

More Things

I can still remember the sound of my heels as I walked down the alley.

The walls seemed to amplify the sound, causing each click to blend in to the next.

It was eerie and scary. It made me hurry, so that the clicks were louder as I started to run.

I wasn't alone.

Something was there. But I didn't know what. I didn't have a clue.

I couldn't hear anything but the sound of my heels, the sound of my breath as I started to pant. The alley was endless, or so it seemed, and it seemed to be getting dark.

That was when I started to hear it. The sound of breathing that was not my own.

It was getting closer and I wished I'd taken my heels off, so I could run faster.

There was no time now, I didn't want to take the chance.

I ran.

I sprinted.

As fast as I could, fear fuelling my strength, my stamina.

It was getting closer and I wanted to give up.

It would have been so easy to give up. I knew what was going to happen, but I didn't.

He never gave up, and he taught me, as he taught so many of us.

"What did he teach you?"

I took a deep breath, jerked out of my recital, and glared at him.

"Sorry," he apologised. "But what did he teach you?"

"Never to give up," I whispered. "That no matter how dark it was, no matter how much you hurt, no matter how much you wanted to die, you never give up. Giving up is the only thing that you can control."

"That's an interesting philosophy."

"Isn't it?" I agree softly. "I saw him under the Cruciatus more time than any human should ever be, but even at the end, when four people were casting it on him, when the agony should have driven him into insanity, he never gave up."

"And so, I was not going to give up."

"You were running though."

I laughed at him. "Idiot," I said with a shake of my head, missing the way my now short hair no longer bounced around. "There is no shame in running from a superior force."

"Sorry," he said, raising his hands, and I want to laugh at him. But I didn't, and I got back to my story.

I could see the end of the alley way, and despite the burning in my lungs, despite the pain in my side, I accelerated. I would not be beaten, I would not submit to my fear.

And I made it, into the light, and I swung around a lamp post, pulling my wand out, so that I could see what had been following me, what had caused my fear, what had terrified me with it's breathing.

But there was nothing there.

The alley was completely empty. And I started to doubt that it ever had. I felt that it was my imagination playing tricks on me

"And that was the first time?" he asked.

"Yeah," I sighed. "Never underestimate the power of the human mind to delude itself into thinking that everything is fine."

"That sounds familiar."

"He said it once, just before defeating Voldemort. Of course, he said it with a few more profanities and implicated the Ministry directly at the time."

"I don't like that name."

"Voldemort?"

"Yeah."

"Idiot," I whisper. "Fear of the name increases the fear of the thing itself. It's one of the few things that he agreed with Dumbledore about."

"Sorry," he said, still uncomfortable.

I shrugged at him, even after these five years, even after everything that happened, these people are still scared to say a name. It makes me think he was right.

"What about the second time?"

I paused for a second to gather my thoughts.

I was running late. Again. Sometimes I think that I've spent most of my life running late.

Late for school, late for class, late for dates, late for exams. About the only thing I wasn't late for was the final battle, but I don't think about that anymore. I never think about that. I don't think anyone who has ever been through something like that thinks about it voluntarily.

Fields of blood sounds like such a cliché, but at the end, when the red had sunk into the soil, that's what it looked like. So much death, destruction, and even though we won, it felt like we lost as well.

My blasted Floo hadn't been working for months, and getting the Ministry to do their jobs was an exercise in futility. So, here I was, at the wrong end of Knockturn Alley, late for a party.

I was dressed in one of my best dresses, and my with my newly shorn hair, I looked about as good as I can. Sure, I was nervous, but I knew who I was, I practised my curses on a regular basis.

I started to walk, fast, moving through the dusk confidently. I wasn't scared, there was no reason to be.

But then I started to sense it again. The same thing as before, the sound of breathing just behind me, the prickling of my skin that screamed of imminent danger, and the fear. The same heart-pounding fear I'd felt before.

My reaction was the same, I ran. But that's when I got the feeling that it was playing with me. That it was allowing me to run, that it was mocking me.

I spun, my wand pulled from down my dress, and nothing was there. But I could still hear it, behind me.

