

Hot Fun in the Summertime

Time: Two weeks into summer vacation

Place: Susan's house

"I can't believe they make us write essays over summer vacation!" complained Harry, throwing down his quill. He was sitting at Susan's desk, finishing up his essay on *Witch Burning Through the Ages*. Susan had a Grade 0 Neptune spell going in the room, enough to create a cool breeze and take the edge off the heat. Sparkle was currently curled up in a box down in the basement, prowling around at night when it got cooler.

"I can't believe they still make us regurgitate information," said Susan, saving her essay with a keystroke. "The Socratic Method this is not."

"The what? Never mind, my brain is too fried to care right now."

"I mean, the entire essay could be written in two words: Because, magic. Essay over. But no, we have to write a bunch of pages about things other wizards wrote about wizards who survived burning hundreds of years ago."

"I noticed you used your *Research* spell for most of it."

"I thought our professor might like reading about someone other than Wendelin for the millionth time. So I dug up some other names and places from there. I had to do the same amount of research you did, it's not like I cheated or anything."

"That's true, I admit. But isn't printing it out with a computer going a little too far?"

"Why's that? Nothing stops a wizard from picking up and using non-magical means of doing something. If they want to tediously scratch out letters with a quill, not a pen, mind you, a quill, that's their prerogative. They're only making their own lives harder. Me? I prefer to use the best of both worlds, where appropriate."

"I guess we're the lucky ones, growing up in both. Getting to see the best but mostly worst of everything."

Susan turned to face him. "You're being oddly grumpy today. It can't just be the homework that's getting you down."

"No, it's my stupid Aunt that's coming to visit soon. She's worse than Senior, if you can believe that."

"I don't believe it. That guy is like the king of anti-magic sentiments for the whole world. And for no reason that I can discern, mind you. He still hasn't let slip why he hates magic so much?"

Harry shook his head. "But she's not anti-magic, she's just anti-Harry."

"With your roguish good looks and charm? I don't buy it."

He smiled. "It's true though. Think I should have gone straight away to an orphanage rather than the Dursleys looking after me. For some reason whenever I'm around she just can't stop herself jabbing into me."

"Like what?" said Susan, coming over to sit on the bed, nearer him.

"Oh, like I'm a product of bad breeding. My father was worthless. I'm too scrawny. That I have no manners."

"Is that all? She obviously hasn't met me, then she would truly know what no manners looks like!"

Harry chuckled. "Yeah. But for some reason she treats that lump Junior like he's the second coming of Elvis."

“Ha! I’d like to see Junior slide into the Chamber of Secrets where certain death awaits. I’d like to see him defeat not one, but two pieces of Voldemort’s soul.”

“He wouldn’t even have fit into the pipe!” Harry said, laughing.

“He really wouldn’t!” said Susan, laughing along with him. She sobered. “You can’t let her get to you. I mean you’re Harry Potter; you know your worth, even if she doesn’t. You proved it hacking a giant snake in two, saving Ginny’s life. How many others can say that?”

“Not many.”

“No, just one. You. And don’t you forget it, either. What has she done in her life that compares, even remotely, to that?”

Harry just shook his head. He picked up his quill again and turned back his book, but Susan continued staring at him.

“It does bring up a good point though,” she said after a moment.

“What?”

“Why didn’t they just get rid of you? I mean I’m glad they didn’t, we wouldn’t be having this conversation if they had. But the fact remains, what incentive did they have to keep you? It must have meant explaining magic to Senior, I doubt his wife did. She hates magic as well, from what you’ve told me. No way did she include ‘by the way, my sister is a witch’ when they were dating. Ugh, Senior dating, that’s a horrible mental image.”

“I really have no idea. It wasn’t familial tendencies, that’s for sure.”

“Still, there must be some reason, and a powerful one. Have to ask the Headmaster when we get back to school.”

“Yeah,” said Harry, troubled.

Twenty minutes later, Harry threw down his quill again. “It’s not that I mind staying here, in the blistering heat,” he said. “I mean, Ron and his family deserved to win that money. And spending it all on a vacation in Egypt? Why not? And Hermione touring France? Brilliant! More power to her! But you would think, at the very least, one of them would have said, ‘Hey, you have teleport magic. I’ll send you a picture of where we’re staying, you should come tour with us for a day.’ But nooooo. Not so much as a peep!”

“Okay, break time!” said Susan, sensing this was not going to end well. “Come on, let’s take a walk.”

“Oh, all right.”

Susan told her mother she was taking a walk around the neighborhood, and the two left.

“You think the ghosts get lonely during the summer?” Harry asked after a few minutes of walking.

“Well, Myrtle said she would miss me. I told her she could come and haunt my toilet over the summer, but she said she couldn’t go that far away from the castle. Which you would think she should, really. There’s still a lot I don’t know about ghosts.”

“Wonder what professor Binns does? Just sort of fuzz out?”

“Maybe. His entire existence is now teaching that class. When it’s not in session he probably isn’t even aware of the world.”

“Too bad.”

“I know. I’ve tried talking to him, but outside the context of history he just doesn’t seem to care. I think because his death wasn’t violent, like the others, so he doesn’t have the emotional imprint that the others do.”

“I have to admit I was kind of worried about Myrtle.”

“How so?”

“You called ghosts an ‘emotional imprint on the world’ right? What if you changed those emotions too much? Made her happy instead of sad. Would she just fade away?”

“I think if it were that easy, there would be way less ghosts in the world. But I do admit, Albus said not many wizards take an interest in studying ghosts, so maybe no one knows.”

“There’s something I wouldn’t mind gathering data and writing a paper about. What ghosts are.”

“You would think after *all of recorded time* there would have been some study of them.”

“Couldn’t your *Research* magic help?”

Susan barked a laugh. “I wish. I would be researching faster than light travel and the cure for cancer! You know what I got when I asked my spell for FTL research?”

“Can’t imagine.”

“A blank book, except for one line in the middle. It read: Keep going faster until you can’t go any faster. Helpful, right?”

“So I guess it’s just a substitute for going to an actual library or reading websites or whatever.”

“You got it. I can look up things others have written, but other than that, I’m on my own.”

“Pity. Well, hello!” Out of nowhere a big black dog ran up to Harry and started dancing about. “Now who are you then?”

“Hi boy!” said Susan, petting the dog. “Where did you come from?”

The dog kept trying to jump up and lick Harry’s face. “You’re a friendly one, aren’t you?”

“No collar or tags, think he’s a stray?”

“Do you have a spell that could help?”

“Sparkle’s the one with *Animal Speech*. Still, if there’s no one in particular watching...” She looked around. No one came running to collect the dog, and it seemed apart from passing cars, no one was taking any particular notice of them. “Okay, I can show you a new spell I asked my book for last week.” She started concentrating, and a magic circle appeared around her. The dog seemed interested, trying to sniff it. “*Temporary Tool*,” said Susan, and as the circle faded she was holding a collar and leash, both milky white.

“Hey, neat, but don’t you already have *Creation*?”

“This is a little different,” said Susan, fitting the collar on the dog. He didn’t seem to mind, and kept trying to lick her face. “This I have to maintain. *Creation*, which takes me a full minute, gets me an object that’s real, like my sword. This is just solidified magic I get to form into the shape of something. I thought it could come in handy when I didn’t want to spend an entire minute casting but still needed some tool or in this case, a leash! It only takes 5 turns rather than 15, so it’s way easier to pull off instantly with energy.”

“Sort of a temporary *Creation*, huh?”

“Exactly. Come on Blackie, let’s see if we can’t find your owner, huh?”

“We’re home, mom!” Susan shouted, and her mother came into the living room.

“And we have a dog now?” she asked, looking at the dog, who was trying to sniff her, the rugs, the furniture, etc. His tail was wagging frantically.

“It came running at us. I figured we would see if there were any missing animal reports in the area.”

“Okay, but you’re the one telling Sparkle we have a dog in residence, not me.”

“Go get him some water Harry, I’ll hop on Craigslist.” She passed him the lead, which he felt between his fingers.

“Weird material. Water- Got it.”

A few moments later Susan closed the browser window and opened her book of magic. There was nothing since a month ago, so magic it was! She started scanning her *Descry* spells, and read them over. She noted with interest that *Object* took only a minute to perform but *Creature* took five, while *Owner* took a full ten!

That escalated quickly. Time for some Energetic Accumulation, as there is no way I’m trying to cast a spell from writings while holding a dog for twenty minutes.

“Let’s take him out back, we have some rope around here, don’t we mom?” she asked, coming down the stairs.

“What sort of adventurer are you? Don’t have 50ft of rope on your person at all times?” Harry joked.

“I’ll see what I can come up with,” answered Stacy.

Susan made her *Magic Scripture* check to read over *Descry Owner* with a 14, more than enough, but then only got an 8 on her *Magic Theory* to understand the spell.

Durr, me so stupid! Time to consult and roll a retry.

Susan went down to ask Sparkle’s opinion, and with her help and re-rolling the check, she got a 15, beating the DIF by 2. “Thanks!” She also got *Accumulation* cast on her, and went back up to see what the spell told her.

“Get ready to note this down,” she told Harry, handing him a pencil and paper.

“You got it.”

She cast *Descry Owner* on the dog after building up energy for three actions, and got a result.

“Owned by a Dennis Scott, 13.34 miles that way.” She pointed. “Dark hair, no glasses, green eyes, late twenties?”

“We’ll need a ride.”

“And an actual address,” said Stacy, who was standing right there.

“That’s what we have the internet for,” said Susan. “I’ll be right back.”

She opened up a mapping website and turned on the satellite view. *Okay, I was facing this way, and I pointed that way. Zoom out.* She got a ruler out of her desk. *Okay, that’s a mile, so thirteen of those would be right... here!*

She told her mother the address, and they all piled in the car. A few minutes later, a young boy was running out of the house shouting “Wookie! Wookie is back! Hurray!”

“I take it you know this dog?” asked Susan as the dog strained against the rope to knock the boy over.

“He’s mine!” said the boy.

A woman came out of the house. “You actually found Wookie? He’s been missing more than a month. Wherever did you find him?”

“He just sort of ran up to us.”

“Thank you so much. We didn’t think we would ever see him again. I didn’t want to tell Mark he was dead, but it was starting to look that way.”

“You got lucky this time, I guess.”

“How did you know where to find me, though? I didn’t put my address in the lost and found picture.”

“Would you believe magic?”

The woman smiled. “Well, however you did it, thank you. We’ve really missed him around here.”

“My pleasure,” said Susan. “Now you stay with your family, okay Wookiee?”

He barked.

“Good boy!”

“So, feeling better?” asked Susan on the way home.

“A bit. You know, I asked Rubeus once why wizards hid themselves, and he said because everyone would want magical solutions to everything. But when you actually do something for someone, and then tell them the truth that you *used magic* to do it, they just pass it off. Would the worlds being together really be so bad?”

“If they had stayed together, probably not,” said Susan. “My father’s world had always been together. But after this long it would take some fast talking to explain why wizards weren’t preventing disasters or curing world hunger for so long.”

“I guess you’re right. It’s too bad, really. I mean, that was such a small thing, but look how happy it made that kid. I wish we could do more.”

“Yup.”

A few days later was Harry’s birthday, where he received gifts from his friends and the school forms. Susan got him a perfectly ordinary DVD player to hook up to the TV she had repaired two years ago, and the complete set of the sci-fi series “Battlestar Galactica”. She laughed and laughed at his reaction.

“You’re in the non-magical world now! Did you think you would get a magical gift? It’s a great series, give you something to watch while your Aunt is over. Stupid ending though, fair warning.”

Harry’s face fell, Senior had left earlier and would be returning in moments.

“Senior said if I behaved myself he would sign my form.”

“Form?” asked Susan. She had yet to receive her Hogwarts letter for the year, as hers could be delivered during the day like any normal person’s mail. Harry showed her.

“Well, there’s two ways to go about this,” Susan said, thinking. “The first is the sneaky way. He must have his signature on something in the house. A check he’s going to mail, or a contract or a bill he signed. We just trace it, and that’s that.”

“We couldn’t!”

“Why not? It’s not like the school is going to call up the Dursley’s and politely inquire if you signed the form or not, are they? The second way, and the more fun way, for me, is I go in there right now and bully Wife into signing it while Senior is away. Or I just open a *Teleportal* while I’m there and Sparkle turns you into someone completely different for the duration and no one’s the wiser. Up to you.”

“They could magically verify it somehow, or the paper could have some kind of charm on it. I think just the *Teleportal* route is safest if he doesn’t keep his word.”

“You got it!”

It seemed Harry was doing well enough, venting his frustrations to Susan for the week of Marge’s visit, but on the last day there was a knock on Susan’s door and he was standing there, trunk in hand.

“What happened?” asked Susan, inviting him in.

“Accidental magic. She started talking about my parents and... well, she blew up.”

“You exploded her wandlessly?” Susan was both horrified and fascinated. She knew some magic could be done without a wand, but something of that magnitude- he must have really been angry. He hadn’t lost control like that since his first year, when they started taking *Magical Theory* class and learning how to avoid random magical outburst like that.

“No, I mean she swelled up and started to float away.”

“Oh, so she’s not dead. Thank goodness for that.”

“I left though, so now I don’t know what I’m going to do.”

“We better get in contact with someone at the Ministry for a start. They’ll need to send someone to put her right and modify their memory. Shoot, this is bad. Does incidental magic show up to the underage charm, or whatever it is? If it was supposed to they’ll be wondering why it didn’t trigger the alarm, which leads back to your *Conceal Magic* I made for you a while back.”

“Which leads back to you,” Harry said sadly. “I’m sorry, it seems I’ve gotten us both in hot water this time.”

“We’ll face it together,” said Susan. “What are they going to do, snap my wand?”

“No, but they might snap mine.”

“Good point. Here, let me have yours.”

“Why? What are you doing?”

“Just a precaution. Hand it over, come on.”

Harry did, and Susan opened her *Pocket Dimension*, shoving it in. Then she pulled one of the wands she had taken from the bullies the year before and handed it to Harry.

“There. If a wand gets snapped it won’t be yours. So you’re safe.”

“Good thinking, but where did you get a spare wand? This isn’t your fake one, is it?”

“Nope, it’s real. It’ll work for you, but not as well as yours, as I understand it. Do you want to hide out at the base? It’s been ready since the dwarf incident.”

Harry started to answer, but there was another knock on the door.

“Popular place today,” Susan said, going over to open it. “Minister!” said Susan with surprise. “How lovely to see you! Please, come in!”

“Thank you, Susan.”

“Minister, may I introduce my mother, Stacy. Mom, this is the Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge.”

“Pleased to meet you, Mr. Fudge,” said Stacy, taking his hand.

“Charmed,” said Cornelius. He turned to Harry. “And here’s the boy himself; Harry Potter. Good to see you came straight here after the incident, I must say. We were worried you might have just ran, or asked Susan to take you away somewhere. She’s done it before, after all!” He forced a laugh.

“The Ministry moves fast,” Susan remarked.

“Yes, given the current situation... anyway, your Aunt is being put back to normal and her memory will be modified to erase the entire incident. No harm done. Your guardians are a bit upset, however. Though upset may be not strong enough a word.”

“I don’t suppose their memories could be modified as well?” Harry said hopefully.

“They could, yes. The event didn’t happen to them directly, they only saw it. Given that they know about magic it would be harder to modify their memories than your Aunt’s, who doesn’t know about magic. It’s all very technical and easy to get wrong. In fact I think you know how it can go wrong, poor Gilderoy hasn’t recovered from Ginny trying to erase his memory, after all. They’ve agreed to overlook the incident and allow you back home, er, next year. As for the rest of the time until school begins, well, I have a proposal for you.”

“Yes?”

“How would you like to stay at Diagon Alley for the duration? I believe there’s a room for rent at the Leaky Cauldron.”

“I’d love to, but how expensive is it? My parent’s money was stolen by supporters of Voldemort so I only have what the bank “loaned” me so I wouldn’t go blabbing the theft to the entire world. I need to be careful and just use it for school things.”

“Really?” asked Cornelius. “I’m sorry to hear that. They haven’t caught the culprits yet?”

“Not that they’ve told me.”

“Odd, usually they pride themselves on- no matter. I’ll pay for your stay personally, how would that be?”

“Really?” Harry said, shocked.

“Least I can do. Now, how to get you there...”

“I can handle that much, I’ve been there,” said Susan. “I’ll take him directly.”

“Splendid! That’s taken care of then. I trust you’ll get him there safely tonight?” he asked Susan.

She nodded. “We’ll leave immediately, unless Harry needs something else from home he didn’t grab.” She indicated his trunk.

“I got everything.”

“Then I’ll be off! Good talking to you again, Susan, Harry. Nice to meet you Stacy. You’ve raised a firecracker of a girl, let me tell you. Good night!”

And he was gone.

“How is it you know the Minister of Magic?” asked Stacy. “Isn’t that like having the president on speed dial?”

“He showed up to watch when I cured some people of a magically induced madness. The parents of a boy I go to school with named Neville Longbottom were tortured for information during the war. I fixed them, because wandless magic couldn’t. I met him again after kill- helping kill the basilisk earlier this year. That’s when I told him to do something about the wizard prison or face me in five years when I did it for him.”

“You didn’t.”

“Oh, I did. You don’t know what that place is like, mom. Pray you never do. It needs to be destroyed. Yesterday.”

“Uh. No wonder he called you that. Wait, did you say war?”

“I’ll explain it later, let’s get Harry taken care of now, okay?”

“Right. Still, why would the minister come here?”

“Good point,” said Harry. “Why did he come here? A flunky would have been good enough. And did you notice- no punishment. Weird.”

“Yeah, that is weird. They went on and on about that first year, didn’t they? About not using magic at home until you were of age, and what would happen if you did. Then this happens, and he seemed more relieved to find you in one piece than angry you broke the law.”

“Wait, you’ve been doing magic since you were little,” said Stacy.

“Oh, my magic doesn’t register to them. Only the type Harry does.”

“Which also begs the question, how did they know? Your *Conceal Magic* item should have prevented it,” said Harry.

“Maybe they’re watching your house? That would be a creepy thought. I... don’t know.” Susan and Harry looked at each other, worried.

“This is too much. Let’s just get Harry set,” said Stacy.

“Okay. Want to come see the magical world? It won’t be too busy at night, but maybe that’s for the best.”

“I’m actually a little hurt you didn’t ask me before this.”

“I didn’t think you- oh. You’re thinking of dad, aren’t you?”

“A little.”

“I’m sorry, mom. Of course you would want to go see what this world’s magic is like, after hearing his stories. I was selfish, wasn’t I, keeping you away from it.”

“It’s okay, honey. I would have asked earlier if I thought it was that important.”

“Still. Okay, then, to Diagonally!”

Harry gave her a dark look. Susan snorted. Stacy just looked confused. “Private joke. I’ll just go tell Sparkle we’ll be back soon, and then one *Teleportal* coming up!”

After Harry got situated in room eleven and said good night, Susan took her mother on a tour of the Alley. Even dark, with only a few witches and wizards wandering about, Stacy was still entranced.

“I’ll bring you back here tomorrow when the place is really jumping and the shops are open,” said Susan. “But at least you can see a little of what the wizard world is like.”

“Is this where you’ll go when you, well, leave home?” asked Stacy.

“Honestly I’m not sure what I’ll be doing, or where I’ll be. I’m only thirteen, mom. I’ve already had job offers, so to speak, making magical items and working as a healer from the school nurse. My magic can do so much, I have to decide where I can do the most good. And like you saw, I can *Teleportal* back to see you any time. I could work thousands of miles away and still have a house in my old neighborhood.”

“You do have years yet to decide. I have to admit, I wasn’t sure what to expect.”

“I know. It’s like stepping back in time, isn’t it? No telephone lines, no electric lights, it’s all magic. They seem to ignore anything not directly magical, which I was just remarking to Harry recently.”

“I think I heard part of that. Something about computers, right?”

“Yeah. They still use film cameras, and write with quills for Pete’s sake. I have to wonder sometimes.”

“You really fly on broomsticks?” Stacy ran over to the broomstick shop, gawking in through the window.

“I don’t. I rather sensibly have a *Flight* spell. But other magic users do, yes. It’s sort of their version of the car, I guess?”

“Crazy.”

“Tell me about it. They don’t have a lot of personal spells. But they do put an emphasis on potions, one would think they would brew up a flight potion. Oh well.”

And so Susan and her mother walked around and looked at the shopfronts. Susan explained to her about the wizard war, and Voldemort. How he seemed to have enchanted certain objects with pieces of his soul, and how dangerous they were. She talked about the school, and the fun she had with her friends there, and about Myrtle her ghost friend. By the time they were ready to go home, Stacy looked a little haunted herself.

“It’s a lot to take in. Sorry I sprung this on you like this. It just sort of came to a head, I guess.”

“That’s okay. You’ve just had so many adventures in your life already. I had no idea that school was so dangerous.” She muttered, almost too low for Susan to hear. “Or that you were.”

“Well, as long as no more pieces of Voldemort show up it should be fine. I mean, what else could go wrong?”

Too bad it was so dark there, or Susan would have seen the wanted posters all over the place. Posters featuring a screaming man with the name of Black.

Getting to school

Time: The day before the train ride

Place: Diagon Alley

By the time two weeks had passed, Susan knew that Black had escaped prison, as that was all anyone was talking about. She had visited Harry at the Alley where they finished their homework (that which Susan hadn't done via computer) and walked the streets. She had taken her mother to see the place when it was "awake" and bought her school books. Stacy had to laugh when Susan told her she was using the bank against itself, turning 1 Galleon into 10 every month.

But finally, supplies packed into her *Pocket Dimension*, Susan and Sparkle stepped through, not to return home for several months. There they met their other friends, and they all told of their adventures over the summer.

"Scabbers didn't take too well to Egypt though," said Ron that afternoon when the four met up. He pulled Scabbers from a pocket, and he was looking a bit droopy.

Susan looked him over. "He doesn't seem hurt, so I don't think *Healing* or *Regeneration* will help. Huh, he's missing a toe! *Regeneration* would fix that, right enough. Rats only live a couple of years though, and not even *Alleviation* will fix old age. I'm sorry, Ron."

"That's the oddest thing, Scabbers has been in the family for ages."

"Really? Well, maybe magical creatures live longer. I was wondering if I should start looking into *Senescent Cessation* for Sparkle, but she says she doesn't feel old, so I don't know. She's technically my *Companion* though, so as long as I'm alive, she should be."

"I think I'll get someone who knows animals to check him over anyway."

"I'm no expert, it's a good idea. Hope it's not serious."

"Thanks."

"We can go together," said Hermione. "I want to get an owl this year, now that I have some spending money."

"Great! Let's go!" said Susan.

The inside of the animal shop looked like the inside of the wand shop, just jammed with animal cages rather than wands.

"I don't get it," said Susan to Harry, looking around. "Wizards can jam more space into things like trunks to make the inside larger than the outside. So why are all these buildings not done that way? Every wizard shop looks two sizes too small for what they're selling inside."

"Maybe the overlapping space would mess things up?"

"Nah, they have trunks stacked together and they don't get messed up."

Harry shook his head. "I really have no idea."

Ron was having Scabbers looked at when Sparkle cryptically said "Cat at twelve o'clock" and a spitting, hissing, clawed fur-ball dropped from the top of the stack of cages onto the counter in front of Ron, and started trying to kill Scabbers. The rat wiggled out of the saleswoman's hands and lad scampered out the door, Ron running after him. Harry followed them both.

"What's that cat's problem?" asked Susan.

“I have to admit something,” answered Sparkle. “I don’t really speak ‘cat.’ I think it’s because I’m your *Companion* rather than an actual pet cat that happens to talk. That’s why I picked up *Animal Speech*, truth to tell. So I’m as baffled as you are.”

“Huh. Did not know that,” said Susan.

“I wonder how much he is?” asked Hermione, breathlessly.

The witch at the counter perked up. “You want him? He’s been here ages- I mean, he’s a great ratter, as you can see. Loyal, strong, a fine example of the feline species. Let’s talk price.”

Methinks the lady doth protest too much, but it’s her money.

When she walked out with the cat Crookshanks, Hermione had actually talked the shopkeeper into throwing in the rat tonic and getting a lower price than what Susan saw on other cat’s cages.

Should have known she would have Negotiation, all the books she’s read.

“Did you find Scabbers okay?” asked Susan, seeing Ron coming back.

“Yeah, he was hiding- why is that thing with her?”

“She bought him,” Susan said.

“You didn’t try to talk her out of it?”

“Why would I do that? I have a cat, she now has a cat. Sure, I doubt Crookshanks can talk or cast spells, but it didn’t cost her background points, either. She got a good deal him, actually. I always wondered if I did...”

“I’m right here, you know.”

“Background points well spent.”

“That’s better.”

They both laughed.

“But think of poor Scabbers! He needs his rest, he’s old!”

“He certainly moved like he was young just a minute ago,” said Hermione. “Oh, and here, your medicine for him.”

“Thanks. I’ll pay you back.”

“No need, she threw it in.”

“Wow, really? Thanks a lot, Hermione. You’re the best.”

“Naturally,” she said with a grin.

“Even if you have poor taste in animals...” he said quietly.

Heading back the bar, the four saw Mr. Weasley reading a paper.

“Man, this Black character is all you hear about nowadays,” said Harry, looking at the front page.

“Harry! Good to see you again. How was your summer?”

“Involved, as usual. I spent part of it here, but you probably already know that. How are you doing?”

“Fine, fine. Very busy because of this Black business, actually. They’ve got us off all our regular cases trying to track him down.”

“He’s that dangerous?”

Arthur lowered his voice. “He’s said to be almost as Dark a wizard as You Know You was. Tell me Susan, can your magic... find people?”

“Indeed it can,” Susan answered just as quietly. “And they’ve helpfully posted his picture all over the place, so I can identify him for the spell. We could go somewhere private and I could tell you where he was in less than half an hour.”

“Really?” he asked, perking up. He caught sight of his wife. “Later then.”

“Hello everyone,” said Molly, the rest of the family in tow. They all said hello and got caught up for a while, then went in to dinner.

“How will we get to the station tomorrow, anyway?” asked Fred (or George).

“The ministry has offered to drive us, but I was just hoping Susan would see clear to just *Teleportal* us all there.”

“That reminds me!” said Susan, snapping her fingers. “I have a present for you two.” She looked at the twins. “We’re ahead of schedule. Those dwarves last year cleaned out the maze for me, so it’s good to go. Even put a door in the middle, so half is yours and half is mine. I just need to sit down with one of you and make you an item to access it.”

“Seriously?” asked one of the twins. “You’re giving us half of your secret, underground base?”

“Sure. What am I going to do with a mile of tunnels somewhere? It’s yours.”

“Thanks,” they said together.

“I’ve had it stocked with a few things. I can take you there after dinner, you can poke around, see what else you might want down there.”

“It’s not dangerous anymore, is it?” asked Molly.

“The team I had knew what they were doing, and I asked the Headmaster to check it over. All the weird giant bugs are gone out of it, and all the traps have been disarmed. The secret doors are marked, for the moment, and it’s been quiet all these months. It should be good to go.”

The twins were grinning like fools.

“Then I guess I don’t see the harm in it.”

“Anyway, back to the earlier question, it’ll be no trouble just to go to the school directly if you’d rather.”

“Oh, but I want to ride the train!” said Ginny. “It’s part of the whole experience.”

Susan laughed. “I guess you’re right, it is. All opposed?” Everyone shook their heads. “Motion passes, we’ll ride the train to Hogwarts!”

After dinner Susan took the twins down to the maze, and she pointed out all the features. They were impressed, and talking about what they would use each room for.

“And you say you’ll make us an item to open our own *Teleportal* down here?”

“Technically it’ll function exactly like the spell, so you’ll be able to use it to get wherever you want to go. Anywhere you’ve seen at least once, that is.”

“Why are you doing all this for us?”

Susan laughed. “What was it I told the Headmaster? Oh yeah, it’s easy to be generous when you have an abundance. It doesn’t cost me anything but time, and I know you guys needed a place to do magical experiments away from prying eyes. That’s all.”

“We can’t thank you enough. Really.”

“Just put it to good use, okay?”

Later that night, Arthur knocked on Susan’s door and was let in.

“I was reviewing the spell,” she said, “I’ve already understood it, so I just have to cast it. Do you have that paper still?”

He handed it over.

“Great. Let’s make some magic!”

Susan concentrated on the ten minute spell, layering the magic circles just so, and looked over at the newspaper picture. "*Descry Creature: Sirius Black, whose likeness I have before me,*" she said, completing the spell.

She paused.

"Well, that's weird."

"He's not nearby, is he?" Arthur sounded panicked.

"Just the opposite. He doesn't seem to... exist."

"Come again?"

The magical circles around Susan faded, and she looked over at Sparkle. "I got no result. The spell went off, and didn't backfire, but I just got nothing. Any clues?"

Both made *Magical Theory* checks, getting a 13 total.

"He's not hidden somehow, I don't think. It wasn't that I was pushing through interference, it was like there was just nothing to find."

"Shape-shift?" asked Sparkle.

"No, he's still the same person if he was shape-shifted. I'm sorry, I just don't know what happened. As far as my magic is concerned, the man doesn't exist."

"Maybe he was caught and killed just recently, and we haven't been told?"

"The spell does specify that it 'identifies the individual's soul and body' so I suppose if they were separated, it wouldn't work."

"Well, we can hope, right?"

"Yeah. Sorry I can't be more help."

"I'll contact the ministry, see if they've got any news. Thanks for trying."

"Of course."

"What do you think?" Susan asked Sparkle when he was gone.

"Not sure what to think, but somehow I still have a bad feeling about it."

The next morning Harry was trying to find a quiet moment to tell Susan and Ron something, but kept getting interrupted. With ten minutes to go the group stepped through the *Teleportal* onto the train platform. Susan had chosen a side hallway that was free of people, as holes in the air appearing weren't normal, even in the wizarding world. Especially with all this Sirius hysteria going around, Susan didn't want to take any chances. But no one saw them, and they joined the throng as normal. Susan stifled a laugh as they carried all their luggage onto the train, while she just walked, looking around interestedly.

Pocket Dimension, how much do I love thee? Let me count the ways.

"Look after Harry, won't you?" Molly said cryptically as she stepped up onto the train.

"I always have, and I always will," Susan answered.

"I know you will. Thank you. Have a good term."

Harry got pulled aside by Arthur as the train was about to pull out of the station, and it seemed rather serious from where she was standing.

What's going on? They're not acting right...

Finally the train pulled away, and Harry just made it at the last second. They found a compartment, empty apart from a sleeping man, and sat down in it.

“What was that all about?” Susan asked. “The Weasley’s have been acting a little strange today, no offense Ginny.”

“No, they are,” said Ginny. “What’s up, Harry?”

Harry looked at her, then back at Susan. “Is she a party member now?”

Susan looked at her critically. “She did handle herself well down in the Chamber last year. I’d go so far as to say yes, I think she’s proven herself. Welcome to Team Susan, Ginny.”

She smiled. “Thanks. I think.”

“Don’t thank me. It comes with a lifetime supply of mortal danger, abject terror, and the most amazing magic you’ve ever seen. Strap in.”

“As to what it’s about, apparently Mr. Weasley thinks I’m about to go looking for Sirius. And get this, there’s going to be Dementors posted around the school grounds this year.”

“From Azkaban? Perfect! The minister came through for me after all,” said Susan, rubbing her hands together excitedly. She debated a short cackle, but decided against it. She wasn’t that far gone. Yet.

Ginny looked at her like she was crazy. “Are you crazy?” she asked. “Do you know what Dementors are? And what does the minister have to do with it?”

“Just from what I’ve read. I told Mr. Fudge in a few years I was going to attack Azkaban and tear it down. Naturally I’m going to have to figure out how to kill these Dementor things everyone seems to be terrified of, and he’s helpfully provided me some to *experiment on*.” Susan grinned wildly.

“Is it too late to leave Team Susan?”

“You’ll get used to it,” said Ron.

“Used to it? She’s insane- she thinks she can tear Azkaban down by herself!”

“Yeah, she probably could.”

Ginny looked around the compartment, where everyone, even Hermione, was nodding to her.

“Okay,” she said in small voice. “Go Team?”

Susan laughed. “Welcome aboard!”

“So why did he think you would go looking for Sirius?” Hermione asked.

“Don’t know. He was insistent I not do so. Maybe he thinks I have some kind of hero complex? Like because I beat up the basilisk last year I think I’m invincible, or something?”

“Humph. I’m insulted. I’m the one it’s more in character for to go looking for trouble,” said Susan.

“That’s true enough,” remarked Ron.

“Maybe he knew your parents or something? We’ll have to look in the library, see if they keep old newspapers around from the war. Maybe we can find out. If you want to, I mean,” said Hermione.

“I’m probably better off not knowing. But last night I overheard them talking, and they think he broke out of prison to try and come after me.”

“After you? Oh, because he was a Voldemort supporter.”

“Yup.”

“I do have to tell you all something though,” said Susan. “Last night I used *Descry Creature* to try and find him. It didn’t work.”

They stared at her. “What exactly does that mean?” asked Harry, who had hardly ever seen a spell of hers fail.

“I don’t know. I’ve only cast it the once before, when I was trying to find Professor McGonagall. The spell didn’t fail, it just didn’t give me a result. So be careful, Harry. If he really is coming for you, and my magic can’t find him... He’s something different, I’ll say that much.”

The others sat in silence for a while, digesting this. Susan got bored and started casting *Repair* on the adult who sitting next to them, asleep. She fixed up his robes (which no longer looked so shabby) and his case (which no longer needed to be held together with string) and wondered aloud who he could be. She of course saw the name on his case, but that didn’t really tell her anything.

“Probably our next Defense teacher,” remarked Hermione. “Who else would be on the train?”

“Good thinking!”

So they talked about going (or not) to the wizard village, and Harry explained Susan’s plan to get him there.

“I suppose if you stay invisible,” Hermione said, “Even Sirius couldn’t find you if he can’t see you.”

Draco also “stopped by” and remarked Susan’s “gang” was growing.

“How’s your father, by the way?” asked Harry. “After he lost his house elf, I hope he can still keep his appointments and such. I hear that good help is really hard to find.”

“Oh, he’s got something special planned for you because of that whole- wait a minute, that’s not a student.” He was looking at Remus at last.

“We think he’s the new Defense teacher,” said Harry. “Shall we wake him and introduce you?”

“Forget it,” he said, leaving.

It was soon after that, when it was getting dark, that the train started to slow.

