

# Fred and George Save A Friend

*by beaweasley2*

It is well known that Fred and George are pranksters and practical jokers. However, when a pretty girl they knew from school shows up with a dark secret and a load of trouble, these two know just what to do and how to handle it.

## A Familiar Face In Diagon Alley

*Chapter 1 of 8*

It is well known that Fred and George are pranksters and practical jokers. However, when a pretty girl they knew from school shows up with a dark secret and a load of trouble, these two know just what to do and how to handle it.

Marysia Duncan was sitting at a small table in Diagon Alley having a cool drink just down the alley from Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes, and she looked pretty with her jeans and white blouse covered with sawdust. Fred knew that Annie Ett's Bed Bath and Body Boutique was moving in just down the street and already it looked very feminine with window boxes, bay windows and a new French door. Even the balcony on the second floor above the shop was already lined with planters and pots full of flowers.

As Fred Weasley watched her, he thought that she was admirable to be opening up a shop here in Diagon Alley, but nuts to be doing so all by herself, considering that almost half of the shops were closed. Florean Fortescue's and Ollivanders had closed, and the windows were boarded up. Flourish and Blotts remained open, though, and Madam Malkin's was busy enough as were the Apothecary and the Quill Shop. Eeylops Owl Emporium had the usual amount of business, but there were only three cages of birds hanging from the eaves of the shop, and the selection inside was less than usual. But as long as there were kids being sent to school, school supplies would have to be bought, and this the best place to get them.

The Leaky Cauldron was practically empty of patrons, although the rooms were sometimes occupied with people not wanting to be home. However, Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes was doing well, and Fred was thankful for it. Both Fred and George had a real knack for mischief and tricks, and their shop was full of many creative products with several new items in development. Behind him a cute girl in magenta robes was putting back items misplaced by customers, a stock boy was refilling the shelves, and George was busy closing out the cash drawer.

Fred watched as Marysia got up and walked away; her long honey colored hair was tied up in a band that swung when she turned her head. He was curious why she didn't come by to say hello. He had known her from school, of course. They were in the year above hers, however, and she had been in Ravenclaw while he had been in Gryffindor. But Fred knew that she had had a crush on him since his fourth year. Granted, she had rarely come up to him when he was in school, and whenever he had spoken to her, she had blushed deep pink every time. She was kind of cute when she blushed, which was probably why he had always tried to make her blush in the first place.

But she had sat there at that little table for almost an hour and a half, watching him hadn't she? He checked his watch again. Yep. So why didn't she come by and see the shop? He had seen her around Diagon Alley for several weeks, getting everything set up for her shop, the leases and permits he remembered those days setting up this shop!

His eyes followed her as she walked down the street back toward the shop across the street and a short way down. Obviously, a bit of money was being put into the new shop, and rumors from the workers said that Marysia was being really picky. But the shop would look really nice when she was done, he imagined, given Marysia's sense of

detail. He tossed out the last of his water and went back inside to close shop for the day. Well, if she was avoiding him, fine.

Inside George was grinning at him, but continued to count out the cash drawer. "We did a really good day today, bro." George smiled openly. "Has she said hello to you today?"

"That's really good," Fred replied, not really listening to George as he watched her disappear into her shop. He darkened the windows and moved to help restock the empty spaces on the shelves.

"She finished dinner, then?" George asked.

"Huh? Oh, yeah, she went back to her shop," Fred replied back.

"Do you want to make the night deposit?" George asked, grinning as he closed the day's earnings into the money bags for the night deposit. He was amused at this brother's lack of attention lately and knew very well why.

"Oh, yeah, sure." Fred caught the bag George sent flying to him and was turning to get out the door...

"You can say hi as you go by," George called out as Fred left. Gringotts Wizarding Bank always had a goblin standing at the bank doors when the shops closed to receive the night deposits. A nice courtesy, but it was really intended to get the gold into the vaults as soon as possible.

As Fred headed down the cobbled street toward Gringotts, he passed by Marysia's new shop and gazed in at the construction inside. He couldn't see her through the windows, and the workers she hired to help had gone home. It was vulnerable for her to stay alone in a shop left in a state of construction, and he glanced up as a light went on in the window upstairs. The flowering plants in the planters and pots on the balcony were all he could see from here on the street. Fred passed by without disturbing her and made his night deposit at the bank. The goblin seated just inside the great double doors signed the cash deposit slip as acceptance of the bag and quickly counted the coins. The goblin then handed Fred a receipt of deposit and returned the empty bag to Fred before dumping the coins back into a second bag and tossing it onto a small cart standing behind him.

On the way back to the shop, Fred once again looked over the new premises of Annie Ett's Bed Bath and Body Boutique, wondering if the girl within would be okay all by herself up there. Taking out his wand, he hung a small bell on the wall near the door and set a Shield Charm on the door and windows. If anyone touched the door in the night, a similar bell in his room would ring and alert him. Fred went back home and upstairs to the flat he shared with George.

"Got the deposit in on time?" George looked up, watching his brother enter and drop the deposit slip into the basket where keys were usually dropped. "So, how was she?" he inquired as Fred turned toward the window facing the street below.

"Yeah, just in time. We made a good amount today..." Fred replied as he looked out of the window overlooking Diagon Alley. "Not too safe sleeping in there, is it?"

"With us watching her all the time, who could possibly get in?" George asked from across the room, comfortable in his favorite chair. "Besides if anyone did break in, all we'd have to do is Apparate in there."

"She had an enchantment set so that no one can Apparate into the flat or the shop. I've tried it yesterday after she moved in." Fred replied. "Besides, she is a full witch now and can take care of herself." His eyes stayed at the window where a moving silhouette could be occasionally seen.

"Good thing or we would have to sit by the window all night and make sure." George was grinning at his brother's back as he picked up another pretty goose quill he was enchanting to spit ink as one wrote with it. He was making this one especially for his sister, Ginny. The ink was going to spit pale stars onto the parchment when she used it, but at the present it was spitting splotches. It was a variation of the new trick quill he had invented last week.

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Marysia had changed pajamas and slipped into a silk robe that wrapped around her and fell to her ankles. She slid open the sliding glass doors and looked out onto the balcony patio from the room that would be hers if she moved in here. Auntie Annette was eager for Marysia to run this shop as an expansion of her famous shop in Hogsmeade, but Marysia wasn't sure this was what she wanted to do.

She had done an internship at St. Mungo's Hospital in the Potions department last summer with her mother and was signed up for their Potions Master training starting in September. She really liked that as a career choice as well. She could have her pick between both career choices, actually, and both had distinctly different benefits.

Then there was her father, always sending her scrolls, papers, journals and diaries to either copy or to translate for him. Marysia sat down on a chair in the open door and gazed down the street at the other lit windows. Diagon Alley would have been pretty if it had been all lit softly for the evening, but too many dark windows made the street look haunted.

As it was, the only furniture she had was her bed, her two traveling trunks, a heavy chair and one table she used as a desk to pile books, scrolls and floor plans on. Well, she could immerse herself into the latest pile of scrolls her dad wanted copied, translated and returned. What she didn't like were the shadows that seemed to move in the dark street below, and she felt a cold breeze on the air.

Odd for early July, she thought. She gazed down the way and could see where Fred and George's flat was and wished that she had the place all cleaned up and respectable with actual furniture in it. It would have been nice to invite them over for dinner and have company sitting here sipping on elf wine instead of being alone. She wondered why being alone bothered her so much lately. Surely, Dementors and Death Eaters weren't running around Diagon Alley?

All the same, her father and brothers were keeping tabs on her daily, all six of them, sending owls regularly or stopping by unexpectedly. Her brothers had all been on hand when she had moved in here two days before, setting all kinds of protection spells on the shop for her safety, and that was comforting at least. But this was her third night alone in the flat.

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Fred sat and watched the pale light as it flicked and danced from the open doorway between her balcony patio and her flat above her shop. I wonder which room that doorway leads to, he thought, a living room or bedroom? He could see her if he stood up and looked. Tomorrow he'd make an excuse to talk to her. Maybe check on her to see how things were going, see if she needed some help. His thoughts were on her as he fell asleep by the window, a small bell hanging from the window latch in front of him.

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*Author's Notes:*

*I owe a big debt of gratitude to Phoenix for all her hard work and time in cleaning this story up and making it presentable. Thank you, Phoenix. I appreciate it more than you know.*

# The First Invitation

## Chapter 2 of 8

It is well known that Fred and George are pranksters and practical jokers. George takes the initiative with a pretty girl he and Fred knew from school.

The whole next day Fred kept an eye on the street, as if waiting for a special delivery. Several times he went outside to sweep the walk, until business picked up and the shop became busy. It seemed that even though there was a certain amount of concern by the parents, the kids that came into the shop were just as happy, boisterous, and curious as ever.

Fred and George's shield hats, gloves and cloaks were selling almost as fast as they could make them. Also Decoy Detonators, Instant Darkness Powder, Liquid Condensed Fog and their the newest invention, Blinding Flash, were becoming very popular and were now available in both regular size and emergency pocket-size containers. They even had pocket-sized Swamp Ooze, which made a puddle of slimy swamp water three meters wide when dropped.

Fred mused that if business continued as it was, he and George would have to consider finding larger premises in Diagon Alley. They still wanted to open a shop in Hogsmeade, but didn't have the time to do that; at least until the summer business quieted a bit.

At lunch, Fred stopped by Annie Ett's before he went to pick up sandwiches from the small café. The wizards Marysia had hired to remodel were working on rebuilding the shop's new shelves and fixtures. It looked like they would be ready to paint soon. The wall sconces and counters were up, and noise from the back meant that there were additional rooms being done. *Possibly the back work area and storerooms*, Fred thought. One older worker in the main room stopped to tell Fred that Marysia wouldn't be back for a while.

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When Marysia came back from having lunch with her mother and running some errands, she noticed several owls waiting for her with mail from her brothers. Since each owl expected a reply, Marysia jotted down a few lines to each one, basically reassuring them she was doing all right. A large box had also arrived, with old scrolls and journals stuffed with added sheets of parchment, that her father had dug up somewhere, asking her to copy and translate them. Unlike the letters he usually sent her, his note was brief, lacking any of the details or the enthusiasm of his discovery. Also, this time he didn't mention where he was or for her to forward back any of the work she'd finished. *That was odd*, she thought as she carried the box upstairs to her room.

She emptied the contents onto the table and carefully packed the documents she had finished the night before, ready to send the package back to her father when he asked for it. She spent the rest of the day busy inside the new shop.

As dusk approached, Marysia took out a pad of paper, and her favorite quill and ink well. She considered which of the journals and papers she should start first, and selected an old diary full of extra sheets of parchment, grabbed the bag of books she used as references when translating, and walked down to her favorite table for a break.

The small café across from Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes and the Leaky Cauldron were currently the only places left that served dinner in Diagon Alley. Marysia as usual, chose the small café, as it was generally quieter and had tables set up outside. The plump lady who ran the kitchen in the café was cooking home-style meals rather than menu selections, and a large menu board announced what was being offered each night. Her food was always so good, and it reminded Marysia of home.

As Marysia sat down, she waved at George, or at this distance it could have been Fred, and accepted her dinner the witch set before her with a warm smile. Between bites, Marysia worked at translating the writing in the diary and became engrossed in her work.

A cloaked, bent figure moving in the shadows down the street at dusk caught Marysia's attention, and she felt a shiver run down her spine. She tried to ignore it as she worked on the pages between bites, being careful not to rip the pages. It gave her a sad feeling that people coming to Diagon Alley to shop and buy supplies should feel the need to be so guarded.

She remembered that not long ago this was a main social area for wizard kind to mingle and meet; with people shopping happily and glad to run into faces they may not have seen for a while.

As the translating progressed, Marysia was surprised by the content of diary; it was much more ominous than what her father usually dealt with. Her father had probably found or borrowed it from someone's library, she assumed, but was uncertain as to why. There were many sheets added between the pages of the old diary, and the text to be carefully copied was obviously spells. The tiny script and symbols on the old diary and on the parchment sheets to be translated were particularly difficult.

"You're not doing homework are you?" Marysia nearly jumped out of her skin, looked up, startled to see George standing over her. "I thought that you graduated from Hogwarts with honors!"

"George, you startled me! No, not homework, a favor for my dad," Marysia replied, as she breathed easier, seeing a smiling face. "I like your shop, by the way. It seems to be doing really well. I'm glad for you."

George was amused that she could always distinguish him from his brother. Outside of close friends and family, not many people could. Of course in school he had frequently caught her watching them, and she even covered for them twice when they were pulling pranks on Umbridge.

"Yeah, it is, thanks. You should come on in sometime, and say hello." He looked up, noting that many of the shops were closing for the night. "What are you doing out here? You shouldn't be out so late."

"Girl has to eat, and besides, the shop is still such a mess inside." She motioned for George to sit, which he declined. "We began painting today, and tomorrow that should be done, and then the products arrive the day after. But with all the construction going on, upstairs and in the shop, I can't actually eat in there until it's all finished."

"You could come and eat with us," George offered. "It would be safer."

Marysia blushed scarlet in the soft light. "I'd like that very much, thank you, but I'd hate to impose on you."

George laughed. "You always were so formal! We eat at seven, so I'll expect you tomorrow night, then."

"Well, then alright. I would like to have dinner with you and Fred. It is very nice of you to invite me." As Marysia watched George walk back to his shop laughing, no doubt at her, the dark figure moving in the shadows down the Alley caught her attention again. It was a cloaked and bent figure she thought she saw earlier, but it quickly vanished. She hurriedly packed up everything, paid for her meal and went back up to her new flat above her shop.

Marysia spent the evening translating the pages in the journals her father had sent her. This was usually easy work and he paid her well for doing it, but some of the symbols didn't have translations that she knew, so she copied them down as they were in erasable ink. She'd have to ask her father about them later.

Marysia was surprised at the context of this batch of journals and papers her father had sent her. Like the diary they were full of Dark magic and Dark Arts, not her father's usual interest. The sheets stuffed between the pages contained very dark and very complex protective magic. Who would want to go through all this? Poisonous plants, snake venom, bloodletting, the killing of an innocent animal a symbol that usually meant a 'young' or 'baby' it wasn't nice stuff. As the night took on chilly stillness unusual for this time of year, Marysia set down her quill and carefully collected the papers she had been working on, placed them in her trunk and went to bed.

A shadow slid down the street as the bent, cloaked figure stopped at the door to the shop, raised a hand and brought out a wand. A door slamming nearby made the figure stop, as a couple started to walk down the street toward the shop. The figure moved away quickly and vanished.

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George woke first and quietly made breakfast. He laughed quietly to himself as his brother slept slumped over in the chair by the window again. He noticed the small bell hanging on the window latch and smiled inwardly. George made himself a mug of hot tea, then made a second mug and slipped from the room, grinning mischievously.

