

"Getting them out of the house was a trial," remarked Harry to the others, sitting around the living room the first night they were there. "They wanted an explanation as to why they had to go into hiding at all, and I couldn't give them one. Especially because it didn't seem like Susan's mother was being forced out."

"Yeah, well, my house is protected. I would have done theirs, but, you know, magic being all evil or whatever."

"It does seem odd," said Hermione. "I mean, the Death Eaters are locked up, Tom is strutting around the ministry like he owns the place—"

"He probably does," muttered Ron.

"Still, he doesn't have to go on about it, does he? No one cares about a couple of non-magical people who are hardly related to Harry anyway."

"At least getting here was easy enough, thanks to Susan. As always." He gave a mock bow.

Susan gave a little bow back. "But of course, sir. No tedious rushing about trying to hide you. What would they have done, anyway?"

"I think," said Arthur, leaning against the back of a sofa, "some sort of plan involving polyjuice to make half a dozen copies of Harry so anyone watching the house wouldn't know which one he was."

"Yeah, because Tom wouldn't just order anyone that came out of that house killed, because he's considerate enough to prevent any collateral damage or unneeded death," said Susan.

"Yes, your way was much easier."

"By the way," Susan got out the map. "Would you say these locations are the castle," she pointed, "And Diagon Alley?"

Arthur looked it over. "I would say that was a reasonable approximation, yes. Why?"

"The bank," said Harry. "I bet he put it in a vault someplace. It's the only location there secure enough."

The others nodded.

"We need to head there, probably in the morning, and take care of something. Plus back to the castle, I guess."

"You're leaving again?" asked Molly, coming into the room. "You all just got here."

"Just for a day. Probably only the morning, really. We're taking out the last pieces of Tom's immortality."

"It couldn't- wait, what are you doing?"

"Tom put pieces of his soul into objects, that's how he came back. These are where he hid the last two pieces. We need to find them, and destroy them."

"You don't have to do it immediately, though, do you? We're expecting hundreds of guests next week. I was counting on your help to get the house ready!"

"Uh, right, because having a clean house is much more important than making Tom vulnerable in case he tires of this little game and shows his true colors."

"You yourself said it shouldn't take long. You can wait until after the wedding, right? His

followers are imprisoned, and he's building up his reputation as a nice guy. He's not going to throw that away so soon, right?"

The four looked at each other. "Funny," said Harry, "I seemed to be making that same argument just recently."

"That is funny," said Susan. "Very well, it can wait I suppose. But if he slaughters his way through the ministry before then, I'm holding you responsible for it."

"Everything will be fine, dear. Now why don't you all go up to bed, we're starting early tomorrow." She breezed out of the room.

"Does she actually understand exactly what I'm talking about here?" Susan asked Arthur.

"I'm not sure. You did put *Immunity* on her before, right? In case I used *Imperio* and was ordered to forget about it?" Susan nodded. "Okay. The wedding is less than a week away, do you mind terribly just waiting?"

"We could put *Tirelessness* on everyone and go tonight if we really wanted to," suggested Sparkle. "We don't actually need sleep every night."

"No," said Susan. "We'll wait. What trouble can he get into in less than a week? And like she said, he's playing it straight at the moment. We could use a few days off."

"I guess," said Harry. "It does seem the thing to do, doesn't it?"

The others nodded.

"Better get to bed, then," said Arthur, straightening up. "See you all in the morning." He leaned over and whispered. "Personally, I'm glad I have to go to work. I'd prefer hanging around the same place as Tom rather than get in the way of my wife getting ready for a wedding." He winked and left the room.

The days passed quickly, as Molly put everyone to work around the house. Harry turned 17 and they had a small party for him. Nothing really important to the story happened, so it could be glossed over.

However, Susan's dread began to grow for some reason.

"It's just nerves about the wedding," said Hermione the night before.

"Why would I be nervous about it? I'm not the one getting married," protested Susan.

"No, something terrible is about to happen."

"You can't know that!"

"But she can infer it," said Sparkle. "Major events always coincide. I mean how many bad things have happened on holidays, or at the end of school, or going back to school... you get the picture. A bad buy wouldn't have something happen two days after a wedding, he would time things to take place during the wedding, for maximum impact. It's just how they work, consciously or unconsciously. It's a morphic field or something. You know 'it never rains but it pours?' Morphic field. Events happening at once through a sort of unconscious telepathy. Like how calculus was developed in two places simultaneously."

"I have read about the phenomenon, but those first Dementors that attacked us didn't coincide with anything."

"That wasn't a major villain, either. That was just a side plot. I'm not saying it always happens that way, I'm just saying events *tend* to happen that way."

"I guess. We better be ready for anything, then."

"Aren't we always?"

And so the wedding came off, with Susan relaxing by degrees as the afternoon wore on.

Krum was there, invited by Hermione, and they had a lot to catch up on. Luna and her father were around, and she and Susan danced a bunch. In fact, it was during a dance that the figures started to appear nearby. The music stopped as the man in charge sent fireworks up with his wand and called for silence.

“Where is Susan Felton?” he cried. “I know you’re here someplace!”

Oh great, who’s this bozo? Susan activated her charms of *Invulnerability* and *Barrier Against Spells* and worked her way through the crowd to stand before him. The Core and Sparkle went over to stand at her back.

“I’m Susan, what do you want with me?” she asked.

“Susan Felton, you are under arrest for the prison break which, only hours ago, emptied Azkaban!” There were gasps and shouts of “impossible” from the guests. He and the other two dozen witches and wizards with him pointed their wands at her. “Come quietly and no one need be hurt.”

She regarded him passively, looking over the odds. “You realize even this wouldn’t be enough to take me in if I didn’t want to go.”

“If you fight us, that’s proof enough of your guilt. The minister promises you a fair trial, under the new laws. Now please surrender yourself and come with me.”

Susan snorted. “You say only hours ago, but all these people here will attest I haven’t left this area all day. How was I supposed to have organized a mass breakout in front of all these people?”

Everyone at the wedding cried this was true, they had all seen her. He called for silence again.

“All I know is, two hours ago a hole in the air opened up, which eye witnesses say is the same type you used to arrive at Azkaban before. Only this time it opened up on the inside. Somehow, the Death Eaters got hold of wands and battled their way through the prison, freeing everyone within and escaping through this hole. As replacements for the Dementors had not yet arrived, there were few guards and they were quickly overpowered. As you are the only one that can produce such magic, naturally you are the number one suspect.”

Got hold of wands? Somatic Sword! I should have checked them, it was all a ruse! I’m an idiot! But why didn’t they have- of course, get me to take the guards away, tell the minister not to assign more, and I take the fall. Clever boy.

“And what was your new buddy Tom doing at this time, might I ask?”

“That is not your concern. Are you coming or not?”

The Core suddenly had wands in hand, but Susan held up a hand, making them wait.

“Well?” asked Susan, looking down at Sparkle.

“We’ve got things to do,” said Sparkle. “And with Tom in charge, your fair trial won’t be all that fair. Plus, there’s no way to prove he has your magic, especially when all the jurors will be against you. They don’t have *Magic Sense* like you do, after all.”

“You heard her,” said Susan, “I’ve got stuff to do. So I’m afraid I won’t be able to come with you. Sorry about that.”

“So am I,” said the man, casting. Sunning spells bounced off her as wedding guests scattered, failing RESolve checks to participate in combat with no real rating in *Magic Combat*. *It isn’t their fight in any case.* Susan calmly took her time casting *Hypnotic Field* as they vainly tried to take her down. With max energy put in she got a 25, far higher than anyone there would resist, as even having an 8 REAson wouldn’t be enough, rolling maximum. It was also 34 meters in diameter, so even the guests stared at it, slack jawed. Susan moved towards the men.

“I could take your wands,” she said, demonstrating by plucking the wand out of the leader’s hand. “And leave you helpless. But you see, I’m innocent, and I plan to prove it. But I can’t do that from inside a jail cell.” She slipped the wand into his ear. “So here’s the deal. I’m leaving, and you’re going to leave, okay? None of them have anything to do with this, and it’s me Tom wants out of the way anyway. If you harass them in any way, I will know. And I will return, and I will not be so... calm. You cannot beat me, that much should be clear to you. I have to come back here because of you, and I will do something much more terrible to you than just snapping your wand in half. I promise. Keep it in mind.” In fact, just as added insurance... She went and plucked all the wands out of the hands of the ‘officers’ and bundled them up. She stuffed the bundle in Arthur’s pocket. “Just so you don’t get any ideas,” she said, walking back over to the man. “You can get them back from Arthur once he’s satisfied everyone else is gone.”

Harry, the only one apart from her not caught by the spell, had meanwhile been apologizing to the frozen guests and reassuring them everything would be fine. With Susan turning away from the ministry people, he came back over.

“Now what?”

“Now we head out. I’ll cover Hermione’s eyes, you get Ron. We’ll walk them over there and start our mission. Just a second though, I want to say goodbye to Luna.”

“Got it.”

She walked over to Luna. “Sorry you can’t come,” said Susan. “But anyone I leave here with will probably become a wanted person. And you know what we have to do. It’s safer if you stay. I’ll see you soon, okay?” She kissed Luna’s cheek and sadly turned away, walking over to Hermione.

“I have to keep your eyes covered or you’ll just get caught again,” she said, picking up the unresisting Sparkle. “Just walk forward and I’ll lead you.” She covered Hermione’s eyes. “Anything you need to get?”

“No, it’s all in the *Pocket Dimension*.”

“Great. A little to the left now, that’s it.”

Once outside the field, Susan opened a *Teleportal* to the Headmaster’s office, and they all climbed through.

“Why here first?” asked Harry.

“We’ll need the sword. I was going to just *Retrieval* it, but as we’re coming here anyway...”

“Good point.”

She closed that *Teleportal* and opened another in front of her, with the other high in the air back at The Burrows. She felt a pull coming from it.

“Huh, never done that before. It actually transmits the gravity field. Weird.”

“Now what are you doing?” asked Hermione.

“Making sure they leave.” She dropped the *Field* and everyone became animated again. The ‘officers’ there looked around for Susan, but they didn’t harass anyone, got their wands back, and disappeared again. The Wesley’s looked worried, and the wedding party began to break up after that.

“I’ll have to apologize to Bill and Fleur later,” she remarked, shutting the *Teleportal* down. “Guess you were right, Sparkle.”

“Naturally.”

“Do you think it’s true, what he said,” asked Ron, nervously. “That everyone broke out of

Azkaban?”

“If he wanted to frame me, I see that as an excellent way to go about it. Force me to show them what I can do, then do the same thing to break them out. The whole wizard world is going to be against me, I’m afraid.”

“Not for long,” said Harry. “We’ll clear your name, don’t worry.”

“Who’s worried? Right now I’m just angry.” She grabbed the sword. “Come on, we have *Soul Shards* to destroy.”

Susan got out the locket and her *Soul Find* spell, casting it from writings. The locket tugged. “Let’s see where it leads!”

They followed the tugging of the chain through the castle, and stopped before a tall statue of a serene looking lady. When Susan walked to one side of it, it tugged back, always pointing to the statue.

“You think it’s the statue?” asked Ron.

Ugh, of course it’s the statue. That Question spell I cast all those months ago. Something about it sitting upon her head, stone statue seek instead? Obvious now, of course. And duh, it didn’t mean a black elf, it meant an elf owned by a Black- Sirius Black. I bet the last is in a vault, maybe the Lestrangle’s vault?

“He couldn’t have killed someone in the corridor here,” said Hermione. “It must be hidden inside or something.”

“The tugging seems to be upward a little,” said Susan, moving it this way and that. *I better act dumb about it, telling them I had the answer all along will make me look really stupid.*

“What are you doing here?” said a voice, and they all jumped. A ghost came gliding down the hallway towards them.

“Looking for something,” said Harry. “Don’t worry, we’ll be gone in a minute.”

“Hermione? Susan?” asked the ghost.

“Hello Helena,” said Susan. “Don’t suppose you could tell me anything about this statue?”

“It’s my mother,” she replied.

“Really?” Susan looked back at it. “Wait a minute, isn’t this the founder of Ravenclaw house? Your name is Helena Ravenclaw?”

“That’s correct.”

“I never knew. Sorry about that.”

“I do not make it widely known. I ask again, what are you doing to my mother’s statue?”

“We think it holds a piece of Tom’s soul,” explained Hermione. “We were trying to figure out how.”

“Impossible!” said Helena. “Why would my mother’s statue house such a filthy thing?”

“Tom loved the school, and there is precedent.” She held up the locket, which was still twitching in her hand. “This belonged to Slytherin himself, and it houses a piece of soul. That’s how we tracked it here. I hate to destroy the whole statue though...” She nodded to Ron, who was holding the sword, and he raised it.

“Wait!” shouted Helena. “I think I know what it is you seek.”

“Yes?” Ron lowered the blade.

“When Tom was in school, he often spoke to me about my mother’s diadem. He seemed more interested in it than the usual student just wanting it for themselves. Eventually he... got me to tell him where I had hidden it.”

“What’s a diadem?” asked Ron.

“Call it a tiara,” answered Hermione.

“Oh.”

“You don’t think he brought it back here and hid it in plain sight, do you?” asked Harry, looking up at the top of the statue.

“Yes, I think that’s exactly what he did,” said Susan. “Good news, I think we can do this without damaging the statue at all.”

“Thank you,” said Helena. “But I still don’t understand.”

“You will. *Sculpt.*”

The head of the statue flowed, and from under the stone emerged a circlet of gold, which clattered to the floor. The statue reformed.

“Wow,” said Harry. “Thousands have walked passed it, never knowing.”

“A clever hiding place,” said Hermione. “Who would have thought to look there?”

“Yes,” said Harry. “Imagine if there was some weird room in the castle, and he thought he was the only one to find it, despite the evidence of hundreds of other students finding it and hiding stuff there. And he hid it in that room and forced us to look by eyeballs while the castle was under attack and there was a big fire and I had to dramatically save Draco life’s which led me and him to realize our-” He finally put his hands over his mouth. The others were staring at him.

“Uh, not thought about it at all, have you?” asked Ron, edging away from him.

“No!” said Harry, looking to see if he was believed. “I like... Ginny. Stupid- Stupid Draco and his brooding eyes, and his bad boy attitude. It just seemed like that’s what would have happened, you know, without Susan here. Just destroy it already and let’s get a move on.”

“Yeah, no one said anything about you... anyway” said Ron, reversing the sword and handing it to Hermione. “Here. It’s your house. You do it.”

Hermione tore her eyes away and reached for the blade, taking it and chopping the diadem in half. It seemed to scream and energy crackled around it as the *Soul Shard* left it. Then it lay still again.

“That’s that,” she said, shouldering the sword. “Only one more to go. Thanks for your help, Helena.”

“Thank you for respecting my mother’s statue. I feel like some great stain on my past has just been lifted. See you all next year?”

They all nodded, and she drifted away.

Hermione gathered the two pieces of the diadem and put them in her *Pocket Dimension* as per Susan’s previous orders to keep them around.

“Okay, we’ll start with the vaults. If it’s not there we’ll have to disguise ourselves, as you guys are known to hang around me. If someone sees you, they’ll know I’m probably nearby. At the very least you’ll be stopped, and it’s such a hassle casting that spell.”

“Would they have moved that fast?” asked Hermione.

“Sure. He had this planned to the minute, that’s how it’s all come off so well for him. We can’t take any chances.”

“I guess you’re right.”

So Susan put *Flight* on everyone, and opened another *Teleportal* into the bank vaults. She chose the center of the shaft, and they all flew through and hung in the air while Susan felt the tugging on the locket.

“This way.”

Susan *Phased* them through the proper vault door, and the others lit their wands and looked around.

“It’s tugging up that way.”

“There is some sweet treasure in here,” said Ron, picking up what looked like a solid gold figurine of a woman. “Ow, it burned me!”

The figurine flew from his hands and clattered to the floor, and suddenly there were two.

“Sweet! One to sell and one to-” There were four. “Never mind.” There were eight.

“Here’s an idea,” said Susan, looking back at him. “*Don’t touch anything else.*”

“Okay, I get the point.”

They turned to continue looking but the statue kept multiplying.

“Uh, it’s going to start hitting stuff soon,” said Hermione, as a copy smacked into a pile of coins and send them scattering. They started multiplying as well.

“Oh, honestly, I can’t take you people anywhere,” said Susan. She got out her *Dead Magic* writings and cast an area around the now dangerously close burning treasure. It vanished and the original items reappeared. “If you think we can get through without any further incidents?” she said, folding the papers and tucking them into her pocket, in case she needed them again.

“Sorry.”

The vault was pretty big, but not that big, and the chain tugged them to a solitary cup with a badger on it.

“Must have been some kind of award or something,” remarked Harry. “You couldn’t drink out of it. It’s got two handles.”

“It’s going to be in two pieces in a minute,” said Susan. “Who hasn’t done one? Ron? You’re up.”

“Hard to get a good angle on it,” he said, moving the sword this way and that. They were, of course, all still flying.

“Hook it around the handle with the sword and put it on the floor then,” said Hermione. “Then just stab it down the middle.”

“Good thinking.”

He did.

Hermione picked up the mangled cup and stored it away, then looked at Susan.

She was grinning.

“Ladies and gentleman, I think we’ve done it. The chain is slack, it does not pull.”

“So it’s the last?” asked Harry. “We figured we would find two in one place!”

“I know, it is odd. Tell you what, the spell works on distance, maybe he hid it in another country or something. I’ll cast it again, and use max energy and time. That should show if it’s on the moon or somewhere else bizarre we haven’t considered. If not, we take it to see Kreacher and I send our buddy Tom a little thank you gift for framing me.”

So Susan read out the spell again, and put energy in, and still the locket did not tug.

“Sweet. We’re out of here.”

Susan opened a *Teleportal* to Sirius’ house, and they went though.

“There you guys are,” said Sirius, coming out of the kitchen. “Have you heard the news?”

“That I helped hundreds of criminals escape prison? Yes, we’ve heard.”

“They’ve been broadcasting nothing else on the *Wireless* since the breakout. You’re all wanted for questioning.”

“Yup, the Susan gang. With Harry ‘Two Face’ Potter, Ron ‘The Ginger’ Weasley and Hermione ‘The Brain’ Granger. Also armed and dangerous, her cat!” Susan laughed.

“It’s no laughing matter!”

“Ah, you have to laugh,” said Susan, waving a hand. “Anyway, is Kreacher around? We have a promise to keep.”

“I’ll find him,” said Hermione.

“Why do I have to be two face?” asked Harry.

“It just seemed to fit, I don’t know. Would you prefer Harry ‘Snake Charmer’ Potter?”

“Anything but two face!”

Hermione came back, the elf in tow. “You have good news for Kreacher?”

“We sure do. This is the last one, and as promised, it’s yours to destroy. Hermione, present the sword.”

Hermione handed it over, and Susan put the locket down on the floor.

“You really destroyed all pieces of Tom’s soul but the one in there?” asked Sirius.

“According to my magic, there isn’t another piece of soul separated from his body anywhere in the world. Unless one of you has been carrying one around and not telling me, the spell wouldn’t have picked up on it, because it was so close by.” She glared at her friends, who grinned. “Yeah, didn’t think so. Chop, chop!”

“It’s so small,” said Kreacher. “Kreacher does not want to bring the blade down and have it shoot away. But oddly Kreacher seems to know everything there is to know about swordplay.”

“That’s because of the enchantment I put on the sword. Wands out, hold it in place with magic,” Susan suggested, and everyone pointed their wands at it, doing just that.

“Very well.” Kreacher delivered a mighty blow, and chopped the thing in two, making it scream and die as well.

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

“Now for the fun part,” said Susan. “Hermione, get them all out, and Sirius, do you have a small box I could use? I have a gift to wrap.”

Susan got out a piece of paper from the study, and sat down to write.

Dear Tom,

I am writing to congratulate you on your masterstroke of framing me for the breakout. Also a nod to Lucius, who really seemed annoyed you had betrayed him. Of course, maybe he thought you had, and were just letting them know who was in charge before rescuing them? Whatever. The point is, your takeover of the ministry was flawless, and you got me on the run. Well played. But I’ve been playing too, and I just finished up, so

*thought I would share my results with you
in the form of this little gift. It should be a nice
trip down memory lane for you, I think.
Be seeing you soon!*

Susan

Susan then placed his note of “Endgame, I win” in the bottom of the box, and piled the now destroyed *Soul Shard* carriers atop it. She taped it, wrapped it up in some old wrapping paper Sirius found in the attic, and taped the note to the top. She cast *Send Object* and it vanished.

She couldn't stop laughing for a half hour after that.

Dream Sequence

Time: Half an hour later

Place: Sirius' living room

"So now what?" asked Harry, after Susan had finally calmed down. Her sides were aching from laughing, and she had to go into another room for quite awhile because everyone looking like she had lost her mind just set her off again.

"That's a good question," said Susan. "We've gone from not knowing Where in the World is Tommy Sandiego, to knowing exactly where he is. The ministry building."

"Doesn't that make things easier, though?" asked Ron. "You can just snap your fingers and get him here."

"I could try, sure. But he no doubt has *Barrier Against Spells* going, as we saw that time in the cave. That means I can't yank him here with magic."

"Not in the living room, in either case!" protested Sirius. "If you're going to do a wizard battle royal go out into the mountains or something. To say nothing of breaking the secrecy charms if you, uh, lose." The others glared at him. "I mean it has to be said."

Susan chuckled. "As we would no doubt both be running *Barrier* or *Immunity* that might be an interesting battle. But no, I know how he's going down, and it's going to be nice and quick and easy. The problem with getting to that state is manifold."

"I can think of a few issues," said Hermione. "Like if he does just up and disappear, there's going to be an outcry. Everyone thinks he's the hero, and you'll be to blame, just like with the prison!"

"Right. Plus he may have passed control to other Death Eaters by now, so that if he does get taken out, they can still campaign against me."

"He might not even be at the ministry building," said Harry. "You did that avatar thing, right? Walking around as mud while laying in bed at home?"

"Yup. Look, I'll just do a *Descry Creature*. If I get a result, I can probably yank him here. If not, he's protected and we'll need to think of something else."

"Sounds good to me," said Sparkle. "Even with your plan, we'll have to control very carefully where and when we engage him in combat. Remember, he's you, magic wise."

"Yes, thanks for reminding me," said Susan sarcastically. She got out her spell and started casting it.

And got nothing in the end.

"Figures. He's too smart for that."

"So then, what?" asked Harry.

"He's not going to fall for the old 'hey you want a peek at my spell-book?' gag again."

"Could we offer him something else he would appear in person for?" asked Hermione.

"Like what?" asked Ron. "Signed photos of Lockhart? Maybe if we hadn't destroyed the locket but sent him a picture of it or something, he might have tried to get it back from us."

"I guess. But that would have been risky too, keeping it around, I mean. He might have been able to come up with a spell to transfer the *Shard* long distance into something else. Or spy on us through it or cast magic through it to kill us, the possibilities are endless."

"Wish I could have seen the look on his face when he opened that box," said Harry.

“Don’t, you’ll set her off again!” said Hermione, exasperated.

“No, I can’t laugh anymore, it hurts too much,” said Susan, holding her sides. “Besides, I am in control.” She put her three fingers together like a meditating guru.

“Could have fooled me,” Hermione muttered.

“Some kind of challenge then?” asked Ron. “Call him out? He wouldn’t risk using your magic, that would give him away and prove your innocence!”

“He would never do it,” answered Susan. “Why would he? I wouldn’t, in his position. He gets the ministry to keep me busy while he puts his other plans into action. He doesn’t need to do more, because he’s won.”

“You don’t believe that!” said Hermione.

“It’s true. For the moment, at least, he has everything he wanted. Apart from me being out of the way permanently, that is. He can pass all the laws he wants, research more magic in his spare time, even start taking over magic governments in other countries once his power base here is secure.”

“You almost sound pleased,” said Harry, “Which worries me a bit.”

“I’m just recognizing his foresight. He’s done a marvelous job of backing me into a corner. I admit, I wasn’t thinking like that at school, so it caught me by surprise. It’s the mistake I make when playing chess, Ron can attest to it. I get caught up in trying to take out the opponents’ pieces I forget the goal of the game- take out the king. Then I, uh, lose.”

“And now he’s maneuvered you into check,” said Ron.

“Sad but true. I guess I just have to figure out which of you to sacrifice in order to get him in check, instead.”

Hermione’s face hardened. Ron just look grim. Harry nodded. “I know I would sacrifice myself if it guaranteed you a shot at him.”

“Harry!” said Hermione, shocked. “You can’t be serious.”

“No? Are you saying those kids at school died for nothing? That everything Susan has worked for and done, cured people, helped people, made magical objects for the school; all that means less than your life? That you wouldn’t happily be taken off the board if it meant we won?”

“That isn’t... I mean obviously... what I’m saying...”

“Now, now,” said Sirius. “You guys have had a long day, I’m thinking. It’s late. You’ve all gotten a shock today and you need time to process it. Get some sleep, and maybe you’ll have some ideas in the morning.”

“Sounds good to me,” said Ron, standing and stretching. “I can play chess all you want, but start speaking in chess *metaphor* and the conversation is over. See you all tomorrow!”

“You can stay here as long as you want,” Sirius said to Susan as she got up. “This is still the Order headquarters, and no one that comes here will turn you in, I know that.”

“Thanks. But we can’t just sit around. Somehow we have to go on the offensive. Keep him off balance for once. The destruction of this *Soul Shards* will have shaken him, we need to capitalize on that.”

“I hope you can. Good night.”

“Night.”

Susan opened her eyes and saw Tom standing before her. She glanced around, looking at the spooky forest and full moon above. Owls hooted and dead wood swayed in the breeze, as Tom silently regarded her from the other end of the dirt crossroads they were standing at. He had his arms folded, and his shadow seemed to move and twist in the moonlight, reaching for hers

like a separate creature.

“Tom!” exclaimed Susan at last, throwing her arms wide as though to embrace him. “How lovely to see you again! And such a wonderful location you’ve chosen for us.” She clasped her hands. “Tell me, did you enjoy your gift? Oh say that you did, Tom. I would simply *die* if it wasn’t well received.” She was smiling at him.

“How?” he asked simply.

“It’s a gripping tale, but simply enough told. I met you first through a man named Quirinus Quirrell, who had sought out your power and skill for himself. He was possessed by the ring, and we managed to save him. Albus had his doubts, but took the ring for safekeeping. We next met you in the diary, thanks to your good friend and faithful servant, Lucius. That version of you tried to possess a friend of mine. We saved her as well, in case you’re wondering. That’s when we learned how to destroy them. I then made it easier to use and destroyed the ring. But our tale doesn’t stop there, oh no. Figuring you had made more but with no easy means to find them, we waited. Sadly, Albus didn’t tell me you could use the resurrection ritual, and steal my power to boot, I had to find that out for myself. Which I did, when we met a third time. Albus still didn’t seem that concerned. Despite the many hours I spent in his office making stuff for the school, he never pressed me to search out any other pieces of your soul in order to destroy them. You didn’t make trouble for anyone, most likely researching my magic, and so as time passed I still did nothing. Then just this year Albus decided you were a threat and started showing us your past. We learned you wanted to make seven of those objects and we realized we had one, courtesy of an elf.”

“He survived!?” Tom asked, finally breaking into her monologue.

“Of course, he had been ordered to. Once I had a sample to work with that was not actively trying to kill me, I created a spell to hunt down the others. Which I did in a single morning, once I realized you had to be stopped.”

“But do I?” asked Tom honestly. “You would still place your trust in that Headmaster of yours, who you actively admit didn’t tell you anything and in fact actively kept knowledge from you? If he had pressed you earlier into destroying my Horcrux perhaps I wouldn’t even have been able to resurrect myself, using a piece I directed Peter to retrieve. Has he even now told you of your prophesy?”

“No, he hasn’t. And no, I don’t trust him very far, actually. But this is about you- You sent those Bogey and Evolved Bogey into the school! Do you know how many lives they took? How much damage was done?”

“I did that? Odd, are you sure? You have proof of it?”

“I have proof you were studying them.”

“And that’s enough for you, is it?”

Susan growled.

“I thought so. However, let us point to the things I have done, and that are provable. A bloodless takeover of the ministry. New laws that reward families with lots of new wizard kids. Women lining up outside my door to have my babies. Incidentally,” he lowered his voice. “There’s just so many, if I didn’t turn 90% of them away I wouldn’t have time to do anything else! It’s made all those years of being, well, dead, almost worth it.”

So wait, is he saying he’s letting 10% of them- “Ugh. Really? You’re bragging about that now?”

He shrugged. “Just catching you up on my latest ‘exploits’ as I’m sure you call them. Is my reign really so terrible, thus far?”

“Not yet, but I see where it’s going. You want an army of *Natural Magicians* all loyal to you.”

“The thought had crossed my mind, of course. But maybe I’m just making up for lost time, and that whole ‘twelve kids’ thing was just for the show.”

“You don’t seem the type.”

“At least I’m enjoying myself. What is your precious Albus doing, huh? Sitting up in his office, not using his power or skill to really help the world or others. What laws has he passed? Did he march you up to the walls of Azkaban so you could destroy that race of foul creatures? No?”

“You did that just so everyone could escape from there! Which I’m actually curious about, now that you mention it. Are they still your followers? I mean, wasn’t their whole shtick blood purity and making sure wizards didn’t dilute the bloodlines by marrying non-magical people? Seems you’ve done an about face on that one. Or was that just an act?”

“No act. I must admit, it took some convincing, but most of the old Death Eaters came around to my way of thinking. After all, we both know the ability to use magic is just a *background*. Sure, the people here don’t have character sheets, but the evidence is clear. You’re a magic user or you aren’t. Those that wouldn’t get behind the new ideals no longer have any place in my organization, and were thrown out.”

“So you’re the good guy now, is that it? In charge of the new, kinder, gentler Death Eater group?”

“The perception of me is, and isn’t that’s what counts?”

“I have a slightly different perception. Born of you, killing a homeless man in cold blood to make the locket!”

“Oh, him. Tell me, what was his worth? Was he contributing to society? Writing epic poems or creating works of art? No, I think not. He was just a parasite, taking and taking and giving nothing in return. People should have a purpose, don’t you agree?”

“It’s not that simple.”

“No? What about your friends? You have Hermione, able spell-caster on her own. Probably would have been the same without you around. She’s just that exceptional.” He produced a notebook and quill out of thin air. “Note to self- offer Hermione job at ministry when she graduates.” They both disappeared again. “Ron, ah, a classic case- nearly worthless until you came along and pushed him into exceeding himself, and now from all accounts has fused martial arts and magic. And Harry, who would have been the one to face me, had you not been here. Because of me he would have ascended heights he would normally not have dreamed of, to survive. With you he’s become an excellent potion maker, decent at wand work, cool in a crisis; in short, he has a bright future ahead of him in any number of disciplines. None of the people you associate with are simply average, now are they? Even Luna has practiced far more than she would have, had you not been around to impress. You make them worthy or you drop them- consider Myrtle. She changed as much as she could, for a ghost, but that wasn’t enough for you, was it? No, you went running to the living girl as soon as she said it was over between you. You didn’t plead, you didn’t try to change.”

“That’s not the way I do things. She said she wasn’t interested in girls, that was the end of it.”

“You fool! Learn a shape-shift spell and approach her as a man! Your cat already knows it, but if you didn’t want her asking questions you could have spent the XP for it yourself.”

“You- You-” Susan sputtered. *How has this conversation gotten away from me?* “That

wouldn't be right. How do you know all this, anyway?"

"Wouldn't be right," said Tom, shaking his head. "To remove the one objection she had from loving you? Really? Something as easily 'fixed' as the shape of your body? It occurs to me she wasn't special enough for you, in the end, and you went on to find someone a little closer to some perceived ideal. But once Luna disappoints you the same way, it'll be bye-bye to the moon, as you go seeking the sun." He shook his head and clicked his tongue.

"I would never just walk away from her like that!"

Tom laughed. "So certain are you? I wonder. As for how I know, haven't you ever heard the phrase 'know thy enemy as you know thyself?' Isn't that what your Headmaster was trying to do for you? I have my ways."

"What do you know about it, anyway? You don't have friends, you have followers."

"Yes, they revere me because I am better than they are. This is how it should be. You lower yourself to associate with your so called friends. We are at the top, Susan, as it should be! They are allowed to be near us because they have proven their worth. It's no different for you. Back to this beggar, he not only had no magic, but was worthless even by Muggle standards. He had no prospects for a better tomorrow, so I did him a favor even as he did me one."

"What favor?"

"Why, I'm surprised you have to ask. Freeing his soul, of course. What do you think the death curse does, that it produces no mark upon the body? You and I both know souls exist, you spent some time destroying bits of mine. I haven't forgiven you that, by the way. Logically then, if souls exist then an afterlife must exist. Why should that man spend another twenty years on this earth in pain and misery, only to die horribly? And he would have died, make no mistake. Only we special few will ever attain immortality. Now his soul is free to go where it will, without all that tedious in-between times, which would only have caused him pain."

"But you can't just go around killing people because their soul exists! Maybe it just disappears."

Tom looked at her carefully. "You really haven't been further than the astral or purgatory, have you?"

"I... no." She looked down at her feet.

"I see. No wonder. May I ask why?"

"I was... afraid. Afraid of what I might find. That the next plane over in either dimension... might be empty."

"Indeed, both would be rather troubling. The truth is humans make other humans suffer much longer than they would, say, a favorite pet. A pet gets too old and is in pain, it is quickly and easily put to death. Not so with humans. And what of those born with terrible birth defects, like missing brains or addicted to chemicals through their mothers? They will either never have a thought in their minds, ever, and force others to care for them their entire existence, or be in agony their entire, short, lives. Would it not be a greater kindness to simply release those souls to journey on?"

"You can't... It just isn't done... Life..."

"I can see you are considering my words. But we have stayed far from what I wanted to talk to you about."

"Which is?"

"Where do we go from here? I was, of course, furious when I discovered my defenses were broken. I wanted to fly to your location and simply destroy you. But I took a breath, and considered carefully what I wanted to do. With your magic I can just research other, less invasive

methods, of immortality. I hadn't bothered up to now, of course, believing my wanded measures to be adequate. I see now they were not, and as I have the time, I can now dedicate myself to once again becoming ageless."

"Until you do, even if you win by beating me, eventually you lose anyway."