“Did we make good time this year, or what?” asked Ron. “I’m starving, and looking forward to that feast!”

“No, something’s wrong,” said Hermione, looking at her watch. “We can’t be there yet.”

“What then?”

As Ron started to answer all the lights went out on the train, plunging the group into darkness.

“*Darksight*,” said Harry at once. “I’ll get my wand, just sit still a minute.” He reached into his overhead bag and pulled it out. “*Lumos*.”

“You know,” said Susan, shaking out her bracelet. “You might want to keep that closer at hand from now on? What with murderous felons out to kill you, and whatnot?”

“Oh yeah. Hey, something’s moving out there. I think people are getting on this train.”

“Defensive positions,” commanded Susan. *Always wanted to say that!*

“We’re in a train car!” protested Ron.

“Then everyone behind me,” she said, getting up and going to the door. “*Immunity*.” Magic shimmered around her.

“How about you all get behind me,” said a new voice. Remus was up at last, and taking an interest.

Might be interesting to see what he can do. “Certainly, Professor Lupin.”

“How did you-”

He never got to finish. Cold started creeping into the car, and a black figure glided to a halt by the door.

“What in the world?” asked Susan.

The door soundlessly slid open, and a bony hand was withdrawn back into the folds of the thing’s cloak. It was floating, and seemed to have on robes that swayed in an unseen wind. It had a sort of hood, and it was impossible to tell where the creature ended and the robes began. The temperature continued to drop.

“Wraith!” shouted Susan. “Undead scum! Back unto death I Susan command thee! *Elemental Bolt (fire)!*” A stream of fire shot out of Susan’s hand, striking it in the called shot location, the body.

The creature didn’t even seem to notice.

“Uh...” *Crap, if that didn’t even touch it, I have no other attack spells that will. What, what about healing magic? If it’s undead, that should hurt it, right?*

The creature seemed to take a deep breath, further dropping the temperature in the room, and Susan heard someone go down behind her. Risking a glance she saw it was Harry, who seemed to be having some kind of seizure. The wraith didn’t seem to be attacking, just sensing, so Susan shouted “You’re on defense, Sparkle,” and turned toward him. She took the full casting time (2.5 seconds) and knelt down next to him. “*Magic Immunity,*” she cast, figuring the creature was doing something magical to him. His eyes popped open again.

He won’t be able to use magic, but at least he’s not unconscious!

A lion appeared in the hallway, and Sparkle shouted to it, “Attack that wraith!” and it slammed into the thing, but again, it handily seemed to notice. The lion started striking out with its paws, a blur under *Acceleration* but that seem to have no affect either.

“What is that thing?” said Harry, looking up at it.

“I don’t know, but throw everything you’ve got at it!” shouted Susan. *I’ll spend max energy and do a called shot for damage this time, let’s see it shrug that off!*

Everyone in the compartment raised their wands, and Susan raised her hand again, magical symbols again flashing around it and lighting the darkness with angry red light.

“Elemental-”

“That really won’t be necessary,” said Remus, putting a hand on her shoulder, and holding his own wand out. “Go on, none of us are hiding Black under our cloaks. Move on.”

The thing silently regarded him.

“*Expecto Patronum,*” said Remus, a silver light shooting from his wand. The creature seemed to recoil back, and glided on down the hallway. The lion was still trying to bite it, claw it, whatever, but the thing didn’t even seem to care.

“Call it off,” said Susan, and it disappeared. She stepped into the hallway and crossed her arms. Looking angrily at it she remarked “Let me guess, that was a Dementor?”

“Yes it was,” said Remus, sticking his head out. He looked from Susan to the Dementor and back. “You don’t feel anything?”

“Should I?”

“How interesting.” He pulled his head back in, and Susan watched as the thing checked several more cars, met another of its number going the other way, and then glided off the train. The thing ignored her completely as it went past, and out the door into the rainy night. Soon the lights were back on and the train slowly started to pull forward again.

Susan went and sat down, finding the others eating chocolate that Remus had obviously passed out. "Want some?" he asked.

Susan shook her head.

"It'll help."

"Help? With what? My seething anger at that creature from shrugging off both an *Elemental Bolt* and acting like that *Magical Ally* wasn't even there?"

"Susan, right?"

"In the flesh. Guess that effective *Reputation* background of mine as part of *Prodigy* is paying off."

"I see what Albus meant when he called you an 'adventurer.' I've never seen anyone do that to a Dementor, let alone on their first meeting with one."

"Do what? It didn't work."

"Fight."

"Oh. Wait, what happened with you guys?"

"I felt..." Ron began, "Like I'd never be happy again. Ginny was shaking like mad."

In fact, Ginny was still shaking, and Hermione went over to her. "It's okay," she said. "It's gone."

"I need to speak to the conductor. I'll be back in a moment." He left the car.

"So then why did it affect me so strongly?" asked Harry.

"I don't know," answered Susan. "I'm just glad *Magic Immunity* worked, and cut it off. It's a dark creature, I can tell you that. I did a *Magic Sense* on it as it went past me again. It felt *wrong*. Like it was wound in the world. I didn't like it."

"So why weren't you affected?" asked Ginny in a shaky voice.

"I had put up *Magic Immunity* first thing. It's a spell I've pre-loaded into this." She held up her bracelet. "And I better put it back soon in case those things come back. Anyway, it makes me immune to all magic. Rather handy, I thought."

"Oh. So this is what Team Susan is all about, huh?"

"Eh, it comes with perks too, like a totally unique Christmas gift, customized with Susan magic for something wanded wizards can't do. Look forward to it!"

"I... I will?"

"Great!" Susan sat down and started casting *Spell Symbol* again, and by the time she was done, Remus had returned.

"Hogwarts in ten minutes," he announced cheerfully. "Everyone okay here, then?"

Everyone nodded.

"I seem to notice my robes are in better repair, can anyone explain that?"

Susan raised her hand, giggling. "Magic?"

"I see."

Her face hardened again. "Professor, I hit that thing square in the chest with fire, and it acted like it didn't even care. Yet you drove it away, so magic must affect them. Was it some kind of healing spell?"

"No. Healing magic doesn't work on them either. I've never seen any spell apart from the one I cast make them care in the slightest."

"I see." *We'll just have to change that, won't we?*

Finally the train pulled into Hogwarts and everyone got off. Rubeus, accompanied by Filbert, was calling first years over, while the rest of the students mounted the coaches for the final leg. They took off, and coming up to the castle gates two more Dementors silently hovered.

Ginny squeezed her eyes shut, and Harry tried to sink into his seat, but Susan looked them over interestedly.

Hermione was rubbing her arms. "Aren't you cold?" she asked.

"Not particularly."

"You have your immunity going?"

"No, it dropped once they were gone off the train."

"Weird."

As the group got off the coach Harry and Hermione were called off by Professor McGonagall. Susan, Ginny, Sparkle, and Ron went to sit down at the feast and watch the sorting. Susan was still a bit miffed that her magic hadn't worked.

"Odd timing, don't you think?" Sparkle said to her.

"What is?"

"That yesterday your magic failed to find Sirius, and today it failed to damage a Dementor."

"You think they're connected somehow?"

"It's a possibility we shouldn't ignore."

"Great, now I'm even more worried."

Harry came back and sat down, and with everyone now present, Albus stood up to say a few words.

"Welcome back, those who are joining us once again," he began. "And to those first year students, welcome for the first time. We're glad to have you. I wish to address you all on a matter of great importance. As you know, the dark wizard Sirius Black has escaped from Azkaban and the ministry believes someone or something here is his target. Thus, guards from that place, in the form of Dementors, have been stationed at the school despite my protests. While they are here I must impress upon you that no one may leave the grounds without permission. They will not be fooled by disguises or magic, and they should be given a wide berth. Give them no reason to harm you, and they shall not. Simple, isn't it? If anyone should feel threatened by one, please go to a prefect, or our new Head Boy and Girl, or a teacher."

He looked around, and most seemed to be getting the message. He seemed satisfied.

"On a happier note, I have two new professors to introduce this year. The first is Professor Lupin, who will be taking over from Gilderoy to teach Defense Against the Dark Arts."

Remus stood up, and gave a little bow. Susan's party clapped the hardest for him, as he at least seemed more competent than their last teacher, which wasn't saying much. Susan was glad she had spruced him up a bit, he looked more like a professor now, rather than a bum who had happened to wander in.

"And secondly, you all know our groundskeeper, Rubeus. Having passed his exams and being certified for teaching, he will be taking over for Professor Kettleburn in teaching Care for Magical Creatures."

Again, the group clapped loudest and longest, and Susan remarked, "No wonder the Headmaster suggested I take the class, despite my arguments. He probably knew, the crusty old goat."

“Let the feast begin!

The First Day Back

Time: 9:00 the first day

Place: Hogwarts School

So Susan took her first Arithmancy class with Hermione, which because it's based on REASON, she and Hermione both enjoyed. She happily saw a one appear on her character sheet next to the skill, and knew she would get at least a three, given her 2d8+1 skill checks.

Hermione said she had to get to her next class, which Susan figured would be *Transfiguration*, along with Harry and Ron, so she said her goodbyes and went to her study period. There wasn't much yet to do there, but she finished her Arithmancy assignment and was debating sending a note to Myrtle with *Send Object* to say "I'm in the library, come see me if you want!"

Would I be able to send an object to a ghost? She made like she was pulling a book out of her bag, but cast *Pocket Dimension* and pulled out her spell book.

"Send a single object to another creature" she read. *So is a ghost a creature? Is one of those Dementor things? Stupid Dementor things! Not getting set properly on fire when you should have- I hate you!*

"What'cha reading?" said a voice over her shoulder.

"Myrtle!" cried Susan, spinning around. "I was just thinking about how I could get you up here. Study period is boring without stuff to study!"

"So you want to study me, is that it?"

"Myrtle, have we forgotten our lessons in being positive?"

"Maybe I need a refresher."

Susan laughed. "You just want a hug. Well, I guess it's all over school that I can touch ghosts now, isn't it? After I cured Sir Nick."

"Can you blame me? I haven't seen you in forever."

"Can't blame you at all. Come here. *Phase.*"

The other students watched as the two embraced. "What, never seen a ghost hug someone before?" said Myrtle.

"I've missed you, Myrtle. I'd ask how your summer was, but I probably already know the answer."

"Actually, I participated in the ghost games for the first time. I even won an event- Feather Lifting. I kept my feather up nearly five seconds."

"Really?" Susan was impressed. As demonstrated last year, a ghost could fling water around or exert enough force to bump an object if they had to, for a split second. Actually sustaining an object in the air was something different. "That's wonderful. Did you compete in any other events? What other events are there, actually?"

"There's flying speed, kicking your own head the furthest, acting, and telling the scariest story. There's completing a scavenger hunt in the shortest time, poetry readings (original poems only), and best dramatic reenactment of your death. There's actually a lot more than that, even. The school is empty for weeks, we have to do something in that time."

"I guess you do. It sounds like a huge deal!"

"Oh, ghosts from all over come, both to watch and participate. They start working on it weeks in advance. If you're not too busy some time," Myrtle looked down, scuffing her foot on

the air. "I thought I might run some poems by you, and maybe compete in that event next year. I was just too embarrassed this year."

"I'd love that!"

"Really?" She brightened. "I'll keep working on them then."

"Please do. Now you said a flying speed event. Don't all ghosts fly at the same speed?"

"Do all people run at the same speed?"

"But that has to do with leg length, and STREngth of muscle, and how much ENDurance you have. Ghosts don't have to worry about any of that stuff, right?"

"We still think of ourselves as human. Flying is basically tricking ourselves into believing we're already somewhere we're not. Then our bodies get pulled along by the strength of that belief. The stronger someone can believe they're at the finish line already, the faster they go."

"Interesting. Is it the same with the feather?"

Myrtle nodded. "We have to believe we've holding it up physically. But we know we're dead, so it's tough. It's like you just believing you don't need to breathe. You can do it for a while, but eventually it catches up to you."

"Why a feather, though? Does the weight matter? I mean, if you can believe you're holding up a feather, couldn't you believe you're holding up a rock, or a desk?"

"I suppose the principal is the same. It's just easier to believe with the feather because it's lighter to begin with. I'll give that a try though, lifting something heavier for that long."

"I think you might be surprised."

Susan headed to Care of Magical Creatures with the others, and asked Harry and Ron how their first classes went. Sparkle went with her this time, she wanted to know what this class was all about, herself.

"Professor Trelawney said all kinds of horrible things were going to happen to everybody, and that Harry was going to die soon," said Ron.

"Well, he probably is," said Susan.

"What? Why?" said Harry, panicked.

"By soon I mean on the geologic scale, like a hundred and thirty years from now. It's all a matter of perspective."

"Don't even joke like that."

"Harry and Ron took it way too seriously," said Hermione. "Talking about Grims or whatever."

"How do you know? Aren't those classes at the same time? You couldn't have been there."

"She was there."

"But she-"

"There's Rubeus!" said Hermione, flushing. "Let's go."

Okay, something odd there. She was with me in Arithmancy, how could she also know what went on in Divination?

The others looked quizzically at her, but Susan just shrugged. "Don't look at me."

"Oh great, look who it is," said Ron.

"Our favorite person," said Harry.

"Draco," said Susan, her eye twitching. "And I had such high hopes for him, before. Did you know that?"

“Why?” asked Harry.

“He seemed decent, underneath it all. But then some things happened he can’t prove, but that kind of turned him against me.”

“The whole raid thing last year?”

“That’s the one.”

“If it isn’t Susan’s Trio,” said Draco, waiting for Rubeus to come over. “Break any more legs over the summer?”

“Hello, Draco. You’re just jealous because you only got two minions. And how many times do I have to tell you? It was non-lethal damage!”

“I’m a minion?” asked Ron.

“Totally a minion,” said Susan.

“At least I’m a sidekick, right?” asked Harry.

She looked him over, bobbing her head this way and that and humming. “Bring me the carcasses of thirteen *Dire Rats* and I’ll upgrade your status from minion to minion first class.”

“Wow, what’s the quest to go from MFC to Sidekick in Training?” asked Ron.

“You want to do that quest? It’s not for the faint of heart. It involves a few more *Dire Rats* than thirteen, let me tell you.”

“What are you blathering about?” asked Draco.

“Oh, we’re just trying to annoy you. Hello Professor!”

Walking up was Rubeus, who grinned when Susan called him professor.

“This way, everyone. Great class for today, don’t you worry. Come along then.”

He led them around the edge of the forest to a fenced off area, and turned to face everyone. “Don’t worry, they aren’t invisible. I’ll go get them in a moment. First, I’d like you to open your books to page-”

“How?” asked Draco.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean... how... do we... open... our books?” Draco drawled. He held up a book bound with rope.

“Someone must have figured out the trick,” Rubeus said, looking around the group.

“Sorry Professor,” said Susan. “Even I was a bit stumped on the whole book issue.” She leaned over to Hermione and whispered, “I dropped an *Immobilize* on it and shoved it into my *Pocket Dimension* separately. Hopefully far away from everything else.”

“You just have to stroke the spine. Thought that would be obvious, but I guess I should have sent a little hint along.”

“Well, that’s just stupid,” said Draco.

“No, we’re stupid,” said Susan.

“No, you’re stupid... what did you say?”

“I said we’re the stupid ones. All of us. We failed the first test of Care of Magical Creatures. When confronted with something unknown and hostile we just tied it up and hoped that would solve the problem. Well, it didn’t. We failed you, Professor, you didn’t fail us.”

“Well, uh, keep that in mind next time, then. So like I said, stroke the spine and open to page 34. While I go get the creatures you’re going to see, you can read about them so you’re prepared. Clear?”

Everyone started unbinding their books, and Susan called hers out of her *Pocket Dimension* and opened it up.

On page 34 was a picture of a bizarre creature that looked to be result of some very odd breeding, called a hippogriff. Either that or the artist was on some kind of hallucinogen. But no, Rubeus led several of the creatures out into the pen from the forest. He tied their leads to the fence and came back around.

“And here they are. Hippogriffs, just like the book says. Part bird, part horse, a very proud creature is a hippogriff. The one thing you must never do is act in an insulting manor towards a hippogriff. Everyone got that? Rule one! Well step up, come on.”

Not many wanted to get closer, but Susan had *Overconfidence*. She closed her book and stepped up. Some other brave students crowded around behind her.

No, this won't do anything for my reputation around here.

“Now, the approach,” said Rubeus. “Let them make the first move. They see you as food, don't forget that. They're smart enough to know eating you won't gain them anything. Still, they see themselves as the predator and you as the prey, so let them choose to allow you to approach. When you have a hippogriff's attention, bow to him. They understand things like that, like a dog flipping over to show its belly. Shows you're not trying to elevate yourself above them. We know the truth, don't worry, think of it as a little play you're performing with him. After the bow, if he accepts you, he'll bow back. If he doesn't then just back away and try later, because they will attack what they see as a threat. Everyone got all that?”

There were general nods.

“Right. Susan, you want to try it?”

“Why not?” she answered. *Oh, I really wish I had learned Invulnerability over the summer. Oh, save your XP for school, Susan. What do you need more spells for over the vacation, Susan? Bright.*

Still, she was not going to clamber over the fence, especially in a skirt. “*Flight*” she whispered, touching the pair of wings on her bracelet. She decided the spell should last “until she was out of sight of the hippogriffs” and felt the magic take hold. She bent her legs as though going to jump, but pushed off the ground with *Flight*, rising quickly into the air. From behind it looked like she jumped, landed on the top of the fence, then pushed off again, rising higher until she fell back to earth. Her feet didn't actually touch the ground- she wanted to be flying, just in case the creature made a move and she needed to get away fast. Only a close inspection would have revealed this, however.

Smooth, Susan. Smooth with a capital Smoo!

The closest hippogriff had taken an interest in her, and was watching her intently. She curtsied, bowing her head to the creature.

“You've got Buckbeak's attention there, Susan. Well done with the bow, now hold it a moment. He's intrigued, no question there. Just a few more seconds... okay, that's long enough, you better back away slowly.”

However, Buckbeak had seen enough, and dipped his head, acknowledging Susan.

“Well done!” said Rubeus. “You can approach. Here, feed him this.” She was handed a dead fish from a pail hanging on the fence. “Just throw it in the air for him.”

Susan held it out, and Buckbeak nodded, so she tossed it to him. It was snapped up with one mighty thrust of his neck.

“Pet him, go on. He won't hurt you.”

Susan put her hand up to his neck and stroked the feathers. Behind her, everyone applauded. Even Crabbe, until Draco shot him a dirty look.

“Would you like to try riding him?” Rubeus asked.

With Flight going, why not?

“He’ll allow that?”

“I should think so. Just don’t pull any feather’s out, it’ll hurt him.”

She walked around the beast and kept one hand in him. (Figuring he was at least part horse, so treat the back end like a horse, of course. She did have *Animal Handling* at a 2, after all) But not riding, so she made a *Gymnastics* check, aided by *Flight* to get on. She gripped the beast with her knees.

“Good mount,” Rubeus said, impressed, and started releasing the chain that had held him. “Get up then!” He smacked Buckbeak on the rump and it reared up, almost tossing her off, but her *Flight* spell allowed her to match his motion and stay on. He opened huge wings and leapt into the air. Susan was going to sit cross legged on his back, but then decided against it. If someone else decided to follow her example, they wouldn’t have *Flight* to keep them in place, and would probably fall and die. So she just rode him normally, waving to the people below.

He went in a big circle, cutting across part of the forest, and landed back in the pen again.

“That was fun!” Susan said. “Thank you, Buckbeak.” She hopped off, and Rubeus threw him another fish.

“Let’s hear it for Buckbeak and Susan,” he said, applauding.

With that out of the way, everyone was willing to give it a try, and one by one the hippogriffs were untied and brought over.

“Nice job with the acrobatics to start,” remarked Harry. “But I trifle showy. I’d give it an eight out of ten.”

“You try getting over that fence with a skirt on, and everyone watching.”

“I guess there is that.”

The only two beings that could have reacted in time to Draco insulting Buckbeak didn’t. Sparkle, because her *Short Attention Span* had made her curl up and take a nap by a nearby tree, and Susan because she was watching Harry. Everyone turned when he shouted, holding his arm and lying on the ground. Rubeus rushed over to grab Buckbeak, and Susan walked over to Draco.

“I’m dying, it’s killed me!” he wailed.

Even I have Low Pain Tolerance, but that’s going a little too far.

“Now, see, that’s lethal damage,” she said, grabbing his sleeve and pushing it up. “I hope you appreciate the difference now.”

“Help me!” he cried.

She grabbed his arm, looking it over critically and getting an 8 on *First Aid*. “That can’t be more than eight points, honestly. *Healing*.” A magical circle appeared under Draco’s arm, as she took the full casting time, less than a second. The wound started to close up, healing 3 points of damage. It was hard to tell without washing it off, but she figured another casting couldn’t hurt. “*Healing*,” she said again, and this time it closed up completely.

Couldn’t have done that the first time?

Rubeus came over. “I’ll take him to the hospital wing. Class dismissed for the day.”

“There’s no need for that, I’ve already healed him.”

“What, are you sure?”

Susan looked over at him. “Am I sure? It’s me, of course I am.” She looked over to where Sparkle was laying. “Hey, can I get some *Hygiene* over here?” she yelled over to her. Sparkle got up and stretched as Draco sat up, looking at his arm.

“How does it feel?”

“Uh, better, I guess. You really do know healing magic, don’t you?”

“Yes, I really do. Why do you think I offered last time?”

“I... don’t know.”

“*Hygiene*,” said Sparkle, touching Malfoy’s back from behind. Draco seemed to ripple a little, and all the blood vanished from his clothes.

“And now to *Repair* your robes,” said Susan, working the casting of the spell into the sentence as she pulled the sleeve down again. She rolled maximum on that, and Draco was sitting there trying to find where it had been ripped. “Oh, it looks like they don’t need it. Weird. Guess everything’s back to normal then.”

She stood up.

“So, what have we learned, class?” she asked, looking around.

“Draco over dramatizes things?” said Ron. Several people snorted.

“No. Well, maybe. But we learned Professor Hagrid knows what he’s talking about, and you do what he’s doing in class rather than what Draco is doing.”

There was a general mummer of assent, and Draco got up.

“Thanks,” he said to Susan.

“Not a problem,” she replied. “And I do apologize for last year. As you just saw, I tend to show off a little more than maybe I should.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

“If you want to go up to see the healer anyway, that’s fine. Not that I don’t trust you, Susan, but just to make sure everything is fine,” said Rubeus.

“I think it’s totally healed,” said Draco, flexing his fingers. “But yeah, I’ll go.”

“All right. The hippogriffs probably need to calm down anyway, so class dismissed. Good job everyone.”

Susan and the others stayed behind to make sure Rubeus was okay.

“Wonder if I’ll get fired,” he said sadly, looking over at the hippogriffs. “It’s a good thing you were here, Susan. Your healing magic is powerful stuff. How’d you do that thing with the blood?”

“That was Sparkle. The *Hygiene* spell. Even brushed his teeth, if he even noticed. I didn’t want him wandering around school grounds with blood all over him. Especially now, with those Dementor creatures roaming around. I don’t know if they’re attracted to blood or not, but I felt it best to take no chances.” She looked around conspiratorially and motioned them all a little closer. She whispered, “Also he won’t be able to prove how bad the wound was, as I put him back the way he was before it happened.” She winked.

“Capital thinking,” said Hermione. “You know he would have milked that for all he was worth, otherwise.”

“He seems the type. Don’t be too hard on yourself, this was a very good third year demonstration. I wouldn’t ask second or first years to do the same, but third years should know better. Draco just... needs, I don’t know. Something.”

“It was really okay?”

“It really was,” said Susan. “I’m glad the headmaster talked me into taking this class. I think it’ll be fun.”

“Thanks, all of you. How did I get such good friends as you, huh?”

“Just lucky I guess.”

“So Draco implied he knew more about Sirius’ motives?” asked Susan. Professor Lupin had not yet arrived, and the group was sitting together, wondering how this Defense teacher would stack up. Conversation had turned to what Draco had said in their potions class earlier.

“That’s right. He doesn’t seem as nasty as usual, but he was asking me about it. Said he would want ‘revenge’ and I should ‘hunt him down myself.’ Weird, if you ask me,” said Harry.

“We’ll have to look into it some more, that’s for sure. How is poor Draco, anyway? Getting over his grievous injury, I hope?”

“I heard he wanted his arm bandaged up, but Madam Pomfrey couldn’t find anything wrong with it. He almost got in trouble for making the whole thing up, but Rubeus was called up and said that, yes, the hippogriff attacked him. He told how you had reacted and she just said, ‘oh, her?’ and that was the end of it.”

“Wait, did she say ‘oh, her’ as in, ‘oh, that crazy girl again?’ or ‘oh, her’ as in, ‘I want to be her when I grow up?’”

“Uh, yes?”

“It’s not all good,” said Hermione. “He did write to his father, so there may be consequences for him.”

“Good thing I went down there and took a peek with *Time Window* then,” said Susan. “He clearly insulted the beast, despite what Rubeus had said earlier. There’s not a jury in the land that would convict him.”

“Wizard law works a little different than what we’re used to, sadly.”

“Tell me about it. The Minister was going to take Rubeus to Azkaban last year, the Headmaster told me. Remember when he came last year to collect him? That’s where he was headed. I mean, honestly, Azkaban with no proof whatsoever! I’m even more furious about it now, given I’ve actually seen what Dementors do to people.”

“Any luck figuring out how to destroy them?” asked Harry.

“I do have a spell in mind that I want to try first, actually. *Undead Annihilation*. Basically causes me to shine with what amounts to holy light, burning anything undead that’s near me. I just have to get one far enough away from any ghosts, as I don’t know if they’ll start taking damage or not.”

“I’ll be happy to lure one away from the castle so you can try it sometime,” said Harry.

“Harry!” Hermione said, shocked.

“What? I’m all for Susan’s campaign for Dementor destruction. You saw what they did to me on the train. If she hadn’t been there who knows what would have happened?”

“Dementor Destruction. I like that. That’s the code name for this mission, or DD for short.”

“I can’t believe you’re actually- wait, yes, I can believe it. It’s you.”

“Relax, Hermione. With *Magic Immunity* running for him a creature like that, which is from what I can tell, totally animated by magic, wouldn’t even be able to touch him. Which brings up another way I could potentially destroy them. *Dead Magic*. Bet that would do the job. Thanks, Hermione.”

“Uh, sure. Wait, what?”

“I’m just worried about Neville,” said Ron. “He’s better since he got cured but he still goes to pieces in potions class.”

“I’m sure Severus doesn’t go out of his way to help matters,” grumped Susan.

“No, he does not. Do you know, he even took points away from Neville because his potion worked? Said I had helped him.”

“To be fair, you did,” said Ron.

“He did all the chopping and stirring, I just gave him some encouragement.”

“If you’ve got *Phobia*, then you have *Phobia*. Just ask Sparkle, she has *Phobia: Dogs*. She could totally take any dog apart with her magic, but she hears a bark and it’s up a tree for her! Like you and spiders, Ron.”

“Spiders? Where?”

“See what I mean? Wonder if I could help him buy it off somehow, or at least speak to Severus and get him to lay off.”

“I don’t see that helping much,” said Hermione.

“Yeah, you’re right. Maybe an *Imbued* item with *Augment RESolve* on it.”

As Susan mulled it over, Professor Lupin came in, carrying his newly repaired case. It still looked old, of course, but it didn’t look old and beat up. Everyone quieted down.

“Hello everyone, I’m Professor Lupin, your new Defense teacher, and we’ll get right into it. No need to take notes, today will be a practical lesson. I do have something to talk to you about, however.

“It seems Professor Quirrell has left us with some interesting artifacts, and everyone I’ve talked to seems to think his style of lesson was quite effective. Do you all agree with that?”

There was a rush to agree that yes, if those “lessons” came back, no one would complain.

“All right, I think we could work something like that in, a few times a month. For now, grab your wands and follow me!”

Lupin led them down the corridor where Peeves was stuffing gum in a keyhole. He turned and started to sing something, but then spotted Susan.

“Good afternoon, Peeves,” she said politely. “I hope the summer wasn’t too boring for you. Did you get to watch the ghost Olympics? Myrtle took first place in feather lifting, you know.”

Everyone turned to stare at her. “Ghost what?” someone whispered.

“As a matter of fact I did. Thank you for asking. Good day.” He tipped an imaginary hat and floated backwards through a wall.

“How did you get Peeves to be... well... civil to you?” asked Remus. “I didn’t even think that was possible.”

“Everyone plays into what he’s doing, and that gives the activity legitimacy. I ignore it, and speak to him as I would anyone else. It’s a basic technique in *Animal Handling*. You reward the positive and ignore the undesired behavior. Take for instance getting your dog to stop barking. If you give him a treat to shut him up, he’ll come to associate barking with getting a treat. But if you let him bark and then give him the treat when he’s quiet, you reinforce quiet, not barking.”

“Did everyone catch that? It’ll be on your first test.” He pointed his wand at the gum and it disappeared. “Onward, then.”

He turned into a staff-room, and they passed Severus on the way into the back.

“Watch out for Longbottom,” he sneered, getting up to leave. “The boy is totally hopeless.”

Susan planted herself in the door.

“Move,” Severus commanded.

“I get your animosity towards me, and possibly even Harry by extension. But why harass Neville? Do you simply delight in causing someone a third your age to be terrified of you?”

“What an interesting question,” said Remus. “Care to shed any light on the subject, Severus?”

“No, I do not.” He pushed passed Susan and left.

“Still a bundle of joy, as usual,” Susan remarked.

“Everyone around here, that’s it. Inside this wardrobe is a boggart.” He gave it a tap and it jumped by itself. Several people took a step back.

“Moved in yesterday, and I thought we might take care of it today. So, who can tell me what a boggart is, exactly?”

Guess whose hand was in the air?

“Yes, Hermione, is it?”

“Yes, Professor. A Boggart is an incorporeal trickster spirit that can instantly deduce a person’s worst fear, and then show it to them by means of taking the form of that fear.”

“Very precise, and you are of course correct. Inside something, like this wardrobe, it’s guessed a boggart has no shape, and just exists as potential. He does not know which of us will be first he sees when the door opens, and thus, what may frighten them. Why does this give us the advantage when dealing with them? Susan! You’ve been talking about fears today, what do you think?”

“I think if we know what we are afraid of we can mentally prepare ourselves for that vision, and know it’s just an illusion. Thus taking the creature by surprise when we are not afraid.”

“Interesting answer, but you will find the creature elicits a fear reaction no matter how prepared you are. Just as your buddies the Dementors emit cold, they emit fear. What about you, Harry? What do you think?”

He looked around. “I think there’s too many of us. He won’t be able to focus if there’s more than one person around.”

“Exactly right! Always deal with boggarts in pairs or more, just in case. Now, I will show you the wand movement and tell you the spell you are going to cast today is *Riddikulus*. By that I mean that is the incantation, not a commentary on the spell. Do you understand?”

They did.

“Good. What this incantation will do is to modify the boggart’s appearance slightly. We are going to use it to force it to assume a humorous shape rather than a scary one, because it is laughter, not spells and incantations (for those with the talent to cast them) that will finish it off. Does everyone understand?”

They all nodded their heads.

“Fine. Practice this movement and this incantation while I have a bit of a talk with Susan here.”

He showed them the movement for the spell, then motioned her over and sat down on the arm of a chair.

“I hear from Albus that you don’t actually do our kind of magic, but some kind of energy based magic from another world?”

“That’s correct.”

“I thought it was some kind of prank, but after talking to people about what you’ve done, or what they *think* you’ve done, I wasn’t sure what to think.”

“It wasn’t any easier for me, coming here. Your kind of magic just seemed so wrong, somehow. But I’ve gotten used to it.”

“As you say, as you say. I ask because you won’t actually be able to cast the spell I’m teaching them, right?”

“Nope. I would have to deal with it the old fashioned way. With fire, and guts, and possibly the snicker-snack of Felton’s Blade, should I need to summon it.”

“I’ve seen that sword. Is it true you simply willed it into your... Anyway, we can talk about that later. I just wanted you to know why I wasn’t going to call upon you to face it, as your methods, as you say, would be different.”

“I’m not sure what it would do for me, in any case,” said Susan. “I have *Overconfident* and so despite fending off gangs of bullies, Voldemort (twice), a huge serpent, etc. I’ve never really been afraid of any of that. I knew I could win. So really I don’t think I’m afraid of anything.”

“Would you be willing to test that theory?”

“You mean have it focus on me and see what it does? Absolutely!”

“On your own head be in then.”

“Okay, enough practice, time for the real thing. You’re up, Neville!”

“Me?” squeaked Neville. Remus took him through the spell, and started coaching him. With that done, the “attack” on the boggart began, and one by one, everyone except Harry and Susan were called forward. Finally, the boggart weakened, Susan was called and confidently stepped up.

The boggart looked at her.

It looked some more.

It began to take a nebulous shape, as if unsure of itself.

Susan began to smirk.

Suddenly another Susan was standing there. Beside her was a Sparkle, who also looked perfectly normal. The two Susans looked exactly the same to everyone else, but the real Susan took one look and started backing away, screaming.

“No! No! Anything but that! Make it stop, please! It’s too much, make it stop!”

The boggart seemed to shimmer, and Susan appeared again, this time looking older and laughing, wreathed in fire. She wore a black cloak, and magical power swirled around her.

“No!” Susan yelled, flinching back and covering her eyes.

“Uh, Neville, you’re up again. Finish it off, all right?”

He stepped up, and with one more application of *Riddikulus* and some more laughter it splintered and faded. Susan, looking pale in the back of the room, breathed a sigh of relief.

“Are you okay?” asked Harry, coming over to her.

“It has terrible. Worse than I could even imagine,” she managed. “I thought nothing- I can’t even think about it right now.”

“But it was just you,” said Hermione. “I mean, mine was bad enough, but there were snakes and spiders and mummies and that giant eyeball thing... you’re most afraid of yourself?”

Susan looked at everyone, and they all seemed concerned. She looked down, embarrassed.

“You couldn’t tell the difference, of course. The first thing it showed me...” she shivered, and got control of herself again. “It was me, but I had lost myself. What made me who I am, in other words, my being a Paragon. I was just plain old Susan, and Sparkle was just a cat. No magical companion, no *Pocket Dimension*, no ghostly friends, no mysterious father. Then it showed me...” She couldn’t go on.

