

## ***Collateral Damage Duel***

Ms. Sequoia Spindlewheel tapped her chin with her wand and sighed. Sitting on her broom above the bustling city center, feeling the sun on her back through a gap in the skyscrapers, she could only wait and watch for the girls below to stop arguing.

“No, *I* should get to go first!” On one side of the dueling circle--a ten-meter wide gap in the bustling crowd of muggalos--Camille Candlelight stomped her feet like an absolute child.

On the other side of the circle, her rival, Persimmony Pincushion, rolled her eyes. “Fuck that! You *a/ways* get to go first!”

“Exactly! That’s why I should get to go first this time too.”

Persimmony rolled her eyes again.

Back in the air, Ms. Spindlewheel pinched the bridge of her nose and decided that enough was enough. Aiming her wand at the sky, she whispered a word, and a burst of magical sparkles shot from its tip and exploded with a bang. Camille and Persimmony looked up, though none of the muggalos noticed.

“Alright,” said Spindlewheel, allowing her broom to float down to the pair. “Since you’re incapable of deciding for yourself, *I’ll* pick who goes first.”

“Well, there’s only one answer to *that*,” said Camille, haughtily flicking a lock of curly blonde hair.

Spindlewheel tightened her eyes. “Yees. Persimmony, why don’t you go first for a change?”

“Hah! In your face, bitch!” The spiky-haired underachiever threw back her head in a laugh.

“B-b-but, *Miss!*” Camille looked like she might burst into tears. “How can you let this--this *hellion* go first? I always go first!”

“Enough!” said Spindlewheel. Camille might be her best student, but *God* she wanted to slap her sometimes.

Persimmony chuckled, the studs in her chin bobbing. “What’s wrong, Candletits? Afraid you’re gonna get spanked by an F-grade student?”

Camille drew in a deep breath. “Of course not!” With a huff, she turned and marched to the edge of the dueling circle to smolder in silence.

Spindlewheel sighed. “Well, Persimmony, here’s your chance. If you can beat Camille, I’ll consider your skills in Transmutation sufficiently proven and award you the passing grade you claim to deserve. Of course, if you *fail* to beat her... Well, there won’t be any need for me to punish you, that’s for certain.”

If Persimmony was at all scared by the prospect of losing, she didn't show it. "Hah, you might as well award me that grade now, teach. This duel's as good as won."

Spindlewheel tightened her gaze. "We'll see," she said, floating up and away.

As Persimmony took her place at the other end of the dueling circle, Spindlewheel came to a stop floating above the very center. (It was always best to keep some space between a dueling circle and yourself. Who knew what kind of effect a misaimed curse could have? Let alone colliding spells...)

"Listen up, girls. For the sake of clarity, I shall repeat the rules: No physical fighting. No killing or disabling curses. No leaving the circle. And no surrendering--this is a duel, if not to the death, then at least until someone can't fight back. ...Oh, and try not to cause *too* much collateral damage." She looked around at the busy plaza they'd chosen to hold the duel and wondered if perhaps they might have been more selective. "...Persimmony, you may cast when ready."

"Gladly," said Persimmony. Raising her ebony wand, the punkish underachiever started to walk clockwise around the edge of the dueling circle. On the other side, Camille, her own wand raised and her mouth set in a frown, moved in the same direction, keeping herself opposed to Persimmony like the far end of a magnet.

At last, Persimmony stabbed her wand forward. "Ranaforma!" she cried, in spiteful tones. A bolt of sparking green magic went flying from her wand.

Camille, of course, was more than prepared. "Defendo!" she said, flicking her wand in a parry. A shield of force appeared before her, and Persimmony's spell bounced off it with an almost comical *ping!*

Ms. Spindlewheel watched, barely suppressing a sigh, as the bolt of deflected magic went careening out of the circle and straight into the crowd of muggalos surrounding them. It struck a young man in a suit, who squealed and vanished, his clothes crumpling to the floor. A second later, a little frog poked its head out and looked about in confusion.

Spindlewheel sighed. She didn't know what she'd expected. Well, at least her wards would keep the other muggalos from noticing the damage.

Back in the circle, Camille was preparing her counterattack. "Libernota!" she cried, launching a bolt of azure fire. Persimmony flicked her wand, and the spell slammed straight into the floor.

Camille, however, wasn't finished. Before Persimmony had a chance to counteract, Spindlewheel's top student launched another blast of blue fire. And another. And...

