

The Shelter

London, 1976

Sparrow was hungry. He'd found a half-eaten bag of chips earlier at a grimy bus stop in Whitechapel - they were delicious and still warm too - but now he was hungry again.

"One day I'll live in a real home," he thought to himself. "I'll be warm and dry, and never be hungry again." He tried to imagine what his dream home would be like, but the rumbling in his stomach made it hard to concentrate.

He sidled closer to the market stall, drawn by the enticing display of fruit. He waited impatiently for the stall holder to turn away so he could grab something. He had his eyes on a shiny red apple, which was almost within reach, but he didn't dare make a grab for it until the stall holder looked away.

A light drizzle was falling on the Aldgate market, adding a dim haze to the early evening light. The London sky was a uniform dull grey, a color that seemed to last the whole winter. Sparrow shifted nervously from one foot to the other, crowding closer to the side of the stall. Finally the man turned to serve a customer. Sparrow snatched the apple and started to run off, clutching his prize as tightly as he could. His arm jerked back as someone grabbed at his sleeve.

"Hey you thieving devil - I saw that! Put that back!" yelled the stall holder.

Sparrow jerked his arm away from the man's grasp, but he lost his grip on the shiny apple and it fell to the ground and rolled under the market stall. He hesitated a moment, then fled when he saw the man angrily pushing his way towards him.

Sparrow was a skinny boy dressed in a variety of mismatched clothes, all of them old and worn, and most of them ripped too. His coat was a man's suit jacket, way too large for him. He dodged easily in and out of the commuters that were streaming out of the office buildings and along Whitechapel road. The road was clogged with cars, taxis and red double-decker buses, all crawling along in the evening rush hour. He looked anxiously over his shoulder - he should have lost the stall holder by now. He could hear a loud voice shouting behind him; the stall holder's son was giving chase. Perhaps he had been stealing too much fruit from the same vendor, he thought. Anyway he seemed to have really annoyed them today.

Breathing hard, Sparrow darted across the road, dodging in and out of the slow moving traffic. A little scared now, he sped up and ran as fast as he could. Going too fast to save himself, he slipped as he dodged to avoid colliding with an old lady loaded down with shopping bags, and found himself sliding along the ground towards a brick wall. He ended up lying in a pile of old newspapers in the corner where a small brick building met a much larger one. The smaller building was the entrance to a long disused underground station, and had four arched windows, two on each side of a pair of doors, all of which had been bricked up long ago.

Still slightly dazed from the fall, Sparrow sat up and looked in vain for somewhere to hide. A dull pain rose in his head as he willed himself to be small and hidden. He huddled back against the wall as far as he could, but it seemed hopeless. The stall holder's son ran into view, puffing and panting with exertion. Sparrow hoped he wouldn't hit him - he was cold and wet now and he didn't want to be beaten too. He started to think of some weak excuses as the angry son got closer to him. Perhaps he would just get shouted at - that wouldn't be too bad.

Then something happened that Sparrow couldn't explain at all. The stall holder's son stopped and looked right at him, but it was as if he looked right through him. Without saying a word, he ran straight past Sparrow and off down the crowded street.

Puzzled but grateful, Sparrow started cleaning off the bits of wet newspaper that were clinging to him. He looked up to see a taller boy standing over him and smiling. Startling white teeth showed against deep black skin. Sparrow looked enviously at the boy's smart new jeans and warm looking coat. He wished he had clothes like that.

"Some scrounger you are - you made a right mess of that, didn't you?" said the boy, as he helped Sparrow to his feet. "I'm Jimmy by the way. I've been looking for you. Come on Sparrow, follow me. It is almost time for dinner. You look like you could do with a hot meal - it will make a nice change from stolen apples."

"What's a scrounger?" said Sparrow. "And how do you know my name?"

"You're a scrounger, or you will be soon, and so am I. We scrounge things for the rest of the group. You know, food or clothes and stuff. Whatever we need," said Jimmy. "As for knowing your name, I know a lot about you. I have been following you around for a while now. I was told to go and fetch you - to show you where we live. You'll like it - it is safe and warm and there are lots of us there. Much better than rolling around the streets in wet newspapers."

