

ANYA
and the
Power
Crystal



Book 2 of the Cupolian Series

N.A. CAULDRON

* * *

Azizi has betrayed us. Queen Doshishi is threatened. None of our spells will work against him. We believe he has gone to the caves. For now, we have convinced the Queen that she is safe, and believe it to be so.

* * *

CHAPTER ONE



THE SKINWALKER

Azizi walked more quickly than he would have liked down the stone path to his brother's house. He had no idea how he was going to handle this. The thought of telling the other Royal Wizards had crossed his mind, but he couldn't bear the thought of that. No, if he wanted to keep his brother alive, his only option was to talk to him alone.

He didn't want to; no one does. Conversations don't get much more awkward than this one was going to become. As the door came into view, Azizi's paced slowed. Maybe he was wrong. Maybe he had completely misread his brother's writing. *Wishful thinking*, he told himself. He knew he wasn't wrong. Caezari had always been power hungry. When their classmates refused to pledge him their allegiance, he carried out his revenge over several torturous months. This spanned from casting the *contemptuous* spell on the star pupil to dusting Jack-in-the-Pulpit over one poor boy's lunch. (His mouth had become so swollen he couldn't eat for a week.) But *this!* Had his hunger for power become so severe as this?

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Casting his doubts aside, Azizi forced himself to accept the truth. He took in a deep breath, his hand reaching for the knocker.

The muffled sound of a few footsteps produced a disheveled man. He was nearly the same size as Azizi, but fairer, blonde, and with a round face. “Azizi! What are you doing here?” the man asked.

“I’ve come to stop you, Caezari.”

“Stop me from what?” Caezari asked with perfect innocence.

“From trying to overthrow Queen Doshishi.” Azizi tried to keep his voice low. The last thing he wanted was to involve the neighbors.

Caezari’s panicked face quickly scanned for bystanders before opening the door wider for his brother and letting him in. He then barred the door behind them and asked in a whisper, “What are you talking about?”

“Your journals, Caezari. I read them.”

“You read my journals?!” No longer trying to stay quiet, the younger brother’s eyes flared with indignation.

“Yes, Caezari. I read them.”

Caezari turned away, his face a display of complete bewilderment. “Wow! I-I can’t believe this.” He walked across the room and braced himself on a wooden desk. “My own brother! Reading my *diary*.”

“It wasn’t by choice, Caezari. Daniel saw them.”

“*Daniel*. The seer.”

Azizi nodded.

“So, you’re here because of some vision.”

“Not entirely,” said Azizi. “I asked him not to tell the others until I had a chance to confirm it.”

“To confirm *what*?”

Azizi dropped his guard a little. He held his hands behind his

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back and paced, stopping at the wall opposite his brother. He planned his words carefully. “He saw me bending over your diary, reading it. But he also saw what it said. And he told me. So, last night, when you asked me to bring you a poultice for your foot, I took it.”

Caezari’s right hand formed a fist. The fingers of his left hand brushed against the wand lying on his desk. His face became timid, frightened.

“I read your plans, Caezari. Though how you intend to become immortal is beyond my understanding.”

The younger brother’s fingers wound around their prize, slowly, and ever so silently.

Azizi continued, “I knew you wanted power, dear brother, but immortality? No man has ever achieved this. Yet your entries sound as if you have found a way! How on earth do you plan to do it?”

Caezari’s hand firmly grasped his wand. His face gradually began to show its true feelings.

“And even if you could,” said Azizi, “why would you want to? Why would you want to overthrow the Queen, disrupt the entire queendom, and force everyone to bow down to you? I just don’t understand why anyone would desire this.”

Caezari smiled at him, but it wasn’t a typical villain’s smile. It was a pure smile, one of actual amusement. Azizi stepped back in alarm.

“Because, dear brother,” Caezari said menacingly, “I like to be in charge.”

Azizi reached his hand behind him, secretly retrieving his own wand. His arm brushed against his brother’s journal that he had hidden under his own robe. “But they will all hate you,” he said. “Is that really what you want?”

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Caezari's smile turned to a look of lust. A lust for blood. Shock could not begin to describe Azizi's feelings as he was forced to defend himself from his own brother. Azizi conjured a shield just as Caezari's wand shot out a flaming red bolt. It ricocheted off of his protective spell and set the thatch roof alight.

"What are you doing!?" Azizi maintained his shield; his dark eyes widened with terror.