"Perhaps. But then, you have not won either. Just walk into the ministry building and sweep aside all opposition. I'm sure if you were to go somewhere a large number of people were gathered, stun them all and drain them of energy, you could throw magic around almost wastefully and tear through any defense I or the ministry could bring to bear."

"Again, that's not how I do things."

"Obviously not. And that is why I'm in control and you are on the run."

"For the moment only. I can't allow you to remain in power, that much is clear."

"Why not? Have I not done good since my return?"

"Your ideals are a bit twisted."

"But still focused on giving those with the greatest chance of success, wizards and the able bodied Muggles, the greatest share of limited resources. Not even your magic could revitalize the sun, once its time is over. And immortal beings like us, or who can become immortal, I mean, must think about these things. Is giving food to a brain dead person, who will never have another thought in their lives, the best thing to do? You feel yes, I feel no. There's no right answer, is there, because it depends on what you're trying to achieve. You- Compassion. Me- Reality. Of course I will ease the public into the more 'radical' ideals, too soon and they would just reject such things out of hand. The boiling frog, and all that. But wizards will one day no longer have to hide themselves, and magic can take its place where it belongs. The proper step in human evolution. After all, it is a survival trait."

"And if a few lives are lost along the way, so be it?"

Tom laughed. "Lives are lost every day. You can't make everyone immortal. Why not lose the weakest of the herd, that the strongest have better chances? You are one of the strong... Even now you could join me."

"Is that what this is really about? Joining you?"

"Of course. I want to see you have kids, too. Spread your magic, let there be two branches, or people that can use both. Perhaps even better, greater forms will arise if you have kids with a wanded wizard. We don't know."

Susan shook her head. "I'm sorry. You have done some good, but only to desensitize people to the evil you'll spread later. You have to pay for the lives you've taken."

"I'm sorry you feel that way. If you do come to your senses, let me know. We could still resolve this peacefully."

"I don't think so."

"So you would try to kill me then?"

"Try?"

"Oh, you are that confident? Then let me ask this question: What gives you the right to kill me?"

"What do you mean? You've killed, you've taken over the ministry. You need to be stopped."

"I see. But you are not a judge, are you? Nor are you part of any trial, any jury. You wish to do to me what you believe I will one day do to others. Execute them unfairly. Or for petty reasons like 'they were unfit to live' and such."

"Oh, your death will be fair, I promise."

“But why you? Why not free the minister and have me arrested? Put me through a proper trial.”

“Too risky, you’ll have plans in place for that.”

“Ah, so only you have the *power* to do the job, is that what you’re saying?”

“Since you took my magic, yes.”

“Forget that for a moment. In the end it boils down to, you have the power, you get to make the rules, am I right?”

“No, it’s-”

“Yes? I’m waiting.”

“You forced my hand!”

“How so? I’m not trying to kill you. If I had, you would know it, believe me. You can’t claim self defense. Your only argument is that I’ve killed in the past, and that’s it. Killed those, I remind you, who had no place or purpose in society. Those who would have died anyway, sooner or later. Yes, I framed you, to get you out of the way, but you can live where you are or anywhere as far as I’m concerned. Just don’t get in my way and I’ll leave you alone.”

“Those people you killed might have been able to make something of themselves if given the chance!”

“Come now, we both know that’s not true. I just want you to think about it. Why does it fall to you to decide if I live or die? Are you really that special? If you decide I need to die, where does it end? Where do you draw the line? How far are you willing to go, Susan?”

“Just far enough, for you. I’ll worry about those that come after you when you’re gone.”

“Very well. I suppose when next we meet it will be to try and kill each other. Pity we couldn’t come to some sort of understanding. Our children would have been magnificent!”

Susan screamed “NO!” as the dream ended and she woke up.

She showered for an hour after that. Good thing there’s hot water charms, huh?

What To Do

Time: Just before Susan opens the bathroom door

Place: Sirius' house

"Are you okay?" asked Hermione as Susan opened the bathroom door. "You've been in there forever!"

"Oh, Hermione, you startled me. Do you need to use the bathroom? You could have come in, it wasn't locked."

"That's not the point. What were you doing in there?"

"Oh, just trying to wash away the mental image of Tom pounding away trying to get me pregnant."

Hermione's face twisted into a mask of horror. "What on Earth made you think of that?" she nearly screeched. "And what possessed you to share the image with me?"

"Sorry about that. You did ask. I was visited by Tom before I came in here and we had a little chat."

"What here? Seriously? We have to leave immediately! I'll wake the others!" She turned to run off, but Susan put a hand on her shoulder.

"Don't worry, it was a dream spell, not him being here physically. He still doesn't know where we are."

"Oh, thank goodness for that. So what did he say?"

"About what you would expect. Come on, let's at least sit down rather than standing here."

"Good point."

Susan and Hermione made their way to the living room, and Hermione lit a magical fire as Susan sat down.

"So what did he say?"

Susan relayed what Tom had talked about, and what she thought it meant.

"He thinks he's doing the world a favor, doesn't he? Bringing his vision for what the world should be to those too weak to make it happen."

"Something like that. The problem is how much sense he made. I mean, why should I go after the guy? Is it my destiny to be an executioner? If he's right, that the only reason it falls to me is because I have the power, then what he says is true. Those with the power make the laws."

"Of course they do. Well," she hedged, "usually people are given the power to make laws by the majority, but if you keep up with non-magical news that isn't so true any more."

"PRISM. The NSA."

"Exactly. The people in power just sort of ignored basic rights, due processes, the whole works. What gave them the right to do that?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, wait, which side was I arguing?"

Susan laughed ruefully. "You see? Not so clear cut, is it?"

"You really want to know the reason?" asked a voice from the stairs. A pair of glowing eyes floated out of the shadows, attached to a small cat. "I can tell you."

"Go on then," said Susan.

"It's because of what you are."

"A *Paragon*? But that doesn't mean anything. Everyone from my father's world would

call themselves a *Paragon*, just like they would call themselves human.”

“Ah, but certain ones had adventures, and certain ones were there to be flunkies, or evil doers, or just regular people. Someone has to pick up the garbage and such, right? Build the evil fortresses, run the power plants. Not everyone can be a hero or heroine. That’s up to the precious few that become something greater.”

“And that’s me?”

Sparkle nodded. “You headed the call. You could have walked away at the beginning. Refused to learn magic, or gone to a regular school in your neighborhood. The universe put obstacles in your path and you plowed through them. Now you’re stuck for it.”

She sighed. “I guess so. It’s the price I have to pay for being so powerful.”

“Right. If you hadn’t had adventures as you did, you wouldn’t have earned the XP you did. Without the XP you wouldn’t get better, or be able to learn more spells. Why do you think the majority of people are just average at everything? They don’t get the XP to become better than average. You did, so you have an obligation to see this through. The universe has expended resources and energy preparing you for that eventuality.”

“Is it really that simple?” asked Hermione.

“It is for us,” replied Sparkle, shrugging, which was an interesting maneuver for a cat.

“What would happen if she walked away?”

Sparkle considered. “Hard to say. Probably she would just sort of become irrelevant to the world. She would lose her friends, as they would go on with their adventures, while she did not. While her power wouldn’t diminish, she would never be able to get any more powerful.” *I can’t tell her that her story would end, and this world would then fade out of existence. With no story there’s no readers. With no readers we don’t even exist! She’s partially Awakened but not enough to understand that sort of thing. And with Hermione here, someone totally Unawakened, I can’t exactly speak freely. It took traveling with her father and many hours of him explaining how the universe worked to Awaken me. He said I should know the truth, but to be careful who I shared it with. Knowing you’re inside a story can drive some to madness, which is why it’s so rarely done. I’ve been hoping she would Awaken herself, I mean she uses cards for crying out loud- That’s as meta as it comes! I guess being the product of a Paragon and someone from this world she doesn’t see things quite as clearly as she would have being born on the Paragon world, like her father. Everyone is Awakened there. If she did she wouldn’t be asking “why me” as she would instinctively know. She’s the heroine of the story, it’s clear she has to fight and defeat the bad guy.*

“I’m not thinking about walking away,” Susan said, unaware Sparkle was having an inner monologue. which took no time, “just so we’re clear.”

“Of course,” said Hermione. “I wasn’t implying that you were.”

“Okay.”

“So Sparkle, what you’re saying is the universe has prepared Susan to do something about Tom, and so she’s obligated to. Just as Harry would have been, had Susan not been here, forcing Tom to take his blood rather than hers to reanimate.”

“Precisely. No moral ambiguity, no need for moping about, he’s the bad guy, go get him.”

“But is he? Did you hear what I was telling Hermione? He’s doing okay things now! I can’t condemn him for what he might do.”

“So condemn him for what he has done. Killing people. The first wizard war. Taking over the ministry without being voted into office. Having no fashion sense. Whatever.”

“Well, you’re a cat. If you see a mouse you don’t think about the moral implications of

taking a life, no matter how small. You just know it's time to eat."

"I think," said Hermione, "if I'm understanding this correctly, that you won't be able to avoid having some kind of showdown with Tom. Right, Sparkle? I mean you say the universe is preparing her, so won't the universe throw them together no matter what Susan tries to do?"

"The universe doesn't... play reverse match maker!" protested Susan.

Well, something is guiding your destiny, thought Sparkle. *Call it the universe if you want, it's much the same thing. Maybe Hermione's a little more Awakened than I thought.*

"Actually, that's not far from the truth," she replied. "You'll be drawn together. Call it fate, or him tying himself to your magic, or just the fact that you're both major powers in the world. Like gravity, you'll attract."

"Ugh, I'm getting images of kids again."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "In other words, everything has worked out thus far, why not see it to the end and forget the whys? You're only going to drive yourself nuts overthinking it. Tom isn't lying awake wondering what the right thing to do is. He just acts. I think you're going to have to do the same."

"Don't forget your three point *Enemy* weakness. You haven't bought that off, so it's going to force things too."

"Oh yeah! Should have just said that in the first place. Okay, you've all convinced me. No more questioning why me, I'll just let events play out. We'll have to think of some ideas in the next few days as to what our next move is going to be."

"Sounds good to me," said Sparkle. "See you in the morning."

"Thanks!" she shouted after her. "And you too, Hermione. Thanks for listening."

"Of course! What are friends for?"

"Wait, I know this one- meat shields, right?"

"Good night, Susan."

"Good night, Hermione."

The next day, the entire Order met to discuss their next moves, and Susan told them about the dream she had shared the night before with Tom.

"Pretty scary, thinking he can just reach into your head like that," said Remus.

"He can't do anything but taunt you," explained Susan. "I mean I suppose you could do some kind of dream combat but you'll just wake up in a few minutes anyway. What would be the point?"

"That aside," said Albus. "Given what he's said to you, and the laws he's put in place, what can we expect from him in the future? I'd like to hear your thoughts from your magic's perspective, rather than mine, which I already know."

"That much should be clear. He's going to lay low, and let the magical world generate an army for him with no work on his part. Well, perhaps a pleasant enough sort of work if women really are lining up to have his babies." She shuddered.

"But he could call up an army," protested Kingsley. "There's all kinds of creatures in the world that would follow him. Vampires, werewolves, no offense Remus."

"None taken. And actually I'm not sure they would join him at this point. They're more interested in Susan's method of suppressing the curse than they are with causing mayhem. Without going crazy, that condition could disappear in a generation or two."

"Well done," said Albus.

“Thanks.”

“The point is, he could just create an army of undead. Or round up more of those fear creatures like he did for the school attack!”

Susan shook her head. “You have to think like him. Wizards, for him, represent the pinnacle of what humans can do. He thinks us hiding ourselves and having small families is absurd. And he wants to prove it. To an extent, he’s right, but now isn’t the time to debate it. Raising a non-wizard army doesn’t prove anything, it just results in a lot of death. And you can’t rule dead people. I mean you can, but they don’t follow orders very well. Or pay taxes.”

“So he wants to bring about a master race of wizards,” said Harry. “That show the world what they can do, and then basically direct the lives of everyone that doesn’t have magic.”

Susan nodded. “But even that’s not his endgame. Endgame is making it so there are very few, if any, non-magical people in the world. I don’t know what he knows about science, if he would keep technology going or not. But his kids plan basically calls for crowding non-magical people out of the world eventually.”

“But they totally outnumber us!” protested Sirius.

“Think about this.” Susan grabbed a piece of paper and got out a pen, then started writing things down. “There are 350 kids in a generation per gender if 1/2 are boys and 1/2 are girls. I’m calling a “generation” here the seven years of schooling a person gets at Hogwarts. Those 350 kids get married to each other and each have 6 kids. Again, half are girls, so that’s a total of 1,050 boys and girls in that generation rather than 350. Now that 1,050 each have 6 kids. That’s 3,150 for the third generation. Now again, 9,450 kids. The wizard population that would have been $700 * 4$ in that time, average, or 2800 new wizards. By forcing a population explosion, we instead have $350 + 1,050 + 3,150 + 9,450 = 14,000 * 2$ or 28,000 people. That’s ten times as many people in just 4 generations! Now, the military forces of our country average about a million at any one time. Let’s say each wizard is equal to 25 regular people. After all, he doesn’t have to carry around a hundred pounds of equipment in the field, he just needs a wand. Plus he’s harder to kill because of healing and shielding magic. Also I’m pretty sure most people around this table could mow down non-magical people like wheat if they had to. So that’s $28,000 * 25$ or 700,000. Plus if they struck the non-magical world wouldn’t know what was going on, or how to respond. In fact they couldn’t respond! Not effectively and quickly enough. 5,000 wizards descending on a military base, destroying the place and then teleporting away would be pretty much unbeatable.

“And that’s what he’s after. At least that’s what his new programs point to. Once he has the numbers he can just take over the non-magical world and then wizards won’t have to hide. What are non-military people going to do about it, anyway? For all you know, non-magical people may welcome magic into the world, once they see what it can do. You’re all afraid they’ll freak out or whatever, and you’re probably right. But sometimes people can surprise you. They might want their kids to be magical, so they would try and marry wizards. Soon, non-magical people are the minority, not the majority. By that time he’ll have passed whatever laws he wants and the world will dance to his tune, knowingly or not.”

“But that would take too long,” said Lupin. “What good is that plan if he’s not around to it come to completion?”

Susan shook her head. “You don’t get it. Right now he’s either researched or is in the process of researching the twenty four hour ritual he can use to become immortal again. Time will mean nothing to the man. He said he hadn’t, but he could have been lying.”

“Wait, again?” asked Alastor. “What’s this again business?”

“Oh right, Albus doesn’t tell anyone anything,” said Susan, glaring at him. She looked back over at Alastor. “How do you think he came back this time? He had a wanded form of immortality that Team Susan has taken away from him. You’re welcome, by the way. He will now turn to my superior *Natural Magician* form.”

“What about his followers?” asked Tonks. “Can he make them immortal too?”

“Sure, you can cast the spell on others or yourself. Doesn’t matter. Once that’s done, they can sit back, pull the strings from the shadows, and wait until sentiment and the numbers are in their favor.”

“So we have to strike now!” said Alastor, banging his staff on the floor.

“Wait a moment,” said Albus. “Is your form of immortality really better? You know how his worked.”

“Well, okay, you don’t get to make backups. I’ll give you that. But a couple of spells put into rings or whatever and you’re set. *Invulnerability* so you can’t be crushed or decapitated. *Barrier Against Spells* so you can’t be touched by direct magical attack. I’m sure he can *Apparate* so he can’t be sealed up in concrete or something. He can use wanded magic to deflect anything not taken care of by those two, don’t forget. So yeah, my magic could make someone pretty un-killable without getting really creative about it. He wouldn’t need backups. Plus, if your magic can make backups, mine can. While my book doesn’t address the way he used, he could research a spell to do something similar with what he has left. Or maybe souls grow back over time? I don’t know. Wouldn’t a soul technically be infinite? Half of infinity is still infinity.”

Most around the table looked puzzled at this explanation but Albus just looked thoughtful.

“I agree, it’s hard to say, because so little research has been done. Still, we are rather far afield of my original question. Which was, to remind you, what should we expect as his next move?”

“Go back underground and research more of my magic. Personally I’m shocked he came out of hiding when he did, but he’s demonstrated a good number of my spells. No one could be helping him, and I suppose he could be staying awake 24/7 but still, I don’t know how he’s managed it. He has what he wants, I doubt there will be attacks or anything. Maybe the splinter group will try and get revenge, or appoint a new leader or something? It could happen.”

“So what, we just sit on our hands?” demanded Alastor. “We need to take the fight to them. Attack the ministry building and flush him out!”

“And what?” asked Tonks. “Fight our friends? Some of us work at the ministry, you know? It’s only thanks to Susan here I managed to throw off the *Imperius Curse* and join you.”

“Which I still don’t think was a good idea,” said Alastor. “You go back there and risk getting taken over again. You’ll spill the beans on whatever plans we make if they tell you to.”

“Maybe that’s what I’m hoping for,” said Susan.

“What?” Alastor roared.

“Maybe all the plans we come up with here are moot, because I have my own plans that don’t include you. Maybe I’m just using you to generate false information and strike from the shadows.”

“You would too, wouldn’t you?”

“Maybe.”

“I thought you said you didn’t have any plans,” said Ron.

“Shhh, don’t tell them that!”

“Oh sorry,” he whispered.

Team Susan laughed.

“This is no laughing matter!”

“Ah, Alastor. The trouble is, you’re too predictable. Tom knew all about my actions around school, so I’m sure he’s researched anyone who has associations with Albus here. So I’m sure he knows you would be the one to want to charge right in. That’s why he took over the ministry the way he did. Unless you can guarantee this small force can get through to Tom and take him out, a frontal assault is out of the question. I’ve already been branded a criminal, and my immediate friends are wanted for questioning. I lead some kind of attack on the ministry and everyone with me becomes a target. Tom doesn’t have to lift a finger, his now loyal force of Aurors will do the work for him.”

“So what do you suggest?”

“Something he hasn’t considered. Maybe vacation in Hawaii? Visit Disney World? It would be the last thing he was expecting.”

“No,” said Harry. “The last thing he would be expecting is for us to all turn into penguins and dance the Bolero.”

“Hum, good point.”

“This is serious,” said Sirius, seriously, unwittingly committing alliteration for further hilarity.

“Oh, I know. The trouble is, at the moment he’s right where he wants to be. We can’t attack because we don’t want to hurt innocent people. He knows this. We can’t lure him out because there’s nothing outside he wants. We could stealth inside, but no doubt he’s accounted for that. The truth is, until we get more information we can’t make plans. For instance, Tonks, is Tom seen around the ministry building?”

“Yes,” she replied. “He’s getting to know everyone and being all friendly.”

“Probably to figure out who might turn against him and needs to be more directly controlled. Okay, that gives us an opening. Our first order of business is to see if he’s there himself or as an Avatar. Tonks, that’s up to you.”

“How can I do it?”

“I’ll make you up a ward with *Dead Magic* in it. If you see him wandering around the corridors, trigger it. If he stays then he’s there in person. If he becomes mud then he’s controlling it remotely.”

“But then he’ll know you’re probing his defenses and change them,” said Kingsley. “Plus if her association with you is known, she’ll be taken into custody. They might even think you killed him somehow, which might work out great for him. He becomes a martyr, and then we’ll never dislodge his influence.”

“That was all I had, so if you don’t like that plan, I’ll have to think of something else. They don’t just grow on trees, you know.”

“It was a good plan,” said Remus, “but without a force there to strike if it is the real Tom, it isn’t enough. The trouble is if he does melt into mud and we’ve got a force there we would now look very foolish.”

“And have to fight our way out, though Susan could take care of that,” said Sirius.

“It seems like we all underestimated the threat he posed when we were told he took your magic, Susan,” said Albus. “It’s always been a failing of mine to properly appreciate how powerful and versatile it is. Now it’s coming to haunt us, because there’s so many ways he can thwart our efforts.”

“I tried to warn you. But there is a possible explanation? As my magic doesn’t actually

belong in this world, it's possible your mind just dismisses it out of hand." *Or you think I'm just a kid, and equated my magic with being young and thus, no threat? Who can say what goes on in that weird brain of yours, Albus.* "And like I said, not even I thought he would learn as much about my magic in so short a time as he has. I've been very careful about my book, too. I've never taken it out since he came back, so he can't be getting information that way."

"Are you sure he can't enter your *Dimension*?" asked Hermione.

"Reasonably. The spells to open them open your own. It's totally separate from any other plane. He wouldn't have anything to target though I suppose he could research a spell of *Open Susan Felton's Dimension*. But I really don't think it works that way."

"Maybe he's just got *Talent* for research or something," put in Sparkle. "You didn't see his character sheet."

"True, there could be a mundane explanation. As mundane as *Paragon* gets, anyway."

"However he's learned it, it makes him that much more dangerous," said Alastor. "But all I'm hearing around this table is negativity. That things *can't* be done. What *can* we do?"

"I'll look through the book to see what spells might help. Something he might not have thought of, that sort of thing."

"We could stake out the ministry building, see if any known Death Eaters come out and trail them," suggested Tonks. "Though more than likely they'll use the floo network or Apparate."

"Wait a second, that can be tracked, can't it?" asked Hermione. "Couldn't we get those records and see where they're going to? Tom probably wouldn't be far away from his followers."

"I can check into that when I go in tomorrow," said Tonks. "Though he knows that too, and probably has them destroyed."

"Keep an eye out for Death Eater activity in the world. If we could capture one, we could get information from them," said Kingsley.

"All right," said Albus. "We know what we're up against, and we've had some ideas. We'll meet again in a week and further discuss our plans. Until then, no matter how outlandish, think of ways we can deal with this situation. The more outlandish the better as it'll be more unexpected. You all have your tasks, keep up the good work."

The meeting began to break up.

"Sir," Harry said to Albus. "How are my relatives doing?"

"Your asking about them shows great moral fiber," replied Albus. "As they are the most charming individuals I have ever met. I released them yesterday to go back home as they would not stop complaining. I don't see any danger coming to them at this point."

"I see. Sorry they were such a hassle for you."

Albus stared at him, uncomprehending. "You're a better man than I, Harry Potter. I don't know how you put up with them for so long and still show any concern for them at all. I am... humbled."

"Susan?" asked Remus.

"What can I do for you?"

"I have a favor to ask, if you're willing."

"Sure."

"The werewolf group I've been working on. They want to meet you."

"Oh. Okay. I'm not doing anything else at the moment anyway, so I might as well."

“There’s a bit more. It’s the full moon in three days, and they want to make sure my item isn’t just a fluke. I wondered if you could cast the spell on them that you put into my item so they could see I’m telling the truth. It would be a great first step to getting them all wearing them.”

“How many of them are there?”

“Eight.”

Susan considered. “I’ll need *Energetic Accumulation* but that’s not a problem. And I can borrow Hermione’s *Tirelessness* object for a few days so I don’t lose the spell by falling asleep. Okay, sure. I’ll need to get started constructing their individual items anyway, so I’d need to meet them at some point. I’ll make up a list of what I’ll need, you can have it ready. I’ll need more than a week, working 8 hours a day, per item. Guess I can get started now, like I said, I don’t have much else to do around here.”

“What’s this going to cost them? I mean you’re talking about a full time job here, and a week’s worth of work for any craftsman, especially an object of this nature, wouldn’t be cheap. I don’t want you to sell yourself short just because you’re still in school.”

“I guess I have to figure out some kind of grade/cost ratio. The book says to charge four times the making of the item, which in your case is 80 Sickles. That’s 320 Sickles or about 19 Galleons. The trouble is I have to take into account that werewolves probably aren’t that wealthy, no offense. Huh, second time someone has said that to you tonight, sorry. Plus the item is very specialized, and made for the person to do one job. But what is peace of mind worth knowing you’re not going to become a raving animal three days a month? Is it worth as much as a wand? Probably not because wands allow you to do all other magic. But on the other hand I’m making eight of them, which if I charged 15 would be 120 Galleons for about three months worth of work. I know Albus initially offered Dobby 10 Galleons a month wages, so he would only have 30 by that time. On the gripping hand, I’m the only one in this world (apart from Tom) who can offer them this piece of mind. And I don’t think he would care to bother.”

“Are you over analyzing stuff again?” asked Hermione, coming over.

“I want the prices I charge to be fair! Is that so much to ask? And with this messed up currency system it’s hard to know what anything is worth.”

“The same thing anything is worth,” explained Hermione. “What someone will pay for it.”

“But if the people I’m trying to sell to can’t pay for it, nobody wins. I doubt there’s an insurance plan that will cover these, after all.” She turned back to Remus. “For the moment then, call it 20 Galleons a shot, which will include the consumable material. They’ll have to provide the item they want to hold the spell. Make sure it’s something that will last, like metal, and they can pass it on when they die. I’m not a goblin, I don’t want it back.”

He chuckled. “We’ll see what they say, I guess. Get me that list and I’ll tell them to get something ready. The shape doesn’t matter?”

“Nope. They just have to have it on them when the moon comes up.”

“Fair enough. Thanks.”

“My pleasure.” *And profit, possibly?*

A sheep in wolf's clothes

Time: The next evening

Place: The Pack's Hideout

So Remus took Susan and Sparkle, via Apparition, to where "his" pack of werewolves was hanging out. As it was the first night of the full moon, they needed someplace secure to lock themselves so they were sure not to hurt anyone. A cave, with parts of the wall scooped out, and bars put across them, served. Susan walked in to see a bunch of shabby looking, depressed people of all ages. It was one hour until moon-rise. Susan was carrying a school bag, which rustled with paper, and Sparkle padded along nervously beside the two.

"Everyone," said Remus, "This is Susan, the girl I've been telling you about."

"Uh, Remus," whispered Susan, "I count real good up to ten, but then it starts to get a bit fuzzy. This doesn't seem like eight people to me."

"Not all of us are werewolves," said a woman holding unto what Susan hoped was her child. She looked about eight years old. "We're just here to make sure they're secure before the moon comes out."

"Isn't that a bit... dangerous?"

"Yes, it is," answered the woman simply.

"It has to be done," said Remus. "That's Wendy, by the way."

"Nice to meet you," said Susan. The woman just grunted.

"You'll have to forgive them, they've had a pretty tough life since they were cursed."

"And this is to be our savior?" asked a man, getting up from the cave floor. "Certainly doesn't look like much."

"Susan, I'd like you to meet Dominic. He speaks for the pack."

"Nice to meet you," said Susan.

"If the stories about you that Remus tells are true, likewise. If you've raised our hopes for nothing... well, it won't go easy for you."

Susan smirked. "Hate to break it to you, but your pack couldn't take me."

"Oh really?"

"Yup. Unless you think you could take down a dragon by yourself, which I've done."

"I read about that," said another man, currently sitting behind bars. "You are the Susan from the tournament, aren't you?"

She did a curtsy. "One and the same."

"You're gonna have to be that good if we get out of control."

"Don't worry, you won't. That's why I'm here. Working non-stop I figure I'll have a couple made by the time this becomes a problem again, and we'll do the same thing. Repeat twice and you'll all be protected."

"But I can't pay what you're asking," said Wendy bitterly.

"Yeah, not a lot of us can," said Dominic. The others grumbled in agreement.

"I'm not going to hold you over a barrel," said Susan, raising a hand. "Right now I know it's tough for you because you're werewolves. I get that. Until you believe you're safe, you won't be. But once you believe you are you can fit into society again. I'll call the item a loan until then. You can pay me back when you're able. For the moment I'll just need the 80 Sickles to pay for the consumed components. If, however, you have something suitably costly I can use, I'll take that instead and cut that much off the final price."

“Pretty generous,” said a woman in the cage opposite where several men were sitting. “What do you really want from us?”

Susan shrugged. “Want from you? Nothing, directly, just that you take your lives back. As far as generosity goes, I can afford to be, at the moment. I don’t have living expenses yet, and I have a small monthly income of my own that meets my needs. At the moment I need exposure more than anything, for when I open a shop dedicated to doing exactly this kind of thing. Solving people’s problems with my unique kind of magic.” *Unique around here, anyway.* “You don’t have to tell people the specifics, but a little word of mouth that I solved a tricky problem for you would go a long way when my shop opens.”

“You’re going to cure us?” asked a girl a little older looking than Susan.

She shook her head. “I don’t know anything that can actually *cure* you. What I’m going to do is suppress the curse. You can have the magic put into an item, like a ring or necklace. This you could pass to another werewolf upon your death. If, however, you’re worried about losing it or having it stolen, I can brand the magic directly into you as a tattoo.”

At least, that’s the theory. I’ve never actually tried it, but reading the spells over I can’t see how it would fail to work.

“It sounds too good to be true,” she said, hanging her head.

“Please, people, I’ve seen her do some spectacular things,” Remus said. “And she’s here tonight, out of no obligation to any of you whatsoever, to help. At least give her, and her magic, a chance! I’m not lying to you all, I haven’t transformed since she helped me, and God willing I never will again. She can offer you the same if you let her.”

“All right girl,” said Dominic. “What do we have to do?”

How dare he call us girl! thought Old Susan. *I could destroy him right now!*

We are not going to rise to it, responded New Susan. *We’re here to help these people, not start a shouting match with them. Remember Severus?*

Exactly, he still doesn’t respect us, despite everything we’ve done in his class.

It’s these people we have to impress at the moment. I won’t do that bullying their pack leader.

Suit yourself, but werewolves probably only respect one thing- and that’s strength.

Susan put her bag down and unzipped it. Turning it over she shook it out, and a small mountain of *wards* tumbled to the floor.

“Last night I thought I would get all of you with one spell, maintain it, and do that the next three nights. Upon further reflection, that was a stupid idea so I made these instead. Everyone come and take one, and I’ll show you how to use it.”

Dominic went and picked one up, holding it away from himself and turning it in his hand. “You say this is a spell? Never heard of anything like this.”

“Exactly. That’s why it’s going to work. Come on, you don’t have much time, everyone grab one.”

Seven more people, including Felicia, came forward to take a ward.

“Wait a minute, you’re the werewolf?” Susan asked her. Felicia nodded sadly. “About a year now,” she said softly.

“I thought it was your mother! How in the world-”

“Fenrir Greyback,” spat Wendy. “I’d like one minute alone with him in chains.”

There was a general agreement to this sentiment.

“Yeah, you want to earn our trust? Use some of this ‘great magic’ you have to take him out. I see you do that, and the pack is yours to command.”

Everyone there nodded.

“Okay, we can talk about that in a minute. Now, take your ward and hold it between your hands. Think about wanting the magic to protect you from the curse until the moon sets. The trigger phrase is ‘I reject the wolf.’ Go ahead, try it.”

There were eight choruses of “I reject the wolf” and magic swirled around the eight people.

“Done!” said Susan. “You’re all safe for tonight.” *That use of magic is specific enough, and I figure a moon cycle can count as a scene.* “As you can see, I’ve made a bunch of them so you can use them all three nights. If making your items takes longer for some reason, I’ll just make up some more.”

“Why can’t you just make us these all the time?” asked a man. “I’m Caleb, by the way.”

“In a way, I could. You only need three a month, with the exception of the blue moon month. They cost nothing but a little time, a piece of paper, and some energy, no big deal. The trouble is, I’m a marked woman. Tom and I will someday soon have a confrontation. There’s no guarantee I’ll win. After that, I may... travel... a bit, before I settle down and start my shop. I might not be able to make enough to last you all. Plus you have to remember to do this, and while I’m sure you’re all very attuned to the lunar cycle-”

“We are,” growled Caleb.

Susan conceded the point with a wave. “But the truth is you slip up once and you’re a monster. My way is safer. You won’t have to think about it anymore. And like I said, my business is solving problems, not just covering them up. This is a cover up, not a solution. And thirdly, would you rather pay me once, for an item that will last generations, or continuously, every month, for wards?”

“I suppose that some good points. Still, I’ll believe all this when I see it. We better get behind bars, people.”

They all started disrobing, and Susan blushed and looked away.

“Yeah, when you don’t have a lot of money, being naked a little while is preferable to ripping off your clothes every time the change comes over you.”

The men and women and into the opposite ends of the cave, and were locked in.

“Why do you separate yourselves?” asked Susan, confused. “You can still see each other, obviously.”

“When we change we become total animals. With a blood-lust you wouldn’t believe. However, we can satisfy that in other ways, once we realize we can’t get out of this cage.”

“Okay?”

“We prefer not to make little wolf babies, is what he’s saying,” yelled the girl Susan’s age, and everyone chuckled.

“Oh. So tell me about this Fenrir fellow,” said Susan to Wendy.

“You tell her,” she said to Remus.

He took a deep breath. “The fact is, some people go out of their way to become werewolves, and Fenrir is the worst of the lot.”

“Well what idiot gave him the name of the wolf that supposedly triggers the end of the world?”

“Yes, the Greyback family has always been a bit unbalanced. The point is, he has made it his mission to infect as many people as he can with this curse. He infected me as a kid, and Felicia and others. He’s somehow made a deal or something with his wolf side. He gets close to a victim and waits for the moon to come up. Rather than killing the victim, which does happen, the

process isn't perfect, he'll deliver a single bite and then get away."

"If I could kill him I would!" shouted Felicia, shivering and gripping the bars of her prison.

"Anyone here would," said Wendy. "Do you know what it's like to watch your daughter change night after night? To know that she doesn't recognize you anymore? That she would rip your throat out given half a chance?"

"No, I'm sorry. I don't. But maybe I can make sure no one else has to suffer with what he's done."

"You're not thinking of-" said Remus.

"How long?" she asked.

"Wendy looked at a watch. "Half an hour."

"Does anyone have a picture of him?"

"I do," said another man, not in a cell. "I'm Jamel, by the way. Not that I'll forget what he looked like when he attacked my wife, Abbey. I put them up wherever I can." A woman in the cell raised her hand. Susan nodded to her and went over to take the rolled up parchment. It was a wanted poster.

Susan smiled. "Perfect. Plenty of time."

Oh, so now we're going to show off? thought Old Susan.

This isn't showing off, it's about justice. It has to be done, and I'm the only one that can do it.

And in no way is about vengeance for that cute naked girl over there? She's a little young for you, you know.

Shut up! He could be stalking someone this very minute. I can put an end to that, so I have a duty to do so.

I'm glad to hear you admit it.

