

Before the Fairy God-Jarvey

by dracontia

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1: The Littlest One

Chapter 1 of 5

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NOTE: If you haven't read the other Fairy God-Jarvey stories, please do so before reading this one. Finding out where Reggie came from is much more satisfying if you've already read about where she ended up.

Disclaimer: This story is based on a more-or-less logical expansion of concepts and characters set forth in the "Harry Potter" novels by J.K. Rowling, who is not me; therefore, I make no money from borrowing this universe, nor do I claim to possess any right thereto. But the Jarvey's all mine.

Chapter 1: The Littlest One

"Peluchita, Peluchita

Mi querida, mi querida,

Aunque el mundo es chingado

Dice Mamá, 'Yo te amo'"

Lechita La Maravillosa sang softly to the still bundle of silvery fluff against her belly. Lechita had been a performing Jarvey in El Circulo Magico until she was crippled in an accident with a dancing Hippogriff. Now she was just breeding stock in the backyard of a little bungalow off Brooklyn Avenue in East Los Angeles. Her other kits had already been sold; they were far too young to be taken from their mother, but her bloodline was fairly famous and her new owners desperately needed the cash. But Lechita didn't understand any of this. All she knew was that they had left her with one baby, and maybe that meant she could keep it. So she named the little gray runt Peluchita.

One of the other breeding mothers, Negrita, shook her head at Lechita. "Dejala, plojera," she said. "Motherfuckers sell that. It don't get stronger, they kill it."

"Cuyate, puta," Lechita snarled. "Nobody take Peluchita."

From the back porch, young José María Gutierrez y Maldonado (Chema to his family and friends) watched the Jarveys in their pens. The latest batch of kits had sold a week ago for a good price; they would be able to keep his older sister Marta in El Colegio de Encantamientos another year.

Only Lechita's little silver runt remained. It had seemed too frail to take to market, so they had left it with her in hopes it would put on some weight. Chema actually hoped it would prove a little too small and weak to ever be sellable... that way, his uncle might let him keep it as a pet. He had spent a lot of time by the nursing pen over the past two weeks, talking to the inquisitive little bundle of silver fur. It was so friendly that once it even rubbed off one of its abnormally long (for a baby) whiskers on him when he poked his fingers through the chain links. Chema regarded this as a lucky sign. He kept the whisker in his little box of treasures, where it gleamed like a silver wire amidst green-and-gold Qetzal Nectar pop caps, stray Gobstones in a rainbow of colors, his mother's St. Christopher medal (Marta got the rosary), and his small hoard of Fuegos Magicales...Pesadillas del Bombero.

Unfortunately, the tiny silver Jarvey did not appear to be growing at all, and indeed, spent most of its time snuggled against its mother. Its utter stillness now suggested that it had been more than just a little sickly. "Tío Pancho," Chema called quietly, "I think the runt died already."

Francisco 'Pancho' Gutierrez's round face looked even more pouchy and mournful than usual as he peered out from behind dirty wire mesh. "Qué lástima... that one had good color. Vamanos, we'll take it out of there before it rots and makes the others sick. Pobrecita 'Chita." The screen door creaked open shrilly, the sound startling Rio Plato, their high-strung stud Jarvey. He swore loudly and made odd barking sounds in his locked cage; they had to keep him quite secure, as he was a known escape artist.

Pancho eased his mesquite wood wand out of its worn silver-mounted leather holster and Petrified the mother Jarvey. He and the boy entered the pen.

"Lo siento, 'Chita," the old man said, "but no way that runt was going to live." He gestured for the boy to take the limp bit of fur from beside its frozen mother.

"Hijole, she's alive!" the boy shouted, trying desperately to hold onto what had become a miniature writhing whirlwind without hurting it.

"Chingate hombron! Déjame! Help! Socorro! Mamá, Mamá! Leggo!" it shrieked shrilly.

"Santa María, it talks already!" Pancho exclaimed, his ancient face collapsing into a network of gleeful wrinkles. He hobbled over to the porch and retrieved a transport container. "If you hurry, Chema, you can sell her at the Brooklyn Market before the last east coast buyers have to leave to take the noon Portkey. It'll be at least a week before they have another Jarvey-selling day." Chema gladly dropped the thrashing and swearing animal into the carrier and the old man activated a silencing charm on it. "You remember how to cancel the charm, chico?"

"Sí, Tío Pancho," Chema said, indicating the latch that could be flipped to allow the Jarvey's voice to be heard outside the box. "You mean I get to sell her myself?"

"Por supuesto...unless you wanna raise Jarveys all your life, mijo, you need to pay for school. And if you don't do so good in school, pues, you better be good at selling Jarveys. Andale, chico!" he exclaimed, giving the boy a slap on the back to set him off in the right direction.

"Pobrecita Lechita," Pancho sighed again, shaking his head. "Maybe when Chema and Marta are finished with El Colegio, you can keep one of your runts." He waited until he was back on the porch to end the spell that held the Jarvey still and silent. Pancho didn't especially like hearing them cry for their kits, but they always got over it in a day or two. In another few months, she would have another litter and this one would be forgotten.

Chema tucked the box under his arm and hopped on his bicycle. His sister Marta said that at El Colegio des Encantamientos they taught you how to ride brooms, but he'd rather make his bicycle into a flying one. Maybe they'd teach him how to do that there. For now, he would make the bicycle fly with his own two legs so that he reached the shabby little storefront that disguised the L.A. Magical Creatures Market in record time. Jefe Beto himself was watching the door when Chema burst in.

"I'm from Rio de Los Angeles Jarveys," he said, holding up the case and panting.

"Hey, you're Pancho's boy. Weren't you guys in here last week?" Beto asked

"Yeah, but Lechita's little one turned out to be an early talker and stronger than we thought when we brought in the first litter."

Jefe Beto pulled out a slip of parchment with which to register the newest kit. He took a moment to look over the tiny creature that Chema offered for inspection before tapping his wand to the parchment to automatically fill in the basic information. "Hijole, chico. That one has good color. Should call him 'Rio Plato II.' He makes the old man look like primer on bondo by comparison."

"Gracias, Jefe Beto. But it's a she. Maybe you could put her on her papers as 'Platita.'"

"You gotta do that, chico. Take the quill and fill in her information. Remember your seller's license number?"

Much to his chagrin, Chema had forgotten it. He fidgeted while Jefe Beto sent someone to look it up, but tried to look professional as he carefully printed all the information on the certificate, signing his name with the pretty, round script that Sister Mary Benigna taught.

Beto gave the papers the once-over and flicked his wand at them to affix the official seal. "If you hurry, you'll catch some of the last bargain hunters."

Chema's face fell. He was so late there was no one left but the bargain hunters? Maybe it would be better to go home and try next week.

No, he had been told to make the sale today. Tío Pancho was a good seller. Chema would imitate him and get a good price for Lechita's runt. Squaring his shoulders, Chema marched into the trading room.

Most of the regulars were clearing out their stalls already; only a few small outfits with center tables and the occasional dealers in the common pen were still proclaiming the virtues of their animals. Unwilling to huddle amongst the occasionals yet feeling silly about claiming their usual stall just to sell one Jarvey, Chema took up a nervously defiant stance in the middle of the room, across from the stall Tío Pancho favored. The old lady who had used it today had already shrunk her empty carriers and was walking away with her three unsold kits. Chema held the carrier high and ended the spell. Tío Pancho always let the Jarveys speak for themselves.

Did she ever speak! Even above the din of haggling dealers and cursing animals, the little kit made herself heard. "Fuckers! Déjame! Mamá, Mamá!" she shrieked, loud and clear without a single bark or growl.

A middle-aged wizard with a shiny, bald head and a build like Tío Pancho's stopped and stared in amazement. "Damn, boy, you went to an awful lot of trouble to train that thing just to sell her in the raw market."

"Check her age...she's too young to be trained. She's just an early talker."

The buyer studied the paperwork skeptically, even going so far as to take out his wand to test the seals and to petrify the Jarvey and pry its mouth open for inspection. Finally, he grunted in slightly incredulous acquiescence and released the animal from the spell. She promptly began to heap impressive abuse upon him.

"I'll give you three Eagles and ten Lunitas for her," the man said with an air of finality.

"She's by Rio Plato, out of Lechita La Maravillosa," Chema said. "She's worth more than that even if she didn't talk early. Not a Denta under ten Eagles."

"You savvy 'runt,' boy?" the buyer asked, eliciting chuckles from surrounding dealers.

"Say that to my face, pendejo!" the Jarvey shrielled, racheting up the chuckles into gales of laughter.

"If I didn't know the Rio de Los Angeles outfit, I'd say the boy was using a ventriloquism charm," said one of the sellers who had overhead the exchange on his way out.

"We're honest sellers," he said, coloring hotly but keeping his temper. "This one's just real smart. She's so small she'll be good for balancing acts, and she'd make a good lady's Jarvey 'cause she's smart."

"Sized to fit in a purse, huh?" someone yelled across the trading floor, causing more laughter.

The buyer studied the glittering eyes of the little animal peering at him with baleful intelligence through the holes in the carrier. Then he looked to the proud-faced boy standing his ground in the busy market full of older, rougher men. Both were a little on the runty side, but somehow, he didn't think it would be wise to bet against either of them. "Okay kid...I'll give you four Eagles. Have we got a deal?"

"Eight Eagles, ten Lunitas, five Dentas," Chema said, holding his ground.

The buyer burst out laughing. "Don't push your luck. Five Eagles, five Lunitas, and I'll throw in two Dentas so you can buy yourself some candy on the way home. Take it or leave it."

Chema made his first sale.

Had anyone been timing Chema's ride home, a world record for cycling might have been recorded. Not that he would have cared...speed was merely a means to an end at this moment. He'd never had so much money in his personal possession in his entire life, and all he could think of was getting it safely home to Tío Pancho.

"Tío Pancho! Look!" Chema was already yelling as he ran across the lawn. His bicycle lay on the ground where he let it fall, wheels still spinning. He banged open the screen door and excitedly poured the money into his uncle's hands.

Pancho's face creased in patterns of pride and happiness. "Bueno, muy bueno, Chema. If we keep doing this good, we'll have enough for your first year at El Colegio by the time you turn thirteen."

"See, Tío Pancho ...I can be useful. I'm not just extra work for you."

"Hijole, don't talk loco like that. You're a good boy, mijo. It's no extra work to take care of your own blood. I wish I could do more for you and Marta; your mamá wa...is...my favorite niece. She would be proud of you, Chema."

Chema looked at the photo over the mantle. A smiling woman waved to him from a little black-and-white photo, her best dress with its huge, ruffled skirt rippling gently in a phantom wind. There were other pictures of Mamá in the house, but this one was Chema's oracle, and her wave meant approval. He tried not to think of it as part of a shrine; Mamá would come back someday, when she found Papá and his lost expedition. That's what Tío Pancho always said (except when he forgot and said she 'might' come back).

Pancho's voice shook him out of his reverie. "But this money, Chema," he said, showing his worn teeth in a wide grin, "we keep here..." he pulled out an old cigar box with layers of charms on it to repel thieves, dropping the coins in one by one, so they could enjoy the sound "...to start saving for your wand. On your twelfth birthday, we'll take *El Jefe Sudoeste* to Albuquerque, and go to the same wand maker made mine. It will cost, but you should have one made to order. Es tradición."

Before going to bed that night, Chema took the Jarvey's whisker from his treasure box and wrapped it in a piece of paper. Tiptoeing to avoid the creaky floorboard in the hallway, he found the moneybox and carefully slipped the whisker into it. Maybe it could be used to make his wand. After all, Tío Pancho's wand had a Jarvey whisker. Chema couldn't think of a luckier, more magical thing in the world at the moment.

The odor of strange Jarveys choked the air around Peluchita, smothering the hot, sometimes citrusy, chemical dustiness of the city. Their voices were angry, their swearing mindless. Her heart beat fast as darkness closed around her... stuffy darkness full of the sounds and smells of furious strangers. Only the unyielding cardboard of the carrier protected her from the chaos. Human voices passed above her head, jumbled and out of reach, like pigeons flying over the dirt-bottomed pen in the yard where she was born.

Her mother was nowhere to be heard or smelled. Where was the pen in the sun-drenched yard where her fur might blend in with the mica-spiked lemon-orchard dust?

Without warning, the darkness began to swirl around her, swallowing the cursing, crying, and barking in a howling whirlwind. Everything physical seemed to almost melt, making her long for even the cold comfort of the stale and papery-smelling carrier.

