

Omens, Illusions, and Endowments

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Sandy was always the non-conformist. She never wanted to be like everyone else, never wanted to not stand out in a crowd. She was independant and reckless.

Then she was shipped off to Cormerick's School for Unfortunate Talents.

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1 - Chapter One

Chapter One

"Sandy!"

"Huh?" Sandy jumped guiltily from the mirror, "Uh, what?"

"Um, do you want the last pizza piece?" Her sister asked.

"Er, no you can have it."

"Thanks," her sister trotted back upstairs. Sandy turned back to the mirror and made one more face. What she had been doing was practicing. Practicing what you may ask? Practicing the expressions essential for Junior High; sarcasm, skepticism, and plain out huh!? Yup, she was ready for school all right.

Sandy stared intensely at the mirror and wiggled her eyebrows slightly. 'Sandy' was the appropriate name for her shock of dirty blonde hair. It was, of course, thick and unmanagable, but a simple ponytail could rid her of that laborious job. She rested her hand on her chin and rapped two of her fingers across her lips. She narrowed her sea-green eyes. The perfect 'I'm listening, but I'm not a total loser creep like my sister, so I actually don't care much.' look.

She didn't exactly know what she was preparing for. She would be going to school with the exact same friends as last year, after all. What would they care what she looked like? Her friends weren't superficial at all.

Speaking of her friends, she couldn't wait to see Carly again! Carly, with her frizzy red hair and thick, horn-rimmed glasses that slid down her nose constantly. Carly and the way she scrunched up her face when Sandy wasn't paying attention in class. Carly and her quotes that she got from famous poets and authors. Carly and her ever-present pile of books at least as tall as she was. Sandy missed her alot. And her other friend, Randy Isaacs. He hated his first name, so they just called him 'Izzy'. He was a dork, all in all. A total dork convinced he knew everything. He looked like a total dork, too, so he had nothing going for him. But he was funny, so Carly and Sandy liked him. Sandy laughed as she remembered how they all met. It was in the first grade, and Sandy was going to a different school than all her kindergarten friends, so she was really worried about meeting someone. She had sat down next to Carly at lunch because Sandy had liked, and still did like, her vibrant hair. Carly, even at that young age, was whirling away on a PDA of some sort.

"Hi, I'm Sandy." Sandy had said, giving a smile.

Carly looked up and smiled a braced smile back. Sandy had instantly fallen in love with the shiney metal braces, and wished with all her might that she might get smacked in the mouth with a softball or something so she would need them, too.

"I'm Carly."

At that moment, a little boy in a red jumper ran up to them, holding out his lunch tray. Izzy had wild, jet black hair now, but back then it was really light. Without a word, he sat down next to them. Truthfully, he thought Carly was cute and wanted to impress her. And the best way to impress a girl, said his six-year-old mind, was to stick corn up his nose. It made Sandy throw up, but Carly couldn't stop laughing and once Sandy finished burying her face into a paper bag, they were friends ever since. The doorbell ring snapped Sandy out of her daydream. She looked at the clock. Nine thirty. They had started dinner late! ...but more importantly...who would come ringing someone's doorbell this late at

night?

2 - Chapter Two

Chapter Two

Sandy sat brooding in her room. If only she could keep her mouth shut! Her mom and dad were lovely people, but even the loveliest have fights. And the stranger at the door had sparked a fight that had been coming for a LONG time. GOSH! Her mind exploded, why why why on earth did you have to open your mouth????????

Sandy was not a person that could keep things to herself, she lacked a lot in self restraint, especially when it came to opinions. It had been cute when Sandy was 2 or 3 when she said, "I think that looks like puke." But then she got older and it was no longer cute, only irksome. And tonight it hadn't been irksome, it had been a spark to one of the worst family fights ever.

She thought it wouldn't matter if she said, 'who the heck would be calling at this late hour?' But it had to Dad, everything mattered to him, and Lindsey, Charlie, and Cammy had stayed out of it. They always did, BECAUSE THEY ARE THE SMART ONES!!!!!!!!!! Thought Sandy. Cammy was the youngest, a small skinny blonde in 4th grade, then Sandy and Effel, identical twins, came in, tall and gangly with unmanageable sandy brown hair in 8th grade, then Lindsey, a short tan brunette in 9th grade. And finally Charlie, who was tall and gangly like Sandy and Effel with the same unmanageable sandy brown hair that adorned Sandy's head. But it looked oh so much better on him, thought Sandy.

Cammy, Lindsey, and Charlie were peaceful people, for that matter Effel was too, but being the loyal twin that she was she had backed up Sandy.

"Hey." Effel came into the room. Just her presence made Sandy feel a bit better.

"Oh Ef I have such a big mouth! Why can't I keep anything to myself????"

"It's okay Sands, everyone will be over it by tomorrow."

"I know, but there's still tonight."

Effel smiled sympathetically. Sandy and Effel looked so much alike that their mom and dad sometimes got them confused.

But not tonight, thought Sandy bitterly. They know who had the war spirit and who had the peaceful manner.

"When does volleyball start?" Sandy asked her sister wearily. She was suddenly so very tired.

"Next week sometimes, I'm not sure." That was thing with Effel and sports, she was never sure about them. Sandy was the athletic one. Probably the reason Sandy had been so feisty tonight was she hadn't had practice of anything.

She played every sport that allowed girls and a lot that didn't. She had wicked athletic skills. But Effel, being someone peaceful was content to the half hour of P.E. they had everyday.

"Ugh." Said Sandy, tired and weary. Her sister stood up to leave.

"I'll tell Charlie to do that thing that he does. The smoothing things over thing that's exactly the opposite of what you do."

Sandy smiled and rolled over on the bed. "Thanks." She said.

And Effel left.

Sandy pressed her head into the pillows and stared at her ceiling. Those little plastic, glow-in-the-dark stars were littered across it. Most of them had faded, but a few were glowing dimly. Sandy had wanted to be an astronaut when she was younger, but now she wasn't so sure. She was athletic, and she would

love to get a scholarship, but she was also uncertain about which sport was her favorite. She had spread herself so thin already, with all the activities.

She popped her knuckle boredly. Her frustration was just starting to retreat and give way to the utter boredom of being confined to one's room when Charlie appeared in her doorway.

"Hey." He said in his cool-as-a-cat way.

"Hey." Sandy said. Her voice was still a little thick.

Charlie sat beside her and smoothed her hair back from her brow. She wondered why he bothered, as it fell back into place almost immediately, but it made her feel better all the same.

"You okay?"

"Mmmhmmm."

"Doesn't sound like it."

"Just wondering about that guy who came to the door." Sandy said.

"We're having dinner with him, but alas, you've been banished." Banished was what he called it when she was sent to her room for the night.

"Mom's sending Cammy up with some food later."

"Sure." Sandy said, then put up a high-pitched, girly voice, "We'll give her time to cool down!"

Charlie saw that coming, "Translation: I don't want to be associated with that smart-alec piece of hair with the girl attached."

It was a game she and her brother played. She would mock someone saying something that got on her nerves, and he would do the translation. Charlie smoothed her hair back one more time, again in vain, then patted her back and left. Then his head popped back through the doorway, "Thursday, the second week of school. Three forty to five o'clock, Volleyball tryouts. Come and join the fun!"

Then he was gone. Sandy laughed. Charlie had a photographic memory, and loved to flaunt it in admittedly considerate ways. But now she was bored again. She rose silently and, with her conscience nagging her, made her way down the stairs and into the alcove near the dining room. 'Eavesdropping is wrong!' Carly and Effel would say in perfect unison.

...Carly and Effel weren't here.

3 - Chapter Three

Chapter Three

"Where is the other one?"

Sandy frowned, the voice wasn't familiar, it was probably the visitor.

"At a friend's house for the night." It was her father's voice this time, but there was an edge to it.

"Um, I'm done with dinner, can I go?" It was Charlie. Figures, he's going to come out and ambush me and then I'll never figure out what they want. Even though Sandy had a twin she was closer to Charlie. She suspected it was because they had been together through all their childhood, doing sports. When Effel and Cammy and Lindsey played barbies or something.

Sandy's whole family was glamorous. Cammy was blonde, Effel, even though identical to Sandy managed to look beautiful while Sandy was a mess, and Lindsey was dark and tan and the picture of a model. Charlie was.... well Charlie, he even managed to look okay. Her parents were slim and tall, her mother blonde and her father with dark hair.

And all the pretty genes were used up on my siblings, thought Sandy. But she didn't care that much, hanging out with the dorks she did, she fit right in. A plus card was that she was an ultra-jock. So she knew everybody.

Charlie came out of the dining room, his expression betrayed none of his feelings, but Sandy knew he wasn't surprised to see her.

"Who's the visitor?" Asked Sandy in a whisper.

"Some guy." Charlie was frequently giving obvious facts away as private information. It was an annoying habit.

"Effel and Cammy are coming." He muttered.

"And Lindsey?" Sandy asked.

"Being sociable."

"I really didn't need to ask."

Charlie grinned and began to walk down to the part of the house that was theirs. Their house had been set up specifically for their family, thought Sandy. The back of the house was Sandy and Charlie's, sharing a bathroom and a study. You might think it would be pretty disgusting to share a bathroom with your older brother, but it wasn't really. And the study was just a room plastered with sports posters. It also had a desk with an apple laptop and an electric guitar. It was always messy but no one except Sandy and Charlie ever used that room, so it didn't matter.

On the complete other side of the house was Cammy's disgustingly pink bedroom, and right above it was the loft Lindsey and Effel shared. Sandy and Effel had used to share the loft, but things had changed as they got older. Lindsey had complained endlessly about what a slob Charlie was and Sandy and Effel weren't exactly the closest so it was decided Sandy should move out. Right next to Cammy's room was her parents', so it worked out perfectly. The suck-ups right next to the parents... And the loud electric guitarists in the back.

Sandy grinned and reluctantly followed Charlie to the back of the house. Naturally they both crashed on the sofa in the study.

"You're supposed to be in your room you know." Said Charlie.

Sandy gave him a 'get serious' look and went over to computer. Charlie watched as she booted up the computer and brought up her email.

Wait a second, thought Charlie, that's my background!

"What's this?" Asked Sandy in a verry annoying voice. "Awww, Vawawy sent wou an email."

Valery was Charlie's girlfriend. Outraged, Charlie jumped from the couch and dashed over to where Sandy was laughing uncontrollably, but by then Charlie was > laughing, too. Just then Cammy opened the door, a sour expression on her face.

"Sandy, you're supposed to be in your room!"

Sandy's laughter disapeered.

"I know Cam," She said disgustedly, "just gimme the food will ya?"

She walked to where Cammy was standing and grabbed the food. Then she pushed into her room, her glum mood back. She heard Chalie trying to calm a tramatized Cammy and she wished she had done something else. Not because it was mean to Cammy, but so she wouldn't have made more work for Charlie.

She carried the plate over to the neon green card table in the corner, and stared at it glumly. Cold potatoes, whopee.

Later that night Sandy snuck out her window. It was an easy process; remove the screen, and slip right out. The warm summer night air swirled around her as she crept silently through the frame. Once outside she began to walk. A fast walk, an escape walk. Once she was out of sight of her house her gait relaxed. Sandy loved night, everything was a secret at night. So silent and so unsaid. It was marvelous. An hour later Sandy slipped back through the window, and carefully refastened it. After that she fell onto her bed in to a heavy dreamless sleep.

She woke up very late in the afternoon and sighed as she read the alarm clock. Twelve-thirty. She'd wasted half of her last day of freedom. Sandy didn't know how to feel, really. She was excited about school and at the same time dissapointed about the short summer. She made her way into the study. She felt like reading something.

Charlie had passed out on the lounge chair, but Sandy wasn't quiet about coming in. If she had to get up, so did her perfectionist brother. Besides, he was in her favorite reading chair.

She poked him hard in the ribs and he shot off the chair with a yelp. Sandy rolled her eyes and plopped down on it with a poetry book, leaving Charlie helpless on the floor.

"I'm Sandy, I'm selfish over a stupid chair and my brother is lying broken on the floor as I laugh mercilessly like the cruel tyrant I am," Charlie said in a nasaly voice that sounded more like Cammy than her.

