

The Gem Sisters

By stinkulousreddous

Submitted: February 21, 2009

Updated: February 22, 2009

When the Mario Bros' friends start to disappear, what can our heroes do to get them back? Progress on hiatus; story started when I was 14.

Provided by Fanart Central.

<http://www.fanart-central.net/stories/user/stinkulousreddous/55667/The-Gem-Sisters>

Chapter 1 - The Request	2
Chapter 2 - The Search is Set	6
Chapter 3 - Pyrope	13
Chapter 4 - Tibs	20
Chapter 5 - The Time Wand	30
Chapter 6 - Luigi's Big Mistake	42
Chapter 7 - Revealed	48
Chapter 8 - The... Truth?	55
Chapter 9 - Fixing the Past	65
Chapter 10 - Doopliss the Duplighost	73

1 - The Request

"Get him now," the woman standing behind the horrible, huge, red creature that had fourteen eyes and ten legs said. The monster looked a little like a dragon, but then again, it didn't have wings or anything. The woman was actually very beautiful, but very unusual looking... I've never seen a woman like that.

The only thing that was *REALLY* strange about her was her hair, it was as long as she was tall, but curled up into about seven twists on her head. Her clothes were unusual; too, she was wearing some kind of ninja suit. Nonetheless, she was very tan, and her eyes were greener than my shirt.

I held my hands out in front of me and generated as much lightning as I could to try and stop the lizard. There was no water anywhere, oh, if only I had some water, I could electrocute him with more power than usual...

Its massive tail swung wildly in my face, revealing to me that this lizard-like monster was, in fact, a him.

It seemed my electricity ball hit the creature in the middle of its enormous head. All fourteen of its eyes were as big as my hand, but the monster was pretty weak compared to its size.

The towering creature slammed its hand right on top of me, sending me sprawling.

"Get off me-" I growled, trying to pull away, though, this wasn't easy, considering its hand was as large as I was.

Then, out of nowhere, there was a warm steam on my face. It couldn't have been the monster, I know, because its head was nearly a mile away from me, but then, what was it? The woman started laughing...

"Stop-" I gasped. "Stop puffing on me... *stooooopppp....*"

"*Luigi!*"

I jerked my eyes open and saw that I was lying in my bedroom, Daisy leaning inches over me. Her brown hair was sticking up in a couple of places, and her eyes were green because she wasn't wearing her colored contacts. She had an odd expression on her face, one that had a mixture of confusion, worry and anger.

"Wha-huh?" I said, sitting up. There was sweat on my face... that was all a dream?

"You were mumbling something like 'get off me' and 'stop puffing on me.'" Daisy said suspiciously. She pursed her lips for a second and said, "You haven't been doing pot with other women, have you?"

I felt my eyes widen. "Of *course* not!" I said. "I was just having a ...bad dream." I didn't dare tell her that there was a beautiful, rather large-breasted woman trying to beat me up in my dream.

"Oh," Daisy said, and sat on the bed. "Well, anyway, remember? You promised you'd take me to the flower nursery today."

"I sure will," I yawned and planted my feet on the floor. "But I don't suppose you want me going looking like this?" I looked very funny; my hair was sticking up in the back and resembled a peacock's feathers.

"Go ahead and make yourself pretty," she laughed. "I'll do the same." she left before I could tell her "*That wouldn't be hard for you!*" to get her in an even better mood, but I sighed and got dressed, myself.

I then made my way down to the foyer, where Daisy was bobbing excitedly.

"Come on, come on, come on," she said quickly. "They're having a sale on azaleas today!"

The flower shop was only two blocks away, and Daisy couldn't be more willing to get there. Sarasaland was unusually busy today, Daisy didn't even take the car, and, while being dragged by the arm down the sidewalk, I noticed that Sarasaland reminded me of New York City today.

Daisy squealed when we got to the entrance of the store.

"*Lookatthat!*" she said. "Look! They're breeding all those different colored tulips!" she zoomed off.

I swallowed, still standing in the doorway. I brushed the dust off the back of my shoes and entered the store.

It was like a jungle in here, I couldn't see where Daisy went at all, much less the funny colored tulips she was so interested in. I went down an aisle with a lot of little potted cactuses and miniature piranha plants. I picked up one of the tiny cactuses, thinking to myself with a laugh that this would make a nice addition to Mario's underwear drawer.

"Do you like cactuses?" came a woman's voice next to me.

"I guess they're cool," I said turning around to look at her. I nearly dropped the plant in surprise.

The woman who had addressed me was not really tall, only about as tall as me, and was eerily identical to the woman that controlled the lizard in last night's dream.

"*You-*" I began, but the words got lost on the way out.

"Do I know you, or something?" she said, noticing the slightly horrified look on my face.

I swallowed and shook my head. This was *impossible...*

"Oh, hey," she said, her green eyes flashing as if she suddenly remembered me, "You're the guy who's going to be our king, right?"

I nodded, still staring at the way her ridiculously long hair was twisted into seven little mini-braids on her head. I didn't mean to be rude, but I just didn't *believe* this...

"Well, let's hope you're around to have that happen," she said in a very high, lighthearted way. Startled at what she just said, I found my voice.

"What does *that* mean?" I said in an almost demanding way. But she just smiled, I blinked, and she was gone.

Did I really just see what I thought I did?

I shook my head quickly, and a hand grabbed my shoulder from behind, which, again, nearly made me drop the little cactus.

"Ahh!"

"I saw that." Daisy said in a low tone. Obviously, I *did* see what I thought I had. "Do you... *know* her?"

"No," I gasped. "I... I think I've seen her around before, but I don't know her name..."

"What... were you staring at?"

I swallowed. "The way her hair was. It was... green."

Daisy laughed. "I'm just kidding, I trust you," she said. She held up a basket full of my weight in flowers.

"Royalty gets a special discount!" she said happily, and then put her eyes on the cactus I was still holding.

"What-" she said, with a laugh. "Going to put that in Mario's underwear drawer?"

"How did you know?" I said, a grin spreading on my face. "Nah,"

I set the cactus back on its shelf as a fly landed in front of one of the mini piranha plants. It bent down and snatched the fly, and ate it as grotesquely as you possibly could. I cringed as fly parts were shot everywhere, and brushed one of its disembodied wings off my sleeve. Daisy, however, was fascinated.

"*Way cool!*" she said. "They're breeding these flowers to be mini!"

I swallowed hard as a little bit of fly guts slid down the plant's mouth and it fell asleep.

"Yeah... it's great." I said.

"Isn't it, though?" Daisy said, fumbling in her basket for something. "Look... I bought six of them!" she held up the palm-sized pot in front of me.

I clenched my teeth behind closed lips. "I think the color of them goes well with our dining room... what do you think?" she asked.

I was bursting to say that the dining room was the absolute worst place to put these things, but didn't want to upset her by saying so. She may put one on my bedside table if I said anything.

"Whatever you think," I forced myself to cheerily say.

"Great!" Daisy said. "Then let's go home. I'm hungry."

I didn't realize it until now, but so was I. I hadn't eaten anything yet today.

It took a little longer to get home than it was to get there, because Daisy was toting around a 145-pound basket with flowers, but she was still ecstatic nonetheless. She burst through the door and accidentally crashed into Weston, our old, feeble and angry butler.

"Um... good morning, your highness." he said irritably as he pulled a blue sakura off his head.

"Good morning!" she said, getting up off him. "Sorry about that..."

He stood up and brushed the dust off himself. "If you don't mind..." he said, cringing. I crammed my fist in my mouth to stop from laughing; one of the piranha plants Daisy had bought had fastened its sharp teeth into his butt.

"Ahh! Sorry!" Daisy said, and ripped the Piranha plant away. Weston said nothing except "augh" and then walked away, rubbing his backside and mumbling something.

The door behind me opened, and I turned around to make eye contact with my archrival, Waluigi. He was a very unpleasant guy: though he stood at nearly 6'1, he only weighed as much as I did, and I was a healthy weight. He was actually very scary-looking, with a pointed moustache and elf-like ears, dark circles under blank gray eyes, and a large, purplish nose. Even though in our last adventure he had learned to work with me, the instant we set foot on the plane home, he learned to loathe me again, and vice versa.

He returned my stare; his long, thin face curled into the usual look of hatred he wore when around me. But all of its color was gone. To my surprise, his face was so white I could have been easily tricked into thinking he painted it with that clown makeup.

"Well, can I come in, or what?" he snarled in his low, nasally voice. Clearly, friendly intentions are not what he wanted right now.

"Did you need something?" I asked in a falsely pleasant way. I made sure to make my eyes seem extra bright, as that was one of the things he couldn't stand about me; he told me last month- the way I have such "perfect, crystalline blue" eyes.

He curled his lip a little... mission accomplished.

"I..." he said, in an obviously uncomfortable way. "I... I need your help."

2 - The Search is Set

"You... *what?*" I said, baffled. "You... *need my help?*"

"Listen, I know you don't like me very much, and I don't like you, but I'm in a fix now." Waluigi said.

I noticed that my jaw was dropped, so I closed it.

"Your brother's coming." he said.

"Why?"

"Because I *asked* him to." Waluigi said threateningly, so I knew that this conversation was over.

"Hello?" Mario said, and stuck his head in the castle door. He glanced quickly at Daisy trying frantically to cram all of her spilled flowers back into their pots in hopes of saving them. I had almost forgotten she was there, lost in the shock of hearing Waluigi ask my assistance. This was certainly a sesquicentennial event... and I just turned 24.

"Hey," Mario said, clapping his hand on my shoulder. "What, are we having a party?"

I shook my head and looked at Waluigi, but didn't say anything. A few minutes of total silence went by.

"Ooookay," Mario said, scratching his head. "So... I came all the way to Sarasaland to see who wins a staring contest?" he paused. "Hey... why are you so white? Are you sick?" he added to Waluigi.

"No," Waluigi said, answering both of Mario's statements. He held out a note that had been clamped in his fist and I hadn't noticed. I slowly took it, uncrumpled it, and read it. It was very messily written, so I could hardly make out the letters.

"*G-r-e-e-n-h-a-i-r-e-d-w-o-m-a-n-t-r-y-i-n-g-t-o-k-i-l-l-m-e*. Green haired woman trying to kill me?" I read aloud, eyes narrowed. Daisy turned around.

"What?" she said, obviously startled.

"Reading a note," I said.

"Oh." she said and turned around and resumed her job of potting plants.

"Who wrote this?" Mario asked, eyeing the letter. The ink was dripping and smeared, and obviously written in quite a hurry. Considering that the message said someone was being *murdered*, this was believable.

"I think Wario did," Waluigi said quietly.

"You ...do?" Mario said, a little shocked. "It's not signed or anything... what makes you think so?"

"I do know my own brother's handwriting." Waluigi said in the normal "*Gee, you're stupid*" tone he has.

"*Wait, wait, wait,*" Mario said quickly. "You... you and Wario are brothers?"

Waluigi scoffed. "*Duh,*" he said. "We never really told you, but, I mean... look at us! We're like... *identical!*"

I stifled a laugh.

"Well, we're not twins, like you two. And also," Waluigi continued. "Why do you think that when we had our fifth party me and Wario signed up as the Wicked *BROTHERS* team?"

"He's got a point," I told Mario with raised eyebrows.

"How much older than you is Wario?" Mario asked. "And..." he paused. "How old are *YOU?*"

"Waluigi was in my tenth grade class," I said, frowning. "He's our age."

"Wario's 28." Waluigi said irritably. "Anyway, I was wondering if either of you characters has *SEEN* a green-haired woman. I'm starting a search for her tomorrow."

"Why tomorr-" I began, but then I felt the blood drain from my face. *A green-haired woman...?*

"Oh," Waluigi said, eyes widening. "You went pale, that means something."

"I...uh..."

"You've seen some girl with green hair?" Mario asked.

I nodded slowly. "She told me that she hopes I'm around to inherit this throne."

Waluigi's upper lip twitched, but he didn't say anything.

"I saw you talking to her," Daisy said. "Was she predicting that you'll be croaked before knighted?"

"Thanks, Daisy," I mumbled. "That really helps."

"Do you want us to help you look for him?" Mario said. He was very used to identifying pleas for rescue missions... obviously. Waluigi's face turned an ugly puce color.

"Well, uh... uh... yes." he said slowly.

"And... what makes you come to *us?*" I asked.

Waluigi frowned. "Like I said. I know you don't like me, and I don't like you, but..." he sighed. "You're the... the only ones that I know who had to live in fear of losing your only brother." he looked at his feet to avoid eye contact with me.

I had to bite my lip to keep from whimpering as Mario slowly turned his head and looked at me.

"I don't mind." I finally said. "I want to know what is up with this woman."

Daisy made a low, "mmrrrk" noise.

"Don't worry," I laughed. "She seems to follow me around everywhere. I want to know what's the deal, is all."

"Okay," she said. "But... where will you start?"

I racked my mind, trying as hard as I could to remember last night's dream. It seemed foolish, but if this woman was real, maybe her world was too.

"Well, I guess she's somewhere that's barren."

"Yoshi's desert." Mario said immediately.

"What?" Waluigi, Daisy and I asked at the exact same time.

"Yoshi's desert," Mario repeated. "I remember being there..."

"You can remember what happened when you were *6 hours old*?!" I shrieked.

"...when Yoshi was trying to get to Kamek's castle back then," Mario said, ignoring me completely. Come to think about it, it did seem like a desert, where I was fighting that lizard... a lizard that now I remembered resembled....

"*Yoshies*?" Waluigi asked. "This has to do with *Yoshies*?"

"Maybe not," Mario said, his pointer finger now at his mouth as though he were a brilliant scientist trying to crack a mystery. "But I suppose we ought to check up on the part of Yoshi's Island that's a desert."

There was a sickening crunch behind me; one of our new mini piranha plants that Daisy had set on the entrance table had six very long legs sticking out of its mouth, and a little dribble of green fluid was falling. The plant was chewing in a malicious way on what seemed to be a very large Daddy Long legs.

"Yuck," Mario said in alarm, but Daisy rushed over to the plant as it sucked in the last very long leg like spaghetti.

"*Wow!*" she said. "Look at 'im, eating so big... isn't he just adorable?" she scratched the flower under what would be its chin. Well-fed and fat, the flower bristled its leaves and lay still.

"Anyway," Waluigi said, turning around, "I'll be back tomorrow."

"Why wait until tomorrow?" Mario asked.

"I want to create dramatic tension," he said, and left the building. Mario clapped his hands together in an irritated way.

"That-" he said sarcastically. "That could absolutely *NOT* be done over the phone. No way, no how." he grumbled under his breath and left the castle, too, leaving me in an awkward state of silence.

Daisy crammed one of the Piranha plants into my hands.

"Can you go put this in the 2nd floor bathroom?" she said.

This vicious plant was not what I wanted to look at while I peed, but okay, that's how she wants it...

"Yeah, okay," I said, and turned around and walked to the second-floor bathroom.

But on the way up, something caught my glance. There was a huge window on the second floor, overlooking the scenic countryside of the subcon Chai.

"*Woah*," I said aloud, and set the plant on a little side table. I completely ignored its gruesome consuming of a spider that had been on the table.

I pressed my hands to the glass and peered down at the little scene on the grassland. There was Chompy, my pet Chain Chomp, sitting in the grass, sleeping... I think...

And sitting near him was a girl with very long, green hair, tan skin and was wearing something similar to a ninja suit.

I blinked and rubbed my eyes. *Why was I seeing her everywhere I went?*

She was still sitting there, next to Chompy.

"Luigi, what's taking you?" Daisy called from the first floor, knocking me out of my little trance.

"Oh... uh... just gazing." I said to her, quickly grabbing the piranha plant and sticking it on the bathroom counter. I couldn't *believe* it... characters you see in your semi-conscious mind while sleeping don't pop up everywhere all the time.

That night, it was rainy. I was pretty glad Waluigi didn't want us to go anywhere tonight; I didn't want to go out in this rain.

And a while after I fell asleep, I was startled awake by a loud crash from outside my bedroom. I sat up, still half-asleep, and clicked on the bedside lamp. Daisy wasn't in the room.

I glanced at the clock; it was 3:21 AM. With a slight groan, I got out of bed and opened the bedroom

door to see what was going on.

All of the lights were off. Despite the large window letting in the moonlight, it was pitch-black. I could hear a struggle going on, though...

"Daisy?" I called out. No reply; but I could hear things rumbling around in some nearby room. Sounded like a fight. I turned on the hall light and looked around. The piranha plant on the side table was knocked down; it was gnawing on some bug that had been on the carpet.

I opened the door to the second floor closet. Clothes were lying around everywhere, but nobody was in here.

"*Daisy, where are you?*" I yelled again. I peered over the little walkthrough overlooking the first floor foyer, and couldn't stop myself from screaming.

There was that green-haired woman, her hand closed very tightly around Daisy's neck. Noticing me, she looked up and grinned.

"I was hoping I'd see you," she said, letting go of Daisy. She crumpled to the ground. "After all, I've got your alacritic, fat buddy, now your princess, you're my next stop!"

"*Nooooooooo!*"

"*Luigi!!*"

I blinked a few times and realized that I was lying flat on the floor of my room, the sheets wrapped around my right leg and waist. Daisy was leaning over the side of the bed, staring at me. She was okay...

"What..." I began, but Daisy cut me off. She looked horrified.

"What's wrong?" she asked. "You screamed and fell off the bed... are you... *sick* or something?"

"N...no..." I said, standing up and pulling the sheet from around my waist. "I'm okay, just a nightmare..." I said.

"Something's wrong," she said nervously. "You normally sleep like a corpse."

"Must have been something I ate," I lied. "I'm going to go on the balcony. I... I need some fresh air." there was a lot of sweat on my face, and my heart was racing wildly.

"Luigi, it's three AM," Daisy said.

"I won't take long," I said and left the room. The entrance to the small 2nd floor balcony was right next to the bedroom door. I slid open the glass door and walked through it.

I leaned over the stone rail of the balcony. This was so weird; all of those dreams seemed so realistic.

