“Ripples in a pond, you know? Even a small change can lead to some bigger ripple elsewhere.”

“I’ll have to be careful then, I guess. Wonder what it could have been?”

“She can’t have been in that much danger in the village.”

“Do you know, I said the exact same thing to Professor Flitwick. Odd how we both came to that conclusion independently.”

“Quite odd. Perhaps there’s some meaning to it.”

“Perhaps.”

“Well, I’ll keep an eye on Professor Flitwick in class. See if he starts acting weird or anything. After all, he wouldn’t have to be under a curse if they’ve offered him something he really wants in exchange for spying on you or something.”

“But why pick *him*? Like I said, I don’t take any classes he teaches.”

Hermione shrugged. “Search me. Maybe he has a known weakness for something? Everyone has their price, right?”

“I suppose.” *I wonder what mine is.* “Good night.”

“Night.”

Inventions

Time: The next Monday

Place: Headmaster's Office

"So I heard about a slight difference of opinion you expressed to my charms teacher," said Albus, finally back in his office in time for their next trip into Voldemort's past. "Right after the first visit to the village, if I'm not mistaken?"

"I guess he doesn't know the meaning of the words 'don't mention it ever' then. Did he tell you how he attacked me?"

"That wasn't exactly the story he presented, no."

"Naturally enough not. He's going to tell his side of it, where I would tell my side of it. Both accounts may be correct, but only one is true."

"And you would maintain your version is the true one?"

"We can go down to his office and you can see for yourself. The facts will speak for themselves."

"Indeed, which brings us to the reason for our further journey tonight. Where we shall see how young Tom Riddle, now several years old, found out he was a wizard."

Harry smiled. "Probably far differently than I did. I bet some weird girl that lived next to him didn't come over, show him a light spell, and tell him he was a wizard, too."

Susan grinned back. "Ah, those were the days, weren't they? Back in the good old days, when life was simpler."

"I think you're still a bit young to reminisce about the 'good old days', aren't you?" asked Albus.

"Why? We have such an easier time remembering them, as they weren't as long ago for us as they are for some."

"Hummm."

"Anyway, if you're trying to convince me Voldi is some kind of monster, why are we going so far back in his life? Shouldn't you be taking me back to places he did terrible crimes and showing me what he's capable of? Everyone seems scared of him, but where's the evidence he actually did all those things he's accused of? I know for a fact the wizard justice system, if it can be called that, isn't too keen on evidence gathering."

"All in good time. Endings must be earned, after all."

"Very well, shall we go?"

"In one moment. First, I must explain a bit where we are going."

"Go on."

"It used to be a non-magical orphanage, but it has since been torn down and turned into a non-magical office building. Thus, I have taken the liberty of casting a few charms on the place that will insure we are not disturbed tonight. And there is one other thing. Susan, how many people can your *Phase* magic bring with you?"

"Easily a dozen, why?"

"We may have to *Phase* through some walls and furniture to keep up with the action. I just wanted to make sure you could do it."

"But of course."

"Fine. If you'll gather round then, Fawkes will take us there, and you can begin your magic."

And so, Susan and Harry found themselves in front of a regular looking office building, and Susan, with Harry's hand on one shoulder and Albus' on the other, cast *Phase* and they stepped inside.

"Now, if I'm remembering properly, and I usually do, we should go in this direction."

It felt a bit odd, to be standing inside a desk and watching a younger Albus interact with the boy Riddle, but that's where the old room was, so that's where Susan cast her *Time Area* magic as Albus directed.

Susan paused the playback after a moment.

"Why is he here?" she asked. "I mean, yes, his house wasn't the lap of luxury, but why did his mother abandon Tom to an orphanage? Was she afraid her father would abuse him or something?"

"She died not long after his birth, in this very place. From what I understand, she had time only to name the child before she died."

"She died? Was she ill?"

"Not physically, perhaps, but life wasn't kind to her even with her father gone. She had suck even lower, hard as such a possibility is to conceive."

"Why was she so hard up? I mean, yes, the family seemed poor, but without the influence of her father, shouldn't life have been looking up for her?"

Albus shook his head. "We may never know why, but Tom's mother stopped using magic to make Tom's father love her. Once he, rather predictably left, I believe she stopped using magic altogether."

Susan stared at him. "I guess it's different for you, but I could no more give up using magic than the use of my legs. In fact, I would rather give up the use of my legs. With magic, I can fly. I guess even she was a bit crazy."

"Her upbringing did her no favors, I assure you."

"Nature versus nurture. Well, we see where Voldi came down on that debate, don't we? He didn't get nurtured, so his impulses must be pure nature."

"Very different reactions, just like I said," said Harry, walking around the frozen Tom. "When Susan demonstrated her magic for me, and showed me her book, we were just so puzzled why I couldn't get any of her spells to work for me. But he seems, I don't know, like he was just told he had inherited a million dollars. For all he knew, having magic was a terrible curse, and sapped life energy away or something. That a wizard could only cast a certain number of spells in their life or had to spend hours memorizing the spells they could later cast that day."

"Uh, I think that's D&D, Harry," said Susan.

"It's the same principle. He didn't know. I mean, our magic seems to carry less risk than yours, Susan, not that I've ever seen one of these backfires you've described. But it makes up for it by being less, uh, all encompassing, I guess I want to say?"

"I know what you mean. He did say he had already done magic. What I want to know is, how? He didn't know any incantations, and he certainly didn't have a wand. Was he simply willing magic to happen?"

"Remember, I could do that too, in the beginning," said Harry. "I haven't really tried since I got my wand, though."

"Yes," said Albus. "It's a curious phenomenon. Almost as if young people are so infused with magic they can make things happen that later in life they will need to use spells for. I don't think anyone's made a real study it, however, to know exactly why. Shall we continue?"

Susan began the playback again, and they watched the wardrobe incident. She stopped it again when Younger Albus said “thieving is not tolerated at Hogwarts.”

She glared at Albus.

“Yes?”

“You were spouting that nonsense even then, I see. Remember right after Sirius was proven innocent? We went to see him, remember, and I told you I had stolen the wands of those bullies that had attacked me. It took me declaring anything stolen from Luna I would consider stolen from me to make people leave her alone. You really should look into that sort of thing more, or do you just like saying meaningless things?”

“That is not really relevant to this.”

“Just pointing it out. Again.”

Playback continued.

“How did you find him, anyway?” asked Susan. “You guys aren’t big on scrying magic, from what I’ve seen.”

“Still,” said Albus, “you must remember there are spells to detect underage magic, even of that sort, that can alert us when something is going on. Present company excluded, of course.”

“Of course,” agreed Susan.

“He was a thief, even then,” remarked Harry.

“Ah, taking Susan’s magic to help his resurrection. Yes, that is a striking parallel. However, in this case these objects held meaning to him as trophies, I believe, rather than owning them for the sake of owning them. Does he strike you a boy who would spend long hours practicing the harmonica, for instance?”

“So, he does not,” said Susan. “But I can see he was calculating, even then. High PERSONALITY too, it shows in how he shifted gears immediately and started calling you sir.”

“Something I notice you don’t do much anymore, Susan.”

“Really? I hadn’t noticed, Headmaster.” *Did I ever call him anything but ‘headmaster’ anyway? When did I lose respect for you- oh right, when you neglected to tell me about the prophesy I had to learn about from the person who is supposedly wizard kind’s greatest foe. He helped me learn the reason you and the ministry were- are so scared of me. You kept it quiet and covered up.*

“Shall we return?” asked Albus.

The next day, Susan and Harry told Hermione and Ron about their ‘visit’ to the past, and about mini-voldi.

“Not the cute and cuddly kind of kid,” said Susan. “More like a vampire, really. Didn’t get enough sun, I expect, to be so pale.”

“But what’s the point?” asked Ron. “Who cares how he was then? We need to find him and stop him in the present.”

“I said the same thing,” said Susan. “But he seems to think it’s important. Not as important as finding Soul Shards, which he hasn’t invited us to help out with, mind you.”

“Not that we really could,” remarked Harry.

“Don’t remind me,” Susan said glumly.

That night, Susan went up to her room and took out her charm bracelet.

My magic is more encompassing than theirs is. This proves it, doesn't it? They can put a spell on an object, yes, like an invisibility cloak or a candy that turns you into a bird. But my magic can allow people to phase through walls or fill an area with knockout energy. I can cast a spell beforehand, like on my charms here, and activate it later. I wonder, could I somehow "package" my magic so they could use it when I wasn't around? It would be single use, but way easier than a single use Imbuing and I wouldn't need to spend XP on it.

She went into her *Personal Dimension* and opened up to *Spell Symbol*, looking it over. *I thought so. It "holds another spell until a condition you specify occurs." I've been specifying that condition as touching the charm and saying a word, but couldn't it be anything? Like setting a trap that goes off if anyone tries to step over it? It just has to "be visible and have line of sight" and be "something overtly observable." Let's try something.*

Susan went over and got out a piece of parchment from her cabin, and a pair of scissors. *As some of us have to spend energy to cast spells, rather than just casting a cut type spell, I keep these handy.* She cut a rectangle, about twice as long as it was wide, and started casting *Spell Symbol* on it. A minute and a half later she got a 21, held onto it, taking the -2, and cast *Immobilize* into it, getting a 14 total on that. The symbol went onto the piece of paper, and she stared it at.

There doesn't seem to be any limit on how many of these I can make. Apart from the two energy I put into it. Let's see, I can take a ton of extra time on the Spell Symbol itself, that doesn't need any extra energy. But putting some into the spell itself would be useful. At 10% energy gain per hour of sleep, that's 8 energy an hour. Sleeping for 8 hours gives me back 64 energy. That means I can go as low as 16 energy in a night making these. But do they work?

She stepped out of the *Dimension* and found Hermione.

"Hey, are you willing to test something for me?" she asked, walking up behind her. She was bent over a book, as usual, and seemed to be writing a report of some kind.

Because writing stuff about magic really helps in spell casting, you betcha. This school has a good sense of priorities, and make no mistake.

"I guess?" she said uncertainly, standing up.

"Super!" Susan smacked her in the back with the paper, which was the activation action for the spell. Bands of force wrapped around her, and the piece of paper fluttered to the ground.

"Hey, what the heck?" asked Hermione, struggling to get out. Susan grinned.

"It worked!"

Sparkle walked over. "How did you do that?"

"The old stand by, *Spell Symbol*," she replied. "Just put on a piece of parchment and set to trigger when slapped on someone. Think about it, I could package just about any spell that way and anyone could use them! They won't wear out, so keep that *Create Foodstuff* item in your first aid kit for an emergency. Forget invisibility cloaks, just slap on an *Invisibility* piece of paper. The applications are endless!"

"Too bad your energy isn't."

"Well, that's the one down side. But I figure I can make a bunch of them a night, especially for things that don't need resisting. They only need two energy apiece."

"An interesting idea."

"Yeah, it's super," said Hermione. "Can you get me out of this so I can finish my report?"

"Sure... soon as I figure out how."

“What?!”

“Maintained spells last for the scene, you know? But what does the scene mean in this context? Maybe if I just decide mentally I don’t need Hermione to be restrained anymore-”

The bands disappeared.

“See, there you go! Nothing to it.”

“Remind me to say no the next time you want something tested.” She sat back down.

“Oh, come on, it wasn’t that bad. And look at what I discovered! I could even package up some spells I don’t know from writing ahead of time, and not have to worry about casting them on the fly. This’ll be great! Anyone can now cheaply and easily use my magic, with no XP cost to make them. Sweet, huh?”

She looked thoughtful. “I can see where it would be useful. Do you have to use paper?”

“No, it can be anything. Small rocks, coins, anything easily carried. Paper is nice because I can write what it does on the back, and how to activate it in case someone forgets. Not that you would, but if I started selling them in addition to *Imbued* objects sometime in the future, it could be handy.”

“I guess it could! It would even work for non-magic users, right?”

“Sure, the magic doesn’t know, it just knows the trigger. I could make a bunch for my mother, not that she needs it with her skills and *Acceleration*. Still, something to think about.”

“Yeah, let me know what you come up with.”

“Sure thing. See you tomorrow!”

“Good night.”

“Come on Sparkle, it’s getting late, and I’ll want to figure out the best spells to use for my new... what should I call them?”

“Spell papers?”

“That could work. Oh, I can’t wait to have a bunch of different ones, it’ll be fun!”

Getting undressed for bed, Susan threw back her covers and found a note folded over and stuck under her pillow. She stared at it for a moment and picked it up with a sigh. She unfolded it and began to read.

I know it’s awful of me to ask me, but Susan I think you’re the only one that can help me with a problem I’m having. I’m going to sneak down to the common room this evening at 10:00, no one else should be around then. Please, please come and at least take this off my hands. I thought I could tell someone about it, but I just don’t know what they would do to me if they found out. You have a reputation for solving problems, or at least beating people up, so I’m sure you can help. I can’t really offer you money or anything, but if I don’t do something I’m afraid my mother will die. I understand if you don’t come.

E.V

“Oh, come on!” said Susan, looking at the handwriting. It looked more like a boy’s handwriting this time, which it hadn’t the last time she got a note like this. “How stupid are you to try this same trick again?”

“Problem?” asked Sparkle, looking up.

“Look at this. Seem familiar?” She passed the note over and smoothed it out so Sparkle could read it.

“At least they were considerate enough not to make you go outside this time. What can they do inside the castle walls?”

“I don’t know. Some sort of mundane explosives under the tables? This is stupid.” She went to crumple the note up.

“Wait, how do we know it’s not legitimate this time?”

“How could something like this be- we have to go check it out, don’t we?”

“That’s up to you, I’m just the *Companion* remember? But we do both have *curious*, right?”

Susan made a growly noise in her throat. “This sucks!”

“I know, but if it’s real we do need to help.”

“Fine, but we’re going down there now, *Invisible*.”

“A wise precaution.”

And so, two hours later, Susan got an 11 to notice the boy sneaking into the room. Sadly, however *Sneaking* checks worked in this world, it wasn’t enough, and she totally missed seeing him.

It was now a few minutes after ten.

“So, what? Did you see anyone?” Susan asked Sparkle.

“I didn’t see anything.”

“Think it was some kind of joke? Or something that was set up even earlier than this? Like last night?”

“I don’t know. Can we go, I’m bored, and you need to get to bed. You aren’t nocturnal like I am.”

“You’re not nocturnal. You just sleep all the time. And I did want to get an early start on tomorrow’s Spell Papers.”

“Susan?” said a quiet voice.

“Ya!” yelled Susan. “Who’s there?”

The boy scrambled out from under a table. “Where are you?”

“I think we can take him,” said Sparkle.

“Me too. Over here, kid,” she said, dropping *Invisibility*. “What’s up?”

“You really came! Thank you.”

“No problem.”

“I didn’t know who else to go to. A teacher probably wouldn’t listen, they would just hand me over to the Aurors or something.”

“You’ve been doing something illegal?”

“Me? No! It’s my mom. After she and my dad split she... It’s hard for me to talk about.”

Susan sat down on a bench. “Come on,” she said, patting the seat next to her. “What’s your name, anyway?”

“Erik Viloría. I’m a Hufflepuff, first year.”

“Susan Felton. Nice to meet you.”

“Really? I’m sorry, I mean, yeah, I mean, you too.”

“Calm down, I don’t bite.”

“I just...” he glanced around. “Here, this should explain everything.” He went to put his hand in his pocket. “You... promise you won’t tell anyone, right?”

“I’ll do my best, but if it’s something that has to be told, I don’t make promises.”

“I understand.” He took a deep breath. “It’s not mine, I stole it from my mother.”

“Just get to the point, I’m a busy girl.”

“Okay, okay. Here.”

He pulled out a glass vial, and handed it to Susan. The small pill at the bottom glowed red, and cast a sickly shadow over Erik’s face. Susan put it up to her eye and looked at it. She shook it. She turned the vial to see what else she could tell about it. She did a *Magic Sense* on it, getting a 9. She tried focusing more, and got one less. She gave a small sigh, taking now a -3 penalty, and get another 9 again.

This is starting to annoy me.

One final *Magic Sense* got her a 17-4 or 13, and this was finally enough to tell it was magically active.

Bingo.

“So what is it?” Sparkle asked.

Erik jumped. “He can really talk?”

“*She* can really talk,” corrected Susan. “And I agree. What is it? There’s some kind of Neptune like spell on it, I can tell that much. Not that it means anything to you.”

“It’s a drug,” said Erik. “It’s what’s killing my mother. I stole this one to bring to the school so I could ask one of the teachers to help me but I never got up the nerve. I thought they might think it was mine, no matter what I said, and expel me.”

“So you’ve been hiding it and worrying all this time?”

He nodded.

“What can you tell me about it?”

“Not much. She leaves the house and comes back with them. She uses at least one a day, and she’s out of it totally when she does. When she’s not high or whatever she doesn’t... she doesn’t...” He was crying, and Susan’s heart went out to him.

“I feel bad for you, but what I can do? I can clean your mother up, but I can’t cure her addiction. I don’t think. And even if I did, she might just go right back to using again.”

“Could you find out who’s selling them to her? Stop them, maybe?”

“Hey Sparkle, I just lost 20 points for my house saving a bunch of kids from getting eaten by weird creatures. How many points do you think he would take for beating up a drug lord?”

“Or you could do the smart thing and actually inform the headmaster before you run off.”

“And lose out on XP gain? That’s crazy talk. You know he wouldn’t let me.”

“I don’t know what ex-pee gain is, but please don’t tell the headmaster I gave that to you.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll keep your name out of it, for now. I did just get yelled at for leaving the village, I don’t think they’ll take too kindly to me chasing down drug dealers. But I’ll see what he has to say tomorrow morning and let you know. At the very least he’ll know it isn’t mine, and maybe we can take this to the right people in the ministry.”

“Anything you can do. I would be so grateful.”

“No problem. Thank you for bringing this to me,” she said, sticking it in her *Pocket Dimension*. “I didn’t even know magical drugs existed in this world. What are they teaching me at that school?”

“The... school you’re currently in?”

“That’s the one. Magical drugs, honestly. I shouldn’t be surprised, wizards are probably just as stupid about that as non-magic users. Get to bed, you don’t want to be caught out here. We’ll be in touch.”

“Thank you.”

Susan nodded, and he took again.

“This one’s going to be fun,” said Sparkle sarcastically.

“Oh yeah.”

Susan awoke the next morning full of energy and vigor, and excitedly started thinking about what spells she should make her first Spell Papers with. Then she remembered the other thing that had happened the night before.

Erik's mother. Right.

As it was only Tuesday she had some classes to get through before she could see the Headmaster, and it turned out he was missing again anyway.

Great, now what? she thought as she stared into his empty office. *I can't exactly go to my head of house, not after what just happened with him. Perhaps the deputy headmistress, Professor McGonagall? I guess it's worth a shot.*

Susan waited until lunch time, as Minerva had classes of her own to teach, and couldn't go gallivanting around the countryside like some other people did. She approached the teacher's table after she finished eating.

"What can I do for you, Susan?" asked Minerva when it was clear Susan wanted to talk to her.

"Usually I would go to the Headmaster about this sort of thing," she replied, "but with him gone, I suppose you're in charge of the school. I need to have a talk with you about something."

"Can I hope that it's something mundane, like a grade or an idea for extra credit?"

Susan stared at her out of the tops of her eyes, head down. "That would be far too much to hope for, professor."

"Yes, from what I've heard of you, it would. Very well, we can talk in my office."

"Thank you."

So both went there, and Susan sat down across the desk from Minerva.

"So what can I do for you?"

"Someone gave me something last night, and asked for my help. But I'm not sure what I can actually do to help, if it's even appropriate I do so."

"Go on."

"This person gave me... this." Susan opened her *Pocket Dimension* with a word and pulled out the vial with the pill in it. She handed it over.

"Is that what I think it is?" asked Minerva, holding it up to the light.

"I'm not sure what you think it is. I was told what this person thought it was, but for all I know they could have been wrong."

"This is a very potent drug, and quite illegal I may add. Even just this one pill is enough to get someone in serious trouble. Why exactly did this person give it to you? Did they want it disposed of?"

"Evidence. They said their mother was addicted to it, and wanted someone's help getting her off it. But this person was afraid to come to a teacher for fear of not being believed and just being expelled for having it. They probably figured you wouldn't expel me, so here I am. Plus I have that whole helping people reputation."

"We could, you know. Expel you, I mean." Minerva looked past the vial at her.

“Perhaps, but I think the Headmaster likes seeing me making items for the school. Keeps me out of trouble, and all that. Remember, I never needed your school to learn magic, I already knew it the day I set foot in these walls.”

“I wonder... Can your magic cure addiction?”

“That’s something I’m not sure about. I can instantly remove a poison from someone, but their body will still crave it normally. I could have my book research a spell to cure addiction, but that smacks of *Imperius*, making them act in a certain way they wouldn’t normally. Even if it was for their own good. Besides, I don’t think you would appreciate me running off, yet again, to do this for their mother without telling someone I was going. Given my recent loss of house points, I thought I would discuss it with someone first before doing anything.”

“So you can be taught? I was beginning to wonder.”

Susan gave her a dark look. “I do what needs to be done, Professor. Nothing more.”

“I wonder if a certain someone who recently returned often said the same thing to himself?”

Have you heard my prophesy?

“That is not the issue here.”

“For the moment, you are right. This is.” She shook the vial.

“What exactly is it? We don’t cover illegal drugs in Herbology class, though maybe we should. People need to be told the dangers of these things, rather than just ignoring them.”

“The ministry would like to believe the drug problem doesn’t even exist, so the information is kept out of the school.”

“As if not teaching someone about something will make them less inclined to seek it out. Sex education, for example?”

“If you feel that passionate about it, I suggest going to work for the ministry and lobbying for a change in policy.”

Nah, I’ll just take the ministry over and... wait, did I just think that?

“Anyway, the drug?”

“Yes. The drug, ‘M’ as it’s known on the streets, can be anything. Basically a non-magical drug is obtained and then a charm is put on it to either heighten the experience or to do something the original drug could not. For instance...” She got out her wand and performed a few gestures. “This drug is a hallucinogen, and the spell that’s been put on it allows the user to guide that experience to a certain extent. Much like a vivid dream that you’re in control of.”

“A lucid dream, you mean? Why bother using a base of a non-magical drug then? Why not just use water, or a chocolate? Wait, haven’t I seen something like that at the joke shop?”

Minerva nodded. “Probably. On its own, the spell would be rather harmless. The harm comes from the narcotic portion the drug is based on. It insures a person comes back again and again, turning this into a real money maker.”

“I see. So what would be the normal procedure for something like this? Obviously, with magic, we would have to be very careful to make sure the person who gave it to me couldn’t be traced. Otherwise the gang or whoever was making it would come after them once they leave school. If I leave any left with magic, that is.”

“Normally?” Minerva gave a short laugh. “It doesn’t matter, as most resources within the ministry are bent towards finding you know who now. They aren’t going to spare anyone for something as ‘minor’ as a drug problem. In fact, the way I hear it, the magical underworld is getting bolder, either due to *his* influence or just a lack of manpower to keep it under control.

One child's mother doesn't rate very high, given the carnage that *his* activities caused the last time. They have to be ready for that."

"Figures. I guess it's up to me after all."

"Now don't go running off again--"

"Why? I'm expecting to face Voldemort in mortal combat one day, with a mastery of my type of magic. You think a couple of drug dealers with *wands* is going to give me any pause at all?"

"It's not just a safety issue. This is organized crime we're talking about here. To send one young girl against that, why, I couldn't live with myself if I let you take that kind of risk!"

"Right," said Susan slowly, nodding. "But you let Harry and me take all kinds of risk during that stupid Tournament thing, didn't you?"

"That was completely different!"

"I fail to see how staring down a fully grown, nesting dragon is totally different from a couple of people who can, at worst, throw spells at me that I'm immune to."

"You can be taken by surprise just like anyone else."

"I wouldn't be alone, Professor. I would have Sparkle with me, at the very least."

"Your cat hardly qualifies."

"Don't let her hear you say that. In any case, I don't plan to just rush out there and beat them up. I don't know where they are in any case."

"Thank goodness for that."

"But the request has been made. I won't just go back to this person and tell them, 'sorry, even though I've handled a lot worse, the teachers won't let me help you. Hope your mom doesn't die. See you.'"

"I'm sure if you make them come forward something can be arranged."

Susan shook her head. "They came to me for a reason, Professor. They're scared. Both for their mom and what an adult might do. They could get taken away and placed in foster care. The gang could find out and burn their house down as an example. They want a solution, not an arrangement."

"I suppose I must try to picture myself in their situation. They are younger, I take it?"

Susan nodded.

"Much younger?"

"I think I can get away with saying that yes, they are much younger than myself."

"I see. What do you suggest?"

"I really don't know. If I could have a squad of Aurors, we would just swoop down, catch them in the act of making the drug, and make an example of them. Bring the mother in, put her through rehab, maybe counseling to find out why she started using in the first place. Then move her to another neighborhood. With just me and no legal backing, the best I can do is just scare them into moving on. I'm not sure I'm comfortable with that. They might be low life scum, but that doesn't give me the right to hurt them. I assume vigilante action is frowned upon by the ministry?"

"Yes, it most certainly is."

"Figures. I would make the coolest super hero, too."

"I don't doubt it," she replied dryly. "One thing you could do is talk to the mother. Find out why she's using this drug and perhaps you could get her to stop."

Susan looked at Minerva skeptically. "Do you really think that would work? She's going to deny she has a problem no matter what. Otherwise she would have already sought help."

“Don’t be so sure. It’s possible she’s just dug herself so deep she can’t get out without help.”

“I suppose it wouldn’t hurt to go see her for myself. Maybe I can get some information about how she buys it and that will lead me to them.”

“An excellent first step. Come and find me after school and I’ll accompany you there.”

Susan paused. “You will?”

“Yes, I will. I don’t see why only the Headmaster should be allowed to gallivant about the countryside doing Merlin knows what. Also, I’m curious to see how you deal with this situation, and I won’t allow you to go without supervision. You are still underage, after all.”

Better her than Professor Snape, I suppose.

“I will see you after school, then.”

“Very well.”

Susan was dismissed with a nod.

“She wanted to come with you?” asked Erik when she found him after school on her way to Minerva’s office. The Team Susan Core, Sparkle, and Luna also said they wanted to help, so were tagging along.

“That was her condition. She didn’t want me to go without adult supervision.”

“Oh. I guess that’s okay.”

“Don’t worry,” said Hermione. “You don’t have this ‘M’ anymore, so no one can prove it came from you. Well, Susan could, but she wouldn’t.”

“That’s right.”

“Drugs,” spat Ron. “Honestly, aren’t people messed up enough?”

“They seek escape, I guess,” said Harry. “But that really isn’t the way to go about it.”

“Yeah, get into something else, like magical research or something,” said Susan. Luna looked away, and looked a little sad. “What?”

“It’s nothing. I guess you’re right.”

“Anyway, I’ll need to see a picture of your house before I can get us there. Do you have one?”

“Uh, no? Who carries around a picture of their house?”

“That’s a problem. How the heck are we going to get there?” she asked the group.

“Knight Bus?” asked Harry.

“That could work. I guess we’ll ask Professor McGonagall about it.”

“Good afternoon everyone. Erik,” said Minerva as the group crowded around her office.

“Hello,” he said softly, staring at the ground.

“Oh, it’s all right, you’re not to be punished for the actions of your mother. There’s nothing to fear.”

“Even if it’s my fault she’s, you know?”

“I assure you, she made all her own choices in this matter, you had nothing to do with it. Though your feeling that you did is quite natural. Try not to dwell on it, dear.”

“Okay.”

“Shall we go?”

“Ah, that’s the one snag, actually,” explained Susan. “My magic can’t get us there. I’ve never been to the area he lives in, and I’m pretty sure google maps doesn’t drive past most wizard’s homes.”

“I’m not sure what a very large number has to do with maps, but we certainly have other options.”

“I was thinking the Knight Bus, professor,” said Harry. “Susan can always get us back here quickly enough to make up for the time it takes to get there.”

“Very well, we can summon it from the front gate. Come along.”

One a teacher, always a teacher, I guess.

Once aboard the bus and speeding towards Erik’s house, Susan got out some strips of paper and started making a few Spell Papers. After the fifth one, Minerva leaned over to her.

“May I ask what you’re doing?”

“It’s something I just thought of last night. See these symbols on the paper?” She held one up so Minerva could see it.

“Yes.”

“They hold the spell I cast after casting the spell to bind the magic into the paper. Then when you smack the paper up against someone, the spell goes off. It’s the closest I think I can get to the way wanded wizards can put a charm onto an object.”

“How inventive.”

“It’s been in front of me the whole time, I just never considered using *Spell Symbol* like this. But I think it could come in handy sometime. Only trouble is the energy cost to make them, so I can’t make too many at one time.”

Minerva looked over at the group riding along. “I don’t think we’ll lack for magical power on this little trip, if everyone’s grades are any indication.”

“Hopefully it won’t come to that,” Susan hastened to say. “But this whole…” she looked over at the driver and the other two people on the bus, “little red problem has consumed my attention today, so I haven’t gotten the chance to make any. Sitting here I thought would be a good time to get started.”

“You really are quite industrious.”

“Thank you.”

“Still want to open your own shop when you graduate?”

“Of course!”

“With this kind of work ethic, I think you’ll do well.” She turned back towards the window.

The group got off the bus in front of a normal looking house, normal, that is, for wizards. However the outside looked run down and overgrown, as obviously the person that lived there didn’t care about that sort of thing anymore. The bushes were growing wild and badly needed trimming, and the grass had obviously not been cut in weeks. Otherwise the neighborhood looked pretty normal, as wizard neighborhoods went. It was away from the beaten track, so some magical plants and animals could be seen. Non-magical people were obviously kept out through some means. No house looked as badly kept as the one they were heading towards, so it was obvious something was wrong within. The curtains were all drawn and Susan got an odd feeling looking at it, like there was something else wrong with the place, just out of sight.

“I did the yard work before I left for school,” Erik explained. “Obviously my mother hasn’t kept it up. Sorry.”

“Personally, I prefer growing things to chopped up things,” said Luna.

“Oh. Well, come inside.”

He unlocked the door and called inside as everyone went in. “Mom, I’m home!”

There was no answer.

“Come on, she’s probably in here.”

The inside of the house had fared no better than the outside, and there was a peculiar smell as the group went further on. Susan saw why- the kitchen obviously hadn’t been cleaned in some time. A youngish looking woman sat spaced out at the kitchen table, staring off into space. On the table before her was a bottle of pills, all six of them glowing red. Also on the table were dirty dishes, half rotten food and scattered about the room were various articles of clothing. The woman herself wore nothing but a bathrobe, which wasn’t even tied and hung open around her.

“You see?” Erik asked, looking away, tears in his eyes. “She doesn’t even know I’m here when she’s high.”

“It makes this part easier,” said Susan, closing her robe up. “Everyone, spread out. I doubt she has the presence of mind to remember how to get more ‘M’ so she must have it written down someplace. Find it and we’ll figure out what to do about it.”

Harry walked over to the pills and grabbed them. “You can’t just *Descry* other pills like this?”

Susan shook her head. “No, it has to be a unique object, or something I’ve personally seen. There could be a million of those pills in the world, the magic wouldn’t know what to focus on.”

“Pity. Think we should just destroy these?”

“That won’t solve the problem. We’ll need them for evidence though, give them here.” Susan stuck them into her *Pocket Dimension*.

“You do realize possessing ‘M’ is a serious offense,” said Minerva.

“How would anyone prove it, though? Only I have access to that *Dimension*, after all. Don’t worry, I’ll destroy them when this is all over.”

“See that you do.”

“Wait a second,” said Susan. “Don’t you have some kind of localized summoning charm?”

“Oh yeah!” said Harry, his face lighting up. “Acco ‘M’!”

Nothing jumped out at them.

“Maybe I didn’t do it right?”

“No, the wand motion looked correct,” said Minerva. “I think there is no more to find here. But let us see what else we can discover.”

Sadly, they hadn’t found anything as Erik’s mother started coming around. She blinked blearily at where her pills used to be.

“Where? What?”

“If I had known you wanted to tackle the big questions, I would have brought ‘The Philosophy of Morals and Values’ along,” said Susan. “Welcome back to the real world.”

“Who?” she asked, blinking and looking around her kitchen.

“This is an intervention. Your son Erik asked me to come and see about getting you off ‘M’ and for good reason, now that I see the state of this place.”

“Erik?”

“Yes, he’s here. He’s ashamed of you. I can’t imagine why.”

The woman seemed to lose interest in her, turning back to the table. "M?"

"Still not quite back yet, are you? Unless single words is your normal method of communication."

"M!" The woman frantically started pushing dishes and things off the table, searching for the drug. Minerva's eyes widened as Susan stood there, arms folded, watching her smash her plates to the floor.

"Oh yeah, we're not a moment too soon, are we?" asked Ron, as he and the others came back into the room, attracted by the noise. The woman whirled on them. Wands were appearing.

"Give it back!" she shouted. "It's mine. Thieves! Help!"

"You're yelling for help because someone stole your illegal drugs? That's a new low, mom," said Erik.

"Baby, help your mother. Get her the 'M' back. Please? I need it!"

"Mom, no you don't. These people are here to help you. Let them!"

"I don't need their help. I just need 'M.'"

"Mom, no! No more of that stuff, okay?"

"Give it back!" The woman made a grab for Susan, but Ron was faster.

"*Stupify*," he shouted, and a red jet of light hit the woman in the chest and she staggered to the side, then fell.

"Thank you, Ron," said Susan.

"Mom!" said Erik, running over to her.

"I'm sure she's fine," said Susan.

"Still, she could have hit her head when she fell," said Harry. "Think we should hit her with the *Alleviation* knife?"

"Probably wouldn't be a bad idea. Look, where's her bedroom?" she asked Erik. "We'll get her cleaned up a little and maybe tied down a lot."

"Come with me."

"Hermione, if you could bring her with us? I think this is going to be a girls only party."

"Sure," said Hermione, gesturing with her wand. The unconscious woman floated up and followed them.

"Non-verbal. Very well done, Miss Granger," said Minerva.

"Thank you."

Once inside the bedroom Sparkle cast *Hygiene* on the woman, and Susan slapped a Spell Paper of *Immobilize* on her.

They're already coming in handy. I never did ask this person's name. I can't just go calling her 'the junkie' or whatever. Oh well.

After she was safely immobilized Susan stabbed her with the knife and waited for her to wake up.

That's funny, she should wake up right away. Of course! She was magically knocked out, my magic won't undo that. Let's keep her like that, shall we? She seemed peppy enough back there she won't mind the loss of some energy, right?

Susan used *Energy Drain* to steal 20 energy, and went back to looking for any clues.

The search continued, and finally Luna found something promising. A note, hastily scribbled, and put up onto a cork board in the basement:

Drop 10 galleons into the flame behind the waterfall fountain at midnight.

“That’s our only clue?” asked Ron. “That’s not much to go on.”

“Yeah, I might as well have asked my *True Question* spell.”

“There is a fountain in a park near here,” said Erik. “I guess I could call it a sort of waterfall.”

“Really?” Susan perked up. “Let’s go and check out this so called waterfall!”

“What about my mother?”

“She’s out of it, for the duration. Even if she does wake up, the spell I put on her will hold her until I get back to the school, as that’s when the scene ends.”

“This isn’t a play, you know,” said Erik.

“Just a quirk of the language, nothing to worry about.”

Erik eyed her suspiciously, but led the way out the door and towards the park.

The place seemed like a regular old park, with some young kids playing on swings and slides while parents watched and talked amongst themselves. However, there was a fountain made of stone in the center, which was cheerfully shooting water in the air from the middle of a stone column. The water then arced over and collected at the base. The column was almost like a cake, with a sort of “stair step” leading from the thick base to the thinner middle portion. Everyone looked around.

“It’s round,” remarked Hermione. “How can something be behind a round thing?”

“There don’t seem to be any nearby statues or anything a flame could come out of,” said Harry, looking around.

“I think it’s more literal,” said Luna. “The flame is behind the water, but only at midnight. Professor, do you think a Confundus Charm might be of help here?”

“It’s worth a try,” said Minerva, getting her wand out. Hermione watched her closely. “I’m pretty sure there are no Muggles around here, but we don’t want to attract attention in any case.” She went around the fountain casting a charm, then faced the fountain again. “That should keep prying eyes away from the place for the moment,” she remarked. “Now, for the water.” She brought her wand up in a sweeping motion, and the water, instead of arcing around the whole fountain, shot up and collected in a thick snakelike rope, coming down again on the other side in one place. “And now for the final piece of the puzzle.” She made another wand gesture, and a small, green, flame appeared on the lower stone “step” around the fountain.

“What exactly is a Confundus Charm?” asked Susan. “It seems to have worked out.”

“It can make a person or object believe something that isn’t true. In this case, it made the fountain believe it was now midnight.”

I guess that’s the magical equivalent to hacking?

“So what is it?” asked Ron, walking to the edge of the fountain and looking this way and that at the tiny flame.

“Don’t you recognize it?” asked Minerva. “You must have more experience with that sort of thing than your friends. After all, apart from Luna you are the only other child that grew up in a wizard house.”

“The floo network?” asked Luna.

“It does seem to resemble the green flame of the network, yes. Trust a Ravenclaw to see it. This must be some sort of unauthorized node, or someone worked out how to create their own personal node points to link this fountain to their place of operation.”

“Ah!” Susan believed she knew what was going on. “So you drop the coins in, and they get transported to the drug factory. They send back a bottle the same way. The ultimate in safety for them, they won’t ever get caught.”

“Meaning they could be miles away?” asked Erik. “How are we going to find them then? Even if you destroy this fountain, they’ll just pick another drop point someplace nearby.”

“I could get through it,” said Susan. “And so could Sparkle.”

“What, shape-shift?” asked Sparkle. “That would do it. But it’s meant for coins, it might have some kind of protection against living things going through.”

“Unless you want to find a squirrel, put him on a lead, toss him in, and then haul him back, I don’t think we have much of a choice.”

“Also you might want to hurry,” said Luna. “This may have alerted them that someone is poking around their fountain.”

“Good point. Sparkle, make us like fairies. I’ll send the *Teleportal* back for the rest of you once the coast is clear!”

While she said that Sparkle walked over to her and touched her leg, then cast the spell to turn them both into fairies. As it wasn’t specified in the spell description if equipment went along for the ride the narrator decided it did, and two fairies darted into the flame.

“Something just came through,” said a man, looking down at the two fairies that had popped out of the fireplace. He seemed average enough, with his average looks and build. *NPC* thought Sparkle, looking around.

“Fairies?” said another man. He also seemed much like a faceless minion, forgettable and easily killed.

These two probably don't even rate a description, thought Sparkle.

“I didn't think real, actual fairies existed.”

“Shows what you know!” said Susan, flying up to his face. *Now, how would stereotypical fairies act?*

“How did you get here?” demanded the first man.

“I flew, like always, silly!”

“But how did you get here?” asked the second, more reasonably.

“Oh, you mean here! I was playing in the water and suddenly whoosh, I started falling. It was *fun*.”

“Again!” said Sparkle, flying up to join Susan. “Let's go again!”

“Yeah!”

“Hold it!” said the first man. “You aren't going anywhere.”

“Oh, just because you're bigger than me you think you can stop me doing what I want?” asked Susan, putting on a little pout.

“Cool it, Bill,” said the second man. “It must have just been an accident. I'll get some powder and you girls can go back, okay?” He turned to leave, muttering to himself. “Real fairies. I never.”

“What-cha doing here, anyway?” asked Susan, darting around Bill and following the man. The room seemed to be a large warehouse full of fireplaces, all freestanding in a row. *This must be some kind of major distribution center! Jackpot.*

“We make things and ship them around the world.”

