

I

Camille was quite proud of her last incantation. She managed a simple spell, but it had been a while since she'd last practised. Can she do something harder? Probably...but it was her partner's turn now.

One should always do magic as with a partner. It's safer with someone to look after you while you're incantating. If anything goes wrong, they can catch you and avoid... unfortunate consequences.

She looked around the little group gathered at the hill top, which was well known to actually be an ancient oppidum, where magic had been practiced for millenia. Her magic society often chose these places, as newbies had an easier time there.

Everyone around her was just trying out different things and enjoying themselves. She smiled idly in memories of joyful outings with them. But anyway, there was magic to be practised... Camille turned to her partner:

"What do you want to do?"

"This one looks fun!"

He handed the grimoire pointing to an incantation, which was meant to momentarily cancel gravity, giving a sensation of weightlessness. It was simple, yet could represent a challenge. Today was about trying out things though, and Camille was up for it.

"Let's do this!"

He confidently traced a circle on the ground with letterings in an arabesque language. Although she was used to the language by now, Camille wasn't sure of what her partner was doing exactly, but decided to trust him.

"I'm ready to start! Can you get in position?"

Camille set up a silver cord between them. Her role was important: In case the magic should become dangerous, she needed to pull the cord and bring him back to safety. As such, she was also tied to the spell and could feel its effects but needed to stay focused on the safety of the person she was tied to.

"This spell's wording sounds odd" Camille couldn't help but think, as he was incantating. Still, she could see objects next to them and her partner lifting off slightly rising into the air, so all seemed right.

A few minutes passed and the incantation was ending. Now was a crucial point: he needed to safely close the spell or bursts of energy would zoom out of the circle and cause untold damage around them.

That's exactly what happened.

Before she had time to react, he instinctively stepped aside and from the circle a powerful jet of magical energy shot out like a bullet to hit her.

The whole world whirled around. Flashes of the hill coming and going before her eyes. "No, this isn't possible, this isn't happening" the only thoughts shouting in her mind.

An impact, and everything stopped. She screamed. No words came out. Shocked faces appeared above her. Her friends urged her not to move but that's all she wanted to do. Finally, she pronounced intelligible words:

"What happened??"

"Mate... you took a hit"

Only then did she realise how giant the people around her looked. The reality struck. She was reduced to the size of a doll.

## II

It took forever to get emergencies on site. They carried her, in a state of shock, to the healing temple. No one could say for sure the injuries she had, beyond the obvious size reduction. Accidents in magic, although rare, had grave consequences. How on earth could such a thing come to be?

The unbearable wait continued at the temple, until, finally, a consultant healer came to see her. He looked utterly unfazed as he examined her.

“Any pain in the head?”

“No?”

Camille was very surprised by the question... how was her head the issue? She was the size of a doll! The couple who had accompanied her to the temple were looking at him dubiously. Unworried as before, he just continued:

“Okay... I think you got really lucky. I don't see any residual issues... you won't need further treatment. You can go home.”

“But... my size?”

“Move around the house. You'll be back to normal after a few weeks.”

Just like that, he was gone, leaving Camille and her friends flabbergasted.

“Common... let's get you home” her friends told her.

With great difficulties, she got to their llama drawn carriage.

In a way she was relieved. She wouldn't have to spend the night at the temple, dealing with poor food and bad sleep. At least she could be in her own space. She wanted peace right now.

### III

“Did this really happen?” Camille was wondering as she emerged from troubled sleep. When she tried to get up though, reality came back hard. Her feet couldn’t touch the floor. All her body was aching from the aftermath of the impact. Healing would take a while but she was still here, on Earth.

She managed to reach her connected book and flick pages to messages from friends. The book was gigantic for her and she struggled with it, but her efforts were rewarded, as messages of support came pouring in. These warmed her heart. She’ll get through this.

Over the following weeks, she found challenges everywhere: Getting out of bed, cooking food, carrying groceries home, or finding clothes that fit.

Luckily, friends helped her with many of these, and built a safe environment around her. They installed an oversized cat flap to her door so it would be easy for her to come and go, bought her a miniature connected book with a matching quill made from a robin feather. They even manufactured little ladders for her to reach high places.

Camille was never one to ask for help, preferring to do things on her own, but she was forced to admit she needed people around her.

She just couldn’t be alone. Whenever she closed her eyes, her mind replayed endlessly the moment of the accident. No one was around to protect her from her own mind, but having people around kept things at bay. No, she definitely didn’t want to be alone.

“I’ll be back to normal soon!” she would tell them.

Camille truly believed what the consultant healer told her. She also went to the magic gatherings sometimes, not to participate but to be with her people, and they gladly accepted her. She even had conversations with her former partner who messed up so badly. It seemed like Camille was just going to bounce back like nothing happened.