It was a slightly breezy night, and the moon was full and hung heavy in the sky.

"It's nice," a voice behind me said. I turned around.

"Daisy," I said wearily. She approached me and gently put her arms around me.

I sighed, head on her shoulder. "You seem upset and tense," Daisy said, softly rubbing my back. "Is something serious wrong?"

"I... I don't know," I admitted. "Ever since that woman talked to me, I've worried about it... and I just had a horrible nightmare about her murdering *you*..."

Daisy let go of me, and to my surprise, she chuckled.

"Don't worry about me," she said. "I assure you that I am tougher than that wimpy little girl."

I smiled. "Yes, I trust that you could whip her easily. You know me- I'm the worrywart, right?"

"Absolutely!" Daisy said. I felt a little better. Maybe I *was* just being a worrywart.

The next morning was usual. But everytime I thought about how my dreams were coming to life... I was wondering more and more if they really were *dreams*. But I had no other explanations for it.

Waluigi and Mario showed up at the castle early the next morning. Waluigi was in his normal nasty mood, but Mario seemed excited, almost. I was surprised; you'd think how many rescue adventures he went on, it would become like a way of life now.

"Should we go?" he asked as I made my way down the final stair of the large staircase.

"Sure." I said. "We've got a pipeline right outside; one of them must lead to Yoshi's island."

"Uh..." Waluigi began; he was obviously about to say something very difficult. "Than-"

"Don't say it, please," I said, grinning, and turned around. "That would be so much of a shock I'd probably go into cardiac arrest."

"Have fun," Daisy said. "Don't get killed."

As we were blasted to the barren, lonely desert of Yoshi's island, I noticed that something was, in fact, very wrong. There was a low sibilance in the middle of this place and I wasn't the only one who noticed.

"Who's doing that?" Mario demanded, wiping sweat off his face. It was very hot. I took off my hat, considering myself stupid for wearing so much clothing.

"Now what," I said. "Where do we start?"

"Over here," Waluigi said, leaning over a footprint that was so huge I could have slept in it.

I know what made that, I thought, but didn't think I should mouth it. I brushed the bottom of it with my palm, and a little dust flew up, but nothing else happened.

"This is getting us nowhere," Mario complained.

And out of nowhere, it felt like something hard, like a rock or something, hit me squarely on the back of the head. Blinking stars out of my eyes, I turned around to yell at whoever did that.

I looked around, confused. This wasn't the desert anymore. In fact, it looked a little like Daisy's idea of heaven. Flowers were everywhere, the sky was blue and beautiful, the temperature was a nice 75 degrees... from Mario's description, I recognized this to be Flower Fields.

3 - Pyrope

This was an actual place in the Mushroom Kingdom... good, I wasn't dead.

"Hello-?" I said, looking around frantically. "*Mario...? Waluigi!*"

Nobody was here except the couple of Bulb-ulbs that were dancing around. How on *earth* did I get here?

I took a few steps toward the large oak tree in the middle of the fields. There was a large beanstalk in front of it. Mario had said that he's ridden it before; it went as high as the clouds.

"*May as well try it,*" I told myself, and boarded the large leaf platform.

As soon as I set foot on the leaf, it started rising. I had to grab hold of a vine attached to the platform to catch my balance.

I sat down as the leaf kept rising higher and higher. I was starting to get a little nervous; I had to be over a hundred feet up by now.

And it truly did reach the clouds. I was a little surprised at how a cloud was not like cotton candy like so many people think, it's really just a bunch of mist...

Finally the leaf stopped. I could see the entire mushroom kingdom; the tops of Peach's castle were just visible over a large cloud. I could see the little flags at the tower tips waving.

I stood up, tightly gripping the sturdy top of the vine. This was quite a view.

I then felt three sharp taps on the side of my head. I brushed my hand there... nothing.

Tap, tap, tap.

"Cut it out-" I told whatever was doing this.

"Hello," someone said.

"Hello what-" I slowly turned around. Nobody.

"Are you dead?"

"No, I'm not dead-" I said, turning around again. Nobody was there. "I think...who's there?" I asked.

"Hellooooo..." *Tap, tap, tap.*

"*I hear you!*" I screamed, becoming a little frantic. This frantic feeling was only intensified as I noticed

that the beanstalk was dissolving under my feet.

I blinked a few times. This wasn't flower fields anymore. I was sitting, staring at the floor, my head swimming terribly.

"What..." I whispered, and lifted my head off my chest. I gasped loudly, I couldn't help myself.

"Don't go dying on us, not now," Waluigi said in a monotone whisper.

Waluigi and Mario were tied up in individual chairs next to me, although Waluigi's right arm was free. He was the one who had been knocking me on the head earlier. We seemed to be in some kind of laboratory...

Mario pressed his finger to his lips. Neither he nor Waluigi were in their normal clothes... it looked like they were both about to get married.

I tried to lift my arm to rub my eyes, but found that I was so tightly bound to a third chair that I was immobilized. Looking down at myself, though, I noticed that I, too, looked like I was about to get married. All three of us were wearing black tuxedos with a single golden charm at the base of the collar. Mario's was a shine sprite, Waluigi's was a mushroom, and mine was a star. Something fishy was going on here...

I bit the inside of my cheek very hard to ensure myself that I wasn't dreaming. It hurt; this was obviously real.

Mario jerked his head toward three other chairs on the other side of the room that I hadn't noticed. They contained three very young people, I recognized them as Julie, the 14-year old radiologist, Ricky, the 12-year old who had a pet spider with ichthyic features and was as tall as a house, and Lauren, the 14-year old pyro who set everything tangible on fire. They, too, were dressed in an unusually formal way, and too had tiny golden charms at the base of their necks. Built into Ricky's bowtie was a cape feather, Lauren had a necklace with a fire flower on it, and Julie had a necklace with a Tanooki Leaf.

Julie had been eyeing me nervously, but now that I was back in my right mind, seemed a little relieved. She twitched her shoulders; that was as much as she could move, because she seemed to be as tightly bound to the chair as I was.

"Well, well, seems we're all awake now..." said a voice from behind me. A voice that was eerily recognizable...

A woman walked out into the middle of our circle of chairs. I screamed; I couldn't jab my fist into my mouth to stop myself from doing so. It was that same woman I kept seeing... only... her hair was down and truly DID reach her feet. She was in a long, silk dress and looked almost like an angel... only, her eyes were glinting maliciously and she looked meaner than usual.

"Do you like it?" she said, holding her hand out to the whole lab.

"What do you want with us?" Mario asked calmly. "And ...who are you?"

She curled her long fingers. "I'm a descendant of Wart." she said simply. "That's all I'll say." I was shocked; Wart was a hideous, frog-looking king... his descendants are beautiful?

"Are you a princess?" Waluigi asked.

"I'll say no more than yes." she replied. "Know me as... as..." she thought a moment.

"Why don't you just tell us your real name," Ricky said irritably, shifting as though the ropes were itching his shoulders.

"No," the princess responded. "Call me... er... Pyrope. Yes."

"Pyrope?" Julie asked, confused. "But... but that's a gem. It's red. Don't you think you should go by some gem that tends to be green because you have so much green? Like Malachite, Cerussite, Phrenite or Kornerupine...oooh, or maybe even Pyromorphite?"

Pyrope shot a yellow beam of light at Julie, and in an instant she was turned into a large snail, though she kept her deep crimson hair, still tied tightly to the chair.

"There are some things wrong with your suggestion," Pyrope said. "Cerussite, Phrenite and Kornerupine aren't always green. And does Pyromorphite sound like a decent nickname to you? Malachite is a green gem, true, but it was already used in the popular Sailor Moon books and I don't want to seem like I'm cramping that style. Have I made myself clear?"

Julie the snail whimpered as a large drop of mucus fell from her tail and splatted loudly on the floor. Lauren snickered quietly and whispered "Julie's an animagus!" Julie glared at her through her four eyes.

"Um... okay," I said. "Pyrope. So... what are we doing here?"

Pyrope sat on one of the counters cross-legged. "Visiting," she said coolly. "I want to show you something. And... don't you all look pretty!"

"We're lovely," Lauren said. And indeed they were. "My hair has never looked so nice. Um... could you let us go?"

"No," Pyrope repeated simply. "Like I said... I want you to see something."

Mario and Ricky groaned in unison, petulance rising. Pyrope turned around and started mixing something in a bowl.

"Are you going to *feed* us?" Waluigi growled.

"Don't be discursive," she said slowly. "I'm not going to feed you, I'm going to show you something."

Ricky was craning his neck to get a closer look at what Pyrope was making, his chair being the closest

to her.

"What are you doing?" she calmly yet threateningly asked him.

"Nothing." he said quietly, and settled down in his chair after an exasperated glance at Lauren. Julie the snail whimpered a little. Pyrope glanced at her for a second, but then resumed her job of mixing something.

Mario twisted his hand around and finally got a hold of one of the ropes that was binding him. Quietly he ignited it with Firebrand, and the rope burned in only a few seconds without creating any smoke or obvious smell. The rope fell to the ground, and Mario pulled himself out of it.

"Ma-" Ricky began, but Mario pressed his finger to his lips again and slowly walked up behind Pyrope. What was he going to do?

Pyrope took in a short, choppy breath and whipped around when Mario was inches from her. Pyrope quickly fastened her long fingers around Mario's neck.

"Going to see what I'm doing over here, huh?" she said in a wicked yet soft tone, and actually lifted him a few centimeters off the ground so that they were at eye level. I gasped loudly.

"I was-" Mario gasped, but it looked very hard to talk, and he didn't anymore. Pyrope suddenly gasped and slowly planted Mario back on the floor. She looked like she was about to cry.

"I'm... I'm... *I'm so sorry!*" she screamed. "I don't kn..know what I was th..thinking!"

"What?" Mario said, obviously a little surprised. He rubbed the back of his neck quickly and said "Oh... uh, it's no problem." He shot a confused look at me, and I shrugged as much as I could, which wasn't a lot.

"I..." Pyrope said. "I can't believe I tied you all up like this... what's gotten into me... and... oh no!" she saw Julie, who had a huge pile of snail mucus forming under her chair. "I did this to you..."

Julie obviously tried to nod, but she had no proper neck bones in order to do so.

"Yes," Ricky said quickly. Pyrope looked on the verge of tears even more. "I didn'-"

"Just fix it," Waluigi snarled.

"Yes... yes, of course..." she said, and shot a beam of light at Julie from her index finger. Clearly, she was another one of those people who could use funny powers with their hands. When the light subsided, Julie was back to normal.

"Um... thanks." Julie said, examining her fingernails. I could have sworn that Lauren mumbled "Skitz." Pyrope suddenly growled loudly.

"What is *WRONG* with me!" she yelled. She pointed at Mario. "You-" she said. "How did you get out of

your ropes? You didn't steal anything, did you?"

"No..." Mario said quickly. Pyrope looked ready to fasten her fingers around Mario's throat again. "So *how did you get out!?*" she snarled.

"I..." he began, but Pyrope suddenly gasped.

"Duh..." she said. "Duh... you and this black-haired" -she glanced at Lauren- "idiot are masters of the Firebrand, aren't you... well, well."

"Yeah?" Lauren said threateningly. "So, what, if we are?"

"So, you are," Pyrope said, scratching her chin. "So's you are. Just a moment..." She turned her back and started working vigorously on something. Mario leaned around her quietly, unseen, and witnessed what she was doing. He stood next to her, undetected, for a second, then quietly walked up to me and burned through the rope around my shoulders.

"She's making some kind of potion," he whispered as he did this. I slowly pulled the ropes off and stood up. Julie and Lauren tilted their heads in unison, hinting that they wanted us to free them, too.

I pointed at Julie and then at my hand. She got the hint and gave the rope a bad electric burn, and it dissolved instantly. She stood up and did the same to Ricky's. He could cause floods with a flick of his hand, yes, but that couldn't silently break ropes.

Before long Lauren and Waluigi had had their ropes either fried or burned and all of our group silently crept up behind Pyrope to see what she was doing. It looked like she was mixing some funny-smelling chemicals into a large pot. A thin line of steam was rising from it.

"Gas fumes..." she muttered. "I guess I did something wrong..." she turned around and noticed all 6 of us standing behind her.

"*HEY!*" she yelled and shot six threads of light out of her fingers. One of them hit me squarely in the chest, and I couldn't move.

"So, you all are too nosy for your own good. Too nosy to live..." Pyrope snarled.

"Hey, that was in a Harry Potter book," Lauren said. Pyrope got in her face.

"That doesn't matter," she said. "Anyway, your silly little fire powers can't break this spell. But, who cares, even if they could, I'm going to take them anyway."

"*What!?*" Waluigi demanded. "*How!*"

"This," Pyrope said with a nasty grin, holding up a small bottle. "This will make you so mortal you can't even measure it."

Lauren whimpered a little, she was obviously scared. A single spark shot out of her index finger.

Mario's lip trembled. "Oh, no..." he whispered. The entire lab rumbled.

"What's going on," Pyrope demanded.

"Y...you said there's gas in the air," Ricky said, realizing what was about to happen. "And Lauren just lit a fire..."

Julie stood up at the exact second that a deafening blast came from the walls of the lab. I kept my eyes shut tight... *not even I could get out of this one alive...*

And when the horrible crackling of a large fire subsided, I stayed still and listened around at things. I couldn't hear anything...

I opened my eyes and was astonished at what I saw. I wasn't dead, like I thought I would have been; rather, encased in a large, blue dome of lightning that hovered a few feet off of the ground. Julie was in the middle of it, long streams of electricity bursting out from her fingers. The rest of our party, I realized, was in here, too, and all of them had every single one of their hairs on end. I glanced at Lauren, and laughed silently at her strange resemblance to Marge Simpson. I put my hand over my head; my hair wasn't standing. I guess I'm not affected by anyone's Thunderhand.

"Is everyone alright?" Julie asked the rest of us. Her golden necklace was acting like a lightning rod; it was shining a bright yellow. She quickly snapped her hands up, and the dome went away. We all crash-landed three feet to the ground.

"Yes," I said, rubbing my head and standing up. I looked around quickly; the burnt ashes of the lab were only a few meters away. This was a place I'd never seen before... I guess when I was thrown into my semi-conscious mind, I somehow got transported here. Waluigi groaned loudly.

"Great," he said. "We're lost in the middle of nowhere... with..." -he pointed at me with one arm and Mario with another- "These two idiots!"

"Hey," Mario said. "You *asked* us to come."

"And we did-" I continued in a matter-of-fact way... "Out of the kindness of our hearts."

Waluigi glared at me. "Are you saying that you think I couldn't do this myself?"

Though that was clearly not what I said, I quickly retorted "Well, gee, obviously, why else would you ask your worst rivals to accompany you?"

That was all it took. In the blink of an eye, Waluigi leapt on top of me and the both of us were knocking the stuffing out of each other. Through the mingled war, I could hear Julie just dying of laughter.

After a few seconds of confused fighting, Ricky stepped up next to us and yelled so loudly that we both froze, "COOL IT!"

Both of us turned our heads and looked at him, though this wasn't easy for me, because one of Waluigi's hands was curled tightly around my neck. He was pinning me to the ground, and my right hand was clasped against a lock of his hair.

"Now," Ricky the mediator said, "Cut this out. You did so well as a team on our last adventure. Why should this be any different." Waluigi leapt to his feet. "Because he-" he began, but Ricky raised his eyebrows at him and he shut up.

"Shake hands," Ricky said. I pushed myself off the ground and rubbed my neck. I imagined that Waluigi's handprint was still there. I held out my right hand after sighing, "Fine."

Waluigi slowly outstretched his arm to mine and grabbed my hand. With all the strength I could muster, I zapped Waluigi with my strongest thunderbrand. I heard Julie's loud shriek of laughter.

"Oops," I said innocently, when I ran out of electricity a few seconds later. "Sorry about that. I guess you grabbed my hand too hard."

"Why, you-" Waluigi growled, looking ready to pounce on me again, but Ricky stepped between us and blocked him from probably killing me. Julie was still trying to catch her breath. Obviously, the feuds between Waluigi and I were very funny to her.

"*COOL IT!*" he screamed again, his arms outstretched so me and Waluigi were as far away as possible. I heard Julie say quietly, "Welcome to the Jerry Springer show. Today's topic is 'I hate his guts!'" Lauren laughed hysterically and started chanting "Jerry! Jerry! Jerry!" Mario sighed and buried his face in his left hand, obviously laughing. I found this pretty funny, too, but didn't have time to laugh because Waluigi had snaked his way past Ricky and had begun trying to choke me again. I could hear Julie start laughing again, but in the dust of our confused fighting, Mario stepped forward.

"Make one more move," he said calmly yet threateningly, holding out his index finger like a gun, "and the both of you are going to be scorched."

I stepped back. Mario was a little stronger than I was, and I knew to not push it.

"Whatever," Waluigi said.

"Do you want me to leave?" I asked in a pleasant tone, as though I were asking him what kind of presents he got for Christmas.

"Nah," he said, waving his hand impatiently. "I see what Homer Simpson does about choking people... it really is fun."

I scoffed loudly, but found it best not to argue. Julie snickered again.

4 - Tibs

"Well, so, what do we do now? We are stranded in the middle of nowhere." Lauren said. Nobody answered; I noticed that Mario was busy examining the little Shine Sprite charm tied in at his collar.

"What is wrong with it," I asked him, involuntarily fingering the little star one I had. But he didn't answer my question, he only said "I wonder what Pyrope wanted to show us so badly."

"I hoped she'd show us her boo-" Waluigi said, but Julie started laughing again. Waluigi went white as he noticed everyone staring at him.

"-ts!" he spurted. "Her dress was so long, you couldn't see what shoes she was wearing." I laughed.

"Okay," I said. "I'm sure you are very interested in her shoes." Mario snorted, trying to cover up a laugh, and Waluigi glared at me. I simply raised my eyebrows, and didn't say anything.

"So, then," Julie said, getting ahold of herself. "What's the plan?"

