

Visitation

Time: A half hour after arriving back in Little Whinging

Place: Harry Potter's House

"I'm telling you, Susan, just be... gentle, with the Dursleys," pleaded Stacy.

"But of course, mother," answered Susan sweetly. "Am I not the most dutiful daughter in the world? Who would not dare to disobey in even the smallest thing that was asked of me?"

"It's fine, honestly," said Harry, who sounded like it was anything but fine.

"I'm just going to go with him when he enters the house so that there are no misunderstandings. That's all."

"I don't want to see the place on fire five minutes from now," Stacy warned.

"I shall wait ten minutes then, out of respect for your wishes."

Stacy just sighed and threw up her hands. She got out of the car and went into the house.

Susan called their luggage out of her *Pocket Dimension* and Harry grabbed his trunk to take home.

"You don't have to do this," he said again.

"Oh, I think I do. They need to be reminded that you are not someone to just be pushed around. You faced the ghost of your greatest foe and lived to tell the tale a second time. And until we suppress this stupid magic restriction that's on you, I'm all that stands between you and that cupboard of yours."

"That's what worries me."

"What are you talking about?"

"I remember you saying you had four different ways to kill Other Senior with your magic. You've learned more magic now, right? I also recall that you only had one attack spell, and said the other ways were just 'creative uses' of magic. Am I right?"

"Gee, I've not thought about it, actually. Let me think... I suppose I could crush someone with *Creation*. *Thrust* them over a long drop. Turn them into a statue with *Sculpt*, but they would have to stand still for that, it doesn't happen that fast. So maybe a couple more ways, anyway."

"I'd be happy to *Dimension Step* him into purgatory, he'd never get out of there," said Sparkle.

"Stop it!" shouted Harry. "I didn't want you to think of more ways!"

"I wasn't serious about killing him, you know. Magic or not, I don't think I could do something like that. Don't worry. It's me you're talking to here, you know?"

"They just bring out the worst in you, that's all."

"That they do. Ready?"

They were at the door.

"Ready," answered Harry, and pushed it open.

"I want all of your school things this inst-" started Other Senior, whose eyes fell upon Susan, standing there with arms crossed. He froze.

"I thought so," she said darkly. "Not so much as a word of welcome. It seems my being away has made you bold, Mr. Dursley."

"There... will be... no magic-"

"Honestly, what has magic ever done to you?" asked Susan, pushing past Harry and stalking towards Senior. "Now, Harry's Aunt I can understand, she lost a sister to magic. A sister

who died *heroically* and *tragically* I might add, protecting her son.” She glared into the other room, where Wife was standing. “But you... I’ve never been able to figure that out. How did you even know about magic? You didn’t react with suspicion to the realization that Harry was a wizard, you accepted it on faith. Like you had been told, years ago, that magic was real. Why this hatred of something that doesn’t seem to influence your life at all? It just makes no sense. It’s like hating My Little Pony but you’ve never actually seen any episodes.”

“That’s none of your business.”

“I see. I suppose not. Well, to business then. There will be no stealing of wands. No taking of books. No locking up of new pets. Harry is going to carry his trunk upstairs, and that will be the end of it. Naturally, if I should hear of the theft of any of his belongings, or he does not appear and tell me he’s okay at least once every three days, I will be back on your doorstep. I will not be knocking on your door. I will be blasting it down *with fire*. Understood?”

“Just get upstairs, boy.” Senior turned around and went into the living room, sitting with his back to Harry.

“I’m glad we understand each other. Mrs. Dursley, nice to see you again. If you and your husband ever get over your irrational hatred of magic, I would be happy to make you some magical objects to make your lives easier. I can be quite pleasant, when my friends are treated fairly. Good bye.”

“Thanks,” whispered Harry as Susan went out again.

She nodded. “Open invitation,” she said. “Come over any time, for any reason. Okay? But let me know every three days, I meant what I said. I don’t put it past him to physically lock you up. And you’ll have to come over for the *Imbuing*. I like you and everything, but I’m not giving up my XP for you.”

Harry laughed. “You got it.”

It was now several weeks later, and Harry was in Susan’s room, idly toying with his new permanent *Conceal Magic* item. It had taken a little more than two weeks to finish, and \$40 worth of “materials,” which Susan used some trash for. The process didn’t care if the “materials” were in one piece, as long as they originally cost the correct amount. A worn out pair of shoes that was about to be thrown out couldn’t be sold for any money, but the fact they had cost money... that was the important part. The more she thought about it, the more bizarre it seemed that anything would have be “consumed” while doing this. When she did a spell, magic appeared. Where exactly was this stuff going when she bound magic into an object? Take the “square of black cloth” this required. The size of the square wasn’t specified, so she found a worn out black sock with the beginnings of a hole and just cut a tiny piece of it off. Done. Why did it need that? She wished she could somehow ask the magic itself what it was doing, but was somewhat concerned it might reveal the whole process to be some kind of joke it couldn’t believe went on for so long. So she watched the stuff get “consumed” and tried not to think too much about it.

Susan made it permanent, for several reasons. She had the time, and Harry didn’t actually have XP to lose. So she figured, *Why not just make it always on? Then he won’t forget accidentally and cast a spell with it off, and get in trouble.*

“Stupid dinner party,” said Harry, looking out the window at his house.

“It got you out of the house for a while,” Susan replied.

“I guess. Thanks for this, again.”

“I’ll still get you a birthday present if you wanted something. I’ve got the money to spend, after all.” *he he he*

“Are you kidding? You’ve given me the ability to use magic at home. That’s amazing! I’m going to be better than Hermione pretty soon.”

They looked at each other.

“Nah,” they said together.

Suddenly there was a pounding on the door.

“What’s that all about?” asked Susan, getting up. “I’ll get it mom,” she said, going to the door.

“Mr. Dursley,” she said with evident surprise. “I’m shocked. What can I do for you?”

“There is some sort of *creature* in my house, asking for Harry. I insist that it be removed at once!”

What in the world? It couldn’t be dangerous, he’s still alive. What the heck...

“You couldn’t have brought it over here?”

“It said that it would not leave until it saw him. It’s still in his room. Take care of it.”

“Okay, sure.”

He spun and stomped off without saying goodbye.

“Have a pleasant evening,” Susan said sarcastically. “Harry, we need to head back to your room, apparently something there to see you.”

“What?” asked Harry, coming out. “Who could that be?”

“Let’s find out. *Flight*. Good thing it’s dark enough.”

Harry and Susan swooped out of the house and over to Harry’s, where they carefully opened the window and looked inside.

“Harry Potter!” said a squeaky voice from inside the room. “It is you! How can you be flying without a broom?” The creature was looking over at Harry’s broom, propped in the corner.

Susan and Harry looked the creature over. It was small, probably no bigger than a -1 size modifier, and had grayish skin with large eyes. It was wearing a tattered... something, but had no shoes.

Harry looked at Susan, who shrugged.

“It’s complicated,” answered Harry. “Look, can you meet me at the house over there?” he pointed. “I’m staying there until the guests leave, so it’ll be easier to talk there than out this window.”

The creature hopped up onto the windowsill, looking down at the two hanging in midair.

“I suppose it must be, sir. Very well, I shall meet you there.”

He snapped his fingers, and disappeared.

Susan’s eyes got wide. “By the gaudy purple robe of my father, that was impressive. No magic circle, no words, just snap. Sheesh. Now I know how you feel, Harry, watching me do magic. Let’s go.”

The two flew back and went inside, where Stacy was up on a chair trying to stay away from the creature.

“I don’t think it bites, mom,” said Susan. “Come on, my room is this way.”

“Very well, mistress,” said the creature.

“My name is Susan, not mistress. And this is Harry, not sir. Now who are you?”

“Dobby, mis- uh, Susan. Dobby the house elf.”

“Nice to meet you, Dobby,” said Harry. “So what can I do for you?”

“Dobby must speak to you about something, very urgently,” said Dobby.

“Before that, can I get you something to eat?” asked Susan, looking the elf over. “No offense, but you look like you could use it.”

“Yeah, and maybe a shirt?” Harry added.

Dobby’s eyes got wide. Then they filled with tears. Then the tears started to flow.

“You would serve Dobby?” Dobby sniffled. “Food from your table, freely given? And Harry offers Dobby clothes, the very shirt off his back. Little did Dobby credit the rumors of Harry Potter’s greatness. But Dobby now sees they were true, oh how they were true. And even a greater surprise, to know that his friends are equally great! Equally giving. Dobby does not deserve such kindness from wizards!”

The two looked at each other. “Why?” asked Susan.

“Yeah, why shouldn’t wizards be kind to you?” added Harry.

Dobby tore himself from their gaze and started bashing his head into the wall and yelling. Stacy ran into the room to see what the heck was going on, and looked down at the elf.

“What’s he doing that for?” she asked.

“Seems to be some sort of racial trait, I don’t know. We haven’t gotten much out of him,” answered Susan.

Dobby stopped. “Was that necessary?” asked Harry, as Stacy shook her head and walked away.

“Dobby was about to speak ill of his family,” he explained.

“I still don’t get it. What does your family have to do with wizards?”

“Oh, you misunderstand. Dobby refers to the family he serves. The wizard family he is bound to, for life.”

“Whoa, wait. Wait. I want to make sure I am totally understanding this. You serve a wizard family? As in you are some kind of servant? And just the thought of ‘speaking ill’ of them prompts you to do violence to yourself?”

“That is the way of things,” Dobby explained. “If Dobby’s master knew was here, he would have to punish himself most grievously!”

“So basically you’re telling me you’re a slave. That wizard families keep slaves.” She looked at Harry.

“I can’t believe this,” said Harry.

“What else besides Azkaban and slaves have wizards been getting into these last thousand years or so, I wonder?”

“That, even worse, they think is perfectly normal?”

“Dobby, I’ll make you a promise. When I stand amidst the smoking rubble of Azkaban, and wizards everywhere know the power of Susan A. Felton, my very next task will be to end the slavery of every house elf.”

“But you can’t!”

“Destroy Azkaban? Not yet, but I’ll get there, you’ll see.”

“I mean free house elves. They must be freed by their masters!”

“Oh, they will. Or I’ll let the one Dementor I leave alive to study have anyone that doesn’t.”

“But Susan, a house elf is born to serve. It is our purpose. I agree, Dobby’s lot is not as he would hope, but many house elves are treated better.”

“I see. Well, I’ll just check their working conditions or something. Maybe pass some laws that allow them more rights. I don’t know. In any case, that wasn’t why you came.”

“No, Dobby came for a very different reason, though he thanks you for your kind words on his behalf.”

“So what is it?” asked Harry, after Dobby paused.

“It is just that, Harry Potter must not return to Hogwarts school!”

Susan and Harry glanced at each other again.

“Let me guess,” said Susan, “There’s some kind of danger there?”

“Yes,” said Dobby, hesitantly.

“As if there wasn’t before, with Voldemort running around in Professor Quirrell’s skin all year.”

“Please,” Dobby yelled, covering his ears, “say not that name!”

“I’ve faced him twice, and quite honestly next to Susan here he didn’t look like much. So I’m saying his name. But we took care of that, Albus knows, it’s all fine.”

“This is something different,” Dobby wailed. “A plot to bring chaos to the school this year.”

“Then I have to be there,” said Harry. “If there’s danger there for me, there’s danger there for others. I need to be there to protect them.”

“So selfless,” Dobby said, in wonder. “So noble, that he would sacrifice himself for others. I should not even look him in the eye, I am too low.”

“Knock it off,” said Susan. “No one is going to sacrifice themselves. Look, I can make us immune to magic. I have spells you can’t even imagine. We’ll be fine.”

“Like making yourself fly?” he asked hopefully.

“Exactly like that. I fought someone who was seriously trying to kill me, someone I thought was professor Quirrell, to a standstill. I would have won, too, if that fight hadn’t been interrupted. Seriously, with me by his side, Harry is in no danger whatsoever. And his friends, Ron and Hermione are also going to be there, and they... well, Hermione’s pretty good, and Ron is fair.”

“He’s fair.”

“I’m sure he’ll improve now that he’s back to himself again.”

“Yeah, no doubt.”

Dobby looked at Susan for a long time. “You claim that your goal is to destroy the wizard prison. You speak as though this will be done, it just has not happened, yet. Then you say you will free house elves, again, like it was nothing of consequence. Can Dobby really put his faith in you?”

Susan nodded. “I’ll let you in a secret, Dobby. My magic isn’t like that of wizards. My father wasn’t from around here. I don’t need a wand, just some words and a little bit of will. And we still have months of time to practice magic here, which Harry can do, thanks to me. He’s getting stronger, and I know this warning of yours will only make him more determined to learn. We appreciate your warning and we will be careful, but Hogwarts is where we belong. Danger or not. In fact it’s better he face danger now, when people like the headmaster are around in case things get out of hand. Once he graduates, he’s on his own. He’ll only have his own skill and knowledge to draw on. So isn’t it better to learn all he can now?”

He seemed to consider this for quite some time.

“Very well. Dobby will put his trust in you. He has heard from his family of your battle with the fake Quirinus. But Dobby did not believe it. Standing here, hearing the certainty of your voice, I now do believe it happened. Please, keep Harry Potter safe.”

“I will Dobby, I swear.”

“Thank you.”

“But seriously, can I get you something to eat?”

“Dobby must depart, he has been gone too long already. If he is missed... farewell, and thank you.”

He snapped again, and disappeared.

“Okay, that was weird,” said Harry.

“You said it.”

Susan grabbed her book of magic and started leafing through.

“*Descry Creature?*” he asked, a wicked look in his eye.

Susan giggled. “You know me far too well, my young padawan. Get the map ready.”

“You got it,” said Harry, getting on google maps.

Less than half an hour later, both sat, stunned. The spell said 26 miles SE of here, right?” asked Harry.

“That’s what it said.”

“Wiltshire. Who do we know that lives in Wiltshire?”

“I admit, it’s pretty empty around that area. It could be someone else, though.”

“Someone from a rich, old, wizard family that wouldn’t have any qualms about keeping a house slave?”

“Dobby did say if his master knew he would be punished. But what if someone else in the house ordered him to come warn you?”

“Would he really do that?”

“Like I said, we were making some progress when we were talking. He’s not a bad guy, he’s just not been brought up very well.”

“Too bad we can’t just ask him.”

“He would just deny it.”

“Especially if his dad was around.”

“Still, he bears watching. If that’s the family that’s going to stir up trouble, and we know his dad was a death eater before...”

“But why make trouble at the school?”

“Because that’s where you are, I guess? If he can somehow arrange things, through his son, to frame you, it would... well, it would be like your vault. Chipping away at you, one layer at a time until you’re broken.”

“Like that’s going to happen!”

“Exactly. Still, if we get the chance, we’ll have to see what his son gives away. Or talk to him at school about it, real casual like. If this is all he could do, sending us this warning, because of pressure from home, we don’t want to waste it.”

“Yes, his father could instruct him to do certain things, and he wouldn’t want to go against those orders.”

“I’m doing a *Research* spell, maybe we can get some more information about the family. The internet won’t tell us, I can tell you that for sure.”

“Okay Hermione. Doing extra work even during the summer.”

“This is important you know!”

“I know. I’ll go practice my stunning spells.”

“Great idea. Remember that precise wand movement!”
The both laughed.

The pair took one last look at the Malfoy mansion on the map, and closed the browser. If trouble was coming, they would be ready for it.

The Magical House

Time: Three Weeks Later

Place: Ron's house

The summer days swiftly burned away as Harry and Susan visited between Hermione and Ron. They received Hermione's invitation first, and Harry wasn't sure about staying over there with two girls in the house, but as her parents were both dentists it was big enough that he got his own room to sleep in. Susan tried to come up with a nice gift to give them, but they refused all offers. According to them, they had been learning about previously unknown (to them) techniques in the dental field with Hermione's *Research* spell. Harry and Hermione also shared the *Conceal Magic* item so Hermione could get in a little practice as well.

Susan then had Hermione over, where they did girl sleepover things that men (such as the author) were forbidden from knowing, and thus could not detail. He apologizes and offers the following advice: Use your imagination.

Then came the letter from Ron.

Dear Harry and Susan,

My mother says it might be easiest if you were to spend the last week with us, to buy your school supplies and go to the train station.

I wasn't sure if it would be awkward or not, being around me, given what happened, but they know you were my "friends" at school, but not exactly what that meant. So I can understand if you refuse.

If you do want to see if we can be friends when I am not under the influence of dark curses, please let me know.

Fair warning, my mother loves the Conjure Foodstuff item you made for me, so prepare for lots of questions about your magic.

Also, my father is absolutely obsessed with Muggles- sorry, I know you don't like that word, Susan, non-magical people. So be prepared to answer a ton of questions about that, too.

Hope Harry didn't get locked up, but dad says Susan wasn't carted off to be tried at the ministry for burning his relatives' house down, so I figure it's probably okay.

Hope to hear from you.

Ron

"It would be easier," Harry remarked after reading it.

"I'd love to see a house run by an actual magical family."

"Your mother won't mind, will she?"

"I doubt it. They met at the train station, when Ron's dad asked her about fire hydrants."

"Oh yeah! We should write a book: *What Really Goes on in the Muggle World.*"

"Right after we destroy the word Muggle. What's it even mean, anyway?"

"Don't look at me."

So Susan had Ron send them a picture of their house so they could *Teleport* there, and packed most of their things into her *Pocket Dimension*. Saying goodbye to her mother and picking up Sparkle, Susan took Harry's hand and cast the spell from her book. She vanished from her room.

In front of her was a house looking thing. Sort of. If the house had been built by someone half mad, and then added onto vertically without taking the normal laws of physics into account. Various additions made of different materials were stacked atop each other, and Susan gave a little "Eep!" as her eyes tried to take the whole thing in.

"You asked for it," said Harry, also a bit stunned.

"Yup."

"Hello!" shouted a voice from a window above them. An older boy, possibly George (or Fred) was leaning out, waving. "I'll send Ron down!"

Susan waved back. "Thank you!"

"Thanks for coming over," said Ron. "My house isn't much, but they kept pestering me to invite you. I had to tell them about what happened at school, though not everything, of course."

"Oh Ron, you're way too modest," said Susan, looking about his room. It was plastered with Quidditch posters and such, *boy things* thought Susan, who didn't have much experience with boy's rooms. Harry's "room" had been a cupboard most of his life, and he hadn't done much to Junior's old room. "This house is pretty amazing. But I have a plan to repay your folks for letting us stay that will make it even more amazing, don't you worry."

"You don't have to," mumbled Ron.

"Course I do! Won't be any trouble, believe me. It's just a spell, one of the vary rare ones that are semi-permanent when cast. And with the amount of energy I can put in, it'll last a long, long time." Her eyes twinkled.

"What's it do?"

"Oh, you'll see!" giggled Susan.

"So, anything interesting happen lately? How was your visit with Hermione?"

"Actually, something interesting did happen," replied Harry. "We got a visit from a house elf a few weeks after school let out. Wanted to warn us about some kind of plot someone is cooking up for next year."

"A house elf told you this? That's weird. Mom's always saying she wishes she had a house elf to help with things around here."

"You mother wants a slave?" said Susan, aghast. "I'm going to have to reevaluate my perception of her."

"What are you talking about? They like being enslaved."

"Like it?" Harry and Susan looked at each other. "You can't be serious."

"It's what I've always heard," Ron assured them.

"Humph," said Susan, making a pouty face. "I could make her a servant, I know that spell. I use it all the time to clean my room up. I suppose I could do it to repay her hospitality, but honestly, wanting a slave."

"I don't think they see it like that," said Harry, looking at Ron, who had a confused look on his face. "Anyway, Susan's magic tracked it back to the Malfoy mansion, at least we think

that's where he went. So the question is, did this house elf overhear some plot and come to warn me against his master's wishes? Or was he sent to warn me by someone living there?"

"You don't really think Draco sent him, do you?"

Harry shrugged. "Who knows?"

"Did he say what this so called plot was about?"

"I don't think he could. Just something about chaos at the school. I'm not sure how that would be different from the normal state of things there, but that's what he said. He seemed relieved because Susan was so powerful. You should have seen his face when he saw us flying about!" Harry laughed.

"Wait, you can use magic outside of school?"

"My magic doesn't show up to whatever wanded wizards did to alert them of what they called 'underage magic.' And I made Harry an item that cancels out whatever that spell is, so he can do magic no problem too."

"Wow."

"You can borrow it, if you want to get some magic practice in before school starts."

"Who do you think I am, Hermione?"

All three laughed.

In the days that followed, Susan insisted on creating an *Imbued* item of *Autonomous Assistant* for Ron's mother, and was studying her mystery spell to put on the house.

She handed Mrs. Weasley a stone hand, "Because it's a helping hand, see?" and told her how to use it.

"It's a grade four spell," she began, "which I know means nothing to you but it does mean it'll drain four energy from you when you activate it. I don't know what that means to you because you don't seem to have desecrate energy but my other stuff works, so it should be fine. I tell you this because it's a warning- you could almost use it to death. Wait an hour in-between uses and you should be fine. If you want other people to command it, that's okay too."

"How do I use it?" she asked, holding it up.

"It's just like Ron's item of *Conjure Foodstuff*. In this case, the trigger word is *Assistant* and the task you wish it to perform. It will vanish after that, and the assistant is invisible in any case, so my advice would be this. Make the task moving from some starting location, performing the task, and then returning. Observe."

She took the item back, then placed it on the floor in a corner of the room. She touched it with one finger.

"Assistant- Follow me. Fold the laundry I show you. Return to this spot." Four energy drained out of her, and she took her finger off. The hand rose into the air. Mrs. Weasley took a step back. "There's now a sort of invisible creature standing there, with the item at the center," she explained. "Now I'll head out to where you have your laundry drying and it'll complete the second part of the task. When it's done it'll come back here rather than disappearing and making you search out in the grass for it. Come on."

She went downstairs and then outside, the hand trailing after her. It started folding the laundry.

"It's about as strong as a normal person, so it can't move huge boulders or anything. It's also not very bright. It won't go berserk if you tell it to wash the dishes and start washing every dish in the house. It'll be smart enough to know it's just the dirty dishes. However if there's any

ambiguity in your orders it just won't activate. Try to be more specific or break the job down more. Don't ask me how it knows, but my magic is aware enough to go away when the task I ask for is complete, so it's getting information from somewhere. Any questions?"

"Your magic made this thing?" she asked.

"Pretty neat, huh?"

The evening before their letters arrived, Susan asked the entire family to join her outside, and they watched as Sparkle cast a spell over Susan, who was grinning like a maniac.

"Now, this spell normally takes 12 hours," she explained, "Which is a bit much, in my opinion. Casting it from my book would normally double that time. And I like you all, but twenty four hours of magic is a little bit much even for me. That's why Sparkle learned the spell she just cast on me: It's a curious one. It relates to how my magic works, and I think you're going to pleased."

Susan closed her eyes and began gathering energy for the spell, and 8 actions later she was ready.

She looked at her book and magical circles started appearing under the house.

"*Fortification*," she said simply, and magical energy exploded around the house in a dazzling display.

Susan fell over, all 80 of her energy rushing out and into the spell.

"Susan!" everyone said, rushing to her side.

"I'm okay," she said, trying to get up again. "Never done that before, bit of a rush, actually."

"What did you do?" asked Arthur, looking up at his house. Bits of magical energy were still binding themselves into the structure in a dazzling lights display.

"Like I said, the spell usually takes 12 hours. When it's done... well, there's quite a list, actually. Basically your house is now the toughest thing on the planet. For the next, oh, eighty years or so."

"What exactly do you mean by that?" he pressed.

"Let the poor girl sit down inside, she looks exhausted!" said Molly.

"That's because I am," explained Susan. "I just used more energy than you would in a week on that one spell."

Of course, unless I go negative I don't actually get any Fatigue so it's probably more psychological than anything else.

"No way!" said Harry, who knew exactly how her magic worked.

"Way," said Susan, winking at him.

They went in and sat down.

"Okay, now I can explain what I've done," said Susan, collapsing into a comfy chair. "Your house would survive a war being fought here, as long as they didn't drop any nuclear bombs on it. It can't burn down or collapse because of an earthquake. No one can use magic to spy on anyone inside, nor can any form of teleportation into the house itself function. No enemy or person who means you harm, even indirectly, can enter. And like I said, it'll last for about 80 years, as that was my rating in Sun magic, at the time."

"You took a massive penalty to cast it instantly, and made up for by using all your energy in one big burst," said Harry. "That's what that spell Sparkle cast did, right?"

"Exactly," said Susan. "*Energetic Accumulation*. It might be considered cheating, given how my magic works, but I felt I owed them the effort."

“So let me get this straight,” said one of the twins. “If there was a troll wandering around outside...”

“...And we just closed the door on him...” said the other.

“...He could pound on it all day and never get in.”

“That’s about the size of it.”

“What an amazing gift,” said Arthur.

“We can’t possibly repay it,” said Molly.

“Bah,” said Susan, waving a hand. “A good night’s sleep is all I need. I’m repaying you for your hospitality this last week. You can’t pay me back for paying you back. Also I wanted to experience the effects of casting spells this way, in case it turned out badly. This was the biggest thing I could think of. Oh, and I have to apologize.” She looked over at Arthur.

“For what?”

“Making those items for my friends. Ron told me about what you do, Mr. Weasley. Hunting down objects that have spells cast into them. I didn’t even consider that it might be illegal.”

Molly looked at him. “Such as a flying car?”

“Now dear, we’ve discussed that. In any case, there’s nothing to apologize for. In the first place, it’s Muggle objects that are the problem. These little stone objects would just be treated as a key-chain if found in the Muggle world, or just tossed out. Also, they require a password of sorts, they won’t activate on their own. So I think you’re fine. Just do be careful about making things like that, okay?”

“Will do.” (Spoiler- she never considers it again)

“I expect you’ll want to get to bed then?” asked Molly.

Susan nodded.

“Off you go then. And thank you.”

“Sure thing. Someone remind me in 80 years and I’ll come refresh the spell on the house.”

“This lot won’t come cheap,” said Fred (or George) at breakfast the next morning. Their books for the year seemed to consist of every book ever written by one Gilderoy Lockhart.

“Gets around, does he?” asked Susan, scowling. “Still, I should think Fred and George could share a set, no? Presumably they’re taking the same classes.”

“We are, and we could,” said one of the twins.

“There’s just one problem,” said the other.

“I don’t trust him not to mess with it,” the both said at once.

“We’ll manage somehow,” said Molly, bustling about. “I’m sure we can pick up Ginny’s second hand.”

“She could have mine,” said Susan. “I doubt I’ll get much out of them, honestly, given how different our styles of magic are. I’ll get them out of the way and she can have them the rest of the year.”

Ginny glared at her.

“You’re starting this year?” asked Harry. “Great! If you even need any help, don’t be shy about asking, okay?” She squeaked something, blushed, and ran out of the room.

“Was it something I said?”

“At least she seems to like you,” said Susan sadly. “Personally she just looks angry whenever she looks at me.”

“She’s just a bit jealous that you’ve known Harry longer,” explained Ron. “She’ll come around.”

“I hope you’re right,” said Susan sadly. “But my offer still stands,” she said to Molly.

“Thank you dear, I’ll think about it.”

When the time came to leave, the family crowded around the fireplace.

“This is your teleportation nexus?” Susan asked, gesturing. “A fireplace?”

“It works,” said Arthur.

How? How does... this... work?

“And you’re all too young to Apparate, so the Floo network it is. Come now, guests first. Harry?” said Molly.

“What exactly do I do?” he asked.

“Oh yes. It’s much like one of Susan’s magical objects, actually. Throwing the powder and stating your destination cause you to appear there. Quite simple, really,” said Molly.

“Oh. I’ll give it a try then,” Harry said, stepping up. “Are you sure you wouldn’t rather just teleport us there, Susan?”

“No, I’d like to experience their form of teleportation. I’m looking forward to it,” she answered. *And a curse upon my Curiosity for saying those words, as I somehow feel I’m going to regret this.*

“Right. Here we go then.” He took a pinch of the powder that was offered. “Diagonally!” he said, becoming wreathed in green flames and disappearing.

“He didn’t just say what I think he said, did he?” asked Susan. “How do you fail a speaking check?”

“I think there’s a very good chance,” said Arthur. “Better get after him.”

“I think I’ll stick to my form from now on,” said Susan, light headed as the rest of the family appeared from the designated flame in point in Diagon Alley.

“You said it,” agreed Sparkle, licking herself clean. “That was awful. How do they put up with it?”

“I expect they don’t know any better. Now where’s Harry?”

“Excellent question,” said Arthur. “Fan out everyone, we’ll meet back here in ten minutes.”

Moments later Harry and the rest of the party were reunited, and everyone said hello to Rubeus, who had found him.

“You’ll never believe where I came out,” said Harry.

“It must have been somewhere close,” said Ron, looking around.

“Some shop called Borgin and Burkes. And guess who was there trying to get rid of some stuff?”

“Who?”

“Let’s just say a man who may in fact own a certain house elf?”

“Lucius Malfoy?” asked Arthur, who had of course been told about the visit by the house elf previously.

“The very same.”

“And he was selling, not buying? Borgin and Burkes, eh? I’d love to get my hands on that stuff before it leaves his possession. I bet I could put him away a long time.”

Harry looked at him, then down at Sparkle. He turned back to Arthur. "You really mean that? I mean if you caught him with it, that would be really, really bad for him?"

"Of course. Why?"

"Because I think there's a way. You would have to see him, I expect?" he asked Sparkle.

"What are you cooking up?" asked Susan.

"After they made the deal, Mr. Malfoy said 'I'll expect you at the manor tomorrow to pick up the goods.'"

"What does that have to do with anything?" Arthur asked, confused.

"I see where you're going with this," Susan said, eyes sparkling. "Oh, that's wicked, Harry."

"What? What are you kids talking about?"

"Come with me, I'll explain on the way." Harry took off.

"Be back in a moment dear," he called back to Molly.

"It might be dangerous, you'll need a squad of people from the ministry to back you up. Or Susan, at the very least. I hope you can round some up on short notice," said Harry.

"Possibly, but honestly, what's this all about?"

"You're going to get there before he does," said Susan. "Mr. Malfoy will then hand you his illegal objects, and then you pounce. Personally I'll consider it as getting him back for mistreating his house elf all these years."

"But he's going to recognize me, it takes a month to brew polyjuice potion. Though I suppose I could find someplace that sells it down there..." he shuddered.

"Not necessary," said Sparkle. "I can shape shift you into him with magic, no problem."

"Really?"

"The spell is fairly simple," Sparkle said. "It should be no trouble at all."

They came to the shop, which Susan didn't need *Magic Sense* to tell her was full of dark magics. "You kids should stay out here," said Arthur, looking it over.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Weasley, but you're with me, not the other way around. We go in together. I want to make sure you come out again."

"That's-" he tried to say, but Susan pushed the door open and went inside.

"Welcome, can I- what?" said an unpleasant looking man.

"Is he the one?" Susan asked Harry, ignoring him.

"That's him."

Susan looked back at him. "I see."

"Arthur Weasley?" said the man, looking past them. "I don't believe this is anyplace I would have guessed you would ever be. Surely you cannot be wanting my services?"

"That depends..." said Arthur, probably trying to stall for time. Sparkle started walking around the man, looking up at him.

"Depends? Who are these children? What is this all about? Why is that cat staring at me? Get out of my shop this instant, all of you!"

"Satisfied?" asked Susan to Sparkle.

"Face," she whispered back, holding a paw up. Susan picked her up and she peered at the man.

"What are you doing?" said the man, beginning to lose it.

“Leaving,” said Susan curtly. “There’s obviously nothing for us in a shop with so rude a salesman. My gold will spend just as easily elsewhere.” She jingled the pouch with her coins in it. “Come, Arthur.”

They walked out.

“My heart is pounding,” said Arthur, walking back to where they had left the others.

“Tomorrow is going to be worse. Unless you’d like me to do shape shifting and you can be invisible. You’re going to have to convince Mr. Malfoy you’re that guy. I hope you’re up to it.”

“So do I,” muttered Arthur. “It’s a mad plan, but it could work.”

“Of course it’ll work,” said Susan. “You’ve got me on your side.”

The Weasley’s went off to get whatever money they had from their vault, and Harry felt it would not do to embarrass Ron by going with them.

“But won’t you need money?” asked Molly.

“My vault was emptied some time after Voldemort was destroyed, probably by Death Eaters. The goblins were of course falling all over themselves to apologize. Apologize, but not offer restitution. Susan here spoke up for that. Though I could pop in and see how the investigation was going.”

“You’ve got nothing?” asked Ron, probably wondering if he should feel superior to his friend because even he had a few Sickles saved, or bad because Harry was now penniless. (In a manner of speaking)

“Not exactly,” hedged Harry. “Like I said, the bank gave me a small ‘loan’ which won’t come due until they get my money back from whoever stole it. And Susan had a rather brilliant plan to make more, so I’m not worried about it at the moment.”

“Your whole fortune stolen?” said Arthur, shocked. “Oh Harry, I’m sorry.”

“Thanks. I’m not even sure how much I lost, it really didn’t matter. There wasn’t anything I could do about it.”

“That’s rough,” said Ron.

“Go on. I’ll meet you over at the bookshop later.”

The bookshop, Flourish and Blotts, seemed to be packed to bursting with people.

“Interesting that a lot of these shops are run by two people,” remarked Susan. “Even down in the seedier part of town, it was never ‘Smily’s Junk’ it’s always ‘Guy and Other Guy’s Magical Doodads.’”

“What’s the crowd all about? They giving something away?” asked Harry.

“No, it’s Lockhart, apparently he’s here this afternoon,” said Hermione, pointing to the sign outside. “I feel like I should be more excited, given the adventures he’s had. But somehow after seeing all the things Susan has already done in her life, he seems sort of bland.”

“I’m just getting started, Hermione,” said Susan, taking her arm. “You haven’t seen anything yet.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of.”