"Translation: Shut up, give me my chair, and let me read." Sandy replied tartly without looking up from her book.

Charlie laughed, sat with his back to her chair, and opened his laptop.

"Get any more love mail?" Sandy asked conversationally.

"Shut up, Sandy." Charlie said.

"Translation: Yes."

4 - Chapter Four

Chapter Four

Ugh, Sandy had forgotten the agony of waking up in the morning! She rolled over to look at her alarm clock, and the neon green letters hit her like a baseball bat. 6 A.M., how painful, Sandy thought. She got up and went over to her dresser. She opened one drawer, and a blue soccer jersey was laying on top. She grabbed it without thinking and threw it over her head. And jeans, which were always trusty. Then she took a hairband and tied her messy hair into a ponytail that didn't actually look much better. She didn't care, though.

With that lovely dressing-up bit, she went downstairs for breakfast. Mom, Charlie, Cammy, and Lindsey were all there eating cereal. Sandy took a bowl and poured frosted flakes into it. A small tiger was at the bottom of the box. Sandy took it out.

"Frosted Flakes are more than good, They'rrrrrrrrre great!" Sandy threw the tiger on the counter and pulled up a chair, happily going about her morning as though no one else existed. The ignoring people went pretty well with the exception of Charlie, being the king of cool, spilling milk down his front and cursing loudly.

Then Lindsey decided to break Sandy's brief good-natured moment.

"Well, someone looks like they're still in their PJ's." She of course was perfect all the way to her unstained shirt. Sandy ignored Lindsey, and of course mom pretended not to hear.

"Time to go now!" Said her mom cheerfully. Then her smile shrank a couple of teeth, "Uh, Sandy here come over here for a moment."

Sandy looked at her, puzzled, then at Charlie, who avoided her gaze. Sandy turned back to her mom.

"Okay mum, um bye guys."

The troop filed out the door, and Sandy turned to her mom. It was too early in the morning to be polite.

"What mom?"

"Well, honey... you have been excepted to Comerick's School of Unfortunate Talents."

"Unfortunate Talents?" Sandy repeated in question form, "What a confidence booster."

Her mother chose to ignore the latter part of her statment, "It's a boarding school for the...erm...gifted...Of course, you can visit on the weekends since we live so close. Oh, God, I was so hoping you'd take after me..."

"...I've never seen any school nearby." Sandy said, cocking her head. Her sandy hair spilled over her shoulder as she did. It made her look even more tussled and her mother quickly brushed it back. Sandy rolled her eyes.

"Don't look at me like that, you need to start caring about what you look like, and of course you've never seen the school, it's warded." She hung her head as though greatly dissapointed. Sandy's eye twitched slightly. What had she done wrong now?

"Erm...warded?"

"Magically hidden and protected." Her mother said casually. Sandy snorted and burst out laughing. Her mother regarded her emotionlessly until Sandy's giggles faded.

"Oh...you were serious...let me laugh harder." Sandy said the last part in her mind. Her mother nodded grimly.

"Sandy, you're endowed with special abilities."

"Yeah sure, complete destruction." Sandy said sarcastically. Her mother gave her a dead serious look.

"Oh, come on, you've gotta be kidding me!" Sandy blurted before she could think.

Her mother gave her a disapproving glance, but explained. "In kindergarten, your first day, every kid in class but you got chicken pox."

"Kids get chicken pox all the time."

"And had it again as soon as they came back. In second grade, the bully picking on you suddenly lost all of her jewelry and couldn't stop spilling things on her new dresses every time she wore one."

"She...she was a klutz?" Sandy should have been excited to be different for once, but her knees were shaking and she felt like digging herself a trench.

"As soon as we moved, it stopped happening. She's a ballerina now. You didn't make things happen for a while after that, we thought it had just been a phase. And then we noticed, it wasn't happening to other people, it was happening to you. Because you were sad about moving, you brought it on yourself. Your hair started to get wildly out of control and wouldn't tame itself no matter what. It used to be like Effel's, so pretty... You started spending less time doing things with your sisters and more time rough-housing with Charlie and his older friends. Then, in fifth grade you met Carly and Izzy. Then it stopped completely. Your father and I were so relieved.

"Then, just last year, you should remember, there was that teacher. Her entire house burned down because she gave you a 'C' and you weren't allowed to play sports until you brought your grades up."

"I...I never meant to do those things, Mom..." Sandy took a step back.

"And running, your second best sport, your father noticed that you took after him a little, using the wind and earth to help you run faster. Your father was a famous elemental. Books have been written about him."

"I..." Sandy tried to say something in her defense, but her throat had closed up on her, as though filled with molasses.

"So, you're going to Comerick's. To learn how to control yourself."

"But...but...Carly...Izzy." True, she didn't say 'Izzy' with much enthusiasm, but still...

"You can still keep in touch, dear." Her mother said it coldly. She didn't like Sandy's friends. "It starts tomorrow, I tried to talk your father out of it, but he's so happy the magic line hasn't dried out." Sandy noticed her mom didn't say her last words with much enthusiasm either.

"And what's your power, being an utter jerk!?" Sandy shouted, then she ran up to her room before her mom could wipe the shock from her face and ground her.

Sandy slammed herself down on her pillow, but not before she noticed that, like her mood, the sky was clouding over and lightning was forking from the once clear sky.

She found herself thinking, for the very first time, 'Why can't I be normal?'

5 - Chapter Five

Chapter Five

Slam! Someone was home from school, where normal unendowed people went. Sandy expected it to be one of the girls, but the footsteps headed toward her end of the house.

"Oh, you're home already." Charlie said, smiling at her cheerfully.

There was mom for you, brave enough to send you to a school with unfortunate in the title, but incondiserate enough to not tell anyone else so they could leave your butt alone.

Sandy didn't trust her voice, or face, or anything really. Not even Charlie who had no idea what was going on. So she kept her back to the wall and said nothing.

"Uh, Sandy?" He came over to her. Sandy hadn't cried since she was two, so she was deeply afraid when tears began to pour out her eyes. She rolled face down into the pillow.

"Charlie?" Her voice was quiet, an unnatural phenomenon. But Sandy didn't go on. She didn't want to say anything. Her brother became alarmed, Sandy was never like this.

"Sandy, what's wrong?"

A burst of fury cut through Sandy. Her parents were shipping her off to school, because of a so-called magical talent! Sandy sat up. She didn't care about her tear stained face.

Charlie looked at her with concern. Sandy normally would have been grateful, but only fear and a sense of injustice would come. She tried so hard to keep her mouth shut, she really, really did...

"It's alright, Sandy." Charlie said. He was only trying to make her feel better.

"It is NOT alright!!! I don't want to be a freak, and I don't want to talk to you! Why can't everybody just leave me alone? I hate mom for being such a prick, I hate Lindsey for being so snobby to me since the day she was born, I hate Effel for trying to make me more like her, I hate Cammy for being a tattletale know-it-all, and I hate dad for being so dissapointed in me all the time!!!" Sandy yelled, covering her own ears, her voice was so startlingly loud, "And you! I hate you, Charlie. I hate you because the only person who can understand me doesn't even understand himself, because you're such a slob, because you LET me be such a tomboy and tease me for anything girly I do, even though you have a thousand girls fawning over you...and you can't even get the girl you like to date you. You think you're the perfect, funny, people person everyone loves, but you're NOT!"

Sandy bit her lip. That was Charlie's one sore spot, being yelled at. Nobody yelled at Charlie. Everybody knew Charlie loved and understood all. Nobody had any right to yell at perfect, agreeable Charlie.

Her brother gave her a blank look and then left without a word, shutting her door soundly even though he knew she hated it.

The power of complete destruction.

That seemed very possible at this point.

6 - Chapter Six

Chapter Six

Sandy hated everybody. She hated everybody except Mr. Momo, her cat. Because Mr. Momo didn't try to make her feel better or worse. He just meowed and purred and was cat-like. And at times when you hate everybody, a cat-like object (hopefully the cat-like object is a cat...) is very comforting. Every so often, over the loud blare of music, someone would come to the door. First it was Lindsay, being awfully sympathetic. Then Cammy, with a message from Mom. Then mom herself, trying to comfort Sandy through a closed door. Then Dad and Effel trying to be kind and nice. But Charlie never came. Sandy didn't mind too much. She was busy packing for school tomorrow and turning up the volume on her stereo. Rock music, thought Sandy, is a wonderful invention. Indeed it was, and if it was turned up loud enough, no one could hear her scream...

Sandy woke up early the next morning. Her bag was packed and everything ready, but still at four in the morning she couldn't get back to sleep. She decided to remove her screen and play soccer at the field half a mile away. No one would know, and if they figured it out... well Sandy didn't really care at the moment. So she put on cleats and got everything together and snuck out through her window. She returned, two hours later, happy and dirty, and smelling of grass. When she collapsed on the couch in the study, she heard someone come in. Sandy froze, it was clearly evident she had been playing soccer! But it was only Charlie. Sandy only partially relaxed. She knew Charlie would not tattle, but he now had this knowledge as blackmail. Sandy knew that they weren't on speaking terms...

"Good-morning Charlie! How are you? I'm excitedly happy since I'm heading off to freak school this morning!" Sandy never really paid attention to rules.

Charlie did not answer, he turned around and trudged back into his room.

Evil, thought Sandy, and then she headed toward the bathroom to take a shower.

An hour later Sandy was sitting at breakfast with the dreadful feeling of complete and utter tension.

"Good morning family!" Said her dad brightly. There was dad trying to be cheerful.

Sandy thought about her comment, she thought about what a bad idea it was and how much trouble she would get into for saying it. She said it anyways.

"Hello Dad! Or really this is good-bye because I won't see you for a week? I'm actually not going to miss you, I really don't have any sympathy because you're sending me off to freak school because of a talent you've never told me about. So yeah, whats so good about this morning?" Sandy finished her speech, and awful as it was she saw a flicker of a smile across the table. Charlie.

But the moment was gone and blank shocked faces were what Sandy saw. No one said anything and the rest of the breakfast was eaten in silence.

Sandy climbed into the car with her mom. She started the car, and like breakfast, the ride was driven in silence. In half an hour the large grey building was seen.

"That's Comerick's." Said her mother nervously.

"School for Unfortunate Talents." Sandy finished, "Key word being unfortunate."

My big mouth, thought Sandy, but she didn't really regret it as they drove up to the twisting black gate.

"Er, Hello!" Said her mother brightly, "We're here to enroll Sandy Rockwell at Cormerick's."

The gatemaster looked at Sandy sadly, and then, as if readying someone for execution, he opened the

gate.

7 - Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven

The tires squealed as they turned hard into Comerick's driveway. Sandy felt like squealing, too, but not in a delighted, giggly way like on Effel nights.

Her mother was busy adding the perfect amount of cherry red lipstick onto her puckered lips. Sandy imagined those cartoons where women have overly big lips and they pull out a lipstick tube, run it over their puffy lips one time, and have a flawless appearance. A vague idea of a smile twitched across Sandy's lips. Her mother could not do it right in one quick swipe. She re-did her makeup every time she was near a mirror. No doubt she wanted to be like those cartoon ladies.

The vague idea quickly faded as the car stopped and Sandy looked up at the tall, gray building. It looked like a castle. Like an evil tyrant's castle. Sandy's heart sped up. She got out of the car and stood, feeling immensely small next to the slightly crooked school. The building's title was twisted over the wooden doors in spindly, uninviting black lettering. Sandy's mother looked even less excited than Sandy. Like she was watching a bad horror film, Sandy saw herself, with a fearless-looking cover over her real emotions, walking up to the door and grasping the ornate gargoyle-head knocker. She let it bang down on the mahogany with a thunk that sent chills down her spine.

She looked back at her mother as if saying, 'Alright, stop joking now and take me back. You can't really go through with this', but Mrs. Rockwell, with a heart as hard as her last name, pushed her daughter through the doors. They slammed behind her with a final sound and she cringed and looked upon the main hall of Comerick's for the first, and most definitely not last, time.

> Sandy found her schedule in the pile on the table by the door and looked at it in confusion.