She would not cry. Crying showed weakness, and the other Jarveys would sense it. Showing weakness was dangerous without Mamá around.

The world slowed down. Jarvey smells and cardboard walls sorted themselves back out again. The ambient air was different, however... damper, sootier. Instinctively, she could tell that this was no place where palms and lemon trees could grow in gray soil. The day felt older, though almost no time had passed. And there were smells of many wizards and Jarveys, not to mention animals whose names she could not even guess at, many more than Peluchita had ever dreamed existed.

She would not cry.

She would, however, scream at the top of her lungs.

"MAMÁ!"

Author's Notes:

Brooklyn Avenue, one of the main streets through East L.A., was recently renamed Cesar Chavez. By and large, everyone who grew up there still calls it Brooklyn.

There are a ton of Spanish words in here, so please bear with me!

Lechita la Maravillosa: Little Milky the Magnificent

El Circulo Magico: The Magic Circus (I know it seems obvious, but I'm being thorough)

Peluchita: 'Little fuzzy/plushy'

Negríta: Blackie

Rio Plato: Silver River

Dejale: Let it go, drop it

Piojería: lice-infested thing

Cuyate: shut up

Puta: whore

El Colegio de Encantamientos: The School of Enchantments (Colegio in this sense suggests a secondary school than a university)

Fuegos Magicales...Pesadillas del Bombero: Magical Fires...Fireman's Nightmare (some really nasty fireworks)

Tío Pancho: Uncle Frank

Qué Lástima: too bad

Vamos: let's go

Pobrecita: poor thing

Chingate hombron: Fuck you, big bully! (One of Reggie's favorite expressions)

Dejame: let me go

Socorro: help

Hijole: an excited interjection invoking Jesus (Hijo=Son), mainly used in Chicano (US) Spanish

Chico: boy

Por supuesto: of course

Mijo: my son

Pues: well

Andale: hurry up, get on it

Jefe Beto: Boss Bert (Beto is usually short for Alberto)

Gracias: thank you

Platita: little silver

Muy bueno: very good

El Jefe Sudoeste: The Southwest Chief (name of a train...it's still possible to ride an iteration of it today)

'Chema' is a contraction of the name José María

Translation of Leche's lullaby: "Little Plushy, Little Plushy/ My dear, my dear/ Though the world is fucked up/ Mama says 'I love you.'

I couldn't help naming Chema's teacher Sister Mary Benigna. That was the name of a sweet old nun whose accent I never was able to place. We met when I was about three years old and she was, from my perspective, about old enough to have taught Latin to St. Paul. She wasn't a teacher anymore by then, but she helped me practice my colors and my alphabet while I helped her to stuff pillows at the ladies' sewing club (I suspect arthritis kept her from more intricate handiwork).

Eagles, Lunitas, and Dentas: The North and Central American equivalents of Galleons, Sickles, and Knuts. Eagles are gold coins; Lunitas (Spanish for 'little moons') are silver coins; Dentas are copper coins (the name references a common type of money used by indigenous people, made from Dentalium shell). Yes, I made them all up just for the heck of it.

Thank you, Tempest, for signing on for a Jarvey adventure that isn't a laugh-fest. I hope it proves to be worth reading, anyway.

Up next: Little silver Jarvey meets the Big Apple.

2: The Student

Chapter 2 of 5

How, precisely, does a Jarvey become a Fairy God-Jarvey? The answers are all here, from the origin of the name Regina P. Fletcher (including why it's shortened to Reggie instead of Gina) to why Reggie speaks Spanish. Please note—in the time-honored tradition of stories involving animals, this contains a substantial share of sadness. But for those who've become fond of Reggie through 'The Fairy God-Jarvey Chronicles,' I hope it will be worthwhile to learn how one plucky little runt survived it all to become the Fairy God-Jarvey.

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"MAMA!"

Toussaint Biguenet heard the shriek above the cacophony of the Morningside Magical Creatures Exchange. It sounded like a Jarvey. It also sounded like it spoke Spanish. Toussaint sighed. He didn't have time to spend teaching his animals English. He'd been searching for Jarveys all afternoon and was discouraged by the pickings. Usually he needed to train at least half a dozen if he hoped to produce two or three decent show Jarveys and turn a profit from his efforts. At the moment, the two carriers floating behind him contained only four Jarveys in all.

"MAMÁ!"

The little voice broke this time, and took Toussaint's heart with it. He sighed again. Gramma told him on nearly a daily basis that Manhattanville was a bad neighborhood to be tenderhearted in. He turned towards the voice.

Shit. He knew that seller. Toussaint never dealt with him if he could avoid it. Didn't look as if he could avoid it today.

"Looking for Jarveys, boy?"

Fuck you for calling me 'boy,' Toussaint thought viciously. Aloud, he said, "Got a few already, thanks." No way he was going to appear eager to deal with Colonel Slanders. No way he was eager to deal with him, but damned if he was going to leave that crying baby with the bastard.

"This one speaks Spanish."

"Too bad. Haven't got time to teach it English."

"Hey, it speaks English, too."

"Sure it does." Toussaint started to turn away.

"Damn you, runt! Talk English already!"

"Fuck you!"

Toussaint almost laughed, but he didn't need to start a fight. "Never saw that one coming."

"The market's gonna close in two hours. Fifteen Eagles and it's yours."

"Sorry, but I don't see my old friend Mr. Rockefeller in here tonight, otherwise I'd hit him up for a loan. But I'll get back to you after the Slades have their ball this year and I've picked out an heiress."

"Don't sass me, boy. This thing has papers. She's pedigreed."

"I don't care if it has a diploma. All I've got on me is nine and seven," Toussaint said. It was close enough to the truth. He had to keep at least one extra Eagle and four Dentas to buy groceries.

"That's robbery! It wouldn't even pay the cost of the Portkey!"

As if this was the only Jarvey you bought and sold today. "You want me to turn out my pockets?"

The wizard squinted angrily and wrinkled his nose. With his bald head and tiny, dark eyes, he reminded Toussaint quite forcefully of a pig. Gramma had told him pigs got mean when cornered, so Toussaint made sure he knew where his wand and the exit were.

"Shit, boy, I ain't got time for this." He held out his hand. "All right, you've got her for nine and seven."

"Papers first." Toussaint knew the drill. There were anti-Apparition wards on the market, but they only reduced fraud, not eliminated it altogether.

Surprisingly, the man only grunted slightly in annoyance before producing a properly sealed pedigree, though the animal's name appeared to have been written by a child and smudged by someone's nervous sweat. Toussaint couldn't make it out, especially as he didn't recognize the word...presumably one in Spanish. He tucked the papers away in his jacket with those belonging to the other four, and handed over the money. Then he added the Jarvey to one of his divided carriers.

The scrawniness of the animal tempted him to repent of the bargain, but just before he exited the exchange and put the mandatory Silencing Charm on the animals, it whimpered, "I wanna go home."

"We're going home," Toussaint promised.

"Let's see, this is Hank, that one's Babe, that's Sandy, and the little brown one with the points can be Willie. And the silver one... how about Reggie?"

"You and your Muggle baseball!" Gramma Edwina could fret, scold, and clean house all at once. She was talented that way. "And what're you doing calling a bitch Jarvey 'Reggie?'"

"It can be short for Regina," he said, never deviating from his mild tone of voice. He ended the Silencing Charm and the Jarveys all began to swear...until he opened their carriers and set down the dishes of food, at which point they dove silently for their dinner. All but the silver runt.

The other Jarveys ran for the food immediately. Peluchita hung back to ask, "Where's Mamá?"

The wizard with big, sad eyes in his thin, dark face looked at her in surprise. "What?"

"You say we go home. Where's Mamá?" Peluchita knew humans were less than bright, but this one struck her as behaving in an uncharacteristically dense fashion.

"I can't take you to where your momma is, but I promise, I'll take good care of you. This can be your home."

"Fuck you! Want Mamá!" Peluchita was close to panic. *Don't show weakness. Scream, rant, rave...sarcasm is good, too...but don't let on that you're afraid.*

Big, warm hands picked her up. Gentle hands. "I'm sorry, little Reggie. Your momma is really far away...sort of like mine. I can't take you to her. I'm a Jarvey trainer, and I can feed you and take care of you and teach you all sorts of neat stuff. I promise."

Peluchita would have objected to this 'Trainer' guy changing her name, but there was something about him. His hands and voice were kind. Sort of like the little boy who had let her chew his fingers. And he missed his mamá, too. Maybe this was a place for people with no mamá? "Can I be Reggie Peluchita?"

He seemed even more surprised, but still talked to her in a kind voice. "How about 'Reggie P.?'"

She sniffed. "I guess... I wanna go home."

"This can be your home." He held her for a long time, not insisting that she eat with the animals on the floor but feeding her from his hand.

Reggie didn't realize that she had fallen asleep between one bite and the next until she woke up on a pillow next to 'Trainer's' warm, fluffy head. Unlike any wizards or Jarveys she had met before, he smelled of something she could only call gentleness. She snuggled next to his ear and went back to sleep.

"Why do you read to those things? It's not as if they're going to college." Gramma Edwina was heading to work, and she liked to make certain Toussaint knew how unhappy she was with the general state of the universe before she started the dinner shift and he started a long night of homework and Jarvey training.

"They sell better if they can say something besides 'fuck,'" he retorted.

"Those beasts are giving you a filthy mouth," she said with a scowl.

Toussaint didn't bother to argue. He only swore because he was weary of her constant criticisms of his entrepreneurial endeavors. "Here, have some Shakespeare," he said, as much to Gramma as to the animals. He began reading 'Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day?' Reggie scrambled into his lap at once. He had never needed to keep her in the pen with the rest of the untrained Jarveys...she'd taken to box training immediately and was able to heel and come when called in less than a week. He didn't even have to call her when it was time to listen to poetry; she lived for any sort of reading.

Most of the Jarveys eventually mimicked some words and phrases they'd heard in the evening reading; a few simply continued spouting profanity. Reggie was the only Jarvey Toussaint had ever encountered who asked about the meaning of words. He had to keep a dictionary by his side during 'Jarvey College,' as Edwina derisively named it, because sometimes even he wasn't quite sure what some of the words meant. Eventually he resorted to taking her to the library in his pocket and reading quietly aloud from encyclopedias to satisfy her hunger for more words.

Every time he heard her say another intelligent thing, his heart wavered painfully between soaring and plummeting, because he knew that he couldn't afford not to sell her...but that it would break his heart to let her go. Still, there were times when it broke his heart for her to stay... especially when she kept asking questions.

"Where are the other ones?"

"What other ones?"

"The other Jarveys, hombron."

"I sold them."

"What the fuck for? What did they do?"

"They didn't do anything. It's just how I help Gramma make ends meet. We can't get everything from magic. Magic helps us get by, but if we ever want to leave this place... live in a real house... get me into college, so I can have a good job... we need money."

Toussaint made the mistake of thinking Reggie's silence meant she was done with her questions.

"Do you think they miss us?"

Uncomfortable silence. Toussaint answered with a question. "Do you miss them?"

"Not really. Babe was an asshole. Willie and Sandy were kinda nice, but they couldn't hold up their end of a conversation with a crane. Hank was sorta loco. But I mean... what if the people who bought them were real fuckers or something?"

"I looked for good people to buy them." It was true. Toussaint never sold to anyone who had a reputation for cruelty. But he was uncomfortably aware that there was no guarantee that they would stay with those people.

There was an even longer silence, and Toussaint feared that Reggie would ask if she was to be sold as well. That made her next question all the more surprising, putting him off balance.

"Where's my Mamá?"

"It says on your papers that you're from Los Angeles."

"So, that's where she is?"

"I figure so."

"Is that where your momma is, too?"

"Sort of... she's with... angels," he said, controlling his voice with effort. He'd paid more attention to Spanish since he'd gotten Reggie.

"Can we go there?"

"Someday. Maybe we'll go to Los Angeles," he said, carefully separating the two answers with a period that bridged infinity.

Toussaint returned to the Exchange and another small 'graduating class' of Jarveys came and went. One by one, the Jarveys from his latest batch were sold. Those who only acquired the basics of house training and whose vocabularies failed to improve after a month or so, went first...occasionally at a loss once the cost of feeding them was factored in. The ones who showed improvement were trained for a few more weeks, sometimes learning advanced tricks like handshaking or shoulder riding. These generally went for a fair sum and helped Toussaint justify continuing the operation to his grandmother.