"Plan," I said blankly. "I think we ought to find out where we are first. Think we're still on Yoshi's island?" Mario closed his eyes for a second and took a deep breath.

"What," Waluigi said to him as though Mario was the stupidest idiot on the face of the planet. "Meditating?"

"No," Mario said simply, his head still tilted slightly upward. I didn't know what he was doing, but what else were we going to do?

"No," he said finally. "No, we're not still on Yoshi's island. This looks nothing like it."

"How can you remember what it looks like?" Lauren asked, astonished. "Didn't you see it... like... 25 years ago?"

"Mmhmm," Mario said, obviously amazed at his own brilliance.

"Oh, I know how you can remember that," Julie said, as if she was a very intelligent scientist trying to culturize bacterial cells. "When you two came to the mushroom kingdom, you strongly regained memories of all the things that have to do with this place."

Mario and I exchanged glances. This girl knew more about us than we did. Julie just smiled at the looks on our faces.

"Do you remember what happened before you were seventeen?"

I glanced at a rock to my left. Come to think about it... other than the very brief memory I had seen with

Cackletta last month, it was true... I couldn't remember a thing about my teenage years... or anything between when I was 8 months old to when I was 18 years old, for that matter.

"Look at that!" Lauren gasped, and pointed at something above the trees. We all looked up. What looked like a huge house was standing not too far away; its roof just visible over the tall trees.

"Should we.... visit?" Julie asked nobody in particular, shrugging.

"Why not," Ricky said. "What are the odds that someone evil is living there?"

Mario and I exchanged looks again. Thinking of all the adventures we've dealt with...

But it seemed that the kids had made the decision for us. All three of them were sprinting toward the castle.

"Follow the teenagers," Mario said with a smirk. "Is that such a bright idea?"

"Sure," Waluigi said. "None of them are dumb blondes..." (Mario said "armk") "lets go."

And so we followed the sound of their crunching footsteps through the thick forest, and it didn't take long to discover that the building really was an elaborate palace. It looked very recently built. Mario approached the large double-doors and grabbed the polished handle. He didn't need to knock, though, a large, middle-aged Yoshi opened the door. He gasped loudly at the sight of Mario.

"Hello," he said awkwardly, staring at the Yoshi's stunned face. "We're lost. Could you tell us where we are?"

But the Yoshi just stared at him. It was actually very cute, it was very overweight, and Yoshis are attractive when they're like that. "Gah-buh..." he stammered, staring upward at Mario, because he only stood to Mario's shoulders. "M..."

"Um... is this a bad time?" Julie asked. Lauren was smiling widely at the Yoshi; she obviously thought it as one of the most adorable things she's ever seen.

"M..." The Yoshi said. "Mario!?"

"Uh... yes...?" Mario said, leaning back a little. I was surprised at his confusion of a Yoshi knowing his name, he was one of the most famous people these creatures knew. But the Yoshi only beamed, squealed a little, and threw his stubby arms around Mario.

"Wow!" the Yoshi said. "Wow! Look at you!"

"Um... have we met?" Mario asked, through a fake grin.

"Of course we have!" Yoshi responded brightly. "You must not remember... no, of course you wouldn't remember..."

"Wait." Mario said, eyeing the little dinosaur. "Wait a second..." He put his finger to his mouth for a few seconds, then his eyes grew wide. "TIBS!"

"Oh, you remember!" Tibs the Yoshi squealed again. "You remember!" And Tibs threw his stubby arms around Mario again, only this time, Mario looked pleased to have this happen.

"Um... you two have met?" I asked politely.

"Of course," Mario said. "This is the Yoshi that both of us owe our lives to."

"Oh!" I said, feeling a little stupid.

Tibs bowed to me, and then turned again to Mario. "Please!" he said. "Don't you all look fancy.... anyway, please, stay a while. I would love for you six to be my guests at my palace... built it just a few weeks ago... what do you thi-"

He didn't need to ask. Julie and Lauren burst in the door, squealing, and ran through a hallway. I could hear Lauren scream excitedly "Julie! GET IN HERE! They've got all this Harry Potter stuff!"

"We've lost the women," Ricky sighed.

"Good enough for me," Waluigi said, and went in too. Tibs was beaming. "How long do you have?" he asked.

"Well," Mario said, scratching his head, "We're sort of on a quest..."

"Wario can wait!" Waluigi yelled, sticking his head out from a room to our right. "This place rocks!"

"Talk about brotherly love," I told Mario, who scoffed and rolled his eyes. "Whatever floats his boat."

I took a few steps into the castle, and sure enough, it was as exquisite as my 100 million dollar mansion. There was a large chandelier in the middle, surrounded by two large staircases leading up to the second floor. A pair of double doors were between the staircases. Fancy, expensive-looking lights were hanging everywhere... a Yoshi built this?

"Wow," I said, shielding my eyes from the very bright lights. "Very nice, Tibs, I like it."

"Do you?" Tibs squealed. "I'm glad! Come, I'll give you a tour..."

"Ah, no thanks," Mario said. "I'll explore for myself."

"Okay," Tibs said brightly. "Make yourselves at home. Oh, it's so good to see you again..." and he went through the double doors on the first floor.

"I guess I'll go... get a bath," I told Mario, with a shrug, and left. Somehow, I knew my way to the bathroom, it was down the first floor hallway and to the left. I guess I knew my way instinctly around mansions, considering my horrible event in one a few years ago.

I entered the bathroom and strung a towel over my shoulder. I looked around... even the bathroom was nice. No, there weren't any chandeliers, but the entire room was made of marble. Funny... this bathroom was a little small and didn't have a toilet or anything... but that didn't really bother me. I turned on the hot water tap and watched the bath water fill up. The tub was very large, and it seemed to take forever to fill up. While I waited, I glanced around the room a little more. Paintings of rich people were hung everywhere. They looked a little familiar... but not really. One of them showed a picture of a ridiculously fat man, he looked only about a decade older than me, and I couldn't help but admire how beautiful this one woman was, she was wearing a sparkling recital gown and had to be my age with golden hair a little longer than Daisy's. I quickly thought of Daisy and told myself to stop looking at pictures of other women.

I glanced at the tub and noticed that it was practically full. I turned the water spout off, was a little surprised to see that I could remove the fancy tuxedo I was wearing, and slid in the water. It was very comforting; the water had to be 115 degrees. This seemed like the perfect time to take an evening nap. I closed my eyes and sank chin-deep into the soapy water.

But I didn't get to sleep long. I was startled awake and practically into cardiac arrest when a high, rusty voice said "Luigi, sir?"

I spat out the large amount of hot, soapy water I had accidentally swallowed and looked to my left. In horror, I realized that Toad was hanging over the side of the bathtub, his beady little eyes focused intently on my face.

"TOAD!" I roared, snatching a towel from off the floor next to me and dragging it across the top of the tub. "Do you MIND?"

"Sorry," he said plainly. "But I just wanted to let you know that... guess what!"

"What?" I panted, still astonished at how stupid and violating someone could be. I thought I had locked that door...

"I'm staying here tonight, too! This place rocks!" he piped.

"You... uh... couldn't have told me this through the door?" I asked, trying to hint that I wanted him to leave me in privacy.

"I guess I could have," Toad said, putting his finger to his chin thoughtfully. "That's all, okay, bye!" And he left the room, shutting the door rather hard as he left. I swallowed. Julie would be most unhappy about Toad staying at Tibs' castle tonight... now I can see why. I heard footsteps coming up the hall.

"Toad..." I heard Julie say. "W...what are you doing here?"

"Visiting!" Toad said brightly.

"Oh... okay..." Julie said, sounding very disappointed. "Well, anyway, is anyone using the bathroom now?"

"Oh, yes," Toad piped. "Luigi's in there."

"He just now went in? Alright, I'll try back la-" I had to bite my lip to keep from snickering when Toad interrupted her.

"He's probably almost finished," Toad said. "He's been in there for about 30 minutes."

"But I just now saw you come out of there." Julie said, her voice an octave lower and strangely mature. "How could he have been in there so long when I just now saw you leave?" Julie paused. "You mean..." she continued, "you just walked in on him? Were you aware that he was in there?"

"Sure," Toad said. "That's how I knew to go in there to say hi."

I heard crackling of electricity and then clinking of kitchen utensils, and could only guess what had happened. My guess that Julie had just fried Toad to the bone with Thunderbrand and then staged the scene to look like Toad had electrocuted himself was confirmed when I heard Julie turn the other way, snickering victoriously and muttering "loser." She must have bumped into Ricky in the hall because she yelled in a panicked voice, "Oh, Ricky! There you are! Please, call 911! Toad accidentally electrocuted himself! He... he went crazy and stuck a fork into the socket!"

"Oh, sure, I'll do that now," Ricky said, and I heard his footsteps down the hall, running. Once he was out of earshot, I heard Julie screech with laughter and then mutter to herself, "I am so ridiculously brilliant..." Then she must have left, because everything became quiet. Julie shouldn't watch so many murder cases on Court TV, I thought.

Tibs showed me to my room on the second floor later that night. It wasn't as fancy and elaborate as the other rooms, in fact, it looked like a place you would find at a decent hotel. The bed was nice and large, and a lamp that was nearly as big as I was hung from the tall ceiling. A few dressers were here and there, and a couple of clown dolls were sitting on them. Tibs blushed as I noticed them.

"They're... uh... my niece's." he said slowly. "If there's anything you need," Tibs said, "My room is just downstairs. Your brother's is in the other 2nd floor hallway, your pointy friend's is next door, (I groaned silently) your teenager with the big hair is just down the hall, the boy's is directly upstairs, and the other long-haired hyper teenager is downstairs, down another hall and to the left." he paused. "Your mushroom friend had to be rushed to the hospital. Apparently, he stuck a fork in an electric socket..." I saw Julie walk by the open door and grin evilly, and I thought, maybe it was my eyes playing mean jokes on me, for a second, Julie seemed to have fangs.

I looked away from Julie, who I heard snickering again, and turned back to Tibs. I don't know why he told me where everyone else was staying, but okay...

"Thanks," I said, and he left the room. I sat on the bed. It was very comfortable, made of some air-like material...

I glanced at the clock and was surprised to see that it was around 11:00 PM. I was exhausted. I clicked off the light, but all of a sudden, I was filled with a paralyzing terror. I don't know why... the room didn't look any different in the dark. But I couldn't shake this horrible feeling, and turned the light back on. I

could feel the hair on the back of my neck standing on end. My heart rate went down considerably now that the light was back on.

"What's wrong with me," I said aloud.

"You mean you just now realized that something was wrong with you?" I heard Waluigi call from next door. Dang... he's got good hearing.

But I didn't know what was scaring me. I'll admit that I'm afraid of a lot of things... but I'm not of the dark. I clicked the light off, and it was almost interesting to feel how my entire body got very tensed up again. I looked around, there was nothing in the room other than me and the furniture. But it felt like there was a bucket of ice in my stomach.

I turned around. Still nothing. What was I getting so tensed up about? I turned the light back on. I guess I have every right and reason to be nervous in a dark and unfamiliar mansion... but there was nothing here. Though I was robbed of my ability to see elemental ghosts, I could see any others, and there weren't any.

"Stop freaking out," I told myself, as sweat dripped down my face. "It's all in your mind. There's nothing wrong. This isn't your mansion." And I clicked the light off again. Once again, it felt as though an invisible fist was wrapping itself around my stomach, but I convinced myself that there was nothing wrong, and flopped down on the bed.

Without even bothering to change out of my fancy dress clothes that Pyrope had somehow changed me into, I fell asleep as soon as I pulled the covers up.

I got a horrible night's sleep. Every thirty minutes or so, I was jolted awake by some tiny sound, once it was a plant dropping one of its leaves, once it was a fly getting eaten by one of those miniature piranha plants. (Yes, Tibs had some too...) The third time this happened, it was a tiny drop of rain on my window.

I groaned under my breath and pulled the covers over my head. Every muscle I had was constricted.

And I had reason to be tense. A few minutes later, I felt a cold hand grab my shoulder. I yelled and jumped out of bed with my eyes closed.

"See," A girl's pleasant voice said, "Told you he could jump high." I opened my eyes and realized that I was clinging desperately to the large lamp hanging from the ceiling. I looked down. Julie and Waluigi were standing there. Julie looked awed, and to my surprise, Waluigi looked mildly impressed; his hand outstretched to the exact place I had just been lying.

"Were you sleeping, or dead?" Waluigi called up to me.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING?" I screamed at them and glanced at the clock. "It's four in the morning!" I wiped the cold sweat off my face and slipped off of the light, and I fell with a startled "Aaaah!" six feet to my bed below. Blinking stars out of my eyes, I stood up. "Well?"

"Sorry to wake you," Julie said very quickly, "But he said something's wrong with Tibs." She pointed at

Waluigi.

"Tibs?" I said blankly. "What, what's wrong with him?"

"Only Mario would know," Waluigi said.

"S...so why'd you wake ME up?" I demanded.

"Misery loves company," Julie muttered, and then pointed at Waluigi and twisted her finger in a circle near her ear, signaling she was trying to imply "He's insane."

"Fine," I said. "Tibs told me where Mario was... come on." He was in the 2nd floor hallway... I think that's what Tibs said. But on the way out, I crashed into something. Igniting a spark on my finger, I saw Lauren and Ricky standing there, looking both confused and angry.

"Are we having a party, or something?" Lauren asked. "It's a bit early, you know..."

"We are going to go wake up Mario. Something's wrong with Tibs." Julie explained.

"Sure as heck something's wrong with him," Ricky said strangely loudly. "Maniac was muttering to himself earlier this evening, saying 'paaaaaintings, paaaaaintings,' and walking out with a bunch of portraits under his arm."

"Well, let's go get Mario," I said. "I know which room he's in, follow me."

And again, I knew my way there. I'm not sure how. I think it was just that, since I had to find my way through a huge mansion before, I guess I've developed some skills like that.

It took a while of winding through hallways and staircases to get to the other part of the second floor. The only way up was to go down to the first floor and climb the main staircase to the other side. The bedroom was on the far side of the hall. I creaked the door open. Mario was, indeed, in here, he was curled into the fetal position he normally sleeps in and was mumbling something about a party. Julie snickered and said, in a very good impression of Peach, "Mario, let's dance the night away..."

"No..." Mario mumbled. "No, I'm a terrible dancer..." I had to clap my hand over my mouth to stop from laughing, and Lauren was starting to lose it already. She was going very red in trying to keep her mouth closed.

"Oh, that's okay," Julie said in Peach's voice. "Let's go swimming, then. I'll put on the bathing suit that you bought me... you know, the transparent one." Now, even Waluigi was trying very hard not to snicker.

"Yes, do thaaaat," Mario mumbled. "Yes, I like that one."

"I'll wear it at our wedding," Julie said. Mario's mouth curled into an obvious smile, and I couldn't help it; I burst out laughing. Mario frowned and lazily opened his right eye.

"Hey," he said irritably, sitting up. "You had to come in HERE and inhale laughing gas?" he glanced at

the clock. "Buh... It's 4:30 AM! What are you thinking?"

It took a while for me to stop laughing; I had briefly consoled myself, but lost it again when Mario said "Gee, I was having a good dream, too..."

"Anyway, Tibs has lost his mind," Ricky said quickly after I caught my breath. "Think you can figure out what's wrong?"

Mario simply blinked and planted his feet on the floor. "Fine," He sighed. "So early... but fine." He left the room, and we all followed him. "Where did he say he was, again?"

"I know," I said, "He said that he was directly downstairs from my room. I think I know where that was."

"Mmhmm," Mario said. "Fine. You lead."

So I did. The hallway was completely dark; cold sweat emerged on my face and my stomach plunged, but I lit a spark on the tip of my finger. This didn't curb my horrible feelings. The hair on my neck was still standing directly straight.

And I was right; I did find my way to Tibs's room without getting lost. Ricky opened the door, and what he said was right, Tibs was leaning over a portrait of a very buff bodybuilder and a couple who looked like dancers. He was muttering over and over again, "Paaaaiinnttiingssss..."

"Uh.... Tibs?" I said shakily, and flipped the light switch. No light turned on. A very large rock fell into my stomach. I felt more nervous than ever.

"Tibs, helloooooo," Mario said, and lit a spark at the end of his finger and waved it in Tibs's face. He didn't move.

"Are you possessed or something?" Waluigi asked Tibs. Another rock plunged into my stomach.

"Tibsss," I plead. "Come on, this is nonsensical..." Tibs finally looked up, made a noise that sounded very much like "Bwaaaah," and the door behind us shut. Lauren tried to open it, but it was soon covered by very sharp vines.

"Ohmygod," Lauren gasped quickly, and turned around. I noticed that my hands were shaking terribly, but didn't bother to try and stop them from doing so. Tibs stood up. A flash of cold ripped across my side. Something was happening that only my unconscious mind knew about.

"Good you all came to visit," he said cheerfully. I was relieved, if he was being controlled by someone... or something... else, he would have a slightly different voice. "Can you remember your past at all?" Tibs asked me and Mario. Was he in a trance? Why would he ask this?

"Uh... well..." I started, but didn't know what else to say. No, of course I didn't remember my past at all. Mario was white.

"Answer a few questions about your past," Tibs said casually, and I'll let you go.

Another rock plunged into my stomach. Why...

"Question one," Tibs said. "Luigi...how old were you when you first met Princess Daisy, and how old was she at the time?"

I sighed in relief. This was part of my past that I still remembered. But there had to be a catch, it couldn't be this easy...

Julie's hand shot up into the air. She whispered "oooooh!! ooooh!!" and was standing on her toes, very badly wanting to get Tibs's attention. Tibs looked at her.

"You know?" he asked. Julie nodded vigorously. "Fine... go ahead. If they don't know, you don't either." Tibs said. But I DID know...

"Luigi met Daisy when he was six months old and when Daisy was 25 years old," Julie said professionally. I looked at Mario in horror. What would happen to us because she got the answer wrong? Mario looked even more pale. What was going to happen...

Tibs pursed his lips. "Right," he whispered. Julie looked very smug. My jaw dropped, Julie's answer was impossible, Daisy's only a year and a half older than me, but I wasn't going to argue when Tibs said that she was right.

