

“Stop talking about it! Okay?”

“What’s wrong, Jen? Are you scared?”

“Yes, Andrew, I am scared.”

She turned and stared at Andrew and their other two friends. Since they left school, Jen, Chandra, and Isaac had mostly walked silently while Andrew carried on about his newest elaborate plan. His plans usually didn’t get them in trouble, and surprisingly no one ever got hurt, even when they jumped into the pool of water at the bottom of the quarry. But his plans had never involved being in a public building after hours, and they had certainly never involved setting a fire there.

Andrew looked surprised, maybe even hurt. “What’s there to be scared about?”

“How about breaking and entering for starters. Arson has gotten more than a few people in trouble with the law.”

He shook his head and smiled. “Nonsense. We’re not breaking and entering anywhere. We’ll be there when they lock the doors. We just have to stay hidden. And it’s not arson. We have to start a small, controlled fire.”

Jen took out her phone, pressed the mic and said, “Define ‘arson’.”

Her phone beeped and a robotic voice said, “Arson—the act of deliberately setting property on fire.”

“I forgot I was talking to the vocabulary queen.” Andrew scratched his chin. “I think that small earthquake this morning has you shaken up.” He giggled at his own pun. “Are the two of you worried?” He looked from Chandra to Isaac.

“This does seem like one of your riskier ideas.” Isaac said. “And I think that earthquake bothered all of us. We haven’t had one here for years.”

“Yeah,” Chandra agreed. “But it also sounds exciting. The magic. Not the earthquake. I mean, what if it actually works?”

“Not likely,” Isaac retorted. “Think about it. A magic spell that will transport someone into a book.”

“No, that’s not it at all.” Andrew massaged his temples. “It’s like you haven’t even been listening to me. The magic will actually teleport one of us to the time and place of the book. That’s why it has to be nonfiction. Some fictional places are real, but the rest of the story is made up. I suppose it’s two confusing for the magic.

“I know it sounds crazy, but before my uncle died, he gave me his diary. I put it on a shelf for a few weeks. I mean, I paged through it, but it looked like a bunch of stories from his childhood. And nothing too interesting at that. But a few days ago, I paged through it again. I noticed some drawings and some words from a language I didn’t recognize. He had notes written next to them. One said, “For luck.” Another said, “Payback.” There are more, but these are the two I’ve tried and they really seem to work.

“I didn’t study for the math test last Tuesday. I tried the ‘Luck’ spell and I aced it. Then when Elsa said she wouldn’t go to the dance with me because she was going with Jose, I used the ‘Payback’ spell. She missed the dance with a stomach ache.”

Well, since you put it that way,” Jen said, smiling for the first time since they had left school, “This sounds much more likely to work. And completely worth the risk of breaking into the library.” She shook her head, “Either of those things could have been coincidences. You’re good at math, and if you remember health class, sometimes girls get *stomachaches*.”

“Maybe they were coincidences; maybe they were magic. But like I’ve been telling you, we’re not breaking in.”

“Oh, right.” Jen let out a short laugh. “We’re already going to be there. You haven’t yet explained how we’re going to pull that off.”

“Simple,” Andrew said. “You know the door in the back that leads downstairs to what used to be the Children’s Library?”

They all agreed they knew the door he spoke of.

“Well I have it from a source that they don’t lock that door, and I’ll bet anything no one goes down there to check it out when they lock the doors.”

“Who’s your source,” Isaac asked.”

“Jason Valdez told me he and a girlfriend snuck down there once.”

“He’s lying!” Chandra interjected.

Her sudden response shocked Andrew for a moment. When he regained his senses, he asked her how she could be so sure.

“Because no girl would ever sneak anywhere with Jason Valdez.”

They all had a good laugh before Andrew hurried them on toward the library.

They spent some time browsing the shelves before one by one sneaking through the door to the old children’s library, which they found unlocked just as Andrew had heard they would.

Once evening came, and the last footsteps exited the building above, they crept their way back to the main floor of the library. They each selected a book from their favorite period of history and gathered in the center of the floor. Andrew unfolded a piece of paper from his pocket and used sidewalk chalk to draw an elaborate design from the paper onto the carpet. It had a central circle with four circles at each corner. Each corner circle had a rectangle next to it. The rest of it looked like a bunch of half circles intersecting at random angles, but as they circled the image, they realized it looked the same from all four corners.