As George walked up to her shop, he saw the tiny bell hanging near the door and laughed before tapping sharply on the windowpane. Marysia, dressed in jeans and a large stretched out sweatshirt, opened the door to greet him. "Hi, there!" George smiled at her. "I thought you'd like some tea." His brother, obviously jolted awake when the bell beside him in their flat jingled, alerting him that someone had touched her door, Apparated just behind him with his wand drawn.

Marysia, holding a brush in one hand and a large steaming mug in the other, looked like she had already started painting. "Ah, thanks, but I have mine." She said, lifting her mug to show him, and then looked behind him at Fred, who looked like he had slept in his robes. "I'd invite you in...but..." she said, as she turned to look behind her at the construction being done.

"Don't mind if we do," George answered, handing Fred the second mug, then passed by her into the mess inside. "Love what you're doing with the place. What do you call it?"

"Shabby Chic," Marysia replied with a grin. "All the shelves are finally finished, and the counters are done. Oh, it was a mess getting all the old stuff out, permanent stick on everything in here. Some of the walls practically had to be rebuilt!"

"Looks nice, though," Fred added, burning his tongue on the hot tea. "I mean, it will be really nice."

"Yes, once everything is painted, and the rugs are in place, furniture and oh, yeah, lamps, products and on and on..." Marysia said, gazing around. "The hard wood floors are done, thankfully, and I'm just touching up the paint," Marysia said, smiling warmly at them. "It is supposed to look like the shop in Hogsmeade when I get done. Although, I won't have a garden out back, just a large formal atrium."

She gave the guys a quick tour, stepping into the atrium, which already housed several kinds of flowering plants. "My brothers keep Apparating in here to check up on me. It's nice that they are all so concerned," she said, with a bit of sarcasm that didn't quite reach her eyes.

Fred's eyebrows went up on her remark.*Her brothers Apparated in here? How?* He wanted to ask her, but didn't. Instead, he asked her about the ever-blooming roses and jasmine.

Finally, Fred and George turned to leave. "It's time for us to go open our own shop," Fred said. On his way out the door, he stopped and turned to Marysia. "If you'd like, come by for lunch, get out of this mess for a while?"

"I'm sorry. I'd love to, but I'm expecting my brother to pop in this afternoon for lunch. But another time, maybe?" Marysia said hopefully.

"Okay, dinner then," Fred said. "After you finish up today, come by the shop." Marysia gave Fred a questioning look.

George smiled at his brother, remembering he'd forgotten to tell Fred he'd already invited her, and then turned to Marysia, and winked at her. "Yeah, stop by the shop, around seven," he added. "I just finished up a batch of brittle!"

"And have feathers, fins or scales all night?" Marysia asked, with a surprised smile. "I know what you did to chocolates! I'd be suspicious of what you two would think of doing to brittle!"

"Yeah, well, I'm sure we can find something that won't give you feathers," Fred replied grinning.

"But thanks for the idea of scales!" George shouted over his shoulder as they left.

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## Dinner With A Surprise

*Chapter 3 of 8*

It is well known that Fred and George are pranksters and practical jokers. However, when their new friend shows up for dinner, Fred and George suspect that there is something going on ? something quite wrong.

That night, a bit woozy from paint fumes, Marysia arrived at Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes early, with a large chocolate cake in her hands, receiving two very surprised looks. Fred was impressed that she had dressed up for the occasion of a casual dinner with them, wearing a sleeveless dress that ended in many layers of flimsy fabric that swished as she walked in the reds, pinks and oranges of a tropical sunset.

She handed the cake off to George, who was the first to approach her. "Why don't you have a look around? We're not quite ready to close up yet," he suggested.

"Why don't I give you the Knut tour of the shop?" Fred said as he held out his arm. Fred guided her around the shop and was pleased at how impressed she was. He was very proud of their shop and demonstrated several of the trick wands, which made her laugh, and a Weasleys' Whirling Wizzer, a hand-held firework sparkler ball, that

amazed her. They tried on shield hats and he demonstrated some of the 'Muggle magic tricks' that were novelties of the store. At the end of the tour, Marysia bought three boxes of assorted candies, two trick wands, several boxes of various sparklers and two Skiving Snackboxes.

At closing Marysia followed George up the stairs, while Fred closed up the shop with his wand and ran up the stairs after them.

"Hope you're hungry; we were going to make a stew for dinner," Fred said, running up the stairs as George opened the door to their flat and led the way to the kitchen area.

"Yeah, if we make a big enough pot, it'll last us for days," George added.

"Mind if I help?" Marysia asked as Fred and George started to pull out various ingredients to make the stew and a large pot. "I love cooking, and I don't get the chance to cook that much anymore."

With a flourish, George handed her a large knife, and the two of them watched her cut, chop and dice up the vegetables, and then carefully drop the ingredients into the large pot. They were glad Marysia wanted to help with the cooking and allowed her to basically take over making dinner. It was like old times at home for them. While she managed the stew, the guys both sat down with their feet propped up at the table to watch.

"So did you finish copying all that stuff for your dad?" asked George.

"What stuff?" Fred asked.

"Some old scrolls, books, journals, papers Dad finds, copies or borrows. Dad's an historian; he sends me stuff to translate all the time," Marysia stated off-hand.

"What kind of stuff?" Fred asked.

"Dad is into History of Magic: famous witches and wizards and ancient magic, old spells. He hunts down references to old and ancient magic, and stories or references of early wizards and witches, copies everything and translates them if needed. Then he collates them into volumes. Sometimes I help him. He has even been published several times," Marysia said proudly. "I have been doing this with him since I was little. We used to spend hours together translating from old languages, runes and symbols. I have many dictionaries from him my usual birthday or Christmas present, a new dictionary. That or a history book! I practically have my own library!"

"What's he working on now?" Fred asked, munching on a carrot slice.

"He was researching the legends of Llyr of the Welch and Lir of the Irish, both supposed to be gods of the sea according to Muggle writings. Dad's also been interested in Finn MacCool, of the Fianna, lately, who it's said was related to the Fairy Hill folk. He did manage to get into a fairy hill a few weeks ago and sent me a stack of Celtic scrolls and copies of a lot of carvings. His last box had some journals... and what I think is a diary, but it's very different from what he usually sends me. It's odd stuff, really."

"What is the 'odd stuff' about?" George asked curiously.

Once everything was cut, chopped and diced, Marysia added some spices, then set the fire to allow the stew to cook, tapping the pot with a quick cook charm, and turned to face them. Marysia paused before speaking, looking a bit apprehensive. "The journal, and the papers he sent with it, is... well... are Dark Magic spells, really... Dark curses and... hexes, jinxes... very Dark Magic protective spells and enchantments, like you might find in tombs. Ones that no one ever wanted reopened. Some pretty awful stuff, really. It's not his usual material at all actually."

"Sounds like stuff my brother would know about," Fred stated, but this had piqued his curiosity too. He did notice her hesitation about it and knew that she wasn't telling him everything.

"What does he do?" Marysia asked. She knew they had two older brothers. She remembered Charlie played Quidditch for Gryffindor and he was supposed to have been an incredible player. Rumors were he could have gone pro. The other brother, she didn't know much about at all.

"He works for Gringotts. Bill's a Curse-Breaker," Fred said. The stew was simmering nicely, so she sat at the end of the table between Fred and George to let it cook a bit.

"This Dark Magic stuff, you said it's like you'd see in tombs?" George asked. "Bill might know more about it, Dark Magic protective spells are just his thing. So your dad is looking into curse breaking?"

"No, not at all. I could see it if Dad was interested in breaking into tombs, but he isn't," she said. "He's a History buff, not a treasure hunter. I'm a bit concerned; it wouldn't be the first time Dad stumbled onto something that was..." She stopped a moment, considering whether to tell them. Her dad had made her promise never to tell anyone, not speak of it. *But this might be related somehow*, she thought to herself and then decided that the information was, "Too dangerous," Marysia mumbled as she got up. She turned back to the kitchen and flicked her wand over the stew. "This would taste better if I had let it cook a while, but I bet you're hungry."

George got up, gathered a loaf of homemade bread and butter that he placed on the table, as she ladled out the stew into three large bowls, and joined them. "You baked?" she asked with a grin, pointing to the bread.

"Nah, Mum sent it with her usual care package of food," George said.

"She assumes that George and I can't cook." Fred laughed and then became serious. "You're changing the subject you said it was... too dangerous. What's too dangerous?"

Her pause was long as she struggled with what she ought to say and what she shouldn't. Marysia just sat there, digging her nails into her fingers, twisting them nervously. "It was a long time ago." She didn't look up. "My dad ran across some papers, spell work that scared him and two names... that scared him... a lot. Wasn't a good time for our family long, sad story really." She looked at each of them in turn, her eyes pleading that the subject be dropped. Fred noticed that besides the nervousness with her hands, and the long pauses, she had a frightened, uncertain look in her eyes. One glance at George and he knew his brother had noticed it too.

"So why does your dad have you translating for him?" George asked. *Okay then, he thought to himself, change the subject, then just try a different approach*

"I have always helped him," Marysia explained. "Dad spends almost all his time in his library, or traveling to other libraries. If I wanted to spend any time with him at all, I had to seem interested in what he was working on, or he'd send me out to play. After a while, I really did enjoy helping him, and we had a good time together doing it together."

"So... let me guess; you took Ancient Runes and Cryptology at Hogwarts?" George asked with a smirk on his face.

Marysia felt relaxed again. If he was going to joke with her, then things were fine, safe. "Well, sure why not! I wasn't going to take Divination, now was I? That's such a useless subject unless you want to read tealeaves or palms. Besides, I already knew quite a bit, having done so much of it with Dad, and it was a fun class for me. Dad was so proud."

"I bet you got an O.W.L. in both?" Fred asked.

"I, um well, yes, I did," Marysia replied with a soft blush appearing on her cheeks. "I received outstanding O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s in both. Why?"

"Figures! Hey, this stew was pretty good, but I'm ready for the dessert!" Fred said, enthusiastically pulling the chocolate cake forward as George flicked his wand to have three plates and forks fly to the table.

Fred cut a slice of cake for her, passing her the plate, and then cut the rest of the cake in half, dividing it between himself and George. Fred held out his fork at her. "Look, I

don't like the fact that you're nervous about this stuff your dad is sending you. No, don't deny it, it bothers you."

She looked down at her lap, shaking her head. "Look, we are friends, right?" George asked, emphasized with a fork full of cake. Marysia looked up, startled at the statement George made. "What is it about this stuff that has you so worried? Maybe we can help?" He tried to look sincere, serious, but his gaze held hers as she considered telling them. Neither Fred nor George broke the silence as she looked first at George and then turned to Fred, obviously struggling with the decision, conflicted.

She was obviously very nervous talking about this. She was afraid, her hands were shaking, and she was practically breaking out in sweats*The napkin in her hands is now twisted so tight*, Fred mused, *she might even be able to break it!* At last she began to talk, but her words rushed out of her.

"The last batch of journals and scrolls were pretty dark magic, not pleasant to go through actually. There are a lot of symbols I don't know, and I don't have a reference for them in any of my books." She paused and looked away. "It's strange because he was researching the Celtic legends, and his letter said that he had finally found the way into a fairy hill. He was really excited about his discovery, told me all about the runes and carvings he had found, all the artifacts and such."

Again she stopped and looked at them, both fear and concern visible in her eyes. "Suddenly, I get another box... only this time I'm given some really Dark Magic... and a note... asking me to copy everything and translate it but no information, not his usual excitement... no details! This last case of scrolls and journals just isn't his usual material at all, and there is this diary..." Her voice became really low, hesitant, she looked disturbed and then quickly shrugged it off, and her face even became controlled, calm. "Dad said he ran across them in the basement of an old house, and the owners just gave him the box. He hadn't had time to go through it and asked if I would."

Once again, fear and concern flashed in her eyes as she looked at them. "But if they gave it to him, why does he want it *copied*?" She began to shiver noticeably. "But he's still away for a few weeks more and I don't know where exactly so I can't reach him to ask about it. He didn't tell me where he is." Marysia noticed how badly her hands were shaking and tried to hide them in her lap, twisting her napkin again.

Fred gave George a questioning look, which he answered with a shrug. Something was wrong about this stuff; they both knew it, but what? "Maybe ~~we~~ should have my brother, Bill, take a look at it? Besides, I'd feel better about him seeing it," Fred said, getting up and moving to the stairs.

"But I'd hate to impose on him. No, really. His time must be very valuable. I couldn't intrude..." George watched her, amused, as she jolted upright, becoming very proper and her posture became very straight and stiff.

George laid a hand on her arm. "He may even know the symbols you can't find. Gringotts has a vast research library on this kind of stuff." He noticed she was shaking as if it were freezing in the warm kitchen.

"He's probably very busy, I really shouldn't obtrude, and anyway, it's such an imposition asking him. I wouldn't want to bother him with this. I'm sure it's nothing, really," she insisted as Fred came back with an owl on his arm.

"In case you haven't noticed, there are a lot of dark things happening lately. Missing witches and wizards, Dementors are loose and running around, odd things reported, even deaths, and you're in that shop alone! Now your dad sends you stuff that obviously bothers you," George said as he watched Fred draft a quick note. "Bill can be here in a few minutes, and this is just up his alley!" The owl flew off out the open window.

"Still, I would hate to impose on him. What if he's busy? Besides, he doesn't even know me," she insisted.

Fred was amused as her insistence continued in that polite and proper manner she had. *She slips into it so frequently that it is almost cute. One minute she's sitting here comfortably talking with us, the next she's all nervous, and when we talk about Bill seeing this stuff her father sent her, she gets all proper, even her posture is straighter. But something about this stuff is really scaring her*, Fred mused. *It would be best if Bill at least took a look at this stuff she's translating* Her father ran across something, he was sure of it.

"It won't be a bother to him. He'll probably like seeing it anyway; he's into curses and stuff like that. Besides, wouldn't you feel better having someone who knows this stuff to confide in?" Fred asked as he moved to her side.

"Well, actually, yes, but I've never discussed my dad's papers and notes with anyone but family before," Marysia replied softly. "Still, it would be such an imposition to interrupt your brother if he is busy. I really don't want to inconvenience him with it. I can't possibly intrude on his..."

"He'll be at home, so that isn't a problem," George cut in with a grin.

"Besides, what are brothers for?" Fred asked, agreeing with George, and winked at her.

"But *he isn't* my brother..." She was twisting the napkin again, her eyes fearful.

"No, he's ours. Course it won't make much difference once you meet him, he is a very likable chap. He can help I know it." Fred laid a hand on her shoulder. "Besides, you'll like him; he's not as charming as we are, of course, but he has his moments."

They just couldn't seem to reassure her, Fred noticed. But the more they tried to talk her into letting Bill see this stuff her father had sent her, the more nervous she became. He looked at George, knowing what they should do.

"George, lets go and escort Marysia home, get *all* her stuff and bring it back here," Fred stated. "I'd feel better once we know what this is all about."

She opened her mouth to protest, but George held up his hand before she could. "No, it's no use saying your polite refusals. "We," he gestured to Fred who was nodding in agreement, "*insist*. Marysia, we'll get your things and come back here. Bill can look at the stuff, and we can decide from there. Okay?" Both Fred and George were already standing her to her feet.

