*The Apprentice*

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**Chapter 1 – The Meeting**

I am sitting in front of a massive black door, the sunshine glittering off the golden handle, waiting and hoping for someone to open it. Escaping from the thieves was harder than I thought, but freedom is worth it. Will someone in this amazing city love a cat like me? An old man slowly trudges up beside me, holding a long wooden staff. Will he help me?

Thank goodness my long journey is over, thought the wizard Rummel. He had travelled far and wide, covering thousands of miles, hoping to find his new apprentice. His weary legs needed a rest and his stomach grumbled in anticipation of a hot stew for dinner. Looking down he found a black cat, skinny and sad, weaving between his legs, craving his attention.

“Meow, meow, meow” wailed the cat.

“What do you want little cat?”, asked Rummel, huffling into his big white beard. “Where do you come from I wonder?”

“Meow, meow, meow” answered the cat. I wonder why he doesn’t understand me. Maybe he’ll help me get in the city’s door.

“You remind me of my old cat called Jet. Maybe I should call *you* Jet, jet black like my old cat.”

“Meow!” yelled the cat excitedly.

“I wonder if you would like to be able to speak, just like my old cat Jet! I think you would! Let me cast the spell” said Rummel excitedly. It had been quite a while since he had cast a spell. After losing his last apprentice, magic had seemed not so important to him.

“Hazzah” shouted the wizard, pointing his staff at Jet after banging it into the ground.

“What did you just do to me?” asked Jet.

“I gave you the power of speech”, said Rummel.

“Whoa I can speak! Thank you. Thank you! How can I repay you?” asked Jet.

“Perhaps you could help me look for my new apprentice”, suggested Rummel.

“I would love to. After all, your gift will help me make a better life. I’m looking for love and someone to care for me”.

“Come with me into the city of Durim and let’s find a good inn with a great stew.”

Rummel and Jet entered Durim through the door, beginning their search for dinner.

**Chapter 2 –Durim**

As they walked into the city there were dozens of elaborately dressed men in black and blue cloaks, covered in golden moons and stars. The colourful buildings were shaped with curves and turns. Wherever you looked there were stores selling exotic foods, smelling of spices.

Finally, after searching the stores, they found Café Max, which luckily sold a fish stew, perfect for both Rummel and Jet. They dined outside to enjoy the city and the sunshine and slurped up their stew as fast as they could.

When they had finished their magnificent meal, Rummel told Jet about meeting the first apprentice.

“I’m going to meet a young girl who wishes to become my new apprentice. She needs to pass a test of pure knowledge”.

“Great. Where is she? “asked Jet.

“We agreed to meet at the town square next to the fountain when the sun is at its highest peak today”.

“ Let’s get going now”, suggested Jet.

They arrive at the fountain to find a young girl with frizzy red hair sitting on a bench. She was busy studying a large volume titled “Magic for Beginners”. Much to Rummel’s and Jet’s puzzlement, the book was upside down and she had not even noticed.

“Greetings. Are you Lizzy?”

“Oh. You frightened me,” said Lizzy, nearly falling into the fountain.” You’re a lot bigger than I thought. Are you the great wizard Lemmur that walked thousands of miles just to get here?”

“It’s not Lemmur, it’s Rummel”.

“Oh, daisy whoopsy, my mistake!” said Lizzy in a sing-song voice.

In a soft and mysterious voice, Rummel gave Lizzy her test. “What is invisible yet visible, edible and drinkable, but you take it in without even knowing? questioned Rummel.

“Bananas”, yelled out Lizzy in an excited voice.

“Well that doesn’t sound right to me. Could the answer possibly be air?” suggested Jet.

There was silence for a moment and after a few seconds, Rummel found his voice again and said “That is very impressive Jet. You are correct! Good for you! You are a clever cat.”

Jet smiled at Rummel showing his lovely white teeth. Rummel grinned back at Jet and in a kind voice, whispered in Lizzy’s ear. Lizzy’s shoulders slumped for just a second, shrugged her shoulders and skipped away, leaving behind her “Magic for Beginners” book.

“I am not particularly looking forward to meeting my next possible apprentice, Zane. He delivered **his** message to me using six frightening gargoyles. Who does that kind of thing nowadays?”

“Are you meeting him here or somewhere else?” asked Jet.

“He demanded I meet him at *his* specialist tailor’s shop where he is being fitted for robes befitting *my* apprentice. He has not even been offered the job yet!”

“Hhm. He sounds quite interesting”.

Jet and Rummel began the slow climb up through the city into the upper streets, looking for the shop “Robes for Richies”.

**Chapter 3 – Growing Gargoyles**

To their amazement, “Robes for Richies” was a large, rather important looking shop, with magnificent window displays of the finest cloths and materials from all over the land. Both Jet and Rummel were amazed not only at the items that could be bought, but at the cost of them as well.

Standing out the front was a rather tall dapper looking young man in wizarding robes, leaning on what seemed to be a gargoyle. The man was tapping his watch looking stern and scowling at passer-by’s.

“Are you the young man named –“ began Rummel.

“My name is Zane”, he interrupted in a stern voice.

“Are you meeting a wizard here today - “asked Jet.

“What if I was? What business is that of yours, you little beast?” he replied in a rude and annoyed voice.

“Excuse me. Please don’t speak to my friend like that. He deserves your respect and –“ began Rummel.

“How dare you address me in that manner”, snapped, Zane, clenching his fist.