“Well, at least we don’t have to add vandalism to our list of crimes tonight.” Jen said. “This chalk will come off with a vacuum cleaner.”

Andrew shrugged. “The journal didn’t say it had to be any special medium.” He stepped back and compared the drawing on the paper to the one on the floor. “I think we’re ready.”

“What is supposed to happen now,” Isaac asked.

“We start a fire in the center. We can use this metal trash can. We each sit at a circle with our book on the accompanying rectangle. I’ll say this incantation,” he sowed them the unfamiliar words at the bottom of the page, “then it sounds like the flames will lash out and take us to the time period of our chosen book.”

“Did this spell have a title?” Chandra asked.

“Yes,” Andrew said. “It’s called, ‘The Best’.”

“And how do we get back here,” Jen asked.

“That’s the one detail I’m not sure about.” Andrew said. “My uncle doesn’t mention getting back, but he did get back.”

Jen looked like she was about to leave the library, but finally said, “Whatever. Let’s do this. It’s not like it’s going to work anyway.”

They gathered on the floor around the drawing, each with their book in place. The only light in the room came from the flicking flames of the fire. Andrew began to recite words from the paper. The chandelier overhead began to sway.

“I think it’s working.” Chandra said.

The floor started to rumble, and some books fell off the shelves.

“No,” Jen said. “I think it’s another earthquake.”

Andrew didn’t seem to notice. He read the words in a trancelike state. A car alarm started blaring from the street outside. As Andrew read, the flames grew larger. They flashed so bright in the otherwise pitch-black room that no one could see anything else. Then the flame went out. When their eyes adjusted, they could see they were still in the library, but something was different. Only three people sat around the diagram. Each of them had a book that had drifted askew during the earthquake. But one person was gone and the book sat perfectly centered on it’s spot.

Jen opened her eyes after the flame vanished. She had tried to keep them open for as long as possible, but the fire had grown so bright that she had no choice but to close them. As she looked around the room, she realized it was a mess; books were strewn all over the floor and the library was an utter disaster.

The first to speak was Isaac as he sat up. He seemed to have lost his balance and fallen down during the quake.

“What’s going on?” he said. His voice sounded strained and confused, his brown eyes were scanning the room worriedly, trying to figure out what had happened.

“I don’t know,” Jen said, looking over at Isaac. “Maybe a sudden earthquake again?” she guessed, trying to rationalize the situation.

“Chandra!” Jen exclaimed, suddenly noticing the girl had been buried under a good amount of books. She made her way over to help her, but Chandra sat up slightly and the books just slid down to her feet. Chandra looked at Jen and said:

“OK, that can’t be another coincidence.” She stood up wiping away some dust that landed on her flowy pink dress.

“Yes, it can,” Jen said. “We’ve been having a lot of earthquakes lately.”

“But you saw what happened. There is no logical explanation for that, Jen.”

“I’m sure there is.” Jen hated not being able to explain away all of her problems with science. Having so many unknowns in life was terrifying, that’s why Jen needed to know everything about everything; science was her safety net. She had had this same fight multiple times with Chandra, Jen doubted they would be friends if it wasn’t for Andrew.

“Not everything can be explained by science, Jen.”

“Yes, it can! Tectonic plates don’t just shift at random, Chandra!”

“Guys…” Isaac interjected, but got no response from the girls. Jen wasn’t really paying attention to him; he didn’t like to see them fight. She assumed that he was probably going to start whining.

“Can you explain the shaking at the exact time Andrew started chanting? The fire suddenly growing in size?”

“Increased oxygen in the air! I-”

“GUYS!” Isaac suddenly yelled, now having obtained the attention of the two arguing girls.

“What?” Jen said, irritated. Sh… He was so annoying sometimes, what did HE want?

“Where is Andrew?”

Andrew slowly regained consciousness. He must have fallen asleep at some point. He remembered starting to read the paper, then the ground starting to shake and… nothing. It was so odd; it was like he blacked out in the middle of the chant. *I guess it didn’t work.*

“Guys, I don’t think it worked, sorry,” he said, but got no response. He opened his eyes only to realize he was not in the library.