"But all I need really is just my dad's papers and notes. I mean, you can't mean *all* my stuff! I can't just move in on you... it's..." she protested.

"Let me guess, it's not proper, it's an imposition," Fred said grinning at her, cutting her off.

"You would be an inconvenience to us and all." George was nearly laughing.

"You couldn't possibly intrude," Fred added. "Such a polite and proper girl you always are."

"Besides, wouldn't you feel safer tucked away in a flat with *two* fully qualified wizards for your safety?" Fred's mischievous smile and George's grinning nod made her relax a bit.

"Well, yes, I would, and it maybe if your brother did, if you think he wouldn't mind that is... you're right of course." She was looking at the floor, her hand opened and closed, her voice becoming resolved. "Okay, but if you don't mind, can we Apparate to the shop?" Suddenly, she remembered the cloaked figure she had seen lurking around and felt knots in her stomach, felt panic rise. "It will be faster."

"I thought that you can't Apparate..." Fred started to say then stopped.

"You can if you aim for the right spot in the atrium, just left of the door. That is the space to your right if you're facing the door. My brother's set it up that way, only family knows about it and now you two," Marysia said, missing that Fred had actually said '*can't*,' as if he had tried it.

All three Apparated to the atrium of her shop and ran upstairs to her room. Marysia was briefly ashamed that her bed covers were folded down and books and papers lay scattered across it. Using his wand, George quickly packed all the papers and books on the table into the trunk that was sitting open next to it, showing a sizable bookshelf in the lid of the compartment.

Fred and Marysia packed the rest of her stuff into her steamer trunk. It was standing open, with one side piled with books. The steamer looked like it held as much as a large double wardrobe. Thankfully, all her clothes were still packed neatly, except for the short nightdress she usually wore, draped on the foot of her bed, which she grabbed quickly, making Fred smile at her embarrassment. Marysia grabbed two cigar boxes that sat on the floor under her bed, closed the trunk only to open another lock to a second compartment, into which she slid the boxes.

\*~\*\*\*\*\*~\*

She ran into the bathroom to collect her things, wondering why she had agreed so quickly to accept their invitation, and amazed that she really wanted to. An angry voice in her head told her she needed to stay and finish her work, which she tried to shake off. She felt the knots in her stomach tighten again as she ran back to where Fred and George waited.

"Nice trunks!" George exclaimed as he watched her pack the rest of her things, and then he realized that the trunk had four locks and the steamer had three. They were going to be heavy!

"Thanks. They used to belong to my Aunt Joanna. Aunt Joanna and Uncle Michal were both killed before my brother, Michal, was born. Really shook up my dad." Marysia felt nervous again; she was babbling. Fred gave her a questioning look. "Uncle Michal was Dad's twin. Dad separated from Mum because of their deaths. Long story not a happy one." She explained as they flicked their wands with a Hover Charm and pushed the trunks down the stairs into the atrium. "Anyway, when I started Hogwarts, Dad gave me Aunt Joanna's trunk. Mum gave me Aunt Joanna's old steamer when I moved in here." The angry voice in her head was demanding that she return to her room where she belonged. Marysia shook her head to clear her fear.

She stopped to lock the door to her flat, fighting the urgent feeling to stop and go back to her room and wait, not to leave her room. 'No,' she said firmly to herself, 'I'm going.' She turned and followed Fred and George back to the atrium. She paused at the door to look back over the shop. Even with the magic her brothers had put on the place, she was glad that Fred and George were taking her to their flat. She felt queasy and her head hurt terribly.

Just before she turned, something caught her eye, a hooded figure looking in the window at her from the street. As their eyes seemed to lock onto each other, she felt frozen for a moment, her terror rising. She felt a wave of malice from it this time, not so sure why, and she backed into the atrium, carefully closed the doors and locked them. She turned to face Fred and George, her confidence returning as she looked at them, and gave them a timid smile.

They all Apparated together, landing in the twins' flat, to find a man, all in black, standing in the living room.

Marysia screamed.

## Dark Magic and Spells

### Chapter 4 of 8

It is well known that Fred and George are pranksters and practical jokers. But when trying to decipher Dark Magic and curses, who better to ask than their brother Bill?

"Not the usual reaction I get?" The question came from a friendly voice full of mirth from the guy standing in the flat.

At the moment Fred heard Marysia scream, he grabbed her, pulling her against him. She was shaking, uncontrollably close to tears, and she hugged him tightly. "Hey, it's alright; it's just my brother, Bill," Fred said soothingly in her ear. He heard her trunks hit the floor, and she buried her head against his shoulder. Fred looked at George, confused. She was holding on to him so tightly, it was giving him a bit of physical discomfort. He looked down at her face and realized she fit perfectly in his arms.

"It's okay. You're safe. We're back. Nothing to be frightened of. He's my brother, remember Bill?" Fred said into her ear, and he felt her relax a little bit. "So, you got my note?" Fred asked his brother, looking over her head.

"Cryptic. I'd say. Even for you two?" he answered, still surprised by the girl's reaction. He shot Fred a questioning look that made his brothers both shrug back. "What's up? What's so important?"

"What happened?" George asked Fred, showing concern. Her reaction to Bill's presence in their flat had startled him and only confirmed his suspicions that something was really amiss.

"I thought, at the shop, I saw... no in the window... please, I must have imagined..." Marysia took a deep breath to compose herself. "Never mind... I'm it's silly really," she said, embarrassed now, pulling herself up and straightening her posture, her arm still around Fred.

"No way! I get a welcome like this, and you say it's silly?" Bill moved toward them. "I thought that I was expected?"

"You are," both Fred and George said in unison.

"Who did you think I was? A Death Eater?" He was almost laughing, although his eyes showed confusion and concern.

"Kind of... I'm sorry, it's just..." She didn't want to admit how frightened she had been by the figure at the window. What if she had been mistaken by his intent? "What they were saying before we went to get my things..." Marysia now really did feel silly. *Surely the figure at the window wasn't a Death Eater! Here in Diagon Alley? Would they really dare?* She had just let her imagination get the better of her.

"Or let me guess, is it my scars? Did I frighten you? I'm sorry if..." he said as he stepped closer. Bill had a warm smile that echoed in his voice.

Marysia relaxed, dropped her arm from around Fred's waist and was now looking directly at him; she could see the scars on his face. Suddenly, she felt very embarrassed by her reaction. "Scars? No, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean... for a moment... I just overreacted. I'm so sorry." Fred kept a reassuring hand on the small of her back.

"No problem." Bill was kind enough to let it drop. "So, your note said that you had something to show me, something I just had to see. What is it, a new Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes product?" Bill asked with mirth. But Fred eyed her, wanting to know why she had reacted so strongly. *Later*, he told himself.

"No, something her father sent her to translate. Bill, this is Marysia," George said, finally remembering that they hadn't been introduced. "Marysia, this is our esteemed brother, Bill."

Marysia, remembering her manners, extended her hand, facing him with perfect posture and composure. "It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance, sir," she said with a warm smile. "I do apologize for my rude behavior. I hope I didn't offend you."

"The pleasure is all mine; no offense taken. Please, call me Bill," he answered back with a smile and a wink at his brothers. "My, I never thought you two ran in proper circles!"

"Yeah, she's right 'n proper," George broke into a brogue, mimicking her posture, standing up straight and tall.

"We've been tryin' to improve 'owrselves," Fred answered in a mock brogue too, grinning, also standing up straight and tall. *My, he's tall*, thought Marysia.

"Open that some 'o her might run off us, ya see?" George continued in his strongest brogue.

"Can't say it's working," Bill said, shaking his head at his brothers. All three of them laughed heartily, and Marysia began to relax. "So, where is this stuff you want me to see?"

"Let's go to the table, shall we?" George made a mock bow with a sweep of his hand toward the kitchen. "Hey, bro, have you had dinner yet? Marysia here made an awesome stew, and we have some of Mum's bread left."

"That would be great, thanks. Fleur hadn't come home yet when I got your owl," Bill answered as he followed George to the kitchen.

Fred helped Marysia as she moved her steamer and her trunk George had packed closer to the table. "Are you okay? What happened? What made you so frightened back there?" he asked softly.

"You and George mentioning strange occurrences, disappearances, deaths, Death Eaters, and Dementors and then I thought that I saw something...someone at the window before we left my shop that gave me a fright." Just mentioning the figure made her hands tremble. Suddenly, she became quite composed. "It was probably just someone checking out the shop, nothing more."

Fred took her face in his hand and looked into her eyes. *Merlin, they were earthy green with flecks of gold, still floating with tears she had held back. Something had really frightened her!* She was looking at him, so trustingly that it made his heart skip a beat. Her lips were full, and they looked soft as she began to smile at him, and her teeth were straight and white. "I should get my things out, don't you think?" she said, snapping him back to his senses.

He helped her sort through the papers George had dumped into the trunk, amazed at how careful she was with the old parchment. She then opened the left lock, opening a second compartment of her trunk and took out more papers, some journals and a diary. Finally, she had everything laid out on the table as she and Bill began to go over them. As they went over the context of what her father had sent her, Bill seemed really interested and was occasionally shocked. "Wow, you did good work on this! Ever consider working for Gringotts?"

Marysia laughed. "No, but thank you for the recommendation, though. I already have two jobs lined up for me, running an extension of my Aunt's shop here in Diagon Alley or working at St. Mungo's as a Potions Brewer. I'm signed up for the Potions master program at the Healers Academy this autumn. This is just side stuff I do for my dad."

"Too bad; we could use you in our translation department." He bent his head back over the parchments and read them through. "This is very Dark magic and some very complex protective spells," he noted. Marysia pointed to another page, which Bill took from her. "This symbol clearly means 'venomous,' but this one here is 'serum or milk.' These marks are either 'thorn' or 'fang,' probably from a plant though, not a snake, yes, see this symbol?" Bill asked, looking at her as he exchanged pages on the table. "Most of this seems correct. It's a very old style I don't see often. However, this is Acromantula venom here... It's an old, rarely used symbol for Acromantula, often confused with 'large spider' or tarantulas, which is similar." He scanned down the page. "You got the rest here right." As he spoke, Marysia made notations of Bill's translations.

"I think that I pretty much have this page correct, except for these symbols here." Marysia handed Bill another page, as George set a bowl of stew near Bill. Both Marysia and Bill quickly moved the parchment sheets out of the way so the food wouldn't spill on them as he ate.

Fred was amused, watching the two academics poring over the sheets and journals before them, leaning close as they read the entries and compared translations, completely engrossed in the writings. Marysia continued to make notations on the symbols Bill knew and corrected the translations on symbols she'd misinterpreted. *It's a good thing Bill was blissfully married*, he thought as he leaned back, watching them.

"Possibly names, or a place. See, it's prefixed here. This might be a location. Most of this is not unusual for Dark Magic. Hum, blood letting, and the killing of an innocent animal this symbol is right 'young' or 'baby' animal this isn't nice stuff." Bill looked at her as she sat back down in her chair. "Some of these pages seem to be the spells written about in the journals. Where did you get this?"

"My dad sent it to me to translate for him. Who would want to go through all this?" She shook her head. "I mean why?"

Fred and George had randomly picked up pages as they were passed around. Fred was amazed at how much work Marysia had done on them, and how much she had yet to do. She seemed to work at random. Not many of the sheets had been completely translated.

"Dark wizards do some pretty amazing things, awful, cruel sometimes, but amazing." Bill set down the parchment. "Where did your dad get this?"

"Well, my guess would be in Scotland, Ireland, or even Wales. He was researching Scottish legends and their folklore. His box before this one was about Llyr, a legend in Wales, and Lir, an Irish legend, both described by Muggles as gods of the sea. Dad thinks that they might actually be the same wizard. Dad's also been interested in Finn McCool of the Fianna, lately. He's known to be related to the Fairy Hill folk, and stories of his ability to do magic seem to be true. Apparently, Dad managed to get into a Fairy Hill a few weeks ago. Then he sent me a box containing all this. But this is not his usual material very different from what I usually get from him actually. I don't think he read any of it before sending it to me."

"Well, these are very complicated curses that would take a very accomplished wizard to do," Bill said, "or most likely more than one very skilled wizard to perform. It would take more than one very skilled wizard to break; at least three would be my guess. And if I'm not mistaken, it would take combining wand cores." Bill ate some of his stew as he read on.

"You've broken spells like this?" Marysia was impressed.

"I work in Egypt mostly. But, yes, I've seen similar spell work, and I've had to deal with some very complex protective spells on the tombs." Bill said casually.

Fred held up a sheet Marysia had translated, with the exception of the last lines. It was about Ravenclaw's blue jewel and seemed to quote a poem. "What's this one?" he asked, pointing to the lines still un-translated.

"That one is a reference to a poem about Rowena Ravenclaw that was supposedly written by her father, or, more likely, the poem was written about her by someone who knew them. It's said that her father gave her a brooch when she came of age, with a large blue stone the color of the early evening sky that's supposed to have an occlusion in it that looks like a bird in flight. The poem ends with what is believed to be the inscription on the back of the brooch, *'From a loving father, to an adored daughter, that she may know how proud I am of her.'*"

"Never heard about it," George said. "But this sheet also mentions 'the evening sky brooch,' and someone wrote 'the blue stone of Ravenclaw' on the margin. Are we even

sure it's really Ravenclaw's? I don't remember reading anything significant about a pin before?"

"Weren't you all in Gryffindor?" Marysia asked.

"Yeah, you know we were," George said, pointing to himself and Fred, "and Bill was in Gryffindor five years before us."

"Well, I was in Ravenclaw. It's a Ravenclaw House tradition for fathers to give their daughters a piece of jewelry at, or after, graduation with a blue stone." She reached into her trunk and pulled out a cigar box, opened it and pulled out a blue topaz pendant set in an intricate gold setting. She handed it to George, who passed it to Bill. Fred looked over his shoulder at the pendant. On the back there was a ring of tiny little marks. "Mine was this pendant. It mimics the brooch of Rowena Ravenclaw's"

"What are these little marks, runes?" Bill asked.

"Yes, Dad had it inscribed with the last line of Ravenclaw's poem." She flicked her wand at the pendant. *Engorgio*," she said, and the pendant swelled up, which then could be seen to read: *'From a loving father, to an adored daughter, that she may know how proud I am of her.'*

"That's very nice!" Bill said handing it back.

"That is interesting. Ravenclaw is said to be from Glen," Fred pointed out.

"The Sorting Hat liked to mention that in its Sorting songs," George said.

"You think that Rowena Ravenclaw could be buried in a fairy hill?" Fred asked.

"Don't know the connection, if any, actually," Bill stated. "Not really my area." He stood up, taking his bowl from the table to the sink. "I'd like to borrow these and see what can be cross-referenced at Gringotts?"

"Give me parchment, and I can make you copies if you like. But Dad is expecting me to return these to him. I would have to send them back when he needed them." George nodded and left, and Bill sat back down at the table.

