

# marmalade

written by Jason Thibeault

**PREVIEW!**

gertrude's broken wand





marmalade

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## gertrude's Broken Wand

### JASON THIBEAULT



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By Jason Thibeault

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## gertrude's broken wand

# PROLOGUE

**gertrude** took a deep breath, closed her eyes, and pointed her wand at the ground.

“Farzyah!” She said.

She waited a second and then opened one eye, peering out across her long nose at the unchanged landscape around her.

She gritted her teeth.

“Palash!” She said, this time pointing the wand at a tree.

Nothing happened again.

“Gripple!” She yelled, feeling her anger boiling.

*Calm down, she thought. Getting angry isn't going to help. Need to focus...*

She took another deep breath and steadied herself.

But her mind was blank. She couldn't think of any more names.

The dark forest around her groaned in response, as if it too was frustrated by her efforts. It wasn't the first time that she



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had stood underneath the leafless branches of the haunted forest with her wand, trying to come up with a name for the land in which they lived. Just like the witch before her and the witch before her and as long back as Gertrude cared to imagine.

She wondered if this was where it all started—when the land turned to a perpetual Halloween. It was a curse that had ruined travel, destroyed the countryside, and brought dark creatures into their lives.

Gertrude looked around, wondering where they were lurking.

Ghosts. Ghouls. Zombies.

And worse.

She looked back at the castle that was shrouded in a perpetual gloom from the clouds above.

A rustling in the trees caught her attention and out of the corner of her eye she saw something moving. A zombie. The shambling corpse wandered aimlessly.

“Ugh, zombies,” she said. “Freak me out.”

With a quick snap of her wand and a few muttered words, the zombie’s head popped off and the corpse fell to the ground.

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Gertrude smiled slyly.

But the appearance of the zombie just punctuated the fact that time was running out.

*No one* had been able to give the land a name.

Gertrude slid the wand back into her braided gold rope belt and remembered the dream she had for the past two weeks—a wide open field, lush green grass, leafy trees...and someone falling on top of her, breaking her wand.

At first, she had been mortified by the dream, dreading the idea of asking Turkley to fix her wand again. The old goat hated her and had sworn never to fix her wand again especially not after what happened last time.

But as the weeks wore on, the same dream waking her every night, she began to look at the brighter side:

*If someone breaks my wand, she had thought, perhaps I can get them to fix it and they can be the kingdom's witch!*

She smiled even now thinking about when she had come up with her plan. Although it was a short-lived smile as she thought about her trip just that morning to the royal library to read the prophecy again. The scroll had been very clear—if the land wasn't named by sunset tonight, everything would disappear forever.

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The castle.

The spooky trees.

The zombies.

Even her.

And although she didn't want to disappear (she was okay with the zombies going), she'd come to realize that she'd rather have her last day spent as not-a-witch than waste anymore time trying to give the stupid land a name.

"When it apparently doesn't like any of my suggestions," she mumbled.

She looked back at the castle and then at the path that led in the direction she thought the clearing from her dream was.

With her wand in her belt, certain she could take care of any of the other haunted forest's cursed inhabitants, she headed off to put her plan in motion.

She kicked the trunk of a huge tree as she walked by and the land shook once as if in reply.

Gertrude, though, just kept right on walking.

## CHAPTER 1

**Rebecca** looked down at her oatmeal and stuck out her tongue.

She hated oatmeal.

The cinnamon her mom swirled in it had begun to melt making it look like a gooey bowl of poo...

“Rebecca, eat your breakfast!” Her mom yelled.

She was dressed in her best *I'm-Rebecca's-Mom-and-Helping-out-in-the-Class-Outfit*—blue jeans and her Navarrete Night Hawks red t-shirt. Her blond hair was pulled back into a tight ponytail and she wore a thin black headband. Rebecca understood why some people called her a *Barbie* doll.

Rebecca pushed away from the kitchen table a little and looked down.