"Next question," Tibs said. "Mario... what was your first Damsel in Distress mission, and who did you save her from?"

Julie's hand shot into the air again. Only this time, she said "oooooh!" even louder.

"You again?" Tibs asked her. "Fine, try."

"Mario saved Pauline from Donkey Kong just before he came to the Mushroom Kingdom!" Julie piped proudly. Tibs looked astonished.

"Right again," he said. Mario's eyes widened. "I did?" I heard him whisper. Waluigi looked at him strangely.

"Last question," Tibs said. "Get this right, and you can go." Julie smiled, the last thing I wanted to do now.

"Okaaay..." Tibs said. "How old were the both of you when you won your first trophies?"

"OOOOOH!!!" Julie squealed, standing on her toes again, her hand raised in the air as high as it would go.

"What?" Tibs demanded. "When!"

"Mario was four months old when he won his in 1999 and Luigi was six months old when he won his in

2003!" she said confidentially. Tibs bit his lip.

"Right." he whispered. "Go ahead."

And, the shining vines disappeared off the door. I was amazed at how Julie knew more about me and Mario than we did. Mario's jaw was dropped, as well, and he was staring at me in confusion.

"Julie," I asked slowly, once we were out of the room, "How was the first and third questions you answered possible?" Julie grinned.

"Well, for the first one, remember your Double Dash racing tournament?" she asked. I nodded. "Well, the baby you came from the past, right?" I nodded again. "And the baby you saw Daisy, right?"

"I guess... yeah," I said, I still didn't understand what Julie was trying to imply. Julie continued.

"So when you went back in time to the year you were really 6 months old in, you took your memory of Daisy with you. In 1981, you knew Daisy existed, right?"

"Makes sense," I said, with a shrug.

"So you simply saw her again a few years ago, you just didn't remember, because your memory had been erased. And as for question three, Mario came forward in time to 1999 when he was four months old and he won a junior tennis trophy at that age. Your first trophy was in 2003 when you visited the Double Dash Tournament for winning the Star Cup on 50CC."

I hardly had time to marvel at how much Julie paid attention to her video games, when Mario, frozen in place in front of me, held out his arm to keep me from moving forward.

5 - The Time Wand

"What's wrong-" I started to ask him, but he held his finger to his lips.

"What?" I heard Waluigi whisper irritably. "Did you hear something?"

"I thought I did..." Mario said. "What was wrong with Tibs, anyway? Why did he trap and quiz us?"

"He's lost his peanut-sized dinosaur mind," Ricky said. Julie laughed. She seemed to laugh at anything that was even slightly funny...

"I'm going back to bed," Mario said. "Tibs isn't killing anyone, so don't mind him. G'night." And he walked off. I hope he knew where he was going. Guess he did.

"Me too," I said. "I guess we'll see Tibs again in the morning."

Julie and Waluigi followed me up to the second floor. We ran into Julie's room first, then Waluigi's. I made my way ten feet from Waluigi's room to mine, alone. But I didn't go to my room, first. I saw, through the dim light of the ball of lightning I was holding, that a water tank was sitting next to my door. I realized that my mouth was very dry.

"Where are the cups," I mumbled to myself, looking around the tank for some. I couldn't find any.

I groaned in frustration. I remembered there was a kitchen near Tibs's room. I guess I'd have to go down there to get some. But I didn't need to; someone with a very, very cold finger tapped me on the shoulder and, from behind me, handed me a cup.

"Thanks!" I said, and turned around. My heart stopped. Floating there was a little orange ghost, a third the size I was, and it was smiling with a look that obviously said "You're welcome!" Its little poisonous-looking fangs were gleaming.

I couldn't move, but screamed so loudly that I was afraid I'd cough up my lungs. The ball of electricity I was holding surged, and as my legs lost all their feeling and gave way, the ghost stared blankly at the light and disappeared. I sat in the dark hall, my mind numb more than it had been in three years. I didn't just see that. I could NOT have just seen that.

"Luigi!" I heard Julie say in the dark. "Where are you?" she ignited a spark on her finger and saw me, curled into a horrified ball against the corner where the water tank met the wall.

"W...what happened?" she asked. I tried to use my voice, but it wasn't working properly. I finally managed to utter "ghost."

"You saw a ghost?" Julie asked, sounding excited. I slowly nodded. My hands were shaking, and my shoulder was still cold where that ghost had tapped me. Waluigi came up next to Julie.

"What, are you being murdered?" he asked me sarcastically.

I slowly forced myself to stand up. Tying a three-foot-thick slab of metal into a bow would have been easier. My entire body was coated with icy sweat.

Mario, Ricky and Lauren all burst into the hall at the same time. All three looked very out of breath.

"What's going on in here!" Ricky screamed. "We heard you yelling..."

"He saw a ghost!" Julie piped, pointing at me. Every tiny bit of color drained from Mario's face so fast I wouldn't have been entirely surprised if he had just died on the spot.

"W...what?" he gasped. "Really?"

"Yes," I said, finding my voice. I was beginning to wonder if my heart rate would ever go down. "It was.... it was that little orange one. It gave me ...a cup." I looked at my left hand; crushed in my fist was the small cup that ghost had given me.

"That's all it did?" Waluigi asked, sounding a little disappointed. "Give you a cup?"

"We're going to find Tibs," Lauren said so sternly that nobody dared argue with her. "Come on. We can't leave him alone in a ghost-infested haunted house."

A fifth rock plunged into my stomach. Deja Vu...

Lauren led the way down the hall and to the first floor. She opened the door that led to Tibs's room's hall.

I couldn't help but scream at the sight in front of us. Julie "wowed" in thrill, but the rest of us were horrified at what we saw. Indeed, there was a bucket of ice in my stomach right now.

Ghosts were everywhere, floating restlessly around corners and merging through walls. I recognized them all immediately, none of them were Boos, but fake spirits brought to life by a dead artist, Vincent Van Gore. These were the same little ghosts that had been so bothersome in my mansion in 2001... this was what my internal alert system was warning me about... I was right, ghosts did inhabit this place...

"RUN!" I screamed, but before I could move at all, Tibs grabbed my wrist. He thrust a small golden wand into my hand, one that was only about five inches long and had a little clock in the middle of a pair of wings at the top.

"T-take this," Tibs gasped. The mansion started rumbling.

"What's going on," I said in a monotone.

"It's Van Gore..." Tibs gasped. "He's ...he's gone mad... messing with all the portraits, ghosts..." Tibs panted and clutched the stitch in his chest.

"But... but I imprisoned him three years ago!" I said loudly as the walls started cracking. "How did he get out?"

"Take the wand," Tibs repeated. "M...Mario knows how to use it. Take it and leave!" A large chunk of the ceiling landed in Tibs's room.

"What's going on!" Ricky screamed.

"There's not much time, Mario knows what to do, GO!" Mario heard Tibs yell this and snatched the wand out of my hand.

"Tibs, what are you going to do?" Mario yelled at him over the large crashing noises all around us.

"I'll be fine!" Tibs yelled back. "Just go! It's your only way out, this place is being destroyed... the ghosts are restless."

"Tibs, come ON!" Mario yelled at him in a frantic voice. "Get over here!"

But Tibs turned and rushed back into his room. Mario momentarily looked hopelessly at the open door, now dust-filled, but then turned to the rest of us.

"Everyone, get back-to-back!" he yelled. I quickly obeyed and planted myself against Lauren's back. Over the noise and ruckus of the crumbling building, I heard a very high pitched, continuous beep, but as soon as it stopped a few seconds later, a bright light nearly blinded us... this felt so familiar...

And in the next second it felt like I was having a horrible out-of-body experience. I could still vaguely see the rest of our party around me, but nothing else, it felt like we were being dragged backwards. I looked down as much as I could. The ground was there, I could see it, only it was turning into grass, the mansion wasn't here anymore. Was that wand a transporter? Where were we going?

Ten seconds later, I felt myself standing upright again; we weren't being dragged backwards. My vision was clear again, the mansion was gone, the land looked totally different. Wherever we were, it wasn't 4:30 AM anymore... it looked like it was about noon. The temperature was chilly. Where were we? We must have been a thousand miles from Tibs's mansion site. I turned around to look at the rest of our party; all but Mario looked as shaken as I felt.

"What...what was that," Waluigi demanded of Mario, who was inspecting the ticking gold wand closely. Was it a bomb?

"Good," Mario whispered.

"Where.... are we?" Julie asked, looking around.

"We didn't move anyplace," Mario said simply.

"What?" Lauren asked. "But... of course we did, look at this place, it's not the same place!"

"Yes, it is," Mario said. I narrowed my eyes in confusion. He returned my glance and smiled.

"Happy birthday, Luigi, it worked," he said.

"Uh... our birthdays were last week," I reminded him.

"They were, in 2004," he said simply.

"Are you trying to confuse us?" Julie asked. Mario raised his eyebrows and held up the wand.

"Luigi, do you remember this?" he asked. I stared at the wand for a second. It was familiar, I know it was... I shrugged.

"Today is October first, 1980, you guys," Mario said. I was starting to worry about Mario's sanity.

"This wand allows us to go back in time."

"A TIME-TURNER!" Lauren screamed, pointing at the wand with a shaking finger. Julie laughed.

"Not quite," Mario said. "It does the same thing... sort of... you can go forward in time, too." he cleared his throat. "Anyway, this is the wand that we used to attend the Double Dash tournament as babies, Luigi, don't you remember? This is how I attended the golf and tennis tournaments in 1999 and 2000... remember?"

"Sort of..." I said, scratching my head.

"This was our only way out," Mario said, pacing. "This wand transports you to the exact spot in a different place in time. All we have to do is move somewhere else and then go back to the present time. We'll be outside the mansion. Let's see..." he glanced at the little clock in the middle of it.

"We left 2004 at 4:56, 34 seconds and 67 milliseconds AM... yes, that's the time we'll go back to... and it will take fifteen seconds to get there...we wasted fifteen seconds of our lives..." he looked confused. "For fifteen seconds we won't even exist."

"So we'll be sort of... dead for fifteen seconds?" Lauren asked.

"That's a good way to put it, I guess," Mario said, "Because we'll be nowhere in the universe for fifteen seconds."

"Wierd," Ricky said. "So us three..." he pointed at Lauren and Julie. "We don't exist yet?"

"You don't exist," Mario said.

"Wow," Julie said. "My parents will be married in a little less than a year..."

"Why did you go all the way back to 1980?" Waluigi asked. "Couldn't you have gone only twenty minutes into the past?"

"I guess," Mario said, "But I just thought it'd be cool to come back to our actual birthdays. I haven't seen this wand in 24 years, after all." he smiled at me. "Yes," he said, looking at the sky. "I believe we're about seven hours old." I swallowed. How weird...

"So, anyway," Waluigi said, "This is freaky. Let's just... let's just go somewhere... besides here... and get back to 2004."

"Fine by me," Julie said. "I don't like the thought of me not existing. Strange world..."

"Modest redhead alert," I joked. Julie looked pleasantly at me.

"Remember that vasectomy I talked about last week," she threatened cheerily. I shut up abruptly. Waluigi snorted a laugh.

"Come on," Ricky said, motioning for us to follow him. "If we were near the front of the mansion, and the rest of it was behind us, we should go this way... how far away from the place do we need to be?"

"Far," Lauren said. "That place was going to burst."

"What about Tibs?" I whispered. "Why didn't he come along? You don't think..."

"I don't know what will happen to Tibs. I tried to get him to come, but he ran back into his room, we ran out of time..." Mario's voice drained out. He couldn't mean that Tibs was still in the mansion? He couldn't mean that Tibs was still stuck in the building while it was being destroyed?

"I am never going back inside a mansion," I said flatly. "Never. All of the ones I've ever been in were horribly infested by ghosts." Mario sighed.

"Let's follow Ricky," Waluigi said, pointing at the 12-year-old, who was already moving to my right. "He knows where he's going... I think."

Ricky stopped about twenty yards away from where we had just been standing. "This good?" he asked.

"I guess we'll try," Mario said. "Come on... stand here... everyone back to back..."

I found Julie's back this time. Mario was fiddling with the side of the wand as though setting the time on a watch.

"Ready, everyone?" he said, once this was done. "Okay..." He pressed in the little button. Immediately it felt like we were being sucked into a tornado. I counted down from fifteen how long it would take for the winds to stop. This time, I was leaning forward.

Three... I thought. Two... one.

The winds stopped abruptly. We were standing in the gloomy shadows of Tibs's palace, in the outdoors courtyard, just within safe distance.

"Welcome back," Mario said, staring hopelessly at the mansion. "Where's Tibs..."

The huge building had now caught fire. Ghosts did this... and just five years ago Mario had called me a chicken for being afraid of ghosts.

"What are we going to do," Lauren moaned. "We can't just leave him in there..."

"OW!" Mario screamed, clapping his hand to his arm.

"What?" I said, whipping around. "Did you get hit by rubble or something?"

"Huh-uh," Mario said, through gritted teeth. "Gosh, that really hurt..."

Julie gasped. "That... that wasn't your Peach-o-meter, was it?" She said. Mario swallowed. "I think it was," he whispered. "Come on, I want to look into this..." and he burst off running as fast as a cheetah towards the side of the mansion. I quickly waved my hand at the others for us to follow him, and then started running, myself.

But I couldn't keep up with Mario. He was dodging trees and rocks so quickly that he was a blur in front of me. Normally I can run about as fast as he can, but when he thinks there's something wrong with Peach, even if you drop an atomic bomb on him, he'll keep going.

Finally he stopped in front of a huge pipeline system very similar to that of the ones in the Beanbean kingdom. I skidded to a stop, breathless, next to him, as he was frantically examining the pipes.

"I remember-" he said, still panting breathlessly, "There-was a pipeline-right outside my window." He pointed up at the charred building; he was right, that was the room he had stayed in. "Which one-do you think-leads to the castle town?"

"I'm not sure," I said. "Is there any way you can tell?"

Julie, Ricky, Waluigi and Lauren all stopped next to us. The kids were breathless, but Waluigi yawned. "What are we doing now," he said irritably.

"There's only four of them," Mario said, acting as though only I was standing next to him. "Guess we should try them all... one of them must lead to right outside the castle..."

Mario jumped in one of the pipes and I followed him. We were transported to a bright place with a warm climate, even though the sun was barely up.

"Koopas's village," Mario said. "We're close enough. The castle is just to the west. You wait for everybody, I'm going."

And he ran off at top speed once again.

I didn't have to wait for everyone else too long. Though, they had made the mistake of trying to burst

through more than one at a time. Julie and Lauren both flew in different directions, Lauren landed in a tree and Julie landed on the roof of a house. The Koopa who lived in the house Julie landed on lazily opened his door, noticed me, and waved frantically. I awkwardly waved back as Ricky climbed out of the pipe.

"Jolly good morning!" The Koopa called and walked over. He had a very strong British accent. "Nice to see you, Mr. Green Mario brother."

I'm so famous.

"The name's Kolorado. Was that me dreaming, or are we being bombarded?"

"We're being bombarded by teenagers," I said and pointed at his roof. Julie was slowly edging to the side of the short roof and dropped five feet to the ground. Lauren was climbing down the tree.

"Ah! Teenagers. Scary things, aren't they?"

"Terrifying," I said, with a smirk at Lauren. "We'd better get going, Mario thinks there's something wrong with the castle town."

Kolorado frowned. "Sure right there is, it's horrible," he said.

"What?" I gasped. "What do you-"

"Some freaky-looking lady with green hair was destroying the place! It's all over the news. We're horrified for the Princess's sake... good to know Mario's on the case. Well, find shelter, it's not safe to just hang around here. Goodbye!"

And he ran back into his house, leaving me feeling very numb.

"Did... I just hear that right?" Julie asked, pointing at Kolorado's house.

"I hope not," I said. "Come on. We've gotta catch up to Ma... where's Waluigi?"

Ricky pointed behind me. I turned around. Waluigi was talking with a bunch of Bob-ombs.

"Come on!" I yelled at him. He waved goodbye to the Bob-ombs and approached me.

"Loons over there say that some ninja-lady is messing the city up," he said.

"Let's go." I said sternly, pointed at the exit to the city, and left. Mario was right, it only took a few minutes to get to the castle town. Mario was nowhere in sight, but that didn't really bother me now. No, what really bothered me was the fact that the city was more beautiful than before, everything was clean and trees were everywhere. Was Kolorado out of his mind? Or was I?

"Woah," Lauren said. "Dude, what's wrong with it? Looks fine to me."

I shrugged. "I bet Mario went to the castle," I said. The castle looked great, too, why did everyone think that it was ruined?

I opened the large castle doors. It was deserted.

"Helloooooooo..." Ricky said, his voice echoing all over the large, empty walls. He laughed.

"Loser!" he said.

"Loser!" his echo said.

"Stop mocking me," he said jokingly.

"Stop mocking me," his echo said.

"I'm an idiot!" he said loudly.

"You're an idiot!" His echo said.

He shot a confused look at Julie, who was trying very hard not to laugh.

"Luigi!" Mario said, running up to me, more breathless than ever. He grabbed my arm.

"Come- no time- explain later." he gasped. He dragged me into a side room and thrust another time wand into my hand, identical to the other, only this one was silver. Gee, I love these new toys. Who else in the world had the power to play with time? When this entire ordeal was over, I was going to have some serious fun with this.

"Take-" he panted. "Take this, get the 'Yoshi's Benitoite.'"

"The Yoshi's what?" I asked.

"Some blue gem," he said very quickly. "It was destroyed by accident when we were babies. Go back and get it."

"Me? Why me? And why do you need it?" I asked.

"Listen to me," Mario said so sternly that I knew this conversation was over. "When you find the gem, you'll know because the gem is a very light blue, and half of it is glowing. Wand's already set, just press this button... good luck."

I pressed the button, and Mario was gone. This wand was different, though, I was being dragged backwards like the other one, but somehow, I felt strange...