Entering the shop, they caught up with the Weasley family, where Arthur and Molly stood quietly arguing. From what she could catch, Arthur had told his wife about the plan to be shape shifted into another person and go after Lucius. Susan shook her head. *You really have to learn what to keep from your wife*, she thought. *Not that Hermione-*

“You okay?” asked Ron. “You’ve gone all red.”

“Never you mind!” Susan snapped, trying not to continue that line of thought.

Getting up to the table, Gilderoy snapped up Harry and started announcing that he would be the one to take over the post of Defense Against the Dark Arts that year at Hogwarts, which made most people applaud. He even gave Harry a set of his books, which she saw Harry tip into Ginny’s cauldron and say he would buy his own.

“No more Professor Quirrell then,” sighed Susan unhappily.

“He did teach us a lot. I hope Gilderoy follows in the tradition,” Hermione replied.

“I just hope he’s recovering okay. We should ask Headmaster Dumbledore when we get back to school.”

“Good idea.”

“Trouble, come on.”

Susan and Hermione walked over to Harry, who was talking to Draco.

“It must be tough, not being able to go anywhere without that sort of thing happening,” he was saying.

“You can say that again,” replied Harry. He seemed a bit shocked to find Draco actually conversing with him in a civil tone.

“Hello Susan,” said Draco, looking over at him. “Hermione.”

“Hello Draco, I hope your summer has been going well?”

“Quite, thank you. What do you think of our new Defense teacher then?”

“There’s something off about him,” said Susan. “He’s either a total faker or the most brilliant but loudmouthed man on the planet.”

“Why do you say that?” asked Harry.

“I know what you mean,” Draco replied, and they all turned to look. “Watch him move. Professor Dumbledore, Quirrell, especially Professor Snape. Even Professor McGonagall, though I am loath to admit it, moves like, how do I explain? Like they’re solid people. You know what I mean? Like they’ve seen their worst fear and beaten it up and laughed at it. Gilderoy doesn’t move like that. He’s showy, big, like he wants all eyes on him, all the time.”

“Yeah, that’s it,” Susan said finally. “I couldn’t put my finger on it, but you’ve nailed it, Draco. You’re a pretty good judge of character, aren’t you?”

“I guess.” He looked away.

“Draco, we’re leaving!” cried a voice.

“It’s my dad, I’ve gotta go. See you at school, Susan.”

“Your father? We should pay our respects!” said Susan.

“Are you sure?” Harry whispered to her as Draco moved through the crowd.

“Just watch him, I want to see if he reacts to us.” She followed behind Draco.

“Sir?” she asked respectfully. “You are Mr. Malfoy?”

“I am,” he answered.

“I’m Susan Felton, an acquaintance of your son’s. It’s an honor to meet the man Draco holds in such high regard.” She held out her hand, which he shook.

“Susan? I’ve heard that name. Yes, my son has spoken of you and your amazing magic quite often.”

“I’m flattered he would mention me. We have spoken a few times about some fascinating subjects. I’m looking forward to having some more with him, when his time permits.”

“Draco, you didn’t tell me she was this charming- hello Arthur.”

Mr. Weasley stepped up behind Susan. "Everything all right here, then?"

"But of course. I was just saying hello to Susan here, she wished to introduce herself."

"She's been staying with us the past week, so I have to look after her, you see."

"Look after her?" he said, seeming surprised. "As though I was some kind of threat to the girl. Still, I'm surprised you could afford a guest. But of course all that overtime you've been putting in- they are paying you extra for it, I expect?"

"I think I'll actually be putting in for a raise soon," he replied smugly. "In fact, I can tell you right now my next job might be the biggest one of my career."

"I wish you luck then," Lucius said dryly, grabbing the one shabby transfiguration book out of Ginny's cauldron. "It seems, judging from the state of this, that you're going to need all the help you can get. I say, what is that idiot doing?" He looked over at Lockhart.

As did everyone else, to see him being thoroughly kissed by a young witch. It didn't seem like he was struggling to get away all that hard.

"That's who Albus chose to teach Defense?" Lucius sneered, dropping the book back. "No wonder the school has gone downhill so much. Goodbye all. It was nice meeting you, Susan."

He put his arm around his son and swept them out of the shop.

"Well?" asked Harry.

Susan shook her head. "I saw the way he moved, but that's about it. Draco was right, when you start looking for it, it's there."

"You've got it," said Hermione.

"What?"

"Don't give me that look. You know your magic is better than ours, that makes you act a certain way."

"Hermione, I may believe my magic is more flexible, possibly even more useful, but never *better*. I hope you believe that."

"Nevertheless," she said. "You know what you're capable of, and it shows. The same as Professor Dumbledore, and Mr. Malfoy."

"Strange to hear those two grouped together, no matter what the context. Anyway, it was all I could do not to laugh in his face. Tomorrow, Susan, we wipe that smug grin off his face."

"I just realized, what happens to Draco if his father goes to prison?"

"He still has his mother. I wouldn't say she was innocent of his dealings, but he's the one I want."

"It's just, if you reveal that you're, you know, yourself, he's going to know it was me helping you out. Because only my magic could do it."

"Hummm." He was thoughtful for a second. "How about two birds with one stone? We get the Auror squad in the house and they step out of nowhere when the box is handed over. He believes Borgin betrayed him because he sees the man walk free, and the real Mr. Borgin's reputation vanishes overnight."

"Won't someone try to take revenge on Borgin?"

"Once he hears about it, he'll flee the country. Man like that, dealing with Malfoy types? He has an escape plan, mark my words."

"Okay."

"Settled then. I can't wait!"

I hope I'm doing the right thing...

Assault on the Manor

Time: The next morning

Place: The Ministry of Magic

Four tough looking wizards, three men and one woman, looked down at Susan and Sparkle. That morning they had gotten up early and gone with Arthur, through the floo network, to where he worked. It was so early that hardly anyone was coming or going, and Susan was taken to a side office where the four were waiting for her.

“And she’s going to make this plan work?” said one of them. “A girl who can’t be a third year student yet.”

“As I’ve explained, she and her cat have certain spells that will allow us to infiltrate the manor and catch Lucius in the act of handing over his illegal objects to who he thinks is the buyer. That will, of course, be me.”

“I don’t buy it,” said another.

“Nor should you,” said Susan. “You’ve just been given a remarkable claim. So obviously it’s going to require remarkable evidence.”

“She’s got you there, Paul,” said the woman. “Why don’t we just see what she can do before we reject her?”

“Fine,” grumbled Paul. “But this had better work, Arthur.”

“Then let’s get this party started,” said Susan. “Sparkle?”

She nodded, and padded over to Arthur. “*Shape-shift*” she said, touching him with a paw. Before the group’s eyes, Arthur morphed into the man she had seen in the shop.

“I saw it, but I don’t believe it,” said another man.

“Yeah, that was something,” said the fourth.

“When we get to where we’re going, your minds are really going to be blown, so get ready. How are we getting there, by the way?”

“We’ll travel by floo to the nearest point near the Malfoy Manor, then fly the rest of the way. How are you going to get them in?” asked Arthur.

“The same way we got past the flame trap to fight Voldemort’s shade. We’ll step into the astral, that’ll make us all invisible and able to pass through the walls. Sparkle and I will be invisible, just in case something bad should happen. Once the bust is made we can just fly back to where we came out and I’ll just go directly to The Burrows,” answered Susan.

“Wait, you fought who’s shade now?” asked the third man.

“What’s the astral?” asked Paul.

“Sorry, the first one’s classified. As for the second, think of it as a slightly offset dimension from us where we can observe, but not be observed.”

“What’s a dimension?”

Susan sighed. “You know, if I had to answer questions about my magic all day I would do nothing else. Can we get on with it before the real guy shows up? You’ll experience it firsthand in a little while, after all.”

“Whatever. Let’s go.”

Coming out of the fireplace, everyone mounted their brooms. Well, almost everyone.

“Wait, where’s your broom?” asked the woman, who had introduced herself as Katrina.

“Please,” replied Susan. “I will not degrade myself by pretending to fly on a broom. Tried it once. Not a fan. *Flight*.” A magical circle surrounded her, and Susan rose into the air. “You coming or not?”

“How-” demanded Katrina, pointing to her and looking at Arthur.

“Don’t ask,” he replied.

“In any case, we better go into the astral now,” said Susan. “He should only see Mr. Whatever His Name Was approaching. You won’t be able to see us, but don’t worry, we’ll be right behind you.”

“You’re the boss little lady,” said the first man. “We’ll do whatever you say.”

“Great, take my hand, and Sparkle will do the honors.”

The four rose on their broomsticks and joined hands with Susan. Sparkle pulled them through to the Astral plane with *Dimension Step*, where they looked around.

Arthur looked around. “Wow, you weren’t kidding. I can’t see you at all! I hope you’re still there. We’re off.” He took off flying, and the others followed him.

“So where are we exactly? I’m Don, by the way.”

“Nice to meet you, Don. Think of us as having slipped through a crack in the world. So we’re sort of ‘beside’ it, so to speak. We can pass through normal matter, but nothing your magic can do will spot us. At least according to Mr. Weasley, when we discussed the plan.”

“There are about a million questions I want to ask you right now, oh, and I’m Terry.”

“I’m sorry that I can’t really answer them. I can tell you my magic is very different than yours, and would ask that you don’t spread it around too much. Headmaster Dumbledore and I are hoping to pass it off as unremarkable for as long as we can.” *Though I suppose around school that ship sailed a long time ago...*

“I can see why. What else can you do?”

Susan smiled. “A lot. With the time to study the right spell, probably anything. I’ve memorized about 30 spells, and Sparkle knows about that many different ones from me.”

“Wait a minute,” said Katrina. “The Longbottoms just got better recently. You didn’t have anything to do with that, did you? The healers said it was some new technique they were working on.”

Susan colored. “Yes, that was me. Again, I’ve requested them not be told, for obvious reasons.”

She whistled. “That was fine work. Most of us despaired of them ever getting healed. That’s some power you- did you say your *cat* knew a bunch of spells? That’s right, she cast the spell that changed Arthur, didn’t she? I didn’t want to believe my eyes!”

“Believe it. She’s just as powerful as I am, in her own right. We’ve been together all our lives.”

“Who are you?” asked Paul, awed.

“Would you believe I just recently found that out myself? But like I said, I can’t really say.” She laughed. “You wouldn’t believe me if I told you, anyway!” *I mean really, can a person that doesn’t know what a dimension is grasp the concept of a parallel reality? Not in the time it takes to get where we’re going, I think.*

They flew on in silence, and finally approached a large mansion, where Arthur descended to.

“Time for us to go invisible. When Sparkle drops us out of the Astral you better make sure you’re not standing inside anything. That could be messy. She can’t drop just you guys out,

so I'll be in the same room, invisible. Make your move and do it fast. If something goes wrong I'll back you up, but then my invisibility will drop. I would rather he not know I was involved. Just say "now" when you're all in position and want to be in the world again, okay?"

They all nodded and dropped down to stand with Arthur.

"Go in and get into position, the walls won't stop you," said Susan. She began casting *Invisibility*.

The four set their brooms down and stepped through the wall, looking around the house. *Have to remember to go back and get those brooms later. Or will they just pop back when the spell ends? Huh.* A few seconds later, Susan and Sparkle did also, now invisible.

They watched as Lucius came to the door.

"You're early this morning," he said, looking past Arthur.

"I figured you were a busy man, I would get this out of the way first thing."

"Very considerate of you. Step inside before someone sees you. I'll get the merchandise."

"Very well."

Inside the room was a series of narrow carpets laid over hardwood floors which gleamed. In fact everything there was expensive, old, or both, and Susan had to admit she was impressed. The rich, even in the wizard world, lived well, it seemed. She watched the others get into positions around Arthur, wands out. He was standing on the carpet, looking about interestedly, while the others were standing on the wood.

Lucius returned with a box. "You have the money?" he asked.

"As soon as I make sure the merchandise is in the proper condition," replied Arthur.

"Oh, very well," he said, handing the box over. Arthur reached out to take it.

"NOW!" shouted Paul, and Sparkle released the spell holding them in the Astral.

Everything went black.

Susan groaned and struggled to open her eyes. It felt cold, like she was lying on stone, and she wasn't sure if she had her eyes open or not.

What hit me? she thought.

"Sparkle?"

"Anyone?"

No answer. That can't be good. What happened to me? Was there some kind of defense system on the house that we didn't anticipate?

Fear filled her.

I was knocked unconscious. That means I became visible, if only for a second. If I was teleported after I got knocked out... oh no, if Sparkle got knocked out the shape-shift on Mr.

Weasley was ended, and he would have been standing there looking surprised. Crap! How did this happen?

Susan got up and checked herself. Nothing seemed to be broken or even hurt, and she wasn't bound in any way. Her eyes were not covered, it was just pitch black here. She felt along the wall and found herself in a cell, barely big enough to stretch her arms across. There was a set of metal bars on one side.

Wow, good thing I learned Phase, I guess. Well, let's see what's out there. Better not use the light spell, I don't want to give away my position. And anyway, what did I make this item for, if not this? She smiled.

"Darksight," she intoned, touching the bracelet. The world lit up as though it was daylight, in black and white.

Huh? Susan found herself staring down a long passageway that went to the left. Not exactly what I was expecting. Though I'm not sure what I was expecting, really. Better get a move on. I don't know how long I was out for and I might need to rescue the others. Especially Mr. Weasley. I got him into this mess, so I'm going to get him out.

Susan easily cast *Phase* on herself and stepped through the bars, keeping the spell going just in case. She turned down the hall, looking around. The walls looked like they had been hacked out of the ground, while the floor was smooth stone. She almost immediately came to another turn, and looked around it. The hallway went for a few paces and then turned again.

Great, is this some sort of maze? I'll follow the right wall then, she decided. Turning again she saw a long hallway that branched left and right, and when she got up to it, found that the left "route" only went on a few steps, then dead ended. She turned right, passing a door on her left.

And where do you go, mysterious door?

Following the right wall she came to a portcullis, which was down. She easily stepped through, *thank you Phase magic,* and stepped into a large room.

Yuck, giant spiders, she thought, phasing through webs to follow the right wall. *The question is, what do they eat?*

Following the wall she made a left turn and came to a door, which she now phased through.

Oh, she thought, as she stepped through a family of rats sleeping in a small nest. *Don't mind me, just passing through. Say, what do you guys eat?* Susan came to another door, and looked around. It seemed as though these two doors were the only way in or out of this place, so where did the rats come from? She shrugged. *Maybe there's some kind of hidden door, or a small tunnel they dug? Could be how they get food, too.*

She stepped through the door and continued following the hallway. It made a u-turn and passed what looked like a bunch of holes in the wall. She peered into them, and saw a bunch of edged shapes inside the holes.

Seriously, a poison dart trap?

She moved on, following a very long corridor and ending at an empty cell. *Naturally there would be more than one.* She moved on, back the way she came but down another long hallway she had just passed to get to the empty cell. Turning right half way down, she spied

another set of bars, and stepped through them. This was a large room, easily the biggest she had seen thus far, and snacking on something in the center of the room-

That has to be the largest centipede I've ever seen. Oh crap!

The thing raised its head and charged for her, and Susan almost started the incantation for *Elemental Attack (Fire)* but stopped herself. *It's not like the thing can hurt me.* As predicted, it passed right through her, and slammed into the wall behind her at high speed. It seemed dazed, but charged again, and once again got nowhere. It seemed to stand there in confusion.

"Not too bright, are you?" she asked. "Just go back to your... dinner." She followed the right wall and came to a door, which she stepped through. Walking down the hallway she spotted a figure hunched over in another cell.

"Hey, I'm here!" she shouted, running forward.

The figure didn't even seem to hear her.

Oh right, I'm still phased. Silly of me, really. She ended the spell, and tapped the bars.

"Who's there?" said the figure, looking up. It was Don.

"It's me, Susan. Are you okay?"

"Susan? It sounds like you, but I can't see a darn thing."

"Oh, okay, just a second. *Light.*" Susan dropped *Darksight*, which she felt was more useful, but figured one casting of *Light* was better than dropping *Darksight* and casting it again another 4 times.

"Oh, there you are. You're okay! Can you get me out of here? My wand is gone."

"I figured as much. Yeah, grab onto me."

One casting of *Phase* later, and Don was standing next to her, outside the cell. She maintained the spell, and kept a hold of Don's hand.

"Thanks, I was worried I would be in there forever! What was that spell- no, never mind, we have more important things to worry about. Are you hurt?"

Good thing Phased people can hear each other, or this would have been difficult.

"No. Whatever brought us here knocked me out, but I'm not bruised in any way. Are you? I know healing magic."

Don shook his head. "No, I'm fine, thanks. What happened, anyway?"

Susan shrugged. "We stepped out of the Astral, and then the next thing I remember is waking up in that cell."

"The floor. I bet it was a portkey! That little slime-ball, he would rig his own house."

"What's that?"

"You can put a teleport spell into an object. Anyone that touches it gets teleported. That's why he was only walking on the carpet- it wasn't there for decoration, it was there to make sure he didn't get caught in his own spell!"

"Devious. And that brought us here, huh? Any ideas where we are?"

"We could be anywhere. Come on, we have to search for the others. Can I have my hand back, now?"

"No, actually. I have to tell you, this whole place is not only trapped, I saw a giant centipede in the room back there. There are also doors and portcullis all over the place. Right now you're still *phased* with me, but if you let go, you're back in the real world again. And without your wand, no offense, you're helpless."

"None taken." Don waved a hand through the bars again. "You're right. But it looks normal, not like that weird space we were in before."

"Different spell. Somewhat similar effect. We can be seen, but not touched."

“Lead on, you’re the one with the magic at the moment.”

“Okay, I’m following the right wall at the moment, so we’ll only make right turns.”

They continued back the passageway and to the right, then made two more rights, then passed a door on the left.

“You said this place was trapped?”

“Yeah, I saw some holes on the side of one wall. Probably something mechanical, a wizard wouldn’t be expecting it. Not that I see how he expected anyone to get out of those cells.”

“Ah, you didn’t trigger it because of this phasing, you called it.”

“Exactly.”

The passageway here was long, and jogged left a bit, then continued right. The two passed another spike trap without realizing it, then came to look at the ugly, squat statue sitting in an alcove.

“Some kind of trap?” Susan wondered. “Would it activate if we weren’t phased?”

“Possibly. Who knows what he’s cooked up for down here.”

“Creepy. Let’s go.”

Turning down the hallway to the left, the two passed a fire trap without knowing it after a passageway to their left.

“This place is extensive! I hope we can make it out of here,” said Don, marveling at how far they had come thus far.

“Don’t worry, if worst comes to worst I can teleport out of here and get help. I just thought it would be faster to find everyone down here, but now I’m not so sure.”

“Tell you what, I can teleport without a wand, though we call it Apparition. The next person we find, we’ll try to get out of here and head back to the ministry. You can stay and rescue more people, as you seem more capable than us without wands. Why is that, exactly? Or can’t you talk about it?”

“Sorry.”

“Ah well.”

The next thing they came upon was Katrina, who was busy chipping away at the rock holding the bars in place with a knife. It was safe as Susan glanced around, so she dropped *Phase*.

“You’re okay!” she exclaimed as they drew closer. “Thank goodness.”

“No, thank Susan. She got me out. We’re all going to get out of here!”

“Great! Don’t suppose you could magic up our wands, could you?”

Susan shook her head. “Sorry, I would need to know their exact location before I could bring them here. It’s a limitation of the *Retrieval* spell. Wait a second, if you guys can teleport or what did you call it? Apparate? Why couldn’t you get out of your cells that way?”

“It was the first thing I tried,” replied Katrina. “I didn’t get anywhere.”

“I’m hoping it’s just the cell,” said Don. “Once you’re out I hope we can do it and get back, then bring reinforcements here.”

“Well don’t just stand there then, get me out of here!”

“Will do!” said Susan. She hauled Katrina out through the bars with *Phase*, then let go of her.

“Nice. That spell would sure come in handy. Ever think of becoming an Auror?”

“The nurse at the school wanted to know if I wanted to be a healer. I’m getting job offers all around.”

“With that magic, I can see why. You sure you’ll be okay?”

“I just rescued the both of you, didn’t I?”

“Good point. We’ll come back when we can. Ready, Don?”

“Ready.”

“Good luck.”

Nothing happened.

“Crap, looks like it’s not the cell. I feel so naked without my wand!”

“The whole place must be warded off. He really didn’t want people escaping from here, huh?”

“I should say not. Lead on, I guess.”

To make a long story short, they next found Paul, and again *phased*, which was a bit difficult now that three grown adults had to touch Susan to maintain the effect. They settled for gently grabbing her hair, and carefully walking behind her. Backtracking now, they came upon Sparkle who was relieved to see them, and had been *phasing* herself through the various creatures and traps found in this labyrinth on her own. Walking the seemingly endless corridors they passed monstrous scorpions, ants, weird symbols carved into the walls, rotting wooden crates and faded tapestries.

Someone really wanted an authentic experience for prisoners here, didn’t they?

They stopped for a rest after walking for what seemed like hours, and Susan made them some food, then pulled some bottles of water out of her pocket dimension and handed them out. (They were reused, filled with the *Elemental Conjure (water)* spell. She hadn’t bought them herself.)

The other three stared at her. “What?”

“Thanks,” said all three, tearing into the food.

Eventually they came back to where they started, Susan’s cell.

“Well, crap,” said Susan, looking back into her cell. “Where is Terry?”

“Probably behind some secret door we passed without knowing,” said Sparkle. “But I would hate to travel that fun-house without *Phase* going, let me tell you!”

“I know. I could probably learn a new spell to help us out, but I’d rather use what we know if possible,” said Susan. “I only know *Path Tracer* though, which is not going to help at all.”

“Pick me up,” said Sparkle to Katrina, “I think I know something that can help. *Detect Friends*.”

“This spell takes complete concentration,” explained Susan. “But it will tell us when we get close. Like 60 feet or so. Anything?”

Sparkle shook her head.

“Well, let’s motor, we’re going to have to walk the whole place again and see if she gets anything. At least we can move at speed, we know nothing here can hurt us.”

They moved off.

“That way!” said Sparkle after only a moment. They were in the room with the rats, and Sparkle was pointing “north”.

“So close?” asked Don, looking around. “Hey, bring that light over here!”

Susan stepped closer to him, and saw what he was staring at. There was a statue of a dragon like creature up on its hind legs against one wall.

“I think there’s a secret passage behind this statue. Move the light slowly around the dragon, would you?”

“Sure.” She did, and he pointed to the mouth.

“Yeah, there’s a switch there that must activate something and move it out of the way. Let’s just step through.”

They did, and found that Don was right, there was a passageway behind the false wall.

“I walked right past it, didn’t even think to check,” said Susan.

“Don’t worry about it, let’s go.”

They came to a medium sized room, then phased through another door and continued turning right. At the end of that hall sat Terry, eyes closed.

“Nice of you to show up,” he said, standing. “It’s been hours!”

“Sorry about that. We walked the whole thing, but there was a hidden door leading to this passage,” said Susan. “You wouldn’t believe the place he’s got here.”

“Well, can we leave then?”

Susan dropped *Phase*. “Absolutely. We’re going to have to teleport, so you’ll have to bear with me a moment while I read the spell over. It’s not one I have memorized.” She pulled her book of magic from her *Pocket Dimension* and started flipping through it.

“You didn’t find any other way out?”

Katrina shook her head. “We walked the whole thing, at least those parts not hidden by fake doors or magic, and didn’t find anything. There may be some hidden staircase someplace, but we didn’t find it.”

A few moments later Susan was ready. “I want to head back to the manor in case Mr. Weasley needs rescuing, but you don’t have wands. Wait a second... We could just walk the Astral again, pull him out that way.”

“I’d rather go back and get a wand,” said Don, “but time is of the essence. We’ve lost enough time as it is. Do what you have to.”

“Done. Grab onto me, everyone. *Teleportation*.”

The six found themselves outside the manor again, and Sparkle cast *Dimension Step* on them again, taking them back to the shimmering mists. “Let’s go,” said Susan, striding towards the structure. They searched for less than fifteen minutes when they came upon a bloody and unconscious Mr. Weasley, who was strapped to a metal table in the basement. He was alone.

“No carpets,” observed Sparkle. “We should be safe to pass through and touch the floor.”

“Our wands!” said Don, pointing. “He put them all down here. That was thoughtful of him.”

“Okay, get ready,” said Susan. “Grab your wands and cover the door. I just read *Teleportation* so it’s fresh in my mind. I’ll try to cast it as quickly as possible and get us back to the ministry. They have a medical center of some kind there, right?”

“They do.”

“Okay. Everyone ready?”

The four went over to where their wands were sitting on a tray, and put their hands out to grab them. Susan turned back to the right page in her book of spells, and began focusing on the symbols. She stood next to Arthur. “Do it.”

The mists vanished, and the Aurors grabbed their wands, then sprang back into cover, pointing at the door. Susan started casting, a circle of light around Arthur’s table. Sparkle watched her, gauging when the spell would be complete.

“Get over here, now!” she shouted, and the others ran over to touch Susan.

They found themselves in the ministry building, and Arthur tumbled to the floor, no longer held up by the table.

“Crap, wish I knew *Regeneration*,” said Susan.

“I’ll get him to the hospital wing, he’s in bad shape,” said Terry, waving his wand and levitating Arthur out the door.

“Now what?” asked Susan.

“Now we take a shower,” said Katrina. “That place was awful.”

“You spent most of the time phased, it’s not like you would have gotten dirt on you. Anyway, I’m talking about the Malfoys.”

“I know. You’ve done your part, go back to the Weasley’s... oh, we better tell Molly about what happened, she’ll be worried sick. She’ll come here anyway. Okay, stay here, I’ll go inform her. Paul, Don, take care of Susan.” She went out too.

“He’s not going to get away with it, is he?”

“Don’t worry, he won’t,” answered Paul. “He’ll be facing charges of resisting arrest, assault, possibly attempted murder depending on how bad Arthur turns out to be hurt. Not to mention the original charge of possession. We’ll have to get a lot more people to bring him in though. If his foyer is trapped that well, who knows what the rest of the house is like.”

“The trouble is how well connected he is. I don’t know how he’ll wiggle out of this, but you can bet he will somehow,” said Don.

“We’ll see,” said Paul. “Will you be okay here for a while? We should go make our report. The sooner we can get on this, the better.”

“Go, get moving. I’ll be fine.”

“Thanks for all your help. Your magic really is something. I’d be happy to have you by my side again in a scrape,” said Paul, also heading out the door.

“What he said. You’re okay in my book too.” Don trailed after him.

“Well, that didn’t go as planned,” Susan remarked, “but we all came back, and Lucius dug himself deeper. I’d love to know where that dungeon was, maybe one day we could clean it out and set it up as a secret base!”

“It does have some possibilities,” replied Sparkle. “But right now I’m taking a nap. I don’t have as much energy as you do, you know.”

“Sure thing. Thanks for your help, as always.”

“Naturally.”

An hour later, Arthur was awake and telling his story to the other Aurors, with his wife and Susan by his side.

“Sorry to put you through that, Mr. Weasley,” said Susan. “It’s a weakness of our magic. If we go unconscious, it goes away. Didn’t think he would go so far as to trap his own house like that.”

“Neither did I, so don’t worry about it. You didn’t do wrong, and I’m just glad you made it out safely. I’ll be fine, so don’t worry. Not sure I’m getting that raise though...”

Back to School

Time: The day before the train ride back

Place: The Burrows

Naturally, Fred and George were quite keen to hear all about the adventure Susan had in the labyrinth. She downplayed it, as there was really no danger she faced, being *phased* the whole time, but they drank up descriptions of the giant creatures and possible traps. They even offered to help her clean it out if they could have a part of it as their secret base, and Susan said she would think about it.

The papers quickly picked up the “Scandal at Malfoy Manor” when a squad went to bring Lucius in, which succeeded. The ministry was now trying to figure out what to do with him, as they didn’t really want to lose the money he provided them.

I guess even in this world there’s two sets of laws- one for the rich, and one for everybody else.

Arthur recovered quickly and was greeted warmly by his family, though it looked like Molly was going to have a long talk with him about the dangers of his job. The night before they left, Arthur took Susan aside.

“I want to thank you for the chance you gave me,” he said. “Even if it didn’t work out. And that wasn’t your fault, so please don’t feel bad about it. We couldn’t have known he would go that far. I hope you realize that.”

“It made me realize you can’t ever plan for every contingency, and sometimes just have to muddle through with what you know.”

“That’ll be true all your life, I’m afraid. Still, he was taken in, and even if he gets off, he’ll be taken down a peg and maybe think about changing his life.”

Susan looked at him.

“We can hope, can’t we?”

“I’m worried he’ll go after you though, or send someone after you.”

He shook his head. “Even he wouldn’t be that reckless. Something like that would implicate him even further. And I’m not worried about being here, again thanks to you.” He tapped the walls.

“Just be careful, okay? I have *overconfidence* enough for the both of us.”

“I will.”

Susan insisted Ron and Harry be ready to go the next day, and shoved all their baggage for school into her *Pocket Dimension* so they wouldn’t need to rush around the next morning. Thus, the three enjoyed a leisurely breakfast while everyone else was rushing about doing their last minute preparations.

“Honestly,” said Susan, looking over her character sheet. “It’s not like I have *Always Prepared* or anything, and yes, my REASON is an 8, but still you would think they’d be a little more organized about the whole thing. They’ve been doing it how many years now?”

Twenty XP? That last dungeon really did it for me. Of course I haven’t learned any new spells in ages. What should I learn, I wonder?

“Channeling Hermione, are you?” asked Ron.

“It does sound like something she would say, doesn’t it?”

“Do you still think we need to worry about Dobby’s warning?” asked Harry.

“I’m not sure,” replied Susan. “With Mr. Malfoy now consumed in his legal battle with the ministry, he won’t have much attention to spare to mess up the school. Unless he wasn’t going to be the one, and was just meeting about it when Dobby overheard.”

“He was too vague anyway,” Ron put in. “We can’t plan for something based on ‘chaos at the school’ now can we?”

“I guess you’re right,” said Susan, putting her sheet away. “We’ll just have to keep our eyes open.”

Getting onto the train was uneventful, and they found Hermione right away and sat down with her in a cabin. Susan was telling her about the labyrinth when the door slid open. Draco was standing there.

“You did it, didn’t you?” he asked, his characteristic sneer once again firmly affixed.

Crap, did he hear me? Susan could feel the dice rolling in her head, coming up with a 4 on her *Persuasion* check.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, Draco. Did what?” she said, knowing she wasn’t going to get anywhere.

“You got those Aurors into my father’s house. They just appeared out of nowhere, and you can’t Apparate into the house, just like Hogwarts. But I bet your magic could have gotten them in. And then when they disappeared from their cells? I bet that was you, too. You were there, weren’t you?”

Thank goodness I don’t have Compulsive Honesty, thought Susan.

“Oh, so just because you think it would have been hard to do, it was automatically my fault when some powerful wizards break your defenses down, is that it?”

“What about that Weasley fellow? He changed back awfully fast after the trap went off. That seems like your magic as well.”

“Look Draco, I’m sorry about what happened to your father,” she lied, “but face facts. He’s into a lot of dark magic stuff that’s illegal. Sooner or later he was bound to get caught somehow.”

“I know you did it, and I’ll pay you back somehow.” He stormed off, Crab and Goyle trailing behind him.

Susan sighed. “If only that loyalty wasn’t so misplaced.”

“What are you going to do?” asked Hermione.

“Do? Nothing. I took Voldemort last year, thinking it was just a show for the others. What do you think would happen if I got serious?”

There was a pause.

“Why are you all looking at me like that?”

At dinner, Ron kept looking around nervously. They had sat back to back from each other at the tables, sitting with their respective houses.

“Don’t worry, Draco isn’t going to spring out from under the bench and curse us or anything,” said Susan.

“It’s not that. I just get the feeling something isn’t right. Like I’m in trouble somehow but I don’t know how.”

“What?” asked Harry. “I’m used to Susan saying bizarre things- don’t give me that look, you know it’s true. But... actually I think I kind of know what you mean. It’s the weirdest feeling like we shouldn’t be here, or something.”

“Where else would you be? At least no one tried to kill me this year coming into the castle.”

“Good point. It’s like Deja Vu, only rather than feeling I’ve done something before it’s that I should be doing some else.”

Susan and Hermione looked at each other. “Yeah, whatever you say, guys.”

Everyone had a good time at the feast, and Ginny was sorted into Gryffindor. Albus gave his usual speech and noted again that the forbidden forest was still a dangerous place. No out-of-bounds corridor this year, noted Susan, so the Stone was either back in the hands of its original owner or still safely tucked away in a *Pocket Dimension*.

School had officially begun.

Susan’s Wednesday schedule was light, given her not taking Transfiguration or Potions class, so she sat down in the courtyard to decide where to spend some of her XP. She had just come back from her first Herbology class, in which she made Sparkle wait outside. There were no earmuffs made for cats, after all. She was having trouble pulling her baby mandrake out, then decided to get smart. She went outside where Sparkle was just laying down for a nap and had her cast *Energetic Accumulation* on her. Going back inside, she gathered energy for two actions, then made her STRength check to pull the thing out.

She got a 26.

Then she did the same thing to plunge it into the larger pot, getting a 38 this time, and almost driving it into the floor. She dusted her hands off and watched with some amusement as the others struggled with this task. Of course she couldn’t keep that up, but then she got smarter. She cast *Telekinesis* on the next one, and made it look like she was pulling it up, but in reality she was just using magic. That went much better, and soon had a row of the plants re-potted, while others were still working on their second or third. She shook her head.

“You certainly have an aptitude for it,” said Professor Sprout, once the task was complete. “Ten points to Ravenclaw.”

“It’s all in the wrist,” Susan said, looking away to hide her grin.

She was now talking spell selection over with Sparkle, who was also choosing some spells to learn.