Persimmony parried the first two, but the third she was unprepared for. Instead of trying to block it, she dropped and rolled, letting the blazing spell streak over her. Like a meteor, it flew into the crowd and hit an unfortunate raven-haired office lady, who screamed as she

shriveled and flattened into a bookmark styled like herself. Lying there on the ground, it was soon lost in the rush.

Spindlewheel tutted. Dodging wasn't against the rules per se, but you were *supposed* to use magic.

"A bookmark?" said Persimmony, wand held up and ready to parry even as she talked. "That's so like you. I bet you'd *love* to stick me in your favorite textbook, wouldn't you?"

Camille huffed. "Perhaps you might actually learn a thing or two." She thrust her wand forward.

Persimmony, however, had the same idea. A bolt of blue flame shot from her wand and barely missed the ball of pink flame launched from Camille's. The two swirled around each other in the air before shooting onward towards their targets. Both witches threw up a hasty shield, and the spells went pinging out of the circle and into the ranks of the muggalos passing.

As Spindlewheel sighed in exasperation, a couple of salarymen behind Persimmony collapsed in on themselves, reduced from human beings to a pair of stripey socks. Behind Camille, meanwhile, a mother and daughter fell to all fours, sprouting brown fur and long, wagging tails. Spindlewheel listened with a frown as they raised their heads and howled.

As the witches on the ground prepared their next spells, Spindlewheel whistled to attract their attention. "I said, try to *avoid* collateral damage!"

"S-sorry, miss!" said Camille, dropping her head in exaggerated shame. Persimmony, ever the opportunist, took this chance to launch another spell at her. Of course, since Camille had bowed, the curse went right over her head and straight into the crowd, where it struck a blonde whose arms were heavy with shopping.

With a gasp, the woman dropped her bags, fell forward, and landed on hands that had already become hooves. As Spindlewheel watched, a pair of horns sprouted from the unfortunate blonde's head, accompanied by a pair of furry ears beneath them. Groaning and shuddering, the woman swelled till her clothes burst with a *rrrip!* and a giant, sloshing udder appeared between her legs, already leaking milk onto the flagstones.

Flicking her tail, the cow looked around and mooed dumbly.

"Persimmony!" said Spindlewheel. "That was incredibly unsporting of you. Both of you retreat to your starting places. We'll begin again. Camille can have the first cast."

Returning to the edge of the circle, Camille stuck out her tongue at her opponent. Persimmony glared back at her, looking as though she might snap her wand.

Like Persimmony before her, Camille walked clockwise around the edge of the circle, wand raised, a spell on her lips. And like Camille in turn, Persimmony did the same, maintaining her distance and keeping her wand up defensively.

Up in the air, Spindlewheel checked her pocket watch. She was beginning to regret ever sanctioning this duel.

At last, with a forceful 'hi-yah!', Camille leaped forward, jabbing her wand at her opponent. A ball of yellow fire burst from its tip--

--and *split* mid-flight into two identical orbs, which shot towards Persimmony from both sides.

The spiky-haired witch held her ground and spun, deflecting both spells with the arc of a single hastily-cast shield charm. The balls of fire sailed out of the ring and into the passing muggalos, striking a plump mother and a short young man.

As Spindlewheel watched, the unfortunate couple threw back their heads in moans of desire and charged each other, tearing off their clothes as they ran. Slamming together, they kissed and groped and slowly fused, bodies losing all solidity till they were a single indistinguishable pillar of flesh, shuddering as it settled. Like molten iron poured into a mold, the former pair congealed into a hat stand styled like their own naked bodies locked in a *very* passionate embrace.

The witches in the ring, however, barely even noticed this. Persimmony was already in the middle of her counterattack, while Camille hurried to raise a defensive charm.

"Echinus!" cried Persimmony. A shower of little blue darts sputtered from her wand in a cone.

Camille only barely raised her shield charm in time. Persimmony's spell struck it like a rain of arrows, embedding itself in the barrier of force. Of course, Camille's charm wasn't large enough to absorb every dart Persimmony had fired. Over half of them simply sailed around it...

...and straight into the crowd.

Spindlewheel sighed as another ten or so muggalos shrieked in sudden shock. As she watched, sharp spines sprouted all over their backs, and they shrank, leaving only a little group of hedgehogs, all curled up in terror.

"Aww," said Camille, covering her mouth as if to suppress a giggle. "They look just like you."

Persimmony ran a hand through her spiky hair and laughed. "I'd rather look like a hedgehog than a pig!"

*Just fuck already*, thought Spindlewheel.

With a howl of frustration, Camille threw aside her shield charm and flung a spherical green spell right at her opponent.

Persimmony threw up her own wand to parry, launching the viridian orb right back at her opponent. Camille, however, was just as prepared and sent it flying back too.