Not everything was okay, however. The promised regrowth was not happening. Although she trusted the temple she was originally sent to, it was time to ask questions to her local healer.

“Did they not scan you for residual energy at the temple?” Asked the local healer, when Camille saw him.

“No... They just said I had been lucky.”

He couldn’t help wincing at this, but quickly composed himself.

“I’d better scan you. You seem fine, but I just want to make sure.”

He took out a pendulum with a dial at the end of it. The dial’s face had the same arabesque lettering Camille used in magic. The healer hovered it around her tiny body. The dials’ hands started rotating madly. His face wasn’t hiding his concerns anymore.

“Don’t worry, you’re fine, you’re still standing...”

“What do you mean?”

“The dial shows... It shows that a lot of energy has been absorbed. Such an amount is life-altering. We need to do more investigating... but your condition is chronic.”

He continued talking about various tests, but Camille’s mind was far away. His words escaped her. Shocked, angry thoughts flooded her mind.

#### IV

Camille's guts were hot and wrenching.

He dared. The person who was responsible for her current state was showing off his magic skills. She saw it in her book. He went out, did the very thing that caused a disaster and flaunted about it like nothing happened. She had been staring at this for longer than she should have, powerless to switch pages, powerless to bring herself together, powerless to ask for the support she needed, powerless to stop the tears.

Camille was alone. That was life now.

Her friends had gone back to their own lives. Her condition wasn't going to improve. What could they do about it? Camille just had to figure out a new life. All she had to do was to get out there and socialise again. What was stopping her doing that? The nightmares, perhaps. The obvious reduction in size, yes, though she could still get out.

"Common... I can't be that lazy!" she murmured to snap out of her torpor.

With difficulty, she got on the street. Immediately, she had to step away from a pedestrian who nearly stepped on her. As she did so, she found herself next to the road, where the proximity with carriages gave her horrifying visions of getting ran over and trampled.

Walking to the closest cafe was a challenge in itself, and so she decided to stop there. A warm tea would help...

Camille did her best to fit in the cafe. Chairs were massive for her, and the tea pot was so big she could have bathed in it... It was the empty chair in front of her that bothered her most though. She used to love sitting with her friends, chatting about incantations and magical things they could try.

Now she was on her own. When she looked around her, she was the only one who was alone. Could the people who were with her always come to sit with her again? She rejected the thought. They were all having a marvellous time, whimsically spending their days doing what she once loved. Who would trade that against spending time with a recluse who had nothing fun to talk about?

She repressed the lump in her throat and the tears in her eyes.

"Not in front of everyone, please."

She went home.

V

It had been a few days since she last got out. All she was doing was flicking through her connected book, waiting for someone to notice her. Maybe, though... Maybe it was time to try something else. She knew of an event in the evening specifically to meet people. Why not try? She had nothing to lose.

She got to the event, not without difficulties. Did she look too worried? If she looked too worried people wouldn't talk to her... she forced a smile. She had not been out in a while. Hopefully no one will notice.

A woman with a gentle smile addressed her:

"Hello dear, are you here for the event? Have you filed the questionnaire?"

"No sorry... I got decided at the last minute"

"Don't worry. What's important is your hobbies... we try to group people to create easier connections, you see."

"Erm... I don't have any... I mean right now... I used to practice magic though!"

"Alright... let me try to introduce you to this table"

The hostess took her to a busy table and set up a high chair for her. Camille hadn't talked to this many people in months. How would she even start?

"Hey! I'm Antoine, What's your name?"

Camille turned to see a young man next to her, with a bright smile. The way he was looking at her with compassion unsettled her.

"Hey... I'm Camille" She didn't know what to say

"Are you into the occult?"

"Yeah... I mean I used to do a lot of incantations. Are you?"

"Oh yeah, I love reading the stars!"

Camille was still short of things to ask. Stars reading was far from her domain. She kept her eyes down, not knowing how to behave. Thankfully, Antoine continued:

"So, how come you stopped practicing magic?"

"I... survived a blast of uncontrolled energy. My partner got scared and let go. It was an accident, but... I'm left the way you see me now."

Antoine's rictus made Camille uneasy.

"Oh my... I'm sorry... that's crazy" He evidently didn't know what to answer

"It's alright. I'm alive eh?" she tentatively smiled

An awkward silence settled between them, neither knowing how to communicate with the other. Camille finally broke it:

"What do you read in the stars exactly?"

"It's fascinating! The way they shine every night tells me various things... like stories from my ancestors, I love that"

“Are you guys talking about stars reading?!”