“Candies!” said Susan, flying over to a table where an odd contraption was taking a liquid from a large jug, squirting one drop onto a white substance from a hopper, then pressing it into a pill shape. The pills were then gently passed over a flame, probably to dry them out and make them hold the shape, and dropped into a basket at the end. From there a table was set up where in progress ‘M’ was being created. There was a large pile of glowing red pills. She made to grab one, which for her was about the size of a pillow, and take a big bite.

“Wait, don't eat that!” shouted the second man.

“Why not? You've got plenty.”

“It's not that...”

“Oh, let her have a bite, Joe” said Bill. “It could be hilarious to watch.” Sparkle followed in the air behind him, looking worried.

“What do you mean?” asked Susan.

“Look how small she is, Joe. Even a bite could kill her. Think what just one does a person, and we're a lot bigger.”

“Kill me?” Susan tossed the pill away from her. “Just what are you two making in here?”

“Go away, annoying bug,” said Bill. “Maybe you’re an endangered species or something and that’s why I’ve never heard of real fairies existing, but you’re getting on my nerves. Go poke that little nose of yours into someone else’s business. And you too!” he said to Sparkle.

“What did I do?”

“Showed up.” He grabbed a bunch of pills and went around the table to the chair on the other side, where he sat and started tracing a complex pattern with his wand.

“First he wants me to stay, then he wants me to leave. He’s a big meanie!”

“He’s just under a lot of stress. We both are, but that doesn’t concern you. You should probably just leave.”

“What about this stuff?”

“It’s really not harmful to people our size,” said Joe. “It’s just a sort of dream people can control, that’s all.”

“Not harmful? Are you sure?”

“That’s what we’ve been told. Why?”

Good question. Wait, I think I’ve got it. “Fairies are closely tied to nature, you know. That stuff seems like poison to me.”

“Why’d you try to eat it then, dummy?” asked Bill.

“I wanted to see what you’d do. You would have let me, too. You’re a bad man!”

“Yeah, I’m the cousin of the devil himself. I thought you were getting some powder so these two could take a powder.”

“Right. Which one did you girls come out of again?”

“We’re not leaving! You’re giving people poison! That’s wrong!”

Joe stood up abruptly. “And what exactly is a pint sized fairy like yourself going to do about it?”

“Aren’t we more liter sized?” asked Sparkle.

“I think we are,” said Susan. “Get it right, meanie.”

“Get out of here, you little pests! Maybe the reason I’ve never seen a fairy before is because they all annoyed people to death!”

“You better not threaten me,” said Susan. “I’ll do fairy magic and make you sorry!”

Joe laughed. “Fairy magic? Pull the other one!”

“Wait Bill, please little fairy, don’t get angry. Are we really making poison?”

“Drop it, Joe. You know what we’re making here.”

“Do I? You know they wouldn’t tell you exactly what that incantation they taught you did.”

“Just drop it, okay?”

Some disagreement in the ranks? Maybe I can use that.

“It just seems to me the more of that stuff someone eats, the more they’re going to want to eat it. They’ll waste away craving it,” said Susan.

Bill sat down again. “Don’t be ridiculous. LSD isn’t addictive.”

“But it’s no health food,” countered Joe. “What if they put something else into it? We wouldn’t know, would we? Or if the charm we’re putting on them is harmful-”

“Can we focus, please? These pills aren’t going to enchant themselves. I will kill you little fairies if you don’t leave, now.”

“You could try,” said Susan. But Joe stepped between them. “They don’t mean any harm. I just want to know the truth.”

“The truth is- debt, loan, more debt, job offer we couldn’t refuse, now they own us. Work!”

I guess they aren’t doing it of their own initiative.

“There must be a better way!”

“What, the fairy here is going to take on the mob for us?” He barked a laugh. “Pull the other one.”

That seems to be his catch phrase. “We probably could-” Susan started to say. Suddenly there was a *POP* and a third man appeared in the room.

“What’s going on in here?” he demanded. “I got an alarm that one of the nodes had activated out of schedule.” The man was dressed in fine robes, and had ‘mobster’ written all over him. Not literally.

“Just some fairies somehow got in,” answered Joe. “They were just leaving.”

“Fairies?” asked the man.

“Hi!” said Susan, popping up on Joe’s shoulder. “You the big boss?”

“There are fairies! Wild. Kill them and get back to work.”

What’s this? Are these two not willing participants in this little game?

“Kill them?” Joe asked, shocked. “What for?”

“Told you,” said Bill.

“If you don’t have the guts, I’ll do it for you,” said the tough, raising his wand.

“Don’t point that at me!” said Joe, raising his hands.

“I’m a great shot, don’t worry.”

“You would really just kill us?” asked Sparkle.

“Yeah, I’ll kill you first, unless your little friend wants to come out from behind Joe.”

Guess we’ll have to take them. She readied card 44, Made You Look, so she would be sure to get the first shot off in combat. *This guy, at least, and probably Bill there. Joe might do the right thing, I think we can work on-*

Suddenly a flock of birds burst from the fireplace and started winging around the warehouse. The minion, (who was Greg, by the way) whirled around, trying to get a fix on a bird long enough to fire a spell at it.

“Birds now?” asked Bill, getting up again. “What the heck is going on today?”

Suddenly the birds landed and morphed into people- all the people Susan had left at the fountain. They all had wands out and pointed at the three.

“What the-” Greg started to say, when 5 stunners lanced out and took all three targets down. All of them went down in a heap, and Susan flew over to them.

“We got worried when you didn’t open the *Teleportal* for us,” explained Minerva.

“But how did you do the bird thing?” asked Susan, delighted.

“I remembered I had some canary creams in my *Pocket Dimension*, they really came in handy,” answered Hermione.

“I guess so! Sorry to worry you, I thought I was making progress with at least one of them, so I hoped to get the full story out of them.”

Ron poked Greg with his wand. “This was making progress?”

“He showed up just thirty seconds ago, honest.”

“I see. So, what did you learn?”

Susan relayed the fact that the two making the drug probably were not doing it voluntarily, and had said something about owing some kind of mob. The third man, she

explained, was there to make sure the operation ran smoothly, and had appeared when it seemed that wasn't happening.

"So now what do we do to them?" asked Luna.

"That's easy," replied Susan. "Watch and learn."

She first pulled most of the energy out of Greg, then used it against him to cast *Destroy Magic*. As Bill seemed more desperate than evil, she only took his energy and put his wand in her *Pocket Dimension*. Joe's wand she just hid in the room, in case Bill woke up and grabbed it.

"You aren't stopping them from using magic?" asked Hermione.

"I think they're victims. Wake Joe up and we'll see what he has to say. If he'll give us the location of the main base, so be it. Otherwise he can just leave and we'll get the information from this loser here." She kicked Greg a little.

"If you say so," said Minerva, waking Joe.

"What happened?" he asked, struggling to rise. "Where did you all come from?"

"The stork?" asked Luna.

"Maybe we do need further sex education at the school..." remarked Minerva.

"Professor McGonagall?" asked Joe, shocked.

"Hello, Joe, I see that O.W.L in *Transfiguration* isn't going to waste."

"You know this guy?" asked Susan.

Minerva just gave her an 'are you seriously asking me that question' look. Susan thought about it. "Right, there's only one magical school in the country. You probably know most people with magic. Sorry, dumb question."

"At least you worked it out."

"You have to believe me, we didn't have a choice!"

"Oh, spare me the theatrics," said Minerva. "What would your mother say, to see you making 'M' like this?"

"I'm telling you the truth. My bother got into some heavy gambling debt, and the people he bet with, they turned out to be some kind of organized criminal group. They set us up with the facility and told us to start distributing their 'product' for them. They said they would let us know when we were done."

"Do you know where they are?" asked Susan. "Or possibly have a picture conveniently, for absolutely no reason?"

"No, nothing like that. They always met us somewhere. I have no idea where their base is located. Wait, who are you? I only got a glimpse of the people that... were birds, but I don't think I saw you."

"Oh, you saw me. I was a fairy at the time."

"YOU?" He groaned. "I get it, fairies don't actually exist. You just needed something small enough to go through the flame. But how-"

"Never mind that. You're sure you don't know anything that can help us find this base of theirs?"

"Sorry, I don't."

"So now what?" asked Harry.

"Wait, aren't you Harry Potter?"

Harry rolled his eyes.

"Hey!" shouted Susan. "You haven't earned the *right* to even lick Harry Potter's boots clean." She grabbed his shirt and pulled him down. "Let me tell you about Harry Potter, okay? Harry Potter is fighting Voldemort as best he can, so that your sorry excuse for a life can

continue with some normalcy, and how do you repay him? By making drugs that split up families and addict young mothers? And you have the audacity to look him in the face, like an equal? You disgust me.”

Joe paled. “That shouldn’t happen! It’s just a better LSD, I swear that’s what we were told! Please don’t say his name again!”

Say what? Oh, that stupid superstition.

“Tell that to the woman who attacked us when we took her ‘M’ away. We had to knock her out or she would have strangled me. Well, she would have tried.” Susan let go of him.

Joe heavily sat down in the chair. “I knew it. I knew something was up. They were really using us, weren’t they? I thought it was selling faster than it should have. I should have known.”

“Yes, you should have,” said Minerva. “But what’s done is done. I think if we turn this man over to the Aurors and show them this... machine, they can take things from there.”

“I hate leaving a job half done,” said Susan. “We promised Erik- where is he, anyway?”

“I left him back at the fountain. If you want to bring him here, that’s fine. I thought, as a first year student, he should stay out of the line of fire.”

“Good thinking.” Susan opened a *Teleportal* back to the fountain, and Erik stepped through.

“Wow,” he said, looking around. “An actual drug den, or whatever you call it. You one of the ones messing my mom up, jerk?”

Joe was staring at the hole in space that closed behind Erik. Susan snapped her fingers. “Oy! Someone asked you a question!”

“Huh? What? My brother and I were making the ‘M’, yes.”

“Did you leave him for me to kill?” Erik’s eyes were wide.

“The others aren’t dead,” said Minerva. “Just knocked out. We’re discussing what to do next right now.”

“Oh.”

Susan wasn’t sure if he was relieved or not.

“Wait, I do recognize you,” said Joe. “From the papers- you’re that girl who was in the tournament. You fought two dragons and lived!”

“Yes,” Susan answered sweetly. “And you thought I was a harmless little fairy.” She shook her head. “Oh, the things I could have done to you.” Susan covered her mouth and gave a little giggle.

Joe gave a weak smile, eyes wide.

“Anyway, as I was saying, I hate to leave a job half done. I think we can get the location out of this guy,” she smacked Greg with her shoe again, “And go take it out.”

“Don’t you think you’ve done enough?” asked Minerva.

“No. Even tearing this place apart, they’ll just get a couple of other suckers to run things from a new location. That won’t solve anything.”

“What do you plan to do?”

“You can modify people’s memories, right?”

“Yes,” she answered slowly.

“Good. You’re going to modify this trash to believe he fought us off, but took a stunner in the end and that’s why he got knocked out. Then take Bill here to the ministry building and slap him in a cell for the duration. I’ll take his place with *Shape-shift* and get him to tell me the location of the base. He’ll have no choice because he won’t be able to return on his own. You can use that awful Apparition, can’t you? You can take us there.”

“And if I do that, you’ll, um, you’ll speak in our defense, right? Put in a good word for us?”

“I’ll think about it. I’ve always said the punishment should fit the crime. If you and your bother agree to addict yourself to ‘M’ and then go through withdrawal like everyone else is going to have to, I’ll consider the matter closed. I’ll then speak on your behalf for leniency.”

“You can’t just addict-” Minerva started to say, but Susan held up her hand.

“I want them to experience what they put others through. It’s only fair. They were stupid, yes, but that by itself isn’t a crime. They want Susan to speak up for them? Fine, but that’s my price.”

“I’ll do it. I don’t know about my bother.”

“You’ll have plenty of time to talk him into it, once you’re in the same cell as him.”

“But-”

“No buts. You broke the law, scum. You’re going to have to pay at least some of that price to society. Getting me there so I can take out the real criminals behind this operation is the rest of it.”

Joe shut up.

“One problem,” said Luna. “What reason are you going to give this guy that he can’t use magic anymore?”

“Oh, good point.”

They all thought a moment.

Wish I hadn’t given back that truth poison now, darn it.

“What about this,” asked Hermione. “He doesn’t know what you can do. During the battle he got hit by a weird spell and couldn’t use magic anymore. The other two managed to drive us off, but not before being knocked out. He’ll have no choice but to have you guys bring him back until his magic returns. He won’t know it’s permanent.”

Everyone nodded, that seemed like a good plan.

So the kids used the floo to go back to the fountain and wait, and Minerva took the unconscious Bill to the ministry to be locked up. She took a measure of ‘M’ to take to the hospital, in case studying it would help those who were now going to suffer withdrawal symptoms. It was her hope some kind of counter charm could be developed to make the process easier. Susan hoped so.

Susan, meanwhile, took on Bill’s form and Sparkle became a fairy again, hiding in ‘his’ pocket. With that done, Susan took a minute and a half to make him a fake wand, and Joe woke him up. His eyes fluttered opened.

“You got them?” he asked groggily.

Oh yeah, I took most of his energy. HAHA.

“Barely. What were a bunch of kids doing here anyway?” asked Joe.

“Little brats,” said Susan. “They got what was coming to them. You’ll have to put some better protections on those floo nodes.”

“I guess so. How did they even stumble into it? What did I get hit with?” asked Greg, sitting up.

Joe looked over at Susan, who shrugged. “Don’t ask us. Never seen that spell before. Here’s your wand back, it went flying.”

“Oh, thanks. I better go report. What happened to those two fairies?”

“Ran when the fighting started. They’re probably long gone,” said Joe.

“Serves ‘em right. Didn’t even know they existed. Come to think of it, this whole thing started with them, maybe it was a setup? Anyway, get back to work.”

“Right,” they both said, making their way back to the table.

Greg tried to get out of there.

Naturally, he failed.

“What the heck?” he said, looking confused.

“What’s up?” asked Joe.

“I can’t Apparate! This is jack, man! That kid did something to me!”

“I’m sure it’ll wear off, don’t sweat it,” said Susan. “You want to stay here in the meantime?”

Greg grimaced. “I really have to get back and tell the others. We may need to move this facility, now that someone’s seen it. We could have Aurors popping in any minute!”

“What? We’ve got to get out of here!” said Joe.

“You just wanted us to keep working?” asked Susan. “What kind of gratitude is that?”

“You’re expendable,” said Greg. “But I suppose at the moment, you’re my only way back. You can take me back,” he pointed at Susan.

“Oh no, you’re not leaving me here alone,” said Joe. “We both go or we all stay.”

Greg pointed his wand at Joe. “You don’t give me orders.”

Joe pointed his wand back. “Are you sure you want to be pointing that at me right now? How do you know it’ll work any better than your last attempt?”

Greg’s eyes flicked down to the wand. “*Lumos*,” he said, and Susan suppressed a grin as nothing happened.

“See?” said Joe. “Now we can play nice, and you can tell your family how we saved the merchandise from those kids, and your life, or you can just sit here until someone comes to see why you aren’t back yet. Unless those kids come back first, with backup, that is.”

“All right, fine. Let’s go then! Grab the ‘M’ you’ve made and we’ll set you up someplace else. We’ll have to send someone back for the machine.”

Greg told them the location, and the three grabbed onto him and disappeared with a crack.

They arrived on a large boat, and as Susan looked around she saw that it at least began life as a modern yacht. It looked like all the electric lights and such had been removed and replaced with magical equivalents.

“Welcome to the Waterlogged Broomstick,” said Greg.

“Is this some kind of Muggle boat?” asked Joe.

“Hey, if you want to hide in the desert, you have to look like sand.”

Ah, so he probably gets the drug from another boat, a non-magical boat that meets up with this one. The owner can run it by magic, but make it still look mundane. This complicates things. Can I Teleportal onto a boat? After all, I’ve seen the boat, but the thing could be in a completely different place next time. I’m not sure the spell is built to handle that. I just wanted to see the place, and then get the law here. Maybe I’ll have to take them out myself.

“Lead on,” said Susan.

“You aren’t supposed to bring them here!” said a voice behind the group. They turned. There was a woman standing there, dressed in fine clothing and walking towards them.

Right. Why would I expect this to be only a man's operation? Women like wealth and power too, don't they?

"It's a long story Kathy, is the boss below?"

"Yeah, he's here. You didn't even blindfold them?"

"I couldn't!" he protested. "I couldn't get us here. Come on, I don't want to repeat myself."

They went below and found a rather obese man flanked by two tough looking men in suits. He had on a lot of gold, and another woman was in the process of feeding him slices of bacon.

Must be on Atkins. Susan looked the two over, and they stared back, shifting their wands to be more visible.

"What are these two doing here?" asked the guy, as the woman stopped giggling and set the strip down. "Do they think they've paid off their debt to me already?"

"Judging by this place, you don't need the money that badly," said Susan.

"Was I talking to you? Huh? Was I talking to you? George, what are you doing?"

"Sorry boss, no choice. We need to send Paul to get the machine and bring it here. Our distribution center is compromised."

"What?" The man tried to stand up, and the woman had to give him a little push to manage it. "Did these two—"

"No boss, it wasn't them. We got attacked somehow. Through the distribution floo, if you can believe that. We're going to have to improve security, maybe make it lethal for living things to get through."

"You better start explaining!"

"I'll go get Paul, he'll need to know why he needs to go get the machine."

"It's a delicate piece of work, I don't like the thought of it being here."

"We can take it to one of the safe-houses, it just can't stay there. Stay here." He stalked off, and the two women covered the doors out while the two toughs pointed their wands.

Susan held up her hands. "Hey, we're unarmed!"

"Can't be too careful," said the guy. "And his story better be good, for your sake."

"Don't worry, it will be," said Bill.

Everyone stood uncomfortably for a moment, until Paul and George returned.

"Now can you get on with it?" asked the boss.

"Yeah boss," answered George. "You start," he said to Susan.

Crap, I can't cast spells if he's making me explain it.

"Fine. We were making the 'M' as usual, and suddenly these two fairies flew in from the fountain drop off point. We started talking to them, to try and find out what they were and how they got there, and then he showed up."

"I was about to kill the things and get them back to work when suddenly these birds showed up, who turned out to be people!"

"People?"

"Kids, I think. I didn't get a good look," said Bill. "We started fighting them off, and George took some weird spell to the chest and got knocked out."

"I can't do magic anymore, boss!"

"What? Are you sure?"

"Maybe it's worn off by now, but it hadn't a minute ago. I'll try again."

He started getting his wand out.

Now for a little more distraction.

“Did you hear that?” asked Susan, making a 10 on her *Deception* check and looking out towards the window. “It was some kind of thump.”

The others glanced over that way, and Susan grinned. A magical circle appeared in the center of the room as Susan cast *Hypnotic Field*, taking the full 1.5 seconds to do it. *There’s no way they’ll see it and react in time. Suckers.*

With 9 extra energy put into the spell and an 11 roll, then taking a -2 for doing the spell non-verbally and +5 as Sparkle used card 34, *Assist*, and added her *INSight* to the roll she got a 23 total. That got everybody, as the 14m radius enveloped the entire boat.

“Thanks,” said Susan, “I have a feeling that extra +5 made a big difference.”

“Sure thing,” replied the muffled voice of Sparkle.

Susan glared at the two ladies, tapping her foot. “The question is, do we take their magic away too?”

“Who?”

“These two women that are here.”

“I would say that anyone here probably knew at least something illegal was going on, and are probably guilty.”

“But I can’t prove it. They may have been innocents.”

“So shove them through a *Teleportal* to the ministry building, sans wands of course, and let them explain their situation.”

“Good enough. But you, Mr. Tubby, are going down.”

Susan moved through the room, draining their energy and then destroying the magic of the boss, Paul, the two guys in suits, and then found the guy steering the boat. It was a little tough to see the controls through the shimmery energy field, but she managed to cut the power.

Weird, they really did a number on this boat. Hooking magical charms up to actual buttons so the boat would respond normally just in case someone looked over at what he was doing. Why not just keep it running on gas though? I suppose magic was cheaper. Jerks.

With that done, Susan deposited the two ladies, Bill and Bob (she found his name in the logbook) through a *Teleportal* with *Telekinesis* as Sparkle suggested.

With that, she turned back to the boss and his flunkies, still frozen like statues. “Hello, boys,” she said, taking her real form again. “I know you can hear me, just not act, so I’m going to tell you how it’s going to be from now on. First up, you’ve lost your magic. That reminds me!” She went and grabbed all the wands in the room. “You won’t be needing these anymore.” She stuck the bundle of them in her *Pocket Dimension*. “Where was I? Oh yes. You get to live like Muggles from now on, a fitting punishment for what you were doing to people. I would turn you over to the Aurors, but they have their hands full and honestly, they would probably just send you to Azkaban or failing that, just kill you. I like my punishment better. You get to live and repent your actions, maybe even decide to do some good in the world before you die. Oh, and I found that sack of coins in your cabin, it’ll be donated to a worthy cause, don’t you worry.

“Now, as far as my buddy Bill and Joe are concerned, yes, don’t you worry, he was safely tucked away before I came here disguised as him, you’re not going to have anything else to do with them. If I find out, and I will, that you’ve made their lives miserable in even the slightest way- I’ll be back. And I’ll rethink my whole ‘letting you live’ policy. This is your one chance to go straight and do something useful with your life. Don’t waste it. I’ll be going now. Hopefully

you know how to drive this boat and can get back? Well, I'm sure you'll all figure something out, you seem the resourceful type. Tootles!"

With that, Susan *Teleported* herself back to Erik's house, where the others were waiting for her. She stepped through, which ended the scene and all of their spells dropped.

"You're safe," exclaimed Minerva. "Thank goodness."

"It was no problem. I met the boss, and he won't be selling your mother or anyone else any more drugs ever," she said to Erik.

"You killed them?"

"What's your problem, kid? Course I didn't kill them. I just took their magic away and left them stranded on a boat someplace. They'll be fine. Sheesh."

"You didn't pick up *Won't Kill* along the line someplace, did you?" asked Sparkle, now a cat again.

"No, I just don't think I should get into the habit, that's all. I'll kill those that deserve it, and no others."

"A fine ideal," said Minerva. "Now, if we can escort Erik's mother to the hospital, I'm sure he's anxious to see her become herself again."

"Fine by me. Then we can get back to the castle, it's been a long day."

"Thank you," said Erik. "If there's anything I can ever do for you..."

"Sure. Study hard. Train. Don't ever back down if you see something happening you know is wrong. Save someone's life. Then tell them the same thing I just told you."

"Deal."

They shook hands, and Susan did a little more magic that day.

Back at the castle everyone collapsed into bed expect for Minerva, who wrote a report to Albus about what she had observed of Susan's behavior.

She was even a bit hopeful as she did.

“Hey, Erik,” said Susan, as Erik came over to see her.

“Hi Susan. I just wanted to let you know, my mother should be released from the hospital soon.”

“That’s great news!”

“Well...” Erik didn’t look convinced. “I mean it is, don’t get me wrong. I’m glad some sort of antidote was created from those ‘M’ samples we recovered, and that she didn’t have to go through too much, but I’m afraid we haven’t solved the problem.”

“Oh, you mean why she started with ‘M’ in the first place?”

“Exactly. Unless we figure that out I’m afraid nothing has changed. She’ll just get addicted to something else, or express it in a different, even more distractive way.”

“I’m happy to talk to her, but if it’s just a mundane problem I’m no psychologist. Despite what I might believe, magic can’t be used to solve every problem. Cover it up, reduce it, make it someone else’s, yes. Solve? Not always.”

“You just seem a lot smarter than me, so if there’s anyone that can come up with a solution, it’s probably you.”

“Hey, there’s lots of different kinds of intelligence in the world, don’t sell yourself short. There’s Naturalist, like Neville, Body-Kinesthetic like Hermione-”

“See what I mean! You even know about different types of intelligence. Who knows that?”

“That’s just because I like to read and find out about the world and the people in it. Also, I have the Internet at home, which I somehow have to bring to wizard kind... note to self, put “bring Internet to wizards” on to-do list.” *Plus there’s that whole knowing things that I have no idea how I know them. Still have no way to find out how that’s happening.*

“My point remains.”

“I guess. Like I said, I’ll be happy to talk to her when she comes home.”

“Thanks. It’ll be soon after Christmas, according to the healers. She’s responding to the treatment well.”

“Good. How are our friends Bill and Joe? Do you know?”

“They’re under heavy guard. From what I heard their addiction didn’t go on for very long, so they had an easier recovery.”

“Pity. Well, come find me when break is over, and we’ll go see your mother.”

“Great. Thanks.”

Susan went back to reading the paper, which was detailing a lot of missing persons reports, both wizard and non-wizard. According to witnesses, odd creatures were seen at the scenes of the disappearances, though no one could agree on what exactly those creatures looked like.

Super, it wasn’t just one nest of those fear creatures. I’ll have to do something about that soon, too. I can’t prove they’re connected to Voldi but the timing sure is coincidental if they aren’t.

With a sigh she put the paper away and got out some “wards” as she was sometimes calling them, and started binding some magic into them with *Spell Symbol*. Just a few made here and there along the day added up, and with her sitting around she got back 5% of energy an hour, so it was easier to do a few here and there than exhaust herself at the end of the night.

She finished one, and was about to start another when a book was slammed down onto the table beside her. She gave a jump and looked over, about to cast *Thrust* on whatever was there attacking her.

It was Hermione, looking angry.

“Our magic,” she said, sitting down, “is rubbish.”

Susan took a moment to decide how to respond to this latest revelation.

“Well, I didn’t want to say anything, but ever since I learned how your magic worked, I’ve always wondered why it seemed so... much the way it is.”

A rather lame finish to that sentence I guess.

“We’re doing human transfiguration,” she explained. “And we’ve started off by trying to change the color of our eyebrows. How can Professor McGonagall even say that with a straight face? Sparkle can touch someone and *poof* they’re a whole different creature. What is wrong with our magic?”

“I wish I could tell you, Hermione. Once you figure out how my spell formula translates to your wand motion to make water I think you’ll have the answer.”

“Oh, that. Forget it. I have no clue. I’ve stared at that thing for hours. Looked up symbology and other runic languages throughout history- nothing. Even the *Research* spell comes up blank, which I honestly expected but I thought there might have been some other form of magic in the world since the beginning of time. Just so I could have a third type to compare them all to, you know? But no such luck. I think it’s just too different.”

“Pity. I guess it’s like us using cups to drink water while animals lap it up directly. We both drink the same water, but we do it in different ways. Forget trying to get a cat to hold a cup, no offense Sparkle.”

“None taken.”

“Plus Lavender Brown keeps looking at Ron in the most peculiar way,” Hermione said, switching gears. “Like he was some specimen to examine.” Hermione’s cheeks reddened, and she hastily opened her book as though thinking she had said too much.

Oh, is that why you’re so upset right now?

“Not sure what that has to do with magic, apart from friendship being magic, but okay.”

“Ron keeps looking back at her, that’s what. With this confused look on his face.”

An echo? Nah, couldn’t be.

“Don’t worry, she can’t hold a candle to you.”

“Are you sure? I mean my hair is all frizzly and my teeth are too big and-”

“You know, Hermione, if I didn’t know better I would say you had the *Insecure* weakness. I mean, what’s so great about Ron anyway? He’s just another *boy*, and a Weasley at that. Red haired, freckled, not as well off as Draco-”

“Totally brought together martial arts and magic into a seamless combat style.”

“Hello Ron,” said Susan.

“He was standing right there? Why didn’t you tell me?” shrieked Hermione.

Susan and Ron fell into peals of laughter as Hermione stared at them. Harry at least tried to show some decorum, but it didn’t last.

“Sorry, Hermione. Honestly, if something he’s doing is bothering you, tell him about it. Don’t complain to me.”

“Yes, why were you talking about me?” asked Ron, sitting across from the girls.

“Lavender Brown,” said Susan, as Hermione went back to her book in shame.

“Oh yeah. Oddest feeling about that girl, you know? Started right after that last Quidditch game that I noticed you didn’t bother attending.”

“Oh yes, because you know how entranced I am about the game. You want a present this year, or what?”

“I meant to say, that totally stupid Quidditch game that I shouldn’t even have bothered going to because I had more important work to be about.”

“That’s better. Anyway, what about her?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know her that well, but I still have the overpowering urge to-uh...”

“Yes?” asked Hermione icily, looking up.

“Be, uh, near her?”

“How about you, Harry? Anyone caught your eye lately?” asked Susan.

She got an 11 to notice Harry’s eyes flick towards Ginny, over at another table, then back. “Not especially.”

“Uh huh. Well,” she cleared her throat. “I’m not sure what advice to give. On the one hand, perhaps you save her from something and that’s why you feel you should be near her, Ron. Or perhaps she just flings herself at you and you respond without a care to other people’s feelings. Your choice.”

“What? Me? If we’re talking echos here, I wouldn’t have created Magic Fu without you around, so what would she have ever seen in me?”

“Maybe you’re a kind, honest person that is worth getting to know!” said Hermione in a huff, picking up her book again and walking off.

Harry and Ron looked at each other.

“Girls.”

“By the way,” said Harry, “are you going to Professor Slughorn’s Christmas party?”

“Who?”

“The potions teacher? We went to get him before school started?”

“Oh, him. Right. No. He used to come around when I was doing *Imbuing* and pester me with questions, but I needed to concentrate and watching someone weave magical energies into objects can only be interesting for so long. He got bored and gave it up after a while. He’s never come see me since. Why?”

“I was invited, thought maybe I could take you.”

“Ah, thanks, but no. I don’t want to remind him I exist, actually. He might decide to come pester me again.”

“I guess that’s as good a reason as any not to go. Can’t blame me for trying.”

“You could take-”

“No.”

“You didn’t let me finish.”

“I saw you looking at Ron. I didn’t need to let you finish to know what you were going to say.”

“Don’t knock it until you’ve tried it.”

Both boys looked horrified.
Ah well, no accounting for taste.

Two days after break began, Ron came to see Susan.

“What can I do for you, Ron?”

“My mother wanted you to know you were invited to our house for Christmas break.”

“Really? That’s nice of her. Thanks.”

“She has an ulterior motive, though. She remembers how the clock hands went from ‘mortal danger’ to ‘home’ when you were last there.”

“Ah. Well, I have plenty of *wards* to give out, they’ll make a nice gift.”

“I wondered why you were making so many of those things all the time.”

“I need to know how useful they are in practice. I’ve got a bunch of them with different spells in them, so I’m looking for feedback as to how people use them. Then I can see what is the most useful and get an idea how much someone would pay for them.”

“Sounds like a good idea. And way safer than what Fred and George did with their joke product stuff.”

“Well, I’m not doing research to make new things, I’m just using a spell to package a spell. I know it works. I just need marketing information now.”

“Well, I’ll owl her you’re coming, if you are...”

She laughed. “Yes, I’ll be happy to come. Thanks.”

And so Susan opened a *Teleportal* to outside The Burrows as break began, and everyone happily greeted everyone. Tonks and Remus seemed to be together, as they arrived at the same time, and Remus took Susan aside.

“I really have to thank you,” he told her. “Because of the item you made me I haven’t transformed in ages. I’ve even been doing some work for the Order, feeling out those who would be open to wearing something similar. If you’re willing to make more, I mean,” he added hastily.

“For gold, sure. I don’t mind going the extra mile for friends, but something that keeps a werewolf from transforming would probably be worth a lot. Not that I would hold them over a barrel or anything! But they do take a lot of time and effort to make.”

“Personally I would have paid any price. You’ll notice Tonks and I arrived together?”

“I did.”

“She finally wore me down. I could hardly refuse her, after all, I am much safer now than I was before. So we’re living together.”

“That’s great news, I’m really happy for you.”

“Thanks. That alone was worth it for me. Sadly there are those werewolves that revel in their transformation and one that has made it his mission in life to infect as many people as possible. So I have to be careful about who I talk to about it, or I could be seen as a traitor to my ‘kind’ as it were.”

“I’m done making stuff for my friends, I can start on a bunch of them. I’ll just leave them unfinished, and anyone that wants one can come see me. I can finish it up while they are nearby, so they can pay whatever their XP equivalent is, and they won’t have to wait the whole time.”

“Oh, you can’t just owl them to someone?”

“Sorry. Items are made to order. I could make them for myself, but you’re talking a ten times increase in price at least to make up for the XP loss I would go through. When it comes

down to learning a new spell for myself or making some stranger an item, right now I have to prioritize myself.”

“I understand. So I couldn’t give my item to someone and make it work?”

“You could. You paid the cost, it’s yours to do what you want. If that means give it away, that’s fine. I know, it’s kind of complicated because your magic doesn’t work that way.”

“I’m sure it makes sense to you.”

Susan nodded. “So is Voldi recruiting big nasties like he did before?”

Remus looked troubled. “No, and that’s worrying. The giants are still up in the mountains doing whatever is it they do up there. Vampire activity hasn’t increased. No werewolf I’ve talked to admits to being approached. And Dementors? They seem to have gone into hiding, we wonder if they aren’t waiting for the whole thing to blow over so you don’t come after them. It’s all very odd.”

“What about all those disappearances and such? Some of them must be mundane and not those fear creatures!”

“That would be nice, but we don’t think so. That one you captured is being studied, and they don’t seem to be from around here. It’s very troubling.”

More than you know. Voldi knows I’m from another world, that’s where my magic came from. What if he researched a spell like Teleportal only it opens to other worlds? He could let in any number of horrors this world has never seen. And thus, doesn’t know how to fight. And we’ve never gone lower than Purgatory, but if he decided to see what was another dimension or two down, he could possibly bring some creatures back that don’t belong here. Great, now I’m even more worried than before, and that’s saying something.

“I wish I could help, but those disappearances seem to be scattered all over the place. If it is those fear creatures, and I’m the only one that can reach them, I should be helping rather than still going to school.”

“Actually, we’ve been working on spells to enter those other planes you can go to, hopefully someday we can fight them on their own turf. After all, we didn’t know they existed until you showed us, and these creatures started coming from there. Now that we know, we can figure out how to go there.”

“Just be careful. Dimension magic isn’t something to fool around with.”

“I’m not doing the research, don’t worry. There are people who dedicate their lives to coming up with new magic, they take the risks.”

Yeah, push too far and you’ll end up someplace you don’t want to go. Not far enough and you might open a hole between the worlds and get sucked in.

“I wish I could help there, but we were just talking about how different my magic was before break.”

“Actually, there is a way you could help. Bring those researchers across, let them see what the place looks like. Maybe if they can study the place on their own, they can find a way to open a door back on their own. That would give them a leg up on opening the door to get there.”

“Sure, I’ll talk to the Headmaster about it.” *If I ever see him again.*

And so the next day Susan handed out her gifts with great ceremony. Hermione received a gold cross on a chain, with *Healing Word* put into it.

“Just think about wanting to heal someone and say ‘healing,’” she explained. “You don’t have to touch them, just be near them, for it to work. If they are wounded in multiple places it’s

best to think about just one place at a time, but healing more than one place can work, if it's not too bad."

"Thanks," said Hermione, putting it on.

To Ron she presented a pair of sneakers she had made slightly higher TR and put *Swiftstep* into.

"It's not a teleport," she explained, "but if you imagine being someplace nearby, and you can figure out how far you can go with a little practice, you'll instantly appear there. I mention it's not teleportation because you shouldn't try using it to go through walls or anything. You are covering the distance, so if you try to *Swiftstep* through a window, you'll smash through the window at high speed and probably die. So don't do that. Otherwise, your word is '*Swiftstep*' after deciding where you want to be."

"That'll be an amazing addition to my *Acceleration* ring. Nothing will be able to hit me!"

"I hope so."

"Thanks."

Harry unwrapped a cell phone of all things.

"A cell phone, of all things?" he asked, confused.

"A busted cell phone, of all things!" Susan replied cheerfully.

"Uh..."

"With a spell of *Distant Conversation* on it. Just decide who you would like to talk to, and the phone will 'connect' you with them, so to speak. You can get a bunch of people if they're not too far away, or one person a good distance away. You have to physically speak, so the cell phone will give you an excuse to be talking to no one. Anyone you talk to might look a little funny though, as they'll have to talk back to be heard."

"That could really come in handy once we're out of school!"

"That's what I was thinking as well. Enjoy!"

"Thanks."

Of course she also handed out a bunch of *Wards* and told everyone how to use them.

"Prepackaged Susan magic," said Arthur, looking one over. "Amazing. You say they won't wear out?"

"As long as the symbol on the paper is intact, the spell says nothing about any other duration." *Unless I die, of course, then they'll all go poof, but that's a depressing thought they don't need to have. Especially not today.* "And I tried to make spells you can't easily do, like shape-shift and *Temporary Tool*, so hopefully they come in handy."

And Christmas went on. Harry had a nice visit with Sirius, Susan and Luna got together, and everyone had a pretty nice time off.

With everyone settling in after New Years, Susan got the summons for their next trip down memory lane with Albus.

"I don't get why he's stringing them out so much," complained Harry, sitting next to her in lunch. "It's not like they take all that long. Just show us what you're going to show us and be done with it."

"I know," replied Susan. "He can't be gone that much, and honestly his efforts to convince me Tom needs to be stopped haven't been all that interesting. I mean, sure, he came

from a broken home. Fine, so do lots of kids. And apart from some disappearances, that may not even be his fault, since he's been back nothing bad has really happened."

"They must be related though," suggested Hermione.

"Why? Maybe people disappear all the time. After all, without me around we wouldn't have tracked those fear creatures to their den. Maybe things like that have always dragged people off. It's just now we have the Voldi threat, so everyone wants to blame him for those happenings."

"You still don't think he's evil, then?" asked Ron.

"I think he might be dangerous, to me especially given what he said at the cave, but not evil. I haven't been convinced we should just nuke the area he's in from orbit, so we can be sure."

"Couldn't he have some kind of *Invulnerability* spell going?" asked Harry.

"Okay, even then we couldn't be sure. But you get the idea."

"We're at the point he's just come to school, so it's probably still going to be a session or two before we get to any real juicy stuff. How much trouble could he get into at school, after all?"

"The trouble is he operated in such secrecy, how will Headmaster Dumbledore know where to go to show you events later in his life?"

"Maybe that's part of what he's doing, tracking down places he went?"

"Maybe. It would explain why he's gone so much. Maybe he's dragging this out so much because of the few concrete pieces of evidence he has, and he wants to make sure they show him in the proper light."

"What, you think he's trying to bias you?" asked Hermione.

"I don't know," replied Susan, shaking her head. "But he hasn't told me everything, that's for sure. Not about the prophecy, or I think, about Voldi himself. How do I trust someone like that?"

"But because Voldi told you about it, you would trust him, is that what you're saying?"

"Not trust, no, he would have to do a lot of explaining his side of the story before I gave him even an inch. But the Headmaster talks like I should just send the *Silent Slayer* after the guy and be done with it. I won't, not until I'm sure. For all we know, after his death he saw the error of his ways and the reason there's been no activity is because there will be no activity. He just wants to do research and be left alone."

"I wouldn't count on it," said Ron.

"Hey, why do you think I'm making all those *Wards*, anyway?"

And so, that evening, Susan and Harry made their way to Albus' office, and stepped inside. There he was, looking quite excited.

"I hope you had a good Christmas," he said, after the traditional greetings were out of the way.

"Did a bit of traveling, saw some sights. Not bad," answered Susan, who had provided the means for everyone.

"Good, good. Let's get started right away. We have a few places to visit tonight. The first you will be familiar with, Susan, for we are going back to the very house where this all began. Then we shall see what secrets the walls of the castle reveal!"

Christmas is over, why does he look like a 5 year old about to opens presents?

Susan and the others stepped through to the Riddle house, and Albus gave her the time to look upon. They watched as Tom barged in on Morfin and talked with him, Susan translating for Albus. She then watched as Tom stunned Morfin and grabbed his wand, stalked out of the house and out of “frame” towards the house of his other relatives.