"Who's your Dad anyway? I may know him." Bill asked, leaning back in his chair while his brother went to get parchment.

"Professor Stefan E. R. Lewgorski," Marysia said proudly. George returned, handing her a large amount of parchment sheets from his room.

"You're kidding! Professor Stefan Lewgorski? I do know him! He's a famous historian. I have several of his books." Bill exclaimed, sitting up straight.

"Your name is Duncan?" Fred asked, more statement than question.

"Mum and Dad separated before Michal was born," Marysia answered. "Mum was living with her sister, my Aunt Janet, when she had us."

"But Michal is a year older than you?" George asked perplexed. Michal had been in their year at Hogwarts.

"Well, yes, Mum always called me her happy oops. Dad came to see her after Michal was born, and I came along nine months later." Marysia shrugged her shoulders. "Even after my parents got back together, Dad wanted Michal and me to keep our last name as Duncan."

"Why?" Fred asked.

"To protect... because... he just did. Part of that long story of my life." Marysia didn't want to go into her past with them yet.

"Someday I'm going to want to hear this story," Fred said, giving her a mischievous look.

"Maybe someday," she said thoughtfully. She let out a sigh.

"Lewgorski, if I remember, didn't he teach at Durmstrang, with a Professor Novakovich?" Bill asked. "I think my two volume book set *The History of Magic, Ancient Magic Spells, Charms and Enchantments* mentions him?"

"Yes he did. And, no, you're thinking of the *History of Magic* books my dad wrote, a seven volume History of Magic set from the notes, journals and course outlines of his mentor and friend Professor Zederic Novakovich, whom the books are dedicated to. Dad also wrote *The Dark and Light of Ancient Magic Spells* and *The Great Wizards of Their Age, Their Accomplishments and Their Achievements*, which were very good sellers. Dad has a humorous way of presenting history."

*Marysia wouldn't be able to hide the pride in her eyes, even if she tried* Fred thought, watching her.

"I have those actually. One of my dorm mates had a set of your dad's history books, and I'd stay up sometimes all night reading them. Those books were far more interesting than Professor Binns ever was. Your dad made me like history. I have a whole collection of your dad's books." Bill set down the parchment he had been holding. "You're right, this isn't your dad's usual topic material. Even in his *The Dark and Light of Ancient Magic Spells*, he didn't go into stuff like this."

"Dad would love to hear that, and you're right. I was really shocked when I began translating this stuff." Marysia took a sheet and placed it next to a blank sheet George had given her. "*Transcribere copia*," she said as she moved the wand over the page. "*Copia*," she said, sweeping the tip of her wand down the blank one. The text, symbols and her translations appeared as an exact copy.

"Neat spell!" Fred exclaimed as Bill said, "Nice and easy," nearly in unison, and the three of them began to help Marysia to copy parchment sheets and the journals the same way. Marysia, however, slid the diary aside and into her open trunk, unnoticed. Before long, everything on the table was copied, and Bill had his copies bundled to go.

"Bill, you said that you work for Gringotts?" Marysia asked tentatively. "May I ask if you have access to the vaults?"

"In a matter of speaking, yes. Why?" Bill looked directly at her, inquisitively.

"Would you be able to place the ones we've finished in my vault at Gringotts? I would feel safer with them there than in my trunks." She looked back imploringly. "At least until I hear from my dad and I can send them to him. I just don't want them lying around."

"Yeah, sure, of course. I can do that," Bill assured her. Fred noticed the look of concern that flicked across her face, replaced with a resolved calm when Bill agreed to deposit them.

As Marysia collected the material they had completed and some of the journals and sheets that were unfinished, her hands shook. Twice she picked up the diary to give to Bill, then took it back. Eventually, she kept one of the journals and the diary with its loose sheets to work on. She looked nervous.

Fred wondered if it wasn't just having this stuff lying around that bothered her. Fred remembered her mentioning the face in the window and her reaction when they had come back here. *Was Marysia uncomfortable about the papers and journals or that figure in the window she had mentioned before? Her initial reaction to seeing Bill... it was probably the figure in the window but why?* Now he wanted to know exactly what, or who, it was she had seen.

He stayed next to her as they said goodbye to Bill, who left with his arms full with three large bundles: her dad's originals, her translations and Bill's copies.

"I'll stop by the bank tonight and deposit these for you; I may leave my copies in my desk tonight as well, since I'm going to be there anyway. I'll let you know what I find out about the symbols we didn't know, okay?"

And with that, Bill was gone.

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*Author's Notes:*

*I owe a big debt of gratitude to Phoenix for all her hard work and time in cleaning this story up and making it presentable. Thank you, Phoenix. I appreciate it more than you know.*

## The Curse

### Chapter 5 of 8

It is well known that Fred and George are pranksters and practical jokers. However, when they become involved with a pretty girl they knew from school with a dark secret and a load of trouble, these two know just what to do and how to handle it.

Marysia stood staring at the spot Bill had just vanished from. She felt his loss immediately and became acutely aware of just how frightened that figure in the window really made her. She felt Fred's hand as he placed it on her elbow, gently guiding her to the sofa, and sat down next to him. Unconscious of it, she moved very close to Fred and he placed his arm behind her. George, however, sat on the ottoman he pulled up in front of them.

"So what did you see?" George asked, looking at her seriously.

"See? When?" Marysia asked, unaware she was digging her nails into her thumb.

"At the shop before we Apparated?" Fred asked, just as seriously.

"Nothing a shadow a figure," she said, yawning. "You frightened me, reminding me about the Dementors and Death Eaters and all. I was just seeing things."

Fred, next to her, gave George an incredulous look, as if he didn't believe her. "You saw something?" Fred asked her.

"Someone was looking in the window..." she said, shivering. "The very idea of Death Eaters here in Diagon Alley frightens me, and then I saw a man in the window. I guess I jumped to conclusions."

"Are you sure?" Fred asked, concerned.

Marysia nodded. "Yes, no I'm... just really tired, and I let my imagination get away with me. I'm sure he was just shopping."

"Marysia, *at that time of night* with everything that's going on in our world?" Fred asked, making it sound more like an exclamation than a question. "The only people on the street at that hour are shopkeepers going home or those who live in the flats above the shops. People just don't linger in the street anymore," Fred said, driving home his point.

Marysia blushed at his concern. "You're right, of course. But it could have been just a coincidence. He could have just been looking in the shop on his way home... I don't know why he frightened me so."

"Marysia, the man in the window, have you seen him before?" George asked.

"I don't think so... I'm not sure, maybe? Yes, no, I don't think I got a good look at him..." she said and tried to hide a yawn.

"But something about him frightened you?" George asked.

"I think it was... his eyes..." she said as a shiver ran down her spine. She leaned into Fred's side for comfort, and felt his hand rest reassuringly on her shoulder.

"Are you sure? You said you didn't get a good look at him?" Fred asked.

"I'm, no... maybe. He was... No, I don't think so," she stammered. "I'm sure I just imagined jumped to the wrong conclusions. New flat and on my own for the first time... I guess I'm just jumpy. That's all it is." *Bloody hell, if my brothers hear about this I'm never going to hear the end of it. Little sister can't handle being on her own* she thought, admonishing herself.

Fred watched her expression, surprised that she seemed suddenly evasive. He looked up at George, his eyes asking. George, understanding the unspoken question, made the tiniest shake of his head and then nodded in agreement. "You're right; it's not safe to be out alone, especially at night," he said. "And with your shop still under construction, it's vulnerable."

*She shouldn't be alone in that flat above her shop until we find out more* Fred thought. *And the access to her flat is the stairs in the back...* "Look, it's been a busy day. You're sleeping here." He hugged her with the arm he had placed behind her on the couch.

Marysia was torn, *I have to go back, but I don't want to. I want to stay here, but I really shouldn't.* "But I couldn't..." she started to protest.

"It's not inconvenient, and you're not imposing, so don't bother with all your polite excuses," Fred said, cutting off her refusal. "You'll sleep in my room tonight." Fred pulled her up and motioned for George to help move her trunk and steamer into his room.

Used to this tone of voice from her bothers, Marysia followed them to Fred's room.

*Thankfully my room isn't too messy*, he thought as he led her inside. He pulled his pajamas from his wardrobe and left her to it. As he turned to face George, he caught his twin's look. "She saw something back there that really scared her," Fred said.

"I know, but she isn't telling us what it is. But I do think you're right; something is up. Her dad stumbled on to something and sent it to her," George said; and then he looked at Fred's door. "You're being chivalrous, though?"

"A true Gryffindor! I'm going to sleep on the couch. I'll hear her if she needs anything," Fred answered back.

"Well, it's better than sleeping in your chair by the window," George said, giving him a knowing smirk. "So, you want to wait until tomorrow to find out why she's so frightened?"

"It's late. Besides it might be easier tomorrow to get her to open up," Fred said. "Things always look better in the daylight, as Mum likes to say."

"You're probably right, but we may not know what's up until Bill goes through this stuff, and that may take a few days. But think about it, I'm not convinced it's just the papers," George said. He stretched as he yawned. "Well, night," he said and disappeared into his room.

Fred could hear her moving around in his room as he listened by the door; then he went into the living room again and magicked up sheets and blankets for the couch. As he lay there trying to drift to sleep, he found himself listening to every little sound and was surprised just how many little noises there were in his flat.

He couldn't sleep; something wasn't right and he knew it. *Marysia is sometimes very proper, but normally she is fairly open, happy and sweet. However, she is terrified of something, and I can't put my finger on it. George was right; it wasn't just the stuff she had shown to Bill. She had been more like herself when Bill had been here and we had all been going over those papers. But as soon as she mentions anything about that man looking in the window of her shop...* but Fred hadn't seen anyone.

A muffled crying woke Fred up. It was very late, and he realized it came from his room. Quietly, he got up, walked down the hall and opened his door.

She was moaning in her sleep. Whatever her dream was, he wished he could see it. Her face was softly lit on his pillow, her long honey colored hair splayed around her face, and the covers had been kicked and pulled, which only emphasized her curves. She gave a soft moan and opened her lips; softly, she said his name, and then her breath caught; she tossed and seemed to wake, *maybe not*, then seemed to fall asleep again. As Fred stood watching her, she seemed to be having a romantic dream once more, calling out his name softly before crying his name out louder and then waking with a strangled cry, as if from a nightmare.

\*~\*\*\*\*~\*

Marysia had pulled on her brother's pajama bottoms with a tank top and crawled into Fred's bed. It was soft, the pillows fluffy and not too flat or too firm. It smelled like him and she inhaled deeply.

He was being so sweet to her, and they had barely known each other in school. Well, aside from a few pranks and some teasing. She used to have dreams about Fred at Hogwarts, but had given up on him her sixth year. Especially after his incredible escape from Umbridge.

Now she was in his bed, and the dreams were coming back. Dreams only her closest friend knew anything about, but never the intimate details.

Suddenly, that face with the malicious eyes was looking at her, and Marysia woke, frightened, looking around. Nothing unexpected was there, no man, no sneering face, no malicious eyes. She closed her eyes, willing herself back to sleep. Once again the familiar dream started again: Fred catching her unaware from around a corner, Fred's smiling face as he leaned in to kiss her, a vicious laugh from behind her, then suddenly those malicious eyes were looking at her and Fred from the window he was coming in the door! She heard his angry demand to come to him as shadows loomed behind him.

She mentally shook her head, a dream it's only a dream, he isn't here.

She fell back to sleep dreaming of Fred again, his soft touch on her cheek, his warm lips, his embrace engulfing her... and then the black-cloaked figure reached out and touched her with a cold moist hand. *Fred... No, he's*, the harsh cold laugh... *Fred help me*. That face with the malicious eyes... *No... stop it him*, those cruel eyes bearing down on her... *Please, Fred*, her mind cried out. *Fred, help*, and she woke, trembling, terrified. *I'm never going to sleep!*

\*~\*\*\*\*~\*

Fred came over to the bed and sat down. "I heard you call me," he said softly. "Are you alright?"

"Bad dreams," she said, her voice shaky. "I just can't sleep."

Fred slid into the bed next to her and lay down, cradling her. "Ginny used to crawl in with me when she had nightmares. I'm a pro at chasing them away," he said as he fixed the light cover she had kicked away. Marysia started to protest, but Fred cut her off. "We are both in pajamas and the door is open."

"But..." she tried to turn to face him, and he had to shift himself carefully.

"I'll protect your reputation and keep the Boggarts away, I promise," he reassured, pulling her back down. It took a while, but she relaxed, as he kept his word and just held her protectively.

Cradled in his arms, she fell asleep. Her dream came back, but this time, Fred chased away the figure with the cold eyes and sneering grin.

Fred could barely fall asleep. This wasn't Ginny curled up against him. Her soft scent was a mix of flowers, meadow grasses and spice so subtle it made his head spin a bit. She was curvy in her tank and pajama bottoms that were so like his own that he could imagine that she was wearing his. She made little noises every so often, *so she must be dreaming again*. Only this time, at least, it seemed they were good dreams. *Is she dreaming about me?* he wondered? Finally, Fred fell into a light sleep, dreaming about the body he held against him.

In the morning, Fred slid carefully from the bed, intending to go to the living room. As he was closing the door, he stopped and watched her sleep a while. She stirred, cried out softly, and turned. The nightmare had come back, and she was moaning, "No... go away... don't... leave me alone... please, help..." between tosses. *Something or someone is definitely haunting her sleep*.

He heard George come from his room and stand beside him as they watched her in his bed. "Not exactly restful, is she?" George stated the obvious.

"No. She was like that most of the night," Fred answered, still watching her sleep, didn't turn to look at his brother.

"Except when you were in there with her." Fred turned to deny it. "Don't try, bro, I heard her too. I was going to do the same thing actually. But I saw you from my door last night, and she was much calmer after you went in." He gave Fred a knowing smile. "Her reputation is safe, and I can vouch for your chivalry."

"Something is bothering her, *really* scaring her," Fred said, following George into the kitchen and sitting at the table. George waved his wand, and the teapot filled with hot water.

"I noticed it too." George sat down, placing three mugs on the table, and faced his brother. "Something she said last night, or rather didn't say. I don't think the problem is just that stuff her father sent her, though. It's, like, something else has her terrified, *and* she won't talk about it."

"You caught that too? I was thinking the same thing," Fred agreed. "She was open enough talking about this stuff she's translating last night after Bill got here, but ask her what frightened her last night at her shop and she clams up?"

Just then, Marysia shuffled into the kitchen. "Morning." She stretched in a way that reminded Fred of a cat and looked at the two expectant faces. "Breakfast?" she asked, eyeing the pot of tea.

"Sure." George turned to Fred, and they moved their fists as George counted, "One, two three... Ha! Paper. Your turn."

Marysia laughed at them. "Mind if I? I don't get to cook for others that often anymore. It's kind of nice to." George got up and began to pull out pans and eggs, cheese, bacon and bread. She began to cook breakfast the Muggle way, humming, her wand sticking out of the waist of her pajama bottoms as the twins watched. When she finished, she walked over to the table with two full plates and one with a single egg on a slice of toast and strips of bacon. As she sat down both Fred and George were looking at her intently.