Reggie stayed, sleeping on Toussaint's pillow and wearing a little blue collar when he took her for walks. He did the walking...she rode in his pocket. Reggie had never grown to proper Jarvey size and had told Toussaint, in no uncertain terms, that the devil would need to defrost his balls the day she would wear a leash. Each week, Toussaint found a new argument against selling her. She wasn't big enough yet (though privately he suspected that she would never grow beyond her current size, a little more than half that of a normal adult Jarvey). She was so trainable that he could sell her as a trick Jarvey for a fortune if he just taught her for a little longer; the market was bad at the moment, and he couldn't get her full price yet; he was searching for a connection who would pay the princely sum she was surely worth.

Reggie awoke to yet another argument between her trainer, whose name she now knew was Toussaint, and the witch he called 'Gramma.'

"Don't waste your time with classes at that crazy Muggle school."

"But I haven't got that much magic, Gramma. I'll take knowledge anywhere I can get it, even if I can't get a degree out of it."

"Your mother was the smartest person I ever knew, and it didn't do her one damn bit of good without a diploma. Without those pieces of paper, child, all the knowledge in the world won't do you any more good than it does those Jarveys."

"I *know*, Gramma. I want to get into one of the three universities in the country that offer both Magical and non-magical education, and that means impressing admissions people at the interviews. I don't want to be stuck in one world or the other. I'm not a Squib like Momma, and I'm going to be a real wizard, not just some home-taught voodoo priest!"

Edwina's face closed up. Without another word, she shoved her wand in her purse and headed out the door.

Toussaint realized his mistake. "Wait, Gramma! I'm sorry!" She refused to look him in the eyes as he pleaded with her. "I didn't mean it like that. I know you do real magic, not voodoo. I just don't want to let you down, like Momma did."

Edwina looked up at him and began to cry. "She never let me down. It was the whole world that let her down, sugar."

He was crying now, too. "It'll work out, Gramma. I promise."

"Well, 'till it does, there's still a restaurant in need of a cook." She gave him a kiss on the cheek and hustled off down the stairs, blowing her nose as she went.

By the time Reggie stopped pretending to be asleep, Toussaint had his saxophone out and was playing it for all he was worth. First, he played fast and angry sounds, teetering on the verge between cacophony and be-bop; then, he segued into bitter blues, and finally, forced himself back into hopeful jazz. He let the last note hang a moment before cleaning his saxophone to put away.

Toussaint read words. Reggie read moods, though she was picking up the odd written word here and there. It was time to talk to him now. "That last one was pretty damned good. What's it called?"

"Five o'clock Jump.' The original title was 'Blueballs,' but they couldn't say that on the radio," he explained.

"I like the original name better."

Toussaint laughed. "You would!"

"Why is Gramma so pissed off at us?"

He took evasive action. "What makes you think she's mad at you, too?"

"Don't fuck with me, amigo. I can smell it." Reggie twitched her whiskers at him and waited out the inevitable sighs.

"I'm not a very powerful wizard. Gramma is sort of low on magic, and Momma was a Squib. Dad was a Muggle musician who rented a room from them. I guess I'm lucky I can do magic at all."

If I stare long enough, he'll get the hint.

Her human was well trained. It only took a few minutes of fixing her glittering eyes on him before he elaborated. "She wants me to become an apprentice to someone...maybe back in New Orleans, where she was born. I don't want to. I like school... Muggle school. And I want to go to a real Wizarding school, somewhere I can find out what sort of things an almost-Squib with a saxophone can do to be useful."

"Where is this school?"

"There are three of them, but I want to go to one in California." He took a worn postcard from the bottom of his saxophone case. Reggie gazed at trees and huge stone buildings, framed by a gate, with a bell tower adding the exclamation point to the sentence.

"Isn't that where Los Angeles is?"

"Yeah. The school is pretty far from Los Angeles, though. But I was thinking we could maybe, I don't know, perform in the magic pavilion in Central Park...you could dance and tell jokes, and I'd play the sax. We'd save up the money for the Portkey to Oakland, maybe even the beginnings of tuition money. I could go to school during the day, and we could perform at night. Maybe we could even make enough to send some back to Gramma."

Reggie wanted to return to California. She wanted to find out if her dim memories of the slightly sweet smell of gray dust under lemon trees and of Jacaranda blossoms smeared on pavement like thin purple flesh were accurate. She wanted to find out if the tang of sun, cilantro, and hot exhaust fumes in the air was really as intense as she remembered. She wanted to see the blinding colors of roses and hibiscus, which she instinctively knew bloomed there while New York was enveloped in the damp, gray, and slightly sulfurous cocoon of autumn and winter. She wanted to find out if her mother's fur was as white and soft as she remembered.

"Hell, what's stopping us? Sounds like a fucking plan."

"I... well, it's not so much a plan as a dream, I guess. I'm not really sure how it would work."

It sounded like he needed a push. "Tell me the poem about holding dreams again."

Toussaint closed his eyes and recited:

'Hold fast to dreams

For if dreams die

Life is a broken-winged bird

That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams

For when dreams go

Life is a barren field

Frozen with snow.'

"I like that poem. Guy who wrote it knew his ass from a hole in the ground, for sure."

That made Toussaint laugh. "I'm sure Mr. Hughes would be happy to know you like his work."

Reggie felt hopeful, seeing Toussaint relax. Maybe sometime soon she could get him to do something about this dream of his. "Hey, you pay the 'lectrics bill this month?"

"Yeah. Wanna watch the late movie?"

"Does a dog piss on a fireplug?"

Reggie and Toussaint spent the rest of the night laughing as Abbot tried to tell Costello 'Who's on First?'

Edwina always shrank when the door closed behind her.

In the restaurant, on the street, in church, her head was held high, a small hat perched defiantly upon her mass of snowy hair. She might be reduced to cooking for other wizards and witches now, but when she was sixteen she had made her debut at an Octoroon Ball. She had been groomed to be the toast of an elite segment of New Orleans' Society, one where 'pureblood' had a meaning Muggles could never imagine. She had caught a very influential eye that night. She had gone to the apartments above the ballroom with a very wealthy, very pureblooded wizard.

And then she had a baby... a baby who turned out to be a Squib.

The hell of it was that New Orleans, in its inimitably eclectic fashion, had high places in society for Squibs and bastards. It had just been her extraordinary bad fortune to associate with a wizard whose family would tolerate the latter, but not the former. She and her beautiful, magic-less daughter were unceremoniously handed a packet of Eagles and put on a train north. She had only a vague notion of New York's existence when she was sent there; all she knew was that she was being exiled into snowy winters, earth tainted by moldering bodies, and a too-fast, undignified pace of life.

Had she known that she would also be subjected to taking in Muggle musicians as lodgers, she might well have left her baby in a basket in the rushes, metaphorically speaking, and leapt into the river.

Stripped of elite manners, most of her accent, and whatever delicacy and squeamishness she may have once possessed, all Edwina Charlotte Biguenet had left was her dignity. Once she slipped into the apartment and her shoulders sagged under the weary burden of watching a century go by, even that seemed to desert her. Coming home to find that the Jarvey was still there, sleeping in *her* chair, was the last straw. She knew where Toussaint kept the papers for his animals. It took all of two minutes to stuff them in her purse and magically shove the Jarvey into a carrier.

Edwina felt even smaller than her diminutive five feet nothing in the Morningside Magical Creatures Exchange. It didn't help her self-assurance that she had forgotten to Silence the Jarvey before Apparating. Somehow, she felt too dizzy to do it now.

"Gramma, don't sell me!"

"I'm not your Gramma," she said angrily, feeling more confused by the minute. "Toussaint bought you to sell, and that's what's going to happen to you."

"Fuck that! He's my only friend in the world!"

"If he's your friend, you go along! He's always telling me you're worth a fortune...don't you know what kind of life he can buy for himself if he has the money?"

"We had a plan, damn it! We were going to perform together...we would raise money for his dream!"

"Dreams don't fill your belly or pay the rent. He'll have plenty of time to dream when he's got a roof over his head that doesn't leak."

The voice of the animal in the carrier grew soft, but it managed to pierce Edwina's ears and land uncomfortably close to her heart: 'What happens to a dream deferred?'

Does it dry up

like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore--

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over--

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?'

"You talk too much," Edwina muttered.

Someone called out the closing time for the market. She tried desperately to remember what Toussaint had said about where he got the best prices. Was it the exporters? That sounded right. Now to catch them before they left.

One wizard stood out among the exporters, his hair as silver as that of the Jarvey she was selling, his eyes very nearly as pale. He seemed as good a place to start as any. She approached him in a fair imitation of her debutante walk, unused for nearly a century.

"I have a Jarvey to sell," Edwina said, holding her head high and cradling the carrier as if it were a bouquet.

"I only deal in trained animals," the wizard said. His accent was British and his tone was dismissive.

"This animal is trained. She is a fully pedigreed, highly trained trick Jarvey. Don't let her size mislead you. My grandson knows his business." Edwina offered Reggie's papers as evidence, barely concealing her relief when the man deigned to look at them... barely concealing her embarrassment when he tested them not once, but three times, for authenticity.

"It's plainly a runt. I'll give you twenty five Eagles, assuming it actually speaks."

"You fucking MORON! I'm worth four times that! Chingate!" Reggie spewed filth at the man, mortifying Edwina and amusing the passersby with the creativity of her insults.

"Your boy is a dab hand at training these things, isn't he," the dealer said dryly.

"He trained her to recite Shakespeare," Edwina said, pulling shreds of dignity around her as an inadequate shield against sarcasm. "He can't help it if the beast has a mind of its own."

The buyer drew his wand to Stupefy Reggie, but she dodged the spell and screamed desperately at Edwina again. "If you're going to sell my ass, at least get what I'm worth so Toussaint can have his dream!"

"She says she's worth four times that...not a Denta under one hundred Eagles," Edwina said.*Chin up; steady... steady.* Strains of a waltz played in the back of her mind as she called upon her memories of the Crescent City's royalty to buoy her up.

Whatever disdainful remark the man was going to make was cut off by words ringing forth from the carrier:

'No more be grieved at that which thou hast done:

Roses have thorns, and silver fountains mud;

Clouds and eclipses stain both moon and sun,

And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud.

All men make faults, and even I in this,

Authorizing thy trespass with compare,

Myself corrupting, salving thy amiss,

Excusing thy sins more than thy sins are;

For to thy sensual fault I bring in sense...

Thy adverse party is thy advocate...

And 'gainst myself a lawful plea commence:

Such civil war is in my love and hate

That I an accessory needs must be

To that sweet thief which sourly robs from me.'

In the silence that followed, he counted out one hundred Eagles, took Reggie's papers, had Edwina sign a document which he magically copied, and transferred his prize to a locked cage.

"The market is closing in ten minutes!"

Wizards and animals scrambled like ants in a broken nest. Feeling as if her purse was weighted down with blood money, Edwina fought her way to the entry of the building and Disappeared.

Back in the apartment, Edwina felt dizzy. She clutched at the table.*Need to Apparate more often to stay in practice,* she thought, just before all her thoughts dissolved in a chaotic jumble. By the time she crashed to the floor, her body was too numb to feel the impact.

Through a rapidly graying world, she saw but did not hear Toussaint open the door and scream. But she tried, before the world went altogether dark, to tell him what she and the little beast had done for him.

"GRAMMA!"

Edwina's skin was dead gray and cooling, and Toussaint wasted precious minutes chaffing her leaden wrists, only to hear her slur something that sounded like, "'sappens twa dream'ferred."

In desperation, he snatched her purse from the table and rushed to the pay telephone in the hallway. His fingers shook as he fumbled with the contents of the bag in a confused attempt to find Muggle change and dial at the same time. He almost dropped the receiver when it finally registered in his mind that the reason it had been so hard to find a dime was that *the purse was stuffed with Eagles*.

He sat on the floor beside Gramma and counted them in the eternity it took for an ambulance to arrive. Fifteen Lunitas... seven Dentas... a dollar and sixty-five cents in Muggle money. And one hundred Eagles.

One hundred Eagles.

And... a copy of a bill of sale... from the Morningside Magical Creatures Exchange. Signed by Gramma, acknowledging she'd been paid in full by the exporter.

Which all had to be swept back into the purse when the bored-looking ambulance attendants came to the door, searched for Edwina's pulse, said a few perfunctory things about elderly people and sudden strokes, and offered to take her body to the morgue.