“Keep it going please,” said Albus, “But a bit accelerated, if you don’t mind.”

Susan sped up the playback and it wasn’t long before Tom returned, performed some magic on Morfin, dropped his wand, and stole his ring.

“Ah, the ring that would later hold a *Soul Shard*,” said Susan, taking a close look at it with the playback paused.

“What did he do with Morfin’s wand?” asked Harry.

“Went straight away and murdered everyone in the Riddle house. I will not ask you, with *Phase*, to go with me as we did to look upon the orphanage. I believe you can imagine the scene.”

“Yes, they didn’t have magic, so they must have been terrified,” said Susan sadly. “I guess there’s no getting around this one. He murdered in cold blood.”

“And not the first time, or the last,” said Albus.

“And of course so called wizard justice being what it was, they looked only at the wand without ever determining if it was actually Morfin’s hand that wielded it.”

“Yes. He did, after all, confess rather proudly to the murders.”

Susan rolled her eyes. “Right, because memory modification magic doesn’t exist- oh wait, it does. Once again our illustrious ministry totally drops the ball and lets the real murderer go free. You realize you’re building just as much a case against them as our buddy Tom here.”

“Perhaps a few of those frames with *Time Window* on it, sold to Aurors, might help to bring real justice to the world, as you so desperately seem to wish.”

“And you do not?”

“I didn’t say that. I am just, perhaps, a bit more inclined to believe they did the best they could with what information they had at the time.”

Susan laughed. “You will never convince me of that, Headmaster. Sorry. My magic can bring the past to light. Therefore your magic could do something similar, if anyone had bothered to research the method.”

“Perhaps. Let us return to the school, then.”

They were walking down the halls to the next place Albus wanted to show them when Susan stopped.

“Wait a second. Something doesn’t add up here!”

“Yes?” asked Albus.

“Magic was done by someone underage. Why didn’t that trip the alarms at the ministry? Don’t tell me that wasn’t around either, from what I’ve heard that spell has been going for hundreds of years!”

“Quite possibly it did. The Aurors arrived soon after that to see what was going on.”

“Where they found a wizard too old to have tripped the alarms. That didn’t cause a single person working at the ministry to say, ‘wait a minute, who tripped the alarm then?’ Seriously? I don’t know how that system works but they had the magic performed at Morfin’s place, then a separate casting up at the Riddle house. Did they think Morfin somehow became underage, did a bunch of magic in his own house, then went nuts and killed some people elsewhere, came back home, did even *more magic* on himself, and got older again? What would be the point of that? To

get caught? Does this alarm start working again if someone un-ages themselves? I know there's an age potion, the twins tried it. Stands to reason there's a youth potion as well." *Or not? Because there are old wizards, like this guy. I know the twins bragged about a potion to make them older, is there no opposite to that?*

"Uh..."

Okay, maybe not. I suppose it would be useful and hence, wanded wizards never thought of it. "Plus the ministry was right there when Harry and I fought those Dementors, even though Harry doesn't trip their precious alarms because of the item I made him. That suggests to me that they get a record of who it was and what spell was cast at the time. They couldn't produce that evidence against Harry, because it didn't exist, but you asked for it, I heard you." Albus seemed to be in some sort of inner conflict, as Susan stared, arms folded, in triumph. "I mean, even if, by some bizarre coincidence they believed Morfin had an underage 'guest' at his house for the duration, they never looked into who it was? That could be, I don't know, a witness to murders? Or someone underage who put him under the *Imperius* Curse to perform them? It makes sense someone under *Imperius* could further cast *Imperio* and gave them orders, yes?"

"Probably," said Albus distractedly, still thinking it over.

The two waited.

"I don't know," he said at last. "What you say makes sense. There does seem to be some evidence of a cover-up or conspiracy. I know he couldn't have been bribing anyone, he didn't have the gold for anything like that. But at the same time, what you say makes perfect sense. They would have been blind not to see it."

"As long as we've cleared that up."

Albus looked troubled the rest of the evening as Susan and Harry reviewed incidents around the castle pertaining to Tom. Like his betrayal of Rubeus, and bullying his gang did of others.

"Seriously, this is the worst you can show us?" asked Susan. "Harry's father did as much, and everyone talks about how great he was."

"To tell the truth I have been stalling a bit, but it's late enough, he should be away from his office. Come along." Albus led them to the office of Professor Slughorn, and the door opened at his touch. He began to look excited again. "This is the most critical event, I believe, and after you watch it I will explain a few things. In your *Dimension*, if you don't mind, Susan."

"I don't mind."

"Excellent. Please let us watch this time..."

And so they did. Standing in the office of a master of potions, Tom wondered aloud what would happen if one were to split a soul into seven pieces.

"Kill? You have to kill someone to make one of these so called *Horcruxes*?" Susan asked, horrified, after past Tom had left the room. He shushed her, then had her open her *Personal Dimension* so they could be sure they were not overheard.

"It's faster than me casting a variety of spells to prevent listening in," he explained. "To answer your question, I'm afraid so," said Albus sadly. "I can hardly believe even he could take it that far. I had my suspicions after we found two, but seven is staggering."

"So, wait, that means we still have..." Harry started counting on his fingers. "Four *Soul Shards* to find and destroy?"

"You've only destroyed two, though, unless you have been finding them and not informing me," said Albus.

“If there’s seven, one was in the ring, right? And one was in the book? One must have possessed the baby and was used for the resurrection ritual. That leaves four.”

“But wouldn’t there have been another piece in Voldemort when he came to kill you, Harry? He made seven *Horcruxes* but his body would still need an eighth piece of soul.”

“That piece would have left his body when he died.”

“Well, we can hope, I guess.”

“This is what you really wanted to show me all along, isn’t it?” asked Susan. “You knew exactly how I would react to someone using magic in this way. Because of what my magic means to me, as the memory of my father’s world!”

“I had a fair idea, yes.”

“So he’s killed and killed, all to safely stash pieces of his soul away, in case his body is destroyed. The object takes someone over, drains their life energy, and he comes back. Or a faithful servant performs a ritual. I guess he is evil, after all.”

“I’m glad this has expunged your doubt.”

“Why not just show me this first? Why all the running around? And you invited that Slughorn guy *back here*?”

“It’s not his fault. I believe Tom had already made his first *Horcrux* when he asked about them. He simply wanted to get an idea about what would happen if he tried the process again, to make further *Soul Shards* as we call them.”

“That aside, why is he back here?” asked Harry.

“We needed someone to teach Potions class while professor Snape taught Defense. He is the best.”

Susan started pacing. “This is bad. We’ll never find them if he was smart about the whole thing. I mean the ring and the locket and the dairy I can accept. Those are all things meant to be worn or used, giving him ample time to corrupt whoever had them. But if he was smart, his last two were something either way too big to destroy or totally impossible to find. Like a tree in the middle of the forest someplace, or the Golden Gate Bridge. Or just a random stone dropped in a stream someplace. They wouldn’t be able to take someone over, no, but they would keep him around and allow them to be implanted for the resurrection ritual.”

“Now now, I don’t think it’s all that bad. Remember his tendency to collect trophies and objects with meaning? I think he chose objects like that to hold his soul. That’s why I showed you his early life, so you could see how he thinks, and maybe anticipate him.”

“Great, so it narrows from infinity objects to a lesser infinity of objects. At least I can probably pick them up with *Magic Sense* if I get close enough.”

“You can?”

“Maybe. The locket had some weird spell like thing attached to it, but I can’t prove it’s a *Soul Shard*.”

“I see. Perhaps it should be retrieved and tests performed to tell one way or the other?”

“Yes, I can see that. Is that why he didn’t look human anymore, when he was resurrected? Because most of his soul was gone?”

“That would be my guess, yes.”

“Unbelievable. It really is. Obviously magic can make a person immortal, my magic can do it. Why not just find out that way rather than murdering people?”

“Because of who he is. He wants the world to fear him, to know that he is superior to them in every way. Why do you think he took your blood rather than Harry’s? To gain more

power, of course, and by extension become more superior. You want the same thing, don't you? That's why you talk of opening a shop to sell things we wizards can't make for ourselves."

"Helping people and killing them seem to be at opposite ends of the superiority continuum," Susan said testily.

"I agree. And as long as you continue to only help them, and not kill them, even when you are given the chance to, all will be well. You have seen what giving into the lust for power does to someone."

Of course he would know about that, I wonder if those guys ever made it to shore...

"Believe me, my magic is powerful enough, I don't need more. Especially not if I have to kill to get it."

"I hope that sentiment remains with you your entire life."

"In any case, our path is clear," said Harry. "We have to find those other objects and destroy them before Voldi finishes his magical research and decides to take over. Or finds out two are already destroyed, and he goes and hides the others."

"Yes. Sadly I have not yet found many hints of other hiding locations, but perhaps if we do have another *Horcrux* in reach we can use it to devise a method of tracking the others."

"I'll look into it."

"Fine. Let me know what you find out."

"I will."

And so Susan went up to bed, thoughts ablaze with what she had learned. *He stood there in front of me, or at least some kind of Avatar did, and I didn't even imagine how much of a monster he was. He's killed all right, even if he was framed for murdering Harry's parents, which I doubt at this point, he's killed others to make his Soul Shards. I won't call them Horcrux because that's just a stupid name. Names should describe things, not further obfuscate them. Killing to become immortal, even with the entirety of magic to look for other answers. I should have finished you when I had the chance.*

The next day, Susan, Sparkle and Erik were standing outside of Erik's house, and Susan was going to try and find out why her drug habit started in the first place. She wondered if she should go in with some defensive spells going.

"How exactly is your mother going to react when she sees me, do you think?" asked Susan.

"She's anxious to meet you, I don't think it'll be a problem," replied Erik.

"Okay."

They went in, and the house seemed a bit different as Susan looked around. It both looked and smelled cleaner.

"Oh," said Erik's mother emerging from the kitchen. "You're here. You must be Susan."

"I must be, no one else wanted the part," she joked, shaking the woman's hand.

"Right. I'm Julie, it's nice to meet you. I guess I have you to thank for getting me off 'M'? Come and sit down."

"Thank you. And if anyone got you off 'M' it's you, not me. I'm sure it couldn't have been pleasant."

They sat down in the living room.

"No, it wasn't. I can still feel the need pulling at me. I doubt it will ever go away."

"Probably not."

"That's why I've been cleaning. Trying to take my mind off it. It's not really working."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"It's nice of you to say." There was a moment of silence. "So, I hear you busted up the entire drug ring, just because Erik here asked you to?"

"It was the only short term solution I could think of. It just sort of happened."

"Just sort of happened?" Julie repeated. "Who are you?"

"I'm Susan Felton, I thought you knew that? This is Sparkle."

Sparkle raised a paw in greeting.

"No," she laughed, "I mean, who are you that you can make the breaking up a drug gang just sort of happen?"

"Believe me, it's better if you don't know. Anyway, I'm here to help you further, if I can."

"Can you get rid of the craving?"

"Not currently, no. I could research something if it becomes a problem. I made an item to keep a werewolf from changing in the moon time, I could make something similar to block craving for a drug. I think."

"Why did you do it, mom? Why did you start taking drugs?" Erik demanded.

"Oh honey, I'm so sorry you had to see me like that. I just needed something, and no one seemed to be able to do anything."

Here we go, the sob story that leads her to becoming addicted to 'M' and driving out her husband.

"It started more than a year ago," she explained. "I started having these really intense nightmares every night."

Wait, what?

“Nightmares?” asked Erik.

Julie nodded. “Several a night, and most of the time after one I would wake up screaming.”

“That’s what that was? I thought you and dad were fighting or something!”

“No, it was just me trying to get away from my dreams. Of course after the first couple of nights they went away, but then they came back. It was a cycle and I just couldn’t break out of it.” She looked over at Susan. “You have to believe me, I tried everything. We went to the healers and they did magic on me, and we did a sleep study and everything. But we never found anything. Then a few months ago they started getting more frequent. That’s when your father left.”

“I thought he left because of the drugs.”

“No, that came later. He left because I was getting so sleep deprived I couldn’t focus on work, or doing stuff around the house. He couldn’t handle it.”

“And he left you when you needed him most?” asked Susan, shocked.

“He was never the type to put too much effort into things,” she explained. “And with me getting worse, he decided I wasn’t worth it.”

“Jerk.”

Julie smiled.

“But if you were waking up all the time screaming, why didn’t I hear it?”

She shook her head sadly. “We put a quieting charm around my bedroom.”

“Oh. So when you started acting funny and I thought it was drugs, it was just because you weren’t getting the sleep you needed?”

“That’s right. I was starting to hallucinate *awake* and thought maybe I should leave you and go back to the hospital before I hurt you by accident. That’s when the man came, claiming he had heard about my problem and had something to help.”

“Let me guess, that man came bearing ‘M’ right?”

“Yeah. He said I could use it to guide my dreams, maybe fight off the monsters that were inside my head. I was desperate, you have to believe me.” She looked back and forth between the two.

I should have put my truth spell on before I came in here, but she seems sincere.

“I’ll accept for the moment you were ready to try anything. Did it work?”

“That’s the thing, in the beginning, it did. I thought maybe that would be the end of it- at the start of the cycle I could take ‘M’ and guide my dreams away from the nightmare things I was seeing. Then... it started to get even worse.”

“How so?”

“I couldn’t wake up as easily. Or the imagery became much darker and horrible. It was almost as if the ‘M’ was now making the nightmares worse, and I couldn’t guide my way out of them. I wanted to get off the stuff, but by then I couldn’t stop taking it. When I tried it was all I could think about. I didn’t know what to do, who to turn to. That’s how you found me.”

“Well, that, uh, isn’t exactly what I expected to hear,” said Susan. “What about now, are you still having the nightmares?”

Julie nodded. “When I was in the hospital, recovering, hardly any. But now that I’m back home I had them all last night. That’s why I’m such a wreck, it seems it’s going to start all over again.”

“It’s going to be okay, mom,” said Erik, going over to hug her.

“I hope so, baby. I hope so. I’m sorry I’ve put you thought this. It was supposed to be a grown up problem but it turned out to be a lot bigger than I thought.”

“Can you help?” asked Erik, pulling away from his mother.

“We can’t ask more of her-” Julie started.

Susan put up a hand. “I’ll be glad to. We need to get to the bottom of this in case others are going through something similar.” She leaned forward. “This so called savior that showed up, I’d love to know what his angle was, and how he really found out. That aside, let’s consider the options, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Option one: Could you be some kind of prophet or oracle? Do the dreams have a common theme about the future?”

“No, just me getting torn apart by wolves, or, uh, ravaged by demonic forms or the like. Disturbing stuff, but I wouldn’t say it dealt with the future. Why? Do you think the stuff of nightmares is coming in the future?”

“Uh, that’s classified.” Susan hastened on. “Option two: Could it be some kind of curse? Do you have any enemies that you know of? Someone powerful enough to cast some kind of curse spell that would do this? Did you sleep with someone’s husband or something, and they’re taking revenge by taking your sleep?”

“No! Nothing like that!”

“I have to ask. You’re sure?”

“Yes.”

“Okay. Lying to me only hurts yourself, so I hope you’re being honest. Could it be the location? I’ll be right back.”

Susan knocked on the doors of all Julie’s neighbors and asked if anyone was experiencing the same symptoms. No one was, though they were a bit shocked to hear someone as young as Susan was helping her out. She went back.

“Nope, no one admits to having the kind of nightmares you had. So that’s out. Wait, no, if it was the location then it would be happening to everyone in the house, not just you.”

“I don’t know if it helps, but I did seem to have more bad dreams than usual growing up. My parents said I would grow out of it but I never seemed to. Nothing this bad ever happened though.”

“Dreams, dreams... I’m sure my mother mentioned something about my father running into a world threatened by dreams. But no, those dreams were coming true or something? Or while dreaming they could manipulate reality? That must be something different.”

“What?” asked Erik.

“Oh, nothing, just talking to myself. What else could it be? Think! No suggestion is too outlandish at this point.”

“Maybe something in purgatory?” asked Sparkle.

Julie jumped off the couch. “I’m hallucinating already!”

“It’s okay mom, her cat can talk.”

“And she loves surprising people with it, doesn’t she?” asked Susan, looking at Sparkle.

“Not quite as much as you, opening *teleportals* and such where people can see. I just can’t help people seeing me as just a cat and being surprised when I’m not.”

“Come on, let’s go see what we can see. I’ll be back in another minute.”

Susan picked Sparkle up, and they *Dimension Stepped* down to Purgatory, but saw nothing out of the ordinary.

“Dingy, poorly lit, nothing really stands out. Looks normal,” said Sparkle.

“Dang. This is going to be tough.”

“Looks that way.”

They popped back in.

“Who are you?” asked Julie again, watching them appear out of nowhere.

“Maybe the only people that can solve this mystery once and for all,” answered Susan. “I’m getting serious now. What else have we got?” Everyone thought for a moment. “Come on, there must be something. Maybe it’s like Neville, and not magical at all? *Research*.” A book dropped into Susan’s hands and she started paging through, making a... “Wait a minute, do I even have the *research* skill?” Her character sheet appeared and she looked it over. “I do not! *Augment Skill: Research!*”

“You are doing magic somehow!” said Julie. “But where’s your wand?”

“I’ll explain later, mom,” said Erik. “Let her work. Her magic is different than ours, that’s why I asked her to help. It’s no big deal, everyone at school knows she’s done all kinds of crazy things.”

“Including some I wish they didn’t,” Susan muttered.

Susan looked through the book, reading about PTSD and the physical causes of bad dreams in adulthood. But nothing she suggested seemed to fit. She tossed the book over her shoulder and it disappeared.

“I don’t know,” said Susan.

“But there must be something,” said Sparkle. “We wouldn’t be here otherwise.” *Our story wouldn’t include a situation with no solution.* “How would we get XP from something like that?”

“Good point. We’re missing something. I don’t know, let me check out the bedroom again.”

“Whatever you want,” said Julie, getting up.

Whatever I want in the bedroom? Tempting, but your son is here and I doubt he would approve. Nor would Luna, come to think of it.

Susan pushed that thought out of her head and looked around the bedroom. Not much changed from when she was first here, she nevertheless poked around.

“You say there’s a quieting charm on the walls?”

“Yes, it should still be there.”

“Turn it off. Along with any other charmed objects, or take them out of the room if you can. I want to see something.”

“Okay.” Julie pointed her wand around and had Erik take a few things out of the room.

“Great, thanks.”

Susan did a *Magic Sense* on the room and got a 14, three from her maximum. She beat the DIF by one, and went over to the bed. She passed her hand over it, looking sideways at the place her senses were telling her the spell was coming from. Her *Magic Theory* check, with her REAson being higher than her INSight, was a 16, and far from her maximum. However, she could tell the spell was some kind of enhancement and entrapment spell.

“Which makes no sense,” she said.

“What doesn’t?” asked Julie.

“There’s a spell in this room, centered around the bed here. Because our magics are different it’s tough for me to say exactly but it seems to be enhancing something, and it feels like it’s ready to pounce on something.”

“Well I certainly didn’t cast any spells like that!” said Julie. “And I’m sure my husband didn’t either.”

“Curious. Well, let’s see what shakes up with a quick peak into the past. I’m going to use a spell that reveals what happened in this room starting with before we showed up and working backwards. Let’s see if we can’t find out who put this spell here, or what it does.”

“Oh, uh, okay, I guess that’ll be fine?”

Susan remembered where she was.

“Uh, you weren’t, um, missing your husband at any point in the recent past, were you?”

“Maybe? With the drugs and not being able to sleep well I very well could have, uh, you know?”

“Erik, you might want to sit this one out.”

“Why?” The two women looked at him. “Okay, ok- Oh mom!”

“What?”

“Ugh!” He left.

“It’s perfectly natural!” said Julie.

“Preaching to the choir, lady,” said Susan quietly, and began to cast. She rewound time quickly during the day and more slowly at night, and suddenly there was a flash and she stopped it.

“Something happened!” said Julie, pointing to her sleeping self.

“Let’s see what...” They watched as Julie thrashed around, obviously having a nightmare, when suddenly there was a flash and a glowing net, not unlike the magical circles that appeared when Susan did magic, appeared. It closed over something in the room, which started to struggle against the glowing stands. Susan’s blood went cold.

It’s a trap. A trap for those fear creatures we encountered. The spell enhances the victim’s fear, which draws the creature. Then the net-

Her thoughts were cut short as a magical circle appeared in the room, and a hole opened into darkness. If her blood was cold before, now it was ice.

A masked man stepped through the hole and looked around, then brandished a wand, causing the creature to float through. He then did something quite odd- he used his wand to rip the carpet up in a certain spot. He grabbed a piece of paper from a pocket, and changed it with a piece of paper under the carpet. That completed he mended the carpet, stepped through the hole again, and it vanished.

Susan ended the spell and collapsed heavily onto the bed.

“What did I just watch?” asked Julie. “Did some strange man just step into my *bedroom* while I was *asleep*? What was he doing there? What was that creature? What is going on?” She was shouting by that point.

Erik burst into the room, seeing that there was no danger. “What was it, mom? What happened?”

“I’ve tangled with those creatures before,” Susan said in a numb voice. “There was a nest of them, and they took some kids hostage. If that’s even the right word, as they didn’t seem to demand anything for their release. They seemed to feed off of fear, they changed shape to try and bring a fear response from the kids. Your nightmares must have drawn them.”

“What about that man?”

Susan shook her head. “I don’t know, exactly. But if I wanted to do magical research on those creatures, I would need bait. That’s what you are. Bait. The spell makes you have bad dreams, and the net catches the creatures when they show up. That net though- can you tear the carpet up like he did?”

Julie nodded and used a cutting charm, and Susan grabbed the *Ward* out from under it.

“Oh, you’ve gone too far this time,” she remarked, looking at it.

“Who has?”

“There’s only two people in the world that can use the type of magic you just saw that opened that hole, and make prepackaged spells like this.” She held up the paper. “There’s me... and there’s Voldemort.”

Julie backed away, hitting the wall behind her. “You mean that, that, that man was... He Who-”

“No, that was probably just a flunky. He wouldn’t waste time opening *Teleportals* for people. And I thought he was just laying low. I’ve been a fool.”

“Wait, slow down,” said Erik. “What’s my mother have to do with him?”

“Somehow, Voldemort found out about the fear creatures. He must either want an army of them, or just to study them. But he needed a way to catch them, right? So he found people that regularly have nightmares and then made sure they had even more, and more terrifying ones, at that. I bet if we kept rewinding this, it would show you attracting more of those things. That’s how they seem to operate, they are drawn to fear. Now is he also connected to the ‘M’ ring? I don’t know, but it seems likely. There must be some kind of alarm that goes off if one is caught, and a flunky comes to pick it up and deliver it. That’s what’s going on here.”

“So what do we do?”

“I don’t know. I would love to jump through that portal when they come collecting, but given the nature of what’s going on here, I don’t think we have that luxury. The luxury of time, that is. We need to shut down this trap so you stop having nightmares and can get a good night’s sleep.”

“I could go without sleep a few more days.”

“No, sleep is vital. You should know that better than anyone.”

“Couldn’t I just sleep someplace else?”

“Sure, for a while. If you’re a reliable bait though, they’ll figure it out sooner or later and just move the trap.”

“So I should sleep in a different place every night?”

“You could. However, I could lock magic away from this room, forever, so they couldn’t set the trap here anymore. Then you could just stay here. Of course that would tip my hand, but maybe he doesn’t care if I know or not? I don’t know.”

“You can’t just catch them or something?” asked Erik. “You’re powerful, right?”

Susan frowned. “I wish it were that simple. There’s something that’s not generally known about his return. We’ve covered it up. As you’re in the middle of this, I’ll tell you. But you can’t tell anyone, and I’ll have your word on that before I say more.”

“Oh, okay?”

“As a wizard. If you tell anyone and I find out, I will take your magic away. Don’t think I won’t. I can, I’ve done it several times already, it’s the same spell I want to use on the room. I just cast it at a person and that’s it for their magic- *permanently*.”

“Okay, okay! I get it. I won’t tell anyone.”

“He stole my magic to come back. Anything I can do, he can do, too.”

“Oh no!” Erik looked horrified.

“Yup. Why do you think we still hold meetings for dueling practice? Because when he comes, it’s not going to be pretty.”

“I’m coming to those meetings from now on.”

“Good.”

“Wait, not only is you know who back, from the dead, he can do two different types of magic?” asked Julie.

“I’m afraid so. That’s why we haven’t let that get out, it could cause a real panic. We’re working on it, Harry and Headmaster Dumbledore and myself. Don’t worry.”

“Oh, Harry Potter as well? That makes me feel a little better.”

I could go for feeling a little better right now. No such luck though.

“So, what do you want to do?”

“Will it stop people coming into my bedroom at night?”

“The bedroom directly? Yes. Other parts of the house? Not so much. But you could put some kind of charm up at night to warn of intruders, right?”

“Yes, that’s possible.”

“There you are then. If they try to get in and fail, then try to come into a different part of the house, they’ll get caught. Personally I think that will be the end of it.”

“How so?”

“Like I said, some Death Eater has been assigned this pick up job. If they found out this place was off limits, they might not report it to their boss. That would be a failure on their part, and I doubt Voldi takes kindly to that sort of thing.”

“All right. Do it.”

“Great, everybody out.”

Susan stood in the doorway and cast *Destroy Magic* into the room, and was satisfied when no other spells could be cast inside.

“It’s done. Anyone in this room becomes non-magical. Any magical items will stop working, and no magical forms of transport in or out will function. I hope it’s enough.”

“I guess we’ll know in a few days if the nightmares stop or not.”

“Send me an owl at the school if they don’t. But I’m pretty sure they will.”

“Thank you. Now it comes down to me, and finding things to distract me from craving ‘M.’”

“Try combat magic. Like I said, you might need it, and sooner rather than later.”

“Yeah, maybe you’re right. Especially if someone does show up here to see why those creatures have stopped being captured. Okay. I mean it though, thanks. You did all this for basically strangers, how can I ever repay you?”

“Don’t ever touch ‘M’ again. That’ll be enough for me.”

And so, Susan, Sparkle and Erik stepped back through to the castle.

“Like she said, thanks,” said Erik.

“Don’t mention it. Helping people reminds me why I don’t just go kill Voldi and take his place.”

Erik stared at her. “I seriously hope you’re joking.”

“No, really. We’re quite similar, as has been recently pointed out to me. We both don’t like the way the ministry runs things. At school we were both powerful magic users. We both want to learn and advance our art. It’s just he took a darker path than I hope ever to even see.”

“Oh. Well, if there’s anything I can ever do...”

She grinned. “Make me a smoothy.”

“A what?”

Her smile went away again. “Never mind. Get out of here, kid. And keep standing up for what’s right.”

“You got it.”

Susan went to bed that night both troubled and a bit happy. *Hopefully no nightmares for Julie tonight. I did some good. But I found out something horrible. He really wants to crush all opposition when he strikes, doesn’t he? It’s not going to be pretty.*

Lock-it Up

Time: The next day, breakfast

Place: Main Hall

“He seriously killed people to become immortal?” squeaked Hermione, spilling her juice all over herself. Ron also looked stunned, and Luna just looked sad. Susan had brought them into the *Dimension* with some food, so they could eat and talk in private.

Susan nodded gravely.

“I thought it was just a spell, maybe someone else cast it on you, that put a piece of your soul into an object. To think that many people died so he could make backups of himself.”

“I know. But that’s what happened in the past. I’m more worried about what he’s planning now, in the present. Trapping those fear creatures can’t be good.”

“Your soldiers took them out easily enough, didn’t they?”

“Sure, we had them outnumbered. What if he’s breeding them or something? Making them smarter, or better fighters? A thousand of those things attack the school and we’re in a lot of trouble.”

“I think we’re already in trouble. How do we know Voldi hasn’t shared the secret of immortality with others?”

“No, remember what the version in the ring said- That only he deserved to be immortal?”

“Oh yeah. So what are we going to do?”

“I’ll track down that locket and see what I can learn from it. Hopefully my book or I can come up with a spell to help track the others.”

“Why wouldn’t the book be able to do it?” asked Harry.

“The book is a fantastic resource, no doubt about that. And asking it to make a better *Create Foodstuff* would be no problem for it. Even this *Personal Dimension* was just a better *Pocket Dimension* after all. I’m going to have to study this object and come up with something myself. I don’t think the book would be able to handle such a complex request.”

“Wait, didn’t you say part of your father’s soul was in the book? That’s why it can do what it does, right?” asked Luna.

“That’s what my mother said. It might be a simplification though, I don’t know. Why?”

“I just wondered, you don’t think he killed anyone, do you?”

“What? No!” Susan was shocked. “He was a hero! And remember, he visited other worlds where they had weird powers and stuff. I’m sure he knew someone who could help him do what he wanted and just called in the favor.”

“I hope you’re right.”

“Of course I am,” said Susan, with only the smallest sliver of doubt. “My magic is different than yours, remember?”

“I think we can probably say with certainty he did something special to make the book,” said Hermione, “And if he didn’t, what’s done is done. We need to figure out more about those fear creatures, and what to do if they do attack the castle.”

“Hermione, would you mind going with Luna and Ron to the place it’s being held and see what they’ve discovered about it? You guys know what wanded wizards are capable of doing, so you’re the better choice to develop that battle strategy.”

“We can do that, over the weekend.”

Luna and Ron nodded, it was okay with them.

“Great. I’ll get permission... from someone, as the Headmaster probably is gone again by now. Meanwhile Harry, Sparkle, and I will track down the locket.”

“Sounds like a plan,” said Sparkle. “Wake me when you find it.”

Susan glared at her.

“Joking!”

“You want to leave the school again?” Minerva asked the Core, that afternoon in her office.

“Yes,” said Susan simply. “We have a lead on a *Soul Shard* and we need to follow up on it. And the others need to get intel on the fear creatures in case a large number of them attack.”

“What in the name of Merlin is a *Soul Shard* and why does it seem to have a different pronunciation than I would expect?”

“A different what? They’re what kept Voldi alive after he tried to kill Harry,” said Susan, mystified. “You must know that- he wouldn’t have gone off without... telling...”

Wait, maybe he did, and this isn’t Professor McGonagall. I guess I’m going to have to test her.

“The Headmaster has not shared the purpose of his absence from this school,” said Minerva with a sniff. “And I trusted him enough to not press the issue. Are you saying he placed his soul into an object?”

Susan shook out her bracelet and touched a charm. “*Immunity*,” she said. “Before we answer that, could I ask you to very, very slowly get your wand out and place it on the desk?”

“What?!” Minerva seemed shocked at the very idea.

“Do it, or I will be forced to take you down right now.”

“Young lady-”

“NOW!”

“Very well, I can see it’s important to you for some reason.” She reached into her robes.

“Slowly!”

“Yes, yes. What is this all about?”

The others looked shocked, but their wands were instantly in their hands.

“Yeah, what’s going on, Susan?” asked Harry.

“Get the wand,” she replied. “I’ll explain in a second.”

Luna picked the wand up off the desk, and Susan was pleased to see the others spread out around Minerva without being told.

“I’m just going to cast *Magic Immunity* on you, Professor, just to make sure you are not under some kind of spell. And to make sure you are who you say you are.”

“Honestly!”

“Yes, honestly. No sudden moves now, this won’t hurt a bit.”

Susan took the extra time and put in a bit of energy, casting *Magic Immunity*. The magic shimmered around Minerva and she stood there as she had.

Susan breathed a sigh of relief. “Okay, you can have your wand back. Sorry about that, but I had to know.”

“Thank you,” she said, taking the wand back from Luna and stowing it in her robes again. “Now may I ask what this is all about?”

“Of course. I now have to wonder if the Headmaster is the Headmaster.”

“You’re doubting him now? This gets better and better!”

“Think about it. He doesn’t tell *you* where he’s going? What he’s doing? And he’s had months to track down *Shards* but so far nothing? What if he isn’t actually doing that? What if he’s been taken over and told to actually work against us?”

“I highly doubt that’s possible. This is Albus Dumbledore we’re talking about here.”

“Maybe. It still bothers me his attitude towards secrecy. I would like to be sure.”

“What do you propose?”

“That’s easy enough. I’ll *Telesummon* him, that’ll prove he’s not someone else running around looking like him with Polyjuice. Then I’ll hit him with the same thing I did you, *Immunity*, and make sure he’s not under the *Imperius Curse*.”

“I doubt he’ll be pleased to be whisked back to the castle against his will.”

“Too bad. He should have been more forthcoming to his *allies in battle* so we were all on the same page.”

“Sadly, him not telling me is more in character than if he had.”

“You’re joking.”

“Hardly ever, Miss Felton.”

Well, he didn’t tell me about the prophesy, now did he? What in the world is going on in his head?

Susan shook her head. “Right. Okay, give me a minute.”

Susan took some time and energy making a *Ward* with *Magic Immunity* so she could hit him with it instantly, and then went to cast *Descry Creature* from writings.

“Actually, may I propose waiting?” asked Minerva. “I do know for a fact he still sleeps here every night. He gets in late, but if you brought him here while he was sleeping-”

“He would have to wait 2d10 segments before he could act! Brilliant, Professor! That would give us more time to hit him with the *Ward*.”

“I’m not sure what you said just then, but I think you’re agreeing with me?”

“Yup. We might even be able to get him here without a wand, I doubt he sleeps holding it. Okay, we’ll hold off for now.”

“Fine. So can you tell me what this is all about?”

So Susan and the others explained about what they had learned about Tom and his becoming Voldemort, and Minerva got more and more pale as the story went on.

“And he’s been showing you this stuff? You’re just kids!”

“Really? You’re going to hit us with the old ‘you’re just kids’ routine?”

“I’m sorry, but you are.”

“Maybe. But I haven’t told you everything, nor will I. We know some things even the Headmaster has not seen fit to tell us, so personally his attitude puzzles me even more, now. Maybe he has his reasons, or maybe he’s secretly working for Voldi without being influenced by magic. He just went plain old dark side for some reason. It could happen. As far as you’re concerned, you’re just going to have to trust us. If he can’t take care of Voldi, one way or the other, we will. After all, he didn’t the first time, did he?”

Minerva stared hard at them, and their resolve shone through on their faces.

She sighed. “Very well. This weekend you may leave the school and go about your various tasks. But I want you to leave from my office, and come back here so I know you’re all right.”

“Thank you,” said Susan with a smile. The others were also grinning.

“I just hope I don’t come to regret it.”

That night, Susan did exactly as she had described, both *Telesummoning* the Headmaster, and casting *Immunity* on him. It proved fruitless, and she then had to explain to Albus what he was doing in the classroom he found himself in. He accepted the explanation but seemed of two minds about it, that they didn't trust him not to be acting under the influence of a curse.

"I certainly don't know you well enough to predict your behavior," protested Susan. "And you leave the school for hours at a time every day, without telling anyone what you're doing. So I had to be sure you were still on our side, and this was the quickest way."

"I see your point. If you are satisfied then..."

"Yes. Sorry about that. Good night."

That Saturday couldn't come fast enough for Susan, who was afraid that, at any minute, hundreds of those fear creatures would pour over the school. However, nothing happened and they all went down to Minerva's office in the morning. Susan opened a *Teleportal* for the others, and then one for herself back home. She stepped through with Harry and Sparkle.

"Gee, I should go say hello to my relatives. I bet they would be really, really, really pleased to see me!" said Harry.

"Yeah, you do that."

"No thanks."

"That's what I thought."

"Anyway, what are we doing back here?"

"The Internet, duh. I need the map if I'm going to see where this locket is."

"Oh, right."

So Susan did a *Descry Object* on the locket and sat trying to map out the location.

"It's weird," she said. "The result puts it back in the neighborhood of Sirius' house."

"Really?" asked Harry.

"Yeah. I suppose the town dump could be nearby. Why don't we just pop in to see Sirius and go from there?"

"Suits me."

So they stepped through to see Sirius, who was delighted to see them so soon, and they explained what they were looking for.

"An old locket you found in the house and threw away in the big cleaning? Wasn't most of that stuff just incinerated?"

"Probably," said Harry. "I don't know exactly what the order did with it. But Susan's magic tells her it's nearby."

"Don't let me disturb you, then."

And, of course, Susan discovered the locket was still in the house, and went down to see Kreacher in his "lair."

"And what do the mudbloods and the traitors and the girl with the strange magic want from Kreacher?" he asked.

"The locket," demanded Sirius. "We know it's here."

"It belongs to Kreacher!" he protested.

"Belongs? Nothing belongs to you, especially if you steal it."

“Wait, Mr. Black, let him speak,” said Susan.

“You can call me Sirius, you know?”

“Are you serious?”

“You know I’m- you’ve been itching to make that joke haven’t you?”

Susan nodded.

“Very well, why do you think the locket is yours, Kreacher?”

Kreacher looked like he was struggling with himself.

“Tell me! I order it!”

“You could be a little nicer,” said Susan.

“Regulus gave his life that it might be destroyed,” Kreacher said in a rush. “Kreacher must follow his orders, even though Kreacher has not yet been able to destroy the locket.”

“What?” Sirius, Harry, and Susan said at once.

“You’re telling me the truth?” demanded Sirius, grabbing Kreacher and shaking him.

“You filthy elf, if you’re lying to me-”

“Stop it!” said Susan. “Put him down. What’s this all about?”

Sirius dropped Kreacher, who stumbled and skittered away from Sirius. “I thought he was just killed by Death Eaters or something. What’s this all about, anyway?”

Susan looked around. “I suppose this house is nearly as secure as my *Dimension*.”

“We might as well tell him,” said Harry.

“Basically,” said Susan, “Voldemort was able to live on because he stuck parts of his soul into objects. One of those objects is that locket. At least, we think.”

“That is what Regulus told Kreacher!” said Kreacher, pounding his fists on the floor.

“And it must be true, for the locket cannot be destroyed, no matter what Kreacher does to follow his orders!”

“Bring it out, then,” demanded Sirius. “Let’s have a look at it.”

Kreacher seemed to be desperately trying to follow this order and not follow it.

Wait, I’ve seen something like this before.

“Kreacher, wait, did Regulus give you other orders regarding the locket? To not show it to anyone, maybe?”

Kreacher said nothing.

“Answer her!” said Sirius.

“Yes!” croaked Kreacher.

“Your old master is dead,” said Susan sadly. “And you can’t follow his orders anyway, can you? You can’t destroy it. But I can, Kreacher. I can destroy it for you!”

Kreacher stopped dead, looking up from the floor where he had been crawling towards his bed. “You are not lying to Kreacher, are you?”

Harry spoke up. “We’ve already destroyed two of them. This one will be no different.”

Kreacher pulled himself to a sitting position and looked at the floor.

“Go and-” Sirius started to say, but Susan put a hand on his arm.

“He’s trying to obey two different sets of orders, let him come to his own conclusions on how is best to do that.”

They waited.

Finally, Kreacher got up and went into his living area, and returned with the locket.

“Yeah, that’s it,” said Susan. “That’s the one we saw.”

“And my brother got this?” Sirius asked.

“Regulus and Kreacher went into the cave,” said Kreacher, softly and sadly. “It was Kreacher’s second time, for the dark lord had made Kreacher test the potion in the basin by drinking it. He left Kreacher there to die, but Kreacher did not. And so a second time Kreacher returned, this time with Regulus, to put a false locket in its place. To atone for his sins, he did not return.”

“I... never knew. Never imagined. So in the end, he died... nobly.”

Kreacher nodded, silent tears spilling down his face.

Susan considered, arms folded across her chest. “Kreacher, I know you want to see it destroyed, but I need to study it. Voldemort spoke of making seven such objects, don’t ask me how I know that, and we’ve already destroyed two. But we don’t know how to find the others. I want to make a spell, a spell that will attract the pieces of Voldemort’s soul or otherwise show where they are. Only when we have all of them, and destroy them, can Voldemort be killed once and for all. I will not demand you give me that locket. I will ask that you trust me with its destruction. And if you wish, I will make you a trade.”