Caezari bore down on him with slow progression. "But you've read my journals, dear brother. You should *know* what I'm doing!" His face contorted with rage as he drew back his wand. An onslaught of green, white, and yellow bolts shot forth.

Azizi held his magical shield with great skill. "I am not the Queen!" The bouncing spells broke dishes and exploded furniture, causing a cascade of dangerous debris. Some of the wreckage landed on him, drawing blood on his head and neck. "Are you insane!? I'm your *brother!*"

Caezari's eyes turned black and grew in size. Azizi crouched behind his wand's shield, truly aghast. This could not be real. But it was real. And deadly. Caezari advanced on him in a towering state of fury. "And *that* is why I must kill you."

"You *are* insane!" screamed Azizi.

A smile spread across Caezari's crazed face. Giant silver bolts leapt from his wand, faster than before, again and again, with relentless force. Azizi's shield diverted the hexes away from him, causing detrimental effects to their surroundings. What didn't melt or disappear ignited. First the roof, then the bed, soon the whole house was on fire.

"Stop, Caezari! I am not your enemy!" Azizi knew what he was going to have to do, but he couldn't.

"You have always been above me!" cried Caezari. "But now I shall be above you all, and I shall use you to get there!"

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“It isn’t worth it!” Azizi couldn’t let him do this. But the thought of stopping him was too painful to accept. He cowered behind his magical defense, struggling with his reality. The pain was too much. His lungs convulsed, his throat constricted, his sharp face gnarled in response to the sobs.

But Caezari didn’t stop. Smoldering straw fell from above. Azizi could smell the putrid stench of his own burning black hair. He could hold out no longer. Hot tears cascaded down his tormented face as he made the only choice that was left. With an anguish so fierce that it ripped his soul in two, Azizi recanted his shield and produced his own red bolt. It flew through the air, as though time had slowed, and hit its mark, killing his brother.

Azizi stood, ever so slowly, still sobbing, still not quite aware of what had just happened. His brother lay fallen, a giant black mark upon his chest. Unmoving. Unbreathing. Unalive.

But before he could mourn, before he could even realize what he had really been forced to do, it happened.

It started with a burn in his chest. A burn so intense, he couldn’t cry out, for he could not indeed breathe. He thought for sure that his insides must be on fire. A piercing pain ripped through his shoulder blades as wings sprang from his back, felling his Wizard’s robe to the floor. Giant red talons exploded from his shoes. His massive, red scaled hands dropped his wand, and he cried out. But his cry did not produce the agonizing wail of a man who had just killed his brother. Instead, long flames blazed through the roof and into the sky.

He thrashed about. His wings catching on the tables, the windows, the floor. Crying out in frustration, more flames leapt from his mouth, touching the neighbor’s house.

Fear encompassed him. He was a danger to everyone now. He jumped, stretched his wings, and flew awkwardly upward. Hovering

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over his brother's home, he saddened. He remembered the spell now, but it had never been witnessed before. This must have been what his brother had wanted. To become a skinwalker. A beast so vile it can only be formed by the most heinous of sins, the murder of your own blood. He was lost forever now. Death would have been kinder.

But his time for lamenting was cut short. White and gold sparks struck him from below. The Royal Wizards. They were attacking him. Acting purely on instinct, he blasted his assailants with his flamed breath. He was relieved to see that their magic protected them, but that protection did not extend to the neighboring houses.

He held his breath to keep from hurting them, the pent-up fuel blistering his throat. The Wizards' barrage continued with ten, sometimes twenty spells hitting him at once. They felt like pebbles being thrown by children. He saw their terrified looks as they realized that he could not be harmed. With one more wail of agony, Azizi shot a flame fifty feet into the air and then flew away.

Crossing the meadow that stretched between the castle and the southern forests, he searched for a place to land, a place to collect his thoughts and figure out just exactly what type of predicament he was in and how, if possible, to get out of it. What would have taken a man days, took him mere hours. He closed his wings and landed at the foot of a timber covered mountain. It had a cave there, and it was large enough and deep enough to hold a dragon. So he stepped inside.

