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The Magic Thief: Lost

Written by

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Published by

Quercus

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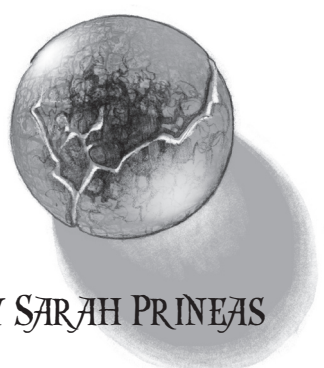
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THE MAGIC THIEF

LOST

BOOK TWO

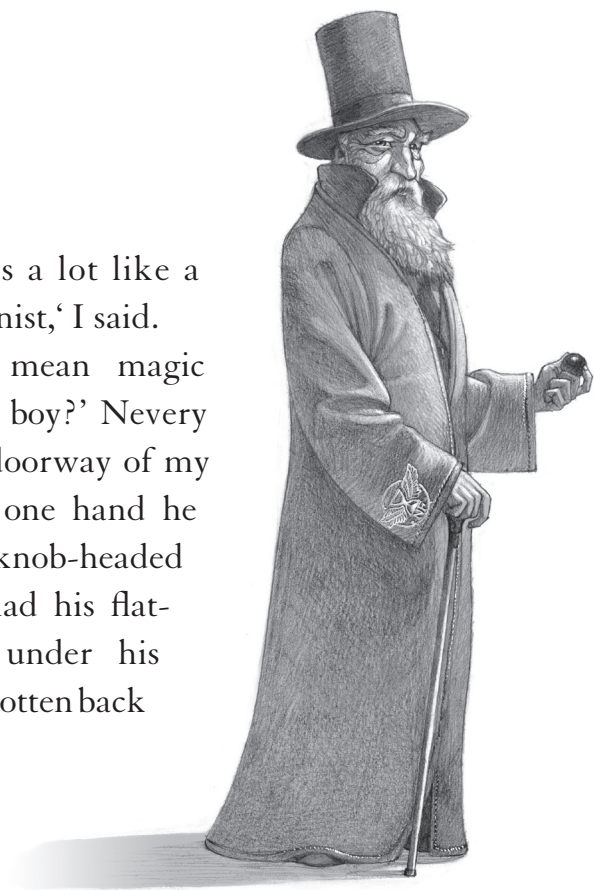


BY SARAH PRINEAS

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Quercus

CHAPTER 1



'A wizard is a lot like a pyrotechnist,' I said.

'You mean magic and explosions, boy?' Nevery said from the doorway of my workroom. In one hand he held his gold knob-headed cane, and he had his flat-brimmed hat under his arm. He'd just gotten back

from a magisters' meeting, which always made him grumpy.

'They'd be controlled explosions,' I said.

'*Controlled* explosions? That would seem to be a contradiction in terms, Connwaer.' He looked around my workroom and scowled.

Benet had helped me strip the faded wallpaper from the walls and whitewash them, and I'd swept the floor and scrubbed the grime and dust off the tall windows and set Lady, the white and tabby-tailed cat, to deal with the mice. A few books from Nevery's library were stacked neatly on the shelves. After everything was ready I'd hung my picture of a dragon, the one I'd nicked from Nevery's study, on the wall. The picture was so sooty and dirty from hanging over a fireplace that it looked like a dragon hidden behind a cloud, but I could make out a gleam of golden wing and a snakelike tail and a sharp eye, red like an ember in a hearth.

I'd been reading Prattshaw's treatise on pyrotechnics. The book lay open on the table in front of

me, along with some papers and a dirty teacup.

'Yes, this is a bad idea,' Nevery said. 'What would pyrotechnics accomplish, hmmm?'

That was a very good question.

To do magic, every wizard had to find his or her own special locus magicalicus. It could be a piece of gravel or a small chunk of crystal or a rounded river stone or a pebble found in the street. When you found it you knew, for it called to you. My own locus stone had been the finest jewel in the city, the centre stone from the duchess's necklace, leaf green and glowing with its own light, and it had been my way to talk to the magic. It had been destroyed when I'd freed the magic from Crowe's prisoning device. After that, I'd spent most of the summer looking all over Wellmet for another one. Nevery'd told me I'd find a new locus stone, but I hadn't. Then I checked every grimoire in the academicos, and none of them said anything about wizards finding a second locus stone. If their first stone was destroyed, they died along with it. But I hadn't died.

'Well, Nevery,' I said, 'the magic talked to me when the Underlord's device exploded.' Nobody except Nevery believed me, but I knew what I'd heard. 'If I make a very small pyrotechnic explosion, it might talk to me again.' And then I could be a wizard, even without a locus stone.

'Hmph,' Nevery said. 'Pyrotechnics is not a reliable method, boy.' He paced across the room and leaned over the table to lift the book I was reading to see the title. 'Prattshaw,' he said, dropping the book. He shook his head. 'I suppose you can't get into too much trouble just reading about it. Don't be late for supper,' he said, and swept-stepped out of my workroom and down the stairs.