But I had no time to wonder what was so different. The whirling stopped, but all I saw was a dull orange light. Wherever I was, it was very comfortable. The temperature was almost hot, and I think my surroundings were nothing but pillows.

"WAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHH!!!!!!!"

Realizing that my eyes were closed, I jerked them open. I tried to see where there was a baby crying, and it didn't take me long to find him. Lying in a nearby crib, screaming his lungs out, was a medium-sized baby wearing all red. I realized that I, too, was in a crib. What's going on?

I stood up, with surprising difficulty, and looked around some more. The room was a typical nursery, rocking chairs and hobby horses were here and there, rattles all over the floor, and a very smelly trash can. The baby next to me kept on screaming. A woman entered the room, looked at the baby, then at me for a second, and screamed. She was a tall, thin, woman with hair that matched my hair color up in a bun. The window outside showed that it was late evening, giving the room a pleasant orange tint.

"EEEEEEK! Come here! Look at him, look at him..." she was pointing a shaking finger at me. I guess I should try to explain what a grown man is doing in their other baby's crib. A shortish man with a very bushy mustache rushed to her side, looked at me for a second, then pulled a camera out of nowhere and snapped a hundred thousand pictures. I blinked the spots out of my eyes as the woman leaned over the crib.

"Standing up, so big, I can't believe it..."

I still didn't understand what was going on, not until the man held up the instant-form film in my eyes.

"The first time he actually sat up on his own," the man said in a very strong Italian accent. "I can't believe it." But I didn't pay attention to what he was saying; I was staring at the picture in horror.

There was a 4 1/2-month-old baby standing in the crib in the picture, one almost identical to the screaming baby, only in green-me.

I tried to explain that this was wrong, that this couldn't be happening, but the only sound that came out of my mouth was "Ack-buh-unk." The people who, I guessed, were my parents, left my crib and attended to the other wailing baby, which I could only guess was Mario. By the time my parents left the room in all, Mario was eagerly drinking from a bottle.

"Mario," I whispered, but all that came out was "Gaah." But Mario looked at me, milk dribbling down his chin, and he took the bottle out of his mouth and said "Ack," which, somehow, I recognized to be "What?" I stared at him for a second before realizing that I could speak-and understand-baby talk. While pondering this, Mario had finished his bottle and resumed crying.

"Hey, hey," I said in baby talk, "Don't, I need to ask you something. Do you know what a Yoshi's Benitoite is?"

Mario paused, looked at me in confusion with wet eyes, then started wailing again. How stupid could I be, no, of course he didn't know what it was, he's less than five months old. So this is what's different about the silver wand... it makes you what you were in the year you decided to travel to, not transport you to your present surroundings. Oh, great... why did Mario give me that one? I can't do anything if I can't even stand up.

I picked up the silver wand and looked at it. I tried to turn the little dial to go back to 2004, but my hands didn't work the way I wanted them to.

"No," I said in frustration, "TURN the knob..." but I had a hard time even holding the wand. How odd, in two months I would be walking, knowing a few sentences, and driving.

"What are you doing?" Mario asked. "You're all... up."

"Just standing," I said, amazed at how unusual this used to be. "Try it..."

"How?"

I shrugged, letting go of the railing, lost my balance, and fell painfully onto the wand. Before I knew it, tears were leaking out of my eyes, and my nose was pointed upward, and I was wailing as loud as Mario had just been.

"Stop," I told myself. "This is stupid, you're 24 years old, don't cry." But I couldn't stop. Mario was pointing at me, laughing.

Finally I got myself under control, but only because my mother had come and stuck a pacifier into my mouth. I had forgotten how fun these things were. By now, Mario had fallen over many times and had given up, and gone back to his job of screaming. Mom stuck a pacifier in his mouth too, and said playfully, "Mario, Mario, calm yourself, if I give you too many bottles you'll throw up..." She picked him up, and as though on cue, he hurled all over her shirt.

I laughed. I couldn't help it. Maybe being a baby wasn't so bad, after all, you could crap your pants, run around naked and hurl on everything, and nobody would really care.

Mom sighed. She got a rag from a nearby table and wiped her very clean, neatly pressed shirt off. She then cleaned Mario up, who laughed the entire time. When she finished, Mario started screaming again. Gosh... did all he ever use to do was scream? Mom stuck the pacifier back in his mouth and he shut up.

Dad walked into the room. "I'm having some business partners over for dinner tonight, we're going to discuss the income of the company and what-not," he said.

"Oh... well, all right. I guess I'll get the stove heated up..." she left the room with him. I heard dad say "Yes, he's got two young children of his own, I believe... big family man, bringing the whole lot over. Anyway, I believe their youngest boy is Mario and Luigi's age, so at..." and he got too far away for me to hear him anymore.

I spat the pacifier out of my mouth and saw the latch on my crib. I wanted out. I started messing with the latch, but I couldn't work it. Mario noticed what I was doing.

"What, you want out?" he said. I nodded. "Then just do what I do..." And he picked up a small bottle of spray.

"What are you doing?" I asked him. "And where did you get that?"

"Smells like poop," Mario said. He dropped the can, and it emitted a smell that did smell very much like baby crap. Then he stuck his nose in the air and cried. I started laughing. Boy, if only I had a video camera...

Dad came back in the room and sniffed at the air a little. Then he said, "Alright, which one of you did it?" then he laughed, picked me up, and stuck his nose in my hair, which was surprisingly thick for how young I was.

"Not you," he said. "Alright, c'mere, Mario." But he noticed the can at his feet.

"Hey-" he said, and picked it up. "What is this doing in here, I thought I threw it out, went bad ages ago..." I pointed frantically at the floor.

"You want out?" he asked me. I nodded.

"Fine," he said. "I'll put you in your pen, come on..." And he slung me over his shoulder and started going out the door. I pointed at Mario, who was staring at me with large, pleading eyes. It was odd; they were a steely gray.

"You want him too?" Dad asked. "Gah," I said.

And before long, me and Mario were sitting in a large fenced-in area of our living room. Mario was bouncing a large ball, but I was trying very hard to remember that this is what our house was like. It was a simple, medium-sized townhouse with a stone fireplace. There was one upstairs room; that was our nursery. The kitchen was right by the staircase, and Mom was in there now making something that smelled very good.

"What are you doing now?" Mario asked, noticing that I was holding onto the little crossed bars that made up the walls of our playpen like I was a prisoner.

"Thinking," I said. "I'm looking for a jewel."

"What's a jewel?" Mario asked.

"It's... uh..." I suddenly remembered that my mom was wearing emerald earrings. "Those things that Mom has in her ears."

"Ooooooooooh," Mario said. "Why do you suddenly want those?"

I yawned. I was becoming very tired. "Just... I think they're...cool," I lied. I guess it wasn't really a lie since I do think gems are interesting, but this was not why I came here. The doorbell rang.

"Oh, that must be the Scapellis now," Dad said, and rushed to answer the door. The Scapellis? He couldn't mean...

He opened the door, and I almost screamed in horror. A very tall man and very short woman were standing at the door, the woman holding the hand of a pudgy four-year old boy with a very pink nose, and the man holding a 7-month-old baby over his shoulder. The two children looked almost identical to each other, though 3 1/2 years separated their ages... I couldn't believe it, it was Wario and Waluigi!

"Can I have a cookie, Mr. Mario?" Wario asked sweetly. Waluigi's father set him down in my playpen and followed everyone back into the kitchen.

Waluigi looked at me as though I was the most interesting thing he's ever seen.

"Um... hi," I stammered. He blinked a few times. My eyes fell on Waluigi's neck. Embedded into a gold chain was a bright blue gem. Only half of it was shining.

6 - Luigi's Big Mistake

"Woah," I gasped to myself. This was going to be easy; Waluigi had the gem?

"Who are you?" Waluigi asked, pointing at me. He had the same nasally voice he did as an adult.

"What's that?" I asked, pointing at his neck.

"My dad gave it to me," Waluigi said, looking at the chain. "He says it's a "priceless family heirloom," or whatever that is."

"Can I see it-" I began, but felt two hands clasp my sides and lift me up. It was Wario's mother who did so.

"Are you Luigi?" she asked, staring intently at the little "L" patch on my shirt. "Yes, I bet you are, it's feeding time for you."

I tried viciously to get away, to get back to the playpen, because who knew when Waluigi was going to lose it... but of course, I wasn't as strong as Wario's mother and she whisked me off to the kitchen. Wario had been supplied with milk and cookies, Dad and Wario's dad were talking about business, and my mom was opening a jar of baby food.

"Yes, that's Luigi," she said. "Thanks for fetching him."

"Which one is older?" Wario's mother asked.

"Mario is older by an hour and a half," Mom said, setting me down in a high chair and tying a bib that read "Spit happens" around my neck. She took a spoonful of what looked very much like cat feces out of a jar and stuck it close to my nose. It smelled like cat feces almost as much as it looked like cat feces.

I jerked my head out of the way just before mom could stuff the food into my mouth.

"Honestly..." she sighed. "I don't know what's wrong with him. Mario will eat anything, but Luigi is so picky..."

Looking at this food, I had every right to be picky. But mom caught me by surprise, she stuffed the spoon into my mouth.

I doubt I've ever tasted anything so gross, perhaps the bean juice I had last month or pitcher of lemonade Julie had once made was worse, but I spit the food out all over her.

"Do you just not like this kind?" she asked me, wiping the gloppy brown mush out of her eyes. I nodded as viciously as I could. She got up, ignoring the other adults' laughing, and took a jar of apple sauce out of the pantry.

“How about this?” she asked. I reached out for it. I liked applesauce fine. She opened one little carton of it and set it down on the mini table in front of me, then turned her back and started looking for something. Wario’s mother was looking at me as though I was a magician pulling a horse out of a hat.

I dipped my finger in the applesauce and tasted it. It wasn’t as sweet as I normally have it... or will have it, actually. Mom stuck a spoonful of it into my mouth. I swallowed and tried to listen to what my dad was saying.

“And as you can see, profits have gone up incredibly since last June,” he said, pointing at a piece of paper. Wario’s dad was mumbling under his breath, stroking the pointy little beard at the tip of his chin. Mom stuck another spoonful of applesauce into my mouth.

“He’s a neat eater, isn’t he?” Wario’s mom said.

“Wish I could say the same for Mario,” Mom sighed. “See our wallpaper? That’s not wallpaper, that’s actually dried food that Mario has thrown.” I laughed.

“Yes, he thinks that’s funny,” mom said playfully, feeding me more applesauce.

“So do you think you’ll have any more children?” Wario’s mom asked.

“Yes, I’d like that a lot...” Mom said. I spit out the glob of applesauce in my mouth. She didn’t seem to notice. “Probably around the time Mario and Luigi are three, we’ll start trying to have a third baby, I’ve always liked the idea of a big family. It’s traditional to our culture, anyway. I’m the youngest in a family of seven.”

“Yep,” Wario’s mother said. “I know what you mean... only I’m the oldest in a family of six.”

“Ouch,” my mom laughed. “five little brothers and sisters? Little siblings are terrible, aren’t they?” She ruffled my hair and untied the bib around my neck.

“Down you go,” she said quickly, placing me on the floor.

While she wasn’t looking, I crawled as fast as I could back into the living room. Mario was chewing on a large rubber ball, Waluigi was drooling.

“Hey, you’re back,” Mario said.

“Can I see what’s around your neck?” I asked Waluigi.

“What...this again? I don’t know how to take it off,” he said, tugging at the chain.

I was starting to feel warm and sleepy. Waluigi tugged on the chain harder. It broke off his neck.

“Oops,” he said, dangling it from his hand. I couldn’t believe he was willing to give it to me! I climbed over the short fence and landed back in the playpen, and grabbed the wand.

“What’s that?” Mario asked, noticing it for the first time.

“A toy,” I said quickly. “Sorry, Waluigi- you’re going to grow up to hate me for this, but-“ I snatched the chain from his hand, forced the tiny dial on the side of the wand to move forward a large amount, and pressed the button in.

Mario started saying “What ar-“ but with a whirl of light I was being dragged away. How far, I didn’t know...

When the whirling and light stopped, I quickly shook my head and looked at my hands. I was still holding the time wand and chain in my left hand, but in my right, there was a glass of punch. My hands were large; I had gone enough into the future that I was an adult.

I realized that I was in the Mushroom Kingdom’s castle, only it was very crowded with tons of Toads and Mousers drinking soda and what looked suspiciously like wine. Mario was standing right in front of me, looking confused, waving his hand in my face.

“Hellooooooo,” he said.

“W...what! Oh, sorry,” I quickly retorted. “I was just... uh... thinking.” Mario laughed. “Good to see that’s a change,” he said. “Anyway, I’m going to go find Peach. I’ll see you later.”

He turned on his heel and left, and I saw a calendar on the wall of the castle, it was the month of May, and the days were marked off to the 31st. The year was 2008.

“Crap,” I mumbled to myself. “Too far... how do I work this thing...”

I turned the knob a little, the clock’s hands moved only a little bit.

“LUIGI! THERE YOU ARE!”

I turned around and made eye contact with Julie, only she looked different- an almost 18 year old Julie. She hadn’t changed much since she was fourteen; her hair was longer, a tad darker, and she looked more like a full-grown woman, but that’s about it. She still had the same long eyelashes, same curly crimson hair, and was only a fraction of an inch taller than the 14 year old Julie I knew.

“Isn’t it GREAT?” she squealed quickly, standing on her toes. “I’m going to COLLEGE, man, I can’t believe it! It was SO nice of Princess Peach to throw a graduation party for me and Lauren... wow, in a month I’ll be old enough to vote!”

“This is your graduation party?” I asked her, not realizing what I just said. Julie looked disappointed.

“Oh... you must have had some of my iced tea, as well... all the people who had some of my iced tea lost their short term memory... I guess I put too much iodine in it.”

“You put iodine in your iced tea?” I asked, shocked.

“You’re not supposed to?” Julie asked. Some things never change... Julie was still a horrible cook. Julie sighed.

“Yeah, and I burnt the granola bars that I whipped up, too... funny thing is, I didn’t even BAKE them, I just burn everything... I burn toast, milk, cereal, brownies...” she droned off. “How will I ever survive the college life...”

“Do what I did in high school,” I laughed. “Win the lottery and then go to restaurants.”

“You won the lottery?!” Julie asked.

“Nah,” I laughed. “I think I’m going to try one of those brownies over there... they look good...” I approached the table. They looked okay, but smelled like cat feces.

“I baked them too!” Julie said happily.

I didn’t touch the brownies.

“What am I doing...” I said to myself. I turned the knob on the wand a little farther and pressed the button in.

With another strangely quick whirl of light I was in a dark, secluded room. In the reflection of the highly polished floor, I looked like a pre-teen.

“How does this thing work,” I yelled in frustration. I turned the wand over. A paragraph I hadn’t noticed, written in tiny writing, read:

Silver time WAND-Used by the ancient peoples of the Mushroom Kingdom to travel in time. Users of this wand will be united with their bodies of the past or future as God has planned it, yet will keep their minds of the time they came from. Yet there is caution to be heeded; anything that happened to them in the past will happen to them again; and if their future is disrupted, it will not matter; it will always turn out the same in the end.

I leaned on a nearby large statue of a Majikoopa and read the inscription a few times. What did it mean by “What happened to them in the past will happen again?”

I pushed a second button on the side of the wand. A hologram shot up above it.

“Woah,” I said, holding the wand so the hologram was upright. It was projecting a little code- it read:

“October1120046:23:12AMFebruary2319815:12:33PMMay19200812:07:13:PMJuly3199110:58:23AM”

It took me a second to work out what this said... it seemed like all the times I had set the wand to go to. October 11, 2004, February 23, 1981, May 31, 2008, and now must be July 3, 1996 at just before eleven in the morning.

And then it hit me- I don't know what it was- but something slammed into the back of my head, it felt like someone had chucked a hammer at me. I whipped around, rubbing top of my neck. Nothing was behind me. But what startled me was that there was no bruise or knot where I had just been hit... if a hammer or similar blunt object had hit me, I probably would be unconscious right now.

"What the-" I mumbled. I stared at my hand, I was holding a funny-looking silver stick with a gold chain around it. Why did I have this... what was it?

I examined the stick. It looked a little like a wand... sort of, there was a clock in the middle. There was a soft "click" behind me, I turned around, two women had landed, and both of them had hair very like clowns; one had bobby blue hair, the other had green hair that reached down to her feet. They both looked like fairies.

"Um..." I said, not knowing what else to say. "Can I... help you ladies?"

"Where do you come from?" the green woman asked. She was only as tall as I was, and the blue haired woman was even shorter.

"Uh..." I said, putting my finger to my mouth thoughtfully. I couldn't think right now, that hit must have dazed me... I couldn't remember the name of my home... The blue woman approached me.

"This chain..." she said, pulling at the one wrapped around the wand. It had a startlingly blue gem attached to it. "This looks like a family heirloom. What do you remember about your family?"

"My family... um..." I said. Why couldn't I remember?

The woman in green sighed. "Yes, another one. How do you feel, boy?"

"Confused," I said with a shrug. "You mean physically?" She nodded.

"Great," I said, shrugging again.

"Unbelievable," the woman in blue gasped. "Nobody has made it through here since that other teenage boy two years ago..."

"Come with me," the woman in green said, and clutched my arm.

"Hey-" I said, jerking out of her grasp. "Um... I can find my own way home... thanks."

"Where is your home?" the woman in blue asked.

"I... I don't know... I can't remember," I said quietly. "I'm just not in my right mind now, I'll remember soon." I took a few steps towards the wall.

"What..." I said, turning around to face them again. "Do you know what's wrong with me, or something?"

They both nodded. "That statue... did you touch it?"

"Maybe," I said. That, I couldn't remember, either.

"That statue is programmed to eliminate anyone who bothers it," the woman in blue said kindly. "I'm... honestly amazed you aren't dead..."

What soothing words, I thought.

"... but it appears to have done some damage to you, you seem to have lost every bit of your long-term memory..."

7 - Revealed

“What are you talking about,” I asked the women. “Lost my memory?” I chortled. “How is that even possible?”

