Sailor Helga

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Sailor Helga

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Chapter 1

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Chapter 1

"Arnold," said Helga into the darkness. "I know that I make fun of you...I know that I call you a football-head and a klutz...and I know that on the outside, I may seem pushy and overbearing, and overall just a really mean person...but on the inside, I'm really not all that bad. I don't hate you...quite the contrary...I like you, I mean, I like you like you...heck, as a matter of fact, I guess you could say that I'm deeply, deeply in lo-"

RIIIIIIING! RIIIIIIIIING!

Helga woke up. She then turned off her alarm clock before groaning and sitting up in her bed, in her room.

"It was just a dream," sighed Helga despondently as she pulled out her locket from under her pillow and gazed at it longingly. "Some day, my love...some day..."

After getting dressed, Helga trudged downstairs and into the kitchen. There, she found her mother Miriam, fast asleep with her head on the counter, and her father Big Bob, hovered over a radio.

"Good Mor-" began Helga, before being cut off by Big Bob's waving hand.

"Shh! Not now, Olga," warned Big Bob, as he turned the dial of the radio to and fro.

"It's Helga, DAD," corrected the young girl for the umpteenth time.

"Yeah, yeah, whatever," he said. Finally, Big Bob stopped on a radio station.

"...In other news, sources have confirmed that a fourth person has been found unconscious on the streets after hours," stated the news reporter. "As seen in the previous attacks, the victim sustained no physical injuries, nor was any of their personal effects stolen. They did, however, describe the assailant as being tall yet well-concealed. Says the victim: 'It was like the life had been drained outta me,' end-quote. The victim is in stable condition and expected to be released from the hospital later this afternoon. Police have advised citizens to stay indoors after dark until the culprit has been apprehended.

"And now a word from our sponsors...IT'S BIG BOB'S BEEPERS, HE'S THE KING, BIG BOB'S BEEPERS, CHING-CHING-CHING! BIG'S BOB'S BEEPERS...!"

"Finally!" exclaimed Big Bob triumphantly. This radio promo was a great idea. I can't wait to see the money roll in..."

Miriam mumbled something incoherently, still half in a daze; Helga rolled her eyes. "I'm outta here," she said, grabbing the closest food item in her reach and heading out the front door. Waiting at the bottom of the porch steps was Helga's best friend, Phoebe Hyerdahl.

"Good morning, Helga," greeted Phoebe.

"Morning, Phoebes," replied Helga. Helga took a bite out of the apple in her hand as they made their way towards P.S. 118.

Phoebe frowned. "Light breakfast again, I see..."

Helga shrugged in reply. "Meh, better than nothing."

"My mother's making sukiyaki tonight. Would you like to come over after school and join us?"

Helga threw the apple core over her shoulder and belched. "Thanks, but I'll pass. I've got to go to the library afterwards and study." She glanced over at her friend. "Big Bob found my last math test."

"Oh," said Phoebe, knowingly.

They made it to the schoolyard just as the first bell rang. Ordinarily, after the morning announcements, attendance was called and class began.

Today, however, the entire student body was called to the auditorium for a surprise assembly. As the students filed in, many speculated the reason for the impromptu gathering.

"I heard he's sick," said Nadine.

"I heard he was arrested!" said Harold.

"Well, now that's just preposterous," retorted Rhonda. "Besides, I heard that he eloped to Cancun with his high school sweetheart. It's just so romantic, it has to be true."

"You're all wrong," said Sid. "Principal Wartz was abducted by aliens."

"Yeah right, Sid!" laughed Harold.

"Oh, so you don't believe me? Take a look at this!" Sid pulled several photos out of his jacket and showed them to the others. His friends were not impressed.

"Aw, Sid, that's just your thumb!" complained Harold.

"My THUMB?!" said Sid in disbelief. "That is an alien, the same alien that has been attacking people all over the city! I saw it with my own two eyes – I risked my butt trying to get these shots!"

"Harold's right," replied Stinky. "These pictures really bite, Sid; all I see is a dang shadow,"

"I'm telling you guys, I really saw it!"

Harold nudged Stinky and winked. "Sure, Sid, sure."

Rhonda added: "The only alien that I see is a backwards hat-wearing dweeb with big nose, stringy hair, and ugly white leather boots."

"Fine!" said Sid, snatching his pictures back. "Just don't come crying to me when the alien comes knocking at your front-doors!"

"Aw, settle down, ya bunch of chuckleheads!" interjected an annoyed Helga. "Aliens...pfft, that's the stupidest thing that I've ever heard...!"

Sid folded his arms and sank down into his seat. "You'll see..." he muttered.

Eventually, someone emerged on stage. It was a tall, slender woman with long blonde hair and an enormous grin plastered on her face.

She grabbed the microphone from the stand on the center of the stage and greeted the crowd.

"Hello, P.S. 118!" said the enthusiastic woman.

"Who's she?" whispered Gerald to Arnold.

"Beats me," Arnold whispered back.

"I'm sure you're all wondering why I called you here today," continued the woman. "Well, rather than beat around the bush, I may as well come out and say it. I regret to inform you that our beloved Principal Wartz, the man you've all come to love and respect during your career as students of this school, has abdicated his position of authority at P.S. 118."

A collective gasp erupted from the seats of the auditorium.

"Yes, your principal has decided that it was time for a much needed extended sabbatical and has left indefinitely. We don't know where he decided to go, or when he is expected to return. That is why I have been employed by the Superintendent to take over running the school in his stead. Just call me Principal Perky!"

"Geez, and I thought Simmons was bad..." whispered Helga to Phoebe.

"Yes, a question?" Principal Perky pointed to the Peapod Kid with his hand raised, and he stood up from his seat.

"Yes, I was just wondering: do you intend to run the school in the same manner of Wartz?"

"The same manner? Oh my, NO!" At this news, the auditorium began to clamour excitedly. "I'm nothing like Wartz! To me, you are all wonderful little seeds of potential, and it is my duty to nourish you so that you grow into beautiful flowers that shape the future and make our world a better place. Yes, flowers! Flowers need space, flowers need fresh air and

sunshine! Which is why I'm giving my flowers an extended recess period, starting right now! Go and grow - you are dismissed!"

The auditorium erupted in cheer as the students made their way outside.

"Hey, Gerald," said Arnold later in the day, right after school. "Doesn't something about our new principal seem a bit...off?"

"What do you mean?" asked Gerald. "I think she's great! She gave us the whole day off just to have recess! Wartz would never do that!

"Well, see, that's what I mean. Principal Perky is everything Wartz is not. It's almost seems too good to be true. Do you see what I mean?"

"Hmm...not really..." replied Gerald.

Arnold sighed. "Gerald..."

Unbeknownst to the two boys, Helga was following them from a distance. Her eyes fell upon her beloved and she swooned.

In the middle of the street, not far off from the sidewalk where Arnold and Gerald were walking, a small, dark animal was making its way across.

Suddenly, it collapsed. Fortunately, Arnold had noticed, because seconds later, the Jolly Olly Man's ice cream truck came sailing down the street, the animal square in its path!

Before Gerald could react, his friend had leapt out into the street and grabbed the helpless creature, barely escaping a head-on collision with the vehicle, which had swerved into a nearby lamppost.

"You lousy little brats!" growled a shaken, but uninjured Jolly Olly Man. "What's the big idea running out in front of loaded ice-cream truck?! Wait till I get my hands on you! Oooh...!!!!"

As the Jolly Olly Man continued with his heated tirade, Gerald crossed the street to get to his friend, who was just getting up off the ground, the animal clutched in his arms.

"Hey Arnold! Are you okay, man?" asked Gerald.

"ARNOLD!" exclaimed Helga, as she, too, ran over to Arnold on the other side of the street. At the last minute, however, she caught herself, and her tone changed from worry to that of derision. "I-I mean...CRIMINY, FOOTBALL-FACE! Have you lost your mind?! You could've been turned into a pancake just now!!"

"I'm okay, you guys," reassured Arnold. "I just saw it collapse on the ground, and...well, I had to save it..."

The "it" Arnold was referring to was actually a black cat, which was still unconscious. Gerald was apprehensive.

"I don't know if you should be holding that thing, Arnold," said Gerald. "It looks like a stray – check out that bald spot." He pointed a finger to the unusually shaped fur-less area on the cat's forehead. "It looks like a horseshoe."

"I'd say more like a grin..." said Arnold. "And anyway, I doubt it's a stray; it has this thing around its neck."

Indeed, an odd-looking crystal pendant hung around the cat's neck. "Maybe I can find the owner's name..."

But as Arnold reached his hand out to touch the pendant, the eyes of the cat shot wide open, startling all three of the kids.

The cat then used the opportunity to slide out of Arnold's lax grasp and dart into an alley across the street.

"Huh. I guess we'll never know now," Gerald said.

Helga let out an exaggerated yawn, getting the attention of the two boys. "Well, that was interesting. I tell ya – you two chuckleheads are a piece of work. Risking your life for a cat? And I thought I had seen everything from you, football-head..."

"Hey! That cat has a right to live, just like anyone else!" retorted Arnold.

"Arnold – it was just a cat! A mangy, flea-bitten, run-of-the-mill cat! It's not like one less cat roaming the streets was going to make any difference in the grand scheme of things! And anyway, so what if it got run over? Cats have nine lives, don't they?"