“Listen Zane. I have travelled a long way to speak to you. Please show some more manners or-”said Rummel in a soothing voice.

“Or what! Can we just get on with this? It seems to me it will just be a formality; it is well known in Durim that I am the best young wizard here. What is this task I must perform?” shouted Zane with a furious look on his reddening face. The gargoyle that was next to Zane began to mysteriously grow bigger and also darker in colour.

Rummel glanced at the gargoyle and began addressing Zane. “Answer this question. I am not stable in the open but when I am in small spaces I am in one place. I am hottest when blue and –“

“’Yeah, yeah enough clues. Water is the answer!” exclaimed Zane. “Is that the hardest challenge you can give me?”

“I think it may be the exact opposite” suggested Jet in a very polite voice. “Is it in fact Fire?”

“How would you know the answer – you’re only a cat!” bellowed Zane. The gargoyle next to Zane grew even bigger, seeming to respond to Zane’s moods.

“Actually” began Rummel, ‘fire is correct”.

“Exactly what I said!” exclaimed Zane, throwing his hands in the air in a victorious manner.

“But you said Water, and I said Fire” said Jet, in a determined voice.

“Yes Jet. You were correct. I think I may have underestimated how clever you really are”, said Rummel, looking at Jet with an impressed look upon his face and nodding.

“Liars both of you!” Zane shouted whilst throwing his arms and cape out wide behind him. The gargoyle that had been slowly growing and darkening split at this very moment into *two* menacing gargoyles and took up positions either side of Zane.

With a flurry of his wand and wrist, and shouting “Flazoo” Rummel turned the two gargoyles into two fluffy bunny rabbits. They quickly hopped away, escaping into the city.

Zane, angry at this sudden turn of events, glared at Rummel with his eyes and shouted “My gargoyles!” In a huff and on the turn of his heel, Zane stormed off in the direction of his rabbits.

“Oh well”, sighed Jet. “He did say he was the best young wizard in Durim. Hopefully he can turn them back”.

Rummel smiled a knowing smile. “Oh well. I hope my last interested apprentice turns out to be much more pleasant than Zane. Although, I am quite confused about my next apprentice.”

“Why are you confused Rummel”, asked Jet.

“Well I saw a very peculiar message on the ground near my house that seemed to come from a balloon that was flying overhead. The message was in the shape of a shadow on the ground written by a thing who calls themselves Shadow. It was all very confusing.”

“That is very strange. Where are we meeting this Shadow?” asked Jet.

“In the topmost tower of Durim survives a tree. Here the Shadow said he sometimes hides out from others. That is where we will go after dusk”, said Rummel.

With that, they continued their slow climb higher up into the peaks and towers of Durim.

**Chapter 4-The Shadow**

Rummel and Jet continued to climb higher and higher through the amazing city of Durim up to the uppermost towers.

“Are we nearly there? Can we have a rest?” asked Jet.

“Of course, my favourite park bench is just ahead, let’s sit there”.

When they reached the bench, Jet jumped up and began to find a spot that suited him.

Suddenly Jet jumped straight off the bench and on to Rummel’s head.

“What’s the matter Jet? Are you jumping at shadows?” asked Rummel.

“More like shadows are jumping on me!” exclaimed Jet.

“Whatever do you mean? But wait! Remember that shadow from the balloon?” To his amazement, when Rummel looked at the bench, the words “**Goodhi little black dog**” had formed, and as suddenly, vanished.

“Pardon me. I’m not a dog and I’ve heard of goodbye but not goodhi”, stated Jet.

“Sorry big kat” formed on the bench.

“Are you aware that you keep making mistakes?” asked Rummel”.

“**I know. I haven’t bean using leters for many years. I make shaodws to speak**” formed in bold and then underline, before vanishing.

“That sounds like the letters I saw on the ground Jet! Do you want to become my new apprentice?” asked Rummel.

“**Yes. I was once an eval wizard who tried to cast a spell using the sun and it backfried**” formed Shadow.

In a gentle but firm voice, Rummel asked Shadow the riddle. What instrument can you hear but not see? Can break glass and lift our hearts? Can be used in anger and in joy”.

The Shadow stayed in a cloud for a long time whilst he pondered the riddle. Slowly and nervously the word “Time” appeared on the bench.

“I’m sorry Shadow but that is the wrong answer” said Rummel in a sad voice.

“Excuse me Rummel but is the correct answer Voice”, whispered Jet.

“I meant I kneaded more time, not the answer” shaped Shadow in letters that looked like teardrops.

“I’m sorry but you’re wrong Shadow”.

Slowly Rummel turned his head and peered down at Jet, squinting his eyes ever so slightly. His right hand started scratching his head and then began slowly stroking his beard. His eyes suddenly widened, eyebrows became raised and he exclaimed “A-ha! You answered all the riddles correctly Jet! You are what I have been looking for all along!”

Jet looked up at him, his eyes shining, ears pricked up and tail curling. “I thought you’d never notice!”

“As a reward for being my new apprentice I shall cast one spell for you. What would you like?” asked Rummel in a kind voice.

“I’d love you to turn Shadow back into a wizard. Maybe he learnt his lesson from his last spell”.

With that Rummel pointed his wand at the bench, whose Shadow has turned into a giant smile, and shouted “Bazaam”. With that a large puff of smoke appeared and then disappeared, leaving behind an elderly man.

“Thank you little black cat” said Shadow.

“You’re welcome”.

THE END