“Come with me,” the green-haired woman said. “Call me Pyrope. No need to tell me your name, you probably can’t remember it.”

“Yes, I can!” I said, offended. “Its...” I thought a moment. What WAS my name?

“Don’t strain yourself, kid.” Pyrope said. “Come on, I’ll take you to an ...er... parallel universe!” she added with wide eyes and a waving hand gesture. I quickly glanced at the wand in my hand. It was vibrating; the clock read “October1120046:23:12AM.” Why? I don’t think it was going to be 2004 until another few years.

“I’m not three years old,” I said, slightly offended. But she grabbed me by the arm with a very cold hand, bid farewell to the blue haired woman, and I gasped loudly as she formed a long scepter out of nowhere, tapped it on the ground four times, and then something weird was happening... like we were flying through outer space at a top speed. I had to keep pushing my bangs out of my face.

“There,” Pyrope said over the loud winds rushing through my ears, she was pointing straight ahead at a very bright light. “That’s the place I was talking about. It’s got creatures and kingdoms like you’ve never seen. A couple of my favorites are the Beanbean kingdom, the Mushroom Kingdom, and Sarasaland...”

The mushroom Kingdom... Sarasaland...?

And then I remembered. Everything that happened to me from the time I was 18 to the time I was 24. I could remember Daisy and her freakish obsession with plants... the time I dared to eat Julie’s homemade cheesecake and ended up in a coma for three weeks, the times when toad watched Mario take a shower and then later watched me do the same... it was all flooding back, I could remember...

I looked at the woman holding onto my arm. Pyrope... PYROPE!

I was about to let out a terrified scream, but there was a great burst of light and we both landed in the center of the Mushroom Kingdom, right by Peach’s castle.

“Have a nice life,” Pyrope said. She lifted her scepter. “You never knew me,” she said, and stuck the tip of her scepter right in the middle of my forehead. But before she could do anything more... I pressed the button on the wand in, I was going forward in a whirl of light...

My heart was racing furiously. Pyrope was the one who led both me and Mario to the Mushroom Kingdom?

The roaring stopped. I was back in the middle of the castle's foyer. It was October 2004 again. I sighed in relief; the Benitoite was still wrapped around the wand. Only... the castle was much, MUCH darker than before... I noticed the only light was coming from a dim candle. I looked at the time wand. The time was 7:10. I had missed a few minutes of my life. I quickly put the chain around my neck. It was a little too small, I thought, as I stuck the wand in my pocket.

The castle was eerily quiet. I didn't like this feeling... but my internal alert system wasn't going bonkers, like it was back at Tibs's place, I don't think there are any ghosts here...

"Luigi?" came Waluigi's voice from in front of me. "Is that you?"

"Waluigi!" I gasped. "Where are you- it's too dark to see well-"

"I don't know," he replied lazily. I walked a few feet and stopped.

"You still there?" I asked him.

"Yeah, I'm not going anywhere." The last candle had no wick left; it died, we were plunged into total and complete darkness- I charged a ball of electricity, which was much brighter than the candle, and looked around the room.

Waluigi was standing in the corner, looking very shaken. Julie and Lauren were right next to him. Both of them looked like they had seen a ghost. (I swallowed hard at this thought.) The room was a total wreck. It looked as though somebody had been murdered in here, there was nothing orderly in this room, furniture was thrown everywhere.

"W... what happened here?" I asked Waluigi. He was scowling.

"Well, after you disappeared for a few minutes," Julie said, "It was like... "BOOM!" -Julie waved her arms over her head in a dramatic way- "Everything was tossed around, like a sort of sudden hurricane in here. We escaped because Mario knew of an underground ...like... rabbit hole, sort of."

"Nice way to put it," Waluigi droned sarcastically.

"What other way could I have put it?" Julie asked. "And then, it was so dark, we all tried to find a way out, but nobody really knows their way around the castle, except Mario..."

Some sort of cork was in my throat now, I couldn't see Mario or Ricky in this room.

"What?" I managed to gasp. "Where's Ricky and Mario?"

"Um... a little help, here?" Ricky said from below me. I looked down. Just in front of my feet, there he was, pinned under a table that had lost a few of its legs.

"Oh! Sorry..." I said, picking up the heavy table enough for him to scramble out from it. He brushed himself off and uttered a quick "thanks."

“But what about-“

Mario burst in the door, panting. I could just see his silhouette in the light of the spark I had lit.

“Ah! Luigi! There you are. Did you get the gem?”

I pointed at my neck. Mario exhaled audibly.

“Great,” he said. “If only that woman didn’t leave...”

“What woman?” I asked, pulling the time wand out of my pocket and stringing it onto the chain with the Benitoite so I wouldn’t lose it.

“Just some lady who knows about this ordeal...” he waved his hand out to the room. I heard rustling on the other side of the room.

“Look at this!” Lauren said, pointing to a tunnel leading down that was only just visible in the low light. “What’s that?”

Mario walked past me. I didn’t move, but watched the both of them examining a short opening in the wall.

“Think we ought to see what’s down there?” Julie asked.

“Why not,” Mario said eagerly. “To tell the truth, I didn’t know this was here.”

And both of them disappeared down the tunnel.

“I don’t like the sound of this,” I mumbled, as Waluigi walked past me. I followed him down, it was a steep, damp tunnel that had to be leading underground. It was also very short, it only took a few seconds to get to the end, which was lit by two single candles. A large door was the dead end.

Ricky squinted at a little message written on the door. It was very hard to read, but it looked like a little poem, perhaps how to get past the door? He read aloud:

“Those who wish to enter must heed this warning note;
Danger lies before you, terrors you must tote;
But if you would go forward, the door will sense the gleam-
One must use the water source of yours that has saline.”

“Water source of yours that has saline?” Lauren repeated. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“That rhymed,” I laughed.

“I have an idea...” Ricky said. He cupped his hands together and, being careful not to extinguish any of the candles, and as though trying to brush away a fly that was buzzing around him, shot a thick stream

of water at the door. It didn't budge.

He shrugged. "Worth a try..."

"Tears," Julie said. "Tears contain saline, and they're a water source... kinda..."

"I get it," Ricky said. "What, do we all have to cry?"

"One of us does," Mario said. Lauren grinned. "I can make myself cry!" she said. She stuck out her bottom lip and screwed up her face. It turned red, and her eyes turned wet. Julie chuckled.

"That's not enough," Mario said. "You have to basically... bawl." Julie chuckled again. "I don't know why," she said, "But everything you guys do makes me laugh." Mario and I exchanged looks.

Waluigi pondered this statement of Julie's, he seemed to be very deeply in thought. He was looking at me in a way I didn't like too much.

"What," I asked him.

"I wonder..." he mumbled, staring intently at me. "Everything we do makes her laugh..." he tapped his chin.

And without warning- I never could have prepared for this- Waluigi swiftly kicked me in the stomach so hard I thought I was going to throw up.

Everyone except me burst into laughter. I was bent over in pain, but managed to look up at Julie. Tears were rolling down her face, she was bent over at the same angle I was, and her face resembled the color of her hair. The door creaked open.

"It worked!" Waluigi said. "I knew it would!"

I drew a sharp breath as I stood up again.

"Why you-" I growled at Waluigi. Julie laughed again as I leapt on him and engaged in a fight identical to the one we had performed in front of Tibs' castle.

Someone grabbed the back of my shirt collar and pulled me away from Waluigi. Mario was holding me by my shirt collar at arm's length.

"Not again," he said.

"Jerry! Jerry! Jerry!" Lauren chanted.

"Besides," Ricky said to Waluigi, suppressing a snicker, "You only did that to get the door open, right?"

Waluigi took a moment to answer, then said "Um... yes! Sure, of... course that's why I did that. I...uh... never wanted to kick you there, neeeever..."

Julie started laughing again, Ricky rolled his eyes and beckoned for the rest of us to follow him.

The next room was one in Peach's castle that I'd never seen before. It looked almost like an astronomy tower. It was huge, probably the largest room in the castle, and was lit by only a few candles. It was very creepy in here. And apparently, Mario had no idea this room existed, as well. He was looking around, open-mouthed, at the place.

"Sweet," Julie's distant voice said. She had made her way to the opposite side of the room. "I didn't know Peach's castle had this room."

"Neither did I," Mario said slowly.

But I was interested in a door that was almost invisible, and it was on the other side of a large, gaping hole that didn't seem to end. The only way to reach that door was to jump across the gap...

"Hey, guys, check that out," I said, pointing at it.

"I bet you can make it to that side," Mario said, clapping a hand on my shoulder. "It's not too far for you..."

I studied the gap size. No, it didn't look all that far. And jumping is my talent...

"Here goes," I said, backing up in order to get a running start. I ran as fast as I could toward the gap, and leaped swiftly across the gap. I landed in the middle of the platform on the other side. Julie was clapping and hooting.

"I bet I can do it too," Waluigi said. He, too, tried. He managed to just barely hit the platform I was on, after sprawling to the ground mere atoms from the edge. He got up. "Told you," He said.

"We'll be back soon," I called after the other four, and creaked open the door. It felt as though it had only rarely been used.

It was very dusty in the next corridor. I waved it out of my face and coughed.

"Wow," Waluigi hissed sarcastically. "How fun."

It was actually a lot lighter here than the rest of the castle. Apparently, the electrical lines to this room hadn't been damaged. I had no need to light any sparks on the tip of my index finger.

"Gross," I mumbled, kicking up dust as I walked. I doubt even Peach knew this room was here.

Somebody besides our group did, however. Sitting in a cozy armchair was a ghost wearing a sheet over its head... or at least I think it was a ghost, but it looked solid... either way, it looked surprised to see us.

"Who are you?" it asked in a male voice. He pointed at me. "You look familiar."

“Uh...” I said, feeling the hair on the back of my neck stand up.

“You’re Mario, aren’t you?” the ghost said, leaping out of the chair to stand in front of me. It was half the size I was. “Boy, I remember that fun time we had! Let’s do it again, I really enjoyed that.”

I felt very stupid, what “fun” time could he possibly be talking about?

“I’m not Mario,” I said slowly.

Waluigi kicked at the funny-looking ghost. It was obviously solid, because his kick sprawled the creature to the other side of the room. I knew what sort of creature this was, this was a Duplighost. Not exactly a ghost, but it had the ability to make copies of anything and everything. Mario also said they had another scary power, but never really went into detail on it. Anytime I tried to ask, he would become deaf, look at something that was to his right, and hum the theme song to the movie Shrek 2 until the subject changed.

“Beat it, punk,” he said. “We’re exploring.”

“Why you- you want to fight me, or something, pal?”

“No,” I said standing between the Duplighost and Waluigi, “we don’t want to fight you,”

But it suddenly felt like someone had tossed a very heavy suitcase at my stomach. Bent over slightly, I saw the Duplighost had somehow gone right through me and was now fighting with Waluigi in a similar way I had recently done.

I took a deep breath and yelled “STOP!” as loud as I could.

The Duplighost did not seem happy with me at all for interrupting his fight; he grabbed my collar and yanked me down so we were making eye contact.

“Listen, bub, NOBODY insults me. Got that?” he violently let go of my shirt. I stood up, rubbing my neck.

“And as for you-“ he said, pointing threateningly at Waluigi, who suddenly stood stiff as a board. I shielded my eyes against a sharp, quick burst of light, but when it didn’t hurt to keep my eyes open again, there were two Waluigis- one was milky white and transparent, and then there was the normal one. Both of them looked terrified.

“You LOSER!” Waluigi shouted, pointing at the ghost-looking copy. “You- you made a copy of me!”

The ghost just stared.

“Let’s get out of here,” Waluigi said, grabbing my sleeve. “I don’t want to be in a room with that stupid Duplighost anymore.” And we left the room, and Waluigi angrily slammed the door, muttering something about how uncreative some creatures were.

“What did you guys find in there?” Julie hollered as I leapt across the gap.

“Just some Duplighost,” I said. Waluigi nervously followed me across the gap.

“Some loser who tried to make a copy of me.” He chuckled. “Didn’t really work, though. The copy looked like a ghost and then didn’t move.”

“I didn’t know Duplighosts shined a really bright light whenever they try to mimic you, though. I thought it was just a simple little puff of smoke, but I don’t really know...” I said.

Ricky and Lauren raised their eyebrows, but Julie looked shocked as though she had just been told she had to repeat the 6th grade. Mario was making a similar face, he looked as though he’d just been given indisputable proof that Peach was pregnant with Bowser’s 9th, 10th, and 11th children.

“WHAT?” Julie demanded.

“What did he look like? What did he say?” Mario asked, shaking a little bit.

“Um... he said that nobody barges in on him, and admitted it was he who cut the electricity...” I said, trying to recall. Waluigi was looking nervous at the look on both Julie and Mario’s faces, which had both become fury. Mario lashed out and grabbed Waluigi by the shoulders violently.

“WHO DO YOU HATE?” he yelled.

Waluigi looked very startled, but pointed at me.

“I think he’s okay,” I said. “It was just a basic move of the Duplighosts.”

“Let’s hope,” Ricky said with a laugh. “We’re wasting time, anyway. What are we even doing down here?”

“Exploring,” Lauren said with a shrug. “Yeah, let’s get out of here.”

On the way out of the tunnel, I couldn’t help but notice that Mario and Julie were acting strangely. Both of them were whispering to each other maliciously, and glancing at Waluigi. Were they going to play a joke on him? By the time we reached the room that opened to the tunnel, which seemed creepier than ever, both of them were looking at Waluigi as though he had gravely insulted the both of them.

“What are you guys talking about?” I asked them, as we entered the dark and quiet foyer of the castle.

“Nothing,” Mario said quickly.

“I’m hungry,” Lauren said. “Are there any good restaurants around here?” She pushed the door open. My entire body went numb.

8 - The... Truth?

The outdoors was a scene of total and complete destruction. Even the sky was a tint of red. I stepped outside. There was hardly a tree that wasn't on fire, hardly a building that wasn't completely downed, and absolutely nobody was in sight. A very slow wind blew a few pieces of rubble past my feet.

Everyone else looked as shocked as I did. Apparently, they had been inside while this was all taking place. I looked back at the castle. The outside was as ruined as the inside.

Julie looked close to tears. She and Mario had forgotten about whispering apparently bad things about Waluigi. "What happened..." Ricky whispered.

"Did you ever find Peach?" I asked Mario.

His eyes widened. "I... no..." he said, shaking his head slightly. Waluigi snorted. A quick, cold breeze ruffled my hair. With a thrill of horror, I noticed that nobody else in our group seemed affected by it. I decided to ignore that. A horrible, plunging sensation occurred in my stomach- I just thought of something-

"We need to go to Sarasaland. Now." I said.

"No way," Waluigi said. "I'm way tired. Let's find someplace to stay."

"It's eight in the morning," Ricky said, consulting his watch. But Waluigi yawned.

"I haven't slept in ages, let's take a nap. No... I like her idea." He pointed at Lauren. "Let's eat."

"No!" I yelled. "What if this is happening to Sarasaland too- the castle- Daisy-"

But Waluigi grabbed my arm with such force that I lost the circulation in my fingers.

"We're eating," he said, his face inches from mine, so forcefully that even I couldn't argue.

So we found ourselves back at the house of the British Koopa. Mario claimed that since the Koopa was an avid fan of his, he'd have no trouble feeding us. And lo-

"Of course!" he beamed, when Waluigi told him what he wanted. "Of course, no stress at all! Come in, now, please, absolutely!"

Julie sat in a squishy armchair by the window, glancing interestedly around at the house. It was, indeed, very unusual- funny trinkets were hanging around here and there, and each of them looked like it came from a distant country.

"Ha-ha, I remember this one," Mario said feebly, pointing at what looked like a small doll made of stone.

“Oh, yes,” the Koopa said. “Still one of my favorites. All the way from Dry Dry ruins, eh? Wow, oh, wow... by the way,” he said, turning to me. “Have I introduced myself to the newcomers, yet? My name’s Kolorado. I’m an archaeologist.”

“I’ve heard all about you,” Julie said.

“I’m an interesting guy,” he said sheepishly. “Come, now, how about a spot of tea?”

“Sounds great,” Waluigi said lazily. “Do I pay you for it?”

Mario and Julie exchanged quick, sharp looks as Waluigi said this. I could understand... it was very, very weird for Waluigi to even mention paying somebody when he perhaps didn’t have to.

“How much you want?” Waluigi asked again.

“We’ll be right back. I think I dropped something on the way to the castle.” Mario said, grabbing Julie by the sleeve.

Then both of them left the house. The rest of the people in the house watched them for a split second, but then Lauren and Kolorado started talking about ancient artifacts, and Ricky pulled out his cellphone to play a game. Waluigi got up and I could hear him rummaging around in the kitchen.

I watched Julie and Mario go sit under a tree nearby. Me being the closest to the window, I watched them out of the corner of my eye, trying to pretend I couldn’t see what they obviously wanted to keep quiet. I could hear them, too, their voices were muffled, but I could just make out what they were saying.

“I can’t believe it,” Mario was saying. “I mean, how can they not know... d’you really think...? I mean, he couldn’t... he was able to answer that one question...”

“We can’t pretend it didn’t once happen,” Julie said, almost sternly. “You know what he’s capable of. You know what he can do. And I can recognize the symptoms as well as anyone can. He’s not stupid, you know. Everyone in the world knows the answer to the question you asked to test.”

What on earth were they talking about? I wondered. I saw Mario run his hand through his hair, trying hard to listen, when Kolorado was pointing to a small doll, telling Lauren about a funny-looking, three-eyed, greenish bloblike creature. He had just gotten done saying “This is an Aich, funny little thing I ran into. They live just about everywhere. They look sorta gross, but their slimy sweat-like excretions will heal virtually any wound immediately. Really came in handy that one time I broke my leg. Something in their excretions heals body cells in a snap. Useful, really, yes... and they’re always willing to help, because they love warm places, and body temperature is very pleasant to them. This is just a doll, the real thing weighs about three or so pounds and is about the size of your hand.”