Sandy Rockwell

1st Period: Poetry Analysis - Mr. Rickman

2nd Period: Science on hair - Mrs. Franks

3rd Period: Gym - Mr. McKaine

LUNCH BREAK

4th Period: History of music - Mr. Williams

5th Period: Symphony - Mr. Williams

BREAK

6th Period: Home Ec. -Mr. Keenlie

7th Period: Helping *you* and *your* ability - Mrs. Reese

It was the wierdest schedule she'd ever seen! And where the heck was Poetry Analysis? Sandy tapped a girl who was walking briskly by on the shoulder.

"Er, hello. Do you know where-?"

"Down the hall to the left, it's my first class, too, so you can follow me!" The brunette girl said politely.

Sandy stared at her, mouth open. The girl's fudge brown eyes widened suddenly.

"Sorry!" She muttered, looking down quickly. Sandy was dumbstruck, but then she recovered herself.

"Er, then... Shall we go?"

"Yeah, I'm Lizzie by the way. You have a nice name."

"Um? What the heck?" Sandy was majorly confused now.

"Sorry, I got stuck in Cormerick's because I read minds. I try not to, but sometimes thoughts are so loud and hard to ignore. And then sometimes I mistake them for things that have been said." Lizzie

apologized quickly.

"Oh. Does everyone here have a wierd ability?" Sandy said, trying to get used to the fact that she really was in a school for the endowed.

"No, most don't actually. They just are really good at something creative, like poetry, for example. Or music. Or they're really smart. Stuff like that. Then there are the people with wierd abilitys. Like me."

"And me." Sandy added glumly.

They had reached the poetry classroom. Sandy walked in and chose a seat in the back by someone very tall.

"Hi."

Sandy turned, it was the tall guy. "Uh, hi."

He looked like he wanted to say something else, but at that moment the teacher walked into the room.

"Hello everybody! I see we have someone new, why don't you stand up and introduce yourself?"

Sandy stood up, "Hi I'm Sandy Rockwell."

She sat back down quickly.

"Hello Sandy!" Said the teacher, "I am Mr.Rickman."

The boy sitting beside Sandy smirked. Sandy shot him a look, and the smirk vanished.

"Well why don't we get started. Anne Marie, I think you have today's poem."

A very blonde girl stood up.

"Time never stops

It keeps going on

Until we die."

The guy beside he started smirking again, but this time Sandy didn't do anything because she was too busy trying not to burst out laughing herself.

"She's here for drama." Said the tall guy.

"Shut up, I'm already trying not to laugh!"

The girl, Anne Marie sat down, looking very satisfied.

Mr. Rickman looked delighted, "That is a wonderful poem Anne Marie!"

The rest of class was spent analyzing Anne Marie's poem. At the end of class Mr. Rickman closed up by saying, "Tomorrow's poem, Sandy! Why not you?"

Sandy was struck dumb. She turned to the tall guy in alarm.

"I have to write a poem?" She asked incredulously.

"Can't be as bad as Anne Marie's. Well gotta fly." And he was gone.

Sandy picked up her books and trudged on to the next class, Science on hair.

The whole day passed as strangely as the first hour. Sandy thought the school was really loopy already, and then she went to last hour, helping *you* and *your* ability.

When Sandy walked into the room, she saw some people that she recognized, but Lizzie was the most familiar, so Sandy sat next to her.

"Hello again!" Said Lizzie brightly.

"Hey, what do we do in this class?"

"It's basically a study hall for all the people with 'special abilities'" Lizzie explained.

"Like the wierd stuff?"

"Yeah."

Just then the tall guy waltzed in. He looked surprised to see Sandy for a moment, the he came over to her.

"Hey I didn't know you were a wierdo."

"Ditto for you." Sandy replied sarcastically. The guy didn't catch it.

"What'd'ya do?" He asked with a smile.

Sandy made a face, "Supposedly I'm an elemental, that's what I was told this morning when they shipped me off."

He looked impressed, "Whoa. That's cool."

"And you?" Sandy asked.

Just then a mean looking senior walked in and said in a short, pinched way, "Hello everyone. This is Sandy, she's new here, be nice. Now, let's get to our work."

Sandy didn't like the way the woman said 'new here' as if it were a crime, but she took a seat anyways, between tall guy and Lizzie. She opened her binder to begin her homework. Without really thinking about it, she began to write;

Life is a loan

It's taken away

Life isn't owned

Not any day

Sandy stared at her paper, amazed at her newfound ability. What the heck was going on?

She mouthed the words of her poem one more time, and then shoved it in her pocket. The senior woman began to drone on about responsible power and training or something like that. Sandy couldn't tell, because Lizzie's voice was drilling in her head. Sandy turned quickly to tell Lizzie not to talk so loudly, but the girl's lips weren't moving. Lizzie looked pointedly at Sandy's forehead and then gestured for her to turn around.

Sandy obeyed and stared at her desk. She wasn't sure she liked having Lizzie in her thoughts.

"Sandy, will you be staying on weekends?" Lizzie's voice sounded clear in her mind.

"No? Why would I want to stay here longer?"

"But it's really cool on weekends! You get to pick which classes you want for the day! I'm going to get something like Alchemy. I want to be able to get a good job when I get out of Cormerick's."

"A job?" Sandy thought numbly, "Like...we have to be freaky forever?"

"Well, yeah..." Lizzie replied. "We're here to learn how...you could get a normal job if you want, I guess, but not everything's as bad as Cormerick's in the supernatural world."

"I dunno." Sandy thought. A weekend with her angry parents and a brooding Charlie?

... Well, that was her own fault, anyway. ...

Or a weekend of whatever classes she wanted?

Of course, Lizzie heard her thoughts and Sandy pictured her smiling. "I'll tell you which teachers are nice and we can discuss jobs and the skills they need. You're an elemental, Sandy, it would be *criminal* not to work for the unnatural community!" Lizzie coaxed.

"Lizzie, I believe you may be over-enthusiastic about this whole thing, but...I'll try it some time. Alchemy sounds like fun."

Lizzie was about to reply when a ruler came smacking down on Sandy's desk. She jumped in surprise, not at the ruler, but at the fact that no one was holding the other end. The teacher glared at her from across the room and Sandy quickly buried her head in her homework. The ruler floated back to its desk in a contented looking way. Sandy tried not to stare too much, because the other kids didn't seem to see anything out of the ordinary.

This was one class she would *not* be taking any more than she had to.

8 - Chapter Eight

Chapter Eight

Sandy was beginning to get a hang of her endowment. She could bend practically any weather to her will. And Sandy learned that elementals had very powerful endowments. Sandy could actually understand her life a bit better now because of this weird...thing...she could do. And where her temper had come from.... and gone now.....

Sandy, who had once been a very, shall we say, energetic person, was now happy and bubbly and really jumpy, but there was a part of her missing. The angry frustrated part was showing up less and less frequently. Sandy actually didn't notice it until her first trip home, which was the first weekend. She didn't stay with Lizzie, who was okay with it, but went home to her family. After all, there were to be plenty more weekends when she would stay. Particularly because detentions were on the weekends.

Upon reaching her family, Sandy felt the old frustrated part return to her. She hadn't noticed its absence until then. Did it have to do with her element? Or what? Sandy was confused, but she bit back on the angry bit of her as best she could and tried to enjoy her family's company. Still, after only a little bit of time she realized that the trip home had been a big mistake. Charlie was still icy with her, even though he was speaking. Her family was family, acting the same, except to her because she had this wierd, freaky endowment.

All in all, it was one of the rather more unpleasant times of her life.

Before Sandy had left she had made a remark to her parents that there were extra classes on the weekends, and asked if maybe she could stay? And her parents said yes, she could. Not even a 'come home please sandy?' or a 'We miss you!'

Not from Lizzie, not from Cammy, and not even from Effel, *her own twin!* And Charlie...well, there had only been one conversation between them worth mentioning. Late at night in the study, the day before Sandy went back.

"Hey." Sandy had muttered as Charlie walked into the room. Sandy had been desperately wishing that she were back at Cormerick's, however unpleasant... it couldn't be worse than this...

"Hi." And it seemed that there would be no more but there was, "Sandy?"

Sandy turned around, "You're vocabulary to me has grown. One word."

Charlie ignored her comment, Sandy was always giving cynical comments like this. "It sucks here at home with you gone. Believe it or not you were the balance beam. You and Me against the rest."

"But..." Sandy was amazed, Charlie was talking to her again, so suddenly, and complementing her! "But it dosen't even out 2 against 4."

"Yeah, but it worked somehow. I think it may have something to do with..." He trailed off.

Suddenly Sandy was blazing again. "Go ahead Charlie, say it! I'm not deformed. I just have a wierd ability! And dad has it, too! Say it! You all treat me like I'm some sort of freak since I have this wierd gift, and it's really been the same all my life. I was wierd because I had a twin and we never talked. Because I rocked at sports better than most boys. Because, when I had Effel, I chose you over her. Say it Charlie!" A breeze swept through the room. Sandy had ruined it again, and she knew it immediately. Charlie stood up and went into his room, and from the hole of rock > posters and dirty clothes she heard his voice.

"Your talent Sandy, your talent."

And dully Sandy thought, I can't wait to get back to school.

The drive back on Monday was no better than the previous one, even though Effel came with Sandy this time. Effel had decided to do Sandy's hair, and it was making them both late, so Effel just came along. Sandy winced as Effel brushed her mane of thick hair back as though hacking down some weeds. All the while her twin kept her distance, as though Sandy had some chicken pox or poison ivy. As if Sandy didn't feel bad enough at this point, she realised that her friends Carly and Izzy hadn't even E-mailed her the whole week. That bubbling anger was rising up in her again, and it was worsened when it started to rain and her mother gave her a glare like it was all her fault. Even though it was, it wasn't exactly. Sandy didn't TRY to make it rain, it just did!

With a moody expression, her mother pursed her perfectly glossed lips and flicked on the windshield wipers. At this point, Sandy almost laughed at the ridiculousness of it all, I mean, how many mothers blamed their kids for making it rain? and then Effel yanked back on her hair and all she felt was pain. Effel finished as they pulled into Cormerick's driveway. Sandy stared up at the cool gray building. It seemed less menacing than it had. Despite the guys who sat behind her in poetry analysis, who Anne Marie had hired to make Sandy's life suck because her poem had been a hit, Cormerick's wasn't that bad. In fact, Sandy was glad to be out of the car and in front of the large wooden door again. Oh yes, detention or not she was going to be staying this weekend.

Or would she? Charlie had said it sucked without her...maybe she should go home...

Then the car door slammed behind her without so much as a goodbye from her mother or twin, and Sandy's mind was made up.

9 - Chapter Nine

Chapter Nine

Sandy was back in Poetry Analysis. She somehow rocked at this class. Every kid has their dream of what they want to be when they grew up. Sandy had wanted to be Mia Hamm's best friend, but she had later been informed that a best friend was not an occupation. Charlie had wanted to be a rockstar, though he sucked at playing guitar. And Effel had wanted to be a lawyer. Perfect little Effel in her perfect little world. But actually before that Effel had wanted to be a writer. Unfortunately, Sandy had no qualms about telling her that she sucked. So she did. And Effel hadn't spoken to her for a week. But Effel really had sucked at writing, her stories were all shallow plot and really pretty stupid.

Sandy had never really tried that hard at writing because she thought school was pretty stupid, and she spent all her time playing sports. But now she was actually trying and, well...she was really good!

The day has dawned

The morning is here

The world is awakened

You're destiny's clear

Sandy shook her head, wierd things were happening in there. As if on cue, Lizzie voice appeared.

"How on earht are you so good at that?"

"I dunno, its wierd, I just think of things and a poem will come along. Uh, Lizzie, I was just wondering.. I thought you read minds, not the whole telepathic communication thing..."

"Well, I'm not very good at it, I've sort of picked it up over the years. But it's really hard, the shallower the mind, the harder to communicate. It's easy with you though. Reading your head is harder because its so complex, however. You sure had one heck of a childhood, that's for sure."

Somehow, Sandy felt complimented.