I turned again, and there was some mocking laughter that didn't sound like it came from a human

mouth.

I took a deep breath, containing my fear, and prepared to fight.

And then it was gone.

I was freaked, but again, I started to forget about it as I joined the party.

"Was he there?"

I snorted. "Of course," I said sarcastically. "He decided to turn up at a party so that everyone could gossip and point at him like some sort of sideshow animal."

"Okay," he said slowly. "And the third time?"

I smiled to myself. Despite the situation, I wasn't going insane. It's somehow comforting to know that.

I'd managed to persuade myself that I had a hyper-active imagination caused by stress, and that I needed to lay off the Firewhiskey.

Until it happened for a third time. I'd talked to a few of my friends, just checking that they hadn't experienced anything similar - and they hadn't.

It was night again, and I was alone, again, and it started, again.

As before, I ran - fear is a great motivator to get into shape.

But this time, just in case, just on the obscure chance, just for sake of mind, I was prepared.

I pulled out the gold coin that I had kept for so long, and I rubbed it frantically as I prayed. I prayed that it would still work. I prayed that he was listening. I prayed that he could help.

Two things happened so close to each other, that I couldn't tell which one happened first.

There was a groan of protest from the thing that had been chasing me, and the sound of someone Apparating in.

I ran straight into him, and bounced off. He caught me before I could hit the ground.

"It was him?"

"Definitely." I smiled slightly at the idea of anyone daring to try and impersonate him. "Let me

tell you something," I said softly.

"When you are terrified, when you know something or someone is after you, when you call for help, you have certain expectations of what you want from your rescuer."

"Like what?"

"A cuddly jumper and a big smile is not what you want."

"What do you want?"

"You want someone who looks like they can deal with the problem, someone who eats problems like yours for breakfast, someone who you know at a glance is going to solve it."

"And he looked like that?"

"And then some," I agreed.

I stumbled back and smiled in relief. He was there, and he'd changed even more. He wasn't that tall, maybe 5ft 10 or so, but he carried himself like he was a giant.

His hair was longer than I remembered, a lot longer, and tied back with a single ribbon. It should have looked wrong on him, but it didn't, it was more like a personal statement.

His glasses were gone, and nothing stood between me and his eyes. His eyes have always been his stand-out feature, and at this moment, I found myself wishing he still had his glasses, so that they could mute the effects those preternatural eyes had on me.

He wasn't wearing robes, that was the next thing I noticed. I started at his feet - avoiding his eyes, and I slowly drifted up, over his expensive looking dragon-hide boots, past trousers that seemed to be made out of some sort of animal - maybe snake, but I'd never seen a snake with scales that big, and up his chest. He had on a plain white t-shirt, with a leather jacket over it - the jacket felt magical in a way I still can't explain.

I drifted up again and blinked, he was smoking. The flare from the tip illuminated his cheeks, his scars standing out, as he inhaled.

"T-thanks," I whispered.

He tilted his head and looked at me, an amused expression on his face.

"Some thing's been following me," I explained, quickly regaining my confidence.

"I know," he whispered.

I blinked at him.

"How?"

He smiled slightly, and flicked the cigarette into the distance. "I saw it."

"What was it?"

He looked at me and slowly offered me his hand.

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Susan, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

"What did that mean?"

"I didn't have a clue, I wasn't to find that out until later. But for now, I didn't care. I was safe again, he had arrived, he gave of this aura of confidence, as if he knew what was going on, why it was going on, and just how he could stop it."

"And he recognised you?"

"Of course, he would never forget any of his friends, or forget people he cared about. That's not who he is."

"Sorry," he said, apologising again. "What's a cigarette?"

"It's a Muggle thing, basically it's tobacco and tar that you set fire to and inhale."

"Sounds awful."

"It is. Kills you, as well."

"So why did he do it?"

"I'm not sure how he started, but he was never affected by the negative sides."

"Why not?"

I snorted and looked at him. "Because he is Harry Potter."

"Oh, right. So what happened then?"

"Then," I sighed softly. "Then my life changed, my illusions were shattered, and everything in life that I held true were found false."