Every step Toussaint jogged towards the docks, he was sure he would burst open. The jarring would shoot up through the worn rubber soles of his shoes, jolt into his belly, burst it, and cause the despair and bitterness roiling within to pour out onto the pavement. His thoughts whirled in painful confusion, blinding him to the streetlights flickering on late. *Why wouldn't Gramma work with me more, so I could learn to Apparate? Why am I such a pathetic almost-Squib that I haven't learned to do it? Why was I at that fucking class when I should have been home, keeping Gramma from selling off my best friend and then dying on me? Can I find the right ship, and will whoever bought Reggie give her to me and take this fucking money back?*

The river... the river was ahead. He didn't begin to know where to look. He ran along the water's edge and screamed, regardless of the strange looks and rude remarks from the longshoremen.

"REGGIE!"

He could have sworn he heard Reggie's voice. But as he called and called and no further sounds were forthcoming, he concluded he must have imagined it. He didn't realize that there were more ships docked there than could be seen. Cloaked in such glammers that not even wizards could watch them sink into the deep, the huge bubbles and the massive sucking sound that marked their strange form of Disapparation went unnoticed.

Toussaint went to the preacher to make arrangements for Gramma's funeral.*Will it cost five Lunitas... or Eagles... to preach Gramma to her grave?* he thought disjointedly. *She wouldn't want even one 'fine' Muggle car involved... wish I could find enough tears to make it grand.* He agreed when the preacher suggested cremation and interment in the Poor Wizards' Vault in Hamilton Heights, remembering something about the dead being buried above ground in New Orleans, where Gramma had been born. He could feel himself nodding in all the right places, saying all the right words as the older man prayed, but aside from that, he felt nothing. Maybe it was too soon to feel anything. Maybe it was too late.

He returned home, only to realize... it wasn't, anymore. Gramma and Reggie had made it home. With just himself there, it was only a couple of cheap rooms that only

Cooling and Warming Charms saved from being an unlivable oven in summer and an icy deathtrap in winter.

'sappens twa dream'ferred...

What... happens... to a dream deferred?

Gramma had never liked 'modern' poetry. Reggie was the only one in the house who shared his admiration for Langston Hughes. For Gramma to have quoted that poem... Reggie must have spoken to her. The word 'sacrifice' stabbed his brain, but he shook it off, trying to cling to the numbness now. Gramma was with Momma now; they wouldn't blame him if he left others to see to the funeral. Reggie was... he couldn't quite bear to think of that.

He dragged the musty carpetbag from the top shelf of the closet. Gramma had brought it up from New Orleans decades ago, and it smelled of mothballs and old magic. His clothes and toothbrush he tossed in carelessly; Gramma's wand and the family Bible (he checked to make sure the faded photos were still safely in the back) were tucked into the bottom with reverence. He finally decided to add Shakespeare's Sonnets to the top of the scanty pile of possessions, not certain he'd ever read them again. It seemed unfaithful to do so without Reggie.

As he was picking up his saxophone case, the handle broke. He very nearly kicked the thing across the room in frustration; he stopped himself just in time with a massive pulse of self-control. Aside from one creased photo in the back of Gramma's Bible, the instrument and its worn case was his one reminder of his father. He didn't think he could live with himself if he wrecked it.

Now the tears came, and the guilt that he couldn't find them sooner.

"How the hell am I supposed to fix this thing?" There was no way the ragged case would respond to another 'Reparo'. Then, his eyes fell on a little scrap of blue leather...Reggie's collar. It was strange to pick it up. He almost expected to feel a physical pain upon touching the thing, but all he felt was suede on one side and pebbly grain on the other. He couldn't quite see the little 'R' he'd magicked on to the nickel-plate buckle through the blurriness in his eyes, but he could feel it. Somehow, it was as reassuring as it was painful.

"I guess you're coming along after all, Reggie," he said softly, and carefully Charmed the little bit of blue leather into the place of the broken handle. Instrument case in one hand and bag tucked under the same arm (it wouldn't do to occupy his wand hand late at night, especially since he still had the rest of Reggie's price on him), he left the apartment.

A blue suede handle on a black leather saxophone case in the middle of Penn Station was not the most monumental of discrepancies. But he was the sort of man who noticed such things.

From the handle, he went to noticing the case. Looked like it had been around the world by owl relay a couple of times, through storms all the way. Except when it was being drop kicked along by angry trolls.

From the case, he went to noticing the man carrying it. Just barely a man, but he had that look on his face of not being a child anymore. That young face didn't fit the old case, or the even older bag. All of it reeked of being held together by magic and a few fervent prayers. Heirlooms, then. And the boy was a wizard, or wanted to be one. Once he'd sensed the aura of magic about the objects, he noticed the outline of a wand in the young man's pocket. It helped that he touched it every so often for reassurance, probably not as casually as he would have liked.

"Which Portkey you taking?"

The younger man almost jumped, but not quite. "Oakland. Then over to Berkeley."

The man nodded at the case. "Got a gig?"

A shake of the head. "I'm hoping to raise tuition money."

"That's ambitious, without a gig. Can you play that thing, or is it just your security blanket?"

Utterly unselfconscious, the young man set down his burdens and pulled out the sax. A few tweaks and a wipe from the rag in the corner of the box, and suddenly, the air was filled with the essence of melancholy so pure, it was beautiful.

Passengers stopped and stared, oblivious to their trains or Portkeys being announced. Conversations faltered and died. Magic-using passengers reached for their wands, uncertain if this was spelled music. Then, they just let themselves be caught up and listen.

The young man lowered the instrument from his lips. After a few moments of utter silence, people shook themselves and clapped. Again, without the least indication of nervousness, the sax player gave a little bow and put away his instrument.

"What do you call that?"

"Goodbye, Reggie."

"Here's my card, son. You've got a gig. If you still want to spend the rest of your time on school and your money on paying for it, you'd best learn Healing Music. Anything else would be a waste."

The smells of thousands of magical beasts, Muggle chemicals, rust, salt, and dead fish made Reggie sick and dizzy. No doubt the thought of leaving Toussaint behind would have left her just as ill had she been riding first class in a jet plane, but she convinced herself that she was glad to make the sacrifice for him, and everything would be better as soon as she left this wretched hole.

"REGGIE!"

Somehow, over the creaking of cranes, shrieking of seagulls, yelling men and grinding, whining gears, Reggie heard him. "HERE!" she shrieked. "Toussaint, I'm in here!" To hell with sacrifice. They would take the money and Gramma with them on the run. Frantic to reach him, she began worrying the latch with her teeth. They'd put an especially good lock on the cage, but Reggie was an especially clever Jarvey. She knew that if she could get her teeth into the right places, the thing should spring open.

Just as the lock shivered and seemed to give slightly, the magic kicked in and she, the cage, and everything around them spun away from there.

Author's Notes:

Spanish Vocabulary

(I know, if you've been following the series, you know these by now...but if there are any new riders on the rollercoaster...in which case, you should be reading the other stories first, chronology notwithstanding)

Los Angeles: The Angels. (The full name of the original Spanish settlement was 'El Pueblo de Nuestra Senora la Reina de Los Angeles del Rio Porciuncula,' which translates as 'Town of Our Lady, Queen of Angels, of the River Porciuncula.' In other words, the city is named after Mary, not the angels; but this technicality was forgotten,

so far as I can tell, approximately fifteen minutes after the settlement was named.)

Amigo: friend (masculine)

Chingate: fuck you (one of Reggie's all-time favorite expressions) especially when combined with...

Hombron: big bully

I figured it was only fair to mention a wealthy Wizarding family in New York...the Slades...as well as the standard-issue Rockefellers. (If you've done your required reading for this one, you might remember Leocadia Slade from 'The Fairy God-Jarvey's Apprentice.') For the record, the Slades made their fortune in the wizarding world's entertainment industry.

Morningside Heights roughly marks the southern border of Harlem in New York City. (Thanks to Wikipedia for a handy map that confirmed that these places were exactly where I thought they were.)

The baseball players Toussaint named his last batch of Jarveys after are Hank Aaron, Babe Ruth, Sandy Koufax, Willie Mays, and Reggie Jackson.

125th street (where Toussaint and Edwina lived) is today called Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. and more or less marks the boundary of an area called Manhattanville. The Apollo Theater, The Theresa Hotel, and Langston Hughes' home are on or near 125th. Edwina and Toussaint are no doubt arguing about the City College of New York, located north of 125th street on Amsterdam Avenue. In the 1950s, it was infamously radical, and Edwina would have certainly formed her own negative opinions about it during that time period...just as she'd been forming opinions about everything in New York since approximately the 1870s.

The poems 'Dreams' and 'A Dream Deferred' are by Langston Hughes. Toussaint is mentally paraphrasing the Langston Hughes poem 'Night Funeral in Harlem' when he visits the preacher.

Abbot and Costello performed the 'Who's on First?' sketch many times throughout their career...always from memory, often improvising new bits on the spot. I'm assuming that Reggie was exposed to it in a late night showing of 'The Naughty Nineties,' the film in which they performed what is considered the definitive version of that legendary routine.

Reggie recites Shakespeare's 35th Sonnet to the exporter...simultaneously sealing the deal on her own sale and forgiving Edwina.

Reggie isn't your run of the mill Jarvey...obviously. If you're thinking the details of this story make it sound like she is very old, indeed, for an animal (even a magical one) by the time she meets Severus and Hermione...you're absolutely right.

Up next: Reggie makes friends in low places.

3: The Entertainer

Chapter 3 of 5

How, precisely, does a Jarvey become a Fairy God-Jarvey? The answers are all here, from the origin of the name Regina P. Fletcher (including why it's shortened to Reggie instead of Gina), to why Reggie speaks Spanish. Please note—in the time-honored tradition of stories involving animals, this contains a substantial share of sadness. But for those who've become fond of Reggie through 'The Fairy God-Jarvey Chronicles,' I hope it will be worthwhile to learn how one plucky little runt survived it all to become the Fairy God-Jarvey.

Disclaimer: This story is based on a more-or-less logical expansion of concepts and characters set forth in the "Harry Potter" novels by J.K. Rowling, who is not me; therefore, I make no money from borrowing this universe, nor do I claim to possess any right thereto. Only the Jarvey is mine, and some original human characters. (I don't think anyone minds that I borrowed Dung for a bit.)

Chapter 3: The Entertainer

Reggie felt dizzy. It was different from the dizziness that came from riding a Portkey, and it left her so disoriented that she couldn't find the door of her cage for several precious minutes. Then it didn't matter, because the flat upon which the Jarvey cages were stacked was being levitated out of the hold and into a foggy, cold evening in a place that did not smell like New York. Or Los Angeles. Or anywhere Reggie had ever been before.

A whisper from an accent so heavy Reggie had trouble making out the words snapped her back to alertness. "Jarveys are over 'ere. Good job they've been Silenced for the journey, otherwise they'd be raisin' 'ell by now."

"Oh, that's what you think, is it, Fletcher? Bloody things would give us a bit of cover if they'd make some noise, what?"

"Not much time, then...thissiz brilliant, if I do say so meself. Get out the dead'un."

The other voice rasped in the darkness, offering a dissenting opinion. Reggie decided that, whatever these asswipes' differences were, they were no concern of hers. She finished picking the lock with her teeth, feeling a jolt of magic as she did so. Evidently the cage had magical as well as mechanical fastenings...though whoever had cast them hadn't counted on a magical creature of great determination working on them from the inside.

Of course, Reggie hadn't counted on a magical alarm.

"Run, Fletcher!"

"Thanks for tossin' me name out when there's an alarm, Grobarty!"

Reggie pushed her way out of the cage and looked for a way past the arguing men. Neither looked like someone you'd want to run into in a dark alley.

"What are you DOING?"

"Gettin' a Jarvey, you plonker!"

"Do it alone, Fletcher, I'm gone." A loud *Crack!* sounded.

It occurred to Reggie an instant too late that if someone wanted to steal a Jarvey, the logical choice would be the one OUTSIDE of a cage. The next thing she knew, a foul-smelling paw of a hand had her by the scruff of her neck, and she was being sucked into the dark again.

"Dejáme! Chingando Hombron! Lemme go, you stinkin', fuckin' asshole!"

The stinking asshole in question drew a wand to Stun Reggie, but she bit him...satisfyingly hard...and his aim went wide. He cursed (impressively, for a human), and yelled, "Uncle, take this soddin' beast before it bites me 'and off!"

A door flew open, and dim illumination crept into the hallway of the dreary building, as if even unthinking candlelight feared to dispute the darkness of the place. "Dung! You stupid pillock! That's not how to hold a Jarvey!" A less odoriferous paw snatched Reggie away by the scruff of her neck, and she found herself held in such a way that she couldn't bite.

Her new captor studied Reggie critically, with faded yet keen blue eyes. "Nicked, I'm sure. At least it looks weaned, though I expect it's asking too much for it to be house trained."