“Guys?” He was in what appeared to be an old alleyway, but not one he recognized. He could tell something was off but couldn’t quite put his finger on it. He stood up and looked around, confused. The houses next to the alleyway looked like something out of a fantasy novel with that old timey look, that rustic style. After seeing that, the realization hit Andrew like a truck.

“Ah! It worked!” Andrew looked for his friends but didn’t see them. “Guys?”

Andrew took a step forward and the world came to life. He heard screaming and yelling in a language he didn’t understand. It wasn’t Korean or English, he listened carefully to try and make sense of it.

“Révolution!” OK, that he understood. But it was said oddly though. Andrew was not good at getting accents, so he listened a little longer before deciding to jump in.

“À mort, le Roi!¹” It was French! Andrew, of course, wasn’t fluent in French; however, 80s time-travel movies taught him that it didn’t really matter. *Bill and Ted²* were wearing jeans way before they were invented and there were no consequences. And wherever they went, they could talk to anyone and be understood. He decided the next best thing to do was figure out exactly what was happening and the best way to do that was to interact with the populace.

He made his way out of his safe little alley to discover absolute chaos; screaming people filled the streets and Andrew thought he heard gunshots. He tried to remember anything from his history class about France and realized with horror that this was the French Revolution.

“C’est qui, lui?³” he suddenly heard a man say, as he pointed at him. He looked angry.

“Umm...”

“Regarde ses cheveux et ses habits! J’ai jamais vu ça! Ça doit être un noble!⁴” He yelled and people turned to stare at Andrew.

That’s when Andrew realized that real life and movies weren’t the same thing, as people started to yell and close in on him. Andrew’s first instinct was to run back to his safe spot in the alley. He thought he was so dead, but as he stepped back where he had appeared, time just stopped.

He stood there for a moment, unsure what to do. He had to hope that Jen and the others could figure out how to bring him back.

As Jen and Chandra looked around, Isaac felt like his binder was getting tighter around his chest. They didn’t know where Andrew was.

¹*Death to the King!*

²*Bill and Ted’s Excellent Adventure (1989, Orion Pictures)*

³*Who’s this?*

⁴*Look at his hair and clothes! I’ve never seen anything like it! He must be noble!*

“Did it actually work?” Chandra said, eyes wide.

“Of course not! Andrew!” Jen yelled as she started to look for her lost friend. Isaac wasn’t breathing. Andrew was his best friend... Well, at least that’s what Andrew thought but Isaac felt something more for him. He couldn’t help but imagine a flow of horrible things that could be happening to him right now.

Especially considering the book Isaac chose. What was he thinking picking a book about dinosaurs, and the Cretaceous Period no less, he was so dumb!

“Hey, look! My book!” Chandra said, as she picked up the book that was in the middle of the circle. Isaac hadn’t even noticed she had moved.

“That’s a relief,” Isaac said with a sigh. Andrew wasn’t going to have to fight dinosaurs. “What book did you choose?”

Chandra looked at Isaac with a worried expression as she hid the book behind her back. “Well...” She was playing with a strand of blond hair that had gotten undone from her bun. She always did that when she was nervous and that stressed Isaac out even more.

“Oh, just spit it out!” Jen piped up looking over at Chandra. She still looked upset. Isaac couldn’t blame her for it, she and Andrew had been best friends since they were kids. She was probably really worried.

“It’s about... the French Revolution.”

“God damn it!!!”

“Hey, I’ve been studying France for a long time, I-”

“What? Wanted to get caught up in the middle of a bloody revolution?”

“Guys!” Isaac said. He didn’t want a fight to break out all over again, he was stressed enough as it was. He understood that the others were worried and mad but fighting wouldn’t fix anything. Jen looked at him for a moment. Her eyes... It looked like she was reading his mind.

“Let’s not fight more, it’s useless.” Jen looked to the side, seemingly embarrassed, and Chandra stared at him with concern.