“I use *Teleportation* all the time,” said Susan. “It’s annoying to have to keep taking the book out for it. But if I do turn that underground area into a secret base, I’ll need a way of carrying supplies and stuff down into it. And if I’m going to share it with the twins, they’ll want to take their own stuff down there. I wonder...” She closed the book, then put her hand on the top. “I want a spell that will open a hole in space between two places and allow me to carry stuff through,” she said to it. “We’ll see what it comes up with tomorrow. Meanwhile, if I assume it’ll be a grade 10 spell, that still leaves me with 10 XP to spend. Let’s see...”

Suddenly, a glowing phoenix swooped down on Susan and she looked up. Professor Dumbledore’s voice said to her: “Susan, welcome back. If you’re not doing anything important

at the moment, can you come and see me? Your password will be Hard Lemonade.” The creature vanished.

What’s up with the lemon theme and this guy anyway?

“I guess new magic will have to wait,” said Susan, snapping the book closed. “Looks like we’re wanted.”

Traveling to the statue of the phoenix, Susan said “Hard Lemonade” and stepped on the stair as it rotated upwards, carrying her to the Headmaster’s office. She stepped inside.

“Welcome again, Susan,” he said, standing up from his desk.

“Thank you Headmaster. It’s good to be back.”

“No trouble, over the summer, I hope?”

“Just a little of my own making, I’m afraid.”

“Yes, I read about your adventure. From the official report, not the news article. Much more informative that way, don’t you think?”

“I should hope so.” She paused a moment. “Headmaster, do you think I did wrong?”

“That’s not really for me to say. It’s for history to decide. I’ve done things I thought were right at the time, but which turned out to be wrong. In fact, the wish to avoid that here is what’s inspired me to call you. I think you’ll remember this?”

He spilled a gold ring onto the desk, carefully not touching it.

“I do. Does it still have that piece of *him* inside?”

“I fear that is the case. I have tried many means of disposing of it, but I cannot. I had hoped you might have some ideas.”

“May I ask exactly what you’ve tried?”

“Ah, various spells, potions and physical things like crushing. It cannot be melted, either magically or with mundane fire. I have tried disintegrating it outright, smashing it, dissolving it both in magical potions and in the more mundane aqua regia. I admit I am at a loss.”

“Immune to magic and physical forces? But of course if I was putting my soul inside an object, I would want it to be sturdy.” She glared at the object for several minutes, mulling it over.

“Susan?”

“I don’t know how it might react, and if it does work, I’m basically committing murder. Oh, I know the things he did, he perhaps deserves death, but many who deserve life are denied it. By killing him, do I not take a step closer to becoming him?”

“Ah, Tolkien. Even the wise can’t see all ends, is the quote if I’m not mistaken.”

“Oh, uh, if you say so.” He looked at her questioningly. *Oh great, did I do it again?*

Where are these quotes coming from anyway?

“Do not think of it as ending a life,” continued Albus when she said no more. “Think of it as releasing a tormented soul from bondage, and letting nature take its course.”

“I will not undertake this task lightly.”

“But you do know of a way?” Albus leaned closer.

“I’m not sure,” replied Susan slowly, opening her book to the Neptune section. “*Destroy Magic*, if cast on a person, will take away their ability to use magic forever. If cast on an area, no magic will function in that area ever again. Cast on an object- the trouble is your magic and mine are so different. This ring just has wand magic charms on it that make it tough to deal with. It hasn’t been *Imbued* because that doesn’t exist for wand wizards. So what would happen if I cast this spell onto it? Maybe nothing. Maybe it’ll bounce off and hit me, destroying my ability to use

magic. It's not something I'd want to fool around with, in any case. As a last resort I'm willing to try, but short of that..."

"I understand your concern. There are no others that are less severe?"

"There's *Destruction* that can just turn something into a powder, but I doubt that would work if the ring is proof against that sort of thing with your magic. Wait a minute!" She flipped some pages. "Yes, there's a lesser grade spell. *Dead Magic*. It just creates an area where magic stops working temporarily. We could just melt the ring down or dissolve it with mundane means after taking it into that area!"

"I will think about what the effect of that might be, as taking it out of that area again may be troublesome. In any case, it does not need to be performed right this minute, the ring is safe with me. If you should come across a spell you think might serve- Will you be returning to your *Imbuing* this year, as you did last year? You may again use my office if you so choose, and I will be happy to provide the ingredients."

"I was just looking through my book for interesting things I could learn and do this year when you called me."

"Then you have my apologies for interrupting you. If you let me know what you come up with, I will keep your password active just as with last year."

"Thank you!"

So Susan went down and paged through her book for quite a while. She didn't see any really tough spells she wanted at the moment, but there were some useful ones, like *Cut*, *Immobilize*, *Deflection*, (in case Sparkle wasn't around for some reason) and *Scribe* that she couldn't fail to learn in a few minutes. So she did. Sparkle picked up *Regeneration* and *Illusion*, of all things.

She thought about making a *Communication* item, but the requirement was "the ear of an intelligent creature" so that was out at the moment.

Maybe Headmaster Dumbledore can come up with something. I suppose if nothing else, Sparkle could cast regeneration on herself and offer one of her ears. She's intelligent.

A *Literacy* item, using energy, would be easier to come up with, and the Headmaster might appreciate reading books in lost languages. He seemed to have a fairly large library in his office. That decided, she went back up to see him and begin the *Imbuing* for an hour before her last class of the day, Defense Against the Dark Arts.

Which began with a story of how Harry met the boy Colin who seemed to be a photography nut, and got into a scrape with Malfoy.

"Sorry I wasn't there," said Susan. "I got so wrapped up in my *Imbuing* I lost track of time. But then it may have been worse if I had been there, given how Draco feels about me at the moment."

"I wondered why we didn't see you at lunch," said Hermione. "Did you get anything to eat?"

"Yes, Headmaster Dumbledore got me some sandwiches. But then he had to remind me to get to my next class, so here I am."

"You really got that wrapped up in it?" asked Ron.

"You have to understand, *Imbuing* is complex, but knowing you're making something that can help someone out? It's amazing to watch the magical energies winding themselves around the object. You just want to see it done, so it sort of consumes your attention."

“I guess like me watching Quidditch.”

“Yes, if watching others play a sport contributed to the world in any way. Wait, did I say that out loud?”

“Very funny,” said Ron.

“Thanks.”

And then Professor Lockhart swept into the room, smiling for all he was worth.

“Welcome everyone! I’m sure you all know me, after all, I see you’ve all got my books there. Except you, Susan, I see. Or did you just forget them?”

“I donated mine to a worthy cause,” said Susan, thinking about the Weasley family not needing to buy a set for Ron. He colored. After she had bought a set and started reading them her astonishment turned to anger. That anger had burned nearly a month, and was now seeking a channel of release.

That channel was before her.

“I read them already, and I have to say I was disappointed. They really had nothing whatsoever to do with the practice of Defense Against the Dark Arts, as they mostly involved you saying how great you were. This class is supposed to be about defending ourselves from dark magic. That’s not going to happen sitting here and reading about what your favorite color is. Though I’m sure the class would be very interested in the wand movement for the incantation that reverted the werewolf who was still under the light of the full moon. As I understand it, only a certain potion, drunk before the moon rises on the days of the full moon, can counteract the change. I asked Headmaster Dumbledore about it, you see, because my magic can do something similar, and thought it fascinating. He instructed me as to the potion.”

Gilderoy stared at her, taken aback.

“No? Not going to show us? Interesting.” She stood up. “See, our last Defense professor, Quirrell, didn’t teach us a lot of spells directly. What he did teach us was that we could learn and adapt to spells being cast at us in the heat of battle. Pay attention to the wand movement, he said, and you know roughly what a wizard is going to cast. Make the some movement and say the same words, and you can use the spell too. All while under fire. I’ve read your books, so called Professor Lockhart, and I don’t see a shred of truth in them. You want to impress me? You want to teach me? Prove you can beat me- I challenge you to a wizard duel, right here, right now. If you win I’ll gladly sit here and learn what you have to teach. But if you can’t beat me, and you can’t, by the way, I have more important things to be doing.”

Whoops. I guess that got away from me, a bit. But seriously, who does this guy think he is? Making a family that poor buy all those sets of his worthless books...

The class was dead silent. Everyone was staring at Susan, who was standing with her arms crossed, staring at Gilderoy. They slowly looked back at him, trying to figure out what he would do.

He bust out laughing.

“Albus told me you were a firecracker! Looks like he was right. Bravo. Of course you would want to know if the man who said he could train you really could train you. It’s only natural! I heard about your duel with Professor Quirrell, I’m sure you could take me with one hand behind your back. But don’t worry, you won’t regret sitting my classroom, I assure you.”

I already do.

“Now then, I’ve prepared a little quiz for you based on my books. Nothing to worry about, just me wanting to see how well you know the man, the legend.”

You’re just going to ignore me, then? I see. Susan sat down.

There was silence as the papers were passed back, and Susan read over the questions. Predictably, they all related to Lockhart, not about what he had done, or how he had done it, but about him, personally.

How can we fit in the same room with this man’s ego?

Susan debated it, but in the end, crumpled her parchment up, and sat staring at Gilderoy the entire half hour the others were writing. He pretended not to notice.

Passing the papers back, Susan put her crumpled ball on the stack and handed it in. Again, he pretended not to notice as he put it on his desk. He started looking through them, but his eyes kept darting nervously over at Susan.

“Well, it seems Hermione was the only one who got all the questions right, including my secret desire. Well done, Hermione! Raise your hand please, so I can learn your face.”

“How could you?” Susan demanded, glaring at Hermione. She shyly put her hand up.

“Excellent. Ten points to Ravenclaw. I should take a point off for your paper, Susan, but I can see you feel very strongly about things. No trouble. Perhaps you can impress us with your magic in my next little task.”

He pulled a covered cage out from behind his desk, which rattled and made funny squeaky noises.

“I’m going to open this cage in a moment, letting out what’s inside. I challenge you, Susan, to subdue the creatures by yourself! How does that sound?”

Sounds like I learned Immobilize just in time.

“It doesn’t sound like the duel I asked for. Tell you what- let them out and time me dealing with them, and then we’ll let them out again and time you dealing with them. See who gets the better time- how does that sound?”

“Now, now, it’s not a competition, after all. Ready?” He whisked the cloth away from the cage, and about a dozen tiny creatures struggled to get out.

Susan looked down, and there was a magic circle around her, being created by Sparkle who was sitting under her. Susan felt the world slow, and realized Sparkle had cast *Acceleration* on her. She smiled.

Acceleration gives me a bonus to all REFlex based checks, which Immobilize falls under! Still, there would be a ton of tiny creatures rather than fewer larger ones. However, her eyes lit up, being a -4 size modifier means their STREngth check to break free is going to be minuscule. With my max energy and the bonus from Acceleration, I should be fine though.

“GO!” shouted Gilderoy, slowly opening the cage, from her point of view. Susan started casting, taking all the extra time she could (2 segments) making her casting time all of a second and a half.

“*Immobilize!*” she shouted, making a grabbing motion with her hands. The last one hadn’t even cleared the door of the cage before magical bands wrapped around them all, (with a total of 19 on the check) making them plummet to the ground. She calmly got up and started picking them up, tossing them back into the cage one at a time. She had to shake it a bit to get them all to fit, but when she was sure she had gotten them all, she closed the cage and let the spell go. They immediately started rocking it and gibbering again.

“Anything else I can do for you, ‘Professor,’ before we see your time at the task?”

Suddenly, a magical bell sounded throughout the school.

“Perhaps another time then, that’s all the time we have for today. See you all tomorrow!” Gilderoy nearly ran up the steps of the classroom and out the door.

Susan picked up the cloth and arranged it on the cage, which quieted the creatures down.

“That was amazing,” someone said. “You actually got them all at once, and you didn’t even have your wand out!”

Shoot, I forgot all needing to wave that thing around. Oh well.

“Let’s just hope his next so called lesson is a little more relevant,” said Susan. “You guys coming?”

“Did you have to bully him?” asked Hermione, putting her books away.

“Bully? Hermione, the man claims to have fought werewolves and banshees. Traveled to exotic lands and slain mighty foes. What do you think Professor Quirrell i.e. the dark lord, i.e. Voldi would have done, had I said those things to *him*? Laughed them off? No, we would have dueled, right then and there. Do any of you still believe a word that man wrote is true?”

Everyone in class stopped packing up and looked at her.

“I don’t,” said Neville. “I stand behind Susan. We need to have Professor Quirrell back. Or failing that, some better classes. I didn’t learn a thing today!”

“Well said, Neville.,” said Susan.

“I think we should have Susan teach us!” said another girl in the class. “She was Professor Quirrell’s referee all those times, after all. And no wonder, after she beat him in single combat! Or whoever it was that looked like him, anyway. Who better?”

There was a general murmur of agreement, though Draco and his two “bodyguards” stormed out.

“I appreciate the offer, but honestly my magic won’t translate. You saw me capture those pixies or whatever they were. I can’t teach you the kind of magic I do, I’m sorry. But if you wanted to learn more charms on your own, or start up a dueling club where anyone can join, I would be happy to oversee that.”

Everyone bust out smiling, and people were nodding and whispering excitedly.

“Tell you what,” said Susan, grabbing a piece of parchment from the desk. She clicked her pen open (because she was not going to lower herself to use a *quill* of all things) and wrote “Petition to replace Professor Lockhart” on the top. She signed her name under it, and slapped the pen down. “Sign if you want this plan to go forward. I’ll take it to the Headmaster. If he won’t replace our so called professor, I’ll ask to start a dueling club and see where it goes from there.”

“I’ll sign,” said Neville., being the first to step up.

In the end, almost everyone did, even Hermione, though reluctantly.

She took it immediately to the Headmaster.

“Back so soon?” he asked, looking up from something he was writing. Susan slapped the parchment down on his desk. He glanced at it.

“Ignored your request for a duel then, did he?”

“No, you can’t know everything that goes on in this school. You just can’t!”

“Perhaps, but I could guess how your first class went. I’m sorry, but he must remain your professor.”

“Why?”

He sighed and sat back. "Honestly? Because no one else would take the job."

"Seriously? I've heard Professor Snape would happily take it."

"He does not believe in the curse set against the position, but many others do."

"How do you curse a teaching position?"

"I do not know. But what I do know is that no teacher has managed to teach Defense for more than a year since I refused to let Voldemort teach the subject. They have all died, or disappeared, or flat out refused after the first year."

"I... see. So we're stuck with him, are we?"

"Who would we hire to replace him?"

"Our class today seemed to think I would fit the bill."

"Really?"

"Of course I told them it wouldn't work. My way of casting magic is too different. But I did offer to bring up the possibility of a club that emulated Professor Quirrell's classes from before. Let younger students learn from older ones, and give everybody a chance to practice."

"The idea has merit. Of course a qualified adult would have to be present at all times..."

"Of course."

"I'll consider the idea. It worked in the past, after all, and we still have the enchanted barrier he created. I wouldn't mind having a generation of children able to defend themselves, should the need arise. Yes, I will think long on it."

"Thank you. That's all I can ask."

"In the meantime, can I rely on you to be less, shall we say, vocal, about your current teacher?"

"I think he's a fraud, but I can only say I'll try."

"No doubt he is. But we have no proof he is anything other than what he says."

"Then what you're saying is I need to gather proof?"

"I'm not saying anything at all, just that the class needs a teacher, and for now, he's it."

"Very well. I'll explain things, and hope we actually learn something useful in his so called classes, rather than just how wide his smile can extend."

His eyes twinkled. "I hope that you do."

That Uneasy Feeling

Time: Several Days Later

Place: Quidditch field

The next day, Susan was delighted to discover a new spell in her book called *Teleportal* and read the description over excitedly.

Create a magical passageway between two points that can be traveled through as long as this spell is maintained. The opening can be up to your rating in meters and can be passed through on either side. If an object is midway between the two portals and the spell is broken, the object will be shunted to the side it's closer to.

The spell was a grade 10 Mercury spell, with the same difficulty as *Teleport*. Susan was so excited she spent the ten minutes needed to memorize the symbology for the spell and got a 17 on her KNOwledge check to remember it.

Over the summer I can make the twins an item to open a gateway to the underground maze. Of course I better ask Arthur to have a squad go down with me and disarm all the traps and get those creatures out of there. Maybe they could go live in the forest behind the school? I hear there's all kinds of weird creatures there now to begin with...

It was now early Saturday morning, and Susan, Sparkle, Ron and Hermione were out looking for Harry.

"I've got that feeling again..." said Ron, looking around.

"What now?" asked Susan.

"Like something big should be happening." He glanced down at his wand.

"Why do you keep looking at your wand, Ron? It's not going anywhere," said Hermione, exasperated.

"I just feel like it should be broken, that's all. And I keep expecting to see Draco come through those doors. Not to mention I keep expecting a howler for some reason, like I was in trouble at home."

"Your imagination is running away with you," said Hermione, but she looked around oddly too.

They sat for a moment, Colin snapping pictures with his camera. Susan looked up at him.

"Where is he getting film from, anyway?"

"What do you mean?" asked Ron.

"It's not from the non-magical world, I can tell you that. We gave up film years ago!"

"What do you take pictures with, then?"

"As I understand it, a light sensitive material that can record how much red, green and blue light hits it across a very small area. That information is saved as a series of instructions a computer can recreate later."

"Say that again?"

"Never mind. The point is, where are wizards getting film from?"

"No idea."

Ron continued looking around nervously.

“Look, if you’re worried about something at home, I could send you back there and you could check it out for yourself.”

“You can do that?”

“I just learned a new spell a few days ago. Come on, we’ll duck under the stands, no one should see us there. You can come too, Hermione, you might want to see this.”

So the four climbed down and went under the bleachers, and Susan opened a *Teleportal* to the Burrows, making Ron and Hermione’s eyes bulge.

“That’s amazing!” said Ron, sticking his head through. “It’s really home!”

“It really is,” said Susan. “I’ll hold it open, go on and check.”

“Thanks a lot!”

“Couldn’t you have opened it right inside the house?” asked Hermione as he stepped through and unlocked the door.

“Can’t. Put a spell on the house so teleport magic won’t work from outside.”

“But you can get through the Hogwarts wards- oh, I see, your magic blocks your magic, our magic blocks our magic.”

“Exactly. They’re doing something else, not teleporting. As I understand it, I’m just switching places with an area of space at my destination when I cast *Teleport*. Or in this case, tearing a hole in the universe between the two points where the intervening space doesn’t exist. A wizard using Apparition, at least as described, actually travels at high speed to their destination as though space is squeezing them from one place to the other.”

“So if wizards studied your technique they could figure out a way to add that to the spells around Hogwarts.”

“I honestly have no idea. My *Magic Sense* is pretty garbled when it comes to wand magic, though I’m slowly figuring out a few things. I have to practice away from places like this, where everything is magic. But at the Weasley’s I did some poking around with it. I have no idea if wandless wizards have a similar skill. If you do, nobody’s told me about it.”

“I don’t think so.”

Ron came walking back, followed by his mother.

“I’m seeing it,” said Molly, “But I still don’t believe it.”

“Hello Mrs. Weasley,” said Susan politely. “Hope we aren’t bothering you too much.”

“Hello Susan. No bother, thanks for putting Ron’s mind at ease.”

“But of course. Say hello to Mr. Weasley for me, and tell him to start thinking about a team to clear out that maze we were stuck in. With this magic, I plan to clean it up and take it over next summer.”

“I’m sure the four who were down there with you would be glad to help, but I’ll mention it to him.”

“Thank you. See you later!”

“Bye mom!”

“Goodbye Ron.”

She stopped maintaining it, and the portal vanished.

Ron stared at where it was. “Can you go anywhere with that?”

“Nah, only a place I’ve seen. That’s why I had to ask you for a picture of your house before. It works the same as *Teleport*, just the method is a little different.”

“Still, it’s pretty amazing. Let’s get back to watching Harry.”

Of course, the three didn't know that history had been changed. With Lucius now busy with his criminal trial, he didn't have the time to send brooms to Hogwarts. Without his father's "gift," Draco didn't become the team Seeker, and the Slytherin team got to sleep in that Saturday. Ron didn't curse himself (his wand wasn't broken in any case) and Hermione didn't get called a bad name. They still went down to see Rubeus after the training session, he was their friend, after all.

They found Gilderoy leaving his hut as they approached, and knocked on his door.

"Hey, good to see you all!" Rubeus said, sweeping them up into one big hug. "Come in, I'll get the kettle on!"

The house looked cleaner than it had last year, though of course the baby dragon had made a mess of things. Still, Susan remarked the place was looking good.

"I can use magic to tidy up again," said Rubeus, tapping the side of his nose. "And I'll show you the other 'fruits' of my labor after our tea."

They got caught up, and Susan realized the perfect person to ask was right in front of her.

"Rubeus," she said, "there's some large and possibly dangerous creatures I'd like moved out of an underground maze. I hate to just kill them, they're as much a prisoner as we almost were. Would putting them out in the forest be okay?"

"What sort of creatures are we talking about?"

"Let's see, some giant centipedes for a start. A very large scorpion. Some giant ants, and probably more rats than I could count."

"Do you think they were enlarged with magic?" asked Hermione.

"Now there's a question. If you could learn a spell to shrink them down again, they could be put anywhere, couldn't they?"

"You don't have a spell to shrink things?" asked Ron.

"Oh sure, but I have to maintain it. Sadly my magic isn't cast and forget, like yours. So I could shrink them, catch them, and then bring them here. But then they would go back to being huge again, so I wanted to see if it was okay to bring them here."

"They all sound like things that can take care of themselves," answered Rubeus. "And they don't sound any more dangerous than what already make the forest its home. Sure, they could be released around there, no problem."

"Great! I could just open a *Teleportal* in their rooms, and they would probably just walk out on their own. Thanks."

"Giant centipede, huh? I'd love to see that."

"I figured you would. I'll make sure to let you know when I'm ready to do it, you can help out."

"So what did Mr. Smiles want with you, anyway?" asked Harry.

"Who? Oh, you mean Gilderoy? Trying to tell me how to do my job, if you must know. Ha! If he knows half of what he says he knows, I'll eat my boots."

"Safe bet, we've had his classes. I'm hoping to organize a dueling club to make up for it, like Professor Quirrell's lessons last year."

"How's he doing, anyway?"

"Last I heard, he was seeking out a monastery someplace. Wanted to just get away from it all for awhile, try and figure out where life is going to go now."

Their tea gone, Rubeus invited them outside to see his vegetable patch, where some enormous pumpkins were growing.

“Now see? There’s an example of what my magic couldn’t do,” remarked Susan, looking them over.

“They do seem to be getting along nicely,” said Ron.

“Your sister said the same thing, she was around yesterday. Cute as a button, that girl. Though I got the feeling she was hoping someone else might be around, if you know what I mean.” He looked over at Harry.

“Don’t remind me,” said Ron.

“It wasn’t me she was looking for,” said Susan, sadly.

That evening, as Susan was about to get into turn in for the night, she noticed a note on her bed. Picking it up, she unfolded it and began to read.

Dear Susan,

I hate to ask you this way, but I have a really embarrassing problem I hope your magic can help me with. I would just die if anyone found out, so can I please ask you to come down to the lake this evening at midnight so I can ask you about it? Again, I’m really sorry about this, and if you don’t show I’ll understand. But I think you’re the only one I can turn to, so please come.

L

It was nearly 11:30 by that point, so Susan activated all her charms (That’s *Flight, Detect Lies, Darksight* and then *Barrier Against Spells*, for those keeping track at home) and flew down there. Sparkle said she wasn’t going to wait out in the cold for half an hour, and Susan said that would be fine. She was hovering over the water, looking out at the lake, when she heard a noise behind her. Stepping out of the darkness were six older boys, and Susan shook her head. All had their wands pointed at her.

“Seriously?” she said. “The old ‘get her alone at night and beat her up’ plan? Didn’t you learn your lesson when the first time this was tried utterly failed and a bunch of upperclassman had to explain where all their broken bones had come from to the nurse?”

They looked confused, like they hadn’t heard such a thing had been tried before. “You were stupid enough to fall for it,” said one of the boys finally.

“Was I?” asked Susan, tilting her head and putting a finger on her chin. “Or was the trap actually mine, and I’m here to see who would be stupid enough to come and try to take me on?”

“We’ll see if you’re so cocky in a minute! *Petrificus Totalus!*”

Susan looked over her shoulder. “You missed.”

“Hey, she’s floating,” one of them said to the other, pointing at Susan’s feet.

“Finally made your *Perception Check* to notice, huh? By the way, who did you get to deliver the note? It must have been a girl, boys can’t come into our dorm.”

“Like we’d tell you?”

“It was worth a try. Anyway, can we get on with this? I don’t have all night.”

The original boy looked like he was going to say something, but changed his mind. “Get her!” he shouted, and spells started flying.

Seriously, you would think they would learn, thought Susan, taking her time to cast *Immobilize* on them all. Apparently, one of them made their STrength check to resist (he rolled a 25, the max), and busted out of the magical bands of force that surrounded the others.

“Huh,” she said, not expecting that. He looked around at the others, wondering what to do.

“Get us out of here!” the ‘ringleader’ shouted. The free one started casting spells at the bonds, but as they weren’t a physical thing, nothing he could do would dispel them. He even tried *Finite Incantatem*, which actually might have worked, but he couldn’t roll as high as she could, being a *natural magician*. (He was considered an NPC spell-caster, and so his maximum roll was 15, and he had to beat a 17)

Susan floated over to him, looking down at him.

“Run,” she said simply. “It seems my magic has decided to spare you tonight, so I won’t argue with it.” *Yeah, that sounds good. Make it seem like I didn’t fail to cast it on him, but rather my magic decided he shouldn’t be bound.*

He looked from her to the others, struggling to get free, and decided that as she was flying, spells bounced off her, and she had apparently conjured up bands of force without effort he was going to cut his losses.

“Sorry!” he called, as he ran away, though whether he was apologizing to Susan or his now ex-friends was unclear.

“Now, what do we do with you?” asked Susan, flying over to the instigator.

“Do your worst!” he said, enraged.

“An excellent suggestion!” said Susan, grabbing the wand out of his hand.

“No, wait, not that!” he shrieked, as Susan said “*Cut*” and ran her finger along the wand, neatly severing it into two pieces. She pulled the halves apart and shook the core out. She dropped the pieces, and floated down, nearly touching the ground.

“Amazing that you don’t think about your own weakness until after the fact, isn’t it?” she said. “I mean, honestly, you carry your source of power around with you, and wave it about to do anything. Get that wand away from someone, and they’re just a non-wizard who went to a weird school. You would think they would be made of tougher stuff than wood.”

She floated over to the next one. “I’ll kill you if you touch my wand!” he shouted.

“You’ll kill me?” said Susan. “You? Kill me?” She floated back a little ways. “*Elemental Attack (Fire)*” she cast, making a called shot to the leg. He went down, crying out in pain. Susan leapt on him. “You’ll kill me? Really? This is the second time. The *second time* I have had to defend myself like this at this school. The first time I let them get away with some easily mended broken bones. This second time I am taking your magic away, and you can all go to the Headmaster in the morning to explain why you all need new wands.” She grabbed the shirt of the boy who was now crying out, his leg burned. “Do you know what I’m going to do the third time I am attacked? Send back bodies! You should be thanking me for this chance to learn your lesson.” She grabbed the wand and snapped it, throwing the pieces into the water.

The third tried to bargain. “I’ll do your homework or something, or maybe I can get you money. I’ll tell you who it was that sent us!”

“Don’t care anymore, you came with what, rape on your mind? I’m letting you off easy, boyo.” Snap.

The forth was already sobbing. “It wasn’t like that! Honest! My dad will kill me.”

“Not my problem. And I don’t care how you thought it was going to turn out, you came down here, wands out. The situation would have escalated, no matter what you individually had in mind. And that, oh helpless one, means you can’t be trusted with magic.” She went to snap it.

Actually, now that I think about it, having a spare wand or two lying around wouldn’t be such a bad idea, Susan thought. As I understand it, a wand can be used by others, just not as well. And if I’m ever in a situation with a wanded wizard who has no wand...

She opened up her *Pocket Dimension* and shoved the wand in. From his perspective, she just made it disappear.

The fifth was more stoic. “I understand,” he said, as she took his wand. “You’re within your rights, I suppose.”

“I’m glad you agree.” She also put his in there, then floated back towards the castle.

“I’ll leave you out here a little while, so you can get the full experience,” she said, turning back. “And I’ll tell you this- before whoever sent you gets any bright ideas about attacking friends of mine who aren’t as well equipped to fight back? I’ll consider that an attack on my person, and respond accordingly. Tell them that, from me.”

Without another word she flew back to the castle, and maintained the spell until she got to sleep, some time later.

However, they did not spend the entire time out there, as Albus watched her flying away in a mirror that had alerted him to the use of magic outside the grounds. He was deep in thought.

On the one hand, she was attacked by 6 people, and she only injured the one. She could just as easily have killed the boy, but aimed at his leg instead. Using magic to assault someone is grounds for expulsion, so she was also within her rights to take their magic away, as that is what I would have done. Still, I fear one day she will go too far. The problem is, if Voldemort returns as I predict, Harry is going to need someone like her at his side in order to triumph. She hasn’t done wrong, per say, but what can my magic do to stop her if she decides she doesn’t need me, or this school, anymore? Could she become an even darker wizard than Voldemort was? She must be more carefully watched I’m afraid, as it seems she is taking the left hand path of prophesy at the moment. She would no doubt take it badly if she found out I was trying to guide her to the other. A very soft touch is required here, but how?

Something to think about. For now I’ll send Filch out with a wheelbarrow to collect them, and we can talk about their punishment.

It was going to be a long night.

After her attack by the upperclassmen, Susan spent a little time deciding on another attack spell to learn, just in case. She settled on *Elemental Burst (Knockout)* because despite her bravado for the boy's sake earlier, she didn't want to kill anyone. Also, with her *Barrier Against Spells* she could center the *Burst* on herself and still be totally unharmed afterwards. So even if she got surrounded she could cast that a few times in quick succession, and take out pretty much any number of assailants. Being *Knockout* it also wouldn't hurt any walls or ceilings in the area if she happened to make it a little too big.

When what happened that night got out there was a further polarization between people being utterly terrified of her and worshiping her. Those that worshiped her kept pestering her about training and the dueling club, but she said Headmaster Dumbledore hadn't given the go ahead yet. Those not constantly retelling their version of her battle edged away from her in the halls as though she was some kind of rabid animal best avoided. She wasn't sure how to really respond to all of this, but she took it in stride.

The six boys that did the attacking received a very stiff detention package rather than being expelled. They were not allowed off the school grounds, Quidditch matches were off limits, and Argus gleefully put them to work cleaning every night. Susan heard about it second hand, and went about her *Imbuing* with Albus as normal, not inquiring why they had not been expelled as they should. She felt it was probably best to just forget the whole thing and hope whoever had sent them had learned their lesson.

However small a chance that actually was.

She did see him looking quizzically at her for several days after the event, as though he was expecting her to bring it up. But she didn't, and the looks stopped. She really, really wanted to indulge her *curiosity* weakness and ask if the two she had stolen wands from had found wands that worked just as well, but she didn't have a 10 RESolve for nothing. She resisted the urge, and he didn't volunteer anything, so she figured it had worked out fine. *As obviously they would have told I had stolen their wands, and he would have asked for them back if it was necessary. Right?*

Susan did discuss with Hermione why the boys hadn't been expelled, but she said "I can only offer you some theories."

"So? Theorize. I love me a good theory. Even a *Game Theory*. *Thanks for watching!*"

Hermione gave her a funny look. "Firstly he may want you to get attacked. I presume you told him about how you gain XP, and you probably got some for the 'encounter' correct?"

"Not as much as I would have liked, but yes."

"Which brings up the second point. He knew you were not in any actual danger, which is why the amount you got was unsatisfactory to you. You have to actually be challenged to gain a proper amount." She looked resigned to something. "And I can't believe I knew that about you to even say that. Anyway, maybe he wanted to see what you would do. See how far you would go."

I have said many times how dangerous my magic is, I guess. So that sort of fits.

"But that still doesn't explain why they're still here."

“Maybe this will. How many kids entered the school with us in our starting year?”

“Less than a hundred, I can say that for sure.”

“Right. And we’re the only magical school for an entire country!”

“There aren’t that many wizards born, so?”

“So?” Hermione was exasperated. “So to lose six of them at once is a pretty big number, actually. Frankly the world needs all the wizards it can get, or soon they’ll die out and be gone. My theory is, though it’s not a *Game Theory*, is that expulsion is really only used as a last resort. If they stay out of trouble that’ll be the end of it. The Headmaster doesn’t want it to get out that six students at once were thrown out, especially Slytherin students who probably have wealthy, *connected*, parents. Especially if it got out that the reason they were thrown out was attacking you, and losing. Not only losing, but having their wands taken away and broken by a younger person. You know how humiliating that is for a wizard?”

“Not really, I don’t use a wand. But I could guess, it would be like someone stealing Sparkle while I was asleep. You’re saying people would start to wonder about me, or why the skills of the six were so poor to let them be disarmed so easily?”

“Exactly.”

“So likely a combination of factors.”

“That’s what I think. Also he may be using you as bait, trying to draw out whoever keeps attacking you.”

“Better keep my *Barrier* handy then, huh?”

It was now almost Halloween.

“We got invited to a what?” asked Susan, when Harry told the story of how Nick saved him from Argus.

“A death day party,” he replied. “His five hundredth, to be exact.”

“That’s not creepy, celebrating the day you died,” said Ron with a weird look.

“I think it might be interesting,” said Hermione. “They could have a whole culture we living people are totally unaware of.”

“Who cares about the culture of ghosts?” asked Ron.

“Aren’t you curious about anything?” asked Hermione, slightly exasperated.

“Quidditch scores.”

“Honestly Ron, there’s more to life than eating and Quidditch.”

“That’s treason, saying stuff like that. Isn’t it?”