"Bet I'm more house-trained than you, you leaky old fucker!"

The blue eyes turned their sharpness back to 'Dung.' Reggie couldn't help but think the sorry bastard was aptly named, judging from his smell. "Damn you, Mundungus, this one talks like a show beast...someone'll be after it, and I'm too old to be put away for possession of a dodgy Jarvey!"

"Oi, swear to Merlin, I found it runnin' loose! And just in case, I left the body of your old Jarvey where I found this'un...wiv changes."

"Fine. But if the law darkens me threshold, don't expect me to leave your name out of it." He ducked out of the hallway and shut the door.

"You're very welcome!" came a muffled voice.

"Boy's an utter pillock," the man muttered, pulling a worn and slightly stumpy wand from his pocket.

"Don't you dare point that thing at me, old man!"

"I don't fancy being bitten by you, nor having you scream for your owner, and...why am I discussing this with you?"

"Stupid son-of-a-bitch. I was trying to escape from the shit-ass who bought me, on account of his attitude sucked. I couldn't give two fucks whether he lost money on me or not. And if you feed me, I won't have to bite your filthy fingers."

The old man snorted. "You'll find my fingers are clean and well-groomed, my foul, furry friend. I'm a respectable entertainer, I am. By your relatively fluent speech, I'm assuming that you've been trained as a trick Jarvey, young as you are..."

"I'm full-grown, shit head. Remember that, or I'll find plenty to say about *your* size."

"...and if you show me what tricks you do, why, we'll talk about food. Then we'll start on the tricks you'll need for *my* act."

"Tricks, my ass. You want entertainment, you fuckin' moron? Here's entertainment, highbrow stuff, no less." Reggie proceeded to recite the first thing that came to her mind: "Shall I compare thee to a Summer's Day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate..." For good measure, she followed up with, "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun..." And she only used a modicum of profanity in the recitation.

Humphrey W. Fletcher had never in his life been more speechless. He shook his head, and went to pour a dish of milk for the Jarvey. "The first thing we need to do is get rid of that accent of yours," he said as he set it before her.

She gave it a sniff, deciding it wasn't too far gone to drink, especially for someone as hungry and thirsty as she was. "I'm not the one with the accent, pendejo."

Humphrey Fletcher frequently remarked that he shouldn't have been surprised that his new pet had mastered the slang and insults of the British Isles far more quickly than the accent. Reggie frequently responded that if he wanted to be an absolute berk, he could ask his no-good thievin' nephew to nick him another Jarvey that could speak two languages, recite almost half of Shakespeare's sonnets from memory, and take verbal instructions rather than needing to be trained like a dumb dog. He usually responded with a gravelly sound in his throat and a flick of his wand, setting the table with props.

Truth to tell, Reggie was studying the accent carefully, trying to sort out how she herself wished to speak. Old man Fletcher obviously used different accents depending on his situation. At home and with his associates, he spoke a bit like Mundungus, her stinking savior. When they practiced their stage act, he ran an entire gamut of speech patterns, from the refined to the ridiculous. Sometimes the gap between the two was negligible.

Humans puzzled Reggie. Everyone she'd ever been close to had spoken a little differently, so there obviously wasn't any agreement on how to speak English. She decided it was a good thing she spoke profanity. It seemed like the closest thing there was to a universal language.

Speaking of talking...

"Now, you're too small to do the stunts old Luke could perform. That act was getting stale, in any event. We'll be coming up with a new act, but if you feel like you can't talk proper, keep your gob shut. Unless I need you playing an obnoxious American." Reggie responded to that with the profanity it deserved, but heeded his explanation of their act, anyway.

After three rehearsals, Reggie was feeling frustrated. "That's your idea of a NEW act? Even for an old fart, you're way behind the times."

"Oh? And what, exactly, is in keepin' with the times, you little over-edyeecated runt?"

"Listen to this, you antique tosser."

Fletcher wore an expression of extreme confusion by the time the Jarvey was done.

"What in the bleedin' hell is blaze-ball?"

"Ah, fuck it, I forgot that wizards have different sports. Me trainer was partial to Muggle games, but he mentioned Clockpot and Quizzitch once."

"I don't know about the other, but it's Quidditch, you foul little flea-trap. I wouldn't expect a creature with such a barbaric accent to unnerstand the finer points of that ancient an' noble game, but..."

"Try me, wanker."

By the time Humphrey was finished diagramming a Quidditch pitch and positions on his charmed board and had animated them to describe the rudiments of the game,

Reggie's whiskers were twitching with excitement.

"Look, fuckwit, don't you see...all we have to do is switch over the names of the positions...instead of 'First Baseman' say 'Chaser,' and so on..."

Humphrey grabbed a quill and ink and started scribbling on the back of a tea-stained program from a closed show.

If the state of Fletcher's rooms (dignifying the space with the name 'flat' was a bit more than even the old man's sense of irony could stomach) wasn't enough to alert Reggie to the fact that Humphrey W. Fletcher was no A-list entertainer, his performance venue erased all doubt. Or, more accurately, his reception by the venue's manager did so.

"What do you want, Fletcher?"

Fletcher straightened his shabby robes with the air of a headliner arriving just in time to save the show. Reggie figured the velvet garment had been the height of fashion once. But that had been a lot of long-lost pile and several shades of rusting and purpling black ago. "Why, Mr. Huntley, you're beginning to worry me. Do you mean to say you've forgotten who one of your premier acts is?"

Reggie was impressed. Fletcher was using yet another way of speaking, one that could probably best be characterized as the poshest accent this side of mockery.

"With that terminal case of mange you call your familiar, you were a bit of variety on the bill. Without it, you're just another cut-rate comedian, and we've our quota of them this week. Why don't you see if there's a corner in Diagon Alley where they'll let you set up your hat?"

"Ah, good sir, it seems you were, indeed, hit with a memory charm by some scoundrel. Surely everyone has heard that I've remedied the sad loss of my former business associate, the estimable Mr. Lukas, and have a lovely new talent to accompany me on the stage."

It took Huntley a moment to register the presence of another living thing in the vicinity.

"What *is* that thing, Fletcher? An animate handkerchief?"

Reggie climbed out of Fletcher's breast pocket, bristling with a retort, when the old man quickly spoke over her. "Why, this dainty young lady? This is Miss Regina, my new assistant."

"I'm the bloody star of your act, I am," she corrected him. "And the name's Reggie."

Huntley eyed them both with a distinct lack of enthusiasm, but finally jerked his thumb towards the backstage area. "Better hit your 'star' with 'Engorgio' before going on. Some of the patrons are nearsighted."

"I'll hit *you* with something, you wanking ball-ache!"

Reggie decided that she needed to work on her intimidation skills, because this only caused the manager to turn and run a jaundiced eye over them both. "Are you sure that's a real Jarvey? It almost sounds like it knows what it's talking about."

"Look, pendejo, just because *you* never know what you're talking about..."

"Aha! You've found yourself an unregistered Animagus, haven't you, you sly old Kneazle! I'm impressed, Fletcher. I never realized Animagi could turn into magical creatures."

Fletcher cleared his throat. "Now, Mr. Huntley, no need to go accuse me of consorting with the criminal element."

Huntley gave a short bark of laughter. "That's rich, considering who your nephew is. Don't worry, old man, your secret is safe with me...IF you two keep the audience awake and amused."

"What's he babbling about, Gramps?"

"He thinks you're an Animagus."

"Talk some version of English, you pillock. Unless you learned Spanish when I wasn't looking."

"An Animagus is a wizard who can turn into an animal."

"Chingando hombron! Where does he get off calling me a wizard?"

"I know it's a mortal insult, Regina dear, but do try to contain your ire."

"Well, it's all right for you, old timer, you're human. I've got me furry pride, you know."

Fletcher chuckled. "I see you're finally learning to speak English. Had to go with that particular accent, did you?"

"Don't know what you're on about. I'm not the one with the accent."

"Not anymore, you're not."

Somehow, in all the times they had rehearsed their lines, practiced their gestures and motions, and tried on their costumes (even after Fletcher had adjusted the fit almost flawlessly, Reggie had nothing nice to say about her tiny Quidditch robes), it had never really occurred to Reggie that 'performing' meant 'doing this all in front of lots of other people.'

She peered around Fletcher's head of snow-white hair as they waited in the wings. At the sight and smell of the number of wizards in front of the stage, she blanched under her fur.

"Fletcher! Psst! Old timer, what the hell is that? A mob?"

"That, my dear, is our audience. Now, get into character and don't forget your lines. We're going on in two minutes."

"Fuck! What do you mean, 'going on'? The fucking WORLD is out there!"

"If only it were. Come on, Reggie! This is what puts food on our table, such as it is. Swallow your stage fright and come along, or that's about all you'll have to swallow!"

Which was how, a minute and a half later, Reggie found herself clinging to the old man's shoulder for dear life, blinded by white light and assailed by an overpowering murmur of voices and odors from the shadowy throng in front of the stage. Suddenly, the sound died down, leaving only the glare and the smell. She was lost again, like a kit sold away from its mum, adrift in the too-quiet, too-musty brightness.

Until Fletcher's voice cut the silence like a knife, tossing her a lifeline...in the form of the opening line. She clung to it with all her strength, her brain beginning to supply the correct answering words.

"Aren't you the Manager?"

"I most certainly am."

"Then you oughtta know the players' names."

"Of course!"

"Then, who's the Chaser?"

"He's one of them."

"Who?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me already?"

"Who's the Chaser."

"That's what I'm asking!"

A few chuckles; the audience was beginning to catch on.

"No, 'What' is one of our Beaters."

By the time they got to 'I Don't Know's the other Beater,' Jarvey and wizard had to raise their voices to be heard above the din of guffaws. But Reggie was only peripherally aware of them. Her world was the voice of her master and partner, and they verbally danced around each other like a regular Astaire and Rogers. Sometimes she forgot a line, but Fletcher worked cleverly around it. She realized that sometimes he invented something to make it a little better, and she responded in kind, realizing with a thrill that the audience had no clue that this wasn't how it was planned.

"You know what, you barmy old tosser? I don't give a damn!"

"Say again?"

"Clean out your ears! I said, I DON'T GIVE A DAMN!"

"Oh, he's our Keeper!"

They brought down the house that night.

Humphrey W. Fletcher was a very happy wizard.

Reggie shared a bill with him as Regina P. Fletcher, in a nod to the widely held but unvoiced belief that his partner-in-comedy was an unregistered Animagus and likely another one of his disreputable relatives. Before the year was out, they were recruited away from that parsimonious bastard Huntley and his shabby dancehall to be given a couple of stylish new outfits and a spot on the stage of the Sable Animagus Club. The weekly pay was better than Humphrey had seen in fifty years, even without the occasional tips. He no longer had to avoid certain wizards quite as assiduously now that there was a decent chance he would actually have enough cash on him to start paying off a decade's worth of casual debts.

Normally, it wouldn't have bothered Humphrey that he was performing in what amounted to the lobby of the fanciest whorehouse in Knockturn Alley. He'd told his jokes everywhere from a street corner in Tangent Alley, when he was barely taller than his father's performing Jarvey, to the stage of the Merlinus Palladian, at the height of his career. However, he'd become rather protective of Reggie, and he suspected that even limited exposure to the ladies who performed beyond the curtains at the end of the hall was giving her an unnecessarily ribald sense of humor.

High-end houses of prostitution being what they were, all the better sort of wizards (in one sense, anyway) frequented the establishment...including Diagon Alley theater owners. One night, Reggie was slipped a note when she pranced amidst the clientele collecting tips.

"Oi, Humph...what's this about the Diagon Odeon?"

Just when I thought she couldn't surprise me any more..."You didn't tell me you could read, you sneaky little stoat."

"Well, I can't...not much, anyway. You gonna tell me about it or not?"

He filed away his partner-in-comedy's latest amazing ability for future reference. Perhaps they could work it into their act. "Seems there was a Mr. Barnaby in our audience tonight, and he has a share in one of the better theaters in Diagon Alley. Do well in our audition next week, and we stand a chance of moving up a bit more in life, me furry mate."

And so it was. By the following spring, Humphrey could actually toss out robes that looked like they'd developed terminal mange (or been hit with a Swiss-cheese jinx) and buy some new ones. A room in a better part of town...or at least, a less-filthy bit of Knockturn Alley...couldn't be too far off. All thanks to an incredibly clever little silver beast with a very big mouth.

Humphrey might actually have to thank that lazy pillock Dung for presenting him with what amounted to a key to a tidy little Gringotts vault.