“Go on,” said Remus. “Work past your fear so it can’t trap you again.”

Susan took a deep breath. “It showed me as an invincible dark lady, more terrible than Voldemort. I had memorized every spell, made items *imbued* with great power. My skills were a ten, and my energy was limitless. I had gone bad, and there was nothing on this earth, or any other, that could stop me. I wasn’t human anymore... I had become a dark Goddess, and the world bowed to me or paid the price.”

“I suppose,” said Remus after a moment of silence, “That if you’re afraid of that happening it won’t. Just keep it in mind as you grow up, and remember how you feel right now.”

Susan nodded.

“Everyone gets five points, except for Neville, he gets ten for having faced it twice. You going to be okay, Susan?”

She nodded.

“I’ll let you stay here until you’re composed again. Good first lesson everyone, class dismissed.”

“I honestly didn’t think I was afraid of anything,” said Susan, several minutes later. Ron, Hermione and Harry had stayed with her, and she was ready to talk about it.

“I wouldn’t be, if I could do what you can do,” remarked Ron.

“Is there a way you could lose your powers?” asked Hermione.

“There’s one way,” Susan answered. “I’ve not told you this, but there is a risk with my magic. That’s why I don’t like to have too many spells going at once, and why *Spell Symbol* has proven so useful.”

“She mentioned it to me,” said Harry. “But it’s never really been a concern, I thought.”

“I’m very careful,” said Susan. “If I take less time to cast a spell, I put at least that much extra energy into it to compensate. You probably can’t tell the difference between a spell that takes 5 segments to cast and one that takes 10, but I can. Anything I can cast using extra time, I do. That also protects me.”

“From what?” asked Hermione.

“If I cast a spell and fail by five or more, it backfires. And believe me, you don’t want a spell to backfire.”

“What happens? And what do you mean by ‘five or more’?” asked Ron.

“Usually the opposite of what you’re intending. Those that backfire offensive spells get hit with them instead. That’s the main reason I know only one lethal attack spell, the easiest one to cast. Those spells with a more nebulous effect? Take my father’s party for example- Oh, what did my mother tell me they were? Okay, there was an elf looking woman, a pale fellow he called a “breath stealer” and a puppy. The puppy was like Sparkle, a sentient being and a wizard. Not very good at magic, though, or just unschooled I guess? They were sneaking into this city and one of them was making a lot of noise.” She snorted. “I think it was my dad, actually. Fantastical magic power, but not someone used to sneaking around, if you know what I mean. So the puppy gets into her head to cast *shape-shift* on that person and turn them into something quieter. Well, like I said, not very good at magic, and she failed by more than five. The spell turned her into a

huge wyvern sort of creature, the last thing they wanted to see when trying to sneak someplace. It took the wizards of the world they went to next three days to get her back to normal. As for failing by five? When I go to do something, anything, I can instantly tell how well or poorly I've done it, based on a number system from 1 to 30. With one being a complete failure to 30 meaning I've done the impossible. Like painted a whole house in an hour. It's connected to my character sheet, I just know it, like I know my name."

The others looked interested. "How did they hide her?" asked Hermione.

"Huh? Oh, that was the ultimate irony of the situation. The wyvern creature looked like creatures who were magically created by this tower they were trying to get into, to guard it. So she was able to march straight through the gates without the people who had taken it over even suspecting. My father laughed about that the whole time- turning something potentially disastrous into something that actually helped them, instead."

"I wish I could have met your dad," said Harry.

"You and me both."

"Oh, yeah. Sorry."

"Anyway, if I learned something like *Dead Magic* and tried to erase a Dementor with it, but it backfired on me, I could lose my magic, instead."

"Then I suggest you don't learn that spell," said Hermione.

Susan chuckled. "Yeah, only as a last resort, honest. But if you do see me cast a spell, and it seems to go really, really wrong? That's what's happened."

"How much of a worry is this, exactly? You seem to use magic at the drop of a hat..." Hermione wondered, obviously thinking of all the spells Susan cast in a typical day.

"Like I said, I have the energy to throw around like water because of my high RESolve and ENDurance. Plus the fact my high RESolve makes sure I can put just about as much energy as I want into a spell. On a scale of one to ten? A one."

"But yet the boggart-"

"Switched between two visions I seem to be equally afraid of. Yes, it's a concern, but when have I ever failed to cast a spell, much less by five? Not going to happen, trust me. Anyway, it wasn't about losing my magic. Even if I backfired something and that happened, I would still have my character sheet, and Sparkle would still be a *Natural Magician*. No, I think I'm more worried that I'll wake up one day and discover this was all a dream or something. That somehow, some way, my whole life has been a lie."

"I wouldn't worry," said Ron. "This all seems pretty real to us."

"Well you would say that, wouldn't you?"

Ron just looked thoughtful.

As it turned out, Remus was an excellent Defense teacher, both creating practical lessons and overseeing the dueling which took place inside the "Quirrell Field" as most were calling it. He even let Susan show off a bit more by performing a sword duel with her blade against a Red Cap. (With *Acceleration* going, so she could dodge better.)

But it was the private "lesson" she asked for that gave him the most pause.

"You want to try what?" he asked.

"Destroying a Dementor. You saw, I couldn't do anything to that one. But I'm convinced one of my spells should be able to hurt them. So rather than just sneak off and do it, like I probably normally would, I figured I'd ask first."

“So you just want me there in case something goes really wrong?”

“Yup. I’m going to try the spell I think has the most chance of working, and then back off when I see how it goes. If it works, great, I’ll memorize it. If it doesn’t I’ll try another spell later.”

“I would think it extremely unlikely you could actually destroy one, no one ever has that I know of, but you should learn to fend them off. I’m teaching my older students the spell, so I don’t see why you shouldn’t have the same chance. Just let me know when you’re ready.”

With a 15 and a 19 in *Magical Scripture* and *Magical Theory*, respectively, Susan was ready. She took the extra time to cast *Undead Annihilation* out of sight, then kept it going and walked out with Remus to where the nearest Dementor was stationed. Remus stayed a few steps back and stopped, as he didn’t have his *Patronus* going which might have invalidated the experiment. As the light coming from Susan touched the Dementor a curious thing happened. Rather than starting to burn as she hoped the thing just seemed to get confused and started floating aimlessly. It started bumping into the wall behind it, like it had been blinded, but didn’t realize either that it couldn’t go that way. She kept the spell going a moment, but when nothing else seemed to happen she let it go.

It seemed to come back to itself and looked around slowly. Susan made ready to activate her *Magic Immunity* charm, but it’s “gaze” swept past her it went back to where it had been. Remus got a bit closer, and stood next to her.

“You aren’t feeling that?” he asked, surprised.

“Feeling-” as Remus spoke, the thing suddenly gave a jerk and looked over at him. It started inhaling.

“Let’s go,” he said, and started backing off. The thing turned again and ignored them.

“You’re sure you didn’t have magic immunity going at the time?” he asked, now out of sight of the creature again.

“Positive. Look, the mark is still on the back of the charm.” She showed him the charm, and the black symbol was still there on the back. “And I know when I’m maintaining a grade 9 spell, trust me.”

“Then why didn’t it seem to notice you? That’s the weirdest part. It sensed me when I got closer, but ignored you? That doesn’t make sense.”

“Did you say sensed?”

“Yes, they don’t see like we do, as they don’t have eyes. I’m not sure how they navigate around walls and such, but us they find by sensing our emotions.”

“Are you sure it’s emotions and not souls?”

“We’ve always considered it emotions, because they seem to drain off happy feelings and replace them with negative ones. Why?”

“The only other explanation why it didn’t go after me, but did look at you is that my soul isn’t exactly from around here. I don’t know how much the Headmaster told you, but my father was literally from another world. So my soul is attuned only 50% to this world, and 50% to that world. Probably why he was a much more powerful wizard than even I am, according to my mother at least.”

“Your father was even better than you?”

“He had a *background* called *Inferno of Magic*. Don’t even ask me where he pulled it from, my book of magic that has notes on being a *Paragon* don’t mention anything like it. Every spell he cast got a boost, so yes, he was definitely stronger than me.”

“Anyway, that’s off the topic. Are you satisfied with that magic? It seems to act similarly to the *Patronus* in that, if they’re confused like that they won’t be able to attack. That light didn’t seem to be directed either, so I’m sure it would keep a number of them at bay.”

“I’ll probably pick it up, yes, but I want to destroy them. Azkaban exists because you guys need to corral them somehow, otherwise they would just float around, right? If I’m going to actually destroy that place, Dementors need to not exist anymore.”

Remus shook his head. “You’ve set yourself up a pretty lofty goal there.”

“What better way to motivate myself?”

And so over the next few weeks Susan tried a variety of spells, but none worked so well as *Undead Annihilation*. She had verified the things didn’t seem to notice her, treating her as an object to be floated around rather than a person to be eaten up. And so it was with some trepidation she decided to try her ultimate spell- *Alleviation*.

“What makes you think this spell will be any different?” asked Remus, walking out with her again a month later. “How many have you tried now?”

“It goes back to what I first said about them when I *Magic Sensed* them. Wounds in the world, I called them. *Alleviation* cures wounds. The spell “restores a creature to its whole, undamaged state.” It isn’t technically a creature, but a creature shaped hole in the world. It does exist though, and that gives me a target for the spell. Hopefully I can use *Alleviation* to collapse that hole, so to speak, and make it not exist anymore.”

“Whatever you say. But why does Sparkle have to come this time?”

“She’s going to put *Energetic Accumulation* on me, so I can put more than 10 energy into the spell. Otherwise I would have to spend 20 minutes casting the thing, which I don’t feel like doing.”

“Not exactly a combat spell, is it?” Remus laughed.

“No, it was never intended to be used this way. But if it can be used this way, maybe I can ‘bless’ some bullets with the spell and just shoot them with it.”

“Would that work?”

“I don’t see why not. They would be considered “consumable” and so take only half the XP cost normally needed. Usually you wouldn’t *Imbue* a spell like *Alleviation* into a bullet because why shoot someone with a spell that heals them? But in this case I think it would work perfectly.”

“Would arrows work?”

“Probably. Why?”

“Way easier to get arrows than bullets around here.”

“Oh, I see what you mean.”

And so Susan cast *Alleviation* on the Dementor that was hanging there, and was pleasantly surprised to watch it disappear without so much as a whimper. A faint *pop* and it was gone. It had cost her 30 energy to do, but the theory was proven. She walked back to Remus, smiling.

“You actually did it!” he said, amazed.

“We’ll have to get another one for this spot, wouldn’t want Sirius getting in this way. But yes, it finally worked. I’m glad it did, I was running out of ideas.”

“Do you realize what this means?”

“I’m learning *Alleviation* for 10 XP way sooner than I thought, and taking up the *Bow* skill?”

“What? No, it means they can be destroyed! That’s tremendous news!”

“But only I can do it. Better to keep this quiet in any case. If they learn I killed one of their number, who knows what they would do. Sure, I seem to be immune to them sensing me, but they don’t know there is something there to sense yet either. Let’s not give them a reason to try harder.”

“Good point. Let’s go see Albus and tell him the good news.”

That night, Susan sighed as 10 XP disappeared from her character sheet, to be replaced by *Alleviation* in her spell list.

Now, who do I talk to around here to get myself a bow and some arrows?

She paused, looking up.

Wait a second, why do I have the Temporary Tool spell for now, anyway? I can just make some arrows with Creation and then fire them with a bow of Temporary Tool. On the one hand I would need to maintain Tool and Successful Strike to make sure I hit, unless I get my rating up really high.

Getting out her notes on calculating costs, she figured it would take 3XP and about 6 Galleons worth of materials to create each arrow. And twenty hours per arrow, which made her scowl. Then, just for the sake of comparison, she looked into making something with “charges,” something she had never done before.

An item I can use five times, like a dagger, would cost me the same amount of Galleons and hours but only 6 XP. To recharge it with 5 again would only cost me 1XP. I guess that makes more sense in the long run, right? A healing shiv, what will I think of next?

The Village

Time: Near the end of October

Place: Gryffindor common room

“How was practice, Harry?” asked Susan, as the Quidditch team came in from the cold.

“Wood’s all into giving inspirational speeches,” he answered. “He knows this is the last year he can win the Quidditch Cup. But flying again is certainly nice. What’s going on in here?” Harry was looking around, noting a lot more people, talking animatedly, than usual.

“Everyone’s excited about going to the village,” said Ron. “It’s almost time.”

“I see,” said Harry darkly. He sat down heavily next to Ron.

“We’re sneaking you in, right?” he asked. “Susan style.”

Harry shook his head. “I’m worried that the teachers know my form hasn’t been signed. If someone notices I’m missing they might go looking for me. With all this Sirius hysteria going about, that might cause a panic. When I turned back up there would be a lot of uncomfortable questions asked of me.”

“Can you do anything about that?” Ron asked of Susan. “What about that shape-shift magic Sparkle used? Could she turn herself into Harry?”

“A very short Harry, maybe. Cats are a -3 size modifier. Harry is a size 0. Sadly, *Shape-shift* only lets you get +2 size modifiers bigger. She could create the *Illusion* he was sitting around, though.”

“I’m not sitting around for hours maintaining that illusion,” put in Sparkle. “I’d lose interest and go to sleep!”

“It’s true,” admitted Susan. “She does have *Short Attention Span*. Best not to risk it.”

“It’s okay, go and have fun.”

“He really should stay here, where he’s safest, anyway,” said Hermione.

“Safest is wherever Susan is!” Ron protested.

“I would need a minute to think of a good argument against that statement.”

“Ha!”

Suddenly Crookshanks jumped up on Hermione’s lap and started devouring the spider he had caught earlier.

“Ugh, does he have to do that right in front of me?”

“Spiders are rich in taurine, they’re good for cats,” Hermione said off handedly.

“I didn’t ask why he was doing it, I wanted to know why here, now? I mean at least he’s doing some good, killing spiders and whatnot, but I’ve got Scabbers with me, you know.”

Crookshanks seemed to perk up at this news, and jumped off Hermione’s lap, sniffing around.

“No, stupid cat, don’t go near my-” Crookshanks yowled and pounced on Ron’s bag. Ron tried to grab him off, but wasn’t having much luck, when suddenly Scabbers popped out of it and took off. The cat let go of the bag and shot after the rat, who scabbled underneath things to get away.

“Stop that cat!” Ron yelled, trying to leap on him. He missed, and Ginny went to grab for him too, but also missed.

“Honestly,” said Susan, shaking her head and raising her hands. “*Telekinesis*.”

Both creatures got magical circles around them, and lifted into the air.

“Seriously?” said Susan, both creatures floating over to her, one on either side. “I’m sitting in a room full of wizards and witches. Literally the first spell you learn is how to make objects float. So why, in the name of Merlin, am I the only one who thinks to *use magic* rather than physically jumping on something? It makes no sense! Are you wizards or not?”

At least most people had the decency to look ashamed. Crookshanks was trying and trying to get down, but finally gave up and started grooming himself. Scabbers was curled up into a little ball.

“Good thing Susan is around, at least,” said Ron, getting up to collect Scabbers. “Look at how thin he’s getting. Please try to keep that cat away from him.”

“All cats chase rats, Ron, it’s instinct.”

“Sparkle doesn’t. She’s a cat.”

“She’s a person in the shape of a cat. She’s a sentient wizard, for crying out loud. Of course she’s not going to chase rats.”

“She’s still a cat, that means what you said is a generalization.” Ron looked smug.

“You’re using semantics against *me*?”

“People, please!” cried Susan, looking around and noticing everyone was interested in this little spat. “Sparkle, a little ‘speaks to animals’ action, if you please?”

Crookshanks sank to the floor.

“Certainly.” Sparkle sat up and composed herself. “*Animal Speech*,” she said, touching Crookshanks.

“Can you understand me?” asked Sparkle.

“Why yes, I can,” said Crookshanks in wonder. “And you can finally understand me now. How interesting. I’ve been trying to tell you about that rat for the longest time.”

“Yes, why do you keep trying to eat that rat? You can’t be hungry, I know what cats eat around here, being one myself.”

He looked over at Scabbers. “No, it’s not that. I’m not sure, really. There’s just something about that rat that doesn’t sit right with me.”

“Can I ask you to please stop doing that, now that you’ve told me directly? I will tell Susan about it, she’s the one who is making you dangle in the air right now.”

“I’ll think about it.”

“I guess that’s all we can ask. Thank you.”

“Sure.”

Sparkle broke the spell off and relayed what Crookshanks had said.

“Do you mind if she asks Scabbers some questions?” asked Susan. “It might give us some insights.”

“Oh, fine.”

Scabbers descended, and started wiggling, trying to get away from Sparkle.

“*Animal Speech*,” she said again, touching the rat. There was a magical circle, but it seemed to splinter and fade away.

“I’ve never seen your magic do that!” remarked Hermione.

“He resisted- *actually resisted my spell!*” said Sparkle indignantly. “You little snout, I’ll eat you myself!”

Ron grabbed him up, and Susan let *Telekinesis* go. “Stop it, all of you!”

“Sparkle didn’t mean it, she was just surprised,” Susan assured him. *Really surprised- usually I’m the one threatening bodily harm to things. It’s not like her.*

“Most of my magic can be resisted, but usually I roll so high there’s no way a normal person can do it. In this case, I’m guessing Sparkle didn’t put much effort into the spell.”

“That’s right. Who expects a stupid rat to be able to roll above an 11 on a RESolve check?”

“That means he was unwilling to talk to us. Something weird is going on with that rat. Do you mind if she tries again? She can put more energy in this time.”

“I do mind, actually,” he said, pulling Scabbers away and putting him back in the bag. “I think he’s had enough excitement for one day, thank you very much.”

He stomped off towards the boy’s dorm.

“I’m sure that won’t come back to bite us later!” Susan said brightly.

So for the moment they dropped the issue of Scabbers and a few days later the time came to head off to the village.

“Still willing to *Teleportal* you in, Harry,” Susan offered. “Come under your cloak, no one will know.”

“Thanks for the offer, but it’s best if I stay.”

“Sorry. If I could give you XP for staying in character really well, I would.”

“Thanks,” said Harry with a grin. “That actually means something to me, though you wouldn’t think it would. Guess I’ve been around you too long, I’m even starting to understand Susan Speak.”

The two shared a laugh, and Harry sadly turned to go back inside the castle. “Have fun,” he said with a wave.

“Sorry,” she whispered, and joined Ron and Hermione, Sparkle by her side.

The group had been there for almost an hour and were on their way to view the Shrieking Shack. Susan was wondering if she should fly over there and see if there was a ghost she could help out. Hermione and Ron were not exactly cordial, and one walked to either side of her. Sparkle padded along silently behind them.

“You don’t have to help everyone out,” Hermione was saying. “If there’s an angry ghost in the shack, leave him to his devices.”

“If my magic isn’t to help people, then what is it for?” Susan asked. “You guys don’t seem to use yours an awful lot, even in situations where it makes more sense, but that doesn’t stop me from doing it.”

“And ghosts can be tricky,” put in Ron. “You’ve reached Myrtle after a lot of work and understanding. The ghost or ghosts in the shack are probably too far gone.”

“Do you hear something?” asked Sparkle, her eyes pivoting behind them. “I think someone’s screaming.”

The others stopped to listen, and there was a huge crash somewhere to their left.

“I heard that,” said Susan. “Come on, we better check it out.”

As they got closer, people started streaming past them, looking terrified.

“I’m not sure this is the way we should be going,” said Ron, tightly gripping his wand.

“This is exactly where we should be going,” said Hermione.

“These are all wizards and witches running from something. You don’t think that’s a bad sign?”

“Susan!” a deep voice cried out, followed by another crash. “Kill Susan!”

That can’t be good.

Rounding a corner the four looked up, and up, and up at the giant that was currently rampaging around the city, smashing everything in sight with what looked like an uprooted tree.
I hate it when I'm right. Seriously, I beat up a dozen dwarves so now I get to fight one giant? Give it up!

“Sparkle-”

“Already on it. *Acceleration!*”

The four blurred as the magic took hold of them.

“You don't think we're actually going to fight that monster, do you?” shrieked Ron.

“You know she's going to, and she's not going to be alone!” shouted Hermione.

“Roll *initiative* ugly, Susan's coming for you!” *Okay, not the best battle cry. Have to work on that.*

Susan and the others entered combat rounds, and the fight was on.

“You want *Armor of Magic?*” Sparkle asked.

“I don't think it would help. Concentrate on *Deflection*. And you two, try not to get hit!” Susan warned.

Now, what exactly are we going to do to a size +2 creature? thought Susan. She at least willed card 44 off of her character sheet, the *Made You Look*, which increased the giant's delay by 10. It looked around stupidly.

Susan took a quick glance around. *Can't use Elemental Burst without hitting a bunch of people, it's simply too big. Wait a minute? Too big?*

“Enlarge my dragon, both of you!” Susan shouted, touching a charm on her bracelet and say “*Ally*.” Beside her appeared her dragon ally, who stood and waited for orders.

Sparkle held, the giant wasn't close enough to attack yet.

Hermione and Ron pointed their wands at the dragon, and both cast “*Engorgio*” on it, meeting the difficulty. The dragon swelled to a +3 size modifier, and accidentally smashed a house with its tail. The giant looked at it stupidly, trying to figure out where this *fully grown dragon* had sprung from.

“Are you sure this is better?” asked Ron, looking over at the wreckage.

“Attack that giant!” bellowed Susan, pointing and ignoring Ron for the moment. The dragon bounded forward.

“*Dazzle*,” shouted Susan, casting. *If I can keep this giant from ever attacking, so much the better.*

The spell flickered in front of the giant, stupefying it, and the dragon, now with a running speed close to 50 kph, closed the distance to the giant and slashed twice. Both arms got it as the giant started flailing around, trying to work out what was happening with its 3 REASON.

“*Incendio*,” both Hermione and Ron shouted, producing goutts of flame they shot at the giant. Hermione's flame nicked the giant in the leg, but Ron aimed high, managing to hit the head. Susan had to admit she was rather impressed. Of course, with a target that size, how could you miss?

The dragon and Susan went at the same time, and Susan targeted the enormous club the giant was carrying with “*Combust*”, getting an 11 total. It burst into flames, causing the giant to stare stupidly at it through his haze of being dazzled. The dragon struck again, going another 11 damage to the right arm.

Gee, this is almost boring, thought Susan. *Is Dazzle OP, or is it just me?*

“Target the right arm!!” Susan shouted to the dragon, who switched to making called shots. The giant took another 9 damage to the arm. He dropped the club, his arm now hanging useless at his side.

“Just defend us,” she then shouted, starting a casting of *Immobilize* and taking as long as she could, 7 segments.

Ron and Hermione shot fire at the thing again, both hitting the body and doing 1 damage each. They got to make another attack before Susan finished her casting, rolling minimum, spending her *Retry* card, and this time getting a 20. The giant made a STrength check to bust free, but was at penalties for his arm being useless. Didn’t seem to slow him down any, as he managed to bust out of the magical bonds surrounding him.

“Well, crap. Maybe together!” Susan shouted, and Sparkle nodded.

Ron and Hermione got off another few blasts of fire, doing a small amount of damage, but as big as the creature was, they really weren’t going to dent it. Susan and Sparkle started casting *Immobilize* together.

Sadly the giant stopped being dazzled before the two finished, and tried to take a step forward. As this was a hostile action towards its master, the dragon went to grapple it. That at least slowed the giant down enough that Susan and Sparkle could cast together, and both shouted “*Immobilize!*” Sparkle, with her *Bonus* card got a 30, giving Susan an effective +6 to her *Mercury* rating. This also got her a 30 on her roll, making the giant once again make a STrength check to bust out. He was currently being grappled by the dragon, and suffered an additional penalty which again, didn’t seem to matter much, and again busted free.

This is beginning to annoy me.

The dragon threw the giant to the ground, making the earth shake, and pounced on him, pinning him to the ground.

“Hold him there!” Susan shouted. *Thank goodness he gets Wrestling.*

The giant and the dragon rolled around a bit, smashing a few more things in the process, but finally some decent wizards showed up and managed to subdue him.

Everyone gathered around the sleeping beast while the dragon sat patiently looking around from its new vantage point. Everyone was wondering where the heck a giant and a seemingly tame dragon had come from, and how both gotten so far into the village without being detected. Those that could think a little further ahead were scratching their heads to try and figure out what to do about it.

“Think we should offer to help?” asked Hermione.

“I really don’t want to open a *Teleportal* in front of all these people, even if I could get it someplace it wouldn’t be a danger to anyone.”

“And there’s not going to be anything we can do,” said Ron.

A few moments later all the students were being rounded up in case something else showed up, screaming about killing Susan, and they made their way back to the coaches to be taken back to the castle. Susan let the dragon go, and people shouted as it faded away like a dream. Many started poking the giant to make sure it was real.

“Not the best visit to the village on record,” said Fred, sitting with them. (It could have been George)

“But certainly the loudest. Did you see what happened?” asked the other.

Ron and Hermione looked over at Susan, who shook her head a little.

“Nope, didn’t see a thing,” said Ron.

“Too bad.”

Hours early, Susan's party trudged into the castle, teachers behind them apologizing. Everyone said that sort of thing just didn't happen, and they would schedule another visit to the village soon to make up for it. Susan decided she would probably stay behind. Figuring her mysterious attacker would strike no matter what she did, there was no reason to drag other people into it. No matter how indirectly it happened.

Harry was just coming down from the tower after talking to Remus and saw everyone spilling back into the castle. He went over to them.

"You're back early," he remarked.

"Yeah, Susan felt like she wanted to single handedly take down a giant, for a little light exercise," said Ron, after making sure the twins had moved on. "A bunch of stuff got smashed up, so they had us come back."

"There was a giant?"

"Apparently," said Susan, miffed.

"And you took it down?"

"Hardly!"

"You'll have to excuse her," said Hermione. "She's been a bit testy all the way back. Apparently not being able to one shot something with her magic makes her a bit tetchy."

"It's just as well. I can't hear you calling me tetchy."

"She's what?" asked Ron, who had never seen Red Dwarf, like the majority of normal people.

"I'm angry, Ron. It's not that I couldn't beat it, it's the fact that now whoever sent it knows I can't beat giants and will probably send more!"

"That's probably not the case," said Hermione. "There's only like eighty of them left in existence. How even one got here is going to be very closely scrutinized."

"Still, the fact that one did show up speaks volumes about their resources. It was just too big!"

"So learn a shrink spell," said Ron. "Your magic must have something like that, right?" Susan stared at him.

"I mean, weren't you the one just recently lecturing us about using magic instead of jumping on something physically? What was it, a cat, I think?"

"Well, obviously I'm immediately going to learn a *shrink* spell," Susan said as if she had thought of the idea herself, fooling no one. She took on a thoughtful appearance, and brightened a little. Ron just shook his head.

"Was it there to harass the village, or specially to go after Susan?"

"We heard it calling her name," said Ron. "That's a pretty good indication."

"So how did you beat it?"

"These two made my monster grow, and he pinned the giant down long enough for some law enforcement wizards to come along and mass stun spell it into sleepy time."

"I have to apologize," said Hermione. "Fred and George insisted on showing us the joke shop right off, so we didn't get to the sweet shop. We were going to get you loads of stuff because you couldn't go. Instead we got to shoot fire at a giant."

"So almost worth it then?" he asked Ron.

"Almost," Ron admitted.

"So, anything interesting happen here while we were away?" asked Hermione.

“Been pretty quiet. Apart from Snape poisoning Professor Lupin, that is.”

“What?” said all three at once, shocked.

“Said he was feeling off color, and so Severus made him up ‘an entire cauldronful of the stuff’ he’s drinking to feel better, according to him. Professor Lupin said he would ‘take the same again tomorrow’ but that mug was smoking. And that’s after he drank it and said it was disgusting.”

“If he’s feeling a bit ill, ask me for a quick *Alleviation*, not some weird potion made by the guy who wants your job,” insisted Susan.

“Exactly what I said to him! But he said no, this potion was the only thing that would help. Bustled me out of there once he finished drinking it, too.”

“I suppose as long as he willing drank it...” said Hermione.

“But he admitted to not being very good with potions,” protested Harry. “So how would he know if Severus got it wrong?”

“Still, you would have to be pretty stupid to poison someone in a drink they asked for. Someone, like Harry here, would be bound to find out. Professor Lupin shows up dead, next thing Severus knows it’s ‘oh, Headmaster, I saw him drinking a strange potion right before he died.’ I mean, come on!” said Ron.

“But he would have thought everyone was at the village, so that would be the perfect time,” said Hermione.

“Look,” said Susan. “We’ll watch him at the feast tonight. If he goes into convulsions I’ll hit him with the... *Alleviation* spell really quick. He’ll be fine.”

I was about to say Dementor killing dagger, but I forgot I didn’t tell them about it. If they knew I found a way to kill Dementors they would think I’d be off the next day to destroy Azkaban. And while I want to, another few years of learning spells won’t hurt. That place may have a layered defense that could give even me trouble.

If anyone noticed, they didn’t show it. “Still, sounds a bit odd, doesn’t it?” asked Ron.

“I have to hope a person teaching Defense Against Dark Arts knows what he’s doing,” said Hermione.

“The real question is, how do we kill the three hours until the feast starts? We were supposed to be at the village, after all.”

“Homework, Ron. Homework.”

He groaned.

The feast was magnificent, even if it did bring back memories of the Death Day party from the year before, and the events set in motion that night. The four kept an eye on Remus, who seemed fine, and Severus, who was his usual grumpy self.

“Haven’t found any strange diaries lying around?” one of the twins joked to Ginny.

“I did find this weird box with a bunch of sealing symbols on it, and ‘don’t open’ carved into the top. Think I shouldn’t have opened it?”

“You didn’t actually open it, did you?” asked Ron, going pale.

“There was no box, you goob!”

“That’s a relief.”

“It was more of a pyramid shape. I forget what happened after that. I think there was a mask inside that I put on?”

“Ginny! Cut it out!”

Everyone laughed. Even Myrtle, who had been coaxed out by Susan to come sit with them. “You can’t enjoy the food, but come and enjoy the company!” she had said.

And so, buoyed by good food and laughter, the students went to their respective dorms for the night, and Myrtle thanked Susan for inviting her.

“Of course! You’re part of Team Susan, now, Myrtle. You couldn’t get away if you tried.”

“I’m not sure how I feel about that.”

“Happy Halloween, Myrtle.”

“You too. Thanks.”

It was with some annoyance that all students were called back to the great hall, and they stood milling about, confused.

“Do you know what’s going on?” many people asked Susan.

“Not yet,” she would always reply. Finally she caught sight of Ron and Harry, and waved them over.

“He’s here,” said Ron, “Here in the castle!”

“Who? You don’t mean Sirius?” asked Susan.

“Who else would I mean? Sirius Black has somehow made it into Hogwarts!”

A Sirius Problem

Time: Immediately after

Place: The Great Hall

As Ron made his announcement that Sirius had breached the castle's defenses the Headmaster called for quiet.

"It appears that the criminal Sirius Black has somehow made his way into the castle. For your own safety then, we are asking you to remain here while the grounds are searched. You will probably have to spend the night here, for which I apologize. Guards will be posted, and I'm counting on our head boy and girl to watch over you all. Please, don't panic, no one has been hurt nor will they. We will tell you what we can in the morning. A good night to you all!"

He started walking away, then turned. "I almost forgot!" He suddenly had his wand in his hand-

If needing to fight Headmaster Dumbledore, spend XP to go first, thought Susan.

-and he waved it about the hall. Without apparent strain or incantations the tables all moved themselves out of the way, backing up against the walls. Another wave produced rows and rows of squishy looking sleeping bags.

Susan whistled. "Now that was some impressing magic. But seriously, who learns a spell of *Nighttime Equipment* for an entire school worth of kids? Come on, Harry, Sparkle." She grabbed his arm and started walking towards the teachers at the end of the room.

"Where are we going, exactly?"

"To join the search parties, of course. At least I am. As you may be the target I'm not letting you out of my sight."

"Of course, how silly of me to not immediately run *into* danger."

"You missed it before with the giant, just thought I would balance the scales a little. Headmaster!" Susan called to Albus as she walked up. "Permission to join the search parties!"

"Denied- oh, it's you, Susan. Is that wise, do you think?"

"Every trap needs bait, Headmaster. Otherwise it's just an object to be ignored and will never catch anything."

"And you propose Harry here be the bait?"

"Certainly. If your magic can't make you invisible, mine can. A squad can then follow us invisibly as we take a look around. He jumps out, chews on our invulnerability to magic for a few seconds, letting them get into place. The invisibility drops and Sirius is taken back into custody."

"A plan with some merit, I admit. And yes, our magic can make us invisible."

"It's settled then."

"You are not seriously letting this girl carry out this mad plan, are you?" asked Severus, stepping up.

"The sooner we catch Sirius the better, Severus. And she can make them both immune to magic."

"I hate to, it's a -3 for me, and Harry won't be able to do magic at all but we shouldn't need to do any other spell-work, that's the squad's job."

"Very well. I shall accompany you myself."

"Professor." She nodded to the potions master, who frowned at her, and walked out with Harry into the hall. "Do you want a second to become-" she looked around. Teachers were

coordinating the search so they didn't overlap too much, but Albus was nowhere to be found. "Smooth. Can't wait until I have eighty years of spell-casting practice under my belt. Imagine 10s in every planet..." She got a dreamy look, sighed, and then shook herself. "Dark Goddess. Right. Let's go Harry."

Susan activated her *Magical Ally* and told it to "Follow and protect us," then put *Magic Immunity* on Harry and herself.

"Where do we go?"

"Oh, let's just wander. With luck he'll find us."

"Is that why you want me along?" asked Sparkle. "My high LUCk?"

"Your company is what I crave, oh companion mine, not your stats."

"What I don't understand is his motive," said Susan, a few minutes after their wanderings began.

"You didn't see the ripped up painting in front of the common room. I'd say it was pretty clear."

"That's not what I mean. Did he want to lay in wait under your bed? Obviously he wasn't going to attack at the feast, he'd have been cut down in under a second. But why tear up the painting then? Did he think we wouldn't notice? No, I think he was looking for something. He was trying to get in and out before you got back. It's what he was looking for that has me puzzled."

"A wand, maybe?"

"I guess, but wasn't he in Slytherin? If he was in league with Voldi you can bet he was. So wouldn't it have been easier to get into that common room to look for wands instead of yours?"

"I guess. Which brings up another question- how did he get in here?" He pointed down at the castle floor.