*Exactly the same*, she thought, *even down to my white Nikes*.

She rolled her eyes and resumed her grimace at the oatmeal bowl.

“We don’t have time for this young lady,” her mom said,

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sweeping the two peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, three oranges, three cartons of chocolate milk and four chocolate chip cookies into the cooler. Then she put in Dillon's ham and cheese sandwich because he was allergic to peanut butter. "We have to be at school early for the field trip to Kartchner Caverns."

Her mom said the name, *Kartchner Caverns*, like it was Disneyland.

"Can't I be sick today?" Rebecca asked. "You could go without me. I wouldn't want *you* to miss the caverns and all."

Her mom gave her that *really?* look.

Rebecca sighed, poking her oatmeal with the spoon. She was only 10. And her parents had explained to her that she didn't get to stay at home by herself until she was 11.

"Mom, where's breakfast?" Dillon asked loudly, bounding into the kitchen and practically jumping into one of the empty kitchen table chairs.

"Dillon! I woke you up 30 minutes ago! Why does it take you so long to get from your bed to the kitchen?" His mom asked, sighing.

Rebecca pushed her oatmeal to him.

"Yuck!" He mumbled. "I won't have time to eat that. Do we

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have any Pop-Tarts?”

Dillon was Rebecca's twin and although they weren't identical everyone said they looked like it. Although Dillon had shaggy blond hair, unlike Rebecca's neatly-pulled back blond hair, they both had the same dimple on their left cheek and the same deep blue eyes.

But unlike his twin, he was wearing his favorite baggy brown cargo shorts and Vans. And, more bothersome to Rebecca, a green t-shirt that read *My Sister Made Me Do It*.

“Why doesn't he have to wear his Navarrete t-shirt?” Rebecca whined. She looked at her mom who stood there with her hands on her hips.

“Dillon,” she said, “go change your shirt.”

But Dillon just flashed those pearly white teeth that all the little fourth grade girls loved and said, “sorry, in the laundry.”

His mom scowled once at him and then went to the cupboard. When she returned, she put two cinnamon Pop-Tarts down on a napkin in front of him.

“What? And he gets Pop-Tarts?” Rebecca cried.

“You'll probably have to take them with you,” his mom said, grabbing the cooler and her car keys off the counter.

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Dillon raised his eyebrows at Rebecca as he took another bite. It was almost like they could speak to each other without talking and she knew what he was saying,

*You should take longer. Don't rush down to breakfast. Then you won't get stuck with oatmeal.*

She scowled back at him, which meant, *She doesn't let me. She waits until I get up so she can pick out my clothes.*

He shrugged and took another bite.

“That’s fine, I’m not eating this slop,” she said and pushed the bowl away.

“Okay, suit yourself,” her mom said. “But you’ll be hungry in a few hours.”

## CHAPTER 2

**At** 7:45am in October, Arizona wasn't hot yet. In fact, it was rather pleasant, a cool temperature they all should be enjoying. And all her fourth-grade classmates were—happily and excitedly bouncing around, refusing to stay in line which only frustrated Rebecca even more.

She was certain that if they all just thought about it for a moment, being organized and in control would get them onto the buses and to the caverns faster. Which, Rebecca knew, would get the field trip over quicker as well.

But she was even more frustrated by the fact that her mom was right.

Rebecca was hungry.

In fact, her stomach had started grumbling even before they had rounded all of the fourth-grade classes onto the lines to get onto the yellow school busses.

But she wasn't about to say anything to her mom who was busy counting kids.

Navarrete was like any other elementary school in Arizona—low, squat buildings around a central grassy area. There



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were a couple of playgrounds, parking lots, and everything was under a lot of shade.

Dillon poked her in the ribs with his elbow, which made her hungrier.

“I smuggled a Pop-Tart for you,” he said, offering the tasty pastry. Even though it had been unprotected in his pocket, Rebecca snatched it greedily, devouring it before they reached the door of the bus.