Arnold became visibly upset, but before something could come of it, Gerald put his hand on his shoulder. "Let it go, Arnold..." he said. Arnold said nothing, but merely sighed in defeat.

Helga smirked triumphantly. "Well, as much as I'd love to argue with you on this engaging topic, I've got bigger fish to fry. See you in the funny papers, bucko."

Helga stormed off in the opposite direction as Arnold and Gerald continued onward down their original path. "Arnold," she scowled to herself. "What an idiot. What a senseless dolt. How I despise him....and yet..."

She watched as Arnold and Gerald turned the corner, she looked behind her back; the coast was clear. She whipped out her locket of Arnold and held it up above her head. "I love you! How selfless you are, risking your own safety and well-being to rescue one of nature's lowlier creatures! Oh, my beloved – how I wish I could have lauded you for your heroics. Instead – like a coward – I spurned you yet again. If only our circumstances were different... perhaps in another time and place, you and I could have been friends, could have been more than friends! Alas, I must win you in this present day and age. Oh, what a cruel, twisted weave fate hath wrought for us...!"

Helga swooned once more before concealing the locket. Then, as if flicked on by as switch, Helga reverted to her same old self and walked away.

She was unaware that, the whole time, she had been watched by the black cat that had allegedly run off. The cat watched Helga curiously before finally disappearing into the alley.

It was nighttime; closing time at the City Library. Helga emerged from the building and began to stretch. "Criminy...I'm not doing that again for awhile..."

As she made her way down the steps and onto the sidewalk, the city lights were just blinking on. The sun had already set, yet there were still a few tinges of pinks and oranges visible in the sky.

By the time Helga was halfway home, the sky was dotted with stars. The full moon shone brightly from above.

Suddenly, Helga felt a presence. She paused and peered over her shoulder; the street was empty.

Helga shrugged her shoulders and continued on, but before she could take two steps, a small, dark figure darted past her near the ground, as if it were being chased.

As it widened the gap between them, Helga was almost certain that it was the same black cat she had encountered earlier in the day...

"RUN!!" Helga thought she heard someone yell, but could see no other person around her. She looked over her shoulder yet again, but this time, as she was looking ahead, she found herself face-to-face with what looked like a tall shadow in the shape of a woman. The shadow had no other distinguishable features save for a pair of eyes that were just two vacant orbs of white.

Too frightened to even scream, Helga turned to run, only to find that it was already blocking her escape.

She turned and attempted to run again, only to watch in horror as two long "shadow-arms" stretched out and wrapped around her waist several times before lifting her clear off the ground.

Helga kicked and squirmed with all her might, but to no avail; she could only watch helplessly as the shadow-woman tightened her grasp around her waist.

Suddenly, Helga felt drowsy – it was if the creature was literally squeezing the energy out of her body. Her struggling became much weaker; she could feel the gaze of the white, lifeless orbs boring into her, relentlessly.

Helga clenched her teeth and, with her last bit of strength, reached out and placed a hand on one of the shadow-arms. "Let...me go...." She demanded, in a strained whisper.

The shadow-monster did not obey, but merely "smiled" – exposing an empty, jagged grin of white nothingness. In its eyes could be detected a hint of malevolent mirth, mocking Helga's futile attempt.

And then she got mad.

"I said....LET ME GO!!!" Helga yelled, as she used her other hand to try and push the creature away.

There was a bright flash of light. In an instant, the monster released Helga from its grasp and staggered away backwards, screeching and covering its eyes with its shadow-arms.

Helga watched as the monster knelt to the ground and let out a final bloodcurdling wail before falling forward onto the street. After a few seconds, a dark smoke began to rise from where the creature lay motionless; it was evaporating.

Helga did not wait to see it disappear completely – by the time the last wisp of smoke had risen into the night air, she was already long gone.

Helga opened her eyes. She was in her room, safe in her bed. She groaned as she sat up.

"Oh, man..." she said, rubbing her eyes. "What a night...I had the craziest dream...."

"Really? About what?"

Helga eyes shot wide open. Slowly, she peered over her knees. Lo and behold, at the foot of her bed sat patiently the black cat with the odd mark on its forehead.

"Good morning, Helga," said the cat. "Did you sleep well?"

Chapter 2: Chapter 2

"Ok...take it easy now...nothing to worry about..." Helga said to herself. "...I'm just hallucinating again...oh, why did I skip those sessions with Dr. Bliss...?!"

"Relax, Helga," said the cat with a feminine voice. "You are perfectly fine."

"How do you know my name?"

"I overheard your father calling for you when you wouldn't wake up. Big Bob, is it? He's a regular livewire."

"Heh...tell me about it. And don't get me started on Miriam. Like this one time, she-whoa, whoa, whoa!! Hang on a second: I'm telling my personal problems to a talking cat." Helga placed a hand over her face and fell silent for a moment. "I think we need to start over."

"Certainly," the cat cleared its throat. "My name is Luna. I am from the 30th century. I was somehow transported to this time period, and now I desperately need to get back."

Helga rolled her eyes. "Oh, gee, well, that makes sense," she said sarcastically.

"Do you see the thing around my neck?" asked Luna. "This is a time travel device known as the Time Key. Under normal circumstances, I should be able to use this device to get back to my own century. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Around the same time as my arrival, I noticed that the city has become overrun with strange creatures. Creatures whose sole purpose is to harvest the energy of any living matter – in your case, unsuspecting civilians."

"Like the one that attacked me last night..." realized Helga.

"Correct. I'm not sure where they came from, or why they are even here to begin with. All I know for sure is that their presence has given this city an over-abundance of dark energy – negative energy, if you will. I predict that if I can eliminate this dark aura from the area, then I can finally return to my respective time period. Only...I can't do it alone. And that's where you come in."

"Me?" asked Helga. "What can I do?"

"Last night, I witnessed the attack. Somehow, you were able neutralize the negative energy coming from the monster, thus destroying it. It is a gift that very few people possess, and an asset that I can most definitely use. That is why I'll be counting on you to rid the city of the evil beings."

"Wow, Luna! You know what, that is a really great idea, and of course I'd be glad to help! I just have one little question....ARE YOU CRAZY?!?! I'M NINE YEARS OLD, FOR CRIPES' SAKE!! AND YOU EXPECT ME TO JUST GO AROUND FIGHTING MONSTERS BECAUSE A MAGIC TALKING CAT TOLD ME TO?!"

"Keep it down up there, will ya?!" yelled Big Bob from downstairs.

"Ah, stick it in your ear!" Helga yelled back.

Luna sighed. "I had anticipated your reaction to be like this. I'll give you some time to think it over. Until then, I suppose I'll give you back this." She dropped to the floor at the foot of Helga's bed, and then came back up with a heart-shaped object in her teeth.

Helga gasped and immediately snatched it away. "My locket! But, how did you...?"

"You dropped last night after the struggle," Luna replied. "Turn it over."

Helga obeyed and flipped the locket over so she could see the back. Instead of the smooth surface that she was expecting, Helga noticed that a symbol exactly like the one on Luna's forehead was engraved in the center. "Oh. You...put a horseshoe on the back."

Luna made a face. "That is a crescent-moon, a symbol of my family. I put it there for your protection. If you happen to run into trouble again, simply yell out the phrase 'Moon Prism Power, Make-up!' - it will do the rest."

"Thanks," Helga said, though not actually meaning it.

Luna smiled and leapt onto the windowsill. "Not bad for a mangy, flea-bitten, run-of-the-mill cat, eh?" she added, before going through the window and back into the outside world.

When she was gone, Helga shook her head. "Last time I sleep with the window open..."

Later that day, during lunch period, Helga sat with the other girls in her class in the school cafeteria. She was deep in thought while fiddling with her food, and not listening to Rhonda talk about her summer vacation in Paris, when Curly approached the table.

"Hello, ladies!" he said.

"Hello, Curly," said Nadine. Rhonda said nothing, merely shuddered.

"You seem to be in a good mood today," noted Sheena.

"Well, Sheena, I AM in a good mood today. And do you know why? Because it is MY official duty as ball monitor to inform you all about the brand-spanking new playground balls that the school has recently purchased. I'll let you girls get first crack at them, IF Rhonda asks nicely."

"Only if we can throw them into your dorky face," replied Rhonda.

"Hot dog! I'll take that as a 'yes'!" said Curly as he pranced merrily away.

"What a dweeb," said Rhonda to the other girls.

The bell rang, signaling the start of recess. As most of the students headed for the doors leading out into the playground area, Arnold made his way to another set of doors that lead into the hallway.

"Hey Arnold!" Gerald said. "Aren't you coming?"

"Not today, Gerald," he replied. "I promised Mr. Simmons that I'd help him with something after lunch."

"Okay, it's your free time," said Gerald as he joined with Sid and went outside.

When no one was looking, Helga slipped out as well and followed Arnold from a safe distance down the empty corridor.

Meanwhile, outside in the playground, a large crowd had gathered around Curly, who had just brought out the bag with the new balls.

"All right, everyone!" he said, sticking his arms out as if to push the crowd back. "Line up to receive your ball!"

