The Leak in the Well

By: Elise Fiala

So there I was, staring down a deep, dark well. I called out, but all I could hear was my voice echoing back to me. I turned to look at the duke who stood nervously behind me. Sweat dripped from what was perfect hair and now resembled a mop glued to his scalp. "What do you expect me to do?" I inquired impatiently as I tapped my foot.

"Well…I…" He stammered "I thought, you know, seeing as…you've um…well…done several *favors* for the kingdom before, that maybe you'd have an idea." I stared back down into the well to examine the black water. A day ago, I had been informed that the water from the well had *mysteriously* turned dark, I guess after I saved the kingdom from annihilation a few years back I'm the first to be called about any *mysterious* situations.

"Well you're outa luck. I got nothin'." I uttered nonchalantly, crossing my arms. The duke stared back at me with such a look I could've sworn he was a begging puppy and I felt something I assumed was pity. "Actually, maybe I can help you." I sighed regretfully. I had better things to do, but maybe it was time I tried caring for once. "I know someone who can give us some more information, but you'll have to wait a few days."

The duke nodded vigorously and exclaimed "Thank you! Thank you! That'll be perfect, just let me know if there's anything you need!" I already regretted my decision, but it was too late now.

Two days later, Zach showed up at my doorstep. If there was one exception for my "No caring" policy, it would have to be him. He's sort of off limits because he's a magical being, but he looks human enough to me. To Zach 'magical being' works, but he prefers to be called a

wizard. I think anyone who knew as much as he did could be qualified as a wizard, no matter what their species. He sometimes scared me with all his deep, philosophical talk, but I'm about as used to it now as I am to the sun cycle. "So what'd ya do this time?" He teased. I rolled my eyes as he sauntered into my pitiful residence.

"I just need you to check out the well nearby." I replied lucidly.

"When?" He articulated.

"Now. Or…as soon as possible anyway." I finished, trying a little too hard to sound considerate. None the less, Zach followed me to the well and began to investigate. A new stench wafted through the air around us and clogged our noses. Even the curious villagers steered clear of the putrid odor.

"Well it doesn't take a genius to know what this is." He concluded daftly. I rolled my eyes yet again at the irony as he continued, "Seems you've got a leak!" I lifted my eyes from the grass patch on the dusty road to look at him. He smiled at me and for once I couldn't help but smile back. I wiped it off my face quickly and listened intently, "It doesn't happen often, but every once in a while you get a crack in the barrier between the underworld and the overworld. This one seems pretty bad." He finished as he leaned back to stare into the blackness again. "These cracks are usually small, but this one is big enough to let some thick gunk through. Normally all you do to close 'em is apply a magic barrier, but not in this case." I squinted at him through the blazing sunlight.

"So what'd we do?" I asked.

"Take a trip to the underworld." He stated casually.

"You're kidding." I muttered.

"Nope!" He smiled, but I grimaced.

"When!?" I protested.

"Whenever…" He ventured. "I should go, I'll leave this situation to you. Oh yeah…here." he struggled to pull something out of his pocket. Shiny gold and silver blinded me as he placed whatever it was in my hands gently. "One use only, so take good care of it. Oh! I almost forgot. Remember; light the fire and all will be clear! This should work well enough." He handed me a small glass vile with a wooden cork. It seemed to be filled with orange sand. I always hated when he spoke in riddles, but I guess I had kind of accepted that aspect of him too. I watched him hike off until he disappeared behind the local tavern. I caught myself smiling again and, frustrated, I started back home.

After careful observation of the gleaming object Zach had given me I was no closer to figuring out what it was then when he first pulled the thing out of his pocket. In dismay, I flung the item to the wooden floor boards. I began to walk off to who knows where, but there was no need. In the next second a gush of air and pure force jolted me forwards into the wall, a deafening bang rang in my ears. Then nothing.

When I woke, I was struck with quite the scenery. It didn't take too many tries to guess where I ended up after that whole explosion thing. Leave it to Zach to give you an explosive and expect you to know what to do with it.

So there I was, sitting at the front gate of a city. Not to mention, an undead city and all I had to go on was "light the fire." I stood up silently. Even I knew what dwelled in the shadows down here, and I didn't plan on waking them. My choices were, at this point, downgraded to two; do what you came here to do or die. It crossed my mind that either were eligible, but I swiped the thought away as I entered through the stone arch into the city.

I hadn't walked far before quiet voices began to echo off the stone fortress walls. Whispers, moans and whimpers seemed to emanate from every dark corner. I tried to ignore them at first, but they seemed to penetrate my skin…, and even into my soul. I covered my ears and began to jog along the dull roads and past the cracked houses. I reached a point where stairs lifted me to the next level of the domain and I continued running with my hands firmly placed over my ears. Moments later, the streets, decorated with eerie, unlit lamp posts, were suddenly illuminated by hundreds of eyes. They appeared in the corners, cold, dark and emotionless eyes. I turned away from them and broke into a sprint. I needed to get away from these creatures, but I couldn't turn back.

I don't know how many levels I climbed, but when I got to the highest point in the city the recent memories of the climb below were all a blur of *don't look…don't listen…,* but now I was here. The top level resembled a spire that stood tall above the body of the city. In the center of the small platform, a pit was dug into the rock and a tall cover was built just above it. It almost mirrored some sort of furnace. Just as realization struck me and I grabbed the vile from my pocket, I spotted the eyes again. *Not now!* I thought in agony as I fumbled with the cork of the small glass. The eyes that lurked in the corners now took form. Corrupt and vile skeletal creatures suddenly jumped to their feet and began to amble towards me. I turned to throw the orange dust from the vile into the pit just as I felt teeth sink into my shoulder.

I opened my eyes and lurched to my feet. I had remembered! I didn't know how much time I had spent here in the underworld trying to evaluate who I was, why I was here, and why my shoulder hurt a great deal, but it all came back to me when I observed the orange dust that was scattered around me. I tentatively scooped up what powder I could into my hand, while carefully watching the skeletal creatures behind me roam around, unknowing of my plot. With a flick of

my wrist I tossed the powder into the fire pit and it exploded into flame. The undead around me shrieked and writhed horridly until they seemed to disintegrate in front of my eyes. *No more gunk here!* I thought, grinning.

I half expected a magical portal to appear right then in front of me, but I ended up having to make the trip back down to the ground on foot where, to my surprise, I spotted Zach. I ran to meet him, almost jumping into his arms, but I stopped myself. In bewilderment, he himself scooped me up and hugged me. I beamed radiantly.

"I got worried…" he tried to explain, but I just smiled at him and he smiled back. "Let's go home." He finished.