Of course, the one catch was that Reggie was as sharp as a tack, in addition to being clever.

"Read to me, you old toss-pot," she said mildly, "or I might just develop a little laryngitis before tomorrow's matinee."

"That's the problem with having an edyeecated Jarvey," Humphrey grumbled as he found his place in 'The Voyage of the *Dawn Treader*.' "Bloody things know how to negotiate."

"Damn straight," Reggie said, settling into his lap for tonight's chapter.

Ah, well. A few Sickles' worth of books, and a couple hours' reading a week, are a cheap enough price for knowing where your next meal is coming from.

But it was more than that, even if Humphrey didn't recognize it as such. He was back...not quite on top, maybe, but he had respect. He wasn't just another comedian on the bill anymore. An owl from Mr. Barnaby proved it beyond all doubt. He read it five times before Reggie interrupted his happy reverie.

"What's gotten into you, Humph? It looks like that piece of parchment set off some sort of 'grinning like a damn fool' hex."

"Start packing a satchel, Reggie, luv! We're gone from this flea-trap, and into a room behind the Odeon. At least, until we start touring next month!"

"Touring?"

"Barnaby's Headliners...the old boy's put together a show with his best acts, ourselves included! We're to be performing all over Wales, Scotland, and Ireland for the year, to end with a show in the Merlinus Palladium in Diagon Alley...and from there, Paris, New York, and MAYBE San Francisco!"

It took all of twenty seconds for Reggie to start cheering, darting around the house in a stream of liquid silver and joyous profanity.

Humphrey laughed until he had a coughing fit at her antics. "Me debts are history, little mate...pretty soon, it's diamond collars and caviar for you!" Together they went through a chorus of 'Today, the Kingdom...tomorrow, Paris, New York, and MAYBE San Francisco.' He was almost exhausted just watching her, so he poured them each a shot of Firewhisky (hers in a thimble) and insisted she take a moment to toast their good fortune.

"Forget diamond collars and caviar, you daft old dog. Get us some decent booze," Reggie said, pulling a face.

Yes, Humphrey might actually consider thanking Mundungus one of these days. As long as Reggie was well out of sight, so his no-good nephew didn't get any funny ideas about stealing her...again.

After all, the only thing rarer in show business than an educated Jarvey was one that could be your best friend.

Reggie had it all planned out. They would look for Toussaint while they were in New York, in case he had already found his dream and was back with Gramma, taking care of her in some nice neighborhood. Maybe he was doing well enough that they were in Hamilton Heights, or even in a brownstone in Brooklyn. Hell, maybe he'd hit the big time, and they had a place way uptown!

If he was still in school, they would catch up with him if...**when**...the tour had to be extended to San Francisco, it just had to...the tour reached California. Reggie and Humphrey had looked at the maps, and they both agreed that the dots for San Francisco and Oakland were almost on top of each other. Surely they could find him.

Once the tour started, she had much travel time in which to plan. Mr. Barnaby chartered a retired model of the Knight Bus and hired a driver/mechanic who went by the somewhat unpromising name (in light of the second aspect of his job) of Al Bodger. Some members of the company (particularly the trick flyers, who hated sitting still for any length of time) objected to this rather strenuously, but the company luggage made Apparating all but impossible.

"How d'you feel about the bus, little mate?" Fletcher asked her early on.

"As long as I'm fed and there's a sandbox somewhere handy, it suits me," she retorted airily.

In fact, it all suited Reggie just fine. The members of the company were at least as entertaining to travel with as to watch. A young man named Ambrose played the harp beautifully, and tried to teach Reggie to sing. She thought he succeeded rather well at it (though his seeing-eye-Crup felt differently, to judge by the howling). Reggie made particular friends with the Tumbling Tornadoes, who attempted to fly inside the bus until Bodger threatened to put them in body binds for the duration of each leg of the trip. Every three weeks they got a few days off, which were spent in the relative luxury of the cozy little rooms behind the Odeon.

Some new child acts came on for the summer. One of Reggie's favorites was a little blonde girl, delicate as a fairy. She toured with them for a few weeks during the summer, singing sweet old ballads under the name 'La Narcisette Noir.' One night, she took Reggie and Ambrose into her confidence over a shared bottle of butterbeer.

"I'm not really French, you know," she said in a conspiratorial whisper. Reggie followed Ambrose's lead and looked politely surprised. Half the people in the company were foreigners pretending to be British or British pretending to be foreigners.

"I'm not ten years old, either. I just finished my fourth year at Hogwarts, but my...guardians...think I'll be more popular marketed as a child performer." That was a bit surprising. She really was a very tiny teenager.

It was a sad day when a man showed up insisting that he was the girl's father, and that the couple posing as her parents were actually her disinherited sister and said sister's disreputable boyfriend. Accusations of using the Imperius curse were bandied about, but ultimately, the man left with 'Narcisette,' a medium-sized bribe, and no further trouble. Reggie knew it was all bullshit; the girl had as good as told her they all thought it would be capital fun to 'join the circus' for a bit. Ambrose agreed, but added that she never would have been allowed to stay; her upper-class accent, unlike Humphrey's, was the genuine article. The chances were good that she was a pureblood of the highest order.

It bothered Reggie not at all that she was now billed as 'The Amazing Educated Jarvey' rather than 'Regina P. Fletcher.' Her pseudo-Animagus status was a draw in Knockturn Alley, but Mr. Barnaby didn't fancy even a breath of illegality around his company. To keep up with demands for her to prove her reading ability, she practiced for a while each day with the Man of 100,000 Faces, a mild-mannered Metamorphmagus who had immigrated from Italy as a child. Humphrey appreciated his assistance, since he himself was unable to read in a moving vehicle without suffering from motion sickness, though he warned Reggie against picking up any traces of Giovanni's remaining accent.

Their acts evolved from town to town, as they learned what got laughs in each region. And they still found time to reminisce, Humphrey about his early days as a headliner, Reggie about her education in New York and, when the bus was stuck in the snow, about the lazy, citrusy heat of her 'childhood' in Los Angeles. All in all, it was a joyous adventure for Reggie, like a year-long holiday.

The company re-entered London in high spirits, ready for their big send-off to France. Rumors flew thick and fast about extending the tour to Orleans and the Riviera, and it was a foregone conclusion that it would have an extended run in America as well.

They couldn't have wished to put on a more flawless performance. The Tornadoes had a good-sized flat behind the Odeon, just off the rooming house used by the rest of the company, and invited everyone back to their place for a celebration dinner. There were good-natured arguments over choice of carryout and offers to pick up some champagne. Which made it all the more devastating when they went to their rooms behind the Odeon to find them being emptied out.

"Packing up for the continent already?" Giovanni asked uncertainly, his face shifting into that of a hopeful child of its own volition. No one else dared speak. A few were holding their breath. Somehow, it didn't look like packing for the tour.

"Tour's cancelled. And since one of the other partners in the company took sick and pulled out, there's no money to subsidize rooms for you lot. You're all to get out. Tonight," the wizard in charge said tersely. He turned his back as if they ceased to exist when he ceased speaking to them, levitating furniture for a pair of surly Squibs to guide. Several rooms' worth of furniture already decorated the pavement.

Reggie looked around. By the expressions on the faces around them, she and her master weren't the only performers ambushed by the news.

"I'm afraid we didn't hear you correctly, my good man..." Humphrey began in his most fluid, solicitous voice. The one that made him the leading member of the company, along with having nearly a century more performing experience than anyone else present.

"I said there's no international tour. Cancelled. Not enough interest in America in comedians and musicians. The Chinese Acrobats were just given permission to tour the country, and old man Slade overruled his daughter's request for our show when he found out he could book them. Same story in Paris...the damned acrobats are headed there next. This building's being sold, and the new owners don't need the furniture."

Reggie had forgotten that the bright new bed and dresser in their little flat behind the theater came with the room. She had a strange, irrational moment of fear for where they would find a comfortable bed for Humphrey's old bones.

It wasn't often that H.W. Fletcher looked old. He did now, and Reggie realized that, as old as Gramma had been, Humph was even older. Frail. Stooped. Worn. Without the light in his eyes, he wasn't the fiercely bright and plucky comedian, he was just a ragged old wizard with no prospects, no home, and no assets but a trunk, a repertoire, and a Jarvey.

Numbly, they trooped over to the Tornados' flat and ate in silence. The celebration had become a wake. No one would have gone there if they'd had anywhere else to go.

Reggie alone would not hold her tongue, though she kept her voice low in deference to their friends.

"We could go back on the road, Humph. Just us. They loved us in some of those places," Reggie argued. "We can't fucking give up now! You told me the show must go on...were you full of shite when you said it?"

Fletcher snorted and aimed a swat in her direction, which she dodged easily. But it wasn't until they wandered out into the street at a very cold, very empty four a.m., that he actually answered her.

"Watch your language and look sharp, Reg! You hold still long enough and that no-good nephew of mine'll nick ya again!" he said. They wandered back to the Palladium in the company of Ambrose and his Crup. Humphrey claimed his trunk from backstage, 'Reducio'-ed it, and stuffed it in his pocket. Reggie scampered up to his shoulder and they prepared to seek out their next engagement.

For another year or so, they managed well enough. Then the troubles started.

Fletcher remembered war; the Grindelwald debacle had been grim, even without a Muggle dust-up happening at the same time. But it hadn't been too hard on entertainers. A good laugh was in short supply, and you could always work for food.

This time it was different. For a long time, it was almost limited to rumors... a Muggle-born witch killed here, some Muggles harassed there. But it didn't take long to escalate. The enemy inspired so much terror that people refused to call him by name. Fear seemed to have everyone in a tight grip.

Theatergoers stayed at home, and gigs were impossible to come by. Fletcher couldn't even set up his hat on a corner of Diagon Alley. There weren't enough shoppers to make it worthwhile. With his small stash of cash dwindling, Humphrey feared it would only be a matter of time before he was obliged to ask Dung to start nicking groceries. Until one day when an anonymous owl arrived with an advertisement.

Smart Jarveys in demand for a variety of projects deemed too dangerous for wizards. Register your Jarvey with our breeding program and get up to 10 Galleons per usable kit!

It was wrong. Reggie was his best friend. She was like family to him. It would be like selling his own nieces and nephews. She was also reduced to hunting rats so that he wouldn't have to feed her so much. Reluctantly, he told her about the letter.

Reggie was quiet for a long time. Then she left, to return with the smell of rat on her breath.

"I was probably too little when I was taken from me mum, you know."

"I know."

"I've grown a bit, but I'm still no more than two-thirds the size of a normal Jarvey."

"Yeah."

"We're up shite creek, aren't we?"

"By the end of the week, I'm going to ask Dung to nick us some groceries."

"Well... if they can find a nice bloke for me... I suppose I could give it a go."

"That's the first time I've ever seen Jarveys what needed to chat each other up beforehand."

Humphrey overheard the grumbling. He didn't care if the man at the stud Jarvey outfit thought he was barmy. He refused to put Reggie down in one of the breeding pens to have the males brought to her one by one, in hopes something would take. Instead, he carried her carefully from cage to cage, letting her speak to each one.

Finally, Reggie sighed. "It's no good, Humph. I don't feel crap. I mean, there's some nice-lookin' blokes here and all, most of 'em dumb as a Quaffle, but a few who can hold up their end of a conversation. Still... nothing's going to happen. I can tell. I don't know how, but I know I can't get anything out of fucking with them. Maybe it has to do with me being a runt."

Fletcher picked her up with a sigh. "It's okay, Reggie, luv. I didn't much fancy the idea of havin' to sell your little'uns. Nor of you having it off with some strange beast. It's like givin' me own daughter away to some cad."

"I guess it's back to work for us, then."

"Yeah," Fletcher said, his expression faraway yet worried. "Finding work's the trick..."

They managed to make their way back to his room without incident. There was just a sip of Firewhisky left in the bottle. Reggie politely refused it, munching on half of a slightly stale scone and washing it down with weak tea. Humphrey felt a curious sense of peace and lightness, watching her carefully polish her whiskers when she was finished, her eyes sparkling softly. She needed no diamonds; he had seen ladies both fine and wealthy in his day, and none of them had been adorned in jewels more glowing than Reggie's bright black eyes.

"Sing a bit for me, Regina, dear."

"I don't know many songs, except some from the show."

"Humor an old man, there's a luv," he said softly, sipping a little Firewhisky before settling back into the rocking chair with the glass on the table at his side.

Reggie started with 'Lydia the Tattooed Lady,' then followed up with 'Beautiful Dreamer,' obviously picking up on his quiet mood.

