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about 1000 words

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“The Magic Fix”

by J. Penelope Baker

The rafters of the library were surrounded by so much smoke, I could almost read words in it. I shook my head, trying to clear the fog from my mind. *I need to focus.* I looked back down at the ancient tome laying open on the table, the words wavering on the page. My head pounded, screaming at me to stop and rest. *This is useless.* I slammed the book shut. *We're doomed.*

“Any luck?” Amelia whispered. Her search, apparently, had also been fruitless.

I shook my head, dread weighing down my stomach. I put the book on top of a stack full of other unhelpful books and picked up the stack, gesturing for Amelia to follow. We walked through the ink-scented labyrinth together, making our way into the piercing brightness of day.

“What are we going to do?” Amelia’s voice made me jump. I had been sitting in the smoke-muffled silence since early morning.

“I don’t know,” I said “We’ve tried everything. Books, divination, memory-loss spells...” I trailed off. My bones ached and my eyes burned. Our search had been going for three days now, growing more and more frantic as the hours passed.

“And now we’re out of time,” Amelia said.

We fell silent. I stared at the street in front of us. People were everywhere, some rushing to get somewhere, others wandering aimlessly from place to place. It was just a normal day for them. Win or lose, their world would stay the same.

“No use delaying the inevitable,” I said to Amelia, and with that, we started on our way.

“Are you hungry?” Amelia asked.

We were passing by someone selling assorted sweets, and while the comforting scent of vanilla would normally make me salivate, today it induced nothing but nausea. I shook my head. We kept walking towards the grandiose building that held the council chambers. “Hattie,” Amelia said, pulling me to a stop, “what are you going to do?”

I could feel her staring, but I couldn’t get myself to meet her gaze. “Don’t worry about me,” I said. “I’ll be fine.” I forced my body back into a walk.

Amelia began to babble. “I mean, maybe we missed something. Surely you can’t have been the *only* person to have...”

The memory of getting caught was playing on a loop in my mind, disrupting my thoughts and making it impossible to keep searching through my mental files.

“Are you kidding me right now?” Professor Fletcher had roared. “You went and broke the most important rule we have in Shroudport, and all you have to say is, ‘I’m sorry’?”

“...or maybe one of the Council members will listen to reason...” the chatter continued.

My eyes caught on a little shifter girl, currently tugging at her mom’s hand and pointing at something down the street. Her green cat-eyes sparkled as she shouted something in excitement. The loop changed reels, now playing a scene involving a very different girl. This one— human.

I heard the thumping of bass buzzing from the car before I saw it careening down main street. Right towards the crosswalk without braking, where a little girl was currently bent down, picking something up from the street. The mother was just turning around, just noticing her daughter was not with her. She would be too late.

I hadn't thought. I just acted. I had flung out my hand and stopped the car in its tracks just before it hit her. Her mom jumped into action, grabbing her daughter, and retreating back to safety. Amelia had acted equally as fast, grabbing my hand and sprinting into an alleyway, waiting until we were safely out of sight to teleport us out of there.

"...so I guess I'm really just hoping that—" Amelia fell silent as we finally arrived at the gleaming marble steps. We halted, breathless.

"Come on," I said, and started my way up the stairs.

Amelia just nodded, affected by the spell surrounding us. The only sound as we ascended the steps were our own breaths and footfalls. The Council's building would've been intimidating even without the spell placed on it. It sat on a raised platform, and the entire thing, from the base of the building to its tallest central spire, appeared to have been carved from the same, black-veined marble. The spell that cast on it created an invisible, muffling bubble that spilled a bit onto the sidewalks at the base of the steps. Most pedestrians knew to avoid this, but the few who didn't became awestruck as they passed through, unable to do anything but continue in silence—at least until they left its influence.

We pushed open the heavy metal doors and were greeted with an identical set directly in front of us. My name was inscribed in the metal at eye level.

"They gave you the main room," Amelia breathed. "That can't be good, right?" Amelia asked.

"How should I know?" I replied. "Like you, I've never done this before." Privately, though, I knew that couldn't possibly be a good sign.

"How long until it starts?" Amelia asked, looking around for some indication of time.

“Horatia Lauren Penfield,” a voice boomed through the room, echoing a little off the walls.

Amelia jumped, but I breathed in one last time before making my way to the heavy metal doors that held my fate.

“What are you going to *do*?” Amelia begged.

I stopped with one hand on the cool metal handle. “I’m going to face the consequences. I’ll accept whatever the council says.”

“But—” Amelia started, but I spoke over her.

“I’ll be fine. I don’t care what the punishment is. I did what I did. I don’t regret it, obviously, but the law is the law.” I stared at the intricate carving on the metal in front of me.

“I’ll be okay, Amelia,” I repeated, then walked in to accept what lay ahead.