Sparrow found it hard to argue that point. He wasn't sure why, but he liked Jimmy already. Perhaps it was the mention of hot food to fill his rumbling stomach. He followed Jimmy a few steps to stand in front of one of the bricked up doors. He could just read a long faded sign above the door:

"St. Mary's Station - Permanently closed. Nearest Station is Aldgate East or Whitechapel".

A bright blue light suddenly filled the arched doorway in front of them. The edges were a deeper, dark blue, while the light in the middle shimmered and crackled with power.

"This leads down to the shelter, the place where we live," said Jimmy, grabbing Sparrow by the arm and pulling him forward. "Don't worry, only we can see it - no one can follow us." They both disappeared into the blue arch, and came out into a dark tunnel on the other side.

Sparrow cautiously followed the other boy as he ran down a dark flight of narrow stairs, a faint light shining up from below. Jimmy paused at the bottom of the stairs to be sure he was following, and then headed off into a dimly lit tunnel, their footsteps echoing ahead. Sparrow had little time to take in the strange surroundings, yet he felt suddenly at ease, as if he was returning to a place

he had known all his life.

Jimmy led him along the long, straight tunnel, passing several anonymous grey steel doors as they went, before turning quickly through a tall arched opening. A soft yellow light spilled out through the tiled archway, where Sparrow paused to catch his breath. The dull pain in his head had eased now, the throbbing replaced by a feeling of warmth and welcome. A large chamber opened before him, its walls lined from floor to ceiling with heavy green and brown drapes. Jimmy darted into the room and left him standing at the entrance, mouth open in amazement.

Muffled sounds of children playing trickled out from one of the many doors, the noise muted by the rich, thick hangings. Delicious smells of roasting meats and fresh baked bread wafted in from a large kitchen, making Sparrow realize he hadn't eaten anything since the bag of chips he had found that morning. Two long rows of wooden tables dominated the room, with a single, solidly built table at their head. The tables were lined with children waiting patiently for dinner - the youngest at the closest end leading up to the older and largest children at the far end.

A group of six older children sat at the head table; four boys and two girls, all looking intently at Sparrow, though none of them said a word. In the middle of the group sat a tall, red-haired boy, his chair solid oak and throne-like, with a high back and broad armrests.

Sparrow glanced nervously around, trying to take in the rest of the strange place. He could just see what looked like a living area, partitioned off from the rest of the room. The smaller room was littered with large floor cushions and had several haphazardly arranged sofas, all looking slightly worn but deep and soft. His attention was jerked back to the main room, as he realized someone was talking to him.

"Welcome to the shelter, Sparrow" said the red-haired boy. "You will be safe here now. Take a seat and join us, we should be eating soon." He motioned to an empty chair near the foot of one the long tables, where Jimmy had already taken a seat. Too hungry to ask any questions, Sparrow hurried over to his new friend and sat down.

The Misplaced

Sparrow leant back in his chair and let out a contented sigh. For the first time in ages, his stomach felt comfortably full. It had been an excellent meal. Plates of roast meat and chicken had arrived first, followed by steaming hot dishes filled with creamy mashed potatoes and vegetables. The dishes were passed up and down the table, with everyone serving themselves and then passing them on. At first Sparrow was concerned they would run out of something before the dish got to him, but he was worrying needlessly - there was plenty for all. A big bowl of chocolate pudding had appeared for dessert, much to Sparrow's delight.

Now that dinner was over, Sparrow found his curiosity returning. He was very grateful for the food, but he wondered how he was going to find his way out again. He also wondered if he should thank someone for their generosity, but no one seemed to be paying him any attention. One by one the children were all leaving the tables, stacking their empty plates neatly on small carts as they left. The carts were then wheeled back into the kitchen by other children, servers wearing white or blue aprons.

Sparrow turned to look at Jimmy, his mind racing with questions. "I had no idea this place existed", he said. "Where are we anyway?"