Meanwhile Korey, the very tall person was a different story completely. He was in the year ahead of Sandy, but he was endowed. When Sandy had asked him with what, he hadn't really replied. Sandy was getting kind of personal about her endowment, too. She wasn't telling anybody, because her own twin was shunning her. It was evident, though, Sandy's gift. There was always a breeze where ever Sandy was. And you could normally tell her mood by the weather outside.

Despite its strangeness, life at Cormerick's was getting more normal, or as normal as it could be. All in all Sandy figured it wasn't that bad. She hadn't gone home for a month, and didn't feel too bad about it. Actually, she figured that the family was getting on alot better without her. Sandy had selfishly hoped that home was going to be a wreck with her gone, but facing facts it probably wasn't, and Charlie, well...too bad, so sad. She wasn't that upset about it.

"Sandy!"

This time it wasn't in her head. She turned around.

"What Korey?"

"Um, outside...." He trailed off.

Sandy realized that she had let her mind drift to far. It was hailing outside, hail the size of basket balls!

"Ooops." Said Sandy. Well...maybe she cared, a little.

The hail stopped and Korey gave her one of his wolfish smirks. Sandy noticed that his teeth were pointed slightly.

"Braces snag?" She asked. Korey gave her a confused look, and then recovered.

"Uh...yeah."

"Carly had that happen, luckily the tooth she chipped wasn't a permanent one."

"...Sure." Korey mumbled an excuse into his shirt and turned away. Sandy was used to him doing that and she returned to her poems without any second thoughts.

The path is not beaten,

It has only its voice.

Only those who can listen,

Are given a choice.

Sandy liked this one second best, so she stuck it in her notebook too. All her poems that snapped to her like that were all about pathways and destinies. The poetry teacher seemed to like it, so she had kept it up.

She took a deep breath. Since it was getting closer to Halloween, the kitchens had began giving off a delightful, spicy aroma that she could smell even in the classroom. Sandy looked around at her fellow unfortunately bestowed classmates and grinned inwardly. The costumes were going to be out of this world at Cormerick's, that was for sure.

Her wandering thoughts were broken as the bell rang. Off to science! She and Lizzie went their separate ways and Sandy pulled her Saturday schedule from her pocket. It was only Tuesday, but it wouldn't hurt. She was trying everything she could have signed up for, and though her schedule was crossed out and redone a hundred times, and in her own handwriting instead of a teacher's, she could make it out:

1. Healing (*Endowed children only)
2. Arts
3. Track (*Endowed children only, we will be dealing with untamed creatures.)
4. Drama
5. Alchemy
6. Flying (*Endowed children only)
7. Tuning to your power (*Endowed children only)

Sandy shoved it back into her trusty pocket. She couldn't wait for Saturday!

But, back to the present, they were testing each other's hair today in science, and Sandy was assigned to do Anne Marie's. A special bottle of puke-green hair dye was calling that snobby witch's name.

10 - Chapter Ten

Chapter Ten

Lizzie had altered her weekend schedule to fit Sandy's so they good spend the day together. Sandy had no regrets about keeping from home. It was going to be one fun weekend. Healing, Drama, Arts, Track, Flying.... The classes were taught with the best teachers, or at least Sandy thought so. Also, no one liked to stay around Cormerick's, so the school was deserted. Practically the only ones left were the endowed children, and the more unpleasent people had thier own schedules, so Sandy was surrounded by friends.

She reached into the pocket of her standard issue grey cloak. It was a Corm Cloak, everyone at Cormerick's wore them and thats what they were called. Well, by the students anyways. Wool and grey. Ugly they may have been, but they kept you warm. A good thing with Cormerick's, the school was almost always cold.

Sandy picked out a pencil and a pad of paper. She had been carrying them around with her all the time now, since the Corm Cloaks had gigantic pockets. She stared ahead, not really thinking, but somehow doing just that. It was a state she was often in before writing a poem.

We cannot reach the future
Nor can we change the past
So we must seize the moment
Because today will never last

Lizzie came up behind her. "Gahk! Poems again. You aren't aloud to have two powers."

Sandy shoved the notebook into her pocket. "Come on then, lets head to..." She checked her schedule, "tuning your ability."

"Oh! This the best of all, they have, like, this seminar and.... It's just great!"

There were five people in TYA. Sandy, Lizzie, Korey, Benny, and Sammy. Sammy was endowed with an ability to see the story behind everything. It was an intersting ability, she had only to touch the object in question, and she would know the story behind it. At the moment Benny was unknown in question of his endowment. It was said to happen, but very rarely. Most endowments were developed by people in their teenage years, but Benny would get his endowment later.

"Hello class." A sinister looking woman walked into the room. Sandy sensed the confusion around her. Who was this lady?

She suddenly realized that she was in sync with Lizzie, and shook herself free. The confusion cleared and Sandy was able to focus better.

"You, you look new. why don't you step up and tell us a little about yourself." She pointed at Sandy.

"Uh, I'm Sandy and.... um..... I'm an athlete." Sandy said.

The lady smiled very maliciously. Sandy gulped. Cormerick's was creepier than she had thought.

"An athelete." The woman repeated with a sneer. She made the word sound nasty, and her tongue seemed to suck on her teeth as she said it so as to give it a gross feeling. The woman's sharp nose was pointing straight down at Sandy.

The teacher reminded her of a hawk. Or rather, a vulture.

"But do tell, do you have any useful talents, Sandy?" She made Sandy's name sound awful, too.

"Why no, as a matter of fact, do you?" Sandy said venomously. It was the wrong thing to say, and she

immediately regretted it. Regretting what she said was not something she did often.

"I am Illudra, but you will call me 'Madam'. I am a shapeshifter and I excel in illusion-craft. You will show me the proper respect, Sandy..." The woman kept the sneer on her porcelain face, "Your father was great, but you will be nothing without my teachings. Is that clear?"

"Yeah." Sandy said, looking away from Illudra's snakey eyes.

"Yes." Illudra said forcefully.

"Yes." Sandy rolled her eyes.

"Yes *Madam*."

"Whatever, Illudra." Sandy said.

The woman's eyes narrowed dangerously.

"But Ms. Illudra, you have such a pretty name. It rolls off the tongue as smooth as pebbles. Please let me say it?" Sandy was being as sarcastic as humanly possible, but suddenly Illudra beamed down at her and placed a hand on Sandy's shoulder like a fond Aunt.

"That's the spirit!"

Oh, brother.

Sandy hurried back to her seat. Lizzie stared at her incredulously.

"Sandy, that was so BAD!" She whispered.

Korey, who was towering over Lizzie even two seats down, just gave one of his trademark grins. "

Thank you, you know I try." Sandy said with a smirk. She had a feeling this particular class was going to be very interesting.

11 - Chapter Eleven

Chapter Eleven

"How about you girl?" Illudra motioned to Lizzie. Lizzie gave Sandy a confused face and once again tried to attach her emotions to Sandy, which Sandy forcefully tried to shake free. Sandy figured she had succeeded because she wasn't thinking about being nice anymore.

"Uh, hi, I'm Elizibeth Brightman and um I have been at this school for 7 years."

7 years! Poor Lizzie, her parents got rid of her when she was 6.

"Hello Elizabeth, do you have an endowment?" Illudra asked as though she had asked the same question a hundred times before. She probably had.

"Uh... yeah."

Illudra made a clucking noise with her teeth, "Go on..."

Lizzie stared at her blankly as if she had no idea what Illudra wanted her to do. "Um.... So I came to Cormerick's when I was 6 years old and so I have spent all my life here practically, my hobbies include singing, dancing, and drama. My favorite food is-"

"Enough!" Roared Illudra. "Return to your seat, please."

Lizzie tried to look bewildered. Sandy grinned at her and she broke out in smile. The last bit about hobbies had been Sandy's. Lizzie had stolen it from her telepathically.

"You?" Illudra pointed at Korey.

"I'd rather not say, you know. I really should have signed up for baton twirling, but I figured what the heck? Why not? When I singed up no one said anything about public speaking."

Illudra stared pointedly at Korey.

"Fine, fine, no need to get touchy." Korey raised his hands in a gesture of peace, "I'm Korey and I wish I'd taken baton twirling."

There was a explosion of muffled laughter as Korey sat back down. Illudra pretended not to notice. The rest of the class passed this way and in an hour they were free to go to dinner.

"Come in." Came the voice of Matron at the knock of her door. The hinges creaked as the tall, pale archamandrite of the west tower stepped in.

"Ah, hello Illudra, how was class today?" The Matron asked as though truly interested.

Illudra stared at her and then began, "You said it would be easy, Matron. Teach them how to use their powers and in the process weaken them! Instead I have a class of smart mouths!"

"There is more time, we shall have use of the stray strands of magic once we weaken them. Keep at it Illudra." The Matron said with flashing eyes.

"Yes, milady." Illudra bowed humbly and swept away into the shadows.

And so the secret meeting in the Matron's keep ended.

Sandy's fork clinked as it hit her plate. She wrapped her arms around her stomach. Korey looked up from his pork chops and potatoes with concern.

"I just don't feel too hungry." Sandy lied. Korey knew she was lying, but unlike Lizzie, he knew when to leave Sandy alone. Nothing against Lizzie, but she was an open book and everyone else was just as easy to read. At least to her.

Sandy smirked and handed Korey a napkin. She didn't feel too good, but that didn't change the fact that Korey's table manners were atrocious.

Korey sighed as he and Sandy parted ways after lunch. Sandy was off to bed. Korey...well...Korey was just gone. Walking. An escape walk. The moon was almost half full tonight, he could feel it in his blood. A magical night. And a dangerous one, too.

The shadows grew in the towering castle, signaling that he should get to bed, but he paid them no mind. This was his home forever. He hadn't been to his house in almost a year, and he knew Cormerick's better than anyone. And still no one knew him. Not even his 'endowment'.

Pah. Endowment. More like a curse.

His sneakers squeaked quietly as he stopped near the staircase leading to the boy's dorm and he looked up quickly. Someone was there, in the shadows.

"Shouldn't you be in bed about now, young man?" The voice was Illudra's, somehow booming even in a whisper.

"Shouldn't you be lying down in your coffin about now, old hag?" Korey asked, his voice soft and clipped. If Illudra was anymore snakelike, she would have hissed at him.

"Mind your business, dog." In her cruel way, Illudra accentuated the word 'dog'. She stepped from the shadows, purple nails enclosed around a small green vial. "As promised, Korey. If you hold up your end of the bargain."

"Will it really...?" He left it hanging, but his cool manner gave way to excitement and he reached out for the vial. Illudra snapped it back with a cruel, teasing smirk.

"Not so fast. Only when the job is done." She said wickedly.

"I...This doesn't feel right." Korey said helplessly, already knowing he had lost.

"You're a dog! You don't know left from right, blue from red! Just take the deal, or the Matron will deal with you!"

"Fine...Sandy is...as good as yours."

12 - Chapter Twelve

Chapter Twelve

Korey thought and thought about the trade. Sandy's life for a vial, one go, one month. It wouldn't even last! No, nope not at all. Don't do it, Korey...

But he kept the vial.

For the moment, nothing had happened, but in two weeks, when the moon shone high.... would anyone be safe then?

"Sandy, I need to talk to you." Korey said as soon as he sat down at the table. Immediately Lizzie tuned to his thoughts, but he cut her out a little more forcefully than usual. She blushed deeply. "Alone."

Sandy looked at Lizzie apologetically and followed Korey into the hall.

"What is it, Korey?" She asked, all smiles.

"Erm...I was wondering if...maybe...you might want to..." Quick, think of a way you could learn more about her without Lizzie intruding....Oh, no. Oh, crap. Crap. He had to do it..."Go out with me sometime on Friday?"

Sandy blinked at him for a while, like, 'Seriously?', and even though Korey hadn't really meant it, he couldn't help but feel a little rejected. Then she smiled even wider.

"Like a friendly thing, right?" She asked.

"Of course! Yeah." Korey said, cursing himself inwardly for not saying that in the first place.

"Sure, I'll get Lizzie."

"No! I mean...er...ack..." Korey coughed into his hand, "I mean, she's going to be doing double alchemy classes. She won't be out for, like, ever. Besides, I was thinking we might go to the 'normal' world.

Lizzie's parents live in a warded house and everything..."