“I think it’s sorta cute,” Lauren said.

I silently pressed my ear to the window and caught Mario’s next sentence.

“You’re right, you’re right... it was a dumb question.” he said. “And I can’t deny. But, I mean, what can we do? I mean... I... well, literally had to... you know, beat myself up. And we need to find the real...” his voice trailed away.

“I understand it’s not easy to relive this, Mario, but you know who we have to find.” Julie said. She seemed, surprisingly, like a very mature kid when she needed to. “Let’s do it tomorrow. I’m certain we both know what’s going on, and we may be the only ones who do know. You never told your brother, did you?”

Mario chortled. “Nah,” he said. “Couldn’t bring myself to do it.”

“I wouldn’t’ve either. But... well... in case we, well... DO have it all wrong...” Julie said, sounding uncharacteristically nervous-like.

“We’ll find out.” Mario said sternly. “Just think of ways to do so.”

“Got it,” Julie said. “Let’s not talk about this here anymore.”

And I turned my head as I noticed them both get up to approach the house again.

“Oh well,” Julie said, as they re entered, and sat back down in her armchair. Ricky pocketed his phone and clapped his hands together, saying “Okay, then... well...”

Kolorado left the shelf with the Aich doll on it, and absentmindedly clicked on the TV. There was a weather report, telling us that the Konga Jungle was going to be very dry for the next few days. “So!” Kolorado said pleasantly. “What are you all interested in eating? Why don’t I call out for something... how about Chinese?”

“Sure,” Lauren said. “But I don’t know how to use chopsticks anyway.” I chortled and said smartly, “You know, how come chopsticks are some of the hardest utensils to use, yet it’s one of the easiest songs to play on the piano?”

The room was so quiet, I heard a cricket chirp. Not even Julie chuckled, which was saying something, as I noticed she had a nasty habit of finding everything I say cute.

“Come on, not even a snicker?” I asked sheepishly.

“Sorry, bro,” Mario said. “Try the one about the super calloused fragile mystic hexed with halitosis next time.”

Kolorado re-entered the room. “Sorry, guys,” he said. “The stores are all closed...”

“Figures,” Ricky said, “As the entire main part of the kingdom is in flames...”

Kolorado bit his lip and said “I did hear about that...I’ll make that tea now...” he left the room again.

“Poor kid,” Lauren said, looking sadly in Kolorado’s direction. He returned a few minutes later. Waluigi

was going on about the little machines he had made with his fortune.

“Yeah,” he was saying. “I and my cousin Wario always build aircrafts. That’s the best ones we can do. And they always work,” he was informing Ricky, who was leaning on the wall with one eyebrow raised. This skeptical look was nothing like the one Julie and Mario had, however. They were both looking very angry.

“Guys...” I asked them quietly. “Is there something wrong with him building machines?”

“No,” Julie said. “But Wario’s not his cousin.”

“Oh, yeah...” I said, thinking about that a little.

“Thanks for the tea,” Lauren said. “Why doesn’t one of us cook?”

“Well... I’m sort of a hopeless cook.” Kolorado admitted. “And my wife isn’t in... she’s the one who does all the cooking.”

“Oh.” Waluigi said. “Well... uh... hmm...” he pointed at Julie.

“You. You look like a good cook. Make us all something, won’t you?”

Any other hopeless cook in the world would take this as a compliment, but not Julie, who leapt out of her seat and put her face very close to Waluigi’s.

“You don’t fool me for a second,” she said fiercely, in a voice and tone she didn’t often use. Waluigi seemed very nervous at this un-Julie like behavior. “We can’t put up with this. Let’s go.”

And she and Mario ran violently out of the house.

“Okaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaay,” Ricky said. “What was that about?”

Lauren and I shrugged, but then my attention was directed suddenly to the TV.

“It’s complete confusion in the large kingdom of Sarasaland,” a reporter was saying. “A bright light was reported bursting from the castle area earlier. No buildings are destroyed nor possessions, but the kingdom is now a complete ghost town...”

I accidentally let go of my teacup. It crashed to the ground and into quite a few pieces. But I didn’t care. Because not only did my teacup sink; so did my stomach.

“There is no sign of life at all in any of the subcons, or the main center, as well. Our major concern is locating Princess Daisy, who was reported mysteriously vanishing immediately following the strange burst of light. More news on this when we return.”

“No!” I gasped, standing up, my worst fears confirmed. “I... I need to go!”

Kolorado considered me for a moment, then said “here, take this. I use it whenever I get lost. It’s a lot like those funny little wands you’ve got- it’s a transporter.” He thrust a third wand into my hand, identical to the two time wands, only, it was bronze, and instead of the clock in the middle, had a small map.

“Just point on the map where you want to go and press this button in. Should take two seconds. I understand you’re worried. You’re dating the princess, aren’t you?”

“Yeah, yeah,” I said quickly, and jammed my pointer finger in the corner of the map, making it scroll up. I saw the minute subcons of Chai, and the castle was right near its edge.

“Good luck,” Lauren told me, looking concerned. I pressed the button in.

I blinked, immediately I was right behind the castle.

“Wow,” I said. “Two seconds, my eye...” and then took off running, dropping the bronze wand, but I didn’t care-

“My wristband!” I shrieked involuntarily, remembering I wasn’t wearing it. I snatched it out of the little key box outside. Why had I been so stupid as not to wear it? I put it on; immediately my clothes changed, and then I violently ripped the doors open.

There wasn’t a sound in here. It was as quiet as Peach’s castle had been. The only noise I could hear besides my own panting was the low rumble of the air conditioner.

“DAISY?” I roared, hearing my voice echo across the empty walls as though six of me were talking. “DAISY?”

No response. I bolted down the halls, my steel-plated shoes clacking loudly on the marble floors and echoing like crazy. I slammed open the door to the kitchen.

“Hello?” I panted, hoping-praying- that I’d run into somebody... somebody... because what that reporter had said couldn’t honestly be true, right...?

I ran up the stairs and burst through the door to the master bedroom. I didn’t like the feeling of this normally bustling castle being so empty. Hot and out of breath from running, I looked around my room. Nothing was missing from here as far as inanimate objects went. I caught my breath and flopped down on the bed, staring at the ceiling.

What was going on? I thought to myself. What was happening? Everything was just far too weird now.

“Tired?”

I nearly jumped out of my skin hearing this strangely familiar yet still unknown voice. I whipped around, and nearly jumped out of my skin again.

It was that woman- that blue-haired woman who looked like a fairy, the one who was with Pyrope just

before she left, the one that explained my memory problems to me. She was sitting on my green blanket folded neatly on the corner of the bed.

“Why do you look so surprised?” she asked me, jumping off the bed to stand next to me, and chuckled. “With your life... well, nothing should surprise you anymore.”

“I-guh-ba-you-“ I stammered. “You- you-“

Her face fell. “You recognize me, don’t you?”

I nodded, that was the only thing I could do. She looked appalled.

“Did Pyrope’s charm not-why did you- I can’t...” she made a waving gesture. “That doesn’t matter.“ I exhaled audibly, but she must not have noticed, she was deep in thought.

“Look,” she finally said to me, grasping my shoulders. “Pyrope... I don’t know what’s wrong with her.” She sighed. “She sometimes knows what she is doing wrong and stops, but sometimes, she’s just so power hungry...she can’t stand people with more power than she has, that means politically and physically...”

I froze.

“Funny thing is, she’s very smart. She’d make a great scientist... always messing with chemicals. She can do just about anything with her potion-making techniques...”

This is why she trapped us in a laboratory, I thought.

“Pyrope also just loves fashion. Always dresses up people, even those she intends to harm. And it’s always fancy-ish clothes, for some reason...” Apatite sighed again, and then got my attention even more my prodding her finger in the middle of my chest. Her hand was cold.

“Listen, this is very important,” she said, as though in a huge hurry, her pointer finger still uncomfortably pressing into one of my ribs, “don’t forget this- my name is Apatite. I’ve already spoken with your brother; he knows what the Yoshi’s Benitoite is. We need to find it s-“

“You mean this?” I asked absentmindedly, holding up the gem on the short gold chain. Apatite stared at it for a second, then gasped sharply and snatched it from me.

“YOU have this?” she asked, mouth open with shock. “How long- where did you get it?”

“I got it... uh... well, to be honest, I got it 23 years ago, it’s sort of complicated, though...” I stammered as I tied the time wand around my neck again.

Apatite looked as though she could have kissed me. “Oh, this is wonderful, I don’t believe it, I SAW that you had it eight years ago, how stupid of me to think it was just a family heirloom- it’s not lost, I thought it had been destroyed... I told your brother so, but apparently, he knew what to do..”

“Where is my brother?” I asked her. “He just ran off, I don’t know where he went...” She looked solemn all of a sudden, giving me a feeling that I really, really didn’t like. I looked down at my feet, there was a little Aich that was sliming around on the floor, making a little “weef” noise. I stared at it, sort of surprised to see it here (I remembered what Kolorado had said... they really do live everywhere...) but ignored it after a while and looked back up at Apatite.

“To be perfectly honest, Luigi, I don’t know.” She said, then smiled a little. “You’re twins, aren’t you? You’d know if something bad happened to him.”

“I would,” I admitted. Apatite was looking at me kindly.

“You seem very upset about something,” she said.

“Yeah, well...” I began, but Apatite approached me. “Sit down,” she said, ushering me back into an armchair by gently pushing my shoulders. I took a quiet but sharp breath, something was wrong with her; she was as cold as a ghost. We sat there in a minute of silence before Apatite suddenly looked horrified. “Do you hear something?” she asked.

“Hear what,” I asked back, sitting on the edge of the seat.

But she didn’t have time to answer; Pyrope burst into the room. Both Apatite and I yelled.

“Apatite!” she gasped, staring at the dangling Benitoite in her hand. “YOU’VE had it... how dare you betray-“

“It’s not her!” I stood up and interjected, having a very bad feeling about this. “I had it- I found it-“ Apatite quickly looked at me thankfully.

“Silence, idiot!” Pyrope shrieked, pointing her long scepter at me. With a quick flash of light, I felt weird, my throat hurt horribly, I opened my mouth to yell- but no sound came out.

I tried to make some noise, a strangled scream or something- but nothing happened.

“That’s better,” Pyrope snarled at me, as I grasped my neck with my hand and coughed, but again, made no sound.

“Pyrope!” Apatite screamed. “What do you think you’re... NO!”

Pyrope smashed her scepter into the middle of the room. Apatite screamed in pain, then her entire body crumbled to dust.

I screamed, too, but I couldn’t hear it. The Benitoite clanked on the floor, rolled over a few times, and then lay still. Pyrope picked it up, lying her sharp scepter on the floor, and chuckled.

“I just don’t believe it. I always knew she’d be a traitor. Yes, this was best for her.” She smudged some of the ashes on the floor around with her foot.

I was horrified beyond belief, no longer caring that for some reason I couldn't use my voice, I had backed into the bed.

Pyrope was tapping her fingers together in a way that strongly reminded me of Mr. Burns, from the Simpsons.

"What to do with you..." she mumbled. I looked at her scepter. I watched the Aich I had seen earlier climb onto the sword-like part of the scepter and curl up, dropping an abnormal amount of slime all over it. Kolorado had said they like warmth; apparently the scepter was hot from having just murdered someone...

Pyrope picked up her weapon and shook the odd little creature off with a disgusted "yuck." The Aich splattered to the floor and crawled up my leg. I didn't try and stop it. I couldn't, even if I had wanted to, because I was still in shock of seeing what had just happened. The Aich came to rest on my collarbone, dripping slime all down my front. I didn't try to wipe it away, even though it felt nasty; like dropping warm jell-o all over yourself.

"I have to get out of here," I told myself. "Get out of here. Use thunderbrand. Something." But then I had a thought, one I didn't like at all...

"Who else have you done that to!?" I yelled.

Both Pyrope and I were startled, since now my voice was as strong as it always was.

"You're a hardy one, yes," Pyrope snarled. She aimed the lethal scepter at me. I leaned back a little bit.

"You know," she threatened sweetly, "Destroying the Mushroom Kingdom wasn't hard at all. Sarasaland's only a little bit bigger, how much harder could it be?"

Feeling a surge of anger and shock hit me in the head, I grabbed the metal part of her scepter, jerked it away and stood up.

"You destroyed the Mushroom Kingdom?" I spat, still clenching the scepter in my left hand. It hurt a little to touch it.

"Let go-" Pyrope snarled, violently jerking it out of my hand, throwing me to the ground. I had enough time to turn over on my back and look up at Pyrope, holding her sharp weapon directly over my chest in a very threatening, scary way.

"This is sharper than a knife," she told me casually. "It would be boringly easy to get rid of you, right in your own castle."

I was too frightened to determine if "Boringly" was a word.

And in the next instant, an incredibly intense pain hit me squarely in the chest- I knew Pyrope had just attacked me- there was a loud whistling in my ears-

"You're dead," I told myself, closing my eyes tightly.

But almost instantly, the terrible pain had turned into a simple, barely-there throb- not knowing what to think, I opened my eyes. I was still in my room, still on the ground. Pyrope was standing over me, holding the scepter that was fresh with blood- my blood- apparently she had stabbed me, but it hadn't succeeded in killing me.

I shakily stood up as the whistling got louder, ignoring the revolted look on Pyrope's face, I looked at my feet. The time wand was on the floor, it was cracked and broken, parts of the silver wings were chipped off, it had taken part of the hit, and it was whistling and shaking madly.

"What's going on," Pyrope demanded, obviously shocked that I wasn't dead.

But I had no time to answer. In that second the both of us were engulfed in white light, through closed eyes I could only see quick flashes of green light and Pyrope yelling madly-

Then everything was eerily quiet. I was afraid to open my eyes, afraid to move at all-my chest was still throbbing just a tiny bit-

But I slowly opened my eyes.

I sat up and looked around vigorously. This was my bedroom, only it was night time. Daisy moaned and turned over in her sleep next to me. Breathing very quickly, I ripped the covers off of myself and ran to the balcony door. I pulled it open and stood outside.

Everything seemed quite normal. It was very cold for an October night; as I adjusted my nightshirt, I could see my breath rising in clouds in front of me; but the sky was clear, in fact, I don't know if I've ever seen so many stars. I looked down. A thin layer of snow had formed on the ground, and my pet Chain Chomp, Chompy, was rolling around, making boulder-sized tracks in the snow. Funny... it didn't normally snow in October.

No, I thought, watching Chompy pee in the snow and turn it sharp yellow, that all couldn't have been a dream. I got hurt a few times, and you can't feel pain in dreams. In fact, I'm still feeling a little pain now.

I put my hand on the spot where I had been stabbed. It stung just a tiny bit. This was so weird-

I re-entered the room, closed the sliding door, and saw in the very dim light that it was just before five in the morning.

"I don't get it," I whispered to myself. I saw the phone. Without thinking, I picked it up and dialed the number to the Mushroom Kingdom's castle.

After a few rings, a very groggy voice answered. "Good morning," he said, suppressing a yawn.

"Mario?" I breathed into the phone, feeling more relieved than I think I ever have. "Mario, you wouldn't believe it, I don't know what's going on, I just had the craziest dream, only I don't see how it COULD

have been a dre-

“Bro,” he said angrily, “You couldn’t tell me about this in about... say, nine hours? Remember-“ he yawned,- “We’re two hours behind you guys.”

He was right. It wasn’t even three in the morning there yet.

“I’m sorry,” I said quickly, “But I’m really confused-“

“Get some sleep, Luigi,” he said, “I know it’s...today and all, we’ll come to your place later.” and hung up. I slowly set the phone down on the receiver.

I took a deep breath and ran my hand through my hair. Daisy turned over again, yawned, and sat up. I saw her silhouetted face turn in my direction.

“My, you’re getting business done early this morning,” she chuckled. “What’s wrong? Remember what I told you- no work today, at all. Why are you awake so early? This is early, even for you.”

“I- I don’t know...”

“Bad dream?” she asked, stretching.

“Well, yeah, but I don’t see HOW it could have been a dream, but then again, I don’t see how it couldn’t have been, what day is it?” I asked, sitting down on the bed.

Daisy prodded her finger in the middle of my chest (I cringed slightly) and pushed me back onto the pillows. I heard her get up and rustle something on the opposite side of the room. She then lit up a tall Christmas tree, one that was decorated in nothing but white and light blue. I stared at it, mouth agape.

“Christmas morning,” she chortled.

9 - Fixing the Past

“WHAT?” I yelled, sitting bolt upright. “That- no, are you kidding me? *That can't be!*”

“It did come on fast, didn't it? Yes, 2004 went by rather quickly...”

I looked around the room. Now that it was light, I could see that it did look like Christmas. Everything in the room had tinsel dropping off of it, and everything was either white or silver to match the tree.

“*Mamma mia*,” I whispered, mesmerized. There was no way it could be two months later! I couldn't have been unconscious for two months; I didn't think I was knocked out at all!

“Oh, I can't wait any longer,” Daisy said, bouncing. “Come on, come on, let's go see our presents!”

I chuckled feebly. “Allright,” I said, planting my feet on the floor. It was a little cold in the castle, I pulled on a robe and followed Daisy down into the foyer, where I had to stop and stare- there was a gigantic Christmas tree, one that had to be no less than fifty feet tall, and since it was the only thing that was relatively light in this room, it was reflecting off everything.

“It always looks better on Christmas Day,” Daisy said, hugging my arm. I had to agree with her. It was beautiful.

“Now, come on, come on!” she said, tugging hard on my arm to make me follow her down the stairs. As she ran, her short nightshirt bounced up a tiny bit- revealing a huge and hideous scar on her side, similar to one that I had gotten a few months ago.

“Daisy,” I breathed, stopping at the head of the staircase. “What- how did you get that cut?”

Daisy frowned at me. “That's not funny, Luigi.” She said in an almost cold tone. She bounced down the rest of the staircase. I followed her, yawning.

“Was that Mario and Peach you called so early?” Daisy asked, smirking and rattling a small present that read “*To Tulip the rabbit, from Santa.*”

“It was...” I said, taking the present from her and finding it cute that our pets got presents too.