"Already told you that - this is the Shelter - this is where we live," said Jimmy. "This room was actually an underground station once, I think. I heard that Figgy and the elders took this place over a couple of years ago. Some of the furniture and curtains and stuff they must have scrounged themselves, but a lot of it was already here. The kitchens and the dorm rooms were all ready to use when they found this place. I heard this was an army base years and years ago. There are loads of storerooms here and we found jackets and boots and just tons of stuff." Jimmy smiled. "That's where most of the toughs got their jackets from. They really seem to like them."

"Who is Figgy, and who are the elders?" asked Sparrow, puzzled. "And who are the toughs?"

"You really don't know nothing, do you?" said Jimmy, grinning even wider now. "Figgy is the big red-headed kid sitting in the middle of the top table - he is the leader. Everyone else there, those are the elders - there is one elder from each group. The tall thin boy next to Figgy is Martin. He's the head scrounger. You'll like Martin, he's ok."

Sparrow still looked puzzled, so Jimmy continued. "You know I told you earlier you were a scrounger?" Sparrow nodded. "Well the toughs are another group, like the scroungers. The toughs are generally the bigger, stronger kids. They are good for fighting or carrying heavy stuff."

The main room was almost empty now, most of the children had disappeared off into the various side rooms. Sparrow took his plate and, following Jimmy, stacked it neatly with the others on the waiting cart. As he turned to leave he almost bumped right into Martin, who was standing talking to Jimmy.

"Good to meet you, Sparrow," said Martin. "I hope Jimmy has been making you feel welcome?"

Sparrow nodded, not sure what to say. He was afraid Martin was going to ask him to leave now that dinner was over. He still had a lot of questions he wanted to ask Jimmy. He wasn't looking forward to going back outside, it would be cold and dark by now. Then his face brightened. Perhaps Martin would ask him to come again tomorrow?

To his surprise, Martin pulled up a chair and sat down. "Why don't we sit here and talk for a bit?" he said. "I'd like to tell you some more about us, and I'm sure you have lots of questions."

Sparrow nodded again, and he and Jimmy pulled up seats next to the older boy.

"Since I am the head scrounger, I'll be in charge of you," said Martin. "Jimmy can show you around in a minute. You don't have any chores to do yet. I generally hand those out after breakfast." He looked at the disheveled young boy in front of him. "You should pick up some clean clothes too. Jimmy can show you where the storage rooms are - just take whatever you need."

Sparrow looked even more puzzled - he didn't much like the sound of chores or of someone being in charge of him, but he would like some clean clothes.

"What are all of you doing down here?" asked Sparrow, finding his voice. "Do you live here? How did you all get here? Don't you have homes and parents and so on?"

"Yes, we live down here," said Martin. "We call ourselves the Misplaced, we live here because we don't fit in anywhere else. We got here much the same way you did - we were drawn to this place. There is something here, a hidden power. You can feel it too if you concentrate. There is a power in each of us too - stronger in some than in others. This is our home now, we have everything we need down here. Most of us here are like you - we were orphans or runaways living rough on the streets."

"What about school?"

"We don't have a formal school, but we do have the carers. They look after the younger children, and they have powers of their own, different to the scroungers. They can heal some wounds too, mainly cuts and sprains."

"I don't understand any of this about powers and scroungers and all that," said Sparrow. "How does that affect me - I don't have any powers. I can't heal people or do anything like that"

"Sure you can," said Jimmy. "Like earlier when you were running from that stall holder? I was right there too, watching you like I was told. Why do you think he ran right past you? Don't you remember trying to hide from him, trying to make it so he couldn't see you? That is how you use your powers - you concentrate really hard and you make something happen. You made yourself invisible - that's how I knew you are a scrounger. All us scroungers can do that - make ourselves not seen for a while."

"What do you mean 'watching you like I was told'?" said Sparrow, "Who told you to watch me, and why?"

“That was me, Sparrow. I told Jimmy to keep an eye on you when he could,” said Martin. “We have known about you for a while now. We are always looking out for more of us, more Misplaced, so that we can bring them here. We can sense if someone has power in them, we can feel it. In the same way that we were guided to this place, children with power will be guided here too - though they don’t know why. We don’t actively recruit people, you see, but we accept all those who turn up.”