“No food on the...” the mom that was counting kids on her bus began to say when Rebecca popped the last piece in and nodded.

Even though they both had their own friends in class, Dillon and Rebecca often found each other anyway.

They sat across the aisle—Rebecca with her best friend Sarah and Dillon with his partner-in-crime Sam. The teacher at the front of the bus, Mr. Rawlins, had to keep telling Dillon and Sam to be quiet and stay seated but every time he turned around, the two boys were bouncing on the seat again. Rebecca just shook her head. Although it did seem like fun, she was far busier talking with Sarah about Jonas. She wouldn’t admit that she had a crush on Jonas but she liked him a lot.

## CHAPTER 3

**The** ride to Kartchner Caverns took almost two hours and by the time the busses pulled into the parking lot Rebecca was famished again.

“You don’t happen to have another Pop-Tart?” She asked Dillon as they lined up to get off the bus.

He shook his head.

“I wish,” he said. “I had actually saved that one for me. But you looked liked you needed it more.”

Rebecca was touched.

“Really? And you gave it to me instead?”

“Nah,” he said, “just kidding. It was in my pocket for a week.”

She punched him in the back but he just played it off with a smile.

Mr. Rawlins explained what was going to happen. First, they were all going to watch a video in the Discovery Center, the main building that had the gift shop, café, and lots of

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information about the caverns. Rebecca had rolled her eyes a couple of times while he talked excitedly about the rocks, minerals, and information about the caverns in the Discovery Center.

After the video, they would all line up to take an electric trolley down to the actual cave entrance where their guide would take them on a tour. Mr. Rawlins stressed several times that they needed to be on their best behavior when riding the trams and during the tour. Rebecca, of course, rolled her eyes again.

Finally, they would ride the tram back to the Discovery Center, board the busses, and head back to school.

Mr. Rawlins headed into the Discovery Center to get everything started while the other parents and teachers worked to keep the students in line.

Even though some of her classmates, like Sarah, were apprehensive about going inside the cavern, Rebecca was bored. At least the October Arizona weather was mild and a slight breeze blew over them. She wondered if she should have listened to her mom and packed the Navarrete sweatshirt as well and then dismissed the thought. She wouldn't be cold.

Part of her wondered why she was dreading the field trip so much. The caverns seemed like a pretty cool place and it was a chance to get away from the classroom for a day.

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But just when she was thinking she should give the day a chance, she saw her mom excitedly talking to a bunch of students, her hands flying left and right as she described something.

“Ugh,” she sighed.

Then suddenly her mom turned and started walking in her direction.

Rebecca panicked and spun Sarah around.

“Talk to me,” she said.

“Um, okay. About what?” Sarah asked.

But just looking like she was having a conversation with Sarah was enough and Rebecca’s mom passed by, giving her a little wink as she did.

Rebecca sighed with relief.

They quickly lined everyone up in their groups and explained how it was all going to work—they were going to enter and explore the caverns as one group but they needed to stay near their chaperone. Rebecca was just glad that her chaperone was Mr. Rawlins and not her mom.

“Watch out for the bats,” Dillon whispered from behind her. “I hear they are huge and like to eat fourth grade girls.”

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She punched him hard in the arm before he even knew she was swinging.

“Ouch, that one hurt,” he said, rubbing the spot on his arm.

Rebecca grinned triumphantly.

“Okay everyone, let’s head inside,” Mr. Rawlins said.

“Is it lunch time yet?” Dillon asked.

## CHAPTER 4

**The** electric tram had taken all of the Navarrete fourth graders to the trailhead from which it was a short walk to the caverns itself. Their guide, an old lady that reminded Rebecca of the school nurse, kept rattling off facts about the caverns that Rebecca ignored. Dillon even made googly eyes at her once and mocked mouthing a few facts himself.