"Aw, come on, Curly!" complained Harold. "Can't you just toss them to people like everyone else does?"

"You animal! I would never do such a careless thing! These balls are factory-fresh - they deserve RESPECT!"

As the crowd groaned, Curly took a new ball from the bag and sniffed it deeply. "Ah..." he exhaled. "I love the smell of regulation rubber in the morning. Huh?"

The ball in Curly's hand began to shake violently. It eventually tore out of his hand and elevated several feet into the air. The other kids stared as the remaining balls in the bag elevated as well and remained there for several seconds. Suddenly, the balls exploded out of the bag, and the lone one that had reached the sky first hit Curly square in the face.

Back inside, Arnold reached the second floor and had entered Mr. Simmons' classroom. Helga peered round the corner and waited for the door to close before whipping out her locket.

"Oh, Arnold," she swooned. "Such a charitable lad, sacrificing your time of leisure to give help to those in need. Yet another reason for I to love, honor, and worship you..."

But Helga's soliloquy was cut short by the sound of yelling and screaming coming from outside. "What is that infernal racket?" Annoyed, Helga walked over to a nearby window and peered out at the carnage taking place on the pavement below.

The balls had taken on the appearance of missile-like trajectories as they sought out and struck the unsuspecting students on the ground. When struck, however, the victims would simply vanish as energy seeped into the ball and looked for another target. Among the casualties: Joey ducked as a ball bounced of the wall, rebounded, and struck him from behind, making him vanish. Sid and Stinky, while trying to avoid the balls, were not looking where they were going and collided, allowing enough time for the balls to strike them as well, making them both vanish simultaneously before falling down. Harold waved his arms

madly as he fled, crying out for his mommy just as one hit him in the back, and he, too, vanished.

"Well...there's something you don't see everyday," Helga said to herself, trying her hardest to remain calm. Some of the balls began to congregate in the middle of the playground, hovering around in a circle, gradually attaching to one another and forming what appeared to a pair of legs. Soon a wide torso was formed, then two arms, and finally a head, made entirely of the balls.

"...And there's another thing you don't see everyday," Helga backed away from the window and began to pace back and forth. "Come on, Helga...think!" She then realized that she still had her locket in her hand. After looking at it for a moment, Helga clutched the locket tightly, a look of determination washed over face. She turned around and ran down the hallway from which she came.

It was eerily quiet when she reached outside. There were no kids remaining on the playground. The man made of balls was standing still in the center of the playground, his back to Helga. Helga took a deep breath and walked toward the towering figure. When she was halfway out, she saw numerous chalk sketches on the pavement that she hadn't noticed before; it was at that moment she realized that all that remained of her friends were crudely-drawn representations of them under her feet. Helga gulped and, after mustering all her courage, pointed a finger at the lone figure standing in the playground.

"Hey, you!" she yelled. "Yeah, that's right, I'm talking to you, bucko!"

The ball-monster craned its neck slowly so he could see the young girl. "Who are you?" he growled.

"I'm Helga G. Pataki, the toughest girl in this city. You'd better bring those kids back and get out of here pronto...or you'll have to answer to Ol' Betsy!"

Helga showed her fist and gave the meanest scowl she could possibly muster, but it only elicited a deep, guttural laugh from the monster. He turned completely around to face Helga, and outstretched his hands so his palms were facing upwards.

"Come," he said deeply. "We play ball." A single black ball materialized above each palm.

"Oh, crap," said Helga. The two balls shot directly out towards Helga. At the last second, she leapt out of the way. Rather than bounce off the walls, the balls exploded, creating a hole in the side of the building. The ball-monster then crossed his arms over his body, then uncrossed them and outstretched them into the air. A long line of black balls appeared overhead, then came crashing down upon Helga, who literally had to sprint across the playground to avoid being hit.

"I thought this stupid thing was supposed to protect me!" yelled Helga, the locket still grasped in her hand. She jumped up vertically as another black ball sailed underneath her legs. Suddenly, she remembered: "Oh, wait – there was something that I was supposed to say first...but what? AAH!" Helga leapt away again, narrowly missing a ball that instead struck the bike rack, causing metal and broken tires to fly everywhere.

"Was it...Moon Magic? No...Moonie Power...that's not it...Make-up Pyramid? Aargh, I'm never gonna get it right!!" In a fit of anger, Helga chucked the locket across the pavement. Only after it left her hand did she realize her colossal folly. "Arnold!"

Helga ran and jumped, sliding on the pavement and catching the locket just before it hit the ground. "Phew, that was close..." she said, sighing in relief. But now she was vulnerable, and the monster took the opportunity to fire a ball directly at her. Knowing that she couldn't escape in time, Helga could only close her eyes shield herself from the impending attack.

But the attack never came. Rather, the ball that was supposed to strike her had instead sailed up and exploded harmlessly in the air. Relieved, but at the same time confused, Helga opened her eyes to see what caused the amazing stroke of luck.

A blonde boy in a tuxedo suit, top hat, and cape was standing in front of her. He turned to look at her. "Are you alright?" he asked.

She couldn't see his face quite clearly, as he was wearing a half-mask, but his unique, football-shaped head looked strikingly familiar...

"Arnold...?" said Helga in utter disbelief.

The masked boy lifted Helga off the ground and into his arms; she was too awe-struck to make a sound. He then leapt high into the air, so high in fact that he landed on the roof of the school building. "You'll be safe here," he said, setting her down. "Let me handle the beast."

Helga, still stunned, could only nod slowly as he went back to the ground below to confront the ball-monster. He pulled out a black cane that she hadn't before noticed, and straightened in a fencing-like pose as he pointed it at the creature. "You want to play? Fine. Then play with me."

The ball monster growled in acceptance of the challenge as it held its arms out straight in front of itself, its palms now facing the boy. Several black balls appeared behind the monster, shooting out in a barrage. Unflinching, the boy took his cane and, with both hands, began to twirl it rapidly, like a propeller blade. As before, the balls were deflected in various directions before exploding without causing any damage.

"Come on," said the boy tauntingly. "Is that all you got?"

Angry, the monster roared and sent another barrage of balls at his opponent. This time, the boy had dropped the cane on the ground and pulled a dozen red roses from his coat pocket; he then threw them at the barrage. As they pierced each ball, they turned from black to red again, and then change directions so that instead they hit the monster dead-on. As the monster staggered back and forth, trying to regain its footing, the masked assailant had picked up his cane again and had lunged forward.

From the rooftop, Helga watched the monster hobble to and fro, unable to retaliate from the boy's relentless attack. Suddenly, she came to her senses. "I've got to help him!" she cried. "But what was that phrase. It was moon-something. Moon...moon...."

"It's 'Moon Prism Power, Make-up'!" yelled the boy, between jabs. Eventually, he struck the monster into submission and it fell backwards onto the ground. "Say it, now!"

"Right," Helga stood up straight and, with locket in both hands, outstretched her arms toward the sky and yelled the phrase. "MOON PRISM POWER, MAKE-UP!"

An enormous white light emanated brightly from the locket, washing over her entire body so that she could no longer be seen. Almost instinctively, Helga grabbed a nearby Frisbee that had accidentally flown onto the roof several weeks ago and jumped off the building. Rather than simply fall straight down, she floated until her feet gracefully touched the ground.

Struggling, the monster finally got to its feet. "Hey, ball-boy!" came an ethereal voice from the body of light. "Play-time is over." When thrown, the Frisbee had become a glowing disc of light. It flew true to its target, slicing directly through the monster's abdomen, causing it to give one final howl before dissipating into shadow, and then, nothing. The glowing disc then made a U-turn and flew higher into the air where it stopped at certain height before spinning rapidly and showered the entire playground with sparkling light. The hole in the wall of the school and the bikes on the bike rack were mended in an instant. The chalk drawings which covered the pavement had disappeared, and the children slowly re-appeared in unconscious heaps on the ground. The balls, which had caused so much carnage and mayhem, simply faded away. Finally, the disc glided back to the ground, becoming nothing more than an ordinary Frisbee, blue and plastic.

"Wow," was all Helga could say. "There's something you DEFINITELY don't see every day". Her eyes fell upon a red rose lying on the ground. As she bent down to pick it up, she noticed for the first time the changes that had happened to her. She was wearing boots, knee-high pink boots! Her elbow-length gloves were white, as was the bodysuit she had on, which was generously decorated with two large, pink bows, one in the back (which was fastened to a short, frilly blue skirt), and one in the front; attached to the latter was her locket, which was still heart-shaped, but now had an ornamented pink cover which held the emblem of the crescent-moon instead of Arnold's visage.

Helga turned and went to the window to get a better look at herself. In the reflection, she could see that she was also wearing a small pink band with a single crescent moon around her neck, a blue and white sailor collar, and a gold tiara with a gem on the middle of her forehead. Upon closer inspection, Helga could see that her blonde-hair pigtails had grown to double their original length so that they were down to her waist. On the inside, she felt stronger, like a soldier; on the outside, however, she felt completely different. She felt...pretty.

"I don't believe it..." she said, touching the reflection with her hand. "Is that me?"

"You did it." Helga turned just in time to see the masked boy exit the playground at the gate. "You saved your friends, and delivered the school from utter destruction." He turned and smiled, giving her a thumbs-up. "Good work...Sailor Moon."