Sandy thought. If she went with Korey on Friday, she'd have to spend the weekend at home with her family and make up a million excuses for not doing double alchemy with Lizzie. But still, it might give her a chance to get to know Korey better. Maybe even figure out his endowment? Sandy had a natural curiosity that was insatiable once aroused, and what better chance of finding out than doing something with Korey on Friday? The only thing that could be more useful would be for her alcove to turn up somewhere and let her spy on him!

"Sure, Korey, sounds like a lot of fun!" She said finally. Korey let out a sigh of relief.

"Cool. Um, meet me outside the school tomorrow after class. Well...uh...paint the town red!" Korey said.

"Maybe a movie, or the volleyball court! Nah...you'll kick my butt at volleyball. How about the arcade?"

"A movie...would be nice. Then we can hit the arcade. And if we have time, I can still kick your butt at volleyball." Sandy said with an amused smile, tapping her chin thoughtfully as she spoke.

"Great, it's a date! I mean...not really, but you get the idea." For a minute Korey forgot about why he had asked in the first place, but as Sandy walked away he remembered and that guilty feeling filled his stomach yet again.

Why did it have to be Sandy, the best friend he had made in eight years of Cormerick's?

"Beware tonight

When in the sky

The moon is bright

Someone will die"

Sandy stood before the poetry analysis class. Reading her newest poem. Something she had written

last night when she couldn't sleep. She didn't notice Korey go pale beside her.

"Sandy, you write these poems but you can't tell us what they mean." Mr. Rickman observed aloud, ever trying to figure things out.

"When I write, I don't think. I just let my hand take over and then there's a poem."

"Sandy have you ever contemplated the fact that maybe you are trying to tell yourself something through your poems?"

She had.

"Yeah, I think they may be predictions." She failed to notice Korey go even whiter.

"Interesting. Most of the times though, nothing you mention is specific."

Sandy shrugged, "Uh..."

"But today..." Mr. Rickman pressed.

"I dunno, I really don't know what I write, when I write, I just, uh, write. I guess someone's gonna die."

Sandy meant it to be a joke, but it didn't turn out that way. Not at all.

Later on the bus back to town, talking to Korey, Sandy realized something. Tonight is full moon! She snapped her attention back to the conversation forcefully.

"Uh, yeah." She gave consent to something she had no clue about.

"Great, me too. Isn't this the stop?" Korey asked, smiling and then jerking his head toward the window.

"For what?" Sandy really wished she had been paying attention to the conversation.

"Uh, your house."

"Why would get off here then?" Sandy asked.

"You said we- Oh never mind." Korey started, then faltered.

Sandy was mildly confused, but she gathered her things and stood up. "Oh know what, my parents are out of town. Well, out of the house at least, with my three sisters. We can go there and grab a bite to eat."

"Sandy, are you doing this on purpose?" Korey asked, giving her a hurt, reproachful look as they stepped off the bus.

"What?" Sandy furrowed her brow and held open the door for him as he muttered another lame excuse.

"Sandy?" A voice came from down the hallway, upstairs from the entryway.

"I thought you said everyone was out." Muttered Korey.

"No I said my parents and three sisters were out. I have a brother, you know. HEY CHARLIE!"

"Sandy? It figures you'd come around now, Mom and Dad and Cammy and Lindsey and Effel are gone.... Who's that?" Charlie stopped at the top of the stairs and regarded Korey analytically.

"Uh, Charlie, Korey, Korey, Charlie. Um, Korey is from school and he has an endowment too, only I don't know what it is, and we're out tonight. I am so gonna kick his butt in Volleyball, wanna come? Well first let's eat I'm hungry." Sandy charged ahead and left Korey and Charlie in the entryway, watching what would have been a cloud of dust, were they in a cartoon.

"She's always hungry." Muttered Charlie, "Well come on then, we might as well build up our energy. If it's you and me against Sandy in volleyball...well...we'll still get our butts kicked."

13 - Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Thirteen

Korey stared across the table at Charlie, who stared back. They had been doing this for about ten minutes now, and neither had touched their sandwiches. Sandy was on her second already. And then, without warning, Charlie smiled and leaned back in his chair. Korey sighed in relief and did the same. Charlie was clearly like the father figure to Sandy, and if he accepted Korey, then Korey could be in the inner circle and then...

...then what?

Oh, yeah. That's what. Korey's smile faded as he looked at his tall glass of lemonade. It was perfect, just the right amount of sugar and water, and little bit of pulp to say that it was in fact fresh. But for all that, it might as well have been blood to Korey.

"So... What's been going on at home?" Sandy asked, taking a stab at conversation and realizing only too late that she had asked the wrong question.

"Uh, great." Charlie didn't want to say too much with Korey around. He shot Sandy a meaningful look, as if to say, 'later I shall tell you the horrors bestowed upon me'.

"Well then, what shall we do? I'm almost stuffed." Sandy said, changing the subject as subtly as possible.

"Um" Korey looked up, "I dunno... We could...."

"Volleyball if you wanna, Sandy. We can play 'till dark, or after, and then we can go watch a movie or something." Charlie suggested.

Korey went pale at the mention of dark.

"Yeah, that's cool." Sandy shrugged in indecision.

Eyes turned to Korey. "Uhm...Sure."

"Um, 53 to 0, wanna call it a night? It's getting dark." Sandy asked.

Korey did want to call it a night, but Charlie didn't.

"No, there's still some light, another half hour." He said.

"What ever." Sandy shrugged, spiking the ball right over her brother's head and earning another point. And there was another half hour, and another after that. And the moon came out halfway through the second.

Korey retreated beyond the light, in private. Where he could transform. Charlie was off at the bathroom so it was Sandy who was still running around.

He hunched to the ground as the familiar ache came to him, shooting up his sides like it always had. The fangs jutted down over his lips, his mouth cracked slightly as it formed into a large muzzle. The familiar tingling in his ears came and his hearing was magnified so that, even here, he could hear the squeak of the bathroom stall door. An inhuman snarl escaped his chest, and finally his wicked claws sprang forth from his dark brown paws.

And then Korey was gone and in his place was a wolf on a mission, who clearly knew his prey.

He hadn't thought about whether it would be hard to get to Sandy, more, rather, of the fact that he was doing this horrible thing at all. But he should have realized that biting an powerful elemental with a prophecy power on the side would not be easy.

Korey's claws clinked on the floor of the volleyball court as he approached. Sandy didn't notice him, she

was smacking the ball onto the wall, catching it, and then repeating the process. Korey's ears flicked backwards and he allowed himself a low growl. The part of his mind that didn't want to do this had been shoved aside long ago. He made his leap for the girl, his teeth bared. Before he was even close, he was thrown to the side roughly. He yelped and hit the ground. Hard.

"Sandy!"

It had been Charlie who had hit him, then. Korey tried to stand, but it hurt too much. He whimpered desperately. He had to get away! After he had been hurt, the logical side of his mind began to come back. He had to get far away from Sandy and Charlie, not only so he couldn't hurt them, but also so they couldn't see him change back. They could not know what he was! Sandy was staring at him in shock, the volleyball still in her hands. Charlie glaring at him darkly, ready to defend his sister, and he was panting unevenly. He had just sprinted across the court in a rage, after all! Korey yelped loudly as the pain in his side stung him, but he stood and ran for it. Straight for the woods.

He wondered why he bothered... Illudra was going to kill him for this...

14 - Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Fourteen

"Korey! Korey! Where are you? Please come on, we really want to go in now and there's something out there! I know that sounds stupid, but there is, so just come on!" Sandy was not panicking, she was oddly calm, even though she knew that Korey was out there, alone, with that horrible, evil wolf.

With a mouth resmbeling Korey's.

And eyes like the sea after a storm...

Suddenly she knew something that she wished with all her might was not the truth. Then, there came that vertigo she had felt so often before...

Once in time,

He was your best friend.

But now, when things change,

The friendship must end.

For if it goes on,

You both will regret it.

You must cut the ties,

And try to forget it.

Sandy blinked. Why did she have to be cursed with these things? It couldn't be true. No, no, no...not Korey. He was silent and mysterious, sure! But he was sweet, and he was funny, and he was her friend! It can't be true, she told herself, it can't. It just can't!

But deep inside she had already drawn herself together and built a wall around her heart. When the strange sensation of vertigo ended, she no longer felt like sinking to her knees or even shedding a single tear.

She had been so *stupid*.

"Come on." She muttered to Charlie.

Charlie looked at her in shock, she was wild and unpredictable, surely, but she had always been loyal to her friends! There had to be a good reason for leaving Korey out in the night when something was going on. So blindly, Charlie followed his sister home. And when there, they both went to bed without much talking.

But somewhere else someone was still wide awake.

"The girl?"

"She's being disposed of tonight." Illudra drummed her fingers in impatience.

"What about the boy?"

"Weak. He wont tell anyone and no one will figure it out."

"But? If he does?"

"The vial."

"Vial?" Lady Cormerick furrowed her delicate brows in cunfuddlement.

"Poison, he thinks is a cure for his...curse. Lady, I assure you, nothing in this plan can go wrong."

The two women departed, the only trace of their meeting a burning candle, soon to go out.

Korey felt stupid. And awful. And full to bursting of guilt. Even after he had tried to kill her Sandy had still tried to find him and help.

Why did you do this? He asked himself. Why?
The vial was why. What to do with it? Should he even use it?
Not now, maybe later. He tucked it into his jeans.
Now, where to stay the night?

15 - Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Fifteen

Korey ran back to his house. He was surprised he even knew where it was, he hadn't been there in so long. But it was the only place he could think of.

The door opened onto his father, who regarded the bleeding, tattered werewolf with a cold glare.

"Korey. Are we to have the honor of being your refuge, home away from home tonight?" He asked thinly. This wasn't the first time this had happened.

Korey's mother was white-faced with worry, as she always was on the full moon, but she managed to go even paler when he walked through the living room. Her fingers twitched and it was clear she wanted to run to her son, but Korey's dad's glare stayed unwaveringly on Korey's back, and his mother restrained herself. Korey gave her what he hoped was a reassuring smile, though it was hard to get his mouth to turn that way after all that had happened.

Then he escaped into his room. It looked like it had two years ago. Exactly. Korey was surprised they hadn't touched it, but his parents were full of surprises.

He threw himself onto his still un-made bed and began to pray for the weekend to be over.

Time is really wierd thing. It speeds up exactly when you dont want it to and slows down likewise. Only time isn't really a thing. Its a metaphor for moments of life and so you are only under the illusion of speeding up and slowing down. Time....

Sandy hated time. She had been in her room all weekend and was dead sick of time, or whatever it was. At the moment she was brainstorming about time, however much she hated it. It was actully a sort of school project, she was trying to get accepted into the time-travel elective at Cormerick's.

Sandy wasn't the say-in-your-room kind of person. She was the jock out side kind of person. Only she was really tired for some reason. She kept falling into wierd, dizzy spells, which was abnormal, because she was the one in the house that didn't sleep.

What was wrong with her? Why didnt Sandy have any energy? Why?

Sandy sighed as she rose from her bed. The sleep had done absolutely nothing.

She leaned against her dresser and stared into her mirror, the image blurry and unfocused. She rubbed her eyes and ran a brush half-heartedly through her impossible hair. Her eyes met with her mirror image again and it made her frown. She looked different.

Her eyes were different, more tired looking. Her hair was lighter, thanks to the hours spent levitating high on sunny days in flight class. Her skin was lighter too, but that was more of the lack of sunlight coming in through her Corm cloak. Sandy had changed alot in the past month.

"So you decided to join the living, huh?" Cammy. She hadn't bothered to knock.

Cammy was cute, Sandy admitted... When she was a baby. Suddenly Sandy had an evil thought. Something that would scare Cammy more than a rubber spider on her pillow or a bad hair day.

"You know, Cammy," Sandy said in a sugary-sweet voice, which immediately put Cammy on the defensive, "I used to come up with witty things like that all the time. You're just like me when I was your age!"

It wasn't true, of course, but Cammy didn't know that. A look of pure horror came to her face.

"You don't mean I'll be like...?" She gasped. And just like that, Sandy's teasing manner was gone and

she was furious.

