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## The New Wizard

The Kingdom of Syrrelle was a beautiful land, a place where people were always happy because nothing bad ever happened; and good things popped up when needed. If the crops wanted water, the rains came; and the Sun shone warm at just the right time of year to ripen the fruit. This was no mystery - it truly was magic. For many years, more than anyone could remember, Bramblewerm, the Wizard, had mixed his potions and cast his spells to make sure the Kingdom was safe and pleasant. So, it was a worry that, one day, seeds for the new crops had been sown, but there was no rain to moisten the soil.

It was possible that Bramblewerm had forgotten to summon the rain-clouds. "He does have a lot to think about, Your Majesty," suggested the King's servant, Raymond, "He hasn't been his usual self lately. Maybe he's sick."

"Rubbish!" growled the King, "Wizards don't get sick."

"Well," Raymond tried again, "He must be getting very old."

"Double rubbish! Wizards don't get old either," the King insisted, "They are supposed to live forever." With that, he spun on his heel and stormed out of his chamber. "Come on! I'm going to find out what Bramblewerm's playing at!"

With the King bustling along in front, Raymond hurried behind to keep up. Through the castle they went: along corridors, down flights of stone stairs, deeper and deeper until they were standing before a large wooden door. By this time, the King was out of breath and very angry. "He'd better have a good explanation," he puffed, "And why is it so cold? It never used to be - Bramblewerm always kept it warm down here." He noticed Raymond about to knock on the door and ordered: "Don't do that! I'm the King! It's my castle and I can go anywhere without having to knock!" Raymond shrugged and opened the door. The King burst into the room. "Bramblewerm!" he bellowed, "We need to have words!" When there was no response, and no sign of the Wizard, he yelled: "Bramblewerm, where are you?"

"Here," said a quiet voice. It came from a small dog sitting beside a pile of rags. "We were making a brew in the cauldron and my Master was going for some more things to put in it when he stopped suddenly, gave a long sigh, then sort-of disappeared." The dog nudged the rags with his nose. "This is all that's left of him."

Raymond's eyes were popping. "If our Wizard has gone," he said, "What are we going to do?" He turned to the King. "You must get us a new Wizard, Your Majesty, or Syrelle will be in ruins!"

The King frowned at his servant. "How am I going to do that? And where do I get a Wizard, anyway? Bramblewerm was here before I was born - I wouldn't even know where to get another Wizard." He turned his attention to the dog. "You are Bramblewerm's familiar, aren't you - the special friend he needed to make his magic work?"

"Well, I *was*," admitted the dog, "Before he disappeared."

"So," said the King, "You must have seen what he used to do; and there's no reason you can't do the same on your own without him."

"Er...", the dog murmured, "I'm not sure I can remember how."

"Maybe *you* can't," said a squeaky voice even quieter than the dog's, "But I can."

The King and Raymond looked to where the voice seemed to be coming from. On a table beside a bowl of cherries sat a tiny, bright-blue creature. "Who are you?" demanded the King, "I don't recall asking your advice."

"You didn't," said the little blue creature, "But I'll give it to you anyway. You being King, you could ignore it; but that would make you a very silly Majesty, without doubt." The King was speechless and just stared open-mouthed. The little creature went on: "My name is Lillfing. I am the very best friend of Digby who, as well as being a dog, you also know as Bramblewerm's familiar. With regard to knowing and remembering stuff; as you can see, I am a miniature elephant, an animal that is renowned for having a long and flawless memory." Lillfing paused to allow this to sink in, then added: "In light of which, Your Kingship, you have two choices - spend who knows how long searching for another Wizard; or give Digby a chance as the new Wiz, with me as his familiar."

"It could be an answer," coaxed Raymond, "At least for now."

"Hmm." The King pondered, looking around the room, then from the dog to the tiny elephant. Finally he announced: "In my majestic wisdom, I do decree that Digby the dog shall be Deputy Wizard, and Lillfing the unbelievably-short elephant shall be his familiar. They - *you*, that is - will do whatever has to be done to magic some rain that will help the crops to grow before we all starve." He thought for a moment, then asked Lillfing: "By the way, what are you - a boy, or a girl?"

The King and his servant had gone. Lillfing was quite upset. "Everyone knows it's blue for a girl and pink for a boy," she said, "I don't think our King is all that smart." Digby didn't answer: he was trying to rummage through Bramblewerm's old spell books. Lillfing asked: "What are you doing?"

"Looking for a spell to bring on the rain," replied Digby, "But I can't even turn the pages properly without hands. I've only got paws and a nose. This is never going to work, Lillfing. I'm just a dog, and I'll always be a dog. I simply can't be a Wizard."