There wasn't much to it, a little dust, a little moss, and lots and lots of spiders. A couple of short breaths took care of those. He set up house inside that mountain, or as much of a house as a weredragon in a cave can. He learned how to change back into a man, and how to transform himself into the hideous beast that he

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now was at will. It wasn't long afterwards that he tried to go back, to make amends, to tell them all what had really happened that horrible day. But he couldn't. Whenever he tried to get close to Cupola, he would go blind and have trouble breathing. Time and again he tried to force his way into his home queendom, only to be forced back.

So he gave up, became one of the creatures of the forests, a lost legend; and over the next 200 years, slowly lost himself to his walker form, hoarding gold and roasting elk with his breath. Oh, he kept an ear out, of course, and had heard the rumors, how Queen Doshishi had erected a Field of Protection that forced all of Cupola's magickind to evacuate. Probably to keep him out, he imagined. Probably for the best, he thought.

And then one day, one boring day while he was out hunting his breakfast, he saw a little brown furball in a clearing. Curious, he stopped to see what it was. It was a monkey. He nudged it with his claw. He tickled it behind its ear. Eventually, he blew hot air on it. (He had learned to control himself quite well over the centuries.) It jumped up and backed away, terrified.

Fortunately, he had also learned to control his strength and was able to gently grasp the monkey before it could run away. The small creature thrashed about in a panic. Afraid it would hurt itself in its fearful actions, Azizi changed into his human form. The monkey stopped and calmed down considerably. Azizi smiled and placed it on the ground. "What is your name, little one?"

"SCREECH!!!" The monkey emitted its apparent last bit of stored energy, and then collapsed. Worried, Azizi took the little creature back to his cave and nursed him into the evening. It awoke, frantically screeching as though it didn't know where it was, and it probably didn't; but then it saw Azizi's calming smile and stopped. Azizi offered the monkey some hot cocoa to soothe it.

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The monkey sipped the cocoa cautiously.

“Now,” Azizi asked. “What is your name, little one?”

“Mmph ha ha ha hee hee.”

“Alexander ... Alexander.” Azizi scratched his chin in thought.

“Ah yes! You’re the witch Avaline’s familiar, yes?”

“Hee hee ha ha ha.”

“Has something happened to her?”

Alexander told Azizi the story of Avaline’s demise, about how she was imprisoned in Cupola, and how the Field was shrinking.

Azizi’s eyes widened with that last part. “The Field is shrinking, you say. Perhaps it is time for me to make old wrongs right.”

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“**A**nya Walberg.” Anya’s emerald green eyes read her name from the assignment posting left by one of the Queen’s guards earlier that day. “Taika Wolf, Gevin Lancaster.” Her two best friends were listed with her. Their names were beside the title “MS-1”. Anya stared at the listing, memorizing some of the other names. “MS-2: Terrence Walberg, Fergus Adamson, and Bradley Fivekiller. Oooh, Mom’s not going to be happy about that.”

“Move out of the way ya daft girl! Just because you were the hero once doesn’t mean you get ta hog the line.” A middle aged man pushed Anya aside, making her almost fall to the ground.

A woman with a dirty scarf tore into him. “Hey! You watch what you’re doing! She brought my grandfather back to me, and if you think—”

Anya didn’t wait around to hear what he or anyone else thought. With her blonde hair flailing behind her, she ran into the center of the courtyard to get away from the growing crowd that had come to look at the Queen’s assignments.

Although scuffles like this were rare, they were becoming more common. It had been a long few months since Anya and her

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friends saved all those innocent people from Avaline and brought them back home to Cupola. Hundreds of victims, misplaced from time and space, had to find a place to live and a way to eat.

But did Anya become the town hero? Well, yes, for a while she did. But when Cupolians had to find a way to feed all those extra mouths and house all those extra bodies, some members of the queendom got a little upset. And that's when bad things happened, like what Anya was trying to get away from just now.

Her pace slowed to a stroll after clearing the crowd. She wasn't up to facing her mother anymore than she was up to facing a bunch of squabbling citizens. While her older brother Terrence and his teenage slayer friends would be thrilled to know they were on MS-2, their worried mother, Birgit Walberg, would not. She had been playing out gory scenarios in her head ever since last summer and informing Anya of them on an almost daily basis. These usually involved her "one and only daughter" getting eaten by some horrible monster.

Anya could only imagine her mother's reaction to both her children being on a Magical Squadron for the Queen. And Anya wasn't exactly sure she would disagree with her, although for entirely different reasons.