"Be like what? ME, with my horrible deformity!?!? Heaven forbid, Cammy, not you, you sweet little angel!" Sandy spat.

Cammy gasped, realising what she had said had been rude. It wasn't that she cared about being mean to Sandy, but it wouldn't look good if her parents knew she'd offended the defective child.

"I didn't mean it that way, Sandy. I'm sorry!" Cammy said.

"I know." Sandy said coldly, and shut the door. She locked it and leaned back against it and just started sobbing.

She never, ever cried over Cammy. Cammy deserved most of the teasing.

But there isn't anything wrong with me! Sandy told herself, I haven't changed any! I was always like this, why does everyone act like I've been mutated or something?!

Self-consciously, she glanced over at the mirror again. She had been partly wrong. No, she didn't have some deformity or mutation or anything, and she still acted more or less the same, but she had changed. Looking in the mirror at this distance, Sandy could see almost all of her, and even this far away she could see the rings underneath her eyes, the tearstains on her cheeks, and the tired, almost emotionless look. She looked positively hardened. She felt that way, too.

A month ago, she would never have given anything up. She was a competitive spirit, determined and skilled enough to win anything. Now she just wanted to let it all go and not have to care about anything anymore.

"I'm growing up too fast." She said quietly, and even her voice was not her own.

16 - Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Sixteen

Sandy wondered what it would be like if she ran away. Many people, children mostly, wonder what it would be like if they ran away. Only a few actually consider it, and even less actually do it. The few that do run away usually return home within a week. The itty bitty percent that doesn't suffer and wishes they had. But one in a million thrive on, not being known. One in a million aren't missed at home or where they were. One in a million make it when they leave.

Sandy wondered if she would be one of those people. She had gone through the regular things people go through when they think about running away. Would she be missed?

By who? Sandy asked her self. Who would miss an awful deformed child?

Not Cammy.

Then, what would she do? She could become an athlete in a league or something. And if that didn't work out, she was old enough for a job a McDonalds. Or would be next year. Finally, would she be recognised?

Nope. Sandy looked so different from how she had been only three weeks ago, no one could possibly know her.

But to take precaution she was going to dye her hair.

Sandy dwelled for a moment on the color. She had always wished for black hair, but lately she wanted dark brown. Really dark, almost black, but not.

Tomorrow she was supposed to return to Cormerick's. What if she dodged her mother? She could her mom she would take the bus. Her mother wouldn't protest for too long, then Sandy could disappear.

Forever.

But is that what I want? She asked, is it really?

Sandy sighed she went over to her closet to take out her duffel bag. Suddenly the door opened. Sandy jumped guiltily.

It was Charlie. Suddenly all the energy went out of Sandy. She couldn't run away, how on earth would she survive? A subtle thought crept into the back of Sandy's mind but she pushed it away.

"Sandy?" Asked Charlie anxiously. "Are you okay?"

"I'm not on drugs if that's what you mean." Said Sandy, trying to sound joking and unconcerned. It came out as a tired, meek sound.

"Sandy, I have to tell you something." Charlie said quickly, ignoring the new brown color of his sister's hair.

"What?" Sandy sensed the importance in the statement.

"SANDY ROCKWELL! COME DOWN HERE RIGHT NOW!!!" Sandy heard the anger in her Dad's voice. She felt so tired. She didn't want to face her dad at all. She closed her eyes. So tired. What had she taken a nap for?

She felt herself sinking. She had one conscious thought. I must be fainting, I've never fainted before.

Wait, that one time at the soccer game....

Then she was gone.

Only later would Sandy wake up. Miles away from where she had fallen asleep. Only later would she learn about Charlie's talent. Later, because now she was asleep and couldn't notice a thing.

Charlie stared in horror at Sandy's now empty room.

What happened!? He thought, looking around wildly for some sign of his sister. The only new thing he could find was a bottle of hair dye in the sink.

Sandy had disappeared. Had she used her powers!? Charlie whistled. He had no idea that she could do that!

He looked over at her mirror and frowned when he realized she had broken it. From the blood spot on the dresser, she'd probably used her fist. Something had really gotten her angry.

"SANDY CATERINA ROCKWELL, GET DOWN HERE NOW!!!" Bellowed Charlie's dad. A gust of wind made Charlie squint. Dad was mad, too.

Charlie sighed. He would have to look for Sandy later. For now, he had to make sure she wouldn't be killed when she came back.

Sandy moaned as consciousness rushed back to her. The blood hurried to her face and she had a moment of total disorientation before she was able to open her eyes.

"Where...?"

Where am I? was what she had been hoping for, but she only got out one word before her mouth was covered.

"Sandy!"

"Korey!?" Her voice was muffled, but the killer look in her eyes was enough to get the message across to the werewolf.

"Look, Sandy, before you do anything..."

Too late. She wrenched his hand away from her mouth and sat up. The blood rushed to her head again, but she didn't pay any mind.

"What? It isn't enough that you almost ate me, you have to kidnap me, too!?" She yelled.

"Shh!" Korey snapped, closing his hand over her mouth again. "Sandy, believe me, the last thing I wanted was for you to pop into my room magically, but you did. I had nothing to do with it!"

Sandy glared at him, but didn't say anything when he cautiously removed his hand. The wind stopped thrashing his curtains around and settled into a wispy breeze.

"You have some explaining to do, Korey." She said.

"I know." Korey said, avoiding her gaze. "Let's start at the beginning."

17 - Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Seventeen

Sandy's Father came charging upstairs into Sandy's room. Charlie wondered furiously what on earth he was to do and finally decided on disappearing.

Not literally, like Sandy. But so much that he would not be noticed.

He slipped into the bathroom and crept into the study and on the computer where he was casually checking his e-mail when his more than mad father came in looking for Sandy. Charlie was planning on paying attention to his father, but when he logged on a popup filled his screen. He moved for the "x" in the corner without paying any attention. But then something caught his eye.

It was his name. Charlie Rockwell. And Sandy's. But those were the only Rockwells on the list. Charlie looked again. It WAS a list but of what... He had no clue.

Suddenly his father was there behind him. Charlie quickly hit the minimize button.

"Well Charlie?"

"Well what?" Asked Charlie as if he had no clue what his dad was talking about.

"WHERE IS SANDY?" His father roared.

"I dunno." Charlie meant for it to sound nonchalant, but the end of his comment turned out sounding worried. Anyways it was the truth.

"Charlie Jay Rockwell you tell me where your sister is right now!"

"Er..... I dunno. Seriously Dad. She left about an hour ago."

His Dad was buying it, he could tell. "Did she say anything before she left?"

"No. Well, I...I didn't catch it."

Satisfied, his father left.

Sandy sat on the floor of Korey's room.

"Korey, Don't. Just shut up for a minute. At the moment I don't CARE what and where the beginning is! I want to know how I got here. And later you tell me why you tried to kill me."

Korey flinched.

"Uhh. I don't know..." He stopped. "How you got here...."

"Neither do I." Answered Sandy. "Neither do I."

"I didn't try to kill you, Sandy. Not me, it was that thing!" Korey blurted after an awkward moment of silence.

"Korey..." Sandy said slowly, "That thing WAS you."

Korey bit his lip and sat beside her.

"Sandy, you're my best friend." He said, reaching for her hand. She pulled away and a furious burst of wind pushed at his back from the window. He recoiled and gave her a pained look.

"Best friend." She repeated, glaring at him. "Best friend!?"

"Yeah." He said calmly, trying to duck under the sudden flurry of leaves as he rushed to close his window. He flicked the lock.

Suddenly, there was a loud bang on his door and his father was yelling at him to open up, swearing profoundly.

"I've gotta hide!" Sandy hissed, forgetting her anger for a moment.

"No time!" Korey yelled, and tackled her as the door opened...

...Onto what seemed to Korey's father like mindless teenage making out.

Luckily, Korey only went so far as to hug Sandy, as he valued his life, but that wasn't what his dad saw. "Korey!" His father said in shock, his face going red. Korey turned away from Sandy, who looked like she was going to kill him and probably was, and snarled at his dad. An inhuman snarl.

"Get out." He said, in a voice that actually made Sandy flinch and back away.

"Korey--"

"OUT!" Korey roared in a tone that would have put Sandy's dad to shame, and the man scampered out of the room.

Sandy stared at Korey in complete shock, and he actually managed a weak grin and a sort-of shrug. Sandy, who now knew what made his smiles so wolflike, could only take a step backwards. Her throat wouldn't let her say anything, and she was shaking uncontrollably. Korey frowned.

"Sandy, I didn't mean to..." She took another step back and Korey followed her. "I'm sorry, Sandy, I didn't mean to scare you, it's just my dad, he--"

"Stay away!" Sandy tried to scream, but it came out as a hoarse whisper.

"Sandy..." Korey's hand touched her elbow and she violently ripped away from him and darted for the door.

"Stay away from me, you monster!" She yelled, and this time it came out as she had intended, and it probably didn't do anything to reassure Korey's father, who could hear it even in the living room.

Korey grabbed her from behind and pulled her back, covering her mouth yet again and lowering his head so he could whisper into her ear.

"You think I'm the monster?" He asked, allowing himself a small chuckle, "If you go out there, you'll have to deal with the man that MADE me the horrible beast that I am."

Sandy's eyes widened, and she wouldn't have been able to say anything, even if Korey's hand wasn't covering her lips.

"Yeah, that's right. Daddy dearest is the one who bit me. He nearly killed me, you know. Almost 'tore my heart out, my blood was so good', at least that's how he put it." Korey seemed to be taking some sick pleasure in telling the story that was scaring Sandy out of her wits, "And you know what's funny? Absolutey freakin' hilarious!?! He doesn't know!"

At this he laughed and for a minute Sandy was really worried about him. Then she was worried for herself.

"He doesn't even know...only on full moons or when he's really ticked does he remember, and he loves it when he does." Korey released her, finally, but she couldn't move. Her knees were too weak.

"So go on, run out my door...Out of the frying pan and into the fire."

18 - Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Eighteen

"Korey know what?" Sandy asked. For she had found her voice at last and the previous circumstances were enough to make her steaming mad. Madder than mad.

"What?" Asked Korey in the strange voice he had been using to tell his story. He was distant, wrapped up in his tale, so that he didn't notice Sandy slip from his grasp.

"I will go. Into the fire, as you so charmingly put it. And leave this pan!" Sandy stormed out of the room and tore through the hall before Korey could stop her. At the end of the hall was the front door, and Sandy threw it open.

She ran down the walkway into-

Into where?

Where Korey lived..

Which was where?

Sandy thought for a minute. Where to go. Where to go.

Then she heard a crunchin noise behind her and all thought flitted away. She didn't even look back. She just ran. Fast. Sandy tore down the street fast as she could. Which was pretty fast thanks to her athletic skills. Farther and farther and farther away.

...Thirty minutes later Sandy was exhausted. As much as she could run she was only a few minutes above normal, and then she got tired.

And as if it weren't enough that she had worn herself out already, she didn't recognize any of her surroundings.

Charlie was lying on his bed. It was two A.M. and he couldn't get to sleep for worry for his sister. He rolled over, tucking his arm underneath his head.

Where was Sandy?

Where and how?

Sandy plopped down in the leaves on the side of the road and swiped the dirt off of her face. She looked around her. Nothing as far as she could see.

"Talk about stupid." She chastised herself glumly.

Crunch! Sandy's head snapped up and she whirled around. Or, at least she tried to, but she tripped over her own feet and her chin hit the ground painfully. She threw herself up like she had so many times in soccer and glanced around.

Despite the strange, calm state she remained in, her heart was thumping against her ribcage so loud that she was sure whatever had made the noise could hear it. But there was nothing. Nothing to see and nothing to hear, other than her own harsh breathing, which was crystallizing in front of her in puffs.

And then a blur darted from the woods and hit her from behind.

This time her arm hit the ground first, and the soft leaves were gone. There was a sickening crunching noise as her elbow hit solid pavement. She cried out in pain and the wind thrashed at the trees above her. Whatever had hit her growled and circled.

Turning to face her was a gigantic, chestnut furred wolf. It snarled and drool dripped down its jaw as it eyed her hungrily.