The classes walked in lines towards the cavern entrance, their guide standing off to the right, slathering them with useless trivia as they walked by. One of her helpers, a much younger man dressed in the same khaki pants and Arizona Parks and Recs polo shirt, stood at the entrance.

“You two aren’t going to cause any trouble, are you?” The old woman asked suddenly, grabbing Rebecca and Dillon as they walked past.

Her greying blond hair was pulled back into a tight bun. She didn’t wear any makeup but there was a strange beauty to her face. Rebecca couldn’t stop staring at her eyes.

“Um, no,” Dillon said as he glanced back at the line. Sam was looking quizzically back at him with that *did you get busted* look.

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The old woman, smiling at them, looked first at Rebecca and then back at Dillon.

“Twins,” she mumbled. “Lovely.”

“Can we go?” Rebecca asked, suddenly feeling uncomfortable under the woman’s gaze. Her blue eyes were piercing.

“Yes, yes,” she said. “You two go on and have some fun in the cavern. But remember to stick together. Wouldn’t want you getting...lost.”

She practically pushed the two away.

Rebecca and Dillon both stared at her as they walked backwards. The old woman continued smiling at them. But it was more like a big bad wolf smile. Finally, Rebecca bumped into the line and she and Dillon merged into the march towards the cavern entrance, glancing back repeatedly as they walked. The tour guide continued to watch them as they disappeared into the darkness of the cave.

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Five minutes into the tour and Rebecca had to go to the bathroom.

“Mr. Rawlins,” she said, pushing past everyone to get to the front of the group. “I need to go to the bathroom.”

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He looked at her and rolled his eyes.

“Really? Why didn’t you go before we entered the caverns? I asked if anyone had to go!” He said and shook his head emphatically. She wondered if he had made that announcement when the creepy tour guide had pulled Dillon and her.

He sighed.

“Okay, see Ms. Burba back there? Head back and ask her to take you.”

Rebecca nodded and headed off before Mr. Rawlins could warn her to be careful about where she was walking.

“Where are you going?” Dillon asked as she passed.

She didn’t answer.

“Ms. Burba?” Rebecca asked.

But Ms. Burba was busy looking through her camera at what she thought must have been a beautiful formation of soda straw stalactites. To Rebecca they just looked like dripping snot had frozen. She stood there for a moment, listening to all the kids talk and the shutter on Ms. Burba’s camera click again and again. She suddenly picked up her mom’s voice, talking to Ethan’s mom, one of Rebecca’s classmates, and cringed at the conversation.



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“You and Rebecca look so cute today,” Ethan’s mom had said. “Do you always wear the same outfit?”

“As often as we can,” her mom answered.

“Well I can’t get Olivia to even wear the same color shirt as me,” Ethan’s mom said. Olivia was in first grade. “She wants nothing to do with me. It’s funny how much I see Rebecca with Dillon,” Ethan’s mom continued. “I’ve heard that twins sometimes share some...”

But Rebecca’s mom cut her off. And even though she couldn’t see her mom’s face, Rebecca knew that she was getting stiff like she always did when someone talked about the special bond that her twins shared.

“Well, don’t worry, that will change soon enough,” her mom said and Rebecca could imagine her sickeningly sweet smile. “I know there’s nothing that my Rebecca likes more than spending quality time with me...”

Rebecca tore herself from the conversation, the urge to go to the bathroom overwhelming.

“Please, Ms. Burba,” Rebecca whined. “I need to go to the bathroom now!”

Ms. Burba sighed and turned slightly from what she was doing.

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“Back there. Take the first right. That will lead you back out of the caverns. The bathrooms are outside,” she said and returned back to her photography.

Rebecca, bouncing from one foot to the other, mumbled a half-hearted thank you and took off running in the direction Ms. Burba had pointed.

“And don’t run!” Ms. Burba called after her, never once taking her eye from the camera’s viewfinder.

But Rebecca didn’t get five feet before a hand was on her shoulder.

It was the tour guide again.