“A trade?” Kreacher looked suspicious.

“Take me to this cave where Regulus died. I will get his locket out and give it to you in exchange for that one.”

Kreacher looked down at the locket in his hands. “Exchange?”

“I would like to see the place my brother died,” said Sirius. “I would be... very grateful to you, Kreacher, if you could take us there.”

“You- you would?”

“Yes. It seems I’ve misjudged my bother, and perhaps you as well. I would like to... hear what you know about the choices he made in his life.”

Kreacher blinked at him. “Kreacher will show you. But Kreacher cannot carry all of you at once.”

“I know,” said Susan. “Just take me. I’ll get the others there myself.”

“No tricks?”

“Upon my father’s name, Elysian Tarsisis, you have my word.”

Kreacher extended a hand. “Then come.”

Susan found herself in a dank, dark place, and put a *Light* spell in the air to guide her. She looked across a body of water but the light was not enough to illuminate the dark pedestal we know is there.

“Nice place. I’ll get the others here, then. *Teleportal*,” she cast, taking the extra time. She didn’t know how far away they were, after all.

The hole opened, and the others cautiously came though.

“Nice place,” remarked Harry, lit wand held high.

“Exactly my sentiment,” said Susan. “Where to now, Kreacher?”

He pointed. “The middle.”

Harry walked to the edge of the water and looked down. “Ugh, there’s bodies in the water!”

“Inferi, no doubt,” spat Sirius. “Better not touch the water, they may activate.”

“Zombies?” asked Susan.

“Undead, anyway. Why?”

“Good thing I have this always prepared,” she remarked, bringing out the new necklace that held *Undead Annihilation* currently. “You really can’t tell when it’ll come in handy. Now we fly!”

Susan put *Flight* on everyone and killed her own *Light*, not necessarily in that order, and they rose high above the water, heading towards where Kreacher said the locket was. They touched down on the small island, hardly big enough to hold them all, and looked at the basin.

“Now what?” asked Sirius.

“He stood here,” said Kreacher. “And gave Kreacher orders to make him drink until the locket could be taken.”

“What did it do to him?” asked Harry.

“Terrible visions, if the same as what happened to Kreacher. Then a powerful thirst overtook him, and he went to the water to drink.”

Sirius shuddered. “And they dragged him down, didn’t they?”

Kreacher nodded. “Kreacher did not want to leave his master, but Kreacher had his orders. Kreacher followed them.”

“I’m sure he died believing you could succeed,” said Susan sadly. “I’m sorry about your bother,” she said to Sirius.

“Thank you. I guess I’ve got to forgive him, becoming a Death Eater as he did. If only he had talked to me about this!”

“He probably felt you wouldn’t believe him, maybe even think it was a trap. He did a very brave thing,” said Harry, glancing around. “Now can we get on with it? This place gives me the creeps.”

“What do you think?” Sirius asked, looking the stone basin over. “It’s not fatal, Kreacher drank it. If you open a *Teleportal*, Susan, I bet I could drink it and you could shove me though, grab the locket, jump through yourself, and close it. I could get a drink at home.”

“No, we should each drink a cup full,” said Harry. “I won’t let you do it alone. What if the potion was changed since Kreacher was last here? Made more fatal?”

“Or we could just take the whole darn thing with us,” said Susan. “Did you forget I made you a *Windblade*?”

Recognition dawned on Harry’s face. “Oh yeah! *Windblade*,” he said, holding up his hand. A blade made of air appeared, and he brought it down in an arc, slicing through the stone at the base of the bowl.

At least, that’s what would happen if this were a visual medium, not more grounded in reality, and Harry were about 20% cooler. (or stronger)

He chopped into the stone all right, but only part way, and then brought the blade back up for another swing. A few more freed it, and the basin came loose from the column holding it up. It didn’t fall, as Susan and Sirius were carefully steadying it, and keeping out of the way of the blade. They lifted it off.

“Okay, let’s get this back to the house and we can figure out what to do next,” said Susan, handing it to Harry so she would have her hands free to gesture.

One *Teleportal* later, and the cave was again empty.

“So now what?” asked Harry, looking at the stone bowl they had brought back with them. Harry and Sirius had tried various things, to no avail. They had even tipped it over and tried to dump the liquid out, but that didn't help either. Susan took a look at her spell list mentally to see what she had. She tried *Sculpt* but apparently the substance wasn't exactly stone, or was enchanted against such manipulations.

“I could try *Destruction* on the basin,” suggested Sparkle.

“Hey, there's an idea!” encouraged Susan. “Just do it in the bathtub in case the potion gets everywhere.”

“Do we want that potion going down the drain, though?” asked Harry.

“Oh... Well, how about this?” Susan looked around in the kitchen, and not finding anything big enough, started looking through the cellar. She found an old cauldron that was big enough, and set the chunk of rock inside, open side down. “There, now we can collect it and see about getting rid of it properly.”

No one disagreed, so Sparkle took the extra time and cast “*Destruction!*” on the rock. There was a flash, and a splash, and the locket was seen falling into the now released potion again.

Which again covered it.

“Oh, come on!” said Susan, exasperated.

“Why not just cast that spell on the potion?” suggested Kreacher, still clutching the *Soul Shard* locket in one hand.

“Eh, it has to be an object, and a puddle of potion isn't exactly an object.” She picked up the cauldron and tried to slosh it around, but the potion didn't move any more at the bottom than it had in the stone basin.

“Wait a second,” said Harry. “Elves have different abilities than wizards, right? Is there something you know, Kreacher, that could help?”

“You would... like Kreacher's help?” he asked, suspiciously.

“Give it a shot,” said Sirius. “Nothing to lose now, right?”

Kreacher regarded the liquid in the pot, then put his free hand over it. He concentrated, and the potion flash froze into a solid. “Now it's an object,” he said.

“I guess it is,” Susan admitted.

Sparkle stepped up again, and the ice was blown away, leaving the locket intact.

“Why couldn't you freeze it like that?” Susan asked the wandless magic users.

“I tried,” said Sirius. “It must have been spelled against it. I don't understand how Kreacher was able to do it.”

“Because he didn't use magic,” said Harry. “We could have probably done the same, sticking it in a freezer. He just dragged the energy out of the system, causing the liquid to freeze. After all, even if a potion is spelled against magical freezing, leaving it out in the winter will still freeze it.”

“Oh.”

“And that, ladies and gentleman,” said Susan, reaching in for the locket, “is why you should learn physics along with your magic. Kreacher, as agreed, a locket for a locket.”

“Kreacher... thanks you,” he said, handing it over and taking the other.

“And now for you, my pretty,” Susan said, holding the soul container up. “What secrets do you hide?”

“It will be destroyed?” Kreacher asked, looking up at it.

“In due time, have no fear. If possible, I’ll let you wield the sword that does the deed. Would you like that?”

“Kreacher would find that acceptable.”

“Thanks for your help, by the way.”

Kreacher looked confused and shuffled out the room.

“I guess he’s not used to being thanked,” said Sirius.

“It’s no problem, I got what I wanted.”

“And without needing to leave the school for hours at a time, for months on end,” remarked Harry.

“Yeah, makes you wonder if the guy is even trying. Still, Team Susan 4, Team Snake Eyes, 3. And hopefully with this, soon to be zero. Come on, we better get back. Thanks for coming, Sirius.”

“No problem.”

“How are you doing, anyway?” asked Harry.

“Me? Fine! The Order is pretty busy. We have to investigate any sightings or odd happenings, in case they’re the other team making a move. Nothing major yet, but who knows when that will change?”

“There is something the Order will need to look into...” Susan explained about the fear creature that was trapped by Voldi and taken away.

“He’s harvesting those things? Why?”

“Study? Breeding? I have no idea. You might want the order to have some kind of support group for those having a lot of nightmares. Put an ad in the paper under the guise of a sleep study or something, and check their homes for charms that intensify bad dreams. Also with ‘M’ production halted, at least for now, more people might come forward to try and get off it. If their stories are similar to Julie’s, they need to be watched. I don’t know if I’ve tipped my hand with Julie, but we’ll probably get a few nights before someone comes to investigate why that trap isn’t producing anymore. We have to find them before something more serious happens.”

“Thanks for letting me know. I’ll tell the others and we’ll figure out the best way to proceed.”

“Good.”

“Hopefully soon the Order won’t be needed anymore and you can go back to a normal life,” said Harry. “Wouldn’t that be nice?”

“You think that locket is all it will take?”

“This, hours of study, some magical research and a dash of luck. Yeah, no problem,” said Susan, shoving it into her *Pocket Dimension*.

“Well, I wish you lots of luck. Though really you seem to make your own.”

“Everyone does,” said Susan with a wink. She opened a new *Teleportal* back to the school, and Sirius went to find Kreacher to talk about his brother.

With classwork, *Wards* to make, S.T.F.U training to oversee, and hanging out with Luna and the others, Susan didn't have too much time to study the locket, but she did when she could. Also she didn't want that *Soul Shard* out and about when others were around, *who knows what it could still do, even like that?* So she took no chances and only studied it while she was alone. Well, somewhat alone, anyway. Sparkle was told to keep an eye on her, just in case the *Soul Shard* made any moves to try taking her over. She didn't think it could, as both Quirinus and Ginny had *wanted* to interact with the soul. She wanted to destroy it, but who know what kind of interaction it would take to "wake up" the *Shard* and let it notice her?

"Any change in behavior, any weird magical feelings you have while I'm looking at it, no matter how small. Tell me and back into the *Pocket Dimension* it goes," Susan told her.

"You got it."

The other problem she ran into was never actually creating a spell on her own before. She wasn't sure where to start. After a few weeks of trying various things she came to the conclusion she would start simpler.

I'll research a grade 1 spell, and see if it matches up with what I have in the book. That'll let me know I'm on the right track. Then I can start working on higher grade spells and match them up. If I get it right a couple of times, I'll go for the big one, a spell I can't be sure will work. Because honestly, I'm not sure how best to use what I've got. Some kind of tracking spell, I guess? I'll have to think about it.

It was now February, and she had been asked to help secure the Great Hall for the Apparition practice. She had her *Legion* stationed around the hall with orders to "Stand and wait for further instructions. If someone appears and attacks others, attack them." She also had her dragon *Ally* and Sparkle's lion *Ally* prowling about. She herself was off in one corner, atop two tables that had been stacked up on top of each other. (She wanted a good view of the place)

"What's with all this?" asked Ron as he came in.

"The protections on this area have been disabled," she explained. "I'm here to make sure no one takes advantage of it."

"But couldn't you know who just open up a *Teleportal*, same as you, to any part of the castle? He wouldn't care about Apparition anymore, right?"

"Sure, but that's a weakness, as you can fire through it, and it's a choke point to moving lots of people. If you want surprise, they get themselves in, individually, and start firing."

"Oh, I get it."

"So keep your wand handy, okay? If anyone tries anything I'm counting on you and the others in S.T.F.U to protect those that aren't."

"Naturally," he said with a grin, and went to find a spot.

Susan repeated herself to Harry and Hermione, and finally it was time to begin.

The instructor explained about the three "Ds" for all of thirty seconds, and basically said "go to it."

*What, does every teacher in this place constantly fail their Teaching checks? That was the worst explanation of how to do something I've ever heard! Just think about it really hard? How is that magic, or instruction for that matter? My book of magic had entire chapters on each branch of magic, and how they differ. Like using *STrength* for Mars or *REFlexes* for Mercury,*

the ways the physical spells are cast differently from the mental ones, and the various ways the whole thing can go wrong. I make it look easy, yes, but you can bet I read and reread those chapters before putting points into the skills and started learning the spells. Three Ds indeed.

As they were told almost immediately to try and get into their hoops, they hastily tried it. Susan couldn't help herself, and busted out laughing when half the people there fell over, banging an open hand on the table and squeezing her eyes shut.

I should have brought popcorn, this is going to be great.

Several of the professors that were there glared at her. She shrugged.

On the forth try, there was a scream as a girl, Susan Bones, appeared in her hoop trying to keep her balance with only one leg. The other had been left behind, apparently, and the teachers sprang into action. Susan also jumped down and ran over there to make sure her magic wasn't needed. By the time Susan got there Susan was gripping her leg as though still surprised to find it there. She had a horrified look on her face.

The "instructor" dispassionately explained how this can sometimes occur with what Susan took to be a failed RESolve check of some kind. He then demonstrated the technique, and bade them try again. He started to count.

"Hold it," said Susan. "That was the extent of both your congratulatory praise and further refinement in your description of the technique? Well done. Let's hold up a minute here and examine what just happened, shall we?"

"And you are?" the man asked, looking down his nose at her.

"Being endlessly rude, as always," answered Severus dryly. "Not to mention butting in where she has no business being."

Susan glared at him and mimed breaking a wand and tossing the pieces away. She turned back to Susan.

"It's Susan, isn't it?" asked Susan.

"Yes, I'm Susan," answered Susan.

"That's a good name," remarked Susan. She turned to the instructor. "Her name is my name too!"

"Delightful. Can we get on with it?"

Susan turned back without answering. "First of all, congratulations on being the first to do it. One day you can tell your grand-kids, 'I Apparated before Hermione Granger or Harry Potter!'"

"Hey, yeah, I did, didn't I?" Susan's face went from shock to wonderment, and she looked over at Hermione, who glared back.

"You sure did. Now, your mind is going to associate Apparition with a negative result, that of *Splinching*. A name which again shows the wizard talent for naming things, I might add. Do not let it. Dwell ceaselessly on the fact that you achieved the goal you set out to do. Traverse *distance* without *space*. Cast your mind back to that event. How did you feel? What were you thinking at that exact moment? Replay the situation in your mind again and again. Now, when you try it again, remember that first time and seek to repeat it. Yes, you left your leg behind, so what? That was an aftereffect of the successful Apparition. Focus only on that success. Repeat this process- every time you do it better, make that the new standard you use for comparison. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Yeah, I think so. That's like visualization or something, right?"

"Something like that. Remember- you did it, no one else did it that quickly. You should be proud, and if your *instructor* was worth anything, he would have made that plain, and done all

he could to encourage you. He might also have asked you to relay your experience to the rest of the class, that you might all learn better, together. But far be it from me to tell him how to teach his class!”

Susan smiled at Susan. There was some general laughter as the instructor scowled at her.

“Now you may proceed,” said Susan, walking away.

“Thanks, Susan,” said Susan.

“Anytime, Susan,” answered Susan, glancing over her shoulder.

In the end, only Susan (the Bones Susan, not our heroine) had successfully Apparated, out of everyone. In fact she was able to do it one time out of every 6-8 tries, which she seemed ecstatic about. She kept beaming over at Susan, who smiled back at her.

“Thank you,” Susan said to Susan as everyone else walked out. “Without your encouragement I doubt I would have succeeded again. That so called instructor of ours is *terrible*. Where did they dig him up from, anyway?”

Susan shook her head. “I don’t know where the Headmaster finds these people. It’s like... students here succeed despite the efforts of the teachers, rather than in conjunction with them.” Minerva glared at her as she walked past. “Though I’m sure there are some exceptions, of course.”

“Thank you so much,” sniffed Minerva.

“I mean, statistically, a few individuals will survive a plague unharmed, it’s the same concept.”

“Could I speak to you a moment?” Minerva said through clenched teeth.

“See you, Susan,” said Susan.

“Later, Susan!” replied Susan with a wave.

Minerva waited until everyone else had left, and Susan called her *Legion* over to her. She dismissed the dragon and Sparkle walked out, the lion disappearing as well.

“What can I do for you, professor?” asked Susan, as the *Legion* formed up at her back. They held their swords upright and stood at attention in a most distracting fashion.

“Must they loom there behind you?” she asked crossly.

“Oh, just ignore them. You wanted to talk to me about something?”

“You seem... much more like yourself than usual today. Just because I allowed you off the grounds-”

Susan lifted a finger. “Where I successfully tracked down a piece of Voldemort’s soul, healed a rift between brothers and helped an Elf past his depression.”

“Yes, all of that aside, that does not give you liberty to interrupt the proceedings here!”

“Where I gave *excellent, proven* advice at how to succeed at physical actions, which Susan herself used to great success. A feat, I might add, not shared by *any other student in the class*. If I was in charge, I would find a new teacher, as that man is obviously inept at teaching. He might be the greatest Apparator in the universe, but with his low *PERSONALITY* and even lower *teaching* check, I think he did more harm than good today. They can be negative, you know.”

“Yes, well, he is a proponent of letting the kids learn at their own pace,” Minerva said lamely.

“Right,” said Susan, unconvinced. “Which is to say, they didn’t learn anything. The one initial success was treated as a failure, and not built upon for future success. Her thoughts on the matter were not consulted, even though her insight would be of tremendous value for others

trying to go through the same process. It's Professor Snape teaching Harry Occlumency all over again. We had to take his lessons into our own hands and do library research to actually figure out the proper technique. Because Snape is a failure as a teacher. He sucked at teaching potions according to, oh, just about everybody, and he sucks now at teaching Defense. My after school classes are both better attended, and more useful than his classes will ever be. Both in Potions and Defense, as we've set up tutoring sessions for both which are going fantastically. You should see the number of potions people have been churning out in my *Dimension*. I've been told many times, by people who feel they could have done better in those classes because they are now doing better outside those classes!

"And some of the rest of the teachers here! I mean, the history teacher is a ghost that hardly notices if his class attends or not. Care of Magical Creatures is a joke, though Professor Hagrid is getting the hang of it, which I applaud him for. And the shambles that is Divination-Need I go on?"

"And my classes? Do you have an opinion on them as well, despite never having attended one?"

"You teach kids to turn animals into water goblets, Professor. Of what possible use is that? When are you going to need a goblet, but only have available a small bird? It makes no sense at all!"

Minerva sputtered and tried to think of an answer.

"That's what I thought. More and more I must question the wisdom and perhaps even satiny of our so called Headmaster. What is he doing when he disappears? Not tracking down *Soul Shards*, or he would have found the one right under his nose in Sirius' house. At least, until we almost *threw it out*. Because after the first *and second* ones we destroyed, he didn't say "hey, be on the lookout for more weird, dark magic objects that might hold more *Soul Shards*." No, he just went about his business like we were unimportant. Trouble is, we kids have done more to reduce his power than an entire group of adults dedicated to fighting him, both now and when he was still known as Tom Riddle to most everyone. Is he really trying to break Voldi's power or just visiting a beach someplace to work on his tan? I wish I knew."

"I admit his behavior is sometimes puzzling, but he does have reasons for doing what he does."

"Are you trying to convince me, or yourself? Because you aren't convincing me of that without some much stronger evidence."

"Are you saying you no longer trust him?"

"Trust? Hummm. I trust actions, professor, and the intent behind them. I know he's out doing something, but not what that something accomplishes. Now, not telling me everything is certainly an action, and I'm sure he has some kind of intent. The intent is to keep me in the dark, which is funny, given how it's going to be me facing him, in the end. Forgive me for wanting to be informed about things rather than find out about them after the fact."

Minerva's eyes got wide. "You know. Somehow you know..."

"Know?" Now Susan was puzzled.

"About the prophesy."

"Ah, I've said too much apparently. Yes, I know about my own prophesy. And guess who told me about it? Our esteemed Headmaster? Nope!"

"He couldn't have! And you went there? And he was..."

"Aw, you guessed, and without even any hints. See, actions and intent. What was his intent? To show good faith and maybe get some more information about me. But the difference

is, a supposed ally left me in the dark while a supposed enemy shared information that could have been very damaging to him. Who should I really trust? I realize Voldi killed with the intent to become immortal. Maybe he regretted every single life he took, but decided his contributions to the field of magic would outweigh the costs. After all, throughout his life people told him how gifted he was, didn't they? And he was. Perhaps he swore after every death to spend eternity atoning for that sin. Perhaps he only killed people already about to die. Except for his family, I mean, that was just murder, plain and simple. I don't know his mind, do I? Maybe as he stripped his soul he lost sight of his original goals and became the monster everyone thinks he is today. In that case he's just a victim of his own magic and should be pitied, not hated."

"You can't be seriously considering joining him or anything?!"

"No. He did kill, and I don't like the way he took my magic, by force. Who knows what he would do with it? He doesn't have the legacy of his father wrapped up in every spell he casts, after all. His use of *my* magic is a perversion and must be stopped. But I still don't know if I'm going to kill him or just take his magic away. For him, being animated by magic in a sense, it might be the same thing."

"You've left me in a difficult position, you know that?"

"What? To tell the Headmaster I know that I have death at my left hand?" She wiggled the fingers on her hand. "And by the way, it was professor Snape that said that little ditty originally. Didn't know I was around, you see? Suit yourself, but consider this: has he told you everything?"

Minerva pondered a moment. "No, he most certainly has not."

"Then why would you go running to him now?"

"I'll have to think about it."

"Whatever. You know how much you need me, so telling him, or not, changes nothing. Voldi announces to the world he's taking over, and there's not a thing your ministry will be able to do about it. I suggest you arm me with all that you can- knowledge. Because that's all you can give me, as I get my magic from inside myself. And that's where this battle will be fought- his will to succeed against mine." Susan tapped her head. "Guts. And by my reckoning, he's already lost."

That evening, as she lay in bed, Susan thought about what Minerva had said.

I suppose I did revert a little bit to Old Susan, didn't I? Bossing people about and such. I think I was doing better, but then we had that victory and it went totally to my head. I guess I'll have to be more careful. Luna wasn't around to head me off like she usually does, that was it. No, I can't think that, I have to be nicer even when she's not around. Julie doesn't get to take 'M' when her son isn't around looking over her shoulder, right? It's the same thing with me and being bossy. To say that Luna wasn't there is a cop-out, and I'm better than that. Right?

Then there's that fear creature, that the researchers are calling a Bogey now. I guess it's a good a name as any. They can't learn too much about it while it's in the ice, but they can't melt the ice or it will get away! I wonder... is there a spell that will lock off all dimensional travel? Maybe I could put that on the room, thaw it out, and see how it reacts. I can always refreeze it when I'm done, just put the spell into a Ward so I don't have to sit there casting from writings on the fly. Yeah, that could work. I'll suggest it for this weekend. I'm sure Professor McGonagall will be thrilled to have me leaving the school again.

She's on FIRE!

Time: Friday

Place: Minerva's office

"You want to leave again?" asked Minerva. "I'm thrilled."

I knew she would be!

"We have work to be about," said Harry. "If those Bogey creatures attack we need to know how best to take care of them. We can't do that while we're here."

"What exactly do you intend on doing?"

"We'll travel to the hospital," explained Susan. "Take the on ice creature to a basement level or some other secure place in the facility. I'll lock the creature down with *Planar Hold* before it thaws totally from the ice, so it can't escape. Then we'll observe what it does and maybe try to communicate with it. Sparkle knows the spell to talk to animals, after all. Failing that, we'll heal it back up, then see what does the most damage to it."

"You're going to torture the poor thing?"

"Poor thing?" asked Hermione. "Do you know what these things did? Kidnapped kids and kept them in a perpetual state of fear. They would have died if it wasn't for Susan!"

"And Voldi is capturing them," said Harry. "We need to find out why. Is he making weapons? Extracting something from them, as a spell enhancer to make *Imbued* items like Susan does? We have no clue right now. Even if it's 'simply' sending them against the school we need to be ready. Nothing like this has ever been seen before, and if bugs invade your home you don't go escorting them out politely. You destroy them."

Minerva thought a moment. "I suppose we are at war."

"And who says these things even feel pain?" asked Ron. "If they are created from dream energy or something, they could just as easily feel no pain at all, just like in a dream."

"I guess there is only one way to find out. And you will have hospital staff there, I take it?"

"They're the ones doing the research," answered Susan. "I just need to go and lock it down. And the Core needs to come so they can start teaching S.T.F.U about whatever the healers learn immediately."

"Very well. I suppose the first of your little excursions worked out well enough. But don't you have Apparition practice Saturday morning?"

"We can go after that. No big deal," said Ron.

"This is a little more important," said Hermione.

"All right. You have my permission. But I do want some kind of written report on what you find out, so I can inform the rest of the staff."

The boys seemed annoyed, but Susan thought it was fair enough. "Deal."

That evening, inside the *Dimension*, those that were going to take the Apparition test went down to the hut.

"Do you think we could practice Apparition in here?" asked a boy.

"We're inside another dimension, after all, so we thought it best to check," said Susan Bones. "I feel like I'm really close to getting the hang of it."

"There's a problem," said our Susan. "If you leave some of yourself behind, I'm not sure even *Regeneration* can help you. It's not damage, you're just not a whole person anymore."

“There was a spell, though,” said Harry, looking up from a potion he was working on. “The instructors used it.”

“That’s true. Come with me, everyone.”

Susan found Hermione practicing inside the field with the others, and she waved her over.

“I don’t expect you watched the spell the teachers were using to put Susan back together when she failed to totally Apparate, did you?”

“I watched them, sure. Why?”

“These people want to practice it, and if you could be on standby to put them together if they don’t all go…”

“Oh. I suppose more practice would be useful. Okay, if you can scrounge up some hoops someplace, I’ll watch them.”

Everyone started thanking her at once, but Susan just rolled her eyes. “Scrounge up some hoops? Are you a witch or not?”

“Yeah, someone must know a spell to create hoops!” shouted one boy. “Hey, anyone know how to make hoops?”

“What about butterbeer caps?” suggested Luna, pulling a handful of them out of her pocket.

“They’re a little small, Luna,” said a boy.

“But I think someone must know a spell for enlarging things, right? If you made them the size of the hoop, you could target the cap, right?”

“Hey, she’s got a point,” said another boy. “How about that?”

Luna smiled. “Don’t act so surprised!”

So someone used the enlarging charm on the caps, and Susan walked away as everyone was struggling to make their checks properly. She had them set up near the lab, so she could be on hand if something went wrong. Not that she would be able to do much but open the door again and find a teacher, but she was confident Hermione could take care of any issues. Luna, however, was another matter.

“May I ask why you carry butterbeer caps in your pocket?” she asked her. “I hadn’t see you do that before. Not that I mind, or anything,” she said quickly, “I just thought it was odd.”

“They’re useful,” she replied.

“I’m not sure how.”

“That’s because your magic is quite specific. We need to be a little more creative. Think about it, what if I needed something but had no material around to use *Transfiguration* on? I could always pull out my caps and do it on them. Or make them bigger, like you just saw. Then if I was, say, being attacked by a dragon I could put *Impervious* on them, and make them repel fire. They could then be used as a shield. Once I learn how to cast *Portus* I could turn them into Portkeys. I was also thinking, make them bigger, use *Wingardium Leviosa* and stand in it. If I didn’t have a broom they could be used to levitate me around.”

“Wow, you really have thought about it!”

“Nah, I just made that up, but it sounded good, didn’t it? I’ll have to write them down so I don’t forget. Actually, I just bring them in here as a training exercise. I don’t carry them around normally, that would be silly. But I guess I’ve convinced myself I should, now, and they did come in handy just now. Huh.”

“Training?”

“Sure.” She pulled some from her other pocket, lined them up in her hand, and threw them into the air as hard as she could. She then tried to hit as many as she could with magic before they hit the ground.

“Oh. Remind me never to make you angry at me.”

“Silly. Why would I ever be angry with you?”

“I’m sure that if we stay together long enough, it’ll happen.”

“I guess. Even I’m not perfect, shocking as that might be to hear.” She fluffed her hair out behind her. They laughed. “*Accio small butterbeer caps,*” cast Luna, and the scattered caps all came back to her rather neatly.

“You’ve been practicing that too, I guess?”

“Not in any meaningful way, but after you do something a few hundred times, you begin to pick it up, whether you want to or not.”

“Must be nice. I could do something a million times but unless I put a number down next to a skill on my *Character Sheet*, I might as well not have bothered.”

“Of course, the reverse is true, too. You don’t actually have to stand around practicing stuff, you just decide to know how to do it, and your number changes.”

“True. I wonder which way is really better?”

“Neither is better, I think. Just your way makes you unique. And you know how I love unique things.” Luna leaned over a little.

“Uh, better not do that here,” cautioned Susan. “If someone sees that while they’re trying to Apparate, they might wind up in more pieces than we can put back together!”

Luna gave a silvery laugh and backed off. “I guess you’re right. But you’ll owe me double, later.”

“Of course, and I always pay my debts. With interest.” She winked.

“That makes two of us that are interested.”

The next day, those in S.T.F.U that had practiced, and talked to Susan Bones about how to actually Apparate were much better at it than the ones that hadn’t. The instructor glared at them suspiciously.

“You haven’t been practicing outside this assigned time?” he demanded.

“Of course not, professor,” said Ron. “That would be terribly dangerous, wouldn’t it? None of us here are that irresponsible, are we?”

Everyone nodded and quietly indicated they, at least, were quite responsible people, all told.

“No, it’s just your excellent training methods have really motivated us. Those three ‘Ds’ just make so much more sense now.”

“Oh. Uh, very well then. Carry on.”

Much of the class stifled laughter and went back to practicing.

Severus glared at Susan, who was invited to watch again, just in case. She put on her best innocent look and smiled back with a little wave.

Two hours later, she was standing in St. Mungo’s hospital, while wizards slowly melted the ice around the Bogey. They were in the lowest level of the place, far underground, in a quarantine area.

“Never thought I would be using it like this,” said the Head Healer. “But all of these people are trained in dealing with dangerous magical creatures, so hopefully it will go well.”

“That’s the problem,” said Susan. “I’m not sensing any magic from it at all. I can sense my ice spell, but inside it is just a Bogey shaped hole. I don’t know how it seemed to change forms or step between dimensions without magic, but somehow it did.”

“And you can stop it from doing that, right?”

“The spell says ‘any form of dimensional travel,’ so it shouldn’t matter if it’s magic or some innate ability the creature has. And if it does, Sparkle and I will haul it back here for you.”

“Okay. Better get ready, the ice is looking pretty thin there.”

“Right.”

Susan got out her notes for *Planar Hold* and as soon as the Bogey was partially free, she cast it on the creature. Everyone left the room and they magically sealed the door, then cast a charm into the room to heat up the floor and melt the rest of the ice. The creature collapsed as soon as the ice wasn’t holding it up anymore.

“It isn’t dead, is it?” asked one of the experts.

“No,” replied Susan. “When they died they became a mist and disappeared. This one got knocked out though, so it went unconscious, and is thus still hurt. Hermione, use your *Healing Word* item and heal it, please. We’ll see if it wakes up then.”

“Okay.”

Hermione directed her gaze to the creature and used the item a few times, until it began to stir again. It changed form into a giant snake, and one of the researchers went rigid with fear. The Bogey perked up, and seemed to be drawn towards the man.

“Get him out of here,” said Susan, looking back at the Bogey. As the man was levitated off, the Bogey’s attention turned to Ron, as it became a giant spider.

Ron screamed and fell backwards, scrambling away from the creature. He hid behind a column and the Bogey seemed to lose interest, now looking around at where it found itself.

This repeated for about two hours, as the Bogey became more and more desperate to escape. It seemed to be trying to step into Purgatory, or find a long enough shadow for some reason, as though that could hide it or something. As it moved about the cage, it took various forms and there were a variety of actions by those watching it. Sometimes the victim just edged away from it, sometimes they fled like Ron. Sometimes they just couldn’t stop staring and had to be taken away to recover in the next room. Susan was targeted three times, but her 10 RESolve pulled her through, though for some reason the phrase “ties go to the defender” softly passed through her mind on the last attempt.

After this, people started hallucinating, as the Bogey tried to smash through the glass separating it from everyone. Twice several researchers panicked, believing it had succeeded, but the others were able to reassure them the Bogey was still safely inside. The ones not targeted by whatever the Bogey was doing were taking notes and muttering “fascinating” a lot, while performing what must have been some sort of detection magic. They seemed to be confused a lot of the time they weren’t afraid for their lives.

Finally, Susan opened a *Teleportal* back to the school and called for Winky. She came forward and asked how she could help.

“See that creature? What can your powers tell us about it?”

“It can’t get out, can it?” Winky asked fearfully.

“It’s been two hours. If it hasn’t managed it by now, it never will.”

“Very well. Winky will see what she can tell you.”

Winky studied the creature a few moments. "It's not, uh, like Winky," she said, looking over at the other researchers. "But it is using two of Winky's abilities. Reading minds, and planting illusions in them. It wants to cause as much fear as it can. It likes the fear. Like a moth likes the flame? It doesn't want to hurt us, I don't think, but it doesn't like being cooped up like that. It just wants us to be afraid."

"I see. Can you read its mind?"

Her face fell. "Winky has tried. It's like reading the mind of a cat. I mean a normal one, no offense."

"None taken," said Sparkle.

"So it's just an animal then? Could you tell where it came from?"

"Not without touching it, and concentrating on it. And I hope you'll forgive Winky saying it, but Winky does not want to get close enough to touch that thing."

"No, I understand. That's actually a big help, thanks."

"May Winky go back now?" she asked, looking back through the *Teleportal*.

"Sure. Glad to see you're doing better."

"Susan gave Winky a task that is important to elves. Winky would not shirk such a duty, and Winky is... coming to believe that perhaps the last master was not a good one."

Susan smiled. "Even just saying that is a big step forward. I'm proud of you, Winky."

Winky bowed, and scurried back through the hole into the castle. It closed behind her.

"She is doing better, isn't she?" asked Hermione.

"Yeah. I should have been checking on her more often, but it looks like she's been using her time wisely."

"How did she tell all that?" asked a researcher.

"Maybe when you're done here you can ask some elves directly and see what they tell you," said Susan with a smirk. "So, how much longer do you think you'll need to study it?"

"We could probably study it for months," said one excitedly. "How does it change shape so easily, for example? Why does it cause such a strong fear reaction even though we know what it is? How can it step into... Purgatory, you called it?"

Susan nodded.

"If it's just an animal, how can it know what we're afraid of? That elf said it was reading our minds, but if it doesn't have language how can it—" He caught sight of it again, and it had become a burly man with a huge ax. He screamed and ran away, holding his eyes shut. He smacked into a wall, having missed the doorway, and fell over. "OW!" Susan sighed.

"Seriously, we only have more questions now," said another. "But we realize you're here to find out one thing. How to kill it."

"Not exactly. I know how to kill it. Have my *Legion* slice it up into tiny bits. What I need to know is, does it have any weaknesses that wanders wizards can exploit so if hundreds or thousands of them attack someplace, they know the best way to fight them off."

"Would they, though? That house elf said it didn't want to attack us."

"But if Voldemort casts some kind of *Berserk* spell on them, or just drives them insane with torture and lets them loose in the castle, they'll attack all right. Oh now what?"

Two more researchers ran out of the room while another became rigid, as the Bogey had become a perfect likeness of Voldemort. Susan got a 21 to resist the fear, but Ron and Harry did not. Harry ran out of the room, while Ron went rigid. Susan covered his eyes and waited for it to

pass. Hermione just looked fearful, but didn't turn away. She heard her muttering "it's not really him. He can't hurt me. It's not really him, it's just an illusion."

How does it know what old Voldi looks like, anyway? Can it pull images from people's brains, too?

Of course now the creature seemed to sense the increase in fear, and with everyone thinking about Voldemort, it stayed in that form. Most everyone left the room for a moment, and it finally started cycling back through the normal fears of the researchers again.

"As I was saying, has your magic revealed any special weaknesses?"

The researchers got together to compare notes, and finally answered no, not as such.

"Then we get to do it the old fashioned way. Team, I'll open a small *Teleportal* that's big enough to stick a wand through. You can see what spells hurt it, help it, or make it giggle."

"Sounds good to me," said Ron, obviously wanting to pay it back for turning into Voldemort like that.

"Super. Anything else you guys want to do?"

They looked longingly at the Bogey, then one cowered back again as it turned into a naked woman with chainsaws for arms.

Susan put up a finger, about to ask what that was about, but then decided against it. She put her finger down and cast *Teleportal*. Ron stuck his wand though.

"I'll try and burn its... uh, leg," he said, taking aim. "*Incendio.*" Fire shot out of the wand and the creature...

...didn't even seem to notice.

"Are you sure you hit it?" asked Harry.

"Pretty sure. I'll try again." Again, the fire was ignored.

"You think it's immune to fire?" asked Hermione.

"How can it be immune to *fire*? What's it made of, asbestos?" asked Harry. "We know it can be chopped up, Susan did it. Try water, maybe that'll hurt it if fire doesn't."

"Okay." Ron shot water at it, which splashed off harmlessly. It glared over at him, chainsaw arms flailing and then turned into a spider again. Ron leaped away from the portal and went back to hiding behind the pillar.

"*Riddikulus,*" said Harry, pointing his wand though. Nothing happened.

"Good try, Harry," said Hermione. "It was possible a Bogey was similar enough to a Boggart that would have worked."

"Wait, you mean like a Boggart maybe only a certain thing can hurt it? Like laughter? Or like a Dementor and only something totally bizarre, like my most powerful healing magic?"

"It's possible."

"Crap."

"Let me try," said Hermione. "*Avis!*" A bunch of birds appeared, and Hermione aimed her wand through the hole. "*Oppungo!*" The birds smacked into the creature, but seemed more an annoyance than anything, as it brushed them aside.

"*Confringo!*" tried Harry, and there was an explosion of fire inside the cell, but again the Bogey was unharmed.

"I don't believe this," said Hermione. "*Expulso!*"

The Bogey was slammed back against the wall, but shook its head and again seemed unhurt.

“*Stupefy*.” Nothing.

“*Petrificus Totalus*,” cast Hermione, and finally, the creature reacted. It fell over, paralyzed. However, it still was able to change shape a second later, and another researcher gave a gasp of fear.

“I was beginning to think they were immune to magic or spells somehow, even though I didn’t sense any *Immunity* or *Barrier* spells on it,” said Sparkle, looking in at it. “Glad to see that isn’t the case.”

“That charm doesn’t last very long, does it?” asked Susan.

“Should have lasted longer, I don’t know why it didn’t hold up. Maybe the fact it turned into something else? At least, like Sparkle said, we know magic works on them. What else can we try? I’ve tried the most destructive spells I know.”

“We know my *Legion*’s swords took them out. Hey, has anyone around here been stabbed lately?”

“Stabbed? This is a hospital, young lady!” said the Head Healer, from outside the room.

“Exactly. Someone must have come in with a stab wound at some point, and still had the knife in them. I want to try something.”

“I’ll go look.” They left.

“Seems like you’re going to have to look up some more powerful spells.”

“I still can’t believe the fire bounced off,” said Ron, recovered again.

“I have a theory.”

A knife clattered into the room. “Here.”

Susan looked over, it was a small dagger, but good enough for her purposes. “Thanks. Okay, throw it as hard as possible at the creature.”

“I don’t think any of us will be able to throw it well enough,” said Hermione.

“And by throw it, I mean use magic to levitate it and plunge it into the creature.”

“Oh!”

They did, and the knife harmlessly bounced off.

“Right,” said Susan. “Now for me. *Elemental Bolt: Fire*.” It hit the Bogey in the head, causing it to start rocking back and forth and try to scream in pain. “I would have to get a one,” Susan sighed. “Go ahead and heal it again.”

Hermione healed it, and they all looked curiously at her.

“Go ahead and ask,” she said. “I don’t need *Mind Read* to know what you’re thinking.”

“Why did your fire work and ours didn’t?” asked Ron.

“I’m glad you asked. It seems even our attacks are structured differently. For example, I magically create magical fire to attack with. Or magical ice, or magical water, or magical knockout. You guys, on the other hand, magically create normal fire to attack with. Or normal birds, or normal increase in atmospheric pressure to slam people around. This binding you did was the first magical result rather than magical cause.”

“Crap,” all three said at once.

“Yup. That means even elf abilities won’t harm these things. They’re *Invulnerable*. I never bothered with it, thinking your magic was like mine and would cut right through it. Another incorrect assumption, I guess.”