Susan shook her head, her desire to 'play the hero' and use her magics for good confused her sometimes. She found it too easy to slip back into her old patterns of just bowling people over by force of will or magic. *Probably because I'm still new to trying to be a little more likable rather than fearsome. Of course if I had a higher PERSONALITY I would probably just charm people into doing what I wanted, like Tom does. Does that make me as bad as him? No- I'm trying to change, aren't I? I just wish those thoughts of my 'old self' would leave me alone.*

She got out several spells on paper, and Sparkle put *Energetic Accumulation* on her, so she didn't have to take the full time casting from writings.

"*Descry Creature*, Fenrir Greyback, whose likeness I have seen in this wanted poster." Magic sparkled around her, and she pointed. "Four hundred and thirteen miles that way."

"Seriously?" asked Dominic.

"Seriously. Now to bring him here. I'm assuming you all know some kind of combat magic?" she asked the remaining wizards around her.

"You're really going to get him here?" asked Jamel, drawing a wand. "For real?"

"For real. You just have to hold him. Do *NOT* attack him. He is going to get what he deserves tonight, but *I* will be the one to do it. Is that clear? Anyone kills him before I'm done with him will make me very angry. Hey Remus, do they want to see me angry?"

"You really don't," he replied. "But may I ask what you intend to do?"

"Philosophize," Susan said with a smile. "Get ready." Wands were drawn. "He's going to appear in the middle of a circle of light, right here." She pointed. "He will be disoriented, but not for long. Remember, restrain only, and leave him talking, I want him to know what I have in

store for him.”

The people in the cages were all standing now, pressed up against the bars. There was a palpable tension in the air.

“*Telesummon*,” said Susan, taking the extra time so that the wand-wizards could get into position. With a *POP* a graying, startled man appeared in the center of the circle and got hit with half a dozen restraining spells.

“What is the meaning of this?” he roared, looking around wildly. “Wait a minute, I know you, girl. What are... wait, you’re all... What’s going on?” He calmed a little.

“Justice,” said Susan, stepping in front of him, holding a sheaf of papers. “You know this girl?”

“Yeah, turned her some time back. What to be a werewolf, little one? In a few minutes I’ll bust out of these magical bonds and tear you all- Remus? Is that little Remus? Nice to see you doing so well my old friend!”

“You’re no friend of mine.”

“No? I did you a favor, turning you. You just were too blind to see it.”

“You admit turning them then?”

“Sure, I admit it. I enjoy it. Makes my life worth living.”

Susan smiled. “I’m glad to hear you say that. Because after tonight, your life won’t be worth living. But you will. You’ll live on, but your purpose will be gone. And justice will be served.”

“What are you blathering on about, girl?”

Susan ignored the question and spun around, addressing the other people in the cave. “Look, all of you. You wanted to know my power? Fine. I’ll show you what my magic can do.” She turned back, looking at the magical symbols on the page and they started dancing around the man, now struggling to get away from them. The wand-wizards held him fast. “Fenrir Greyback, I curse you. I curse you with the form most opposite your own, that of the sheep. To break this curse one who you turned must honestly forgive you, and in your presence speak the words ‘I forgive you for what you did to me.’ I curse you with this form until the day you die. *Cursed Form*.”

“Noooooooooo!” shouted Fenrir as his body rippled and changed. The people of the cave, man, woman, and child alike, stared in fascination as the man shrank down to become a sheep. “No! No!”

“Sadly, he can still talk,” said Susan. “A limitation of the spell, but someone could always put a silence charm on him to shut him up if he gets too annoying.”

“Change me back!” demanded Fenrir, falling to the ground on four hooves in front of Susan. “Please, I’ll do anything. Change me back!” He started turning, looking back at his new body. “I’m a sheep. I’m really a sheep. This is a nightmare!”

“Nope,” said Susan, crossing her arms. “But you could say it’s a dream come true for several people here. In fact, I’m letting that little girl out right now. I figure it’s about twenty to moon-rise, wouldn’t it be ironic if she was the one who tore you to pieces?”

“You wouldn’t dare! You <female dog>! She’ll kill you all! And I hope I breathe my last as you do!”

Wait, was that just censored? thought Sparkle. *I guess to keep the rating low for the story.* Remus flicked his wand, and the sheep went flying. “Apologize!” he demanded, after Fenrir hit the wall of the cave and crumpled.

“I’m quite capable of doing that myself if I wanted to,” Susan said, putting a hand on his

and lowering it. “His words won’t hurt me.” She walked over put her face down by the face of the sheep, who was struggling to rise. “You think a little werewolf could take me? After what you just watched me do to you? Trust me, I could tear a werewolf apart with my bare hands. They wouldn’t stand a chance. One spell by me, one spell put on me by my cat. There wouldn’t be a single thing a werewolf could do to me.” *Well, two, technically.* Energetic Accumulation and then Augment STRength. *I could become strong enough to lift mountains. Though my body probably wouldn’t be able to stand the strain.* “You think you’re strong as a werewolf? You’re nothing compared to how strong my magic can make me.”

“Please, at least send me back. Don’t let me die like this! I beg you!”

“Oh, do you now? Begging? That’s rich. How many mothers have begged someone, anyone, to stop you? To help cure their kids? But no one came, did they? No one but me. I could have killed you tonight, but rejoice, that’s not how I do things. No, you’re going to live, and your punishment will fit your crime to your dying day. Don’t you agree?” she asked over her shoulder.

She got no response, and looked around. Everyone had backed away from her, the people in the cells now looking a bit glad bars separated them from this girl.

She sighed. “I really have to stop doing that. I promised myself I wouldn’t make people scared of me anymore. But look what you did. They’re more scared of me than they are of you, now.” She straightened up. “Sorry about that. Sometimes when I get angry I kind of go too far. And he made me a little angry.”

“What are you going to do with me?” Fenrir asked in a small voice.

“Keep you here until moon-rise, to make sure my curse beats yours and you don’t become some kind of weresheep. After that, I’ll let them decide your fate.” She pointed a thumb behind her. “Maybe the little girl you infected, her name is Felicia, by the way, can look after you. You’ll make a nice little pet, won’t you? Maybe someday she’ll even forgive you, but I doubt it. That’s up to them.”

“We’ll, uh, do whatever you recommend,” said Dominic.

“Oh yeah, the pack is mine now, isn’t it?” asked Susan brightly. “Really, I don’t want it. I meant what I said, my part in his punishment is over. Just don’t try and make lamb chops, he’ll turn human again when he dies. That could be awkward.”

“We really are protected, aren’t we?” asked Caleb. “We’re not going to turn tonight?”

“Yeah, you really are. Did you think I was playing some kind of game? Tricking you for some bizarre reason?”

“They won’t change?” Fenrir asked, hope in his voice. Susan ignored him.

“We’ve never had reason to hope before,” said Wendy. “But you just snapped your fingers and the man I’ve hated for years is now laying on the floor of this cave, as a sheep. That’s going to take some getting used to.”

“Yeah, why can’t you just do that to Tom?” asked Remus.

“He’s protected by my magics,” Susan said bitterly. “Believe me, I tried. I couldn’t get a fix on his position, and thus, I can’t *Telesummon* him anywhere. He’s too smart for that.”

“You’re really going to take *Tom* on? The man formally known as He Must Not Be Named?” asked Dominic. “I thought he was some kind of good guy?”

“He’s the worst, and yes, one way or another a similar fate is in store for him. His punishment, too, shall fit his crimes.”

The only time, I think, that Susan will show the violence inherent in the system, thought Sparkle.

“I believe you,” he said. “I think you can win. If this all works... I’ll get you the money.

I'll pay for everyone's if I have to. You have my support, and I'm sorry I doubted you."

He stuck his hand through the bars.

"Uh, maybe you could put your pants on before we get all huggy-weepy?"

"Oh yeah, I forgot. Not that I doubt you, but we'll wait until moon-rise just to be safe."

"That's fine. It's not long now."

And so the group, (and one roped up sheep) came out of the cave to look upon the full moon.

"I never thought I would see it again," said Felicia. "Not with human eyes, anyway.

Thank you, Susan."

"My pleasure. If you all don't mind, I'll start on hers, first."

"That's fine," said everyone, possibly a little too quickly.

Really have to watch that... But I guess at least now I'm aware I'm doing it, and want to try and restrain myself in the future? I mean he needed to be stopped, for all I know I just saved another innocent life tonight. Or even better, kept a kid from having to live a half life, like Remus did.

Tom's right though. I had the power, but did I have the right to rip this man from where he was and do this to him? He has a way out, the spell requires it, and he'll live as long as he would have otherwise. He's just no danger to society anymore. Isn't that what Tom's new 'corrective' laws are all about? Aren't we the same?

Yes he's killed, but that beggar really was just a leach, right? He had a point, the beggar went to the afterlife, and Tom's immortality got stronger. Was it such a bad trade? asked Old Susan.

No, I can't think like that! That's his way of thinking, not mine!

I'm so messed up.

Nearly three weeks passed rather quickly for Susan, slowly for the rest of the team, who were pretty bored hiding out in Sirius' house. Kreacher, at least, was in high spirits, and even seemed to be coming around to the fact Hermione was a person rather than "the mudblood." Sirius no longer shouted at him, as any member of Team Susan within earshot would glare at him when he did, so he finally gave it up. With Susan's *Regeneration* he was also looking and feeling better, and he was also now practicing the ESPer techniques she described to him. She brought the girl Felicia and her mother Wendy to the hideout for the first week as she made Wendy's item, which Felicia talked her mom into being a tattoo. Wendy argued at least for an earring, but Felicia said she would then have to wear those earrings and no other, forever. Also there were situations, like swimming, where it would make no sense to wear earrings. Rings or bracelets were tricky, given how young she was, thus not knowing what size would ultimately be the correct one. Wendy finally gave in and said a small tattoo, not easy visible, would be fine. Susan smiled and started work.

She put the *Imbuing* into the ink inside a bottle of ink. (She had to use Hermione's gift of the wireless to check into exactly how tattoos were made, and the proper inks and such to use.) Both Wendy and Felicia were fascinated by the iPad and internet, once she showed them how to use it. Oddly, they seemed to take to it better than her own mother, a fact she attributed to them thinking it was just a "magic box" they poked at to make stuff happen rather than concentrating on "expensive, high tech gadget" which created a sort of mental block in people.

In any case, a week(ish) later, Susan asked what design Felicia wanted, and she chose a catgirl, like her namesake. (Her mother had been horrified when Felicia did a google image search of her name, but Felicia laughed and laughed.) Susan concentrated, then cast *Conductive Displacement* on the ink. She breathed a sigh of relief as Felicia winced, but the image she had in mind appeared, leaving the ink bottle empty. Susan did a *Magic Sense* on the girl, and was pleased to know the enchantment held, protecting her forever from turning into a beast again.

"Thank you!" said Felicia, over and over as she hugged Susan.

"Yes, thank you. You don't know what this means to us."

Susan stroked Felicia's hair and looked past her head. "You know something? I think I do, just a little. I never had a sister, I guess I didn't know what I was missing."

"You mean that?" asked Felicia, grinning widely.

"Yeah. This week has been great. And you're great, too. Now go out there and do something incredible with your life, okay?"

She nodded seriously. "I will. When I get my wand I'm going to study really, really, really hard and maybe be as good in magic as you are someday!"

Susan smiled. "You better. *Teleportal*." A hole opened behind the two, back to their house. "Stay safe out there, both of you. And Felicia, try not to bite anyone. Technically you can still infect others, but as you'll be human I don't know exactly what might happen. Best to leave that to speculation, forever."

"Okay. Come visit me lots and lots, okay?"

"I'll try my best, once all the craziness in my life is over."

Felicia laughed. "No, you better come anyway, because I think craziness will follow you

around forever.”

Susan laughed with her. “You know, you’re probably right. We’ll see each other again, I promise.”

“Pinkie promise?” Susan had, of course, introduced her to Friendship Is Magic.

“Cross my heart and hope to fly, stick a cupcake in my eye!”

“Okay! See ya!” She jumped through the portal. “Come on mom!”

“Just one second, baby.” She turned to Susan, and also put her arms out for a hug. Her eyes were shiny with tears. “Thank you again. I’ve not seen her like this since she got turned, it’s really been hard for her. You’ve done more for her than I ever dreamed. Our nightmare is finally over.” The two hugged.

“You stood by her side through it all. Many wouldn’t. You deserve just as much thanks for me. Now go on, get out of here.”

“If you ever need anything... what am I saying? There’s nothing I can do you can’t do yourself. I’ll do my best to repay you though. Somehow.”

“Mom!”

“Coming!”

“Good luck.”

“Thanks.”

With that, she also stepped through the portal and both waved as it shrank ...

“Bye, big sis!”

“Bye, little sis...”

... and disappeared.

Susan sighed, feeling tears in her own eyes.

“You really liked her, didn’t you?” asked Hermione, stepping out from the hallway.

“It isn’t just that,” replied Susan, wiping her eyes. “Helping the Longbottom family was nice, but quick, and rather impersonal. I got to know those two, since they had to hang around. She was always popping up to show me some cute pony thing she had discovered, and when she found that Darkstalkers character that shared her name, and I thought her mom would melt through the floor!” She was smiling now, even as tears trickled down her face. “And now she has her whole life as a witch ahead of her, rather than a life of being an outcast for something some maniac did to her for *grins*. She was the little sister I never knew I wanted.” Tears were falling faster now.

“Come here. What’s this really about?”

“Oh, Hermione! Why do I have to go kill Tom?” she sobbed, head on Hermione’s shoulder. “Why did he have to take my magic like he did? Why couldn’t he have just stayed dead? I hate him! Hate him for forcing me to come after him, because I’m the only one who can. Hate him for forcing me to become a monster in order to deal with him. What if I can’t stop, Hermione? What if I kill him, and it’s just the first step to becoming him? Like I get a taste for blood or something?”

“Now, now, that won’t happen.”

“You don’t get it. I have a darkness inside me, Hermione. A voice that agrees with him, that thinks I should join him. Look at what I did to Professor Umbridge, is that who I really am? I turned Fenrir into a sheep, for goodness sake. And I won’t say he didn’t deserve it, but afterward I saw them looking at me. Like *I* was the monster. And I was, Hermione, I was. I just snapped my fingers and rewrote reality the way I wanted it to be. That’s what my magic can do. *I*

just want to help people,” she cried, “like I did for Felicia. But I can’t, because of *him*. I’m just as bad, I know it! I’ve proven it time and time again, even though I swear *this time will be the last time I do something like this*. But it **never is**. There’s always going to be some bad person out there that has to be stopped. But if I go bad, who is going to stop me? Superman gave Batman Kryptonite, just in case, but there’s nothing like that for me! What am I going to do, Hermione?”

“I... I don’t even know what to say. You aren’t anything like him. He wouldn’t have helped those werewolves, would he? He would have seen them as a resource, a tool for his own ends. You saved them, Susan. You did a good thing, honest! That’s who you really are, I know it!”

“Honest?” Susan was looking up at Hermione now.

Hermione nodded. “Come on, you’ve been working too hard on that *Imbuing*. Show me some funny cat videos on YouTube and we’ll go out for ice cream or something.”

“Yeah,” said Susan, wiping her eyes. “Okay. Just you and me, okay? I couldn’t face the guys right now. Let me wash up, I must have a -2 penalty to my LOOKs at least.” She tried to smile. “Thanks... for listening.”

She ran off to the bathroom.

Hermione looked over at Sparkle.

“How is she really doing?” Hermione asked.

Sparkle looked over at where she had gone.

“This is the first I’ve heard any of this. That’s the trouble with having such a high RESolve, you know? Where other people would crack early, you can keep going, but your next check becomes that much tougher. That means the meltdown is bigger too. That didn’t seem too bad, but as her friend, I would stay by her and get her to talk about any other concerns on her mind. She may still be trying to hide her real feelings. She’s under a lot of strain, with this whole Tom thing that she thinks is her fault.”

“Shouldn’t you be the one to do that?”

“I’m her *companion*, yes. We’re friends, but I can only help her so much. I think she relates better to you, being human and all. Maybe she should take a break, go see Luna tomorrow. She always managed to make Susan feel better. Suggest it to her, will you? One day not working on *Imbuing* won’t hurt.”

“Okay. What about this darkness she spoke of?”

Sparkle shook her head. “That actually worries me most of all. It sounds so familiar, but I can’t place it. I know it was when I was with Elysian, but we visited a few worlds together and I was just a kitten at the time. He didn’t let me near the dangerous stuff, my magic skills were only potential then. That’s why he left me with her, so I could learn magic along with someone else. He knew I was a *Natural Magician*, as he hoped she would be. He could have trained me, it’s true, but he was focused on saving his world, and said that wouldn’t be fair to me, because he couldn’t give me 100% of himself.” She chuckled ruefully. “She’s more like him every day, I think. It was long ago, and I was young, but sometimes they feel the same, you know? I recall him saying something about a force of darkness, I think? I did a *Magic Sense* on her, which is all I can do, but I wish her father was here now. He had a staff that let him sense things like life energy or soul corruption. Another gift of his world, like the book of spells he took, given to him to help his journey. She’s not under any magical influence, that much I could tell at least. She’s pretty powerful by herself, and she’s carrying around all those spell charms on her bracelet. It’s hard to cut through, but she didn’t feel any different, magically. It could just be stress.”

Hermione nodded. “Agreed. I might just do some *Research* on stress related diseases. See what I can find.”

“Good idea. Just don’t let her know until you have something concrete. She might not want to be seen as weak, her comment about the boys seeing her like this suggests it. If she thought she really was cracking up, because she saw you looking into it, that might make things worse.”

“I agree. I’ll be careful.”

A minute later, Susan reappeared, looking better, and she and Hermione went to have a girl’s night out.

Susan threw herself back into her work for the next person, the slightly older than herself Roselle. She wasn’t as fun as Felicia to be around, but they got along okay, and Roselle paid what she could, promising the rest later.

“Six more to go, sorry about using your house like this, Sirius.” she said as they all sat down to dinner that evening.

“Hey, you’re welcome to it, Susan. This used to be a place of dark magic and hateful people. Now it’s become something a lot greater, and it’s all thanks to you. Plus I get to meet some interesting people, and maybe the name of Black can be redeemed a little bit. I’m not much help to you otherwise, but if this is all I can do, I’m glad to do it. You kids have transformed that basement down there, I hardly recognize it!”

“We didn’t have anything better to do,” said Harry. “And it’s good magical practice for us. We know Susan doesn’t need a nice space to work in, but it can’t hurt.”

“Well thanks. It is a big help, I can’t exactly have a construction crew over to do a home makeover, now can I?” They all laughed. “You smoothed out the walls and painted them, put in carpet, even made the air smell better. And those fires of yours are so cute, Hermione!”

“Thanks.”

“It’s really starting to feel like a home around here, something I never thought I would say. I owe you guys.”

“Ah, we all owe each other, so it’s even,” said Harry. “Any news on the Tom front?”

“No. Various Order members come in and out, but he’s just hanging out at the ministry building. Of course no one sees him coming or going, but why would they? Tonks said something about new security spells they’re putting up around the place, too. Probably to detect the kind of stuff you can do, Susan, so you can’t get into the place as easily.”

“Not that I would. Too many innocent people would get hurt trying to go through the front doors. Well, he’ll slip up sometime. I hope.”

“He’s bound to. His own overconfidence will be his undoing in the end.”

“I hope you’re right.”

That night, Susan found herself in what looked like Sherlock’s study. There was a cheery fire, and books on shelves. There was a large chair facing the fire, and Susan smelled tobacco smoke, probably from a pipe. A smaller chair stood beside it, both in a deep red color. A grandfather clock ticked away off to one side, and struck the hour. It was 2 o’clock.

“Now what, Tom?” Susan asked.

A head poked around the edge of the chair. “Ah, Susan, welcome! Please, have a seat!”

“Why should I? I don’t go around pulling you into my dreams. Why should I put up with you pulling me into yours?”

“Now, now, we can be civil to each other, can’t we? Especially because I’m here to ask for your help.”

Susan walked around the chair to face Tom. He had a pipe in his house, and slapped a book shut. He removed the pipe and gestured with the stem. “Please, sit.”

Susan started laughing. “Seriously? You want my help?” A knife appeared in her hands. “Hold your wrists out and I’ll start a’cutting. Now is it down the lane or across the street, I can never remember.”

“Charming, as always. And I came up with this more... intimate setting, rather than where we met the last time, too.”

“Yes, you’re all heart.” She dropped the knife and it vanished before hitting the plush carpet beneath her feet. She looked down. “What am I wearing?” It was a Victorian style gown, in white. Susan concentrated, and changed it into street clothes. “Fine,” she said, dropping into the chair opposite Tom. “Make it good. And lose the pipe, you look ridiculous!”

“Really? Huh, I thought I looked rather dapper with it. Ah well.” The book and pipe disappeared. “I’ll get right to it. You know that certain members of my organization split off because they no longer felt my ideals were the ones they were hoping for.”

“You said as much last time. I’m surprised you let them live.”

“Susan, please! I am not a cold blooded killer.” Susan glared at him. “Anymore, I mean. I’ve left that life behind me. No, if they have a difference in philosophy then that’s their prerogative. I wished them well and sent them on their way.”

“Good for you. Can I go now?”

“Ah, how silly of me, not to stress the main point at the beginning. I let them go weeks ago, and they’ve been planning something.”

“Oh?”

“Yes. There is a rich widow that lives in the village. I think her name is Samantha Littlestine? Something like that.”

“Bigelstine?”

Tom snapped his fingers. “That’s the one. You know her, then?”

“What did you do?”

“Me? Nothing!” Tom held up his hands, a picture of innocence. “Like I said, this is totally outside my influence. I learned, through my contacts, she has a lot of valuable art pieces and such in her house. They have been cut off from their fortunes, and now need capital to start a new Death Eater group. I have learned their plans are to break into the home of Samantha, and rob her blind.”

“You just can’t leave well enough alone, can you? You knew I knew her somehow- so you’ve targeted her to... to break my resolve or something.”

Tom looked genuinely hurt. “I’m genuinely hurt. I’m trying to give you a chance to do some good, and take out some Death Eaters. That is what you want to do, right? That they chose a person you know is regrettable, but she is the richest lady in town.”

“I... You... You’re serious?”

“Completely serious. I don’t need former associates causing trouble for the new ministry, it makes us look weak. As a bonus you can get some XP out of it. Not that capturing a few wanded wizards will be much of a strain for you.”

“Why can’t your so called ‘new ministry’ just handle it?”

“The thing is, if I had Aurors stationed there before the attack, questions would be raised. How did I know? Why did I personally send agents there when, really, there was no need? Even I can’t control every news reporter in the world. That charming Quibbler fellow is proof enough of that, right? I mean, really, if I wanted to harass you, I would go after the people you know personally. Like that Luna girl you’re so fond of.”

Susan gripped the edges of the chair. “Leave her alone, or so help me-”

Tom put up a hand. “I know about your temper, and your ability to throw magic around when you’re angry. In fact, according to reports, there was a time magic actually started to manifest around you without you even casting any spells. A hidden gift from your father, perhaps, or something darker inside your very soul? No matter. I wouldn’t dream of going after people you know, because that would almost certainly result in your tearing the ministry apart looking for me. Even if you didn’t kill anyone, you would undoubtedly drain the energy of everyone there, raising your own potential for destruction by many times.”

“Count on it.”

“So there you are. I leave you alone, you leave me alone. Simple, isn’t it? That’s why I’m telling you about this splinter group. They aren’t related to me, and so they are not to be protected by me.”

“So you’re also sending a message to the others that did stay by you. If they leave, you’ll send Susan out after them, is that it?”

“Humm. Something like that, I suppose. Not you specifically, but rather that leaving my service will not be tolerated, and there will be consequences. It just so happens they chose a stupid thing to do first. I want no destruction to come to the village, after all. That’s where the wizards live! Also the woman did her duty, and had several children, which earns her my respect. She has fine grandsons by all accounts, and hopefully under the new laws will soon take wives and do their duty to wizard kind.”

Susan snorted. *Their duty. What, having a bunch of happy-happy-fun-times in the bedroom?*

Tom continued. “Why wouldn’t I send the best person I know to take care of the issue, even knowing her feelings for me?”

Susan remained silent.

“The heist will take place sometime tomorrow night. There are 4 of them, easily taken. Naturally I have not shared everything I have learned about being a *Natural Magician* with my followers, so they will be unprepared for you despite any efforts they take to pull off this theft. I assume you know the address?”

“I’ve been there, yes.”

“Splendid! I don’t have to have you memorize it, then. This dream sharing is convenient, but hard to take anything away from it. By the way, have you been staying up lately? I despaired of reaching you, these past few nights. Owls don’t reach you, so you must be hiding out somewhere... I hope you’re not getting into trouble.”

“None of your business. You know too much about me already, somehow.”

“As you know too much about me, sadly. Very well.” He stood up. “Have a pleasant rest of the evening.”

Susan awoke, and wrote a note for Sirius to find in the morning.

Had another visit by Tom. We’ll need the Order before lunchtime, please get them here.

Then she tried to get back to sleep, with thoughts of what Tom was really planning running through her mind.

Susan recounted the dream to the members of the Order that showed up, and they started discussing what to do about it.

"It's probably a trap," said Alastor. "I would advise letting us handle it, rather than going yourself."

"I suppose I can give you some wards to take with you, to take their magic away."

"Why would we want to do that?"

Susan looked at him curiously. "What are you expecting to do with them, then? You can't take them to the ministry, now can you? That's delivering them to Tom. They can't come here, and they can *Apparate* out of anyplace eventually. The only foolproof course is to make sure they can't make magical trouble ever again. This will also insure that, even if they wanted to, they couldn't go crawling back to Tom for forgiveness."

Alastor looked uncomfortable. "I'm not sure I'm as willing to take someone's magic away from them as you seem to be. No offense, but to us it's like cutting off a leg." He indicated his artificial leg.

"So what is your big plan then? Kill them? Duel them in the house, possibly destroying priceless artworks in the process? I'm sorry, but that's a bit worse than cutting off a leg. I won't stand for it." *Get it? Stand... leg? Never mind.* "You aren't going to use my info for something I'm morally against."

"You won't stand-"

"People, please!" said Remus. "Let's take a step back here. Before you get into a shouting match, Alastor, what is your plan, should you catch them? Susan has a good point, Azkaban is not an option, nor is imprisoning them elsewhere. We can't let them ransack Mrs. Bigelstiene's manner but we still need to figure out what to do with them once we've caught them."

"They're Death Eaters, they deserve to be killed," he growled. "It's what they would do to us."

"And are we no better, then?" asked Harry.

"Well said, Harry," said Frank (Longbottom, you didn't forget about them, did you?). "I do have to say, Susan, your magic to take away our ability to do magic frightens me unlike anything else. I would much rather see you healing people, like you did us, then... the other."

"The question remains," she said, looking over at Alastor, "is your plan to kill them or not?"

"They deserve no mercy or kindness for us. Yes, I would kill them, at that."

"You think *Destroy Magic* is merciful?" Susan laughed. "Yet you've just said losing magic is like losing a limb. Frank here says it scares him more than anything. Am I really taking the easy way out by asking to do things my way?"

"Better get used to killing now, girl. After all, you say you're the only one that can take Tom out now, isn't that right?"

"You better get used to not killing, old dude, if you want my help at all in the future. I'll do what needs to be done, but I refuse to end up like you. You see only one, final, option for every situation, that much is clear. The punishment should fit the crime. Ask Fenrir about it sometime, I hear he's sporting a nice, pink bow at the moment."

He is right, of course, thought Old Susan. Wouldn't you want a quick end rather than lingering on for years, unable to do magic? To forever know what you had lost?

I could get it back with a spiritual quest, there's nothing to say they couldn't do the same thing, Susan thought back. I'm taking their magic away for using it wrong. If they repent and promise themselves they'll never use it in that way again, there's every chance that would be enough.

You can't be sure of that.

No, I can't. But at least this gives them a chance to regret their actions, and maybe expunge a little of that blackness from their souls before they die.

Alice spoke up. "I'm not sure I like either option. They can hardly fight back with Susan's *Immunity* magic going, isn't that correct? Just cutting them down where they stand doesn't seem right. Even for the more merciful option that leaves them alive."

"Women," snorted Alastor.

Thrust! thought Old Susan.

No, that's what I would have done, when I was you. She stood up. "You're sure you don't want to apologize for what you just said? I could get Bellatrix here for you, maybe set you up a nice little death match. Then you could see how far a 'mere woman' is willing to go."

"It was uncalled for," said Sirius. "You are a guest in my house, Alastor. Apologize."

"You would side with her."

"I'm not siding with anyone! I'm asking that you treat everyone around this table with the respect they deserve! You do remember what Bellatrix did to Alice and Frank, right? Are you really going to say Alice went through less because she was female?"

"If we don't fight to kill, we'll never win!"

"Chess," said Ron, causing everyone to look over at him.

"Exactly, Ron," said Susan. "We're sitting here arguing about the fate of pawns, when we should be working out how to take down the king. Tom came to me. He knew I wouldn't just rush off and kill his former followers. Out of some spark of decency or just to make them suffer longer I don't know. I don't care. The operation is mine, and we'll do it my way."

"Then I shall have no part of-." He also made to rise.

"Sit down, Alastor," said Albus, speaking up at last. "And you too, Susan. Tell me, what would you have happen to them once they no longer have magic? Do you realize they will have no skills, no resources, to enter the non-magical world?"

"You would rather they just be killed?"

He shook his head. "I'm not saying that. I just want to hear your thoughts."

"I'm certain jobs could be found for them. Even in the magical world, some things must be done through mundane means. What do you do with 'squibs' when you discover them? Do the same thing with these new ones I'll make."

"I see. It is, as she said, her show. She has heard our reasoning for why their deaths might be preferable. If she chooses to go ahead with her plan, she must live with the consequences."

"Hey, I'll hand them the sword if they want to run themselves through," she said, shrugging. "Once they realize what they've lost, that is. Everyone deserves to end their own lives if the pain of living becomes too much. I'm just saying, let's declaw them, no offense Sparkle, and then see where that takes them."

"I do actually take offense to that one. I looked up declawing once, do you know what they do?" Sparkle asked.

"My apologies. I'll think of another analogy later."

“That’s fine. So long as you’re sorry.”

“So what is your plan?” asked Alastor.

“Same as always. When they show up, hit them with *Hypnotic Pattern* and then take their magic away. Restrain them, drop the *Pattern* and see what they want to do. Simple, easy, nothing gets destroyed.”

“Then we get to pick up the pieces,” he grumbled.

“At least you won’t have to carry out bodies,” she countered.

“I don’t like it.”

“Too bad. We’ll head there this afternoon, so they don’t get the jump on us by coming early, and get set up. After that it’s just a matter of waiting, a couple of combat rounds, and a late supper.”

“Seems simple enough. Good luck with it.”

“You aren’t coming?”

He got up. “Doesn’t seem to be any need. You’ve got it all sewn up nicely, haven’t you? You and your magic, saving the day again. Enjoy yourself.” He left without looking back (though his eye probably was).

“What’s eating him?” asked Susan as the front door closed.

“He’s itching for a fight, that much is clear,” said Alice. “To prove he still has it, or for revenge or what, I don’t know.”

“Maybe to prove that he’s still alive,” said Hermione. Everyone looked at her. “Don’t you feel it? Like he shouldn’t even be around this table right now. I think it’s an *echo*, he died if Susan wasn’t here somehow, and he’s trying to figure out why he’s still around.”

“That would confuse anyone,” said Ron. “I’m still amazed I can do Kung Fu, tell you the truth.”

“I’ve had that feeling too,” said Sirius. “Like I shouldn’t be here.”

“Same for us,” said Frank, looking at his wife.

“We’ve all been touched by Susan’s magic,” said Albus, “And for the better, I think. For what it’s worth, thank you for coming to us and telling us about this. The old you wouldn’t have, she would have just gone off on her own. The rest of us will come with you, in case something should happen. It could be a trap, after all. Tom could put *Magic Immunity* on these four we expect, and then we would have a real fight on our hands.”

“I guess I shouldn’t take anything Tom says at face value. Especially now. It all comes back to fighting myself, doesn’t it?”

“If I may ask, why do you trust the man at all?” asked Alice. “I know you weren’t there for the first time he tried to take over, but you must have heard stories. I mean, think of poor Harry here, growing up without his parents!”

Albus chuckled. “Susan doesn’t believe things without seeing them herself. When I asked her that question she said Tom could have been framed for all he was said to have done, including killing Harry’s parents.”

“Let’s just say he’s played it straight with me in the past,” Susan said, pointedly not looking at Albus. *Unlike some people in this room.*

“Oh.”

“So, let’s say they are immune to magic,” asked Tonks. “What do we do about it?”

“They’ll be immune to spells, not magic. There’s a difference, and a significant one. If they were immune to magic they couldn’t use their wands. So, this leaves them pretty

vulnerable- regular fire, objects conjured in midair to crush them, pulling the air away from them so they can't breathe, anything physical. Now if they have *Invulnerability* going, like I would in that situation... let's just say you would have to get pretty creative. We can go over some things to counter that situation before we go."

That afternoon Susan and several members of the Order, including Albus, stood outside the home of Samantha Bigelstine. Susan knocked, and an elf opened the door.

"Yes?"

"I'm Susan Felton, is Samantha at home?"

"Susan?" cried a voice from the house. "How lovely to see you again- wait, what's all this? Albus Dumbledore? Is that you?" She looked at the members of the Order, confused.

"May we step inside?" Albus asked. "There are some things we need to discuss with you."

"Of course. Please, come in. Grabyle, tea for our guests."

"Coming right up, madam."

So Susan explained what Tom had said, and that she wanted to watch over the house that evening to make sure nothing happened.

"But why my house? I mean, yes, I have many objects 'de art but no more than any other wealthy person in town."

"Coincidence does happen, I suppose," answered Albus. "Especially when Susan is concerned."

"Well, I trust her, and of course you, Albus. If these other people are with you... oh, that's Harry Potter, isn't it? I doubt you want to do me harm, so you're all welcome to stay for the evening."

"Thank you," said Susan. "Sorry to barge in on you like this, but we had to move fast."

"It's no bother," Samantha said lightly. "It gets a bit lonely in this house sometimes, this will be a nice diversion."

So they all chatted, and the sun went down. Samantha set a nice table for them all, and everyone had a great time getting to know her better. It was around 7:30 when it happened.

There was a knock on the door.

"Are you expecting anyone?" asked Albus, wand already out.

Yikes, Quick Draw *much*, Albus? *Note to self, have Magic Immunity already going in any fight against the Headmaster.*

Samantha shook her head, but summoned her calendar from the other room to be sure.