"If he can escape a place like Azkaban that has Dementors like cat ladies' houses have cats, he can certainly get in here that just has them patrolling the outside."

"You think he managed to develop a spell to make himself invisible to them? Like your *Magic Immunity*?"

"I hope not. A criminal like that with immunity to magic? That would be a scary- no, couldn't be. He would have just walked into the great hall and stabbed you. After all, we've seen your magic can make you invisible. He would have just done the same thing I did- cast the invisibility then the immunity, like I did with my *Ally* here."

"His version might not cancel out using wands. He is a wand user, after all. You aren't, so *Natural Magicians* like yourself probably never cared about that restriction. Hence your current spell that just sort of says 'turn it all off.' Or it just makes him invisible to them, but not the immunity stuff."

"Oh dear. What if he already found what he came for, and now is miles away with it? I doubt he knows anything about explosives, but I would take a good look under everyone's bed before they're let in into that room again. He could already have a wand, and just cast some spell into the sheets to strangle the next person that uses them."

"Stop it, you're making me paranoid to go back in there."

"As well you should be. Every inch of that place is going to need checking. I would insist on it."

“I guess you’re right. But what could be worth the risk of getting caught here that would be found in a boy’s dorm room?”

“I guess we’ll see if something gets reported stolen.”

After an hour, Albus reappeared behind them and stopped them. “I doubt if anything will happen after this long,” he said sadly. “I’ll escort you back to the hall to spend the night.”

“Sorry about that, Headmaster. It was a logical plan.”

“Indeed. We can only wonder at Sirius’ motives. Come, I have more to do this night, as you so recently pointed out.”

“Glad to see you were paying attention!”

The two were led back to the hall, and tried to get some sleep.

The days passed without further incident, leading Susan to think she was right about the attack.

He had gotten in, found what he was looking for, and left again? But it doesn’t make sense, how would he have known where anything was in the Gryffindor common room?

Susan’s reverie was shattered when Severus walked into their Defense class that day instead of Remus. Everyone looked confused.

“As you can see,” he said, “I will be taking over this class for the next few lessons. Are we all present and accounted for? I see one face is missing, the redoubtable Mr. Potter. Perhaps he believes he can be late to class because the rules do not apply to him?”

Where is he, anyway? He’s been practicing for that silly Quidditch he finds so enjoyable. I bet he’s stuck listening to Wood’s strategy speeches, as usual. He’s been complaining about them going on and on lately. I wonder.

“Telesummon!” cast Susan, taking the full time. A very confused Harry appeared out of nowhere, accompanied by a burst of air pressure as he displaced the air where he was now standing.

“Huh? What?” he managed, looking around. “How did- Oh, Susan. Is it time for Defense already? Thanks for getting me away from- why are you here?”

“Showing off, as usual, are we Susan? Five points from Ravenclaw. Sit down Potter.”

It’s a good thing I have Overconfidence and not Vindictive, Susan thought, because there’s much I could do to you that would never be traced back to me.

“No, really. Where’s Professor Lupin?”

“Don’t become agitated, he’s going to be just fine.” Severus looked like he fervently wished this was not so. “You’ll be seeing him again soon.”

“If he’s ill, Susan could cure him,” he said.

“So that she could show off some more? No, I think we will allow him his time alone. Now sit down, and one point from Gryffindor for not following my instructions.”

“We’ll go see him later, just try to get through this without setting him on fire, and it should be fine,” Susan said to him.

“Okay.”

Harry went to sit down, and Severus started looking through Remus’ desk.

“I am not seeing any sort of course schedule here, so I will teach what I feel is appropriate. Please turn to page 394 where we shall begin to talk about werewolves.”

There was a groan from the class.

“Again?” asked Dean Thomas.

“What do you mean, again?”

“We’ve covered them twice already, Professor,” said Hermione. “Once in year one where we chiefly focused on treating their bite, and again with Professor Lockhart when we read *“Wanderings with Werewolves”* in which he describes their habits and methods almost as much as he describes himself.” She looked thoughtful. “Perhaps a little less...”

“Oh.” Severus looked a bit taken aback. “Then I’m sure someone can tell me how to distinguish between the wolf animal and the transformed wolf person?”

Every hand went up.

Seriously, does he think we’re stupid? Every non-magical person over the age of five could tell you that.

“How the curse of the werewolf is transmitted?”

Every hand stayed up.

He does think we’re stupid.

“The vulnerabilities of the werewolf?”

Why does this man have such an obsession with werewolves? He’s wanted to teach this class for how long and this is his lesson?

“How they transform?” Severus seemed to be grasping at straws now. Still every hand was raised.

Seriously, werewolf lore has even been part of the non-magical world since the first monster movies were produced in... what? Susan made a KNOWledge check of 14. The forties, I guess? What does Severus think he’s playing at here?

“You!” Severus said, pointing to a random person. “How are they killed?”

“Silver,” the person answered. “They’re allergic to it, and it inhibits their regeneration. After they’re dead, burn the body. Though Professor Lockhart insisted he used a charm to turn one back into a human.”

“What can turn one back into a human?” he asked another random person.

“Sunrise. They’re werewolves for life. If there was a charm, I don’t think they would be so feared.”

“How would you handle one?” he asked Susan.

“That depends. Am I facing it on the field of battle, or has someone come to me claiming they are one and wanting to be cured?”

“How about both, for completeness.”

“Very well. Naturally I would want to subdue it, so an area effect *Elemental Burst (Knockout)* would probably do the trick. Then bind it with *Immobilize*. Being unconscious it doesn’t get its STrength check to resist, so it’s now tied up. Being knocked out won’t stop it for long, because it’ll regenerate, fast. However, once tied up, I would have enough time to cast *Suppress Curse* on the person, turning them human again. Then I would cure them by making them a permanent item of *Suppress Curse* that they would have to wear continuously, perhaps as a piercing. Not a cure, as such, because if the item was removed they would start transforming again, given the right conditions, of course.”

Severus, and the rest of the class, stared at her.

“Was that not what you asked, Professor? You did want completeness.”

“You can actually cure werewolves?”

“I can make them an item that keeps them from transforming. That’s probably as much of a cure as they could reasonably expect. It would take me a couple of weeks of work and... I forget what the required material is. 80 Sickles worth of stuff, I can tell you that much.”

“I see. Well-” he addressed the class again. “I can see your knowledge in this area isn’t as woefully lacking as I feared. How surprising.”

Suddenly Headmaster Dumbledore burst into the room, followed by Minerva and Filius. He looked around wildly.

“Headmaster?” inquired Severus.

“Is Harry Potter here?” he asked, scanning the room. “Wait, I see that he is.”

“Yes, Susan did not want him to be late, and so brought him here in that infuriating manner of hers of doing impossible things with relative ease. Why?”

“Oliver was talking to him about Quidditch strategy when suddenly he disappeared. Accordingly he became quite concerned, and immediately went to fetch a teacher. We started a search immediately. It was only a moment ago when we decided to look in the obvious place, and here we are.”

“I’m sorry, Headmaster.” Susan stood up. “It’s just Professor Snape has apparently been assigned to fill in for Professor Lupin. I didn’t want Harry to be late and cause the professor to further take points away from him. We’re studying werewolves for the *third* time, *apparently*, instead of doing the scheduled activity of combat practice.” She pointed to the board where the schedule was written in, then looked back at Severus. “I guess you didn’t see it, Professor, or even bother to ask. How is Professor Lupin, since I have you here, Headmaster? I can heal him if he needs it.”

“The Headmaster did not come here to be pestered with-”

“Severus. You really should stick to the assigned schedule. Honestly- Werewolves? I’m surprised at you.”

He glared at Susan, who sat down again and smiled sweetly.

“However, next time you decide to yank a person through time and space, Susan, I would appreciate a little warning. Especially given the current situation, which I don’t think I have to explain to you?”

“Of course, Headmaster. I apologize for causing you to worry. I’ve already lost house points, if that makes you feel any better?”

“Very well. You may continue, Severus.”

The three walked out, and Severus spun to face Susan.

“You! Just what do you think you’re playing at?”

She looked a bit confused. “What do you mean?”

“You knew snatching him up would cause an uproar. You must have known it would only be a matter of time before the Headmaster came running. Did you really think you would need him to rush in here like that? I told you I didn’t want you in my potions class because I deemed you dangerous, did you think you needed an out in case I tried to harm you?”

“If you tried to harm me, but were unable to kill me with a surprise attack, one action later you would have a dragon in your face. My next action would make me immune to magic. Less than five seconds later you would be dead, or reduced to ‘muggle’ status, unable to ever do magic again. I would not need complicated plots that may or may not bring the Headmaster here. Consider, I could have brought him here just as easily as I did Harry. No, the truth is as I have stated it- fearing you would take offense out of proportion to the act, I believed it best to get

Harry here as quickly as possible. No twisty thought process like the one you came up with even entered my mind.”

“Then I see you are even further gone than I thought. Using magic like that without even considering the consequences, it’s worse than reckless. Fifty points from Ravenclaw! I hope it teaches you a lesson!”

There was an immediate outburst from everyone about how unfair it was.

“Silence!” he roared. The room quieted.

“Well, anything to say about that?”

“You’re right. I should have realized that you would twist anything that happened into some kind of punishment for me. I’m just too tempting a target, aren’t I? What is it in me that you hate about yourself so much? Just snapping your wand a few years ago isn’t enough to explain it, given I repaired it perfectly. This seems personal, but you don’t know me. Obviously there must be something driving you to these lengths, because the people we hate most are the ones that show our own perceived faults too clearly. What I want to know is why.”

“I do not have to explain myself to you, girl. And you’ve just earned yourself a detention.”

“I see. You really think that will change anything?”

“It better change your attitude, or worse will be coming to you.”

“Worse than facing down a basilisk? I’ve got news for you, Professor. There’s not much worse than that, so you’ll forgive me if I’m not exactly quaking in my boots.”

“We’ll see.”

Severus looked around the room, as if remembering the rest of the class was there.

“Class dismissed. Get out of here, all of you. Not you, girl, I’ll have to take a minute to think up a suitable detention for you.”

The others quietly made their way out, and Susan waved off Hermione, Ron, and Harry, who also left. She and Severus stared at each other, neither backing down.

“You’ll come to a bad end, you know that?” he finally said.

“Seriously? Let’s review: I cured the Longbottom family of madness, and fixed Neville so his brain works right. I protected the Philosopher’s Stone, defeating a piece of Voldemort’s soul in the process. I befriended a ghost, and beheaded another at his request, fulfilling a desire hundreds of years overdue. I destroyed a basilisk before it could actually kill someone, and another piece of Voldemort’s soul went down. Did he tell you? Not that long ago I discovered a spell to kill Dementors, which I put into practice killing one of the so called guards of the school, who turned out to be useless after all. I’ve faced down a giant, a dozen dwarves, and made the Weasley house invulnerable to attack. I’ve given gifts to my friends that took hours upon hours of work to enchant, oh, and let’s not forget the *goblin quality sword* I made for the school. Seems even if I ‘came to a bad end’ this very day, tales of my deeds would be told by generations. What have you ever done that’s so great?”

“Now, for your detention,” he said, ignoring her, “I think scrubbing out all the bedpans in the hospital wing will give you plenty of time to think things over.”

“Great, I really like Madam Pomfrey. We can talk remedies while I work.”

“Obviously I am forbidding you the use of magic to do this task. It must be done with physical labor. Tonight. I will personally check on your progress.”

“Physical labor only. Understood.”

“You are dismissed.”

And you are a very sad, petty, little man.

“What is he making you do?” asked Ron, seeing Susan come up, whistling a little tune.

“You guys didn’t have to wait for me. Though I suppose class did let out a little early. Scrub the bedpans in the hospital wing, of all things.”

“I’m glad I don’t have to do that!”

“It’s not a problem. He said I couldn’t use magic to clean the pans, but he really doesn’t understand about how my magic works.”

“It’s probably best if you don’t antagonize him,” said Hermione.

“The man’s a menace,” Susan said sharply. “I hope to push him far enough that he physically or magically attacks me. He’ll be out of here for sure.”

“You planned all this?”

“Hey, I didn’t make him come teach that class. I didn’t give me that detention and take those points away from my house. He did. He could just as easily ignore me, but no- he has to try and make my life miserable. I won’t have it. I could easily destroy him with magic, but that would lead me down a road I do not want to take. So I’ll just have to make him destroy himself. It’s that simple.”

“Wow.” Ron seemed stunned. “Just make sure we’re not around when he loses it, we could get caught in the crossfire.”

“Remind me never to get you angry at me,” said Harry.

“You don’t have anything to worry about, you’re my friends!” said Susan seriously. “I’ll fight just as fiercely for you as I would for myself, and don’t you ever doubt it.” She turned and started skipping down the hall. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I have a spell to study for tonight!”

Susan studied a spell, and made her checks, a 16 in *Magical Scripture* to read the difficulty 13 spell, and a 10 on *Magical Theory* to understand it. This of course wasn’t enough, so she thought about it the rest of the day, and after dinner pulled her book out again and made another check, this time getting a 15. She smiled.

Sixteen minutes later, a squad of seventeen soldiers, each looking like they had been sculpted from flame, and carrying a gleaming sword made of steel came into existence. They glowed with an inner light, and Susan laughed out loud to see them.

“Form up, and follow me, men!” she said to them. They did just that, and marched through the halls of Hogwarts behind her. She marched in front of them, banging an imaginary drum and making drum sounds with her purdy mouth. People scrambled out of the way to see these men of fire march through the halls, and when she reached the hospital wing she shouted “Company, halt!” The men stopped.

“What is all this?” said Madam Pomfrey, hurrying over.

“You have been informed I’m serving a detention this evening?” asked Susan.

“Yes, you’re supposed to be cleaning these bedpans.” She gestured over to the stack of them.

“Excellent. Bring me seventeen shallow pans of water, and enough rags and sponges and such to get the job done.”

“You’re not supposed to use magic...” she said, looking the soldiers over.

“I’m not. I’m just standing here. The pans, please.”

Madam Pomfrey threw up her hands. “Do what you want, I’m not the one serving detention.”

So as the pans were brought out, Susan turned to face her *Battalion*. “All right men. Your mission tonight is to clean these bedpans. Each of you take one, some water and a sponge, then clean it until it shines. Hand it to me. If there are no more, wait for further instructions.”

The first rank of them stepped forward and started following her orders, then the next rank stepped up, and the next, until they were all hard at work. Susan sat down on a bed.

“This physical labor stuff certainly is character building, isn’t it?” she remarked.

“What are they?” asked Madam Pomfrey, holding her hands up to one to feel the heat coming off it.

“Oh these? It’s the *Battalion* spell. They’re supposed to be soldiers, of course, but they’ll follow any orders to the letter. Handy, huh? I’ve have them mop up and make beds while they’re here, if you want. By the way, I don’t see Professor Lupin, who was supposedly not feeling well, around here. Has he recovered?”

“He’s resting in his own room-”

“And what’s all this?” Severus asked, stalking up.

That man stalks everywhere. Must be murder on his shoes.

“I’m performing my detention, as per your instructions.”

“I instructed,” he sneered, “that you were not to use magic.”

“I’m not using magic. I used magic to create this squad of warriors, true, but that was before I got here. They follow my orders and, as you instructed, are also not using magic to clean the bedpans. They are using physical labor only, as you can plainly see.”

“This is not what I meant.”

“Then perhaps next time you should be more clear in your instructions, so that I don’t misunderstand.”

“I’m warning you, girl-” he said, taking a step towards her. Suddenly, each soldier snatched up its sword and pointed them at Severus.

“Oh, I should warn you. They’ve been given standing orders to protect me, and you seem a bit hostile right now. You might want to back off before they misunderstand.”

“You’re playing a dangerous game, girl.”

“No, you’re playing an unnecessary one. Every teacher here but one has accepted what I can do, and even embraced it. You seem bent on showing I’m some kind of monster or something, but really I’m just reacting to what’s done to me. Ignore me, and I’ll ignore you. But come at me, bro, and I’ll respond in kind. It really is that simple.”

“One of these days...” he stomped off.

Susan shook her head sadly. “That man’s pain runs very deep. If only he would ask for my help instead of beating himself up about it. Oh well. Back to work, slackers!” The soldiers went back to cleaning, and before long the room was clearer than it had ever been.

“Anything else they can do for you?” asked Susan.

“I don’t think there’s anything else that can be done.”

Susan turned back to her soldiers. “Nice work tonight, men. Promotions! Promotions! Fall upon your blades, honorable warriors! Until I call upon you again, be gone!”

They made ready to follow this order, but Susan snapped her fingers and stopped maintaining the spell. They melted away.

“Until next time, have a good night!” said Susan, giving a little shuffle step as she left the office.

“We’re going out in that?” Susan said, watching the rain whip past. “Remind me again why?”

“To show support for Harry,” answered Ron.

“To keep an eye on Harry,” answered Hermione.

“To watch Harry play,” answered Ginny.

“I’m not. I’m going back to sleep,” answered Sparkle, turning and walking away.

“I’m only going because you’re going,” answered Myrtle. “And rain doesn’t bother me.”

“I was afraid you would all say that. Give me a second…” She got her book out, then paged through almost to the back. “Ah, grade three? I can handle that.” She read for three minutes, then made her checks to make sure she could understand the spell. She exactly beat the difficulty for *Magic Theory* but her *Magical Scripture* check was double what it needed to be. “Be right back!”

Susan stepped into a bathroom and went into a stall. On the wall she placed a *Teleportal* leading back to her room, where she changed into a one piece swimsuit. Her bracelet dangled from one wrist, but otherwise she left everything in her room. Once back into the castle she came out, book in hand.

“You’re wearing that?” Ron asked, eyes wide.

Susan held out her arm. “I can get all of you with this spell, so grab on. It’s touch.” Ron looked skeptical. “I have to be touching the people I cast it on. Don’t worry Ron, you won’t get cooties.”

Everyone grabbed her arm and she envisioned the symbols from the book (currently held up by Hermione) around herself, and said “*Withstand Weather*.” Energy shimmered around her, and she put her book back in her *Pocket Dimension*. “Okay, let’s go,” she said, snapping her swimming goggles in place.

“Wouldn’t *Phase* have been easier?” Myrtle asked, as they made their way through the stands. Everyone was staring at her.

“What? You’ve never seen a girl wearing a swimsuit during a hurricane before?” She turned to Myrtle. “Sure, if everyone wanted to hang onto me for the duration. This way we’ll all stay warm, and I can still do magic if I need to. Plus I wouldn’t be able to hear the commentary with *Phase* going.”

“That is the best part.”

“Agreed. What I need is a lesser *Shell* spell. I wouldn’t need something to deflect gunfire, just raindrops. Have to have my book research that for me sometime.”

“You’re getting a lot of funny looks.”

“I usually do. They’ll get over it.”

Myrtle thought for a moment, then seemed to shimmer. She was wearing something similar. “There, now we’re both the same!” she said brightly.

“Neat trick, Myrtle. When did you figure out you could do that?”

“Recently. I was thinking that my clothes were actually just a part of me, and then I tried envisioning myself wearing different clothes. It took a little practice, but I finally managed to figure out how to change them.”

“I wondered if that might be possible. You could have ghost fashion shows at the Olympics too. You’re not constrained by reality, after all, only your imagination.”

“I’ll have to suggest that! Wow, it could be the first new event in ages, everyone would want to compete in it.”

The group made their way to some empty seats near the front of the pavilion, and Susan stood with Myrtle at the edge. She was being pelted by frigid rain and wind, slicking back her hair and running down her bare limbs. With the spell going, it felt quite pleasant. Everyone else there was hurtled as far under the tarps or umbrellas as they could get, but Team Susan wasn’t going to let bad weather spoil their enjoyment.

What enjoyment there is to be found in this bizarre sport, anyway.

“This spell of yours is pretty nice,” said Ginny. “I’m not cold at all. How about that? I thought you were nuts before, but now I wish I had changed too. The spell doesn’t stop us getting wet, so your suit makes sense.”

“Everything I do makes sense, you just sometimes have to look a little harder to see it.”

“You could always just take your clothes off,” suggested Myrtle, trying not to smile.

“I’ll just dry them out later, thank you.”

“Suit yourself,” Myrtle punned.

“Has it started or not? I’m not sure I can even tell,” said Ron.

“I think that’s Harry there?” Hermione pointed. “Or, no, over there?”

Susan just shook her head and enjoyed the rain.

About twenty minutes into the match Hermione realized Harry was having trouble because of his glasses, and ran off to help him.

“With magic, in case you were wondering,” she remarked to Susan before she left.

It’s about freaking time these people started thinking with magic.

The match went on, until suddenly everyone gasped and looked over in one direction.

What? Is this game finally over? Wait, they’re looking down, not up.

Susan looked where everyone was, and was shocked to see dozens of Dementors gliding into the stadium. “Oh crap!” she shouted. “Harry! Where is he?”

I can’t Telesummon him on a broom! It doesn’t cancel momentum, he’ll go splat! I can’t take all of them, and I didn’t learn the repelling spell because I didn’t figure on facing a hundred of them at a time. Oh, this is not good.

Susan started reviewing the spells she knew, desperate to find one that could help, but there were too many, and Harry was too far away and moving. She could see figures zooming about high above, and figured they could be the seekers, chasing the Snitch. She looked over at Myrtle.

“Can you find him?” she asked her. “Warn him that they’re on their way.”

“Got it,” she said, taking into the air. Tense seconds passed as more Dementors spilled into the grounds.

How many of these things are there? And why are there so many? There aren’t that many entrances to the grounds, even with two per door. Something’s off here.

Suddenly, everyone gasped and she saw a figure tumble from the air towards the ground.

Harry! Even at my maximum range I couldn’t catch him with TK. Stay alive so I can heal you later, please!

She saw the Headmaster slow his fall, and breathed a sigh of relief. He whirled on the Dementors and pointed his wand angrily. The silver phoenix she had often seen deliver messages appeared in the air, and the Dementors turned and started floating away.

“Come on,” said Ginny. “We have to go make sure he’s okay.”

Myrtle flew back over. “I’m sorry, I wasn’t fast enough.”

“It’s okay, he’ll be fine.” Albus had Harry on a stretcher and was levitating him away from the field. *As long as a single spark of life remains.*

The group hustled over to the hospital wing, where they found Harry already laid out on a bed.

“He didn’t even break his glasses,” said Fred. (Pretty sure it wasn’t George)

Of course he didn’t, I made them stronger last year.

Madam Pomfrey said his injuries weren’t severe, so Susan started casting *Healing* on him instead of the longer *Alleviation*. Harry opened his eyes.

“Welcome back,” Susan said. “How do you feel?”

“Crappy. What happened?”

“We were hoping you could tell us,” said George. “Do you remember the match?”

“Did we win?”

“Ah, about that.”

“We lost?”

“It’s just that, well, Cedric caught the snitch because he didn’t realize the reason you fell behind is because you fell, literally. He said it wasn’t fair and that the match should be scrapped, but for now it’s staying as is.”

“We thought you had died,” said Alicia.

“No we didn’t,” protested Susan. “Headmaster Dumbledore caught him (with magic) didn’t he?”

“But then he rushed Harry over here...”

“To get him away from the Dementors, yes. They seem to have a stronger affect on him than most, for some reason.”

“Sorry everyone,” said Harry, shutting his eyes. They popped open again. “Susan, what are you wearing?”

She posed, one leg extended. “Swimsuit. You like it?”

“Why- no, don’t tell me. So why were those Dementors hanging around?”

“I don’t know,” answered Hermione. “But the Headmaster was furious with them. We think he went to go owl the minister about the whole incident. He rushed off after he brought you here.”

“You’re okay, aren’t you Harry?” asked Ginny.

“I’ll be fine. I’m sure it’s only what Susan would call ‘non-lethal damage’ after all.” He managed a weak smile.

“I don’t know,” mused Susan. “Falling damage is lethal, there’s a formula and everything. If you people had character sheets, as is sensible, you could just look rather than guess. But that’s neither here nor there.”

“Let’s go get dried off, team,” said Fred. “Harry needs his rest. Don’t take it too hard, anyone could have fallen, seeing that many of those things pouring into the place.”

“We still have a chance at the cup, it’s not over yet,” said George. “See you later.”

The team members left, leaving only Susan’s party there.

"I'm sorry I couldn't help," said Susan. "You were too far away for *Telekinesis* and moving too fast for *Telesummon*. I have to give credit to wanded magic, it all seems to have a far greater range than mine." She pouted.

"Can your magic protect him against Dementors?" asked Ginny. Susan shook her head.

"The one spell I used before cancels out his ability to use magical objects as well as protecting him from magic. So even if he activated that, he would have fallen because his broom wouldn't have worked any more. And he can't walk around with it on normally because then he couldn't use his wand."

"Speaking of that, where is my broom? Did someone fetch it?"

"That's the oddest thing of all," said Ron. "Professor Flitwick brought it up, just minutes after you fell. Said it was in his office, with a note attached. Do you know what this means?"

Ron handed Harry a note.

T.T. One Hour. Willow.

"I don't think I know anyone with the initials T.T," said Harry. "And the only Willow I know is from Buffy the Vampire Slayer."

Hermione's eyes got wide, and she shot up from her chair at Harry's bedside. "Susan, I need your help." She grabbed Susan's hand and ran out, yelling "Be back in a minute, fellows!"

Hermione found the nearest bathroom and dragged Susan into it.

"Hermione, you're so forward. There's plenty of time tonight for us to be alone together."

"What? No, there's no one at your secret base, right?"

"Not at the moment, no. Why?"

"Just take us there, now. There's not a lot of time."

"Okay..." Susan cast *Teleportal*, and the two stepped through, closing it behind them.

"I'm not supposed to show this to anyone, but I figure you're okay. Your magic can probably do this anyway."

"Do what? Why are we here?"

"We're going to save Harry's broom!"

"How?"

Hermione took a golden hourglass from under her blouse. "With this. It's called a Time Turner. It's how I'm getting to all my classes this year."

"Wait, you mean to tell me that rather than create a potion of, oh, I don't know, *You Don't Need Any Sleep Tonight* and just studying through the night, they gave you a *time machine* to take more classes?"

"Yes, they gave me a time machine to take more classes. Come on!" Hermione pulled her close and threw the chain around her neck, then spun it, once.

The world around them blurred, and solidified again.

"Okay, we're now exactly one hour back in time. We're going to sneak over to the Whomping Willow and wait there. That message must mean that it's going to be blown in that direction. We're going to catch it, then put it in Professor Flitwick's office with that note."

"They gave you a *time machine*—"

"Can we talk about that later?"

"Fine, fine. Take my hand so I can know where you are."

The two joined hands and Susan cast *Invisibility*. “I’ll open it behind Rubeus’ hut, no one will be back there.”

Taking the extra time, Susan opened her *Teleportal* and both stepped through.

“Okay, we’ll fly over there so we don’t bump into something, or someone,” said Susan, then cast *Flight* on them both. They flew over to the Willow and hung in the air, holding hands, waiting for the match to be over.

“So, about this time machine...”

“Yes?”

“How far back can you go?”

“Six hours.”

“Interesting. If I recall my spell correctly, I could go back a week per Saturn rating. I never looked into the spell because I wasn’t sure what would happen if I went around messing with time. This is either safer, because it’s only a little ways back, or has other protections on it.”

“They gave me a whole list of provisions and things to watch out for.”

“Ah. Which is why we’re here, and not just warning the Headmaster of what’s about to happen before it does.”

“Exactly.”

“Well! That’s quite the secret you’ve been keeping from us, you know?”

“I’m sorry, I had to.”

“I know. Imagine if one of Voldemort’s followers had gotten hold of one of these in the hours after his death at Harry’s place? The world would be a very different place now, I expect.”

“I don’t even want to consider that.”

“I suppose it’s only fair to trade secrets, since you told me yours.”

“There’s something you haven’t told us?”

“Yeah. I figured out I can destroy Dementors with *Alleviation*. Because it takes so long to cast though, I *Imbued* it into a knife, which I can currently use five times. Slash them with it, and they’ll disappear for good.”

“Why didn’t you tell us?!”

“I was worried you would think that now that I had figured it out I would immediately go to attack Azkaban.”

“Give us some credit. I don’t think you’re that stupid.”

Wait, she doesn’t think me that stupid? So she thinks me a little stupid? If I were visible right now I would scowl at her. “Yeah, but I didn’t want that worry to be inside you. Of course, now that I realize how many of them there must be, it’s going to take more than one knife with 5 charges to take that place down.”

“Did you see how many of those things there were? Imagine what Azkaban must be like.”

“I know, it must be horrible. I was staring at them, thinking there was nothing I could do against that many. No wonder they all get shut up in that prison. Still, there must be some way to destroy them faster or in a larger area.”

“If anyone can do it, I’m sure it’ll be you.” Hermione squeezed her hand.

“Thanks,” said Susan, squeezing back.

A few moments passed. “If we’re the ones that write that note, and we only knew to come here from reading the note, where did the information to come here come from?” asked Susan.

“In the original timeline the broom probably hit the willow and got smashed up. So we went back in time to catch it. We left the note so future-past us wouldn’t have to go through that

loop again. This time loop stabilized meaning the information seems to come from nowhere, but in reality came from the time before we knew where it ended up.”

“Okay, time travel- weird.”

Nearly an hour later the broom came flying towards the invisible pair, and Susan rolled her *Catching* check, getting a 12.

Never thought that skill would actually come in handy.

“Now, how do we get it into the office? I suppose I could just open a *Teleportal* over there, I’ve seen it. And he’s at the game for sure, so he wouldn’t see it open.”

“Sounds good to me,” said Hermione.

Susan created a small *Teleportal* and dropped the broom through.

“Wait,” Hermione cried. “Don’t forget the note.” She got out her wand and floated some parchment, ink and a quill through the hole, then hastily wrote the note that she would had already read. She floated everything back through, and the two flew over to the hospital wing to await themselves.

As they disappeared, Susan ended *Flight* and *Invisibility* and they walked out again back towards where Harry was.

“You’re back already?” asked Ron. “What was that all about?”

“I just realized I needed to do something real quick with Susan. All done now though. What were we saying?”

“We were just talking about how the broom got saved and wound up in professor Flitwick’s office.”

“Guess it’s just one of those mysteries,” said Susan.

“Unexplainable. Probably magic,” said Hermione.

“I’m just glad it’s safe, I don’t care how,” said Harry. “I don’t have the money to get another one, after all.”

That weekend, Harry stayed in the hospital bed, despite Susan curing his wounds.

“If Dementors have that much of an impact on you I want to make sure you don’t have a relapse or something,” argued Madam Pomfrey. “You may have visitors, but I want to keep an eye on you.”

So Susan went to visit him.

“We have to figure out why you seem to have more trouble with them than everyone else. There must be some reason.”

“I wish I knew!”

“I’ve even tried the *Research* spell and didn’t get very far. They’re considered Dark creatures, but they don’t have loyalty as such. If someone promised them a lot of food, that’s us by the way, they would follow that person. I don’t think they hold grudges, so they aren’t out to get you because of the Voldemort thing. Though I suppose they might think they would be eating better if he hadn’t been killed? I didn’t really see them directing any sort of power at you.

“Could you have some kind of *allergy* to them, somehow? Like your system tries harder to fight off their influence than other people? But they’re so powerful that it just shuts your brain down to protect you? Because I could make you an item of *Undead Annihilation* which seemed to at least confuse them, but if it’s just their presence that triggers this reaction, that wouldn’t help you. Plus you would be glowing with holy light all the time, which might be a little distracting.

“You obviously can’t get near them, you’ve had the reaction every time they were in sight range. But not until you saw them. On the train that one was rattling around but you only reacted when it was right in front of you. These were much further away, but then there were more of them. That might have something to do with it.

“I’m sorry, Harry. I threw a lot of spells in my book at them some weeks ago trying to see what would slow them down, anything. I didn’t find anything that would help. I could make you an item with *Augment Stat (RESolve)* but I’m not sure you get RESolve checks against these creatures. Or even if you have a RESolve in the way I do. I’ve failed you Harry. My magic has failed you. And I’m sorry.”

Susan stood looking down at the floor.

“Now what would my friend Susan say at a time like this?” asked Harry, looking thoughtful. “Maybe something like ‘You haven’t failed, you just have yet to succeed.’ There probably isn’t a lot of experimenting done on them so that’s why your *Research* spell didn’t give you much. I’m just going to have to learn to deal with them on my own. The Headmaster used some spell that chased them away, I’m sure I can learn the same thing. Now that I think about it, Professor Lupin used the same spell on the train that first time. I can’t imagine why I didn’t think of that earlier. He can teach it to me!”

“You were probably subconsciously hoping never to come face to face with one again. So your brain blocked it out so you didn’t have to think about the experience.”

“Something. So don’t feel too bad about it. On Monday I’ll ask him, and see what he says.”

“I’m going to go ahead and feel slightly bad about it, if that’s okay?”

“Tell you what- feel really bad about it for an hour, and we’ll call it even. Deal?”

“Deal.”

Also during the weekend Susan tried to get in to see Professor Lupin, but was rebuked.

“I can’t see anyone right now,” he called through his door.

“If there is something wrong with you, *I can fix it,*” Susan shouted back, carefully not adding the “...you moron” to the end. “You have seen what my magic can do. You have heard what I have done. I don’t care if one of your legs has fallen off or you’re under a curse that disfigures you to a LOOKs of zero. Whatever it is, my magic can help. Why will you not allow me to help you?”

“I have my reasons. Now please, just leave me alone for now.”

“Fine,” Susan grumbled. “Just trying to help. Can’t help my best friend fight off Dementors. Can’t help you because of pride or whatever. Honestly- grown ups!” Susan stalked off.

I should just Phase my way inside, and to heck with him. Hit him with the Healing Shiv and be done with it. Stupid adults.

That Monday he was back in class, but looking rather worse for wear. The class immediately began complaining to him about Professor Snape and his fixation with werewolves.

“And he gave Susan detention!” yelled Neville.

“And took fifty points from her house!” yelled someone else.

“Fifty points? Why?”

“It’s not important,” said Susan. “I’ve put the whole thing behind me, and sort of got my revenge in any case. Now what is important- are you sure you don’t want me to hit you with

Alleviation. If you really are sick it will cure you, and restore any lost STrength or CONstitution you may have lost.”

“I’ll be fine,” he said with a smile.

“I knew it!” shouted Neville. Everyone looked over at him.

“You cured my parents, didn’t you?”

Oh crap. Crap, crap, crap! Double Crap. Triple even! I just had to open my big month, didn’t I?