Isaac knew why she looked at him like that. Chandra knew about his feelings for Andrew. Isaac felt so lost, he wasn’t a leader, far from it. Andrew was the leader of this group and without him, he was scared things were going to fall apart. He wanted to do his best to keep everything together, but Isaac wasn’t Andrew... he was going to try though.

“Let’s-” But Isaac wasn’t able to finish as time froze.

Andrew didn’t know how long he had waited in the small space that froze time, knowing him it wasn’t even 10 minutes. The people that were chasing him were still there, but they were like statues. Andrew wasn’t afraid they would suddenly spring back to life anymore. He was wondering what was taking his friends so long.

“... Wait... AH! I’m an idiot!” He said, as he realized that, of course, his friend couldn’t help. If time stopped here, it had probably stopped there too.

Now, it was time to find a way to get out of this situation. If he squinted enough from inside, he could make out the outline of the time stopping bubble. It was an odd yellowy tint and wide enough for Andrew to stretch his arms before being out of range.

Test time. Andrew put his finger out of the bubble and waited. Nothing happened, so he slowly inched forward until most of his body was out but the tip of his toes. Still, nothing moved. He lifted his foot out of the bubble, but immediately put it back as he heard screaming for a nanosecond.

Everything had moved an inch, his whole body needed to be out of the bubble for time to move again. Andrew looked around and noticed two wooden boxes mixed with trash. He made sure he could reach one of them, then dragged one into his bubble. Reaching for the other was more difficult but he managed, barely. Now, he just needed to find a way to stack them. If he did, he would probably be able to reach that window ledge and get to the roof.

Andrew tried to lift the boxes but that was basically impossible, they were just too big. It took a lot of trial and error to get the box on top of the other, luckily for Andrew it wasn’t like he was wasting time or anything. He could have taken him a hundred years, and nobody would ever be the wiser. He finally managed by building a makeshift ramp with the garbage he could reach.

He climbed and jumped, reaching the window ledge as time started again. Realizing Andrew was gone, the man on the ground frantically looked around.

“Sorcier!⁵” one said, as he realized the boxes had been moved. Andrew had just managed to crawl on the roof out of sight, as one of the men looked up.

A sigh of relief escaped Andrew’s lips. He was finally out of danger, but he didn’t understand why the bubble didn’t bring him back to the library. He looked around at the scene to see if he could do anything to try and get back home but there was no glowing thing, no magic machine, no easy way out.

He sighed and decided to wait. Maybe his friend could find a way to help him get back to the present. God, time travel was messing with his brain, he needed to close his eyes for a moment.

“- try and figure out what went wrong, OK?” That was weird, Chandra though, she could swear there had been a pause between Isaac’s words but shrugged it off.

“Nothing went wrong,” Chandra said. “Actually, it all went according to plan, the spell did what it was supposed to do,” she said looking at Jen who actually seemed to agree with her for once.

Chandra never really understood why the short-haired brunette didn’t like her, maybe she assumed that she was a frilly popular girly girl. Other than her tanned skin, Chandra had all the looks of that kind of girl: blond hair, blue eyes, pretty face... It was both a blessing and a curse. It could also be the fact that Chandra tended to avoid Jen’s eyes. Technically it was Jen’s fault, her green piercing eyes made her feel like she was judging her every action, which she probably was.

⁵Sorcerer!

“Then why are we all here?” Isaac asked.

“Remember this was a ‘spell’ made for one person.” Jen said miming air quotes around the word “spell.”

Chandra really wanted to tell Jen off for her behaviour, sometimes her stubbornness came in handy, but other times it was just impossible to deal with. She didn’t though, Isaac would probably have a panic attack if they started fighting again.

The poor kid loved Andrew more than life itself, she could tell he was worried sick. Especially looking at his face now, he was pale, and his eyes were filled with worry and fear, probably scared something bad had happened to Andrew. Chandra just wanted to ruffle his fluffy bleached hair and tell him everything was going to be OK, but Isaac wouldn’t like that.

“Oh yeah... Well, we need to think about how to get Andrew back, he is probably counting on us to do something.” Isaac said, looking around the library.

The pieces of the ritual were still in place, the chalk was starting to disappear, and a couple of books were still scattered around the place. Other than that, nothing had really changed. Isaac picked up the books that were in the way staring at one for a moment, Chandra took a peek, it was about the Cretaceous period. She could tell it was Isaac’s book, no wonder he was so worried. Andrew would not have survived dinosaurs.