"No, nothing on the schedule."

Tonks rippled, and suddenly there were two Samanthas in the room. "I'll go check it out," she said, holding her wand behind her arm, out of sight.

"Just say, um, 'lovely evening' if you want me to stun them," Susan said as she walked by. "We'll be right behind you."

“Got it.”

The others hid, and Tonks opened the door. “Can I help you?” she asked.

“Uh, maybe? Are you Samantha Bigelstine?”

“Who wants to know?”

“Well, you don’t know us, but if everything has gone according to plan, Susan is here tonight. We need to speak to her, if that’s okay?”

“Uh, what?”

“It’s about Tom. Please, believe us. We mean you no harm, and if she’s not here we’ll just go. But if she is, can we talk to her please?”

Susan looked around the corner to see four men standing there, looking worried.

Tonks looked behind her. “You heard?”

“Yeah,” said Susan, stepping out. “Let them in, if that’s okay with you, Samantha?”

“The more the merrier, I guess? If this is a robbery, it’s the most pleasant one I could imagine.”

“We’re not here to rob... you?” said the man, coming in and looking at the two Samanthas. Everyone else started coming out of hiding, wands pointed.

“No sudden moves now,” said Albus. The men paled a little more, if that was possible.

“Uh, no sir,” said the second one through the door. “We don’t want any trouble,” said the third.

“Thanks for agreeing to see us.” The fourth held out a small box. “A token of our good faith.”

Sirius grabbed it, and the four men were marched into the living room, where they were shoved down onto the couch while being covered by everyone there. Sirius shook the box, and it rattled as if four sticks were inside.

“Shall I open it?” he asked.

“Let me see,” said Susan, not touching it. She directed him to spin it around, looking for *Spell Symbol* marks, and did a *magic sense* on it. It registered as not having any magical signature at all. “It’s clean.”

Sirius opened it, and pulled four wands out.

“These yours?” he asked.

The first man, probably elected to be the spokesman for the group, nodded. “We know what she can do, having them wouldn’t do us any good. We’re here to talk, not fight.”

“So talk,” said Susan, turning to them. “I got word you were planning to rob this place.”

“We didn’t know how else to see you,” said the man. “So we planned this fake robbery, knowing Tom would probably learn about it. We hoped he would send you to punish us, given what you can do. And I guess he did.”

“Wait, let me get this straight. You played Tom to get me here, who thought he was playing me into doing his dirty work?”

“Exactly.”

“I have a grudging respect for this plan. I’m listening.”

“We want to help you take him down.”

Susan laughed. “Oh, that’s just too much. Really? You’ve turned over a new leaf, is that it?”

The faces of the men darkened.

“Wait a moment,” said the real Samantha. “These old eyes of mine aren’t what they used to be. Let me get another candle so I can get a good look at you. I’m an excellent judge of character, after all.”

She came back with one of the candles Susan had made, and Susan gave her a little nod.

Good thinking. I didn't expect this so I didn't think to put on a truth spell. Stupid, really. I'll have to learn to be more flexible.

"Can we continue?" The third man in shot him a dirty look, and gestured to Susan. "Oh, I mean, uh, is that better for you?"

"You're really trying, aren't you?" asked Susan. "So, it is a new leaf then?"

"Not exactly," said the second man.

"We know about your temper," said the forth. "We don't want to be smashed up or whatever."

I did good! thought Old Susan.

Oh, be quiet.

"We're going to be honest," said the first. The candle didn't flicker. "We don't like his way of doing things, but not for the reasons you might think."

"The Death Eater group as we knew it is probably finished forever," said the third man.

"Thanks to his betrayal," muttered the forth.

"The fact of the matter is, we still hold to the original ideals of the group," said the first.

"Oh, you mean the pure blood craziness?" asked Hermione.

"Er, yes. But, well, you've seen what he's done, right? I mean, have as many kids as you can? With anyone you can have them with? What's that all about? And then giving people tax breaks because of it? Madness!"

"He wants a wizard army-" said Susan, but the man put up a hand.

"We know. He spoke at length to us about his glorious mission to bring magic out of the shadows. But that's the opposite of what we want."

"We like being in the shadows," said the second man. "Less paperwork."

"Plus," said the third, "this will just make more Mudbloods, not less." He saw Hermione glaring at him. "I mean, uh, more half-blooded wizards? Which are, uh, just as worthy as anyone else?"

"Basically," cut in Albus, "you don't think you'll get your way so you want revenge on the man you followed who you thought would get you what you desired?"

"When you say it like that..." said the forth man.

"Great," said Susan sarcastically. "A bunch of people we know will turn traitor once they feel they can't get what they want. If it ever looks like I can't take Tom out, I can expect to be stabbed in the back by you. There's a total recipe for success."

"We wouldn't do that!" said the second man. The candle flickered. Susan gave him a dark look. "Okay, maybe we would, but you can take him, right?"

"I hope so."

"And what then?" asked Albus. "Say we take what you're saying at face value and allow you to help us? Tom is now gone- what do we do with you? Known terrorists, murderers, etc."

"Pardon us for helping?" asked the second man hopefully.

"Give us medals?" asked the first.

"Have a parade?" asked the third.

"Uh, perhaps not," said the forth, seeing there was probably no chance of that. "We'll accept punishment for our crimes." The others started to protest. "No, seriously, guys," he said to them. "What is our revenge worth? You all said it was worth taking this chance, right? You know what Susan does to things she doesn't like. Seen any Dementors lately? No? At least we won't have to worry about that in the future. Okay, she puts us in a magically dead prison, it's still better than what we deserve. From their point of view, I mean."

"I guess," said the third. "At least we'll have our revenge to keep us warm at night."

"But isn't revenge a dish best served cold?" asked second.

"Is now really the time?" asked the first.

"Wow, there really is one in every group," said Harry, glancing at Susan.

"One what? Why is everyone looking at me?"

Albus cleared his throat. "That aside, even if you wish to join our group, we can't exactly trust you with wands or responsibility."

"Actually," said Susan, "We could. It's called *Contract*. We write up that they cannot place us, the known members of the Order, into harm, directly or indirectly. That will keep them in line. Or any innocents protected by us, reveal secrets, yadda yadda, we can think of the actual wording later."

"I have seen the effectiveness of that spell, when you couldn't tell us about your activities at the school," remarked Albus. "That would be acceptable."

"Some kind of Unbreakable Vow?" asked the first man.

"Yes, something like that," answered Susan.

"Seems fair enough," said the third man. "We're at your mercy, one way or the other."

"We do have information for you," said the fourth man. "We didn't come here empty handed, we knew you wouldn't be able to trust us."

"You're still getting *Contracted*, information or not. But okay, let's hear it."

"It's about you, Susan," said the first. "We kind of found out by accident, when we were making a report."

"Found what out?"

"The way he's been learning about you," said the third. "I was the one who saw it. I came to make my report, and it looked like he was reading some little girl's diary. It was all hearts and saying how great Ron looked when he was practicing his martial arts and—"

Hermione shrieked. "That's my- How did you- Not another word!" Her face was red and her wand pointed a little more forcefully.

"Oh, sorry." The candle flickered. "Anyway, when he heard me behind him he slammed it shut and it vanished. Curious about why the boss was reading some girl's diary I stuck outside the hallway after I gave my report. He did some kind of spell, your kind, Susan, and the book reappeared. He went back to reading. He skimmed parts, but other parts he made notes about in another book. A real one, I guess. The one he summoned seemed not wholly real, if that makes sense."

"Did it look like this?" asked Hermione, holding a hand out. "*Research*." The summoned book dropped into her hand.

"Yeah, exactly like that!"

"Oh. Crap."

"Hermione," asked Susan, trying to keep her temper. "Why was Tom reading your diary?"

I think you already know the answer, thought Old Susan. What will you do to her, I wonder?

She swallowed. "I think, maybe, because I wrote about the things you did? I wanted to write a book about your adventures later, so I didn't want to forget anything. I didn't know he could just pluck it out of the air, I'm sorry!"

"Did you tell her not to?" asked Albus.

Susan felt her anger draining away. "No. I never suspected *Research* could be used in that

way, but it makes sense. Just because it's not published, doesn't mean the spell can't find it. He just wanted to research me, and the spell gave him everything he needed. I don't blame you, Hermione." The candle flickered. "I don't! I didn't think about it, why should she have?" she shouted at it.

"Uh, are you talking to a candle?" asked the second man.

"You stay out of it!"

"But it's my fault," said Hermione, wringing her hands, "I shouldn't have been writing about you."

"You can write about me all you want," said Ron.

"Ron!"

"I don't think anyone is really to blame, here," said Albus. "Susan has often underestimated the power of her own spells being used against her—"

"Thanks for reminding me," she muttered.

"And this is just another case of us being a step behind Tom. None of what he learned was all that damaging, was it?"

"I don't know," said Hermione. "If I gave him ideas or told him about some weakness of Susan's in passing, who knows what he could make of it? Obviously I'll stop immediately."

"Oh, no you won't!" protested Susan.

"What? I'm confused."

"Now that we know, we can use it to our advantage. You're going to write about how depressed I'm seeming, that I feel I can't win. How close I am to just giving up, that sort of thing. He'll lap it up, never suspecting that we're telling him exactly what we want him to hear."

"That would seem to work to our advantage," said Albus. "I approve. Please do as she suggests, Hermione. I'll go over with you exactly what sort of things to write later."

"Okay."

"So, uh, is that useful then?" asked the first guy.

"Oh, you're still here?" asked Susan. She laughed. "Yes, despite it all you did good. If we can stay here awhile longer, Samantha, we'll get that *contract* written up and you four can be put to work. I don't want you out of my sight without signing it."

"Whatever you want. So we'll be allowed to help take Tom out? What's the plan? Maybe we can give you some pointers on assaulting his base or something."

"Right now... there is no plan. No assaulting, no battles. We're just waiting to see what he does."

"Are you serious? You haven't been planning at all?" asked the fourth guy. "I would have figured you would leave tonight! This very hour!"

"Too many innocents in the way," said Susan. "That's not how I do things."

"Innocents? You mean acceptable casualties?" asked the second guy.

"No, I mean innocents. Those working for Tom under a curse or just plain old misinformation. At the moment he's not hurting anyone, unless you have information that he is?"

"He just researches stuff all the time," said the first guy. "Personally I think he's cracking up. He's always talking to himself."

A glance went around the room. Hermione snapped her fingers. "Is he sleeping at all?"

The men shook their heads.

"That's it then. You warned me about using *Tirelessness* too often. There you go. In order to stay up and research magic twenty four seven he's not sleeping at all and it's catching up to him. That might also work in our favor."

“That must be it,” agreed Susan. *But he seemed pretty lucid in the dream. But then, he would, wouldn't he? If dreams are what he needs... I don't know.* “Maybe we'll get lucky and he'll backfire something he's researching and solve our problems for us.”

Don't count on it, thought Old Susan.

Susan's blood ran cold. *Talking to himself? Like maybe a version of himself in the past, who seems to keep cropping up more and more lately? That ritual that brought him back, are we more connected now, or did it do something to both of us because of the mixed magics? What's happening to us?*

And so the four “reformed” Death Eaters signed the *Contract*, with wording specified by Albus, and they became “allies” to the Order. They were put into a separate place, as even with *Contract* going, none of the Order trusted them to know the location of the actual headquarters. They told the group what they knew of his location, which wasn’t much, as he would just *Telesummon* them when they were needed. Hence, none of them actually knew where Tom was staying.

Susan continued work on the anti-werewolf charms, and making *Wards* before she went to bed with a variety of spells on them. One night, the group, who had been practicing and generally laying about in the *Dimension* while Susan worked the past few weeks got a visit from Severus.

“No threats have been made against any of your families, you’ll no doubt be pleased to hear,” he said to them as they came in.

“Good to see you again, too,” said Susan, sitting down. Sirius was there, eyeing Severus with undisguised disgust. Albus was also present, probably having heard what Severus had to say before the others arrived. “No need to loom, have a seat.”

“Additionally,” he went on, ignoring the invitation, “the Dark Lord’s behavior seems to grow more erratic with each passing day.”

“How so?”

“He seems to be arguing with himself over some plan to compensate for the loss of his Horcrux objects. As though some invisible person were saying whatever he has planned will work perfectly and not to worry, while he maintains he is very worried.”

“But you don’t know what that plan is?”

“He has not taken me into his confidence in that matter, no.”

“Too bad, that would have been useful.”

“Perhaps you would like to trade positions with me? Go to the Dark Lord’s side while I stay here and... what is it you’re doing again?”

“Making a pack of werewolves safe. You know, helping people, and the world by keeping more from being made?”

“Yes. In the grand scheme of things, a very important activity.”

“I know, it must be so frustrating not to be able to give me homework and such. That I can spend my time how I wish, rather than writing useless reports about species that don’t exist anymore.” She pretended to look thoughtful. “How did that happen again? Oh right. Me.”

“Are you still bitter about that essay he assigned us about Dementors?” asked Hermione.

“I’m so over it, Hermione. I had the last laugh, after all. I got the satisfaction of being proven correct, that my method of dealing with them was the most efficient. Even he can’t ignore empirical evidence.”

He ignored her again. “And what have the rest of you been doing, as if I didn’t know?”

“Training,” said Ron. “We could go a few rounds if you wanted to see the results.”

“I have much more important things to do than try and not bruise your fragile ego by defeating you with a single spell. Some of us have actual work to be doing.”

“Right, where you hang around Tom and he doesn’t tell you anything of importance.

Great job,” said Susan.

Wait, thought Old Susan, *if he really is on our side and he’s that close to Tom, why doesn’t he just knife the guy in the back and be done with it? He’d never see it coming.*

Good question.

“You might be surprised,” said Sirius, who had been sparing with the group and sharpening his own skills.

Severus ignored him too. “Perhaps this will more fall into the category of *importance*- It seems Tom is recruiting from the ranks of those species considered dangerous by wizards. For example, the giants have disappeared from their home in the mountains.”

“I see. That is actually worrisome. Did he say why?”

“He has not said he is doing it at all. However, I have gotten the sense he is preparing for something, and he needs all the power he can get do to it.”

“That’s strange, he has all the power he needs with my magic. And his plan to take over the non-magical world won’t be ready for generations. Are you sure it’s him? I mean, there could be more disgruntled Death Eaters out there that are building their own army to try and take him out.”

“I highly doubt it. He wouldn’t allow such a thing to go on.”

“I suppose you’re right. Okay, I’ll keep that in mind. Anything else major to report?”

“Pregnancies among women are up.”

“What about among men?” asked Ron with a smirk. Severus glared at him.

“There is a spell that can be worked to tell if a woman is pregnant,” Albus said. “I’ve had the order working it when they can where there are large concentrations of wizards. It seems the lure of gold has motivated even the most reluctant of couples into conceiving. It doesn’t show on them yet, but a few months from now you’re going to see an unnatural amount of pregnancies.”

“So his plan to create a wizard population large enough to challenge the world is actually working?” asked Susan, shocked.

“Obviously,” said Severus.

“Are the tax breaks that substantial?” asked Hermione.

“It’s not just that,” said Albus. “You can’t keep up with the news here, but... well, see for yourself.” He pulled out a paper and tossed it down. “In this issue alone, three articles were written subtly implying it’s every person’s duty to make sure their legacy is secure. That only through childbirth will magic survive as billions and billions of non-magical people continue to be born. That having many children is a mark of status and respect rather than, well,” he looked over at Ron. “Just two people really loving each other.”

“Are the tax discounts sustainable? It doesn’t seem like they would be, if they go up as the number of children you have goes up.”

“There are some,” drawled Severus, “who will never have children. The *penalty* for such an act also increases by the year. That will make up for some of the deficit.”

“Can’t find a date, huh?” joked Susan.

“What about you?” he asked. “Can you and your little friend Luna have children together? I think not.”

“That’s because you don’t know the full extent of the *Shape-shift* spell. To be fair, neither do I, we’ve never tried that, uh, particular experiment as of yet.” She colored.

“Wait,” said Hermione. “You mean if you *Shape-shifted* into a... well, a male version of yourself, then you would have, um, you know?”

“Would I be fully functional? I don’t see why not. The spell says *“The new form gains all*

the biological abilities of the intended form,” and having kids is a biological ability, right?” She grinned.

“But what if you cast it on her, and got pregnant, and then used it to become something else? Like a cat or something? Wait, could Sparkle be turned into a man and then what would that mean if ‘he’ had-”

“Fascinating as this conversation is,” broke in Severus, “I’m going to be on my way. You know how to reach me, Albus.” He turned and strode out of the room.

“I must be on my way as well,” said Albus, rising. “I am glad to hear you are not letting your skills grow dull during your vacation here,” he said to the wandless magic users.

“Now that we know something’s up, we’ll probably put in more time training,” said Ron.

“What vacation?” protested Susan. “I’m doing as much work now as I ever did in school. More, actually. And here, if I mess it up, it impacts someone else as well, not just me in the classroom. Please don’t think our hiding out here means we’re idle in any way, Headmaster.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it. Keep up the good work, all of you.”

That afternoon, Susan went to go visit Dominic, where he worked in the non-magical world as a maintenance worker for an office building. He had provided them the address, in case she needed to talk to him for some reason.

“Like ‘em young, do you?” joked one of the guys he was having lunch with when Susan walked in and came over to him.

“She’s my niece,” he said, getting up.

“Niece? Niece? What a strange word,” said another guy, repeating it to himself. “Kneece.”

“It’s French,” said the original guy.

“Oh, how do you know?”

“I went to collage you know!”

“What, for three weeks?”

“Just ignore them,” said Dominic, putting a hand on Susan’s shoulder and walking her away from them. “What’s up?” he said in a low voice once away from them. She could hear them still joking amongst themselves.

“Have you been approached by any seedy looking characters for your, you know, special talents?”

“As a matter of fact, I was a couple of days ago. Told them I wouldn’t have to worry about that little problem very soon. He went on about me betraying my people, if you can believe it. Said there were going to be some big changes soon, and I should choose my side carefully.”

“Really? Anything else?”

“No, sorry. Was it important? I was going to mention it when my turn came, didn’t think anything of it. There are those who try to use people that... have my problem as a distraction for committing crimes. I’ve been asked in the past to do shady things, like somehow being what I am makes me lose my morals or something. I just figured that was more of the same.”

“Just that others are being recruited as well, it seems. Do you know who it was? Had he approached you before this?”

Dominic shook his head. “Never saw the guy before.”

“Okay. I doubt he’ll come back, but try and get his name at least if you do see him again.”

“Will do. How’s everything coming?”

“We’re on schedule, don’t worry. If I may ask, why do you work in a place like this? I mean, you have... you know.” She made a wand motion with one hand.

“You kidding? You have to register, you know? If you get...” he looked around. “Bitten.”

“What, like a sex offender or something?” Susan asked in a shocked but quiet voice. “For something you didn’t even do?”

He nodded his head. “For something I didn’t even do. Nice, huh? Makes it tough to get a job over there, like I’d hang around during the problem times. Lucky for me, the Muggle world doesn’t exactly keep up with that list, so it’s much easier to find work here than on the other side. Of course it means doing things the Muggle way, and believe me, convincing someone to hire a guy with no Muggle identity is no picnic. Plus changing the money, going back and forth, it’s no easy life.”

“I can imagine. I doubt you have a social security number or anything like that. How do you even get paid?”

“I didn’t when I first started looking for work here. There’s a sort of underground for people like me, we help each other out. That includes the older ones helping the younger ones to get established here. Checking accounts, identity cards, the works.”

“Well, if I have my way, someday none of that will be necessary.”

“You dream big, kid. I hope it works out that way, for all our sakes.”

She smiled at him. “See you in a couple of weeks.”

“You got it.”

And so the weeks passed uneventfully. “Dark” creatures continued to disappear from the world but no one knew to where or how. Susan took a trip out to where the giants used to be and they just got up and walked off one day.

“Where are they headed?” she asked Albus, who was there with her.

“Not much in that direction but more mountains,” he replied. “Pity your *Time Area* is stationary.”

“And we can’t use the *Window* because it’s mountains. They’ll be out of sight no matter where they’re headed in minutes.”

“Curious.”

And then it was almost time for school to begin again. The core stood before Susan.

“What’s up, everyone?” she asked.

“We need to talk about what to do now,” said Harry.

“Are we going back to school?” Hermione asked.

“Please say we aren’t!” said Ron.

Susan sighed. “I kind of figured we would, actually. There’s not much there for me, and you all are pretty good at combat magic by now, but I’m sure there’s more you can learn there. I would rather graduate than not, it’ll help my credibility when I want to open my shop.”

“But you’re a wanted criminal,” said Harry. “And the ministry says they want to talk to us about you, that’s why we’ve been here all this time.”

“But they can’t move against the school, can they?” said Susan. “Anyone they send, Tom must know I would just knock them out of *Imperio* and they would then be on my side. And I’m not a criminal. I’m wanted for *questioning* regarding the events surrounding the breakout. I’m not wanted for *causing* the breakout.”

“That could just be clever wording to throw you off guard.”

“What if he just sends people who aren’t under any curse?” asked Hermione.

“Remember, not everyone at the ministry was taken over, according to Arthur. Just key people who give the orders. They think you’re the bad guy, not Tom. Nothing you say would make them believe differently. They’ll still try to take you in. You’d have to fight them off, and they’re just doing their jobs so you won’t.”

“Oh. I hadn’t thought of that. Still, I would get a trial with the new “fair” laws they’ve put in place. He doesn’t want that. I would just show myself *not* doing magic while the attack on the prison was going on, thus clearing my name. Or take them to the cave and show them Tom fighting Albus and the others, and using my magic. Or just use a truth candle, there’s tons of ways I could show my innocence.”

“What about us?” asked Ron.

“What about you? You’re wanted for questioning about my whereabouts. If I’m walking around Hogwarts, that becomes moot, yes?”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right.”

“So we are going back?” asked Harry. “What are you going to tell everyone?”

“The truth, of course. We’ve been printing enough stories in the school paper about Tom and me and what I’ve been doing. I’ll just put another story in the paper about my innocence. Plus everyone’s seen what I can do, they wouldn’t try anything. If I’m walking around the halls like I belong there, everyone will accept I do. After all, if I’m not hiding or running, I must be innocent, right? It’s the same technique Tom used, if you think about it. He’s wandering around the ministry building, so obviously he must not be a criminal! He only had to control a couple of people, like the minister, who made some announcements and everyone bought it. The headmaster does the same thing and I’m in the clear.”

“This isn’t your *Overconfidence* talking, is it?” asked Sparkle.

“I don’t need *Overconfidence* to know everything will be fine. Don’t worry about it!”

Isn’t that the definition of the word? thought Sparkle.

“Is the headmaster going to like you walking around though? It could mean trouble for the school,” said Harry.

“He said whatever I thought was best is what I should do.”

“I guess if he doesn’t mind...” said Hermione.

“Are we going to the station?” asked Ron.

“No, we’ll go directly this year. I don’t want to be wandering around in a crowded train station. That would be a terrible place to have to fight, if some random person decides they’re going to try taking me in themselves.”

“Is there a reward for your capture?” asked Ron, a glint in his eyes.

“Ron!” said Hermione.

“Just asking. She can break out of anywhere and I could use the gold.”

“I had gold, once,” said Harry wistfully.

“All we can actually prove is that you had a vault with a message scrawled on the wall,” Susan reminded him.

Hermione just rolled her eyes. “I’ll start packing.” She got up to leave.

“We’ve got days, Hermione,” said Ron, going after her.

“Some of us don’t leave everything to the very last second, Ron,” she said, walking out.

“How are the werewolves doing?”

“Great! I’m working on the last one now, for Dominic. Some of them even paid me, which was nice. Not exactly the way I saw spending the summer, but at least I did some good in

the world. And made a new friend or two.”

“So this is a preview of what you’ll be doing after we get out of school?”

“I guess you could say that. Of course, it won’t be all making stuff. Some problems will be solved just by normal spells and maybe some looking into things, like I did for Mrs. Bigelstine.”

“I just hope you know what you’re doing, going back to school like this.”

“We can’t hide out here forever. Especially if he really is planning something, I’ll need to be ready for him. At the school I’ll be a bit more central, and if something does happen that needs my attention, I’ll get informed of it a little earlier than if I was here.”

“I guess. I just can’t help but think I should be out there, somewhere. Not actually doing anything worthwhile or specific, but just... out there.”

“That’s helpful. I think you’ve just been cooped up here too long. Trust me, getting back to school will do you a world of good.”

“I just don’t feel I should be there, that’s all.”

“Where should you be, then? We’ve destroyed Tom’s *Soul Shards*, he’s not making trouble at the moment except for the vanishing magical creatures. And for I all know that’s some natural phenomenon or just them heading to a big party someplace, and we humans just never knew about it because we weren’t watching them so closely.”

“You and that pesky proof thing again?”

“Right. There’s nothing for us to do, or find, or search for or protect or kill.”

“Are you saying our lives are threatening to become... boring?!”

“Not to worry. I have a good feeling about going back to the school.”

“And by good you mean bad?”

She nodded. “Very bad. Which is good!”

“We can always come back here if it turns out to be a bad idea.”

“True. Anyway, have to finish this up. Don’t want to keep Dominic waiting.”

“Okay, see you later.”

Getting Warmed Up

Time: An hour before the train arrives

Place: Hogwarts Great Hall

“You took first place in three events? That’s great,” Susan said to Myrtle, who had been telling the group all about what went on at the castle during the summer.

“I only took the poetry prize because you helped me out.”

“I just made some suggestions, the poetry came from you. I’m really happy for you.”

“Thanks. I guess your summer was pretty boring?”

“Yup. Not a fight to the death to be seen. No offense.”

“None taken. Are you sure you should be around here, though?”

“Why not? Kids are going to steam through those doors in about an hour and everything will be fine. You’ll see.”

“I hope you’re right.”

And as predicted, kids started coming through the doors, talking animatedly until they set eyes on Susan. Then they stopped dead in their tracks and drew back to the doors, unsure of what to do.

“What’s the holdup here?” shouted a voice from behind them, and professor McGonagall pushed her way to the front. “Sit down, all of you. You’re upperclassman, I expect better behavior out of all of you.”

“But it’s Susan,” said a boy, pointing over at her. “Susan Felton. She’s wanted by the Aurors!”

“I know who that is, thank you. And if she was a wanted criminal she wouldn’t be sitting here in the great hall, now would she?”

“But that’s Susan!”

“We have already established that fact. Sit down, all of you!”

No one moved.

Susan got up, and the crowd, now backed up into the hallway, tried to take another step back. People near the back stood on their toes to try and see what was going on. She made her way to the entrance and stood up on a table.

“Hello everyone! Welcome back!”

Silence.

“Tough crowd. Now look!” she shouted. “You may have heard some things about me, and you will hear the true story once the school paper starts up again. For now all you need to know is that I have been framed. Yes I destroyed the entire race of Dementors, and good riddance. But I would never break people out of prison who belonged there. And that’s the end of it. All right?”

“What about all those monsters that are disappearing?” shouted someone near the middle. There was a general hum of agreement.

“I don’t know anything about that. Look, you’ve all seen me doing stuff. Have I ever needed anyone to fight my battles for me? Especially a horde of giants or whatever? No. What would I feed them, for gosh sakes? Do you think I have them in my pocket? I’m as baffled as you are about it, and that’s the truth.”

There was a general nodding of heads, and Susan caught phrases like “what would she do

with them?” and “she doesn’t need an army, she is one, like she says.”

“Maybe you’re wiping them out, like you did the Dementors,” shouted a girl.

“Uh, have I been shy about making it known what I did? No? You think I wouldn’t be doing the same if I was taking out some other group of evil creatures? Anyway, giants are living beings, not just undead energy floating around. I don’t kill, it’s not my style. I heal. It just so happens that healing, my kind of healing magic, doesn’t agree with Dementors. What I did to them wouldn’t work on giants, or any other creature. What do you care if giants or dragons or kobolds go missing? I thought they were considered pests anyway.”

“They shouldn’t just die or disappear without someone looking into it!”

“I did look into it. The giants just as a group decided to get up and walk away from their homes. That’s all I saw. No struggle, no teleporting, they just walked away. What happened to them after that I don’t know. But they went willingly, and no one here has anything to fear from me.”

“Now go and sit down!” yelled Minerva, and the students reluctantly obeyed. There seemed to be an invisible bubble around Susan, as traffic flowed around her, and when she sat back down with the group a space formed around her.

“Honestly,” she said, disgusted.

“I’ll support you, even if they won’t,” said a voice.

“Hi Neville!” everyone said, as Neville walked over to the table with the group. “I do have to sit with my house, though.”

“Screw it,” said Susan. “You’re sitting with me, along with the rest of my friends. All this house business is stupid anyway. We need to be united, not arbitrarily divined into groups.” He was reluctantly pulled down by Ron, and took a seat.

“Hope no one forgot me,” said Luna, also coming over and sitting down.

Several other members of S.T.F.U. got up from their tables and went to sit at the “Susan table” with the others, and were greeted warmly.

“Will we still have training sessions in the *Dimension* this year, Susan?” one asked.

“We sure will. Potion making too, the whole bit.”

“Excellent!” said another.

She answered other questions about her summer, and the Headmaster gave his usual speech, and everyone went up to bed.

“Now was that so bad?” Susan asked Hermione, unloading stuff from her *Dimension* into the room.

“I guess it could have been worse. You’re going to have to explain things to every single person here, though, judging by the way you got stopped just on the way up to the dorm.”

Susan laughed. “That’s why I’ve got the newspaper article already written, and why the paper will be starting up early tomorrow. Tom wants to run a smear campaign against me, I’ll give him a taste of his own medicine.”

The next day, the Daily Prophet had its own version of events to report:

Susan back in Hogwarts?

Susan Felton, suspected terrorist and wielder of what some are now calling “wild” or “free” magic because of her non-reliance on a wand, reappeared yesterday in Hogwarts school of witchcraft and wizardry. She has not been heard from since the previous school year ended,

and her activities during the summer break are a matter of some speculation. There are rumors she was seen in the company of known werewolves, but to what end is unknown. It is known that shortly after she destroyed the Dementor race and possibly released the prisoners there, other races began disappearing. Coincidence? This reporter doesn't think so; To date, five major centers of a specific creature, including giants and dragons, have seemingly vanished without a trace.

The minister refused to comment about why Susan had not been taken into custody immediately upon learning her whereabouts. "We know where she is now, so she's obviously through hiding. We'll deal with her as is appropriate," is all this reporter could get out of Mr. Fudge. Could it be even they fear her "free" magic and the army of creatures she may now have at her command? Tensions at the school are running high, as Susan stalks the halls like a lion seeking prey. Will parents begin putting pressure on the Headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, to throw her out of the school? Will they pull their children out for fear of what she might do?

This reporter can't help but wonder: What are the limits of this "free" magic she uses? The ease at which she subdued not one but two dragons during the Triwizard Tournament, not to mention all the other spectacular things she was seen doing, makes one curious. Was that the limit of her ability and power, or only the beginning? What are her ambitions, now that she only has one year of schooling left? Are any of us truly safe when such an unknown magic is loose in the world?

"Well, they'll wonder now, won't they, Rita?" asked Susan to no one in particular. She tossed the paper down and grabbed an apple, then started cutting it apart to eat it. "Knew I should have kept a lower profile. Stupid tournament."

"I agree," said Harry, probably recalling his own trials getting through it. "But on the bright side, some of those questions are answered in your article." He indicated the room, half of which were reading the Prophet and half which were reading the Times.

At least they are reading the Times, Susan thought. Now I just have to rely on people's sense of honor and knowing truth from lies.

She paused.

I'm doomed.

Later that afternoon, Susan went up to the Headmaster's office, as always, to pick up her *Imbuing* stuff for the school.

"Good afternoon, Susan," said Albus as she entered.

"Hello, Headmaster. Hope the ministry hasn't given you too much trouble about me being back here."

"None at all, surprisingly enough. I have yet to receive even an owl from them as of yet."

"So it's just Rita being her normal, sensationalist self. I half expected to see a bunch of Aurors up here to try and take me in by force."

"I think everyone by now knows how futile that would be."

"That actually concerns me, now that you've brought it up. Time and again I've faced threats and every time I overcome them. Anyone wanting me out of the way now knows they have to be pretty creative about it."

"The grounds are secure, of course. Apart from Tom using your type of magic to sneak people in, we will have plenty of warning for anything that might happen."

"I feel safer already!"

“Now, now, there’s no need for sarcasm. Tom didn’t seem too stressed about finding you over the break, what makes you think he would cause trouble now that you’re here?”

“I’m the only one that can really unmask the guy, and he knows it. Plus I could decide to just create a huge dead magic zone around the ministry building and let the resulting building collapse take him out.”

“You wouldn’t!” Albus said, concerned.

“No, but Headmaster, people think other people will do what they themselves would do. It’s difficult to step into another’s shoes and say ‘given what I know about this person, how do I think they are going to react to such-and-such?’ Someone’s first thought is going to be what they would do and then go from there. That’s how easily prevented crime exists, you know? You think that you don’t need to lock the doors on your car because you wouldn’t open someone else’s car door and grab their iPad sitting on the front seat. Whoops, someone did, and you’ve learned the hard way. It’s the same thing here. He knows if he tries something and misses, he should expect the response he would use if the situation were reversed.”

“Ah, you have experience with this sort of thing. I think I’ve heard you remark about underestimating trying to fight yourself.”

“Exactly. The trouble is you’ve shown us how he was in the past, which is fine. But he’s gone through a lot since then- death, rebirth, new magic, new ideals. So how can I predict what he’s going to do when he’s not that guy any more?”

“That is a problem. But do people really change? I mean especially a person like Tom.”

“Maybe not change, but his options have certainly increased. He could send anything in here, really, and there’s not much you could do about it.”

“You seem unconcerned about that.”

She shrugged. “I’ll deal with things as they happen, no point worrying about it until then, right?”

“I suppose, given the range of things he can now possibly do, worrying about every little thing would be counterproductive.”

“Exactly. I know what I know, and that will just have to see me though.”

That night, Susan found herself back in the “study” with Tom, who was again sitting in the big chair by the fire.

“Now what?” she said to no one in particular.

“It’s me, of course,” said Tom, rising out the chair. He suddenly shot a look over his shoulder, then looked back at her.