“Anyway, I wonder if we should bring some sort of gift?” asked Susan.

“I know how we can find out!” Hermione said brightly, holding up a stone book on a chain. “*Research*.”

And so it was a somber group, dressed in black, that walked passed the brightly light banquet hall and down the stairs to the dungeons. They didn’t have any gifts, as such, as it seemed ghosts had little use for physical objects. However, each had thought of something they could do at some time in the future in his name, and would tell him later that evening. Susan had her “gift” in mind after hearing Harry tell of how Nick lamented his incomplete beheading. She was carrying the titanium sword she had made in a loop on a belt, and was going to try her *Phase* spell after telling Nick her plan.

“Someone else must have set this all up,” said Hermione, looking at all the blue flamed candles lining the staircase. “These are physical objects, so ghosts wouldn’t be able to do it.”

“Who does do all the work around the castle?” asked Susan. “There can’t be that many kids in detention at any one time, can there?”

“I have no idea. It isn’t mentioned in *Hogwarts: A History*. It’s probably just done by magic. Maybe the castle cleans itself?”

“Do you smell something?” asked Ron.

Entering the large chamber where the party was being held, Nick greeted the four with a flourish of his hat.

“Welcome! Thank you for coming. I actually didn’t expect you to, I’m ashamed to say. I don’t have much in the way of hospitality to offer living guests.”

“Don’t worry about it,” said Harry. “We’re... glad to be here? Is that appropriate?”

Nick laughed. “It will do. Come and meet everyone!”

Nick ushered them inside and started pointing out ghosts, of which there must have been hundreds.

“There are that many ghosts in the area?” asked Susan, astonished. “But of course they would all come, wouldn’t they? Ghosts probably like a good party just as much as anyone else.”

“There’s actually very few of us,” said Nick, “Considering how many died in the war. Most choose to pass on, of course. I must mingle. I understand if you don’t want to stay long, just stopping in is more than I could have hoped for. Thank you all.”

“We have some gifts for you later, so we’ll come find you before we leave.”

“You shouldn’t have!”

“Go on, we’ll talk later.”

The four checked out the “food” table, and watched sadly as ghosts tried to taste the rotting food. Susan just looked thoughtful.

“Oh crap, she’s seen us,” said Hermione, trying to duck back behind Susan.

“Who has?” she asked. “Oh, hello Myrtle.”

Myrtle floated over to the group, looking sad as usual.

“Good to see you out and about,” Susan said. “Are you enjoying yourself?”

“I’m not sure I can enjoy myself anymore,” answered Myrtle. “But I suppose it’s a nice enough party. Who are your friends?”

“This is Ron and Harry. Guys, this is Myrtle, who makes her home in the girl’s bathroom on the first floor.”

“You haunt a bathroom?” asked Ron.

“It’s as good a place as any, I should think,” said Myrtle stuffily. “Though not many come and see me apart from Susan.”

“Myrtle is... a little sensitive,” said Susan. “Because she’s easy to tease, people do it all the time. When they’re emotional it seems ghosts can interact with the physical world for what amounts to a single action. So she’s always flooding the place out somehow. I’ve been trying to work with her to not take everything so personally, but it’s not easy.”

“It’s not my fault people are so mean! And you’re just trying to study me as a ghost, not because you like me!”

“What makes you think I don’t like you? I will admit I’ve been trying to figure out what ghosts are, because I like finding out things related to magic. As far as people being mean to you

goes, we've talked about that; you choose how you are going to react to what other people say or do. That power lies with you, and nothing can take it away. Remember that."

"I try, it's just so hard."

"I know. We'll keep working on it."

"Do you think you can help her?" asked Harry.

"I'm not sure," replied Susan, trying to brush Myrtle's cheek with the back of her hand.

"Ghosts seem to be as much an emotional imprint on the world as a spiritual one. I think Myrtle died very horribly, and very sad. And there's nothing even my magic can do about that. You know I would if I could, Myrtle."

"I know. I'm sorry I'm so useless." She drifted away, her head down.

"I guess even your magic can't do everything," remarked Ron, watching her go.

"You are kind to her," said a voice behind them, and from under the table Peeves the Poltergeist arose. Peeves could go insubstantial if he wanted, but now he looked solid. "I'm not sure how to deal with that."

"Hello Peeves," said Susan. Peeves usually stayed away from her for some reason, probably because he couldn't quite focus on her. "It's frustrating to me. I've seen my magic do incredible things for people here. Impossible things, for them. But I can't help put to rest one sad, lonely girl. She might be my greatest failure, come to think of it."

Peeves got a glassy look in his eyes and also turned away.

"I've never seen him so civilized," said Hermione. "Did you do something to him?"

Susan chuckled. "No. But from what I've learned about the difference between a ghost and a poltergeist, Peeves thrives off disorder. One might say he embodies chaos at this school. Dealing with him calmly and rationally would then seem to rob him of some of his motive power."

"I'll have to give that a try the next time I see him," remarked Harry.

A moment later the band stopped, and Nick floated to the center of the room and said it was time for his speech. However, he was interrupted by figures, riding horses, bursting through the wall.

They were headless.

"Oh, come on!" said Nick.

The lead man spotted him and rode over, putting away the horn he was blowing from his head, which was being carried under his arm.

"There you are, Nick! Hoped we might run into you some time tonight! I see you're not too broken up about not joining us." He turned to the others behind him. "Broken up? His head's still attached, you see?" They laughed.

"Very amusing," said Nick sarcastically. "So glad you could stop by."

"Of course, of course- wait, are there live people here?" He hopped off the horse and set his head back on his shoulders. "How did you manage that?"

"We're friends of his," said Susan, stepping forward. "We were honored to be invited."

"Really?" He seemed skeptical. "Say, that's a fine sword you have there. Don't see many people carrying those around anymore."

"I'm glad you pointed it out!" said Susan. "As I have everyone's attention I would present my gift to Sir Nicholas, if he will allow me the floor for a moment."

“Please,” said Nick. He leaned closer. “My speech is ruined anyway because of these buffoons.”

“Excellent. Before I get his hopes up, however, there’s something I’ll need to try, first. Is Myrtle still here?” Susan looked around.

“I’m here, you’re not going to make fun of me in front of everyone, are you?” she asked, floating up.

Susan shook her head. “You know, you don’t have to expect the worst every time. Anyway, no, I want to try something I had an idea about after using this spell about a dozen times a few weeks ago. Come here.”

Myrtle shyly approached.

“*Phase*,” cast Susan, becoming slightly transparent.

Please let this work!

“If there’s anyone here that needs this more, I haven’t met them,” said Susan, unsure if Myrtle would hear her. Stepping up to her she threw her arms around the ghost and pulled her close.

Yes! It worked!

Myrtle felt very weird, like hugging a cold, tingly energy field that was soft, and there were gasps throughout the chamber. For the first time a living person was touching a ghost!

“Oh!” said Myrtle, hugging Susan back, her eyes wide. They stayed like that for some time, in the silence that only ghosts and three other living people can achieve. Finally Susan stepped back and took Myrtle’s face in her hands.

Wait a second, I heard that! Can I- “Myrtle, you are not useless, or ugly, or fat. I think you’re actually pretty cute, when it comes down to it. And every time you start thinking you’re not, I’m giving you a hug, okay? That’s the deal from now on, between me and you. Got that?” She smiled, hoping Myrtle had heard her, too.

“You really do like me?” said Myrtle. “I- I can’t. Oh my gosh!” She turned and fled, and it sounded like she was sobbing.

“That didn’t go exactly as planned,” remarked Susan. “But at least the theory is sound.”

She turned to Nick, and drew the sword. “I can obviously touch ghosts now, as you’ve all just seen. My question for you, Sir Nicholas, is whether or not you would like me to finish the job started five hundred years ago and become a headless ghost.”

There was pandemonium in the hall as every ghost reacted to this request.

Maybe I should have done that in private, thought Susan and ghosts crowded around her, touching her.

“Quiet!” shouted Peeves, and the ghosts backed off.

“Thank you, Peeves. How about it, Nicholas? I can’t guarantee anything, but I will make the attempt. Even if it does work, I don’t know what it will do to you. Changing something about yourself after you become a ghost? Well, it’s never been done. But my blade is at your disposal.”

Nick didn’t hesitate. “Do it,” he said, floating lower and popping most of his head off. Susan took careful aim and swung, chopping through what was left of Nick’s neck.

His head came off in his hand, and Susan held her breath.

“What an odd sensation,” remarked Nick, turning his head to look at himself. “I do believe it’s worked.”

“I suppose you’ll be wanting to join us now,” said Patrick, the leader ghost.

“Perhaps next year,” said Nick, popping his head back in place. For now I have guests to entertain, so I wouldn’t just leave them. Go about your business and we’ll see how I feel next year.”

“Yes. Next year. Right. Very well. Come along then,” he said to the others, who rode off rather more subdued than how they had entered.

“Thank you,” said Nick simply, as Susan sheathed the sword and let go of *Phase*. “Putting him in his place was quite satisfying, after all.”

“My pleasure,” answered Susan. “Now, I think you were going to make a speech?”

“Yes, of course. My late lamented lords, ladies and gentlemen...”

“Come on,” said Susan to the others. “Before his speech ends and I get mobbed again.”

The four slipped out as best four corporal beings could, and were soon on their way back to the great hall.

“I’m sure they’re still at it,” said Ron hopefully. “We should be able to get something, right?”

Then Harry stopped in his tracks and started looking wildly around.

“What’s up Harry?” Susan asked.

“You don’t hear it? Shhhh,” he replied.

Susan made a *Perception (hearing)* check and got a 12, one from her maximum, and thought she might have heard a slight hissing noise.

“It’s going up, come on!”

What is? But before she could ask, Harry took off at a run up the stairs, and the others, confused, followed after him.

“He’s gone mental,” remarked Ron.

Susan shook her bracelet out of her sleeve and drew the sword again. Knowledge of how to use it again flooded into her from the *Augment Skill* spell on it. Whatever Harry was running after, she wanted to be ready. He stopped on the landing and listened again.

“Not here, it’s going to kill! Come on!” He pounded up another flight of stairs, and the others wisely got their wands out. Reaching the second floor he wildly looked around and took off down the hallway. They covered most of the second floor without finding anything out of the ordinary, but down one lonely corridor Hermione spotted the fateful words, scrawled upon the wall as by a shaking hand.

Twice have I been defeated by children.

This time a child shall be my salvation.

My revenge is loosed from the chamber.

“How did you know?” asked Susan, looking at Harry.

“What’s that?” asked Ron, pointing.

“*Light*,” cast Susan, and the hallway lit up. “It’s a cat. Not Sparkle, thank goodness. Is that Mrs. Norris?” She was bent over a puddle of water that glimmered in the torchlight, her tongue frozen in mid lick.

“We should get out of here,” said Ron.

“Go if you want,” said Susan, passing the sword to her right hand, leaving her dominant hand free to cast with. “Whatever did this might still be around, and I intend to make sure they pay for it.”

They got little choice in the matter as fate decided the entire school should show up at that moment, stopping behind them. Now they were subjected to another kind of silence, as everyone tried to process what they were seeing.

Argus pushed his way to the front. “What’s the hold up here. Move along. Wait, is that my cat? Mrs. Norris? Someone has killed my cat! You!” he pointed to Harry. “You’ve done this, haven’t you?”

“We just found her like this!” protested Harry.

“A likely story!” said Argus. “I’ll punish the whole lot of you and make no mistake—”

“Argus,” said a voice behind everyone, and the crowd parted to let Albus through. He looked thoughtfully about the hallway. “I see.”

“Return to your dorms,” said Minerva, waving everyone on. “There is nothing more to see here.”

“You were the first on the scene?” asked Albus, taking the cat gently in his arms.

“Yes, Headmaster,” said Harry.

“Then I would like you four to come with me while I check on Mrs. Norris.”

“My office is the closest, if you just want a quiet place,” said Gilderoy.

“That will be fine,” said Albus, striding off in that direction. Susan’s ball of light bobbed after them and the students parted. There was more than one odd look at the sword Susan was carrying, and she caught a few whispers that it was the same one she had fought Professor Quirrell with the year before.

Entering the office, Albus put Mrs. Norris on the desk as the portraits of Gilderoy scrambled to make themselves presentable again. Susan looked at them in disgust. She then wondered if she should risk a *Magic Sense* on Mrs. Norris, or offer a *Detect Condition* spell, but the Headmaster was already deep in concentration so she just leaned on the sword and waited for him to finish.

The others sat down on the bench over by one wall and looked miserable. Both Severus and Minerva were there as well, with Minerva taking almost as great an interest as Albus in looking the cat over. Severus just glared at the boys, and Gilderoy looked out of sorts, not being the center of attention. He tried to bring the conversation back to himself.

“Probably killed by a very powerful binding curse,” he said. “I know several ways to counteract them, of course, but a bit too late now. Such a pity I wasn’t—”

Susan looked over at him, and he flinched back a little as she raised the sword point off the floor a little. “Be quiet and let them work,” she nearly growled. Snape looked slightly impressed as Gilderoy’s eyes darted about the room, but found no help.

“Yes, of course,” he said softly.

For several minutes Albus poked the cat with his wand and tried various incantations, but nothing seemed to help. Finally he straightened up.

“She lives still,” he announced, much to Argus’ relief.

“How can that be?” he asked. “She’s not breathing or anything.”

“She has been petrified somehow. Exactly what means were used I cannot say.”

“He knows!” said Argus, pointing to Harry. “He did it to get back at me for yelling at him about tracking mud into the castle. Or he asked her to do it for him!” He now pointed at Susan.

“This is not Susan’s way of doing things,” he said gently. “And the magic required would be above that which a second year, even one that practices as much as Harry does, could produce. No, I fear we must look elsewhere. Unless you have some ideas, Susan?”

“I would need to study her condition myself,” she replied. “There are some spells that can tell me exactly what’s wrong with her. And away from this castle full of magic I could do a *magic sense* on her and see if there’s a spell I could use to cure her, but it would be tricky. The petrification spells in my book actually deal with turning people to stone and back. Not just putting them into this sort of... stasis. So I’m not sure what to tell you at this point.”

“Can you tell us what happened?”

“Sure. We were on our way back from the Death Day celebration, and incidentally Nick is now headless. It worked the first of the two ways I had hoped, so I’ll put the sword back tomorrow. Anyway, we were heading to see if we could get something to eat from the feast when suddenly Harry said he heard something and ran up here. That’s when we saw the words and about thirty seconds later everyone else showed up.”

“He heard *something*?” pressed Severus. “Can he be more specific?”

“I thought I heard someone saying they were going to kill. But it must have been something else, just something I thought was words. And because we had been around ghosts all evening, you know...”

Susan, Hermione and Ron looked at him. “It’s true, we ran all over the first and second floors,” said Hermione. “That we came upon Mrs. Norris was as much coincidence as anything.”

“I take it you three heard no such voice?”

“I just heard a sort of hissing noise, that’s all,” said Susan. The other two shook their heads.

“I see.”

“It seems there are many mysteries here,” said Albus. “But the good news is, even if Susan’s magic cannot restore Mrs. Norris, our magic can. Once the mandrakes the students have been so carefully tending are fully grown they can be used to create a suitable potion for curing this particular malady.”

“Oh yes, I could easily-” started Gilderoy, but Susan glared at him and lifted the sword again. “Yes, never mind.”

“I would be more than willing,” said Severus.

“Thank you,” said Argus.

“As far as you four-”

“I think they’re probably both tired and hungry,” interrupted Albus. “Why don’t you go down to the hall and I’ll have some leftovers sent up to you. Goodness knows we’ve still got mountains of food left. Then it’s straight off to bed, all right? We’ll talk more about these mysteries in the morning.”

They said their good-nights, and made their way to the great hall, where they found a miniature banquet set up for them.

“Works fast,” said Ron, grabbing a roll and starting to butter it. Hermione rolled her eyes.

“Did you really hear a voice?” asked Susan.

Harry nodded.

“You better make sure you tell him, you were pretty sure when you took off running. It’s happening again, and he’s forewarned this time, I’m afraid.”

“Who is?” said Ron, his mouth full of food already.

“Voldemort, of course,” said Hermione. “Didn’t you read what was on the wall? *Twice I have been defeated by children*. That’s Harry and Susan, in case it wasn’t obvious. *This time a child shall be my salvation*. He’s possessed a student this time, rather than a teacher. I’d love to know how, I would hope no student would be dumb enough to go looking for you-know-who like Professor Quirrell did. But this chamber and weapon business, that’s what I don’t get. Why would he need a weapon? Unless he was actually scared of you, Susan.”

“Wasn’t there some kind of secret chamber here at the school?” asked Ron. “I could swear someone told me something about that. Not Fred, I think it was Bill, he’s fairly trustworthy.”

“The question is, what can we do about it?” asked Harry.

“Not cast *Exorcise* on every person in the school, if that’s what you’re thinking.”

“Why not?”

“I suppose I could, if I took it in batches. But still, that worked because Professor Quirrell was almost gone. Voldemort’s soul had nearly fully invaded his own. Also he was touching the object that the soul was stored in. If he’s smart he would just recede a little when I cast the spell, and then come back stronger afterwards.”

“We don’t have much to go on,” said Harry sadly. “If it’s not someone we know personally we won’t know if their behavior changes, the biggest giveaway.”

“It’s a problem. Still, he likes grand things, right? Like the ring- look how fancy it was with that big, black stone. Look for something you would put your soul into if you were a dark lord.”

They finished and started back up to their respective dorms.

“What did you mean when you said one of two ways when you were talking about Nick?” asked Hermione as they climbed the stairs.

“That? Oh, simple. They’re not really people, right? They’re a kind of emotional imprint on the world animated by magic. I guess. I haven’t really done as complete a study as I would like. Point is, while I was holding it and *Phased* the sword was phased too. So it could touch other insubstantial things. My thinking was that it would either complete the job of cutting off his head or make him believe that it could. I think a ghost is mostly what they believe themselves to be. That’s why they still wear clothes for one thing. I mean, they don’t get cold, right? And what’s decency to a ghost? But they believe they should have clothes, so they do. Nick believed he shouldn’t be headless, and so he wasn’t. I changed that belief. Maybe. Like I said, it could have just been the sword cutting his head off the rest of the way. To test it I would have to actually wound a ghost with it, one who didn’t know what the experiment was about. Blind test and all that. In any case, whichever way it happened, it worked, so he’s at least a little more satisfied with his situation.

That reminds me, I should go check on Myrtle. She might need another hug. I’ll see you tomorrow, okay?”

“Good night.”

Tracking the Attacker

Time: The next day

Place: Headmaster's office

"How can I help?" asked Susan upon reaching the Headmaster's office the next day. Albus looked at her.

"As you know what your magic can do better than I, wouldn't you already know the answer to that question?" he asked.

"Actually, I do. I just wondered if there was something specific you had in mind before I started work."

"That's very polite of you. What did you have in mind?"

"I'll stop work on my *Detect Lies* item for the moment and start work on a *Time Window Imbuing* instead. Do you have an empty picture frame I could use? That would be best. And I'll need a stone or a torch from the hallway where the incident happened. The *Enhancer* is "An object that was present at the time and place you want to see" so hopefully that will allow the magic to be bound into the frame but still work at other times and locations."

"Wait, slow down. You're going to make a what?"

"*Time Window*. It's a spell that opens a hole of sorts into the past, allowing you to see events that happened. You have to be present where you want to look backwards, and you have to tell it the exact time you want to see, but otherwise I think it could come in handy."

"I should say so. Knowing exactly what was in that hallway when the attack occurred would answer a number of questions."

"That's what I was thinking. I'm worried though, whatever did this didn't use a spell, did they?"

"Not that I can determine, no."

"Great. Another blow for *Barrier Against Spell* rather than *Magic Immunity*. I should have just paid the extra points for it. Oh well."

"How long until it's ready?"

"It's grade 7," she replied, flipping through her book. "So making it energy based is probably out. I really wish you all could just tell me your RESolve, honestly. That means 50 charges..." she trailed off, writing calculations down on a sheet of parchment. "Figure about 60 hours. Working 2 hours a day, five days a week- 6 weeks from now. Ugh, that is not going to cut it."

"You could cast the spell from writings, could you not?"

"Sure could! I just thought this might be more useful than the other things I had planned to work on."

"Perhaps you are right. I wouldn't mind having such an item on hand, just in case. Would you be up to using the spell now, however?"

"I'll read it over, let me make sure I understand how to cast it."

"Of course."

Susan took several minutes and made her *Magical Scripture* check, getting a 15, beating the difficulty of the spell by 3. Then she used *Magical Theory* and got a 16, so she announced she was able to cast from writings and walked with the headmaster down to the hallway. Once there she looked around, and saw Argus scrubbing away at the words written on the wall.

“Hermione was wrong,” she remarked, realizing something.

“About what?” asked Albus.

“She said Myrtle haunted a bathroom on the *first* floor, but last night the gang and myself went up a flight of stairs from the basement, then another set to get here. Thus, this must be the *second* floor, and there’s Myrtle’s bathroom right there. I know it well, I’ve talked with her many times. Odd I didn’t realize it last night when she said it.”

“Odd of her to make such an elementary mistake,” Albus added.

“I know. Weird, right?”

Susan went stiff, a sudden chill creeping along her spine. She remembered Harry’s words quite clearly from the night before: “If it’s not someone we know personally we won’t know if their behavior changes, the biggest giveaway.”

No, she was with us the whole time, Susan thought. There was no way she could be with us at the Death Day party and up here... but if there was some kind of chamber and she was compelled to open it, whatever was inside could have done this while she was with us.

“What’s wrong?” asked Albus. “You look like a Muggle that’s just seen a ghost.”

Susan swallowed. “Professor, say I suspected someone of being possessed, right? Then I asked that person ‘Did you do such and such a thing’ and had a *Detect Lies* spell going at the time. If the person answered they did not, but they actually had *while under possession*, would that answer register as truth or a lie?”

“I think I understand where you’re coming from,” said Albus after a moment. “In essence, you’re asking are we our bodies or are we our spirits?”

“Something like that. I should run that experiment with Myrtle, that might answer the question definitely. Or not, given that she doesn’t have a body anymore. She’s only spirit.”

“I would be interested to hear the results of that experiment. For the moment, shall we head down to where the event took place and poke around?”

In reply, Susan snapped her book closed and stood up. “Let’s go, but then I want Hermione pulled out of class and her belongings examined. Don’t tell her what it’s about, obviously, in case Voldemort takes hold of her or pulls away to avoid detection.”

“My thoughts exactly.”

So Albus and Susan headed down to the second floor corridor where Susan cast *Time Window*, asking the spell to show her the time they showed up (a known time) and then rewinding from there. After the words disappeared from the wall Susan started it playing forwards at normal speed again. What they saw wasn’t that useful. A crying Myrtle dashed into the bathroom-

This should be right after I hugged her. She got that upset over it?

She glided through the wall and a second later a splash was heard. Water gushed out from under the door and the two watched in anticipation for what they knew what came next. They were disappointed. Mrs. Norris walked from one end of the hallway and stopped to look at the puddle, as if deciding whether to drink or not. She did, but as she was lapping up water she suddenly froze and the words appeared on the wall.

“Wait, that’s it?” asked Susan. “So what the heck caused it? Something invisible?”

Albus was craning his neck, looking at all angles through the opened window. "Do you have a spell to see invisible things?"

"I'm not sure that's necessary," answered Susan. "Look." She pointed through the window at the far end and rewound the scene. Playing it through again she watched the hallway carefully. "No footprints in the water. Someone invisible would make splashes. There is no one in this corridor but Mrs. Norris."

"That does seem to be the case. How unfortunate that this has only produced more questions for us."

"Like where is the writing coming from? Could this weapon that's been released have just been sent at random? And the words were spelled to appear wherever the first victim was? If that really is the case we got lucky it wasn't worse. Not that I wish petrification on Mrs. Norris, but it could have been anyone, even a professor!"

"That is certainly possible, and troubling. To not even have a target in mind, but to just spread fear and unrest by letting it loose. He is truly too far gone to save."

"You really thought, after all this, that he could be?"

"Allow an old man some hope."

"I think it might be too late for even that. With luck we can prevent anything worse from happening."

"Do you then believe we will find something by searching Hermione?"

"No, Headmaster, that would be far too much to hope for."

Both left the hallway, neither considering someone on a broom might have been doing magic in that corridor at the time. After all, who would be flying through the castle halls, even invisible, right?

So the two went to collect Hermione from her Transfiguration class, causing quite a stir when the headmaster walked into the classroom. Naturally, Susan had activated her *Barrier Against Spells* charm, just in case.

"I'm afraid we must burrow your star pupil for a moment," he said to Minerva.

"Of course Albus. May I know what this is about?"

"I'm afraid even she cannot until Susan and I are satisfied regarding certain things."

"Very well."

A confused Hermione gathered her things up and left with the two, heading up to the Ravenclaw common room. They weren't out of the room when Albus turned to her.

"I fear I must ask for your wand," he said gravely. "Slowly and carefully, if you please."

"Am I in trouble for something?"

"No, this is just a precaution. It will be returned shortly."

"I don't understand," she said, slowly pulling her wand out.

"You are not meant to. The wand? Thank you."

"I'll check her person, if you can check her belongings," said Susan.

Albus nodded. "Of course if it were me, I would hide it."

"I would hope it would need contact to work. If not we're all in trouble," whispered Susan. "Come with me," she said to Hermione, dragging her towards the doors and then into the shower area.

"Will you tell me what's going on?" pleaded Hermione as they entered.

"It's safer if you don't know for now. Believe me, this is for your own protection."

"My own- What is going on?"

“Please, just trust me for now. Can you do that? You know me, I wouldn’t ask this of you lightly.”

“Fine, but this better be good. Why are we in the bathroom, anyway?”

“Oh, this is really going to blow your mind.” *And not exactly how I dreamed of saying this...* “I need you to take your clothes off for me.”

It looked like Hermione as going to protest further, but then she just shook her head. She sat down and started undoing her shoes, which Susan held her hand out for. She shook them, then set them to one side. As Hermione took everything off she ran her hands along it, searching for hidden pockets. She didn’t find any, and soon Hermione was nearly naked. Susan walked around her, checking her hair and ears for jewelry. She breathed a sigh of relief when she didn’t find anything.

“Now may I be told what this is all about?” she demanded.

“Yes, I think it’s safe. Basically the Headmaster and I suspected you of being possessed.”

“What?” shrieked Hermione.

“You got something wrong last night, and it wasn’t something you should have gotten wrong. So we had to investigate. You understand, right?”

“I guess after Ron got enspelled last year you can’t be too careful.”

“So now you understand why I couldn’t tell you. If you were you might have bolted.”

“I guess I can see that. Can I get dressed now?”

“What? Oh, yeah, sure. Sorry.”

“Sure you are. So what did I get wrong?”

“You said Myrtle’s bathroom was on the first floor, but it isn’t.”

“I did? That’s weird.”

“Yeah, we thought so too. Hence our whole operation. I was worried because last year Ron got snared because Voldemort would have only considered Harry to be a threat. He knows differently now, so I thought I might be targeted, through you.”

“That’s a bleak prospect.”

“I just have to be careful, that’s all. You too, if he’s really wondering around the school again and knows what happened last year.”

“This so called attack though, it doesn’t seem like his style.”

“That’s a good point. He didn’t seem like the mustache twirling villain of old. He had a goal, wipe out the wizard prison. How does this chamber and petrifying cats come into the picture?”

“I wasn’t able to bring *Hogwarts: a History* because of all the Lockhart books we had to bring. Can I borrow yours?”

“You think anything will be in there? Anyway, don’t you have that book memorized?”

“Probably, but it’s a place to start.”

“Come on, I want to tell the Headmaster you’re all clear.”

The three met up, and Hermione went back to class after Albus reported her possessions didn’t seemed possessed. He thanked her for her cooperation and also cautioned her to be careful, given her friendship with Susan.

They headed back to his office, both deep in thought.

“So we’ve got nothing,” said Susan to Harry, Ron and Hermione at lunch that afternoon. “No clues, no suspects, nothing. And if the Headmaster is stumped, I don’t know what we can do about it.”

“It’s been pretty hard on Ginny,” remarked Ron, looking over at her table. “Can’t imagine why. I mean she loves cats and everything, but come on. She seems a little more emotional than usual.”

The four looked at each other.

“Nah,” said Susan. “If she was possessed she wouldn’t be moping around about a cat, right?”

“Yeah, couldn’t be,” said Ron.

“So what’s our next move?” asked Harry. “You say you and Headmaster Dumbledore checked the area for clues?”

“We looked into the past to see exactly what happened. That didn’t tell us much. I’m not sure a further look would reveal anything, but I suppose it’s worth checking out.”

“In the meantime,” said Hermione. “I can think of one person to ask who might know something. We have his class next, in fact.”

“Who? Binns?” asked Ron.

“Of course. He’s been around a while, right? Maybe he knows something. Come on, let’s get there early and ask him.” She started to get up.

“He’s a ghost, remember? He won’t be early.”

“Oh, right.” She sat down again.

Now in class, Hermione put her hand up, interrupting Professor Binns speech about some warlock convention.

“Can you tell us anything about this chamber that the ‘revenge is loosed from?’” she asked.

“Are you talking about the Chamber of Secrets?” asked Binns.

“It has a name? So it does exist!” The class began to look interested for the first time ever, and the energy level in the room took a tick upwards.

“Hardly. Mere speculation and supposition.”

“Still, if someone went through the trouble of giving something that doesn’t exist an actual name, doesn’t that mean it has relevance?”

“People named the Loch Ness Monster as well, but that doesn’t exist, now does it?”

“I have no idea, I’ve never looked into it.”

“The point is, this is History of Magic. That means historical facts, not legends about rooms that don’t exist.”

Susan started laughing.

“You find something amusing in that statement?”

“I do, Professor. To think that you actually believe history is about facts is astonishing. A history teacher should know better.”

“Of course history is about facts! What else could it be about?”

Susan shook her head. “History is what we agree may have happened in the past, not a true record of what happened. It’s written in the best possible light for those it depicts, and skips over that which is inconvenient or distasteful to those writing it. And so many things factor into it- religion, personal bias, the experience of the person recounting the tale. Take the dropping of the first atomic bomb- a Japanese child who lived through it and an American general would tell

you very different ‘historical’ accounts around the single fact that the bomb got dropped. To say that history is simply the record of facts that led to our current situation is downright dangerous to believe.”

“In any case,” interrupted Hermione. “The issue here is this Chamber of Secrets. Can you tell us, possibly from experience, anything about it?”

“I hesitate to deviate from the established curriculum-” Binns looked around the classroom. Even a ghost would notice the difference in attention he was getting at the moment. “Oh, very well. But please understand this is only a story, not facts, despite what some people might think about their subjective relevance.” He glanced over at Susan, who put on an innocent look.

“The story begins when Hogwarts itself was constructed. Four people over a thousand years ago helped to bring the castle into being with magic. Those four became the first heads of house and taught for as long as each was able. In the beginning the four worked together to find those with magical talents and bring them to the school. After a while, however, Salazar took to the notion that only people with two magical parents should be allowed to study here, the so called ‘pure blood’ wizards. Obviously the other three took exception to this idea, believing anyone with magical talents should be taught to use them. We know this from records at the time, which depict him leaving the school after many arguments with the other three.

“Now, as far as this chamber is concerned; The story is that during the construction, Salazar added a room somewhere that only he knew about. As if he could have foretold his disagreements with the others and hidden something like that from them! Furthermore, he placed within the chamber some sort of creature or monster, which only his heir could control. At that time of the heir’s return to the castle the chamber would be opened, and the creature released to give Salazar his revenge upon the other houses and non pure blood wizards.

“So as you can guess, there are many holes in this so called legend of the secret chamber. Salazar was not the type to hope that someday a person would come along that thought as he did and start killing wizards. He would have acted, then and there. Also he would have no need for monsters, as even in those days the killing curse was known. Furthermore, the castle has been searched, and no evidence of a chamber has been found.”

Several other people now took up the discussion, with Binns fending them off verbally. Hermione, however, was writing. Susan leaned over to see what she was doing.

Chamber of Secrets

- 1) *Can only be opened by the Heir of Slytherin.*
 - a) *Why? Spell? Blood test somehow?*
 - b) *Did Salazar even have any kids?*
- 2) *Has some kind of creature inside*
 - a) *What kind of creature can still be alive down there after a thousand years?*
 - i) *What powers does it have? Upon being released, only managed to petrify a cat*
 - b) *Why can only this Heir control it?*
 - c) *Why does it care about blood purity? Could it be commanded just as easily to clean the castle, or entertain people with songs?*
- 3) *How did Voldemort come to learn about it?*
 - a) *Is it actually mentioned in a book he read?*

- b) *Is he the heir? Find out his last name/parentage*
c) *He knows the killing curse, why would he rely on some creature?*

“We didn’t see any trace of it in the hallway,” whispered Susan. “Put down 2, d; Is it invisible?”

“Got it.”

Finally class was over, and the four left to discuss what they had heard.

“So do you think there really is some weird chamber someplace?” asked Ron.

“Something petrified that cat. Something the Headmaster couldn’t explain,” said Hermione.

“Or lied, because he didn’t want to tell us,” said Susan.

“You really think he knows?” asked Harry.

“He’s told me things, and made guesses about things I’ve done that are eerily accurate. I wouldn’t put anything past the man.”

“So why not tell us?”

“Because I have a certain tendency to run straight towards danger, or at the very least, not back down from things?” Susan smiled at him.

“I guess there is that.”

“Come on, we’ve got some time, let’s go check the place over.”

The four came to the hallway, where the flickering letters still appeared scrawled on the wall.

“Odd that they haven’t managed to get rid of them,” remarked Susan. She looked all around. “Huh, crack in the ceiling there. Weird.”

“Come and look at this,” said Harry, pointing out the window. The others crowded in to look, and found a bunch of spiders vainly trying to walk through the glass. Susan opened it and they scuttled out.