“That can’t be right,” protested Hermione. “If we make normal fire, then your *Magic Immunity* would be worthless. You would still get hit by it and set on fire!”

“I, um, well, gee... I guess I could be protected from the effect of magic as well? Wait, has anyone just shot fire at me like you guys did to the Bogey here? I mean, Professor Quirrell shot red magical energy at me, not fire. Some things I’ve used *Deflection* on, and I’ve dodged once or twice. The turning to stone of the basilisk was magic, no help there. In my duel with Draco he was not trying to seriously hurt me, just disarm me and such. That quill of Her Fluffy Pinkness was magical, and when we fought Voldi in the cave they just shot magical energy at each other, not actual fire. So *Immunity* would have worked against that.” As Susan ticked these off on her hands she began to get more frightened. “I think we’ve just exposed a huge weakness in my *Magic Immunity* spell. And thank goodness too, I would not have looked as cute as I do now if my skin started melting off from being ON FIRE!”

In the end, Susan decided to freeze the Bogey again, as the hospital staff said they didn't mind keeping the room cold. They wanted a chance to discuss their findings with other magical creature experts and maybe have another session. Susan said that was fine, just "owl me at the school when you're ready."

She was currently looking over *Invulnerability, Barrier Against Spells, and Magic Immunity*.

"Why did I drop *Barrier* and pick up *Immunity* again?" she asked Sparkle.

"The snake, right? It didn't use spells so you needed to become immune to the ability it had of turning you into stone with a look."

"Right, that's what I thought. Just making sure. I'm just not sure what the best thing to do is!"

"What are your options? Maybe if you talked it out we could come up with something."

"Okay. What are *Companions* for, right?" She grinned.

"I would have said friends, but I guess it's the same thing."

"That's right. Who ever heard of a companion that wasn't a friend? That would be really weird. So, if I rely on *Magic Immunity* I don't get the benefit of *Acceleration* or *Invulnerability*. So if Voldi shoots fire at me, I'd probably die."

"Would he know to do that is the question."

"I would have to guess that yes, he would."

"You didn't find out until just now."

"Sure, but I wasn't a wanded wizard most of my life. I have to assume that he either realized the difference right away or figured it out soon after. Like you said, he would know anything to make me miserable because he's the villain."

"I did say that, didn't I? I must be very intelligent."

"You must be. He would have researched all the ways I'm vulnerable, after all. I think that's why he's going after the Bogeys, they're hard for wanded wizards to take care of."

"Well, low level ones, anyway."

"Yes, that's a point. But there's only so many teachers in the school, and they don't routinely teach the kind of attack magic we've seen the bad guys using. I mean defense class focuses on stunning and shielding, right? Not actively trying to blow someone up."

Sparkle chuckled. "It seems rather ironic that because evil wizards have used higher level spells than they could have, you were safer than if they had used more common spells."

"Yeah! At least Hermione is going to ask for the incantation of the magical attack spell she saw the fake Professor Quirrell using against me. Then she can teach it to the rest of S.T.F.U."

"Think Professor McGonagall will show her?"

"After she learns those Bogey creatures can't be hurt except with direct magical attacks? Absolutely. Anyway, back to the problem at hand."

"Right."

“So let’s say instead I use *Invulnerability* and follow it up with *Barrier*. That would seem to cover all bases, but if he attacks beside magical creatures like Dementors, which I remind you can now see me without *Immunity* going, they’ll be all over me.”

“You can’t become totally unbeatable, you know.”

“I guess not. Each method seems to rather conveniently leave gaps that can be exploited.”

“And a good thing too, remember, anything you can do, he can do... better.”

“I concede the point. And any creature that’s an ESPer or uses similar techniques, like that *Illusion* power of the Bogey will get through regardless. Well, not through *Invulnerability*, but you know what I mean.”

“That’s true. Anyway, is it that big a deal? Just learn *Barrier* again and switch up your charms. Learn *Invulnerability* and drop *Detect Lies* and *Flight*. I mean from the charm bracelet, don’t forget how to cast them. You don’t use them very often anyway, right? Not enough to need instant access to them. Then you can decide which you want to use as the situation dictates.”

“Actually, I was thinking about making an *Invulnerability* item, because that would be useful to have going all the time.”

“It’s your XP.”

“Yeah, that’s the problem. On the flip side I would just need to activate one or the other, and if *Immunity*, I just know I can be physically damaged again.”

“What’s the point difference?”

Susan consulted the *Imbuing* chart she had made at home, detailing different variables plugged into her spreadsheet and printed out.

“Let’s see, it’s 7 XP for *Invulnerability*, and 17 XP total for the *Imbued* item. So that’s a difference of 10.”

“What about as energy based? It’s not like you’re short of it, and you could activate it with a word.”

“That would just be 10, a 3 XP increase. That’s doable, especially now that I know that energy draining spell. Let’s see,” she flipped through the book to the *Imbuing* section.

“Activating an imbued item requires some action, blah blah, using an *Active Action*. Still, my delay represents recovering from an action, not performing the action. The action is performed, then my delay goes up. So I could activate it while getting hit with something and it would go off, protecting me. Then I just have a slight delay to deal with. What to do...”

“What have you been spending XP on anyway? I didn’t think you had learned any new spells recently.”

“No, I put it into my planet skills. I raised them all to a six.”

“Ah.”

“I don’t know, making it energy based I might as well just use *Spell Symbol*. In combat that means activating two things rather than one.”

“But how many times are you surprised in combat? If this is about protecting yourself from Voldi, I doubt he’s going to surprise attack you, one on one. He’s going to send his army to wear you and your allies out, then attack. Heck, at this point he may still think he has a shot at winning you over! You haven’t sent the *Slayer* after all, right?”

“He doesn’t know I know he has backups. We have to destroy his *Soul Shards* before I can even think of killing him. Better the enemy I can see than the spirit, hiding inside someone, that I can’t. He seems like a calculating guy, so you’re probably right. It would save me the energy cost, too.”

“And don’t forget, you make *Wards* now. If you learn the spell you can pass them out to your friends, along with *Barrier* if you relearn that, and protect others even if you aren’t around.”

“Not that I plan on dragging anyone into my fight with Voldi, but it doesn’t hurt to be prepared, does it? I guess I would just have to size the situation up and decide which way to go. If there’s Dementors, activate *Immunity*. If it’s just one on one, activate the combo. I’m four XP short at the moment, let’s see if there’s a spell I can forget.” She looked her sheet over. “Wait, why did I learn *Animal Speech*? You know that one, right?”

“I think it was because of the trial.”

Susan snapped her fingers. “That’s right! I didn’t want to cast it from writings, and I didn’t know *Spell Symbol* at the time. I would just make a *Ward* with it if I was in a similar situation again. Bye-bye, *Animal Speech*!”

So Susan learned *Barrier against Spells* (again) and *Invulnerability* (rolling 14s on her check to memorize both) and taking her XP total to 0.

“Ah, there’s just something about seeing that 0 here, and knowing you can do more, rather than just having the potential to do anything.”

“Something bad or something good?”

“Ah, good question. Look, Hermione is back, maybe we’ll see some destructive spell action!”

As there were not a lot of people in the *Dimension* at that hour (it being a Saturday afternoon) Hermione showed Ron, Harry and Luna the spell and they started practicing it. Susan went back to work, first replacing the *Spell Symbol* on her charms to reflect her new spells, and then made a few *Wards* with the new spells in them to hand out. After that she closed the *Dimension* up, and went to bed.

In the weeks that followed, Susan attended the trial for the two ‘M’ makers, Joe and Bill, speaking on their behalf for leniency. She didn’t stick around to see what the sentence was, but she had fulfilled her end of the bargain which she thought was pretty fair.

She also brought several of those researchers interested in the Bogey to Purgatory, to help them figure out how to open their own dimensional door and go through. She even did a casting of *Dimension Gate* from writings so they could study an actual hole between dimensions, and they all went away quite excitedly talking about various methods they would investigate.

According to her *Magic Sense*, Hermione had mastered the equivalent of *Elemental Bolt: Magic* and so was busy teaching the others in S.T.F.U how to cast it. Susan was even asked to do a presentation on the Bogey, which she agreed to, for a special Defense Against the Dark Arts class. Susan debated hauling the ice chunk out here... but decided to leave it where it was, because honestly it was too dangerous to move it. And seeing a vague shape inside an ice cube was not going to prepare them for seeing their fears. Bogarts already had that covered.

“Hello everyone!” said Susan, getting up to the front of the class. She had *Augment Skill: Teaching* going on herself, and wouldn’t really have been nervous getting up to talk in front of that many people anyway because of her *Overconfidence*. “Today we’re going to be talking about a seemingly new type of creature that happens to be hanging around causing trouble, the Bogey. Now the Bogey and the Bogart are very similar, in that both try to provoke a fear

reaction. There is talk that the Bogey is some kind of evolved Bogart, which would explain a few things. One researcher even postulated they were some kind of half Dementor/half Bogart. Let us hope they are wrong! The mental imagery of a Bogart and a Dementor getting it on could drive even me to the very brink of madness.”

She paused to let that imagery sink in.

“In terms of the Bogart, there is a critical difference. Firstly, the Bogey is not touched by the *Riddikulus* spell. We tried, believe me. Second, they do not lurk in dark places like wardrobes, they lurk in a sub-dimension of our very own world, called Purgatory. I see you have no idea what that means.”

She went over to the chalkboard and drew a circle. “This is the world. Now imagine that overlaid atop this is another space, that these creatures can step to and from, and walk around.” She drew another circle, almost overlapping the first. “It is not separated so much by physical distance as it is rotated away from us. It’s difficult to explain without a lot of high level Arithmancy that would bore you all to tears. I don’t even know the math, but I’ve been there so I can picture how it works. As humans didn’t build anything there, and there are no plants, it’s just a sort of gray, uniformly lit blah. But you can use it to see into our world, and so these creatures go there to spy on people having bad dreams. They then come out and seem to eat or somehow absorb the energy generated by the fear. Researchers also believe they can walk from one area of shadow to another, though we didn’t test this as that would be letting our one captured specimen get away.

“What else do we know about them? We know they are *Invulnerable*. This is why the researcher suggested they are part Dementor, because Dementors also seem immune to physical forces. Do not shoot fire at them. Do not try to crush them with rocks or any other sort of physical means. It will fail. Bind them, trip them, trap them. If you know a spell to cause magical damage, use that, it will work. They will ignore *anything* else. Like the Bogart they will take a form you will find scary, therefore I advise tackling them in groups, if possible. Otherwise you will run the risk of being paralyzed with fear and unable to act to defend yourself. Yes, they seem to heighten fear around themselves, another difference between them and the Bogart. I have seen grown men shriek and cower when they became something feared.” She shook her head. “It wasn’t pretty, believe me.

“There is another difference between them and Bogarts- they can cause you to hallucinate in order to create more fear. This makes them especially dangerous because they could turn the group against itself by making some members of the group resemble monsters or themselves, so you don’t know who is who. When you are fighting them do not believe everything you see. Even if you think one is dead, it might be just an illusion, so be absolutely sure.”

A hand went up.

“Yes?”

“Do they suck out your soul like Dementors?”

“Not that we have observed. When we were studying the creature it seemed only to want to cause us fear. When it took a shape more than one person was afraid of, and the fear increased, it stopped trying to escape. It seemed to be taking the fear in, somehow. When it was just causing one person to be afraid, it didn’t seem interested in us at all. While trying to escape it still went through various forms the people around it were afraid of, so we don’t think it has conscious control of the ability. Also, a group of them had kidnapped a number of children and were holding them in the sub-dimension I spoke of earlier. They were alive and well after being rescued, and they showed no ill effects. A Dementor would have wanted to feed immediately in

that situation and we wouldn't have recovered the kids. Perhaps because they aren't really as fed as these creatures, Dementors being half starved usually because they don't get much to eat? It's unclear at this time."

Another hand. "How many of them are there?"

"We have no idea. Because they live most of the time, we think, in Purgatory, we have no way of getting an accurate count. I fought a pack of about a dozen, but I have no idea if that's typical or what. We don't know where they are coming from, or if they've always been around and are just becoming bolder now for some reason. Perhaps fears of Voldemort and his Death Eaters making a move have drawn them out. We don't know."

"Can they fly?"

"We did not observe them flying. I suppose if they took a form with wings they could, if someone was afraid of birds for some reason."

That got a laugh.

"However, as soon as they got out of range or took on another person's fear, they would drop. Not that the fall would hurt them in any way, but I should think they wouldn't bother. Any other questions?"

"How do you know so much about them?"

"Was that you, Draco? Still, you are checking your sources, which I would give you house points for, if I could. The question is a valid one. I was the one who first ran into them. A little girl named Kelly found me when I was in the village a few months ago. Told me her sister Emily was missing, and asked my help to find her. Little did I know I would find a nest of the Bogey creatures and have to kill them. But I did. I managed to capture one, and researchers at the hospital have been studying it."

Hermione's hand went up.

"Hermione?"

"You said they were immune to physical damage, right? But didn't you use your soldiers to attack them? They use swords, right?"

"A good point. Some of you may have seen the magical warriors I can conjure up. Most recently guarding the Apparition tests, but before that with the whole Professor Umbridge incident." *Shoot, I broke the first rule of the Professor Umbridge incident. You don't talk about the Professor Umbridge incident!* "To answer Hermione's question, yes, they use swords, but they are literally magical constructs. That includes the weapons. So they are not swinging a regular sword and doing damage, they are technically using a part of themselves that looks like a sword, but in reality is solidified magic. If you happen to have any goblin made weapons on your person, that would probably work too." The class tittered, like anyone was rich enough to just carry something like that around! "Or the sword you may have seen me use in my duel with the fake Professor Quirrell that is currently in the Headmaster's office. Or if you know a way to enchant a weapon to do magical damage, that would probably also work. Oh, and one other thing- they can damage each other."

She got a lot of blank looks.

"In other words, if you're fighting more than one, fling one into the other and they'll both get hurt. You'll have to do it pretty hard, so *Wingardium Leviosa* is probably not going to do the job. Look up a spell with a little more oomph, it shouldn't be that much harder."

Note to self, go down and talk to the elves about this after class. They'll need to be told the same thing, and the TK trick, as that may be the only thing they have that'll work. I doubt enough of them are advanced enough to know Cohesion. Though of course you never know.

“Would a thrown potion of fire work?” asked one person.

“If it was magical fire, yes. If the potion just bursts into regular flame, then no.”

“How can we tell the difference?”

“Ah.” Susan thought a moment. *I wonder if I could teach them Magic Sense. It’s not like that would be restricted to my world, right? But then, magic is a little more a part of me than them.* “Does anyone have any ideas? Come on, don’t be shy.” Hermione put her hand up again. *Thank goodness for good old Hermione.*

Susan nodded to her. “If the fire can be put out with normal means, like water or sand, it’s probably not magical. If you need a spell to put it out, it certainly is.”

“An excellent answer.”

Another hand was raised.

“It might also spread faster than regular fire, or burn things like metal, that normal fire wouldn’t.”

“Would the color be any indication?” said another.

“It could be hotter than normal!” said yet another.

“Perhaps our professor could have a class where we safely explore these ideas?” said Susan, looking over at Severus. He seemed grudgingly interested, and gave a little nod.

“He says he’ll think about it. Anything else?”

Another hand went up.

“Yes?”

“I’ve never seen someone do a presentation like this, it must be serious. Do the professors here expect some kind of attack?”

Susan took a deep breath and looked over at Severus again. He shrugged, like *this is your show, not mine.*

“To answer that question I will have to give you a little history. I see you rolling your eyes back there! Don’t worry, this is the action movie kind of history, not the history class kind of history.” More than half the students looked blank. *Oh, right, they don’t know what movies are.* “Moving on- In the course of my investigation of their habits and such, I met a woman who was struggling with a drug addiction. The reason she was taking the drug was because of the terrible nightmares she was having. She was desperate to be rid of them, and decided to try anything. During one of these nightmares, a Bogey was attracted to her room. When it arrived, a trap went off, catching it, and an agent of Voldemort appeared almost at once and dragged it away.”

The class sat in stunned silence.

“So do I expect an attack? Yes, I expect an attack every day. If not by these creatures, by something else, and I will until Voldemort is safely locked up or otherwise neutralized. Before you ask, yes, I know for a fact the man that came was working for Voldemort, there is no question of that. So what he’s doing with the creatures I cannot guess, but you can bet it isn’t good for us. I also found evidence it was this very man who put the spell in her room that amplified her nightmares and thus, the fear she was feeling. In essence, baiting a trap!”

“If they can step through from this purgatory you talked about, they could attack at any time!” a girl blurted.

“And know you know the reason for this class. Yes, because this ability to shift planes is not Apparition the wards guarding the castle will not stop it. Now maybe he is simply studying the creatures to see if he can magically duplicate the ability.” *That is to say, find out how to let his Death Eaters do it on their own. He can cast the spell just as easily as Sparkle does.* “The

researchers at the hospital are currently doing the same. If they figure it out, I'm sure the protections around the castle can be adjusted." *After all, my magic could lock the place down, with the spell I put on The Burrows. The castle is a tiny bit bigger than their house, though. So magically, it's possible.*

"Can we train to fight them?" asked another girl.

"Certainly. Attend classes. Study hard. Be flexible in your thinking if you're facing one. Just because the creature was unknown until now, the danger was not- you've learned about more dangerous creatures in your classes here. They are not immortal, and they will fall to properly applied magic, just like anything else. They move differently, yes, and physical forces won't work, but that shouldn't bother a bunch of wizards and witches too much. This class isn't a game, it's trying to arm you for what's out there, so you can defend yourself and your families down the road. Take it seriously, practice when you can, and you'll be fine."

"Then let's get to it!" shouted someone.

"And so I turn the class back over to Professor Snape. Thank you for your time, Professor."

He didn't move, but beckoned Susan over.

"Yes?"

"I have to admit, you did better than I thought you would. You've even gotten this normally apathetic bunch of losers interested in my Defense class at last. Plus tracking these creatures, fighting them on their own turf... that is what defense against the dark arts is all about." He looked over at his class, who was watching him interestedly, or perhaps, watching Susan? "Perhaps my methods of teaching could be different. And honestly, I may have been too hard on you, in the past. It seems you are putting your skills to good use, rather than what I feared you would do. I am still watching you, however, in case this is all an act." He bent down to whisper to her. "I will never admit this if you tell anyone: five points to Ravenclaw."

Susan's eyes got wide, he never gave points to anyone but Slytherin students. From him, it was a hearty handshake and congratulations. He straightened up.

"Now go sit down, we might as well keep the momentum going and talk about other creatures with similar traits or something."

Susan walked over to her seat unsteadily. *Severus praising me? What has the world come to?*

Show me the Money

Time: March. Ron's Birthday

Place: The Two Broomsticks

With both elves and members of S.T.F.U practicing spells/skills to neutralize or kill things that were *Invulnerable*, Susan was feeling much better than she had after learning they were. She had some success in creating some spells on her own, and was confident she could work up to making a detection spell of some kind in the coming months. So, she took a day to relax, which happened to be Ron's Birthday.

Birthdays were mostly ignored, in terms of things Susan made, as in her words "What, one *Imbuing* or *Fabrication* a year isn't enough for you?" So she had gotten him some mundane thing, and they were now sitting in the village, relaxing.

"It feels weird to be here," said Hermione, looking around. "Don't you feel that?"

"A little," replied Harry. "I didn't want to be the first to mention it, though. If you want my honest opinion, I'm more worried about Ron."

"What about me?" said Ron, scowling.

"I don't know. I just have the strangest feeling you're about to be poisoned or something."

Ron sputtered and slopped his drink down himself, pushing his cup away from himself. "Oh, you would wait until I was drinking to say something like that. Thanks mate."

"Sorry!" said Harry with a grin. "It wasn't intentional. I really do think it's an echo."

"I've been thinking about that," said Hermione. "If something like that really was real, like Susan was really messing reality up by being here, wouldn't we be feeling it all the time?"

"Not necessarily," said Susan. "I mean, why would Ron be poisoned every day? But he does go to class every day. My presence hasn't made that not happen. So the normal, everyday stuff is probably about the same. It's only major events, like a poisoning, that you would feel are different."

"Why would I be poisoned at all?" asked Ron.

Everyone looked around at everyone else. "Maybe it was an accident?" suggested Harry.

"Pretty weird accident, unless he vaporized a potion he was making in class and breathed in the fumes or something," said Susan.

"I suppose we could speculate all day, but in the end-"

"Excuse me," said a lady, coming up to their table. "You are Harry Potter, aren't you?" she asked Harry. She was well dressed, and probably in her 110s, but still spry. Susan noticed a large diamond ring on her finger, and she wore the traditional black pointed hat.

"That's me," he said, resigned. "I don't do autographs though..."

The woman laughed, or perhaps cackled, as she was a witch, after all. "No worries, I wasn't going to ask for one. No, it's one of your friends I need to talk to."

"Poison!" said Ron, looking startled.

"Well, in a way I suppose it is," said the woman. "Do you mind if I sit down?"

"Here, you can have my seat," said Harry, jumping up. "I'll go get another chair." The others edged away from her a little, and Ron pushed his chair away from the table slightly.

"So kind of you," said the woman, sitting down. "You all look spooked about something. Don't worry, I don't bite."

"Is it really about poison?" asked Hermione. "It's just we were just talking about it."

“Not actual poison, don’t worry. In any case, my name is Samantha Bigelstine. I think I’ve read about you in the paper, young lady,” she said, looking at Susan.

“I have featured prominently in the past, that’s true. I’m Susan. This is Ron and Hermione.”

“Good, good. And you’re all friends of Harry Potter, are you?”

“I’ve been his friend since we were about eight. Is that important?”

Harry returned and sat down next to Ron, his eyes on Samantha, in case she tried to poison a drink or anything.

“Possibly. You don’t mind me proving a little history first, do you? I need to ask one of you for a favor... well, it’s a paying job rather than an actual favor, but I’ll need to explain before I make the request.”

“Go ahead,” said Harry.

“Thank you. Now, as you can see, I’m getting older, and even witches don’t live forever. The fact of the matter is, I’m working on my will. My own daughter died suddenly some years ago, but she left me three wonderful grandsons. At least, they act that way when I’m around. Quite frankly I don’t really trust any of them with my fortune which is why I’m trying to be extra careful to leave it to the person who will use it the best. I considered just splitting it into thirds, but with the house, and all the artwork and such, that would probably just lead to more fighting. I’ve seen them at holidays- they try to hide it, but they’re all foaming at the mouth to see me gone and get my money.”

The friends looked at each other again.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” said Susan.

“Oh, it’s just the way the world works. When you’re older you’ll understand. For now, I just need to know if one or the other of the brothers will squander the fortune on something frivolous. That person or persons gets a lesser share. I wouldn’t just cut them out, that would also cause a lot of fighting when I was gone.”

“Wouldn’t a Seer of some kind be better to consult?” asked Hermione. “Not that I put a lot of faith in that discipline, I’ll have you know. I mean it is the future you’re talking about, right?”

“Funny you should mention that,” said Samantha. “It’s partially about the future and partially about them. That’s why I said it was about poison, in a way. It only takes a drop of poison in an otherwise good drink to spoil the whole drink.” Ron was reaching for his drink again, but changed his mind and drew back his hand. “I’m worried getting the money might change them, or that they are keeping their real intentions secret.”

“So how can we help?” asked Ron. “You did come to us specially, so you must have something in mind.”

“I do and I don’t, young man. As your friend, Hermione, was it? As she suggested I hired a very reputable Seer for advice. Incidentally I do share your thoughts on that branch of magic, Hermione. But I figured it couldn’t hurt. I worst I would be out an hour of my time, and at best they might have some insights! After all, they also study people, trends, behavior, and more to help them ‘interpret’ their ‘findings’ and tell people what they want to hear.”

Yes, prophesy seems to work more through people than with them, according to my research on the subject. Though some people swear by the tea leaves and such, it’s a spoken prophesy that gets crystallized in the Department of Mysteries, not the random ramblings of some wanna be psychic. She gave a rueful laugh. *Actually, now that I know that Elves are all*

ESPers, it's not so far-fetched. They can get flashes of the future, as well as manipulate time itself to an extent. Maybe I should suggest finding a trusted elf rather than a so called Seer.

"That still doesn't explain why you came to find us," said Harry.

"Well, the Seer I hired told me something quite unexpected. I don't know how they normally operate, but this one went into a sort of trance, and told me a few true words were all I could reasonably expect. I was hoping for just "give the money to the eldest" or something, but the message said nothing about my grandsons. Rather it was this: 'Seek friend of Harry Potter.' So here I am!"

"You're up, Susan," said Harry at once.

"Definitely right up Susan's alley," confirmed Ron.

"We have complete faith in you!" followed up Hermione.

"Am I missing something?" asked Samantha.

Susan shook her head. "No, things like this happen all the time. I hope this time it will be a nice, normal side-quest. Hopefully not leading to me discovering a new type of creature and a plot by Voldemort to use said creature to attack the castle." Samantha looked shocked at hearing the name. "Yes, I say his name, get over it. All right, I'll be glad to help, but we'll have to talk about how best to utilize my magic." She stood up. "Let's go over there. I don't want to take up your birthday time, Ron. You keep having fun and I'll catch you up later."

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Samantha, "I didn't mean to take up your time in the village. I know it must be hard taking classes up at the castle. I'm sure it isn't any easier than it was in my day."

"You have no idea. And don't worry about it, such is the life of the Paragon. See you guys later."

"So," said Susan, after Samantha ordered her a new drink. "Do you have any particular preference as to how I go about figuring out which of your grandsons is worthy of the fortune?"

"We didn't discuss price," Samantha reminded her.

Lady, if you have to ask, you can't afford- She smiled. "I'm not really going to charge you. I'm an adventurer, this is what I do. XP is my reward."

"Ex-what? I don't want to know. But I insist on paying. Especially if I'm taking you away from your friends. You're doing me an invaluable service, though I don't yet know how you can do any better than I myself could. Your friends seemed to have no hesitation recommending you. This sort of thing really does happen to you often?"

Susan nodded. *And thank goodness, XP doesn't grow on trees.* "I don't mind, honestly. Whatever you think is fair, then. After all, I don't guarantee success, the future is a pretty tricky place."

"Neither did the Seer I hired, but his hand was open before he left for speaking four words. One of them only two letters, and one of them a proper name!"

"True, but the right name at the right time... Anyway, like I said, do you care exactly how I go about it?"

"I suppose I would take exception to you torturing them or using other illegal magic, but short of that, no."

"Don't worry, I don't have anything like that in mind. Have you asked them directly what their intentions are?"

"That would be the height of rudeness!"

"Yes, people say that to me. I just call it 'being straightforward.' Odd how that works, isn't it? Can you get them together tomorrow, say about 2:00 PM?"

“Certainly.”

“Good. I’ll arrive at 1:45. I won’t look like this though, I’ll be posing as an ‘adviser’ to you, and leave it at that.”

“Won’t look like this?”

“I’ll look like someone totally different. If they recognize me from the paper, they’ll know something’s up. Also I’m a little young to be in the field of banking, so I’ll need to look older. So don’t be surprised if someone totally different comes to your door, it’s still me.”

“Very well. But they’ll just lie to your face, won’t they?”

“That’s the best part. Whoever isn’t lying gets the money.”

“You’ll be able to tell?”

Susan smiled. “Trust me, it will be very plain who is telling the truth and who is not.”

“Very well, I’ll leave it in your hands.” She got out a small bag. “Here’s your advance, for any expenditures related to the job. I’ll give you twice as much when I’m satisfied I’m giving my fortune to the right person.”

Great, give it to me, and I’ll use it to open my own shop and start spreading my magic far and wide. “Thank you very much, I won’t let you down!”

Susan got her address and bade her farewell, promising to meet her the next day. After that, she went to the bathroom to count her money and get Sparkle.

Fifty Galleons! I guess it is important to her.

Susan opened a *Teleportal* to her dorm room, where Sparkle was sleeping on the bed.

“Sparkle,” she hissed.

“What?” she answered, raising her head.

“Come here, I have a job for you.”

“Okay?”

Sparkle came through and Susan carried her back into the pub.

“I need you to come up with a new face and body for me. Older, maybe mid-thirties. Thought you might like to look around and get some ideas here. Don’t copy anyone too exactly, but being close is fine.”

“I guess I can do that. May I ask why?”

“Sure. Our next job. Get an idea and then we’re going shopping.”

“You’re the boss.”

So Sparkle looked around and Susan said goodbye to Harry and the others, and went looking for an upscale clothing shop.

“May I help you?” asked the woman at the counter. She didn’t notice Sparkle dart into the shop and head towards the back.

“I’m looking for something that witches would consider business attire. Something I might wear to a job interview, maybe?”

“Certainly, I’m sure we have something suitable. Come this way.”

Susan selected something too big for her, making the woman helping her protest. “We cannot alter that enough to fit you, perhaps this would be more suitable?” She pulled something else off a line of clothes on hangers.

Susan smiled and shook her head. “Don’t worry, I think this will be fine. You have a changing room?”

“Yes, right over there.” She pointed.

“Then I’ll be right out.”

Once inside, Susan stripped down and Sparkle touched her leg, changing her into the new form she envisioned.

“Very nice,” remarked Susan, turning this way and that in the mirror. She put the clothes on, then had Sparkle see where they didn’t fit quite right. Sparkle ended the spell, then touched her again, with the new form in mind. “Much better.” She stepped out.

“Uh...” the saleswoman was at a loss for words, “You... is there... what?”

“I understand your confusion. Not to worry. If you think this looks okay I’ll take it.”

“It looks like it was made for you!”

Even though it was the other way around.

“Excellent. I’ll change back and you can wrap it up for me. Oh, also a small selection of makeup, just the essentials, mind.”

“Yes, of course.” The woman was looking about the store, thinking she was being tricked in some way. However, the store was empty apart from Susan, and the changing room was empty as well. Susan headed back in, trying desperately not to giggle and changed back into both herself and her old clothes.

I’ll finally be able to use that Disguise skill I picked up so long ago. Though I guess I used it for the dance, didn’t I?

When she returned the clothes were neatly boxed up, and as per instructions, the saleswoman had selected a makeup kit and started to put them both in a bag.

“That won’t be necessary,” said Susan.

“Ah, yes?” said the woman, no doubt wondering if she was going to make it through this transaction. She rang up the sale on an old fashioned cash register, and Susan held back the urge to beat the woman to death with her pouch full of enough gold to buy a nice house in the suburbs and live comfortably for 10 years. She handed over enough gold to buy a very, very nice car, new, with all the options, and the insurance payments and probably gas for years, and took back her mere *silver* in change. Then she blew the saleswoman’s mind by sliding the whole box into her *Pocket Dimension* and walking out.

“You enjoyed that, didn’t you?” asked Sparkle, walking beside her.

“Not at all,” she replied with a straight face. “That’s the art of the dress!” she singsonged.

“Where to now?” Sparkle rolled her eyes.

“Just one more thing. I need some candles.”

That evening Susan put *True Flame* on the pack of candles she had bought, via *Spell Symbol*.

“Why the whole pack?” asked Sparkle, half way though.

“In case she wants more. Or she asks for some to sell, herself. Of course, once you know the trick, the trick is useless. But they’re super easy to make and I could basically charge what I wanted for them, as nothing like it exists on the market today. The only thing they have is that truth poison stuff, which is illegal for obvious reasons.”

“So why wouldn’t this be illegal?”

“Because I’m not forcing anyone to tell the truth. They could not answer the question, or tell enough of the truth to not make the flame flicker. This just calls them on a blatant lie.”

“I guess.”

“This actually makes me feel like a wanded wizard, though I’m not sure why I would want to. Putting a charm on an object is just so... so... wanded.”

“And that’s a good thing, is it?”

“It lets me fit in a little better.”

Sparkle stared at her. “I’d ask who you are and what you’ve done to Susan, but I see you using *Spell Symbol* and I don’t think Voldi would bother. Do you *want* to fit in a little better?”

“On some level, sure. My friends are great, don’t get me wrong. But I can’t share their joy at mastering a particular spell. I just make a couple of checks and I either cast it, or not, every time. The result is in the roll. I know I know it, the XP disappears from my *Character Sheet*, there’s no half-way. I can’t talk to them about a lot of their classes, like charms, or commiserate over homework or test results. It sets me apart, and that’s kind of lonely. Think about it- I may be the last daughter of my father’s world. I have to live up to that in a certain sense. They know that too, and that means I’ll forever be a little bit alien to them.”

“And the way you’ve chosen to make up for that is by trying to be bigger than life and showing off all the time?”

Susan thought a moment. “I guess you’re right. I never thought of it that way. I thought maybe I was getting away from acting like that because of Luna’s influence, but what if it was deeper than that? I feel like she accepts me the way I am, maybe even understands me a little. I don’t have to show off any more, because I know she’ll be there to share my victories and defeats.”

“Or you just don’t have as many opportunities because you’re working in the *Dimension* while the others train a lot of the time now.”

“Or that. It could be a variety of reasons. I reverted back quickly enough in that Apparition class, after all.”

“How are they doing with that, anyway?”

“Oh, much better. Hermione has had to save a few of them with that spell she picked up, but they’re all doing it reliably now.”

“Of course, that teacher thinks it’s up to his wonderful direction.”

“Ha, as if! No, talking it out among themselves really helped, I think. Shocking, right?”

“Who would have thought? Of course the backwards way they do everything doesn’t help.”

“I know, right? Our way is so much more sensible.”

“Yup.”

Both sighed, and Susan went back to work.

Susan, dolled up in her new body, makeup, and suit, pulled the chain that rang the bell at the front door of the address she had been given. The house was huge, much like the Malfoy mansion, and Susan wondered what career path led wizards to such wealth? *Perhaps a little trick with gold and the non-magical economy? And unless they're hiding it down at the school, they can't use the spell that breaks the charm on the coins that makes the trick possible for me. But sooner or later the goblin bank would get wind of it and shut that down, if they could do it, right? That's why I only do such a "small" amount per week. Oh well.*

"Yes?" said the man who opened the door.

"I'm Susan, Mrs. Bigelstine is expecting me."

"Indeed. Right this way, please."

Susan was lead inside, and yes, the amount of art pieces, paintings, statues, masks on walls, antique weapons, and more filled the house as far as Susan could see. Several elves bowed low as she and the butler went past, and she inclined her head to them.

"Good work," she said to a group of them dusting. "It can't be easy keeping everything so spotless."

Susan had to grin as they reacted quite surprised, as though they didn't know what to do when someone complemented them. *Probably they don't.*

"Ah... Susan?" asked Samantha.

"How do I look? Consultantly enough for you?"

"I'm not sure that's a word. How in the world-"

"Magic. And I'm going to do more in a second." Susan pulled a candle out of her clutch and held it up. "I need a candlestick to put this in, and please show me to the table we can sit at, please."

Samantha raised an eyebrow, but said "come with me."

An elf came up with a candlestick and Susan inserted it and set it on the table. "Thank you," she said the elf, who bowed their way out the room. "Did you know, Elves are enslaved because of an enormous binding spell placed on the entire species hundreds of years ago?"

"No, I didn't."

"True story. Now, we're going to get some more *Truth* today." With one finger on the candle, it magically lit and Susan put it down in the center of the table. "Now, this candle is a magical truth detector. When it flickers, someone has just told a lie. That's the only thing that can make it flicker."

The candle flickered, and Susan smiled. "Telling a lie, and magically generated wind are the only things that can make the candle flicker."

It was steady.

"As you can see. You could smother it, but not blow it out. I'm the only one who can do that."

"Amazing. Was this a charm you came up with yourself? I'm not familiar with it."

"In a manner of speaking. It was passed down to me from my father."

The candle was steady.

“Well, that could be useful. I’ll have to watch what I say, but I doubt they’ll notice if the candle flickers a bit.”

“Hopefully, that’s the case. Now, as I said I’ll be posing as an adviser so I’ll ask them straight out, if they received the bulk of your money after your passing, what they would do with it. The grandson that doesn’t lie is probably the best bet. Unless of course they honestly want to open a strip club or something, then it’s up to you to decide.”

“What if they’re all liars?”

“Then I’ll have to do something else to earn my fee. Hopefully it won’t come to that.”

“I hope so too. Is there anything else I should know?”

“You have a beautiful house, so you’re right to be concerned about this.”

Samantha laughed. “Thank you! I’ll go get the boys, they’re already here. Make yourself at home.”

Moments later, the three brothers were escorted in, and Samantha introduced them.

“Susan, this is Terry, the eldest.”

“How do you do?”

“Jan, the middle child.”

“How are you?”

“And Valentin, the youngest.”

“How’s it going?”

“Nice to meet you all. Now, has your grandmother appraised you of what this meeting is about?” All three shook their heads. “Very well. To put it bluntly, gentlemen, it is about your futures. As you probably already know, your grandmother is quite wealthy. She wishes to leave you her fortunes when she leaves this world, but at the same time she, and again let me be honest, doesn’t trust you.”

Terry looked affronted. Jan moved his head side to side, as though considering this carefully. Valentin just grinned.

“She shouldn’t, my brothers are scoundrels,” he said. “They would have the fortune frittered away in a month.”

Truth

“And exactly who are you?” asked Terry.

“I am the woman who your grandmother has hired to see if you are worthy of getting even a single Knut of her money or it goes to her dog when she dies.”

“She doesn’t have a dog,” said Jan.

“Maybe she will after this meeting?” Susan leaned forward and put her chin on her hand. They all scowled.

“This is not how this is supposed to work!” protested Jan.

“Actually, I’m surprised something like this isn’t done more often,” said Samantha. “You should be glad I’m even considering letting you have *my* money. I could just as easily donate it to a cause I support and leave you on your own. It is my choice, after all. It’s only the fact that I think one of you might be responsible enough to make something of it I’m thinking about it at all.”

“We’re all responsible, grandmother,” said Terry.

False

“Come now, you must have thought it over,” put in Susan. “Impress me. Make me want to open my own bank vault and throw my money at you.”

“Are we... bidding on who gets your fortune, grandma?” asked Valentin.

“I suppose you could call it that,” Samantha answered. “This isn’t exactly what I had in mind when I hired her, but I do have to admit it’s an approach I hadn’t thought of. Very direct. I like it.”

“I’m not going to sit here and tell some stranger my plans for your money, even if I had thought about it,” said Terry.

False

“Which I haven’t.”

False

Ha! You will if you want to see any part of this fortune, chum. And apparently, you know it!

“You’ll probably outlive us all anyway, you’re stubborn that way,” he concluded.

True

“It’s nice of you to think that,” she remarked. “But let’s be reasonable. I’m giving you a chance to present your case so there’s no hard feelings later. You know exactly what to expect, and I know my money will be spent wisely. Is that so much to ask?”

“It’s what we in the biz call the win-win situation,” said Susan.

“It just isn’t done!” said Terry.

“Well, now it is. Everything changes, as the song goes. You’re welcome to leave, that narrows our choices by one third, which makes my job easier.”

“Fine. If you must know,” said Terry, “I plan on using the money to go into broomstick making. I have some ideas for the field that I believe in, and many people order custom brooms made rather than going with mainstream models. With luck my brooms will catch on and I’ll one day have a thriving business empire.”

False

“I suppose I’ll go next,” said Jan. “I would field my own Quidditch team.”

False

“With proper coaching, done by me, of course, I’ll soon have a world champion team!”

Great, down to you, kid.

“Those are all nice, and everything, but my idea is a bit more altruistic.”

False

“I want to start researching vampirism. I think it could be cured, if someone cared enough to help those unfortunate souls that have become blood sucking monsters. There is some risk, of course, when collecting a large enough sample size, but I actually have contact with some vampires who would be willing to work with me for a cure.”

False

“And that’s your final word on the matter?” asked Susan, looking them over. “One business plan, one sports team, and one altruistic goal. Why would you even buy a Quidditch team, anyway?”