She watched as the boy started to run, then leapt up high, to the top of a nearby building, and then out of sight. As her fellow classmates were coming to, Helga stood and looked on, in awe over what had transpired.

Helga finished her math test early that afternoon (the extra studying had apparently paid off). As the other students in her class were still solving problems in their heads, she wrote about her own personal dilemmas inside the little pink book that she kept hidden in her desk.

Well, it's been quite a week. One minute I'm flunking long division, and the next I become some sort of evil-thwarting super-heroine. Talk about your ups and downs. Boy, that monster was tough, but I think I showed him who's boss. The strangest thing about this whole incident, though, is that it only happened an hour ago, yet no one seems to remember, not even Arnold.

Helga looked up and saw that, two desks in front of her, Arnold was still working on his test; from the time they had come back to class, he had given no indication that anything out of the ordinary had occurred at all.

Could it be that I'm wrong? Maybe it wasn't him that saved me....wait, what am I saying? Of course it was him, who else could it be? Then why is he pretending like nothing happened? Does he know something that I don't? Perhaps...perhaps even he's not aware of what happened? But that doesn't make sense.

Helga looked up again, and this time, spotted Luna outside, perched upon the windowsill. She smiled and nodded at the black cat, who fully understood the meaning, and left.

Whatever the reason, it's too late to turn back now. I've got to get to the bottom of this mystery, and if using these new-found powers of mine helps me to figure it out, then so be it. Who knows? Maybe Arnold and I will finally become closer in the process. Only time will tell.

Helga

Chapter 3: Chapter 3

It was the afternoon. School had just ended and best friends Helga and Phoebe were walking down the street towards home.

"...and that's what '*Deus ex machina*' means," concluded Phoebe.

"Uh-huh," replied Helga, who didn't seem all that interested. Phoebe detected this, and decided to change the subject.

"So, what's next on the agenda?" she asked. "Throwing rocks at city property, if I'm not mistaken."

"Huh?" Helga had been looking upwards, obviously not paying attention.

"Helga, are you listening?"

"Yeah, yeah – I heard you," she lied. "Actually, Phoebes, I just remembered...I have an orthodontist appointment at 4:00. I'll catch you later, ok?"

"Oh...ok" said Phoebe, but Helga had already turned and run off in the opposite direction. When Phoebe continued to walk home, she failed to see her friend sneak into a nearby alley. Seconds later, Helga was actually leaping overhead from one building to the next, in her transformed disguise.

A few days later, Phoebe decided to call Helga on the phone. She dialed her cell number, and was pleased when Helga had answered.

"Yeah?" said an anxious Helga on the other end.

"Hello, Helga. It's me, Phoebe. I was wondering if you'd like to come over and just...you know...hang out...?"

"Oh geez...as much as I'd love to, I'm kinda busy at the moment...maybe some other time?"

Unbeknownst to Phoebe, Helga was actually surrounded by several shadow-figures. She was on the defensive and struggling to hang on when she had received the call.

"But, Helga..." pleaded Phoebe.

Helga jabbed a shadow in the face with her elbow. "Sorry, Phoebes...my hands are tied..."

She hung up. Phoebe sat on her bed despondently, the ring tone a bitter sound of rejection in her ears.

It was Friday. Class would be over soon, and Mr. Simmons used the opportunity to make an announcement.

"Everyone!" he said. "Don't forget that your book reports are due on Monday!"

"Monday?" cried Harold, slapping his hand on his forehead. "Oh, man – I completely forgot about the book report!"

"Calm down, Harold," reassured Stinky in his Southern drawl. "Me an' Sid are goin' to the library tomorrow morning. You can come with us."

Harold groaned. "The library? Aw, I hate the library!" He slammed his head hard on his desk. "OW! Now my head hurts!!"

"It's gonna be a looong weekend," sighed Sid.

While the other students were packing up and preparing to leave, Phoebe approached Helga's desk. She slapped her hand loudly on the desk top, yet had a pleasant smile on her face.

"Uh, hey, Phoebe..." said Helga, uneasily.

"I have an idea," said the bespectacled girl. "What say you and I go see *Wrestlemania* this Saturday? My treat."

Helga raised her eyebrow. "I thought you hated wrestling."

"Well...since you've been busy all this week, I figured what better way to catch up on lost time than by watching muscular men resolve their differences physically in a sweat-laden ring?"

Phoebe flashed the pair of tickets in front of Helga, whose face lit up. "Gee, Phoebe...that sounds great..."

Helga peered out behind Phoebe, to the window. There, on the outside windowsill, Luna was gazing at her. "...but, I have to spend all of Saturday running errands with Miriam. Sorry."

The bell rang, and Helga promptly left the classroom. Dejected, Phoebe plopped the tickets in Gerald's hand and exited without a word. It took a while for Gerald to register what happened, but when he realized that he possessed ringside seats to the weekend's match, he immediately got up from his seat.

"Hey Arnold! Guess what...?" he said, as he sought out his best friend.

Later that evening, at the Heyerdahl household, Phoebe was sparring in the private fencing room with her father, Kyo. After he had scored a hit, Phoebe fell to the floor. Concerned, he took his mask off and came to her aid.

Phoebe waved him off. "I'm fine," she said, getting back to her feet.

"You seem distracted tonight," said Kyo. "Is something troubling you?"

Phoebe sighed, and took her mask off as well. "Actually, father...yes, there is something. My friend Helga...I think she hates me."

"Why do you say that?"

"Well...lately she's been avoiding me. Every time I try to spend time with her, she brushes me off. I'm getting the feeling that she doesn't want to be around me anymore. I wonder what I've done to upset her..."

To her surprise, Phoebe heard her father chuckle. "Oh, Phoebe," he said. "I'm sure you've done nothing wrong. I'm certain that there is a logical explanation behind your friend's behavior."

"You think so?"

"Yes – your friend has probably been preoccupied with other important matters in her life. Give it time, daughter. Eventually, it will all make sense."

"I hope so, father," said Phoebe, still a bit depressed.

"Now then, I think that is enough practice for today." They both bowed, thus concluding the session.

Phoebe went straight for her room, and plopped onto her futon. She reached for a picture frame on the bedside drawer. Contained inside was a picture of Phoebe and Helga together, with Helga inconspicuously making bunny-ears over Phoebe's head. Phoebe set the frame on the ground and drove her face into her pillow. "Oh...this really stinks!" she said, the pillow muffling her voice.

"This stinks, Luna," complained Helga. They had been training for several hours, and were now taking a quick break on the rooftop of some building. "Can't we call it a night?"

"The enemy never sleeps, Helga," was Luna's authoritative reply.

Helga let out an exasperated sigh. She was sitting on the ledge of the building, letting her boots dangle freely over the edge, and looking up at the stars that were slowly flickering on in the night sky. A light breeze was blowing, and her long blond pigtails were left to dance faintly in the direction of the wind. "Yeah, but I'm pooped. Let's just go – I don't think we're going to see any action tonight."

"That's what they want you to think," began Luna. "We must-"

"Well, what about I want, Luna?" snapped Helga, abruptly standing up on the ledge. "We've been doing this nonstop for days! I'm tired, and I've been missing out on a lot of things. I can't remember the last time I've just goofed off or hung out or played baseball. And Phoebe, poor Phoebe...she probably thinks I'm neglecting her..."

"There are things more important, Helga."

"To you, maybe! But where does that leave me? All you care about is yourself! In case you haven't noticed, Luna, I'm not exactly the most popular girl in school. I've only got one good friend, and I'm not about to lose her just so you can get back to your precious future!"

Luna was taken aback. "You're right, Helga." She said slowly. "I have been selfish. Please forgive me."

"Hey, yeah – well, it's no biggie," said Helga, sitting back down in her spot. "Just loosen up a bit, will ya?"

"I'll try," Luna said, apologetically. "Tell you what – let's make a deal. You do a bit of reconnaissance work for me tomorrow morning, and I'll let you off the hook for the rest of the weekend. Sound fair?"

She extended her paw to Helga, who gratefully took it in her hand and shook it. "Alright. Now I'd better get home – they swapped "The Wheel" with figure skating tonight, and I don't wanna miss Big Bob blow a gasket when he finds out."

Saturday morning rolled in quickly. Helga was still a tad bit fatigued from the other night, but followed through on her word. She rubbed her eyes and yawned sleepily as Luna dutifully led her to her destination. When they had arrived, and Helga was awake enough to open her eyelids all the way, an incredulous look washed upon her face: it was the City Library.

"You're kidding," she said.

"Lately, I've been getting some very unusual vibes from this location. I think the enemy may be plotting to use this place as a source to harvest more negative energy, and I'd like you to investigate."

Helga scoffed. "Criminy...what a way to spend my Saturday morning. Alright, alright – I'll check it out, but when I'm done I'm outta here, ya got that?"

Helga walked up the steps and past the twin stone gargoyles that stood as immobile watchdogs against any intruders. She opened the main door and went inside, but seconds later returned back outside, pale as though she had seen a ghost.

Luna went up the stairs and approached Helga, who was now leaning against the shut door. "What's wrong?"

"I can't go in," said Helga.

"Why not?"

"Phoebe's in there."