“Yes, I realize that. Are you okay?”

“Couldn’t be better.”

“You seem a bit twitchy, have you been getting enough sleep?”

He put his hands over his heart. “Why Susan, your concern touches me deeply. It’s so kind of you to worry about me.”

“I’m not worried about you, I’m worried about the people around you. If you go nuts crazy a lot of innocent people will get hurt. Now if you wanted to go quietly crazy...”

“I’m not mad. I’m not. I’m *not*,” he shouted over his shoulder. He looked back at Susan. “I mean, uh, you don’t... that is...” Suddenly he raised his hands and half lunged for Susan’s neck, but seemed to stop himself. “No. No!” he shouted.

“Seriously, what’s going on with you right now?”

He drew himself up. “That is none of your concern. Now why are you here?”

“Yes, exactly.”

“What? Oh, yes, I brought you. Yes. I wanted to make one final plea to you, to join me and... and... what was it? Destroy the world?” he asked off to his left, past Susan. She glanced over there but didn’t see anything. “Of course, I mean *save* the world. The wizard world- yes. We have the power, and it’s our responsibility to use it correctly.”

He’s got a point, said Old Susan. If we weren’t meant to use our magic for great things, why were we given it? Your father’s destiny was to travel between worlds on his little crusade. What’s yours? Do you know why you got it, really? Maybe this is it, to help really bring magic back to this world. And think about this- if you were by his side you could temper his actions, make sure he took the moral path. And make sure he got enough sleep.

Oh, be quiet.

“Sorry, but from my perspective, saving the wizard world means taking you out.”

“Yes, he though, I mean, I thought that might be the case.”

“You really need to get some sleep. You’re staying up with *Tirelessness* aren’t you? It’s starting to show.”

“You think running things is easy? You think I have time to just lay there, when there’s work to be done?”

“Everyone else seems to manage it.”

“No one else can be as great a wizard as I am. Not even you.”

“I’m a great wizard because I use my magic correctly, not because I have so much of it.”

“Correctly? There is no correctly. You do what’s best for yourself, end of story.”

“I’m sure it’s a great comfort to those you killed, they can know you were doing that because it was best *for yourself*.”

“Are you still going on about that? I died you know. One could even say I died once for my sins. That would be enough for some people, but no, not you. Let it go already.”

“I can’t. The law is clear. Those people are dead, you’re still alive. That cannot go unpunished.”

“I see. He said that’s what you would say but- yes I know, I know!” He was shouting off to the side again. “Sorry about that. What I mean to say is, I thought you might say that, so this will be our last meeting. If I can’t reason with you I’ll just have to take you off the board. Nothing against you personally.”

“You really think you can take me?”

“Oh, one way or the other. Oh, and I hear those Death Eaters are working for your side now? Didn’t expect that, hope they aren’t spies or anything. That would be terrible. See you!”

The dream faded, and Susan woke up, recalling it perfectly.

Okay, he’s losing his marbles all right. Does that make it better or worse for me?

Susan started to lay back down but magical energies swirled around her. “*Barrier against magic,*” she cast, taking no time but using maximum energy. She got a 15, just 2 above the needed 13 to cast the spell. She felt herself almost teleport away from the castle but whatever he was casting splintered off her new *Barrier*.

“What’s going on?” asked Sparkle, jumping up on the bed.

“It appears,” said Susan with a grimace, “that Tom is now tired of waiting and is going to start forcing the issue.”

“I’m amazed you were even awake!”

“I wasn’t. He brought me into another dream to give me ‘one last chance’ and then-” she

rolled *Magic Theory*, getting a 20, “I think he tried to *Telesummon* me away from here.”

“He must not have known you would be awake right after the *Dream Link*.”

“Probably. He never experienced it from this side.”

“What are you going to do then? You can’t keep this spell up forever, just a scene. Then he’ll try again, and you need to sleep sometime.”

“Well, we can use that to our advantage, actually.” She got out the writings for *Personal Dimension*. “Let’s go look up the reverse of that spell. I can just make up some *Wards* with it, and slap one on myself. The ‘scene’ will be just ‘that night.’”

“I guess that would work.”

“Sure, no problem. I’ll just have to keep my bracelet handy when I’m not under the counter spell. If I hadn’t rolled max just then for my Sun check, I’m not sure what would have happened. Come on.”

So Susan looked up *Planar Hold* and make herself some *wards* using that spell. She activated one after stepping out of her *Personal Dimension*. “Okay, I’ve asked for the magic to last until I morning, and as I’m not maintaining it, that should be enough.”

“But this is only a temporary measure, right? I mean, if he’s now actively trying to kidnap you, you’re going to have to do something about it.”

“I agree. I’ll talk to the headmaster tomorrow and see what he thinks. Quite honestly I expected better of Tom. If this was the only thing he could come up with, I’ve got nothing to worry about.”

“I hope you’re right.”

“You say he tried to kidnap you?” asked Albus, after Susan told him what happened the night before. He was sitting at the teacher’s table, finishing his breakfast, when Susan came to talk to him.

“He’s cracking up, I’m afraid. Maybe he tried some mental *Insanity* spell that backfired on him or maybe he’s just not getting enough dreams. Either way, I’m worried he’s just going to get worse.”

“And perhaps his efforts to spirit you away may become more dangerous as well.”

“The trouble is, there’s only one spell to teleport someone against their will, and he tried it. I can keep *Planar Hold* up when I need to sleep, so I don’t think that’s the thing we need to worry about.”

“What are you saying?”

“I’m saying we need to be careful he doesn’t start trying to actually kill me while I’m here. Innocent people might get hurt because of it.”

“I agree.” He thought for a moment. “What would you do, if it was you?”

“You mean if I was him? Any number of things. Go to the astral, open up a small portal, and drop an *Elemental Devastation* through it. I mean, this is Tom we’re talking about here, right? He doesn’t care about taking innocent lives, is what you keep telling me. If we’re talking about what I would personally do it would be *Hypnotic Field* rather than *Devastation* but you get the idea.”

“I do get the idea, yes.”

“I’m putting the castle at risk. I should leave.”

“That is to be considered, yes. But consider this- if you do go back into hiding he may start tearing the magical world apart looking for you. At least here we can meet his threats on ground we know.”

“The trouble is he could send anything after me. I’ve never really sat down and thought about all the ways my magic could be used to assassinate someone from afar. But I’m guessing there’s probably ways, since he knows right where I am.”

“But by the same token he is limited in what he can do. If he attacks you in a way our magic can’t explain, questions will be raised as to how. Even he couldn’t explain that away. You’ve published your side of the story in the school paper, that story becomes more believable if he manages to kill you with your own magic.”

“That will be of great comfort to me if he succeeded in killing me.”

“I presume you are equal to the task of keeping yourself alive. You have been up to this point, after all.”

“Of course. I just thought you should know what’s going on, that’s all.”

“It was quite thoughtful of you. Thank you for telling me.”

At that moment, owls came through the windows and started dropping mail on people. One dark owl circled overhead, then swooped low over Susan, dropping something.

“*Phase*,” she cast quickly, taking zero delay and letting it drop through her to the floor. When it didn’t explode she took another step away from it and ended the spell again.

“Aren’t you taking this a little too far?” Albus asked, looking down at her.

“I don’t get letters, Headmaster,” she replied, walking around it in a circle. She narrowed her magical senses to just the letter, getting a 9 on *Magic Sense*. “Thought so. This has a spell on it, Headmaster. Two, actually. My favorite *Spell Symbol*, probably set to go off when I touched it.”

“What’s the other?”

“You don’t want to know.”

“I see. What should we do about it? Can you guarantee it will only go off when you touch it?”

“No, actually I can’t. Can you erase any writing on the paper without opening it? I could, but I would have to get the spell out.”

“Certainly.” He pointed his wand at it. “Done.”

“It’s safe then,” she said, bending over to pick it up. “The spell was inside the writing, and with that gone, both spells are broken. Here.” She handed it to him. “If your magic can tell you where this came from, or what path the owl took or something, we might be able to track down where he’s staying.”

“That would be tricky, but I’ll take it. Nice reflexes there, by the way.”

“Please. The day an owl beats me in *Initiative* is the day I open up my *Personal Dimension* and don’t come back out.”

Of course, I used 5 energy to make sure I rolled well, but who’s counting?

“As you say. Still, that’s two attacks already. He wasn’t kidding about getting serious.”

“I know. Sure you still want me around?”

“Unless something more serious than easily dodged pieces of paper are sent your way, I don’t think we have to worry.”

“I hope you’re right.”

That afternoon, Susan was out by the forest for Care of Magical Creatures.

“I do wish Ron and the others had kept up this class,” said Rubeus sadly, looking at the few students he had at this level. “Almost not worth bothering with.”

“Sorry Professor,” said Susan. “How’s Filbert been?” She indicated his *Magical Ally* that was watching the proceedings with interest. By that time, no one was concerned with the huge dragon that hung around with Rubeus, they were always together.

“Seems like he gets smarter every day,” he replied. “Why, just yesterday he brought in firewood and got the fire going without me even asking him to! Of course, we’ve had the same routine every night for the past, what, four, five years? But usually I have to tell him. Last night though- What’s he looking at?” Susan looked over at him, and he did seem to be paying close attention to the forest. “You see something Filbert?” he called over. Suddenly, spiders of every size, from cat to large dog, burst from the darkness and started making their way towards Susan.

“Oh crap!”

Rubeus stepped in front of her and started running towards them. “Hey, you lot aren’t supposed to be out here! Get back to the forest right now, where you belong!”

The spiders didn’t seem to listen, they swarmed over him, making for Susan.

Can they understand human speech? Anyway, good thing Ron isn’t around. “For sacrifices made!” shouted Susan, holding her ring up high. Her *Legion* appeared before her. “Kill any spider that gets close!” she shouted. “The rest of you, wands out- start driving them back into the-” she looked over and saw the others in the class running away as fast as they could. *Or, alternatively, you could just run away. Thanks a lot. I guess we can’t all be adventurers.* She

shook out her bracelet. “*Invulnerability*,” she said as the first spider reached her, darting between two soldiers that swung down at it. She ignored it as the spider made futile efforts to bite her leg, and called forth her *Magical Ally*, instructing it also to destroy all the spiders it could. She noticed Filbert had already jumped into the fray, tossing spiders left and right to get to his master again.

Interesting.

Finally, Susan cast a spell of her own, *Temporary Tool*, and made herself a ghostly copy of her sword, and started swinging. She was using the sword untrained, but no spider could hurt her and they weren't heavy enough to knock her over. Also they were pretty big, and there were a lot of them, so it was hard to miss anyway. She did have to cast a few *Shrink* spells on ones that tried to pin her arms to her sides. With two soldiers by her side and her own blade, even the seemingly endless wave of creatures started to believe this was a bad idea and started backing off. As they started to thin out, she grabbed a few and drained their energy to make up what she had lost through the fight. Rubeus stood there shaking his head and watching them go.

“What brought that all on?” he asked as Susan came up to him. She stuck the sword point into the ground and leaned on it.

“Probably Tom. I guess maybe he didn't know I knew *Invulnerability* or never bothered to research that himself? Probably not, as he would only be thinking about protection from magic, not protection from this.” She gestured to the sword. *Actually, this sword is just solidified magic. Would it count as a weapon or as a spell for the purpose of Invulnerability? I suppose I could cut myself and find out...*

“You mean he went in there and caused all those spiders to attack? How did he know you'd be here?”

“He probably *Researched* my schedule. Never thought of that one, he would know what classes I was taking, and when. Darn it. Hey, are you okay? They didn't bite you or anything, did they? I can heal you if they did.”

“Get through this thick hide? I don't think so. Good job Filbert!” he said, rubbing the head of the dragon who was looking pleased with himself at his master being okay.

“Sorry about your class, they seem to have beaten a hasty retreat.”

“Class?” He looked around. “Now doesn't that beat all. They ran away.”

“They bravely ran away, away.”

“I should dock them all points. Oh well, class dismissed I guess? We'll meet here again tomorrow, if I have any students left. Besides you, I mean.”

“Okay with me. Thanks for trying to protect me like that.”

“Guess I shouldn't have bothered,” he said sheepishly.

“It's the thought that counts. I can't believe the others didn't even try. I mean, being, well, you, helps. But to just leave us to our fates, that seems a bit harsh. Anyway, I appreciate the thought.”

“You are my responsibility in my class. Can't let you be hurt.” He sighed and looked at the bits of spider that were strewn around the area. “Poor things. The hurt ones will probably be eaten before sundown. If it was Tom, like you said, I would love to know what he offered them to do this.”

Given their nature, it probably wouldn't have taken much.

Susan and Rubeus walked back to the castle, while Susan thought about making up some *Wards* with *Telesummon* in them, so she could get Sparkle to her side in a hurry if she needed her. *After all, Acceleration would have been nice to have just then, even if they couldn't have*

hurt me.

The two were met by a horde of teachers halfway, wands out and ready for action. They seemed almost disappointed it was over.

“Showing off again, girl?” asked Severus.

“You just can’t think positively, can you?” she asked him. “I survive an attack by hundreds of spiders and I’m showing off. Honestly, if I’d been killed would you finally crack a smile? Or would you say ‘Did she have to bleed all over the place?’ or something?”

“You are all right, aren’t you?” asked Albus.

“We’re fine, headmaster,” said Rubeus. “Take more than a few spiders to frighten us, eh Susan?” He gave her a mighty whack on the back, and since *Invulnerability* had already dropped, she staggered.

“Yeah, that’s right,” she said, after she recovered. “Still want me to stay, Headmaster?”

“Oh please, let her leave,” pleaded Severus.

“She stays,” said Albus. “Back to your classes, everyone.”

“Now I’m really glad I dropped that class,” said Ron, when she told him about it that evening at dinner.

“Well, you shouldn’t be,” said Susan. “Professor Hagrid misses you. All of you, he said so himself. You should at least go see him more often.”

“We could go see him tonight,” said Harry. “Thank him for looking after Susan. Not that you needed it, of course,” he hastened to add.

“That’s a great idea, Harry,” said Hermione. “Susan, think you could pop me down to the village so I could get him a little gift? Get him some proper biscuits rather than those things he usually offers us.”

“Hermione,” said Susan, pretending to be shocked. “Are you asking me to help you break the rules?”

“Good point. I’m too used to being at Sirius’ place and just asking you to do stuff. Sorry about that.” She thought for a second. “Can you open the portal just inside the bakery? I could just hand them the money and they could hand me the biscuits so I didn’t have to leave school grounds.”

“I was just joking you know. I’d be glad to get you down there.”

“We could just ask the castle elves for some,” said Ron. “They’d no doubt be more than happy to give us some.”

“Then it wouldn’t be a proper gift,” said Hermione.

“The elves!” said Susan, snapping her fingers. “I need to go see them myself. See how Winky and the others are doing with their ESPer training. Thanks for the reminder, Ron.”

“Uh, sure, no problem.”

“Back to Professor Hagrid,” said Harry, “He’s doing okay, right?”

“Rubeus? Yeah, he’s fine. A bit down about his advanced class being so small. And them running away at the first sign of danger. Why?”

“He was a friend of the family, I just wanted to make sure he was okay, that’s all.”

“Oh, yeah, he seemed okay apart from that. I think that *Ally* I made him is becoming something I didn’t expect, and he treats it like a friend. Plus he has his duties around the castle and probably more respect now that he’s proven he can run classes okay. Yeah, I think he’ll be fine.”

A few days passed, and there were no further attacks, but Susan had taken to watching owls in case any more tried to dive bomb her at breakfast. That's how she noticed the one acting a bit weird.

"Say, isn't that owl acting a bit weird?" she asked Hermione, pointing.

"Where?"

"That one on the ground there, that didn't bring a letter in."

"That's funny, usually they stay up in the rafters. I wonder if it's-" She broke off in mid-sentence, screaming and pulling out her wand.

"What?" Susan looked over, and in the place of the owl, there was a fully grown dragon there now, hissing and rearing, looking around as if searching for something.

Probably me.

The rest of the room quickly noticed, and there was a general panic and screaming, loudest by the younger kids. Rubeus jumped up, and the other teachers quickly got out their wands and started pelting it with spells. This only served to enrage the beast, which spat fire at them. Albus pointed his wand at the fire and it hit a barrier.

"Protect Susan!" someone shouted, and half of S.T.F.U put themselves between the dragon and her, wands out.

You guys are so sweet. You really didn't have to bother though.

At this point, Susan finished casting *Shrink* using 6 energy, but underestimated the RESolve of dragons. She felt him resist the spell, and to her, time slowed to a stop, allowing her to decide what to do.

I haven't checked my cards in ages, what do I have? Let's see, a Personal Stake, Unfailing Resolve and Gimme Gimme! There are no cards in the discard pile so that's useless at the moment. Too late to exchange number 36 but I can play Personal Stake to make sure this dragon doesn't hurt anyone, giving me 2 XP and allowing me to use 1 to get a re-roll. I'll put more energy in this time.

She made another *Venus* check, this time getting her maximum, and reality reasserted itself. The dragon could have gone from being +3 size modifier to being -5, but she figured that was too small and stopped the spell at -4. It shrank to the size of a tiny lizard, and stood there, confused.

Of course, no one but her knew that had happened, and there was a general confusion as everyone tried to figure out where it had gone. Shaking her head, Susan went over to it, grabbed it by the tail and held it up for the Headmaster to see.

"What shall I do with it?" she asked.

"Quiet!" he shouted to the room in general, and after a moment everyone went silent again.

"I assume your spell won't hold him for long?"

"Long enough to decide what to do. I can't keep him this small indefinitely." It started trying to bite her finger, twisting and turning to get a grip. "Oh, aren't you cute?" she said to it, gently dislodging its ineffectual teeth and scratching it on the head. The mini-dragon looked confused.

"Headmaster," said Minerva, "He looks small enough to take through the Floo network. Could he be taken to Romania directly?"

"Excellent idea, Minerva," said the headmaster, beaming. "We'll go directly. Back to your breakfast, everyone. Classes will begin on schedule!"

There was a general muttering as Susan and Albus walked to his office. Fawkes lifted his head as the two entered, and seemed to perk up at the sight of the mini-dragon.

“He’s not for you,” said Susan with a smile. Fawkes put his head back down with a sort of humph sound.

“Wait here,” said Albus, taking the lizard sized creature. “But please don’t release the spell until I get back.”

“Naturally, Headmaster.”

He grabbed some powder in his free hand, and the dragon looked back at Susan.

“It’s okay, you’ll be happy where you’re going,” she said to it. Albus threw the powder, named someplace, presumably in Romania, and disappeared.

“Wawk?” asked Fawkes, opening one eye and looking at her.

“It was a dragon, Fawkes. *Shape-shifted* into an owl shape, by the looks, then flown in with the rest of the owls. I just cast *Shrink* on it, making it harmless.”

Fawkes nodded, seeming to approve, and closed his eye again. Susan didn’t wait long, as a green fire flared in the fireplace and Albus stepped through, dragon-less.

“All taken care of,” he exclaimed. “They were happy to have a dragon to watch again, actually. Seems all of theirs have disappeared like the giants and other dragons around the world.”

“We’re going to have to look into that pretty soon. I don’t like the implications.”

“I know. You’re the one with better scrying magic though.”

Susan snorted. “Don’t think I haven’t tried. I even tried *True Question*: ‘They have gone to help who needs them most. They will return soon.’ I mean that’s a lot of help, right?”

“I suppose it means they haven’t all died, so that’s something.”

“I guess. Anything else for now? I’ll need to get to class myself.”

“You seemed to have trained your followers well, I noticed. They stepped right up to protect you.”

“We all protect each other, Headmaster.”

“I’m sure you do. Off with you, then.”

Time was, you might have gotten some house points or at least a ‘well done’ capturing a dragon like that, thought Old Susan. Now it’s just another day at the office. Are you sure you should be wasting your time here, rather than hunting down Tom?

She ignored the thought and went down to class.

The group was chatting as always as they ate breakfast, when suddenly Susan was seemingly grabbed out her chair and started grappling some sort of unseen foe. She seemed to be choking, and someone nearby pointed a wand and said a spell. They looked confused as she continued choking. Harry, Hermione, and Ron jumped up to try and help but they couldn't seem to touch the attacker like Susan could.

"What do we do?" Hermione cried, wand out but unable to see anything to cast a spell on.

"Wait," said Harry, "she thought this might happen." He plunged a hand into his robes and came out with a piece of paper. He slammed it on the ground and there was a swirl of magic. When it disappeared, Sparkle was standing there. She was wiggling her butt, and looked like she was about to pounce on something. She looked around.

"That was rather embarrassing. What's going- Oh great. Grab on to me!" she shouted.

"We have to help her!" said Hermione.

"You're going to. Grab on!"

They did as they were told, and Sparkle cast *Dimension Step* and vanished. By this time, Albus and the other teachers gathered around her.

"How can we help?" asked Minerva.

"You'll have to get her some parchment if you want an answer," said Severus, clearly unconcerned by her predicament.

"Fetch Madam Pomfrey," Albus said to Severus. "Unless you know of some potion that can help her?"

"She could take a potion to keep her blood oxygenated," suggested Severus. "Oh, she's choking, might have a difficult time swallowing a potion at present."

"Yes, I realize- Filius, do you know of some charm that could help?"

Filius started trying various charms, and Susan was getting weaker and weaker, when suddenly there was a shimmer of magic around her and she went down to one knee, gasping.

"Are you all right?" Albus asked, concerned. Susan held up a hand, not up to talking yet.

After a moment she was able to speak. "*Silent Slayer*," she rasped. "*Invulnerability*." Magic swirled around her, and Susan relaxed. *Even if he sends another, it won't be able to hurt me.*

Now will you go after Tom? asked Old Susan. *After all, you can't defend against everything he can throw at you all the time. And he only has to succeed once.*

There was a *pop* and Hermione, Ron, Sparkle, and Harry stepped back into the great hall from the astral.

"What is going on?" asked Albus. "Where did you three come from?"

"Four," said Sparkle.

"That was the *Silent Slayer*," said Harry. "Good thing we prepared that in advance."

"What does that mean?" Albus further pressed.

"It's an invisible, untouchable assassin," explained Harry. "It can only touch her, and its entire purpose is to strangle someone. However, you can hurt it from the astral plane, where we just went."

“We came back because she put up *Invulnerability*,” Sparkle put in. “It can’t hurt her now.”

“You mean something like that could come for any of us?” gasped Minerva.

“If that’s so, why has the Dark Lord waited so long to send it against us?” asked Severus.

“He didn’t want Susan dead until now?” ventured Hermione. “And it’s obviously not our kind of magic. It would be a dead giveaway.”

“*Dead giveaway!*” shouted Peeves, floating overhead. “HA HA HA!”

“Shut up, Peeves!” all the teachers said.

“Well done, everyone,” croaked Susan, getting her strength back. “You carried that off well. I’ll make adventurers of you all yet.”

“You should go down to see Madam Pomfrey in any case.”

“No need,” said Susan, getting out her character sheet. “No damage done, see?”

“Still...”

Suddenly, the door into the great hall banged open, and Argus burst in. “Headmaster,” he called. “Something’s approaching the castle!”

“What new horror awaits us because of you?” asked Severus.

“Everyone,” called Albus, “please return to your dorm rooms. I highly doubt you are in any individual danger, but should anyone begin to exhibit symptoms like Susan here, get word to me immediately. Please stay in groups that have at least two people that can summon a Patronus. Prefects?”

The Prefects started herding everyone back to the dorms, and Albus nodded his approval. “We’ll head up to the rampart, see exactly what’s coming. Come along, everyone.”

The members of S.T.F.U gathered around to come, but Albus ordered them to look after everyone in the castle. They reluctantly agreed, but Luna stood staring at him, as if daring him to order her away.

“You may come, Miss Lovegood,” he sighed.

“You don’t think this is what I think it is?” asked Harry to Susan as they walked.

“I’m very much afraid it might be,” replied Susan.

“It’s all very exciting,” said Luna. “Don’t you think?”

“Seriously?” asked Hermione.

“Oh, have a little faith, Hermione. Susan hasn’t let us down yet, and she’s not going to start now, right?”

In the early morning sunlight, a vast force could be seen approaching the castle from the road. Overhead, dragons wheeled and roared, and giants’ steps shook the earth as they took one step to a normal person’s ten. Other evil looking creatures followed a group of humans, some masked, some not. Cornelius Fudge was among them.

So was Tom.

Albus scowled down as the force approached, and Tom held up a hand to stop the march a stone’s throw from the castle. He barked orders to his death eaters and they broke off, each taking a single group of creatures and spreading out. Some went off, presumably to over back exits to the castle, as they went around the side.

Tom looked pleased, and conferred with the minister.

“Oh, sure,” said Minerva. “Make this grand gesture and then make us wait.”

“Patience, Minerva,” said Albus. “I take it, Severus, you did not know this was coming?”

“No, Albus, I would have told you.”

Would you?

“He seems to trust everyone less, not just me, lately. This was probably put together at the last minute. I mean look at those formations. Have these creatures no pride? It’s all the others can do to keep them from tearing each other apart. Look how they must be separated, lest they fight each other and ruin whatever he has planned.”

“Now is not actually the time for a critique.”

“As you say.”

A few moments passed as Tom allowed his troops to get into position. Finally he looked up at the figures on the castle wall, and smiled. He put his wand to his throat.

“Do I have your attention, then?” his voice boomed. “I want one thing. Two things. One thing that is two things. The one thing is people- two of them. I want two people to come out of that castle. I will name them for you if you can’t guess them. Can you guess them?”

“I see what you mean about his crumbling sanity,” remarked Harry.

“Showing your true colors at last?” Albus shouted down to him, his own wand at his throat.

“My dear Albus, as you can see, I am here with the minister’s approval!” He gestured to Cornelius and the masked figures that had stayed with him laughed a bit. “I am here to apprehend a dangerous criminal and make the world a safer place! It’s my... what’s the word? Duty. Yes. As a protector of the less magically gifted.”

“It’ll only be safer when you’re gone, Tom! Why the dragons and giants and things?”

“My dear Headmaster, could you be ignorant of her power? If I didn’t bring a force like this she would no doubt escape! This is the only thing that might give even her pause.”

“Thing is I still could escape,” muttered Susan.

“What about you, Cornelius? You don’t find this all a bit odd?”

“My dear fellow-” he began, then put his own wand to his throat. “My dear fellow, I’ve seen what she can do. We all have. Breaking those criminals out of Azkaban, and after doing such good in the world too. You speak of true colors but what of that girl standing next to you? She’s got you under some kind of spell, no doubt, and it’s for your own good we’ve come to save you. She has our word on a fair trial. It’s all legal. It’s just rather unfortunate that the biggest and toughest creatures on earth are considered a bit... evil.”

“A ‘bit’ evil? Look around, Cornelius. Those are Death Eaters next to you. Probably the very ones you just spoke of, broken out of prison by Tom, there.”

“No, no, those are...” he looked confused a second. “They’re... important people. Yes. Very important to have them here.”

“Enough talk!” said Tom. “I want Susan and Harry Potter out here in ten minutes. And don’t think of jumping through one of those little holes in the air, Susan,” he added. “I’ll take this castle apart with you inside or not. Have to prove you’re not here somehow, right? You don’t want that on your conscience do you?”

“What’s he want me for?” asked Harry.

“Fine,” she shouted down. “I’ll be down before your ten minutes is up.”

“You better!”

“You can’t be serious about going out there!” said Albus, as Susan walked towards the

door. "Even you can't defend against that many."

"Actually, giants are totally non-magical, they couldn't get through *Invulnerability*. Dragon fire could be a problem, I admit. It's not a spell, but is it magical fire or real fire? Don't worry, Headmaster. This was always the plan, though it's come rather suddenly. I'm not foolish enough to try taking them all on."

"But why me?" asked Harry again.

"I don't know, Harry," said Susan. "Ron, Hermione, would you mind giving up your items to Harry, in case my plan backfires and we do need to fight our way out?"

"Not at all," said Ron.

"Of course not," said Hermione.

They both handed over their various objects with spells in them, and Harry slipped them on. "What exactly is your plan?" asked Hermione.

"I plan to end it. Let's just hope it works. Come on, Harry."

"That's not an answer!" said Hermione.

"Faith," said Luna. "She knows what she's doing."

"Albus, really," said Minerva. "I've questioned your decisions before but this- sending two children out there- it's madness."

"I know, but I trust them to stay alive at least long enough to delay him. We won't be idle. While she walks down and they talk, we'll be getting the castle's defenses ready, in case they do attack."

"But what about them?"

"Somehow I doubt Susan even considers that many creatures to be threat to her. I'm not happy about it, but you would rather she just run and he attacks here? She's willing to go out there to give us time, possibly even saving everyone in this castle. I respect that decision."

"But what if she dies, Albus? You've said she's the only one that can possibly fight Tom, because only she understands his magic."

He turned to her. "You do have a plan?"

"I do."

"And it's a good one? Something he won't see coming?"

"I've got it pretty well worked out. I've had years, after all."

"And you can get away in a pinch?"

She got a ward out of her pocket. "It has *Teleport* in it. All I have to do is slap it on myself and I'll teleport whoever is holding onto me back here."

"You see," he said to Minerva. "Nothing to worry about."

"That makes me even more worried."

"Good luck," said Luna, hugging her. "You haven't even told me your plan, but you seem confident so I'm sure it'll turn out all right in the end."

"You just wait and see."

"Be careful, Susan," said Hermione. "And you too, Harry. Get out of there at the first sign of trouble."

"We'll cover you from here," said Ron. "They're assaulting a castle, after all."

"Thanks everyone. See you soon."

"Throwing her to the wolves, then, Albus?" asked Severus. "I didn't think you had it in you."

His reply was muffled by the door closing.

Susan and Harry walked down the empty corridors towards the front gate. “So this is it, then?” asked Harry.

“Yup.”

“Will you kill him?”

“Seems the only way.” Susan could feel her older self, rubbing her hands together in anticipation.

“How?”

“You let me worry about that.” *After all, Voldi may be able to see through your eyes and I do so want this to be a surprise. Not that it has ever really come up, given we all basically forgot about it until I remembered it just now. Ah well.*

“But-” Susan shot him a sharp look. “Okay, but I don’t like not knowing.”

“Trust me, I don’t like knowing!”

A fairy flew up. “Leaving without me?”

“Knew you would come running. You can sit this one out, you know.”

“Hardly.”

Susan smiled. “Thanks.”

“My cards are yours if you need them, though only two are really useful.”

“What did you have?”

“*Glad I brought this shotgun, Extra Cash, It’s Not as Bad as it Looks, and Wild.*”

“Maybe I could buy him off!” *Though getting that wild card twice would be nice, with the gimme gimme.*

“Yeah no.”

“And what would you do with a shotgun?” asked Harry.

“It can be any weapon, actually.”

“Great, conjure up an orbital laser platform and take them out from space.”

“I think it has to be, you know, real? Plus I’m not sure that counts as being ‘armed,’ what do you think, Sparkle?”

“I think you need to remember he’ll have cards too.”

“Hopefully *Disaster Strikes, Endless Ammo* and maybe an *Assist.*”

“Good luck with that.” She flew up and sat on Susan’s shoulder.

“You don’t want to be yourself?” she asked.

“Better to take the penalty and stay out of sight. I don’t know if he knows I exist, but he doesn’t know what spells I know. Hermione never wrote about me, right? So I’m your ace in the hole.”

“Glad to have you along!”

“This just feels so wrong,” remarked Harry. “Him walking up to the castle like a day at the beach. Albus just letting you go? It should be me facing him on some stormy night, not you facing him before breakfast.”

“I always do my killing before breakfast,” Susan joked.

“Are you really that *Overconfident?*”

“I can afford to be, and you would too, if you knew what I knew. As for you facing him, that option went away when he stole my magic, you know that. No, this is classic *Paragon*. If you’re going to have an encounter, then have the encounter, don’t beat around the bush. He’s realized he can’t kill me from afar, and now he’s come for his showdown. I intend to give him

one.”

“You want my energy?”

“It’s nice of you to ask, but that hopefully won’t be necessary.”

“Okay.”

“You ready?” They had reached the door.

“No! Let the Headmaster go out there in your place! Let S.T.F.U. take his army. It’s what we were training for, isn’t it? You don’t have to do this alone.”

“I’m not doing it alone. He’s allowed my best friend to come with me. Though why I can’t really say.”

“Should we let him have his way?” asked Sparkle. “I mean he’s protected with your *Barrier* item but even he can be squished by a giant. Tom asking for you both is very fishy.”

“It’s probably just that old grudge. Once I’m dead he’ll try and kill Harry, in front of his Death Eaters, so they know his power is supreme. But we won’t give him the satisfaction, will we, Harry?”

“We don’t know what magic he has up his sleeve at the moment,” she further protested.

“None, in just a moment,” Susan said with a wink. She pulled the door open.

“You actually came out,” said Tom, looking her over. “I don’t believe it.”

Susan did a *Magic Sense* on him, rolling minimum of course, but even that was enough to tell he had a bunch of spells going on his person. But she was pretty sure one of them wasn’t *Plastic Proxy*. It seemed Tom had come in person. “As you made the long journey here, I figured I should repay the complement.” She gave a little bow.

He returned it. “So, shall we get this little party started?”

She gestured to the army behind him. “Were you being truthful before? Is that army just for intimidation, or are you going to order them to attack?”

“They’re here to watch me destroy you. What?” He glanced over at nothing. “Yes, and Harry, of course. Really, only I am needed.”

“Full of confidence, I like that.”

“I thought you might.”

“One last thing- will you leave them alone if you, by some miracle, win?”

“Who, those fools cowering in the castle? Why not? I give my word, no matter the outcome here, my army will depart this place in peace. You heard me!” he shouted to his minions. They reluctantly agreed.

“That’s all I can ask.”

Tom stood and looked at her a moment longer. “You must realize how futile it is to fight me. I have his type of magic,” he gestured to Harry, “as well as your own. What can you do to me?”

“Fight you? Of course it’s futile to fight you. I wouldn’t dream of it. We’re both immune to magic, I presume, so what would be the point?”

Tom laughed. “Then what exactly do you expect to do, standing there?”

“I expect to kill you.”