“Didn’t think spiders would ever act in unison like that. Maybe I need a number 4 on my list. What’s wrong with you?”

Everyone turned and saw Ron across the hall, backed up against the opposite wall.

“I’m afraid of spiders,” he answered.

“You out-mass them a million times. You can kill them by accident and never know it. How can you be afraid of them?” Hermione asked.

“I just am, okay?”

“Hey, if a man has *Phobia: Spiders* written on his character sheet, then *Phobia: Spiders* it is. I can’t do anything about my *Curiosity* or my *Overconfidence* now can I?”

“I’m guessing no?” said Hermione.

“Exactly. Leave him alone.”

“Sure, whatever.”

“Let’s ask if Myrtle saw anything. Or heard anything, because she was probably inside. There was water here, and that’s her handiwork.”

“We’ll wait out here,” said Ron, looking at Harry.

“Oh, come on you two. It’ll be a naughtily little thrill for you. Don’t worry, no one uses this one because of her.”

She pushed the door open and stepped inside, and the two boys reluctantly followed her.

“Hello,” said Myrtle, passing through the stall door. “Nice to see you again, Susan.”

“Glad to see you in such high spirits,” said Susan.

“Spirits? Is that some kind of joke because I’m dead?”

“What?” Susan rolled her eyes. “Myrtle, what have we talked about?”

“Sorry. It’s just so- Hey, what are boys doing in here?”

“Living dangerously,” replied Hermione. “We wanted to know if you saw or heard anything last night, out in the corridor.”

“Not really. After Susan hugged me I couldn’t handle it and jumped back into my toilet.”

“That explains the water outside,” said Harry.

“Then everything was quiet until that fuss that brought everyone up here.”

“Pity. We could have used a break in the case,” said Susan. “Say, Myrtle, how would you like to help us out?”

The others stared at her.

“Me?” said Myrtle. “How can I help?”

“I could do it with *Flight* and *Phase*, but I just don’t have time. We need to find this Chamber of Secrets, and ghosts can pretty much go anywhere in the castle. I want you to start at the top and work your way down, going through every room around here. See if you can find some sealed off chamber that has a monster in it. Report back to me so I can take it out before it hurts more than a cat.”

“You would trust me with such an important job?” Myrtle was shocked.

Susan shrugged. “Why not? It’ll give you something to do rather than just hang around here all day. Right? Think about it, you could actually help save the school!”

“No one’s ever... relied on me for something before! Are you sure?”

“Of course I’m sure. I wouldn’t have asked, otherwise.”

“I’ll get started right away! Thank you!” She shot through the ceiling.

“Great, she’s on the case-”

Myrtle came back down. “But I want another hug for this!” She took off again.

“I’ll give you two!” Susan shouted after her, laughing.

“You actually motivated her,” said Hermione, staring.

“Because I treated her like a person, not just some sentient energy that hangs around. I have to wonder, were ghosts used when they originally looked for this chamber? Or did wizards just ‘perform some magic’ and give up after not finding anything?”

“They are looked down upon,” said Harry. “And not just because they’re ghosts. There’s something deeper at work, like people seeing them as death. Or being reminded of death? Or not having had the courage to move on? I don’t know. Let’s go before someone catches us in here.”

Good thing they didn’t wait “a few days” to do all that, (honestly, why would they have?) as in another time, Ron and Percy had a fight outside that very bathroom. However, he wasn’t scheduled to walk past for another three days, so the group slipped out, no one the wiser.

Mission Impossible

Time: Several days later, lunchtime

Place: The great hall

“He complemented you on your list of things to find out,” said Susan to Hermione. “But he didn’t have much to offer. At least that he would tell me about.”

“That’s too bad. There hasn’t been another incident but I’m still worried it wasn’t a one time thing.”

“How’s Ginny?”

“Fine? I guess? I don’t talk with her much here in school,” answered Ron.

“Oh, okay. The teachers haven’t relaxed, I’ll tell you that. Something’s up around here. We just need a way to find out more information.”

“Don’t you have some kind of spell?” asked Harry.

“I guess we could try a *True Question*, but the description says the answer usually takes the form of a cryptic riddle. We don’t need any more riddles, we have enough, thanks.”

“What we need is to get into the Slytherin rooms and poke around,” said Hermione.

“Why bother?” asked Ron.

“If there’s any information about opening some hidden chamber, it’s got to be there.”

“Even if we could get in, like under Harry’s cloak, we don’t actually know where it is.”

“Where what- oh, you’re right.”

“That’s always bothered me,” said Susan. “That the houses are not only separated, they’re kept apart by hiding the entrances and giving those entrances passwords. That’s never really felt right to me.”

“Still, Ron’s idea is okay on the surface. Harry and Susan follow a bunch of Slytherin students from lunch or whatever back to their common room, under the cloak. Then she can open a portal to their room any time. We choose a time when they won’t be there, like during a Quidditch match, and see what we can find.”

“Interesting idea,” said Susan, thinking it over. “I can easily put the portal on the ceiling, and make it just big enough to look through. That would show us if anyone was there.”

“I was also thinking, we could use Polyjuice Potion to disguise ourselves as actual Sytherins, just in case someone comes in!”

“Or... I just ask Sparkle to cast *Shape-Shift* on us and be done with it.”

Sparkle raised her head from the bench. “Be glad to.”

“That reminds me, she spent months poking about the castle, didn’t she?” asked Harry. “When we first arrived here?”

“That I did. Before you ask, no, I didn’t find any chambers with weird creatures in them.”

“Pity.”

“Also, Susan has forbidden me from wandering around at night as I used to, given the danger.”

“That’s probably smart,” said Hermione. “You don’t want to wind up like Mrs. Norris.”

“My thinking is that with *Phase* cast, whatever made Mrs. Norris like she is wouldn’t hurt me. Susan does not wish me to take that risk.”

“Yeah, I may be *Overconfident*, but I’m not stupid. We can take risks after the mandrake potion is made.”

“Want me to go get the cloak? We could do it right after lunch. The sneaking in part, anyway.”

Susan shook her head. “No, I’ll just cast *Invisibility* on myself. It’s not perfect, that would be *Veil*, in case you were interested, but given my skill and energy I can pretty much disappear.”

“So why not just poke around invisibly?” asked Ron.

“We might have to move stuff or open books, that’s why. And four people poking around is more likely to stumble on a clue than one.”

“Right.”

“Start looking for someone to impersonate, then point them out to Sparkle,” said Susan, finishing off her soup. “I’ll find a quiet place to get *Invisible*, then follow some Slytherin. See you later.”

Susan slipped out and went to a nearby bathroom, then cast *Invisibility* on herself, taking the whole extra 1 segment of casting time.

She got a crappy 7, but with 9 energy and the extra 1 from taking more time, she was confident she wouldn’t be noticed. For good measure she cast *Phase* on herself so she wouldn’t accidentally brush up against something and knock it over. She was at a -3 for holding the spells, but she didn’t think she would be going into combat or anything.

It was odd, Susan found, to walking about the castle and not having people react to her presence. *Is this what it’s like to be dead? To have the world just continue and there’s nothing you can do to change anything? Is this what Myrtle feels like? No wonder she’s so depressed all the time.*

It felt like being dead, as she could no more see herself than anyone else, and was thankful for *Phase* keeping her untouchable as well as unseen. She chose the largest group of Slytherin students walking away from the hall, and nervously followed them down to the dungeons. They stopped in front of a stone depiction of a snake carved into the walls. Looking around, they made sure there no non-Slytherins about, and one by one touched the snake while speaking “Ambition,” which must be their password. Susan watched as they disappeared, rather than stepping through a doorway.

Don’t tell me it’s like the platform 9.75 gate!

Susan stepped through, and found only rock on the other side. She sighed.

Stepping back through, she waited a moment to make sure there would be no one near where she came in, and dropped *Phase*. She immediately cast it again, but this time held onto it without finishing. Luckily, she was not attacking, using an offensive spell, or affecting another creature, so she stayed invisible. She reached a hand out to touch the snake and said “Ambition”, and found herself elsewhere.

She immediately released her hold on *Phase* and became insubstantial again, then looked around.

No, this place isn’t creepy.

The room was lit with a slightly nauseating green light that emanated from several globes hung from the ceiling. There was a stone snake above the fireplace, and what looked like skulls on the mantle.

Wonderful.

As she looked around, several students were lounging in stuffed chairs by the fire, and she moved over to the window, behind them.

Are we underwater? She peered out the windows, which seemed to confirm her suspicions. *He wasn't paranoid at all, was he? Crap, if his chamber is like this, someplace you get teleported to that isn't actually connected to the castle, we'll never find it.*

When she was sure there wasn't anything sticking through her, she dropped *Phase* so she could hear again. Listening to the boy's conversation it seemed they were as baffled as anyone as to the identity of the attacker.

Good thing that's all anyone's talking about these days. Well, no sense in hanging around, right? Crap, how do I get out of here?

Susan looked around, hoping to find a private enough place to open a *Teleportal*. It didn't look like anyone was going to leave any time soon, showing her the way to do it, so she wandered through and up some stairs. She passed into the dorms, which weren't that much different from her own, and found a quiet corner. A few seconds later she was visible again, and walking down from her own dorm.

That evening, the four gathered in the Gryffindor common room and Susan told them what she had seen.

"That's probably why Myrtle hasn't found anything," said Harry.

"No, she hasn't found anything because she spends more time telling people about how Susan trusts her with this mission than actually performing the mission," said Hermione a bit bitterly. "I've been hearing that all over school now."

"Ah, let her have her fun," said Susan. "It keeps her occupied instead of moping around, and she's meeting all kinds of new people. Sure, if she did find it that would be great. But I'm not relying on that."

"Oh no. That means you're relying on us to find something in the Slytherin rooms!" Ron paled.

"It's the only lead we have at the moment. Harry, you're going to be our distraction. Your next Quidditch match is with Slytherin, so they'll be out there for sure. Don't disappoint me now!"

"In other words, don't catch the snitch right away if I can help it?"

"Exactly. Draw the match out as long as you can. That'll give us more time to look."

"I'll see what I can do."

As the day dawned Ron, Susan and Hermione touched *Sparkle* as she cast *Shape-shift* on them, and they turned into Slytherin students.

"And it goes away when you stop... maintaining it, right?" Ron asked, nervously.

"Don't worry, you won't get stuck like this," said Susan. "Making a spell permanent requires a lot of work."

She opened a small hole in the air, and peaked through.

"Looks good, it's all clear!" Letting that casting drop she opened a bigger one, and they stepped through into the Slytherin common room.

It was hardly twenty minutes fruitless minutes later when the three were startled by voices. They had split up in order to cover more ground, and look for different things. Hermione had found a section with books and was quickly paging through them, while Ron had taken the

staircase up to the boy's dorm and was tapping bricks with his wand to see if any sounded hollow. Susan was just looking around in general, trying to figure out if there were any hidden switches or compartments in the room. She froze as the people came in, but was off to one side and so not immediately noticed. She heard Draco's voice, and stayed still.

"Did you see the look on his face?" Draco was saying, laughing. "Trying to get away from that Bludger. Then wham! Wish it had hit his stupid face rather than his- hey, what are you doing here?"

Susan turned around. Draco was looking at her, and Crab and Goyle were both with him.

"How did you get back here before us? You were watching the match, weren't you?"

Great, now what? Time to fake it, I guess. Why didn't I take Deception as a skill?

"I was, now I'm here. Why do you care?" she replied, hoping she was being haughty enough.

"What are you doing, anyway?"

I guess I might as well tell the truth, maybe he knows something. "Just doing some more poking around, looking for information on this chamber of secrets."

"Ugh, not you too. Honestly, everyone around here thinks they're the Heir of Slytherin. Give it up."

"He must have left some clues around here."

"You think after a thousand years someone wouldn't have spotted them? Forget it. Seriously, how did you get here so fast?"

"Does it really matter that much? How's your father by the way?"

"All the charges were dropped last week, I thought everyone knew that."

"Oh, I knew that!" Susan lied. *Crap, I haven't been reading the paper lately.* "I'm talking about his, uh, reputation. All the charges were dropped, right? He didn't lose any standing in the community?"

"That's a weird question. If I didn't know any better--"

Suddenly another figure appeared near the entrance. It was Professor Snape, and he didn't look happy. He never looked happy, but in this case seemed more grumpy than usual. "What did you do that--" He spotted Susan. "Leave."

"Yes, professor," Susan answered quickly, and started up the stairs to the girl's dorm. She turned when she was just out of sight and peaked back into the room, but Severus was waving his wand about and she couldn't hear their conversation. *Pity, that would have been interesting.*

The trouble now was, Hermione and Ron were trapped in their respective sections. Susan wasn't sure if she could climb the stairs to the boy's rooms, she knew boys couldn't climb the stairs to the girl's rooms in Ravenclaw. Casting any new magic would probably attract attention, given the magical light that was produced, so she was in a real bind.

If only I knew how to get out of here! It may be as easy as just walking back through the way I came. But if it isn't, I'm going to look really stupid smashing into the wall there.

It looked like Severus was yelling at Draco, who was taking it in stride. She could also see Hermione looking back at her from behind a bookcase at the far end of the room.

Well, at least I can get her over here.

Creeping up the stairs, Susan stopped in the hallway where the separate doors led to the rooms and started casting. She figured she was far enough away, and they were distracted anyway. A *Teleportal* opened behind where Hermione was standing, and Susan put a hand over her mouth, pulling her through and closing it. She jumped, surprised, but whirled around and saw it was Susan.

“You scared me half to death,” she said quietly. “But what do we do about Ron? Hopefully he’s smart enough to stay put, but what happens if Draco goes up there?”

“Don’t know. Tell you what, why don’t you go back for now, reduce the number of people that might get caught here.”

“Wait, can’t you just *Phase* your way over there?”

“Sure, but to make the *Teleportal* I would have to unphase. That might set off some kind of alarm or something, if girls aren’t allowed in the boy’s dorm.”

“Oh. You need a spell to summon a person to you.”

“There is one. *Telesummon*. It’s grade 8 though, not exactly something I can cast from writings at the moment.”

“There must be something we can do!”

“Wait, I’ve got it. Go get Sparkle, she knows a spell we can use!”

Susan quietly opened a teleportal back to her dorm room, and Hermione hurried off to find her.

Come on. Come on!

Hermione came back, Sparkle at her heels.

“Great, thanks Hermione. Sparkle, I need your *Illusion* magic. Go down to the foot of these stairs and create the illusion of what’s already there. Put the circle on the ceiling, I doubt they’ll notice it up there.”

“What good will that do?”

“I can slip into the *illusion* and not be seen, then get Ron out from the other stairwell and *Teleportal* us out of here.”

“Ah, so you want a quiet, covering illusion. Got it.”

Sparkle cast *Illusion*, getting a 16 in the attempt (with 6 energy put in, minus 3 for already maintaining the *Shape-shift*) and if the others noticed they gave no sign. Susan slipped her hand into the space beyond the doorway to the stairs and was pleased to see it disappear. She carefully made her way over to the other side and stuck her head through.

“Ron!” she hissed. “Come on, we’re getting out of here!”

“Thought we were done for,” said Ron, coming down the stairs. “Where’s your body?”

“Never mind that now.” Susan started casting again, making another *Teleportal* there by the stairs. She kept glancing over at the others, and it seemed to be wrapping up, but she only needed another two seconds- *there!*

Ron jumped through the *Teleportal* and Susan followed suit, then went over to the other one she was maintaining and beckoned them though. Once safe she dropped both and Sparkle dropped both of her spells.

Hermione breathed a sigh of relief. “I don’t think I’ve been that scared for a long time!”

“What, you didn’t trust I would get us out of that? HA! And again I say- HA!”

Ron was looking around. “Wait, this is your room! I can’t be seen up here!”

“Sparkle could always turn you into a girl for the duration,” suggested Susan.

“I’ll just stay like I am, thanks. Let me off someplace, okay?”

“Can’t put you inside your dorm, I’ve never seen the inside of it. How about behind Rubeus’ hut? There shouldn’t be anyone back there. We can head out to the field and see why the match got done so early.”

The others agreed that was fine and they all stepped through. Rubeus wasn’t around, so they headed to the field, which was almost completely empty.

Looking around, Susan was trying to find someone she could trust enough to ask what was going on, and not get a lot of questions about why she didn't know, when she spotted Gilderoy. He also spotted her, and turned, literally running the other way.

"Something terrible has happened," she said. "We need to find out what. Now."

She spotted Neville, and waved him over.

"Hey Neville, how are you?"

"I'm okay. Weird match, huh?"

"Ah, we just got here, actually. What happened?"

"You didn't see? This one Bludger just would not leave Harry alone. And then when we went to grab the Snitch it broke his arm!"

"Oh no, I wish I had been there."

"So does Harry. Someone shouted they would go look for you, but he said you were busy and they wouldn't find you. That's when Professor Lockhart came rushing up—"

"He didn't!"

"He did. He tried to fix Harry's arm but all he managed to do is remove all the bones. It was pretty gross, actually."

"No wonder he ran- oh, when I catch that guy..." She made strangling motions with her hands. "He went to the hospital wing?"

Neville nodded.

"Come on folks, lets- Hey Neville, how are your parents, by the way?"

"They're fine. Why do you ask?"

"No reason. Just curious. Thanks for the update. See you!"

The three sped off to the hospital wing. By the time they got there, Harry was just downing a potion, and nearby him, a bottle with a bunch of bones on it sat on the table.

"Noooooo!" cried Susan, hand outstretched, screeching to a halt in front of him. "Crap!"

"I tried to tell her you would be along any minute, but she insisted I drink it."

Susan slumped over. "Sorry, Harry. This whole day has been wasted, and now this. But she didn't know."

"Know what?" asked Madam Pomfrey. "You kids shouldn't be here, this is a medical issue, after all."

"Know that Sparkle knows *Regeneration*. Tell me, how long until that potion works?"

"Overnight. Why?"

"I'm really sorry, Harry. I don't dare have her cast it on you now, the two magics might interact in some weird way."

"You really could do better?" Madam Pomfrey asked.

"Sure! *Regeneration*, at the level Sparkle would cast it, say..." she did some rapid calculations in her head. "Less than 8 seconds."

"You could regrow the bones in Harry's arm in less than eight seconds?" She seemed skeptical.

"You could chop off both his legs and with *Regeneration* going, he'd be totally fine again in less time than pouring a glass of orange juice."

"Let's hold off on proving that for the moment. I'll take your word for it. Ron can help him get into a gown, he'll be here until tomorrow after all. Then you can leave."

“Why?” asked Susan. “He’s not sick. We won’t catch his bones being vanished away by incompetent people. He should have us around to take his mind off it, rather than just lying there in pain. He can do homework!”

She sputtered a bit. “I guess you’re right. Stay then.”

After Harry was comfortable he got to tell the story of what happened.

“The match started as normal,” he began. “But right after that something happened with the Bludger. Basically instead of just zooming around at random like it’s supposed to, it was targeting just me. We were losing pretty badly because Fred and George kept trying to keep it off me. Finally I told them to let me deal with it and they went off to defend others, and I just started zooming around. I saw the Snitch, but as I reached for it, the Bludger smashed into my arm. I managed to get it, but it was a near thing. Sorry I couldn’t give you more time, it just worked out that way.”

Ron, Susan and Hermione looked at each other.

“What?”

“When we were in the…” she looked around. “You know where, Draco came in looking like the cat who got the cream. Then Severus stormed in and said “What did you do to that?” and then clammed up because he saw me. Looked like he was ripping into Draco pretty good after that, though I couldn’t hear anything. He put up a silence spell or something. Anyway, I wonder if one has to do with the other?”

“Like he was about to say ‘Bludger’ before he saw you? It would fit,” said Hermione.

“The question is, what do we do about it?” asked Susan. “We don’t have any proof, and he could have been talking about something else entirely. It’s only the timing that’s suspicious.”

“Still pretty suspicious!” said Ron.

“I agree. I think I’ll take on Mission: Information Retrieval and head down to see if they’re taking a look at the Bludger. You guys stay here, I’ll be back soon.”

“You got it.”

“Wait a second- why didn’t you just use your *Deflection* item to stop it?” asked Susan.

“Oh.” Harry looked away. “I left it back in my locker when I went out on the field. I didn’t think someone would try to kill me right in front of everyone.”

“Did you forget last year, when your broom tried to buck you off?”

“I kind of did, actually. Don’t worry, I’ll keep it with me no matter what, now.”

“Better to figure that out now than later, when you’re ducking death spells. See you soon.”

Susan went down to the field area, where Professor Flitwick, Headmaster Dumbledore and Gilderoy were looking the ball over. It was still and silent on the grass, while its companion struggled to free itself from the restraining strap.

Susan marched up to Gilderoy. “Nice job with Harry’s arm.”

“Thank- oh.”

She pointed back the way she had come. “You may go.”

He turned to the others. “Yes, well, as I explained, all quite simple. You can take it from here, right? See you all later! Perhaps I’ll just go up and see how young Harry is-”

Susan looked daggers at him.

“Perhaps I’ll just send him a card. I signed his books but I’m sure he’ll love another autograph. Goodbye.”

She watched him retreat, then turned to the others.

“How is Harry?” asked Albus.

“Doing well. I was too late to use my magic, he had already drank some potion, so he’ll have to suffer through getting his bones back the hard way. He should be fine tomorrow.”

“I’m relieved to hear that!”

“So what have you found?” she asked.

Albus’ eyes sparkled. “Why don’t you tell me?”

Susan looked over at the castle, then all around herself. “I should be far enough away that the top of my head won’t come off. Give me a second.”

Susan performed a *Magic Sense* on the ball, (getting an 11) and then on the other (getting a 16). She looked back and forth between them, then picked the inert one up and walked off a ways with it. Albus raised an eyebrow. She repeated the *Magic Sense*, this time getting a 14, and without the two wizards standing next to her, was pretty sure she knew what was going on.

“I don’t think this one can be called a Bludger anymore,” she said, dropping it again. “It’s been stripped of magic, so now it’s just a weird ball. That one, on the other hand, is magical. If one needed any more than a visual inspection to tell that. Based on this evidence I would say that somehow this Bludger was either wiped of magic or never had it in the first place. Then someone controlled it during the match, making it attack Harry.”

“An interesting theory,” said Albus. “How would you test it?”

“I would immediately grab Draco Malfoy before he has a chance to do another spell, and see what the last spell he performed was.”

“That seems oddly specific.”

“I have my reasons, but I can’t actually tell you how I know that, or inform you that Snape probably knows something about it. Can’t do that, so I won’t. Now, how would I prove it?”

She thought for a moment. “I could cast Time Window, and look for someone concentrating on controlling it. However this place is huge so that would take a while, they could hide anywhere. I could put *Detect Lies* on myself and ask the short list of suspects if they did it or not.”

“Draco?” asked Albus.

“It’s a short list, like I said. That’s the trouble with magic, there’s really no physical evidence left behind. I have no idea how I would come up with actual proof of anything. Not without days of spell casting, anyway, covering this whole place.”

“Pity. I cannot exactly accuse Draco without some kind of proof, after all.”

“I know. I’m sorry Headmaster.”

“Don’t be! I don’t expect you to have all the answers. But it is troubling, that someone was able to do this. It could easily have been more serious, and I just let it continue so as to not stop the game. So the blame is mine. I will have to be more proactive in the future. Still, I can’t help but wonder where Harry’s friends were, in his time of need.”

“Looking for clues to where the Chamber of Secrets is, naturally. We figured it would be best to do it with less people around.” *Of course I didn’t say where we were looking.*

“And were any clues to be found?”

“We didn’t get much time to look, honestly. As soon as we heard this had happened, we rushed out here.”

“I heard you set a ghost to looking? Very inventive.”

“Thank you. She needed something to do, and it’s something she’s perfectly suited for. So I figured, why not?”

“Why not indeed? I think we can pack this up,” he said to Filius. “But keep it unenchanted, in case someone else wants to look at it.”

“Will do,” answered Filius, dropping the ball into the trunk, closing it, and levitating it behind him.

“I’m going to get back to Harry. See you later Headmaster.”

“Until next time, Susan.”

Coming to December

Time: The next day

Place: Hospital Wing

“How are you feeling, Harry?” asked Susan, early that Sunday morning.

“It wasn’t pleasant, but I’ve survived it.” He wiggled his fingers. “I have some news though.”

“News? How can you have news laying in a hospital bed?”

He pointed. “Take a look over there.”

Susan went over to a curtained off area and looked inside. “Hey, it’s camera man! Whatever his name is.”

“Colin. Whatever petrified Mrs. Norris ripped through his camera and got him. But there’s more.”

“Oh? Do tell.”

“I got another visit from our favorite house elf last night.”

“Dobby? What did he have to say for himself?”

“Basically he was concerned that he was wrong in allowing me to come back, because it looked like you couldn’t protect me as you promised.”

“And did you inform Mr. Dobby that fact was because you left the item Susan had made for you behind?”

“I did mention that, actually. He made me promise I would keep it with me at all times now.”

“Good advice. Anything else?”

“He let slip the Chamber had been opened once before. Little odd, that, don’t you think? Headmaster Dumbledore played dumb on the whole subject, but it seems he might know exactly what we’re dealing with.”

“In his defense, we would go rushing off to deal with it.”

“Of course we would. But we’re going to do that anyway. At least if he told us what it was, we would go in *informed* rather than *ignorant*.”

Susan thought for a moment. “You know, there was a book I read once. The characters were about to go face the evil mastermind, who was a great wizard. But the guy who fought him before wouldn’t tell his apprentice anything about the guy. He said that if he overplayed it, his apprentice would get cocky and let his guard down. But if he underplayed it and the guy started pulling off all kinds of magical trickery the apprentice would freeze. So he said nothing, just basically to remember what he had been taught and deal with the situation as it arose.”

“I guess that makes some sense. Still, I would rather know, I think, than not.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean. I might be able to whip up a spell that makes us immune to whatever it is, but sadly I don’t know what it is.”

“Maybe he doesn’t know either. Maybe it’s something different this time. Who knows?”

They sat in silence for a moment.

“Too bad about Colin. He’ll miss a lot of classes, those mandrake things take an awful long time to grow.”

“They are plants, I guess.”

“Hey, we never talked about what you found. I guess nothing, because I didn’t get you enough time, right?”

“I did speak to Draco, he seemed to think the Slytherin rooms had been searched pretty well. Mainly because all Slytherins want to find out they’re the Heir, I guess.”

“That’s something, at least- We know where not to look.”

Susan started pacing. “It would be so much easier if we knew what we were dealing with! If I had seen it I could *Descry Creature* and find out where it is. If I knew where the chamber was but not how to get there I could use *Destination*. What’s the point of having a book full of spells when they won’t do you any good?”

“You’ll think of something, I’m sure.”

“I’m having a hard enough time coming up with a Christmas present for all you guys this year. You want me to solve this mystery too?”

They both laughed.

As December approached Albus finally agreed to allow Susan to start up the old Quirinus equipment and start combat lessons again. The students were getting more and more nervous about things, and traveling in packs about the school. Which Susan actually thought was a terrible idea, because that just meant more people would get caught by whatever was petrifying people, rather than less.

Susan also “dropped” her *Barrier Against Spells* and picked up *Magic Immunity* instead. It was only 1 more XP, and her *Spell Symbol* item was carrying the spell anyway, so why not? It would make sure she couldn’t be petrified by whatever had come out of the chamber, and that’s what counted.

Good thing I learned about Spell Symbol, she thought. Before I made that item like I planned to. I would have felt pretty foolish right about now, had I done things that way.

The news about the combat lessons was met with a lot of excitement by everyone, and so Susan was busy working overseeing that, and on *Imbued* items for her friends Christmas gifts. Naturally several teachers were in attendance at all times, and things went smoothly, for the most part. Until one day when Draco showed up.

“I’m challenging you to a duel,” he announced, looking at Susan.

Everyone looked at him like he was nuts. “Are you sure about that?” asked one boy. “She beat professor Quirrell, and he ran away!”

We never did find out who that was, did we? Or who tried to kill me that one time.

“She thinks she’s so great, I’m going to take her down a peg!”

“Fine,” said Susan, resigned. “Go nuts if it’ll make you feel better.”

They stepped into the barrier, and Susan quietly fingered a charm on her bracelet. “Immunity,” she said, activating *Magic Immunity*, with a duration of *until I step out of this ring area*.

They waited for the gong that would tell them to begin, and with the sound, Draco started casting spells at her.

Which of course bounced right off. *Wonder if the rules say I can just walk over there and take his wand away? That’s winning a duel, right?*

“Kinda figured that would happen,” said Draco, pausing in his barrage. “That’s why I came prepared with this! *Serpensortia!*”

Susan watched, fascinated, as a long black snake seemed to materialize out of his wand and fall to the floor between them. It reared up, tasting the air.

“Neat!” Susan said, cocking her head and looking at it. “Is it an actual snake you just summoned from somewhere, or is it some kind of magical construct you created?”

Draco sputtered. “I don’t have to answer that!”

“Guess I’ll have to actually cast a spell,” she said. *Because if it’s just a magical construct, I’m immune to it. If it’s a real snake, not so much. Another little flaw in my magic, I guess. Maybe I should look into Invulnerability as well?*

“Not to worry,” said Gilderoy, the “officiator” for the day. He jumped into the field. “I’ll take care of it!”

As Susan was debating whether to cast *Thrust* on him to get him out of here he pointed his wand at the snake.

Oh right, these people don’t respect the Action methodology. They just get to do whatever they want, when they want.

Instead of vanishing as he (hopefully) intended, the snake began to enlarge, and even Draco started looking worried.

Can that man perform any spell correctly?

The snake stopped growing and opened its mouth, looking at Susan. *Really wish I had Acceleration on right now. Oh, right, I’m currently “immune” to it. Shoot. Still, a quick casting of Elemental Burst (Knockout) should do the trick.*

Then the snake turned and looked at Harry. He was standing there, actually hissing at the thing.

Okay, that’s bizarre. But at least it’s distracted. I’ll take the full casting time then.

Susan cast, and 5 segments later an eruption of energy filled the area between the posts.

Pity Gilderoy wasn’t still in here, the man can scurry when there’s trouble, I’ll give him that.

She got an 18 on her casting check, and made it 4 meters wide, centered in the middle of the “arena.” The snake went down, unmoving, and when the energy burst cleared Draco was on the floor as well, clutching his right leg. Susan of course was still immune, even to her own magic.

“All that, and you only got hit in the leg?” Susan asked, shocked. “Weird. Of course it only had two chances to hit you, but getting a five both times...”

“What are you babbling about? My leg is broken!”

“No it’s not, you big baby. That damage was non-lethal, I specifically learned it with *Knockout* rather than something like *Acid* or *Fire*. It can’t carry over into lethal, that’s the whole point. Are we done here? Because if so, I’ll heal you up.”

“Don’t you come near me! Crab! Goyle! Take me up to the Hospital Wing. My father will hear about this, mark my words.”

His two goons rushed to his size and carefully picked him up, and Draco played it up as much as he could. They hobbled off. Everyone else was looking at her.

“So, anyone else want to have a go? That wasn’t even a warm up. I thought he had a little something more exciting than a snake planned, to tell the truth.”

No one stepped forward, so Susan walked over and picked up the snake.

“Here you go, Mr. Defense Against the Dark Arts,” she said, handing it to Gilderoy. “I expect you can take care of one little unconscious snake, yes?”

He held it as far away from himself as he could. "Certainly. I'll just go take care of that, shall I?"

"So what was that?" asked Harry as she walked back over.

"Just what I said- *Elemental Burst*. It creates an explosion of a certain element, chosen when you learn the spell. I chose the 'element' *Knockout* which basically just renders whatever limb it hits unusable for a while. If I get high enough on the damage roll, that is. The bigger question is, why did that snake hesitate and look over at you?"

"I just yelled at it to stop, that's all. You must have heard me."

Everyone seemed to be edging away from Harry at this point, and Susan looked around.

"What's the matter with you all?" she demanded. "Get back to practicing! You knew how powerful I was before this when I fought Professor Quirrell. Why are you looking at me like I just grew fangs or something? I learned a new spell, you people do it all the time!"

"I think they're looking at me," Harry remarked softly to her.

"But there's no teacher," one person said, looking around.

"Trust me, with our so called teacher gone we're actually safer. Very well, go run and find someone willing to take over then."

"Me?"

"Why not you?"

"Sure. Sure, why not? Going now! HAHAHA."

"Weird. Come on, not you too Ron." Ron was backing away as well. "What's gotten into everyone?"

"Harry's a Parselmouth!" he said. "He can talk to snakes."

"Is that all? Who cares? I mean, yes, interesting that snakes have a language that people can speak, but that doesn't make him a monster. I could talk to it if I woke it up and cast a spell."

"I guess I *can* talk to snakes," Harry said, looking at nothing. "I never really thought about it, but one time at the zoo I talked to a boa constrictor."

"Yeah, I'm still not sure what the big deal is."

Ron pointed to a Slytherin boy standing nearby. "Don't you know why the symbol of their house is a snake? Salazar was a Parselmouth, and it's passed through family lines."

"Well I'm sure there were more families than his that could do it."

"Maybe, but not many."

"Look," said Harry, turning to the others. "I'm not, okay? There's no way."

"Yeah?" said a Slytherin girl. "Prove it! He lived a thousand years ago, so who knows how many great, great, great, great grand-kids he's got."

"But I got sorted into Gryffindor, not Slytherin."

There was a general consent that this much, at least, was true.

"And if he is, Susan here will stop him, right?" asked a younger boy from Hufflepuff. There was some nervous laughter.

Susan shrugged. "Count on it. But I grew up with the guy. No way is he the Heir of Slytherin, trust me."

They seemed torn, as most really looked up to and respected Susan, so they wanted to believe her. But the possibility of Harry being someone they feared, someone who was setting things loose in the castle to try and kill people... That was a bit harder to reconcile, no matter how highly Susan was regarded.