A strange voice drifted up from the floor: "Clothes do maketh the man, my old friend."

Digby's fur was standing on end. "Did you say that?" he asked Lillfing in a trembling whisper.

"Not Lillfing, Digby," said the same voice. "Surely you haven't forgotten me already? We've been together for so long."

"Bramblewerm?" said the dog in surprise, his head wrinkling in a frown. "Where are you? I hear you, but I can't see you."

"He must be under his robes," suggested Lillfing, trying to push her way into the pile of rags.

"Not here, Lillfing," said Bramblewerm. "I am beyond the robes. I now pass them to you, Digby. You must wear them, if you are to be the new Wizard of Syrelle."

"How can I do that?" asked Digby. "Look," he started to say, his voice becoming muffled as he nosed his way into the pile of rags on the floor. "They're too big, and they weren't meant for a dog."

Bramblewerm's voice chuckled. "Is that right, my friend? Aren't you beginning to feel a little different?" The pile of rags stirred and rose slightly, then a bit more. "Your nose is tingling, is it not?"

"Oooh," mumbled Digby from under the robes, "This is weird."

"Not weird, Digby," said Bramblewerm, "It's magic, and you are about to inherit the powers I pass on to you now. No longer will you be my familiar, nor even Digby the dog." As the room seemed to darken, the robes with Digby under them began to glow. "Arise Wizwoh, the new Wizard of Syrelle."

In moments, the robes had grown to the height of a man, and a man was wearing them. "My word, very impressive, Digby," said Lillfing, then corrected herself: "Sorry - Wizwoh. Your face is kind-of similar to the one you had before; the nose is shorter, though. I guess now you've grown into a proper Wizard you'll be wanting a new familiar."

"Why would I, Lillfing, when I have you?" said Wizwoh.

"Quite right," Bramblewerm's voice added, "A Wizard must know and trust his familiar; while you, Lillfing, are the special friend who will help make his magic work. Now I should go. I leave the peace and safety of Syrelle in your hands. Be wise, Wizwoh; and be patient with him, Lillfing. I bid you both farewell." The last words rose into the air and began fading as if Bramblewerm was flying away.

Wizwoh felt suddenly alone and called out: "Will you ever return - if we need you?"

"You won't," Bramblewerm's voiced echoed from far away, "Learn together and your mistakes will hopefully be few. As for returning, I may pop back to see how you're getting on in, let's say, a hundred years or so..." Then he had gone.

Sometime later, there was a knock on the door and Raymond entered. He was puzzled, then shocked to see the back of a man wearing Wizard's robes and said: "Bramblewerm?"

"Bramblewerm's retired," said Lillfing, "May I introduce you to Wizwoh, the new Wizard of Syrelle."

Raymond was even more confused when Wizwoh turned. "N-new W-wizard...?" he stammered, then frowned, "I think I should know you. Your face looks familiar."

Lillfing giggled. "Similar, maybe; but not *familiar*, not anymore. Now, what do you want?"

"Er..." Raymond had to think for a moment, then remembered why he had come. "The King demands to know what's happening about the rain; and he summons Digby, the Deputy Wizard, to his chamber. Where is he, by the way - Digby, I mean?"

There was a brief silence which made Raymond very uncomfortable, then Lillfing urged: "Go on - do it, like we practised."

Wizwoh nodded and smiled. His arm came up and the sleeve of his robe covered his face. It lowered briefly. Raymond's mouth fell open as he found himself staring at Digby the dog's head on the Wizard's shoulders. The sleeve rose again, to drop a moment later, and the face was once again that of Wizwoh. While the servant was still dumbfounded, Lillfing said: "You should go back to your King and tell him that the new Wizard of Syrelle will not be summoned, ordered, commanded, or anything else. As for him demanding, that's not a word anyone with sense would throw at a Wizard; not unless he wants to get turned into a newt. If his Majesty wishes an audience with my Master, Wizwoh, he will have to make an appointment like anyone else. Now, toddle off; and close the door behind you."

Once the servant had gone, Wizwoh said: "I think you might have been a bit rude. The King won't be very happy."

"Not straight away," replied Lillfing, "But when we bring the rain, what can he say?"

"I've been thinking about that," said Wizwoh, "The rain, I mean. Do you reckon that new spell we concocted will work? What if it doesn't? What if we bring too much rain? We could drown everyone."

"No, no," Lillfing assured him, "That will never happen. And even if it does, we can just try again. The way Bramblewerm was talking, we'll have plenty of time. In a hundred years or so we may actually be able to get it right."