“What do you mean, Neville? Are your parents ill?” *Oh sure, don’t put any points into Deception, Susan, why would you need a skill like that?*

“And that potion Madam Pomfrey gave me to drink that you suggested. You made that too, didn’t you?”

“I’m not really sure what you mean.” *Yeah, I’m failing these rolls, aren’t I?*

“Don’t play games with me. My parents were in that hospital for years. Then suddenly overnight they get cured, and no one can tell me how? I spend my life as the clumsiest person I know, and then I drink a potion and suddenly I’m fine? Both of these things just happened to come along just as you entered school? A person who goes around showing off her ‘ancient magics’ or whatever. Do you think I’m an idiot?”

“We can talk about it later, Neville. Let’s just get back to the lesson.”

“Fine.”

I’m being punished, aren’t I? But why? Did I do something bad recently?

At the end of class, Neville planted himself in front of her. “Yes or no. Did you cure them or not?”

Susan sighed. “Yes, Neville, I cured them, and you too. Happy?”

“Yes, I am. I got my family back, and I didn’t have to live with my grandmother anymore. Why didn’t you tell me? Were you having a nice little laugh behind my back, ‘oh, Neville is so dumb he hasn’t figured it out yet.’?”

“What? No. Honestly I never gave it another thought. In the beginning I didn’t want you told because you would have felt obligated to do something equally amazing for me, and I didn’t want you to be under that kind of pressure. I did something good for someone, and I wanted to do it anonymously because to me it’s just a spell. It’s not amazing or anything, I don’t really deserve any real credit.”

“Really? That’s the whole reason?”

“That is the whole reason. I promise.”

“You should have told me. I’ve been down on my knees every night thanking God for the miracle that gave my parents back to me. That made me a normal person. All this time I was praying to you.”

“No, no, no, no!” Susan waved her hands in front of her. “Don’t even think that! I was just the conduit, you know? I mean, if there is a God then He put me here to do good works, and that’s what I’ll do. I’m just a person with a little bit better magic than most. Honest.”

“You could have at least let me say thank you.”

“Oh, but you did! Every time you smiled and joked with the others, I had your thanks. When you talked about your parents, I had your thanks. When you walked with your head up, rather than down, I had your thanks. You didn’t need to say the words; it wasn’t a spell. It was in everything about you.”

“Well, thank you anyway.”

“Of course. I’m glad they’re doing okay, and can put that chapter in their lives behind them. But if you really want to thank me, go do something amazing with your life. Become the best wizard you can, and someday, someone will be thanking you for their lives. I’m sure of it.”

“Okay. I’ll see you later, okay?”

“See you.”

Whew.

By that time, Harry was done talking to Professor Lupin and the two left together.

“He says he’ll teach me,” Harry said excitedly.

“Great! That’s wonderful news.”

“Not until after Christmas though, because of this strange illness he’s been under.”

“Yes. I can’t imagine why he won’t allow me to help him. It’s very odd, he knows I can cure all illness.”

“Maybe it’s something really embarrassing?”

“I suppose it must be. Christmas huh? Time to start working on presents again, I guess.”

“You can just get me something normal, if you want. You don’t have to make me a magical item.”

“Of course I do. It keeps me out of that stupid Potions class, after all. If I’m not making stuff Headmaster Dumbledore will find some less enjoyable activity to keep me occupied. Idle hands, and all that. You can count on it.”

“As long as you enjoy doing it.”

“Seeing magic swirl around an item, and at the end having something useful to give my friends? Count on it.”

Naturally the others worked out the same agreement with Susan as last year- Hermione and Ron would be staying here, and she would bring all their families to the castle for the holiday.

There was another trip to the village planned, but Susan insisted she was staying here for the duration.

“They probably haven’t cleaned up the mess from the last time I went there. I would rather be attacked here where at least there won’t be freaking giants roaming the halls. They wouldn’t fit, for one thing.”

Of course, Harry and I will go, I just want to make it seem like we’re staying behind to fool my would be attacker. I’m so sneaky!

That year Ron was easy, he asked for an item of *Withstand Weather*, because it seemed too useful. As it was only grade 3, Susan was happy to oblige him.

Susan had a rather inspired idea for Harry. She was going to *Fabricate* his broom, but then decided against it. Brooms were replaceable, and new models came out every year that had different characteristics. But she knew something that wasn’t easily replaceable- *wands*.

So she gave a minor boost to one of the stolen wands she had hanging around, and asked Hermione (who she considered to be the best spell-caster) to give it a try. It still worked, so obviously her binding of magical energies into the structure of the wand didn’t hurt its ability to be used as whatever *Magical Focus* these wizards needed. So she made Harry’s wand DTR 6, probably more than was required, as even making it DTR 4 (an increase of 1, as wood started at DTR 3) would make it regenerate damage.

Hermione caught her doing it, and excitedly asked for the same, and Susan said she would be happy to.

“I was going to make you something else, but if this is what you want.”

“Are you kidding? To have my wand never break, scuff, crack, splinter- nothing? That’s huge for a wizard! Have you seen how beat up Mr. and Mrs. Weasley’s wands are?”

“If that’s what you want, your wish is my command.”

She also snuck in a *True Owner* on each, so they would be reunited with their wands should they ever lose them. It only counted as 1 charge to *Imbue*, after all. So she figured, why not? The tough part was getting some of their hair, but that’s what *Phase* magic was for, right?

In fact, I could go into business making wands unbreakable, and unsteal-able. Figure every wizard will want it done, right? So the number of wizards in the world times cost per wand times number of new wizards born every year...

cha-ching

Visitation Rites

Time: Two days before Christmas

Place: The hallways of Hogwarts

“There you are,” exclaimed Susan. “Come on, I’m sure they’re waiting for us!”

“What are you talking about?” asked Harry.

“Hermione and the others. We’re heading to the village.”

“How did you know- they told you about it?”

“Okay, now I’m confused.”

“Fred and George. They gave me this sweet map of Hogwarts that shows everyone’s positions.”

“Seriously?”

“Really. Take a look.”

Harry showed Susan the map, and there they were, marked clearly where they were standing.

“I have to admit, sometimes your magic really impresses me. I have no idea how I would make something like that. No idea at all.”

“Nice, isn’t it?”

“I could see where it would be useful. So you were thinking of sneaking over there using this, right?”

“Exactly. There’s a secret passage directly there, right inside the castle! Fred and George don’t believe Mr. Filch knows about it, so I was going to use it.”

“Really?” Susan frowned.

“And you’re not as excited as I would have thought. You’re not thinking what I’m thinking, are you?”

“I think I am. That’s how he might have gotten in. We better check it out. I was going to offer my *Teleportal* services to get us to the village, but this seems more important.”

“Us? I thought you said you were staying here. Too dangerous, you said.”

“Classic misdirection technique. Now my *Enemy* thinks I’m staying here, when really I’ll be there. Of course that probably doesn’t matter, an *Enemy* is an *Enemy* no matter where I go, but I can at least make them work for it.”

“That’s up to you. Come on.”

Checking the coast was clear, Susan *Phased* Harry and herself through the stone statue that sat in front of the passage, and there it was- a dark hallway leading off into the distance.

“Well, well, well,” said Susan, looking down the cramped passage. Harry’s wand had lit up the area, and he was holding it in front of himself. “Someone was busy a long time ago, weren’t they?”

“What do you want to do?”

“See where this connects to. In the meantime, I’m going to be reading a spell to put on the other end. Let’s get walking.”

She pulled her Book of Spells out of her *Pocket Dimension* and started flipping through, looking up occasionally to avoid running into the walls. “The question is how deadly do I want to make it? Ah, here we are: *Elemental Trap*. Only grade 4, I can easily meet the difficulty to read and understand it. Wait, it’s not permanent? What’s the point of that?” She slammed the

book shut again and stuffed it back in her *Pocket Dimension*. “Glad I learned *Spell Symbol* then,” she said.

“So what’s the news?”

“There’s a trap spell you can put on doors and things called *Elemental Trap*. But it’s worthless, because no one in their right mind is going to spend XP to *Imbue* a door with something like that. Not when *Spell Symbol* exists, that’s permanent. Whoever made that spell up needs to rethink.”

“But you can still do what you want?”

“Yeah. I’ll just put my trusty *Spell Symbol* on the other side of this passageway, whatever the door is that leads down here. Then I’ll cast my *Elemental Burst (Knockout)* into it, so whoever next opens the door will get a nasty surprise.”

“What if it’s us?”

“Why would it be us? We’re not going to use it, and I’ll warn Fred and George off it when we get back. When the whole Sirius scare is over I’ll come back down here and scratch it out, so it can be used again.”

“I guess that’s all right.”

“Anyway, let’s fly, unless you really want to *walk* down the rest of this passage.”

So Susan cast *Flight* on them both and they zoomed down the passageway at speed. As it was a straight hallway they didn’t need to do any fancy maneuvers, and within minutes came to the end of the passage. There was a wooden trapdoor leading up.

“And here we are,” said Susan, touching the door. “Time to make some magic.”

A circle appeared and swirled on the surface of the wood for a minute and a half as Susan envisioned mystical symbols and put energy into magic. With that spell cast she put more energy into *Elemental Burst* and cast that into the symbol that now was “burned” into the wood.

“And done!” she announced, the magical energies fading away. “Want to test it?”

“No!”

“Aw, you’re no fun. Now, let me think of a quiet place I can put this *Teleportal* and we can be on our way.”

“I didn’t bring the cloak, someone will see me.”

“Not if you have some special Susan *Invisibility*,” Susan reminded him.

“Oh yeah.”

So the two stepped out, Harry invisibly and Susan not, and they started looking around for Ron and Hermione.

“They probably hit the sweet shop first this time, as they didn’t get a chance last time. Let’s head there.”

“Right. Lead the way.”

Susan felt something pinch her jacket and they made their way through the streets. “They’ve got Dementors patrolling the streets at night?” Susan looked up at a sign, posted on a wooden fence. “They must be getting desperate by this time.”

“As if he would be stupid enough to wander around a village of wizards,” said Harry, “All who know his face on sight. If I was him, I’d be hiding out in the Mug- the non-magical world, where it’s unlikely I would be known.”

“For sure. Come on, the sweet shop is over here.”

“Susan!” cried Hermione. “You decided to come after all?”

“I was planning on coming the whole time. I just announced I wasn’t to throw off any attackers.”

“It’s kind of sad you have to worry about attackers.”

“I’m used to it. What’s up with you guys?”

“We were trying to pick up something for Harry,” said Ron.

“What a wonderful idea, given that Harry is not within inches of me right now. Probably miles away. Miles and miles away. Or- he’s behind me. One of the two.”

“You didn’t?”

“When have I ever not done something I shouldn’t? Wait, that came out wrong.”

“Harry?”

“Hello, Hermione,” said the voice of Harry. “Nice to see you Ron.”

“I suppose as long as he stays *Invisible*. Is it the cloak or your magic?” asked Hermione.

“My magic. We didn’t think about the cloak before we left.”

“Left? Didn’t you just, you know, wish yourself here?”

“It’s a long story. Want Harry and me to leave so you can get back to shopping? We can walk around until you’re finished.”

“If you don’t mind.”

“What do you say, oh invisible one?”

“Let’s go see the joke shop, it’ll be warm in there.”

“Meet you at The Three Broomsticks then?”

“Say twenty minutes?”

“Fine, fine. Come along, He Who-Must-Not-Be-Seen.”

So Susan and Harry pattered around the joke shop, where Susan was aghast at the number of products, and their functions.

Do some wizards just do nothing but cast charms on objects? Good thing it doesn’t cost them XP or anything, they’d be going backwards after a day!

“How long do the charms on your products last?” she asked a salesman.

“We offer a six month guarantee. If one of our products fails to activate before that time, simply bring it back for a replacement and your money back. Customer satisfaction is our top priority.”

“That sounds more than fair. Good to see a place that stands behind its products. Thanks.”

“Of course. Let me know if you see anything you’d like.”

“I will.”

If I plan to use it within six months, anyway. Now I see why items made by wizards are made so easily. They don’t last like mine do. It takes goblins to create things like magic swords that can last generations. That’s an interesting thought- was Harry’s cloak made by goblins? It’s held up pretty well over the years if it belonged to his father. Weird.

She looked at some things, like *Instant Darkness Powder* that she could make too, just a handful of black powder with *Darkness* imbued into it. *Would items that last longer command higher prices?* She looked at what they wanted for it. *Probably not. Given how cheap this stuff is, it takes them zero effort after all, you can easily replace it every few months. And this probably isn’t the kind of stuff you buy without intending to use fairly quickly.*

The two of them made their way back through the streets to the restaurant, and went inside. Hermione called over to them, and they sat down. Ron had drinks waiting for them, and

passed them out. Harry had his back to the wall, and no one was paying special attention to them. She could feel Harry looking at the mug.

“I think it’s safe if you wanted to drink it,” said Susan, looking around. “Just try to not be too obvious about it. The mug won’t go invisible if you pick it up, but it doesn’t count as an attack, a spell, or ‘affecting another creature’ so you won’t become visible again.”

“Good to know!” The mug floated up and some of the liquid disappeared. “Hey, that’s good stuff!”

Of course, in walked a bunch of teachers and Mr. Fudge. The mug disappeared under the table as they walked over.

“Ah, Susan,” said the minister. “Wonderful to see you again!”

“And you, minister. I hope you’re well, knowing all the stress you must be under. What with Sirius still on the loose.”

“Quite a nasty business, I admit. The Dementors petition me daily to be let into the castle.”

“I expect they would. Children are, after all, typically filled with more positive emotions than adults.”

“Quite, as you say. Would you mind if I sat down a moment, there’s something I would like to ask you.”

Crap, now what?

Suddenly she felt a finger brush the back of her hand, and she knew Harry must have gotten up.

“Please,” she said, gesturing to the chair. “Join us!”

“Thank you. I’ll just be a moment,” he said to the others.

“Really, Cornelius? Now?” said Minerva. “Let the poor girl alone. It’s Christmas!”

“It won’t take a moment.”

She shook her head and sat down at the table next to them.

“What can I do for you, minister?”

“Just a few quick points. I heard a Dementor went missing from his post some time ago. You wouldn’t happen to know what could have become of the creature, do you?”

“What do you take me for minister?” Susan said, putting on a shocked expression. “Some sort of mad scientist, that has fiendishly captured a Dementor and is performing gruesome experiments on it in some secret lab?”

“I wouldn’t put it past you, if the things could be captured or held. But you did express to me some desire to destroy them, and when I heard one was missing... well, it brought you to mind.”

“Not to worry,” she assured him. “When I figure out how to destroy them, you’ll be the first to know. Because you’ll get a call from Azkaban, that an invincible little girl is attacking and taking them out.”

“I’m serious. We have to account for them. Did you destroy one somehow?”

She sighed. “Yes, I found a spell that would destroy them. Okay? Are you happy knowing that? Does it fill your heart with a tiny warmth as it does mine? Does it please you that your persistent questioning has made me give in and answer you?”

Ron was of course choking on his drink by this time. Hermione just looked cross.

Cornelius looked between them. “So, she knew, he didn’t. Interesting. Is it reliable?”

“I would have to destroy more of them to answer that question. If you’d like to ‘loan’ me some to perform my fiendish experiments on...”

“I think not.”

“Pity. In any case, yes, that one is gone, never to return. And to be followed by more of its fellows soon, I hope.”

“So why aren’t you attacking the place? You seemed rather emphatic about it.”

Susan looked away. “It’s too slow. Remember how I cured Neville’s parents?”

“That’s the spell you used?”

She nodded.

“I guess I don’t have to worry about you mowing them down like weeds then, at least not yet.”

“I shouldn’t say this, but I don’t know how I’m going to effectively weaponize the spell. Given how many of them there are, even I would be overwhelmed attacking directly.”

“I see. You said ‘effectively weaponize’ meaning you have, to a certain extent, done so.”

“That is correct.”

“Well, at least that minor mystery is solved. Now, on to Sirius Black.”

“Yes?”

“Can your magic find him?”

“Didn’t Mr. Weasley tell you? Though I suppose you don’t talk with the little people around the office, do you? It was the first thing I tried, as soon as I learned he was on the loose. My spell didn’t exactly work right. I still don’t know why.”

“What did it tell you?”

“Essentially? That the man was neither living nor dead upon the earth.”

“He is very much alive, I assure you.”

“I know he is, given his breaking into Hogwarts not that long ago for reasons unknown. As to the failure of my magic, I cannot say. I’ve never had a result like that from a spell before.”

“That’s a pity. We’ve done all we can, and he still eludes us. Why? How? If only we could learn that, we would have an edge!”

“There’s one thing I don’t understand, if you can tell me.”

“I’ll answer what I can.”

“Why here? Why his obsessions with Hogwarts? If he really was loyal to Voldemort shouldn’t he be in hiding, gathering up those also loyal? Building their strength, biding their time?”

“We, uh, can’t really say what his motivation is,” he answered shiftily.

“Don’t give me that. There’s a lot more going on here, and you know it’s going to be me standing with Harry if Sirius ever catches him. I’d like to know exactly who I’m fighting against.”

The minister thought for a moment, then looked at the three of them.

“Now it’s my turn to say I shouldn’t be telling you this. But you’ve been honest with me, and I’ve seen your power, so I’ll tell you their history. But you must not tell Harry, please. I’ll have your words on this.”

“The information will not pass from me to him in any way minister, you have my oath as a wizard.”

The others nodded.

“Very well. The thing is, at one time, Harry’s father and Sirius were the best of friends. Troublemakers at school, perhaps. But loyal to each other. Or so we thought. There were, shall we say, certain indications that you-know-who was about to attack the Potter family for his own reasons. Albus suggested to them that they go into hiding.”

Not even he can say Voldi's name. Just how bad was it during that time?

"Now I don't know if your magic can do something similar, but we can perform a ceremony and actually store a piece of knowledge inside someone. If it's the location of a safe house, that house is wiped off the map. Only those that have been told the house is there would be able to see it. Anyone else would be unable to perceive it being there at all. I mention it because this is what Albus did. He sent them to a safe house and bound the secret inside Sirius. To prevent the information being tortured out of him, Sirius also agreed to go into hiding, and the ceremony was performed."

"So Harry's parents were betrayed by their best friend?"

"That does appear to be what happened, as not a week went by when the attack took place. You can imagine how Albus felt, who had offered to hold the secret himself. This was all the proof he needed that Sirius was a traitor, and went after him. Somehow he managed to stay one step ahead of Albus and was caught only later."

"Is that when he performed that curse that killed so many people?"

"Exactly. He had been cornered by another friend of theirs, Peter Pettigrew, in an alleyway. Peter confronted him, according to eyewitnesses, and tried to take him down himself. Sirius didn't leave much of him left, and the explosion left a crater in the ground and a dozen dead. The magical enforcement squad said he'd cracked, standing there in the street laughing, and let himself be lead away."

Susan thought for a moment.

"I'm sorry, but that story just doesn't make sense."

"I assure you it's what happened."

"It's what people saw happen. People tend to see what they want to see, or fill in blanks that they missed in odd ways."

Cornelius gave a little laugh. "So what do you think happened?"

"It's not what I think happened, it's what I think should have happened. A person like Sirius, who followed Voldemort, would have known the killing curse. So Peter walks up to him, shaking with rage and whatnot, and Sirius plays it cool, right? 'It wasn't me, let me explain' he says to Peter. 'I'll give you one last chance' says Peter. 'But it better be good.' Then he takes Peter into a back ally and one burst of green light later, no more Peter. Why blow him up in that spectacular fashion? Why kill innocent people? It doesn't seem his style. I mean he waited how long to betray the Potters, and for what? Why not just finish them himself, bring Harry's head to Voldemort on a patter? Did he really think that far ahead? Hide his true self that long? I'm not buying it."

"The facts are the facts," said Cornelius, getting up. "Peter died a hero, and Sirius want to Azkaban for life. I know you don't approve if it, but the fact is we need a place like that to make people like Sirius think twice."

"No, you need swift justice, as in a death penalty, rather than torturing people for years until they're just a shell of their former selves. Death, I think, would be preferable."

"You are certainly entitled to your opinion. If you can offer us any other assistance, I would certainly be grateful for the help."

"I will let you know immediately."

"Thank you. Good afternoon to you all."

Rejoining the teachers, they talked about Sirius and had a drink, then left.

“You with us?” asked Susan. She felt a finger grab her jacket. “Let’s head back to the school,” she said to the others. “We have some things to talk about.”

“Well done, telling him we wouldn’t tell Harry. He told Harry himself, so we didn’t break our word,” said Ron.

“The thought had crossed my mind,” Susan replied. “It’s not my fault he didn’t ask if Harry was there, invisible. The man is minister of magic, of all things. You would think he’d be a little sharper than that.”

“Are we walking back?”

“Heck no. I’ve got energy, and the Susan Express is a smooth ride, baby!”

“So, what, he wants to finish the job?” asked Harry, now visible again, and back inside Hogwarts. “A perfectionist villain?”

“This so called ceremony,” said Susan. “Do you know anything about it, Hermione?”

She shook her head. “Not yet.”

“That’s the kind of answer I like to hear. Anyway, could it have been observed? Could an invisible person have watched, then walked behind him while he told Albus what the secret was he had just locked away?”

“And your father couldn’t have been that thick, Harry,” said Hermione. “I have to believe that he would not have hung around a person who went to Voldemort’s side. I mean there would have been signs.”

“You would think,” said Harry. “It does explain what Draco said to me, though. Why I should want ‘revenge’ on Sirius.”

“The timing also seems wrong. Unless he lost track of time, Sirius would know when you were going to enter Hogwarts, Harry,” said Susan. “Why choose your third year of school and not your first? You’re more experienced now, older. If I wanted to finish someone off, I would want to do it when they were as weak as possible.”

“Is his dedication to Voldi so great that he would want revenge that baldly? I mean, to sneak in here and try to get into your common room really smacks of desperation. Unless you think about what we’ve already seen,” said Susan.

“What? What have we seen?” asked Ron.

“Pieces of Voldi scattered about. A ring? A diary? Perhaps there was another piece hidden here someplace, and that’s what he was after. That’s why he hasn’t been seen since- he’s off finding some sucker Voldi can take over and return to physicality.”

“You just have a way of making bad situations that much worse, don’t you?” asked Hermione.

“It’s a gift. In any case, we know the official line now, and why everyone’s so freaked out about him running around. We just have to get the real story.”

“Maybe it is the real story?” ventured Ron.

“Come on, Ron. Myrtle, the chamber, and Rubeus? Gilderoy? The reasons Voldi wanted the stone? When has anything we’ve thought or been told been the real story?”

“It could happen.”

“She’s right,” said Harry. “Until we get the story from him, I’m going to trust my father and give him the benefit of the doubt. We know there are powerful curses- curses that control people.” He looked at Ron, who nodded. “Maybe he was cursed before he went into that ceremony, we don’t know. After all, they wouldn’t suspect their best friend, right? Who better to make your puppet, as Voldi has already shown us.” She looked at Ron.

“You didn’t suspect me,” Ron admitted. “That part of his plan did work perfectly.”
“And with wizard’s insistence on not finding proper evidence, as in the case with Myrtle,” Hermione put in, “I have to doubt what we’ve been told, too.”
“So we keep looking for answers, and if Sirius does show up, we give him the chance to explain. With *Magic Immunity* running, of course.”
“Can’t be too careful,” Harry said.

The next day, Christmas Eve, the school was mostly empty and the four found themselves with little supervision.

“I know someone who can tell us more about Sirius,” said Harry. “Rubeus. He knew my parents, right? Maybe he can give us some insights into his character.”

Everyone agreed that was a good idea, and trooped down to The Hut, where they banged on his door.

And then waited.

“I hear crying,” said Sparkle, getting a 20 on *Perception*. “Should there be crying?”
“Crying? No!” said Hermione, alarmed. She pounded on the door. “Professor Hagrid? It’s us, The Four Heroes.”

“I still think Susan’s Adventuring Squad,” venturing Susan.

“What was wrong with Hero Harry and his Sidekicks?” asked Harry.

“Better than Ron’s Misfits,” grumbled Ron.

“Whoever says it first gets to decide,” said Hermione.

“That’s fair,” said an unconvinced Susan.

The door flew open, and there stood Rubeus, sobbing. “News travels fast around here, don’t it? Oh it’s just horrible. I knew you would come, Susan, I just knew it.”

“Come on, professor, let’s talk about it.” Hermione grabbed his hand and pulled him inside. Susan shut the door and looked around. There on the table was an opened letter, official looking, from the seal. Over in the corner was a hippogriff.

Probably Buckbeak.

“Who died?” asked Ron.

“Can we be a little sensitive, please?” asked Hermione, glaring at him.

Ron appeared to think about this.

“Can you tell us what happened?” asked Hermione. Rubeus shoved the letter at her and sat down heavily.

She read it over.

“You better have a look,” she said to the others.

“So let me get this straight, you’re off the hook, but now Buckbeak is going on *trial*? It took them this long to come to this decision? So much for the swift wheels of justice!” said Susan.

“I’m sure we can come up with a defense,” said Hermione, “So don’t you worry, Professor.”

“Defense? They’re going to hear it right from the hippogriff. I’ll just learn *Animal Speech*, it’s only grade 4. They can hear his testimony themselves.”

“Why not just have me do it?” asked Sparkle.

"I'm not sure the court would allow a cat inside, and plus, he might think you're being offered up as a snack."

"I could go in fairy form. I haven't used *Shape-shift* in ages!"

"I suppose that could work..."

"Well they accept that kind of thing?" asked Harry.

"They will if they know what's good for them," Susan said darkly. "So cheer up, Professor, one way or the other we'll make sure he's okay."

"The problem is that the people hearing the case are more loyal to Lucius than to me. It was his son that was hurt, so no matter what we say or do, they'll order his execution."

"Then we'll just have to give them an execution," Susan said. "What do you think we have *Illusion* magic for, anyway?"

"Would that be good enough to fool people?" asked Harry.

"I can put *Energetic Accumulation* on myself just as easily as on Susan," Sparkle said. "So yes, I could make it realistic, trust me."

"Isn't that him there?" Ron asked. "Why not just let him go and say he got away from you?"

"Can't. They would just track him down, and then it would call my fitness for the job into question. That would just make things worse."

"It was worth a thought."

"You four, you've always been so nice to me. Can't even imagine why."

"Because you're nice to us. Professor Snape gets to beat his head against the wall where I'm concerned because he's so pigheaded. You asked nicely and got to know me, so you get the benefit of my magic same as any of my other friends. It's as simple as that."

"I heard about your little stunt with the detention," he said with a slight smile. "But you really shouldn't bait him like that."

"I know, it's against my sweet and charming inner nature. What can I say? That man brings out the worst in me for some reason."

"You going to be okay?" asked Hermione.

"Yeah. Somehow you guys always seem to make me feel better. Thanks."

The four left to allow Rubeus to compose himself, and walked back up to the castle.

"Sorry you didn't get to ask about Sirius," said Susan.

"It's okay," Harry said with a shrug. "Not that important right now. I can go when he's feeling a bit more like himself."

"What are we going to do about Buckbeak though?" asked Ron. "None of us are lawyers."

"We're just going to have to do what we always do," replied Susan.

"What? Bully people with a bunch of magic they've never heard of?" asked Hermione.

"Wreck wherever we are with fire magic?" asked Ron.

"Verbally pummel them into submission?" asked Harry.

"You guys know me too well," said Susan, her heart swelling with pride at being so well understood by her friends.

Truly, friendship is magic.

And so Christmas came, and Susan explained to Harry about why she had been stealing his wand off and on for the past few weeks. He was pretty excited about that, having a wand that

was tougher than an iron bar. It was overshadowed, however, by the arrival of a brand new broom.

A Firebolt. With no card or note attached.

Glad I choose not to Imbue the broom then.

“Who do you know that could spend that much on a broom you don’t need?” asked Ron.

“That’s a good question, Ron,” Susan said. “Why send him a broom when he already has a broom?”

“I suppose I should give mine back to Professor McGonagall then?”

“Sign it first. She can sell it when she retires and buy her own island,” Susan joked.

“This is serious,” said Hermione. “It could be some kind of trap!”

“Who would trap a broom?” asked Ron, running a finger along it. “I’m touching a Firebolt. I can’t believe I’m touching a Firebolt!”

“Seriously, Hermione. He’s already touched it to unwrap it. If there was some kind of curse on it, I’m pretty sure it would have activated by now.”

“I suppose. It’s still pretty suspicious.”

“Business as usual then,” quipped Susan. “The only one I can see both rich enough and holding a big enough grudge would be Lucius, for freeing Dobby last year like you did.”

“You don’t think he would put some kind of time activated curse on it that would make it stop flying, do you? I think everything is fine, use it a month or two, then wham, it soars into the air and then stops working?”

“There would have to be cheaper ways though,” said Ron.

“What does he care about money, though,” Hermione put in.

“Exactly!” said Susan. “You could probably hire a decent hit-man for what this broom cost. I suppose that might not be as satisfying to watch though.”

“He seems the type who would like to watch,” remarked Ron.

“Ron!” Hermione smacked him in the arm.

“Tell you what,” said Susan. “Tonight after dinner when I send my mom home I’ll go with her. I’ll take this broom and the broom Harry uses now. Away from all this magical interference I’ll use *Magic Sense* and see if they feel magically different. That will at least tell us something about it, right?”

“And I suppose I can have the teachers look at it before I use it,” Harry said wistfully. “If it will make you feel better, Hermione.”

“It’s the right thing to do.”

“How come the right thing is always so difficult?”

After a lovely dinner with the parents, Susan took the brooms and stepped through the *Teleportal* to her house.

She went to her room and concentrated on the brooms for about a half an hour, then said goodbye to her mother and stepped back into the school.

“I find nothing amiss about the new one,” she announced. “Magically they feel very similar, which is to say they have very little magic of their own. I still don’t understand how you guys make them fly like you do. What I can tell you is there are no spells which would be equivalent to Mars or Pluto, that would be War and Death. I sense what might be some Sun spells, protection, on both, but that’s about it.”

“I would still recommend taking it be examined by a teacher,” said Hermione.

“I will, okay? Tomorrow I will explain the situation to Professor McGonagall and ask her advice.”

“I just don’t want to see you hurt, that’s all.”

“I know, I’m not mad at you. I just want to know why a broom of all things?”

“I was thinking about that while I checked them over,” said Susan. “I only had one thought. This broom was, oh, I can’t talk about that. Uh, suffice to say, when you fell it got blown towards the Whomping Willow, okay? Someone who saw you fall and saw the broom flying that way would now believe you didn’t have a broom any more. But who could that be, I asked myself.”

“You don’t suspect Sirius somehow, do you?” asked Hermione.

“I admit, it’s far fetched.”

“It’s totally ludicrous,” said Ron. “The guy’s on the run, he’s not going to be able to saunter into a bank and withdraw hundreds of Galleons, is he?”

“But he was a friend of the family, and we know he’s on the run. He could have been hanging around and what he saw would fit the requirements for needing a new broom.”

“I have to agree with Ron on this one,” said Hermione. “Even if he was a friend of the family, and framed, where would he get the money?”

“Yeah, if he had that much cash buried someplace or whatever he could get out of the country, start a new life,” said Ron. “Buying brooms just doesn’t seem likely.”

“Hey, I didn’t say that was the answer, I just said it was the only answer I thought of. Weirder things have happened to us.”

“That’s for sure,” Ron grumbled.

“I’ll still turn it in. Maybe they can find out who bought it from a serial number or something. They can’t sell too many of these things, right?”

Raising Shields

Time: 8:00 Thursday evening

Place: History of Magic classroom

“All three of you?” asked Professor Lupin as Ron, Hermione and Susan followed Harry into the classroom at eight o’clock that night.

“What, you think they don’t want to learn how to protect themselves from the un-killable beings of hatred in the shape of a man?” asked Susan.

“It’s okay, isn’t it?” asked Harry. “You can teach three as easily as one, right?”

“I suppose,” said Remus. “But that doesn’t explain why Susan is here.”

Susan stuck a cheerleader pose. “Goooo team!”

“I see.”

“Seriously, I want to see how this magic works, maybe it’ll give me some ideas. Also I want to measure Harry’s reaction and maybe find some other defense against them.”

The large case next to Remus shuttered and gave a little jump.

“You can’t seriously have one in there?” Ron said, backing a step away.

Remus barked a laugh. “This is just another boggart I found. He’ll serve as a stand in, as long as Harry hasn’t found something scarier than a Dementor to be afraid of.”

“You mean apart from Susan?”

She stuck her tongue out at him. They laughed and the case shook again.

“Let’s get down to it. This spell is a little different than your garden variety spell because it requires three things to cast, not just two. The first, of course, is the wand movement. I shall demonstrate.”

Remus made exaggerated wand movements and Susan slapped her hands over Hermione’s eyes.

He looked over at her, confused.

“Please demonstrate it at speed, Professor,” she explained. “Otherwise Hermione’s Photographic Reflexes will memorize it wrong and she’ll never get it straight.”

“Very well then, once for her, and once for the slower, less gifted boys such as myself, okay?” He grinned, and Susan lowered her hands.

He repeated the motion, faster this time, and Hermione demonstrated it back at him.

“Very good. You weren’t kidding- and that explains a few things. Anyway, now we add the incantation. *Expecto Patronum*. You try.”

“*Expecto Patronum*,” they intoned.

“Good. Now, both together! Nice and slow for the boys, a little bit more to the left on the third motion there Ron. Just a bit too high on the second motion Harry. You’re giving it a bit of a twist, Ron, there’s no twist- yes, that’s better.”

“And now the third and most difficult part of the spell. The happy memory.”

“What?” said Hermione.

“You must charge positive energy into the spell to counteract the negative energy given off by the Dementor. The Dementor then starts feeding on it, rather than you. Done strongly enough it can overwhelm them and drive them back.”

“Wow, a spell you have to cast with a smile,” said Susan.

“Indeed. The trick, of course, is finding exactly which happy memory will work best. It may take some soul searching and many times the memory is not one you would expect. So take a moment to think it over, and we’ll put all three of the pieces together.”

So, what? They make some sort of PERsonality check and that adds a bonus to their spell-casting roll?

The three stood silent for a moment, then nodded that they were ready.

“Very well. Try all three together then, all right?”

“*Expecto Patronum!*” shouted all three of them.

“Again.”

“*Expecto Patronum!*”

“Good, one more time.”

“*Expecto Patronum!*” This time, Harry and Hermione got silver sparks, and both of them grinned at each other. Ron looked disappointed.