The meeting broke up quickly after that.

The next day, an intense snowstorm canceled Herbology so Susan put some more time into making her Christmas gifts. She had begged off making the ones for the school a while ago, and was working on the gifts instead. Albus said he didn't care what she worked on, as long as she practiced the same amount other students put into potions class. She thought that was a pretty good deal, given she was working harder at *Imbuing* than they were at potions. She also thought about telling him that "practicing" had nothing to do with her getting better at something, but figured that would just confuse him more, so she let it go.

She was starting on Hagrid's, and had learned a new spell to do it. After being attacked by that snake she started to wonder if better wizards could summon bigger things, and so looked into *Magical Ally*, both *Minor* and *Major*. *Minor* only got her PERSONALITY in powers (a five), and *Major* was only two XP more, so *Major* it was. She settled on a small dragon, and started working on an *Imbued* item like Mrs. Weasley's *Helping Hand* item. It was a small dragon statue he could toss and activate, and the dragon like creature would form around it, basically "coming to life." Given how the spell worked her newly created dragon, (which was the size of a bear), could breathe fire, fetch sticks, and even fight another copy of itself.

Perfect, he'll love it! Now to start putting it into an object.

That one was going to take the longest, because she had to make it permanent rather than energy based. After all, she couldn't exactly go ask him "Rubeus, what's your RESolve? An eight or higher? Fantastic."

She was scrounging around the dorms for stuff in trashcans she could use for the "materials costing 10 monetary units times its EXP cost" when a familiar animal flew up to her.

"Susan," it said in Albus' voice, "There's been another attack. Please come to the 4th floor, east hallway. Your skills are needed."

Not good, thought Susan. Especially so soon after everyone found out Harry could talk to snakes. But what skills of mine does he need? I looked Colin over, there wasn't anything I could tell them. Wonder if I should tell the others?

Susan made her way there, deciding not to interrupt the game of wizard's chess that was going on. Her new *Magical Ally* led the way and she herself was under *Magic Immunity*, just in case. It seemed best not to take any chances at this point. She climbed up the stairs to the 4th floor and wondered how to figure out which the "east" hallway was, when she came upon the Headmaster and a few other teachers. The area had been blocked off by a shimmering, partially transparent wall, but she could vaguely see them through it.

Some sort of Elemental Wall I guess?

She knocked on it, and part of the wall disappeared, allowing her through.

Beyond, she saw a Hufflepuff boy, Justin, laying on the floor, but something else drew her eye. Hanging in midair was the pale form of "headless" Nick, rotating in place but unmoving.

"How is this even possible?" asked Susan, walking around him. "He's a ghost!"

"Exactly our concern," said Albus sadly. Then he caught sight of the dragon. "Uh, this creature..."

"He's harmless. He's just guarding me until I get back to the dorm. Don't worry, it's a magical construct under my control. It won't hurt anyone."

“Your scare with the snake?”

“I wasn’t exactly scared, Headmaster. I took it out with a single spell, after all. But I admit it crossed my mind that better wizards could summon larger things, so I figured it might do to have something like this around.”

“Your magic continues to astonish me. In any case, it is your magic we need right now, specifically your ability to touch ghosts.”

“You want Sir Nicholas moved to the hospital wing, but you can’t do it?”

“Correct.”

Susan looked about. “Probably better to go there directly, rather than cart him through the halls.” She looked down at her dragon. “You need a name! Spike? Nah, the Bronies would get upset you weren’t canon. Anyway, you did good. Good boy. See you later!”

She let him go, and started casting *Teleportal*, which made everyone there react like Ron had the first time he had seen it.

“Oh yeah,” Susan said with a laugh as the teachers looked through it. She had positioned the other end by the wall, so that it wouldn’t impact anything, and behind a screen so no one on that side would see it. “I forget you hadn’t seen this spell before.”

Crap, now that I think about it, will I be able to push him through? I don’t see why not, it’s a hole in space, not something physical.

“You can just open a hole in the universe to anywhere you want?” Albus asked.

“Not just anywhere. I have to have seen the place the other end connects to.”

“And I thought I was the most powerful wizard on the planet,” Albus grumbled.

“Just because we can do different things doesn’t make me more powerful than you,” said Susan. “But given a few more years of XP gain and spell learning? I wouldn’t mind the title.” She stepped through the *teleportal* and looked around. “Where do you want him?” she asked.

“Right over here,” said Albus. “We’ll put some curtains up around him.”

“How did you all get in here?” asked Madam Pomfrey.

“Magic,” answered Albus.

“I’m guessing you’ve always wanted to say that,” Susan said, rolling her eyes.

“Perhaps.”

She cast *Phase* on herself, then grabbed Nick and dragged him through. The others floated Justin through, and Susan closed it behind them.

They made Justin “comfortable” and the others teachers left to go back to their classes.

“Who found him, by the way?”

“Would you believe Peeves?”

“Oh great. So much for keeping it quiet!”

“Yes, not much chance of that.”

“I don’t want to sound callus, but does this tell us anything else about the attacker? I wouldn’t think many things could bring harm to a ghost.”

“Apart from you, I would have said nothing could, before this.”

“Ah. Yes. I suppose I am a suspect. Possibly even the number one suspect. You haven’t seen all my magic can do, and I could easily have been lying about my petrification spells turning people to stone, rather than these sort of living statues.”

“I’m glad you figured that out. However, unless you can be in two places at once, you were playing with your new dragon friend during the attack. That rather rules you out.”

“Unless my magic can allow me to be in two places at once.”

“Can it do that?”

“Maybe. There are some time spells I could learn, that would do it. But the description is unclear as to exactly what happens if you go into the past and make changes. I’m not really ready to risk that quite yet. But honestly, if I could be in two places at once, I would put one of me to making *Imbued* items while the other did things a little more fun. Of course if it can make two of me, why not three? If not three, why not four? Imagine the possibilities!”

“Yes, I’m imagining them.” The Headmaster looked a bit haunted for a second. “Thank you for your help in moving Nicholas.”

“My pleasure. I wish I could do more, but making permanent *Magic Immunity* items for every person in the castle is a little bit beyond even my abilities.”

“Nor would I expect you to. But please do continue to keep your eyes and ears open. You never know when a clue might make itself known.”

“I will.”

“By the way, how’s Fawkes?”

“Still looking dreadful. Even a creature that is reborn as the phoenix does seems hesitant to let life slip away. I can’t blame him, you know. Still, when it is one’s time, there is no denying the call. Thank you for asking after him, however.”

“I just want to see the baby Fawkes, I bet he’ll be so cute!”

“You have no idea.”

Many people who had signed the list to stay over the holiday hastily took their names off once it got out about the double attack. Ron was stuck for it, and started hanging around Susan more, and Hermione asked if Susan would do what she did the year before and take her home for Christmas Day. Susan told her she had a better idea, why not invite them here for the day as well? She said she would ask.

Harry wasn’t going back *there* if he could help it, and Susan got permission to bring her mother to the castle and show her around. She wasn’t sure about having her there while there was such danger, but as long as they stuck together, Susan reasoned, she should be fine. It seemed the Weasley family was staying at the castle as well, and Susan offered to bring Mr. and Mrs. Weasley in for Christmas day as well.

“It’ll be a great party!” Susan explained to him. “My mother, Hermione’s parents, your parents, the teachers. All feasting and getting to know each other. We’re all friends, I don’t see why they shouldn’t meet.”

“They’ll be in Egypt with Bill, though,” he said.

“So have them send me a picture.”

“Oh yeah!”

Naturally, the thing everyone was most looking forward to was Susan’s gifts. Susan and Hermione went in together on Ron’s, Hermione buying him a shimmering eagle feather quill, and Susan *Imbuing* it. She put her spell of *Scribe* on it, as she had noticed him looking at her paper filling up with notes in history class.

Hermione opened hers and pulled out some fancy robes, which she exclaimed over until she tried them on.

“They’re a bit too big,” she said, trailing the end on the ground.

“They’re that way on purpose,” Susan explained. “After all, why make special robes if you’re going to outgrow them? So you’ll have to find some way of putting them up if you want to wear them until you’re fully grown.”

“I can just pin them up.”

Susan shook her head. “Nope. I meant it when I said they were special. These robes will never wear out, ever. They’ll stop a sword thrust, as they are basically plate armor now, and should someone manage to pierce them they’ll magically repair themselves. So getting something like a pin through them is probably impossible. Some tape would work though.”

“Wow! Thanks! That’s amazing!”

“Sure. It was nice *Fabricating* something for a change rather than *Imbuing*.”

Harry took a piece of paper, which was his gift, out of the wrapping. He read it over. “Oh, now I see. That’s pretty neat.”

“What did you get him?” asked Ron.

“I kept asking him for his glasses, so he knew something was up, just not exactly what. Basically I’ve done a minor *Fabrication* on them, so they’ll be tougher to break. But the real magic comes from *Darksight*. At night, or even in perfect darkness, he can activate them and see perfectly. In black and white, of course, but still perfectly.”

“Thanks!” said Harry.

“I wonder if Rubeus figured his gift out?” Susan asked, the gift giving over. She had Hermione do a spell to cover his gift with wax, and made it look like the dragon’s egg he had hatched last year. Inside the box she had written some clues for him.

Rubeus,

It’s a pity about Norbert, so I got you another friend just like him.

Hatch this egg just like you would any other dragon’s egg, but keep a close watch, he’ll have a short gestation.

When he’s hatched, you’ll notice he’s a bit shy, but he’ll have left something behind you can use to see him. Put it on, and he’ll appear for you. He can understand you, and he’ll do anything you tell him to do that he’s capable of. He loves playing fetch, but he can also dig things up, protect your hut, or even breathe fire. He can trap, hunt and help you do just about anything you know how to do. He doesn’t need to eat or sleep, so don’t worry about that.

He can fight on your behalf too, he’s great at unarmed combat and wrestling. Don’t worry about him getting hurt. If he “dies” he’ll return within 24 hours.

Enjoy!

Santa

P.S. Don’t have him use too much fire ether, that will make him disappear for a while too.

Susan had snuck down to his hut to see how big his finger was, and made him a stone ring with a dragon motif. *The statue idea was nice, but this seems more practical.* As the spell was permanent, all he had to do to summon the *Ally* was put it on, and the creature would appear and do whatever he told it. It would be as smart as he was, and have his skills, so Susan was

pretty sure he would love it. She had left it for him inside his hut, *Phase* once again coming in handy.

The Christmas feast went well, everyone having been transported to Hogwarts for the occasion. The four showed off their classrooms and what they had been learning, and generally had a great time. Susan introduced her mother to Myrtle, who was amazed to be talking to an actual ghost like it was a person, and Myrtle enjoyed being included in the festivities. She did pull Susan aside and apologize for not finding the Chamber, but Susan explained it might not be possible to find without the right password, and said she shouldn't feel bad about it.

"I'm trying not to," Myrtle said, looking downcast. "It's just so hard not to be negative about everything."

"You're doing really well," said Susan. "The you I originally met wouldn't have taken this in stride even this much. You've made tremendous progress."

"Thanks. It's all because of you."

"Maybe, maybe not. I thought of a present for you, by the way. Once everyone leaves I'll fix up your bathroom with *Repair* magic. No sense leaving everything in here all busted up if this is where you live. The others agreed to help clean it up too, so we'll be along later."

"You're way too nice to me."

"No, I wish I could do more. I made some great gifts for my friends this year, so you should be treated equally. You're my friend too, after all."

"Friends? I never had- Oh!" Myrtle zoomed away, overcome by emotion.

One step forward, two steps back. Sigh.

With Slytherin house already infiltrated, and Hermione avoiding her fate of being turned into every otaku's dream girl, everyone went to bed that night happy and fulfilled.

Those that did go to bed, anyway. Myrtle floated around her sparkling clean, newly *Repaired* bathroom, wondering how she could repay her friend. A friend she never thought she would have, especially in death.

Rubeus didn't sleep, he stayed up all night playing with his new dragon friend.

And then there was poor Ginny, who was starting to feel like she was losing her mind. She had been making the equivalent of a Susan *Acting* check all night to fool everyone into thinking things were normal. The trouble was, she was such a good actor, everyone believed her. No one suspected that inside, Ginny was troubled.

Because Ginny was startling to hear voices.

"Do you have a minute?" asked Myrtle, floating up to Susan. She was back making things for the school, even though Albus had said the Christmas presents she had made more than passed her "potions" class.

For the next five years.

He had explained that what Susan had casually done with Harry's glasses, Hermione's robes and Felton's Blade (as he was calling it) was Goblin quality Masterwork Forging. Goblins trained for decades before they were allowed to begin crafting items to actually sell, and any one of those pieces would have sold for thousands of Galleons. He showed her the similar Sword of Gryffindor, which shared many properties with Felton's Blade.

"Guess I know what field to get into after I graduate," Susan joked.

Rubeus in particular loved his new "pet" the baby dragon, who was making himself indispensable around the grounds. Apparently it had even fought off some creature going after chickens that Rubeus kept around. The noise of the scuffle had woken him, but by the time he got out to the coop, whatever it had been was gone. The creature had put up quite a struggle, there was wreckage everywhere, but no more chickens were killed after that. If possible, the *Magical Ally* looked a big smug after the attack, and even swaggered a bit when it walked. That was probably a person's own projecting though.

"I can give you more than that if you can wait ten," Susan replied. "I have that much time left until this hour of *Imbuing* is over and I can take a break."

"Okay..." Myrtle started to leave.

"Hey, go see the baby phoenix. He's so cute! Only a couple of weeks old, he just reincarnated recently."

"Oh, I've never seen a baby phoenix before. The Headmaster won't mind?"

"Go ask him, he's right over there." Myrtle spun around.

"Sorry Headmaster, I didn't see you there!"

"Only have eyes for Susan, eh?"

"Headmaster, please!"

"In any case, I'm sure Fawkes will be pleased to have a visitor. He's growing fast, but he's still a baby at heart."

When Susan was finished she walked in to see Myrtle and Fawkes playing a sort of mimic game, where one would do a little shuffle step dance or make a noise and the other would have to try and do the same.

She's actually smiling! There's hope for this ghost yet.

Albus watched with interest. "You've done something I didn't think was possible," he said to Susan.

"My magic is all about the impossible."

He shook his head. "It is not to your magical abilities I now refer. But rather your ability to make things better just by being you. You've actually taken an interest in the castle's ghosts, something no one, not even myself, has ever done. But more than that. You've actually *changed* two of them- for the better. I might be out of place, but I think you've given two ghosts a reason to live. That is no small feat."

Susan colored. "I just did what I thought was right."

"And how many others can say the same?"

"Ah," Susan countered. "It's easy to be generous when you have an abundance."

"I suppose that's true." However as he said it, Albus looked a bit troubled.

"So what did you want to see me about?" Susan asked, leaving the office to get ready for her next class.

"I was feeling bad because someone threw a book through me," she answered, "But Fawkes cheered me up."

"You can still have a hug if you... wait, why would someone throw a book at you?"

"I don't know."

"Take me through it step by step. What happened?"

"Well, I was sitting in my toilet, just thinking about things, and suddenly it just falls through my head."

"I doubt it was anything personal," said Susan. "Probably a prank on someone. Stealing their book and throwing it into the "haunted bathroom" sort of thing. You just happened to be there when it happened. Is it still there?"

"I didn't move it."

"Ah yes, I forget sometimes, talking to you. I wonder if my magic could fix that somehow, make you physical again? Anyway, let's go see what it is. I'm not sure *Repair* can dry something out, but if it's smudged I bet it could return the book to the way it was before it got wet."

"You're welcome to it."

So they went down to Myrtle's bathroom and she fished the book out. For a wonder, it came out dry.

"Okay, magical item, anyone?" she asked.

"Is it?" asked Myrtle, peering around her.

Susan flipped through it. "Blank. That's weird. And look at this date, fifty years ago."

"I was killed fifty years ago," Myrtle said in wonder.

"Really?" Susan asked, interested. "You didn't see who had this, did you?"

Myrtle shook her head. "No. There was someone, I heard them run out."

"I see. So it wasn't magically brought here, it was placed here. Why?" Susan started pacing. "Because someone knows you and I hang out together? Because they knew by leaving it with you, it would get to me?"

"It's possible."

"Fifty years old. It still doesn't add up though- if this is a clue of some kind it's not a very good one. There's nothing written here, just the name. T.M Riddle. Does the name mean anything to you?"

“My memories are kind of fuzzy. It’s possible there was a kid with the last name of Riddle when I was alive, but I can’t say for sure.”

“This wasn’t put here by accident, I’m sure of it. Thanks for coming to get me so fast, Myrtle. I’ll continue looking into this and let you know what I find out. Fifty years, huh? You should have a Death Day party too.”

“Oh, that would be a lot of trouble. I wouldn’t want to put anyone out.”

“Ah, Myrtle.” Susan *Phased* herself and gave her a hug. “I’m sorry you died, but glad you did too. Otherwise we never would have met, and I would have one less friend.”

“Thanks for being here. It’s nice... having a friend.”

She didn’t run away that time. She is making progress! Though to be fair, this is the place she would normally run to...

That evening Susan got the book out and showed everyone.

“This was left in Myrtle’s bathroom. And by ‘left’ I mean ‘thrown’. Predictably, she came to get me right away, and here it is.”

“It’s a beat up old dairy,” said Ron. “Who cares?”

“On the surface, yes, it’s a beat up old diary. What’s interesting about it is firstly, it came out of the water dry. So it’s obviously magical. Secondly: the date. It’s been hanging around for the last 50 years but there’s not a pencil mark inside apart from the name. T.R. Riddle. But what’s most interesting is that Myrtle says she was killed exactly fifty years ago too. Coincidence? I think not. This relates to her in some way, and now that she has a friend who cares about her, it’s come to light. And that’s the kind of coincidence that screams ‘plot point’ to me.”

“Screams what?” asked Ron. Harry was nodding, this was “Susan Speak” but he knew that one. Hermione figured it out, she didn’t need to ask. Sparkle just raised her head. “Say that name again?”

“T.R Riddle?”

“I thought so. I’ve seen that name someplace,” her *Photographic Memory* finally coming into play.

“Seriously? Can you show us?”

Sparkle got up and stretched. “Follow me.”

Sparkle led them to the trophy room, where she bumped the glass with her paw. “There you go.”

“Special service to the school, eh?” said Harry. “That might be something I would want to brag about- in my diary!”

“But either he didn’t, or did and magically hid it,” said Hermione. “Hand it over.”

Susan did, and Hermione got out her wand and tried various spells. It lay in her hand like a ratty old book would be expected to.

“Well, I’m bored,” said Ron. “Let me know if you guys figure something out about it.”

“He doesn’t have *Curiosity*, does he?” Sparkle remarked. “I thought I was the one with *Short Attention Span*.”

“Can your magic tell us anything?” she asked, handing it back.

“Let me see.” Susan spent a few minutes paging through her book. “I don’t think so. There’s *Appraise Magic* but according to this “you must have some idea of what you are looking for” which is of course useless because if we knew that, we wouldn’t need to cast the spell. Sorry.”

“Maybe it was just made water resistant and someone forgot that would make it repel ink, too?” said Harry.

“Then why keep it around for fifty years?” asked Susan.

“It keeps circulating as a joke?”

“That’s a long time for a joke to stay in circulation,” said Hermione.

“I suppose the clue could just be the name, which we’ll have to look into some more. It may just relate to Myrtle though, and not the chamber or the attacks. The timing could just be a coincidence, after all. If you think of anything though, let me know, okay?” Susan started casting to put it into her *Pocket Dimension*.

“Wait a second,” said Harry. “Would you mind if I held onto it?”

“You really want to physically carry it around?”

“I just get the sense that’s what I’m supposed to do.”

Susan considered it. “Okay. It’s yours, just don’t lose it.” She handed it over.

“You can just find it again with *Descry Object* right?”

“Yeah, but if you don’t lose it, I won’t have to bother, right?”

He laughed. “Don’t worry, it’s safe with me.”

A month and a half passed, and it was now Valentine’s Day. Hermione came down to breakfast to find Susan scowling at her character sheet. She also noticed the whole place had been decked out with lurid Valentine’s Day decorations. Hermione sat down, her eyes not knowing where to look, but then noticed Susan.

“What’s up?” she asked, glancing at the paper. “Wait, is that... you?”

“It’s all there, in orange and yellow. Susan Felton, this is your life.”

“I’ve caught glimpses of it when you go to check something on it, but I’ve never seen you stare at it so intently before.”

“I don’t like flashing it around, it reminds me that I’m different than all of you. Right now I’m just deciding something. With this past month I’ve knocked *Telesummon* off my ‘spells to learn’ list after the Ron incident, but it bothers me a little. In almost two years I haven’t actually put any points into skills, just spells. My mother told me stories about what my father went through, and it seemed he got XP a lot faster than I do. Also I seem to get cards more sporadically, like whatever gives them to me doesn’t think I’m really in any danger and so doesn’t bother.”

“What are cards, and how do they work?” She grabbed some toast and started buttering it.

“Cards allow me to rewrite the laws of physics or do impossible things without spells. I can also sacrifice them for more XP, or for something like *Love Interest* I can play them on myself and get XP for doing so.”

“They aren’t magic, are they?”

“I don’t know what they are. They just show up on my character sheet from time to time, and by willing them to be used, reality gets warped in my favor.”

“And you say this ‘ability’ of yours came from your father?”

“Yup. Apparently everyone on the world he came from had a character sheet, and those that went on adventures got cards, XP, the whole works. Everyone else just sort of leveled off at being average at everything.” She sighed. “I would love to visit there sometime, I think the people there would really help me understand myself.”

“So what has you all concerned now?”

“A couple of things. First is learning more skills, or getting better at the skills I already have. I can fake having better magic with energy, but I just wonder if I should be improving myself in that way, or finding more spells to learn. I guess it’ll just depend on the situations I find myself in. Trouble is I only know I need a spell after the fact. Like wanting to get Ron back, I may never need to do that again.”

“Can’t you use your magic to get better at stuff?”

“That’s how I’m getting by in Astronomy still, yes. *Augment Skill*. I just have to wonder if I’m doing the right thing. And I can’t use that and get better at spell-casting- stupid closed loopholes. There’s no one here to advise me, because it’s unique to my situation. You guys can learn spells and skills and potions and knot tying and whatever else all in a single day and not have to worry about how many ‘points’ it uses up. I don’t have that luxury.”

“I would have to say, you are a wizard. Isn’t your worth really in how many spells you know? You were saying how Headmaster Dumbledore praised you for your *Imbuing*. Everyone loves Rubeus’ ‘pet’ dragon, and he’s had many offers to sell it, from what I understand. You could go into business for yourself after you graduate just making those for people. Sure, they would have to stick around while you did it, but I would liken it to getting a portrait painted. People have to stick around for that, so there’s precedence. You said you can only give it abilities as spells you know, right? So being able to offer a creature that each person can customize and choose the abilities of would be even better. Or just charge to make magical items of all kinds. Sure, it’ll seem weird to people at first, but Goblins do it, and charge ridiculous fees. They work in secret, and you can too. Just separate your lab and your nice, posh waiting room, and they’ll be none the wiser. You can just say you figured out the secret, and are undercutting them.

“Or learn *Alleviation* and go to work for a hospital. Charge 10 Galleons a casting, times what, eighty castings a day? That’s 19,000 Galleons a month you would be making. Do that for a year and you can retire! Or hire people to keep track of your money, or perform research or whatever for you. What would you need more skills for than just more magic?”

“Good point,” Susan admitted. “And honestly, there’s no spell that isn’t useful in one situation or another.”

“Exactly. So what’s card 12?”

“That’s what started this whole inner monologue, actually. It’s one of the only cards that works against you while it’s working for you.”

“Huh?”

“This card is special. Most cards have an exchange value. I got *Unlimited Ammo* one time, and as I don’t go around shooting people I turned it in for XP. Easy enough to understand, right? Say I don’t use this card awhile- It vanishes like it never was when my cards are refreshed. I can’t turn it in, I have to play it to get the benefit. But when I do, something terrible happens to ‘the entire party’ and we all get 3 XP for it. That would be Sparkle and me, in this case, as you guys don’t have XP. Or would the card *make* you take some, and you would then be aware of it and could use it like I do? That would be an *interesting* experiment.” Susan’s eyes shone with the possibility. “Downside to that is, as Harry, and Ron... maybe even Myrtle by this point, are considered part of my ‘party’ for the purposes are cards- that bad thing would happen to all of you. It’s geared towards combat I think, so we would all get into some kind of fight. I don’t want to put you in danger, but I do like XP...”

“So you would get better for it?”

“Yup.”

“How much is 3 XP anyway?”

Susan got her book of magic out. “In magical terms, enough to learn the spell *Communication*, allowing me to understand and be understood by any person in their native language.”

“That’s only 3?”

“Yup. Double that to 6 in the same planet and you get *Write Memory*, a spell to actually go into someone’s head and alter their memory. Double that- which is impossible, the most powerful spells are only 10 to learn, and you get *Senescent Cessation*, which makes you stop aging.”

“And you just sort of decide to trade this XP in, and you are suddenly better at something, or know a spell?”

“Getting better at a skill, yes. To learn a spell I have to study the formula and commit it to memory. For me being a *Natural Magician* it takes as many minutes as the spell’s cost.”

“Oh, is that all?”

“Hey, you and your photographic reflexes can learn a spell by seeing it cast once. So don’t you go thinking my way is better, or anything.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it. Hey, here’s Harry and Ron!”

“Good morning,” said Harry, sitting down.

“What happened to this place? Did someone’s love potion explode?”

“It wasn’t like this last year, so three guesses who set this all up,” said Susan.

Everyone looked at Gilderoy, at the head table, smiling even wider than usual.

“What were you talking about?” asked Harry.

“I have something to run by you guys,” answered Susan. “I totally understand if you don’t want to do it. But I would get XP for it, allowing me to improve myself or learn a new spell.”

“Is this some kind of dark ritual?” asked Ron, leaning away from her.

“No... yes. Sort of. I can make something bad happen to all of us. But Sparkle and I will get 3 XP for it.”

“Actually,” said Sparkle, raising her head, “I would get 5.”

“You cheater! Explain yourself!” Susan pointed down at her.

“I have *Personal Stake*. If I play it to have the ‘driving need’ to protect you from the *Disaster Strikes* I get another 2 XP.”

“Clever cat! I like it.”

“What sort of terrible thing are we talking about here?” asked Harry.

“Could be anything. Reality will warp and change, so it could be the ceiling falling on us to someone deciding to attack us that normally wouldn’t have.”

“And it’ll only happen to us,” said Hermione. “So you don’t have to worry about others getting caught in the cross fire.”

“What have all these dueling lessons been for,” asked Harry, “if not to prepare us for bad things happening?”

Ron looked skeptical. “I guess we do have the most powerful magic user around here with us,” he said. “Of course that could mean the ‘something bad’ is that much worse.”

“But we would know it was coming,” argued Harry. “We would be prepared. I want to see some action. Oh, but not if it means whatever has been attacking students shows up.”

“Better to face it here, with the Headmaster and everyone around, than later in some dark hallway,” said Hermione.

“And it would only go after us. They could take it out from the sides and the back while we distract it.”

“Interesting, using Susan’s reality bending abilities to force a confrontation with the thing. Would that even work?” asked Hermione.

“I think it’s more of a side plot thing than anything. I don’t think we have to worry about that particular thing showing up.”

“I say do it. Wands at the ready, everyone!” said Harry.

The others nodded, getting their wands out.

“Thanks everyone. Just remember, you can’t complain later, you agreed to it.” She shook out her bracelet, but didn’t activate it, preferring to save the ‘charge’ on each charm as she needed it.

“Just a second,” said Sparkle, and took the time casting *Acceleration* on everyone. Because she was casting on five people (really four and herself, a cat) she took a rating penalty of 5, but used 6 energy so her net skill gain was a 1. Then she did the same with *Armor of Magic*, having everyone touch her, and got an eight total on that. Then she realized she should have done them the other way around, because the penalty for maintaining the *Acceleration* was higher than for *Armor of Magic*.

Live and learn.

She nodded that she was ready.

Susan concentrated, and the 12 disappeared from her character sheet. The four looked around worriedly.

“Did it work?” asked Ron. “I don’t think it worked.”

Gilderoy stood up.

“Oh no, please don’t let him be the *Disaster*,” Susan moaned.

“Happy Valentine’s Day!” he shouted, getting everyone’s attention. “As you might have guessed, I had this all set up for you, to celebrate and take your minds off recent events.” He spread his hands out to encompass the decorations around the room. “But the fun doesn’t stop there, no.” He clapped, and a dozen disgruntled looking dwarfs, all looking about, burst into the room.

“My cupid-” he started to say, but then looked at them more closely. “Hey, you guys aren’t in costume!”

Indeed, they weren’t. Susan didn’t know what Gilderoy had planned, but these dwarves meant business. They were decked out in armor and had wicked looking axes in their hands. They spotted her.

“Death to Susan!” said one, raising his ax high. The others followed suit, bellowing a hearty war cry, and charged.

Oh crap why didn’t I learn Invulnerability this is going to suck what spells do I know I’ve forgotten them all calm down Susan you can’t forget them they’re on your character sheet we’re all going to die oh help! Susan thought. She felt the dice rolling in her head, and knew she was rolling *Initiative*.

Susan got to act first, and knew she needed to 1) make the sides a little more even and 2) slow them down, so she started casting *Magical Ally*, taking a slight penalty because she figured

it would take the dwarves at least an action or two to get to her. A magical circle appeared between the dwarves and the party.

Then two more appeared, as Sparkle started casting the same spell. Given the penalties she was already at for maintaining *Acceleration* and *Armor of Magic* she actually added 2 segments to her casting time.

Hermione, Ron, and Harry got up from the bench and raised their wands, ready to cast.

The dwarves started moving forward, but their numbers now worked against them as several in the back looked like they could have started moving, but were blocked by the ones in front of them. However, most of them started charging.

Susan finished casting and got exactly the difficulty, a 13. A dragon appeared where she put the circle, and it waited for orders. "Defend us, but try not to kill them," she shouted at it.

It roared in response.

All the dwarves now spaced themselves out enough and were running towards the party, axes held high, poised to strike.

Harry shouted "*Confundo*" and pointed his wand, but the spell went over the heads of the dwarves. "Aim low!" he shouted, realizing his mistake.

Hermione pointed at the lead dwarf's ax and shouted "*Evanesco*" and it disappeared, leaving him running towards the group with no weapon. He looked down at his hands, confused.

Ron, on the other hand, pointed his wand at the dragon and shouted "*Engorgio*," which made the dragon grow another size modifier bigger.

"Nice one!" said Susan. "*Lubricate!*" Casting instantly, and targeting the area of the floor where the dwarves were, she got the spell off and they started using their COOrdination to try and remain standing.

Less than half of them fell over.

Do they have some racial bonus against knockdown checks? Susan asked herself. *Of course, they would have a lower center of gravity.*

Sparkle finished casting, but only got a 9, and so spent her *Retry* card, rolling a 10. Exasperated, she spent 2 XP for a +4 bonus and got it, making two +1 size lions appear. She shouted a similar command to them, ducking under the table.

"I'm no more help, I'm at too much of a penalty," she said to Susan. "I'm out of this fight."

Susan, now at a -3 herself for the dragon, nodded.

The knocked over dwarves started getting up.

The dragon leapt forward and made a called shot to the lead's leg, and got a 21 to hit. The dwarf tried to dodge, but he only got a 10, not nearly enough. His leg was swept out from under him with 13 damage. He fell over in a spray of blood, clutching his leg and yelling in agony. Some of those students nearby with weak CONstitutions fainted. Others looked on interested, wondering if this was actually part of the show.

At this point, a bunch of stuff happened simultaneously. The dragon spun, again making a called shot to another leg, and targeting another dwarf that hadn't yet made the check to stand up. He hit with a 27 and did 7 damage. The dwarf cried out in pain.

The first lion did a called shot, getting a 23, while the second one did the same, getting a 24. The first dwarf's leg was torn off with 21 damage, and the second took only 9.

Susan cast an *Elemental Burst (Knockout)* behind the group, making it four meters wide and hitting the back four so she didn't hit her allies. She got a 19, and hit two locations on all of them.

One took too much damage to the body and went limp.

One took twenty damage to the left arm and then another twenty to the body, and went down.

The third went down.

The fourth, oddly, only took damage to his arms and made his STrength check to hold onto his ax.

Three out of four isn't bad.

Harry pointed at a dwarf who was down and trying to get up and shouted "*Expelliarmus*," which hit and the ax went flying out of the Dwarf's hands.

Hermione tried "*Immobulus*," on one still running, which worked. However he was still in the *Lubricate* zone and running, so he skidded towards the lion right in front of him, who raised a paw and seemed to grin.

Ron shouted "*Petrificus Totalus*," but missed, because he hasn't been practicing like he should.

Dwarves were trying to get up, and one finally got an attack in on the dragon. Sadly, the dragon is DTR 5 while his ax is only OTR 4 so it bounced off.

"That's no fair!" said the dwarf, beginning to wonder about his choices in life. The dragon raised a claw, then swung down at him. As you can guess by this point, another leg was ripped off, and he went down in spurt of blood and regrets.

A lion took a swing for the dwarf now sliding towards him and as the dwarf couldn't dodge, hit him for 11 points of damage in the leg. Being paralyzed makes it hard to make COOrdination checks, and he went down.

The other lion swung at the dwarf now in front of him, but missed because the dwarf spent max energy. "HA!" he shouted.

Albus Dumbledore began to stand up, and took in a mighty breath so he could yell "Stop this at once!" very dramatically.

A second dwarf tried his luck in bashing the dragon, but again it bounced harmlessly off. They didn't know you could spend two energy to raise the TR of a weapon for a single action. Too bad for them.

With two juicy targets the dragon decided to use an off hand action, and swung for one, then the other. Two more legs went flying, and those not spattered by this point are spattered, while those that were previously spattered are now drenched. More people faint. Those not fainting or wiping blood from their eyes began to think that maybe this isn't part of Gilderoy's surprise.