Sparrow was torn. He really wanted to hear more about the Misplaced and this strange underground shelter they lived in, but he didn’t want to outstay his welcome.

“I suppose I’d better be going now,” he said in a quiet voice. “Thank you very much for the food – I was really hungry. Can I come back tomorrow and hear some more?”

Martin grinned broadly at this. “You haven’t understood yet, have you?” he said. “You can live here, with us, if you choose to. You are one of us, you are Misplaced. We would like you to join us. We have food, clothes, and somewhere warm and dry for you to sleep.”

The idea of sleeping somewhere warm and dry was tempting, especially compared to another cold night on a park bench. Perhaps he could stay for one night, thought Sparrow. It was probably still raining outside too. He nodded slowly in agreement.

“Good, that’s settled then,” said Martin. “Jimmy will show you where the boys’ dorms are, just pick out an empty bunk. Let me know if you need anything else, otherwise I’ll see you at our meeting tomorrow morning. Jimmy can tell you where it is.”

The Warehouse

Sparrow was having a wonderful dream. He had found a magical place with a lot of new friends, as much food as he wanted, clean clothes that didn't have holes in, and a warm bed to sleep in at night. He was so warm and comfortable he didn't want to wake up. The only problem was that someone kept poking him in the side. He swatted the hand away and rolled over, trying to get back to his dream.

"Wake up, wake up, rise and shine," said Jimmy, poking him again. "Come on, Sparrow, we've already missed breakfast".

Sparrow sat up with a start. It wasn't a dream, it was real.

"All right, all right," he grumbled good-naturedly. "Stop poking me will you? I'm getting up now, ok?"

"Don't take too long," said Jimmy. "We can grab some food in the kitchen before the meeting starts. Get dressed; I'll see you in the dining hall." Finally convinced that Sparrow was not going to go back to sleep again, Jimmy left him to get dressed.

Sparrow hopped lightly out of bed. The dorm room was empty except for him, nothing but rows of empty bunk beds the entire length of the room. He really must have overslept. He got washed and dressed in a hurry, anxious now to see what the day would bring. This was his first full day in the Shelter. Any thoughts of going back to his old life had left him. This was a lot better than living on the cold and rainy London streets.

He wanted to try his powers again, but Jimmy had warned him not to use them too often. They had stayed up late last night, talking about the shelter and the Misplaced and the different powers they all had. Sparrow had practiced turning himself invisible, concentrating hard to make himself unseen. He was good enough at it now that he knew he could do it at will. It was still an effort though, a strain on his mind. Jimmy had told him that was normal. Using the power was a lot like exercising a muscle - it got stronger with use, but you had to be careful not to overdo it.

Jimmy was sitting waiting for him when he went out into the dining hall, chatting with two other scroungers Sparrow had seen last night at dinner and a tall, strong looking girl with long brown hair who he didn't recognize. His heart sunk a bit when he saw that he really had missed breakfast. The dining tables were almost empty, the servers busying in and out of the kitchen clearing the last dishes.

Jimmy smiled and got up. "There you are, sleepyhead," he said, then turned back to the others. "We are going to grab something to eat from the kitchen before the meeting," he told them. "I'll see you there in a few minutes. You should come too, Tanya," he said, looking at the tall girl. "Martin told me to ask you along. He probably wants some help from the toughs this week." Tanya nodded in agreement.

Sparrow wasn't sure if he liked Tanya or if he was scared of her, or both. She had an odd face, he

thought, more plain than pretty. Her jaw was broad and square, and her confident eyes seemed to pierce right through him. She looked friendly enough when she smiled, but Sparrow was certain he'd lose a fight with her. He decided to stay on her good side just in case - much better to have her as a friend than an enemy.