"How'd you sleep?" George asked. Fred kicked him under the table and George winced. Marysia noticed and ignored it.

"Fine, thank you," she said politely. "You? Jam?"

"No, thank you," George copied her with mock politeness, a bit exaggerated, making Marysia laugh at him.

"When do you have to be at the shop?" Fred asked. "It's our 'inventing' day, so we can go in anytime."

"Margaretta is coming with the products later this afternoon," she said, carefully cutting the yoke to spill onto her toast. "I don't have to be in until then. I have quite a few witches to interview this afternoon too. We had many applications. Most likely it's because employees are required to test and use the products. Auntie Annette narrowed it down to eight. I get to meet them and pick three, two full time and one part time."

"If we had that policy, our employees would rob us blind!" George said.

"Annie Ett's Bed Bath and Body Boutique is all about skin and hair care products, among other things. It's good for the clerks to know the products. It's a perk. Besides, the shop in Hogsmeade has very loyal employees. Auntie Annette's clerks have been with her for ages."

"So are you going to be in there at all by yourself today?" George asked.

Marysia looked alarmed, then calmed. "No, Margaretta will be with me today, and Mum said my house-elf is coming by. I won't be alone."

"You have a house-elf?" George asked, nearly choking on his tea.

"Not *technically* mine, exactly. Well, in a way she is, I suppose. When Dad inherited Uncle Michal's home and estate, Twink and Kennel came with it. Kennel is ~~very~~ old and Twink was pregnant when we moved in. I used to carry Twink's baby everywhere in a little basket, fed her, changed her. I even tried to dress her once." Marysia giggled at the memory. Fred smiled at her. "Twink had a fit and took Tobpi away from me, that's what I named her, but Tobpi wouldn't stop screaming for me, and I wouldn't stop crying either. Finally, Mum 'gave' her back to me. Everyone in the family jokes about her being mine. So Tobpi considers herself to be *my* house-elf. Tobpi nearly cried the whole time I was at school. Mum had to give her tiny amounts of Euphoria potion when she had enough."

George laughed and Fred shook his head. "Mum gave Tobpi permission to visit with me at school a few times. I know that Professor Flitwick knew about it, but it was kept quiet," Marysia said.

"Marysia?" George looked at her inquisitively. "What happened last night?" Fred gave his brother a tap under the table with his foot.

"What do you mean? Nothing!" Marysia looked alarmed.

"I don't mean you and Fred," George looked at his brother and kicked him back under the table, "I mean last night?"

"When?" Marysia asked, alarm in her voice.

"I think he means last night when we were leaving your shop?" Fred asked.

"So what did you see?" George asked, looking at and her repeating his question.

"At the shop, before we Apparated?" Fred repeated his question too. He was facing her, watching her expression carefully. She looked almost confused, and then a distant look crossed her eyes as he watched her.

"There was a figure... standing at the window... looking into the shop. I couldn't see his face... just his eyes." She shivered at the remembrance of them. Fred and George noticed that her face became impassive momentarily. "It was nothing, probably just someone interested in the shop."

"Have you seen this person before?" George was watching her reaction as her face became confused again.

"Yes no, I've seen many people moving around lately, acting like they don't want to be seen... moving quickly between the shadows... several times... he in a cloak... moving around. No... he's probably just shopping." She shook her head, like clearing her thoughts, and then became confused again. "I have... no... I don't remember."

"What does this *he* look like?" George asked, watching carefully now.

"I, ah, a cloak... in the dark his eyes... sometimes.... No." Marysia's voice was hesitant, forced; her face became blank, momentarily confused again, and then impassive. "Do you want more eggs?"

"Have you seen his face?" Fred pushed.

"What, no. Yes, no, I... can't... recall." Fred looked at her as if shocked.

"How long has *he* been hanging around Diagon Alley?" George asked.

"A few days... a week. Since I moved in upstairs... no... Three, maybe five days... no... I don't remember actually." She looked like she was fighting to remember, and then her eyes became glossy.

"Marysia, you've been involved in setting up that shop for two months now, but you have only been *living* here for four days! I watched you move into the flat. I have seen you every day! You have dinner right across from the shop!" Fred announced as George briefly smirked at his brother and then became very serious again.

"Marysia, has this guy been near you or your shop?" George asked. "Have you spoken to him?"

Marysia's eyes glazed each time she tried to remember anything about this guy, almost as if... "No, I sometimes, in the shadows..." But she just shook her head, completely confused, unsure. "His eyes just shoppers looking in the window, those eyes are every... no."

"George, you don't think she has been hit with the Imperius Curse?" Fred asked. She was fighting some internal turmoil obviously.

"Could also be a Confundus Charm, but it seems so specific. It's like she's not supposed to remember this guy," George stated.

"Why would I be?" Marysia looked shocked. "I mean, of course I'm not! Why would anyone... to me?"

"Heck if I know? Maybe it has something to do with that stuff your dad sent you? I doubt it has anything to do with shampoo." Fred looked earnest. "Marysia, you have a great sense of detail. You're articulate and smart. But you *cannot* give us a description of a guy you have seen for the last four days, to a week, that has been following you and watching you wherever you go!"

"I have an idea, Marysia. I'm going to give you a drink that will have a simple Truth potion. It will only make you answer the truth to a single question." George got up, went to the sink cabinet and came back with a glass of juice. "Here, sip this." Marysia took several sips of the juice and immediately felt a calmness overcome her. "Now, tell me about this figure at the window of your shop. Have you seen him before?"

"All the time - he follows me everywhere." Her voice was calm, the effect of the Truth potion.

"Take another drink." Marysia took another large swallow. "Now, what does this guy *look* like?" George asked again.

"Shorter than you are, broad shoulders, he wears a hooded cloak, his hair is black, I think, shoulder length. His eyes are pale blue and very cold. It's his eyes... they scare me." Marysia's words had flowed easily, exploding out of her rapidly, and then she faltered as she tried to continue. "He has... a large nose, bent... like it has been hit before... hair on his chin..." She suddenly stopped, shaking.

Fred handed her the drink again, and wordlessly she gulped down more. "Has he spoken to you?" he asked.

"Yes no, in the shop... my room... as I..." She struggled with her words, turned her head sharply; she was obviously fighting it.

Fred indicated that she should take another drink of the juice and Marysia took another swallow, but the glass shook in her hands. "He was in your room? What did he want?" Fred asked alarmed.

"Yes. He said... I'm... cannot say... kill... if I get it... he wants..." she screamed, jumping up to run, and Fred sprang up, grabbing her, holding her tight.

This time when he held her, Marysia struggled, hitting him. Fred pinned her arms, locking her to him as she struggled. "Calm down, calm down, it's alright." Tears ran down her face and she was terrified. "He can't hurt you here, Marysia. Calm down. I won't let him get to you."

"No, I can't... kill me... if I... don't tell... cannot tell..." Suddenly she went limp, crying against his chest.

'*We need Dad*,' Fred mouthed silently to his brother, who nodded, went to the fireplace, and in a whoosh of green flame George vanished.

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*Author's Notes:*

*I owe a big debt of gratitude to Phoenix for all her hard work and time in cleaning this stroy up and making it presentable. Thank you, Phoenix. I appreciate it more than you know.*

## Discovery and Revealed

### Chapter 6 of 8

It is well known that Fred and George are pranksters and practical jokers. However, when they become involved with a pretty girl they knew from school with a dark secret and a load of trouble, these two know just what to do and whom to turn to for help.

"Marysia, why don't you take a shower or a bath?" She was up looking up at Fred with unfeigned trust, even though large tears still trailed down her cheeks. "No more questions. Come on." He took her hand, guiding her to the bathroom. She followed him passively and stood there as he turned on the hot water, then waited until he stepped out. Fred waited outside the closed door for a moment until he heard her open the shower door, and then he walked back to the living room. Throwing himself into his favorite chair, Fred stared out the window.

He tried to recall a wizard that fit her description: *short, broad shoulders, shoulder length black hair, some kind of beard, and pale blue eyes, with a large nose, bent like it had been broken before...* Fred couldn't recall anyone that fit that description. *But if he's been hanging around the street... Surely I've seen him?* But Fred drew a blank, nothing clicked.

Fred glanced down the street at the window to her flat. *And he has been in her room... threatening her* That alone made him angry. *He has threatened her and placed her under a curse... and who knows what else he has done...* Fred took a deep breath to push back the anger that swelled up at that thought. *So who is he? How does he know about this stuff her father sent her, and what exactly does he want? The stuff she showed Bill had to be translated.* Fred looked down the hall toward the bathroom, relieved he and George had found out in time. *As soon as Dad gets here, we can break the spell she's under and find out*

Suddenly, Fred remembered that he hadn't set out towels for her. He walked back to pull a towel from the cupboard, thought of Ginny with her wet hair wrapped up like a turban, and grabbed another. *Ginny always uses two, maybe Marysia does too*

He poked his head into the bathroom. The candlelight from six candles lit the bathroom. *Okay then, she's still in the shower. I can just set these down for her and go* he thought. The opaque glass of the shower door showed her outline perfectly as sounds of the water and steam filled the room. He could see her move as she washed her hair, combing her long hair out with her fingers and then rinsing it.

He looked away, noticing a toiletry bag sitting on the counter; her wand lay on top of her neatly folded pajamas, which were beside it. *She must have Summoned them to her*, he surmised. A musty, woodsy scent with flower undertones filled the steamy air as Fred stepped in and set the towels down.

He stood transfixed, watching her as she rubbed the frothy soap on her body, lathering her arms, her breasts, down and around her torso, bending low to wash her legs...

He couldn't bring himself to turn and go. He watched, mesmerized as she bent over to clean her legs and feet, for what seemed the longest time.

Straightening up, she turned and twisted under the water, letting it run down over her. He could visualize the water running down her face, running down her front *This is nuts! She'd be furious if she knew I was watching her. But she's so pretty... even just the outline of her body...*

Marysia turned around, raising her arms over her head, stretching; her hands were visible above the glass door, opening and closing like a cat in luxury. She arched her back, letting the water massage her, letting the water cascade over her. She turned around again, and Fred shook his head to shake the senses back into his brain, finally turning to leave. He heard the water turn off, and he ran into his room.

Seeing her trunks sitting there, he realized she would be in here in a minute. He quickly chose his clothes from his wardrobe and wheeled around to see her standing there in a towel, clutching her pajamas, toiletry bag and wand to her chest.

"I just needed to get my um robes." He hoped that he wasn't blushing noticeably. His cheeks felt very hot suddenly.

"Oh, yeah, right. This is your room after all," she said, blushing. "Did you get everything?" Stepping into the room, she dropped her things on his bed and stood there, watching him, waiting.

*Merlin, even dripping wet she is adorable. Get a grip, Weasley!* He turned his head to stop staring at her and looked at the books lying on his floor and on his bed. "It looks like my room has been turned into a study hall."

"I do tend to do that sorry. Michal is always teasing me about my books. I tend to pile them on every surface in my room. I didn't mean to do this to yours," Marysia said, looking at her books and magazines spread about. "These were tossed into my trunk, and I had to pull them out to get my toiletry bag," she offered as an explanation.

Fred picked up a magazine, which read: *'What is sexy this summer,' '50 romantic tips that will excite him,' and '14 ways to please your man'* Apparently, there was a quiz inside. It was a Muggle magazine, as the pictures didn't move.

"Oh, no! Please give that to me!" One of her hands let go of the towel, which split to reveal a line of skin up her thigh. "Please, give me that it's... please," she stammered. He was amused that she didn't want him to see it.

"I like you saying 'please' to me." *Where did that come from? Was he nuts?*

As she reached for the magazine, the towel dropped a bit, exposing more of her. *This is impossible. She doesn't look like she wants anything, seems innocent on her part... but bloody hell, she's sexy in that towel. I have her in a compromising position, that's all it is. I should just go.* But he didn't move, watching her discomfort. As he handed her the magazine, she was blushing a deep rose pink. "This is a Muggle magazine?" *Yeah, bloody brilliant, state the obvious!*

"Well, yes, my Aunt Janet gave me a subscription as a birthday gift. All the Muggle girls read it. It's very popular." He gave her a quizzical look. "She's a Muggle, my aunt... and... well, we lived with her, in her house..." she was babbling again. *I'm standing in a towel, and he is staring at me. Calm down, get a hold of yourself. He was a perfect gentleman last night, and if he was to do anything, he would've done it last night, wouldn't he? But he didn't. It's nothing he's not leaving, she thought to herself. I'd give anything to know what he is thinking - or maybe not.* Fred was looking at her with a mischievous smile that flashed in his eyes. *Oh, I love that look. Oh, if only...*

Fred almost laughed at himself as he handed her back the magazine and left the room, holding his robes over his obvious excitement *Blimey, was she, did she still? No! Does she still have a crush on me? Cool,* he thought as he left the room. *Wonder if she has read those articles?*

George was standing in the hall where his door faced Fred's. He had a smirk on his face that Fred suddenly wanted to wipe off. George motioned for Fred to follow him into his room. "Dad was on a raid, but I left him a message at home and at work. I even found Kingsley Shacklebolt and asked him to tell Dad we needed to see him. How was her shower?"

"Wet, I'm sure." Fred crossed his arms. "So, do we open the shop and leave her here, or do we stay with her? Do you think this guy is still around, watching?"

"I think we should, and yes, I think he is out there somewhere, watching. But I don't think he'll come in here, especially if he is alone. He'll wait until she goes back to her shop." George sat down on a chair. "Verity is already here, and I asked her to man the shop. If it gets busy, I told Dennis to stop stocking and help her. I have a bad feeling about leaving her alone until Dad can lift the curse on her."

"Do you think he knows she brought all her stuff here?" Fred asked, moving to the bed to change into his clothes.

"I'm sure of it. I stopped by for a look in her shop before coming back up here. It looks like everything is normal, though," George answered. He had thrown his work robes over his pajamas. Fred balled up his pajamas and chucked them into George's hamper. "I think I'll take a quick shower unless you need a cold one?" George teased.

"No, thanks, showered last week. It's your week, remember?" Fred said, throwing George's pillow at him. George chuckled, throwing the pillow back. Fred caught it and faked throwing back at George before dropping it back on his bed instead. Then he left the room, saying, "I'll go clean up the kitchen; least I can do since she made breakfast."

When George came back to the kitchen, he found Marysia and Fred making potions on the table. The heat protection mats lay under three cauldrons, all bubbling away. "The trick of having multiple cauldrons going at the same time is to have your ingredients ready, or at least most of them." She passed her knife to Fred. "No, use the flat of a knife on the sopophorous beans; you'll get much more juice that way."

"Whoa, where did you learn this?" Fred exclaimed as the bean oozed under his knife.

