

THE OTHER SIDE OF THANKSGIVING

Continuing the adventures of Faustus the Great and his assistants, last seen in “Run, rabbit, run!” in the Rabbits contest. This story takes place at the same time (more or less) as “Turkey Day”.

The day before Thanksgiving, “Why do I have to have Thanksgiving with my dad?!”
“Because he’s your actual family and we’re not. And Thanksgiving’s a time for families.”
“So you’re trying to get rid of me?” she pouts, folding her arms.
Paul sighs, “Yes, if it makes you feel better. We’ll be happy to have you back afterwards, if that’s what you’re worried about.”
“But you’re still sending me away now!”
“Yes. You’ve been with us for months. Your dad might be worrying.”
“Oh, please, I phone him to let him know I’m ok!”
“You’re still going.”
“Fine, ‘boss’.” She lapses into a very sullen silence.

The night before Thanksgiving, “This is so unfair. He’s not making anyone else go back to their family. You’d think he’d at least send Anne back. She disappeared for more than a year, for Christ’s sake! Surely her family want to know she’s alright.” Dell turns at a knock on the door. She rolls over on the bed, wiping her eyes with the back of her hand. “Who is it?”

“A friend.”

Dell sighs, “What do you want, Anne?”

“Heard about you goin’ home. An ‘heard you weren’t none too happy with it. Figured you might wanna talk.”

“To you?”

“Got anybody better in mind?” she pauses, “Look, are ya gonna open this damn door or am ah gonna be stuck out here all evenin’? If ya ain’t interested, ah got way better things to do.”

“Ok, I guess you can come in.” The door swings open and Anne walks in, a baggy t-shirt draped from her shoulders, her jeans looking painted on, or possibly tighter. She flops onto the bed next to Dell.

“So, what’s got you so hot ‘n’ bothered about all this?”

“Nothin’.”

“Riiiiight. Ok, as nothing’s wrong, how’s the veiling doing? I haven’t heard any explosions, so it must be working.”

“Yeah. It’s getting easier, but...”

“But it still feels like you’ve run a marathon or two?”

“Yeah. How come you make it look so easy?”

“I’ve been doin’ it for a lot longer. You’ll get used to it.”

“Right.”

“Figured out how to make your secret admirer’s gift work out yet?”

Dell looks down at her hand, and lets the veiling fade, revealing the gleaming black gem,

“No. And don’t call him my secret admirer! It’s not like that.”

Anne smiles indulgently, “Suuure it’s not.”

“It’s not!”

“Ok, ok, it’s not. Ya want a hand wakin’ it up?”

“Waking it up? It’s alive?!” she stares down at her hand with a renewed sense of horror.

“Nah, nothin’ like that. It just needs to be turned on.”

“What will that do?”

"How'd I know? You're the one who talked to the Jack."

"He didn't say anything! I mean, something about shadows and spying pools and..."

"Scrying pool, not spying. Though I suppose it could be used for that."

"What's a scrying?"

Anne laughs, "It's not a thing, really, just what remote viewin' got called before people tried to get all scientific with it. So, the Jack said ya'd be able ta use shadows as pools, did he?"

"Yeah, something like that."

"Then wakin' your stone up shouldn't do anythin' ta worry about."

"You're sure?"

Anne shrugs, "Pretty much. Can't be 100% without talkin' to the Jack in question, but, yeah. They're tricksters and pranksters, not out 'n' out nasty."

"That makes me feel so much better."

"Wuss. C'mon, what have you got to lose?"

"Nothing, I guess. So, what are you going to do?"

"This." She takes a tight grip of Dell's wrist, turning her palm up, "Now, don't struggle."

"Struggle?!"

"Shhh." She stares intently into the dark gem, singing something that refuses to stay in Dell's head, slipping just outside her mind.

"What's...?" Dell goes quiet as Anne begins to sway softly. The gem pulses, shadows crawling over her skin around it. Dell falls silent, staring at the gem, feeling a slight chill in her hand as the shadows pulse along.

Anne looks up with eyes covered in a glossy black film. She blinks twice, the song fading away, and her eyes are once more grass green. "Done. You may applaud now."

