

A Lesson in Magic

Lesson 1- Always take a friend, the buddy system is key.

There are many experiences that most women would consider to be pretty much universal. One of those experiences is having to walk somewhere after dark. It's a nerve wracking experience more often than not.

You nervously clutch your keys, glancing around, trying to keep to the well lit areas and avoid any people on the street. The problem is there are no other people on this street. Why is that a problem?

Well it's a problem because if I am the only other person on this street, why can I hear a second set of footsteps behind me? I'm on high alert, looking around cautiously but I can't see anyone. I hurry and walk a little faster, reluctant to run in case it causes someone to chase. Is it weird for me to assume the footsteps are someone following me? Maybe. But I just can't shake the feeling.

A few times today while I was working my job at the local kindergarten I felt eyes on me, but every time a kid would start crying or fighting and I would forget about it. But now that I'm walking home in the dark all those times come rushing back to me. Why oh why did Mr Rollinson have to be so late picking up his daughter? Usually I make it home before it gets dark. I only live a few minutes away from my workplace. But today he called and said he was running late.

As the newest and least experienced member of the staff, I was the one who got stuck hanging around for him so that the kid could go home and I could lock up afterwards. As a result I'm stuck walking home in the dark. I should have called for an uber or something but I didn't want to waste the money, I figured it's such a short walk after all. By the time the uber arrived I'd probably already be home! Well I'm regretting that decision now. I make a quick mental assessment of my situation. I'm about ten minutes from home.

Maybe less if I run, but I've never been all that athletic and I have asthma so running would probably end badly. I don't have much in the way of ways to defend myself, just my keys which I'm already clutching, my handbag and my empty lunchbox. My shoes are flat heeled black boots which are good for moving around at least.

You need good shoes to chase after toddlers all day. My jeans and baby pink shirt with the kindergarten's colourful logo on it do not lend well to blending or hiding, but that might be my only choice. My long brown hair is tied back in a loose ponytail with a light wave in the end. It was curled when I left home this morning but it didn't last all day.

That is such a pointless thought to be having right now. Still, at least my hair is out of the way although I'm suddenly picturing all the ways a ponytail could be a problem. Is it easier for an attacker to yank my hair back if my hair is up or down? This really feels like the kind of thing we should be taught in school.

Maybe I can call someone for help, but who? The police? It would take forever for them to get here, it would be faster to run home. Plus what am I going to say? I THINK there MIGHT be someone else on the same street as me and I ASSUME they're following me?

Yeah I doubt they would be coming in a hurry. I could try my brother Damien. He would come if I asked, but he's a firefighter and is working a late shift tonight. Which means he's either dealing with an emergency OR he's at the fire station. It would take him just as long to arrive as the police.

Okay, new plan. It's dark, but it's not THAT late. Maybe there's a shop or business open somewhere nearby that I can duck into. Somewhere with people where I can hang out until whoever this is goes on their way. Or until I can call an uber to take me the rest of the way home. I search around, but all the buildings around me seem dark.

Shit, shit, shit! I mindlessly turn right down a side street. I'm not heading towards home anymore, but I'm pretty sure there is a service station or something this way. I don't care what the place is at this point, just as long as it's well lit and has people.

I'm only walking a little longer before I realise that turning was a mistake. Clearly I had my directions wrong. The streets are actually getting darker and there is no sign of a service station. The footsteps behind me are getting closer.

My heart is racing and I'm sweating way too much for such a cool night. I walk faster and I can feel my ponytail flicking around my shoulders. My chest is tight, either from asthma or anxiety, maybe some combination of the two.

I should probably take my inhaler but I'm not willing to stop and dig around in my bag right now. The footsteps behind me are so loud, I risk a quick look behind me and finally I can see him. A tall, lanky man. He looks kind of unkempt with

scraggly hair and an unhealthy pallor. We make eye contact and his eyes must catch light from somewhere because they flash an odd yellow colour.

The man grins at me and increases his stride, gaining on me. That's it, there's no point pretending I didn't see him. I break into a run, clutching my bag and lunchbox to my chest. I'm panicking badly, I can't breathe and I think I might be lost. Everywhere is dark and I have no idea where to go. I'm considering knocking on a random door and screaming for help when I hear it.

Down to my right I can hear music. I don't know exactly where it is but I immediately veer right and head towards it. My lungs are burning and I feel a little dizzy. I don't think I'm getting enough oxygen, still I power through. The music gets louder. I can see the building it's coming from, there are lights on in the windows. I rush towards it and yank on the door but it doesn't open.

Damn it the door is locked! Of course it's locked, this is the back of the building. I ran down an alley without checking which side of the building I was on. And now, genius that I am, I'm stuck in a dead end alley with nowhere to go. Maybe I lost the guy? I turn around and shriek when I realise that he is standing only a few feet away and is steadily approaching.

The yellow glint is back in his eyes. I don't know what else to do so I throw my lunchbox at him. It's pretty pointless. He flicks it away and growls at me. Huh? Growls? Who the hell growls at people? I clutch my keys, holding them out in front of me like a weapon.

A useless, pointless weapon that is going to do me zero good because I can't even breathe right now, much less fight off a guy who is probably a good foot taller than me. He takes another step towards me and into the light streaming from the window of the building and now I'm sure that I've not gotten enough oxygen because there is something not right here.

What I thought was sunken in cheeks and a sickly pallor is actually a completely deformed face streaked with greyish fur. In fact the man's whole body has chunks of fur everywhere, like a sick dog who has lost half his fur. I bet this guy has fleas or something. He grins at me again, taking in my horror and now I can see his teeth, or should I say fangs. What the actual hell is he? I scream at the top of my lungs and with the hand that isn't holding keys, I bash on the door behind me.

"SOMEONE LET ME IN. PLEASE HELP ME. PLEASE! I NEED HELP, I'LL DO ANYTHING PLEASE!" I scream mindlessly. The creature reaches for me. I swipe at him with my keys but he catches my wrist and yanks me forward. I feel something biting into my wrist and I see his clawed fingers as they draw blood. I can't

breathe, this is too much. My vision is blurring. I'm about to die in a back alley and my final thought is that I wish Mr Rollinson hadn't been so late.



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