Luna blinked. "So?"

"So? Don't you get it? I told Phoebe that I'd be gone all day running errands. If she caught me, she'd think I was a lying creep. Unless you've got a Plan B tucked away somewhere, I'm not setting another foot in that library."

Luna sighed. "Very well," she conceded. Luna surveyed the surroundings; there was no one else on the sidewalk or street. "Follow me," she said as she quickly scaled down the steps and

into a nearby alley, with Helga close on her tail. When they were both well-hidden, Luna did an unexpected back-flip. To Helga's surprise, at the peak of Luna's flip, there was a glimmer of light and an item had suddenly materialized. Helga took it in her hand and inspected the device curiously. The object was pink and pen-shaped, with a small red gem decorating the top.

"What is it?" asked Helga.

"This device is called the Luna Pen. It grants the user the ability to disguise themselves so that they may slip amongst people unknown."

"Get out!" Helga exclaimed excitedly, looking at the pen with heightened interest. "Just think what I could do with this baby..."

"Helga-"

"I could sneak into PG-13 movies..."

"Helga-"

"I could get special privileges at restaurants..."

"Helga-"

"I wonder if this thing would work at the casinos..."

"HELGA!"

"What?"

"That pen is for official scout business ONLY," said Luna in a stern voice.

Helga's excitement about the new item evaporated as quickly as it had formed. "Killjoy," she muttered.

"We are wasting time. To use the pen, yell out phrase "Disguise Power!" and state the disguise you wish to take on."

"Sounds easy enough." Helga stood tall and held the pen up above her head, as she did the locket before.

"Disguise Power! Turn me into a...a...a big, geeky bookworm!"

There was a great flash of light and in an instant, Helga's appearance had been altered. No longer was she the pigtailed, pink dress-wearing tyrant everyone had recognized. Her hair was still blond, but was now loose and very frizzy, and cropped so that it only reached her neck. Her dress had been swapped for a pair of faded baggy blue jeans and a loose white t-shirt with the pi-symbol adorning the front. Old, rundown sneakers replaced her traditional white shoes. Across her shoulder she carried an ugly, drab-looking tote-bag; on her nose rested a pair of previously broken tape-mended glasses with extremely thick lenses.

"'Tho..." asked Helga. "Ho' do I luk?"

"Um..." replied Luna, tilting her head.

Helga moved her jaw around and spit something pink out of her month. Apparently, the retainer had been part of the disguise as well. "That's better," she said. "Now hop in. I want to get this over with."

Luna obeyed and leapt into the tote-bag as Helga went again for the entrance to the City Library.

Inside, things didn't seem out of the ordinary. The only peculiar sight included the amount of kids present; this was to be expected however, as many students had book reports that were due following the weekend. Sitting at a long table across from one another were Sid and Harold, both busy reading. Stinky approached them and sat down next to Sid, a book in his hand.

"Hey fellers," he said proudly. "I'm doin' my book report on Huck Finn. He's a might keen adventurer who sailed down the Mississippi."

"Stinky," said Sid, not lifting his eyes from his own book. "I bet you can't even spell "Mississippi"."

"What are you reading?"

"'The Outsiders'. Some of these guys got some crazy names. Whoever heard of a kid named Ponyboy?"

"I've got both of you losers beat," taunted Harold. "My book is so short and easy, I'll be done in an hour!"

"Uh, Harold..." retorted Sid. "You're reading a book of nursery rhymes."

"So what? It's got enough pages!"

Helga, who was close enough to hear the whole ordeal unfold, merely rolled her eyes as she walked past. "Morons..." she said under her breath.

"Be sure to keep a lookout for any suspicious activity," whispered Luna from the tote-bag.

"Do signs of intelligent life count?"

"Very funny."

In another section of the library, alongside one of its walls, were small little identical rooms with closeable doors. These were the private study rooms, and Phoebe had been occupying one of them. Inside, she sat at a small table, her back facing the door. The table was covered in school textbooks and assignments that she hadn't been given yet in class, but wanted to complete in advance. Though she had a geography book in front of her, Phoebe's mind was

wandering. She kept thinking back to her talk with her father the other night; his words echoed over and over again in her head.

"'Eventually, it will all make sense...'" she repeated softly. "But what? And when...?"

Helga hadn't noticed when Luna had jumped out of the tote-bag and stood in front of the only study room whose door was left ajar. Curious, she peered inside, and sure enough, Phoebe could be found deep in thought. Seeing her sitting there amongst her work triggered something in Luna's memory. She was reminded of someone she once knew very well who had exactly the same drive, responsibility and work ethic. Luna smiled and stood in awe of the uncanny resemblances, for a moment completely forgetting about Helga...

Meanwhile, Helga had finally completed her walkthrough of the library. "All right, Luna. We've checked the whole library, and I didn't see anything strange..." At that moment, she suddenly realized that Luna was no longer in her tote-bag. "Luna? Luna??"

She walked around some more, retracing her steps. She eventually passed by the table where Sid, Stinky, and Harold were still reading, then stopped; something was not right. She turned around and looked at them – at first glance, they looked as though they were deeply engrossed in their books, but upon closer inspection, she saw the truth. For some reason, the boys looked a lot older and frailer, for their cheeks and eyes were sunken in. Simultaneously they turned their heads to face Helga, giving her a look of doleful complacency that made them resemble zombies.

She backed away and into another table with another group of people who happened to look the same way. "Uh...Luna?" Helga called nervously, this time a little louder.

"Quiet in the library, please," Helga turned in the direction of the voice, where she saw a stout, white-haired librarian in a blue dress with white polka-dots, and tiny, square-rimmed spectacles giving her a sly grin. Clutched in her right hand and over her chest was a large hardcover book.

Helga scowled. "What's going on here?" she demanded.

The woman did not respond. Instead, with her free hand, she pursed her index finger against her lips, and let out a slow and steady "Shhhhhhhh....". As she did this, a black smoke escaped from her lips and slowly encircled the woman, engulfing her. When the smoke had dissipated, the old librarian had become a hideous-looking gigantic rat, still with white hair in a bun, still wearing the dress and glasses over her beady little eyes, which were substantially dwarfed by her enormous nose.

"All right, pal," said Helga, getting into her fighting stance. "The buck stops here! Any last words?"

"Words? Hmm, words....now let me see...." The rat-woman opened the gigantic book in her hand and began to thumb through it hastily. When she found what she was looking for, she ripped the page clear out of the book and it fell precariously to the ground. A word leapt out of the sheet then faded away quickly, but not before Helga had a chance to read it.

"'Animate'?" There was a low rumbling sound. Helga looked and to her horror saw that the books were suddenly flying off the shelves and coming towards her. They circled her like hawks so she couldn't move, and some had even swooped in to strike her. "Ow! Ow! OW! Hey! Watch the merchandise!"

At this point, Phoebe was getting very annoyed by the amount of noise outside the study room. She got out of her seat and peered out the door where she got the shock of her life. Books were flying about all over the library in a wide, circular pattern. Phoebe was dumbfounded. "A cyclone?" she wondered aloud, trying to make sense of the situation. But all logic was thrown out the window as soon as she caught a glimpse of the rat-woman, who was now laughing maniacally.

Phoebe shrieked, though it was drowned out by the deafening shuffling of paper from the books. Immediately she slammed the door shut and locked it, then dove underneath the table and covered her head as though she was practicing an earthquake drill at school.

Suddenly Luna appeared in front of her. "Phoebe? All you alright?"

Phoebe let out a small little yelp, and scooted as far away as possible. "A t-talking cat?"

"There's no time to explain. I need your help!"

Phoebe closed her eyes and shook her head. "No, no, no...illogical! Cats can't talk - it's physically impossible!"

"Helga's in danger!"

Phoebe opened her eyes and looked at the cat. "What did you say?"

"I said that Helga is out there, and she's being attacked by that monster! We've got to save her!"

"Helga..." Suddenly it all made sense. Phoebe crawled out from under the table and knelt on the floor. "What do I have to do?"

"First, you have to give me something that's personal to you."

"Personal?" Phoebe thought for a moment. "Well, there are my glasses..."

"Perfect. Now, place them on the floor with your hand on top."

Phoebe obeyed. "Good. Now I want you to relax. Clear your mind..."

Phoebe took a deep meditative breath and closed her eyes. Luna stared at the ground as beam of light emitted from her crescent beam onto Phoebe's glasses. After several seconds the process was complete. Luna smiled. "I thought so...."

The rat-woman snapped her fingers. The books instantly fell to the ground; Helga was sprawled out on the floor, beaten and bruised. The rat-woman approached her with a malevolent grin on her face. She opened the book again and was about to speak, when she

noticed that a chill, dense fog was quickly covering the area. Pretty soon, she couldn't even see right in front of her nose.

"Cease, villainous interloper!"

The rat-woman turned around. The fog gently gave way and Phoebe emerged from the mist. She walked over and confronted the monster so that they were only a few feet away.

"How dare you disrespect this library by un-hatching your twisted designs! I will not sit idly as you hurt the people I care about and hinder the eternal quest for knowledge. In the name of the great minds of history – Charles Darwin, Sir Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein - you shall be punished!"

"Nice introduction," commented Luna.

"Thanks," Phoebe replied.