While the newly freed victims returned to their long lost families, and the whole queendom celebrated, the Queen secretly plotted; at least Anya and her friends assumed that's what she was doing. Her Highness was rather fond of such activities. See, up until Anya and her friends discovered Queen Pernicity's secret and made her all sorts of mad at them, everyone believed that magic wasn't real, and that magical creatures didn't exist. Turns out, however, that magic was very much alive, along with a plethora of magickind. It was just kept out of Cupola by a magical dampening Field ... that was now shrinking. And although the rest of Cupola

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also found out about the Field, magic, and magickind when their loved ones turned up out of nowhere, they didn't know about the Field's loss of power. But the Queen did. And Anya, Gevin, and Taika knew it too. And she knew that they knew it. And they knew that she knew that... Well, you get the idea.

They also knew what the look Queen Pernicity gave them at the celebratory ball meant. Something bad. Real bad. Like, "I'm going to find some way to make you pay for doing this" bad. Hence their assumption of how she'd been spending her time lately.

Anya crossed her arms and took a deep breath. Not knowing what the Queen's intentions were made her on edge. Just what exactly was she up to with this Magical Squadron business? Was she going to send them away? Banishing them from the queendom in the hopes that no one would ever find out what they knew? If that were true, then why all the other teams?

Surely she was overreacting. Queen Pernicity couldn't possibly have done all this just to get rid of them for finding out about the Field. They had been so careful to make sure she realized that they were not a threat to her. That included not telling anyone else all the stuff that they had found out. I mean anyone! No parents, brothers, sisters, friends, neighbors ... nobody.

But that didn't stop others from talking. The victims that had been released from Avaline's basement had been telling all sorts of stories. About how magical creatures used to live in Cupola, and how much nicer it was then, and even about an east side rebellion, though Anya didn't want to believe that part.

Luckily for the Queen, and probably Anya and her friends as well, nearly all of the present day Cupolians disregarded a great deal of what they heard. Most of the victims were considered too traumatized from the whole ordeal to be completely stable. But is

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that what the Queen thought?

Arg! Confused and frustrated, Anya plopped down to watch the archers practice.

The only people she could talk to about all of this were her friends, but none of the thoughts that rambled through her head seemed to bother Gevin or Taika in the least bit. Anya supposed that was to be expected. Gevin wasn't much for thinking into things, and Taika lived and breathed her job at the library. Of course, it could be hard to tell with Taika sometimes. Her gears turned a lot more than people realized. She didn't always tell everything that she was thinking; no one would have understood most of it anyway.

But Gevin... What was up with him lately? Although Clay, Gevin's older brother, had returned with the other victims, he was still only a squire, which compelled Gevin to keep his job at the stables, so that his mother could stay home with his younger brother Brent. That wasn't the problem. Anya was OK with all of that. Even with all the thank-you gifts, she was sure his family needed the money. The problem was that he spent every minute of his free time sparring with Terrence, and none of it doing things with her like he used to.

One of the archers missed, forcing Anya to find a safer place to sit and feel sorry for herself. She walked behind a nearby building, ensuring she was shielded from anymore training accidents, and leaned against the wall to watch the rest of Cupola go about their day.

Anya pressed her lips into a fine line. Truth be known, she was jealous of her family and friends. They had a purpose, a plan, a passion. She had nothing. No desire for anything in particular for her future. Again. Yes, she *had* been offered her old position as Kitchen Elf, but she wasn't that desperate; and being part of a

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Magical Squadron sounded exciting, but still, no one had any idea what their actual duties were, or when they actually started. They had to be given them before much longer though, right? Especially now that all of the other squadrons had been assigned, surely.

Anya hoped so anyway, because she wasn't sure how much longer she could go on in this annoying limbo.

With no purpose and nobody to talk to in the day but her mother, she had been spending most of her days since Avaline's capture doing the one thing no one else in Cupola could. Magic.

She couldn't do any spells at home. Not only was it too dangerous, but the Field prevented it. So, she used Avaline's old cottage. It was located just outside the magical dampening Field that surrounded Cupola, making it the perfect place for such an exercise.

Almost every other morning but this one, she had risen early, made the journey there, and started her spell work.

At first it was all very simple, lighting fires, turning her wand into a glowing light to help her see in the dark — stuff she had done before. But slowly, the spells started to become more complex. She had gotten to where she could call things to her from short distances and make small things move across the room. She even took up a bit of target practice, although she was never able to bring herself to shoot directly at anything more cute and fluffy than a moss covered rock.