She raised a hand. “*Weapon*,” she said, spending an XP for an action. A Beretta 9000, bought by Mundungus many years ago, dropped into her hand from her *Somatic Sword* spell. It was fully loaded, and the extra clips and a few grenades, for insurance, nestled in her robes. She had gotten them out of her *Pocket Dimension* while they walked. She spent another XP for an action before Tom could do anything. “Nullification,” she said, activating the imbuing of *Dead Magic* that had been put on the gun itself. All magic in a 6 meter radius, encompassing Tom and part of his army, was suppressed. (Obviously she couldn’t center it on herself, the spell would cancel itself out!)

A third XP was spent, making all of this happen simultaneously: She put 10 energy into MANipulation and made a called shot to his body. Then, with some grim satisfaction, she pulled the trigger five times, getting a 19-1 (for the called shot) with her 5 in the *Pistol* skill. All five shots slammed into Tom’s chest, doing a total of 35 damage and tearing him apart.

His army stood stunned and as the shots echoed away, and in the shocked silence shared by them all, only one sound could be heard.

Five .40 bullets had just slammed into Tom, causing massive damage and fatally wounding him. His army stood in shock, the magical world not having much experience with non-magical weapons. Blood coated Tom, and everything was stock still as they absorbed what had just happened.

I win, thought Susan, lowering the pistol slightly. Then she heard the sound.

It was a wheezing laughter, and she looked around for who was making it. Her eyes snapped back to Tom, who hadn't fallen yet.

"I win," he managed, as magic started swirling around his body.

"No! No! No! You're in the *Dead Magic* zone, you can't be doing magic!" Susan shrieked.

"What's going on?" asked Harry, and Susan saw that power was swirling around him, too.

Have to cast Immunity on him! Wait, this can't be a spell, he's got Barrier up all the time. What do I do?

But even as she thought it, Harry and the dying body of Tom lifted off the ground and sped towards one another. There was a burst of magic and light, and Susan shielded her eyes. When she looked again, only one figure stood there. He had his eyes closed, and he seemed to be what would happen if you smashed Harry Potter and Tom Riddle together. There was the scar, but the less pronounced nose. This figure was not quite as tall as Tom had been, but not quite as short as Harry still was. His hair was sparse, as Tom had none, and even their clothes seemed a bizarre amalgamation of Harry's and Tom's robes. The figure opened his eyes, and smiled widely.

"Excellent," he said, softly. "Yes, that seems to have done the trick rather nicely."

Magic swirled around him, and Susan recognized a sun spell. He was healing what was probably the remains of his injuries.

"What did you do?" demanded Susan, but Tom/Harry ignored her. He spied both wands at his feet, and bent to pick them up. "But how complete is it, in the end?" He looked both wands over. "It is said that both his wand and mine share a core. Now we share a body. I wonder."

He looked thoughtfully at them for a second, then raised both wands up into the air. Fireballs started spurting out of both of them, and Tom/Harry started laughing with a maniac delight.

"But the stats- what about the stats?" he asked himself, still totally ignoring the silent followers around him. He lowered the wands, put both in one hand, and a piece of paper appeared in his empty one. "Yes, as I thought. No wonder I feel such energy! We share the stats as well, these are a bit higher than mine were. Still, not as high as I would have liked. I wish you had been more physical, Harry. Ah well."

"What did you do?!" Susan demanded again. With a flourish Tom/Harry put the character sheet away and turned to face her. He laughed as she raised the gun again.

"Poor Susan. You didn't anticipate this, did you?"

"What? You couldn't have done magic, I cut it off!"

“Did you forget? I suppose you did, never having anyone with your same type of magic to fight against. Every spell has a reverse.”

“Oh no- *Free Magic.*”

“*Correct!* For all the good it will do you now. Are you going to shoot me again?” He gestured with his free hand at the gun in her hand.

Finish him, thought Old Susan. *End it!*

No, Harry is trapped in there! If his magic put them together mine can take them apart! You can't guarantee that. Remember how you cursed yourself for not being able to let your mother die. Isn't this just a rerun? You have the chance to make up for your... lack of conviction, before.

I have to try to save him. She lowered the gun.

“Excellent. After all, I do now hold your precious Harry Potter hostage, in a way. Oh, this is a glorious day, isn't it?” He spun, again taking both wands in hand and sending magic shooting off into the he sky. “I have the magical properties of two bodies, plus a greater *energy* to use with *Natural Magician*. My followers, I am reborn a second time, and this time I am more powerful than I was. And it's all thanks to you, Susan!”

“But I killed you!”

“And I thank you for it! You never considered that there could be another piece of my soul floating around out there, did you?”

Susan was horrified. *I only cast the spell to look for other pieces when Harry was around. And I made the spell to ignore anything close, in case we were carrying one or that one in the locket counted as “closest”. This is all my fault.*

“I see that you did not. Well, a little spell I like to call *Spell Trigger* and a spell probably not in your book brought the pieces of my soul together upon my death, rather than moving on to whatever afterlife exists. I was hoping to just take over Harry's body, then kill you in your sleep sometime when you didn't suspect it. But this works too. If you could only feel what I'm feeling right now- So much magic! I don't need to kill you anymore, my power is supreme.”

“I'll stop you, somehow.”

“Really?” Tom/Harry plucked Harry's *Barrier Against Spells* item from his robes. “As long as I wear this, I'm immune to any spell you or anyone else uses. No one would risk hurting Harry Potter, with non-magical fire or whatever that- ah, bullets, I see. I seem to have his knowledge as well. Ugh, what is My Little Pony? Never mind, I'll destroy that later. I assume you'll try and create some spell to undo what I've done. Good luck with that, while I carry this.”

“I will stop you,” promised Susan, reaching into her pocket and grabbing a ward. Tom/Harry put up his wands, but Susan just slammed it against herself and *Teleported* back to the castle wall. Tom/Harry laughed and amplified his voice again.

“As you have done exactly what I wanted, sending out Harry and Susan, I will leave this place. I have things to do in my new body, and with my army. After I have conquered the rest of the world I will be back, and you can all acknowledge me as your supreme ruler. Until then, try not to lose hope.” He said the last sarcastically, laughed uproariously, and started shouting orders to his army to form up and move out.

Up on the wall, everyone looked at Susan, who was in a state of shock.

“I did this,” she said softly. “I did it. All my fault. Handed him over. Walked out there like a moron. Spent XP to kill him, didn't manage it. All my fault. Can't stop him now. Even stole Ron's and Hermione's items. He used two wands.”

“I think perhaps we might want to do something about her,” said Minerva.

“Chuck her off the castle wall?” suggested Severus.

“I think not,” said Albus, pointing his wand. Susan crumpled and went to sleep.

When she woke up, it was dark, and she wasn't sure where she was. The events of the “battle” flashed before her.

What have I done?

“She's awake,” said a voice, and Susan looked over to see Hermione sitting next to her. Sparkle she saw at the foot of her bed, and Ron gave a start, obviously waking up himself. “Are you okay?”

“What's happened? Why am I here?”

“The headmaster thought you could use a little time to process what happened. It's been hours, Pottermort is gone.”

“Pottermort?”

“It was that or Voldery. We had to call him something.”

“What's he been doing?”

“Taking over the magical world.”

Susan sat bolt upright. “You're kidding?!”

Hermione shook her head. “Three counties have already fallen. He marches in, destroys everything in his way with his two wands and... well, your magic, and then takes over. He's being quite systematic about it.”

“How are you feeling?” asked Albus, coming around the curtain.

“Lousy. This is all my fault.” Susan looked down at her hands, unable to even meet his eyes.

“I let you go. So the blame is partially mine.”

“And then you would be headmaster of a bunch of rubble and maybe I would feel even worse. Is it true?”

“What Hermione said?” He paused. “Yes. Nothing seems to work on him, now. He can counter anything as mundane as fire, and Harry's item protects him from magic.”

“Great. More things that are my fault.”

“Hey, none of that now,” said Ron. “Let's talk about the new plan instead.”

Susan shook her head. “I don't know. Seems my plan got us into this.”

“Yes, an unconventional approach, to be sure.” Albus gingerly took the gun out of his pocket and handed it over. “I don't exactly know how to use it, and I wasn't comfortable handling it. Perhaps you could, uh, put it away again?”

“Sure,” said Susan, absorbing it again. “I was so sure that would work. He wouldn't have planned for something as non-magical as a gun.”

“To be fair,” said Hermione, “it did work. It just so happened that he had a plan one step above that. It wouldn't have mattered what you did to him, he would have let you kill him to get Harry's body.”

“It's an interesting point,” said Susan. “Did he send those things against me just to wind me up? He wasn't actually trying to kill me at all, but rather get me mad enough at him to come out and do what I did?”

“He has the same *Question* magic you do, I would guess,” said Albus. “He might have inquired how best to neutralize any advantages you had.”

“Whatever he did, it worked. Is he traveling with his army? That should slow him down.”

Albus shook his head. “No, he's subjugating governments on his own. His army is

following him, and it seems some part of it is left at each place, to 'remind' everyone who is now in charge. Don't worry, the world is a big place. It'll take even him a while to take over the whole thing. Especially now that the magical world has been warned he's coming. Leaders are going into hiding and giving orders from secret locations."

"Okay, that's some good news. He kept his promise though? No one here was hurt?"

"Ah, no one here, no."

She looked between them all. "What aren't you telling me?"

"Sadly, it seems the minister outlived his usefulness. He started to protest that Tom hadn't captured you, which was the intent in coming here, and the hybrid killed him. I'm sorry."

Susan was torn, on the one hand she didn't much like the guy, but on the other, he didn't deserve to be killed outright like that.

"Can we save Harry?" asked Hermione.

"My book of magic says that magic can do everything. It did put them together, after all. I just have to figure out how to do it without a spell. Or get that item away from him. The problem is, how do we know he hasn't set something else like this up? Another *Spell Trigger* that will save his life."

"Hopefully he has no more *Soul Shards* to latch onto," said Ron.

"Yeah, what was all that about? He tried to kill Harry, not turn him into a *Soul Object*."

"I can only guess," replied Albus. "Perhaps his soul was so unstable it broke apart when Tom tried to kill Harry all those years ago. That soul went into the thing Tom was thinking about- Harry. It explains why he can talk to snakes."

"Little late with that revelation, Headmaster. No offense."

"None of us considered two souls living in one body. After all, he wasn't possessed like Quirinus or Ginny was."

"How is Ginny?"

"Taking it pretty hard, but I think she knows you'll do everything in your power to get him back," said Ron.

"Tell her that's right. And you have a point, Headmaster. I can't imagine how I would have gotten a *Soul Shard* out of a living body. The others we stabbed with the sword, that's a little tricky when it's a two for one sale."

"Indeed. But that same quandary exists now, and in fact is even more difficult. Now it's two souls and two bodies joined into one. I'm open to suggestions as far as that goes."

"Umm, Harry's soul... it does still, exist, right?" asked Hermione quietly.

"The hybrid was able to use Harry's wand as well as his own," hedged Albus. "I can only see that being true if both souls still existed."

"Right," said Susan. "Harry wasn't killed. He was just... blended."

"Well, let's unblend him!" said Ron.

"We can't just stick him in a centrifuge," said Hermione.

"A what?"

"Never mind."

"As far as suggestions, I don't have any," said Susan. "There's a whole planet that deals with souls, Pluto... okay, there's a whole branch of magic that deals with it, as Pluto isn't considered a 'planet' anymore. Stupid scientists. Anyway, it's more about animating people that are dead, or talking to the dead or moving between dimensions yourself. I've never seen any spells dealing directly with the soul. Until I made the one to find the other pieces of Tom, anyway. So we know magic, my magic, can work with the soul, it's just a question of how to go

about it.”

“There we can be of no assistance,” said Albus. “Except to offer our support and give you what you need. By the way, the story I’ve been circulating around the castle is that Tom has, for reasons unknown, simply taken Harry, besting you in a duel. I did not want anyone here to believe one of their classmates was, however unwillingly, responsible for the whole ‘taking over the world’ thing.”

“Thanks. I’ll get to work on it.”

“Get some sleep. You two as well. Plenty of time to figure things out in the light of day.” He got up from his chair. “Good night, all of you.”

“Good night,” they chorused back.

“See you in the morning,” said Ron, getting up and stretching. “Don’t be too hard on yourself, okay? Even you aren’t perfect.”

“I know, but I still feel responsible.”

“We’re behind you,” said Hermione, squeezing her hand. “I’ve seen you do some amazing things, whatever you come up with will just be the latest.”

“Thanks.”

With her visitors gone, Susan got out her book of magic from her *Personal Dimension* and sat in bed, looking at it. *No sense worrying about Tom seeing it now. He’s too busy taking over the world to care about my book.*

“Hi, dad,” she said at last. “It’s pretty bad here, and it’s mostly my fault. I need your help, if you’re really listening to me. The thing is, this guy, Tom, who stole my magic, somehow created a spell to put himself into a new body if he died. He didn’t realize it would be a combination rather than simply a soul transplant, but it worked out that way. Now he’s got an item I made for a friend that makes him immune to spells.

“Come to think of it, how did he research so much magic so fast? I mean, coming up with that spell alone should have taken a lot of trial and error, but he couldn’t exactly test it, could he? How did he know it would work?”

“Anyway dad, I need a way to destroy this guy’s soul, leave my friend’s soul intact, and do it all without actually casting magic onto the combined creature he’s become. If you can come up with a spell like that I would really appreciate it.”

Sadly it was just a book, and even as she held it close, it could offer her no comfort. Her father was off somewhere, saving worlds, and she didn’t know how to go about saving this one. Resigned, she spent part of the night until she fell asleep again paging through the book and looking for a solution, but finding none.

The next morning, she was awakened by Madam Pomfrey shouting for people in the hall to be quiet. *Irony much? Well, better get some breakfast and- what’s this?*

She picked up the book and saw a spell she wasn’t familiar with, and read it over excitedly.

“Thanks dad,” she said with a smile. *I don’t know what you did that allowed me to pay those points for this book, but I’m glad you did.*

In the halls, everyone expressed sympathy she had lost, but she said the next time would be different. Many expressed interest in going after Harry, and she said she could use all the help she could get, and the Headmaster would announce something soon.

If he approves. Which he may not. But it's the only shot we have right now.

She made it to his office, and he used his Patronus to call the others in. Including Myrtle.

"Here's what my book came up with," said Susan. "And you may not like it, just telling you that right away. There's some risk."

"Any plan is risky at this point," said Ron. "What have you got?"

"It's like this; we can't directly attack him with magic so we have to do it indirectly. My book came up with a spell to separate my soul from my body."

"What good is that going to do?" asked Hermione. "Are you just going to re-target it, so that Tom is ripped out? But how would you know which you were going to get? If you got the wrong one..."

"No, that's not the plan. We would need to get his *Barrier* item away from him to do that. No, I have to attack him in a way that isn't a direct spell. And I'll need your help. You guys send everything you have against him so he's at least distracted. Myrtle or another ghost takes my soul and shoves it into the hybrid body. According to this spell, I'll then enter some sort of dream state or inner universe where I can track down Harry's soul and with his help, destroy the part of Tom that's hanging around."

"I could see where that would be risky," said Myrtle. "If you mess it up your soul could wander forever. Or be totally destroyed!"

"Yeah, that's the risk I'll have to take. That's why I want someone I can trust, like you, to carry me around. Apparently doing it this way leaves me little more than a swirling ball of energy."

"Oh. But I can't go far enough away from the castle!"

"Yeah, and what happens to your body in the meantime?" asked Ron.

"I've thought about that," answered Susan. "Right after I cast the spell and become a *Soul Form* one of you slaps a *ward of Freeze* on my body, putting it into suspended animation. That should keep it safe, even if this spell does technically kill me, I should be able to go back in and be thawed out no problem."

"Should?" squeaked Hermione.

"The spell says I'll be able to leave and enter my body. It does not go into detail about how long I can safely stay out. But as long as my body is frozen it won't be more than 30 seconds from it's perspective."

"Then we just have to solve the ghost thing," said Ron.

"I may have a solution for that," said Albus. "What about taking a piece of the castle with us? You can 'haunt' that piece and go with us."

"I don't know, I've never tried anything like that. Could we try it now?"

"It seems the sooner we put this plan into action, the better. Come, we'll find a suitable piece of the castle we can use for the duration."

The five swept from the office with purpose- there was a chance!

“So where is he now?” asked Susan.

“Reports say he’s rampaging around China at the moment,” Albus replied. “Given the population there, it’s no surprise they also have a large percentage of wizards and witches. They also have several magical cities where we have only one. This works to our benefit as we can hide out in one and surprise him when he comes looking for their magical leaders.”

“And you’re sure Myrtle can travel through the Floo network attached to a piece of the castle?”

“We tried it several times, to various locations, and it worked every time.”

“Okay. Go over the plan one more time.”

“We’ve been over the plan three times!” protested Ron. “I think we know what we’re doing.”

“This is my soul we’re talking about here, Ron,” said Susan. “And maybe the only chance we’ll have to stop Tom. Everything needs to be perfect.”

“You don’t even know if your spell will do what you need it to! You’ve never tried it.”

“I have faith in my father’s book. It was made to be the ultimate resource on our kind of magic, and my father used his own soul to improve it. I have faith in it.”

“Still,” said Hermione, concerned, “it’s an awful risk.”

“We have to move fast. I won’t have him killing any more people because of the mistake I made in trying to kill him. I should have used *Magic Sense* on him before shooting him, to check if he had the reverse going. But I didn’t. That makes it my problem. Now, the plan?”

Albus held up a *ward*. “You’re going to cast this new spell on yourself and Sparkle. That should separate your souls from your bodies. At that point, Myrtle will grab them, and I’ll stick this *ward* onto your body. In seconds it will be covered in ice, and ready for you to return to it. Myrtle, carrying your two souls, will accompany the force heading to China, who will attack Tom. While he’s distracted you’ll be placed into the hybrid’s body by Myrtle, where you hope to engage Tom’s soul in combat. When you win, that should forcibly eject Tom from Harry’s body, or at least give Harry control over it so we can think of a better long term solution.”

“Okay, that’s it. Try to keep him occupied for as long as you can. I don’t know what I’ll run into once Myrtle shoves me in there, or how long it will take to find Tom. If you can keep him distracted, and keep his magic tied up in the physical world, that should help me a lot.”

Albus nodded. “We’ll do our best.”

“Okay,” said Susan, looking at her friends that were crowded around her bed. “You ready, Sparkle?”

“As I’ll ever be, I guess.”

“Good luck,” said Hermione.

Susan gave a weak smile. “Seems like you have the harder job. Don’t any of you die trying to distract him. If he seems too powerful just get out of there, let me handle it.”

“Run away?” scoffed Ron. “That’s not how adventurers do things, is it? You never have.”

“Oh sure, use me as your example. Stay safe, Ron.”

“Course.”

“I wish I could come with you,” said Luna.

“I know, but this spell is risky enough. I won’t risk you too. This is my problem, and my risk to take. Besides, Myrtle only has two hands. We don’t want her shouting ‘why can’t I hold all these souls?’ now do we?”

“You better come back.”

“Of course! What kind of story has the heroine losing? Not this one.”

“I’ll hold you to that.”

“No problem. You’ll see. You ready, Headmaster?”

Albus nodded, and Susan began to envision the magical symbols, as printed on the page before her, and cast *Soul Sever*.

Everything went black.

When Susan opened her eyes, she wasn’t sure where she was. At least, she thought she opened her eyes, it was difficult to tell.

“Sparkle?” she called, looking around. There was no answer, but Susan swore she saw an elegant woman appear, looking over her shoulder. She was dressed, or perhaps was covered, in fur, and she was swishing her tail behind her. She disappeared.

“Wait!” shouted Susan, taking several steps toward her and putting her hand out.

Did I just imagine Sparkle as a human? What’s going on? I can’t see a thing, if I trip over something... She stopped.

“Sparkle?” she called again, and this time, a disjointed series of images flashed before her. Sparkle casting *Acceleration*. Sparkle using *Elemental Line*. Sparkle vanishing into Purgatory with *Dimension Step*.

How did I just see that if she stepped into the next dimension? What’s going on here? Am I inside Harry or not? This isn’t exactly what I had in mind for this.

“Myrtle?” she hesitantly called. A generic looking ghost seemed to pass through a wall before her, and quickly vanished, leaving her in darkness again.

Okay, this is weird. Susan stood and thought for a moment. I don’t seem to be dead, there’s a distinct lack of angels and such. I’ve seen Hell, and this ain’t it. Nor am I in the Astral or Purgatory planes, my father knows I’ve spent enough time there to recognize them. So I guess it must have worked? But this is just darkness, how do I find Tom? She held a hand up to her face. It’s totally dark here, how is it that I can see myself? She looked down at herself. I could have sworn I wasn’t wearing anything a second ago, but now that I think about it, I’m wearing my school uniform. Okay, think this through. She went to sit down on whatever she was standing on, and jumped back up again. There was a chair there! Wait a second. She went to sit down again, and once again, a chair, looking very much like a chair found in every classroom in Hogwarts, appeared beneath her. I can see this chair, and myself. But what does that mean for finding Harry? Wait, if I want a chair and one appears, maybe a light?

Susan held up a hand, and a torch appeared in her hand, looking exactly like she had taken it from Hogwarts itself. *Not exactly what I had in mind, but okay.* She looked around.

Everything was still black.

I guess if there’s nothing to illuminate, a light doesn’t get you very far. The torch vanished and she put her hand down again. Okay, the plan was, put me inside Pottermort’s body. If that

worked, I'm right where I need to be. But I expected some kind of, well, something to be in here with me. Going on that assumption, that I'm actually inside or alongside Harry's soul, how do I make him appear? Think Susan! You wanted to sit, and a Hogwarts desk chair appeared. You wanted light, and a torch appeared. Stuff Harry has experience with. Wait, yeah, I think I'm onto something there, she thought excitedly. I have to think in terms of what Harry, or I suppose Tom, would have experienced. This is his psyche, right? That's why I got a torch when I wanted light. He would light up his wand, and of course he's used to the torches around Hogwarts. He probably sees them as being more 'natural' than flashlights or whatever. Her eyes got wide. Can do my magic here? If everything in here relates to Harry...

"Elemental Bolt (Fire)" she cast, and a stream of fire shot from her hand.

Okay, I lost an energy, I felt that much. So my magic does work. No book, of course. Wait, I got the chair, didn't I?

Susan concentrated on her book of magic, and felt something drop into her hand.

All right! she thought, opening it up with a grin. Her face fell.

Wait, what's this? It's all just gibberish...

Because Harry doesn't understand my magic, and has only glanced at my book before. This is my book of magic from his memories, not from mine. Great. The book vanished again. So what spells do I personally know that can help me now? She tried summoning her Character Sheet as normal, but couldn't manage it. Probably because there's no real copy of that in Harry's memories. I've never had it out long enough for him to get a good look at it. However, as she concentrated, she found she could access the information on it as though she was looking at it, so it was nearly as good.

I could fly, but where to? Maybe Telesummon? But that works physically, not mentally. Of course, I'm in a mental landscape so why the heck not? I'll give it a try. But who to summon? And if I backfire it who knows what could happen to me. Better save that as a last resort. Okay, go over it again, step by step.

Tom tries to kill Harry, but makes a Soul Object out of him.

He then uses this connection to escape death, and takes control of the new hybrid form.

What does that mean? Harry must still exist, I mean if I give up hope on that this whole rescue mission was for nothing. And Tom has never seen my book, right? Even if he somehow used the Research spell to pull spells from my book, which would totally be cheating, he wouldn't have seen the cover. But the cover was right, Harry's seen it often enough to remember it.

But Harry's not here, directly or indirectly, and neither is Tom. Does that mean he's been captured somehow? Or is Tom just suppressing his soul? So then what was that image of Sparkle I saw when I called her name?

"Hermione Granger!" she called, and an image of Hermione appeared before Susan. She looked different though, but faded away before Susan could really study the differences. Wait, is that how Harry sees her? Must be, I suppose everyone sees people a little differently, based on what attracts them? Man, this would be so interesting if I wasn't on some a deadline. Okay, so how does he see himself?

"Harry Potter!"

Susan nearly fell off the chair as a hat dropped over her head. "Gryffindor!" shouted the Sorting Hat, and disappeared again.

"Excuse me, I'm in Raven-" Oh right, Harry isn't. And I'm talking to a figment of

Harry's imagination. Great, just great. So now what?

"Harry Potter," she said again. This time, a more evil looking Severus appeared, and sneered his name before vanishing.

"Harry Potter!" she called. This time she saw Harry himself, looking sad as he walked off a Quidditch pitch. Was this just after he gave up that crazy sport? This is getting me nowhere.

Finally figured that out, did you? asked Old Susan.

You're so smart, what would you do? she asked back.

Obviously just calling something out is making him remember something about himself. That's not going to help. You need to find the real one.

How do I do that? I suppose I could try Telesummon...

No, remember where you are. This is a mental landscape. You need to envision him, get him to appear before you.

Oh, like an ESPer INSight check before a teleport? Okay, we could- I could try that. You know, I've never thought about it before, but you seem to be separate from me. Once I started being aware of my behavior and tried to change it, you started 'talking' to me. I always thought it was just me thinking about stuff, but here it feels different. It's like you're my natural inclination to do something, and now that I'm starting to suppress that inclination, you've popped up try and convince me to still do it when my actions diverge from what I used to do. Now that I'm here that sense of disconnect is stronger than ever. So while I have you, let me ask: Am I right? Are you real or am I just imagining the whole thing?

She waited.

Hello?

Okay, now I'm losing it. Talking to my own thoughts like they were a separate person. Susan shook her head, then closed her eyes. So I need to envision myself wherever Harry is. Think about Harry, what makes him who he is? What defines him? Think about those qualities. Then just take a step.

Susan heard music and laughter before her, and her eyes snapped open. She froze as her eyes darted this way and that, taking in what she was seeing. Surrounded by a golden chain held up by posts was what could only be called an amusement park.

As she watched, frozen, in the distance an empty roller coaster car went up a hill, then invisible people seemed to scream as it shot through across the tracks. Other rides whizzed and looped, while lights blinked and games seemed to play themselves.

Okay, that's not creepy at all. Is Harry in here someplace? At the very least, Sparkle won't miss this now that it's appeared. I'll walk around the place, see if I can get a feel for it, and hope Sparkle comes running in a few minutes. If not I'll have to go inside the rides and look for him, he could be anywhere.

Susan stepped up to the gate, which was a simple turnstile with the chain extending off in either direction. It seemed to encircle the whole park, and Susan gingerly stepped through the turnstile, making it turn. She looked over, and the 00000000 was now 00000001.

Super. Be our guest, I guess? She looked around, deciding to wander towards the back, where the coaster was still carrying invisible people through the drops and loops. To her right she

passed a large tent with a sign “Hall of Mirrors” sitting in front of it. Looking at the doorway, she stared as Hermione’s name, elegantly written in gold, was printed on a wooden board hanging above the door.

Well I know Hermione’s not in here. Right? She went over to the door, careful not to step inside. “Hermione!?” she called, making a tunnel with her hands over her mouth. There was no reply.

Okay, are they all like that? She looked across the way to a teacup ride, and sure enough, above the entrance gate to that ride was a sign with Neville written on it, again in gold.

Right.

She moved on, past various Carnival style games with people’s name over them.

Yeah, I guess that person is a little hard to pin down, she thought, looking at a “whack a mole” game with a name of someone she didn’t know well over it.

At the back of the park she looked up the roller coaster, which bore her own name.

Seriously? I’m not that volatile in my emotions, am I?

You have to ask? replied Old Susan.

Quiet in the peanut gallery. Hey, peanuts! I wonder what they represent? As she looked, a roasted peanut cart, balanced on its wheels as though someone was pushing it, rolled by. *Those smell good. Speaking of peanuts, where’s Ron, anyway?* Susan went off opposite the coaster, and saw some more rides to check out. *Oh, there he is,* she said, looking over at a sort of train ride. *I suppose he is always moving forward. Hey, there’s even a haunted house!* She went over and stared up at the sign. *Ginny. I should have guessed. We’re not that mysterious, are we? Boys. Wait, did you just answer me again?*

Hello?

That’s going to get old fast.

Susan viewed other rides, like the Ferris wheel for Albus and a broken down Bumper Cars with an “out of order” sign and Draco’s name over it. His sign was written in black, and looked weather-beaten and worn. *Okay, it seems all the people in Harry’s life are here, in one form or another. But what does that mean? I wanted Harry, but I stumbled into a representation of everyone he knows, as represented by an amusement park. If he’s really here someplace it could take hours to check the whole place, he could be underneath a ride, behind a mirror, anyplace. Guess I better start at the beginning, maybe I can get some clues.*

Susan went back to the entrance, checking the indicator on the turnstile, which still read 00000001. *At least I know I’m still alone here. Though Sparkle could just slip through without turning it.* She went over to “Hermione” and went inside, letting her eyes adjust to the dimness inside. Looking around, she saw each mirror held an image of her friend, doing something different. In one mirror she was looking bossy, in other, laughing and dancing in that dress she wore to the Triwizard ball. Everywhere Susan looked, Hermione was studying, talking, yelling, crying, putting her hand up and more. Susan stumbled out the door again, dazed.

Okay, I think we’ll leave that one until later. Not that I mind a little Hermione, but that was ridiculous. At least there wasn’t any sound, but seeing nothing but Hermines from every angle? Weird. Is that a clue?

She walked over to the Roller Coaster with her name on it, which continued to go through the motions of loading people and sending the cars flying about the track. *Am I*

supposed to ride it or something? She watched as the restraint dropped over the empty car seats and the car started up the first hill. She stepped near the track and looked at it rising into the air. It seemed to be a fairly standard coaster, modern construction, and Susan wondered where he had even seen a roller coaster to base it on. *Has he ever been to an amusement park? Maybe he looked it up once? Wait a second, what's this?* Looking closely at the supports that ran between the tracks, they were not uniform in thickness or color like she expected. *Did he just get the detail wrong, or does it mean something? Maybe he just likes it better.* She touched one.

She stood there with her arms crossed while Alastor looked at her. He looked down at his wand. "You don't have that magical immunity of yours I've heard about going, do you?"

Susan shook her head. "Straight up RESolve check, Professor. I wouldn't mind trying it again."

"Very well."

She got it cast on her again, this time failing to resist with a 17. She realized unless he did something to put her life in direct danger, she wouldn't be able to make a new RESolve check to break free again. Thus she flapped her arms and did other silly things under Alastor's direction.

"Looks like it worked that time," he remarked, dropping the spell.

"Nobody's perfect, even with a 10 stat," she said, shrugging.

Susan was thrown back, gasping. *It's a memory of me. Wait, does that mean all of these bars represent memories of me?* She went over to one at the opposite end of the waiting area and, making sure there was no car coming, touched another.

"Hey!" shouted Susan. "You haven't earned the *right* to even lick Harry Potter's boots clean." She grabbed his shirt and pulled him down. "Let me tell you about Harry Potter, okay? Harry Potter is fighting Voldemort as best he can, so that your sorry excuse for a life can continue with some normality, and how you repay him? By making drugs that split up families and addict young mothers? And you have the audacity to look him in the face, like an equal? You disgust me."

Yup, looks like it. She looked at the enormous structure, and whistled mentally. *That's a lot of memories. But I'm still no closer to finding the real deal. Where are you, Harry? Hey, I wonder if the "Ron" ride is the same? He has a similar motif going, with supports for a track. Wait, supports? Memories of us supporting him? This whole place is figurative right down to the bolts, isn't it? But does that help me at all?*

"So, you going to ride it, or what?" asked a voice behind her.

"Gyaaa!" shouted Susan, jumping in the air and spinning around. Sparkle sat there. "Don't do that!" Susan put a hand over her heart, which was beating a mile a minute. *Of course, my body is back frozen in ice, so this is just the idea of my heart.*

"Sorry. Nice to see you made it through, though. Where are we?"

"Apparently some kind of memory bank for all the people Harry knows. Represented by carnival rides. Not exactly what I was expecting in here."

"No," said Sparkle, looking around. "Learn anything?"

"Not much. You can't take anything literally here, though, I found that out. It's all symbolism."

"I see. What were you looking for when this appeared? Or did you land here?"

“No, I started out in just blackness. Things I shouted seemed to materialize for a second, so I concentrated on Harry. This is what appeared.”

“Interesting. I was out in the blackness too, but then I saw this appear quite a ways away. Took me until now to get here.”

“Odd that we weren’t right next to each other, after all, we came in together.”

“Not exactly. She probably held each of us in one hand. So we probably got shoved in at least a little distance apart.”

“That makes sense. Now if we could just make sense of this riddle here.”

“What if it’s nothing more than, like you said, a memory bank? You could scour the place and not find anything.”

“You’re right. But can we afford to just leave it behind? I might never be able to call it up again.”

Sparkle looked around. “You say everything in here symbolizes something?”

“That seems to be the case. Why?”

“It seems to me we shouldn’t focus on the “rides” if you already know what they are. If this does relate to Harry in some way, you need to look past the obvious stuff.”

“Easier said than done, but I’ll try.” The two went around the queue for the coaster and looked around. “Okay, ignoring the rides... There are food carts, trash cans, trees. You think they mean something?”

“You say everything here is symbolic, you tell me.”

“They could store memories, just like the attractions.” She walked over and touched a tree, but nothing happened. “Or not.”

“Not the tree, the leaves. That’s where the memories would be.”

“Hey, you’re right!” She looked up, but no leaves were in reach. “I suppose we could use *Flight* to get up there. I just don’t want to use my energy up before I meet Tom. He’s no doubt lurking in here someplace.”

“No doubt. Is there something out of place? I’m no expert on carnivals or whatever this is, but maybe if we found something that didn’t fit, that would be a bigger clue.”

“The entrance was odd. Did you come in that way? Usually there’s a lot of gates for going inside and then leaving again. I haven’t seen any exits to this place, and the entrance was only one person wide.”

“And that chain is weird too. Isn’t there usually a fence?”

“Come on, let’s go look at that again.”

The two walked back over to the entrance, and both studied it from various angles.

“It seems perfectly normal,” said Susan, running her hands along it. “Metal. Cold. Won’t go backwards...” She tried pushing the inner mechanism but it wouldn’t budge. “No reaction when I touch it.”

“You know,” remarked Sparkle, “You say everything is symbolic here. What does a chain represent?”

“I guess restraint?”

“Right. This isn’t a fence, which you would think would be here. That would be a barrier. I mean, someone’s memories are pretty personal, right? Wouldn’t you think a guy like Harry, who by the way has studied that Occlumency stuff, would have a better barrier around his memories?”