"The Entertainer is taking a bow," Reggie sang cheerfully, her voice startling him as it intruded upon his consciousness. Had he fallen asleep? He must have; she'd started another song, and he could tell he'd missed some of the lyrics. Humphrey focused on her silver fur, admiring how the dim candlelight shimmered on it.

"...does his dance step and sings his song

even gets the audience to sing along..."

She really began to throw herself into the performance, closing her bright eyes and belting out the words as loudly as her tiny lungs allowed.

"With his snappy patter and jokes,
he knows what pleases the folks,
the Entertainer, the star of the show!"

The room began to gray around the edges.*Funny, I don't recall being this aware of falling asleep before.*

"...with all the singers, dancers,
acrobats and clowns..."

He closed his eyes before the beauty of Reggie's silver fur could be dimmed as well.

"There was a dancing bear,
even a dog act there..."

A sweet fragrance came into his awareness.

"Now the curtain is going down

On the Entertainer, the artist, the pro...

He was put on this earth

To bring us laughter and mirth,

The Entertainer, the star of the show."

His last thought was that Reggie's voice suddenly sounded much clearer and purer than he had ever realized.

Author's Notes:

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the 'Who's On First' routine was performed by Abbot and Costello many times over their career, and they were said to have improvised and ad-libbed their way through it each time. In honor of that vaudeville tradition, the adapted version of the act has not been copied directly from any of the transcripts of those performances, but reconstructed entirely from my memory of the various versions I've heard and read over the years. (My personal favorite is the version from 'The Naughty Nineties,' though one of the renditions from their T.V. show was pretty good as well.)

A 'bodger' would be someone who cobbles things together, makes makeshift repairs. Not necessarily a name to inspire confidence when looking for a mechanic...

Is 'La Narcissette Noir' really who you think it is? Well, if she were, there is no reason to think she would remember Reggie specifically after several decades, though I imagine such an experience might prepare her to think more kindly of Jarveys than might otherwise be imagined.

'Lydia the Tattooed Lady,' by Harold Arlen and Yip Harburg, is an absolutely hilarious song. It's probably best known from Groucho Marx's rendition thereof in the movie 'At the Circus.' It became a signature song of Groucho's, and was such a favorite of the late, great Jim Henson that he had it performed by a Muppet chorus at his funeral.

'Beautiful Dreamer' by Stephen Foster was one of my grandfather's all-time favorite songs, which I played and sang for him whenever I visited Grandma and Grandpa's house.

'The Entertainer' by Scott Joplin is probably best known as 'that song from the movie *The Sting* (1973). Ironically, The Entertainer...written in 1902...was no longer popular by the 1930s, the time period during which *The Sting* is set. 'The Entertainer' actually has lyrics, some of which Reggie sang in this chapter. These particular lyrics are from the version sung by Milton Berle near the end of the Muppet Show's run. The full version of the song is a celebration of Vaudeville in its heyday (yes, Vaudeville is specifically mentioned in the lyrics), and the 'entertainer' in question is a true Vaudeville headliner, a person whose talents range from comedy to emceeing to singing and dancing...a person not unlike Humphrey W. Fletcher. And not unlike Reggie.

Humphrey Wilberforce Fletcher was so named in honor of the character Wilberforce Humphries on 'Are You Being Served?' Mr. Humphries was portrayed (delightfully, I might add) by the late John Inman, who died not long after I started work on this particular chapter...so that the name is no longer merely an appreciative nod, but a tribute. So the curtain falls on yet another entertainer.

Up Next: The Fairy God-Jarvey.

4: The Fairy God-Jarvey

Chapter 4 of 5

How, precisely, does a Jarvey become a Fairy God-Jarvey? The answers are all here, from the origin of the name Regina P. Fletcher (including why it's shortened to Reggie instead of Gina) to why Reggie speaks Spanish. Please note—in the time-honored tradition of stories involving animals, this contains a substantial share of sadness. But for those who've become fond of Reggie through 'The Fairy God-Jarvey Chronicles,' I hope it will be worthwhile to learn how one plucky little runt survived it all to become the Fairy God-Jarvey.

Disclaimer: This story is based on a more-or-less logical expansion of concepts and characters set forth in the "Harry Potter" novels by J.K. Rowling, who is not me; therefore, I make no money from borrowing this universe, nor do I claim to possess any right thereto. Only the Jarvey and her friends are mine.

"Humph?"

No reply.

"Humphrey? You fall asleep on me?"

Humphrey was still and silent in his rocking chair. Something about it didn't seem right to Reggie.

"C'mon, Humph, snore or something." She clambered up his leg and put her little paws on his chest. It took her a moment to realize that there was no whisky-smelling breath puffing against her whiskers.

"Humphrey!"

It was a horrible moment, but Reggie wasn't aware of the horror. Nor did she realize that all her fur was standing on end, the room crackling and alight as if it were in the middle of a roman candle, or that there was yelling all around her. All Reggie knew was that her master needed help and that she would do anything at all to get it for him.

Tarty wondered why potential Fairy Godmothers always seemed to find their powers in the middle of the night. Or during mealtime. Or when she was using the loo. All things considered, she supposed she was grateful that this one had set off the alert in the middle of the night. Though she'd made some unusual slip-ups in the standard recruitment spiel over the years while suffering lack of sleep.

Before she could give said speech, however, she would have to clean up the mess.

"Oberon's holey socks," Tarty muttered under her breath.

One glance showed her that the old man on the floor was beyond help. She cleared the mob of Healers, Aurors, and inexplicably, an acrobat, a bookie, and a petty thief. She speedily rendered them sufficiently confused that they would wander home promptly and consider this all a dream by morning...hopefully no one had seen them vanish from their prior locations when they'd been sucked into the dirty little room as if by Portkey. Finally, she banished the pile of assorted medicinal substances, both magical and Muggle. She couldn't wait to find out who had done all this. Mab was going to either go into some sort of Nirvana or have an apoplexy, depending on whether the creature showing this much power was Fairy kin or another type of magical creature.

She launched into her standard speech as she looked around the room for the source of the magic. "I'm Tarty, a recruiter for the International Fellowship of Fairy Godmothers and related Do-Gooding Beings. We detected your use of our sort of magic and I was sent here to find out who was using it, and invite you to join the Fellowship."

"Fuck invitations! My master needs help!"

Tarty looked around wildly for several seconds before locating the speaker, perched on the fallen wizard's chest. "Wait... you're...you're a Jarvey!" the fairy exclaimed, amazed.

"And you're fucking observant," the little silver Jarvey snarled miserably. "Now that we've established our identities, care to tell me what the hell you're doing here?"

"You were trying to save him...and you did all that?" Tarty asked in awe.

"For all the fucking good it did," she answered mournfully. "Don't even know how the hell I did it."

"We can teach you," said Tarty, regaining her equilibrium. Non-fairy or not, this one was a find and a half. "I don't think we've ever had a Jarvey work for us before, but if this is an example of what you can do, then you're definitely in. What was your name again?"

"I'm Reggie, and I still don't know who the fuck you are. And *what* am I supposed to be 'in,' again?"

"In the Fellowship...I already mentioned it, pay attention. You'll be trained to use your magic to help others, the way you tried to help this elderly wizard..."

"...He was my master, Humphrey W. Fletcher!" Reggie interrupted.

"...and eventually, you'll become a Fairy God...um, Jarvey."

"Will I be able to make him better?" she asked hopefully.

Tarty shook her head, looking at the innocent little silver face with sorrowful eyes. "Sorry, honey. Death is beyond fixing, even for the most powerful Fairy Godmothers ever. But you can heal some mighty sick people, and soothe some awful hurts with your power. You can help people in some pretty remarkable ways, if you come with me and learn to use it." The little winged creature patted Reggie on the shoulder. "If it's any consolation at all, your master wasn't a day under 160 years old. Even under ideal conditions, with the best medical care and everything, it's unlikely that he would have lived too much longer."

Tarty decided that she could wait a bit for the Jarvey's answer. Losing someone you loved enough to move heaven and earth for (almost literally) was plenty of shock. Learning about the whole Fairy Godmother thing would take a bit more adjusting. It wouldn't do to have a promising recruit go 'round the twist.

"He was good to me, you know."

"I believe it. And you were good to him. Look at how peaceful his face is."

Reggie slumped beside her dead master, saddened that she had somehow managed to put him on the floor. It seemed undignified. She patted his cheek again with her paw, though the gesture was without hope this time. He was too relaxed for sleep, and was slowly cooling; the longer she stayed, the colder he would become. It wouldn't help to watch him stiffen in death. There was nothing more she could do for him.

All her life, she'd been doing things for others. Fletcher had explained how she'd probably helped put food on the table for the first wizards who ever sold her, and that her price had bought Trainer a sort of freedom she would never know. For almost five years, she'd kept her master's body and soul together.

Well, that soul had sailed now. She could leave, if she chose... but for what? To scrounge Knockturn Alley for scraps until she was trapped and sold again, possibly to a much less kind master than Fletcher? Or perhaps magic could find a way around her underdeveloped body, and she would be made to bear litter after litter of kits, only to see them sold away...

"That's the problem with being an educated Jarvey," she said under her breath, reflecting that decision-making was probably easier if you didn't have much of a brain with which to decide. Less successful...but definitely easier.

Tarty cocked her head curiously at the beast, but said nothing.

"Help me put him on the bed? It's bloody wrong to leave him on the floor like this."

The fairy obliged, drawing a wand that resembled a hatpin and floating Humphrey gently to the bed. Reggie pulled a patched coverlet over him. With her sharp little teeth dragging one corner and Tarty's magic guiding the other, they made a neat job of it. He almost appeared to be sleeping. Reggie smoothed his hair once more before

slinking to the floor. She let her tail thump listlessly on the last Muggle journal she'd scrounged before they'd taken to hiding. Humph had always been a good sport about reading to her from those things, indulging her taste for science that had developed in long-ago library trips with Toussaint. Never mind that the aged entertainer hadn't a clue what 'science' was.

"Oi, Tarty...what's this magic I'm supposed to have used?" she asked, trying to feel interested in the answer. Surprised to find that she was, at least a little.

"Even we're not entirely sure what it is. But we've been able to make it work. And it has something to do with love."

Reggie thought of the little boy who had let her gnaw his fingers for comfort and the old man who had said he was sorry. She thought of huddling with Toussaint for warmth and telling jokes to try to cheer up Gramma. She thought of all the evenings she'd spent with Humphrey, making a glass of Firewhisky last for hours as they relived his glory days and she finally soothed him to sleep with a sonnet. She was a beast, born and bred to serve humans. She was good at it. It gave her a certain sense of satisfaction. But that service had always had an element of compulsion before, regardless of how much she loved the humans she served.

With this power the fairy was talking about, service would be her choice. Her privilege. Her pride.

"Love?" she said thoughtfully. "Yeah... I can do that."

"That's not funny, Tarty."

"Do you see me laughing, Madam Mab?"

Reggie knew the thing behind the desk was no Madam. Madams wore the latest robes, low-cut but still classy, could talk politics like an MP and wine like a sommelier, and any man who stood in their way never knew what hit him. This thing was an oversized insect in sequined pince-nez. Although if pressed, Reggie might venture to bet that she knew a thing or two about bulldozing men.

"I know we've relaxed standards over the past few years, but it's a Jarvey! What's next? Clabberts?"

"Yes. A Jarvey who cared so much for someone other than herself that she pulled up enough magic to transport no fewer than seven humans to his aid when he was dying. Her pre-magic record is nothing to sneeze at either, from what I've gathered in her recruiting interview. I have no doubt everything in my report will be fully verifiable. You know darn well that 'any creature which displays the power and the aptitude for the job is eligible to join the fellowship.' Nowhere do the regs say 'except Jarveys.'"

Mab shook her head. "I can't put my name to this! What's more, I can't ask anyone to train a Jarvey. You want it in, you train it!"

"Fine. Do I keep my old desk, or do you need me to move?"

"What?"

"I'm wondering if you need an ear trumpet to go with those glasses. You said that if I wanted the Jarvey to join so badly, I'd have to train her myself. I'm asking if you want me to move my stuff back into the fieldwork office, because I'll need to be back in the field, getting the hang of things, if I'm to be any good as her master. I don't imagine it will take her very long to ace the coursework. So I'd better get started now if I'm to prepare a replacement in my old division and work out any kinks in my field technique before I start training her."

"You're serious."

"As a heart attack."

"Fine. I wash my hands of it. If you can train the thing, I guess we have to hand it a tutu. If not, enjoy your new career as a Christmas tree decoration, Tarty, once you put the beast back where you found it."