He followed Jimmy into the kitchen. The air was pleasantly warm, still heavy with the smell of breakfast. The cooks and servers were hurrying around, washing dishes and stacking plates. The kitchen prepared two meals a day on weekdays, and three on Sunday. Most of the children were out during the day, either doing their chores or just playing in one of the local parks, so no formal lunch was served during the week. Jimmy had told him that Sunday lunch was especially good - they always had a roast of some kind with all the trimmings. Saturday and Sunday evening meals were much simpler. A lot of the older children were still out then, so instead of a set meal the cooks just laid out snacks on the long serving counter that ran almost the entire width of the room.

Jimmy ducked under the counter and led Sparrow straight up to a heavy set boy in a stained white apron. He had a large round face with small eyes. His thick, meaty arms were busy cleaning a heavy pan. This must be the head cook, Sparrow decided.

"Hey Tubbs - can you cook us some eggs or something? We missed breakfast," said Jimmy.

"Two plates of scrambled eggs and toast, coming right up," said Tubbs. "You should start getting up earlier, Jimmy. That way you could make breakfast." He picked up a large frying pan and a single egg, and began cooking on a huge old fashioned electric stove.

"That isn't going to be much between the two of us," Sparrow whispered to Jimmy, but Jimmy didn't seem at all concerned.

"Just wait and see, my hungry friend," he said, a tone of mystery in his voice. "Tubbs always makes plenty, don't you worry."

Sparrow watched, fascinated, as the cook concentrated hard on his work. As he gently stirred the eggy mixture, it seemed to grow and grow. Eventually the entire pan was full with steaming scrambled eggs. When he was happy they were done, Tubbs scooped them out onto two plates and added two slices of thick buttered toast each.

"How on earth did he do that?" said Sparrow, looking at the two plates heaped with eggs. "There was one small egg in there at first, and then it just ... grew."

"He's a cook, that is what they do," answered Jimmy, amused by the look of surprise on Sparrow's face. "That is their power, no idea how it works. They just start cooking a little bit of something, then when they are finished they have lots of it. Anyway, eat up. When we're finished I'll show you where the meeting room is."

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Sparrow had never been to a meeting before. He didn't really see the point of this one, either, and

was very pleased when it was over. Martin had called together all the scroungers, plus a few of the toughs including Tanya. As far as Sparrow could tell, the scroungers were in pairs, and Martin had handed each pair a piece of paper with a list of items they needed for the week. Sparrow had been worried he would be given something to do on his own, so he was relieved when he was teamed up with Jimmy and Tanya.

“So what is this warehouse we are supposed to go to,” Sparrow asked Jimmy.

“I think that is something Figgy found, ages ago,” said Jimmy. “It’s an old disused warehouse about half a mile south of here. We use it for extra storage space, it’s useful to have somewhere above ground to store stuff. Then when we need things Martin sends a couple of us out to go get them.”

“Are we going to have to lug all that back here?” said Sparrow, looking at the list Martin had given to Jimmy.

“You two just carry some of the lighter stuff,” said Tanya. “Let me take care of the heavier items. That’s why Martin wanted me to go along.”

Even though she was the largest and strongest of the three, Sparrow doubted that she would be able to carry several boxes at once, all of them full with clothes. He wasn’t about to say this to Tanya though, better just to keep quiet and see what happened.

“Let’s get going then,” said Jimmy, leading the way out of the shelter to the main tunnel. Sparrow recognized the first part of the tunnel from the previous night, but then Jimmy led them further south, and then into a smaller tunnel that branched off on their left.

After about a mile, the tunnel reached a dead end. Dusty wooden stairs led up to the ceiling, which looked as though it might have once had some kind of trap door in it. However if there ever had been an opening there, it was now blocked by a solid cement ceiling. As they got closer to the stairs, Sparrow began to hear a low buzzing in his ears, and the air at the top of the stairs seemed to shimmer slightly.

“There’s a portal there,” said Jimmy, pointing to the top of the stairs. “Keep hold of me, I’ll lead you through,” he said, taking Sparrow by the arm, but Sparrow shook his head and stayed where he was.

“Let me try it on my own,” he said. “How do I make it work?”