“Don’t lose heart, Ron, you’ll get it,” said Remus. “Do you two want to try it against the real fake thing?”

“Wait,” said Susan. “Before you do that, close your eyes, both of you.”

They did.

“Now, freeze that moment in your memory. You saw the sparks, what exactly were you thinking at that time? How were you breathing? What were you feeling? How did the magic feel to cast? Try and capture all the details you can in your memory. Now, repeat all of those things in your mind, again and again. The feel of the wand in your hand. The tone of voice you used. Burn them there so you can call upon that memory again the next time you need that spell. Then repeat this exercise each time you do better, so you can come back to that moment and always get the better result.”

“Interesting technique,” remarked Remus.

“Thank you. Now, cast it again. You should have a few successes under your belt before you go blazing into battle with this thing. Ron, try a new memory.”

“Got it.”

“Who’s teaching this class?” asked Remus.

“It’s whoever says it first!” said Susan, and she and Hermione burst out laughing again, making the case rock back and forth.

“I had friends like you, once. Then I took an arrow to the knee.”

“You know that means getting married, right?” asked Hermione.

“No, I didn’t.”

“What happened?” asked Harry.

“They all died in the war. At least most of them did. The ones that didn’t probably wish they had. I’m the only one of my group that managed to stay relatively in one piece. It’s a funny old world, isn’t it?”

“I’m sorry,” said Hermione.

“Happy memories, friends! Happy! You’ll never cast the Patronus charm with those frowns! Let’s see those smiles again!”

They raised their wands, and this time all of them managed to produce the sparks.

“Well done, Ron.”

“I’ve been practicing my wand work,” he admitted.

“Good to hear. One more time?”

They repeated it, their spell gaining in strength a little.

“Right then. You three, back away a little so it sees Harry first. If he can’t handle it, you step in, Ron. You remember the spell for the boggart, I hope?”

“*Riddikulus*. How could I forget that one?”

“That’s the spirit. Now, on three? One- Two- Three!”

The trunk opened, and Susan sidled over to get a better view. A twisted shape materialized out of the darkness, and all three said “*Expecto Patronum*” and waved their wands.

All failed.

Susan looked hard at the creature. It didn’t seem to be directing any sort of special power she could see at Harry, but he was still taking it the worst. He was desperately shouting the incantation, which even Susan knew wasn’t going to work, his wand-work had totally degenerated. He fell over, and Ron stepped up. The shape turned, and suddenly became a giant spider, which Ron pointed at with his wand and cast “*Riddikulus*,” putting skates on it and making it slide around. He laughed it back into the box, and helped Harry stand up.

“You okay?” he asked.

“I can’t believe even a fake one has that kind of power over me,” said Harry. “These boggart things really know their stuff.”

“It’s all in your mind, Harry,” said Remus, handing him some chocolate. “The boggart is activating parts of your brain that remember your experiences with the real thing. That’s all.”

“Technically it’s all in your soul,” put in Susan. “I still didn’t feel a thing coming from that creature.”

“I don’t know,” said Harry. “I never told you this, but before, and just now, I heard…”

“Go on.”

“Well, I can hear my mother’s last moments. Voldemort tells her to step aside, she isn’t the one he came for.”

“No way!” said Ron. “Seriously?”

“No wonder- that scar of yours, is that the key?”

“What do you mean?”

“You got touched by a curse, right? That’s what gave you the scar. What if some part of you actually died that night? The ‘damage’ to the soul might heal, but then again it might not. What if the reason you’re so vulnerable to them is because you don’t have a whole soul to fight them off with?”

“That makes an astonishing amount of sense.”

“What do you think, Professor?”

“I admit, there must be something. That line of thought had not occurred to me.”

“So knowing, or at least guessing that is true, can you do something?” he asked Susan.

She sadly shook her head. “At least, not right now. *Alleviation* deals with the body, not the soul. That’s the domain of Pluto, not the Sun. There are spells to damage to soul, strip it away from the body, but none I know of to put it back.”

“If we take the soul as a life energy that makes us different from a similar ratio of water and chemicals in a beaker, stripping it away *would* be permanent. You would have to somehow call it back from wherever that energy goes when it leaves a body,” said Hermione.

“I’m not God. Funny, I was just telling Neville the same thing not that long ago…”

“I understand. I’ll try again.”

“If I might make a few comments?” asked Susan. “Harry, you were kind of flailing around at the end there. If it doesn’t work, take a breath, remember your wand movement, and concentrate. Just shouting the words isn’t enough for a spell, you know that.”

“You don’t understand what it’s like,” he said. “But I’ll try.”

“No one gets it on their first try,” Remus said. “Even Hermione here didn’t. So don’t be disheartened, you’ll find a memory strong enough, I know you will.”

“Just how advanced is this spell?” asked Hermione.

“I am teaching it to my seventh year classes, and no other,” he replied. “It’s considered too difficult to perform before then. Sadly, this spell also feeds back on itself. The more you fail at casting it, the more likely you are to fail because you start believing you can’t. So we tend to wait until kids have a lot of practice, so they’re totally comfortable casting spells, and have a firm base to start from. I accepted Harry because I know how much he’s practiced to try and catch up to Susan.” Harry went red. “Albus told me. At least, that’s what he guessed all your practice was about, Harry. He could be wrong, of course. Hermione I’ve heard good things about, so I figured she should try. And Ron has the support of his three good friends, who will cheer him on, so how could he fail?”

“With style, and grace,” answered Ron.

“With flair and attitude,” answered Susan.

“With dignity and... he won’t fail at all!” said Hermione.

They laughed.

“Now, select another memory, and let’s try it again.”

“Okay, that was new,” said Harry, again sitting up from the floor.

“Are you okay?” asked Ron.

“I guess you can get used to anything, even passing out.”

“Did you feel something different that time?” asked Remus.

“No, I heard my father that time. He actually tried to *hold off Voldemort*, to give my mother time to get away with me.”

“You heard James?”

“You knew my father?”

“He was one of the friends I spoke of earlier who died in the war. It’s not something I like to think about, you understand.”

“I get it.” Harry looked off into space. “He was brave. He knew he wouldn’t last against someone like Voldemort, I could hear it in his voice. But he tried anyway. I’ve never really known anything about my father. How extraordinary.”

“Not how I would have wanted you to remember,” said Remus.

“Harry,” said Susan, hesitantly. “There’s... a spell. I hesitate to offer it, but maybe it would help? I don’t know. It’s called *Remember*, and it can make you remember something that you’ve forgotten. You obviously have the memories of your parents being killed inside yourself, so this spell could probably make you remember the whole thing. I’m not suggesting you should, just, if you wanted to remember them a little better, I could make it happen.”

“Your magic really can do most anything, can’t it?”

Susan could only nod.

“I’ll think about it. I’m not sure if I want to remember their last moments, but maybe it would help fight off the Dementor. It’s making me remember in bits and pieces, which sort of

freaks me out. If I could sit down and remember the event beforehand, maybe some of that power it has over me would diminish.”

“It’s worth a try. I would need a few minutes to read the spell over and make my checks. So just let me know. It could be pretty, um, emotional? So you might want me to do it when you can be alone for a while.”

Harry nodded. “Thanks for offering. It made me realize something important.”

“What’s that?” asked Remus.

“This memory thing, I’ve been going about it the wrong way.”

“How so?”

“I was thinking about the first time I flew, or winning that first Quidditch match. But that’s the wrong sort of happy for this spell.”

“So what’s the right kind of happy?”

“Her.” Harry pointed to Susan. “It isn’t about one big burst of happiness, it’s about a thousand days of being happy with someone. That first time we met, and she dragged me into the world of magic. Those times she stood up for me, because I couldn’t stand up for myself against my Aunt and Uncle. Finding all the stuff in my room *Repaired* with magic. Standing with her against Voldemort- not once; Twice. Using the gifts I know she slaved over, despite how fun she says *Imbuing* is. Watching her hammer that giant with spells, and believing *without doubt* she would find a way to take it down. Knowing she’s at my back, no matter what. Susan is my happiness.”

Susan was blushing furiously as everyone looked over at her.

“I wonder what would have happened if you had been born in my time instead of this one? Would the war have even happened? Or would you have joined with him and crushed the world under your boot heel? I have to wonder.”

“I’m ready to try again.”

“Third time’s the charm? Okay, get your happy face on.”

Remus waited until all of them had their wands raised.

“Here it comes!”

Susan watched with interest as Harry actually managed a weak barrier against the thing, though it seemed to be taking all his concentration to do it.

You’re doing it, Harry. Keep it up!

“Can’t... hold... it...” Harry said, straining.

“That’s good enough for now. Hermione, you’re up!”

Hermione dodged in front of Harry and it became her fear, which she *Riddikulused* back into the trunk. Harry went down on one knee.

“You did it!” said Remus. “Congratulations.”

“I feel like I’ve just wrestled a bear,” Harry managed. “That spell does take it out of you.”

“It does require a great deal of concentration, I admit,” said Remus, getting out a large chocolate bar. “Share this with your friends, you’ve earned it.”

“We didn’t manage to do anything,” complained Ron.

“You just have to find the right memory. You can practice on your own, now that you know the spell.”

“Were it that easy,” said Hermione.

“But it is,” protested Remus. “Once you’ve mastered it, you’ll understand.”

“I suppose.”

“In any case, we can try it again one week from today, same wizard time, same wizard classroom. You’ll have another week worth of practice and maybe some new happy memories to try out, am I right?”

“That sounds fair,” said Harry. “I’m not sure I’m up for any more spell-casting at the moment anyway.” He broke the bar into four pieces and handed it around. Susan refused.

“You guys have it, they don’t seem to affect me, remember?”

“Wait a second,” said Harry. “If you knew my father and he was your friend, and Sirius hung out with my father, that means you also knew Sirius!”

“Until he went nuts and betrayed James, yeah. He fooled us all, Sirius did. Why do you ask?”

“I was just trying to get more insights into his character. I wanted to what made him tick, why he’s broken in here and why everyone thinks Hogwarts is still a target of his.”

Remus shook his head sadly. “I can’t answer that, Harry. Given what he did at the end, I can’t say I knew him at all. I’ve given it some thought over the years, really I have. But I don’t think anyone really knew him or what his goals were. I’m sorry.”

“That’s okay. It must have been tough, learning someone you thought you knew was really a monster.”

“I hope you never have to go through it.”

Harry’s eyes flicked over to Susan. She only rolled a 10 on *Perception* so she missed it.

“Yeah, I hear you.”

Susan noticed the next few weeks were tough on Harry, as he tirelessly practiced the *Patronus* charm, went to Quidditch practice, and studied for all his regular classes. Hermione also started looking frazzled, and Susan had to keep her mouth shut when she overheard Ron asking Harry about it. She had been sworn to secrecy, and couldn’t tell them Hermione owned a *time machine* to get to all her classes. She looked down at the tiny stone dream catcher she had been working on since she learned about the Time Turner, and sat down by Hermione. She was surrounded by books, spread out on the table like a fort against ignorance.

Hermione looked up, but when Susan didn’t say anything, she went back to work. A few moments passed as Susan debated handing the object over. She had made it for Hermione, so technically it wasn’t hers, even though she could use it if she wanted.

It must be nice, not having to worry about XP. You just have to put time into something, don’t you? I wonder which is really the superior method of advancement?

“Is it worth it?” Susan finally said.

“Is what worth it?” Hermione asked, looking up.

“This.” Susan swept her hand over the books. “Being irritable all the time from lack of sleep. Getting snippy towards your friends. Not having any free time.” She lowered her voice. “Actually aging faster than everyone around you.”

“Of course. I’m learning stuff, and I’m good at it.”

“I don’t deny that. But when you leave these walls and graduate, that doesn’t mean you’re barred from picking up a book and learning more if you want.”

“But I’ll be older then. I won’t be able to learn as easily as I can right now, being younger.”

“But at the same time, when you look back on your time here at Hogwarts, are you going to regret spending so much time with these books, instead of with your friends?”

“You think I’m choosing books over friends?”

“Do I see you surrounded by books or friends right now?”

“Are we answering every question with another question?”

“What do you think?”

That got a slight smile.

“I just, I want to learn everything I can. But the workload is increasing, and I have to practice the *Patronus* charm on top of it all. Then there’s Buckbeak’s trial I have to prepare notes for; Maybe it is a little much, and I’m not getting anything out of Divination.”

“So I ask again, is it worth it?”

“To me, it is.”

“Okay. I have something for you, but you have to promise me you’ll use it responsibly.”

“What is it?”

Susan handed her the stone object. “It’s got *Tirelessness* inside it. Activate it by saying ‘No dreams tonight,’ and deciding on the task you’ll do instead. While you’re doing that task you won’t need sleep, the spell will keep you as awake and alert as you are when it’s activated.”

“This is great!” said Hermione.

Susan grabbed her hand and covered the object. “Responsibly, Hermione. Only every other night at most. Okay? I don’t know what the long term effects would be on you, going without sleep for several days in a row. While it’s active you won’t get tired, but you’re still pushing yourself more than normally would. You’ll just be sitting and studying, not running marathons, so it will probably be okay. If you’re tired it won’t stop you from being tired, it’ll just stop you from getting more tired. Got it? So get a good night’s sleep tonight, and then use it tomorrow to catch up. As long as you only do every other day you’ll always be well rested.”

“Okay. Thanks.”

“I’m not sure you should thank me or not. Just keep this year in mind when you choose your classes for next year. Going a little lighter on the course work won’t make anyone think less of you.”

“I- thanks.”

“Now *go to bed*. Plenty of time for this later.”

“Okay, mom.”

“I’ve seen your mom, so I’ll take that as a complement. Growl.”

“Susan!”

Susan laughed all the way back to her dorm room.

Her laughter didn’t last long as Hermione came to find her moments later.

“We need you down there again,” she said, exasperated.

“What’s up?”

“Ron thinks Crookshanks ate Scabbers.”

“He is rather single minded,” said Susan, grabbing her spell book. She followed Hermione back downstairs.

There, she found Ron looking daggers at Hermione, while Harry stood by helplessly.

“Present the evidence,” Susan said to him. Ron shook his bed-sheets at her.

“I see something red, which could be anything. But for now we’ll give you the benefit of the doubt.” She turned to Harry. “Map, please.”

“What?”

“Map. You know, the one that shows where everyone is? I don’t have to do all your magic for you, in addition to my own, do I?”

“Oh yeah!” Harry rushed off to get the map, and Susan shook her head.

Honestly, they still don't think with magic first. You would think by now they would have learned.

Harry returned, and after making sure no one was paying attention, got the map out.

“Does it even show pets?” asked Ron.

“We prefer the term *Familiars* or *Companions*, if you please, Ron,” said Sparkle.

“And yes, it does. Look, there's Crookshanks, here we are so there's Sparkle, it even shows Trevor, Neville's toad. Now, Scabbers, where are you?”

The four studied the map.

They looked.

They looked again.

“Well he couldn't have gotten out of the castle, could he?”

“It wouldn't show him, if he were dead!” cried Ron.

“In that I must admit you are probably right. I'm sorry, Ron.”

“It's not my fault!” said Hermione.

“No, it's not. And blaming her would be unfair, Ron. I think you know it, too.”

“She knew that monster of hers had it out for Scabbers, but she didn't do anything about it.”

“What exactly did you expect her to do? It's still odd though, Crookshanks hasn't gone after any other small animals in this place. Only Scabbers. And he did say there was something weird about that rat.”

“What does that matter?”

“I don't know. It just seems odd, doesn't it? That a cat would go after a skin and bone rat instead of a nice fat toad, for example.”

“We could question him again, if you wanted,” said Hermione.

“Only Sparkle can hear him though, and I'm sure cats will stick together.”

“Oh crap, you're right!” said Susan.

“Of course I'm right.”

“No, no, I mean about *Animal Speech*. Shoot, why didn't I think of that. I was going to have Buckbeak speak at his own trial, but that spell doesn't work that way!” She opened her book to *Animal Speech*. “I guess it's a touch spell, so possibly anyone touching the animal while the spell is cast- no, anyone touching the caster when it was cast would be included in the spell. It would probably have to be cast on everyone at once. In fact, we better try that so I know I don't have to have the book research a higher grade spell for me before the trial.”

“I'll go get him,” said Hermione.

A moment later, she was back carrying the cat.

“This'll be good!” said Ron.

“Let's see,” said Sparkle, sitting up. “There's the cat, Ron is included of course, myself, Hermione should probably hear what he has to say, and you'll want to hear this as well, I assume?” She looked at Susan, who nodded. “Five in all. That brings my rating down to a zero, effectively. I get a plus two for the time, plus I can spend 6 energy on it, and it's difficulty nine. As long as I don't get minimum on my check, we're fine. Everyone touch me, please.”

Sparkle put a paw on Crookshanks, and everyone touched Sparkle.

“This isn't going to go really wrong if you do get minimum?” Hermione said nervously.

“I have to fail by five, rolling minimum means failing by one. Ready? *Animal Speech*.”

Magical lights shimmered around the group.

“Ha, got maximum. What was I worried about?” Sparkle put her paw down. “Now then, we need to talk to you about the rat.”

“The one we spoke of earlier? Very well,” said Crookshanks.

“Hey, I can actually understand what he’s saying,” said Ron.

“Whew. It’s a good thing,” said Susan. “Did you eat that rat?”

“Nope, he got away. Gave me a good chase, too. Pity. Something about that rat, you know?”

“No, I don’t. And we never did try talking to him again, darn it.”

“How do I know he’s telling the truth?” asked Ron.

“Read it for yourself,” said Susan, showing him the book.

“*Speak with a normal animal, which will answer your questions to the best of its ability.* Okay, I guess that means they’ll tell the truth.”

“I am, Ron. I’m sorry I couldn’t talk to you directly before, but believe me when I say that rat is not all that it seems.”

Speak with a normal animal, thought Susan. *What if the reason that spell failed before is because Scabbers isn’t a “normal animal” but something else? That it wasn’t his RESolve check at all? Too late to find out now, I suppose.*

“All right. I guess you’re off the hook, but where did he go?”

“Through a hole in the wall.”

“But the blood- you did wound him, didn’t you?”

“Yes. It is my shame that it couldn’t be a clean kill. I know that’s how you would have wanted it.”

“He admits it!”

“I am a cat, Ron. We have our pride. You know what I mean,” he said to Sparkle.

“I don’t believe this- he probably crawled into that hole and died. Murderer!”

“I don’t understand.”

“He doesn’t see the death of a rat as murder,” said Sparkle. “More like, just the way things should work.”

“I see. But the fact remains that more than likely, he’s dead.”

“I don’t know if the map shows the insides of the walls,” said Harry. “It was never meant to track down rats, after all.”

“I’ll be happy to check with *Descry Creature* if you want, Ron.”

“You wouldn’t mind?”

“Not at all. This will also show if he really has gotten out of the castle somehow, because my magic extends further.”

“Thanks.”

“Of course. Is there anything else you can tell us about the rat?” Susan asked.

“He wouldn’t have been very good to eat, much too thin.”

“I meant about how we wasn’t a normal rat.”

“It’s just a feeling I had. He didn’t seem to act like a rat should be acting.”

“I see. Thank you.”

Susan took the bloody bed sheet and set it, and her book, down on the table.

“What are you doing?” asked Ron.

“I can use the blood as an enhancer for the spell. It’ll make it work a little better.”

“Fantastic!”

“I am, there’s no sense denying it.” She grinned.

“Just get on with it. He could be still alive.”

“Okay, okay.”

Ten minutes later, the blood disappeared from the sheets, and Susan got a curious look on her face. “Now isn’t that interesting?” she said.

“What? Is Scabbers still alive or not?”

“I just got the same result when I looked for Sirius. That sort of not dead but not alive either result.”

“Are you sure that spell works?”

“Of course. I found Dobby with it when he went back to the Malfoy mansion. That’s how I know what I’m supposed to get out of it.”

“What does that mean?” asked Hermione.

“I can’t say for sure,” answered Susan. “But there’s more going on here than we realize, I think. I just can’t imagine what. Sorry Ron, but I can’t say for sure where he is. But he’s not dead, I can tell you that.”

“That’s something. Maybe he’ll come back on his own if someone can keep their cat under control!”

Hermione just looked down, sadly.

“I’m standing right here,” remarked Crookshanks.

“No sign of Scabbers yet?” asked Hermione, looking over at Ron. He had elected to sit several seats away from Hermione, with Ginny and Neville. The weather was much better this time, with the sun shining brightly, and spirits around the field were running high. Quidditch did seem to do that to people. Myrtle hovered nearby, while Sparkle was curled up on Susan’s lap.

“No, I even tried *Descry Creature* the next morning, but still nothing. It’s so bizarre. Myrtle checked inside that hole, too, but didn’t find any bodies or anything, so that rat has just vanished off the face of the earth.”

“Do you have any other ideas?”

Susan shook her head. “Sirius I could understand, he may have had some kind of anti-screaming magic put on himself that interferes with my spell. But a rat? No way.”

“We should have been more insistent about getting Scabbers to talk when we had the chance.”

“Yeah, but Ron would have... reacted badly, I think. Better not to pushed it as far as he’s concerned. And as fascinating a mystery as it is, Scabbers is only a rat, in the end. A long lived rat, yes, but still just a rat.”

“I hope you don’t think of me that way,” said Sparkle. “As just a *cat*.”

“With your background point cost? No way. You’re an essential part of the Susan/Sparkle team, you know?”

“It is nice to hear it once in a while, you know.”

“What? All those little snacks I get you don’t say ‘love?’ I -suppose if you prefer it exclusively verbal-”

“I retract my complaint.”

Susan laughed. “As well you should.”

“How’s the sleep reducer working out?”

“Great! I’m getting so much done at night, those extra eight hours every other day really help.”

“Glad to hear it.”

“I was thinking about the Dementor problem, too. You say you have a knife that can kill them?”

“Yeah, I made it with charges, why?”

“Can I see it?”

“See it? I guess.” Susan pulled it out of her *Pocket Dimension*. Hermione looked it over.

“So why can’t you just make an energy version of this knife, like you did for all our other items?”

“Two reasons- first, only I could use it, because it takes all the energy a person can possibly spend to activate that spell. Though maybe it works differently for you, I don’t know. But even so, I could only activate it 8 times in a row in a fight, and you saw how many Dementors there were at the last game.”

“Okay, that’s a problem.”

“The second problem is one of intent. The intent of the spell *Alleviation* is to heal someone. A magical item can be any shape, it’s just I want a knife shape so I’m sure it’s sticking in them when it activates. Striking with the knife is the activator in this case, with the spell directed outwards. Say I made the knife energy based- I would have to stab them, then activate it. That takes two actions, for one, and which of us is going to get the “benefit” of the spell? I’m not sure, but it’s a good guess it would either be a 50/50 chance because we were both touching it, or whoever was touching more of it.”

“Then the solution to your problem is easy!” said Hermione.

“Easy. Right.”

“It is. Make the knife in two parts!”

“What?”

“First, make the blade. Put the spell on that. You can make that permanent, so whoever touches the blade will get the affect of the spell, right? I mean, I just have to be touching the *Tireless* item while I activate it, but couldn’t the activation be touching it?”

“Yeasssss...” Susan said slowly. “I think I see where you’re going with this.”

“Then slide the blade into a handle. The handle doesn’t have any spells on it, so you can touch it normally. Stabbing with the blade then makes whatever you stabbed start healing, or in the case of a Dementor, disappearing.”

“That’s... brilliant!” Susan’s eyes were shining.

“You could even use it to heal regularly. Just draw it out slowly, and the wound the knife made will heal up as the knife is pulled out.”

“Hermione, I could kiss you!”

“Hey, watch it with the kissing,” said Myrtle.

“That’s okay,” Hermione said quickly, handing the knife back. “I wanted to repay you for the item, so I’ve just been thinking about creative ways to do it, based on what I know about your magic.”

“That would seem to do it, I can’t think of a fault with your logic. The XP cost though...”

Susan put the knife away and got out her book, where she had replicated the formula and a table in the back. She got out a pencil and started figuring.

She stared at the figure for a while.

“How much is it going to cost?” asked Sparkle.

“If I *Fabricate* it before hand so it can’t be destroyed somehow, about 20 XP. I currently have...” She got out her character sheet. “Eight. Let’s see, oh good, I have gotten some cards, maybe I can turn some in.”

Her face fell.

“What the heck is this? Three cards, probably to make up for us not getting any in so long, but two of them are worth zero if I turn them in. What a gyp!”

“Isn’t that phrase racially insensitive towards gypsies?” asked Hermione, seriously.

“The- what?” Susan’s mind had to shift gears for a second.

“Isn’t that where the phrase comes from? Gyp- Gypsies?”

“I honestly have no idea.”

“I made out like a bandit,” said Sparkle, looking at her own character sheet.

“Wait, you’ve got one of those too?” asked Hermione, looking down at her. “But your father wasn’t from another universe, was he?”

“Of course I was born in a different universe,” explained Sparkle. “You didn’t think I was from around here, did you? I traveled with Susan’s father across several worlds after he rescued

me. Ah, I was only a kitten in those days. Good times. It's actually quite a thrilling tale, remind me to tell you sometime. Now, I didn't have a character sheet at first, because I wasn't from his universe, but after I became Susan's *companion* I... how do I put this... woke up the rest of the way and became a *Paragon* like her. It's all quite complicated."

"I guess."

Susan was looking it over too. "Dang, you could turn yours in for 5. I was robbed, I tell you."

"How can you tell, anyway? It's just numbers."

"I just sort of know. Card 8 gives me an extra action, card 17 gives me a hint from some external source, and card 34, the only one with a trade in value, lets me add my INSight to a single roll made by someone else. I wonder how that would work on you guys, you don't roll for stuff."

"You've said that before. Rolling. What exactly are you rolling?"

"Dice. I thought that was obvious."

"Explain how that works."

"It's easy. When I want to use a skill I roll the Half Die Level of my stat. So let's say for casting Mercury magic, I roll a d8, because my stat is a 4. Then I add my skill rating, and that's how well I did that task."

"I have never seen you roll dice. In fact if you had to stop and roll dice for everything you would never get anything done!"

"It's a sort of mental thing, it goes on in the background. I'm aware of it, sort of thing."

Susan waved her hand near the back of her head. *How can I explain this so they understand it?*

"Your dad's universe must be a messed up place."

"Hey, you're the ones doing it wrong from my perspective, don't forget."

"Anyway, what's Sparkle got? And it seems she has eighteen experience?"

"I don't spend it as fast," said Sparkle, smugly. "She's always looking for the next spell to learn, like she's gotta catch them all, while I just learn what will benefit our little team immediately. I already learned the most useful buffing spells, so I'm just accumulating them at the moment."

"That makes sense."

"To answer your question though, I got card 14, which just gives me 2 XP right off the bat, card 20 which makes an attack miss someone, and 36, which boosts a mental stat by two before I make a check. Of course I'm going to use card 14 right now."

That card disappeared off the sheet, and her EXP box went up to 20.

"Oh, thank you very much. I would have traded you, you know?" said Susan.

"I have a better idea. Make me the knife, as I can now afford it. I'll let you hold onto it though. No hands, you see?" She flexed her claws.

"You would do that for me?"

"You've never asked, but those Dementor things? I want to see them destroyed just as much as you do. They don't seem to notice me, because I'm from a different world or just an animal or because of my size, but one day they might. Probably the day I'm next to you when you decide to take on a hundred or so of them yourself. We already know I'd be helpless against them, after all, we have the same spells and only two worked. The one is too long, and the other, I suppose I could learn, but how many other undead roam around? I'd rather use the XP to make sure you can do what needs to be done, and end the problem rather than just making it confused for a little while."

“Wow.” Susan was touched. “I appreciate your giving up 20 XP for me. You’re the best, Sparkle.”

“Yes I am. Glad you’re finally realizing it.”

They all laughed.

“But even I’m not stupid enough to take on hundreds of the things at once!”

“Hahahahahah,” said Sparkle. “Yes you are.”

Everyone cleared their throats and looked away.

“So, uh, how long will it take to make?” asked Myrtle.

“Seventy hours,” said Susan, resigned. “If I work 2 hours a day consistently that’s about a month. Good thing I have the time you usually spend in *Potion* and *Charms* class to work.”

“I guess. Hey, the match is finally starting.”

“That’s odd,” remarked Susan. “His broom looks different, doesn’t it?”

“I think it’s the Firebolt,” said Hermione. “I guess it tested clean for curses after all.”

“And he actually gets to ride it here?”

“Why wouldn’t he?”

Susan looked at her, face scrunched up.

“What?”

“That’s like giving one person in tennis a bigger racket, or making one side of a football team carry fifty pound weights in their pants. I thought everyone used a standard broom so the people on the brooms won the games, not the brooms themselves.”

“I guess I never thought of it like that.”

“I mean, the seeker for the other side- this Cho person- if her broom doesn’t have the same acceleration as Harry’s, it gives him a totally unfair advantage in the game.”

“One might say your magic was cheating- at life.”

“And I would point out how intelligent that person was. That’s not the point. Like when Ron lost Scabbers. Did he immediately think “I’ll use magic” and go to get Harry’s map? No, he did not. It isn’t that my magic is better, I just reach for it more easily than other people do for some reason. I mean, you’re wizards, but you don’t really act like it.”

“I’ve thought about that. It’s almost like we have some kind of mental block against it. Like we should solve problems without it.”

“That’s just crazy talk.”

“Oh no, look!” Hermione jumped up and pointed, as three figures, cloaked in black, shambled across the field as Harry went for the snitch.

“Something odd here,” remarked Susan.

She watched as Harry whipped his wand out and shot silver at the figures, then accelerated and put his hand over the snitch. The energy of the spell crashed into the figures, and they went down in a tangle of limbs.

“We better see what’s up,” said Susan, lifting Sparkle onto her shoulder. “As Harry either got really good at casting that spell recently, or those aren’t Dementors.”

Everyone was streaming to congratulate Harry, but Susan and Hermione walked over to the “Dementors.”

Susan sighed. “Really, Draco?” she said, as he poked his head out of the robes. “Did you really think it was the sight of them that chilled Harry’s blood so? How little you understand.”

Let's see, make it good. Oh, I know! “The darkness inside Harry tries to get out and join them. It longs to be free of him, but he holds it back. And pray he continues to do so, because if that darkness ever gets out, well, I shudder to think.”

She left him there, gaping at her, as Professor McGonagall came over to sort them out. His eyes were darting back and forth between her and Harry, who was excitedly waving at Susan and Hermione, who waved back.

That evening the Gryffindors had a huge party, which Susan and Hermione stopped at for about an hour to congratulate Harry.

“I still have some reading to do tonight,” Hermione said after a while. “I really should be going.”

“And I have a new *Imbuing* to start, thanks to her great ideas, so I'm going to get going too. Well done, Harry, your broom- I mean you won that match expertly.”

Harry looked confused.

“Just a sore point. Come on, Susan. Leave the hero his to cheering masses.”

“Night, Harry! Just remember to raise a glass to the real hero of the day, your Firebolt.”

That morning Susan woke up to even greater security around the castle, and was told that once again, Sirius had made some attempt to do something in the Gryffindor boy's dorm room.

“So if he was after some object he didn't get it, got the wrong one, or needed something else,” said Susan, sitting with the others at breakfast. “Seems a funny time to return though. The castle is mostly deserted when Broom Ball- I mean Quidditch- is being played. Perfect time for him to slip in and start rummaging around.”

“That knife he was holding wasn't for rummaging though,” said Ron. “It was for killing.”

“What sort of wizard uses a knife? Wands aren't exactly locked up, they're put on nightstands and slipped into bags. He could have grabbed several on the way in or out.”

“None have been reported missing,” said Harry.

“And you say he just ran away when you woke up?” asked Hermione.

“Did you hear something?”

“Knock it off, Ron, it's a good question,” said Harry.

“Yeah, just scampered away.”

“What would have happened if he had grabbed, say, my wand?” asked Harry.

“One of several things. He might have politely returned it to you without realizing what he was doing. He might carelessly leave it someplace where it would have been swooped up by a bird, then coincidentally dropped at your feet the next day.”

“Neat.”

“Why Ron though?” asked Sparkle. “From all accounts it seems more like Harry would be the target, not him.”

“Yeah, did your family do something to him?” asked Harry.

“Not that I know of. I can't imagine why he would want to kill me. I'm nobody.”

“You're not nobody,” said Susan. “You're not an unnamed NPC, so you're doing way better than most.”

“A what?”

“You know- A non-player- you know what? Never mind. Take it from me, you aren't a nobody.”

“If you say so.”

“Poor Neville though, look at him.”

Everyone looked over to see Neville, sadly eating by himself.

“It was his fault for leaving the passwords lying around,” said Hermione primly.

“I thought you cured him of that?” asked Ron.

“I can’t cure *Forgetful*, Ron. I basically just gave him back his sense of limb position, that’s all.”

“Come on,” said Harry. “Let’s go sit with him, show there’s no hard feelings.”

“No hard feelings?” asked Ron. “I could have died last night.”

“Somehow I think if you were the one he was after, you wouldn’t be here right now. The man did supposedly blow somebody up, along with a ton of other people. Remember? I doubt he would hesitate to kill one defenseless boy in his bed because of manners or whatever,” said Harry.

“Yeah, I guess. It was still stupid of him.”

“I agree,” said Susan. “But the mistake was made, he learned from it, case closed. Come on.”

“Hey, Neville,” said everyone, sitting down next to him.

“You- you don’t have to...”

“Course we do,” said Harry. “We’re your friends, right?”

“Thanks,” he mumbled.

It was now several days later, and Ron was making an effort to be nicer to Hermione. It seemed he was trying to put the whole Scabbers incident behind him, which Harry said was because of a talk Rubeus had with them two days ago.

“What I need to know is, are you going to the village this time?” asked Harry. “And no misdirection, I need to know.”

“Do you, now? Sadly no, I will be out that day. It’s the day of the trial, after all.”

“Already?”

“Time does fly, doesn’t it? Hagrid was going to bring himself and Buckbeak on the Knight Bus, but I’ve been to the ministry building, so we’re just going to walk through a *Teleportal* to get there. I just hope his own testimony, and the precedents Hermione and I researched will be enough. We’re not going up against the law, sadly, but against Lucius Malfoy’s money.”

“You’ll lose for sure!”

“Probably. I just want to be seen making the effort. It’ll make the *illusion* that’s to come later that much more believable.”

“Good luck.”

“Thanks!”