"I don't have time for this," hissed the monster, and pointed at Phoebe. Once again, the books had taken of mind of their own and were flying straight for their target. Phoebe stood firm; she crossed her arms in front of her face, then separated them until they were both at her waist.

"SHABON SPRAY!"

A stream of bubbles appeared and intercepted the books' trajectory, causing them all to stop in midair and fall back to the ground.

Of the books that were in the air, Stinky's was one of them. It had slid over to Luna's feet, giving her an idea. "Phoebe," she said. "Spell 'Mississippi'."

Phoebe was puzzled. "M-I-S-S-I-S-S-I-P-P-I. But, why...?"

The rat-monster scoffed. "Mississippi? Oh, please – that's such an easy word. Try spelling 'Massachusetts'".

Phoebe looked at Luna, who nodded, then back at the monster. "No. Let's see YOU spell it."

"Fine," said giant rat. "M-A-"

"Without the book," Phoebe gave Luna a knowing glance.

Insulted, the rat-monster tossed the book aside. "I don't NEED this book. I am a walking, talking dictionary and encyclopedia. I know EVERYTHING."

"Is that so?" Phoebe picked 'Huckleberry Finn' off the ground. "Who wrote this book?"

"Easy, Mark Twain, real name Samuel Clemens. When was the book published?"

"In 1885," replied Phoebe. "The book was initially banned in most libraries and schools because of its controversial content. When and where was the author born?"

"Florida, Missouri on November 30, 1835. Give a famous quote by the author."

"'The universal brotherhood of man is our most precious possession.'"

As they relayed questions back and forth, Luna quietly slipped by and went to Helga's aid. "Are you all right? Can you get up?"

Helga groaned as she slowly got herself to her feet. "Yeah."

"Good. Do you see that book on the ground over there? I think that's the creature's source of power. I need you to destroy it."

"No problem," said Helga, who put her hand in her shirt...then in her pockets...then frantically in the tote-bag, dumping out all of its contents.

"What's wrong?"

"My locket!" exclaimed Helga. "I must've left it at home!"

"Now, don't panic. We'll just have to be creative, that's all.

"Creative? Wait a minute – I've got an idea." Picking up the book and taking a pen from her pocket protector, Helga hastily began writing something on one of its pages.

Meanwhile, the rat-monster had finally been stumped by one of Phoebe's questions and was struggling to answer. "Wait, wait...I know this..."

"Hey, big fat rat!" The monster turned just in time to see Helga rip a page out of the book and throw it into the air. "Time for you to live happily never after."

The moment the page touched the ground, a black vortex formed in the center of the book and grew out rapidly, out towards the monster.

"NOO!!" it screamed as the vortex held it in its grasp and sucked in before receding back into the pages of the book. Helga shut the book and it instantly disappeared in a cloud of thick black smoke. Almost instantaneously, the books vanished and reappeared in their proper places, and the people of the library went back to their healthy selves, but were all fast asleep. Harold was sucking his thumb as he lay his head on top of the nursery rhyme book, the page opened to "Little Boy Blue".

Phoebe, still not quite sure what had happened, went over to pick up the page that Helga had ripped out of the book. Scribbled across the paper was a phrase that Phoebe was all too familiar with.

"*Deus ex machina*?"

"Yeah..." said Helga. "I got it from a friend."

Up until this point, neither Helga nor Phoebe could recognize each other. But after uttering that remark, Phoebe suddenly realized that the geek that had saved her life was actually her

best friend.

"Helga? Is it really you? It's me – Phoebe!"

"Phoebe? No way! I can't believe it!"

"I know! I barely recognize you!"

"Oh, yeah? Look who's talking – check you out!"

For the first time, Phoebe looked at herself and realized that she, too, had changed dramatically. Her hair, which normally only reached her neck, was now cascading down around her shoulders; the yellow scrunchie on top turned into a blue bubble hair-tie, the hair bound by it now a long flowing ponytail. She was wearing a costume identical to Helga's sailor suit, save for a few minor details: her boots were blue rather than pink, as were her bows. Her glasses, which were initially a conservative color, were now striped two tones of blue.

"Listen, Phoebe," Helga began. "I'm really sorry. I wanted to tell you what was going on, but-
"

Phoebe held up her hand. "It's okay, Helga. I understand...I just probably wouldn't have believed you if I hadn't experienced it firsthand for myself."

"Speaking of which, how did you become a scout anyway?"

"Allow me to field that question," interjected Luna, whose presence had almost gone unnoticed amongst all the excitement. "It's actually the same way I turned you into a sailor scout, Helga. I may not be able to fight, but I am able to transfer temporary powers to someone when the need arrives. I just need to determine the spiritual planet of the person I'm delegating the powers to, and have a personal belonging that they keep with them all the time to use as a *henshin* – or transforming device."

"What is my spiritual planet, Luna?" asked Phoebe.

"Well, Phoebe, you are ruled under the planet of Mercury. Of course, I had the feeling you were the moment I laid eyes upon you. You remind me of the girl I knew already, the original Sailor Mercury. Liked to succeed, worked hard, always reading, always studying – to me it seemed like the perfect match."

Phoebe smiled. "Well, Luna, I'm glad to be able to continue her legacy. And I would be honored to join your team."

"All right, then!" said Helga, wrapping Phoebe around her arm with one hand and messing up her hair with the other. "This calls for a celebration! You've still got those *Wrestlemania* tickets?"

"No, actually, I-"

"Good. We don't need them."

Phoebe blinked. "But I thought you loved wrestling."

"Ah, they'll be other matches. We've got lost time to catch up on, Phoebes. What say you and I go over to Slaussens and grab something to eat? And then afterwards we could..."

"Throw rocks at a dumpster?"

Helga smiled and put her arm on Phoebe's shoulder. "Right. Throw rocks at a dumpster."

And so ends another chapter in this crazy adventure of my nine year-old existence. Can you believe it? Turns out Phoebe, my partner in crime, is now my partner against evil. Heh, I always thought she'd make a great sidekick. And now I'm glad I don't have to go it alone anymore. But all this "spiritual planet" junk makes me wonder – will it just be the two of us, or will there be others?

Helga

Chapter 4: Chapter 4

Note: For the sake of clarity, whenever a character is in their transformed state, their name will be given in italics.

For example:

Helga G. Pataki: Helga

Sailor Moon: *Helga*

Fourth-grader Rhonda Wellington-Lloyd reveled in the attention she was getting over her brand-new ruby ring. Recess had just ended, but Mr. Simmons had not yet returned to the classroom, so she took the time to garner oohs and ahs from her fellow classmates.

"It's so purdy..." exclaimed Stinky in total awe.

"Isn't it?" said Rhonda, flashing it coyly, close to her face. "It's precision-cut. Daddy had it custom-made especially for my birthday!"

"But...I thought your birthday wasn't until next month?" Arnold pointed out.

Rhonda waved her ring hand. "Details, details...What's a few weeks' difference going to make? Besides, I always get my birthday presents a month in advance from my parents – I wouldn't want them overshadowing the sincere, yet modestly-priced gifts I receive from all of you when I throw my party. That would be rude. Now then - who wants to see it in the light again?"

As the adulation persisted, Helga simply rolled her eyes. She had passed on looking at the ring and was the only student that remained at her seat.

"Criminy..." she muttered under her breath. "All that fuss over an oversized hunk of rock. Give me a break..."

Finally, Mr. Simmons returned to class and the students went to their seats so that he could begin the lesson. As was her normal practice for third period math, Helga decided to tune him out and instead focus on her beloved Arnold. She pulled a sheet of loose-leaf paper from her notebook and began sketching his portrait in pencil, after which she proceeded to draw a big heart around her creation. She then did something she never did before – after a moment's hesitation, Helga drew a mask around the eyes of her doodle-Arnold, and then added a top-hat and cape. She looked wistfully at her drawing, then rested her head in her hands and swooned.

School was over a couple hours later. Nadine was getting her things out of her locker when Rhonda walked by.

"Remember, Nadine..." she said as she walked past, never stopping. Nadine closed her locker and sighed.

"What's the matter, Nadine?" asked Arnold, whose locker was only a few feet away from hers.

"Nothing," she said. "It's just that...well....every year, Rhonda's mother gives her a ton of money for her birthday, and she celebrates by bringing me with her when she goes to the mall."

"That sounds pretty cool," said Gerald.

"Not really. It's the same thing every year – Rhonda goes on a shopping spree, and I'm left to carry all the bags of the stuff she purchases. She loves it, but I hate it."

"Well, why don't you tell her that you don't want to go this time?" asked Arnold.

"I would, but we've been doing this for as long as I can remember. It's sorta like a tradition..."

"NADINE!" yelled Rhonda from the end of the hall.

"Coming! I've got to go. See you later!" Nadine ran to catch up with her impatient friend.

"Poor Nadine," sympathized Arnold.

Gerald simply shook his head. "Mm, mm, mm! I'll pray for her."

At the mall, Rhonda was in peak form. As usual, Nadine was left to lag behind with the dozens of bags from the dozens of stores as her friend walked briskly ahead.

"Ah, isn't this great, Nadine? There were so many sales this week! I don't think I've ever bought as much as this!"