“Did I hear that you need to go to the bathroom?” She asked.

Rebecca nodded but tried not to stare at her eyes. Something about them frightened her.

“Well, don’t go right. That won’t take you back outside. You need to go left and then another left, then straight.” She said, smiling that wolf’s smile again.

## CHAPTER 5

**Rebecca** followed the tour guide's directions to the letter.

Left, then another left, then straight.

But instead of heading her outside when she rounded a tight corner, she was plunged into a cavern of utter blackness.

"Oh no," Rebecca whispered, overcome by a sudden panic. Disoriented by the darkness, she spun around but couldn't see the light of the tunnel because of the bend.

And what made it worse was the fact that her panic made her need go to the bathroom almost unbearable.

She stomped her feet a few times and then started to run back the way she thought was the cavern entrance. Only it wasn't. She stumbled around, groping her way forward, bumping into rocks and stalagmites.

"Help!" She yelled.

Her voice echoed back at her.

"Oh please help, please," she screamed. "Help!"

Then she let loose a scream that hit a pitch she saved for

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special occasions, the one that caused her dad to get off the couch and come ask her to never scream like that again.

But this time, no one came.

Rebecca could feel the tears coming but she pushed them away. Crying wouldn't accomplish anything except maybe make her want to go to the bathroom even more.

"Okay, you can do this," she whispered, putting her hands out in front of her.

"Just retrace your steps back to the light. Let's start there," she said, feeling better hearing another voice even if it was her own.

But as she walked backwards from where she ended up, she didn't find her way back. In fact, she bumped into a wall.

"How can that be there?" She yelled, feeling the cold stone with her fingertips. "I just came from that direction!"

She stood there for what seemed like forever, listening only to her frantic breathing and the pounding of her heart. She began to doubt what direction she had actually come from.

"Help!" She yelled again, a feeling of panic beginning to take hold.

"Don't freak out," she told herself. "Stay calm. Someone is

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bound to come soon. You just need to think this through.”

She started to stomp her feet again although, for some reason, she no longer had to really go to the bathroom.

One minute passed.

Then two.

Then what seemed like an hour.

And still no one came.

“Oh come on,” she whimpered. “This can’t be happening.”

“Dillon!” She screamed at the absolute top of her lungs until her throat was raspy and raw.

Finally, the first tear fell and then another.

With each tear her panic grew until it was all she could feel in her chest—an iron band around her heart. Her breath came in shallow, quick gulps.

The walls seemed like they were closing in. Every direction she turned to put out her hands, her fingertips felt the cold stone.

It was almost as if the darkness itself was trying to crush her.

Picking a direction and running, her shins slamming into stalactites, her shoulders and arms crashing into rocky out-

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croppings. She no longer cared if she got hurt because she was convinced that she was going to spend the rest of her life in the caverns. In fact, she would become part of the school tours from now on. *Come see the wild-eyed, crazy, Kartchner Cavern girl who was lost here 50 years ago but still can't find her way out...*

Then suddenly, a pinpoint of light appeared in front of her.

Rebecca let out a huge sigh, sniffed and wiped the tears away with her arm.

“Oh, that has to be Ms. Burba with a flashlight,” she said, stumbling forward, hands outstretched.

The light, though, didn't get any bigger.

“Is that you Ms. Burba?” Rebecca asked. “I'm so sorry but I guess I took a wrong turn...”

That's when she felt the floor drop away.

One moment it was there, the next it wasn't.

And then she was falling.

And screaming.

But the screaming stopped suddenly when her head bumped into the wall.

The falling didn't.

## CHAPTER 6

**When** Rebecca woke up, she was lying face up. She blinked a bunch of times after she opened her eyes as the sky above was the brightest blue she'd ever seen.

Her head hurt and she rubbed her cheek where she'd collided with the rock on her fall down.

She looked around at the plush green grass that surrounded her and the huge, leafy trees that blew in a gentle breeze.