Chandra looked at the circle for a moment before Jen pulled her from her thoughts.

“This is a ritual made for one person...” She seemed to have had one of her epiphanies that, of course, she didn’t share.

Jen did that often, Chandra didn’t really understand why she kept everything to herself even her ideas, but hopefully this was a good one.

Andrew was chilling on the roof, looking over the sea of rioting people. He had guessed he had been sent to Chandra’s book. She had been studying France for a long time, she loved the country and probably, without thinking about the consequences, wanted to visit one of its most influential moments in history.

It was a bit sad that it was so violent. Andrew wasn’t a fan of that kind of stuff, but he couldn’t really blame France, violence is everywhere.

“Woah Andrew, you have been alone for too long, starting to get edgy,” he chuckled to himself. Andrew was an extrovert by nature so this wasn’t a great situation for him... alone... on a roof... he would probably go insane, even though it had only been about 5 minutes.

It felt like so much more to Andrew; being stuck in time for a while made him feel like he had been here for ages. This was ridiculous. He hoped everyone was OK. He knew that Jen and Chandra tended to fight when he wasn’t there and Isaac had heightened anxiety, so this was probably hell for him. Andrew wanted to do something, he hated getting others involved in his messes. Why did he even ask his friends to come?

He looked over the side of the building to see if his alleyway was safe. It wasn't. There were still a couple of guys standing there. Andrew dared not risk it, he didn't know where else he could go though.

He messed up his hair a little. He usually used hair gel to make it spike up but right now, it wasn't doing him any good. He couldn't change his clothes though; fitting in was going to be impossible. He knew why he had brought his friends with him; he was scared to do it alone. He always acted brave, but he wasn't, he had been preparing for weeks but still didn't feel ready.

He had looked through the library before to find a specific book with a specific date. He had had a whole speech ready but was still scared. He, at least, wanted Jen there, but things didn't go as planned; he ended up in France instead of with his dad. The man wasn't dead, at least from what Andrew knew, but he had left when he was a kid. Andrew wanted to give him a piece of his mind, but he was scared.

He wanted to go back in time to try and convince his father to stay, he wanted his dad back... but that didn't happen. He chickened out, too scared of what his dad would say, so he asked his friends to come. For support in a way. That didn't happen though, it just ruined everything.

Andrew couldn't bear being alone. He looked over at the bubble one more time and noticed it had changed; it was now a classic blue. Without thinking, Andrew jumped down towards the bubble, he just wanted to be with his friends again.

Jen quickly started to pick up everything from the floor and on the chalk, putting the books back on the shelves randomly.

"Jen what are you doing?" Chandra asked, as she watched Jen. Jen took a moment before answering.

"This ritual was made for one person, no one else is supposed to be here to mess things up. Because we've been walking on the chalk, it's now dull and you picked the book back up again. It messed everything up, like closing a door... maybe?" Jen added. It was just a theory after all. Chandra looked at her with surprise, as if she didn't think that Jen was taking this situation seriously before that. Of course she was, but she still thought that magic was a bunch of bull.

Isaac, on the other hand, started to help clear things off the floor as soon as he heard what Jen said, even redrawing over the symbols. He looked relieved in a way but was now crying, all the stress was finally too much. Jen felt bad for giving the kid hope, she didn't know if it would work.

"Well?" Jen said, looking at Chandra. "The book." Chandra hesitated for a moment before handing it to Jen.

"I didn't think you were taking this seriously..." she said, quietly. Jen was shocked but thought, *no wonder you were fighting with me.*

"Of course I am! Andrew is my best friend; I would do anything for him." Jen didn't want to come to an old dusty library to try a fake magic trick that Andrew had found in his uncle's book, but she did so anyway because she loved him.

Andrew was like family; she would always have his back. She took the book from Chandra's hands, Isaac was standing next to the symbol, he had stopped crying but looked like he could start again at any moment. Jen felt bad that she was still having a hard time with his recent change in pronouns and almost made a mistake earlier.