"Potions master Ogden at St Mungo's actually. I've done internships with my mum there, and she shares workspace with him. Watch your timers. You need to stir in the Murtle sap in this one," she instructed. George was impressed as he stood there. She had Fred making three of the shop's potions at once.

"How many cauldrons do you have going at a time at St. Mungo's?" Fred asked as he stirred in the Murtle sap.

"Add a counterclockwise stir to every seven; it will blend the potion better. A master potion maker can sometimes have six going at a time, not counting the ones that can take a month to make. Then there are those that need to sit for a while, simmering between ingredients. I've seen Mum with eight and on rare occasions ten, but that's because several of them were at different stages or took days to make. If you time it right, it's not so hard. Mum likes to use timers; some use various hourglasses."

As George sat down to watch them, he noticed that the instructions had been rewritten on cards, which were floating above and behind each cauldron. She had made several little stars, a few dashes and arrows where each potion needed to sit and simmer or to be stirred. "It helps if you change the star color when you have passed the step too. Are these really Doxy eggs?" she asked, holding up a glass jar.

Suddenly, a swoosh and a loud spuff could be heard from the fireplace, and Marysia jumped. Fred placed a firm hand on Marysia's arm. "It's probably my dad. George and I are expecting him," he said reassuringly.

A thin, balding man with a warm smile walked out of the fireplace, and a pair of little brushes floated up to swat at his robes.

"Damn these things! Boys, can you get these things off me? Every time I come here too." He smiled at Marysia who turned to watch him in amusement as the little brushes swept the ashes back into the hearth. "Oh, yes, and who is this?"

"Oi, Dad, come on over, need to keep up on this. Trying something new here to save some time," Fred called, waving Mr. Weasley over to the table. "We're almost finished... well, nearly."

"Dad, this is Marysia Duncan, classmate from school." George jerked his head at her and then turned to Marysia. "This is Dad." George never left his chair; he had been amazed, watching Fred and Marysia work.

"Mr. Weasley, I'm delighted to meet you," she said very formally, standing up and facing him to properly shake his hand. "It's an honor to make your acquaintance, sir." George started to laugh, and Fred shook his head.

Mr. Weasley was momentarily taken aback by her formality. "Delighted to meet you, too. You attended Hogwarts with these two?"

"Yes, sir, I attended Hogwarts. I was a year behind Fred and George, actually. We didn't have any classes together, unfortunately." Her manner was still formal, but her smile was warm, and Fred realized it was her up-bringing again. *After all, she came from a family with house-elves, and the Muggle outfit she's wearing says money all over it.*

"Dad, come sit down. Do you want anything? Would you like a Coke?" George asked.

"What's a Coke?" Mr. Weasley asked as he sat down, watching Fred move from one cauldron to another.

"Oh! You know about Cokes?" Marysia beamed at George. "Have you ever tried a root beer?" Marysia's smile was still warm and friendly, and her formality was fading. But before Mr. Weasley could ask what a root beer was, Marysia noticed Fred picking up some ground Assame seeds. "Watch it. You are doing the wrong one. Stir in the chopped Waynoka roots to the first, and then add the slug juice to that one," she said mildly, catching Fred just in time. "See, that one in the middle isn't quite orange enough yet, but this first one is turning blue." Fred nodded and followed her direction. "You'll get it. With practice you'll be doing six at a time!"

She turned back to Mr. Weasley to answer his question. "Coke is a Muggle drink actually. I didn't know you knew about Muggle drinks. Most wizards are clueless about Muggle stuff." Mr. Weasley, however, had been watching George in anticipation as he walked up to him with the Coke. He turned to her and was about to say something before George cut him off.

"Six! Do six at a time?" George asked, astounded. He handed Mr. Weasley the cold Coke in a bottle and sat down, watching Fred as he moved between the three potions going at once.

"You can if you know your potions well. Fred said that these are regular products for your shop. So you must know them pretty well, right?" George just nodded. "I marked the points on your ingredients cards here, timing markers where ingredients need to be added or stirred, when it needs to simmer and when you have to let the potion sit. If you co-ordinate the potions so that the stars fit each other, you can have more than one cauldron going at a time. In a way it's like cooking a big meal with several dishes. Of course, it's easier if you have someone to help too. It's just timing."

George looked amazed. "This is going to really help a lot!"

"So, Marysia, is it? You're familiar with Muggle drinks then?" Mr. Weasley asked as he sipped his Coke. He let out a small burp, which caught him by surprise. "Oh, my excuse me."

Marysia looked at him, beaming as Mr. Weasley covered his mouth, blushing. "Yes, I've um, had them before." Marysia hesitated *Have to be careful talking to wizards about Muggle stuff, not all wizards are open to it. But Mr. Weasley has such an expectant look...* Her puzzled expression made George shake his head and Fred laugh.

Fred gave her a soft prodding in the ribs. "Dad loves Muggles, *anything* Muggle. It's an *obsession*." He changed the last two stars that marked the ingredients he'd added. Marysia nodded.

"*Fred!*" Mr. Weasley admonished him, his tone stern, but his eyes were full of interest.

"I've had Cokes, like the one you have there, and root beer, ginger beer, Seven-up and orange soda. My brother Sebastian likes beer. I've had that too, but it's an acquired taste, I think," she said, passing Fred some Fennel leaves he'd diced.

"What do they taste like?" Mr. Weasley asked. "Do they taste like this?"

Marysia laughed. "Ginger beer tastes a bit like ginger, but very sweet, Seven-up has a bubbly lemon taste, and orange soda is like bubbly orange juice. Root beer it's, um... different." She faltered, looking at George for help, but he shrugged, amused by her attempt at trying to explain this to his dad. "And beer is, well, beer. It's alcohol, and if you drink too much, you get snookered." Marysia turned back to the potions. "They are hard to describe if you haven't had one."

Marysia made suggestions to Fred constantly as they finished up the potions. Finally, it was time to siphon them into bottles. George grabbed a box of containers, and they each took a cauldron and emptied the potions into the containers.

"Well, boys, this is all entertaining, but your message sounded urgent," Mr. Weasley spoke up as the last of the potions were cleaned up. "Your mother and my boss said you were looking for me, George?"

"Dad, we think that Marysia here may be under the Imperius Curse," George said, looking at his dad seriously. After setting the cauldrons in the sink to be washed later, George stood between the kitchen and the table.

"Or it could be a Confundus Charm," Fred added, equally serious. He shifted his chair to face his dad and brother. Mr. Weasley looked at his boys, nodded and faced Marysia. She was sitting there dumfounded, turning to look first at Fred, and then turned to look at Mr. Weasley and George. "There has been someone following Marysia for a few days now, possibly a week," Fred continued. Marysia drew in a sharp breath, startled that they were telling him this. "But whoever he is, he has her under some kind of curse."

"She had trouble telling us any kind of description of him until we gave her our Truth potion," George added. Mr. Weasley nodded thoughtfully.

"She was mumbling about him in her sleep last night," Fred said calmly.

"What we know is that he is about a hand shorter than us, broad shoulders, pale blue eyes, and dark hair, possibly a beard." George looked at Marysia, who was looking really nervous again. "She gets really scared, can't talk about him, acts like she's fighting a curse when she tries."

"Almost went hysterical this morning when the Truth potion was wearing off." Fred looked at his father. "Thought that you'd know what's going on?"

"Also, thought you should know, working at the Ministry and all." George leaned back against the wall. "We'd have her tell you, but..."

Marysia jumped up to run at the mention of 'the Ministry,' with a look of pure terror, but Fred had been ready this time. He grabbed her and pinned her arms with his own as panic overtook her. Mr. Weasley was stunned. George flicked his wand, binding her feet together and coiling a rope up her body as Fred loosened his hold. Fred lifted and carried her to the couch.

Mr. Weasley followed. "Unusual, but I don't think it's the Confundus Charm. Could be the Imperius Curse... or not...." Fred winced at the look of utter terror she now had for his dad as Mr. Weasley looked at her intently, gauging her sudden reaction. She blatantly refused to answer any of his questions and struggled against the bindings, then began to cry. "You say this wizard has been hanging around her?"

"Yep," both Fred and George said in chorus.

"Unusual reaction though. Should have brought Kingsley with me, he's better at this than I am, Auror after all." Mr. Weasley turned. "I may need his help. Regardless, he should know about this anyway. I will be a moment," he said and then Apparated out.

Fred sat next to Marysia as she struggled, tears running down her face.

Two loud cracks brought Mr. Weasley back with a tall, bald, black wizard as they Apparated into the room. Marysia was trying desperately to get free of the rope binding her. Fred and George watched as Kingsley Shacklebolt and their father asked Marysia several questions.

"I think it's possible, Arthur, both maybe... could be a Predomination or Subordination curse, or an Enslavement spell, used as a curse but they are old charms and quite difficult. Usually the Imperius Curse is used, easier. Whatever... it's very strong." Kingsley looked at her expression. "She is absolutely terrified of me."

Fred and George repeated what they had told their father, and about Marysia's actions and reactions, and patiently answered Kingsley Shacklebolt's questions.

"She went hysterical when she heard I was from the Ministry. Before that she was ever so polite," Mr. Weasley added. "The boys said she isn't able to talk about this wizard, but she is fighting a curse, whichever one it is. I think she's under the Imperius Curse to make her obey him"

"Could be, could be, but that's not the only one. Could be the Confundus Charm, but she doesn't seem confounded, maybe confused. It doesn't sound like she ~~can't~~ remember him, only cursed so she can't *speak* about him or his intent... clever," Kingsley said. "She's definitely under more than one..."

Kingsley and Mr. Weasley tried different counter-spells on her as they broke down the spells and curses that had been placed on her *He must have had plenty of time to practice these old spells on her*, Fred thought angrily. *Oh, when I get my hands on him...* Once the spells were removed, Mr. Weasley undid the Binding spell George had cast.

Marysia was able to freely tell them about the wizard who came into her shop or flat daily, and followed her every move, and how he had placed the Imperius curse on the wizards who had been hired to help remodel the shop.

"What about the journal and these papers he has been asking you about?" Kingsley asked.

"I'm not sure what papers he wants actually, and he didn't know either. He looked at what Dad had sent to me, and whatever he's looking for wasn't there. He hasn't seen the stuff that came in the latest box though. I only got them day before yesterday, and I was keeping them separate. He always asked to see the papers I'd *finished* translating, so I always showed him *just* the finished stuff. He was mad because it wasn't what he wanted. He asked me again before I came here to have dinner with Fred and George, but we were interrupted, and he had to leave. He was really mad," Marysia explained. She was shaking. "The new stuff... I was careful to never completely finish any of it, so I wasn't compelled to show them to him." She looked up. "But *they knew* something was up," she said, moving her hand, demurely indicating Fred and George. "And I *wanted* to tell them - *so badly*..." She began to cry again. Fred wrapped his arms around her, holding her as she cried. "Said... if I told, if I said anything about him he'd know... he would kill me."

"Where are these papers now?" Kingsley asked.

"Bill has a copy. He took a copy of them last night to figure out the symbols that she didn't know," Fred stated.

Mr. Weasley's face paled as George finished. "Marysia asked that he put her copies in her vault in Gringotts."

"*Bill!* I better find Bill," Mr. Weasley cried out.

Kingsley nodded to Mr. Weasley. "Find him, find out about these papers and what they say unless Bill hasn't finished translating them. I'm going to try to find our mischief maker." He turned to Marysia as Mr. Weasley Apparated out. "Young lady, I'm going to ask you to do something that goes against every fiber of my being."

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*Author's Notes:*

*I owe a big debt of gratitude to Phoenix and Notsosaintly for all their hard work and time in cleaning this story up and making it presentable. Thank you both. I appreciate it more than either of you can know.*

## Dementors and the Death Eater

*Chapter 7 of 8*

It is well known that Fred and George are pranksters and practical jokers. However, these two are not afraid to stand up to trouble; they know just what to do and how to handle it.

Marysia looked up at Kingsley Shacklebolt, concerned. "What?"

"Marysia, I'm an Auror. Kingsley Shacklebolt is my name. I think that this wizard is, or could possibly be, a Death Eater." He was being friendly, but his demeanor was professional and his eyes were serious.

*Just like my dad when he wants me to travel with him.. Only this won't be as pleasurable.* Marysia braced herself to hear the worst.

Fred kept a reassuring arm around her shoulders. Marysia's look of fear was apparent, *but not because Kingsley is an Auror, at least not this time* Fred could see the difference. Her eyes were skeptical, but questioning, when she looked at Kingsley before he mentioned Death Eater.

"I'm going to place you back under some of the spells this wizard put on you. I will confound your memories about these papers, try and hide the memory of Bill getting them." Kingsley watched her face as he spoke. "It will protect Bill and yourself. Maybe this wizard won't realize you're not under *his* control, at least long enough for him to make a mistake. And I'll be watching you."

*Well, he's being reasonable, but can an Auror do that? Are they allowed?* Marysia nodded. "Alright then," she said apprehensively and looked at Fred inhaling deeply.

Reading her concern, Fred gave her a slight squeeze. "It will be alright; you can trust him."

"You said that you have been remodeling a shop?" Kingsley asked patiently. "Which one?"

"The shop it's up the street a bit, not too far from Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes, just past Gringotts. It's an expansion of my aunt's shop, Annie Ett's Bed Bath and Body Boutique."

She was shaking again, Fred noted, and he rubbed his hand on her shoulder reassuringly.

Kingsley smiled. "My wife will be pleased! She loves that shop a regular customer. So what is the layout? Is it anything like the one in Hogsmeade?"

"Yes, it has the same floor plan and about the same size. The shop is as close to the original as I can make it. Aunt Annette wanted customers who walk in to feel like they were in the Hogsmeade shop. But I don't have space for the private garden, of course, so I have set up an atrium in the back. Marysia thought for a moment, *He hid in the pantry once, followed her into the workroom...* "There is a small storeroom, more like a walk in pantry behind the counter, under the stairs. There are also the workroom and a small storeroom downstairs," she pointed out.

Kingsley nodded, thinking as she described the shop in detail. "Hum, fine then that's good. I know the Hogsmeade shop well."

"She already has the sign up in the window and a plaque above the door," Fred added. "You can't miss it, and there are potted plants and a flowering vine."

"It's a clematis," George stated. Fred and Kingsley both turned to him. "Growing on the side of the shop, a clematis vine. Mum has one like it on the fence at home."

Marysia remembered something else: *he would come into my flat from the shop.* "I have a two bedroom flat upstairs with a large patio balcony in the front. It's accessible from the stairs behind the counter. But he usually came in when the workers were still around... or when I came back from dinner." *I think*

"Alright then, are you ready, young lady?" Kingsley asked. Fred and George watched as Kingsley placed the spells on Marysia and carefully confused her memories about the night before, blurring any memory of Fred or George seeing the papers, of meeting Bill and Mr. Weasley, and eliminated the memory of meeting the Auror. After asking her several questions, Kingsley nodded, satisfied. He said bye to Fred and George and left to watch the street for the wizard she'd described.

"I need to get to the shop!" Marysia exclaimed suddenly as if waking from a trance.