“That’s to keep people out. That wall would be at the edges of that darkness, I think? We’re already past that barrier.”

“Then why have something like this at all?”

“So you’re saying the chain is actually keeping these memories hostage or something?”

“What else would a chain symbolize?”

“You got me. So, what? We do something symbolic to it? Cut it?”

“What’s the worst that could happen?”

“The worst that could happen? Some kind of bound up potential could be released, destroying the whole place and us along with it.”

“I forgot, you have a knack for coming up with awful things that can happen.”

“Thanks. It’s a gift.” Susan cast *Temporary Tool* and came up with a thick, long handled bolt cutter.

“That chain isn’t all that thick.”

“True,” said Susan, setting the cutting end against the chain, “But who knows what the DTR of it is. Brace yourself.”

She chopped.

The bolt cutter sliced through the chain easily, but Susan still had her eyes closed and was flinched back.

"You can open them now," said Sparkle.

"Just making sure," said Susan, feeling a little foolish. She opened her eyes and looked around. The park was gone, but neatly looped up at her feet was a thin golden chain.

"That was rather anticlimactic," Sparkle remarked.

"And it still doesn't get us any closer to finding Harry, or Tom for that matter." She dropped the *Tool* spell and nudged the chain with her foot. It seemed perfectly ordinary.

"Still think it symbolizes something?"

Susan shook her head. "Your guess is a good as mine. Still, it stayed behind when the park vanished, so it must mean something. I might as well bring it along." She reached down and touched the chain, which suddenly gave off a bright light, forcing both to look away. When their vision cleared, the chain was gone.

"Now what?" asked Sparkle.

"I think..." Susan pushed her sleeve up, and there was the chain, now wrapped around her arm as though it had grown there. "We had it wrong. It wasn't about restriction, it was about tying together. All of the people Harry knows, all tied together with a golden chain. That's so sweet."

"Are you okay?"

"What, this?" She touched the chain, which was warm and soft. "Doesn't hurt at all. I guess I don't have to carry it, but I still don't know what it means."

"Yeah, we don't know enough about this place, and what rules it operates under. So, what's the next step, boss?"

"Keep looking for Harry, I guess. Do the same thing, concentrate on him, and see what we get."

"Aren't we supposed to be finding Tom?"

"I thought about how best to go about it. I want to see why Tom took over the hybrid form rather than Harry. If he's captured or something we need to let him out. Maybe he won't get control back, but he might serve as a distraction. And if possible, I'd like to capture Tom in the same way."

"Why? He needs to die, though I know you don't want to hear that."

"That's just it. The last time I rushed into killing him and look where it got me. I want to make sure, this time, he doesn't have any more surprises waiting for us. That means taking his items away, stripping his ability to do magic, the whole ten yards."

"You mean nine yards."

"No, we're going the extra yard for him."

Sparkle rolled her eyes. "Okay, so should be both concentrate on something specific, or just on Harry in general? We should probably stay in sync with each other as possible, don't you think?"

"Excellent idea. Now, while I was experimenting, I called Harry's name a couple of times. I saw the Sorting Hat, him giving up Quidditch, and him being scolded by Severus. Well,

Severus saying his name, anyway.” She looked down at the chain. “And when I concentrated on him, I found this- the representation of his relationships with others.”

“What are you saying?”

“I’m saying, what if he wasn’t imprisoned or anything like that, but rather- scattered.”

“You mean we have to put him together?”

“It makes sense. I didn’t get the guy, I got an amusement park. We can concentrate on him again, but I think we’re going to get another piece of him.”

“But there could be hundreds of ‘pieces’ of him. People are extremely complex, not like us cats.”

Susan snorted. “I think if we get enough major pieces of him, it’ll be fine. We don’t need to find his love of butterbeer or the exact shade of purple he finds most pleasing. We just need to find his major attributes.”

“His relationships with others is pretty big. I suppose if I were to think of ‘Harry Potter’ one of the things I would pick to define him is his magic.”

“Good thinking. I’m sure being a wizard is a big part of how Harry sees himself, given the Hat appearing the first time. Okay, the symbol of his magic is the wand, so let’s concentrate on Harry’s wand.”

“Right.” Both closed their eyes and concentrated. Susan thought of all the times she had seen Harry’s wand, and how Harry held it. She imagined him casting spells she had seen him perform, and how his features subtly changed while he was holding it. After all, he was a wizard with a wand or not, but without it, he may as well be just a person. When he was holding the wand he *knew*, without doubt, what he was. That showed, just a little, and Susan concentrated on it.

She felt something happen around her, and opened her eyes.

Setting on a pedestal maybe ten feet away was Harry’s wand!

“Wow, that was easier than I expected!” said Sparkle.

“We know a little bit more about this world, so it makes sense that once we know what to ask for, it provides it.”

“We *think* we know a little bit more. It still all conjecture at this point.”

“Yes, you’re right. I shouldn’t think that, just because I’ve learned a little, that I’ve learned everything. This is still very new. Still, with the wand down...” she took a step towards it.

Suddenly, there was a horrific screeching sound, and the ground started to rumble.

“What’s going on?” shouted Sparkle.

“How should I know?” Susan shouted back, hands over her ears. In the distance, a mountain range started to rise out of the blackness, and the pedestal with the wand zoomed off towards it. “No, no, no!” Susan shouted after it. As the pedestal neared the mountain a cave opened it, and it shot inside. The rumbling stopped.

“Can’t let you do that, Susan!” boomed a voice all around them. “This should occupy you for a bit, while I take care of this rabble trying to defeat me. Then I’ll work out how to engage you directly.”

The voice died away.

“I think he’s worked out what we’re doing,” observed Sparkle.

“No, you think? Come on, we better fly over there.” She started to cast.

“Wait a second,” said Sparkle, holding up a paw. “You say you saw the Sorting Hat when you called Harry’s name?”

“Yeah. So?”

“Why not save your energy and try doing things as they work here. Wish up something Harry knows well, like a broomstick, or a car, and we’ll just get over there that way.”

“That’s a great idea!” exclaimed Susan. “But forget brooms, we’re going in style!” She concentrated, and a whistle was heard in the distance.

“You didn’t…”

“I sure did!” Tracks started appearing nearby, and seconds later, the Hogwarts Express pulled up alongside the pair. “All aboard!” They climbed into the only car that was attached to the train, and it whistled again, then started picking up speed.

“Are you sure this is safe?” asked Sparkle.

“I can feel myself maintaining it, like a spell,” Susan replied. “As long as I don’t go to sleep, it should be fine. Relax, it’s not like we can get hurt here anyway, we’re souls at the moment.”

“All the more reason to be extra careful.”

“Ah, you worry too much.”

Susan wasn’t sure how long the train chugged along for, but the mountain got steadily nearer, and finally the train slowed to a stop. They both got out, and Susan went over and patted the engine.

“Thanks,” she said to it, and it disappeared. “Let’s go.”

Susan looked up at the mountain range, towering above her. Small shapes she took to be bats fluttered around the peaks, and one even had a smoke ring around it. Before her was the smooth rock face, the entrance she had seen swallowing the pedestal nowhere to be seen.

“Uh, how?” asked Sparkle.

“That figures. He closed up the entrance. How will we ever find it now?”

“It could be worse, actually.”

“Sure, the mountain could be on fire!”

“No, I mean, it could be worse than just the entrance being closed up. He could have rotated the entire mountain so the entrance is actually in the back now.”

“Oh. I see what you mean. Want to circle the whole thing and take a look? I could bring the train back.”

“Wouldn’t it just be easier to make the mountain disappear?”

“Can we do that?” Susan looked up at it again. “So far I’ve been able to summon things from Harry’s memory, and they’ve gone away when I stopped ‘maintaining’ them. You think I could do it in reverse? Wish this mountain away?”

“You could try.”

She thought a moment. “Tricky. If the whole mountain range goes, maybe the wand will go with it.”

“That’s fine. Just summon it up again, and grab it quick before someone makes it speed away.”

‘Okay, I’ll give it a try.’

She took a deep breath and stared at the mountains. Then she closed her eyes and tried

picturing the mountains vanishing, and then being gone for good. They remained stubbornly in her mind's eye. *I want the wand. It shall come zooming out to me.* She held up the hand with the chain wrapped around it, and *willed* the wand into it. *Come on. Come on!* Minutes passed. Finally she opened her eyes again.

"Still there, huh?"

"Sorry. Didn't even waver."

"I suppose what I'm calling up is like *Temporary Tool*. Forcing a part of Harry's memory to appear before me. But really, I'm no more in control of this realm than anyone is in control of me. If Harry had ever seen dynamite maybe I could blast a hole in the mountain, but without any idea of where the passageway is, we could blast for years."

"Let's at least go check out the base of this thing," said Sparkle. "Maybe he was sloppy because he was in such a hurry and there might be some clues."

"Some Blues Clues?"

"I'm going to pretend you didn't say that."

So the two walked over the base of the mountain, which seemed to spring from the "floor" of this place without regard to what actual mountain terrain looked like. The mountain sat on darkness, and despite there being no light, Susan could see plainly the colors of the rocks as the slope rose above her. The two split off, walking a few paces away from each other, looking for clues. The rock face was seamless, with no indication there ever was a hole where the pedestal disappeared down. Susan did, however, feel like her arm was tingling a little, but brushed it off as either nerves or the fact that *a gold chain seems to have sunk partway down my arm.*

She walked back and Sparkle shook her head. "There's always *Phase*," she suggested.

"And wander through solid rock for hours? Not what I would prefer. He may have totally closed the path for all we know, the wand could be at the very center of this thing, surrounded by solid rock!"

"I admit, it's not going to be easy."

"If only I knew *Passageway* or had my book!"

"You would have to cast it a whole bunch."

Susan sighed. "I guess you're right."

"I could *Shape-shift* you into some kind of burrowing creature. With *Augment (STR)* going... but no, that's even worse than *Phase* isn't it?"

"At least we could tell where we had been." Her arm tingled again. "What?" she shouted, looking down at it.

"Uh, are you talking to your arm?"

"Yes I am, thank you very much. It's tingling. I don't know what it means."

"Put your hand out for a second." Susan complied. "Wave it about." Susan wiggled it all over.

"Do the Pony Pokey and you turn yourself-"

"No, no, I mean as though you were searching for something. That's part of Harry, right? Maybe it can tell us where the other part of Harry is."

"Oh!" said Susan, surprised. "I guess..." She swept her arm back and forth over the mountain as though scanning for those precious little life forms. "It does tingle more when I'm pointing right here," she said, putting a hand on the rock. She jerked back as part of the mountain seemed to dissolve, leading inside.

“That worked,” Sparkle remarked.

“I’ll say. What the heck happened?”

“I can only guess, but if you’re really carrying a piece of Harry with you, it makes sense he can exert some control of what’s going on around him. This is his *Soulscape* too, after all.”

“*Soulscape*. Hey, I like it!”

“Thanks.”

Susan took a deep breath. “Shall we?” she asked, sweeping her hands towards the darkened portal.

“Can you summon up a torch or something? I wouldn’t put it past him to have a pit trap right inside the door. Even if Harry knew what you wanted and was able to make this passageway, that’s not to say Tom doesn’t know it, and can start exerting control again.”

“Will we really need something like that? It won’t be any darker inside the cave than it is here, outside it. There’s no light in either place, and we can see the mountain just fine.”

“I guess. Just be careful.”

“Of course.”

Susan cautiously stuck her head inside the cave, and noticed there was a long tunnel leading further inside the mountain. She envisioned a stick in her hand, and started prodding the cave floor just inside.

“Seems okay. Let’s go.”

“You are getting the hang of this place, aren’t you?”

“Little by little. I do have fairly high mental stats, you know.”

“I suppose so.”

“Anyway, I’m pretty sure anything Harry has ever seen, I’ll be able to conjure up, at least temporarily. It’s worked so far.”

“Trouble is, Harry’s seen Dementors and things too, and if Tom decides to throw stuff like that at us…”

“Don’t worry, Harry has his own *Alleviation* knife, and he knows what it can do. I’m guessing it would work just as well.”

Sparkle considered. “Probably. Well, let’s go.”

“Yup, we’re going.”

“In we go.”

“Nothing stopping us.”

“So then why aren’t you going?”

“Okay, okay. I’m going!”

Inside, the tunnel was smooth and featureless, as though the rock had simply disappeared in order to create a walkway.

Come to think of it, that’s probably exactly what happened.

Susan walked ahead of Sparkle, who was trying to watch every direction at once. As she walked, she thumped her stick down ahead of her, to check for traps or illusionary floors.

“I wonder if Harry’s ever seen a mine cart,” Susan remarked. “We could just ride down.”

“I’d rather trust my own four paws now that we’re inside. There’s no telling what’s in here.”

“If it was Harry that made this passage, it should be a straight walk to the wand, right?”

“I hope so.”

The two walked a moment, Susan thumping the ground with her stick as she walked, and Sparkle casting glances behind them every so often.

“At least you were right about not needing a torch,” she remarked. “I can see just fine in either direction.”

“I figured. Have you ever really needed a light in a dream?”

“Not that I can recall.”

“What have we here?” The two stepped into an open area and looked around. Before them was a chasm, which descended into darkness. Directly in the middle gently swung a rope bridge, which seemed to be well anchored on this side. The other was too far away to see clearly.

“So much for being a straight path,” said Sparkle, sniffing the rope. “You think we can trust it?”

Susan shook her head. “Obviously not. The only reason to not have the tunnel we’ve been walking through is to set up a trap of some kind.”

“We could *Flight* our way across.”

“Let’s see if Harry can’t help us, first, before using energy.”

“What, you want to try flying across of *brooms*?”

“No!” Susan hastily assured her. “No brooms. No, I’m thinking this place is wide enough, and the halls in Hogwarts are pretty long...” She concentrated, and a section of hallway shimmered into existence before them, next to the bridge.

“What holds it up? Wouldn’t the middle be in danger of falling as we went across?” asked Sparkle, looking underneath the newly created stone.

“It being a hallway holds it up,” Susan explained, going to thump it with the stick. She opened her hand. “Hey, it’s gone.”

“Maybe you can only have one solid memory at a time?”

“I guess. I wasn’t concentrating on the stick, I figured it would just *stick* around.”

“Very funny.”

“Thank you. Still, better see what’s up.” She concentrated, and the stick appeared back in her hand, and the hallway disappeared. “So much for that.”

“Yeah, if we get attacked you better hold onto the bridge or we’re in trouble.”

“Wonder why I can only have one thing at a time? Size obviously isn’t the issue.”

“Why can you do that at all?” countered Sparkle.

“Eh, good point. Come on.”

They walked out across the hallway, but after a few hundred steps, they realized they weren’t going to make it. The hall ended in blackness, but they were still not even halfway across the chasm. To their left the bridge creaked invitingly.

“Now what?” asked Sparkle, looking over the edge. “This hallway isn’t long enough.”

“Or was the other end moved since we’ve been walking?” asked Susan. “After all, we couldn’t exactly tell how far away the other side was.”

“Good point, but I’m not sure Tom can influence this area any more. Or at least he isn’t actively doing it.”

“What makes you say that?”

“He would have just made the corridor back there endless. I mean nothing in the real world can be, but this is just the idea of a mountain. It can have whatever features he wants.”

“True, and just making objects from Harry’s memory couldn’t have helped in that case. That is one way he could have stopped us. I think he was a bit distracted at the time.”

“If the others are doing their jobs, yes. The question remains though, what are we going to do now?”

“I have an idea. I’m going to move this hallway so the start is here rather than the end.”

“Or we could just walk back to the start and you could use a longer hallway from his memory.”

“The halls at Hogwarts aren’t that long. I think we should just try it from here. It’s easy enough to create things, you’ve seen me do it a bunch of times now.”

“I guess. Just be ready with *Flight* if you mess it up.”

“Don’t worry, it’s not like we can die here.”

“Really? Tested that, have you? Maybe we’re more vulnerable here, you don’t know.”

“I suppose. Come on.” Susan held her arms out and Sparkle jumped into them.

“Ouch, watch the claws.”

“Sorry.”

Susan thought about what she wanted to do, then jumped in the air, visualizing the hallway underneath her starting a few paces back, and extending further. It worked, and she touched down on the stone again.

“See? Nothing to it.”

“Great. Let’s just get some solid ground under our feet, this place makes me nervous.” Sparkle jumped down and the two made their way across again, which worked, and they needed no further extensions. On the other side Susan made her stick again and poked at the entrance.

“How do we know the real path isn’t down in the ravine someplace?” asked Sparkle.

“Good question!” said Susan, closing her eyes and raising her arm. She swung it across the ground and then up towards the opening again. “No, it’s this way. I can tell, somehow.”

“Good enough for me.”

A few more minutes in and the two heard what sounded like a waterfall, and the temperature started rising.

“Why is there temperature at all?” asked Sparkle. “I mean, this place can’t be hot or cold.”

“But Harry certainly knows what hot and cold feel like. I suppose that can seem as real as this stick is.”

“Granted, but shouldn’t it be getting colder if there’s a waterfall of some kind ahead?”

Susan shrugged. They soon discovered it wasn’t a *waterfall* that was making the noise, but rather a *lavafall*. Both shielded their faces and squinted at the molten rock pouring down across the passageway. The “air” here was even difficult to breathe, and the heat and fumes were stinging their eyes.

“Do you really think we’ll be hurt if we go through it?” asked Susan.

“You’re the one holding the stick.”

“What? Oh, right.” Susan poked the stick forward, head back away from the flow. The stick caught fire before it even got too close, and Susan backed off again. “I think so,” she said, looking at the end which was now on fire. She stopped concentrating on it and it vanished. “Now what?”

“What object does Harry know about that can stand up to that kind of force?”

“We don’t know how deep it goes, either. The bridge thing was fine, but this is a little bit different.”

“Yeah, falling would be fine. Getting hit with a ton of molten rock might prevent any

spell casting.”

“You think?”

“Could make it tricky. Let me think now. I suppose there’s always *Phase* if nothing else.”

“Sure, make me use my energy, but save yours.”

“Exactly.”

Susan paced a moment, thinking. “I feel like I’m playing Scribblenauts.”

“Of course you only get one object.”

“That’s the trouble. And, like, Harry knows what ice is, but he’s probably never seen a tube of it 10 inches thick. Plus that lava stuff could be hot enough to burn right through ice like nothing. How can I risk it?”

“You could put your solution there, wait to see what happens, and then remake it if it gives you enough time to go through.”

“True. Wait a second…”

“What?”

Susan had the stick in her hand again, and stared at the falling magma. Then she stared at the stick a moment and shoved it forward. This time it didn’t catch fire.

“What did you do?”

“You mean what didn’t I do. I think the last time I expected it to catch on fire, so it did. This time I’m concentrating on it not catching on fire, so it isn’t.”

“Okay, that solves one of the problems. You can’t exactly use an umbrella, even a big one. The heat will still be a problem, and there’s obviously a hole the stuff is running into. How are you going to do both? Keep the stuff off of us and provide us a place to walk?”

“Easy. It’s something Harry knows well. The train.”

“The Hogwarts Express? I guess it’s long enough.”

“It should be. We’re just going to put it, and the tracks, back a little ways. Get aboard, start it going, and I’ll make sure it doesn’t burn up while it’s carrying us through the lava.”

Sparkle thought about it, but didn’t see any problem with the plan. “Wait, wouldn’t that be two things?”

“I guess we’ll find out.” Susan stepped back, concentrating on the train. *Of course it’s a little big to fit in this passage, but I think I can come up with a scaled down version for the occasion. After all, size is relative, the sun is huge but when you think about it, you think about a tiny orb in the sky.*

A second later, tracks and a scaled version of the Express appeared, looking ready to go.

“Okay, get aboard,” said Susan, concentrating. She moved slowly to the first passenger car, maintaining the vision of the tracks not burning up in the lava. Once they were both aboard, the train started moving, and with a jolt, shot through the area with the lava. Luckily it wasn’t that deep, and the train cleared it in seconds. They hopped off, and Susan made it disappear again, making the tunnel cool down.

“That’s better,” said Sparkle.

“Couldn’t do anything about the heat it picked up. Let’s get away from this area.” Once clear, she made a cooling drink appear in her hand, and then a dish of water for Sparkle.

“Thanks.”

Once again the pair walked deeper in the mountain, and once again came to an opening that seemed to lead into a more open area. Susan was again walking while poking the ground with a stick, but only halfheartedly at this point.

“His traps and such seem more the gross variety rather than the subtle,” she told Sparkle, when she asked.

“That’s what he wants you to think.”

The two quietly peered out into the open space, and Susan groaned. “Is that what I think it is?”

“If you think it’s that basilisk, wrapped around the willow tree that would have smashed Harry’s broom to bits if you hadn’t gone back in time, yes.”

“Great. Either I could probably deal with pretty easily. If I’m going to fight these things I’m going to need my blade, *Acceleration*, *Magic Immunity*... wait, I can’t have both. Shoot. To avoid being turned into stone I need *Immunity*. To avoid being bitten I’ll need *Acceleration*. But I can’t have one if I have the other!”

“Even if you whacked something with the sword, you would need *Augment (STR)* to actually do any damage.”

“True. My STRength is pretty low. The only way Harry killed it before was a) with our help and b) I used a card on him.”

Sparkle gazed into the room. “Is there anything Harry might remember that could help us?”

“I don’t know. If it’s the same plant it might have the little button to paralyze it momentarily. That would help. But getting past that serpent is going to be troublesome without a lot of magic going.”

“We could just let our *Magical Allies* do the fighting for us.”

Susan considered. “True. Wait a second...” The stick disappeared out of Susan’s hand again and in its place was a ring.

“Isn’t that the ring you made for Professor Hagrid?”

“Yup. Figured it might be in his memory. Now, if it works the same way, we’re doing good.” She slipped it on, and Filbert appeared, looking around. Susan laughed. “I guess it works.”

Suddenly, Sparkle’s lion ally was there, and Susan jumped back. “Hey, how did you do that without casting?”

“He’s seen it,” she replied simply. “He knows how fast it is and the damage it can do. I just pulled it out of his memory, like you’ve been doing with stuff. You didn’t think you were the only one that could do it, did you?”

“Uh, maybe a little? Okay, get in there and tear everything in that room to pieces,” she commanded the dragon. Sparkle repeated the order to the lion, and both bounded into the room. A few moments later, everything was quiet, and they both walked back.

“I guess we won,” said Sparkle.

“I think you may be right. Let’s take a look.”

The chamber was empty.

“They must have disappeared when they were defeated?” asked Sparkle.

“Must be. Saves us trying to make our way through the debris.”

“How many more of these are we going to have to go through, anyway?”

“No idea.”

Once again the passageway narrowed, and the two followed it as it went deeper into the mountain. Susan’s arm was starting to really tingle, making her think she was getting close, and soon enough they came to another open chamber and there was the wand and pedestal.

Surrounding it was a swirling of energies, in layers, circling around the center to protect it. Susan felt she could make out all kinds of elemental energy, from fire, ice and wind to rocks and possibly pure magic. All the layers seemed to be spinning and swirling, flaring and dying in unpredictable patterns.

“That will be hard to neutralize,” remarked Sparkle. “No one thing will work!”

“I agree.” She walked around the area, looking for weak spots, but the energies were arrayed as multiple overlapping barriers, and Susan didn’t see any way through. “I suppose *Phase* is still on the table.”

“Tricky. You would have to solidify to pick it up, and that last energy shell seems pretty close to that pedestal. Hard to see clearly because there are so many barriers, but it looks like it’s right up against it. It would be a big risk.”

“One good thing, these shells aren’t closed domes,” Susan remarked, looking up. “It’s just sheets of elemental energy that shoot straight up. You could fly over and grab it in your mouth. You’re small enough it wouldn’t touch you.”

“If I was very careful about it, yes,” Sparkle replied, looking the area over carefully.

“Think *Magic Immunity* would work?”

“No. I think these are just natural things, like real fire, that are just being animated in a way that seems magical. This mountain isn’t made of magic, it was made of whatever things are made of in dreams. You could still get burned or slashed to ribbons from that ice.”

“So *Invulnerability* then?”

“Trouble is I think that middle layer is just pure magic. It’s just a glowing energy field- It can’t be plasma, Tom wouldn’t know what that was. Or if it’s something like ether or something else magically active-”

“You’re right. That would be a problem. Think I could just shut it down? Try doing what I did to make the passageway? Use the part of Harry I have to influence my surroundings?”

“Tom might be able to feel that, and move it away again.”

“Ugh, you’re right. We need to do it as “quietly” as possible. You should *shape-shift* into your fairy form, that’s small enough you wouldn’t have to worry about getting hit.”

“True. I can fly naturally in that form. I just hate to think those barriers are set at that height to make that sort of plan appealing, and will shoot up if something approaches from the air.”

“Crap! That’s exactly what I would do, too.”

Susan and Sparkle discussed various things, but hadn’t come to any real conclusions when Susan jerked her head to look at the wand. “Look!” she said, pointing. The wand was lifting itself off the pedestal, and rising into the air. It rose above the shells and floated towards Susan, who tentatively touched it, then grabbed it out of the air. Immediately she felt a jolt, and almost dropped it. There was a flash, and the chain that was wrapped around her arm was now smaller, and wrapped around the wand. Susan and Sparkle looked at each other, then a voice behind them said “Now was that so hard?”

They both whirled.

"Myrtle!" shouted Susan, running to hug her. "How did you get here?"

"I've always been," said Myrtle, returning the hug. "It just took me a little while to get used to things."

"Used to-" Susan pulled back and looked at her. Myrtle was smiling, and her eyes were shining. She looked different somehow, but Susan couldn't put her finger on how. She was grabbed up in a hug again.

"It's so good to feel warmth again!" she said, pressing close to Susan.

"Wait a second- you're solid!"

Myrtle laughed. "Figured it out, huh? I knew you were smart," she said sarcastically.

"But wait, how?" said Susan, holding her at arms length again and looking her over.

"Not exactly sure," she replied. "All I know is, when I shoved you two into Tom, I came along for the ride as well. When I woke up I was solid, and just like a person again. For example," she twirled around, making her skirt lift up. "I couldn't fly like a ghost, I had to walk. That's what took me so long to get here, I had to get used to using my legs again. Fifty years of floating around will do that to you, you know? By the time I got near that park or whatever it had vanished, and then there was this weird mountain I saw. Well, I come over here and hoped you were inside, and you were. So here I am! Luckily I still have my ghost powers or I might not have made it."

"Yeah, how did you pass the lava fall?"

"Barrier. I've been practicing with the elves, I can do a lot of what they can do, despite being a ghost. After all, moving things with your mind is moving things with your mind."

"I guess so. Well I feel stupid. I could have done that myself with *Telekinesis* magic."

"Don't feel too bad, I didn't think of it either," said Sparkle. "We were coming up with all kinds of convoluted solutions, we missed the easy, dumb one."

"Yeah. Anyway, let's get out of here and see what other pieces of Harry we need to hunt down before we can see the guy. I don't suppose you know how to find him?" she asked Myrtle.

"I've just been trying to find you guys. Sorry."

"No big deal. Hey, look at that!" Susan pointed, and the walls of the mountain were growing transparent, and over the course of a minute or so disappeared entirely. The three found themselves standing in the blackness again.

"Forgot how creepy this place was," said Sparkle. "Hurry and summon the next area so we have something to look at, at least."

"It does sort of make your eyes bug out, doesn't it?" said Myrtle, looking around. "What was that all about, anyway?"

"I'm not sure, but it all relates to Harry. The chain represented his bonds with us, the people he knew. The wand of course is his magic. I think we're piecing him together, so to speak, from whatever Tom did to him when he took over. At least that's the theory."

"So how many more do you think you'll have to find? He could be in a dozen pieces!"

"Maybe, but I don't think so. I mean, how many things would you say really define you? For me it would be my character sheet, my magic, my bonds with others. A normal person would say their job, their house, their friends, maybe their car. Clothes? I guess. There aren't that many

really strong identifiers that people would use, I think.”

“I hope you’re right. I have no idea how much time has passed in here, but it felt like I was walking around for ages.”

“Sorry about that. If we knew you had come in as well, we would have looked for you.”

“There was no way you could have known, it’s okay.”

“Anyway, Harry?” asked Sparkle.

“Sure thing. Let me concentrate a second, Myrtle.”

“Okay.”

Susan concentrated again, calling to mind things she might tell others when describing Harry Potter.

But what’s another defining characteristic?

Suddenly the largest area she had seen so far filled in, from what looked like the castle grounds in the distance to the forbidden forest which was close enough to touch.

“Tell me we don’t have to walk through that!” protested Sparkle.

“I’m afraid we might,” Susan replied, trying to look through the foliage.

“Why don’t we just fly over?”

“Good question,” she said, looking up. “I just wonder if it’ll be that easy. Myrtle?”

“Yes?”

“Can you lift yourself with your *Telekinesis*? I’d like to see something.”

“I’ve never needed to before. Let me check.” Myrtle looked down at herself and slowly began to rise in the air. “Huh. This is weird. Ouch.” She moved a little lower and rubbed her head. “I hit something!”

“Thought so. Come on down.”

“What?” asked Sparkle. “What did she hit?”

“Nothing, that’s the problem.”

“I don’t get it.”

“The only things that exist here are what we believe exist,” she explained. “Like with the train. I was able to keep it from melting by believing that it wasn’t. Basically I refreshed the model that was in my mind over and over again. It’s the same here. There’s no sky, only this forest. The “space” only extends to the top of the trees. Now maybe Tom made it that way or maybe that’s just how it is. Doesn’t matter, the problem stays the same. No flying.”

“Super.”

“Yeah. That’s a long haul, and if the things in the forest in Harry’s memory are here in this copy, and they act the same-”

“Or Tom has added a few surprises of his own-”

“Exactly. We’re in trouble.”

“Can’t you use magic?” asked Myrtle, pointing at the wand.

“Sure, but I don’t have unlimited energy, and every spell takes at least one. I’m trying to save it for the showdown.”

“I mean Harry’s magic. I mean you have his wand, right?”

“Would that work?” asked Sparkle.

“Now that she mentions it... maybe,” Susan said thoughtfully. “This seems to be a part of Harry, and things I wish up from his memory appear. Why wouldn’t his magic respond as well? *Wingardium Leviosa!*” she finished, pointing the wand at Sparkle. She rose into the air. “How about that!” Susan gushed.

“Wonderful, now can you put me down?”

“Uh, hum. Well, let’s see.” It took a moment, but Susan figured out how to gently lower Sparkle to the ground.

“Thank you.”

“Sure. Didn’t even lose an energy. Of course, I never paid much attention to the wand movement or incantation Wanded Wizards used.”

“Hopefully the intent will be enough,” said Myrtle. “You didn’t need magic to get this far, right?”

“True, I just thought about stuff and it happened. Okay, stick close everyone.”

The group made their way through the thick trees, senses alert for motion or sounds that would indicate an attack. Suddenly they heard a howl and a large, dark shape burst forth from behind a tree. Susan started to cast *Thrust*, that being what she was used to, but then remembered the wand in her hand and raised it. By that time the shape was upon her, and claws were about to tear her in half. She was about to use a reactive action to dodge when she realized she hadn’t made any *Initiative* checks, and wondered what was wrong with her. The claws were inches away from her belly when the werewolf was jerked off its feet and slammed into a tree a few feet away.

“You okay?” asked Myrtle, looking concerned.

“I’m... not sure. That didn’t exactly go as it usually does. Thanks, by the way. I take it that was you and not Sparkle?”

“It wasn’t me,” said Sparkle.

The werewolf howled and snarled, thrashing about trying to get free from the force pinning it to the tree.

“Did you roll *Initiative*?” Susan asked.

Sparkle shook her head. “No, I didn’t, now that you mention it. That’s odd.”

“Yeah. I suppose because Harry doesn’t have any memory of how that actually works? I guess I don’t have as much command over this place as I thought. Anyway, better take care of him.” She pointed to the wolf. “Let’s see, what was that fire spell I saw him use? *Incendio*.” Fire shot from the wand and hit the wolf in the chest, causing him to howl in pain. However, before their eyes the burn healed and the fur came back.

“That didn’t work so well,” remarked Myrtle.

“I had hoped that would be enough, but I guess all that studying of werewolves in class is working against us now.”

“What, Harry thinks they regenerate that fast, and so they do?” asked Sparkle.

“Exactly. I’ll need to take it out in one shot, if that will even work. The book says they can regenerate the head too.”

“Unfair!”

Susan snorted. “Tell me about it. I wonder if he has anything sharp and silver hanging around his memory?”

“Didn’t you cure some werewolves? Why not just use that spell and turn him harmless?”

“That’s *Suppress Curse*, and I don’t know it off the top of my head.”

“Too bad.”

“But there is the object you made,” said Sparkle.

“Hey, you’re right! That could work, Harry was there part of the time I was making that thing. I hate to maintain just that, but let’s see what happens.”

Susan envisioned the ring she had made for Professor Lupin, making it appear on the hand of the werewolf. It looked confusedly at the thing, made a weird grunting noise, and disappeared.

“That seems to have worked,” remarked Myrtle. “Where did it go?”

“Back into nothingness, I guess,” replied Susan. “Harry knew it couldn’t stay a werewolf with that ring on, but it had no human form to return to. So it just vanished from existence.”

“Are you maintaining the ring?” asked Sparkle. “We may want it back again if more attack.”

“No, it vanished with the thing.”

“Great. Let’s keep going.”

Making their way forward again for several minutes, Sparkle kept jerking her head and swiveling her ears as though hearing something.

“What can you hear?” whispered Susan.

“I don’t know, but there’s a sort of clicking, chittering sound all around us.”

Susan gripped the wand tightly, remembering the magic she had seen Harry do. If she wasn’t going to have the *courtesy* of the *Initiative* she wanted to be ready. *My first instinct is going to be my magic, but I have to think like a wanded magic user now. How does Harry do it?*

“They’re getting closer, get ready!” Sparkle said. The three stopped and went back to back, looking around wildly for what was going to attack them.

“Spider!” shouted Myrtle, looking up, and a spider that had been dropping down instead slammed into another one coming out from behind a tree.

“There must be dozens, can we fight that many?” asked Sparkle. “I could put up *Elemental Line* but they aren’t actually real so I’m not sure it would work.”

“Wait a second, I think I’ve got this one!” Susan said brightly. She envisioned the basilisk, its body in a circle around them, and looking out at the spiders. Those they could see just coming out took one look at the serpent and dashed away in terror.