Spindlewheel watched, eyes flicking from side to side, as the spell bounced back and forth between the two witches.

At last, Persimmony overbalanced, and her rebound shot missed her opponent by a meter or more. "Hah!" cried Camille, as if she'd achieved some kind of victory.

Sailing into the crowd of muggalos, the spell struck a dark-haired young woman, who raised her arms above her head to form a circle and compacted into a tennis racket. She clattered to the ground, and the duel went on in ignorance of it.

High up in the air, Spindlewheel looked at her pocket watch and sighed. Was she really missing her lunch break for this?

Back in the circle, Camille and Persimmony had stopped casting to continue their time-honored tradition of trash talk. "So, what's next?" asked the latter. "Y'gonna try turning me into a nightlight so y'can finally get some sleep?"

Camille huffed. "Very clever. Why don't you save me the effort and turn yourself into a firefly?"

Persimmony chuckled.

Spells flew from both witches' wands, passed each other in midair, and deflected off a pair of quickly-cast shields. Another pair of shrieks sounded from the crowd.

One came from a blonde in a pink dress, who cried out in shock as her head swelled and the rest of her shrank. For a second, the new lightbulb hovered in the air, before falling to the ground with the clatter of breaking glass.

The other cry came from a young woman in white, who could only scream in horror as her body dissolved--from toes up to head--into a cloud of glowing insects.

As the fireflies dispersed, Spindlewheel nodded, impressed. She didn't realize Persimmony had mastered swarm spells.

"You know," said Camille, pacing along the edge of the circle. "I've just thought of the perfect spell to use against a classless whore like you."

Persimmony laughed. "Is that so? Go on then. I can't wait to see it."

Camille smiled. "Gloria Foramen!" She thrust her wand forward. Pink flame surged from its tip and went screaming through the air in Persimmony's direction.

The studded witch bit her lip. With a cry of 'Defendo!', she raised her wand and cast another shield, forming a barrier of force to protect her. Camille's spell crashed straight into it, the pink flames dashing off the surface like water off an umbrella.

What they didn't do, however, was stop. Instead, pink flame continued to spurt from Camille's wand in a torrent.

High above, Spindlewheel frowned. If Persimmony didn't think of something soon, she was toast. Perhaps literally.

Fortunately for the underachiever, she did. With a twist of her wand, Persimmony reshaped her shield into a channel that guided the stream of flame away from her...

...and, predictably, into the crowd. It struck a young woman, burning away her clothing as it vanished into her body.

As Spindlewheel watched, one eyebrow raised in curiosity, the young woman squeaked and started to swell. With an audible *boing!*, her boobs tripled in size, bouncing for several seconds before a wave of rubber washed over them and froze them as a pair of pumped-up balloons. As the woman tried to shriek in shock, her lips bloated into a fat 'O', and the rest of her face simplified into something cartoonish. Falling backward, the sex doll landed on its ass with a squeak.

It took Spindlewheel a moment to realize the spell wasn't over. The new doll was glowing, and instead of ignoring it like the other victims, a number of the men in the crowd were running towards it, pants bulging in desire. As she stared, they ripped off their clothes and went to work on it, filling every hole it had available. Soon a small crowd of men had formed and were waiting for their turn.

Back in the circle, Persimmony looked disgusted. "What kind of perverted spell was that?! Hey, Teach, d'you see what kind of weird shit your star pupil is studying?"

"Sh-shut up!" said Camille. "I only used it because it was perfect for you! You'd make a much better sex doll than a witch, you stupid whore!"

Persimmony snarled. "Someone's looking to buy a one-way ticket to wormville." She flung the spell before Camille even had a chance to respond.

With a yelp, Camille leaped out of its path, letting the spell sail past her into the crowd. A young man yelped and shriveled into a worm.

"Hey!" said Camille. "That type of spell shouldn't be allowed! Who knows what could happen to me as a worm?!" Even as she spoke, a bird flew down, snatched the ex-man up, and swallowed him whole.

Persimmony shrugged. "Well, that's okay, I mean, you're the best witch in class, right? So you won't get hit by it, will you?"

Camille huffed.

With a sigh, Spindlewheel whistled. "Enough banter! If you don't hurry up and finish, I'm calling this whole charade off! Get back to your starting positions--Camille can cast."

Glowing, the two witches retreated to opposing sides of the dueling circle. Camille raised her wand, brow furrowed in concentration. Persimmony lifted her own, ready to deflect anything that came at her.

At last, Camille cast. Persimmony didn't wait to block--instead, she flung her own spell and leaped out of the way as fast as possible. A ping sounded as it bounced off Camille's shield.