If Reggie hadn't been so lost in awe at what Tarty had done for her, she would have come up with something much more elaborate than a distractedly muttered comment of 'puta' in response to Mab referring to her as 'it.'

"Mab, if she doesn't finish the basic coursework and get to the apprentice stage in less than a year, I'll personally bring you a Pansy Parfait straight from Oberon's in the Elysian Glade. But since she will, I'll expect you to fasten her apprentice tutu yourself, as a show of confidence in her abilities."

Mab laughed...not an especially pretty sound. "You're on. Now get out of my office and register that thing."

Still a little overcome, all Reggie could manage to say was, "Thanks, Tarty."

"Honey, I'm doing the whole fellowship a favor. I got faith in you. Besides, I miss helping folks, being in the thick of things. Your case was the first unique recruitment experience I've had in two decades. Made me realize how much I miss the unpredictability of fieldwork."

"What's with Mab, anyway?"

"Been in the office too long, away from the folks we're bound to help. I take it she had a bad experience...met someone who didn't believe in fairies or some such...in one of her last field assignments. Whatever century *that* was. She's kind of bitter about non-fairies getting into the Fellowship, too."

"Maybe she resents us non-fairies because of the whole not believing in fairies thing. People don't think you guys exist, and then other critters get to be Fairy God... Thingies," Reggie mused.

"See, that's part of what makes me think you'll be a gem in the service. You got interesting insights, kid."

Reggie shrugged. "It's just psychology."

"OK, here's the queue for the registration desk. Be careful what you say or you'll end up like the kid who's stuck with 'Erm...I' as his official name in the fellowship."

Two Bowtruckles and a nervous imp that was obviously hoping to be taken for a pixie later, the pixie at the desk was running its bored and slightly disgusted eye over Reggie.

"New recruit?"

"Obviously, you wanker."

Tarty gave her a warning look, and Reggie bit her tongue.

"Species?"

"Jarvey." *As if you hadn't figured that out, arsewipe.*

"Name?"

She toyed with the idea of answering Peluchita. But it had been so long ago... another lifetime, in which anyone had even referenced that name. And she wasn't that runt anymore.

"Regina P. Fletcher," she said proudly. "But call me Reggie."

"Regina Fletcher, a.k.a. Reggie" the clerk grumbled. "Next."

"I said Regina **P.** Fletcher!" she yelled. But the clerk, oblivious to her complaint, was already on to the next trainee in line. As she turned away, she muttered under her breath, "Stupid fucking wanker."

"Sorry about the name thing, kid," her soon-to-be Master Fairy Godmother said apologetically when they were clear of the queue. "But that's bureaucracy for you."

"It's okay, Tarty," she said, shrugging half of her slender body. "I don't guess it matters too much."

"What's the 'P.' stand for, anyway?" Tarty asked.

The Jarvey's voice was so soft that the fairy almost missed her answer. "Peluchita."

Tarty couldn't stop grinning.

"I knew it was going to be fun to watch Mab put your apprentice tutu on you when you finished your classes shy of the year. You know, you could have finished in seven months if you hadn't launched that campaign to 'modernize' the program."

"You're gloating, Tarty."

"Yup. Feels good, too."

"I still maintain those wankers need to get acquainted with the current century and work psychology into the curriculum." Reggie flicked her tail, producing a twist of sparkling blue mist. Tarty knew that the tail thing was yet another bee in Mab's bonnet... Reggie was not just the only Fairy God-Jarvey ever, but the only Fairy God-Thingy to use something other than a wand as a focus for her powers. *The kid's unorthodox from the ground up*, Tarty thought fondly.

"C'mon, **Apprentice** Fletcher. You can revolutionize the world of Fairy Godmothering later. Right now, you need to review the files for my next case so you know what you're looking at when you come with me tomorrow."

"Call me Reggie, or you're gonna be picking your tutu out of your ear **Master** Tarty."

"OK, I'm thinking we need to review Fairy Godmother etiquette before we study the file..."

Tarty still thought it was a damn shame that they hadn't promoted Reggie to Journeywoman, First Class, right out of the gate. Granted, her Apprentice's Journeywoman project had been unorthodox, to say the least. But that was Reggie. And it was pure malice on Mab's part that had kept her a Journeywoman, Second Class, for over ten years. Tarty sighed.

Ah, well. At least it means she checks in with me once in a while. It's nice to get the lowdown on the latest case straight from the Jarvey's mouth, profanity and all.

"How's my favorite Fairy God-Jarvey today?"

"Still the only Fairy God-Jarvey, you silly sod. How's my favorite permanently demoted Fairy Godmother?"

"Still grateful that you got me out of the bloody recruitment department and away from having to respond to that damned alarm during dinner."

"Yeah, poor Ashrowan looked a right pillock, choking on a woodlouse when he got the call at lunch yesterday. Er... speaking of gratitude..."

"Great segue into asking for a favor," Tarty said with a grin.

Reggie snorted a little. "Tarty, I need a leave of absence for a personal project. I'd like to help some people I used to know. I know it's not an assignment, but they're great folks, and..."

"Relax, kid. You have a week...and this file might come in handy."

Reggie paged through the file, at times murmuring ('I'd forgotten his name'), at times smiling mistily, at times letting her mouth fall open in amazement. "I'm not even going to ask how you knew."

"Kid, I took your recruitment interview. I was your Master for over three years. I'd like to be able to claim I've been your friend for the last dozen years. It didn't take a scientist of any kind to figure out that you would want to get back to your roots one of these days. I'm only wondering why you didn't ask sooner."

"You give yourself too damn little credit, Tarty. And would you believe that I was kind of afraid of what I might find?"

Tarty understood. It was pretty clear that Reggie had been resigned to discovering that her mother was dead; Reggie had outlived her mother's generation readily under the influence of fairy magic, just as she would easily outlive her peers...and their great-grand offspring. The shock on the Jarvey's face had been plain, though, when she read that Gramma had died the same night as the fateful sale. Though all she said was, "You got a plan yet?"

"Actually, yeah."

"Good. Write it up, but I'm not going to read it until it's all over. I'm going to observe, but not interfere. Consider this a dry run for your Journeywoman, First Class project, since no one's officially assigned to these two. Though based on what's in that file, I think I can fix it with Pooky after the fact."

"You're too good to me, Tarty."

"It's the least I could do for the best Apprentice I ever had."

"Hey, Tarty...you weren't shitting me when you said you'd like to claim me as a friend, were you?"

"I don't bullshit."

"I know. And... you haven't been a friend. You've been like me own mum." Reggie bumped her whiskers against Tarty's face in a Jarvey-style hug and whisked out to her unofficial assignment.

When Journeyman Blueleaf came to inquire about a missing case file half an hour later, Tarty was still sniffing.

"Master Tarty? Is something wrong?" the pixie asked, his trademark gentle concern plain in his voice.

"No, kid... just... just a little emotional today, that's all."

Blueleaf brought her tea, anyway.

Author's Notes:

If Mab ever has access to a Spanish/English dictionary, she would be even more irked that Reggie had called her a puta (whore).

Tarty the tough-talking Fairy Godmother sort of quotes 'The Blues Brothers.' ('Bullshit? I don't bullshit!')

Next up: The Epilogue. Reggie has a little more of her family to take care of before she moves on.

Epilogue: There Are No Chance Meetings

Chapter 5 of 5

Reggie has her tutu, and has been on the job for some time. There's just one more bit of unfinished business she needs to take care of before she moves on to the rest of her life...

Disclaimer: This story is based on a more-or-less logical expansion of concepts and characters set forth in the "Harry Potter" novels by J.K. Rowling, who is not me; therefore, I make no money from borrowing this universe, nor do I claim to possess any right thereto. Only the Jarvey and her friends are mine.

Epilogue: There Are No Chance Meetings

"José María Guitierrez y Maldonado."

"Toussaint Biguenet."

The short, squarely-built, philanthropist shook hands with the tall, slender Healer. "I appreciate your coming to the orphanage, Healer Biguenet. Our children need to hear your inspiring story as much as they need your healing music."

Chema wondered why Healer Baroff had never sent this fellow before. This Biguenet guy not only seemed to know his business, but was a natural choice to work with orphans, seeing as how he could speak so wisely about having been raised without his parents. *Funny, getting the notice that the children needed their school physicals the very week Biguenet was available and Baroff wasn't.*

"Thank you. But I think they could take ample inspiration from your story. It's quite an impressive journey, moving up from selling Jarveys to running the entire Magical Creatures Syndicate for the west coast."

He could have added that it was no hardship to take Healer Baroff's place on the trip to the orphanage, even if Toussaint was by far shyer and less accustomed to assignments involving public relations. How could anyone begrudge the poor old fellow the chance to see his favorite limited run revival at the Greek Theater, especially considering how crushed he'd originally been to learn that the show had been sold out for ages before it opened? *What a coincidence, extra tickets popping up just at the same time as the charity project.*

Chema shrugged. "My family raised Jarveys for years. It was honest work, but at some point, I figured out that the real money was in managing the sale of them. I went to El Collegio to make my granduncle happy, then took a position with the boss of our local market and worked my way up. I ended up so successful that it only seemed right to share the wealth." He made a modest gesture that encompassed the orphanage and all his other works of charity. The summary didn't begin to hint at the effort involved in becoming the youngest wizard ever to 'work his way up' that high. "I understand you got started with Jarveys, too."

Toussaint didn't quite wince. The loss of Reggie still stung, though time had dulled the pain. Still, he always added 'Jarvey Trainer' to any requests he received for biographical information. To leave it out would have felt as disloyal as if he'd denied Gramma or been ashamed of Momma for being a Squib. "True. I used to train them. Money from the last sale brought me west." He hesitated before saying, "That last one was special. I still have her collar." He showed his host the little scrap of leather, currently serving as a watch fob.

"Yes, there's something special about beginnings and ends. A whisker from the first Jarvey I ever sold is in my wand." He showed the Healer the use-polished length of red and white manzanita wood, not sure why it was so important.

"Is that a Quetzalcoatl-scale handgrip?"

"Sí—Perdon, I start speaking Spanish when I think about the story," Chema said with a laugh. "My father brought it back from an expedition. He'd been... lost... for a good many years. When my mother finally found him and they made their way back to the States, they had almost nothing to show for the efforts but their lives and this scale, a gift from the creature that saved them." Chema was amazed at himself for having told even a much-abbreviated version of the story. He had many friends; he was a friendly, open, human being. But it was unusual for him to have an actual confidante. It was rare for him to trust immediately and freely, considering the cutthroat business in which he was raised. It was all the more surprising that the tall stranger before him with the gentle, slightly sad expression inspired such instant trust.

"Amazing... I would love to hear more about it sometime. 'Dragon Birds' are the Phoenixes of the Western Hemisphere; Healer Muro befriended one, and sometimes it gives him pinfeathers for use in healing potions."

Toussaint cared very much for people; it was one of the things that made him a great Healer. However, it was rare for him to feel a connection, a real kinship, to another human being. It had been a little easier with animals... especially Reggie. Yet somehow, standing in front of an almost aggressively cheerful man who had been a stranger before today and who was separated from him by a host of cultural, linguistic, and geographical factors, he felt a connection.

"You know, I think it was a great thing that we met today. It's one thing for the children to hear music and be inspired. But I think that they should ~~learn~~ *earn* music as well. If you still have connections to your university, maybe we could start some sort of program—teaching jobs for music students to help make ends meet, the learning experience for the children... this could be a tremendous opportunity for them!"

Chema knew he was going into 'selling' mode as he began to describe his idea, but rarely had he felt such enthusiasm. It was almost like the day he made that first sale,

the day he realized he could be proud of himself and make others proud of him as well.

Normally, Toussaint would have felt taken aback at the abruptness of the suggestion, but instead, he caught some of the other man's enthusiasm. He felt his teeth showing, rare in his usual reserved smiles. He also felt the remarkable emotion of surprised hope, a feeling not unlike the day he learned there was such a thing as healing music... that even with his low levels of magic, he could do good and honor all the sacrifices that Momma and Gramma had made. "I think that's one of the best ideas I've heard in a long time."

In the background, an invisible creature whose tiny paws needed no silencing spells trotted away, to sense of inner peace and a promotion to Journeywoman, First Class.

FIN

Author's Notes:

So, that's where Fairy God Jarveys come from. I hope it was rewarding for you, even if it wasn't as humorous as usual. It's Phoenix Rising next for Reggie and me (and for the incomparable Tempest). We'll see the rest of y'all after the conference!