She would apologize later but right now, she needed to keep her priorities straight. She carefully placed the book in the centre of the circle and waited.

"What now?" Isaac asked.

"We wait," Jen responded. "There's nothing else we can really do." She backed away with Isaac. They didn't have to wait long as a bright light suddenly appeared.

Andrew was in 18th century France and now, he was on the floor of the library. He had jumped into the blue bubble and back then, there were boxes but not now, so he ended up falling on his face.

"Andrew!" The first one to speak was Jen, as she quickly approached to help him off the floor. Andrew groaned in pain, at least it wasn't stone but wood still hurt like hell.

After being propped up by Jen, he looked to see Chandra standing there, surprised but happy, and Isaac crying.

"I- " Andrew started but was cut off by Isaac.

"Oh my God, you're alive!" he said through tears. Andrew didn't know whether they were tears of sadness or happiness. He guessed maybe a bit of both with stress mixed in for flavour.

"Course I am!" Andrew smiled, slowly standing up. His head hurt a bit, but he could live with that. He looked around and saw the area around him was clean, but the rest of the library was a mess. He had no idea whether it was the spell's doing or his friends', but he didn't ask.

"What happened? Are you OK?" Chandra asked, probably speaking for Isaac, as he was trying to stop himself from crying.

"It worked!" he smiled. Jen didn't seem to enjoy the idea it did, but Andrew continued anyway. "It was surprisingly scary; I was in old timey France and people wanted to kill me. I don't know why," Andrew admitted, he didn't know any French. Isaac had finally stopped crying and managed to mutter.

"Can we please talk about it later..." he asked, probably not excited to hear how Andrew almost got killed.

"So, it actually worked..." Jen said flatly, looking at Andrew. Her stare was so intense, as if she was trying to force Andrew to tell the truth even though he wasn't lying. She looked away after a moment and started to think.

"This is amazing!" Chandra said with a smile. "Are there more spells in your uncle's book? We have to try them out!" Andrew smiled, but hesitated for a moment. He felt bad that he made Isaac cry and everyone worry.

"Yeah, but next time let's be more careful, OK?" he said, which made Jen chuckle and made him smile.

"OK but first," Isaac said. "We need to get out of here." Everyone looked at Andrew, he had forgotten they were locked inside the library.

"How long was I gone?" Andrew asked.

"Umm maybe ten, twelve minutes," Chandra said with the kind of smile that said *We're going to have to sleep in the library, aren't we?*

Andrew felt so embarrassed that he had no escape plan. He looked at Jen, but she gave him that look *You're the one who screwed up here, I'm not helping you.*

"I thought I was gone longer," Andrew admitted. Being stuck in time, he felt like much more time had passed than it actually did. Isaac looked over at him, expecting Andrew to have some grand plan, but he didn't.

"So..." Isaac said when Andrew didn't talk. "What now?"

"I don't want to bang on the door... let's just find a place to sleep..." Andrew said, too tired to think of anything else. Jen started laughing and Andrew sighed in defeat but smiled. Even though Jen was making fun of him, at least, she was laughing, and Andrew was happy to see her again.

"So, we're just stuck here?" Isaac said. But he didn't seem mad about it, he was more anxious about being caught or getting in trouble. Chandra smiled at Isaac, and that seemed to make the boy feel better, but not by much.

"Don't worry, Isaac," Jen said. "If we just camp where we hid, we shouldn't get caught. We will just have to stay in the library until it opens and people start coming in and out... you know... to avoid suspicion." She started to walk off towards the old children's library. Chandra followed her and Andrew stayed behind to talk to Isaac.

"So...", Andrew started. He wanted to comfort Isaac; he could tell he had stressed him out. A lot. "I'm sorry."

"It's OK," Isaac responded, avoiding eye contact. Andrew took that as a sign it wasn't.

"You know, I kinda wish you'd been there. I could have used your forward-thinking skills to avoid getting in trouble," he chuckled. But Isaac looked away.

Andrew wondered if he did something wrong again.

"You're always there for me!" he smiled, ruffling Isaac's hair. The kid was the shortest of the group, which made him kind of cute. "Let's go join the others! Don't wanna keep them waiting!" Andrew said, as he started to make his way to his friends with Isaac.