“Ok,” said Jimmy. “It’s easy, really. Just concentrate on the portal, right at the top of the stairs there. Think about the trap door that used to be there years ago. Just keep thinking about what it used to look like, and you’ll see it. When you can see the portal, just climb right through it and go straight through to the other side. Don’t hang around in the portal though, that’s important. Martin told me never to wait in the portal, just go through it.”

“But I have no idea what it used to look like, that’s silly.” said Sparrow. “How am I supposed to know what the trap door looked like when I have never seen it?”

“Don’t be daft,” said Jimmy. “You don’t need to know exactly what it looks like. All the portals are doorways, you can just think of a door if you like. Think of a door or an opening, anything you can go through. That should be good enough to trigger it.”

Sparrow wasn’t convinced, but he was prepared to try it anyway. He screwed up his eyes and thought about an old wooden trapdoor, set into what was now a solid floor. Perhaps it would be covered in cobwebs, he thought, and the wooden planks would be dry as bone and faded with age.

For a few seconds, nothing happened. Then the buzzing sound got louder, and a bright blue portal appeared, right where he had imagined a trap door to be. He couldn’t see a trap door, but there was a large hole where solid floor used to be. He put his arms through the hole and pulled himself up into the room. Behind him, Jimmy and Tanya followed.

Sparrow found himself in an old, wood beamed warehouse. Shafts of daylight filtered in through a pair of dirt covered skylights, high overhead. He could make out several stacks of boxes, each one covered with a faded green tarpaulin. Empty wooden pallets were scattered around the floor. At the far end of the warehouse, a pair of sliding metal doors were closed tightly together, a heavy metal chain wound between the handles, the ends of the chain padlocked together. There was a smaller door with a keyhole to the left of the two large ones.

Jimmy walked over to one of the stacks of boxes and dragged the tarpaulin off. “Here we are,” he said. “Most of the clothes Martin wants should be in here.”

“How did all this stuff get here?” asked Sparrow. “Did you really steal all this?”

“It’s scrounging, not stealing,” said Jimmy. “We just scrounge what we need to live, and we all need clothes, don’t we? This place was Figgy’s idea, ain’t it brilliant? Some of the stuff is scrounged, that’s true, but a lot of it we buy. Figgy or one of the older kids arranges to be here when it gets delivered. Figgy said we needed a place with a proper delivery address to store things, and he was right.”

Sparrow was still doubtful. He wondered where Figgy got the money from in the first place, but he decided he might not like the answer if he ever found out. “How come they deliver to a bunch of kids?” he asked. “Don’t you have to sign for it or something?”

“Like I said,” answered Jimmy. “Figgy or one of the older kids is always here to sign for it. If they ask any questions you tell ‘em your dad has just left, but that he told you to sign for anything that came. They won’t ask any more questions after that - they just want to deliver the boxes and be gone.”

Jimmy and Tanya started sorting through the boxes, passing them down to Sparrow to stack onto one of the wooden pallets. They put aside two of the smaller boxes for the two boys to carry. They had almost finished when they heard voices coming from outside the warehouse, voices that got louder and louder, and footsteps that got closer and closer, ending up right outside the small door.

Sparrow held his breath waiting for the footsteps to die away, but they stopped outside the

warehouse door. There was a crack of splintering wood, and Sparrow watched horrified as the metal tip of a crowbar was forced between the door and the frame.

“You two, find somewhere to hide - right now!” whispered Tanya. “Let me take care of this.”

Sparrow glanced at Jimmy, and they moved together behind a stack of boxes. Sparrow saw Jimmy concentrate, then his whole body seemed to shift and blur. So we can see each other when we are invisible, thought Sparrow, just no one else can see us. Standing next to Jimmy, he imagined himself small and hidden too. The power came easily to him this time, and the pain in his head was much lighter than before.

The door burst open and three rough looking men slunk into the warehouse. All three were unshaven, and wore thick black leather jackets. The leader of the group was completely bald with a long scar running down his left cheek. He was hefting the crowbar in his hands, as if he enjoyed feeling the weight of it.