Had I ever been late for supper? No.

I went back to the book. Tourmalifine and slowsilver, it said, were *contrafusives*; that meant slowsilver attracted and confined magic, and tourmalifine repelled it. When mingled, they exploded.

I closed the book and set it aside. In a box under the table where Nevery couldn't see it, I

had a stoppered vial of tourmalifine crystals. And I had a little lockbox with a few drops of slowsilver in it that I'd nicked from Nevery's workroom.

I brought out the vial and the lockbox. The book said that very small amounts of slowsilver and tourmalifine caused very small explosions – just puffs of smoke, really. Clear as clear, Nevery didn't want me doing pyrotechnics. But he wouldn't notice a puff of smoke, would he?

With the raggedy sleeve of my apprentice's robe, I wiped out the teacup and set it on the table; then I tipped in a few crystals of tourmalifine, careful not to get any on my fingers. I didn't have a key for the lockbox, so I pulled out my lockpick wires, snick-picked the lock, and opened it. The slowsilver swirled at the bottom of the box. As I set the lid back, it crept up the sides, almost like it was trying to escape. I tapped the box, and the slowsilver slid back to the bottom again.

I dipped the end of one of my lockpick wires into the slowsilver. A mirror-bright bead clung

to it as I lifted it out. Carefully – *steady hands* – I brought the slowsilver to the teacup and tapped it from the end of the wire. Like a drop of water landing on sand, it splatted into the centre of the little pile of tourmalifine in the bottom of the cup.

I held my breath and bent closer to see.

The slowsilver soaked into the tourmalifine. I counted *one*, *two*, *thr* –

With a *pop* the cup shattered. A whirl of fizz-green sparks flung me away from the table and fountained up to the ceiling, then swarmed round the room, crashing from wall to wall. I scrambled to my feet. On the table, the vial of tourmalifine cracked open like an egg, spilling green crystals across the tabletop; the box of slowsilver tipped over, and a silver-bright snail crept out.

'No!' I shouted, and grabbed for the slow-silver. It squirmed out of my fingers and I ducked as the sparks flew over my head again, *whoosh*.

The slowsilver reached the tourmalifine. They mingled.

In a corner of the ceiling, a whirling ball of sparks and fire gathered, then streaked across the room, knocked the table over, and slammed into me.

At the same moment, the mingled elements exploded.

I lay flat on the floor and ducked my head. White fire and crackling sparks filled the room. And so did the voice of the magic. *Damrodellodesseldesh*, it began, the words vibrating low and slow in the bones of my arms and legs. *Ellarhionvar*, it went on, faster and higher, the words rattling around in my skull. Then a shriek that made my teeth hurt, *arhionvarliardenliesh*!

Then, silence.



To the Magisters,
Magisters Hall, Wellmet.

Because you are clearly unwilling – or unable – to understand what happened when Dusk House was destroyed, I will explain it to you yet again. The explosion at Dusk House was not – I repeat, not – a pyrotechnic experiment gone awry. Pyrotechnics had nothing to do with it. Underlord Crowe and the wizard Pettivox, who betrayed us all, built a device – a massive capacitor created, using large amounts of slowsilver, to attract and then imprison the city's magic. The reason, magisters, you have found no evidence of the existence of this device is because it was completely destroyed in the explosion, which also destroyed Dusk House and killed Pettivox.

My apprentice and I have speculated on

the reasons why Crowe attempted this magic thievery. Perhaps it was a move to seize control of the city; perhaps he had plans to weaken our magic for some other purpose. We know that they succeeded in almost depleting the entire city's magic. As you know, Crowe admitted nothing, and has been sent into exile; his reasons, therefore, would seem to be lost to us.

On to magical issues. My fellow magisters, you have made it absolutely clear that you cannot believe my apprentice's theories about the magic of Wellmet. I repeat them to you now: The magic is not a thing to be used, but a living, sentient being which – or perhaps I should say <u>who</u> – serves as a protector of the city of Wellmet. The spells we use to invoke magic are, in fact, the language of this magical being. Our locus magicalicus stones, my fellow magisters, enable us to communicate with the being. Much research remains to be done on the being's actual nature, to discover why it is here in the city, whether other cities are inhabited by similar beings, and

to determine what the magic intends for us, the humans who live here.

Whether you believe this theory or not is of no consequence. Do note, however, that as a result of Conn's actions, the city and its magic have been saved from almost certain disaster. The magical levels of Wellmet have stabilized, though I am concerned that the levels remain lower than they were before. Yet despite the fact that Conn sacrificed his locus magicalicus to save the city, you argue that because he no longer has a locus magicalicus he should no longer be considered my apprentice. That is for me to decide, not you.

It is said that only a fool stands in the way of a new idea; I trust, magisters, that there are no fools among you.

Yours sincerely,

NEVERY FLINGLAS

Magister
Heartsease, Wellmet