“The same reason you buy everything else for investment purposes. Buy low, sell high. Take a struggling team, buy it out, and whip it into shape. Then sell it to someone else.”

True

“Who then does what? Tries to repeat the process?”

“Teams that do well make money, of course. Signings, merchandise, ticket prices, all of that sort of thing. They would make some money over time, where I would make a large profit all at once. It’s an investment as much as a managing job.”

“So you just plan to turn the money into more money, using a Quidditch team as a vehicle?”

“That’s correct.”

False

“Okay. So, anything else anyone would like to add?”

They shook their heads.

“Very well. Allow me to consult with Mrs. Bigelstine a moment and we’ll let you know what her decision is.”

They all walked out, looking rather confused.

“So,” said Samantha, scorn in her voice. “They’re all liars then?”

“It does seem that way. Sadly with the candle flickering almost nonstop the weakness in the technique is shown. We don’t know what their actual intentions are, only that they don’t want to tell you. Interesting that they were so prepared, however. I wonder if they rehearsed this, for all their protesting.”

“It wouldn’t surprise me. So now what?”

“Now I have to do a little more work to get that money you promised me. Do you have a sheet of paper? Or parchment, as it’s called?”

“I can get you one.”

“Oh, before that, do they live in the village? All of them?”

“Yes.”

“That makes things easier.”

When Samantha came back, Susan took a pen out of her pocket and wrote:

Can I find out how Terry wants to use his grandmother’s money at his house?

Can I find out how Jan wants to use his grandmother’s money at his house?

Can I find out how Valentin wants to use his grandmother’s money at his house?

Then another three lines:

When is the time I should use to see when <person> is going to use his grandmother’s money?”

“Right,” she said, looking it over. “Question takes two minutes to cast from writings, and is difficulty 10. I can make that easily enough. That’s about 15 minutes and we’ll see how we go from there.”

Samantha watched her curiously, as she write down answers gained from her *Question* spell.

She got a *Yes* for Terry and Jan, but a *No* for Valentin. She then crossed out the line for him and wrote instead:

Where is the place to go to show how Valentin wants to use his grandmother’s money?

Another casting, and she had the answer, an address in the village.

“Okay, that answers multiple things at once, just by asking a single yes or no question.”

“What exactly are you doing?”

“It’s a spell to receive answers to questions, but without all the tedious tea drinking or palm reading usually associated with getting those answers. It’s the reason I never had to take *Divination* class, actually. It’s more reliable, available on demand, and for finding factual information, can’t be beat. At least, anything that can be told in a few words. I’m basically just asking the universe for information. It’s not perfect, of course, but then it could have been my phrasing of the question too.”

Because when I asked where the nearest piece of Voldemort’s soul was, it said “within sight” and I magic sensed everything in the room and nothing. And it had no clue what to do with “the next nearest piece of Voldemort’s soul” or “the third piece of Voldemort’s soul.” I just think it’s not able to attune something like that, probably because Pluto deals with souls, not Jupiter.

“Anyway, this tells us there is a place I can go to find out the true answer to this question. Now I just have to cast it three more times to see when. That should fit into six words, so in about ten minutes we can head out.”

“Please, continue.”

So Susan cast it three more times, and got an answer like “January second, twenty thirteen, four seventeen.”

Yup, just fit into my rating words, just like I thought. I just hope that’s 4:17 in the afternoon, but then, I can check AM and PM quickly enough.

“Right then. Get them back in here, and grab your jacket. You’re getting your answers whether they like it or not.”

And so the three came back in and sat down.

“Gentleman,” started Susan. “I’m going to give you one last chance to come clean. I know for a fact I was being lied to by all three of you. Give me the truth, or I will find it out myself.”

“You can’t prove that!” said Jan angrily.

“You know what I’ve observed?” asked Susan sweetly. “Guilty people use a particular phase, like ‘you can’t prove that’ or ‘there’s no evidence of that’ when confronted. Innocent people just flat out deny things or get upset the question was even asked. In any case, I have my means, and to prove it, take a look at this.”

She slid the paper across to them (she had made a copy first, of course) and they looked at it.

“What will be found, should I magically go back in time and check these dates, times, and locations? Any thoughts on the matter?”

Valentin looked astonished, like he couldn’t believe he was seeing this time and place on this paper.

“Have you been following us?” he asked. “How do you know I was there at this time?”

“Today was the first day I had seen any of you. Like I said, I have means you do not know. So, are we heading to these places now or are you telling me the truth?”

“Even if we go, this was months ago,” said Terry. “You can’t seriously believe you can just go back in time and see our conversations or whatever at that time?”

Susan smiled a cold smile. “I believe that all things are possible.”

“Grandma, clearly this person is crazy,” said Jan. “You shouldn’t listen to her.”

“Obviously she’s not, as I watched her sit down and pull these things out of thin air. They’ve got you worried, don’t they? I think it will be quite interesting to see what else she has in store for me. We’re going, or you’re out of the will completely. Make up your minds.”

The three whispered to each other, back and forth.

“We think this is some trick,” Terry said at last. “You’re bluffing somehow. Fine, we’ll go to these places and you can show us your *time machine*.” He and the others laughed. Susan and Samantha did not. After all, Susan knew where to get an actual time machine from, should she desire one. *It isn’t their fault the ministry keeps them secret, and with good reason. Taking more classes not withstanding.*

“Then we’re off. Which one is closest?”

“That would be me,” said Terry. “It’s not far. Come on.”

So they went to Terry’s house and went inside.

“So, dazzle us,” he said, flopping down on the couch.

“I will. I don’t suppose you remember which room you were in at this time?”

“How do you expect me to remember that?”

“Very well. I’ll just use a little more energy then.”

Susan went to cast *Time Area* with her maximum energy, allowing 15 meters of time to be replayed. She figured that would get most of the house. She asked for the time specified by the *Question* spell, and then paused the playback. She went from room to room, finally standing before two men sitting at the kitchen table.

“Ah, there you are,” she remarked.

“What?” said Terry, springing up from the couch. Everyone walked in, and goggled at the overlaid time.

“Last chance, we hear it from you then, or from you now. What’s it going to be?”

“Some kind of trick,” said Terry, passing his hand through his “younger” self.

“Very well. Play on!”

“I’m telling you, man,” said the dark haired stranger across from Jan. “If we figured it out we could be rich! Do you know how much goblins want of their stuff? And then they want it back when the person that bought it dies. Like it was just some kind of rental fee or something.”

“But no one has, and they must have tried, right?” asked Terry.

“Nah, they’re all too scared of the goblins. But that’s where we’ve got to do it smart.”

“Like what?”

“We figure out how they do it, right? Then we go to them with some pieces we’ve made and show them what we can do. They don’t like it, tough. We tell them we’ve given the information to a third party who will release it if anything happens to us. They won’t dare make a move on us.”

“Yeah, that could work. We have to figure it out though. And maybe their stuff is so expensive because it takes a lot of material or something. Maybe they hardly break even.”

“Bah, we can do it better. We get wands, after all. That must count for something.”

“It’s going to be years before I see even one coin of my grandmother’s fortune though.”

“Don’t worry, I’m not going anywhere. And you don’t have to just give me the whole thing, we’re partners. You say we’ve tried enough stuff, and that’s the end of it. Promise.”

Pinky Promise?

“All right, I’ll think about.”

“I knew you would see it my way. We’re gonna be so filthy rich!”

Susan stopped the playback and waved a hand, ending the spell. “So, you want to try and break into the armor and weapon crafting business, is that it?”

The others looked haunted.

“How-”

“Magic. Now answer the question.”

“Yeah, I thought about it. It seems reasonable. Use part of the money as seed money or bribes or whatever to see how they make stuff. It’s not fair only goblins can make enchanted armor or weapons!”

They aren’t, but I’m not going to tell you that.

“Maybe they don’t think it’s fair we keep them from making their own wands? Ever think of that? And why didn’t you just tell us the truth, then?”

“Like he said, it’s kind of dangerous. If they found out before we had that leverage over them, they could come after us. I didn’t want my grandmother to worry that her money got me into trouble. Even if I did make that trouble for myself.”

Shoot, we need another candle.

“Very well. It’s down to two, care to fess up, or are we making a second visit?”

“I think this was a trick of some kind,” said Jan. “You’re in on it together, aren’t you? Trying to make me tell you... I mean, trying to get me to deny my Quidditch team plans. Well I won’t- That was some kind of illusion or something! It had to be. Come on then, I’ll take you to my place, and we’ll see if this ‘magic’ of yours can do that a second time!”

Oh boy. Though I suppose denial is the most predictable of all human responses.

And so Susan and the others made their way to Jan’s house. He was married and his wife met them all at the door.

“What’s going on, honey?” she asked. “You didn’t tell me your family was going to be stopping over. And who’s this?”

“It’s a long story, Melanie, I’ll tell you later. This is Susan, she’s going to be doing some magic around here, so she says.”

“Nice to meet you. I’m working for Samantha to clear up a few... legal issues.”

“Oh, I see. Please, come in.”

“Thank you. And who is this?”

“This is our son, Matthieu.”

Susan knelt down behind the small boy, hiding behind his mother. “Hello, little one.” He went further behind Melanie. “He’s darling.”

“Thank you. He’s pretty shy though. Say hello, Matt.”

”“Lo.”

Susan smiled and got up. “Don’t worry, this won’t take long. Can you show me the center of the house?”

Melanie looked over at Jan, who shrugged and nodded.

“Sure, right this way.”

Susan again cast *Time Area*, using the time specified by her earlier *Question* spell, and walked around looking for the earlier Jan. She found them in the living room, with Matt playing on the floor, and the adults having a serious conversation.

“More bills today,” said Melanie. “And we have so little saved to put Matthieu through school.”

“I know, but business is picking up a little,” said Jan.

“You said that last month, but we don’t seem to have any more in our vault.”

“I know, I know. But I’m doing the best I can. I just wish...”

“Wish what?”

“No, it’s horrible to think that way.”

“You wish you had your grandmother’s money, is what you were going to say.”

Jan looked down. “Well, it would certainly make our lives easier. We could put enough away for Matt’s schooling, my retirement, pay off the house, and I wouldn’t have to work so hard all the time. It’s not fair.”

“Of course it is. She worked hard for her fortune, she should spend it any way she wants.”

“Stop! Stop, please!” yelled the current Jan. “I believe you, it’s no trick. You’ve seen what you came to see, haven’t you?”

Susan looked over to Samantha, who gave a sharp nod and Susan ended the spell.

Melanie was standing in the doorway, shock on her face. “You just pulled our ghosts from the past? What did I just see?”

“Don’t be silly,” said Susan. “I just replayed time in this area. A simple spell, really.”

“Simple? You don’t even have a wand out, how did you do magic?”

Ugh, I keep forgetting about that.

“Susan? Susan? Why does that name sound familiar to me?” asked Terry. “And something about weird magic...”

“I can’t imagine what you mean. So, shall we take a look at what the youngest has in store, then?”

“Why not?” said Valentin. “Let’s bare all our secrets, shall we? It’s a day of revelation. The question is, do you know where to go? Humm? Did your so called ‘magic’ tell you?”

“That we’re going to...” and she gave the address.

“Oh, I guess it did. Come on then, let’s get this over with.”

“Sorry to have bothered you,” said Susan, as the group left.

“Why didn’t you just tell me,” Samantha asked Jan as they walked. “There’s nothing wrong with wanting to provide for your family.”

“I thought the others had such grands plans, what I wanted to do would be so foolish in comparison. That’s why I made up the story I did.”

“Silly boy.”

The group finally stood on the outskirts of town, in front of a rundown old building.

“Go ahead,” said Valentin. “This is the place. Lay me bare for all to see!”

“Grow up, Valentin,” said Terry. “No one wants to see your theatrics.”

Susan cast a third time, and a ghostly Valentin and another man appeared outside the place.

“You really want to fix this old place up?” asked the man. “It’s so out of the way. Hardly in the village at all.”

“That makes it perfect for what I have in mind,” said Valentin, peering in through the window.

“You aren’t going to be doing anything illegal now, are you?”

“What? No! I just want to open a sort of bar for people who don’t fit in at the Three Broomsticks or the Hog’s Head. A place a guy can meet a nice goblin girl he has his eye on, or an Elf and a Goblin can have a drink a peace without being judged. Neutral ground, as it were.”

“You’re dreaming!”

“Maybe. But there are outcasts in this world. Why shouldn’t they have a place they can feel safe? Where all forms of attraction, no matter what gender, species or magical curses you possess count for anything.”

“What, you mean like werewolves?”

“Exactly. Most of the time they’re totally harmless, but if word gets out you’re cursed, no one wants you around anymore. The community turns against you, but that’s just the time you need your community the most!”

“I guess you’ve got a point. Still, fixing up this place isn’t going to come cheap.”

Valentin sighed. “No real dream ever is, I suppose. Still, you think it can be fixed up?”

“You came to the best. My repair spells will have this place looking like new in a jiffy. If you can afford them.”

“Which right now, I can’t. I just wanted an estimate on what it would cost to outfit a place like that.”

“Hummm...” The man looked in the window himself, then got out an abacus of all things. “You’ll need a fully stocked bar...” *clack clack clack* “Furniture...” *clack clack* “Various permits...”

“I think we get the idea,” said Susan, closing the spell down.

“Yes,” said Samantha, “I think we do. Thank you for doing this for me.”

“Certainly. Of course I can’t advise you which of your grandsons has the more, uh, noble use for your wealth, that’s something only you can decide for yourself.”

“Agreed. But you’ve at least shown me a little bit of what kind of people they are, and that was more than worth the expense. If you wish to come back with me I’ll have your fee drawn up.”

“That would be most kind of you,” said Susan, opening a *Teleportal*. “In fact, I’ll even save us all the trouble of walking.”

The four stepped through, amazed. Suddenly, Terry snapped his fingers. “You’re that Susan from the school, aren’t you? The one in the tournament? I thought you were younger!?”

Susan giggled. “I guess you found me out. Hey Sparkle.”

A head poked out of Susan’s pocket, and a fairy flew out. “Stuffy in there. What can I do for you, Boss?”

“Fairy!” said Samantha. “I never thought I’d see a real, live, fairy.”

“Don’t get too excited, Samantha,” said Sparkle. “You still haven’t.”

“Wha?”

“I’m guessing you want the spell dropped?”

“The jig, as they say, is up.”

“You won’t fit in those clothes anymore, though.” She perched on Susan’s head.

“Oh shoot, you’re right. Well gentleman, sadly you will not get to see me in my original glory. This form will have to suffice. Yes, I’m Susan Felton, the so called winner of the Triwizard tournament. Along with Harry Potter, I mean. Though the only thing we ‘won’ was a date with Voldemort. But you don’t want to hear about that. I took this form because I figured it would be hard enough to accept what I wanted to put you through. If I still looked like a kid, I never would have gotten you to agree.”

“You got that right,” said Jan. “So that’s how you’re able to do all that stuff? I read something about your magic being different.”

“That’s me. It’s come in handy, though.”

“The candle, that’s how you knew we were lying!” exclaimed Valentine. “I thought it was weird.”

“Can’t pull a fast one on you guys.”

“Still, those could come in handy. Do you have any more?” asked Terry.

“Oh, I could be persuaded to part with them, for a modest fee.”

And so, not long after, Susan, a heavy purse sitting in her *Pocket Dimension*, went back to the school. She changed, and all the spells the two were maintaining dropped.

“That seemed to work out well,” remarked Sparkle.

“I guess. Ripping their secrets out of the past started to make me feel a little dirty though. Everyone is entitled to their secret wants, right?”

“Yeah, I guess. How much you want bet Valentin is gay?”

“No bet. I’m sure he has more in mind than just non-humans hanging out in his new bar.”

“Think she’ll only leave the money to one of them?”

“Given how rich she seems to be, I’m sure the dreams of all three brothers can come true in one form or another.”

“Of course, you can already do what Terry wants.”

“True. But I wish him luck. And if he does figure it out, it’ll be a nice comparison with how I do it. If he’s willing to show me, anyway. I’d love to know if it’s even remotely similar, and I doubt the goblins will be willing to show me. No matter how high I roll on my *Persuasion* check. With Terry, at least there’s a chance, because once he can do it, I’ll show him how I can do it, and we can compare notes. Maybe even learn to improve the process by eliminating weaknesses in our respective techniques with the strengths of the other.”

“Very true.”

“Opening my own shop is really getting me excited, you know? Doing things for people like that on the side. It could be an exciting life!”

“Defeat Voldi first, then we can talk about that.”

“You had to remind me...”

Discussing the Future

Time: Beginning of April, first Friday of the month, evening

Place: Dumbledore's office

"Good evening, Susan, Harry," said Albus as the two entered the chamber. "Have a seat. There's a few things I'd like to talk to you about before our next journey."

Susan and Harry looked at each other, but shrugged and sat down.

"First there is the matter of the gold. Apparently a large amount was just donated in your name, Susan, by a Mrs. Bigelstine. Also a letter was included, congratulating me on educating such a fine young woman as yourself."

"She didn't have to do that," said Susan, a bit flummoxed.

"She did not, you're correct. Also, I don't really feel we had anything to do with it, but there you are. I just wondered if you had any suggestions as to how the money should be spent?"

"Books," said Susan immediately. "Possibly hiring competent teachers for a change, especially for one class in particular I can think of. Build a Faraday Cage in one of the classrooms and have a class on technology as part of 'Muggle' studies. Use the money to outfit the classroom with modern computers, tablets, HD TVs, video game systems, the works. Of course you'll have to work out how to get the internet fed into the castle, show them the wonders of the google search. Let kids raised in magical families know what they're missing through their parent's ignorance, in other words. Buy some actual pens instead of quills, at the very least. They won't fail around here, they aren't technology in the strictest sense. But there's a reason we gave up quills a thousand year ago or whatever, and there's no reason wizards can't use them. They sell them in boxes of fifty or more in any office supply store you know, so they aren't hard to come by." She took another breath to offer some more suggestions, but Albus put up a hand.

"I get the idea. I'll see what we can do."

"Great."

"The next item of business concerns Harry."

"Me?"

"Yes. As you know, I placed an enchantment around you when you were a baby, which enhanced the protection your mother gave you when she died. This is what has kept you safe all these years."

"I do?"

"Of course. I told you... hum, when did I tell you about this? Recently, wasn't it?"

Harry shook his head, glancing over at Susan.

"First I've heard of it," she said to him.

"I could have sworn I told you all this. Well, in any case, that protection will expire when you turn 17."

"What protection?"

"In short, the agents of Voldemort would have been unable to find you while you resided at your Aunt and Uncle's house. Sort of like having a secret keeper without having one. Are you certain I didn't mention this?"

"Very certain," said Harry, certain.

"How curious."

"Why?" asked Susan.

"I beg your pardon?"

“Why when he turns 17? Why not just cast it as strongly as possible and let it wear out naturally? That’s the one benefit your magic has over mine, you don’t have to maintain it. But it does break down, unlike mine, if I make it permanent. So why, by the evil looking goatee of my father, did you create an enchantment to protect Harry Potter until a certain date? Do you think his mother would love him more the day before he turned seventeen than the day after? How does the magic even know what age he is? What does it care how many seconds you’ve existed on the Earth? It obviously didn’t stop Dementors from finding him, but if they worked directly for Voldi they couldn’t have? The entire spell makes no sense. How did you even know such a spell, as it’s a sort of once in a lifetime event, and even you can’t be that *Always Prepared*.”

“There was a reason,” he said, thoughtfully tapping a finger against his cheek and looking around at the paintings on the wall. “It was so long ago now, I can’t seem to recall what it was.”

“Fantastic. Well done.” *As usual*. “In any case, it doesn’t matter, as I’m sure it hasn’t actually operated for several years.”

“What?” Albus perked up. “What’s this?”

“Show him your *Barrier*, Harry.” Harry got out his *Barrier Against Spells* item and held it up. “I made this ages ago and gave it to him. He’s totally immune to spells, and that means yours too, Headmaster. And I’m sure I’ve cast *Magic Immunity* on him at some point, so that would also have broken any enchantments on him. That’s why I go around casting it on people, to make sure they aren’t under the *Imperius Curse*. Would it reassert itself after that?”

Albus leaned back heavily, making his chair squeak. “I have no idea. I didn’t anticipate... well, you, actually.”

Neither did this whole universe, apparently.

“In any case, Harry will continue to enjoy the protections he has always had. The items I’ve made him, his own long hours of training in the *Dimension* rather than flying about on a stupid broomstick, and me personally. Plus Ron the Magic Fu master and Hermione with her *Photographic Reflexes* and enormous store of spells.”

“I would say we’ve got it covered,” said Harry with a grin.

“Yes. Yes, I see that,” said Albus, not paying much attention. “But why haven’t they attacked then? Especially during summer, when he’s nearly helpless?”

“Who would attack him?”

“Death Eaters, of course. Who else?”

“Why would they risk it? In the first place, he’s usually over at The Burrows or my house during the summer. Either is nearly impregnable, again thanks to me. And why would they anyway? They didn’t the first time someone tried to kill him, right? Voldi himself came a ‘knocking.’ She paused. “Sorry, Harry, that was a little insensitive of me. I apologize.”

“It’s okay.”

“Anyway, he hasn’t been attacked for the same reason you haven’t been, unless you have?”

Albus shook his head.

“You’re away from the school doing who knows what. Perfect time to jump you, no? Unless Voldi considers you both beneath himself now. Wonder why he would think that- oh wait, it’s because he *stole my magic*.”

“I’m well aware of what he did, thank you.”

“Oh, good. So who cares about Harry? The guy is immortal, Harry is not, and neither are you. Patience will solve any problems he has with you two, why bother attacking you directly? It’s too risky. Even if he sends a whole squad, I’ll more than likely be nearby, *Hypnotic Field* the

area and tear their magic out of them. Why take the risk- you're nothing compared to him now. I'm sorry, but it's the truth. And he's hardly helpless, he's been in fights before, and can do magic without the ministry knowing about it. We've often spared during the summers."

"It could explain why his group has been so quiet."

"You've shown us he doesn't act without thinking things through. Even killing his father's side of the family, he came up with a very cunning plan in seconds, and got away with it. Okay, more due to the corrupt and idiotic thinking of the ministry, but still."

"And that's why the Bogies?"

"That's why the Bogies. Something hard to injure, scary, and most importantly: expendable. When they swarm over the walls we're going to be swimming in them. That's what you have to plan for, not Voldi himself. He'll stay nice and safe a million miles away, or direct the battle through an *Avatar* like... he did... that one time."

"What time is this?"

When I found out about my prophesy, he was wandering around the ministry building as mud. "That's not important." Albus eyed her momentarily. Susan felt herself make a RES check, getting a 22. "Did you just try and read my mind?" Susan said angrily.

Albus looked away. "Don't be absurd."

"I made the resistance check, Headmaster. Don't think you can just pry into my thoughts. My RESolve is a 10. As a Paragon it can't be higher."

"I really don't know what you mean."

Susan eyed him suspiciously.

"In any case, I thought you should know. Be very careful after your 17th birthday."

Harry nodded.

"Now, shall we check out another piece of Voldemort's history? I have some excellent clues where he might have placed other bits of his soul."

"Actually," said Susan, "I'm going to rely on my magic for that, and get actual answers, rather than just conjecture. If it's all the same to you, of course."

"You've developed a method to track the other Horcrux? That's wonderful news, why didn't you tell me? We could leave tonight and destroy them!"

"Whoa, cowboy. Not so fast. I'm getting comfortable doing my own spell research now, it's true. I've done a grade one spell, a grade three spell, and I'm working on a grade six spell. I figure the magic I'll need will be about that level, so if I can pull off coming up with a spell of that grade by myself and have it work, I'll start working on a spell to track down his other bits."

"But without a Horcrux to work from, how can you even begin to do this research?"

Harry and Susan looked at each other.

"I said to tell him right away, remember?"

"And I gave you excellent reasons why we shouldn't. Too late for that now, though, I suppose. *Pocket Dimension.*"

Susan tossed the locket onto his desk. Albus bent down over it, looking it over. "This belonged to Salazar Slytherin! How in the world did you come by it? It was one of the objects I was going to show you tonight!"

"Kreacher had it," said Harry. "We nearly threw it out when we were cleaning."

Albus did a double take, then banged his ear. "Say that again? A house elf? Cleaning what?"

"Kreacher found out about it when Voldi took him to test the potion he made," said Susan. "Sirius' brother found out about it from him, and decided to do something about it. So

they went back and grabbed it. He died, sadly enough, but charged Kreachter with destroying it. As he had no Basilisk venom handy, he couldn't. So it just sat around until we cleaned the house out. We came to realize what it was later and went back for it. Luckily he had saved it from the trash, and we traded him for it."

"All my work. All my efforts. And you had already beaten me to it."

"Yeah," said Susan slowly. "You really can trust me, you know? I sort of have powerful magic? A desire to see a dangerous man made less dangerous, and make him pay for all the people he murdered? Sound familiar?"

"But why didn't you want to tell me about this? After all, that trust you speak of goes both ways. It might have been invaluable to finding the others!"

"I know it will be. It gives me something to focus on while I research the spell. Now, why didn't I want to tell you? There was a reason, but it was so long ago, I can hardly recall." Albus looked skeptical. "Oh right, it's coming back to me now." Susan counted off on her fingers. "Because you're never around? Because you didn't ask? Because you don't even trust Professor McGonagall enough to tell her what's going on? Because I don't trust you? Any of this ringing a bell?"

"What indication have I given you that you shouldn't trust me? I've allowed you to get away with things no other student would! I've backed you always!"

"Because no other student can do what I can do. Apart from the McGonagall thing? Trust has to be earned, Headmaster. Search your heart, I think you'll find a thing or two in there that might make you untrustworthy in my eyes."

There was a pause.

"Who have you been talking to? Have you been digging into my past? I can explain, you know. There were circumstances surrounding those events you're probably not aware of."

What's this? No I haven't, but maybe I should.

"Like I've said before, I put faith in results, not intent. What happened in your past is long over, I'm worried about tomorrow. You go out for months "looking" for something and never find a single thing. We got hold of this one in a day. I'll use it to track the others, the spell should only take a month to research when I'm done with the one I'm in the middle of. Would you have any results in that time? Judging by your past performance, I would say... no."

"That long?"

"I can only work on it a couple of hours a day, with my classes and such. If I did nothing else it would only take me eleven days, if I knew exactly what sort of spell to create, that is. I'll have to come up with that, first. That will add few days, at most. I'm creating a completely new spell, from scratch, that can track down a soul. Can you do better?"

"I must admit that I probably couldn't."

"Then don't go pretending a month is so long a time. It's not."

"I suppose not. Well, it seems you have the situation well in hand. I guess I'll leave you to it, then."

"Thank you," said Susan, grabbing up the locket again and putting it away.

"Say you finish that spell- what would you do then?"

"That's easy. It'll be early June, so we'll just take our exams and start looking. Hopefully Voldi won't have made a move by then, and we can have the summer to track down *Soul Shards*. Of course it shouldn't take long, there's only three to find, and my magic is nothing if not efficient. We'll destroy them, then when Voldi comes out in the open we'll nail him."

"And by 'nail' you mean..."

“Capture. Strip of magic and bring him in for trial. Finish my last year here, destroy Azkaban, then who knows.”

“I see. You still wish to do that?”

“It’s still standing there, isn’t it? I still have the power, don’t I? This girl doesn’t make a promise if she can’t keep it.”

“I just would hate to read about your death in the morning paper, having been killed by Dementors.”

“They don’t scare me. Now that you mention it, though, is there a secure place we can leave a ton of potions?”

“Potions?”

“Yes. We’ve got all kinds of potions ready to go in the *dimension* and there should be a better way to distribute them, should they be needed. If it comes to a fight here I won’t want to waste time opening my *dimension* to get them to people, so they should be locked up in the castle someplace. I don’t dare use them, they may react with my own magic in odd ways, but they were made with school ingredients so they should stay in the school.”

“I’ll see what I can find. Just how much space will you need?”

“A couple of shelves worth of space. They’re sitting on shelves about this wide...” Susan spread her arms. “This deep, and this tall.”

“Full?”

“Crammed full. Labeled, stoppered, ready to go. We’ve been working there for like two years now, and potions aren’t that hard. At least, when compared to *Imbuing*. We actually need the space, my little cabin is getting cramped. But you’re *never around to ask*.”

“Yes, we established that. Very well, I’ll talk to Severus and he can find some space that can be locked up somewhere. I guess a lot of people deserve some extra credit. Funny how you seem to inspire people to do extra work they normally wouldn’t.”

“They wouldn’t normally try to do everything in their power to protect themselves in an attack? They wouldn’t think ahead and get things ready so they aren’t wishing they had that potion of speed or whatever when they really need it?”

“Uh, no, not usually.”

“Must be a cultural thing. Anyway, let me know where I can unload the *dimension* sometime.”

“I’ll do that. Is there anything else you needed to discuss?”

Albus looked over at Harry, who shook his head.

“I guess not.”

“Then I will bid you goodnight, Headmaster. If you think of anything you might have missed telling me, due to some slight oversight, you know where to find me.”

They left.

“Laying it on a bit thick, aren’t you?” asked Harry as they walked back to the dorm.

“I didn’t write *Prophecy* on a big stick and beat him in the head with it. Anything else is remarkable restraint on my part, I think. I want to give him every chance to come clean. Notice how he still hasn’t?”

“The so called ‘clue bat’ perhaps?”

“The very thing. And what was that about his past? Something fishy there...”

Harry nodded. “He was right about one thing though, you seem to influence people without even trying. I mean you think nothing of spending hours making items, or studying your book of magic. When it was safe to bring it out, I mean.”

“That’s what I do, though. Prepare. Learn. Run scenarios in my head about fights I might get into and how to win them. I can’t see how you wouldn’t.”

“That’s the thing. When I’m around you, that sort of thing seems natural. Like I don’t need to talk about the weather, or about Quidditch or a joke I heard the day before. I should get to work on that potion I was thinking about. It’s like you infect people around you with... I don’t know, adventure’s disease or something.”

“And when I’m not around?”

“Then it could wait. Or I’ll never need it, or something distracts me, like a pretty girl or something. It’s hard to explain.”

“I guess it must be. I just do what comes naturally. I don’t know what to tell you. If that means people are making potions and practicing combat maneuvers, so be it. Doesn’t seem to have done them any harm. Do you know bullying is down like 60% now?”

“Really?”

“Hermione mentioned it. Seems Slytherin students are more than twice as likely to bully, and guess who has never once set foot in my *Dimension* for combat lessons?”

“A Slytherin?”

“You guessed it. But with people able to drop in and get some tips on spells they’ve not mastered, or just practice a defense spell over and over, Slytherin students are kind of falling behind.”

“Should we do something about it?”

“What can we do? They want to play the high and mighty rich kids who don’t need the help of a *Ravenclaw*, then that’s their business.”

“But they’ll be in just as much danger if something attacks the castle.”

“Bah. What would attack the castle? No point. Oh, sure, I’m training people just in case, because you never know. But there’s nothing here Voldi wants but me, and attacking a castle makes no strategic sense because I leave it. No, those combat lessons will serve them far better outside in the real world, should they come under fire for some reason. Plus they’ll have a little more confidence in themselves, which will be earned because they worked for it. Being able to say ‘I trained with Susan herself’ will be worth a lot one day, you’ll see.”

“But you said to the Headmaster- this sea of Bogey you’re worried about-”

“Yeah, they could come here, I admit. I just think the probability is low, that’s all. He could be gathering them for some other reason, we don’t know. If I make the Headmaster believe that attack is imminent though, and Voldi is gathering them for some reason, he might step up the defenses around here. And that’s no bad thing.”

“And if he’s focused on what’s coming from outside he’ll be less likely to see what you’re doing, here inside, am I right?”

“What?” Susan was honestly shocked. “I’ve been good all year. I’m not even plotting anything, or... or anything. I mean come on Harry, I’m not the person I was when I was screaming at Umbridge, you know?”

“No, you aren’t, I guess. And you would have told me.”

“Yes, I would have. I don’t keep things from you, or any of my friends.” *Expect for that one thing, I mean. But is a secret weapon a secret weapon if you tell people about it? I think not.*

“Thanks.”

“Sure. Now if you’ll excuse me, my *adventure’s disease* is telling me to get another hour of spell research done before bed.”

Harry chuckled. “Good night.”

“See you later, Harry.”

Susan and the Core sat down for breakfast and everyone was bursting to ask Susan if she had finished it. The past two months she had worked hard on completing the spell to lead them to the other pieces of soul, and they knew she was close. The night before she had borrowed Hermione's charm and went into the *Dimension* while the others went to bed.

"Anything interesting happen last night?" asked Hermione, as Susan handed her the charm back.

"Oh, went for a midnight stroll around the lake. The weather sure is getting nice, isn't it?"

"Did you? That's nice."

"Yup. Sure is nice to have no responsibilities at all. No worries, no cares, the whole bit. The whole 8-bits. Heck I'd go so far as 16-bits. More colorful, more sprites onscreen, you know?"

"Any special plans for today?"

"Oh, the usual. Fall asleep in history class. Scowl at my buddy Professor Snape in Defense class. Use triangulation to figure out where the other *Soul Shards* reside. That sort of thing."

"You finished it, then?" asked Harry excitedly.

Susan smiled. "Sure did. Want to see?"

"Yeah!" She slid some papers over to him, which he glared at. "You know what I mean."

"Nope, I only know what you say."

"I want to see the spell- in action!"

"Tough. There's too many people around. We'll do it tonight over by that big map hanging in the history classroom. That way I can get the first line."

"Line?" asked Ron.

"I decided to make it work sort of generically, rather than just targeting his soul specifically. I'll hold the chain (or object) and it will tug in the direction of the nearest piece of soul that's not within about 10 meters or so. That way if someone else comes along and does this, I could use the same spell to track down those pieces as well!"

"Why did you put a distance modifier in the spell itself?"

"I figured if I didn't, the spell might consider the piece I was holding to be the closest, and just kind of vibrate in my hand. By specifying it I worked around that problem. That's why it took me a little longer than I thought, trying to work that into the formula."

"But it works?"

"Yup. Tried it out last night outside the castle, and it pointed back towards the castle and a little to the right. Tonight we'll use the map and figure out where it's pointing. Then I'll head home, and to a couple of other places I've seen and gather some more lines. We know there's probably 3 out there, so this way I should be able to narrow down the area they're in. Shouldn't take too long, really. We can get the approximate area with mapping software and maybe get them all in a single day."

"I hope you're right. If we can take care of this over the summer we won't even have to worry about missing any school!"

“Don’t forget, this just makes him killable, should it become necessary. He’s still going to be out there when this is done, doing only he knows what with my magic.”

“But it’s a step in the right direction,” said Hermione.

“Absolutely. A little piece of him gets to die for every life he took. At least, every life he used to split his soul up.”

“I can’t wait,” said Harry. “Knowing he’s out there someplace, waiting for the right moment to... do whatever it is he plans to do? I’d rather not have that hanging over my head any longer than I need to, thank you very much.”

“You and me both.”

“You are taking us with you, right? When you go to find them?” asked Ron.

“Uh, yeah? Why wouldn’t I? You can all take care of yourselves, and I’ll need the help if Voldi actually shows up when we grab one of them. After all, he could have put more alarms on them by now. I may be *Overconfident* but I’m not stupid.”

“That’s fine then.”

“What about Luna?” asked Hermione.

Susan shook her head. “No, she’s going home where I know she’ll be safe. She’s a hard worker and I love her, but she’s not on the same level as you guys. Anyway, aren’t parties of four traditional or something? Even if you are all squishy wizards rather than a fighter, a thief, a black mage and a red mage.”

“You’re a squishy wizard yourself,” remarked Ron.

“True. I guess that makes Hermione the fighter, she’s got the armored robes.”

“They actually fit me now, too.”

“So am I the thief or the black mage?” asked Harry.

“You’re the red mage, I’m the thief. I’m stealing the *Soul Shards* after all. Ron’s the combat wizard, he’s the black.”

“I don’t know, your magic is more versatile, so shouldn’t you be the red?”

“What are you all talking about?” asked Ron.

“Poor, poor Ron,” said Harry, patting him on the shoulder. “Doesn’t even know about the classics.”

Everyone but Ron laughed.

That day passed slowly, and Susan felt there was a terrible anticipation in the air. She could swear she felt the castle holding its breath, and everyone seemed to feel it. They moved a little more quietly than normal, and glanced around as though nervous about something.

Strange, no one should have any clue about what I’m about to do. Maybe it’s just my perception of the world that’s changed, because I’m so keyed up?

Finally, after like a month, classes were over and the sun was setting. The group slipped into the History classroom as the castle was winding down for the day. Sparkle was with them this time, and looking tense as well.

“Something’s up,” she said. “I’ve been feeling prickly all day.”

“It’s just nerves. We’re about to do something momentous here,” said Susan, brushing her off.

“No, it’s more than that. I’m telling you it’s more than just me.”

“People have been acting a little funny,” said Ron.

“You noticed that too?” asked Harry.

“A couple of people even asked me in the bathroom today if you were okay,” said Hermione. “They seemed relieved when I said you were. It was the weirdest thing.”

“Well it can’t be an echo, I can’t change my own destiny, right? And all that’s going to happen is the chain on this locket will move and it’ll show us the direction of the nearest *Soul Shard*. I’m not even leaving the castle tonight, so what could possibly go wrong?”

“You had to say that,” said Sparkle.

“Oh, come on, don’t tell me you buy that old superstition about things getting ten times worse if you say ‘what could pos- mumfh’.”

All three of the others slapped hands over her mouth.

“Okay, okay,” she said, fighting them off. “I won’t say it again. Sheesh.”

“As I was going to say, have you checked your character sheet lately?”

“No. We haven’t gotten cards in ages so... wait, do we have cards?” Susan got out her sheet and looked, and yes, she had new cards written down.

“Great, ‘I Took a Night Class’ and boosting a single mental or physical stat for an instant. As everything I do is basically magical, that’s not going to help much. I’ll just turn all three- no, maybe I’ll hang onto the Night Class. I only have 5 XP but given how jumpy everyone is, I might need to learn a new spell in a hurry tonight. I’ll hang onto it.” Two more XP were added to Susan’s sheet, and card 5 and 36 disappeared from it. “Did you get any good combat cards?”

“Only ‘It’s Not as Bad as it Looks,’ which could come in handy if someone takes a nasty hit. I turned in my others. Our favorite, the ‘endless ammo’ for one.

Humm, maybe I’ll regret that one, but they can’t know that.

“If you four are done making me paranoid, perhaps I could get on with it?” Susan asked.

They looked around, but nothing seemed amiss. They all nodded.

“Thank you.” Susan got out the paper with the spell written on it and the locket, and looked at the map. “Oh yeah!” She got out a pencil and some paper as well, and Hermione sketched a quick representation of the map.

“Great. We can use this to get a very, very rough idea where it’s pointed. By the way, which way is north, anyway? We’ll need to know so we know where the thing is pointing.”

“*Point me,*” said Harry, getting... no, he had his wand out. *They really are jumpy tonight. Wonder why?* His wand swung and Harry said “That way is north.”

“Wait, did you just say ‘point me?’ How is that Latin?”

“Maybe it was developed more recently?” ventured Hermione.

“If spells can be cast in English, why not translate all spells into English? Make them easier to remember. And don’t tell me a spell to tell you where north is was developed recently, because that seems like something that should have been developed thousands of years ago.”

“Maybe they’re stuck the way they first get created? I don’t know. I thought you wanted to use your spell?”

“Right you are.” Susan read and cast, and she held out the locket. It started to tug, rising up in a certain direction.

“Looks like that way,” said Ron, “If that’s north, it’s pointing across this way.”

“No, we’re oriented this way,” said Hermione. “So I would put the line across there.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right. I see what you’re doing now. You go to a couple of different places and draw more lines, and where they intersect is where you’re looking. You can narrow it down from there!”