"I'm going with you," Fred announced as George's eyebrows disappeared into his hair. "I'm going to be around just in case his guy tries anything on you. I'll protect you like I did last night," he said with a wink.

"Better yet, you could come in and *help*," Marysia replied, flicking her fingers as quotes when she said help. "Margaretta is coming today with the products and all the supplies for setting up the work room. You could come and go as you need to all day if you want." Marysia liked the idea of having him around.

George shook his head, but Fred raised his hand. "I finished most of the potions we needed to do today. If Marysia helps again, we can finish the rest after dinner," Fred countered George's look of complaint. "We can both do three potions each, with Marysia helping?" Fred asked with a look questioning whether this was a good idea.

She shrugged and nodded. "If not, we could do three of them after you close up the shop and then finish the other three after dinner? It will take longer, but would be easier."

"So we can have all the potions caught up tonight," Fred stated, turning back to George.

"I don't know," George said, but he knew Fred had his mind made up. "I'd like to try brewing three potions at the same time... It looked hard fun, but hard."

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Fred walked with Marysia to her shop, keeping alert for any signs of the wizard she'd described, but didn't see him. Looking in the window of her shop, he saw two women were already there; a middle-aged witch, who was carrying boxes out of the fireplace, and a younger witch, who disappeared behind the counter carrying a large box. The witch stepping from the Floo set her pile of boxes down and Apparated out. As Marysia entered the door Fred held open for her, there was an excited, high-pitched squeal followed immediately by a small darting figure that ran straight for her. She deftly caught the petite house-elf in a swoop, spinning her around in a hug, before kissing her on the head and setting her down.

*This obviously happens all the time*, Fred thought, amused. The petite house-elf looked up at Fred curiously and then skipped off. The house-elf, he noticed, had lace sewn on the pillowcase she wore, and it was tied around her chest with a wide ribbon in a perfect bow on her back. Quite a few witches were waiting in the atrium and came into the shop as she arrived. Marysia gave Fred a warm smile and followed Margaretta to the table set up in the atrium to interview the first one.

The shop looked quite different without the construction equipment, paint buckets and extra boards stacked around. Instead there were boxes beginning to pile up on the hardwood floor. Everything was painted a soft off-white color, trimmed in a very pale sunrise-gold. Behind the counter a staircase with a delicately carved banister curved and disappeared. The windows to the atrium took up the entire back wall behind the staircase, and it was full with plants already, many in bloom. The fireplace, made of warm sandstone, sat on the wall opposite the counter, and a rug was rolled up on the floor next to it. *Even empty this is such a ladies' shop*, he mused. *No mistaking that!*

The house-elf ran around, happily placing products on the shelves, her ears bouncing. The house-elf, Tobpi, seemed to know on which shelf everything needed to be, taking products from each box, placing them on the shelves. The older witch reappeared with several more cases of products from the Floo, setting them down on a counter with the rattle and clinking sounds of ceramic and glass containers. The little house-elf immediately ran over to take a large box, to carry it over to the shelf where she intended to place the items. Fred casually pulled out his wand to help move the other boxes to where the house-elf was working and to clear the counter for the next delivery. Within a few minutes the witch appeared with more cases, and Fred, smiling, sent them flying with the Banishing Charm across the shop to land expertly next to the house-elf.

"She'll wear you out if you try to keep her pace," said a warm and friendly voice behind him coming from a shapely, slightly heavy woman. "I'm Marysia's aunt's sister, Margaretta."

"Fred Weasley," he said, extending his hand. She looked up, surprised as she shook it.

"Not Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes' Fred Weasley?" She had that look of awe and respect that gave him an inner sense of pride.

"The very one," he said, smiling at her.

"Oh my! Stocking our shelves? Just won't do!" Fred laughed at her. Her charm was magnetic. "We are so hoping that Marysia chooses to work for us permanently, but she passed all her classes with Outstandings and earned a place at the Healer's Academy in the Potions master's class," Margaretta said, giving him a warm smile, and then she turned her gaze, watching Marysia, who was talking to a young wizard at the counter. "She intends to do both, running the shop as a manager around her course schedule at St Mungo's until she decides." She suddenly gave Fred a frolicsome grin. "Maybe you can help her choose?"

Fred smiled back, laughing at Margaretta's innuendo. "I've seen her potions work; she's very good."

Margaretta nodded, brimming with pride. "Yes, she is."

*Figured Marysia would want to take on both jobs. It will keep her very busy*he thought. *But it will mean she'll be living here, at least*

As the older witch appeared yet again with more boxes and set them down, Fred sent one box sailing easily from the fireplace with a swish of his wand. She stopped to thank him, introducing herself as Almaline.

"Fred, Fred Weasley. It's nice to meet you," he said in return.

"Oh! Are you really? Oh my goodness," she responded, surprised, her eyes instantly flashing with respect and recognition. She chatted briefly with him, then Apparated out. Each time Almaline reappeared from the Floo, Fred moved the boxes to where she indicated, and Tobpi placed the products where they belonged. Between the three of them, the work went quickly as the house-elf bounced around.

Except for the times between Almaline's appearances and disappearances, Fred spent most of the day watching as Marysia moved around between interviews and helped set up the back work area. She gave every indication that her intention was to run the shop, and Fred was hopeful she would.

By late afternoon, Margaretta, Marysia and Fred ate a late lunch of sandwiches from the restaurant Marysia liked best as the women talked over plans for the shop and its possible employees. It was obvious that both women had liked the same three, and Marysia had liked the young wizard that had applied for stock boy. Marysia filled out the appointment cards usually used for special invitational lunch appointments for the witches she wanted hire.

By the end of the day, the shop was almost ready for its opening. The shelves were half full already with the colorful jars, bottles, vials, boxes and canisters, all neatly lined up and displayed. Fred knew he had to go home too, help close up their shop and all. Tobpi's lip quivered when she was told they were through for the day until Marysia picked her up and said she was needed the next day, which made Tobpi smile again. She hugged the petite house-elf and set her gently back on her feet before the house-elf popped out. Margaretta gave both Marysia and Fred hugs as the two women said their cheerful good-byes before Margaretta joined Almaline inside the fireplace. Almaline called out, "Annie Ett's Hogsmeade," as she threw down the Floo powder, and they vanished in an eruption of green flame.

"Why didn't she just Apparate?" Fred asked as he watched them go.

"Margaretta can't," Marysia said quietly. "Side-along Apparation terrifies her."

"Never passed her Apparation test?" Fred assumed. He knew someone who had severely splinched himself and never got over it.

Watching his face cautiously, Marysia said hesitantly, "Never went to magic school." Fred looked back at her, puzzled.

Marysia paused a while before explaining, her voice unsure of his reaction. "Didn't you notice that she didn't use any magic at all?" Fred shook his head. "Margaretta is the nicest, kindest person I know. She has incredible business sense, and she can do any figure in her head. She went to Muggle school and has a degree in business." Marysia waited to see if he caught on.

"She's a Squib?" he stated, surprised.

Marysia winced. "I hate that word," she replied, but nodded, surveying his reactions.

Fred suddenly caught on. *She wants to know if I'm prejudice against Squibs?* "She has a magnetic charm about her," he stated, remembering his first impression when meeting her.

Marysia smiled warmly. "Yes, she does. And she keeps this business going. I admire the fact that she and her sister went into business together. You'd love my Aunt Annette too. People say we are very much alike."

Fred inclined his head to go, but Marysia wanted to get a 'few things' first. "I'll be right behind you. I'll catch up to you at your shop." She turned and ran upstairs. He shrugged and went outside.

\*~\*\*\*\*\*~\*

Her flat had been ransacked: boards lifted up, cupboards all opened, several torn off, all the boxes and crates opened or smashed. Marysia moved carefully through the flat, her wand drawn. Everything was still and quiet and very cold. She cautiously entered her room, relaxing when it appeared empty and lowered her wand. *It's really cold in here*, she observed, and a shiver ran down her spine. Like the rest of the flat, it had been ruthlessly ransacked. Then the door closed behind her.

The wizard in black robes and menacing eyes, who had been terrorizing her, stood blocking her escape. A Dementor floated at his side. "Welcome back, young lady. I've been waiting for you," he snarled.

Marysia was petrified with shock and fear. "What do you want?" she managed to say, her voice a mere squeak.

"You have something I want obviously," he said, his voice controlled and cold.

"What?" Her fears were escalating, and she was freezing, but she couldn't move, couldn't cry out. The Dementor hovered, waiting.

The wizard moved into the room, getting close, followed by the Dementor. She turned toward the patio as an escape and saw another Dementor hovering outside the glass doors. The Dementor in the room hovered nearer, closer to her, and she screamed in terror.

"Tell me where the diary is, and I'll have it back off," the wizard demanded.

"What diary?" she cried, the confusion in her mind mixed with her fear.

"Don't play games with me. I know it is here. I followed it here," he snarled. "Give it to me."

"I don't have it!" she screamed. The Dementor outside the glass doors was opening them and coming inside. All thought vanished as she watched, horror struck. The other was hovering above her now; its hands and face visible.

"*Liar!* Your father sent it to you," the wizard berated menacingly.

"I don't know what you mean. He's sent a lot of stuff to me!" she pleaded as she fell to her knees.

"I know it is here. Where have you hidden it? I'll tear this place apart if I have to," his voice rose in anger. The second Dementor joined the first, its hood pulled back, and Marysia tried to turn, to avoid looking at its face and its hands, either of them...

The Dementors lunged at her, and Marysia screamed again, feeling sick and faint at the same time.

Suddenly, Fred and George erupted through her bedroom door as she collapsed in a huddle on the floor.

\*~\*\*\*\*\*~\*

Fred watched her fly up the stairs to her flat, waited a moment, and then stepped outside to wait for her. He waved at George as he crossed the street. "Where's Marysia?" George asked as Fred approached.

"She said she had to 'get something'. How much more could she have?" Fred asked, amused.

"Fred, she's a girl! They have lots of stuff..." he answered laughing, and then stopped short. A dark shadow seemed to roll up the wall by Annie Ett's Bed Bath and Body Boutique. It wasn't the shadow that made him freeze; it was the climbing clematis vine on the wall as it shriveled and died instantly from frost that caught his attention. "Fred Marysia!" he cried. "Quick grab Shield Cloaks!"

Fred didn't turn around, he simply Apparated with his brother into the shop. They both grabbed Shield Hats and Cloaks and then Apparated to the atrium of her shop.

As they entered into the shop itself, they heard Marysia screaming upstairs and bolted up to her. The door to her flat opened easily. "Her room should be down this way..." Fred said in a throaty whisper, and they ran to where her room should be.

Not taking any chances Fred fiercely thrust his wand at the door. *"Bombarda!"* he yelled, shattering the door, and Fred and George burst in ready to fight.

*"Expecto Patronum,"* George yelled, and his wand burst a sliver light that became a large orangutan Patronus that flew at the Dementors, causing them to freeze midair. Marysia seemed to slump to the floor as the Dementors floated up toward the ceiling.

Simultaneously, Fred aimed the Bat-Bogey Hex at the Death Eater. Winged lumps sprouted on the face of the Death Eater and began attacking his face.

George struggled with the Dementors as they lunged yet again, trying to descend toward Marysia, who was now lying on the floor. The orangutan Patronus held its ground, arms and legs flailing, keeping them away from her. Slowly, George's Patronus pushed the Dementors away, along the ceiling, toward the open glass doors, and their hoods once again covered their hideous faces.

Fred fired another curse at the Death Eater, which struck a glancing blow as he swung at the flying Bogies around his face. The Death Eater fired curses that bounced around the room as he and Fred struggled to hit each other. Fred effectively sidestepped a green jet of light from the Death Eater's wand and fired off a Stunning spell. It hit the Death Eater's left arm, making it hang limply at his side.

George, meanwhile, was holding his ground, and his Patronus finally managed to push the Dementors into the open doorway of the balcony. George moved to avoid Fred and the Death Eater as they fought. He felt a glancing blow on his shoulder as a spell repelled off his cloak.

Fred was having better luck than the Death Eater, the shield hat and cloak helping to deflect wizard's spells. Both the Death Eater and Fred were heading toward the glass doors of the balcony, where George was chasing the Dementors off with his Patronus.

The orangutan Patronus, waving arms and legs wildly, finally chased the Dementors off as they escaped out the glass doors, over the balcony patio and into the night.

Marysia lifted herself up, her terror seeming to slack off as she looked up at Fred fighting against her foe, but she was feeble, woozy, and unable to rise. Her memories of the wizard's visits were becoming clearer and more focused as shame and anger mixed with her fear. She couldn't help them, *Even if I could aim a spell at him, it might hit Fred!* She felt worthless.

Fred's attacks pushed the Death Eater out onto the balcony patio. Even as he fired another curse at Fred, the Death Eater in his long cloak slipped on the wet tiles on the patio floor. *Water from the potted plants,* Fred noted. *I'll have to thank whoever had watered for her* He gave George a nod without taking his eyes off the Death Eater, and together they shouted spells: Fred, the Jelly-Legs Jinx and George, the Furnunculus curse.

Marysia watched, stunned, as Fred and George stood their ground in the doorway. *If anything happens to him them, it will be my fault.. How could I have been so stupid to let him get to me... If Fred and George hadn't come.. I'd be... dead.*

The Death Eater's imbalanced footing distracted him, and he fell as the curse and jinx hit him squarely. He slumped to the floor, a revolting lump. The large winged bogies were now flapping around a swollen face. There were thousands of small tentacles that broke out all over his face, arms and hands, and he fell onto the iron guardrail and potted plants that surrounded the patio. Even with the wiggling tentacles on his arms, the Dark Mark could be seen clearly on his left forearm.

Kingsley Shacklebolt suddenly burst into the room next to Marysia. "You*cannot* Apparate in here!" he bellowed. "Is everyone okay?" He moved quickly out onto the balcony and applied the Body-Binding spell on the squirming Death Eater.

Fred and George gave each other a high five. "Chalk one up for the D.A!" they cried.

Marysia retched.

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*Author's Notes:*

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## It Is Never Over

*Chapter 8 of 8*

Simply put, this is the aftermath of the ordeal, when the mind must accept and sort out what happened. Finding the calm after the storm... Yeah, right!

Kingsley was the first one to Marysia's side, helping her to her feet and cleaning her up. He was greatly concerned that a hex, jinx or curse might have hit her when he saw her down on the floor. Marysia was very grateful for his kindness, but confused as to who he was until he removed the befuddlement from her mind. She gasped in shock and horror, swaying as all the hidden memories of the last twenty-four hours hit her suddenly at once.

Fred, out on the balcony, was giving the Death Eater a few extra zaps adding the Tickling Charm and Itching Jinx to the deformed, tentacle-covered body. The Death Eater was laughing and trying to roll and scratch the best he could, all the while growling insults at Fred.