Rebecca knew immediately that this wasn't where she was supposed to be.

*The last thing I remember, she thought, was falling.*

"I should still be in the cavern," she said, imagining herself lying at the bottom of some deep pit that she'd fallen into, not some plush, grassy field. "How did I get here?"

"I don't know how you got here either but I'd really appreciate if you got off me," a voice said.

That's when Rebecca realized that she wasn't lying on the grass all around her. She was lying on someone else who was lying on the grass.

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“Oh, I’m really sorry,” Rebecca said as she rolled off and stood up, looking down at whom she’d apparently landed. The first thing that Rebecca noticed was that she was old. And not just old-person old, but ancient. Egyptian old. Her face was so wrinkled that it was almost impossible to make out her features, even her eyes and mouth. Her nose though stood straight up in the air three inches from her face.

It was impossible to miss.

“Quit staring at my nose,” the old woman said. “It’s rude.”

“Sorry,” Rebecca replied, sheepishly looking down at her white sneakers. She didn’t know how the old woman could have known she was staring at it.

The old woman, dressed in a long black gown and a pointy hat, didn’t get up. She did, though, look over at Rebecca.

“For being so young,” she said, “you sure are heavy.”

Rebecca gasped.

“That’s really rude!” She said.

“So is falling on top of someone,” the old woman replied, then thought about it some more and added, “and staring at their nose.”

“I said I was sorry.”



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The old woman snorted.

“What’s your name, anyway?” She asked, finally pulling herself up into a sitting position. She tried to fix her tall, pointy hat but it was bent in a strange direction and she gave up.

“Rebecca.”

“Well, Rebecca, it seems that you owe me a favor,” she said, grunting and groaning as she tried to get up. Rebecca stepped forward and offered her hand but the old woman shooed her back, finally managing to stand up.

That’s when Rebecca noticed her other defining feature.

She couldn’t have been more than three feet tall.

Rebecca was tall for her age. Both she and Dillon were the two tallest kids in their fourth-grade class. But the old woman whom apparently Rebecca had fallen on top of was only as tall as a kindergarten. Rebecca looked up for a second, trying to figure out from where she’d fallen. She half-expected to see a tiny hole. Then she looked back at the old woman who was glaring at her.

“Stop staring at how short I am,” the old woman snapped.

Rebecca was shocked again.

“Can you read my mind?” Rebecca asked.

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The old woman grunted, sizing Rebecca up and down, left and right, commenting to herself that she looked entirely un-witch-ish but would do perfectly.

“It seems that you broke my wand when you landed on me,” she said, holding out what appeared to Rebecca to be a mangled stick. “And a witch can’t cast spells without a good wand.”

“I’m sorry,” Rebecca said, “but you are a witch? I must have fallen and hit my head.”

The old woman shook her head.

“Well, you might have hit your head but that doesn’t mean you aren’t really here,” she said as she dusted off her robe. Rebecca noticed that she also wore a braided belt of golden silk from which hung a small, purple emblem. She couldn’t quite make out what it was but it looked important.

“So where am I then?” Rebecca asked. She was beginning to get really worried that she had, in fact, hit her head and was lying unconscious or dead at the bottom of some hole.

“Um,” the witch said, looking at her broken wand, “we don’t quite have a name for it yet.”

“You live in a land that doesn’t have a name?”

The witch shrugged.

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“What do you call it then?”

“Here.”

“So I am here, in here, but where’s here?” Rebecca asked, the whole concept beginning to confuse her.

*Is it possible?* She wondered. *Could I have really ended up in some strange land?*

As an avid reader, she’d lived out such adventures in her head. But to think it was actually happening to her was almost unimaginable.

She was more inclined to believe she had died in some horrific fall and pinched herself just to make sure.

It hurt.

And although she was relieved that she wasn’t dead, she felt a pit grow in her stomach that she’d never see her brother or parents again.

The first tear fell down her cheek.