The anguished cries of dying dwarves that had not passed out from blood loss filled the chamber.

A lion made a mighty leap towards a far away dwarf, who began praying to his deity. The other took another swing at the dwarf he just missed, and connected this time, ripping off a limb.

Susan, seeing basically that this fight was over but will need to do some healing very soon, got out of her seat.

Ron tried another “*Petrificus Totalus*” which went off this time, and another dwarf fell over, rigid as he is tall. Well, sort of, he is a dwarf, after all.

Hermione shouted “*Reductio*” while pointing to one of the active axes and it began shrinking away to nothing.

Harry tried his signature “*Expelliarmus*” but this dwarf made his STrength check and held onto his weapon.

Both lions pounced on the remaining dwarves and held them down. With gleaming teeth and no chance to get out from other the magical constructs, they surrendered with a cry and a flung ax.

What was I worried for?

“Stop this at- oh, never mind,” said Albus, “It looks like it’s over.”

A Ravenclaw student at the table clicked a stopwatch. “Huh,” he remarked. “Five seconds.”

Older students and teachers rushed over to get axes away from the dwarves’ reach, and some started medical procedures on those with missing limbs. With wanded magic keeping them stable, Susan and Sparkle were able to cast *Regeneration* on them one after another, and healed them all up.

They were all very polite about the whole thing, and some even apologized for mercilessly trying to kill her. Susan, however, thought this was more out of hindsight about how powerful she was than any actual regret on their part. With them healed and in magically created chains, they were led to the dungeon for questioning.

“Some Veritaserum, if you please, Severus,” said Albus, once they were safely secured.

“What will happen to them?” asked Susan, worried that her playing of the *Disaster Strikes* card had condemned these dwarves to death.

“I will exercise my rights to question them, and the release them to the dwarven government. Depending on what charges you wish to level against them, their fate could be almost anything.”

“Ah.”

“You do not want them killed, I take it?”

“No. I could have had my dragon do that easily enough.”

“Indeed. I was quite surprised at the quickness and ferocity of the beasts, both dragon and lion.”

“It’s the spells they have on them, and the amount of magic I put into them when they’re created. Sparkle has *Acceleration* going on hers, mine is just naturally super quick.”

“I see. Ah, here is the truth serum.” He held it up to show the dwarves. “I will personally argue for lenience, whoever agrees to drink this willingly and answer my questions.”

All of them were willing.

“That’s weird. I guess they are either really scared of what I’ll ask to be done with them or they have no problems telling us what they know,” remarked Susan.

“I agree. I shall choose on at random them. You.”

The dwarf stepped forward and was handed a glass of water with three drops of the potion in it. He drank it down.

“I don’t like this... just a second before you question them.”

Susan stepped out of the room and activated her *Detect Lies* spell from her bracelet, then went back in.

“Okay.”

“First, why did you try to kill Susan?”

“We were paid to,” said the dwarf.

“By whom?”

“After we were contracted to play cupids for Gilderoy a bag appeared in our dressing room. Inside were five hundred Galleons, a picture of a girl, and a note. The note said if we killed the girl while we were in the school, that much again would be given to us.”

“And you had no problem accepting this task?”

“Do you know how bad the economy is right now? Especially if you’re a dwarf? We agreed to dress up as *cupids* and deliver *singing telegrams*. That should show you how desperate we are.”

“Yes, that does seem out of character for dwarves. Do you have the note still, by any chance?”

“No chance. We burned it.”

“Of course you did.”

Albus thought for a moment. “How about the bag, or the picture?”

The dwarf shook his head. “Not even the original gold is left, we already traded it for untainted coinage. Who knows what kind of spells were put on it, after all!”

“Seems you’re quite thorough.”

“Course! We’re dwarves!”

There was a general murmur of assent.

“Then I guess there’s nothing left we can do. I’ll be contacting your government shortly.”

The dwarf nodded and went back with the group.

Later, the group stood in his office, Harry, Ron and Hermione looking around at all the junk Albus had accumulated.

“Most of it came with the office,” he said, looking around himself. “It seemed to fit, so I just left it. Who knows what half of it does? Anyway, to business. You all handled yourselves very well down there, and I just wanted to congratulate you. It’s not many second year students who would not only keep their cool, but manage to fight off a platoon of dwarves. It seems the foundation Quirinus gave you, plus your own practice has paid off.”

“It was Susan’s creatures that did most of the work,” said Harry.

“Perhaps. But you did your share. I did notice, however, that Ron could use a little more practice with his aim.”

“Yes sir,” said Ron, looking down.

Albus laughed. “Now, now, none of that. Be proud! You didn’t run, you didn’t panic, you calmly dealt with the situation you found yourselves in. I’m awarding you each twenty points.”

“Thank you!” they all said.

“It worries me that Susan’s unknown assailant is still at large. It seems they are searching for your weakness quite methodically. First it was directly against you, with magic. When that didn’t work they tried older students and more magic. When that didn’t work they tried physical attacks, with dwarves of all things. I shudder to think what they’ll try next.”

“It worries me too, my friends could get caught in the crossfire. If someone has a problem with me they should just come out and say it. Stop hiding behind others to do their work for them.”

“I agree. But this is our reality. How confident are you in your skills, if you were being honest?”

“Setting aside my *Overconfidence* weakness? You saw how confident I was. My latest spell, the *Magical Ally* works out great, and Sparkle learned the spell along with me. So we can now summon up some pretty darn strong fighters in an instant if we have to. I can make myself immune to magic with a word, plus my fireball attack I have yet to show, if I really want to kill someone. My *Elemental Burst* will take out a group, and with *Acceleration* going I’m like three people myself because I’m so fast. Plus Sparkle watches my back, and has a completely different spell list than I do, further adding to my survival chances. I’ve got my bases covered, I think.”

“I might sit down and think about what my weaknesses were though, just in case. You can bet your unknown assailant is doing so right now.”

“I will.”

“Very well. That will be all, go to your classes.”

“Can I introduce them to Fawkes before I go? I bet even Ron has never seen a real phoenix before.”

“Of course. I’ll let you know when the representative from the dwarven nation arrives.”

“Thanks.”

Which he did, later that day. They all went down to the dungeon, where the dwarves were eating.

“Caught them in the act, did you?” asked the dwarf.

“Yes. They attacked Susan here, and would have killed her, had she not fought them off rather expertly.”

“Her?” He seemed surprised, looking her up... and up.. “You’re stronger than you look, girl.”

“Thank you. I think.”

He looked at them, and they looked down, ashamed.

“Well, what do you want done with them?”

Susan did a double take. “Wow, dwarven justice moves fast!”

“Course! We’re dwarves!”

“Right. Seems I’ve heard that once before. What are the limits on what I can ask for?”

“You can ask for their lives, but not the lives of their children or wives. A fine could be levied, up to a percentage of their income per year for the next ten years. You can have them rot in jail. You could ask-”

Susan held up a hand. “What if I had a job for them, and we called it even?”

“What sort of job?” asked one of the prisoners.

“There’s an underground maze I want to clean out and use as a secret base. It’s full of traps, many of which I can describe, and some giant insects, which I can also describe. I will provide transportation to and from the location, and food and water for the duration. It won’t be fine dining, but it’s hearty. Because you’re dwarves!”

She waited a beat.

She didn’t get a laugh. In fact they even seemed slightly confused, like they didn’t know what she was talking about. “Ahem. Anyway, I want the traps disarmed and the creatures within herded out, not killed, if you can manage it. Again, I will provide for their transportation. You

just need to get them into a single room. You may keep any treasure you find down there.” She was thinking about that weird statue and the moldy crates, who knew what all was down there, really? And there may have been more secret passages they didn’t find that held more treasure...

“There is at least one secret passage, which I will show you. If there are more I would love to know about it. What else do you need to know?”

“How big is it?” one asked.

“If I were to start at a room, walk the maze only making only right turns and not worrying about traps? I would say it would take me two hours to get back to my starting point. It’s pretty big.”

“We get to keep the Galleons we already got?”

“Sure, but you failed in your task. If I was an evil wizard I would have you killed for it. Disappearing for a while might be your best option.”

The dwarves nodded.

“How about this transportation you spoke of?”

“I’ll open a magical gateway between here and there you can walk out of any time. It’ll go away when I’m asleep, so you’ll be stuck there every night. You’ll need lanterns and whatnot.”

“We can see in the dark.”

“Okay. Well, camping stuff, anyway.”

“They’ll need to be guarded,” said the official dwarf. “They are dwarves, but we’ll need to make sure they do the job.”

“The school will cover the expense, and provide any mining equipment or other supplies the group requests to dig the traps out,” said Albus. “I recommend you take her up on it, this seems quite fair.”

“Actually it seems a little too good!” one of the prisoners said. “We get to explore an underground maze and look for treasure? The traps can’t be that dangerous!”

“I have no idea. I was *Phased*, that is, like a ghost when I was there last. I noticed some things that seemed to be traps, but I couldn’t say what activated them or what they exactly did. And while I saw a statue and some boxes, it could all be worthless, so you might not find any actual treasure.”

“Doesn’t bother us,” said one. “As far as punishments go, we can handle it. Treasure would be a nice bonus, but we shouldn’t get any sort of reward as this is supposed to be a punishment.”

“So you’ll do it, then?”

“When you’re satisfied it’s clear, we get to leave? No other requirements?”

“I’ll forget the whole thing ever happened. But to be clear, there wasn’t much down there-”

“Deal!” shouted all the dwarves.

“And there you have it,” said Susan. “Thank you for coming by,” she said to the official.

“My pleasure. Naturally you’ll want them to start immediately?”

“Naturally. I’ll get together with the other people who were there and draw you up a map of what we remember, and I’ll list out the bugs I saw. Oh, Headmaster, I already cleared it with Rubeus, but I guess I should actually ask you. It’s okay if I release some giant bugs into the forest behind the school, right?”

That reminds me, I promised to let him see them before they went into the forest. I’ll have to show him where the portal is, so he can help if he wants.

“They will find they are among their own kind.”

“Great. I’ll be in touch, fellows.”

And that was how Susan turned her *Disaster Strikes* into her secret base, with no more effort on her part.

Every morning she made the dwarves a sack full of *Conjure Foodstuff* and a barrel of *Elemental Conjure (Water)* and set her *Teleportal* to face the forest so the dwarves could drive the giant insects out into it. They took to the task with gusto, and seemed to be fairly nice guys, now that they were not trying to kill her anymore. Obviously she always had her *Magical Ally* hanging around (running off a new charm on her bracelet) when she spoke to them, plus the guards the dwarven official had assigned, but they gave no trouble. In fact after she remarked about giving part of it to the Weasley twins they installed a separating door, complete with lock and key. She talked to Ron about what they might like down there, and he said they were always cooking up something at home. He told her about the kind of things they were always buying, and Susan put her *Resources: Money* to good use stocking the place with furniture, lighting, and things for magical experiments. Hermione actually provided the lighting, she could make some nifty flames that never went out, just like the torches around Hogwarts, and made a few of them per hallway. Susan was quite jealous of that charm, given the massive XP cost she would have had to pay to do the same.

The *Disaster Strikes* was over, and all it cost the group was a vital clue as to the nature of the diary. With no “cupids” wandering around Harry did not spill his bag, and thus, did not get ink on the diary. Without the clue of the vanishing ink, he didn’t write in it, and so it didn’t write back. It was now almost two months since he had been given it, but was no closer to figuring it out.

Luckily for them, reality wanted to follow the same course, so there was bound to be a break soon.

From the horse's mouth

Time: Just after the secret base was finished

Place: Rubeus' hut

"So when I saw your dragon fighting with those dwarves I knew you must have been the one to send me Filbert, here," said Rubeus. "So I knew I had to thank you properly." Filbert, having heard his name, perked up, but when no orders were forthcoming he put his head back down.

Susan laughed. "You don't have to thank me, I was happy to do it. And anyway, it got me thinking about learning the spell for myself, and that really worked out well. So I should be thanking you!"

"I guess we'll both just thank each other, then. Those dwarves didn't give you any trouble after you beat them up, did they?"

"Not at all. I just hope they don't turn up dead."

"Someone talking about me? I always turn up dead," said a voice. Both turned to look and saw Myrtle floating through the wall. "Being a ghost and all."

"Hi Myrtle!" said Susan. "You're out pretty far. Do you know Rubeus?"

"I might have before, I don't know. I was lonely so I came to find you. But Harry said you were out here, so here I am."

"Nice to see you expanding your horizons. Rubeus, this is Myrtle, a friend of mine. She was helping me find the chamber of secrets, and instead found something quite different."

"You shouldn't be poking around, looking for that chamber," said Rubeus. "It's bad business."

"If I don't, who will? In any case, I'm not, Myrtle is. Or was, she said she didn't find anything. I figure it's like the entrance to the Slytherin rooms- some kind of portkey."

"Why should you be the one to do it? Wait, how do you know about the entrance to the Slytherin rooms?"

"I know because I wanted to know, so I figured it out. As for why me, because I'm the only person on earth that can become totally immune to magic, that's why. So whatever it is that's petrifying these people won't be able to turn me. Then I can take it down, and remove the danger forever."

Rubeus was skeptical. "You can really make yourself immune to magic?"

"Sure. I haven't told anyone this, but I've been attacked more times in this school than... well, than any one person should, really. This last time a whole bunch of older kids came after me, and I broke their wands and left them outside for hours down by the lake. Guess what? No attacks after that. Okay, a different kind of attack, but none like that."

"What?" said Rubeus. "You got attacked and didn't report it? Then you broke a bunch of kid's wands, just like that?"

"Of course. They were trying to kill me at the time. I broke their wands so they would have to turn themselves in, to explain why they needed new ones."

Rubeus shook his head. "In my fifty years of working here I've never heard of such things going-"

Susan sprang up like her seat was on fire. "What did you say?"

"In my fifty years-"

“I thought so. Stop right there. Myrtle was killed fifty years ago. The T.M Riddle diary was from fifty years ago. Now I learn you’ve been working here exactly fifty years as well? Once is an accident. Twice is coincidence. Three times is an enemy action. You know something.”

“I really don’t though, that’s the thing.”

“Don’t make me cast *Detect Lies* on myself, Rubeus. Because I’ll do it. This needs to be dealt with, and I’m the only one who can.”

Rubeus stared hard at her. “You’ve beaten a couple of life or death situations, from what I’ve heard. Honestly I didn’t believe half the stuff I heard about you, but now…” He fingered his ring. “But you’ve done so much for me, and then making me Filbert here. You really think you can do something?”

Susan nodded.

“I guess I could trust you, but honestly I don’t know anything.”

“Tell me, and let me decide where it fits in.”

“Okay. Like I said, it was fifty years ago. I made a mistake, when I was a student here. I took an egg from someone, a spider’s egg, and from it hatched a spider I named Aragog.” He paused. “I think I mentioned this to you once before, didn’t I? When you repaired my wand? Anyway, he grew pretty fast, and it was getting more and more difficult to hide him, see? Then someone died, someone who is with us in this very room.”

“Me?” squeaked Myrtle.

Rubeus nodded. “That’s when I got framed for it. Or rather, Aragog did, but I had brought him, right? But he didn’t harm anyone, I kept him well fed. There would be no reason for him to have hurt a student. But Tom Riddle, that’s your T.M Riddle, Susan, he forced Aragog out into the open. I couldn’t prove it wasn’t him, so they expelled me. That’s when my wand was broken, and when Albus took me on as groundskeeper. He knew I was innocent.”

“Then, fifty years later I show up and mend your wand. But events repeated themselves, and the chamber opened again. Why? After all this time?”

Rubeus shrugged. “I never knew how it was opened the first time.”

Susan got up and started pacing. “The house elf knew something was coming this year. Something I promised to protect Harry from. We think he works for Lucius, as that’s where we went when he left my house. His son proclaimed no knowledge when we talked to him, but I should have had *Detect Lies* going at the time. Stupid Susan, very stupid. And sloppy. Then the attacks started. First victim was a cat, outside Myrtle’s bathroom. Myrtle died fifty years ago. Then there are two more attacks, and that voice Harry hears. Harry can talk to snakes, can he also hear them if he can’t see them? What snake lives fifty years? Could it be a decedent? Then this diary shows up, again connected to Myrtle. But now we find it’s connected to you too, because he’s the one that got you expelled. It’s like I have all the pieces in front of me but half of them are turned over, so I can see their shape, but not how they fit into the picture! The diary is blank, who keeps a blank diary around for 50 years? And don’t forget the connection to Voldemort, as he’s in this somewhere too. If another piece of his soul really is floating around, we haven’t seen it. Of course, we didn’t know until the end of Professor Quirrell, either. This is really frustrating!”

“Can’t help you there,” said Rubeus. “Told you I wouldn’t be much help.”

“You’ve added another piece, and that’s something. Wait, let me guess- His ‘special service’ to the school? That was getting you thrown out, right?”

Rubeus nodded.

“Unbelievable.” She stopped pacing, and magical energies sprang up around her as she envisioned the proper symbols. “*Retrieval*,” she said, and the “award” dropped into her hands. She glared at it, then handed it to Rubeus.

“Break it,” she said. “Or I will. I won’t have this in the school anymore. Not now that I know what it means. In fact I can’t believe it was kept here all this time, really.”

“How did you... You have no idea how long I’ve waited for this.” He took it, and easily crushed it in his giant hands. “Wonder how long it’ll take Argus to find out it’s gone,” he said, throwing it into his trash bin with a grin.

Susan grinned back. “So was Aragog killed?”

“Nah, he escaped. Lives in the forest now, and has tons of kids. You should visit sometime!”

“I’ll take your word for it. At least now I know why Headmaster Dumbledore said the giant insects would be ‘among their own kind’.”

“Yeah, plenty of weird stuff back there.”

A thought struck her. “Wait. Myrtle.”

“Yes?” said Myrtle.

“They must have checked for poison. That’s the way spiders eat, they inject you with something that turns you into goo and they just slurp it up. Obviously they didn’t just take the word of some kid, they checked the body over to see how she died? Right?”

“I really don’t know.”

“But even if it was Aragog *then*, whatever it is *now* is paralyzing people. And ghosts, after I so kindly chopped his head off, too! No spider could do that, even a really big one. But you say Headmaster Dumbledore knew about all this? He knew the chamber had been opened, and didn’t tell us? Honestly, what that man is thinking sometimes makes me wonder.”

“You can’t pin all the blame on Albus, he wasn’t headmaster at the time. He was just a professor. So he might not have been told anything, either.”

“Okay, that makes me feel a little better. He inherited this problem, then. Still, a person killed by spider venom and a person killed by magical... whatever this thing is would be two totally different things. To think they didn’t even look into it. I don’t suppose you know, Myrtle?”

“I just sort of died. I don’t remember seeing any spider though, I can tell you that.”

“Well that’s something, at least. Tommy boy must have figured it out, we can too. Either he left directions or someone else happened to figure it out recently. The timing bothers me, though. Well, I won’t take any more of your time, Rubeus. Thanks for the tea, and the conversation. If you think of anything else that might be helpful, let me know.”

“I will.”

“Come on, you can escort me back to the dorms, Myrtle.”

“Okay!”

“So that’s what he said,” she told the others when they got together that evening. “It’s more connected than I thought, all this chamber stuff. And while we aren’t any closer to solving the whole thing, at least we know a little bit more about how Myrtle died.”

“And we know it can kill. We’ve been lucky so far, it seems,” said Hermione.

“Yeah, that begs the question,” said Harry. “If it has the power to kill, why doesn’t it?”

“It’s fifty years old, at least,” said Susan. “Maybe its power is weakening after all this time.”

“Fifty years is nothing,” said Hermione. “Remember, the chamber was supposedly built by Salazar when the castle was built. That’s a thousand years ago.”

“I’ll have to ask the Headmaster if wanded wizards can make magical constructs like my *Magical Ally*. Rubeus’ ring could survive a thousand years, and if someone picked it up again and slipped it on, boom. It would appear.”

“I doubt it, or more wizards would have them.”

“You’re probably right. Tell me Harry... no wait a second. Be right back.”

Susan left the room, then put *Detect Lies* on herself. She came back in. *I don’t know what Harry’s chances are of making the RESolve check against that spell, but why take chances?*

“As I was saying; You’ve been hanging onto that diary awhile, do you feel any different?”

“No, just frustrated we can’t do anything about these attacks.”

Truth.

“You haven’t found yourself wandering around, wondering what happened?”

“No. Why are you-” He tossed the diary away from himself. “You think this might be another piece of Voldemort?”

“You always were quick on the uptake. It’s possible, but not very likely. I mean the ring I can understand, but this is a ratty old book.”

“Yeah, you’re right.” He retrieved it from the floor. “Well, I’m not possessed.”

Truth

You don’t think you are, anyway.

“Then you won’t mind me casting *Exorcise* on you, right?”

“Wouldn’t mind that at all.”

Susan did, and nothing happened, so she was satisfied.

“So now what?” asked Ron.

“Keep gathering clues, I guess? The book isn’t going to tell us anything, so it’s up to our detective work at this point. Put the pieces together, people! That’s what my party is for, not just to be a squishy meat shield.”

“Thanks for the imagery,” said Ron, getting up to leave.

“My pleasure!”

The group was now sitting in the Gryffindor common room, relaxing during their Easter break. “So what are you going to take next year?” Ron asked Susan.

“That’s the trouble, you guys get options,” she complained.

“What do you mean?”

“Let’s look at the list, shall we? Starting from the bottom there’s Divination. I’m guessing that’s just like potions for me. Worthless. Anyway, I have the *True Question* spell if I want riddles about the future babbled at me. Care of Magical Creatures? Okay, that I could possibly take but seriously, if I want to raise some magical creature I’ll just look up how to care for that magical creature. Muggle Studies? Uh, hello? I hate that word, and I am one in a certain sense. I could teach that class. I should, given the questions your father asked me, Ron. That class is obviously somewhat lacking. So we’re left with Arithmancy, which I hope is just math, and Study of Ancient Runes. I don’t need to study Ancient Runes, I can just touch them, cast a spell, and read them perfectly. So I guess math it is.”

“Oh.”

“You sound disappointed.”

“I just hoped we could all continue taking the same classes.”

“I’ll have to talk to Headmaster Dumbledore about it, honestly, to see what he recommends. Maybe I’ll get something out of those other classes, who knows? But if potions is any indication, probably not.”

It was later that day when Harry came running up to Susan, who was sitting next to Hermione and reading.

“I... well, remember when I said the diary was safe with me?”

“You didn’t?!”

“It was stolen! My trunk had been ransacked and thrown everywhere, and that was the only thing missing.”

“Come on. I doubt it’ll be any more enlightening than the first time, but we have to try...”

Susan looked over *Time Window* and cast it inside Harry’s room. An invisible force tore the room apart, and walked off with the book.

“Super. They took no chances, did they?”

“Can you find it again? It must be more important than we realized. I’m sorry, I should have let you hold onto it.”

“Don’t sweat it,” said Susan, paging through her book. “I’ll have it found momentarily.”

She started reading over *Descry Object* and made her checks to understand it. She had to ask Sparkle for an *Assist* on her *Magic Theory* to understand a crucial point (she got a 10 on her check, rather than the 11 she needed) but Sparkle clarified the point, and for 30 turns Susan carefully envisioned the object. She figured her difficulty wasn’t that high, it must still be in the castle.

When she finished the spell though (with a 17 on her check) she got thrown across the room by magical backlash.

When she came to, Sparkle was looking down at her, concerned.

“I had to use *Awaken*,” she said. “So don’t move too much if you can avoid it. How badly hurt are you?”

Susan put out a hand and her character sheet appeared. “Some non-lethal to the head. What’s going on? Why am I here?”

“That’s a relief. Wait a second while I put *Regeneration* on you.”

Susan waited, the others looking on, concerned. Soon she was up and looking around.

“What happened? How did I get knocked out?”

“You don’t remember? You tried to do a scrying spell on the diary.”

“Why would I do that? Is it missing?”

The others looked at each other.

“Don’t you remember? We were sitting in the Great Hall and Harry came running in saying the diary had been stolen. You tried *Time Window* but the thief was invisible. Then you tried *Descry Object* and got knocked back,” said Sparkle.

“I don’t remember that at all. I remember sitting down with Hermione a while ago. Wild. You think I botched the spell?”

“When have you ever botched a spell? In any case you would have known and been able to spend XP to retry it.”

“Good point. So what happened?”

"I only got an eight my on *Magical Theory* check. You figure it out."

Susan sat and thought awhile, getting a 17 herself. "We know the book is magic. But we never found out how magical it was. It could have some sort of anti-scrying spells on it. You know how hesitant I've been to mix our magics together? This is what I was afraid of happening."

"You're sure you're okay?" asked Hermione.

"Thanks to *Regeneration* I'm totally fine. Don't worry. But if the book really is gone, it must have been more important than we thought!"

"I said that already," said Harry.

"Oh, did you? Sorry. Hopefully I can say something new: What are we going to do about it?"

"If your magic won't work, there's little we can do, apart from keeping our eyes open for it. Do you remember me apologizing? I did, you know."

"I'm sure you did. I've got a bad feeling about this."

Susan's "bad feeling" came true the next day, as Harry again heard the voice on the way to Quidditch.

"Tell me you don't hear that!" he exclaimed.

"It's out again?" asked Susan. "And it wasn't out when the diary was with us- crap, somehow that's the piece of Voldemort's soul, it has to be. It's taken someone over and using them to open the chamber."

"You know what comes next- Someone's going to be petrified again!" said Hermione. "Or worse, if we aren't so luckily this time. We have to do something."

"I agree, but what?" said Susan. "I can deal with it, but you guys can't."

"Go and tell the headmaster," said Hermione. "I'm going to the library, I don't have time to explain but I think I have the last piece of the puzzle. I'll find you later!" She took off up the stairs.

"At least let me cast *Magic Immunity*- oh shoot, she's gone. Would it have killed her to stick around another few segments for some spell casting?"

"I just hope it doesn't kill her that she didn't," remarked Ron.

"Why can't you cast the spell on us, then we all can deal with it?" asked Harry.

"It's how the spell works. 'the target is unable to use magical items' and what do wanded wizards use?"

"Magical items," he replied sadly.

"Exactly, wands. I could still cast spells at it, but you couldn't. Now come on, we have to find the Headmaster. We'll check his office!" On the way, Susan activated her *Magic Immunity* charm, and hoped she wouldn't be the only one to reach him.

The three pounded down to the office, where the Headmaster was descending from to watch the match himself.

"It's loose again," panted Harry. "Whatever the creature is that's in the chamber. It's out, I can hear it. We have to corner it and let Susan take it out, once and for all."

"Slow down," said Albus. "You can hear the creature? How?"

"Because I can talk to snakes? I don't know. All I know is that every time there's been an attack, I've heard a voice saying it's going to kill someone right beforehand. That's why I'm always the first there, I follow it!"

“And to think I was trying to protect you by not telling you more. Very well, I shall cancel the match and get everyone inside. Let us hope we are not too late.”

But of course, they were. Two more students had fallen to the strange curse, and Susan looked bitterly at the frozen form of Hermione.

“I will find this thing and destroy it,” she swore. “If I have to take this castle apart, stone by stone, myself.”

“Oh Hermione, why didn’t you tell us? Why run off like that?” said Harry sadly.

“She ran off?” asked Albus.

“When I heard the voice, she said that she thought of something and to go get you. She was on her way to the library.”

“Can you explain this?” Professor McGonagall asked, holding up a small mirror. “It was found near them.”

“Not yet, but I intend to. Come with me. *Path Tracer*.” A green line, which only Susan could see appeared from Hermione and she started following it back.

Albus and Minerva looked at each other, but silently followed Susan without question. The line led her to the library, and to the exact places within Hermione had gone. She had to weave around a bit because she had checked multiple shelves, but she was led to a section on monsters where she looked around.

“We don’t know what book she looked at specifically. I would guess a book about snakes or snake like monsters, if there is one here. I can cast *Time Window*, which I’m really going to have to memorize if this keeps up, if I have to.”

“Let us look for a moment,” said Albus. “And perhaps we shall not need it. You say she was here, right here?” He pointed.

“The line is tangled up most here, so she spent the most time here looking at one side or the other.”

“Then let us see...” He looked over the shelves, finally selecting an old looking book. Not that 95% of the books in the place didn’t look ancient, but you get the idea. He paged through it.

“There seems to be a page missing,” he remarked, showing them. “Now what do you make of that?”

“I’m guessing Voldemort got here first, and tore it out. Just in case someone got any ideas and wanted to make sure they were right.”

“Voldemort? Perhaps you should start from the beginning.”

Susan looked around. “Not here. Your office?”

“Very well.”

They went to the headmaster’s office and sat down.

“So, from the beginning, what are the ten radical isotopes?” Susan joked.

“Sorry, what?” said Albus.

“I... I’m not sure why I said- The beginning was Harry and me getting a visit from a house elf named Dobby...” Susan told the whole story, from what they thought the message meant, to their new theory about the diary.

“So you believe there’s another piece of Voldemort out there, and you didn’t immediately come and inform me?”

“We don’t have any proof of anything, just theory. And honestly, you haven’t been very forthcoming with us. How many hours have I spent in here *Imbuing* stuff? And not once did you say ‘oh yeah, fifty years ago this very same thing happened’ or ‘Gee, wonder if Rubeus has anything he would like to tell us after all these years.’ No, you just kept it to yourself. I had to learn all of this from a ghost, and an old book, and random chance. So I think we can both take our share of the blame for those people down in the hospital, can’t we?”

“I suppose you’re right. I should be old enough to know better. In order to protect you I put others at risk, and now this is the result. It’s just hard to trust your magic, when it’s so different from ours. But perhaps that will be our saving grace.”

“That’s what I’ve been saying all along,” grumbled Susan.

“Forgive me. But even knowing what the creature in the chamber is doesn’t allow us to find it, does it? Either the chamber or the creature.”

“You know what it is?” asked Harry.

“Yes, I do. It is a basilisk, which is why you can understand it, Harry. It is a magical snake, many times bigger than any you have seen, and it can kill with a look. Can you find it with this description?”

Susan shook her head. “Not with my magic. *Descry Creature* needs me to envision the creature in my mind. Even if I saw a picture of what one looked like, I have never seen this specific one. So that’s out. *Destination* is also out, because while I know there’s a “chamber of secrets” the actual destination is not known to me. If I already knew where it was the spell could show me the quickest way to get there from where I was. But as I don’t know where it is, that won’t work.”

Albus thought for a moment. “I suppose we could tear the school apart for this diary, but given that it has already been given up and retrieved, you can bet it won’t be easy to find.”

“We have to do something!” insisted Susan.

“I have some new policies to write up, and I’m afraid teachers and students alike are not going to find them easy to live with. You had better head back to your dorms, there will be an announcement soon.”

As professor Flitwick read out the new rules, Susan inwardly groaned. The Headmaster was right, nobody was going to like these rules. Honestly, what was the point of being escorted to the bathroom? It’s not like a teacher was any less vulnerable to this creature, were they? Better to allow them to make their way there alone, blindfolded. At least then it wouldn’t be two bodies that were found, just one.

Surrounded by the others, the place still felt empty without Hermione by her side, and many had come to her and expressed their sympathies. There might have been a little fear there, too, everyone had seen or heard about the dwarf attack. They knew what she could do if she got angry, so no one wanted to be a suspect in her eyes. Susan was too busy keeping an eye out for an old diary to really notice though.

She was idling flipping through her spell-book, looking for anything she might have missed that would help, when a silver phoenix swooped into the room.

I keep forgetting to ask about that spell.

“Susan, when you hear this, immediately take Rubeus off the property. It’s Azkaban for him otherwise, I fear. I would ask you not be found in his hut, but I doubt you’ll listen. Events will play out there tonight if you’re interested.”

She jumped up, slid her book of magic under her covers (not wanting to even take the time to cast *Pocket Dimension*) and opened a *Teleportal* into Rubeus' hut.

"What in the world?" he asked, as a hole opened near one of his walls.

"Quick, come through. You too Fang, come on boy! We have to get you off property, I just got a message from the Headmaster."

"What is this?" Rubeus was carefully poking his finger through the portal.

"Come on, I'll explain everything later. You have to trust me!" He started to put a leg through. "Wand! Do you have your wand?"

"Got it right here. Never without it now. Through the hole, Filbert, that's a good dragon." He squeezed through and was standing in the dorm. "Is this your room? I took one step and entered the castle?"

"Quiet, I have to think. Where to put you that's off school grounds... The base is a little small for someone your size. The Burrows, of course!" Susan started casting again, and another hole opened, showing Ron's house.

"Quick, get through! Tell Mr. and Mrs. Weasley I sent you to hide out. They'll trust you, no one that means them harm can enter the house, I made sure of that. I'll come by later tonight and explain. Go! Go! Go!"

Rubeus was looking back and forth between the two portals. "I've never seen magic like this before."

"Will you just get through there?" She startled trying to push him. "The Headmaster said 'immediately' you know?"

"Okay, okay, no need to shove. But you better come and explain all this..." He stepped through, and his two animals went with him.

"Great, see you soon!" She closed the hole and that scene winked out, then she and Sparkle stepped through the other hole into the hut. Susan sat down to wait.

She didn't have long, as there was a knock at the door.

She opened it, and both parties gave a surprised "You?!" when they saw who was standing there.

She pulled Ron and Harry inside, gave a look around, and closed the door.

"Where's Rubeus?" asked Harry.

"I got a message from Albus, take him off property. He's knocking on the door to your house at this very moment, Ron. I hope your parents don't mind, but it's the only magical place that's safe I could think of."

"Nah, they know him. They'll be a bit surprised to see him turn up like that though. What's going on?"

"We're going to see. Something is going down tonight, but I don't know what. What are you doing here?"

"Thought we would ask him for the story first hand. Maybe he would remember something else useful, you know?" answered Harry.

There was another knock at the door.