“Wow, didn’t think he would ever come in handy,” remarked Susan, waiting a moment to make sure the spiders were long gone.

“Ugh, that’s the thing that killed me!” said Myrtle in disgust. “Make it go away.”

“We got our revenge on it,” said Susan, making it disappear again. “What else lives in these woods that Harry would know about?”

“Unicorns?” asked Myrtle.

“Centaur?” asked Sparkle.

“Neither are big on attacking people on sight, I think. Maybe that’ll be the end of it?”

There were no further attacks, just a lot of trudging through densely packed trees, and finally the group came out the other side of the forest.

“Now what?” asked Sparkle, looking around. “Something inside the castle?”

“Look,” said Myrtle, pointing. “Something is going on over at the Quidditch field.”

“Let’s take a look.”

They walked over to find two brooms near the edge of the play field, and Bludgers swooping back and forth in the air above them.

Susan hid her eyes with her hand. “Please tell me we don’t have to catch a stupid flying ball.”

“I think we have to catch the stupid flying ball,” said Myrtle.

“I guess he took quitting the game harder than he let on,” said Sparkle, watching the balls swoop around. “If he made a copy of this in his memory and it serves to define him, I mean.”

“I guess I should have been more supportive of the thing he really liked doing, even if I didn’t see the point of it,” admitted Susan. “I feel kind of bad now.”

“He really did have more important things to be doing,” reminded Sparkle. “All that battle practice, for one.”

“I know.” She grabbed a broom and hopped on it. “Better see if we can fly these things before we get in there and have to start ducking balls.”

“Harry made it look easy, maybe it’ll be that easy here, too?” hoped Sparkle.

“I hope so.”

“Never thought I would fly on a broom again,” said Myrtle, pleased. She put her hand on over the other broomstick. “Up!” It flew up into her hand. “This’ll be nostalgic for me.”

“Great, you can give me some pointers,” muttered Susan, pulling the handle up. She stared rising in the air and moving forward. *Yeah, I’m going to regret this.*

Susan found the broom wasn’t too hard to control, and after a short practice they got up to full speed and darted into the play area, looking for the snitch. The two Bludgers immediately took off after them, one apiece. Myrtle scowled at the one after her and it shot down, impacting into the sand below and getting stuck there. It started trying to wiggle free, and Myrtle smirked at it. “And stay down,” she called, looking around again. Susan, on the other hand, shot magical energies at the one coming after her and blew it apart.

That’s the way to do it.

She only got about a thirty second reprieve as another come out of nowhere and swooped towards her. She blasted that one to bits as well. “Nothing?” she called to Myrtle.

“Nothing yet.” she called back. “Oops, better slam mine down again!” The ball she had mentally thrown had worked its way out of the hole and was zooming towards her again. “This is fun!”

Fun?

The two weaved this way and that, dodging, slamming or blasting the balls that kept appearing. *I can’t even seem to make Perception checks to spot it. Is this how everyone on this planet has to get by? Crazy!*

“Gotcha!” shouted Myrtle, as something shiny zipped into her hand. “TK for the win!” She landed and got off the broom, holding the golden sphere up for Susan to see.

“Nice job!” shouted Susan, landing nearby. “Now, if it stays true to form...” She watched as the forest vanished, but the castle remained.

“That’s odd,” remarked Sparkle. “You think it means something?”

“Must be. You have a good hold on that thing?”

“It won’t get away,” answered Myrtle, showing the struggling ball. “I can see what Harry sees in that game. Wonder if we could make a ghostly version.”

“I still don’t. But hey, whatever. Come on.”

The three walked to the castle and around to the front, as they couldn’t get any door to open in the back where the Quidditch pitch was. The main gate stood open, silent and foreboding.

“Checking the entire castle might take a while,” remarked Sparkle. “Should we split up? There can’t be that many dangers, everything we’ve faced has been ‘native’ so to speak, to the

area we were in. The castle is safe.”

“We’ll see what’s inside, then decide,” replied Susan.

They cautiously stuck their head through the door and looked around. Everything looked basically the way Susan remembered it, and there was nothing there waiting to attack them.

“Looks okay,” said Myrtle. “I’ll go first if you want.”

“No, we go together,” said Susan. “Come on.”

The three stepped through the door, but then gasped as they did not step into the castle but rather into the Dursley house!

“What in the world?” asked Susan, looking around.

“Where are we?” asked Myrtle.

“This is where he lived before coming to the castle, or staying with me. I suppose this place is strong in his memories.”

“Does it mean something? Did it ever change like that before?”

“No, there was always a clear area which disappeared. Of course I can’t say I’m an expert at the *soulscape* or anything. Look around for any clues.”

“Got it.”

The house was empty, no phantom Dursley stepped from memory to accost them, but Harry wasn’t to be found either.

“*Accio Harry Potter!*” Susan said, raising the wand. Nothing happened. “Worth a try,” she said, shrugging.

“Nothing in the basement,” said Myrtle, coming upstairs again. “Though the details were a bit fuzzy down there. I don’t think he spent much time down there.”

“Probably not.”

“Think this is just to distract us?” asked Sparkle. “I mean, we were stepping into the castle. Maybe we should try to get back there?”

“We could try.” Susan opened the front door and looked out. “Looks like the neighborhood. Myrtle, come with me.” She held out a hand. “Sparkle, if we disappear keep looking around here for clues and we’ll try and get back. You stay put, no sense all of us getting lost in here.”

“You got it.”

Susan and Myrtle squeezed sideways through the door, hands jointed. They were outside the house and looked around.

“No, I guess we’re supposed to be here,” said Susan. “There must be something we’re missing.”

Back inside the three called Harry’s name and looked around.

“What about that cupboard he was locked in?” asked Sparkle. “Did anyone check there?”

“No, walked right past it!” exclaimed Susan.

“What’s this?” asked Myrtle.

“Come and see.”

They walked over to the closet under the stairs and Susan reached for the handle. She didn’t grab it, and looked down where it should have been.

“No wonder I walked right past it, there’s no handle anymore!”

“I suppose he would want to edit his memories, so that he couldn’t get stuffed in there anymore,” said Sparkle.

“I guess.”

“What’s this funny indentation?” asked Myrtle, running her hands along the wood. “Is

there like a depression here?"

Susan and Sparkle looked it over. "It does look like you could fit something in there," remarked Susan. "That's not on the real thing. Wait, here's another!"

In all, the group found three depressions, seemingly carved into the wood. A place for a ball, a place for a wand and a place for a chain.

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" asked Sparkle.

"Put the Snitch into it, let's see what happens," said Susan. Myrtle did so, and nothing happened.

"I suppose if it is some kind of key, it'll need all three. But how do I separate the chain?"

"Try just pulling it off," suggested Sparkle. Having no better ideas, Susan did, and the chain easily separated from the wand and wound itself into a circle.

"Here goes nothing," Susan said, slotting the wand into the door, then pressing the chain into where it looked like it would fit. They stepped back as the door shimmered and disappeared.

Harry Potter stumbled out.

"Thought you would never find me," he croaked, blinking against the light. He held his wand in his hand, and his voice sounded weak. Susan supported him, and led him over to the couch. Myrtle went to the kitchen and got him some water, which he drank greedily.

I guess to slack an imaginary thirst, one must use the idea of water.

"Are you okay?" asked Susan, after Harry thanked Myrtle for the drink.

"I think so. I've been stuffed in there for what feels like days."

"Look, we don't have a lot of time," said Susan, getting down to business. "People may be dying outside at this very moment. Can you take control of your body back?"

"I'll try," Harry said, closing his eyes. "But this place seems real to me. I can't feel my body any more than you can feel my body. I mean, we're all inside it, at the moment, right?"

"But we're not you. Give it a try."

"I am trying!"

"It won't work, you know," said Tom. All of them yelped and jumped away. "I figured my efforts would only slow you down. Seems I was right. I guess there's no putting it off any longer." He looked over at nothing. "No, I won't just kill him. Maybe that's acceptable behavior where you come from, but here we have what I call a sense of honor." He looked back at the Harry. "Sorry about that. So, how shall we do this? Four on one doesn't seem that sporting."

"But we aren't stupid enough to fight you one on one," replied Susan. "We want you gone, and that means taking you out as quickly as possible."

Tom sighed. "I suppose that was too much to ask. Yes, yes, you told me so, bravo. Shall we go outside then?" He waved a hand, and the inside of the house was replaced with the backyard of the Dursley's house. "I suppose it all started here, didn't it?" he asked Harry. "Your meeting with Susan. Her meeting with the teachers from Hogwarts when she bypassed their wards. Such a troublemaker, even then. It seems fitting it should end here, as well."

"You could give up," said Susan hopefully. "I mean, you are outnumbered, like you said. I don't care how much power you have, you still can't keep track of four people at once."

"I'm not exactly helpless, especially here," replied Tom. "I have your magic, Susan. My own considerable talents. Harry's magical power. Plus I can reshape reality, given this is my mental landscape, after all."

"You've forgotten something," said Harry.

“Oh?”

He raised two wands. “I can counter whatever you do to the area, and we’re one person now. That means I have your magic as well as my own.”

“Is that? It is! You’ve managed to summon my wand as well as your own. Well done, Harry. I can take them,” he said to his invisible companion.

“You shouldn’t have given me all that time to think, locked away like that. I couldn’t get out, but that didn’t mean I couldn’t come up with some strategies for when I did.”

“I hope you thought well, then. We’re going to see just what you came up with.”

“Are you okay?” asked Susan. “You don’t seem to be all there, quite frankly. I wouldn’t want you whining after you lost that you were tired or something.”

“Are we going to fight or just talk? I’m fine. We can take you.”

We?

“Let’s fight then!”

“*Acceleration*,” he and Sparkle said, magic swirling around everyone.

“That’s not going to help you,” he sneered.

“But at least we’re still even,” said Susan.

“We’ll see about that,” said Tom, raising his wands.

The final battle was about to begin!

Final Battle with Tom

Time: Seconds later

Place: Inside Pottermort's psyche / Outside the memory of the Dursley house.

Tom fired twin beams of magic at Harry and Susan, but she cried "*Deflection*," putting in some extra energy and getting a 16 from splitting it two ways. A split second before it hit both of them, punching through the *Deflection*, Susan realized that perhaps she had underestimated Tom and should probably have put some more energy into that spell.

He is the final boss, after all. No sense holding back anything now!

"Declare card 29- Wild as a Missed Me!" she said, making the attack go wide instead. "Declare card 38, Gimme Gimme! to get it back."

Whew.

"Thanks," said Harry, not realizing it was the card that saved him, not the spell. He shot a similar bolt at Tom but the ground rose up to deflect it.

"*Destruction*," cast Sparkle, targeting the wand in Tom's right hand. He just smirked and the wand stayed where it was.

"Just like the lava train," said Susan.

"Oh, right!" said Sparkle, understanding.

Myrtle, meanwhile, had been looking around for something to throw at him, and figured the car in the driveway was a good start. She gave it a burst of power and it popped into the air, arcing to fall on Tom. He saw it rise though and glanced at it, making it disappear before it could hit him.

"Keep him on the defensive!" Susan shouted. "That way he won't be able to attack!"

"Unless I use XP, like this," Tom said, spending an XP for an extra action. He fired bolts at Harry and Susan again. This time Susan and Sparkle both reacted, casting *Deflection* with maximum energy. With the bonus from Sparkle, Susan got a 23, and as ties went to the defender, it bounced off.

Harry sent magical bolts away from himself, left and right, and Tom looked at him like he was going crazy. Suddenly they arced around the ground and Tom threw himself backwards as they met where he had been standing and exploded.

"Oh, very clever," Tom remarked. "Yipes!" Myrtle grabbed his leg with *Telekinesis* this time, but Tom made his STrength check to throw it off.

Wish I knew how much she failed by, I could have used by Bonus card on her. Oh well, this battle is just getting started.

"*Elemental Attack (Fire)*," shouted Susan, and Tom snarled and created a barrier around himself. Susan didn't actually cast that spell, however, rather envisioning the Hogwarts Express to materialize above him and crush him. Tom looked confused when no fire splashed at his shield, but almost lost concentration as the locomotive landed on him with a crash. It held, but he was now pinned under it, his shield the only thing keeping it from rolling over on top of him. Sparkle saw an opening, and imagined the shield bubble full of water, and Tom jerked back, obviously not expecting this. He vanished, and reappeared on the top of the train, his barrier disintegrating and letting the train and water fall. Susan took a free action to stop maintaining the train, and Tom himself started to fall. Myrtle smiled and Tom slammed into the ground.

Climbing out of the pit he had created, Susan saw it was full of pillows, and Tom seemed unhurt. "Oh, I see," Tom had time to say before magical energy swirled around him. "No fair!"

he said, looking at Susan, who wasn't casting anything. He looked confused, and ice suddenly materialized around him. Everyone looked over at Harry.

"So that's what using your kind of magic is like," he said. "Interesting."

"How-" Susan started to say, but Tom smashed his way out of the ice. "We'll kill you all!" he shouted.

We? He keeps saying that.

"You just imagined her magic, didn't you?" asked Myrtle with a grin. "*Elemental Attack (Fire).*" Fire shot out of Myrtle's hands, which Tom countered with his wands.

"That's right," replied Harry. "What shall we do next?"

Sparkle answered that question by darting sideways, so there was a line between herself, Tom, and the small mound of earth Tom had made previously to deflect Harry's bolts. "*Thrust,*" she cast, getting a 22. Tom went flying but flattened the earth again before he hit it. He flipped over, skidding to a halt.

"This is going to take forever," Susan complained. "Someone hit him already!" *Wait, I get one object...* She held up a hand and a ring appeared on her finger. She made a fist. "For sacrifices made," she said, and her *Legion* appeared around her. *Yup, that's in Harry memory too. It was his mother that made it possible, after all.*

"Oh no you don't!" shouted Tom, and torrential rain started to fall from inky black clouds overhead. The soldiers washed away.

"I thought you were supposed to be countering stuff he's doing!" Susan complained to Harry.

"I thought I could!" he shouted back. "Hey, here's something we know works!" Harry passed the wand in his right hand to his left, and was suddenly holding Susan's gun. He squeezed the trigger.

"That only worked because I allowed it to, in order to take you over," Tom sneered as the gun did nothing. "You think I would just let you shoot me again?"

"It was worth a *shot.*" Harry punned, glancing disgustedly at the gun and taking up his wands again.

Everyone groaned internally.

Myrtle dashed over to where the rain was still falling and held her hands up. Long icicles appeared, which she flung at Tom, but he easily dodged them.

"He's got *Acceleration* going, that makes his dodge better," Sparkle said. "Try to get that car back or something he can't dodge as easily."

"Oh, that's why the train!" Myrtle replied, understanding. "Got it."

"*Entangle,*" cast Sparkle, making vines and trees burst from the ground and start trying to grab him. The water in the area now worked against him as he stopped the rain and switched to fire, a ring of it leaping from his wands. It singed the plants, but they kept coming.

"Nice one," said Susan, conjuring up the Express again, and making it flatten the whole area. No barrier appeared this time. "Think I got him?" she asked hopefully.

"Get down!" shouted Harry, waving his wand. Susan felt herself pressed to the ground as beams of magic passed over her. *Guess not.* She looked over, and Tom was standing on Harry's house now.

"Thanks."

Sparkle looked over, and suddenly the troll that had been guarding the Philosopher's Stone was standing next to Tom, and took a swing at him with his club. Tom dodged, but lost his footing, tumbling off the roof. He let himself fall, but before he hit the ground was standing

upright again.

Aarg!

Myrtle considered, and figured the troll was big enough. It went flying after Tom, who dodged both the troll and the club, as the troll took another swipe at him on the way down. He splatted into the ground and disappeared.

Maybe it's time for an old standby. If this works... "Dazzle," cast Susan, and Tom looked at her like she was nuts.

"You realize this isn't my body, right? You can't dazzle my senses when they're out there." He pointed up with a wand.

So I guess Hypnotic Field is out. It was worth a try.

"Dodge this," said Harry, the dark clouds coming back. He concentrated, and lighting stabbed down at Tom, something even he couldn't dodge. What he did do, however, was cause a metal tube to surround himself, so the lighting hit that instead of his body.

"I can easily anticipate what you're going to do, boy," he called. "You can't win against yourself."

"That means neither can you! And I have friends with me. Where are your friends?"

"I have something better."

"Uh, no?"

As Tom and Harry were staring at each other, Sparkle was looking high in the air. She imagined the dragon Harry had gotten the egg from during the Triwizard Tournament, and it dive-bombed out of the sky, spewing fire out of its mouth. Tom must have felt the heat because he yelped and rolled to one side. The dragon followed him, not letting up with the fire. Tom snarled something and suddenly was atop the dragon, wands pointed at its head. Twin beams lashed out and blew the dragon's head off, making it disappear. Tom was on the ground again.

He seems to be getting better at that, we need to take him out somehow before he really masters this place and our numbers don't mean anything. At least we seem to be keeping him from taking active actions against us.

Myrtle looked over at the house, and suddenly every piece of glass she could see shattered and sped towards Tom in a deadly cloud of sharpened glass. Tom raised his wands and all that got near him was a shower of dust that streamed past him.

"Come on, you're not even trying, Myrtle," he taunted.

Susan thought about heat, and the glass dust now around Tom melted and fused. Tom cried out and was suddenly elsewhere, clothes smoldering.

Finally hurt him?

"Working together, huh? Guess I should concentrate on taking one of you down at a time." He raised his wands to fire at Susan, but as she blinked, Harry was in front of her.

"Now we end this!" he shouted, firing twin beams of magic of his own. Tom's magic and his collided in midair, halfway between them. Both cried out and tried to pull back, but it seemed neither could. Their wands were locked together by the spells.

"Help me!" both cried, looking over at Susan.

Wait, what?

"What do I do?" she cried.

"I don't know, something!" Harry shouted back.

Tom was screaming, but it seemed to be with two voices. A dark aura began surrounding him, and Susan could have sworn it was glaring at her. Suddenly, in a flash, it all made sense to her.

It all makes sense to me! He keeps saying 'we' and talking to some unseen thing. The reports of his 'insanity' by his followers. I think he's possessed somehow!

Casting, she ran over to Tom and put her hands on his arm. She felt the magic backlash around her, but held on. The darkness around Tom seemed to notice her and tried to strike out, but couldn't seem to move while being pinned by Harry's magic. She smiled grimly. "Exorcise," she cast, and there was a magical explosion, throwing Tom, Susan, and a dark *something* away from each other.

Susan struggled to stand. She looked over, where Harry was being helped up by Myrtle. Sparkle was shaking her head, trying to clear it, and Tom was down, sprawled out on the ground. Above him stood a manlike shape made of blackness. It turned.

"So. Figured it out, did you? He gave you enough clues, the little fool. Useless." He kicked Tom but the "foot" went right through.

"What are you?" Susan demanded.

"And you," said the shape, turning back to Susan but ignoring the question. "I am coming to hate all *Paragons*. Your father has caused me no end of troubles on his little 'journey' to save his world. Looks like I should have tried a little harder with you."

"You know my father? What, your voice sounds familiar, now that I hear it from the outside."

The thing laughed. "That's right. You like history? I can give you a little history lesson, if you want. I guess I'll have to introduce myself though, so you have the proper context. I'm to you what are you to... ants. Yes, that's about right. To be technical about it, I'm a higher order being from outside your dimension. You don't have any trouble with that concept, do you? You know about other worlds, right? Well, mine is above them all."

"Okay?"

"And of course when I say 'above' I'm talking mathematical dimensions not physical space. Whatever, I doubt you could comprehend any but the simplest explanations. In any case, I've always known about the lesser dimensions you creatures inhabit, and watching you all amuses me sometimes. But I got worried. What if there were higher dimensions than mine, and something was watching me with the same amusement? I couldn't have that."

"So you came here? Lower down? Why? To hide?"

Susan noticed the others had gotten up, and were slowly making their way over to her.

"That's easy enough to explain. If I'm going to break into higher order dimensions, I'm going to need a lot of power. And while a bit flat, your lower order dimensions can provide it. Not a lot per reality, of course, but there are a lot of them down here, so it adds up."

"You're the darkness that covered my father's world, draining it of energy and life!"

Susan gasped, realizing what she was talking to. It gave a little bow.

"The same. Some worlds I can act more directly in, others less so. Some are totally incompatible with my vibrational frequency, forcing me to work exclusively through avatars, like you and Tom here."

"Me?"

"Of course. I saw your father come to this world and drew back, waiting for him to leave. After the trouble he's caused me in the past I began to recognize his presence in worlds I was active. But here he conceived a child, and I knew that was my opening. I implanted just a tiny bit

of myself into you, but not enough I guess. I wasn't sure how much of me the unborn you could handle, so I erred on the side of caution. The influence of that Luna girl certainly did a number on your potential, didn't it? You were supposed to go much further with my help. What you did to that Umbridge organism was inspired, and I thought your development coming along nicely. Then you started going against my inclinations."

"And you started whispering in my ear more directly."

"That part of me did, but essentially correct. Please don't think of me as one dimensional, as you yourself are." He sighed. "You're probably lost to me now, but I can take some comfort knowing you'll soon be questioning every decision you ever made, or will ever make. 'Is this what the creature wants me to do?' you'll ask yourself. 'Was that thing I did what I really wanted?' Oh, to feel every agonizing moment."

"You really don't see us as people at all, do you?"

"People? You're sentient fluid that walks around a little while, and then stops. Forgive me if I don't get all weepy."

"So if I'm following this," said Harry, now beside Susan. "You saw another chance when Tom here was reborn."

"You are masters of stating the obvious, I'll give you all that," he sneered. "Yes, through him I thought my plans would be possible. After all, I would get to use your own power against you, and he didn't seem the type to start taking other's advice. I also was able to put a bit more of myself inside, having learned more about your limits from studying you, Susan. That blood he stole from you was an excellent conduit, allowing a 'seed' if you will to pass from you and grow in him."

"But to what end? You want this world's power but what does that mean?"

"How to explain... Each world has a certain amount of potential. Be it for magic or science, it can only go so far before hitting a wall. Worlds like the one your father came from, that have a high amount of both, are pretty rare. But that's what makes them so valuable. Here's where I come in. I disrupt the natural order in any way I can. This increases the potential by decreasing the amount of magic or tech a world is using. I've done it various ways in the past. Here, I wanted Tom to disrupt the science of this world by making an army of wizards to destroy anyone non-magical. That would allow for greater magic in the world, which I would then have had him use to slaughter the wizards. That done, the potential of the world would be fully returned, ready for me to claim."

"Leaving the world like my fathers'. Dark and nearly lifeless."

"Correct. Having taken a world's potential it falls into darkness as nothing can get done on it anymore. It dies shortly afterwards."

"Like a spring winding down..." said Harry.

"Yes, that's it exactly. With less forces acting on the spring it winds up again, and then I steal the spring. Oh, these primitive metaphors. You realize that isn't actually close to how it even works, right?"

Susan waved that off. "And you're the reason he picked up my magic so fast. You were helping him."

"Naturally. While I was willing to wait for the whole plan, (your time means nothing to me), I also knew you would be improving your skills and learning more spells. You're not as good as your father, he has some unique backgrounds to help him, but I knew another *Paragon* would be trouble. I needed him ready to face you when the time came. But he too noticed something was wrong, that his desires were changing, and again some flat little no power

organism pulled away from me! It was very vexing!”

“Forgive me if I don’t get all weepy.”

“Cute. So does that about cover it? Is your curiosity sated? I would hate for you to die with any ignorance, after all.”

“Die?” Susan laughed. “We won, in case you haven’t noticed.”

“Really?” The darkness looked around. “I seem to still be inside the hybrid. Separating me from this mental construct of his hasn’t changed anything. In fact, it’s made your situation worse. Remember that energy I was talking about?”

They nodded.

“I’ve been staling,” the creature said, holding up a ball of crackling energy. “While I brought some down from the dimension I inhabit. When this goes off, it’ll take out a nice chunk of world. That will leave your world some energy, but given the destruction, I’m pretty sure the ‘spring’ will wind back up as you people kill each other off for the dwindling resources that are left.”

“But it’s in here!” Susan protested. “So what good is that going to do you?”

“True, but it’s not an issue. It will burst out of this body, vaporizing it and you three first, then continue outward. Any last words?”

“Why didn’t you just do that in the first place?” Harry asked.

The creature laughed. “I couldn’t act directly, this dimension isn’t compatible with me. Haven’t you been listening? It was your friend Susan there that made this possible, forcing me out of Tom and allowing me to act directly. Think about that as you die!” He put the ball in both hands and started to squeeze.

“NO!” shouted Tom, leaping up and causing the creature to stumble back. Tom threw himself at the creature, and there was an explosion of energy, throwing everyone back and opening a hole in the ground where the creature was.

Seconds, minutes or hours later, Susan opened her eyes to see she was back in the blackness again, all trace of Harry’s neighborhood gone. She staggered up, then went over to shake everyone else awake. They seemed unharmed, and Susan was surprised to find Tom laying there, breathing weakly.

“You survived that?” she said, walking over to him.

“Not exactly,” he explained weakly. “I used an XP for dramatic pause. Wanted to apologize for all the trouble I caused you.”

“What? You? Apologize? No way.”

“Way.” He weakly smiled. “I admit, my choices in life were probably wrong, but I did honestly believe what I was doing was for the best. We wizards shouldn’t have to hide what we are, and die off. Of course, if that creature was telling the truth, it would free up ‘potential’ for greater science to be discovered if wizards all died off. At least, that’s what I believed until that creature sort of took me over. Whatever else you think about me, you can’t fault me for that.”

“I guess. Wait, if you had an XP you could have used it to stabilize rather than just talk to me!”

Tom shook his head. “I’ve paid the price for my actions. And you heard what he said. He’s probably still inside me. My making that energy ball blow up in his face may have driven him off to recover or whatever, but it didn’t kill him. He wasn’t actually here to kill, you understand.”

“Yeah, I guess. I... suppose I owe you an apology. I never tried to save you. Looking

back now I see I should have.”

Tom shook his head. “No reason you should have. It took my death to see what was really important in life, but by that time it was too late. My Horcrux were made, and they would pick up where I left off when I made them. That was the point of them, after all. Didn’t realize I had put one inside Harry, either. Sorry about that, Harry.”

“That’s okay. Without you I wouldn’t be the person I am today.”

“I suppose. That’s about what I wanted to say, and I can feel myself slipping away. Thank you, Susan, all of you, for freeing me from that creature.”

“Don’t worry, you’re only the first.”

Tom smiled. “I figured. Good luck.”

Susan slipped into blackness again.

When she next opened her eyes, she felt she was freezing, and blankets were being piled around her.

“It worked!” someone was shouting, and she felt people nearby dancing. She blearily looked over to see where she was.

Ah, hospital wing at the school. Guess I survived it after all.

“How do you feel?” asked Harry, stepping up next to her.

“Harry? You’re yourself again!”

He grinned. “After Tom died our bodies separated again. Thank goodness.”

Duh, it was a P type spell, so of course him dying made it go away. “I’ll say. Did everyone make it through the attack? Are the dark creatures rampaging around? What’s been going on?”

“Everything will be fine,” said Albus, stepping up behind Harry. “With Tom and his protections gone, the magical world has retaken what he stole and is now rebuilding itself.”

“Thank goodness.”

“You are Susan, right?” asked Myrtle, floating up.

“Of course I am, why wouldn’t I be?”

“I sort of forgot which soul was which,” she admitted. “So I had a fifty/fifty shot at getting it right.”

“You mean I could have ended up in Sparkle’s body? Where is she, anyway?”

“Here,” said Sparkle, coming out from under the covers. “Staying where it’s warm.” She went back underneath again.

“Harry has been telling me about your adventures inside his *soulscape*, as he calls it. It seems we owe you greater thanks than we knew, given that you saved our entire world from being drained of energy.”

“Not a problem,” said Susan. “Did he tell you a little piece of that darkness is inside me? Always has been.”

“I’m not too worried about that. You’ve chosen your path, I think, and turned away from that darkness. In any case, we all have some amount of darkness in us, it just seems you can talk to yours, that’s all.”

“I guess.”

And so, Susan was congratulated by her friends, and she and Myrtle told the tale of what

they went through to everyone who asked, and the magical world started picking itself back up. Susan was interviewed by Rita Skeeter, and had a hardly embellished story written up about her in the paper. Of course she didn't tell Rita everything. Tom's body was recovered, and given a proper burial. Of course, only a few people attended the ceremony, with the up and down nature of Tom's interactions with the wizarding world over his lifetime, Susan felt it best not to stir up trouble. Of course, those under the *Imperius Curse* came out of it, or were freed with Susan's help, and everyone began to piece the "real" story together.

Finally, after about two weeks, things calmed down, and Susan went to see the Headmaster.

"Good afternoon, Susan," he said as she entered his office. "Have a seat, as this doesn't feel like a social call."

"It's not," she said, dropping into a chair. "I want to know how to get permission to leave school early. I want to have graduated, but honestly this school isn't doing anything for me."

"I thought this day might come. One moment please." He drew out his wand and sent his *Patronus* winging away. "Now, you were saying? Ah yes, graduating. I suppose saving the whole world does allow one a certain leeway. May I ask what your plans are, should I allow this early graduation?"

"I have to track down my father, and help him put an end to that darkness creature that's threatening our worlds. To that end I'm going to research the spell that brought my father to see Lady Inari, and ask for her help."

"I see. You think you can do it, then?"

"I tried asking my book, but I just got a weird result. I know it's possible, because my mother said the wizards in my father's world sent him on. It took them all, I now realize, because the world had so little power of life left. I think I can do it myself."

"Working together with Sparkle, I'm sure you can," said Albus. He got up and paced, looking at the various instruments around his office. "I have a confession to make," he said at last. "It probably won't surprise you, but your father and his group found the magical world right away with their skills. He explained what he could to us about what he was fighting. Of course, he didn't have the details you did, only what he had observed from his travels. But he told us what to watch for. He then went about his business of trying to determine if this world was in danger. We know now, of course, that it was, but that danger was hidden, because this darkness creature knew he was here and hid. I do think he truly fell in love with your mother, Stacy, and conceived you in love, rather than just leaving behind a soldier to carry on his work. It struck me as being the kind of man he was. And there's something else. We knew you were coming."

Hey, is he finally going to tell me about...

"There was a prophecy made about an 'outside girl' who could help us."

"I know."

"You know?"

"Yes. Tom took me to hear it a long time ago. About the time I stopped trusting you completely, strangely enough."

"I want you to understand, I had to let you choose your own path. If I told you about the prophecy, what you were supposed to do, it might have changed what you would choose to do. That is why I allowed you so much freedom over the years. With you there is the potential for a new age of magic. Given the choice between that and you becoming an agent of this darkness

you described, well, I hope you don't think too badly about me for keeping this from you."

"It seems everyone does for themselves what they think is best. It's only from the outside do we call it evil or good. If you can live with the guilt of your actions, I suppose I can forgive you them. I guess it didn't matter much, in the end, for all I disliked you for not trusting me enough with that knowledge."

"Some knowledge can only be appreciated at the proper time," he said, reaching up to grab a scroll from a high shelf. "This, for example."

There was a knock on the door.

"Come in!" called Albus, and Luna entered the office. "You got my message, then?"

"I came as soon as I heard it. What did you need to see me about, Headmaster?"

"It's about your further schooling," Albus explained. "I'm about to give something to Susan which will determine her fate for the foreseeable future. I know how close you two are, so I thought you might want to make that decision together."

"What decision? What's that scroll?" asked Susan.

"This," Albus said, handing it over, "is something your father gave me before he left. He told me I would know if the time was ever right to give it to you, and he was right. Please, read it and you will understand."

Susan unrolled it, and Luna read over her shoulder.

My Dearest Daughter,

If you are reading these words, my fears have come to pass. This world was indeed in danger, though I could find no trace of it. However, it seems you have risen to the challenge, as is proper for the daughter of the greatest wizard even born on his world. ;-) It was always my intention to check up on you from time to time, and the fact that I have not means one of several things has happened.

The first, and least troubling, is that I am on a world where time runs much slower than it does here, so while you have aged many years, I have not.

The second, and most troubling, is that I have failed in my mission, either through my capture or death.

You now have a choice to make. Do you stay on your world and defend it (an action I would not think less of you for doing) or take up my fight and help others? To even make that choice however, you need a way to reach Lady Inari, and that is what the remainder of this scroll contains. The spell to open a doorway to her world, where you can seek her advice. If she knows I am captive somewhere she can advise you on the feasibility of a rescue attempt. If I am dead... at least you will know and can mourn the man you never knew. You have your own life. Please do not think this is your father commanding you to leave your home and fight for people who don't even know you exist. You must choose where your future takes you.

But I think the call of adventure will be as strong in you as it was in me, and we will see each other for the first time someday.

I look forward to that day.

My daughter, I congratulate you. You have obviously done well in coming this far, both in your magical training and in your personal maturity. You must be a hard worker, and I hope have made many good friends here on this world. It's an odd one, but I'm coming to understand that all worlds are, in their way.

Good luck, in whatever path you choose to walk.

*Love Eternally,
Elysian Tarsisis*

"I'm going," said Luna, before Susan even had a chance to say anything.

"How do you even know I'm going anywhere?" she protested. Luna just looked at her. "Okay, you know me too well. You better clear it with him though." She glanced at Albus.

"I believe that traveling to other worlds might be just as educational as staying and studying at this one," he said, a slight smile on his face. "If your father allows it, you may accompany Susan on her journey. Given what you'll face, I'm sure you'll get lots of practice in magic, and I'll feel better having a wanded magic user alongside you, Susan. You admit your magic isn't limitless."

"True."

"Thank you," Luna said. "When do we leave?"

"Tomorrow morning," said Susan. "I'll need to pack some things, say goodbye to everyone, the whole bit. Plus study this spell so I can cast it. We've got some work to do. You'll need a good book of spells to practice, hopefully we can come up with one."

"I hope I see you again," said Albus. "And your father and I can get reacquainted. He seemed an interesting man."

"You will. I promise. This world is my home, but I know my duty now. Thank you for this." She rolled the parchment up and waved it. "It will save me some time, that's for sure."

"Thank your father. I simply took care of it until you were ready. Good luck."

Susan nodded, then took Luna's hand. They proudly walked out of the office and towards their next big adventure.