Spindlewheel covered her eyes and groaned as yet another pair of spells sailed into the crowd. They were going to fire her for this--she was sure of it.

On Camille's side of the circle, a group of schoolgirls shrieked and started to grow. Muscles swelling till they burst through their clothes, fur sprouting all over their newly-bared skin, the four of them screamed as they turned into horses.

While two of them looked about and neighed in confusion, the other two moaned as something between their legs hardened. As one of them mounted her former friend, Spindlewheel rolled her eyes and turned away. Soon the sound of stallion-on-mare was impossible to ignore.

On the other side of the circle, an unfortunate teenage boy took Camille's bolt to the head and fell onto his back, legs and face aimed towards the sky. As Spindlewheel watched, the young man's mouth stretched wide, and a wave of smooth whiteness spread over his changing skin. In seconds, he was no longer flesh but porcelain: a normal if strangely humanoid toilet, sitting piped to the ground in the middle of the plaza. Even as she watched, a young woman dropped her panties and planted her ass on his face. Spindlewheel turned away before it could go any further.

"That's it!" She floated down to the duelists. "I've had enough of this nonsense. Get back to your starting points. I'll give you one more offensive spell each, and if that doesn't end the duel I'm calling it a draw. Persimmony, you cast."

"But miss!" said Camille. "That's not--"

"Be quiet! Get back to your starting point!"

Persimmony chuckled. "Don't worry, Candletits. One spell is all I need to finish--"

"Persimmony, you be quiet too! Both of you, back to your positions! Now!"

Mumbling, the two witches retreated to the edge of the circle. Both raised their wands, both locked eyes with the other. Both furrowed their brows in intense concentration.

When Persimmony's spell came, it came without fanfare. One moment she was pacing, the next the spell had left her wand: a beam of intense pink light, pouring without end. With a scream, it shot through the air--

--and crashed into an identical beam cast instantly by Camille.

Spindlewheel raised an eyebrow.

As one, the witches on the ground grit their teeth and thrust their wands forward. Their spells surged, crackling where they met. Sparks of magic burst from the collision, starting little pink fires in the center of the circle.

For a moment, the pair stood locked together in this magical arm-wrestling match. Then, together, they opened their mouths and screamed, and the spells pouring from their wands surged--

There was a pop, and a flash of pink light went off in the center of the circle. With a hiss, Spindlewheel threw up her wand and shielded. Below her, Camille and Persimmony squealed.

Slowly, the pink light faded.

Lowering her wand, Ms. Spindlewheel was just in time to see her unfortunate students screaming as buttons replaced their eyes and stuffing filled their lungs. Camille's skin had turned to pink fabric, while a thick bush of bristles had sprouted from Persimmony's back.

"M-M-M-Miss! Help--Mmmphf...!"

"Fuck you, Candletits! This is all your--Mmmphf! Mmmphf...!"

Their cries faded away, and a pair of stuffed toys dropped to the ground with a couple of comical squeaks: a pig and a hedgehog, indistinguishable from any normal pair of toys.

The city center seemed a lot quieter too. With a sigh, Spindlewheel looked around and found the remaining muggalos gone--every single one of them--replaced by an army of stuffed toys in every type and color possible.

Groaning, she massaged her temples. *Fabulous.*

Hopping off her broom, she flicked her wand and summoned her former students to her. "Well," she said, holding them to her face, "I hope you two are happy. Just look at how much damage you've caused!" She swept her arm at the stuffed carnage around them. "Do you know how many memory charms I'm going to have to cast to keep the muggalos from noticing this mess?"

Her students, of course, didn't answer her. She sighed. "Well, it's not like you can help me fix it, is it?"

Lowering her wand, Spindlewheel let the toys fall to the ground with a pair of little squeaks and punted them aside without a second thought.



Closing her eyes, the teacher spun in a circle, and a plume of magical sparkles poured from her wand's tip, coating every toy in her vicinity. For a few seconds, they simply sat there sparkling under the effect of the dust.

Then, one by one, they vanished with a pop, transported to toy stores and children's bedrooms and anywhere else appropriate nearby.

Camille and Persimmony were the last to disappear. "Have fun," said Spindlewheel, voice flat. "I'm sure you'll make better playthings than you ever did duelists."

And with that, she hopped back onto her broom.

As her stick sped away from the once-crowded plaza, Spindlewheel drew in a deep breath and sighed. She'd lost her best student on paper and her best student in practice together in one duel. What a calamity.

Well, if nothing else, at least her class would be quieter.