Dell stares at her hand as the shadows retreat back into the gem.

"I said, you may applaud now."

"Oh, ok, yeah, that was, uhm, should something be happening?"

Anne rolls her eyes, "Norms. You haven't done anything with it."

"Oh." Dell looks back at the gem, "So, uhm, what could I do?"

"You said it was a scrying gem, right?"

"I...think so."

"Close enough. So, just stare into it, kinda like you're doing now, and try to think of somethin' ya want to spy on."

Dell stares into the gem, her forehead furrowing.

"Maybe not trying quite that hard. Ya move around the van ok, right? So just think like ya do then. Ya don't need ta know exactly what it is ya're doin'. Just let it happen."

"Ok, ok..." the gem shimmers, a wavy, blurred image slowly coming into focus. Dell gasps and the gem snaps back to its glossy darkness. She looks up, "I did it." A smile spreads across her face, "I did it!"

"For all of three seconds. Let me show you how it's done." She takes Dell's wrist, her eyes going unfocused as she stares into the gem. Slowly something begins to stir in the depths. A bolt of darkness leaps up from the centre of the gem and Anne flies off the bed, landing with a loud thump on the floor.

"Ohmigod! Are you ok? I didn't, what just, that wasn't me!"

Anne blinks dazedly, wincing as she pushes herself up, "Owwwww! Yar Jack does not like sharin', girl. Ah been kicked by honest t' goodness mules that di'n't hurt that bad. Ah swear if that leaves a bruise..."

"It wasn't me!"

"Ah know. Ya ain't the one who gots ta worry 'bout me. Yar Jack on th' other han' had best keep one of his stupid, triangle eyes open or ah'll be havin' squash smoothie come All

Souls.” She glares at the gem, “An’ if’n ya’re listenin’, ya pumpkin-headed, tinhorn, leadbritched, Yankee bastard, ah ain’t mindin’ ta be makin’ threats ah ain’t gonna keep. Anyhow, ah’m gonna letcha get some sleep an’ let that thing calm itself on down. An’ find me somethin’ ta drink.” She walks to the door, with a slight limp, and leaves Dell alone.

Dell looks down at the gem, “That wasn’t nice. If you’re going to be mine, you need to work with my friends and not attack them.” The gem sullenly refuses to reply.

Thanksgiving morning, bright and early, after a night of shadowy, half-remembered dreams, Dell yawns, staring into the depths of the gem, watching the scenes flickering past as she tries to control where she’s watching, her scrying gaze flicking from shadow to shadow to shadow, room to room to room, “Booooooring. Everyone’s asleep.” She sighs and the images vanish. “Well, better get ready for going back to my dad.” She sighs again, reaching for something reasonably decent to wear, settling on faded jeans and long-sleeved top. She looks down at the dark glassy gem and starts to mutter the chant Anne taught her, feeling the nonsense words tugging deep within her, her hand shimmering as the gem fades from sight.

Thanksgiving morning, somewhat later, “What so you mean I can’t drive there? It’s, like, just across town!”

“And you don’t think your dad might be suspicious if you show up in the van you were supposed to steal off us? He did send you away into hiding after all, not to go gallivanting with the people he tried to get you to rip off.”

“Oh, yeah, I guess that would make things tricky. So how am I supposed to get there? It’s clear across town. On Thanksgiving!”

“I thought it wasn’t that bad.”

“That was when I was driving it!”

“And I’m sure that makes sense somewhere. Come on. I’ll show you.” He opens the door, stepping through into the back of the van. Dell follows.

“So, now what?”

Paul walks up to the doors, “Now, observe closely, nothing up my sleeve.” Dell rolls her eyes, “Everyone’s a critic.” He opens the door, revealing a deserted alleyway.

Dell walks to the doors and pushes her head through. “Hey! This is right at the back of the theatre!” she pulls her head back, “How did you...? Wait, never mind. Ok, how do I get back? I mean, you’re not going to just leave the doors open all day where anyone can see them.”

“Just call me on the company cell and we’ll arrange pick up. Just not until after dinner.”

“Sure you’ve got reception for that antique?”