"K...Korey?" She muttered, tears coming to her eyes as she forced herself to sit up and sling her useless left arm into her lap. The thing hunched its shoulders and chuckled. Or at least, it was trying to. What came out was a grotesque snarl.

"He's only a whelp. He can't even change when he wants to." The thing told her, leaning back on its haunches. "Only on the full moons. And he's not very strong or brave, even then...It was a very rude thing you did, dashing through my house so and seducing my pup. Made me very angry indeed."

"I didn't-" Sandy started, but she let it drop. What was the use of trying to explain? Why help Korey out? She asked herself, but found that she still cared about him, even if he had attacked her. It wasn't his fault. It was this thing's!

Suddenly that anger boiled up in her again, and this time she embraced it. She leapt to her feet, completely ignoring her arm. She didn't need it when she had the wind and the earth.

And she snarled back at the wolf. The wind tugged viciously at his brown fur and even pushed him backwards. His claws scraped the pavement and his ears swiveled against his skull at the grating noise.

He glared at Sandy and she glared back.

"YOUR pup? You BIT him, you monster. You destroyed him." She said darkly.

"I made him stronger," The wolf scoffed, though he looked far less threatening. "And he is MY pup, in all aspects of the word."

"..." Sandy had to think of something to say, quick. Had to keep the upper hand while she had it. What had she read about wolves in school? Carly MUST have told her something! At least one thing she could use against the monster!

'Show him you aren't afraid.' Said that cursed voice in her head, even though it didn't create a poem this time. Sandy looked back up at the wolf, into its golden eyes, and dropped all the threatening stuff. She just wanted to beat the snot out of the guy, despite the trouble she was jumping in to by not running for her life. The elements were on her side, after all!

So she gave the beast a grin and said, "Fight ya for him."

Charlie sighed as he stared at his ceiling. His father was pacing above him and he could hear the scuffling of his socks through the cheap plaster. He rolled onto his side.

"It sucks here without you, Sandy." He muttered, poking at the bedspread. It was true. He hated it here. He wasn't always in trouble like Sandy, but it was so...

So BORING without her!

He sighed again and buried his face in the pillow.

"I wish I was wherever she is."

The wolf chuckled again, and its ears straightened.

"Foolish wench. I'll rip through you like tissue paper." He snorted, flashing her a grin. Sandy didn't let it phase her, and stood tall, her good arm outstretched and flowing with the energy from her anger.

"Bring it on, gramps. I've faced tougher than you." Sandy said, and mentally added, 'in computer games.'

"...Not uglier, though, I have to say."

"You stupid child." The wolf growled, "You are an infant, and you banter like one as well."

"Why waste my good ones on you, squirrel bait?" Sandy asked.

At this the wolf lunged at her, and she was fully prepared to knock it aside with a chunk of earth when something did it for her.

Out of...absolutely nowhere! her brother Charlie appeared and landed directly on the monster. Charlie yelped in surprise and grabbed the animal's ears so he wouldn't fall. The wolf bucked and snarled and thrashed in a circle, but he couldn't throw the boy off of his back. Charlie was just panicking and screaming his head off. After all, the fur beneath him had been his pillow only a few seconds ago.

Sandy just stood there. She would have laughed if it wasn't so serious, but other than that she couldn't do anything but stare as her brother wore the monster down.

The wolf sank to the ground and Charlie rolled off of it and ran to his sister.

"What the heck is going on!? What happened to your arm!? What IS that thing!?" He yelled, his eyes wide.

The wolf moaned, only this time it was a human sound. And in the place of the great wolf was Charlie's father, looking bruised and battered, but no worse off than Charlie.

"I'll explain later." Sandy said wearily. "Just pick him up and we'll try to get him somewhere safe. I think I ran that way..."

"You THINK!?" Charlie shrieked.

"Just help me!" Sandy snapped, then tried to calm down, "I can't pick him up, I think my arm is broken.

The best thing to do is find a house. Just, a house, anywhere, and call for help."

"We can't call mom and dad, if we want some real help." Charlie said, propping the semi-conscious werewolf on his shoulder as instructed.

"We won't," Sandy said as she unfolded a mud-sploded slip of paper from her pocket and read over it.

"We'll call Izzy."

19 - Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Nineteen

"Now, we just need to find a pho-"

Cutting Sandy off, Charlie passed her a cell-phone with his free hand.

"I took it from dad earlier today...Hoping you'd call somehow." He explained at her confused glance. She beamed up at him and dialed in the numbers with her good arm. It rang twice, then...

"Hello?"

"IZZY? IS THAT YOU?"

"Uh, yeah-"

"Great. Cool. Where are ya?" Sandys frantic mindset was disappearing rapidly.

"Uh. At my house. Sandy is that you?"

"Yeah. Er. Im stuck. I dunno where. And- and yeah." She suddenly realized how pathetic that sounded.

"Izzy is that Sandy? Lemme have a go at the phone! Please!" Sandy heard someone in the background.

Then a "yeah" And suddenly she was talking to Carly.

"Sandy, is that you? Whoa! I have way not talked to you for like ages. How are ya? Whenever I call over to your house they say your gone. Whats up? I mean you have got to let me in! Oh my gosh, know what I have Mr. Richter this year. Uhhhh. He is such a-not gonna say it...."

"Ohhh. Dang. Sucks for you." Sandy said, caught up by Carly's story.

"Sandy! My god!" Yelled charlie.

"Oh yeah. Er... Cars, me and Charlie are like-" Suddenly there was a loud beep.

"What!" Yelled Sandy.

On the screen there was a small empty battery, flashing and mocking her. She sank down onto the cold turf.

"Charlie. Were stuck." She looked up Charlie.

"No."

"What? What kind of answer is that? No?"

"Were not stuck."

And suddenly they were at Izzy's house.

"Charlie?"

"I dunno."

Sandy ran forward and pressed the doorbell. It was answered in a minute.

"SANDY!" Yelled Carly, pushing past a stunned Izzy. "Oh my gosh! Where have you been!?"

"Lots of places." Muttered Sandy before closing the door behind her.

Carly ushered the three of them into her living room, where Sandy explained to her two friends what had happened over the past month. When she got to the part about magic, Carly gave her one of those looks, but didn't interrupt, and by the time Sandy was talking about her chilling encounter with Korey's wolf form for the first time, Izzy was hiding behind Carly and shaking.

Sandy was as good a storyteller as a poet, apparently.

"...So I told him I'd fight him for Korey and then Charlie sort of...appeared, like we did here, and then we called you and then... Well, that's about it."

"Hmmm." Carly mused, then she said what Sandy expected the least. Sandy had expected 'you're joking, right?' Sandy had expected 'yes? Police? Yeah, a size seven straight jacket should do it.'

But she had not expected Carly to laugh and say, "That means your brother owns Korey!" "Huh?" Charlie said, looking up from Korey's father, who was lying on the couch and apparently in great need of some Advil.

"Yeah," Carly said, "Sandy started the fight for possession of Korey, and technically Charlie won." "But I-" Charlie stammered.

"Anyway, that's not important," Carly interrupted, turning to Sandy, "We need to get you home, and we need to take Korey's father back, too."

"No! I'm not going back home, and I'm NOT going back to Korey!" Sandy yelled, jumping up. True, she had almost forgiven Korey by now after seeing that it wasn't his fault but his father's, but she wasn't going to crawl back to him!

Charlie placed a calming hand on Sandy's shoulder and said, "We don't know where Korey lives." "I know where that man!" Izzy piped up, finally coming out of the shock caused by Sandy's story, "He used to own the company that made my favorite comics. I've called him before on the comic hotline! I know his number! You can call for help!"

Sandy smacked her forehead, but one look at Korey's disgusting father told her that she had to go back, if only to get the man locked up.

"...I should probably apologize to Korey as well...but I don't have to be his friend any more." "Sandy Rockwell, you're as stubborn as a mule." Carly said with a shake of her head.

"Hey, Carly?" Charlie asked. "What were you doing here before we called?"

"Oh! Well, er, I...You see--" Carly blushed brightly and avoided Sandy's suspicious eyes.

"We're lab partners in science." Izzy said cheerfully, and skipped out the door.

Korey sat down helplessly on the floor as Sandy dashed away from him. He stared at his carpet in dismay.

Did she really think him worse than his father?

"I'm not a monster, not like him. I'm not what he wants me to be. Sandy will see. She'll run right back in here after dad starts yelling at her and she'll for-"

Wait a sec.

Why wasn't his father yelling?

She got away, Korey told himself, she ran and got out the door and ran back home before dad could even get up. That's what happened.

But he knew it wasn't true.

"Oh, no." He leaped up and shot out the door, only to find that his worse fears were true: Sandy was gone...

But so was his dad.

20 - Chapter Twenty

Chapter Twenty

"So....." Sandy said, trying to break the silence that had fallen as they all realized how awkward their situation was. Three friends with magic powers barge in on lifetime buds of Sandy and discover that her brother is now the proud owner of a werewolf.

Sandy bluntly pointed that out.

That all laughed a bit; the tension eased. Still, no one really knew each other. They were all connected because of her, Sandy realized.

"Um....." She said, "What's our next move gonna be?"

Izzy and Carly stared. Charlie looked at her like she was crazy.

"Gee, Sands? I dunno? Why not call Korey?" His voice dripped sarcasm.

"Oh." Sandy stood, unsure of what to do or what to say, or even, of what she was feeling. On one hand she wanted to trust Korey, but then...everything had gone so hopelessly wrong.

And Sandy's once natural energy wasn't around to back her up anymore. She didn't know if she even wanted to sort it all out.

"Sands?" Charlie asked, raising his eyebrows. "Take it."

He held out the phone. Sandy reached out and tapped in the number that Izzy had given her with her good hand.

666-9325.

666? Thought Sandy, ironic coincidence? The she heard the phone pick up and took it from Charlie.

"Hello?" Came Korey's voice.

"Korey? It's Sandy." She sounded calmer than she felt.

Suddenly she remembered a time when all had been easy, when there had been so magic talent. When she was a sports star and nothing else.

"Sandy?" Came Korey's reply, and it reminded her that she couldn't go back.

"Korey, I, uh...could you...give me directions to your house?" Sandy asked, her arm stinging from holding the phone. She quickly switched to the other hand, letting the throbbing one fall at her side. She had forgotten that she had fallen on it.

"Uh...yes...Where are you now?" Korey's voice sounded unbelieving through the speaker.

"23 Rhododendron Drive." Sandy replied, wincing as Charlie took her arm and began wrapping it in some gauze that Carly had given him.

"Okay...I'm down the road about a mile, first house on the right after you turn onto Westbrook." Korey said, trying to keep his shaky breath from giving his fear away.

"Alright...I'll see you in a few." Sandy sighed. "And > Korey?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm really sorry."

"It's okay Sandy." Korey said with a relieved sigh.

"Come on over, we'll sort it all out."

"Alright. We've got your dad in hand. I'll see you in a few... I love you."

Sandy's hand flew to her mouth as soon as she'd said it, stinging at her arm more. Carly, Izzy, and Charlie all stopped to stare at her like she was crazy yet again. She hoped Korey hadn't heard, but she could hear him breath out slowly, a rush of static over the phone.

"...What?" The werewolf asked.

"Oh, sorry!" Sandy lied easily, "I was talking to my brother. I'll see you!"

"Right! See you!"

Sandy slammed the phone onto the receiver. Charlie shrugged at Carly, and Izzy just blinked.

"It was just a habit." Sandy said with a frown. "Stop staring at me and let's go."

About an hour later everyone was at Korey's house. Korey's dad was still unconscious, which made things a bit smoother. Sandy wondered briefly what it would be like if he was awake. But then stopped. She was feeling dizzy, and nauseous, and her arm (not to mention the rest of her body) was in pain. She sat on the bed in Korey's room while Charlie, Carly, and Izzy took turns telling the story. Sandy just sat there.

Sandy loved and hated the feeling of not being needed. She loved it when she was tired or in pain.

When she wanted to learn something and needed to be invisible.

She hated it mostly, though. She hated it when she was around and no one paid attention to her.

Especially in sports. She was good though, so that never happened. But when it did Sandy hated it. She hated feeling useless.