It wasn't long, however, before Taika joined her. It seemed her library couldn't hold any more bottles of potion, and she wanted to utilize the space of the cottage.

Anya could still remember Taika's exact words that first day they went to the cottage together. "Wow! Look what they did to this place!"

Puzzled, Anya scanned around the insides of the cottage.

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There were broken potion bottles. The shelves were emptied and hanging from the walls. Books were torn and scattered, and scorch marks from errant spells were everywhere. Other than the one or two things she had moved around herself while practicing, it looked exactly as she had left it. “What are you talking about?” she asked.

“Well, it was to be expected,” said Taika. “It would have been the first thing I would have done too.”

“Again,” asked Anya, “what are you talking about? It looks exactly the same as when we left it.” She went over to the broken glass in the kitchen floor. “Here’s where Gevin threw the potions into the fire.” She pointed to the other wall where a large black hole lived. “Here’s where that first one exploded before we made him put the rest of them in the fire.” She pointed to another marked wall. “Here’s where Avaline missed.”

Taika stopped her. “No, Anya,” she said before walking into the living room. “Look at the couch.”

Anya followed her into the room. “Oh my!” It appeared as though someone had taken a dagger to the cushions. “What happened?”

Taika turned her head to survey the room. “I’m assuming the Queen sent her guards to search the place.”

Anya walked over to the couch. She picked up one of the cushions and stuck her arm through its fluffy hole. “For what?”

“Anything that could be dangerous, naturally. Queen Pernicity obviously felt threatened by Avaline, so she sent her guards to make sure there was nothing left that could be used against her.”

“But a cushion?”

“Better safe than sorry.” Taika shrugged. “I would be.” She then went around tidying up the place.

Anya left Taika to her cleaning and started on her wand

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exercises. By the end of the day, Taika had the house looking less like the old cottage of an evil witch, and more like a walk-in potion pantry.

However, Anya was afraid that having Taika there would make practicing her wand work difficult, and she was right. A few days after joining Anya, Taika started directing her on what she thought Anya should be concentrating on.

“Have you learned any defensive spells?” Taika asked.

Anya ignored the question and bit her lip in concentration. She was trying to stack a bunch of rocks on top of each other with a levitation incantation, and she was on her fourth one in the stack. Her left arm hung out absentmindedly for balance, while her right arm gripped her wand with unnecessary force.

“Here.” Taika went over and tried to adjust her wand hand for her.

“Taika!” The rock fell, knocking over the others.

Taika winced. “Sorry. It’s just that you were gripping your wand so tightly, I was afraid you were going to snap it in two.”

“No offense, Taika, but I have been doing this a bit longer than you have!” A lot longer by her standards. Although a brilliant potion master, Taika didn’t have an ounce of magic in her body.

Taika stepped back. Her hurt showed through in her voice. “Anya, the books say to hold your wand—”

Anya pinched the bridge of her nose. “Taika, I’m sorry. I know you’re only trying to help.” She widened her eyes and fluttered them. “But please, I’ve got this. OK?”

Taika sucked in her lips.

Anya tried again but couldn’t, not as long as Taika stood there watching. Eventually, she gave up and asked, “What was your question?”

“I was wondering if you had learned any defensive spells yet.”

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“Like what?”

“Well—” Out came the books. After defeating Avaline last year, Taika had confiscated all of the witch’s spell books and took them back to Cupola for further study. Since then, it had not been uncommon for her to pull one from seemingly nowhere at any moment’s notice and start quoting from it. She opened a particularly large one marked *Basic Spells for the Beginning Witch* at this moment. “It says here,” she read, “that the first spell any witch should learn in order to guard themselves is the shield.”

“The shield?”

“You know, to protect yourself from other attacks.”

“Does it protect me from swords or just spells?”

Taika read, “The *cover* spell is the easiest, and therefore weakest spell of defense a witch can use. But it’s still better than nothing. It will protect against basic enchantments and small objects.”

“Small?” asked Anya. “How small?”

“I don’t know. It doesn’t say.”

“Well if it’s so weak, why don’t I learn a better one?”

Taika gave her a disapproving look.

“Ugh! Fine,” Anya sighed.

Taika said with an air of authority, “Hold your wand in the direction of your attacker and say, ‘*Cover*.’”