"Quick, under the cloak! I don't mind being found here, but you might not want to be. And in case something happens, you're the only people left to deal with it."

The two flung the cloak over themselves and Susan touched her charm bracelet.

"Immunity," she intoned.

Never hurts to be too careful, right?

She opened the door and stepped back, and was unsurprised to see Albus come in, looking around. The other figure she vaguely recognized, having seen him only once before.

“Ah, Susan,” he said. “I didn’t expect to see you here. Cornelius Fudge, Minister of Magic.”

“Ah yes, you were there when I cured the Longbottoms. I remember.”

“You disappeared quite suddenly after that, we didn’t get a chance to talk. Then Albus refused to let me talk to you for some reason.”

“I’m sure those reasons were good ones.”

“Yes, quite. I thought students weren’t allowed to run around castle grounds unescorted, Albus?”

His eyes twinkled. “I doubt very much she ‘ran around’ as you put it. She came here directly, unless I miss my guess.”

“Came direct- never mind. Where is Rubeus?”

“You wish to question him? Were the last fifty years not enough time to get around to it, then?”

“No, I’m here to take him in. For his own safety, yes, that’s it.”

“Thinking about his safety is admirable. What about the safety of every student and teacher in Hogwarts? Are you concerned for their safety?”

“Of course, that’s why he has to leave!”

Susan put on a quizzical look and looked past him. “Did you bring a small force of wizards that’s outside, invisibly awaiting your orders to attack?”

“Why would I need something like that?”

She looked at him for a moment. “So let me understand this. You, the Minister himself, came here- alone, mind you, to bring in Rubeus. Obviously you expected him to go quietly. You expected this because you know, in your heart, that he is innocent. If you had any doubt, even the smallest inkling that he would snap your neck like a twig should you try to drag him off to prison you would have stayed far away. How am I doing so far?”

Cornelius looked away.

“Petty good then? Okay. And what do we call the activities designed not to solve a problem, but for politicians to point to and say ‘See? See all the things we’re doing to keep you safe’? Two words: Security. Theater.”

“In other words, politics,” said Albus.

Cornelius sputtered a moment. “I demand to see Rubeus!”

“I’m afraid he’s on vacation, at the moment,” said Albus.

“Vacation?!”

“Indeed. He’s been working so hard these past few months, I thought it was time he took a break. Susan here took him off the school grounds just this evening.”

Susan smiled. “Exactly right. He’s beyond our reach now, I’m afraid. Won’t be back for, oh, quite some time, I should say.”

“You arranged this somehow!”

“I?” Albus put on an air of innocence. “You were with me from the moment you arrived.”

“You stepped into the other room for a moment to ‘get something’.”

Before Albus could respond, there was another knock at the door.

“More visitors!” said Susan. “What a popular guy this Rubeus is tonight! Come in, come in, there’s plenty of room! Can I offer you wine? Sparkle doesn’t drink because she’s a cat, but I wouldn’t mind a glass!”

Then she saw who was at the door, and for the second time that hour two people exclaimed “You!” though this time quite a bit more angrily.

As though by reflex, Lucius started to draw his wand from his cane, but saw that the Minister was there, and shoved it back down again.

“Is there something I should know about?” asked Cornelius, his eyes darting between the two. The temperature around them dropped, but the sparks in both sets of eyes could have burned the hut to the ground, if they had been real.

“It’s nothing,” said Lucius, breaking off the staring contest. “I’ll deal with her later.”

“Bring it on,” said Susan, folding her arms across her chest. “I’m not afraid of you or your dwarves. Who are, incidentally, my dwarves now, given they would probably be quite reluctant to fight me again for any amount of gold.”

There was a second of panic, quickly masked. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. Anyway, I’ve come about Albus.” He handed the Headmaster a scroll.

“And what might this be?” he asked, unrolling it.

“As you can see, it’s an Order of Suspension. All twelve of the governors have signed it. I suppose they feel you haven’t done enough to protect the school, and who can blame them? So many attacks...”

“Wait a second,” said Cornelius, “That seems a bit drastic, Lucius. I’m sure with the new precautions they’ve put in place—”

“My dear Minister, this is a matter for the governors, as you know. Perhaps soon we will find someone to appoint that will do a better job of running things.”

“Politics?” asked Susan.

“Politics,” replied Albus sadly. “And this I cannot ignore. I will step down and leave the premises, as they demand.” He turned. “It seems to me, Susan, that I must leave this in your hands now, where apparently it has been, all along. You have all the pieces, and you have the right friends. You need only to ask the right questions now.”

“You seriously are leaving this in the hands of a *child*?” Lucius exclaimed. “You are further gone than I thought.”

“You underestimate her at your peril,” said Albus, moving past him out the door. “She could have taken those dwarves herself, you know. She let her friends help to let them feel useful.”

“What is this about dwarves?” said Lucius, hurrying to catch up to him.

Susan and Cornelius were left staring at each other.

“Is it true, some of the things I’ve heard about you?”

“What have you heard?”

“Fighting off dwarves? Beating Professor Quirrell last year in a *duel*? Somehow surviving a killing curse before even setting foot in the castle? Your cat can talk? You’re some kind of reincarnation?”

“You don’t know the half of it.”

“I see. I should go.”

“Farewell, Minister. I’m sure we’ll see each other again. I’m sorry you weren’t able to take Rubeus in, but you still have the news of the Headmaster departing to fill your theater with, right?”

“Yes, about that. I am sorry, I didn’t know. It wasn’t my intent to call him into question.”

“I understand. Don’t worry, hopefully this whole situation will be resolved soon.”

“You really think you can solve it, don’t you?”

“Minister, I think I’m the only person who can.” Cornelius looked troubled, but at the fact that she thought that was true, or that she said it with such conviction, he probably wasn’t sure.

“Good night.”

With the door closed, the two came out from the cloak.

“Now what?” asked Ron.

“He said we had everything we needed. We just had to ask the right question. He also implied one of my friends knew the answer. But we’ve talked about it, gone over it, again and again. Well, think about it some more, you two. I’ll go see if Myrtle knows anything else in the morning, I guess, but I don’t know.”

Susan opened a *Teleportal* back to the castle, and a moment later Rubeus’ hut was empty.

The Chamber Opens

Time: The next day

Place: The Great Hall

Everyone was buzzing about the fact that Albus was gone, and that Rubeus was nowhere to be found. News about the Headmaster had been published in the paper, but speculation was rampant about Rubeus.

“He’s safe,” Susan replied, when asked. “They were going to take him to Azkaban, so I hid him away.”

“How did you know?” was usually the next question.

“A little birdie told me,” is all she would say about it.

Ron was getting worried he hadn’t seen Ginny at all that morning, and at Harry’s insistence went and asked about her. No teacher knew where she was either, and so search parties were sent out, in pairs, to look around the school. What they found was another line, added to the original taunt seen outside Myrtle’s bathroom. It now read this:

*Twice have I been defeated by children.
This time a child shall be my salvation.
My revenge is loosed from the chamber.
Now that child is mine, body and soul.*

“Oh crap!” said Susan. “It was Ginny all along?”

“You don’t mean-” said Ron.

“It all fits. We were so stupid before. That’s the missing piece- where did the diary come from? Dobby knew what was coming, he heard it from his master, Lucius. Lucius who had the book and slipped it to Ginny when they met in the bookshop. That’s why it didn’t try to take you over, Harry, it was already taking over Ginny! She must have tried to get it to me, but I failed her, and she was compelled to take it back. Now with the Headmaster gone Voldemort doesn’t feel he needs to sneak around anymore, and has made her go into the chamber to finish sucking away her life energy. We have to get into that chamber, she might not have much time left.”

“But how?” asked Harry. “It’s all well and good for Albus to say we’ve got all the pieces, but we still don’t know how to get into the place.”

“It all revolves around Myrtle somehow. She’s a friend, she was there when it was opened the... first... time.” Susan trailed off. “What if she was there because that’s where the entrance is? All this time I just thought she was picked because she was alone, and no one would miss her, giving the heir time to get away. But what if she was there when it was opened?”

“You really think the entrance is inside a girl’s bathroom?” asked Ron.

“Why not? What better hiding place could there be?”

“We’d better check it out then.”

“Let’s go.”

They spoke to Professor McGonagall, telling them the Headmaster charged her with dealing with the situation before he left, and she nodded. “He informed me some time ago that if there was a time you felt you needed to act, that I should let you. I will tell you the same thing I

told him. I think it's incredibly foolish for you all to rush into danger like this. Even if it is to save your sister."

"We'll be fine," said Susan. "Count on it."

"Good luck."

None of them saw Gilderoy sneaking behind them, watching their every move.

Susan and the others prepared themselves, then went into Myrtle's bathroom to talk. Sparkle had on a new collar, from which dangled two flat pieces of stone. After the whole dwarf thing, Susan had experimented with *Spell Symbol* and realized she didn't have to be the one putting the spell into the symbol. She could cast and maintain it, then Sparkle could put a spell in, and later activate it. So her *Magical Ally* now rode in the symbol, meaning she wouldn't have to take the -3 to maintain it. And Susan's *Magic Immunity* rode right next to it, targeting Sparkle. So both could have both spells going, and not be at penalties. Ron was carrying Felton's Blade, just in case the creature was resistant to magic and they needed a physical weapon. Getting past that whole paralyze with a look thing was going to be tricky, but the plan was for Susan and her *Allies* to occupy its attention while the others attacked it from the back with spells and edged objects. Susan trusted her *Augment Skill* on the blade more than she trusted Ron's spell casting ability, though she would never say that to him.

"What's all this?" asked Myrtle, when they all entered the bathroom.

"We think we know where it is," Susan answered. "How well did you search the castle?"

"Very well, if I say so myself. I was very methodical about it."

"But I bet you didn't think to check this room, that you had spent so much time in."

"Here? Well, no, not really."

"Take us through that night you died, if that's okay. What happened?"

"As far as I can remember I was here," she said, drifting over to a stall. "I remember someone coming into the room, and hissing of all things. It sounded like a boy, so I opened the door to tell him to go away, and then it was over for me."

"So you looked this way?" Harry said, staring out of the stall.

"It was more nearer the sink, I guess? That part isn't clear."

The five crowded around it, looking for any clues. "Why not just speak snake in the room?" suggested Susan. "Something should respond, right?"

"I've only done it unconsciously, though. I didn't even know I was speaking snake."

"Close your eyes," she said to Harry.

"What?"

"Just do it. Close them. Okay, imagine you're back when Draco summoned that snake. It's before you now. You have to tell it to open the chamber. See the snake in your mind, hear what it's saying to you."

Harry hissed something, and the others smiled grimly as the chamber of secrets finally revealed itself to them.

"It really was here the whole time?" asked Myrtle. "I can't believe it!"

"We've all been a bit blind," said Susan. "Don't worry about it."

"But how did Ginny get past Myrtle to open it all those times?" asked Ron, looking down into the pipe.

"I was out looking for the chamber a lot. Or talking with Susan. Or just exploring. I had never done that, you know, but I wanted things to talk to Susan about so I started looking."

"It's okay, honestly. Better you be away than here and get petrified like poor Nick, right?"

“I guess.”

“All right, let’s go. We’ll activate *Ally* and then *Immunity* as soon as we get down there. Remember, Sparkle will be your eyes. Listen to her, and keep yours closed. I’ll keep it away from you. Ron, if you can get Ginny and get out, do it. Don’t look back. We’ll probably be seeing our good friend Voldi so expect weirdness.”

“*Armor of Magic*,” Sparkle cast on Harry and Ron. “*Acceleration*,” she cast on everyone.

“Ready?” asked Susan.

The others nodded.

“Then let’s go.”

Down, down into the ground the four fell. *No wonder she never found it, it’s not in the castle at all, is it?*

Finally the pipe leveled out and the four shot out of it, Susan and Sparkle not opening their eyes until they were safely *Immune* to magic.

“Attack any large creature you see,” both said to their *Magical Allies* who went into fighting mode, looking around.

“Looks safe for the moment,” said Susan. “But keep your eyes down.”

“*Darksight*” said Harry, while Ron lit up his wand with “*Lumos*.”

Moving further down the chamber they saw the cast off skin, getting an idea about the size of their opponent. Ron cast “*Engorgio*” on both *Allies* so they would at least have a chance, and moved on. They moved on, past the skin, and came to another door, this one surrounded by snakes.

Harry looked resolved, and the others nodded to him. He hissed something, and the door opened, spilling a cold, white light across them. They stepped forward and entered the chamber proper.

There was Ginny, lying on the ground as though dead. “Ginny!” shouted Ron, forgetting not to look up. “Come on, wake up. We have to get out of here!”

“I thought you might turn up,” said a voice they all recognized. Ron raised the sword, holding it over Ginny. Stepping out of the shadows came a familiar figure.

“Tom Riddle,” said Harry. “There’s pieces of you all over the place, isn’t there?”

“If my plans went as I anticipated, yes. You must be Harry and Susan, Ginny here has told me all about you.”

“I expect she actually wrote in it, yes?” said Susan. Then to her dragon; “Watch him, but don’t attack unless he does.”

“Quite the creature you have under your command,” Tom remarked. “And of course you are correct. From what she told me, she wasn’t sure how it had gotten in with her other books, but a diary is a diary, after all. Imagine her surprise when I wrote back to her. Of course, she didn’t trust me at first, who would? But I’ve always managed to charm those I needed to, and it wasn’t long before she told me everything.”

“Not everything. Or do you know what happens to other parts of you?”

“She told me what she could about Professor Quirrell. It sounded like something I would do.”

“I bet. And this?” she gestured to Ginny. “Is taking the life of a defenseless girl really your style?”

“If I get to live again, certainly. What is she ever going to do with her life?”

“I see. Well, it’s been a blast, but I’m afraid this conversation is over. Before you go, let me say it will give me great pleasure to unravel you with my magic, one inch at a time.”

“This conversation is over when I say it is!” Tom roared.

Susan ignored him and bent over Ginny. Magical symbols spun around her as she was touched.

“What are you doing?” demanded Tom. Then he started hissing. “*Exorcise*,” cast Susan, getting a 17, and energy swirled around Ginny and got sucked back into the book that was laying nearby. The figure of Tom winked out like a candle flame, and Susan gave a small smile. She looked over at Ron, who had his eyes tightly closed.

Oh shoot.

Susan spun around, and rearing up was a huge snake, deciding which of them to strike.

“Ron,” said Susan quickly. “Grab Ginny and run directly to your left. The way is clear, keep your head down. Leave the sword for Harry.”

“Got it,” said Ron, as Susan helped scooping up Ginny and put her over Ron’s back. He dropped the sword and Susan kicked it over to Harry.

“Just to your left,” said Sparkle, and Harry reached down to grab it.

“Let’s dance,” she said the creature, looking it in the eyes. “Attack!” she shouted to her dragon, rolling *Initiative* in her mind and pointing to the creature. The dragon leapt forward.

The dragon decided to shoot fire as it ran toward the serpent and gave a mighty *Elemental Bolt* which missed by inches as the snake dodged out of the way.

That thing’s pretty fast for such a huge creature.

Sparkle yelled to Harry, “Run straight ahead, I’ll tell you when to stop. Attack that snake!” she yelled to her *Ally*. It also started moving towards the serpent.

“*Elemental Bolt*,” Susan cast, getting an 11 total and scoring. She had done a called shot to the body as well, but the serpent, distracted by the dragon that was half as tall as it was, and not turning to stone as the snake looked at, missed its dodge. Still, it hardly seemed to notice.

This thing is going to divide damage by, like, five! thought Susan. *This is going to take forever!*

The dragon had reached the snake and swiped at it, getting a 31 and hardly scratching the thing. The lion took off running, its natural *Acceleration* serving it well, as it seemed to blur from one place to the other.

Harry also took off running, trusting Sparkle to tell him when to stop. Sparkle ran with him.

Susan, the dragon and the lion now attacked at once, all making called shots to the serpent’s body with claws and fire. They bloodied it, but rather than dodge, it readied to strike. It didn’t count on how fast the constructs were, and they struck again, putting energy into *STrength* this time, for extra damage.

The serpent hissed in anger, and as the dragon struck yet again (a 2 active delay will do that for ya!) the serpent struck down at it with fangs. They acted simultaneously, so the dragon couldn’t dodge, not that it would, because it hadn’t been commanded to dodge, only to attack. It took 7 damage to the body, hardly feeling it with its *Tough* background and DTR 5 enhanced

health levels. The serpent however felt his attack, combined with the lion's, which was another 14 damage. The serpent was still up and fighting.

Go down already!

The serpent reared up to strike again, but by this time, Harry was finally behind it and Sparkle shouted "You're behind it. Strike to your right!"

I wonder... Susan willed her card 29, *Wild*, to be played on Harry as a *Power Overwhelming* just to see if it would work. It did, and Harry cracked his eyes open and struck out with the blade, adding all his energy into *STrength*. Susan also mentally added her card 32, *Damage Add* to the mix. With a mighty shout, Harry cleaved into the snake for a total of 45/5 or 9 damage, bringing the total damage the serpent had sustained to 43, and that'll pretty much kill anything, I don't care what backgrounds you have.

The serpent thrashed about, dying, and Susan had to dodge as the torn up body fell forward. Sparkle felt herself roll a *LUCk* check, getting a 15, and threw in her *Bonus* card, because hey, it seemed important.

The serpent, falling fast, struck the dairy with a fang and pierced it straight through. The dairy seemed to wail and thrash, pinned by the giant fang. Black smoke billowed out, and magical energies could be felt swirling and dissipating. Soon it was quiet, and the chamber went still.

"Are you all right?" Susan asked, her voice made odd by the sudden silence.

"I actually killed it!" said Harry, wondrously. "Wow, that took a lot out of me. I've never felt as powerful as I did in that one instant!"

Should I tell him? Nah.

"Well done," she said. "You really did it. You stopped the monster and no one will ever have to worry about it again."

"Indeed, bravo!" said a familiar voice. Gilderoy stepped out from the hallway, giving a little clap. Before him were Ron and Ginny, who were still unconscious. "I would never have believed it possible, but you actually did it." He pointed his wand at them again, and prodded them forward.

"What are you doing here?" asked Harry, thrusting the sword point at him from across the room. "And where you were when the fighting was going on?"

"Holding Ginny and me hostage," answered Ron.

"Seriously?" asked Susan. "You just stood there and watched while we fought that thing off?"

"What did you expect me to do? Anyway, it looked like you had the situation in hand."

"What about all those books? You seemed rather brave when you were fighting off werewolves and such single handedly. Why, you practically threw yourself into combat with gusto, the way I read it."

"My dear girl, no one person could have done all those things in my books. Heavens, no. But one person could take the credit for doing them, now couldn't they?"

"And so the truth comes out," said Susan sadly. "You're a fake, just as I suspected."

"Yes, you suspected me from the start. Now that I've seen you in action, I can see why. You've got the touch, you've got the power. When all Hell was breaking loose you were riding the eye of the storm."

"So why tell us all this now? Feeling guilty now that you've seen real heroes in action?"

“My dear,” he said, affronted. “Those things in my books actually happened, you know. I had to track down the people who had done those things and get the story out of them. Then I had to modify their memories to make sure they couldn’t blab. Then there were books to write, signings to attend- it’s not easy being famous, you know.”

“I’ve never seen you do a spell properly. How can you do memory charms?”

All this time, Gilderoy had moving forward, and was now past Ron and Ginny. So he didn’t see Ginny palming her wand and open one eye.

“Memory charms were the one thing I always excelled at, actually. As you’re going to find out very shortly. Don’t worry, I won’t erase your whole memory. Just your fight with this creature, so I can take the credit. Of course I’ll have to do Harry and Ron as well, but that won’t be a problem.”

“You’ll regret it.”

“I don’t think so. I never have before. *Obliviate!*”

Susan stood there. Gilderoy looked at her, then peeked down at his wand.

“I said you’d be sorry,” said Susan, about to cast *Thrust*. However, another voice rang out. “*Obliviate!*” As Gilderoy went down, Susan saw Ginny pointing her wand at him. “I don’t remember much from being possessed,” she remarked, “but I do recall that one, at least.”

Ron was smiling. “She came to fast, but decided to play at being unconscious, just in case.” She climbed down. “Good thing she did.”

“He was going down, one way or the other. Thanks, Ginny.”

Ginny looked down. “I’m sorry about all the trouble. I put the book in a place I thought you would find it, but then he made me go get it again. I was further gone than I thought, I guess.”

“Is it over, then?”

Susan walked over to the serpent, still pinning the diary down to the floor. “Yeah, I think so. Stand back, I’m going serpent milking!”

“You’re doing what?” asked Ron.

“Getting the venom out. Headmaster Dumbledore said he tried everything on that ring, but this venom seemed to work wonders on the book. Now maybe that’s just because the book was just a book, but I’d be interested to see what happens if we drip some on the ring.”

“If you think you can do it...” He didn’t sound convinced.

“Not yet!” said Susan, and started casting. First she made an iron barrel with *Creation* to store the stuff in, then gave herself a better rating in the skill with *Augment Skill*. It took some doing, but with a little help from her *Assistant*, *Lubricate* and some more *Creation* she managed to rig up something suitable for the occasion. Moments later she had a barrel full of venom and capped it off.

“See, nothing to it!” She looked at it for a moment, then did a *Magic Sense* on it. It was magically active, so she figured it would stay potent without freezing and she stuck it into her *Pocket Dimension* for safekeeping. Turning back towards the others she saw them staring at her.

“What? Haven’t you ever seen a snake milked before?”

“Not one that big,” said Ron.

“Had to be done. I don’t think there would be much poison in just the fangs, so breaking them off is no good.”

“Right.”

“Still, I should have some proof, at least. Get me a fang,” she said to her dragon, who jumped up on the thing and ripped a fang off.

“Good boy!” Susan then grabbed up the book and threw it to Harry, who was dragging the sword on the ground. He looked exhausted. As well he should have. Meaning to spend all the energy you can and then having a card played on you so you can literally spend all of it you possess will do that to you.

“You delivered the final blow, you should keep the book.”

He looked at it and grimaced. “At least until I can give it to the Headmaster, anyway.”

“Before we go,” said Ginny, pulling Susan’s arm. “I need to have a girl talk with Susan here. No boys allowed!”

They went a little ways down the tunnel, leaving Ron and Harry scratching their heads.

“I couldn’t bring myself to come to you directly, though I thought about it many times,” said Ginny. “I just couldn’t get over my jealousy over you and Harry. But I’ll just forget about Harry, you two are obviously made for each other. What other team could have taken down that huge serpent?”

Susan laughed. “Is that why you avoided me while I was staying at Ron’s? You thought I liked Harry?”

“You don’t?”

“As a friend, sure. I’m more interested in Hermione, though it’s probably Myrtle I’ll end up with. I don’t think Hermione likes girls like I do, but I think Myrtle might, if she isn’t just happy to have any friend at all and I’m projecting...”

Ginny stared at her. “Oh.”

“So help yourself. He’s a good guy, you could do worse.”

“Well in that case,” she said, grabbing Susan’s hand. “Let’s get out of this hole.”

“My thoughts exactly.”

“Hello!” said Gilderoy when they returned.

“Oh, you’re up and about?” asked Susan sourly.

“Shouldn’t I be?” He looked around. “What a weird place. Not what I would call home. Who are you?”

“He can still talk,” said Ron. “Bash him in the head with the sword and let’s go.”

“Ron!” Harry was shocked.

“Kidding! Just kidding.”

Susan opened a *Teleportal*, and they stepped back into the bathroom, where Myrtle lit up to see them come back. Even with all the energy she had lost casting all those spells the last hour, she managed one more. A *Phase*, at Myrtle’s insistence, so she could get a hug.

Leaving the Chamber Behind

Time: The next day

Place: Albus' office

"You should start writing your own series of books," said Albus, after listening to the tale of the battle with the Basilisk. Minerva, Severus, Rubeus, the minister and the Weasley family were all there. Somehow, despite Susan knowing exactly how big the office was (she thought) they weren't crowded in the least.

"Yeah, Ron's Adventures Inside Hogwarts!" said Ron, making a rainbow shape with his hand.

"Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets," said Harry.

"Dobby's Risk," said Susan.

"What?!" exclaimed everyone.

"Think about it. Dobby learned the diary was coming to Hogwarts and tried to warn us. But he's bound, by magic, not to betray his master. Not only that, if Lucius ever found out he could command Dobby to torture himself *to death*, over weeks, and Dobby would have to comply. At worst, in the Chamber? I could have died. A bit of venom, a second or two of terror, and it would have been over. Not so for poor Dobby. It is he who is the real hero of this story. Because he took the biggest risk, and had the most to lose."

The others looked ashamed.

"But it was you who saved Ginny," said Molly, still holding onto Ginny. "Killing that awful serpent in the chamber. How could you, Albus? Sending children into danger like that?"

"I have my reasons," said Albus. "And I know you will not be satisfied with what I can tell you, but this much I will say. Darker days than these are coming, I can feel it in my bones. Harry- and Susan, must be ready for them."

"Now, now, everything turned out well. And you've seen Susan's magic, how could they not have prevailed?" asked Arthur.

"And her magic shall prevail once again," said Albus. "The cure for the petrified people will be ready soon, but we have a petrified ghost to care for, as well."

"I told you, my magic can't help them..."

"Oh, but it can. *You can touch ghosts*. We will simply give you some of the cure, which you can apply to the ghostly form of Sir Nicholas, curing him along with the others."

"Oh!" said Susan, realizing he was right. "Why didn't I think of that?"

"Now, to your reward!" said Albus.

Susan began to raise her hands to protest.

Albus was faster, as though he knew what her reaction was going to be. He raised a finger. "I know, you don't want any credit-"

"You kidding?" asked Susan. "I want a huge banner put up in the great hall proclaiming my heroic act, and a new holiday, "Susan Day," and my face on a stamp, and my own line of beauty products, and a fashion line-"

"All that you ask, and more." Albus was grinning widely. "Perhaps I could find you a publisher, get you that book deal you were talking about? Two, even. One for the 'fictional' version for the non-magical world, and one with the real story for ours. As much as you would want told, I mean, unless you don't mind the world learning about your particular gifts at last, Susan?"

“You wouldn’t dare do all that!” yelled Susan, stomping a foot.

Everyone laughed.

“But seriously,” said Albus, “I’m awarding two hundred points to Ron, Harry and Susan, and one hundred to Hermione. You are all exempt from exams for this year, and perhaps we can work out a schedule for you, Susan, for your studies next year that will satisfy. I know you had some... concerns about it.”

“Now that I can live with. But I do have one request...”

“Yes?”

“Rubeus. I want tutors for him, should he so desire them. And whatever records show he was expelled I want erased, and an official apology issued. He should graduate if he wants. Not some honorary thing, but a real, honest to goodness ‘I graduated from Hogwarts’ diploma. Taking the exams and everything. After suffering fifty years in silence, the truth about the situation should be told.”

“I agree. I’ll see to it, if that is your desire, Rubeus.”

“Of course, if I really do graduate, I’ll have to demand a pay raise,” he said, almost to himself. He stroked his beard. “Higher education, and all that.”

Albus chuckled. “Very well. If you graduate.”

“I’ll do my best, Sir. Thank you, Susan.”

“It’s what you deserve.”

“Oh dear,” said Albus, as though the thought had just occurred to him. “Wasn’t your wand broken when you were expelled, Rubeus? What *will* we do about that?”

“About that, sir...”

Albus waved a hand. “I’m sure you can take care of that later, if you have to.”

“Right.”

“Now, there are certain things I must discuss with the children, so I won’t keep the rest of you. Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, please feel free to use my fireplace to return home. If you wish Ginny to accompany you I won’t say a word, but she really should finish the year with her friends.”

“Would you like to stay?” asked Molly.

Ginny nodded.

“Then we’ll see you at home in a few weeks.”

They went off to say their goodbyes and go home, and the Minister came over to shake Susan’s hand.

“You’ve done the entire wizarding world a huge favor,” he said. “If there’s anything we can do for you, just name it.”

“In that case, close Azkaban.”

His handshake stopped, and his hand went cold. “What did you just say?”

“I had it from a rather untrustworthy source last year, but I’ve looked into it since. I realize the Dementor creatures scare you, and Azkaban is as much their prison as it is for the poor souls you feed to them. But Dementors do not scare *me*. I will find a way to destroy every last one of them, and then the walls of that place will come down. You can do it your way, in the next several years, or mine, as soon as I leave this school. I have another five years to perfect my magic, which is already considerable. Think about it, and think hard. Because I lay every death at that place at your feet, and call due.”

Cornelius looked over at Albus, who nodded gravely. "I would take her seriously. She seems to be quite passionate about it, one of the reasons I kept you two from talking before this. I knew this is what she would have to say to you."

"But she couldn't, could she?" He seemed to remember his hand and snatched it back.

"You have no idea the things I could do," Susan said gravely.

"At least, uh, come to me before you do anything rash," he said. "Perhaps we could come to some agreement about the place."

"I'll warn you before I begin my assault, so that all innocent lives may be taken from the place. At that time you can try to persuade me to call it off, but your argument had better be a good one. I suggest starting work on it now."

"She's really-" Albus nodded to him. "Very well, I will."

"Excellent!" said Susan brightly. "I'm glad we had this talk!"

"Yes. Glad." He left in a daze.

Ginny and Rubeus left, leaving just Ron, Harry, and Susan.

"Now we come to the issue of the ring," said Albus, bringing it out again. "This venom seemed to work well on the book, but how can you be sure it will work on the ring, as well?"

"I don't," she answered. "But it won't hurt to try, will it?"

"I suppose not, I've tried many things myself."

"Then everyone stand well back."

First, Susan put on some dragon-hide gloves and opened her *Pocket Dimension*. She looked through and saw the barrel was intact, so carefully reached through and grabbed it out. Setting it down, she worked off the lid, then let any drops of the stuff on the underside drip off. She set it down on another piece of dragon-hide and grabbed Felton's Blade.

"Can I ask exactly what you have in mind?" said Albus as she stood far away from barrel.

"Certainly. This blade has been *Fabricated* so it regenerates itself. Normally it wouldn't even matter because only magical things could hurt it. But this venom is magically active, I sensed that down in the chamber. I'm going to stick the sword in and let it get a little dissolved. The blade will of course reform, so I'm hoping some venom will get absorbed into the blade as it regenerates. Then we can safely swing it about without venom splashing everywhere. I then chop the ring in half, destroying it, and the piece of soul trapped inside."

"You're solidifying and weaponizing Basilisk venom?"

"That's the plan." Susan stuck the blade into the barrel, part way up, and it started hissing and releasing a foul smelling cloud. "Oh yeah, that's the stuff."

She left it a moment, then pulled it free, venom dripping from it. She then carefully inverted the blade, and started spinning it, so the drips traveled down the rest of the blade towards the hilt, but didn't shake off. It took some careful doing and some energy put into MANipulation, but she pulled it off, and soon the blade was shining and new looking again. However, now it had a spidery green pattern running throughout the length. Susan carefully capped the barrel off and stuck it back in her *Pocket Dimension*, then admired her handiwork.

"Not bad, not bad at all," she remarked. "But will it blend?"

She walked over to the ring, and set it down in the floor. It began to vibrate, and a piercing sound could be heard coming from it. "Oh, scared?" asked Susan, taking *Aim* at the ring with the point of her sword. "You should be. You did things the wrong way, and now I have to clean up your mistakes. But don't worry, I'll see at least that much of what you wanted done."

Putting energy into STrength she plunged the blade down, through the center of the ring, and chopping it into two pieces. Again the magic flared around the object as the soul inside dissipated, and was gone.

“Two down, some number not yet known to go,” she said, taking the gloves off. She set the sword back on the shelf where it lived, and put the gloves down on Albus’ desk. “Any other impossible tasks you’d like done before lunch?” she joked.

“I must caution you,” said Albus, looking seriously at Susan. “If it truly was his desire to see Azkaban destroyed, for its own sake, and not just to release the Dementors themselves, you are starting upon the same path. Was it his research that led him further and further down that path of darkness, as he sought to destroy them as you claim to wish to? Or was that darkness inside him, and his words only a justification to himself for the power he had in the end? Always keep that in mind, Susan. It is the choices we make with the power we have that define us. There is one critical difference between you and him- you get people to like you by doing good for them. Sometimes without them even knowing. His way was manipulation and blackmail. Make sure the one doesn’t become the other.”

Susan nodded. “I understand. You’re afraid I might become an even more terrible Dark Lady than he was, given what my magic can do.”

“I admit the thought had crossed my mind, seeing you make demands of the Minister like that.”

“I know how you feel. On my father’s world there were all kinds of wizards like me. And cyborgs, and dragons and fairies and probably other stuff he never told my mother about. But the point is they were equal- if someone went bad, there was someone just as powerful on the side of good that could deal with them. Here, well, you know. But I’m one of the good guys, just like my father. When I hear about a place like Azkaban I think ‘what would my father do?’ It is his memory that drives me, and the stories he left with my mother that inspire me. Saving whole worlds, putting right what once went wrong. So please, don’t let it trouble you.”

“Very well. I hope, one day, that I do not have to remind you of those words you have just spoken. Now, there’s a thing or two I would like to talk to Harry about, if you don’t mind.”

“Of course! I’ll see you later, Harry. And thanks for the help down there. Knowing you were at my side made it easier.”

And so Dobby was freed by Harry’s quick thinking after Susan left, and a week later Susan helped chop up Mandrake. (Being immune to their cries made her ideal) With Severus creating the potion and Susan administering it to Nick, all the victims of the Basilisk were restored. It was discovered why they were not all killed outright, and Susan did more poking around the site of the first attack, finally figuring out the crack in the ceiling was where the eyes of the Basilisk had shone down, catching Mrs. Norris. The words in the hall faded away, and everyone was glad to finally have normal life back at the castle.

Well, everyone but Draco, who stared more hatefully at Susan when he saw her.

But she did have that three point *Enemy* weakness to worry about, didn’t she?