Sports, that was something Sandy hadn't done for a while, useless or otherwise. She missed it, she missed feeling useful and good at something. She wanted to go and run, she hadn't for such a very long time, not for fun. But then reality caught up with her.

She was injured, sitting next a werewolf, and was really, really out of practice.

Out of habit Sandy tugged at the end of her ponytail. She suddenly realized they were all looking at her.

"What?" She asked suspiciously.

"Do you have an idea?" Charlie repeated. This time Sandy heard him.

"I think we should run." It wasn't meant to be literal. Or, she supposed, it wasn't meant to be literal for them. She was the one that wanted to run.

"Sandy?" Carly was looking at her.

"Sorry. I just have no idea what to do. We're in too deep, or I am anyways. I wish I'd never found out about this "talent". I wish I still went to a normal school for normal people. And I wish I wasn't injured so I could run."

"But you are injured." Korey said, placing a hand on the gauze around her arm. "And we need a better plan than just to run...I...I've tried that before, and look where I am now. Back where I started."

"I think maybe the best thing would be for us to go to Cormerick's." Charlie said softly.

Korey's eyes widened and he pulled away from Charlie and Sandy as though they could burn him.

"We can't!" He whimpered, and Sandy could imagine that if he were in his wolvern state, his ears would have been pressed flat to his skull. "We can't! She's back there, and she want's Sandy...and Charlie, now, too."

"Why?" Charlie asked in alarm. "Because of your powers...she wants them...You're so strong...She's never felt anything so strong. She wants to control it for herself..."

He whimpered again.

"She's so powerful already...strong and-and dark." The werewolf was shivering all over now and Carly ran over and put her arm around him to support him.

"Who?" She asked gently, in her talking-will-make-it-better way.

"I-I-...I can't tell you...She won't-" He swallowed.

"She won't what? WHO won't what?" Sandy asked frantically. Charlie touched her shoulder.

"Calm down Sandy," He said, and then turned to Korey. "Korey, please...tell us what you know..."

"O...Okay, I will. I-I--"

His father gave a huge snort, cutting him off quickly. The group cringed and there was absolute silence

for a moment, a tension running through all of them as they waited.

Korey's father fell back into his snoring monologue.

"Not here." Korey whispered, putting a finger to his lips. "It's not safe here."

"Then...We'll go to my house. Effel can fix Sandy's arm, and then...we'll talk. We'll make a plan." Charlie said.

Sandy had no intentions of crawling like a sniveling dog back to her parents, but she couldn't deny that it was the best hope they had.

"Okay." She said finally, letting her shoulders slump. Izzy grinned and held up a pocketbook, one that he had just swiped from Korey's father. He reached inside and pulled out a gleaming golden car key.

A wicked, hyper smile crept onto his face.

"I'll drive."

21 - Chapter Twenty-one

Eek! Will be replaced soon!

22 - Chapter Twenty-two

Chapter Twenty-two

Sandy and Effel sat on the bed.

They looked like each other. Sandy's hair was straight and smooth, left hanging down to her shoulders with a lacy white headband adorning her head. Her face was swathed in makeup, and she was wearing a pink racerback tanktop with a jean miniskirt. In essence Sandy was Effel - they shared a chromosome after all.

Effel, on the other hand, was sitting in an orange track hoodie and oversized Adidas pants. Effel's hair had been de-straightened and was pulled back into a fly-away curly ponytail. Charlie, Korey, and the others were in the study looking at the popup, so Effel and Sandy were alone while they changed. Sandy realized how long it had been since she'd spent this much time with her sister.

She realized, startled, that she missed it. There was a knock at the door.

"Can I come in Effel?" It was mom.

"Yeah mom, comon in!" Effel sang in an overly cheerful voice. Sandy gave her sister a please-dont-blow-it look. Her mom opened the door.

"Oh, Sandy I didnt know you were here."

Mom looked at Effel (pretending to be Sandy) as if she were a worthless pile of dirty laundry. Sandy realized she had forgotten to tell her sisiter that she was in trouble for some reason or other. Time to work the newfound 'favorite twin' charm.

"Mom," Sandy began, "Sandy was in a hurry, and things haven't been going well at school, so please. Don't be hard on her."

Effel gave her sister a grateful look. It was official, they were each other!

"It's okay, relax Effel. I mean... Sandy." Charlie said as Effel, Korey, Carly, and Izzy exited the car.

"Remember..." Charlie said, turning the ignition so that he could whisper to them without the roar of his car. "Effel is Sandy, Korey is still on Illudra's side, Carly has no powers but is here for...uh..."

"Study." Carly said, adjusting her glasses.

"Yeah... And Izzy has a delayed power, but he is pretty sure it's going to be invisibility. Sandy and I will take care of things back home. Good luck, you guys, you know the plan."

With that, Charlie revved up the car and backed out of the bleak driveway of Cormerick's.

"I just hope we're not getting in too deep." Korey muttered. Effel shivered and clung to his arm. He was the only one who knew this dismal place and she was *not* going *anywhere* without him.

"Just be grateful it's our school break." Izzy said, not looking too thrilled himself.

"Oh, and F.Y.I...." Carly said in an attempt at humor. "We're already in deep."

There was a halfhearted chuckle or too between the group. Effel was looking scruffy and wild, even in her corm cloak. A perfect disguise.

"Only place to go is up." Izzy said, finally brightening them. "Now, let's go..."

They all turned and entered the huge doors into Cormerick's School for Unfortunate Talents. Effel gapped at the castle-like interior, letting the hood of her cloak fall back as she studied the place.

"Wow, this is--"

Korey elbowed her gently. "You act like you've never been here, Sands."

"Well, I..." Effel quickly covered, "I did miss Monday. I guess I kinda missed this place."

"Sandy!!!" A blur of dark brown and Effel was practically knocked to the ground with a thump! there was an ecstatic girl crushing her in a hug.

"Uh...Lizzie!" She really hoped she was right.

"Sandy, I..." Lizzie froze, tensed, and then dropped the hug suddenly, looking at Effel with wide eyes.

"Oh!...You're...Welcome back, Sandy."

Effel sighed in relief. "Guess Lizzie's with us now, too."

"Lizzie's always been with us." Korey said, giving her a strange look.

"Yeah, silly. You are SO SO out of it, today!" Lizzie giggled, then she beamed at Carly and Izzy. "Hi, Carly, hi, Izzy. Good to see you, I haven't in so long. Good thing you got your schedules changed.

C'mon, we'll be late for Poetry Analysis if we don't hurry!"

"I feel like I stood in front of a waterfall of toxic waste. How do mom and Effel *live* with this foundation stuff!?" Sandy griped as soon as Charlie came inside.

"Ah, it's for the greater good, Sands. Give it time. I think you look... oh-so-pretty." Charlie gave her a ridiculously giddy smile and she hit him in the ribs. "Ow!"

"Shut up, Charlie. I'm covered in crap and I have to be Effel for a week!"

"Translation--" Once again, Charlie was the proud recipient of a jab to the ribs. "Oof!"

Sandy looked pleased. "It's a good thing my arm was only twisted...Otherwise we couldn't have pulled this off...still..."

"Worried about Eff?" Charlie guessed.

"Yeah... hey! She's supposed to be my twin, not you!" Sandy laughed, but still looked a little concerned.

"She'll be fine...We, however, have... the *parents* to deal with...and we *have* to be nice, *Effel*." Charlie said firmly.

"Eeeyw, why are you talking to me!? Go bug Sandy, I have to powder my nose!" Sandy threw her hands in the air and stuck her nose up.

"Oh, really?" Charlie said evilly, then he reached out and tickled her ribs. Sandy laughed and ran, closely pursued by her brother. It was probably going to be a while before they could goof off together again.

"Sandy?" Asked Mr. Rickman. "You don't seem yourself today."

"Umm." Effel wracked her brain. "I'm felling a little sick today."

Mr. Rickman surveyed Effel. Trying to figure out what was going on. Effel sat there, trying to be Sandy and look a bit worn out all at the same time.

"Well, I hope you feel better tomorrow." He had apparently decided that sick was all "Sandy" was.

Effel closed her eyes. She really did feel worn out. Maybe it was the fact that she had to pretend to be Sandy, who had so much more energy. Or the fact that she had gone without sleep for more than a day. Or maybe it was all things combined.

It was the latter, decided Effel.

Korey looked over at Sandy - No! Effel - he reminded himself. Although it was probably easier to think of her as Sandy. Lizzie might not be the only one with mind reading powers.

They looked so much alike. And acted alike too, but there was always that one thing that made them so totally different. Korey wondered if their plan would work at all.

Music. Music thought Effel, is Sandy good at music?

No, the logical answer was no.

But Effel was and she wanted to show off. It was a trait that she and Sandy both shared. So in music she sat down at the piano and played. And played and played and played. Oblivious to the stares of the teacher and all her classmates.

"Effel hon! Are you ready for dance?"

Sandy quickly darted up to Effel's bedroom. She really couldn't stand to be in it for that long. Pink and stuffy and no rock band posters.

Dance? Effel was in dance?

Huh, Sandy mused you learn something new everyday.

"Yeah, um....yeah." Sandy wondered how the heck she was going to get through a week of being Effel with no one figuring it out.

"Aaand, stretch.."

Sandy tried, she really did, but how on Earth was she expected to lift her foot over her head in a friggin' tutu!?

As anticipated, she fell flat on her butt for about the sixteenth time in rehearsal. Class had started but fifteen minutes ago.

"Effel, are you alright, sweetie?" The dance instructor was attempting to sound kindly, but it was obvious that Sandy was ruining her perfectly planned stretching session.

Get used to dissapointment, Sandy thought, rubbing her backside as she stood. She ignored the girls giggling behind and in front of her; turning from the bar on the wall to get a good look at her.

Sandy cursed the creation of leotards as she mumbled her answer, "Yes, I'm fine... do you think I could sit out, just this once? ...I feel a little dizzy."

"Of course you may. It must be your equilibrium off or something. Please do." What she meant was, 'Get the heck off my bar before I whack you with my one-hundred dollar apeice lacy ballerina shoe'.

"Yeah, yeah. You have more off than your equilibrium, lady." Sandy muttered under her breath as she took a seat on the matt behind the instructor. She made a rude gesture with her finger and stuck her tongue out at the woman's back. The girls submitted to another bout of giggling as the instructor turned around to find Sand - Effel's - innocent eyes blinking at her as if she were insane.

Sandy shrugged as the woman turned again with a snort. Effel could possibly be having it worse...

...Possibly.

Sandy must have been in heaven compared to how Effel was feeling!

She was in Illudra's classroom, sinking slowly into her seat and trying very hard to keep thinking like Sandy in case there were any mind readers about. She was trembling slightly. She couldn't quite place it, but there was something about that Illudra character.

You know, other than that she had tried to kill her twin by manipulating Korey's curse.

Yeah. Besides that.

Korey eased his hand over hers, his abnormally long nails brushing her finger in a nice way as he laced them through her own. Effel looked over - and up, Gods, Korey was tall - at the werewolf in surprise, but he was seemingly fascinated by the speaking teacher at the front of the class room. Effel couldn't see so much as a blush on his pale features.

She was sure she was blushing enough for both of them.

Korey glanced down at her, squeezed her hand, and gave her a wolfish sort of grin as if to say 'it'll be okay'. Effel smiled back, breathing out a silent sigh of releif.

Lizzie broke into giggles beside them and had to excuse herself to a very ticked looking Illudra, fleeing as quickly as she could from the room.

"You'd just as well be making out during my lecture, Korey! Sandy!" Illudra screamed.

Effel attempted to move her hand away, sinking even lower as every pair of eyes in the class turned their way, but Korey tightened his grip. What the--?

"Really? That's divine!" Korey purred. "I'm positive that the tap dancing instructor would NEVER have let

us! You rock! I'm so glad I took this class now!"

An ear-peircing scream practically shook the bathroom mirror. Lizzie stifled her giggles in surprise.

Several birds took off from the trees surrounding Cornerick's.

The headmistress looked up from her studies in the tallest room in the entire castle-like school to listen to the shriek of one very, very frustrated Illudra all the way down on the ground floor.

Korey laughed his proverbial tail off.

Effel just died.