Paul sighs, “Yes. Now quit stalling.”

“Ok, ok, I’m going, grouch.” She jumps down from the van doors into the alley, her hand giving a shiver as she passes through. She glances back to see Paul looking puzzled before he pulls the door shut and the doors become just a blank wall again. Dell sighs, slouching off down the alley.

A few minutes later, she stands in front of the door to her former home, “Might as well get this over with.” She reaches for the buzzer.

The door opens. Her father’s jaw drops. “Ardelle? Is that you? What are you doing here?”

“Hi, Dad.” she smiles up at him, “It’s me and it’s Thansksgiving so I’m here to spend some quality time with my family.”

“Where have you been? What happened to you? Are you alright?”

“I’m fine, I’m fine. Really.”

“You’ve, uhm, you’ve, uh, grown.”

“Uh-huh. Good living and stuff, I guess. So, can I, you know, come in? I feel weird doing this

on the steps.”

He steps aside.

“Thanks, Daddy.” she walks past, hearing the TV already on. The door closes behind her as she sinks into the couch, feeling a couple more springs in it give out.

“Where have you been? I haven't seen you in months and now you just walk back and...”

“Oh, Daddy, it's fine. I've just been busy. I'm working now.”

He splutters something.

“Oh, it's not anything too dodgy. Some backstage stuff across town. Aren't you the one who always says young people today don't know how to work and are all too lazy and sponging off our hard-working parents?”

He pauses, staring at her, “Are you making fun of me, Ardelle?”

“Of course not, Daddy. Just following your example and getting out to work early. It's a proper job, really.” she smiles winningly up at him, “And I told you, it's Dell, not Ardelle.” she chides gently, still smiling up at him as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth. “So, when's dinner?”

“Dinner?”

She looks at him, “You were going to have a frozen turkey dinner again, weren't you?”

“Yes, but...”

“And you only got one, right?”

“Yes, but...”

Dell continues to look at him.

“I'll go and get some more.”

“Thanks, Daddy!” she calls out as the door closes. “Now, to get my stuff.” She pulls the key out, scampering along to her room. She pushes the door open, coughing at the dust. “Sorry I've been away so long, guys. You would not beelieve what I've been up to. Now, Anne said this would work, so, here goes nothing.” She pulls off her rucksack, opening it and waving her hands, chanting something that doesn't make sense at all. She feels her palm pulse, almost losing track of the nonsense words, but manages to press on. She opens her eyes, staring at all the stuffed toys hop off the shelves, flying into the sack, “Oh, wow!”

A few minutes later, she locks the door, every shelf and drawer emptied into the bag, which even now barely looks half full, “I can't believe that worked! I have to tell Anne when I get...” she stops, feeling her palm pulse. She looks down, a wavering image of Anne's head appearing in the gem... “back?”

“Dell?! Hey, girl, what are you doin' in here?”

“What do you mean? Why are you in the gem?”

“Ah ain't in the gem. Ah'm in your kitchen where someone's getting 'ready to serve me up. Yum.”

“My kitchen?” she looks down the corridor.

“Weeeeell, your boss's kitchen, if your bein' all picky 'bout it.”

“Oh. What do you mean 'serve you up'? She peers into the gem, “And where's the rest of you?”

Anne smirks, “The rest o' me's what's bein' served up. Jaks is usin' me as a turkey stand in. Should be wild.”

“She's what?!”

“It'll all be fine. Shame you're gonna be missin' it. Ah bet ah taste delicious.”

“You're weird.”

Anne's shadowy head beams, “Sure am. An' ya say that like y'all ain't.”

“I am not weird!”

“Ha! We're havin' a conversation through a magic gem the spirit o' Halloween stuck in your

han'. Ya spend half your time lit'rally bein' part o' the transport. An' you're sayin' ya ain't weird? Hell, y'all almos' make me look normal."

"You? Normal?"

"Ah said almos'. No need t' be so tou...yeeeeeeow!!"

"What?"

"Nothin' t' do with ya. Someone was just checkin' whether ah'm done. An' them prongs is cold! But that doesn't matter none. How in the Goddess' name did ya get that thing ta do what it's doin'?"