A woman bursted in their conversation. She had been talking to everyone in the room with great enthusiasm and now was their turn.

Antoine and her started talking eagerly. Camille sat there, unable to add to the conversation. Soon, she was lost in a sea of noises. She went home again. What else could she do?

## VI

Camille was sitting on her roof. One of the good things about her size is that she was able to climb up her walls easily and access it. She was at peace here. Little to no sounds reached here.

It would be a beautiful place to die.

Some time had passed since her first social event, and though she kept trying, nothing improved. She felt small, invisible, yet her size had nothing to do with it. She only had so much will in her, and that all spent. She knew of herbs.

A bit of a potion and she wouldn't have to keep trying anymore. The thought was relaxing. Camille didn't have the concoction tonight though. She'll just have to keep going one more day.

## VII

The encounter sent electroshocks throughout Camille's body. A cat. Normally harmless but she was a toy to him now. He had approached her while she was in her safe place. She stiffened. Even though she didn't know how to live, she didn't know if that was how she wanted to die.

He kept approaching, fixing her. Then he just sniffed. Analysing her in all aspects. He lifted a paw. She closed her eyes, expecting a brutal end. Instead, she just felt a gentle tap on her head. She opened her eyes. He was just sitting, his emerald eyes full of curiosity.

Unsure why she was doing it, she extended her hand, reached his head, and stroked him.

"Mmmrrrrp?" he voiced

A sudden noise from afar caught his attention and within a moment he was gone.

## VIII

Meeting with the cat became a usual routine. Each night, she was looking forward to seeing him. He was a silent companion to her contemplation. She brought him food so he would keep coming back, but he didn't seem to mind when she occasionally forgot. He didn't have a collar, so she assumed he didn't have an owner.

One evening, he came to their usual meeting but something was wrong. She could see a red patch on his calico fur. Her throat dried up, he couldn't be hurt, she wouldn't handle it.

Nonchalantly, he washed himself and the red patch disappeared under his tongue. She realised it was just a bit of pasta sauce, he must have gotten it from food hunting. Camille couldn't help but laugh as tears pricked her eyes.

"You can't scare me like that!"

"Meeoow?"

"I've had my life destroyed, I've seen a person I trusted with my life take it over while I could do nothing, and the people who were always with me are far away now. Do you think you can just turn up and look all bloodied? You're the only one I have left and I won't let you be hurt like I was!"

She bursted out, the flood gates of her tears fully opened and she had no desire to close them after keeping them closed for so long.

He looked at her curiously while she was crying. Eventually, he put his head against her, purring softly. She embraced his head and rested her own into his soft fur. There her tears slowly dried.

After a while, she raised herself up. It was getting cold and late. The emotions of the past few moments made her light headed, though. The cat was looking at her again.

"Meow?"

"Dizzy... I'm going to call you Dizzy." She smiled, and busied her thoughts on how to get him home.

## IX

Camille got the idea when Dizzy jumped on her kitchen top. She had a ladder to access it but it took her a lot of effort. To him it was effortless. What if she just sat on his back?

“Come here Dizzy”

“mmmMMrrraooww” he resisted, but complied.

She patted him gently when he got to her level. He looked surprised but didn't budge when she mounted on his back. She made herself comfortable on his shoulders. There she should be fine...

“Now jump up again!”

“Mmrrrrpp”

He was being reluctant.

“Dizzy...”

He exhaled grumpily but sat up, and tapped his feet in preparation for the jump. Camille's tiny heart was beating hard as she clung with all her strength.

He jumped.

The instant later they were softly landing on the kitchen top.

“That was so cool!”

“Meeeeooww”

“Can you do it again?”

He aimed at the top of the cupboards this time. Several wine bottles Camille stored there fell off.

## Epilogue

“You ready?”

From Dizzy’s back, Camille was talking to Antoine and Ellie, his new girlfriend. Turns out, he and the woman from the social event became close. Camille smiled at the sight of the happy couple.

She was introducing them to magic today, back with her society. Climbing up the hill on cat-back turned out to be far easier than on foot. Especially now she had a little saddle Ellie had fashioned for her.

“Yeah, I think so... Ellie?”

Ellie just smiled back

“Don’t be so frightened! We have an expert with us!”

Camille laughed, truly and effortlessly

“If you’re not scared of living in a doll house!” she jeered.

She directed them on drawing the arabesque letterings, clumsy as they were. Moments later, multicolour bubbles appear from the circle.

“Meeeeeeooooowrrr” Dizzy was mesmerised by the spectacle.

Camille trusted him not to move, as he was used to carrying her. Thanks to him, she’d reclaimed her life. Her heart felt light with that thought.