“That’s right Ron. Or we just fly in a straight line until it points downward, but that’s a last resort. It could be halfway across the earth!”

“Man, I hope not!”

“Yeah.” Susan dropped the spell, and the chain went limp, making the locket swing back and forth until Susan put it back in her *Pocket Dimension*. “And you were worried something terrible was going to happen.”

Which is of course, rather predictably, when the bloodcurdling scream echoed through the halls of the castle, and pandemonium erupted.

The group ran into the hall, where from out of nowhere, Bogey were appearing.

“He wouldn’t!” shouted Susan, not believing her eyes and cries of surprise went up all through the castle, and spells started flying. “There’s nothing of value here! Why attack this place? You know even this won’t hurt me, Voldemort!” She shouted up at nothing.

“Come on,” said Hermione, “We have to go help!”

“*For Sacrifices Made*,” intoned Susan, holding up her ring. She was ringed with warriors and lost 10 energy. *A fair trade*. Sparkle was already getting her lion out, and Susan hastily got out her dragon, as well.

“Should we stick together?” Ron asked, blurring with *Acceleration*.

Hermione reached into her *Pocket Dimension*, bringing out a potion and downing it. Then she activated her *Phantom Doubles* around herself.

“No,” said Susan, “too much power all in one place. I’m sure each of us can finish one of these things pretty quick. But if we all go for the same one, it’s a waste of effort. Split up. Get through the castle as fast as you can and take those things out as quickly as possible. Defend those too scared to move. What am I telling you this stuff for, you know it all. Go!”

“Good luck,” the other three said to everyone. Ron vanished, reappearing down the hallway and blasting down a corridor, no doubt into a surprised Bogey.

Harry conjured his *Windblade* and set off, determined. His wand was held at the ready in his other hand.

“Wait,” cried Sparkle. “*Acceleration*.” She took the extra time, and they all blurred as the magic took hold of them.

“Thanks,” he cried, now sprinting at a walk down the other side of the hallway.

“I’m headed to the library,” said Hermione. “There’s always a lot of people there at this time of night.”

“Good idea. The Headmaster can take care of himself, but he’ll be a target and even he could get overwhelmed. I’m headed to his office.”

“Stay safe.”

“You stay safe! In fact, you five!” Susan pointed to five of her warriors. “Stick with this girl, and attack anything that attacks her or she attacks.”

All five banged their swords to their chest and fell in behind Hermione. She nodded and set off down yet another hallway, blasting a Bogey as it stepped out of purgatory, and one of the soldiers cut it down. She moved on as it vanished.

“Now for us,” Susan said to Sparkle. “Let’s go.”

“Follow me,” she said to her lion, and Susan gave orders to her remaining troops. They moved off.

Please be okay, Luna. I can’t track you down right now, I need to defend as many people as I can, and that means freeing up the headmaster, who will no doubt be swarmed by these

things. I should have worked with him to improve the defenses here so they couldn't step through from purgatory. Oh right, he was never here, the idiot!

Susan roamed the halls, where it seemed dozens if not more of the creatures were fighting. She conserved energy, having her fearless warriors take point and chop anything that looked like a Bogey to bits. The sound of combat echoed through the halls, and more than once she came to a dead or wounded person. Those she could help she hit with the *Alleviation* knife and told to follow her. When they found a large enough group she left them and continued on her way. She had never spent so long marking time in combat rounds, which made everything seem to take longer. She knew it shouldn't take more than a few minutes to reach the Headmaster's office, but with all the distractions, it seemed to take an hour.

Suddenly Albus' *Patronus* flew up and said with his voice- "Susan, come to the main doors. Something monstrous is there, and we can't hold it back much longer! It's already killed- ACK!"

It vanished, and Susan took off running, ignoring combat down other halls in her haste. She skidded to a halt as she came to the main entrance, which was blasted apart, rubble everywhere. She couldn't believe her eyes, there were three very large and very weird... things... attacking the wizards trying to hold them back.

The first was a huge clown, its mouth shaped like an 'O' and making creepy, slow, circus music sounds. At least, something akin to that was coming forth from the figure. It carried an enormous balloon animal sword, which it was currently using to block a spell being thrown at it by Albus.

The second was a huge spider, easily as big as Susan's dragon *Ally* and currently sinking enormous fangs into a student.

The third was the most inhuman, seemingly just a ball of darkness, which crackled with weird, red energy along its edges like lightning.

Looking at them, Susan felt afraid but managed to make her three RESolve checks against fleeing immediately. The ground around the creatures was littered with bodies, as three teachers, Minerva, Severus, and Albus, tried everything they could to protect those still alive. There were six kids behind them, one of which was screaming at the top of their lungs and trying to claw their eyes out, while another just rocked back and forth. The others simply cowered, unable to do anything but shut their eyes and roll into a ball. All along the hallway, the stone seemed to ripple as though made of jello, and the torches nearby were burning with an unnatural blue flame. *Yeah, these things are bad news all right.*

Susan knew what she had to do.

First she opened a *Teleportal* behind the kids into the hospital wing and shouted "Get them through here!"

Albus stopped firing energy at the clown and whirled, flicking his wand. All six kids tumbled through the portal and Susan closed it.

"I can't seem to touch them with spells!" he shouted over the crazy "music" coming from the clown. "Do they have some of your *Immunity* magic going?"

Susan stared at them, making a *Magic Sense* check. Luckily, she rolled maximum, a 17, and cut through the interference of the spells going off all around her. They all had *Barrier Against Spells* going.

"They sure do! Crap! Dragon, *Legion*, destroy those creatures!"

“Lion, attack those creatures!” shouted Sparkle.

The constructs pressed forward.

Fastest, of course, was the Lion, under permanent *Acceleration* and having “mad stats.” It leaped over the heads of the *Legion* members and came crashing down on the sphere, probably hoping to drive it to the ground. Sadly, it passed straight on through, making the lion cock its head as if to say “now how in the world did that happen?”

A split second behind was the dragon, which also jumped, but not at the creatures, at the wall. It grabbed on, sunk its claws in, and let loose with fire at the spider, which was in the middle.

Is that treated as a spell or a natural ability?

The fire harmlessly splashed off the creature, which gave a final shake to the poor person in its jaws and dropped them.

Guess that answers that question.

The lion went again, deciding to ignore the sparkly ball of darkness and lunged for the spider. It fared no better as it bounced off the creature’s *Invulnerability*. (They are, after all, technically a creature, having been summoned with a Venus spell. Unlike a Legion member that is made of condensed magic to resemble a person. That’s the story and I’m sticking to it.)

Sparkle started casting *Destruction*, taking the full 7 delay, while beside her, Susan cast *Retrieval* to get her sword from the Headmaster’s office. It dropped into her waiting hand.

“What should we do?” shouted Albus.

“Just try and slow it down, I doubt you can do anything worse than inconvenience it,” she shouted back.

One of the *Legion* made it to the closest creature, the spider, and took a swing with its sword. Because the spider was a +1 size it hit, doing a tiny bit of damage.

The lion decided to try and pin the spider to the ground so it couldn’t skitter about anymore, and make an attack. It touched the spider.

The closest *Legionnaire* reached the clown, who didn’t bother trying to parry or dodge, it just took the attack and smashed into the soldier with its balloon animal sword. It made a humorous *boyyoyoyng* sound as it smashed into the soldier’s head. The soldier staggered under the weight of the blade.

Four of the Legion were now in front of the creatures and struck out, with each creature now surrounded on at least two sides by the forces of good. The clown took another hit, again not bothering to dodge but rather striking out again, smashing into the head of the attacking soldier and staggering it, as well.

The two facing the ball of darkness had their swords harmlessly pass through it, and it seemed to laugh as they did.

The one now to the side of the spider struck out, and the spider, now about to grapple with the Lion couldn’t dodge, so it took another small wound to the body.

The dragon tried fire on the clown, who ignored it totally.

Susan could now act, and sped through her soldiers, sword at the ready, with her new speed of 14. She knew she would get there in 5 segments.

The lion and the spider now made *Wrestling* checks to see who would go down, but the spider won it and slammed the Lion down into the ground. It seemed surprised. The spider plunged down with its fangs, striking a leg but not sinking in very far.

The ball crackled with energy, and four beams shot out of it, which the soldiers around the creature didn't bother to dodge. They were all struck, taking minor damage, but one's entire arm was nearly blasted off, and now hung limply to the side. The sword clattered to the ground.

Susan, still moving, decided to try and take that one out first, and instantly cast *Phase* on herself, which she could take as a free action while moving.

Sparkle finished casting, and the ground around the clown disappeared in a flash. And while 60kg of rock sounds like a lot, rock is pretty heavy, so it hardly staggered the thing. "Shoot, that spell was never made for this kind of thing!"

"An excellent thought, however!" said Albus, blasting more rock from under the feet of the clown. "See if we can't keep it off balance!"

The dragon, seeing an opportunity, lunged toward the clown, using its *ST*rength to propel it forward and drive the clown down. The clown tried to bring its sword up to deflect it, but it was too slow and the dragon plowed into it. With the uneven ground now under the thing's feet, it went down with the dragon atop it.

Several more soldiers moved into position, and the spider looked around, deciding what to do next. It attacked with two of its front legs, knocking two soldiers back, but only denting their armor.

Sadly, the number of soldiers in the hallway now worked against them, and most of them just tried weaving back and forth looking for an opening, but not finding any. The ones in front were now pounding the clown, which seemed to heal as fast as they stuck it, and the spider could use its long legs to keep any swords out of reach of its body.

To make a long story short, Susan slashed at the sphere again and again, aided by Sparkle casting *Successful Strike* on her. She did called shots for damage, which with *Acceleration* going, didn't create too much additional delay for her.

By the time she had finally beaten the ball, making it vanish in a puff of arid smoke, the spider's legs had been encased in rock thanks to the *Transfiguration* efforts of the three wanded teachers on the scene. Susan ran at it, but it noticed and spat out a crackling energy web that slowed her down. This proved not to be magic resistant, and by hacking at it and pounding it with spells the four managed to bring it down, so Susan could run underneath the body of the spider and stab up repeatedly until it was dead.

The clown had by that time thrown the dragon off and stood up again, frowning but still "playing" creepy music.

It doesn't even look damaged!

She backed off as it bonked soldier after soldier, who had now started to dodge as several of them had been "killed," which made them explode. Oddly this didn't seem to hurt the clown at all, and Susan wondered how she was ever going to take such a thing down.

"Can't you cancel out what keeps it safe from magic?" shouted Albus over the sounds of battle.

"No, I can't- it's immune to magic, remember?"

"Then we need a plan! It's too strong, we can't box it in with stone, it'll just break through."

“I can kill magic in the area which should stop the spell and its *Regeneration* but my *Legion* goes too. You’ll have to deal with it by crushing it or something. Accelerate rocks from outside the anti-magic field, understand?”

“That should work, do it!”

Susan fell back and put a hand inside her robe to hide what she was doing and got out her *Somatic Sword* object. In this case, the weapon she wanted to use against Voldemort. As she did, the three teachers lifted all the rocks and debris around the creature, floating it above, ready to drop. When she was part way down the hall she activated the enchantment on it with a word-*“Nullification”* and pictured it centered around the clown. The flame warriors around it vanished and the rocks dropped. It threw up a hand but got buried, but was still fighting.

Severus conjured daggers in the air and whipped them at the creature as it tried to break out of the rubble, and several scored. It screamed, no longer “playing” music from its mouth. The wounds didn’t seem to be closing up either, so Susan believed they had a chance. The other two teachers conjured other weapons and sent them flying towards the thing, which finally made it vanish. They all looked around, making sure nothing else was in the area, and Susan let go of *Dead Magic* and reabsorbed her weapon.

Didn’t want to use that until I was standing in front of Voldi. After all, you don’t use your trump card until the game looks like it’s over.

“Let’s not waste time, there may be more of those things in the school.”

“I very much hope not,” said Susan, wearily dragging the sword to a ready position again.

In the hour that followed the castle was swept from top to bottom to make sure no more fear creatures were inside. Luckily only a few of the smaller, weaker creatures were around, and were swiftly dispatched. Susan, the Headmaster, and Harry were now in the hospital wing, where the lucky ones were recovering.

“It’s a good thing we had that tremendous stock of potions,” Madam Pomfrey was saying. “Things would have been a lot worse without them.”

“Susan, there you are!” called a voice from the door. She turned to look and there was Luna, smiling happily at her. They ran to each other and embraced.

“I was so worried about you,” said Susan, near to tears.

“Why? I wasn’t worried about you,” said Luna with a laugh.

“What?” Susan held her at arm’s length, and Luna beeped her nose. “I knew you would be okay, so why worry? Maybe next time you can put that same faith in me, okay?”

“Yeah, okay. Deal.”

Susan saw Hermione past Luna’s shoulder. “Okay, Hermione?” she called.

“I’m okay, but Ron is dead-”

“Dead?!”

“Dead tired after all that.”

“Don’t even joke like that, a lot of people didn’t make it.”

Her hands flew over her mouth. “What? Really?”

“You have to understand,” said Albus, coming up behind Susan, “You and your group are far better equipped than the normal student here. They do not have your ability with spell-casting, and so were not as able to defend themselves after this attack.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t know. They just seemed to go down so easily, I didn’t think...”

“You were fortunate then.”

She looked over at Susan, who still had her sword, tucked into a makeshift belt at her waist. “You ran into something else?”

Susan nodded. “I’ll tell you later.”

“Yes, for now we must focus on the defense of the castle. I’ve called in the rest of the Order, who are patrolling the halls. They are also checking to see if anything is missing, though a full inventory of the library and offices could take weeks.”

“I honestly didn’t think he would attack, there’s no point,” said Susan.

“But he has, and now we must discover why. He would not stage such a large scale attack without some cause.”

“You don’t think-”

At that moment there was a puff of smoke and a piece of paper appeared at Susan’s feet.

“Get down!” she shouted to Luna, throwing herself across Luna’s body and driving them both to the ground. She squeezed her eyes shut and cradled Luna’s head expecting an explosion or something.

“Is that your sword, or are you just happy to see me?” said Luna after a few seconds.

Susan opened her eyes, everyone was looking at her fairly amused.

“It could have been a *ward* of some kind, you know,” she said, untangling herself from Luna.

“If so, then why not when you were asleep?” said Albus, looking the paper over without touching it. “No, I think this is just a message.”

Susan did a *Magic Sense* but felt nothing, not that she might with only a 13. She reached over and picked it up. It was folded just once, and she unfolded it.

Endgame.

I win.

“That’s it? *I win*? What the heck?”

She looked around at everyone, who looked back at her, confused.

“What?”

She looked back at the paper. Three words. *Endgame. I win.*

“What?!”

She shoved the paper at Albus.

“What?!!!!”

"Clearly, something has happened," said Albus, seated behind his desk. "But what that something is eludes me for the moment."

A few of the Order, including Mad Eye and the Longbottoms were there, as well as the Core and several teachers.

"It makes no sense," repeated Susan. "Why just send a bunch of creatures into the castle to cause a panic? Does he have that many of them to waste? Does he just not care?"

Flitwick walked into the castle, and set the picture frame down where it belonged. "I've checked all the secret passages for the time of the attack with *Time Window*, and nothing. Not even a mouse used those passageways during the attack."

"Unless he was both *Invisible* and *Phased* so he didn't have to bother opening them," said Susan.

"Well, yes, apart from that."

"Thank you, Flitwick. You may attend to your house."

"Another body was discovered," he said. "The count is now twenty, I believe."

Pain showed in Albus' eyes, and he nodded.

"It could have been much worse," said Flitwick, and turned, walking away.

Everyone paused a moment, thinking about the damage, both to the castle and to the people in it caused by the attack.

"He is right. It could have been much worse. I don't want you to blame yourself, Susan."

"I should have killed him when I had the chance, and let my mother fend for herself."

"But you did not, and because of that, Ron was able to combine martial arts and magic. This no doubt saved many more lives than if he hadn't."

"But the attack would never have happened-"

"One cannot say what would or would not have happened. Perhaps another would have come forward and done this. We can't say. You cannot safeguard the world, Susan."

"Perhaps it's time for magic to just go away."

"And you could no doubt do such a thing, but I would caution you against such rash actions, especially until we are in position of all the facts."

"What were those creatures we fought, Albus?" exploded Minerva, as though she could no longer contain the question.

Albus looked troubled. "If we are to call a Bogey an evolved or changed Bogart, then I would call those creatures an evolved Bogey. Those Susan saved when she arrived described them as being the most terrifying thing they had ever seen, and the one that was screaming had to be sedated. We think she may have suffered some kind of mental breakdown, just at the sight of them."

"If she has, I can cure her."

"You will have to in any case, we cannot regrow her eyes, they are quite unlike bone. I believe you can?"

Everyone in the room shuddered, imagining what could have driven the poor second year to do that to herself. Susan nodded.

“Do so in the morning. I believe if you hit her with the knife now, she will wake up again?”

“Yes.”

“Better to let her rest for the moment, I think. Even magically making her mind whole again, her brain should have some time to process the incident.”

“You’re the boss.”

“What if those things attacked the bank, or the ministry?” asked Severus. “Would anyone there be able to stop them?”

“Tom has never been about wanton destruction. I can hardly believe even now he would do such a thing. But you’re right, we should check in to make sure those locations do not need reinforcing.”

“I’ll do it.” He walked off towards the fireplace.

“I would need to drain some people of energy if I’m going to be doing more fighting tonight,” said Susan.

“Hopefully that will not be necessary.”

“And you say Voldemort thinks he’s won?” asked Moody.

“That’s what the message said,” spat Susan. “His little gloating missive.”

“You’re still alive, so I doubt that’s the case. Remember that.”

“Don’t worry.”

“What are we going to do, Albus?”

“Cancel the rest of school, for a start. No exams this year, obviously. We’ll hold a service for those that died in two days, to allow their families to get here. Tomorrow will be spent assessing the damage and getting everyone back on their feet. Then we start repairing the damage that was caused. Have you had any success, Susan, in your efforts?”

“Just today, right before the attack.”

“Coincidence?”

“I don’t know, but the item is safe, his so called winning wasn’t about getting that away from me in the confusion. He would know it was in my *pocket dimension* anyway.”

The others looked puzzled, but didn’t press the issue.

“Then the task falls to you. I will be needed here, so you must carry on my work. I dare say you’ll do a far better job than I did in any case.”

I could hardly do worse, now could I?

But she simply nodded.

“Good. Now, it’s late, you should all get to bed,” he said to the kids. “There’s nothing more you can do tonight-”

There was a knock on the door and Flitwick stuck his head back in. “Sorry, Albus. It’s twenty one now, Susan Bones apparently- well, there’s no body but... She died defending a group on the fourth floor, she and the creature she was fighting took each other out, somehow. They just came out of hiding and told us. They all called her a hero.”

“NO!” shouted Susan. “No, no, no! I only just met her! She seemed so nice. She can’t be dead!” Tears, coming for some time, could no longer be held back, and Susan choked up.

“I’m sorry,” he said simply, and closed the door again.

“This will be a trying time for all of us-” said Albus.

“Don’t give me that crap,” hissed Susan. “You wanted me to want him dead, fine, I want him dead. But let’s put the blame squarely where it belongs- me. I could have taken him out before he resurrected. I didn’t. This is *my fault*.” She stalked out of the room, slamming the door

and making her way back to the dorms. The hallways were strangely quiet and empty, and it seemed only one torch in five was lit, making them seem much darker than normal. Susan threw herself down on the bed and let the tears come, imagining the last moments of Susan Bones, desperately trying to defeat something she was probably utterly terrified of, and having to sacrifice her life to do it.

Susan felt arms around her, and looked up through blurred eyes. It was Luna.

“Oh, Luna!” she wailed. “What am I going to do?”

“Shhh,” said Luna, stroking her hair. “It’ll be okay. Everything will be okay.”

Susan cried herself to sleep, rocked in the arms of the girl she loved.

The next morning, Susan awoke to find Luna staring at her.

“Good morning,” said Luna, a slight twinkle in her eye.

“Morning,” said Susan, looking away ashamedly. The events of the previous night were still fresh in her mind. Luna grabbed her face and brought it back to face hers.

“I know, you’re embarrassed because of last night, yadda yadda. You should have been strong and sworn revenge and all that *boy stuff* they seem to like. Well wrong. You did what any normal person would do, and I love you all the more for it. You don’t need to be all tough and ‘I can take anything’ all the time, you know? Someone you knew *died*, it’s only natural to be sad.”

“They died because of me.”

“And I’ll have none of that, either. The minute I believe you didn’t do the best you could in any situation is the day I turn my back on you. Again, you’re human. You did what you thought was right at the time, and that’s the end of it. If you start second guessing everything you’ll never be able to do anything!”

“I…”

Luna looked at her piercingly.

“Okay, okay. But I still want to know what that gloating was about.”

“I might be able to help there,” said a voice, and Susan looked over Luna. Hermione was sitting on a chair nearby, with a slight smile on her face. Her legs were drawn up and she was hugging her knees.

“Hermione! How long have you been there?”

“Oh, not long.”

“I didn’t hear you come in!”

“Maybe I entered quietly.”

Susan pushed herself up off the bed. “I must look a mess.”

“Don’t worry, no one is going to be looking their best today. You want to go get cleaned up, or…”

“No, tell me the bad news. Were more people found dead?”

Hermione gave a slight nod. “Twenty four people is the official count. There’s going to be a monument put up with the names, the way I hear it.”

Susan shook her head. “Twenty four.”

“It would have been a lot worse if you hadn’t held that class. Apparently there were hundreds that attacked, but as everyone knew their weaknesses, thanks to you, it went a lot better than it could have. Plus a lot of those potions were used so that helped a bunch.”

“Are you stalling?”

Hermione was silent a moment, looking at nothing.

“Her-”

“You’re not going to like it.”

“What?”

“You’re really, really, really not going to like it. Maybe you should have breakfast first?”

“Hermione!”

“Okay, okay. Here. It was delivered early because of the main story.” She took her feet off a newspaper and reluctantly handed it over.

TOM RIDDLE’S TRIUMPHANT RETURN TO THE MINISTRY

Late last night, Tom Riddle or “Lord Voldemort” as he came to be known by the “Death Eater” organization, was welcomed with open arms back to the Ministry family he worked tirelessly for these last twenty years.

In a stunning twist, the man we made out to be the most evil person on the planet was revealed to be a secret agent for the ministry, who was tasked with bringing down the “Death Eater” secret society that had apparently been operating for hundreds of years.

“It’s been a tough journey,” Tom was quoted as saying, “And I know a lot of you will have questions about my activities while under cover. Not to worry, they will be answered.”

The Daily Prophet can confirm that last night, dozens of men and women were captured in raids all around the country, and were taken to Azkaban on suspicion of being affiliated with the “Death Eater” cult.

“It’s been operating for hundreds of years, and is responsible for all kinds of disasters even we thought were natural,” said Tom. “That’s why I had to go so deep undercover, you see? They wouldn’t have trusted me otherwise, and I never would have been able to get all the names and evidence I plan to submit to the courts.”

Tom declined to answer further questions at the time of this interview, stating he would be giving a full question and answer briefing at 2:00 this afternoon, Eastern Time. The ministry confirms this time, so tune your Wireless in at 2:00 for what will no doubt be the interview of the century.

“WHAT?”

Half an hour later, having showered and hastily eaten something, Susan tried to get into the Headmaster’s office. She found a crowd of people there, from reporters to angry parents yelling about the safety of the school.

“He might be a bit busy,” said Susan. “Maybe we should come back later?”

“Yeah,” said Hermione. “He seems to have a full schedule at the moment.”

“Let’s find Harry and Ron, maybe talk about this.”

Luna and Hermione nodded, and went in search of their friends.

They found them in Myrtle’s bathroom, where Harry and Ron were crouched over the newspaper article themselves.

They all greeted each other.

“This saves us finding a quiet place, I guess,” said Susan. “Sorry I haven’t seen much of you this year, Myrtle.”

“It’s okay. I know you’re with Luna now.”

“Myrtle was great last night,” said Harry. “That’s why we came here this morning, to show her the article. I ran into her and she helped me fight off a whole bunch of those creatures last night.”

“Really?” asked Susan.

“Yeah. Her *Telekinesis* is pretty strong now. She held them in place or defended me while I zapped them.”

Myrtle looked embarrassed.

“Nicely done, Myrtle. Looks like all that practice paid off.”

“It was no big deal,” she answered. “Harry told me you got a message from... well, Tom, I guess, last night?”

“Yeah. *I win*. Now we know what he was talking about. This whole attack was to distract me in case someone at the ministry got word to me somehow.”

“But what’s his game?” asked Ron. “He can’t expect people to believe he’s some kind of good guy after all this time?”

“They’ll believe it if he’s presented in that light. And as he probably has everyone at the ministry under *Imperius* by now, they’ll be happy to sing his praises.”

“But the Death Eaters, weren’t they his idea?”

“Well of course they were. It’s a masterstroke to throw them to the dogs like he’s done, apparently. Odd though, I wouldn’t have thought even he would be so callus as to throw away his own followers.”

“Maybe he feels he doesn’t need them anymore,” said Hermione. “You said the Headmaster said he was always a loner.”

“I guess. He must be feeling really bold right now to come into the open like this.”

“I can see it now,” said Harry. “He marches into the ministry, right? Of course there’s shock and awe, no one believed he would just stroll inside. They try to capture him but with *Barrier Against Spells* going, everything they try bounces right off. He uses *Imperius Curse* on someone, and orders them to capture another, and to tell that person to place themselves under his command. So the number of people under his command doubles every few minutes, and he just has to stand there telling people to *Imperio* more and report back to him. Soon the whole ministry is captured.”

“Dad!” said Ron, face pale.

“We can break him out of it if need be,” reassured Susan. “Don’t worry.”

“Oh yeah. You really think that’s how it happened?”

“Why not? It’s what I’d do.”

“And I thought Susan was dangerous,” said Myrtle. “You sound like you thought about it.”

“Only in the context of Susan casually giving me an item to take over the magical world. She put a lot of trust in me.”

“Wait a second,” said Ron. “Last night Headmaster Dumbledore said, after you left, that the creatures you defeated had *Barrier Against Spells* on, right?”

“That’s right, spells wouldn’t touch them. Why?”

“Why couldn’t you snap them out of it like you snap people out of the *Imperious Curse*? Why did you have to maintain something and let that last one be crushed by rocks?”

“Oh, that’s easy. Voldi was maintaining that spell somehow. Either directly or through *Spell Symbol* or something. If I took it away it would just come back. Your magic doesn’t have that method, and one person can *Imperio* all they want in a day and it’ll stay around forever. But they don’t *maintain* it, you see? If it gets broken off them it doesn’t come back until someone casts it on them again.”

“Oh, I get it. Thanks.”

“Sure. I don’t think we’re having the service for those that died yesterday. The Headmaster is swamped, and teachers were running all over trying to keep order in the halls. This place is a mess.”

“I wonder if there’s anything we can do?” asked Hermione.

“Yeah, keep our heads down and stay out of the way,” said Ron. “They don’t need us adding to their problems.”

The others sadly nodded.

After lunch, every person with access to the *Wizard’s Wireless* brought out their crystals and sat impatiently waiting for 2:00.

“Wait, explain this to me again?” asked Susan, as Ron had one.

“It’s a crystal. It’s been magically charmed to pick up a broadcast from a central location. Every crystal vibrates in time with every other, so a million people can hear the same broadcast. We’ve had one sitting at home for years, you’ve seen it!”

“I saw a box that music came out of. I thought it was a technological device rigged up by your dad. I didn’t think you were casually *transmitting information faster than light*.”

“What’s the big deal?”

Hermione, Harry, and Susan looked at him like he had lost his mind.

“You really don’t realize how this one crystal, if given to the non-magical world, would revolutionize everything. No more cable connection, no more wire for internet access, telephone, cell phones no longer need batteries.”

“No, I guess I didn’t.”

“Obviously. Now he tells me. Do you know what I could do with some crystals that redirect and split any power that hits them?”

“Power that hits them? What?”

“Arg! Look, sound is energy, right? You talk, the energy moves through the air and hit your ears. Now, some person in a studio is sitting presumably talking into one of these things, right?”

“Yeah?”

“So the energy that hits the crystal is then transmitted to every other crystal on the planet. Basically, duplicating that energy with absolutely no regard for the laws of thermodynamics at all.”

“The laws of what?”

“Never mind. The point is, what if I tuned it differently? Could I put one into a room that collects light and sound instead of just sound? That would be a nice bugging system, wouldn’t it? How far can I push the energy transfer capabilities of a single crystal? Could I make a shield that has one crystal in the back, and ten in the front? Then cast *Elemental Bolt (Fire)* into the one on the back and have all ten on the front spew fire? After all, that fire is just energy, right? Just a little more energetic than sound waves. Could the process be reversed, and every crystal in a set transmits and receives? Instant set of walky-talkies. You people use owls for goodness sakes,

when you have fax machines right here! Magic fax machines! Just make a spell to turn a coded set of signals into a pattern on paper, and another spell to encode a piece of paper, and you can instantly send that piece of paper around the world. And that's just what I've come up with in the five minutes I've known about the stupid thing."

"I guess it's an underutilized thing, huh?"

"Yeah, you might say that. *Wizard's Wireless* indeed. You guys are just so infuriating sometimes."

"Sorry."

"Forget it. I'm just on edge because of this whole interview. Aarg!"

So about a million years later, the clocks finally got around to swinging towards 2:00 and everyone lit up their (*stupid*) *Wizard's Wireless* and tuned in.

Interview Transcript

Time: 2:00 on the dot

Place: Ron's spell of *Scribe* capturing how the show went down

Announcer: And thanks for joining us. I've got Tom Riddle, The minister of magic, Cornelius Fudge, and for some strange reason, the warden of Azkaban, Jerome Andsmith, here in the studio. Thanks for coming.

Voices: Glad to be here.

Announcer: Now, Mr. Riddle-

Tom: Please, call me Tom.

Announcer: Tom then. You caused quite a stir last night when you arrived at the ministry, didn't you?

Tom: *laughs* I certainly did, Bob. But the time was right, and I wanted to finally clear my name after all the years of misery I've put up with to try and bring down, once and for all, the infamous "Death Eater" cult.

Announcer: Yes, tell us about that, please. I was under the impression you yourself started the group.

Cornelius: Nonsense. That group, or cult as it should really be called, was started sometime in the late 1200's, as a secret society dedicated to terrorizing those they claimed had less magical blood.

Tom: Exactly right. Attempts to break into the group had met with limited success, mainly because the agents that tried were never allowed far enough into the ranks to learn all their secrets. So years ago, after I graduated from Hogwarts, the minister at the time asked me, no I take that back. He *charged* me with destroying the group once and for all.

Announcer: Which you claim to have done.

Tom: Ask Jerome here how many Death Eaters now grace the cells at Azkaban.

Announcer: Jerome?

Andsmith: A lot of them.

Announcer: *laughs* A man of absolutes, to be sure. But what about all the stories of the horrible things you did?

Tom: Just that- stories. I had to build up my reputation and make the other cult members believe I was one of them. That meant going the whole hog, so to speak. I had to convince them I was as crazy for blood purity, which is nonsense by the way, as they were. The ministry was, of course, instrumental in printing stories about my vile deeds, which the other cultists lapped up like cream.

Cornelius: We told some stories, too, didn't we Tom? I can't believe they actually bought that crap we had printed.

Tom: *laughs* I know! It just goes to show how far removed from reality the cult members were. Of course a lot of people I supposedly "killed" had to go into hiding and have their identities changed to maintain the illusion. Can't have people *coming back from the dead*, now can we?

Voices: *laughs*

Tom: Don't worry though, we compensated them for their trouble. One time the minister joked with me "why *can't* you just kill them, it'll be cheaper?"

Voices: *laughing*

Tom: Seriously though, they agreed to go underground with new identities, and we used that to stage “killings” where I could dramatically show how loyal I was to the cause by killing them. All staged- they would drink a potion to put them into a sort of sleep where they would appear dead. At the time the potion was about to kick in I would dramatically “kill” them with Avada Kedavra. A spell that *sounds* like the killing curse, but actually just produces a green light.

Cornelius: You don’t know how many months the ministry spent developing that sound alike spell to fool them. It was a nightmare.

Announcer: I can imagine. But if all of that was faked, why did you disappear for so long? Right after trying to kill Harry Potter, in fact.

Tom: Ah, Harry Potter. Good old Harry. I knew this would come up, it’s going to be... a little hard to talk about.

Cornelius: No, Tom. Don’t push yourself. The ministry signed off on the plan, I’ll tell them about Harry.

Announcer: Please, go on.

Cornelius: The truth is, Harry Potter... doesn’t exist.

(Everyone in the place magnetically swung towards Harry, sitting there, wondering if he had deluded himself into believing he existed)

Cornelius: Don’t get me wrong, there’s a boy, probably listening to this broadcast at this very moment, who believes his name is Harry Potter. And for all intents and purposes, it is! But the Harry Potter we created, the infant that supposedly ‘destroyed’ the ‘dark lord’ somehow... never existed. It was all a hoax.

Announcer: What are you saying?

Tom: *sighs* You have to understand how the cult works. There was an initiation period I had to go through, where I would be forced to endure physical and mental trials for many years. I had to disappear. But if I had just *snapped fingers* up and vanished, the cult’s reputation would be called into question. The ministry had done a tremendous job turning me into a monster, and that’s what I had to stay. So I had to disappear in a way that people could delude themselves into believing.

Announcer: Why this initiation in the first place?

Tom: They had me chosen as their new leader, and wanted to make sure I was really 100% committed to their way of life. If I broke during the trials, my heart was not pure enough, and they would have left me for dead. It was a risk, but if I wanted to truly take the cult down, I had to accept.

Cornelius: So we leaked information to the cult about a so called ‘prophesy’ about a ‘chosen one’ who would one day save the world from the big, bad, Voldemort. We chose an orphan, basically at random, and destroyed every trace of his old identity, in case anyone ever looked into it. We then constructed a life for this boy, this “Potter” person, faking birth records of his entire family and such. We even set up a bank vault in his name, not that there was any gold in it!

Voices: *laughs*

Tom: As I recall you even put a message from “death eaters” in there about them stealing it, isn’t that right?

Cornelius: We did, just to make it more authentic.

Tom: Then I came along and tried to kill him.

Cornelius: And we all know how that supposedly went. *Laughs*

Tom: Exactly. I mean, I didn't think the public would buy it, but they did, and in spades! I mean, a baby with no magical power, somehow escaping the killing curse? Preposterous.

Announcer: But the cultists must have known the truth!

Tom: They did, but they needed the excuse just as much as the ministry did. The cultist agents in the ministry at the time (and there were some, believe me) were made to believe I had left a message that with the 'boy of prophecy' gone I was now going to study even darker magics and return more terrible than before. According to them, they covered it up and said he had just survived somehow. Basically telling both sides what they wanted to hear, allowing us to direct their behavior.

Announcer: So the magical world got a few years of the cult being less active because they were focused on you, while they thought it was you being gone that made that happen?

Tom: Exactly right. I went through the trials and then spent years making sure I knew every last member of the cult personally. How they made their money, where they kept it, the whole works. Finally it was time to bring in the ministry again.

Cornelius: We got word about where they would be, and there they were. We captured the majority of them and smashed their places of power forever. No more will families have to worry about their loved ones being threatened by people in masks, screaming about blood purity. Thank goodness, those days are finally behind us.

Announcer: So there's really nothing to some people's claims that wizards born of two wizard parents are better than, say, a wizard born of non-wizard parents?

Tom: Total fabrication. I mean, you can either do magic or you can't, right? There's no middle ground. You want to be a great wizard, kids? Study hard in school. That's all there is to it!

Voices: *laughs*

Announcer: Speaking of the school, did you hear about the attack last night?

Tom: Tragic, simply a tragedy. My heart goes out to all the families who lost children to those creatures that swarmed the school. Such a waste.

Cornelius: We learned, just this morning, in fact, that healers at St Mungo's had been studying one of the creatures for some time now. I have to wonder, did that somehow provoke the attack? A sort of retribution for locking one of their species up? We're going to look into the matter very closely.

Announcer: I would think so. Now let's turn to Dumbledore. He's been a very outspoken figure, both against ministry policy and the Voldemort persona you created. Was that just part of the act?

Tom: Actually, he was the measure of our success!

Cornelius: Exactly. The more riled up he got, the better we knew our schemes were working. After all, if you can fool your friends you can fool anybody. His performances had to be genuine, so he wasn't told about the plan at all.

Announcer: Boy, his face must be red right about now.

Cornelius: Yeah, we'll send him a formal apology soon. He's a smart guy, I'm sure he sees the necessity of our plan now, in order to take the cult down.

Announcer: So it was all just a ruse.

Tom: And finally one that can enjoy its success.

Announcer: So what's next? Are you afraid of some kind of retribution from any cult members that didn't get captured? You put away an entire cult- what do you do for an encore?

Tom: The heart of the cult is gone, never to return. With more education about what makes a wizard, hopefully we'll never see a cult like that again. As for retribution, I don't think

the cult members are getting out of prison for a long, long time. As far as what's next: we still have plenty of work to do in the ministry, don't we, Cornelius?

Cornelius: That's right, Tom. With the cult danger past, we can finally enact some laws that have been a long time coming.

Announcer: Such as?

Cornelius: Well, for one, if you look at population growth in the wizard community, it's actually negative and has been for some time. We'd like to change that.

Announcer: How so?

Cornelius: To start, tax breaks for those that have a lot of kids. And tax penalties for those with few or none. In fact, if you have enough kids you may even receive tax credits.

Announcer: You're planning to... *financially incentivize* having children?

Tom: It works out great for me. I've been off the market so long, I want to start catching up. And as a sort of hero, I don't think the ladies will be hard to convince, if you catch my drift. You people out there can't see it, but I'm totally winking.

Cornelius: How many did you say you wanted?

Tom: At least twelve. I love kids.

Susan: *gasping* Twelve kids? They could all be *Natural Magicians* for all I know. Do you know how powerful that would make him?

Voices: SSHHHHH

Announcer: I guess you better, if you're planning on having that many.

Voices: *laughs*

Cornelius: Also, for too long we've ignored due process in the magical world. Take Sirius Black- he's just one example of how the system failed. We want to change that. We want to give each person currently in Azkaban a real, fair, trial. And that's not all.

Tom: We're going to institute a more graduated response to crime, rather than just putting everyone in one place and forgetting about them.

Cornelius: After all, they could be productive members of society with a little nudging.

Announcer: Define nudging.

Cornelius: Well, for a first offense, and obviously something like murder would be viewed more harshly, we would like to try rehabilitation first. If the person doesn't respond to that, we would then go with the *Imperious Curse* to try and modify behavior.

Announcer: Isn't that an unforgivable curse?

Cornelius: Yes, and we aren't changing those laws. A carefully screened and monitored group of individuals will be allowed to give certain, specific commands to people deemed nonredeemable. Then they will be monitored to see if that's enough or not.

Announcer: How could that not be enough?

Tom: The curse can be thrown off, in time. And some people can fight it off right away, though people like that are pretty rare.

Announcer: And if they do throw it off?

Cornelius: Then we would very reluctantly make them unable to do magic anymore.

Voices: *gasps*

Announcer: What did you say?

Tom: It's a spell I learned as part of my activities with the cult. It's not even that hard, really. It was a tool used to keep members in line, and I've offered it to the ministry as a similar deterrent.

Cornelius: Obviously that will be done only after all other options are exhausted. But I think you'll agree, it's more humane than what we used to do, and that's stick people in a box with a bunch of soul sucking monsters.

Tom: Tell them about the Dementors, Cornelius.

Cornelius: Yes, good point. There is a girl currently in Hogwarts school, named Susan Felton, that once threatened me with tearing Azkaban down from within and killing every Dementor that existed. I would like to invite her now, with ministry approval, to do just that. Well, not the tearing it down, we need the building.