"Oh, you want to threaten me?" Fred growled back. "I'm not a nice... sweet girl... unprepared... to take you... on you... inept... disgusting... troll," he stammered, emphasizing each part of his sentence with a swish and flick of his wand, levitating and then dropping the Death Eater. He proceeded to bounce the revolting lump several more times until finally George, laughing so hard he could barely speak, had to stop him.

Marysia, standing inside looking out the open doorway, was completely stunned by the appearance of her attacker and amused by the bouncing, laughing, wiggly, tentacle-covered blob he'd been reduced to. Even Kingsley stifled his laughter watching the last few bounces, trying to maintain an authoritative professionalism when he was ready to remove the Death Eater from Marysia's flat.

As soon as Fred and George re-entered her room, Marysia went over to them quickly, hugging Fred, then George, kissing both on the cheek, then embraced Fred again, kissing him soundly. Fred deepened the kiss and heard her muffled exclamation before she relaxed in his arms. He set her back onto her feet, noticing with relish that she had to catch her breath as well as her balance.

Marysia blushed a few shades of pink before she glanced at George expecting him to comment. George instead stood there with his arms wide open, grinning wickedly, and ready for his next turn. Marysia laughed at him, her eyes sparkling, and gave him another hug and demure peck on his cheek.

Together, Fred and George helped Marysia as she searched the mess of her room for the papers and books thrown around by the Death Eater during his search for the elusive diary. Some of the old parchments and several of the books needed repairing. Many them were beyond fixing and would have to be painstakingly either taped back together or simply recopied. Eventually, everything Marysia wanted to salvage was boxed.

Fred and George did what they could to repair some of the damage to her room. *But the flat*, she admitted to herself with a heavy sigh, *I'll have to hire someone to come in here to fix the major damage*. She picked up an armrest of her favorite chair, still barely attached to one half of the seat and one leg. George picked up the other two parts of it, and together they managed to reassemble it back to its original shape. "Well, if my chair can be fixed, so can the rest, right?" she said, trying to sound hopeful.

"It will be fine. It will take some work, but it'll be fine," George said reassuringly.

"Marysia, you are going to have to come back to our flat tonight," Fred insisted. "No excuses."

"Definitely. Who knows what that lousy biased slug said to his pals. You won't be safe here. Not for a while at least," George stated, equally insistent. "If one of his friends tries to get at you, we will be there to handle him, or we can get hold of Kingsley again."

She ran her hand on the back of her chair. "I could just go stay with my brother," she said, with a deep sigh. "Romauld, Sebastian or Michael's, any of them. You have already done so much. I don't want to become a burden."

"That's not a problem at all. But Marysia, this Death Eater was aware of your brothers," George said, shaking his head. "He made sure you *couldn't* tell your brothers anything."

"And may know where they live. Kingsley said he'd have to check on them," Fred pointed out.

*He is right. The Death Eater made sure that I couldn't say anything to any of my brothers, or to my father. I wasn't able to tell them he was in the shop, in my room nothing, except that I was 'fine' and not to worry.* Marysia was too shaken to protest further and numbly nodded.

Once back in the flat, Fred held out a large piece of chocolate for her. "Here; eat this, it helps," he said, remembering how many times professors had to give chocolate to the students in his fifth year.

Eyeing the innocent looking square, Marysia asked warily, "And will I get feathers?"

"No," Fred said, pushing an errant strand of hair from her face. "It's just chocolate. You've been through enough today." She looked up at him to see a glint of mischief flash in his eyes. "Unless... you'd like feathers? I'd hate to disappoint you if you had your heart set on them," he offered. She simply shook her head, made a demure smile, and bit into the chocolate.

George pulled out the stew from the night before, and Marysia made grilled cheese sandwiches the Muggle way for each of them, occasionally stirring the pot of stew.

Fred sat at the table, watching her as she cooked. This time she wasn't whistling as she had before, just quiet. She served them first before finally sitting down herself. She smiled politely and placed her napkin on her lap before picking up her sandwich and taking a bite. Somehow Fred knew. *She just isn't ready to talk about what happened. She seems to be handling it okay*, but he wanted her to talk to him. Although she was sitting right next to him, she seemed kilometers away.

Throughout dinner he and George talked between themselves, making suggestions for products, product enhancements and stock items they needed. Fred noticed that she played with her food as she ate, listening, wistfully smiling occasionally in response to their conversation. Several of the product suggestions even made Marysia laugh or shake her head. *Humor is the best medicine*, Fred thought, mentally checking off which ideas made her laugh.

George gathered up the dishes afterward and magicked the dishcloth to begin washing them. Fred guided Marysia to the living room, pulling her hand to sit with him on the couch, as George followed with three glasses of elf wine.

Marysia sighed as George handed her a glass, remembering her wish only two nights ago. Marysia nestled against Fred on the couch, wishing she could just lay her head on his chest and listen to his heart beat reassuringly under her cheek. She wanted to scream at herself for being so stupid, cry, curl up next to him... just let everything go...

"Do you want to talk about it?" Fred asked softly, wrapping his arm protectively across her shoulders. Marysia shook her head and sipped on her wine.

George sat in his big comfortable chair, kicking his feet on the coffee table. "Are you sure? It might make it easier for you, getting it out."

Marysia shrugged. "I... didn't know he was there," she said softly, "in the room. It was cold... but... he was behind the door and trapped me!" She took a deep breath and let it out slowly, shakily, trying to stay calm. "I shouldn't have gone in there, but... Oh, he was furious. I thought he was going to let the... De-de-mentors g-et me," she choked on her last words. "He would have... they were going to..."

Fred gave her a reassuring squeeze. "I should have gone upstairs with you, but I'm glad I didn't," Fred said, as Marysia gaze snapped to his, "otherwise, it would have been you and me against that guy and two Dementors."

Marysia looked up at George. "What I want to know is how you knew? How did you... the Dementors?" She shivered, the memory of the Dementors hovering over her still too fresh in her mind.

"It wasn't so much seeing the Dementor. It was a movement in the shadows and seeing the climbing clematis vine outside your shop dying from frost that told me that the Dementor was there." George explained. She cocked her head and furrowed her brow, not understanding. "Our fifth year, when Fred and I would walk on the school grounds, we would see the plants freeze around us just before we could actually see the Dementor. You mentioned shadows bothering you... and then seeing the vine freeze... I realized what was happening. Besides, I saw a shadow in the upstairs window when I made the night deposit. I thought it might have been you and Fred, until I saw him on the street."

"But you know you fought them? How did you make them leave?" she asked, impressed.

"We learned how to in school," George said in his usual bravado.

Suddenly, a woman with red hair, wearing an apron over her robes, burst into the room from the Floo, in hysterics, screaming that a clock told her that her sons were in mortal peril. "*Couldn't believe it!*" she practically screeched as she entered the room. "I had to hear it from an Auror...*You two!* The worries you give me. *What were you thinking* and Kingsley said *you attacked them all by your selves!* You're not in the Order! Taking on dangerous wizards! With no regard, no regard at all... Just rushed right in, he said. How could you have been so reckless? *Brave*, he said..." She seemed to repeat most of what the Fred and George had done, except coming from her it sounded horrid!

Fred had removed his arm from her shoulder when Mrs. Weasley appeared in the room. He squeezed Marysia's hand discreetly as she sat paralyzed in shock. "It wasn't that big of a deal, Mum," George tried to interject, getting up.

"Tell me! What were you thinking?" Mrs. Weasley's voice raised several decibels and an octave. Fred and George's heads bowed as she raved. "You could have been killed! An Auror in the street and you two have to take on Death Eaters *all on your own!* You could have died! Both of you *I could have lost you!*"

"Aw, Mum, it was just one," George said, not really looking his mum in the eye.

"And he wasn't really all that much of a threat," Fred added, rising too.

"*Not much of a threat? It was a Death Eater!* Could have called for help, but *nooo* you take on a Death Eater yourselves, with no concern for the dangers! *All by yourselves!* Not even thinking, were you?" Mrs. Weasley roared. "When your father told me what you'd done! I couldn't believe it! I just couldn't! I just don't know what I would have if I lost you! If you had been seriously hurt! If he'd killed you! How could you be so reckless?" she ranted.

"We managed him fine," George said, trying to reassure her.

"Yeah, Mum, we handled him. We won after all," Fred said, trying to sound reasonable.

"*He was a Death Eater!*" Mrs. Weasley's voice was so loud the neighbors could probably hear her.

"And two Dementors," George said, as if that would make things seem better! Fred shot him an 'Oh-no-you-didn't-just-say-that' look.

"*Dementors?* Here in Diagon Alley?" Mrs. Weasley looked taken aback. "You were attacked by Dementors? *Here!*" Apparently neither Mr. Weasley nor Kingsley had told her about the Dementors.

"Nothing we couldn't handle," Fred tried saying in his most reassuring tone. He wanted to say, *No, Mum, across the street*, but stopped himself before he did. *She'd flip over that too.*

"Molly, the boys are fine. Kingsley said that they had the situation all wrapped up by the time he got there," Mr. Weasley said. He, however, looked at Fred and George with pride and then cowered under Mrs. Weasley's angry stare.

Marysia hadn't even seen him come in! She stood to greet him, following her well-ingrained manners, and then froze as Mrs. Weasley turned to her husband. *Arthur*, they could have been seriously hurt! They could have been outnumbered! They could have been *killed!*" Mrs. Weasley continued in her scolding tone.

"They were lucky?" Mr. Weasley shrugged, except he looked proud, rather than displaying the indignation that was showing on Mrs. Weasley's face.

Suddenly, Mrs. Weasley turned on Marysia, who fully expected to be remanded next for getting her sons in trouble. "Hello, dear, I'm Mrs. Weasley," she said pleasantly, with a warm smile. Marysia reeled on her feet in surprise.

Fred laid a hand on Marysia's back to steady her, as George held back a laugh. *It's hard enough for family to take Mum when she gets all wound up, never mind meeting her in that state*, Fred thought. *And Mum had been good and wound up the moment she came through the Floo!*

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Weasley," Marysia said trying to steady her voice. "Hello. I am very pleased to meet you, ma'am." Falling safely into formality, she shook Mrs. Weasley's hand. "I am very honored to meet you. I am Marysia Duncan." Fred and George, watching her face, both had to suppress a chuckle. Marysia looked terrified of their mum, but was trying her best to be polite.

Mrs. Weasley turned her attention back on the twins. "*Well*, you two could certainly learn a bit from this young lady on manners!" she said, her voice rising, pointing at each in turn.

"Yes, Mum," they both said, heads bowed to hide their smirks.

The story was told several times. Even Marysia was expected to give her account before Mrs. Weasley felt calmer about the incident. Soon it became very late, and Mr. Weasley had to practically pull Mrs. Weasley to the fireplace to go home.

"Do be more careful. Watch out for each other. Stay out of trouble. Oh, the worries you two give me," Mrs. Weasley kept saying as she hugged and kissed first Fred, then George, twice each. "It was lovely to meet you, dear. You're welcome over to our home anytime," she said to Marysia as she gave her a hug too.

"Well, thank you. It has been a pleasure to meet you," Marysia responded as Fred winked at her. "Mr. Weasley, it was lovely to see you again. Thank you ever so much for everything you did to help me. My family will be most grateful to you, really." Marysia almost wanted to hug him too, but remained poised.

Mr. Weasley blushed as he took her hand. "Well, yes, glad to be of help. Very glad everything worked out well." Marysia smiled and placed a slight peck on his cheek, which made him turn a deep shade of red.

As Mr. and Mrs. Weasley left through the Floo, Marysia walked over to the window overlooking the street. She stood staring at the glass doors of her flat and shivered, crossing her arms, rubbing them as she stared at the dark entry to her bedroom. It looked uninviting, and the memories of the Dementors and Death Eater were all still too real. Without turning she knew it was Fred who came up behind her before he wrapped her in his arms. "Knut for your thoughts?"

"You were amazing in there, just amazing." Her eyes never left the glass doors to her bedroom. "I couldn't even move... I was so scared. All those curses and jinxes you did and the Dementor! How did you know how to get rid of it? We did not have that in school?"

"Extracurricular activity," he said proudly, "and it was George who ran the Dementors off, not me."

"No, you were too busy with the Death Eater!" she said, turning her head, looking at him in amazement.

"He wasn't really all that tough actually. I've met tougher ones," Fred said, giving her a reassuring squeeze. "Truthfully, seemed a bit inept."

Marysia turned around in his arms to face him. "You have fought Death Eaters before?" Her look of admiration and surprise made Fred laugh.

"I'm not friends with You-Know-Who or any of his pals." He had an assured look in his eyes. "My whole family feels the same way. If we have to face him or them, well, then, we will fight."

Marysia cocked her head. "Right, your dad's in the Ministry."

"It's more than that." He wanted to tell her about the Order. With her ability with potions, she'd be a big help. "We sort of belong to a group that's fighting You-Know-Who. You have met six of them already."

She looked amazed. "I'd like to hear more about this group... but not tonight. I'm still shaking from my first Death Eater encounter." She shivered again. "Not to mention my fear of Dementors."

"Are you sure you're alright?" he asked softly.

"Yes... no... I still feel like my worst nightmare came true. Actually facing a Dementor is my worst nightmare and there were ~~two~~!" She shifted her weight and looked away. Fred kept his hands on her waist. "Then add in a Death Eater, being under his curses... I never thought I'd ever have to really face being under the Imperius Curse and..." she ran her fingers through her hair and looked back out the window. Fred wrapped his arms around her again, and she laid her head on his shoulder. "It's... easier when you read this stuff, and it's not you or someone you care about. When it's..."

"Do you *want* to stay here again tonight?" Fred almost held his breath as she turned to face him slowly.

"Yes, please. I would like to, if you don't mind my doing so?" Her habit of formality was amusing. Fred didn't answer, took her hand and led her to his bedroom.

Marysia changed into the pajama bottoms and tank top she had left folded on the foot of his bed in the bathroom, brushed her teeth and hair and walked back into Fred's room. He had folded back the covers, changed into his pajamas and was hanging up his work robes.

She held his hand as she sat on the side of his bed and looked up at him. "Stay?" she asked timidly. "Stay. I don't want to be alone. Childish really, but..."

"Are you sure?" he asked, searching her face.

She let out her breath slowly and nodded. "I can't be alone tonight... with everything. I suppose... I'm still shook by it." She looked up at him imploringly. "I guess... I'm just glad you can chase Dementors away as well as Boggarts. I really just want you near..."

Fred lay next to her once again, cradling her in his arms. He spoke softly into her hair. "I'm not going to do anything tonight. But I'm not really this noble you should know. And if *you* are ever in *my* bed again, don't expect me to be." He could feel Marysia's reaction of surprise and heard her sharp intake of breath. "Know this; if *you* are ever in *my* bed again, I am not going to restrain myself," he said, kissing her hair. She turned to try to see his face as he kissed her temple, warmly and sensually. "Now, try and get some sleep."

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*Author's Notes:*

*I owe a big debt of gratitude to Phoenix for all her hard work and time in cleaning this story up and making it presentable. Thank you, Phoenix. I appreciate it more than you know.*