"I don't know. I was just thinking about you after the bag worked so well and it just throbbed and..."

"An' where's your pa in all this? You ain't doin' this while he's around, ah hope."

Dell pulls a 'do I look stupid' face, "He's out getting dinner. Frozen turkey dinner. Yum."

"Betcha ah taste better. Shame y'all can't be here."

"Not funny."

"Heh. Maybe ya could persuade your gem ta let ya sample some."

"If you're going to be like that, I'll cut you off."

"How? Ya don't even know how ya cut me on, do ya?"

"I'll think of..." Anne's shadow head vanishes, "...something? Anne? Anne, are you there? Anne?"

For several long seconds, nothing happens, and then Anne's face coils out of the shadows once more. "Where did you go? What happened? Are you all right? Was it something I did?"

"Hey, hey, one question at a time, huh? Ah'm fine. Jackie jus' yanked off the cover. Guess that musta cut us off. So, ya got a reason for callin' me up when ah'm in the middle'a bein' dinner?"

"Oh, I was just going to tell you that the bag trick worked and it was so cool and it looks like there's almost nothing in it and..."

"Hey, hey, slow down a bit, will ya? It worked? You're comin' on good, then. Maybe ah'll teach you some of the really good tricks."

"What do you mean by..." she stops, hearing a key rattling in the lock, "dad's back, got to go, bye!" she closes her hand and the connection winks out, Anne's face dissolving into rivulets of shadow.

"Who are you talking to in there?"

"No-one, Dad. You must have heard the TV. But I've put it back to football for you."

He harrumphs into the kitchen to prepare the delicious frozen turkey dinner, muttering about how hard it is to find anywhere open on Thanksgiving.

The dinner eventually comes out of the oven, dry and slightly overdone. Dell and her father sit across from each other at the table, one and a half of his eyes on the football. Dell stares down at the unappetising food, wondering what Anne would have tasted like. It would have to be better than this, at least. Maybe there'll be leftovers when she gets back and... She stops, shivering, her hand growing colder and colder as she taps it on her knee under the table. She looks over at her Dad, still glued to the TV and 'accidentally' drops her fork on the floor. She looks down under the table and almost gasps as she sees her hand pulsing, wrapped up completely in shadows.

"What's..." and then she watches as it sinks into the shadows, "what?" she feels something soft, and hot, and kind of slippery, on her fingertips. She pulls her arm back and stares at the piece of juicy turkey breast she's holding. "Where did you come from?" she mutters, slipping it onto her plate. It tastes divine, succulent, juicy, so much better than the dreary, thin, dry frozen turkey. She pushes her hand under the table, feeling it go cold, slowly pulling back a leg of turkey, stuffing, and more slices, devouring them quickly in case her dad looks around.

"So, this job you're doing..."

She swallows the turkey and mash mouthful, "I'm just driving people around, Dad, maybe helping a bit backstage."

"You're too young."

"You didn't say that when you got me driving. Or took me out of school. Or got me to swipe those ciggies. Or..."

"Ok, Ardelle, enough. When are you coming back?"

"I don't know. I'm having fun, learning stuff. You don't reeeally need me, do you, Daddy?"

"No, I don't need you, but.... oh, come on, you useless piece of shit, my grandmother could have made that pass and she's been dead for fifty years!"

"So, you don't need me. And you wouldn't want me to stop enjoying myself while I can, would you, Daddy?"

"I worry about you." he replies around the rubbery turkey.

"Daddy, you taught me well. I'll be fine. And if not, I know your number."

"I don't know. You run off..."

"You sent me away."

"...I don't see you for months..."

"I phoned every week."

"...and now, when you could come back, you don't want to."

"Oh, Daddy, it's not like that. I just..."

"Yes! Yes! That's it! Touchdown!!!!!"

"I just want to get things done myself, not rely on you for everything."

"Alright, alright, Ard...Dell. You can go, but you will call regularly."

"Oh, thank you, Daddy!" she jumps out of her chair, running around to hug him.

"Ardelle!! What are you doing?! I can't see the game!"