“Look at all these boxes, they must be full of clothes and stuff,” said the man closest to Sparrow, pulling open one of the boxes stacked near the door. “I bet we can flog this for a fortune at the market.”

“You’re not going to be flogging anything,” said Tanya loudly, stepping out into the middle of room. “Who do you think you are, breaking in like that? I’ll call the police if you don’t get out.” All three men jumped at the sound of her voice, then the leader let out a low chuckle.

“It’s just a kid. Hey kid, beat it out of here, unless you really want a smack on the head?” He raised his arm and advanced menacingly towards Tanya, who didn’t move an inch. The other men snickered.

Sparrow looked questioningly at Jimmy, but Jimmy just motioned for him to wait. The bald man took a careless swipe at Tanya, and she ducked easily away from it.

“See, I asked you nicely to leave,” said Tanya calmly. “So what happens now is really your fault, not mine.”

Sparrow watched fascinated as power seemed to build around Tanya. Like a leaf in a windstorm, the bald man was lifted straight up in the air, and then flung screaming towards the other two men. He smacked hard into one of them and they both ended up sprawled on the floor.

Sparrow felt Jimmy tugging on his sleeve, pointing at the one man still standing. Sparrow nodded in agreement; he knew exactly what Jimmy was going to do. This was a lot like a tackle on the rugby field, except their target had no idea they were there. They both dove hard at the man’s legs, who went down with an astonished yelp. The two boys rolled away and crawled to the edge of the building.

The bald man disentangled himself from his friend and struggled to his feet, still holding his crowbar. The other two got up and looked at each other with scared eyes, ready to run.

“I ain’t never seen nothing like that,” said one of them to the other. “Must be some kind of martial arts or something.”

“All right, all right, we’re leaving,” said the bald man, and pretended to turn and leave. With a single swift motion, he turned back towards Tanya and threw the crowbar at her, the heavy piece of iron spinning dangerously through the air towards her head.

“Look out!” shouted Sparrow, afraid the cowardly attack was going to catch Tanya off guard. He needn’t have worried. Tanya had kept her gaze fixed on the bald man as he turned to leave. The spinning crowbar never reached its intended target. Tanya just seemed to glance at it and it stopped dead still, hanging impossibly in midair. Then it turned around, and flew as straight as an arrow, whistling just past the bald man’s head and ending up buried in the warehouse wall. The three men had seen more than enough. All three fled the warehouse, jostling with each other to get through the narrow door.

Tanya closed the small warehouse door, and looked at the now broken lock. “I’ll ask Figgy to send a fixer out to mend that,” she said. “Don’t worry, I doubt those three thugs will ever show their faces around here again.”

Sparrow was still shaking from the fight. He looked over at Jimmy, who was grinning widely. The dull pain was building in Sparrow’s head, and he was relieved to release the power and turn visible again.

They hurriedly finished moving the last boxes onto the wooden pallet. Jimmy and Sparrow took one box each, leaving Tanya to mentally lift the pallet a few inches off the ground. Sparrow was impressed how effortlessly she moved the stack of boxes. He wondered just how powerful she really was? They made their way carefully through the portal and then down the old wooden stairs into the tunnel.

When they were safely back at the shelter, Tanya insisted that they went to find Figgy, to tell him what had happened. They found both Figgy and Martin reading newspapers in the reading room. With frequent interruptions from both Sparrow and Jimmy, Tanya told the two elders what had happened. Martin was mainly concerned that no-one was hurt, but Figgy was beaming with pride at Tanya.

“Good job they took a tough along, what do you say, Martin?” said Figgy. Martin just nodded in reply. “Nice going Tanya, looks like I trained you well.”

“You know, one day when I leave here, Tanya is going to make a fine leader for the toughs,” said Figgy, looking pointedly at Martin as if daring him to disagree.

“A fine leader for the toughs indeed,” said Martin, returning Figgy’s stare. Sparrow had the feeling he was missing something important here, but he was too tired to care. He was glad when Martin told them all they could go and clean up and rest for a while before dinner. Whatever problems Martin seemed to have with Figgy, he was glad they didn’t involve him.