“I heard you talking about a dream you had. Did you have a funny dream?”

“You have no idea...” I said.

“Ah, well, don't worry about it, now. Mario and Peach'll be coming over soon, anyway. Talk to Mario then, if you need to.” Daisy grabbed a present deep under the tree and rattled it. I heard whatever was in there shatter as though made of glass.

“Oops...” Daisy said, staring hopelessly down at what most likely was now a mangled, ruined present. “Ah, well... hope that one’s Weston’s...”

I laughed and checked the tag. It was addressed to me- “To Luigi, from Julie.”

“Oh. It’s mine. No matter. Probably one of Julie’s brownie batches.” I said.

“It made a glass-like noise like that?” Daisy asked, taking it from me.

“Have you ever seen Julie’s brownies?” I asked her, still chortling. “They could break your teeth, I swear.”

Daisy turned her head toward the door. “Did you hear something?” she asked.

I listened hard. There seemed to be nothing out there.

I walked over to a side room and clicked on the television. The five o’clock news was on, and nothing seemed to be so unusual- the reporter was talking in a helicopter over the fields of Easton, talking about some new houses being built in a new area of town... nothing seemed unusual, at all.

I plopped down on the couch and thought about what had just happened. Daisy was going on like nothing on Earth was wrong... yet, I know, I had just seen Pyrope... it couldn’t have been more than an hour ago...why was it already December!

Daisy entered the room. “We’re having the holiday party, remember?” she asked.

“Wh... oh, yes!” I said, obviously supposed to agree.

“People will be arriving in just a couple of hours,” she said. “Give or take three- I’d say Mario and Peach will come first, knowing your brother...”

“Oh... okay...” I said. “But it’s still so early in the Mushroom Kingdom...”

“Well,” Daisy said, sitting down beside me, “You did call them and wake them up, right?”

I chuckled. “Yeah, I guess.”

And, a few hours later, as Daisy had promised, Mario and Peach showed up, at eight o’clock, sharp.

Staring at my brother from behind as he busied himself at the punch table pouring himself some, I realized that if it was truly December, that I wasn’t dreaming now, I needed to do something...

“Listen, Mario,” I said, dragging him into the sitting room. “I need a huge favor.”

Mario took a sip of his punch. “Mmm?” he said, raising his eyebrows.

“I need to borrow your gold wand.” I said.

“Why?” he asked, halfway through another sip.

“It’s just really important-“ I said, trying to act casual. “I need to go back and change something.”

“Um, alright,” Mario said, handing it to me. I pressed the left-hand button that showed a hologram of today’s date, then turned the knob back enough that it read “October 12, 2004, 4:32 PM.”

“Thanks, bro,” I said. “I’ll be back.”

And I pressed the knob in.

This flash of light was incredibly quick. I found myself in the sitting room in my castle. Everything was quiet. I opened the front door. I ought to be arriving any minute...

An Aich slided past me as I held the door open. I smiled down at it, but it just slowly made its way to the staircase and under a table.

“My wristband!” came my sudden voice from just outside around the corner. Startled, I slunk upstairs at the exact same time I had burst into the castle, screaming “DAISY?!”

I bolted into my room and hid in the closet. It was sort of amusing listening to myself run frantically around the castle, until finally coming into the room and flopping down onto the bed.

Then Apatite appeared on the corner. “Tired?” she said.

I watched myself leap up, look at Apatite, and panic again.

“Why do you look so surprised?” Apatite had asked me. I watched as Apatite explained what the deal with Pyrope was, and saw that little Aich enter the room.

“Listen, this is very important,” Apatite said to me, sticking her finger into one of my ribs. “don’t forget this- my name is Apatite. I’ve already spoken with your brother; he knows what the Yoshi’s Benitoite is. We need to find it s-“

“You mean this?” I had asked, and handed Apatite the Benitoite.

I watched as Apatite rejoiced and said how stupid she must have been to see me with it so long ago, and watched myself become more nervous and worried about Mario-

I heard a loud whooshing noise that was unfamiliar. Pyrope burst into the room dramatically. This was neat, sort of like watching a movie.

And then Pyrope killed Apatite. I cringed as I was forced to watch it for a second time.

“Who else have you done that to?” I had yelled after the Aich sat on my shoulder. It was sort of funny seeing the looks on my own and Pyrope’s faces, they were identical.

“You’re a hardy one, yes,” Pyrope snarled, threatening me with her weapon.

“You know,” she threatened sweetly, “Destroying the Mushroom Kingdom wasn’t hard at all. Sarasaland’s only a little bit bigger, how much harder could it be?”

Hearing these words still sent a little jolt of anger through me. She was destroying the things I loved because they were more powerful than she was... I clenched my fist but was careful not to make any noise.

I had whacked her weapon out of my way and yelled “You destroyed the Mushroom Kingdom?”

“Let go-“ Pyrope growled and threw me off. I started feeling tensed up, I knew what was coming. She was now holding the weapon over me, and my hair stood on end as I watched her attempt to plunge it into my chest.

But she had failed in killing me; she did nothing more than scratch me. Or, at least I think, because the instant she had hurt me, I could see that my clothes were ripped, but there was actually no wound at all-it was the time wand around my neck that was destroyed- it started vibrating and whistling as I realized that I wasn’t dead. The chain was broken; the wand fell to the ground as I stood up.

Positioning myself so I wouldn’t miss anything, I watched as Pyrope and I stood for a second, staring at the madly vibrating and screeching wand on the floor, which then exploded with a burst of white light. I let my jaw drop as I watched myself disappear with a quick blink, while Pyrope was yelling madly, jabbing the scepter into the floor, and then disappearing, as well-

And then there was an explosion- as though the castle had been bombed, I felt the ground shaking-

I threw myself to the ground and snatched a coat from the closet. I threw it over my head and, frightened, waited for the rumbling to stop.

And it did. Afraid to see what had happened, I slowly pulled the cloak off of my head.

My jaw dropped again as I looked around. This looked exactly like Peach’s castle did; ruined. I pushed myself up. The closet I was in was missing its roof, as I stood up, pieces of insulation and wood hit me in the head. I left the closet to get a better look. I was unharmed.

What had just happened, I wondered to myself. Where did Pyrope go, and I was thrown to two months into the future?

I picked up the broken pieces of the time wand off the floor. They were colder than usual, but seemed now to be broken beyond repair. As I examined it, I saw a huge amount of thick slime coming from under a heavy armchair.

“Oh, no...” I whispered, dropping the pieces and picking up the armchair. Under it was the little Aich that had been in the room. I picked it up; it hung limply in my hands. It was dead, killed by the heavy weight of the armchair that had smashed its delicate organs.

“Poor thing...” I whispered, feeling my heart break for the weird little thing. Then it hit me- as the final bits of slime dripped off its lifeless corpse, I realized why I was still standing here-

As I remembered what Kolorado had said about these things- “Their excretions will heal any injury or illness, it’s a chemical that immediately tells body cells to recover in a flash...” This Aich had slimed all over everything. When it crawled up my arm and onto my shoulder, it had slimed on my neck, reviving my voice after Pyrope had disabled it.

And, I thought, as a tear budded in my eye, this Aich had also slimed all over Pyrope’s scepter. When she attacked me, it only hurt a little bit because I’d been immediately healed, and kept alive...

“Luigi, sir!” someone behind me yelled. I turned around. It was Toadsworth, running towards me frantically.

“Oh- oh my heavens-“ he panted, catching his breath, “The castle- *Peach*... I don’t...”

“Where is she?” I asked him, strictly reminding myself that it was the middle of October. “Where’s Daisy? I’ve just like... lost contact of everyone, I’m so confused...”

Toadsworth looked up at me.

“We have no idea what’s going on,” he said. “But honestly- I’ve never been so happy to see you...”

Toadsworth and I left the room and entered the foyer. I swallowed hard as I looked around the foyer. It was totally ruined. Chunks of the ceiling were falling out, and everything. I took my wristband off.

“Where is everyone?” I asked.

“The red-haired girl, and your brother...” Toadsworth said, “I believe I heard that they ran off to Peach’s castle.”

“Peach’s castle?” I asked, stepping off of the last stair and into the foyer. I was careful to not step on any glass. “Why there?”

Toadsworth shrugged. “The rest of your friends are here, now, though, they’re quite worried, really...”

I opened the door to the outdoors, and was immediately blinded by a flash of extremely bright light.

“Luigi, sir!” someone screamed. “Tell us what happened while you were in the castle!”

I blinked. Dozens of reporters with flash cameras were bearing down on me as though we were in a football game.

“Do you have any idea what ruined the castle!” is the sort of things they were saying.

“I... uh... I don’t...”

"Come with me, kid," an old man said, grabbing my arm and pulling me away from the crowd. He led me into a large, nearby hotel. I shut the door and turned to face him.

"Thanks," I gasped, wiping my forehead and glancing out the window.

"Your friends are here, too. I've got a gift for you."

"What?" I asked him. This was a total stranger to me- why did he have a gift for me?

The man pushed a box of chocolates into my hands. "Here," he said. "Your friends are in the other room. Just stay here until the reporters leave. This will keep you occupied."

I looked down at the box. "Thanks," I said. I went into the side room, and as he had said, there was everyone except for Mario and Julie.

"*There* you are!" Ricky said. "I know those reporters probably startled you, but what on earth *DID* happen in there?"

"It was Pyrope," I said, sitting down and opening the box of chocolates. "She was here. She smashed my time wand with her scepter, and then, I really missed the next part, but it was when she did destroy the castle."

"Luigi, come here," Waluigi's voice sounded. I sighed and set down my box of chocolates, "Just a minute," I told Ricky, and left the little side room- I spotted Waluigi in the foyer of the hotel, talking with Birdo, who I was surprised to see here.

"Huh," I said to Waluigi.

"What," he asked, annoyed.

"Didn't you call me?"

"No," he said impatiently, and then went back to talking and bragging about machines and aircraft with Birdo.

"Alright..." I said, and went back into the sitting room and opened my box of chocolates.

"Which one next... which one next..." I mumbled, scanning the box for one that looked like it had caramel filling. Those are my favorites.

"*Luigi!*" Waluigi shouted again.

Again, I agitatedly set down my box of chocolates and walked over to Waluigi.

"What," I said again.

"Do you have some mental problem, or something?" Waluigi asked me. "I haven't been calling you."

I rolled my eyes at his stupid joke, and went back into the room with my chocolates.

“Luigi, you idiot-“ Waluigi called.

“Nice try, Waluigi,” I shouted, not looking up and picking up a chocolate and breaking it in half, (it looked like it had nougat filling,) “Very funny joke.”

“No you, idiot, I’m in here-“

“What?” I said, startled, looking up from my box. “Where... what, are you hiding?”

“I’m not hiding; I’m in the room next to you.”

“Your joke’s very funny, but I apologize for not buying it-“ I said, stuffing the candy into my mouth. It wasn’t nougat, it was coconut filling. Not bad, I thought. I went back to digging for chocolates.

“Come over here.” Waluigi said sternly, like a parent scolding a child.

“Where,” I said lazily, not looking up from my box of chocolates, trying to see which one could be caramel filled.

“To the room next to you.”

I picked up the box of chocolates and swallowed the one already in my mouth. I saw Waluigi in the foyer, with his back to me.

“You’re not in the room next to me, you’re in the foyer, I see you.” I said sardonically, unwrapping another chocolate.

“Just do it!”

“Alright, alright,” I said, suppressing a snicker because this was so stupid, and walked to the next room, another small sitting room that was almost identical to the one I had just been in, only was completely empty.

“Close the door,” Waluigi said.

I sighed and slowly closed it. “This is very stupid,” I said, swallowing the chocolate in my mouth.

“You’re the one who’s stupid. Turn around.”

I did so. The box of chocolates slipped out of my hands as I slid down on the wall until I was sitting, open mouthed and staring, on the floor.

“Yeah, I know,” Waluigi said. “Surprise, surprise.”

It WAS Waluigi- only it was that copy of him that we saw back in Peach's castle- just milk-colored, slightly blue, transparent- a ghost.

10 - Doopliss the Duplighost

I opened my mouth to yell, but he cupped his freezing hand over my mouth. I cringed.

“No-“ he said, looking around nervously, floating a few feet off the ground.

“But- but that Duplighost- made a copy-“ I stammered. Waluigi grabbed my shoulders, chilling me to the bone. I cringed again.

“Don’t you get it?” he yelled. “This IS me! That danged Duplighost- well you can guess-“

“He’s-you?” I gasped, pointing at the foyer.

“Yes!” Waluigi yelled. I understood. “Julie and Mario already know what happened. I met them back up at Peach’s castle...”

“That’s where they went...” I whispered. “They did know. They...like... attacked you.” I chuckled. Waluigi ignored me.

“...And both of them said you’re the one to go to for ghost problems,” he added, with a sly smirk. I swallowed hard.

“The Duplighosts’ name is Doopliss. He can’t stand for you to tell him his name.” he continued. “Mario and Julie are in Peach’s castle, now, trying to figure it all out...”

“Peach’s castle?” I repeated. “Where we found Doopliss for the first time?”

“Yeah.” Waluigi said. “Follow me. Get the rest of the group. We’ve got some exploring to do.”

“Exploring.” I said. “Why do you call it ‘Exploring?’”

“What else should I call it? Mario said that there’s a parrot who is the only one who can control Doopliss living in a small town called Twilight Town. That’s where we need to go...” he said. “Come on. Being a ghost isn’t much fun.”

“Why should I help you?” I asked slyly. “Remember, just the other day? You said you didn’t neeed me?”

Waluigi floated down close to my face and said “Do you really think the world needs two of me?”

I thought about that for a minute and made up my mind.

“Allright, allright. I’ll go get everyone.” I said. “What will you do?”

"I'm going to go to Peach's castle," he said. "I'm going to go head off Mario and Julie."

"Fine," I said, and left the room.

How scary... I thought. Right in front of me, that had happened... and the thought just gave me chills. Was THAT what had happened to Mario? That he had been forced to live as a ghost, and used as a puppet for another? Is that why he was so secretive about it? How scary...

"Guys," I said to Ricky and Lauren, "We need to go back to Peach's castle."

"You realize how far away that is?" Lauren told me. "Don't you have that wand thing that Kolorado gave you?"

"Oh, yeah..." I said. "I dropped it in the lawn somewhere behind the castle. Come on."

We left the room. "Come on, Waluigi," I shouted, forcing myself to remember that the real Waluigi was making his way back to Peach's castle.

"Alright, alright," he said. "Where are we going?"

"Peach's castle," I replied simply and smartly. "Mario and Julie went that way."

"Whatever," he replied dully.

"Come on," I said, creaking open the door to the hotel to make sure that all of the media was gone. The coast was clear. "I dropped the little wand out behind the castle."

We walked the short distance to the back of the castle, and through the large amount of rubble behind it, I couldn't see the wand.

"What are we looking for, again?" Ricky asked, in a bored tone.

"The little bronze map wand," I said. "That'll get us to Peach's castle in the blink of an eye..." I tried to remember where I had been when I tossed it behind my head and ran.

Well, I told myself, if I had just tossed it behind my head, wouldn't it have landed a little ways away from the castle?

And so it had. Lying in the backyard's surviving flower patch was the five-inch-long wand.

"There," I said, going over to it and picking it up. I traced my finger on the small map, and it scrolled and stopped on a spot just over the mushroom kingdom.

"Stay close, everyone," I said, and pressed the small button on the side in.

A micro-second later, I blinked; there we were, standing just outside of Peach's castle.

“Where do you think Mario and Julie are?” Lauren asked.

“Inside, I suppose- probably back where the little cellar was...” I said, and creaked open the door.

They, however, were not at all in the basement, but just beyond the door. Both of them looked stunned to see us.

“Luigi!” Julie said loudly. “There you are... what are you doing here? What’s that?” she asked, pointing to the wand in my hand.

“This is kind of like the time wands, only it’s like a map, where you can travel to different places, rather than times...” I told Mario, handing him the wand.

“Wow!” Mario said, eyeing it. “This... this is amazing! Did you... know this is what we need?”

“We have to go to Twilight town, don’t we?” I asked.

“Twilight town?” Doopliss-Waluigi yelped. “Wh...why there?”

“You’ll see,” Julie told him. “Come on, everyone.”

Mario tapped in the travel place on the wand and pressed the button in, and in the blink of an eye, we were standing right next to the darkest and creepiest tower I’ve ever seen.

“Here?” I said blankly. “Here? THIS is Twilight town?”

“This is the steeple,” Mario said. “Come on.” He immediately walked past the creaky gate.

“I’m not going in there,” Doopliss-Waluigi said.

“Why not?” I asked slyly. “You don’t want the fuzzies to suck you dry, do you?”

“N...no...” he said reluctantly, and then followed us into the steeple.

The inside was even darker and gloomier than the outside. It was absolutely huge, however, and if it wasn’t so ghost-house looking, it would be an actually very nice place.

“I know my way around here pretty well,” Mario said, in a monotone. “Watch out for the boos, they live here, too...”

“What?!” I yelped, sounding a bit like a dog that had had its nose smashed in the door. “Boos? Here?”

“Go figure?” Mario said, smiling weirdly at me. “Come on. The first flight of stairs is this way.”

“Uh... you go that way,” Doopliss-Waluigi said. “I’ll just... uh... stay here.”

“Do what you want,” Julie said slyly. “The boos won’t let you out, anyway.”

Dopliss-Waluigi gulped. "Yeah, okay." He said.

"What is with him?" Ricky asked, once we were out of earshot and starting to climb the stairs.

"Waluigi's been possessed by a Duplighost," Julie said told him darkly. "That's not Waluigi. Dopliss is the ghost; Waluigi encountered him in Peach's castle. We're here to straighten things out."

I gulped. The stairs creaked and groaned as we climbed slowly up. I seemed to be having trouble moving my feet- my stomach now felt like it weighed ten times more than usual. We had just got off the second flight of stairs when Mario stopped dead in front of me.