Susan learned *Animal Speech* the next day, figuring it would be more believable for everyone to ask them to touch her, rather than a cat, when she cast the spell. Sparkle was going, in fairy form, to cast *Energetic Accumulation* on her, in case there were a lot of people that wanted to talk to the hippogriff. Half an hour before the trial was scheduled to begin, she *Teleported* them there, with Rubeus holding Buckbeak’s halter.

“Thanks for coming with me,” said Rubeus for about the millionth time.

“I’m happy to. It will be an educational experience to see how the wheels of magical justice turn. Where’s the courtroom, anyway?”

Rubeus led them to a magical elevator, where he got a lot of dark looks for dragging a hippogriff through the place.

“You would think magically inclined people would be more tolerant of magical creatures,” said Susan as the doors closed.

“They know what he’s on trial for,” explained Rubeus.

“Oh, was it in the papers or something?”

“No, it’s just that no other animal comes here except those on their way- to death.”

“Ah.”

Going into the courtroom Susan had to shake her head. The judge’s benches were high in the air, forcing anyone on trial to crane their necks to look up at them. The jurors were already seated, and she saw Lucius and Draco sitting to the left. Lucius rose angrily and walked over to her.

“What are you doing here?” he sneered down at her.

“What does it matter?” answered Susan. “Afraid that things go badly for you when I’m around? I wonder why?”

“Nothing you say here will make any difference. That creature is as good as dead.”

Susan looked around him at Draco, who looked away.

Maybe not feeling quite up to it, anymore, are we Draco?

“All rise!” The judge came in, then motioned them to be seated. “The matter of Lucius versus Buckbeak- wait a moment, who is this girl?”

“If I may approach the bench, your honor?” asked Susan.

The judge raised an eyebrow and nodded.

Susan felt herself making a *Speaking* check, getting an 8. *Not bad, not too bad at all. Not great, but I am just a kid. They wouldn’t expect perfection.*

“Members of the court, I am Susan A. Felton, a witness to the alleged attack. I will, at the court’s pleasure, cast a spell upon this hippogriff allowing those who wish it to actually understand the beast’s words and ask him directly what happened.”

“This is certainly unorthodox,” said the judge.

“And probably a trick. I would suggest the girl be removed from the courtroom. She obviously has no place here,” said Lucius.

“Thus far, she has shown far more respect to the proceedings and to me than you, Lucius. Perhaps it is you I should have thrown out.”

Lucius looked shocked.

“You may return to your seat, you will be called at the appropriate time. I will also consider this spell.”

“Thank you, your honor,” said Susan. She turned back to her seat and stuck the tip of her tongue out at Lucius. He scowled.

“To continue- The matter of Lucius versus Buckbeak will now begin.” She looked at Rubeus. “Please state your name for the record.”

“I’m Rubeus Hagrid, your honor. Keeper of keys and grounds at Hogwarts school of witchcraft and wizardry. Professor of Care of Magical Creatures.”

“Very well. And you, sir?”

“Lucius Malfoy.”

“Draco Malfoy.”

“I will hear the testimony of the plaintiff!”

Draco got up.

“Your honor. On the day in question I was brought to the edge of the forbidden forest, where the professor introduced us to the hippogriffs. Susan was the only one brave enough to approach one at first, and she showed off by jumping over the fence somehow.”

Oh yeah, I activated Flight.

“After that she was accepted by him, and he allowed her to fly on his back. They flew for a moment, then landed. At this point we were all encouraged to try approaching one, and it got pretty chaotic. I did everything right, but for no reason Buckbeak just attacked me out of the blue! Susan hurried over and healed my arm up, but now I’m scared to go near any magical creature.”

Susan looked at him. *Bet you don’t want those words getting around school, she thought.*

Draco shot her a look. *I know you won’t spread that around school, you’re one of the good guys.*

Susan looked away, balling up her fists. *Crap, he’s right! Curse you, good guy code!*

“Is it possible you misunderstood how you were to interact with the hippogriff?” asked the judge.

Wait, isn’t that what they call “leading the witness?”

“Maybe. He’s kind of hard to understand, and he was really nervous about teaching a class. It was his first one, after all.”

“I see. And what about Susan? Do you get along with her?”

Draco looked confused. “I did in year one, but then in year two she humiliated me in front of the Defense Against Dark Arts class. We haven’t really spoken much since then, but she did apologize for the year before.”

“Humiliated you? I see. She has just revealed she can talk to creatures with her magic, do you think she spoke to him while in the air and goaded him to attack you?”

“I didn’t consider that possibility.”

Susan was looking over at Lucius, who gave a much too innocent “I didn’t do anything” expression.

“Is there any other testimony you wish to enter at this time?” asked the judge.

“No, your honor.”

“Very well. I will now hear the testimony of... ah yes, the hippogriff himself, in this instance. I will allow you to cast your spell, Susan.”

Susan stood up again. “Your honor, the spell has a very short initial range. Any who wish to hear the testimony of Buckbeak must descend and be touching me as I cast it.”

“That does not seem so onerous. Must we remain touching you for the duration of the testimony?”

“No, your honor. Once cast the spell will persist even if we leave the courtroom.”

“I understand. Jurors, please descend. I will also make my way there, and I expect the court stenographer will also wish to be included.”

A woman typing into a device off to the side nodded.

“Your honor,” said Lucius, standing. “Surely you must realize this is trickery of some kind. How are we to know this so called spell of hers works as intended? Perhaps it is in reality

some kind of illusion magic, which will only make us think we are hearing the hippogriff's 'voice'?"

"A good point. Can you answer this, Miss Felton?"

"I can prove the words are true, your honor. But to do so I will need a candle."

"This is proving to be a most unusual case. I will allow a short recess that a candle be found and brought here, and for the jury and myself to descend." The gavel came down.

Susan hurriedly pulled her book of magic out of her *Pocket Dimension* and started looking over *True Flame*.

It's only grade 2, a baby could cast that from writings.

She finished as a candle was brought in, and she cast the spell over it with a snap.

Magical energies swirled around it and a flame came to life on the wick.

"My name is George," said Susan. The flame flickered.

"My name is Susan," said Susan. The flame was steady.

"Draco is my lover, and I shall take no other." The flame flickered.

"I believe I have demonstrated how this spell works?"

"She could be doing that herself!" protested Lucius.

"I invite the court to try it for themselves. Tell me something you know is a lie, but which I do not know is a lie, and tell me something that is true. You will see the flame correctly move, or not, regardless."

So the jurors, one by one, spoke truth and lies until they were satisfied. Susan then had Sparkle cast *Energetic Accumulation* on her, and explained the spell. After everyone touched her she finished off with *Animal Speech*, after first of course allowing the hippogriff to bow to her so she could safely approach.

"Can you understand me?" asked Susan.

"I can," said Buckbeak. "What a surprising thing. And apparently I can speak to you now."

"Does this satisfy the court?" asked Susan.

"It does. We shall resume our session."

They all made their way back up to the high benches, and the trial resumed.

"Please state your name for the record," said the judge.

"Now how would I put my name into your language?" the hippogriff asked himself. "I think the closest approximation would be 'Moonlight through rustling leaves and falling onto a still pond as the weather becomes cold.' Yes, that would be it."

"I thought your name was Buckbeak."

"That's the name he may have given me, but it is not the name my father gave me."

The judge was watching the flame. "I see. Can you describe the events surrounding your attack on this boy?"

"Yes."

There was a pause.

"Ah, your honor," said Susan. "I should have been more clear. The spell makes him answer quite literally."

"Understood. Please describe the events surrounding your attack on this boy."

"I was led out of the forest by the big man and there were many delectable morsels in front of me. The female was the first to approach. She easily cleared the fence holding us in, although she had wings herself, and I was intrigued. She bowed, as is proper, and then fed me a

fish. I allowed her to approach, and then she leapt atop me. She was much lighter than I expected.”

I still had Flight going at the time.

“With that we took to the air. After we landed, that boy,” he pointed with his beak “was polite to me for a time, then I believe he insulted me. His tone of voice was quite derogatory, I’m sure of it. Naturally I could not let that pass, and I grazed his arm with a talon. I believe he learned the lesson. After that the female took the wound and the blood away.”

Everyone had one eye on the candle flame, which hadn’t moved.

“You say you believe he insulted you?”

“Yes. I could not understand him as I can now understand you, but his meaning was clear to me.”

“I understand. That is the extent of your testimony?”

“I do not know this word ‘testimony’.”

“Is there anything else you would tell us that could change our minds in concerning the events you’ve told us.”

“I do not believe so.”

“Then the court shall have a short recess while the jury deliberates. We shall reconvene when they have a decision.”

“Are we winning?” asked Rubeus.

“I’m not sure. All that stuff Hermione and I researched isn’t seeming to come into play here. This isn’t exactly how I envisioned this going.”

“Probably because they’ve never had a hippogriff that could speak for itself, before.”

“There is that.”

Moments later, the jury filed back into the courtroom.

“Have you reached a verdict?” asked the judge.

“We have, your honor. In the case of Lucius versus Buckbeak, we find the accused guilty of attacking without provocation, given the vague nature of the accused’s understanding of our language.”

“Then the punishment is clear. He is to be kept isolated from his kind and will be sentenced to death by beheading. This court stands adjourned.”

They filed out. Lucius, looking smug, came over to Susan. “I had to admit, I was slightly worried your little tricks might win you the day. Still, you’ll find that money speaks more loudly than a beast and a trick or two.”

“Can you buy justice in the magical world then?”

“My dear girl, you can buy whatever kind of justice you want, no matter where in the world you are. Best learn that now. Come, Draco.”

Draco silently followed his father out, and Susan turned to Rubeus.

“I’m sorry, professor. I really thought that would work, but it seems they’re too much in his pocket to see real justice done. Still, he won’t actually get the satisfaction, in the end.”

“I understand,” said Rubeus. “Open up one of your portals, and let’s go home.”

Tricks

Time: Last weeks of May

Place: Great Hall

Harry's broom had won the Quidditch cup for Gryffindor, and Susan was glad for him. Seeing as they probably should have won the last two years in a row, it was time the team got a break.

There would be no appeal to the trial, which Susan hoped didn't seem too suspicious. But she and Sparkle had worked out the illusion they were going to show, and had practiced making it move realistically.

"Once the job is done, just put him back with the other hippogriffs and call him a different name. He doesn't think of himself as Buckbeak anyway," said Susan.

Thanks to Sparkle's sacrifice, the dagger with *Alleviation* on it was created without issue, and Susan gave the original one to Harry.

"Keep it close, and remember you can only use it five times," she cautioned. "But I can recharge it for you, if you do use it."

"I'm sure it'll help. Thanks."

Exams were coming up, and everyone was rushing to cram as much knowledge into their heads as they could, and Susan even raised her skill in Arithmancy and Herbology, just for the novelty of it. Of course she was going to rely, as always, on *Augment Skill* for her exams.

Which went well for her, as magically she had now memorized 42 spells, some of them, like *Temporary Tool*, new this year. She sat the "charms exam" with professor Flitwick, and demonstrated what she had learned that year. (*Magical Ally Major, Telesummon, Animal Speech, Temporary Tool, Alleviation*).

Needless to say, demonstrating *Temporary Tool* for Professor McGonagall's "Transfiguration exam" went over well, as she thought up more and more elaborate shapes for Susan to create. She was worried that even her great store of energy would be exhausted, but was finally let go.

For "Potions" Susan reminded Headmaster Dumbledore about all the items she had made over the year, but he said he remembered, and gave her full marks.

The more mundane Astronomy and History of Magic Susan really didn't care about, but put the spell on and did her best.

The most fun she had was in Defense, where she really got to show off, flying about a sort of obstacle course full of "dark" creatures he had devised. She didn't go as wild as she wanted, as she needed to save some energy for that evening when she went to save Buckbeak. Of course, it was Sparkle controlling the *Illusion* but if something went wrong, she wanted to be at her full potential.

After the obstacle course she saw one of her favorite people, Cornelius Fudge, Minister of Magic, approaching.

"Good day, Susan. I must say, I was watching you flying about there. Quite amazing, really."

"Why thank you, Minister. I appreciate the kind words."

“And I know Harry, of course! But who are your other friends?”

“This is Ron, and Hermione,” introduced Susan.

“Ah yes of course, Ron Weasley. Your father does speak of you often. Very proud of his youngest son, I can tell you that.”

“Thank you, Sir,” said Ron, more at awe with meeting someone like the minister than Susan ever had been.

“It’s a pity I’m here for such a nasty business,” he continued. “This execution, it’s terrible, really it is. I don’t normally come to attend these things myself, but I needed to check on the security measures for Sirius so I thought, why send two people from the Ministry when one would suffice?”

“Excuse me, Minister,” said Harry, “But isn’t checking security measures a little late? Exams are almost done, we’ll be going home soon.”

“All the more reason to keep a close eye on things, Harry. With so few chances left to strike before everyone leaves, Sirius is bound to try at least once more. Plus, we wouldn’t want him hiding out here during the summer, would we?”

“No, I suppose not.”

“When is the execution scheduled, then?” asked Susan.

“Sunset, probably around 8:30 or 9:00. Don’t tell me you want to attend?”

“I should be there. I did defend him in court, after all.”

“I suppose that’s up to you. If you’ll excuse me, I must be off.”

“Nice seeing you again, Minister,” said Susan.

“Oh-” Cornelius turned as if a thought had just occurred to him. “Have you made any progress on that anti-Dementor weapon you were working on? What did you say, something about ‘effectively weaponizing’ a spell?”

“Possibly, Minister. Very possibly.” She gave an enigmatic grin.

He looked troubled. “I will leave you to it then.” He walked away briskly.

“Thanks to Hermione,” she muttered.

“So what is the plan?” asked Ron as evening approached. The five were heading down to witness the “execution” of Buckbeak.

“Professor Hagrid already has him hidden somewhere,” explained Susan. “Sparkle is going to hide nearby where she can see everything. By the time the Minister and his execution squad arrive, they’ll believe Buckbeak is tied up outside the hut. As I understand it, the ‘ceremony’ calls for one quick swing of the ax, so when that happens, Sparkle will change the illusion to his head rolling off and blood going everywhere. That will be that, and everyone’s happy.”

“Doesn’t sound too complex,” said Hermione. “I guess it should work.”

“Don’t worry, no *Disaster Strikes* card this time!”

They all laughed.

Sparkle trotted off and made her *Hiding* check, getting a 10. Then rolled a 17 on *Illusion*. Susan played her *Assist* card, making the total a 22, as they really needed to sell this. With that roll any opposed “check” done by someone in attendance would need an 8 REASON and to roll maximum on it, which hopefully, Susan thought, wouldn’t be likely to happen.

“Wow, that’s him all right,” said Ron.

“Even I can’t tell it’s an illusion,” said Hermione. The fake Buckbeak blinked and looked around, and a rope tied him to a fence-post nearby.

“Coming from you, that’s reassuring. I figure you have the highest REASON, apart from myself, anyway.”

“I thought it was going to be an illusion,” said Rubeus, coming out of his hut.

“That is the illusion, professor,” said Susan. “That’s the beauty of it.”

“Oh, right. You know, if it gets out I tricked them...”

“But that’s the beauty of it, professor! You didn’t know a thing about it. It was *my* idea, *my* plan, *my* fault. As far as any of you are concerned, this is Buckbeak. This time I didn’t even tell you about what I was going to do, that’s your story so stick to it.”

“Thanks, I’m in your debt once again.”

“Pay it forward.”

It wasn’t long before the Minister, an elderly looking man (even for a wizard) and a guy with a huge ax showed up. Susan was also surprised to see Lucius Malfoy trailing after them, and Dumbledore himself.

“Figured I would see you here,” he said. “Good thing I decided to come witness this myself, to make sure you aren’t using any of your tricks.”

“And a good evening to you as well, Mr. Malfoy,” said Susan. “And if by ‘tricks’ you mean ‘superior magic’ then don’t worry, I won’t be using my magic tonight as long as you’re on your best behavior.”

“I’ll be watching you closely,” he said as he swept past her.

Yes, watch me. It’ll help cover any slips Sparkle makes with the illusion. “Mew mew memm me me.” grumbled Susan. “Jerk.”

“It is true though,” said Ron, “You won’t be using any magic.”

The four smiled at each other. The headmaster was still standing there.

“Good evening, Headmaster,” said Susan.

“Ah, good evening!” he exclaimed, as though seeing her for the first time. “Should you four really be out here?”

“Please. Is there somewhere safer, in all the world, than with me?”

“I don’t suppose so. I’m not sure this is something you’ll want to see.”

“Then call it off. As a respected wizard I’m sure your voice carries some weight. Of course, if your coin pouch doesn’t match that of a certain L.M. then maybe it’s time those that govern wizard law get shaken up a bit.”

“My voice does seem to carry little weight, as of late.”

“Albus, you’re needed,” shouted a voice inside the hut.

“Excuse me.”

He went inside, and they signed some form or something as Susan and the others nervously waited outside. Lucius kept looking out the window at them, as though they were going to steal Buckbeak and bolt at any second. Soon enough they came out, and Rubeus said a sad farewell to Buckbeak.

“Do it,” he said, turning away.

The ax came down, and Susan had to admit the illusion was flawless. The head rolled away, the body jerked, and blood pumped out for a few seconds onto the ground. It was a little too realistic, and Susan had to keep reminding herself it wasn’t real.

“If no one has any objections, I’ll be taking the head,” said Lucius, drawing his wand out of his cane.

Susan’s blood ran cold.

“I do object!” said Susan, thinking quickly. “Quite strongly, in fact.” *For more than one reason. That head isn’t actually there- does he suspect?* “What do you want it for? Stuff it and hang it on a wall? As some kind of sick souvenir?”

“That’s not your concern.”

“I will not allow you to gleefully laugh at us every time you see his head.”

“How are you going to stop me?”

“Like this.” *Come on, Sparkle, pick up on this, or it’s all over!* “*Elemental Attack Fire!*” Susan pointed her palm at the head.

There was a brief hesitation, and fire shot out of her hand, engulfing the head and seeming to set it on fire.

“Oh, very convenient, a fire spell.” Lucius went over to the head and held his hand out to it. “Though it does seem warm enough to be on fire.”

“Are you saying then, that this execution did not happen, Lucius?” asked Albus. “Do you doubt your senses so much?”

“Where this girl is concerned, I doubt everything. Very well, I shall accept this, for now. But if I find out I’ve been tricked...” he left it trail ominously.

“You’ll what? Do nothing with your useless magic? Perhaps you would like to feel the heat of my attack spell more directly, so your concerns, as well as your body, can be vaporized. Begone, and never let me see you foul these grounds again.”

“One day, girl, you will not be under the protections of the Headmaster, and that day-”

Susan smiled. “I’m not afraid of you, or your pitiful magic. Anytime, anyplace. Wizard duel. You’ll die, I’ll walk away.”

“Humph!” He stomped off.

“That *Overconfidence* of yours will one day lead you into trouble,” Albus remarked.

“Good thing I have the magic and the friends I need to back it up.”

“Indeed. Have a good night, everyone.”

They left, and Sparkle, once they had gone out of sight, dropped the *Illusion*. “Warn me when you’re going to do something like that. I thought you were really casting it for a second there.”

“No, I knew it would be more convincing if you did it. Well done, everyone, they bought it. Still, perhaps some kind of *Psychic Link* wouldn’t go amiss next time.”

“I can’t believe it,” said Rubeus, still watching the direction of the castle. “It really did work!”

“What do you think he wanted the head for, anyway?” asked Ron.

“Given his twisted mind, I can’t imagine,” answered Harry.

“Come on, we’ll have a cup of tea and I’ll escort you back to the castle,” said Rubeus. “I’m still shaking, I just can’t believe he’s going to be safe.”

So they all piled into the Hut and Rubeus started boiling the water for the leaf juice.

“I’ll get the sugar,” said Hermione, taking the lid off the sugar bowl. She gave a shriek and almost dropped it. “I’ve found you another rat!” she exclaimed, handing it to Ron.

“No rat could replace- Scabbers! It’s Scabbers!”

“Seriously?” asked Susan.

“Look!” Ron tipped the bowl out, and they crowded around. It was Scabbers, missing toe and all. He looked even worse than he had before, and almost seemed frantic, looking around at everyone who was there. “Now how in the heck did he get way out here?” Ron went to grab him, but he struggled to get away. “Scabbers, you can’t have forgotten me in that time. It’s me, Ron. Come on, stay still.”

“I’d offer to hit him with *Alleviation* but he seems rather spunky, for looking so thin.”

“I don’t understand what’s the matter with him. Is that cat around here someplace?”

“He has a name, Ron.”

“Maybe he’s just afraid of all cats now, and Sparkle is setting him off,” said Susan.

“Come on, we’ll take a rain check on the tea, professor. I’ll walk them back to the castle and maybe in the dorms he’ll calm down a bit.”

“You shouldn’t go alone,” protested Rubeus.

“Alone? There’s five of us, and we’re all wizards. I think we can handle the 300 foot walk to the castle. Did the Headmaster seem all that concerned we were out here? If it’ll make you feel any better, I’ll get out my dragon and Sparkle can call out her lion, and it’ll be seven of us.”

“I guess he didn’t. Okay, thank you again, for everything.”

“Sure thing. Just make sure not to call any hippogriff Buckbeak where anyone can hear!”

“Right.”

Halfway back, Scabbers finally managed to break free of Ron’s grasp, and started running away, down the path. Both Susan and Sparkle had kept their word, and both their *Magical Ally* spells were going.

“Oh, honestly,” said Ron, whipping his wand out. “*Wingardium Leviosa*,” he cast, pointing at the rat. Scabbers lifted into the air.

“Do my eyes deceive me?” exclaimed Susan. “You had a problem, and you actually reached for your wand, *first thing*. Ron, tonight you have become a man. No more chasing after things for our Ron, no sir. Look at that wand-work- perfection!”

“Oh, knock it off,” said Ron.

“Seriously, I’m pretty sure that’s the first time you’ve used magic outside a classroom against something that wasn’t trying to kill us. I’m really impressed.”

“Thanks.”

“Crookshanks!” Hermione yelled, pointing. “He is out here.”

“Scabbers couldn’t have smelled him from that far away. That’s why cats groom themselves constantly, get rid of scent,” said Susan.

Crookshanks took a single bound away from them, and then looked back.

“Do any of you get the impression that cat wants us to follow it?” asked Harry.

“Something strange is going on, I’ll admit that much. Can animals be put under curses that make them do things?” asked Susan.

“I don’t see why not,” said Hermione.

“Let me see if I can get close enough for an *Animal Speech*.” She moved closer, and Crookshanks stayed put. Susan reached out, casting. “*Animal Speech*.”

“Come see,” said Crookshanks. “He can explain everything. He knows about the rat. You have to come see him. It’s dangerous for him here, so he’s waiting. Please, you have to trust me and come with me.”

“Who knows? What’s this about?” asked Hermione, also coming closer.

“A friend of mine. I met him and we finally managed to communicate. He asked about the rat, and I told him something was odd. He thinks he knows. Come on!”

“What do you say, guys?” asked Susan, relying on what Crookshanks had said.

“We have to trust him,” said Hermione.

“No we don’t,” said Ron, floating his rat closer to himself.

“I say we go for it. If there’s a chance we can learn something about all this, let’s take it.”

“You’re outvoted, Ron. If you want I can have my dragon accompany you up to the castle, and I’ll take responsibility for Scabbers.”

“No, let’s just get this over with.”

“We’ll come, lead the way.”

“Excellent. It’s not far, just through here. Mind the branches though, I have to go first to shut them off.”

“Branches? Whatever.”

Crookshanks led them to the base of the Whomping Willow, and ducked under it. He hit a knot in the trunk, and the branches went silent.

“How about that?” asked Susan of no one in particular.

“Come on, there’s a passage,” said Crookshanks. “Not far now, he’s waiting!”

“In for a Knut, in for a Galleon,” said Harry, “we might as well go all the way. *Lumos*.”

“Stay and guard this passage. If anything comes out that’s not us, catch them but don’t seriously hurt them,” Susan said to her dragon.

Sparkle said something similar to her lion, and they were off.

The four traversed the tunnel, Susan getting fed up with being bent over and cast “*Flight*,” on everyone. Hermione scooped up Crookshanks, and they were off. They zipped through, and came out of a hole in the floor in a very dusty room.

Crookshanks sniffed around. “He’s here. Come on!”

“I’m dropping *Animal Speech* and *Flight*,” she said. “I don’t want to be at negatives if this is a trap of some kind.”

“Wands at the ready,” said Harry. All three wands were out.

Susan cut off the magic, but Crookshanks led them further in, then up a flight of stairs to the second floor.

There they saw a big black dog, curled around himself. He opened his eyes, and almost seemed to smile. He got up, stretched, and before their very eyes started transforming- when it was over, there stood Sirius Black.

“Of course,” said Susan, looking him over. “I was searching for Sirius Black the man, not Sirius Black the dog. No wonder my scrying magic didn’t work out so well. But that would mean...” she looked over at Scabbers.

“Hello, Harry,” said Sirius. “Thanks for coming.”

“You better talk fast, you’ve got some explaining to do.”

“And we want *The Truth*,” said Susan, touching a finger to her *Detect Lies* charm. Light flickered around her, but they didn’t exactly know what the spell did, so she wasn’t sure if they still got the RESolve check against it. Still, she had put energy into the initial casting, so they probably couldn’t beat her, anyway.

“I know, but it can all end tonight. My nightmare, the legacy of my past, all can be revealed.”

“So start, you know, talking,” said Ron uncertainly.

“Remus needs to be here, this story is his as well. I don’t suppose I could convince one of you to run and fetch him?”

“No need,” said Susan, magical symbols coming to life in a circle in front of her.

“*Telesummon.*”

There was a loud *pop* and Remus stood with them.

“Susan?” he said, whirling frantically around. “How did I get- Sirius? Is that you?”

“It’s me, old friend.”

“I’ve been so worried!” The two embraced.

“Do you two need a moment?” asked Ron.

“No, everything will be fine,” said Remus. “You’ve managed to track him down then?”

“He’s here,” Sirius pointed to Ron. “At least if he’s managed to hold onto him.”

“Scabbers? You’re after my rat?”

“Seriously? That’s where he’s been hiding these last fourteen years?”

“Who would have suspected?”

“I certainly didn’t!”

“What are you two talking about? Are you in league with each other? What’s so important about my rat?”

“That rat is the key to everything,” said Sirius. “My freedom from Azkaban, for a start. He can have my old cell, the traitor.”

“Nobody goes to that place,” Susan said. “Now what is going on?”

“I’ll have to start at the beginning,” said Remus. “But I only know part of the story. I’ve never believed he was guilty, but at the same time I don’t know what happened in the end.”

“Just start explaining, please.”

“Okay. Your father, myself, Sirius and a man named Peter were all friends in school. There were reasons, good ones, at the time, that we had to become Animagus.”

“Because you’re a werewolf?” Hermione asked sweetly.

“Yes, because I’m- Hey, how long have you known?”

“Since always. Of course professor Snape didn’t help, all but beating us in the head with it. We’ve studied them for three years, you know.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Susan said, as Harry said “Why didn’t you tell us?”

“Would that have made any difference?” he asked.

“Yes, because I could have effectively cured you. As I explained to Severus.”

“You did, did you? Failed to mention that, I must say. But that’s not here or there, though when this is over I would like to hear about this miracle cure of yours. As you saw, Sirius here became a large black dog. Your father became a stag, Harry.”

“My father could turn into an animal like that?”

Remus nodded. “And Peter, well, maybe you can guess?”

“A rat?” asked Hermione.

“You’re on a roll tonight, Hermione. Yes, he became a rat. When it was my, ahem, moon time, they would hang out with me, because I would only attack humans, not other animals. They kept me safe and guarded against me getting out. Now just after you were born, Harry, the Potter family needed to disappear.”

“The whole secret spell thing.”

“Exactly. Sirius was chosen-”

“But I didn’t go through with it. That was the beauty of my plan, you see. It’s just rather unfortunate it went so wrong.”

“What happened?” asked Harry.

“We switched at the last second. Peter went in my place to become the *Secret Keeper* and we both were going to go into hiding. Everyone knew about James’ and my friendship. Of course I was the natural target for Death Eaters. So I thought, “why not obscure the secret even more?” So we switched, and he knew, but I didn’t.”

“Then he betrayed us all,” said Remus sadly.

“Yes. Little did we know he’d been working for Voldemort the whole time. Little sneak, we should have known when his animal form was a rat. We weren’t very bright, back then, I guess. The point is, once I learned what happened I went after him. He escaped me though, sacrificed part of himself to do it, too, a finger. Framed me very neatly.”

“Wizards don’t seem too big on evidence, even though they have truth serum and whatnot,” said Susan.

“Preaching to the ordained, trust me.”

“Sorry, continue.”

“After that he took his rat form and hid. Of course he would want to stay near a wizard family, keep his ear to the ground in case *he* started gaining strength again. Or if one of the old followers got too close.”

“There’s a spell that can force him to return to his normal form,” said Remus. “Hover him in the air and I’ll cast it on him. Then he can tell you himself.”

Ron looked over at the others.

“It does explain everything,” said Susan. “The so called ‘attacks’ by Sirius that never led to any deaths. How ‘Scabbers’ has lived so long. How he lost that finger. It won’t hurt to see if they’re telling the truth.”

“All right, I guess I can trust you, even if you are a werewolf.”

“Dumbledore must trust him to let him teach here,” said Hermione. “That’s why I didn’t tell anyone.”

Scabbers was floated into the middle of the room, and Remus got out his wand.

“Actually, I’ll take it from here,” said a new voice. Lucius bust into the room. “If this really is Peter Pettigrew, I know certain people who would love to have a long talk with him. Thanks so much for finding him for us.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” said Susan. “You actually came in here, where it’s six against one?”

“I don’t plan to stay,” he said, grabbing the floating rat. “Bye for now!” He vanished.

“No!” screamed Sirius.

“*Apparition!*” said Remus. “That snake, I should have realized he’d just run. Where did he come from, anyway?”

“That was the only chance I could clear my name!” Sirius wailed. “It’s gone for good, now.”

“Not exactly,” said Susan. “I had a truth spell going, and every word you said was true. I could testify to it.”

“That won’t hold up in court,” Remus said, shaking his head.

“Yeah, I’ve seen what you wizards call the court. But there must be some other way to clear your name, there just has to be.”

“Couldn’t we, you know, go after him? He’s probably gone back to his mansion,” said Harry.

“That place is trapped up to the hilt,” said Susan. “We could be teleporting into who knows what. There is one way, though. If one of you has a picture of him! I bet Lucius will use that spell you were going to use, to turn him back into himself. Then I could *Descry Creature* on him, get his rough location, and then *Telesummon* him back here like I did you, professor.”

“I’ve got a picture in a scrapbook that Professor Hagrid gave me!” exclaimed Harry. “We just have to get up to the castle to get it.”

“Do you feel cold?” asked Hermione.

“He wouldn’t...” said Remus, looking frantically around.

“Wouldn’t what?” asked Sirius, but at that moment a Dementor burst into the room, then smashed its way out the ceiling. Three more followed it into the room and started draining the heat out of it.

“*Expecto Patronum*,” shouted just about everyone in the room. The Dementors staggered back and hissed at them.

“*Pocket Dimension*,” cast Susan, taking the extra time to save energy. She got a 16 and pulled her knife out.

“That one probably went to tell the others where to find us,” said Remus. “If they attack in force we’re done for. They’ve cut off our exit through the tunnel.”

“Not for long,” said Susan.

“*Acceleration*,” said Sparkle, knowing what was coming. She also took the extra time, figuring they weren’t going anywhere with that much *Patronus* energy being directed at them. She got an 8+4, or one over what she needed to get the spell off.

Susan blurred into action, as for her, the world had just slowed down tremendously. She stabbed the nearest one, and the two adults watched in morbid fascination as the thing writhed and disappeared before their very eyes. Two more quick blows, and the other two were gone, and the passage was clear.

“I’ll hold them off here,” said Susan. “You guys get out of here and get that picture. Hide Sirius someplace, the Hut maybe. Rubeus doesn’t know he’s a dog, you can say you found him wandering around outside.”

“Just open a *Teleportal* to the dorms and we’ll all go!” said Harry. “You don’t have to face them alone.”

“Sorry, Harry. If someone sees him they’ll raise the alarm. If the alarm is raised he’ll get captured. If he’s captured they’ll have a Dementor suck out his soul on the spot. The only chance we have is if there are no Dementors around to do the deed. I’ll meet you at the hut and perform the magic to get Peter back. We’ll march him up to the castle and have him confess, clearing Sirius’ name. Trust me, this is the only way.”

Harry tried to protest, but Hermione put a hand on his shoulder. “I think she’s right. I can feel them coming, can’t you? We have to get out of here.”

“Come on,” said Ron.

Harry got out his copy of the *Alleviation* dagger. “You better come back.”

“Hey, it’s me. I may be an OP character, but I’m your OP character. Now get going. Sparkle, go with them, you can’t do much directly against Dementors, but you’ve got things like *Dimension Step* if you get in a tight spot, okay?”

“Got it. Good luck. But I’m your companion, remember? If you die, I have no idea what happens to me.”

Susan nodded. "*Flight. Darksight.*" she said, touching the proper two charms on her bracelet.

"I won't forget what you've done for me," said Sirius, turning to go down the passage.

"I've seen wizard justice. Go!"

She leapt into the air, and sighted the hoard of Dementors flying towards the shack.

"Endless Duel," as performed by DarkeSword, started playing in Susan's mind as she stabbed her first Dementor. (You can find it yourself, go ahead the story will be here when you get back.)

The first of many.

Harry, wand lit, led the way in case there were more Dementors waiting for them down the passage. They were only moments down the tunnel when Remus stumbled, falling to the ground. Everyone looked back at him.

"Are you okay?" asked Hermione. Her face took on an aspect of terror. "You didn't take your potion tonight!"

"Sadly, you're right," said Remus, his features beginning to change. "I was about to when I was whisked here. Sorry everyone. I'll go back the other way, but I don't think it'll help. I'll smell you down the passage, and come running."

"Just go!" shouted Sparkle. "I'll hold him here, get going."

"Are you sure?" asked Ron.

"He won't bother me, I'm a cat. I can take him."

"I'm... ugh... very strong as a wolf!" Remus cautioned. He threw his wand to Sirius, who caught it deftly.

"I'll transform and help!" said Sirius.