Anya cast her wand forward and yelled, “*Cover!*” An invisible umbrella emanated from her wand. Anya could only tell it was there because the scenery within it was distorted.

She held the shield for several seconds before Taika said, “Now see if you can move about with it some.”

Anya turned around, ever so slowly, until she was facing left of where she was before.

Taika got that thoughtful look on her face. “Hmm. Let’s see.” She grabbed a few pebbles and faced Anya head on. “I’m going to

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toss these at you and see what happens, OK?”

Anya nodded. Her hand was getting tired. This spell wasn't like the others. Not only did she have to hold it, it vibrated her fingers too.

Taika tossed the rocks up into the magical dome. They bounced off, leaving distortion ripples in their wake.

It made the vibrations harder. Anya winced and backed away.

“Are you alright?” asked Taika.

Anya grunted, “Yeah.”

“Can you handle some more?”

Unable to talk, Anya nodded a yes.

Taika continued to toss rocks, leaves, and other small objects at her until the spell collapsed.

After putting her wand away, Anya held her throbbing hand, rubbing it with her good one. “Guess I need more practice,” she said.

“Hmm,” said Taika. “Would you like for me to help you?”

While having someone help her was probably a good idea, Anya had gotten used to being alone prior to Taika coming with her. And to be honest, she didn't want to be constantly corrected on her posture, stance, wand grip, aim, pronunciation... She could probably think of more but didn't want to make herself cry this soon before dinner. Hoping to prevent herself from having to endure said torture, Anya asked, “What about your potion making?”

“That only takes up so much time.”

“And Otis?” Otis was Taika's supervisor at the Royal Library. He spent most of his day there sleeping in his armchair and ignoring everything else. This was perfectly fine as prior to her working there, Taika was its only patron.

Taika darted a sidelong glance at Anya.

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Anya rolled her eyes. “A day here and there is one thing, but you can’t expect him to cover for you all the time.”

“Cover me for what? There are no visitors to the library, remember? He’s going to have to get used to me being gone one day anyway. I’m on MS-1 too, you know.”

“So is Gevin. Doesn’t he need help?” Even Anya knew that was a paltry attempt to get rid of her. With all the sparring he and Terrence had been doing lately, Gevin probably knew more about combat than any of them.

In the end, Taika won. Several days a week she joined Anya at the cottage, helping her practice her spells. And as much as Taika’s corrections annoyed her, Anya knew they were good and managed not to snap at her ... much.

A cold wind jerked Anya back from her memories. She shivered as she watched the first flurries of the season fall. It was only a week ago that she and Taika had to stop going to the cottage because the weather had gotten too cold to make the journey easily. Deciding that it was also too cold to be standing outside just now, Anya left to tell Taika what she had learned from the assignment sheet.

On the way, she passed by Avaline’s cell. It had a little barred window that opened up to the street of the courtyard. This allowed its prisoner an up close and personal view of the main hustle and bustle of the day, albeit at foot level. It was not the least bit odd to see Cupolians kicking dirt or throwing rotten objects through her window. She did change their family members into weird animals and keep them in cages for a couple of hundred years after all. So things like this were to be expected.

It was not expected, however, to find her pet monkey, Alexander, having a conversation with her. No one had seen or heard anything about him since he escaped from his cage in the

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middle of the woods last year. They had assumed, or at least had hoped, that was the last they would see of him. He was not a very nice monkey. So when Anya saw him sitting on his haunches outside his master's jail cell, she was understandably surprised.

"Alexander!" Looking back, she probably would have wished that she had kept quiet and listened in. But hindsight is often wiser than the present.

Alexander screeched in anger and leapt at Anya. Anya dodged out of the way. He landed behind her and turned for another attack. Wishing she had her wand, and could use it inside Cupola, she snatched up some pebbles and showered him with them.

He yelled at her again and bared his teeth. Anya quickly grabbed fistfuls of dirt, rocks, broken pottery, anything she could find on the courtyard's ground, and threw them.

It worked! He retreated, swiping at his face and squeezing his eyes shut in obvious pain. When he opened them again, he screamed in rage one more time before disappearing over the castle wall.

Now that the danger had passed, Anya became aware of what was going on around her. A small crowd had formed. Avaline was reaching her arms through the barred opening, screaming obscenities of the saltiest nature, and shaking her fists at her sworn enemy. Embarrassed, Anya ducked her head and quickly resumed her journey to the library before anything else could happen.