“Hey, there’s no time for crying,” the witch said, waddling over to Rebecca and shaking her arm. “I need my wand fixed right now. Before the sun sets.”

The witch wrinkled her nose.

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*Can't tell her too much*, she thought. Then she got an idea.

"And once it's fixed," she said, "I might be able to get you home."

She felt guilty about saying that considering her real plan to make the strange girl the new witch, but if it was going to be the only way to get Rebecca to go and get the wand fixed then so be it. She didn't feel like waiting around for someone else to drop from the sky.

"Really? You can send me home?" Rebecca asked, sniffing and wiping the tears off her face. "Why can't you take the wand to get fixed?"

"Well," the witch said, her mind working quickly to come up with a good story. "The wand repair shop, Turkley's Wand and Magical Gizmo Emporium, is located just over that hill at the castle," she said, pointing first with the broken wand then, when it looked as if the tip may completely fall off, using her other hand. She cradled the wand after Rebecca turned to look in the direction she had pointed.

*If the wand breaks completely*, she thought, shuddering at the idea.

"Okay, I can go," Rebecca said. And then, taking a deep breath, added "how far is it?"

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The witch smiled.

“I think it’s just about an hour walk,” she said, pulling out an old, red handkerchief and folding up the wand inside. The witch only hoped that it would keep the wand together for the journey. She handed the bundle to Rebecca who took it carefully.

“And what was the name of the store again?”

The witch, feeling anxious about the chances of her plan actually succeeding, snapped back:

“Turkley’s Wand and Magical Gizmo Emporium.”

Rebecca just hung her head, feeling guilty about breaking the wand and confused about everything else.

“Oh, deary, listen, I’m sorry,” the witch said as she stroked Rebecca’s arm a few times. “It’s just not everyday that someone falls from the sky and breaks your wand. But you going to Turkley’s is a huge help!”

“Well I’m glad I can help somehow,” Rebecca said hesitantly, looking up and immediately regretting that she had. Standing that close to the witch, Rebecca got to see every mole, hair wrinkle, blotch, spot, and stain on the ancient skin. It was enough to make her want to vomit.

Instead, she took a deep breath with her imagination, and

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continued to smile at the old lady.

“Now last thing,” the witch said, “when you get to Turkley’s, don’t mention my name.”

“But I don’t know your name anyway,” Rebecca quickly replied.

“It’s Gertrude,” she said. “But if you mention my name, he’ll kick you right out of the store without fixing the wand. And he’s the only wand repair shop for days.”

The witch gave Rebecca a hard stare. Rebecca did all she could to stare right back but looking into the yellowing eye, shot through with blood vessels, and oozing some clear liquid, made it feel like she had spiders crawling up her back.

“And you do want to get home, right?” Gertrude asked.

Rebecca just nodded. For some reason, words escaped her right then.

“So here’s what you have to say,” Gertrude said, poking her palm with one of her fingers as if to punctuate each word:

“Hi Turkley. I need my wand repaired and I hear you are the best. Do you have time?”

“But it’s not,” Rebecca started to say when the witch cut her off.

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“You know it’s not your wand, I know it’s not. But Turkley can’t. He’s had some bad experience fixing wands for people that aren’t the owner. So he has to believe it’s your wand.”

Rebecca nodded.

She fidgeted a little bit, wanting more time to think things through.

It was all happening so fast.

“Okay girl, get going,” Gertrude said, practically pushing Rebecca in the direction she had pointed to earlier.

With two hands gingerly carrying the bundled wand, Rebecca started walking, looking back to see the witch staring after her.

“Oh,” and Gertrude called as Rebecca started to climb the hill, “throw out the handkerchief before you get to Turkley’s. He might know that it’s mine!”

Rebecca let out a deep sigh and nodded while Gertrude walked to the nearest tree and sat down with her back against the trunk.

Even if it was some fantastical dream, Rebecca was glad to be away from the old woman who smelled like rotten fish.