"No," said Hermione, pulling him down the tunnel. "If some Dementors get past Susan, they'll come down the tunnel. They'll kill anything they find at this point. Come on!"

"People keep sacrificing themselves for me. I'm not really worth it," remarked Sirius as he followed the others.

"Let's dance, werewolf," said Sparkle, then realized she had *Phobia: Dogs* written in the *Weakness* side of her character sheet.

Do werewolves count as dogs, strictly speaking?

"*Magical Ally, Major,*" she cast, getting out her lion. Remus was still painfully transforming, so she took the extra time. After the penalty for keeping Susan's *Acceleration* going, she just made it, and waited for the transformation to end. "Attack that person if he tries to get past you," she said to it. The lion watched him carefully. There was barely enough room for him in the tunnel, but he was longer than he was tall, so it was fine.

I'll let my lion wound him, then try to immobilize him. Werewolves are supposed to be pretty strong, so doing it right off the bat probably isn't such a great idea.

As Remus took on more dog like features, Sparkle started edging back away from him.

Yeah, looks a little doglike to me. She felt herself make a RES check, and got maximum, a 21. *Eh, I could take him,* she decided.

The transformation complete, the werewolf looked the lion over, as if deciding what to do about the thing blocking his way. He sniffed, and caught the scent of the others down the passage. He tried to shoulder past the lion, which was its trigger, and the lion took a swipe at him, making him yelp and then bare his teeth. The fight was on.

The lion took another swing at Remus, but somehow he dodged out of the way.

That can't be a good sign. Let's see if I can't slow you down a bit more.

She began casting a spell, to finish in 3 segments.

Both the lion and Remus went simultaneously, so both slammed into each other. They made opposed *Wrestling* checks, and they seemed evenly matched, neither one budging an inch.

Sparkle's spell of *Thrust* went off, and she got a 13, which Remus easily counted by sinking his claws into the walls as the wave of energy passed him by.

So much for that.

The lion once again went to throw Remus to the ground, and the wolf stumbled trying to pull his claws out of the wall. The lion touched Remus and was going to slam him.

But the wolf broke free.

Once again the two slammed into each other, acting simultaneously, and this time it seemed the lion had the upper hand, and he sank his claws into Remus. The lion tried to slam him up against the wall, rather than throw him, which worked. The werewolf's head slammed into the wall. The wolf shook his head as dirt fell from the passage.

I bet that's not enough to get past this thing's DTR, he barely looks stunned, that must have been non-lethal. Still, he should be at penalties, I'll try to Immobilize him. She was impressed that Remus was keeping up with her *Accelerated* creature, and was glad she chose that spell to give it as a power. *What else did I give it? Oh yeah, my Knockout Touch. Better start it using that too, duh.*

Remus bared his fangs and growled.

Sparkle started casting, taking 2 extra segments, and finishing 7 segments from now.

The lion and Remus again acted simultaneously, again making opposed *Wrestling* checks, but this time the lion added *Knockout* damage to the strike. Remus hardly seemed to notice.

The lion took a swipe at Remus' head, which connected, tearing a chunk out of it, and bloodying Remus' eye. Sparkle watched in horror as the wound started closing up immediately.

Sparkle's *Immobilize* went off, getting a 24 with max energy spent. She got three back with *Energy Boost*. Remus was attacking simultaneously, but even with the head injury, busted out easily, making the lion dodge.

Remus just missed him, snarling in frustration.

I know how you feel, buddy.

The lion acted again, making a called shot to the head, and hitting for 23 damage.

Remus' head exploded all over the passageway, and he dropped.

Oh no, I've killed him! I should have been making the Ally hold back more! Wait- oh no!

Sparkle watched, fascinated, as the damage was still regenerating, meaning Remus could be up again at any moment. She started casting as soon as she was able.

It was a near thing. In a panic, Sparkle didn't use any extra time casting the spell because she was worried she might not make it with how fast the damage was regenerating.

No wonder people around here are so afraid of these things.

“Immobilize,” she cast, just as Remus opened his eyes and started getting up. As technically he was exactly into *Gone* he didn’t get his resistance check against it, and the spell held.

Now what do I do with him? she thought, as he struggled and growled.

In the end, she had her Ally grab the bond around Remus’ body and just drag him, slowly, down the corridor. When she reached the other end and came out, she saw Severus holding a very angry looking Sirius at wand-point.

“Where’s the wonder girl?” he asked.

“Still at the other end fighting Dementors, I expect,” said Sparkle.

“Let us hope she pulls though,” he said without conviction. “Why so late to the- what is that?”

The lion had finished dragging Remus, now fully healed and still struggling, out of the tunnel.

“Professor Lupin, as if you didn’t know,” said Hermione.

“Oh, figured it out, did you? Forgive me for not awarding you any house points at this late juncture.”

“Have you ever awarded any student not in Slytherin house points?”

“Just move. I’ll take over carrying the dear professor. Don’t think this means I can’t strike you down in an instant, Sirius.”

The five, plus one floating, snarling wolf, were led up to the castle and were met by professor McGonagall.

“Please put this,” he indicated Remus, “In the dungeon somewhere away from anyone else. I must see the Headmaster about him.”

“You captured Black, Severus? This is most unexpected.”

“He’s innocent, professor-” Hermione tried to say.

“Silence! You’re all in enough trouble, so I suggest you stay quiet. Is the minister still here?”

“I believe so.”

“Good, then the sentence can be carried out with speed.”

“Notice anything missing?” asked Harry, gesturing to the sides of the door.

Severus’ eyes flicked back and forth. “Where have all the guards gone?”

“I don’t know, Severus. It is a most peculiar night. I have him.”

“Then I must lock up Black before he escapes again. Come along.”

“I’ll go with you so I know when to release the spell,” said Sparkle.

“Very well,” said Minerva. “But where is Susan? Usually you two are inseparable.”

“We were separated tonight,” she said, looking in the direction of the village. “And I hope this isn’t the end of our story...”

When Sparkle finally made her way up to the hospital wing after tracking the others down, she walked in to find the Harry, Hermione and Ron trying to explain the situation to Albus.

“I wouldn’t put any faith in anything they say,” said Severus. “Obviously they’ve been bewitched by Sirius.”

“He didn’t even have a wand,” protested Hermione. “That wand you took from him belongs to Remus.”

“You did say he was dragged out after them,” said Albus.

“I’m sure if he’s searched another wand will turn up. Or in the passageway, or where it leads to. Who knows where a crafty person like Black would hide his wand?”

“In any case,” said the Minister, “it does look like I’m going to witness two executions today. If you’ll excuse me, I have to find a Dementor to perform The Kiss.” He turned to go. “You were always complaining about how many were around, it shouldn’t be hard.”

“Actually, that might be a problem, Minister,” said Albus. “They seem to have fled the grounds.”

“What? All of them?”

“There is not a Dementor to be found anywhere near-”

As he said this, a window into the hospital wing smashed open, and into the room plummeted a Dementor. It landed heavily on its back as a battered Susan, clothes torn and hair wild followed close behind and jumped atop it. Its head turned and it reached out towards the people in the room.

“Don’t let her kill me,” it rasped.

“And how many have said the same while you killed them?” asked Susan, plunging her dagger down into the side of the creature’s neck. The adults were stunned as the Dementor gave a scream and faded away.

Susan, hardly realizing where she was, jerked back unsupported and spun, landing on the windowsill. She scanned the night, her head darting back and forth in search of further Dementors to kill. She didn’t see any.

With a start, she realized where she was, and lowered the knife. However, she remained hovering in the air.

“Sorry about the window,” she said, painting. “Keep the pieces nearby and I’ll repair it tomorrow. I’m feeling a little drained at the moment.”

Cornelius hadn’t taken his eyes off the knife. “You actually did it, didn’t you?”

“What, this?” She held up the knife, flipping it in her hand to point up again. “I found it worked pretty well, thankfully. Where’s Sirius?”

“Professor Flitwick’s office, which I think you know well, Susan? Thirteenth window from the right of the west tower. However, the consequences of any rash actions now will be severe.”

“Too bad there isn’t a Dementor within a mile of here,” said Susan, pointing the knife at Cornelius. “I could take another dozen or two tonight, should they be sent after me. Sirius is innocent. My magic tells me so and I can prove it. You don’t want justice, you want a scapegoat. Tell the public whatever you want- he was killed here, Dementors got him, whatever. He won’t be seen in public until I can clear his name, you have my promise on that. You never did find Professor Hagrid when I hid him, did you? I’ll be back soon.”

With that, she turned and flew out the window again.

“That girl really scares me sometimes, you know that?” remarked Ron. “I’m really glad she’s on our side.”

“I hope she is,” muttered Albus, too low for anyone to hear.

When Susan returned, Albus was patiently explaining to Severus and Cornelius it would not be in their interest to arrest Susan.

“She’s helped a criminal escape justice!” said Cornelius.

“She’s given an innocent man a chance to have his name cleared,” counted Albus. “Ah, Susan, you’re back. I trust Sirius is secure?”

“He won’t be found.”

“You think your magic makes you above the law?” asked Severus.

“I think it’s time for magical law to be... revisited,” said Susan. “With a greater emphasis on evidence gathering and less emphasis on just pointing fingers and saying ‘he’s the one, he’s done it all right. I’d recognize him anywhere.’”

“That isn’t your place.”

“Then who? Did you know that there was a time being gay, that is, being simply attracted to someone the same gender as you, was illegal? Go look up what happened to Allen Turing sometime if you don’t believe me. If a brave few men and women hadn’t decided to fight those sorts of laws, the situation never would have changed. It starts with one person saying ‘that’s enough’ and goes from there. Well, I’m saying it- That’s enough. Enough people having so called “trials” where the guy with the money gets to decide policy. Enough people being sent to have their very life energy sucked out by undead creatures. Enough of ‘that’s the way it’s always been, so the law can never change.’ I want a new trial, if Sirius even got one to begin with. I want Peter Pettigrew, who is alive and well, found, and questioned. Until that time, Sirius stays in hiding and there isn’t a single thing you can do about it.”

“She is underage, and I’m not sure killing Dementors is illegal, because no one ever considered they could be killed. So I’m not sure if she could even be brought up on charges there. As long as Sirius stays out of sight, it’s the same as if he’s been recaptured. I have your word on that?”

“He’s in a place only I can get to.”

Well, the twins could, but the door is locked at the moment, and they have no reason to unlock it.

“Then the official story will be that he’s been captured again and new evidence has been uncovered that casts doubt on our original story. We’ll start hunting down Peter and give you time to get your story together for the court.”

“I can have him here in fifteen minutes if someone will get Harry’s scrapbook,” said Susan. “I have that much energy left, at least.”

“Harry, would you mind running to get it?” asked Albus.

“Not at all, sir,” he answered.

Harry came back, his face troubled.

“What’s the matter?”

“All the pictures that showed him have been taken. He must have heard us talking about how the spell was cast, and knew he could be identified, and thus, captured, that way. So he stole them all.”

“Crap!” said Susan.

“How convenient,” said Severus.

“I want Peter here, he can prove Sirius’ innocence in two seconds. He supposedly died that day, remember? Sirius’ “trial” was for the death of Peter and some muggle witnesses. If

Peter didn't die, it casts doubt on the whole thing! Why would I keep the pictures from Susan at this point?"

"Whatever you say."

"Minister, he's an unregistered Animagus, a rat. He could be in either form, so make sure you check for that too," said Susan.

"Very well. I'll see what we can do. Perhaps you did the right thing, perhaps not. There may be repercussions, Susan."

"I do not fear the truth, minister."

"But as you've already said, the truth sometimes comes from those with the gold. Have a good rest of the night, all."

"You should spend the night here," said the nurse on duty. "You look terrible."

"Nothing a good night's sleep won't fix."

"Still, perhaps that would be best," said Albus.

"This isn't over," said Severus, stalking out.

"It never is, for you, is it?"

Susan put her knife back in her *Pocket Dimension* and got ready to go to bed. Her mind kept going back to the fight with the Dementors, after she had killed a bunch of them. That one that had looked at her, and made her feel chilled.

"I see you," it had whispered before she killed it.

But then they all could.

“Wake up. Susan, wake up!” Susan found herself being shaken. She wasn’t in her dorm room. *Where am I?*

“What? Where-”

“It’s okay, you’re safe. It’s me, Hermione. You were shouting.”

“Oh Hermione,” Susan said, hugging her.

“Uh, are you okay?”

“I made a mistake tonight.”

“What do you mean, mistake? You protected us, and made sure they couldn’t kill Sirius.”

“I’m talking about the Dementors. I shouldn’t have done it, it’s too soon.”

“What’s too soon? What happened out there? Can you talk about it?”

Susan looked past Hermione, and in the darkness she could make out Ron and Harry both sitting up, looking at her.

“It’s okay if you don’t want to,” said Harry. “But we were worried about you. And that was scary just by itself.”

Susan sighed. “Okay, come over here.”

Harry and Ron sat on the bed next to Susan, and Hermione sat next to her on hers. She conjured up a purple flame that hung in the air and warmed them, as Susan thought of how to begin.

“The first dozen or so fell like dominoes,” she said at last.

“What’s dominoes?” asked Ron.

“Ssh,” said Harry.

“I moved among them like a wolf among lambs, and there was nothing they could do to touch me. They died, and with each of their screams of anguish, I felt a little happiness come back to the world.” Her face lit up, remembering, but then fell again. “It didn’t last.”

She looked over at the window she had broken, which Albus had repaired with a wave of his wand. She shivered despite the warmth coming from the fire.

“The next dozen fell, but by this time, even *accelerated* as I was, they knew something was wrong. They could tell something was killing them, even if they couldn’t see what. They began to mill about, uncertain. With each one I killed they seemed to grow aware of me, somehow. I still felt that joy with each Dementor disappearing, but suddenly one actually dodged my knife stroke. I thought maybe it had just gotten lucky, maybe it had rolled some kind of *Blind Fighting* check against me. It too, fell to my blade.

But then others started dodging, and I had to put energy into COOrdination to start hitting them. Then they started fighting back. I still had *Acceleration* on so I wasn’t worried about them actually grabbing me, but it was obvious with each one I killed, they saw me better and better. They started dodging all my blows, so I put *Augment Skill* on myself and that helped. For the next few, at least. They realized it was the knife, and starting surrounding me, trying to grab it. Lucky for me they aren’t used to... prey... that fights back. The merest scratch from my blade was fatal to them, so I was still holding my own despite the odds. Of course, being much faster and smarter and being able to fight in three dimensions didn’t hurt.

“Some kind of signal passed between them, I could feel it. They scattered, probably figuring I couldn’t catch all of them. They were right. I think they knew more would die if they stayed, and they had to bring word to Azkaban that there was something that could kill them. Bring back the knowledge of how to see me, maybe even start me feeling like you guys do when they’re around. Afraid.

“I chased down those I could, ending with that one you saw me kill in here. By that time the rest were gone.

“So now they know. They’ll be ready when I attack Azkaban. I still have *Undead Annihilation*, that confused them last time I tried it, and these won’t know about that. But if the same thing happens, if I attack and they find a way to break past that... Well, I guess there’s always *Magic Immunity*, at least I could cast that and get away. It seemed to protect you when I cast it on you, Harry.

“So that’s the story. I guess I was dreaming about it, as the whole thing was fresh in my mind. Sorry I woke you.”

The others stared at her. They had never seen her look so vulnerable. She had taken on everything the last three years without hesitation, but now here she was talking to them like she was afraid. She looked afraid.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t help,” said a quiet voice from above. “I watched you fighting them. You were magnificent, let me tell you.” Myrtle floated into view from behind the curtain she was hiding behind. “I so wanted to help you, but I knew I couldn’t. I was so afraid when that one grabbed you. How could I face eternity without you? You gave me hope, Susan. Please say you’ll always be here by my side. Please?”

Susan smiled, but it was a sad smile. “I’ll do my best. For all of you, my friends. And you are my friends, you know that, right?”

“Course we do,” said Ron, looking away.

Susan stuck her hand out over the flame. “Susan’s Spectaculars forever!”

“Harry’s Hoard,” said Harry, putting his hand over hers.

“Hermione’s Heroes and Heroines.”

“Ron’s Rebels.”

“Myrtle’s Mesmerizers.”

Everyone looked over at Sparkle.

“Call yourselves whatever you want,” she said. “You’re all my servants one way or the other.”

They all laughed.

“Thanks for listening,” said Susan. “I’m feeling a little better now.”

“And don’t worry,” said Harry. “When you attack Azkaban it won’t be alone.”

“She won’t?” said Ron, inching away from Harry. “I mean, of course she won’t. I only wanted to live to be seventeen anyway.”

“Why are you all up?” shouted a voice. “Go back to sleep!”

“Sorry Madam Pomfrey,” everyone said.

The next morning at breakfast, Albus came to where Susan and the others were sitting.

“Good morning,” he said cheerfully. “I hope you all slept well last night?”

“For the most part,” said Susan.

“Good. You’ll need your wits about you for the trial.”

“Trial!?” shrieked Hermione. “They didn’t even wait a day?”

“Calm yourself, Miss Granger,” said Albus. “I have not yet received word from the ministry. However, there’s some interesting stories in this morning’s paper, if you care to take a look.”

He placed a paper down on the table, and they gathered around to look at it.

“They didn’t mention me, did they?” asked Susan.

“No, not by name. But those who know you will recognize the signs. In any case, I thought you might like to get a start on your defense of Sirius, as you know they’ll be calling upon you to provide it soon.”

“An excellent suggestion, Headmaster,” she said, popping a last bit of toast into her month. “I would like to leave immediately.”

“I assume you wish to visit a newspaper archive, see if any pictures of Peter are to be found?”

“That would be incorrect, Headmaster. I want to see the incident with my own eyes. This will allow me both to see his face, and what happened that night so I know all the facts first hand. With the XP I earned last night slaughtering Dementors I have more than enough to learn *Time Window*, a spell I feel I’m going to be casting a lot in the near future. Give me some time to memorize it, and we can leave at your convenience.”

“Very well, I shall return shortly.”

“Thank you.”

Susan rolled maximum on her KNOwledge check to memorize the spell, and 7 XP disappeared from her character sheet. It was replaced by *Time Window* on the back. When Albus returned with Fawkes, she was ready to go.

“Before we leave, Headmaster, can you cast a charm over the area so we do not attract undo attention?”

“Actually, before I left my office I took the liberty of casting a charm upon my robe. Anyone not magically attuned will ignore the presence of the object in a five meter radius. As luck would have it, that includes us.”

“Clever. Compensating for the fact it’s harder for you to cast magic upon yourself by casting it upon something you’re carrying. Uh, did you have to take the robe off first?”

“I shall leave that to your imagination. Shall we?” He smiled and offered his arm. “I’ll be back soon, guys. Don’t get into any trouble while I’m gone, okay?”

“I won’t do anything you wouldn’t do,” said Harry.

“No, I said don’t get into any trouble-” but Susan was fire before she could finish that sentence.

They appeared in a rather average looking street, and people streamed by them as though they were invisible.

“Do we have far to walk to get to where the event took place?” asked Susan, looking around.

“Actually, we’re standing where it took place,” said Albus.

“I guess time can erase even the most destructive of magics. If you can provide me the exact, or nearly exact time, I’ll get started.”

He told her the time the eye witnesses reported seeing the two men fighting, and Susan took a couple of steps so she had her back to a building.

“We’ll get a wide angle view first, then narrow in once I’ve seen exactly where I should put the window.”

“This is your show, do whatever it is you wish.”

Several castings of *Time Window* later, Susan had what she needed. It was obvious in watching the event that Peter, not Sirius, had his wand out and did magic that day. She also took a good look at Peter’s face so she could use *Telesummon*, and requested a squad of magical enforcers for when she brought him in. Albus believed he would probably be enough, but several teachers could stand in rather than bother them.

“And of course, you’ll be there,” he reminded her.

“Well, let’s just say I’m not feeling as invulnerable as I once did.”

I never did pick up that spell, maybe I should.

Once back in the castle, Susan got out her book and cast *Telesummon* from writings. She felt something odd, and was disgusted to see Peter did not appear.

“Maybe he’s back in rat form, trying to avoid my spell?” she asked no one in particular. She tried again, this time trying to summon the rat.

Again, she failed.

“Okay, maybe I need to summon him as the rat Scabbers rather than as Peter because that how I know the rat?” She was feeling a bit desperate by that time, but again, this produced no response.

“I don’t believe this! What’s going on?”

“If I might make an observation?” asked Albus.

“Uh, go right ahead?” *What does he think he’s going to point out to me about my magic?*

“You spoke often to your friends about how your magic worked and what it could do, yes?”

“I did. I saw no reason to hide it from them.”

“And of course Peter, or should I say Scabbers was probably somewhere nearby, correct?”

Susan had a bad feeling she knew where this was going.

“He’s put up some kind of barrier around himself that keeps him from being summoned, hasn’t he?”

“That would be my guess. He had three years of learning about your magic to work out many spells to try, and he would be motivated to perfect them. He would have had the run of the castle at night, and thus access to the library to do research.”

“Not to mention he could try them all, there’s no limit to the magic wanded wizards can have going at once. Even if he has to cast them every hour, he would find a way. And I’ve never really wanted to mix our magics because who knows what would happen? So he could be beating my casting check because he doesn’t *have* a casting check in the same manner I do. Uh, this sucks! If he finds a piece of Voldemort and tells him everything I told my friends about my magic, there goes the element of surprise when I face him.”

“It seems as though your magic is not unbeatable then,” Albus said with concern.

“First the giant, then Dementors seeing me, and now this. It’s a lot of blows my magic has taken lately. I don’t like it, no I do not.”

“I still feel you have it within you to rise to these challenges.”

“Of course. I’m still Susan Felton, after all.”

“Of that there is no doubt.”

That evening, Albus informed her that a special hearing was being convened the next day, in order to determine if she should be charged with conspiracy.

“They did move fast!” said Susan.

“They know the school year is over, and you’ll be returning home soon. They want to see this matter settled before then.”

“How considerate of them. Tell me, you’ve seen what I’ve seen. I do have a case, right?”

“If you can show them what you’ve shown me, even the most corrupt government official will have to concede the evidence is compelling.”

“Then that’s exactly what I’ll do.”

The next day, Susan arrived dramatically in the courtroom by stepping through a *Teleportal*. She had insisted on spending the last three hours with Albus, and said all of this was part of her plan. Albus said he hoped she knew what she was doing, and Susan could only agree with that statement.

“We were worried you were not coming,” said the judge. Susan looked up, and saw many more stern and official looking faces looking down at her. Her lip twitched, Mrs. “hem-hem” was there, wearing her usual pink outfit.

“My reasons for arriving in this fashion will be explained, your honor,” she replied.

“I see. This is not a formal hearing, despite the full court being in attendance. We felt the matter urgent enough, and with large enough reproductions to involve everyone. I trust you have no objections, Albus?”

“Me? No, please proceed as you will,” he replied.

“In that case, I will come straight to the point. Susan, you helped Sirius, a man we believe committed gross acts of murder twelve years ago, escape custody. You have told the minister of magic that you spoke to Sirius, and could tell, through your magic, that he was telling the truth when he spoke of his innocence. Given the nature of your magic and what it has already accomplished, we will allow you the benefit of the doubt- up to a point. You are here to convince us, however you can, that Sirius Black is innocent. Failing that, outline the plan to prove his innocence. Failing that, turn him over to us so we may explore the issue further. Can you do any of these things?”

“Your honor, if it pleases the court, I can prove Sirius Black was framed in less than ten minutes.”

There was a general feeling of shock that went around the courtroom. The judge motioned for silence.

“By all means, proceed.”

“Thank you. Ladies and Gentlemen of the court, you have just seen me step through a hole in the air. Headmaster Dumbledore, can you tell the court where we were before we entered this room?”

“We were in my office in Hogwarts.”

“Thank you. I say this to you because the first spell I will cast for you today to prove Sirius’ innocence will take us to the very place he was apprehended. You will see there, with your own eyes, the events that transpired that very day.”

“You will carry us that far back in time?” asked a shocked wizard.

“Not exactly,” explained Susan. “Rather I will use a second spell, that of *Time Window* to open a portal that we may see that time. Now, I’m sure some of you are asking yourself, ‘how can we be sure that is the actual events and not some sort of illusion?’ This is an excellent question. Headmaster Dumbledore, I call upon you to answer a second question. Can you tell us how long you and I were together in your office?”

“Three hours prior to our entering the courtroom,” he replied.

“Thank you. And do you believe that I was myself? That I was not some illusion or fabrication planted into your mind? That we interacted and you saw no reason to believe I was anyone but Susan Felton?”

“As far as I could tell, you were, and are, your enigmatic self.”

“Then I propose this initial test- allow me to open a *Time Window* to a time within the last three hours that will show this room, or indeed any room you would like. As I have been with Headmaster Dumbledore for that time, there is no way I could have been here, spying on the events within these walls. If my *Time Window* shows the true events, you may thus be assured they are the true events where Sirius is concerned also.”

“An interesting method. Please proceed in showing this courtroom.”

“What time would you like to view?”

“Make it, oh, two hours and 6 minutes ago exactly.”

“Very well.” Susan cast the spell, and asked for the time specified. The window opened, and everyone looked down at it, as it showed them what happened in the room. “Does this satisfy the requirements I have laid out?”

“Open your doorway to the location, I see where this is going.”

“Thank you. The Headmaster was kind enough to charm the area, so no non-magical people will notice us while we are there. If you would not mind descending while I cast the spell?”

The members of the court came down, and Susan opened her *Teleportal* to the location, and then *Time Window* to show them what she had seen. She “paused” the window as Peter was chopping off his own finger.

“As you can see, this man has a wand, Sirius does not. This man cast a curse, Sirius did not.” She resumed playback at a slower speed. “This man, Peter Pettigrew changes before your very eyes to become a rat, scampering away from the explosion he himself caused.”

They demanded different angles, and speeds, but in the end, stepped through the *Teleportal* back to the courtroom.

“It seems we have an apology to offer to Sirius, and a warrant to issue for the arrest of Peter Pettigrew.”

Yes!

“A full pardon will be issued? He can again show his face in the magical community?”

“Yes, I’m sure the papers will pick it up without any prompting from us in any case. They do love rubbing our noses in it.”

“I assure you that was not my intention.”

“Still, you have said some things to the minister about how displeased you are with the current state of things. You Know Who also professed such sentiments. I hope I don’t have to tell you that we will be watching your further development very closely.”

“I seek only justice, not power.”

“From where I sit, it seems you already have power enough.”

Albus put his hand on Susan's shoulder. "I think we are ranging a bit afield of our purpose here, if I may be so bold as to say it."

"Yes, Albus, you are of course right. You are free to go, and please tell Sirius his pardon and apology will be drawn up within the hour."

"Thank you, your honor. You done a lot to restore my faith in wizard law today."

It looked like the judge was going to say something, but then just turned away and left as the courtroom cleared.

"If you don't mind, I'd like to go directly to tell Sirius the good news," said Susan.

"You're in the driver's seat. I can't *apparate* back to the castle, after all."

Shoot, could he improve the wards around Hogwarts to deny me teleporting in? I suppose it would be a lot of work to keep out one person...

Susan opened her *Teleportal* and stepped through her to base, which was looking a bit different now.

"Susan!" said Sirius, jogging up to her. "How did it go?" He was looking better, not quite as ragged, but still gaunt. Ten years with minimal food and being around Dementors will do that to a person.

"They accepted the evidence, you're a free man at last."

He smiled broadly. "Thank you, I don't know what to say, this is marvelous news."

"It's a good day, I'll say that much. What have you been doing down here, anyway?"

"Unpacking, making it look a little less like a hole underground and more like a basement. You had a lot of stuff in boxes, after all. I hope you don't mind."

"Mind? This is amazing!" The halls had a plush carpet, and the walls were smooth and white. Torches hung, evenly spaced at regular intervals, and even the ceiling had been smoothed over. Walking into each room was more like walking into a furnished basement than a dungeon crypt, and even the air smelled better. Susan had been buying things and carting them down here with her *Resources* for some time, but she hadn't bothered to unpack anything yet. Sirius apparently had. "You didn't have to do all this."

"Are you kidding," he said with a laugh. "I've been cooped up a cell for more than ten years. You gave me a wand and better food and the hope of freedom. I had to do magic again, get moving again, and this seemed as good a way to repay you as any."

"You're in the wand making business now?" asked Albus, looking sharply at her.

"I gave him one of the spares. I took them from those bullies that attacked me last year. I broke two of them, but stole the other two, as I figured having some spare ones might come in handy."

Though my book does detail how to fabricate an object for those needing a magical focus. I wonder if that would work for them as well as Paragon spell-casters?

"I see. As I recall all of those boys told me their wands were destroyed. Probably to avoid having to admit a girl younger than them had taken them."

"I shoved them into my *pocket dimension*, which would have shown them magical circles. From their perspective I simply cast a spell and they disappeared. They probably just assumed I had destroyed them, as they never came back and asked me. Wonder why that was?"

"I see. We don't normally tolerate theft around Hogwarts, you know."

"Of course you do- don't be silly."

"In what way do we tolerate theft?"

“Luna Lovegood gets her stuff stolen all the time. Granted, she usually gets it back at the end of the year, but that’s really no excuse.”

“Really? I didn’t know. I’ll look into it.”

“Thank you. I told her I could put a stop to it, but she said she didn’t mind, oddly, so I didn’t press the issue.”

“Anyway, you did put a lot of trust in him, didn’t you?”

“I knew he was telling the truth, that was enough for me.”

“I suppose it’s more accurate to say you put a lot of trust in your magic.”

Susan laughed. “Headmaster, I’ve put trust in my magic more times since coming to this school than I can even count. It’s part of me. To not trust it is to not trust myself.”

“Well, anything else I can do, please just let me know. I have a huge debt to repay you.”

“I’ll keep it in mind. Where would you like to go, anyway? I can take you anyplace I’ve been, if you want to start a new life for yourself.”

“Actually,” he said, looking around, “I thought I might stick around here for a while.”

“But you’re free!”

“Exactly. I’m here by my own choosing. I want to finish this place up, make it an actual home for you, not just a hole in the ground. And with my picture in the news so much, I think I’d like to let people forget me for a time before I make any appearances in society again. I don’t need people running from me screaming, after all.”

“I’m happy to send you a food parcel every day. Sorry it’s so bland, it’s all my magic can come up with. Maybe a small stove and some spices would help?”

“After prison food, your stuff is like a feast every day.”

And so Susan, Albus and Sirius talked for a while longer (he seemed eager for news about the outside world) and he explained his plans for the hideout. Susan made a list of things to buy and said she would bring them down, along with some decent clothes for him and anything else he needed. Then it was back to the castle where a new problem was developing.

“What do you mean, he’s not going to teach next year?” Susan said to Hermione. “He didn’t get possessed or memory wiped or even hurt at all, with that regeneration of his. I would think he’d appreciate the salary.”

“He is a werewolf,” replied Hermione.

“Yeah, it took a bit of cunning to just tie him up. Granted, I don’t have a lot of combat spells, especially not at that level. I’m just the *companion*, after all,” said Sparkle.

“Hey, you’re a character with her own character sheet. You did good, and that’s that.”

“That goes without saying.”

“It was Severus,” said Harry. “He let slip that Remus was a werewolf to the press. Probably to get back at you, Susan. They were talking Order of Merlin before that.”

“Hey, you think we could get *Sirius* to teach here? Now wouldn’t that be a hoot?” asked Ron.

Susan snorted. “That’s the most intelligent thing I’ve heard you say, Ron. Good. Idea. I’ll ask about it, who knows?”

“If you want to say goodbye, you better hurry. He was packing.”

“Say goodbye? I have to tell him about the cure!”

Susan burst in to the Defense office, and was relieved to see Remus was still there.

“Thank goodness you hadn’t left yet,” she said.

“And a good afternoon to you as well,” he replied, grinning.

“Yes, yes, how do you do?” Susan waved a hand. “Come and see me before the next full moon, and I guarantee you’ll never transform again.”

“You really can cure me?”

“I can make you an item to suppress the transformation. You’ll stay yourself, and in control, as long as you wear it. Make it a ring of some kind and you’ll be cured for life.”

“What’s it going to cost me? I know your items use up things to make, right?”

“Well, I would suggest something that’ll stick around the rest of your life, and maybe someone else’s if you want to pass it on. So the cost of the ring, gold or titanium as you prefer. Then 80 Sickles in ‘components’ so really whatever is handy you want to get rid of that equals that amount. Couple of weeks of your time while I infuse the magic. Another week and a few more ‘components’ if you want it to repair itself if it’s damaged. That’s about it.”

“Seems straightforward enough.”

“It has been thus far. Are you sure I can’t convince you to stay and teach next year?”

“Even with this cure of yours, owls will start arriving any minute now to Albus about how reckless it was to have a werewolf teaching here. Parents won’t accept it, they won’t believe the curse can be suppressed.”

“I’m sorry. You made a good teacher, the school will be emptier without you.”

“It’s kind of you to say.”

“I’ll let you finish packing. Here’s my address, come soon.” She wrote it out for him and handed it over. “I’ll need to get it done before another month passes, after all.”

“I will, thank you.”

And with that, the school year ended. Hermione decided to drop some classes and hand in the Time Turner.

“It came in handy, but I feel like it could become a crutch if I let it,” she explained.

“Being able to go back in time like that could become, I don’t know, addictive somehow. I already miss it, a sure sign I did the right thing.”

“That’s probably for the best,” remarked Susan. “Especially if you feel that way about it.”

People were buzzing about the news that Sirius Black had been found innocent, and that Peter was now being charged with the crimes he had been imprisoned for. As good as their word, the ministry issued a formal apology to Sirius, which Susan had framed and gave him with his daily food allotment. Every day he seemed to get a little stronger, and she brought him books, games and newspapers to use in his down time. He said he was enjoying being able to think clearly and actually get warm for the first time in a long time. He wanted to ease back into being around people, as he wasn’t quite ready for that yet, after being alone for so long. Susan was happy to stay and talk and she had Harry would make regular visits if he wanted them.

He explained about sending the broom, and that he was Harry’s godfather. He even signed the permission form to visit the village, and invited Harry to live with him once he moved back into his house.

Harry, of course, said yes.

Even with all this, Susan's thoughts were dark as the train pulled away from the Hogwarts station towards the non-magical world. The Dementors were a force to be reckoned with, and she only had one weapon against them. If they could see her now, they might come after her, or somehow create more to build a larger army. She still believed what she had done was the right thing, but what that meant for her, only the future Susan knew for sure.