"Yeah...I can tell," panted Nadine, her knees buckling under the severe weight of Rhonda's purchases.

"I've said it once, and I'll say it again – fashion is what sets us apart from the animals, Nadine. An animal is incapable of understanding the essential facets of human nature. Snappy clothing, a cute hairdo..."

"...And an engaging personality?" chimed in Nadine.

"What? No...honestly, Nadine, haven't I taught you anything? The three essential facets of human nature are snappy clothing, a cute hairdo, and this..." Rhonda opened the purse she

was carrying, pulled out a tube of lipgloss and held it in front of her friend's face. "Nancy Spumoni #9 Lip Gloss – PrimaDonna. I never leave home without it."

Rhonda paused for a moment to pull out her compact vanity mirror so that she could apply the lipgloss. As she was admiring herself, she noticed a small little store in the reflection of her mirror. Snapping the compact close, she turned around and looked at the shop vivaciously.

"Ooh! I've never seen this place before. It must be new! Hold my things, Nadine – I'll be right back."

Before she could protest, Nadine fell to the ground beneath a mountain of bags, and had no choice but to stay put as Rhonda entered the unfamiliar store. Inside, the shop was dark and square, yet very cozy. The walls to Rhonda's left and right contained shelves that were completely stocked with various sprays, lotions and other cosmetic assortments. As she gazed at the items on the wall, she was startled by a hand on her shoulder. She quickly turned and was met with the friendly smile of a very beautiful woman with medium-length, tight black braids.

"Welcome!" greeted the shopkeeper. "Can I help you find anything? Or are you just browsing?"

"Hmph. I don't browse, I buy," remarked Rhonda indignantly.

"Ah, I see – a woman who knows what she wants. In that case, may I interest you in this product?" The woman sauntered over to one of the shelves and plucked down a heart-shaped bottle made of black glass. "This is one of my favorite perfumes. Essence of Aphrodite."

"Ooh...*tres chic*...and the bottle is so lovely..." commented Rhonda. The shopkeeper handed her the bottle, and she admired it for several seconds. It only took one whiff before her mind was made up. "How much?"

Rhonda emerged from the shop not long afterward, just as Nadine was pulling herself together.

"*C'est fini*, Nadine – we can go home now!" she said, holding a small bag containing the perfume. "We've done so well today. I can't wait to..."

Rhonda stopped dead in her tracks. They had passed a store that was tuned to a radio station playing music. Immediately, and without any reservation at all, she started dancing to the beat.

On FIRE!

(fire, fire)

FIRE SOUL!

On FIRE!

(fire, fire)

FIRE SOUL!

On FIRE!

(fire, fire)

FIRE SOUL!

FIRE SOUL!!!

Rhonda finished dancing in a pose where the arm holding the bag was above and behind her head, her free arm outstretched in front of her, and her palm open and facing outward.

" And that was Ronnie Matthews' new hit single, "Fire Soul"...," said the man on the radio, a disc jockey (currently) known as Top 90 Ned.

Rhonda straightened herself and resumed walking. "Come along, Nadine," she said, as though nothing had happened.

Nadine suppressed a giggle. She had known Rhonda since kindergarten, and was well aware of her obsession with the latest trends and hottest fashions. Being cool and popular was paramount to her. And yet whenever she heard her favorite song (her favorite being the oft-changing flavor-of-the-week on the pop charts), for one brief moment, she would abandon all reservations and just dance her heart out. It was her major weakness, and it always amused Nadine to see her best friend not care about anything else and just be herself.

"Ah...wasn't yesterday fun, Nadine?" asked Rhonda as the two friends walked to class the next morning. "I can't wait to do it again..."

"Yeah, it's too bad your birthday only comes once a year," commented Nadine, sarcastically.

Rhonda's face lit up. "Nadine, that's a fabulous idea! When I get home, I'll ask Mother if we could make our shopping sprees a weekly engagement!"

Nadine groaned furtively.

"By the way," added Rhonda. "You haven't said anything about the new sweater I'm wearing."

"Um...it looks exactly like your old sweater."

"Nadine, bite your tongue! Sure, to the untrained eye, they may LOOK the same, but they're made by COMPLETELY separate designers."

Nadine took a second look. "Uh, Rhonda...?"

"For example, note the stitch pattern on the sides – it's much more subtle than my other sweater..."

"Rhonda...?"

"...And note the designer label on the back...and the quality of the fabric..."

"Rhonda..."

"I swear, Nadine, you'll never become as fashion-conscientious as I am...I don't know what you would do without..."

"Hey, Rhonda!" yelled Helga from the other end of the hallway. "Your fly is open!"

"WHAT??" She looked down and, to her dismay, her black pants were indeed unzipped. Those who were in the hallway immediately began to point and laugh. "Nadine, why didn't you tell me?!?"

Horrified, Rhonda turned beet red and quickly darted off, passing Mr. Simmons along the way.

Mr. Simmons scratched his head in confusion. "What happened to Rhonda?"

"She's not feeling well, Mr. Simmons..." Nadine quickly lied.

"Oh dear – well then, I think you'd better go see if she's alright. I'll excuse you from class until you both come back."

"Thank you, Mr. Simmons," said Nadine as she raced down the hallway after her humiliated friend.

Rhonda remained in the Nurse's office for most of the morning. As she laid face-down on one of the cots in a semi-catatonic state, the nurse sat beside her quietly, taking her blood pressure.

"It's official. My life is over." Rhonda said, not budging from her spot on the cot.

"Oh, don't be silly. You have a long, full life ahead of you," commented the nurse.

"Don't you get it?!" snapped Rhonda, looking up angrily. "I committed the ultimate fashion faux-pas! Me! The most stylish and coolest girl in P.S. 118! There's just no excuse – I'm a fashion failure, and that's all there is to it!"

"Come on, Rhonda," said Nadine, sitting on her other side. "It's not the end of the world."

"Oh, yeah? I'd like to see you walk around school with your zipper down. You don't understand – I can never show my face in public again!"

Finally, Nadine was fed up. "You know what, Rhonda? I've had it – all you've ever cared about is how other people think. Well, guess what? They don't control your life, you do. So, if you want to sit in here and mope and feel sorry for yourself because of a stupid little zipper, then you do that."

The school bell rang. "I'm going to lunch now." And with that, Nadine stood up and exited the office.

"She's right, you know," added the nurse. "I think it's about time you rejoin your friends; I bet they've probably forgotten all about your little incident. And I'm sure a nice, healthy lunch is just what you need to feel better."

Rhonda sighed in defeat, and nodded. The nurse then led Rhonda to the door, but instead of heading for the cafeteria, she went straight for the girls' washroom. There she looked at herself long and hard in the bathroom mirror.

"Maybe Nadine has a point..." thought Rhonda. "Maybe if I just walk into that cafeteria head up high, no one will even mention my transgression. All I need is a distraction..."

Suddenly she snapped her finger and pulled from her purse the Essence of Aphrodite perfume. "A-ha! My *piece du resistance*!" Rhonda sprayed it liberally on herself, then stormed out of the washroom on a mission. As she made her way to the cafeteria, she passed by a boy from another class. The boy walked on, staring at Rhonda and not looking where he was going, and ended up falling into a nearby trash container.

Meanwhile, in the cafeteria, Helga was recalling the events of early morning for Phoebe's benefit.

"...so then I yell, 'Your fly's open!' and she bolts for the nurse's office. Ha ha ha! I'm telling ya, it was a laugh riot!"

Phoebe nonchalantly took a sip from her milk carton. "That wasn't very nice, Helga," she chided.

"Oh come on, Phoebes! She deserved it, what with her glitterati this and bling-bling that..." as she said this, Helga mimicked Rhonda's gestures with the ring from the day before. "Besides, she's such an easy target – tell her that her shoelaces are untied and she throws a fit!"

"Methinks that someone is jealous..."

"What? Jealous? ME? Oh please, don't hold your breath! Why would I be jealous of a snotty, stuck-up princess like miss Rhonda Wellington Lloyd? Since when do I care so much about what other people think of me?"

Phoebe didn't respond, but she did look over to the table where Arnold was sitting and having

a very engaging conversation with Lila. Helga followed her eyes, then gave Phoebe a dirty look.

"I didn't say anything."

"No, but you were thinking it, and you can cut it out. I don't care what ANYONE thinks about me, you got that?"

"Whatever you say, Helga," Phoebe said with a little smirk.

"Just shut up and eat your salisbury..." muttered Helga as she angrily stabbed her fork into her food.

The cafeteria doors flung open as Rhonda appeared. Helga grinned. "Well, look who finally decided to show up..."

Ignoring Helga, Rhonda made her way to the lunch queue. It wasn't until she was next in line to pay when she slapped her hand on her forehead. "Oh no – I forgot my wallet at home!"

"It's okay, Rhonda," said Harold, who was standing in front of her. "I'll pay for you."

"Oh," said Rhonda, quite taken aback. "Thank you, Harold..."

But as Rhonda picked up her tray and left the line, she noticed that Harold was trailing behind her, and when she sat down at a table, he sat right beside her.

"Uh..." she edged slightly away from Harold. At this point, she felt the presence of someone else. Sure enough, sitting on her other side, Stinky was taking in loud, snorting whiffs of air through his nostrils.