Announcer: Someone can do that? A girl? A girl at school? A girl at school can kill Dementors?

Cornelius: I know, it sounds impossible. However I've seen her do it with my own eyes. She created a weapon that basically heals the world where the Dementor exists, driving it into nonexistence again. Her magic is very special and very precious, really one of the only people with that type of magic in the world. Unless those we call Squibbs can tap into this magic she seems to use and she just got lucky and figured out how. Again, one more thing we need to look into, with her cooperation. Once she graduates I hope we at the ministry can work very closely with her. But please, I beg you Susan, destroy the Dementor race as soon as possible, so those people in Azkaban don't have to suffer anymore. We'll find another way to keep them under control, leave it to us!

Announcer: This is all a lot to take in!

Cornelius: Not to worry- we'll be distributing leaflets and debating new laws and such for the next couple of months. We are serious about bringing wizard kind into a glorious new age, and we're hopeful you can throw your support behind us again.

Announcer: Your approval ratings across the whole ministry were a bit low.

Cornelius: And we apologize for that, we really do. Also again to Harry and Albus, who we made our pawns in this game. You deserved better, and we hope can somehow make it up to you.

Tom: That's right. You're still a hero in my eyes, Harry. It can't have been easy for you, living a lie. I mean, you must have felt something, right? That your life just didn't fit right? Now you know. If it were me, it would be a real relief to know there was a reason I felt I didn't belong. I know your pain- infiltrating the cult was a place I didn't belong, so it must have been something like that. Except you didn't sign up for it. Maybe we can get together some time and talk it over.

Cornelius: Obviously, if you want to find your real parents, we'll help you any way we can, Harry.

Announcer: I guess that's everything for now. We'll have recaps for those who joined us late, and some experts in to discuss what the new laws being proposed will mean for wizard kind. Stay tuned.

The rest of the day passed in a daze for everyone. Susan stumbled about in a fog, halfheartedly denying people the sight of her *Alleviation* knife and dodging questions about her magic. Harry seemed to be in shock, with people exclaiming how terrible it was, what the ministry had done. He kept saying "I never had any gold?" and mumbling "That explains everything." The muggle born among the student populace suggested suing them somehow. She somehow made it through the rest of the afternoon, and found herself in bed, Luna's arms once

again around her. She stared at the ceiling, listening to Luna breathe and wondered if the last several years of her life had been a lie.

After that, everything went great. Tom got down on his hands and knees and begged Albus and Harry for forgiveness, and promised to do whatever he could to make it up to them. They went to the sites of his “killings” and Susan watched his “victims” take potion, and then walk away to begin new lives after they were “killed.” The soul containers were shown to be just a bit of illusion magic, and the ministry, true to its word, weeded out corruption and began the road to recovery. Three hundred years later there were three schools in the country to handle all the magical students, and tentative feelers were put out to integrate, at long last, magic and science. It was felt that, finally, humanity was mature enough to handle the knowledge and responsibility the bringing together of magic and technology, and signs were good that the consensus would be positive. Susan and Luna watched all this with their 87 descendants, (*shape-shift* magic was really incredible, to allow them to alternate having kids with each other by one of them turning male, and they had a lot of kids... for the tax breaks) and life was truly heaven on earth.

Then the next day, back in the “real” world, Susan woke up.

“Luna?”

“Hum?”

“Yesterday there was that interview thing, right?”

“Um hum.”

“I guess the world is still spinning.”

“Yump.” She snuggled closer.

“And I was invited to destroy all Dementors.”

“Humm?”

“Come on sleepyhead, there’s work to do.”

Realizing a Dream

Time: Later that morning

Place: Headmaster's office

"So what was that all about?" Susan asked Albus, who did not have an angry crowd of people in front of his office that morning. The daily paper had more stories about the "heroic" exploits of Tom Riddle, who was apparently basking in his newfound fame and working closely with the ministry "again." Also under the new laws, it was said, families like the Weasleys would not only not pay taxes but get money from the government for having so many children. So they were of mixed feelings about the whole thing, to be sure. The papers also talked about the new prison regulations the ministry wanted to enact, and other minor laws that would soon be changed or abolished.

"That was Tom being more clever than even I believed possible," Albus finally answered.

"So it's a lie then?"

"How can you even believe for a second anything he said was true? You've felt the results of his killing people directly, in the form of the Horcrux. He can't explain that away!"

"It just seems so plausible. It's no wonder everyone seems gaga over him."

"Well, if he's got even you questioning his actions, I have no hope that anyone else will question the story in the least."

"Are the death eaters really in Azkaban?"

Albus nodded. "I went there yesterday myself, to verify it. They are. Tensions are high there, as they expect you any moment to come in and start killing Dementors."

"About that, do you think I should?"

"I don't think it's a trap, but it could very well be."

"Still, it seems to be the only shot I'll get at destroying them. That's what bugs me about this whole thing. That Tom actually seems nice, and personable. I mean he was cracking jokes yesterday! Jokes! And apologizing, and sympathizing and-"

"Yes, yes, it does give one a bit of cognitive dissonance, doesn't it?"

"I- yes. Never thought I would hear you say- anyway, they posted a picture of the entrance to the place, along with a plea directly to me to go there soon. Just what I needed, really, almost as if he knew exactly how my magic worked."

"He is more dangerous now than ever, given he no longer must hide in the shadows. He has ministry "support" plus his own exceptional magic and yours. No doubt he feels confident he's learned all the spells he needs to, for the moment, from your school of magic."

"No doubt. But what if he's not what you think?"

Albus slammed a hand down on the desk, making Fawkes puff up his feathers. "Tom is evil! Do not let this act of his sway your judgment. Remember the attack? Didn't you say to me you wanted him dead?"

"I've calmed down a bit since then. The truth is, I don't have proof it was his doing, don't you see? I know he was studying the creatures, but that's not proof of anything. Maybe they did track me down and attack me because I was the one who's holding the Bogey at the hospital."

"Your obsessive need to find proof for everything-"

"Don't you dare finish that sentence, Headmaster. Proof is everything, don't you see that? You can't just decide 'oh, well he's guilty because I would like him to be' and leave it at that. That's the ministry's way, not mine."

“But the *Soul Shards*...”

“May have been consensual. Maybe he made them at a nursing home, or in exchange for a lot of gold given to the family members of those he killed. Or maybe they were Death Eaters he killed to make disappear because they were close to exposing him. Did you see the situations he was in when he made them? Can you point to the innocent life that was lost in their creation? No? Then you can’t point to them as the reason for me hating the guy.”

Albus stared at her for a long moment.

“Fine,” he said at last. “I can see you’re still not thinking clearly, probably because of the shock. I don’t blame you. Winky, if you could come here, please?”

There was a pop, and the elf named Winky appeared in the room.

“The Headmaster called Winky?” she asked.

“The elves!” said Susan. “Are all of you okay? I didn’t even think about you guys when the attack started. I’m sorry.”

“Susan prepared Winky and the elves properly beforehand, miss,” said Winky. “The elves were able to defend themselves against the fear creatures when they came. No elf lives were lost. Winky herself killed three, as Winky is the only one to so far master *Cohesion*. Other elves are now taking their lessons more seriously after seeing it.” Winky almost seemed smug.

“That’s a relief. Wait, three by yourself? That’s amazing, Winky. You’ve really come a long way.”

“Miss is kind to say so. But Winky has miss to thank, never would she have tried to expand her abilities without your direction.”

“I’m just glad it worked out.” She looked back at Albus. “But why call Winky here?”

“Have you forgotten your list of ESPer abilities, noted by your father? Bring out the locket and we shall see what Winky can tell us about it.”

Susan shrugged and took it from her *Pocket Dimension*, handing it over to the elf.

“This is a bad thing,” said Winky, holding it away from herself as far as possible. “Winky only needs the lightest touch to tell that much. There is much anger in it, and terror, and sadness.”

“What I want to know, specifically, is when did it come to house a piece of Tom’s soul? Can you tell me that, Winky?”

“Winky will attempt to learn this.” She closed her eyes and concentrated. After a moment she gave a yelp and tossed the locket away from herself.

“I take it you were successful,” said Albus, dryly.

“Winky saw,” she said. “Such hatred in that face. Such calmness as he killed. Why is Winky being asked to see these things?”

“Because I want you to take us there, if you can,” said Albus, standing and grabbing the picture frame that held the *Time Window Imbuing*.

Susan went and picked up the locket, then put it back in her *Dimension*. Winky considered.

“Winky will try. Winky believes she got a good enough look at the place to *Teleport* there.”

“Excellent. Grab hold, Susan.”

Susan shrugged, and both grabbed hold of Winky.

“Winky can not lift you both at once!” she protested.

“I’ll go first and send the *Teleportal* back for you,” said Susan. Albus nodded and they both disappeared.

A moment later, all three stood on a lonely country street, far, it seemed, from civilization.

“He came here to make a *Soul Shard*?” asked Susan, unbelieving. “That doesn’t seem right.”

“This is the place,” said Winky.

“But what time?” asked Albus.

“Winky can only tell you approximately.” She did so, and Albus lifted the frame and activated the spell, searching through time for the event he knew would prove his case. Susan didn’t need to ask why her better *Time Area* wasn’t being used, they needed to see beyond the limits of that spell, which the *Time Window* spell was better suited to doing. Some time later he slowed the recording and brought it closer to where the young Tom was sitting beneath a tree. He was happily humming to himself, and looking the locket over.

“Now we shall see,” muttered Albus, as a man, obviously homeless, was seen wandering up the road. He came over to Tom.

“Spare some change?” he asked.

Tom looked him up and down, a sneer on his face. “You are a muggle, are you not?”

“A what? Mister, do you have any change or not?”

“I have something better. An end to all your worldly concerns.”

“Mister, I don’t want to join no cult. I just want to eat tonight. Can you help me out or not?”

“Oh, but I can, my friend. I will help you out this very moment.” He pulled his wand and casually killed the man, then started muttering something over the locket as he waved his wand over it. He winced, but continued, and soon he was straightening up, a wild look on his face. He began to laugh.

“I think that’s about enough,” said Albus, lowering the frame. “Do you see? You can’t explain that one away, Susan.”

“No, I can’t. He just killed that guy in cold blood, and casually stood there over his body as he strengthened his immortality. He even laughed about it!”

“That is your enemy. Do not be deceived by his outer veneer, it is the beast *inside* you must defeat.”

“Headmaster, do you think doing that to himself changed him? Made him less human, so that each time it was easier than the last?”

“Possibly. By that time he had no doubt made the ring and the diary, possibly others we haven’t found yet.”

“That reminds me. Which way is north?”

Albus performed the *Point Me* spell while Susan got out her copy of the map and her *Soul Find* spell. “Can you even tell me approximately where we are?”

Winky just shrugged, but Albus touched the map with his wand, and a bright spot appeared.

“Nice trick! Okay, here we go.” She cast *Soul Find* and noted the direction it pointed, drawing another line. It didn’t intersect with the first one she had drawn. “Interesting. That one’s closer, huh? Okay,” she packed everything away again. “Let’s go back before someone sees that hole in space and gets a little too curious.”

And the road was again empty.

Back at the school, Albus thanked Winky and sent her back to work.

“So, now what?” asked Susan.

“For the moment, your plans should be unchanged. Find the other Horcrux and destroy them. Tom himself is now able to hide in plain sight, surrounded by ministry personnel either controlled by him or just naturally thinking he’s the good guy because of what they’ve read about him. We can’t make a move against him until we’re sure he’ll stay dead this time. At least his new brand of government seems benign for the moment. There isn’t any immediate need to take him down.”

“Isn’t there, though? I mean the longer he’s in power the more people will come to believe he’s some kind of savior for them. And the more they like them, the more they’ll believe his message is the right one. Sure, the laws are good now, but what’s his goal? He’s just softening people up with his new laws so they’ll be easier to swallow what he really wants to do later on.”

“Perhaps. It will still take many years to get people used to the new way the ministry works. After all, until you’ve gotten your first gold for having all those kids like he suggested, the idea is so much vapor.”

“That’s true. He’ll announce anything new probably the day after they get refunds, so those that benefit from the new laws are at their happiest. Thus less likely to protest, lest that money disappear again.”

“Right.”

“What about the prison?”

“You must use your own judgment there. Go in with every protection you can, if you choose to go.”

“All right. Is the service happening today?”

“Yes. Seven PM.”

“I’ll be there.”

“What do you think?” she asked the Core at breakfast. “Do we go commit genocide or what?”

“More like an extinction event,” said Hermione.

“I certainly wouldn’t mind less Dementors in the world,” said Harry. “Those things freak me out.”

“I almost think you have to,” said Hermione. “The way he put it, the ministry could very easily paint you as selfish or evil if you don’t go and destroy them right away. I mean, you have the power, why do you not act, is what the public would say.”

“I agree with Hermione,” said Ron. “Now that Tom is the good guy, you don’t want to become the bad guy. Girl. You know what I mean.”

“They’re right,” agreed Harry. “Remember Umbridge? If you start stuff with the ministry now you’ll have a tough time getting your way with a little shouting and floating people around.”

“You’re never going to let me live that down, are you?”

“Probably not. The point is, especially with the new laws in place, they could bring you in and perform the *Imperious Curse* on you, and make you do whatever they wanted. If that gets passed, anyway, and given how the ministry probably answers to him alone now, it will be, and quickly. Plus, Tom knows about your magic, he would be sure you were not running any spells, or had any jewelry on you.”

Maybe I should have made that tattoo after all.

“So I should appear to cooperate fully, while awaiting my chance to strike, is that what you’re saying?”

The others all nodded to each other. “Pretty much,” the answered.

“Want to get started right after this? I want to get back for the memorial service.”

“What’s the plan?”

“We have two knives, I suggest Ron, you go with Harry and Hermione can go with me. I’ll slap *Magic Immunity* on you, Harry, so you can be outside the influence of a *Patronus* charm, which they’ll shy away from, but still kill Dementors. Same with me. Our partners can watch our backs and keep the *Patronus* up in case something goes bad.”

“But wait, I thought you couldn’t use magical items when you had *Immunity* going? That’s why we can’t use it, and wands at the same time!” protested Ron.

“I’m not technically using a magic item,” explained Susan. “Remember, the hilt of the knife is totally non-magical. I’m basically making them use the item on themselves by sticking it in them. That activates it, healing the person it’s stuck into. Just so happens that kills this particular creature.”

“Oh.”

“I have some *wards*, I’ll get them out and go get Sparkle. Then we can get over there and let the slaughter commence.”

And so, moments later, four people and a cat stood in front of the prison door, which was closed tight. All around them was the ocean, and she could see, high above, some Dementors flying about. She gripped the knife.

“How exactly do we attract their attention?” asked Ron, looking around. “I doubt they have many visitors come this way.”

Suddenly, two men jumped out of the wall to either side of the door and pointed wands at the four.

“Impressive,” said Susan. “But could use a little more flair.”

“Susan?” asked the man on the right.

“That’s me. You going to let me in or what?”

“We’ve been told to expect you. One moment please.” He took a crystal out of his pocket. “It’s Susan Felton, here on ministry business. You can open the doors.”

As though thin ribbons of the door were being slid back, left and right, a hole opened in the wall of the prison, allowing the four to look through.

“Harry and me first,” said Susan. “You guys get out your *Patronus* forms.”

“Right.” said Hermione and Ron.

Susan stepped through, noticing the blank wall on the other side.

“Didn’t know you guys had *Phase* magic, walking through walls like that.”

“It’s the wall,” explained the guy on the left. “It’s enchanted to allow us, and only us, through. And only from this side.”

“Interesting.”

Hermione and Ron stepped through, their silvery animals following them. The door pieces slid back into place.

“I suppose you’ll want to see the warden,” said the guy on the right.

“There’s really no procedure for this, so yeah, speaking to the guy in charge is probably the place to start. Lead on.”

“Uh, you’ll all have to surrender your wands,” said the guy on the left.

Susan barked a laugh. “You can try taking them from us, but I don’t think you’ll get very far. So personally, I wouldn’t recommend it. You know who I am, and why I’m here. They’re with me. You don’t like it, take it up with the minister.”

The two looked at each other and one of them spoke into their crystal again. He listened.

“This way.”

“Good choice.”

The five were led up level after level of stairs, and drifting past, coming out of a side passage, was a Dementor. Susan nonchalantly stabbed it as they went past, and it spasmed and disappeared. The two escorts raised their wands again with a jerk, pointing at her. Susan looked at them with a curious expression on her face.

“Sorry about that, it’s just a reflex of mine.” She started wiping nonexistent blood off the knife on her pants. “I can’t see one of those things without wanting to destroy it. I’m sure you feel the same way.”

“Uh, yeah. So that’s the weapon, huh? That tiny knife?” Their eyes were transfixed on the blade, and they lowered their wands again.

“It’s bigger on the inside.”

“Ri- right. Almost there, this way.”

They were taken into an office where the warden, Jerome Andsmith, was waiting for them.

“So, you’re here to kill all the guards in my prison?” he asked without preamble.

“Not all of them. Just the soul sucking, darkness generating, flying, unholy monsters. You can keep the Dementors. Wait, I said that backwards.”

“And where does that leave me?”

“What do you mean? I was invited here by the minister himself. Obviously he’s given you additional human guards or the resources to hire more.”

“No, he hasn’t. The first I heard of this insane plan was on that *Wireless* interview, and we haven’t spoken since.”

“I see. Do you have some way of contacting him? Maybe he just wanted to wait until I was here.”

“I’ve been trying. He’s in a meeting, they say. Or you just missed him, they say. Or try back in an hour, they say. Where does that leave me, huh?”

“I’m not sure what to tell you. Public sentiment, from what I hear, is positive regarding the minister’s plan to have me destroy the Dementors. If I don’t, people are going to start showing up at the castle or ministry building demanding to know why.”

“They’re going to be a lot more pissed off if there’s some kind of breakout from here with the guards gone.”

“You call them guards, but aren’t you in just as much danger from them as the prisoners? Your *Patronus* goes out at any time, and they’ll suck you down just as fast as anyone else. Right?”

“That’s not the point.”

“Then what is? Your prisoners can’t Apparate away, right?”

“No, the charms are checked monthly.”

“And none of them have wands. So what exactly are they going to do?”

“Funny thing about that- when they were brought in, there was not a wand to be found in the bunch.”

“What?”

“You heard. No wands. We couldn’t find them anywhere.”

Susan smirked. “Did you look up their-”

“Yes. Repeatedly.”

“Ew,” said Ron.

“I don’t like it,” he said, looking down out the window into the prison. Susan could see a bunch of dark figures flying about, up and down the various levels.

“I don’t like Dementors. Now I’ve been given a job to do, are you going to let me do that job or not?”

“Can’t it wait?”

“So that more people, possibly innocent ones, can die at the hands of these creatures? No, I don’t think so. He said to ‘destroy them as soon as possible’ and that they would ‘find another way to keep prisoners under control.’ He didn’t say ‘take your time and get to it next week’ unless you heard a different version of the broadcast than I did.”

“I was there.”

“Ah yes, with your wonderfully accurate answer of ‘a lot of them’ when asked how many Death Eaters you now had between your walls. Tell you what... Do you have some paper?”

“You mean parchment? Yeah.”

“Get me a sheet of it.”

Jerome pulled one from his desk, and Susan sat down. The guards and the Core looked at each other warily, wands out. Susan wrote:

Dear Minister,

I am at the prison. The warden doesn’t think he has enough guards to compensate for the loss of his Dementors. Can you meet me at the entrance to the ministry building to talk to the guy in five minutes?

You Know Who

She snickered over the signature, and got out her *Send Object* spell. “Which way to the ministry from here?” she asked. Jerome pointed. “Great.” She cast it, and it disappeared. “Now we wait five minutes.”

Which passed very slowly, as they weren’t big on small talk, prison guards. Finally Susan opened a *Teleportal* to the fireplace room in the ministry. Cornelius was there.

“I can’t come, very busy around here, but I can talk for a moment,” he said.

Yeah, your new master doesn’t want you whisked away to have your enchantment broken, now does he? I wonder if he knows about Telesummon. Oh well.

“Not a problem,” she said. “Just reassure Mr. Andsmith here you’ll be sending him more guards before I leave this awful place.”

“I’ll put them on broomsticks immediately. I’ve already got some people standing by. Thanks, Susan, the world owes you a tremendous debt. We’ll have to talk sometime once you’re out of school. I’ll stop by, I know where you live. See you!” He walked off again, and Susan closed the *Teleportal*.

“You can just... do that?” Jerome asked. “Just whistle up the minister, and talk to him through a hole in the air? Who are you?”

“Felton. Susan Felton. I like my martini shaken, not stirred. And yes, there is a difference.”

“I’ll take your word for it. Okay, if the minister says he’s got more guards for this place, go to it.”

“Thank you. Now, my friend Harry Potter here-”

“The Harry Potter? I heard what the ministry did you, kid. Hope you find your real parents.”

“Yeah, uh, thanks.”

“Anyway, Harry has a weapon as well, so we’ll be doing this in two teams. Hermione and the cat are with me. Shall I just clear each floor out or what?”

“You’re seriously going to slaughter every Dementor in this place? I mean you’re here, but I still can’t believe it.”

“She can do it, boss. We saw her kill one on the way up here.”

“I’ve dreamed of nothing else since I learned this place existed,” said Susan. “So how is best to do it?”

“They just kind of float around, I can’t really command them to do anything. I guess I’ll have my guards accompany you, and seal off higher levels as you clear out lower ones. If you can do it quietly and quickly enough, maybe we can get most of them before they even realize what’s going on.”

“That would be ideal. Let’s start at the bottom then.”

“You only have two?” asked the guard from earlier. “We would be happy to help, if you had a couple more laying around.”

“Yes, I only have two.”

“Why?”

Susan glared at him. “You ever made a weapon that can kill a Dementor?”

“Well, no.”

“When you do, you’ll understand why there’s only two.”

“That was a little harsh,” whispered Hermione.

“It’s okay,” said the guard.

“It’s the atmosphere in this place,” said the other. “Even with a *Patronus* going, there’s so many Dementors you can’t avoid feeling their negativity. We don’t take it personally.”

“Then ask me again before I leave, and I’ll give you a better answer. Come on, we’re wasting time. I have a memorial to attend tonight.”

And so, Susan and Harry walked the prison, each in separate directions. As the Dementors were basically solitary creatures, it was easy to pick them off one by one, and Susan and the guards slowly moved up the floors. She was at the 10th floor when she heard her voice being called from a cell.

“Susan!” said the voice. “Over here!”

“Why, Mr. Malfoy! What a surprise. Don’t tell me *you’re* a Death Eater? This must be some kind of mistake. Guards, open this door immediately. Don’t you know who this is?”

Lucius’ face lit up with hope, but the guards stayed where they were.

“We can’t allow anyone out, you’ll have to take it up with the minister. Sorry.”

“Oh well, no big deal. See ya!” She turned to go.

“Wait! Please, as a favor to my son, can’t you get me out of here? He’s told me what you can do, it would be nothing for you to help me escape!”

“Nothing?” sneered Susan. “Just a little thing called betraying my principles. If you’re in here there’s a reason for it. Don’t worry, you’ve been promised a fair trial, and I think the minister actually means it this time. Though with Voldi running the show now, I don’t know how long that will last.”

“Yes, you see? You know as well as I do, he’ll betray all that you love in the end. He betrayed us, his loyal followers! Putting us in here, making it out that he was some kind of hero. Get me out of here, get all the Death Eaters out, and we’ll help you destroy him. Take our magic afterwards if you must, but don’t leave us here to rot. Please! We know his weaknesses, he tested his magic on us all the time. We can help you!”

Susan leaned towards him. “I know his weaknesses too. They’re my weaknesses, remember? And remember the night he was resurrected? How you stood there and did nothing to help Harry and me? The helplessness you feel right now is what we felt, then. Help you, indeed! You’re a Death Eater, and this is where you belong. Just be glad I’m not willing to allow Dementors to destroy you a piece at a time. That’s the only kindness I can give you.”

“You’ll regret not helping us, one day. We know his plans, too. We could help you, make sure he doesn’t put them into action.”

“Write them up, I’ll look them over.”

“No. The deal is we get out and then you get the information. At least the inner circle; The newer, lesser members can stay here and rot. They didn’t have any real loyalty to the Dark Lord.”

“What Dark Lord? Haven’t you heard? It was all a big scam, directed against you.”

“That’s a lie and you know it! He walked into the ministry with us and took over. Then betrayed us and had us put here. Said he didn’t need us anymore, that his ‘new’ followers would do well. He’ll regret it, mark my words. One way or the other.”

“Yes, he will. But if things go well, you’ll be in here when it happens, where you belong. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have more work to do.”

“Tell my son...”

“Yes?”

“Tell him I love him... and to choose a different path than I took.” Lucius turned away, and Susan went on.

The slaughter continued.

And so, Susan successfully destroyed what she believed was the bulk of the Dementor race, and made it back to the school just in time to change and attend the memorial service.

A monument had been erected, with the names of the people that had died, in the courtyard outside the main entrance. It was a statue of a young boy and girl, wands outstretched, fighting off a hazy form that was reaching for them. Underneath them was the inscription "Fear only stops us acting if we let it."

It was now the next day, and the school was closing early. Even the canceling of exams wasn't enough to raise the spirits of those that streamed out of the castle, plodding out unhappily. The entryway was still a shamble, further reminding everyone what cost the attacking creatures had extracted. Susan knew Albus could probably put it to right with a single wave of his wand, but hadn't, rather allowing the people that went past to see that the castle was wounded as well. That everything was not all right with the world, and that maybe some things could not be easily repaired. Even with magic. Or maybe the Headmaster wanted the damage repaired by hand, as a way to honor those that had died. Or maybe he just hadn't had time, it was hard to tell, with him.

"So what's plan from here on out?" asked Luna. "I can tell you the Quibbler is going to dig for the real truth behind Harry."

"It's okay, Luna," said Harry. "I talked to Professor Slughorn and Rubeus, and they all said they knew my parents well. Actually Professor Slughorn wouldn't stop going on about my mother. It was kind of creepy, she was only like 15 at the time he knew her. Anyway, I know who my parents are and what they sacrificed for me."

"But if other papers," she said this with scorn, "are going to just write lies, it's up to us to tell the truth, isn't it?"

"The truth will come out when Tom is destroyed and the *Imperius Curse* lifts on the ministry. I just don't want you or your father to be in danger."

"If Susan does her job, we won't be," she said, looking at Susan.

The others looked over at her.

"I'll do the same thing with her house as I did with yours Ron. We have a few weeks before the wedding, so I'm sure we can fit it all in."

They nodded.

"Who's getting married?" asked Luna.

"Fleur is marrying Bill," replied Ron a bit sourly. "Ginny is real excited about it."

"Is Luna coming with us?" whispered Hermione to Susan. "When we do those other things?"

Susan shook her head. "I've discussed it with her. I know I should have more faith she'll be all right, but I would just rather know she's safe at home."

And four is the max party size, thought Sparkle.

"So what is the actual timetable? You could come directly to my house, you know?" said Ron.

Harry shook his head. “Headmaster Dumbledore insisted I go to my house, even though Susan told him I was immune to his magic, and thus, any protective charms he cast. He seems to think *Barrier Against Spells* means only new spells, but Susan thinks differently. No big deal in any case. I’m going to help Susan put her possessions in the *Dimension* cabin, now that the potions lab is cleaned out. Then the Headmaster wants the Dursleys to go into hiding for some bizarre reason, so I’ll make sure they clear out and then we’ll head to your place. Before the wedding we’ll track down the last three *Soul Shards*, as Susan says it shouldn’t take long.”

“I’ll already have their approximate locations, and look on Google maps to get a good entry point before I leave the Internet. The sweet, sweet internet. With luck we’ll only be gone an afternoon.”

“I was thinking about the internet,” said Hermione. “And I made you something for once. Here.” She handed Susan a pair of crystals from her bag.

“Is this... no!” Susan’s eyes lit up.

Hermione smiled. “Yup. They go both ways. Hopefully they work. Obviously I couldn’t really test them around the castle, but Professor Flitwick said I did the charms right. It was a simple matter to adjust the spell to work for higher frequencies, he just didn’t understand why I wanted to enchant two crystals I couldn’t use for talking.”

“This is great, Hermione! Thank you so much!” Susan threw her arms around her.

“What’s this now?” asked Ron.

“I can set one of these crystals next to the router at my house,” explained Susan. “Then pull out the other one anyplace. I can’t wait to see if it’ll work in the *Dimension*. That would be sweet. Anyway, that’ll transmit the wireless signal through this crystal and back to my iPad so I can get the internet anywhere. The ultimate wireless!”

“I understood about 10 words in that sentence.”

“Never mind. I’ll show you later. But what about recharging?”

“You have sunlight in your *Dimension*, right?”

“A solar charger! Of course! You’re amazing, Hermione, I didn’t even think of that. Heck, I could probably buy some big ones, strap them to the roof of the place, and have all the electric power I could ever want. I didn’t even think of that! Heck, I could lift them with *Telekinesis* and you could put a permanent sticking charm on them. That would hold it.”

“That’s not something you can just go buy though, is it?”

“It is if I go to where the solar panels are. I’m sure some companies that sell them have pictures of their buildings on the web. Oh man, this’ll be so great.”

“But you don’t know anything about installing them,” said Sparkle.

“Ah, but I will with a little help from *Augment Skill* now won’t I? Even if the installation is trained only, I can put a point in easily enough.”

“I guess it doesn’t need to be pretty, just functional.”

“Anyway, I’m sure I can buy a complete system. I’ll tell them I’m going to be out in the boonies and I just want to run a few things. I’m sure they can sell me a system that just has plugs and some batteries attached to it. There are clouds, after all. I’ve got the gold from the job I did, and that seems like a fantastic use for it. Visit a couple of places that buy gold in several cities so they don’t get too suspicious, and I’ve got it done. It won’t even take more than a few of the coins.”

“Gee, I want my own personal dimension,” said Ron.

“Next Christmas, then.”

“Seriously?”

“Sure, it’s just a spell. I can make you an item that contains it. I could make one for everyone, if you wanted. As it’ll be your last gift while I’m in school, it should be a big one. That fits the bill.”

“Can I have, like, my own castle in it?”

“It’s your dimension. Whatever you imagine it to be, it becomes.”

“Nice. Anyway, what were we talking about?”

“The timetable, yes? But I think we covered it.”

“When is Harry coming over? I’ll need to tell my parents.”

“The Headmaster said that should be classified,” answered Harry. “Not that Tom couldn’t just use the *Question* spell and find out.”

“Your parents probably already know,” said Susan.

“Except my father is probably still under the *Imperious Curse!*” said Ron. “Hadn’t you better come undo that first?”

“They’re meeting you at the train station, though, right? I can slap *Immunity* on him then. But honestly, I’m sure he didn’t bother putting every single person there under his control. I mean, no offense, but your father isn’t exactly high up in the organization, is he? And his department isn’t, shall we say, vital?”

“I guess.”

“So there you are. I’ll check him just in case, but I wouldn’t worry about it. After all, he went home, and he wouldn’t have been able to get through the door if he meant any harm to anyone inside. It doesn’t matter that he owns the place, as far as my magic goes.”

“Oh. I’ll take your word for it.”

The rest of the trip passed mostly in silence, as the usual ‘we’re going home for the summer’ excitement had been dampened by the reason everyone was going home early. Usually people were always passing by the rooms, and laughing and talking, but not so much this year.

When the train pulled into the station, Susan put *Barrier* and *Invulnerability* on herself, just in case there was an ambush waiting. There wasn’t, and she successfully cast *Immunity* on Arthur and Molly, who turned out not be under any kind of curse at all.

“Told you,” she said to Ron. Then she asked Arthur “How is it at the ministry? What’s the general sentiment?”

“Business as usual, oddly enough. That story of his he cooked up really fooled them all, and putting his entire Death Eater group in prison didn’t hurt either. He walks around the place all the time, talking and getting to know everyone at the office. Everyone really likes him.”

“What’s he look like?” asked Harry, thinking of that inhuman face he saw during the resurrection.

“Uh, like Tom Riddle, only older. Why?”

“Shape-shift,” said Harry, Hermione, and Susan together. “Bet if I could knock that off him, they’d be singing a different tune.”

“He’d just spin it that you made him look like that to trick people, and the other way he looked is his natural face,” said Hermione. “No one is going to be able to say differently.”

“Yeah, I guess. Well, stay safe Mr. Weasley. We’ll see you soon for the wedding.”

“Looking forward to it. Bye kids!”

Susan and Harry said their goodbyes, and Susan found a quiet corner to open her *Teleportal* home.

Susan wasted no time, and Harry was in no mood to hang around his Aunt and Uncle's house, so he came over early the next day and they moved Susan's possessions into her *Dimension*. After lunch, Susan looked into solar systems (solar panel systems, she wasn't buying a whole star system or anything) and selected a company to go talk to in order to buy it.

"You coming?" she asked Harry.

"Are you kidding? Of course I'm coming. Where else would I go, back to discuss the nature of reality with Dudley?"

"A fair point. I'll go get ready, wait here."

Susan had Sparkle *Shape-shift* her into her "professional" persona, and changed into her business type clothes.

"Ready to go?"

"Hubba-hubba! Are you sure you want to be seen with me?"

"You can be my son. Behave yourself, young man!"

"Yes mom."

They laughed.

"Right. You know the plan, Sparkle?"

"Yup. I'm going to make the *Illusion* that there's a big truck waiting to be filled up. You'll have the *Legion* move the stuff into the "truck," which will be covering your entrance to the *Dimension*, which you'll open with a ward to avoid suspicion. I'll then make the "truck" drive away, and we'll head back here."

"You got it. Let's go!"

And so they put the first part of their plan into action, trading in several of the gold coins at various exchange shops until they had a suitcase full of money. Susan didn't waste the trips, as basically she had chopped the country into 16 squares and chose an exchange shop inside each square. After they traded the coin Susan cast *Soul Find* and made a note of where it pointed. It seemed there were only two locations left.

"Isn't that where the castle is?" asked Harry, looking the map over in a back alleyway.

"You know, I think you might be right. Wouldn't that be a hoot. And not only because of all the owls flying about the place."

"Uh, that was terrible. Still, with the castle empty at least we can take our time searching."

"And I know the place well enough I don't have to look online." She folded the map back up. "Let's get going, I think we have enough to buy all I want now."

"Are they really going to take a suitcase full of money, though?" asked Harry, trailing after her, about to open the final *Teleportal* to the solar place.

"They're the new bills, with the hologram and everything, so I doubt they'll think it's counterfeit. Anyway, I'm an off the grid type, I don't want to use credit cards. That's how the evil government tracks you."

"Would an off the grid type wear a business suit like that?"

"Oh. Well, to be taken seriously, maybe. I'll tell them I go naked most of the time, this is what I wear to work. I don't know. Just go with it."

"Okay, mom."

“The eye roll was a good touch. Do that at least twice while I’m talking to them, they’ll be eating out of our hands.”

“Yes, mom.”

And so Susan picked out a mid-sized solar system and told them she just wanted the pieces, she was fully qualified to install it herself. The salesman shrugged, but after a slight argument over the “funny money” and a few internet sites later, what seemed to be a group of burly men came down from the back of a “truck” and started loading boxes inside. In reality, it was the members of the *Legion* working in concert to move everything through the doorway. The place next door carried home appliances, so she bought a refrigerator, an electric oven, and some smaller things like a toaster and an indoor grill.

“I can’t believe it all fit,” said the salesman, watching as the “workers” closed up the “truck” and prepared to dive away.

“It’s bigger on the inside,” said Susan.

“Oh, a Whovian! Didn’t figure you for one.”

“A what? My son says it all the time,” said Susan, recovering. “TV is a tool of the devil, you know.”

“Oh, mom.” Harry rolled his eyes.

The salesman laughed. “I wondered why you didn’t pick out a TV with all that other stuff. Well, good luck!”

“Thanks for all the help.”

“No problem. You need anything else, you know where to come!”

“I sure do.” They shook hands, and passed back into the *Illusion* zone where they climbed back into the “truck” and “drove” it away. The man watched them “go,” then shook his head, chuckled, and went back inside. Susan opened a *Teleportal* from a ward and they went back home.

“How did it go?” asked Stacy.

“Super,” said Susan, now back to her old self again. “Can’t wait to get it set up. But I did a lot of magic today, so I’ll think that can wait until tomorrow.”

“I guess I should get back home,” said Harry.

“Ah, stay for dinner at least,” said Stacy. “They won’t feed you very well, right?”

“I won’t say no to that. Thanks.”

That night, Susan spread the map out on the table. “Can this be right?” she asked Harry. “It looks like only two more to go, not three. The castle and if I’m not mistaken, Diagon Alley.”

“Did we miss count or something? I’m sure we’ve only destroyed two, found one, and traced two. That’s only six, not seven.”

“Right, his original soul that died when he killed you. The dairy, ring and locket. Two unknown. One became the resurrection. I see two possibilities.”

“Which are?”

“Someone managed to destroy one or he only got around to making six. Remember, Sirius’ bother couldn’t have been the only one to find out about that sort of thing, right? Someone else may have and torn it up.”

“I just can’t shake the feeling we’re missing something.”

“You were right there for most of these. They meet up pretty well, given the resolution of the map and a general ‘that way’ sort of mentality the spell provides at that range. Wait, there’s a third possibility.”

“Which is?”

“Two of them are hidden in the same place!”

“Oh, that must be it!”

“It’s the easiest explanation.”

“Yup,” said Harry, nodding, convinced. “Good hiding places must be tricky, so naturally he might put two nearby. Like that cave, he might have dropped one into the water so someone finding the first one would think they had found the only one!”

“Exactly. We’ll narrow it down, chop-chop what we find, then I’ll run the spell again and see what I get. Bet you one place will have two.”

“Right. Well, see you tomorrow for the install?”

“Sure! You’re doing the sticking charm, after all. Unless you don’t know how?”

“I may not be as good as Hermione, but I can at least manage that much!”

“Okay. Same time tomorrow then.”

“Good night. Thanks for dinner, Mrs. Felton.”

And so, Susan and Harry spent the next two days unpacking, moving things into position (though the *Legion* did the heavy lifting) and generally forgot their troubles for a few days. Susan was delighted when her solar system started collecting energy and she heard her refrigerator kick on. The second day Susan and Stacy went shopping, filling it up with stuff.

“I can see why you want to move into this place,” said Stacy, after they had finished moving all the food. “You’ve got everything here. And the weather- it’s like this all the time?”

“Pretty much. I haven’t seen it rain yet, but the grass doesn’t die. Or grow, now that I think about it. I tried to envision a complete ecosystem when I first opened it, but really it’s all magic. So I don’t even know if the trees and grass need water, because they might not be trees and grass. Just magic shaped to look like them.”

“Like those warriors you call up?”

“Right. That’s probably what it is, though anything I take out of here will vanish, so I can’t exactly test it.”

“No need, right?”

“Apart from satisfying my own *Curiosity*, no. Thanks for the help, by the way.”

“Sure. You have to leave home sometime, and knowing you have a place like this to call your very own... well, it makes me feel better.”

“I’m sorry I don’t spend much time here during the summers. It’s just, I need to look after my friends. I sort of got everyone into this mess with Tom, so I have to get them out.”

Stacy laughed. “You don’t have to explain. I see a lot of your father in you. Always rushing off to save someone. Talking about duty to his world, his people... you’re so like him, sometimes I almost think I have him back, looking at you.”

“I’ll bring him back one day, mom. Even if it’s just for a visit. I’ll find him, help him save my adoptive world, and bring him back. I promise.”

“I hope he’s still out there, fighting the good fight. I worry... well, that’s for another time. He always talked about how amazing his world was, I do hope you get to see it sometime. Now come on, let’s go swimming!”