"Gawrsh, Rhonda," he sighed. "Your hair smell like a big ol' bowl of lemon puddin'...and I LOVE lemon puddin'..."

Eugene was next to come to the table. He set his tray down across from Rhonda and smiled, raising his eyebrows in an allegedly seductive manner. "This seat taken?" he asked.

Rhonda eyed the three boys suspiciously. "Did you all take geek pills this morning?"

"*Wheeze...wheeze...wheeze...*" Rhonda tilted her head slightly. Brainy stood behind her, breathing down her neck.

Helga had witnessed the whole thing unfold and looked at Phoebe cynically. "Oh yeah – I'm REAL jealous of Rhonda right now..."

Later that day, sixth-graders Ruth, Connie, Maria, Cookie and Simone were spending time at the mall. Ruth eagerly walked ahead, leading the others to the same new store that Rhonda

had visited the day before.

"I'm telling you girls," said Ruth. "They've got all sorts of neat stuff at this beauty store. I didn't buy anything yet, cuz I don't get paid my allowance until the weekend, but-"

Suddenly, she gasped.

"So, where is this place?" asked Maria.

"I-I don't understand. It should be right here..." Ruth pointed at a vacant space plastered "FOR LEASE" and turned to look at the other girls for help, but only received cold stares and exasperated sighs.

"I don't see no store!" said Connie, vehemently.

"But...I know it was...I was just here last week..."

"Oh brother," said Simone. "Looks like Ruth the Airhead strikes again. Come on girls, let's get out of here."

Simone, Connie and Maria walked away from the empty store as Ruth desperately tried to explain the nonexistent beauty parlor. Cookie stood and looked at the sign "Madame Edusa's Boutique" above the vacant space for several seconds, blew a bubble with her gum, then followed the group.

That evening, Luna prepped Phoebe and Helga for the night's assignment. She paced back and forth in front of them, detailing what needed to be done.

"I'm glad that there are two of you now," she said. "At least now we can split up and cover more area. Phoebe, tonight you'll come with me and scout the western portion of the city."

"Right," Phoebe nodded in compliance.

"And Helga-"

Luna paused, then sighed. Once again, Helga was not listening. She was looking up at the full moon, her mind elsewhere. "HELGA!"

"What?" she snapped.

"I'd like you to cover the eastside, understood?"

"Whatever," Helga said sarcastically. "Criminy, I know what I'm doing. I've only done it like a hundred times already."

The two teams split up. Phoebe and Luna leapt onto the rooftop of a nearby building and began covering ground. Helga, on the other hand, merely turned around and casually walked down the street, taking her sweet time.

Meanwhile, at Sunset Arms, Arnold was leaving the boarding house, holding his pet pig Abner by the leash.

"I'll be right back, Grandpa," he yelled from the porch. "I'm just going to take Abner for a quick walk!"

"Okay, Arnold, be safe," his Grandpa called from inside. And with that, Abner darted down the stairs and down the sidewalk, dragging Arnold behind as he tried to keep up.

"...and so, using a pleasing scent to attract its prey, the Venus fly trap lures unsuspecting insects to their doom..."

The television blared in the living room. Miriam snored loudly on the couch; her mouth was gaped wide open, and in her right hand, she held a half-empty coffee mug containing her favorite beverage.

Meanwhile, upstairs in her own room, Helga was lying on her bed, holding her locket an arms-length away from her face. As she gazed at Arnold's visage, the same thought kept burning in her mind: was Arnold really the boy who rescued her?

She silently pondered the question, staring intently at the locket, as though expecting the item to come to life and reveal the truth.

Suddenly, Helga's attention was brought to the sound of squealing outside her window.

"I'd recognize that pig anywhere..." she said, sitting up on her bed. Helga opened her window to peer outside and, sure enough, spotted Abner running around frantically on the street below. Immediately, Helga knew that something wasn't right.

"Arnold..."

Helga jumped out of bed and planted her feet firmly on the ground, the locket still grasped in her hand. "***MOON PRISM POWER, MAKE-UP!***"

Just then, she heard a pounding on her door. "Helga? What's going on in there?" Abner's "barking" had apparently roused Miriam, who had felt a tremor coming from Helga's room when she was climbing upstairs. She tried to open the door, but fortunately, it was locked, "Is everything alright?"

"I'm fine, Miriam!" said *Helga* through gritted teeth. "Criminy – can't a girl get changed in peace?!"

"Uh-kay honey, g'night..."

Miriam's footsteps trailed off. She waited until she heard her parents' door shut tight before going exiting through the window.

Following the frantic pig, *Helga* was led down the street several yards away, to a large and wide creature comprised entirely of green gelatinous goo. Inside the translucent belly of the beast, much to her surprise and horror, was Arnold, floating around as if in suspended animation.

Once she got past the overwhelming shock that her beloved was in danger, *Helga* sprung into action.

"That's it pal – you are so dead," *Helga* sprinted full force towards the monster. The monster stood its ground and did not attempt to retaliate. When she was close enough, she stuck her leg out and gave the creature a solid kick in the abdomen. The move had no effect; rather, her leg was taken in completely by the monster's belly and in no time flat, she too was engulfed.

Frustrated that she was now floating upside-down inside a creature that barely flinched at her attack, *Helga* began to get angry. She closed her eyes, clenched her fists, and growled in her typical scowling manner. As she did this, however, her body began to glow. Suddenly, the monster began to expand, and then finally exploded, spewing a wave of green goo everywhere. *Helga* ended up lying on her back, on top of an unconscious Arnold.

"Huh. That worked," she said, picking herself up and dusting off the goo that was quickly dissipating. *Helga* then turned her attention to Arnold. "Arnold? Are you alright? Can you hear me?"

She knelt down beside him and for awhile didn't do anything except stare in total awe and admiration. Despite the frightening incident, Arnold's face was calm, and he had the countenance of a sleeping angel.

"He's so beautiful..." she thought, gently parting his hair with her gloved hand. Finally she came to her senses and carefully put him over her shoulder. Throughout the entire ordeal, Abner barked furiously.

"All right, all right – I heard you," *Helga* started out slow, adjusting to the dead weight, but then gradually picked up speed until she was jogging down the street. Abner followed close on her tail, his leash dragging lively on the concrete behind him.

Around the same time, Rhonda was at the City Park. She was on a less-traveled route, trudging through bushes and ducking low-hanging tree branches. At last she had come to a little clearing, surrounded on all sides by trees. Gasping for breath, she leaned against one of the trunks and sighed.

"Whew...I think I lost them..." she whipped out her vanity mirror and was about to open it, when she heard the rustling of leaves a few feet away. "Who's there?"

Suddenly, Curly emerged from his hiding spot, a large heart-shaped box of chocolates in tow. "A-ha! There you are, my pet!" Rhonda couldn't believe her eyes. He approached her and handed her the box of chocolates.

"Uh...thanks," she said.

Curly then got on one knee and placed a hand over his heart. He pulled a small book from his back pocket and held it up prophetically so that he may read it. "*Ah, how do I love thee? Let me count thy ways...*" He tossed the book aside. "But that would take all night – so how about a kiss instead?"

Repulsed by the suggestion, Rhonda pushed Curly onto his butt. "Ugh! No way! I can't believe you, Curly – you're such a creep!"

"She's right, Curly," said Sid, who also appeared from behind the trees. "Besides, if anyone's going to get a kiss, it should be me!"

"In your dreams!" yelled Harold. "That kiss belongs to me!"

The two boys were about to get into an altercation when Lorenzo, of all people, broke them up.

"You two are acting like animals!" he chided. "Surely not fit for someone of such high caliber as Rhonda. A sophisticated lady needs a sophisticated man. And I just happen to be available..."

"You?" the two boys said skeptically.

"Why not?" Lorenzo replied. "After all, heh...*I* have a limo."

"You're gonna have your front teeth on the ground if you don't get out of my face!" threatened Sid. "Rhonda's my girl!"

"No, she's my girl!" yelled Stinky.

Suddenly, the rest of the boys from Mr. Simmons' class emerged from the trees, all bitterly arguing, feuding over Rhonda. Unable to take anymore of the chaos, Rhonda put her hands over her ears and yelled: "STOP IT, STOP IT, STOP IT!!!"

The boys fell silent, and were all staring at the exasperated girl.

"That's better. What? Do I have something in my teeth?"

"Uh...Rhonda...?" Sid made a pointing gesture, signaling for her to turn around. When she

did, Rhonda came face-to face with a hideous green-skinned woman with yellow eyes, snake hair and reptilian scales.

"Sssssssssso...." hissed the woman. "I finally found you."

Rhonda fainted to the ground.

"Let's get out of here!" screamed Sid as the boys turned and fled.

Suddenly, the snakes on the woman's head extended outward, biting every single one of them and turning them to stone as they stood. In no time flat, she had taken a clearing full of boys and changed it into a garden full of still-life statues.

"***SHABON SPRAY!***"

The clearing was swiftly overtaken by fog. The snake-woman hissed and began to look about in confusion.

Standing on the limb of a tree, high above the ground, *Phoebe* and Luna were examining the scene.

"Can you see her?" asked Luna.

"No," replied *Phoebe*, "The mist is too thick..."

"Try pressing your earring."

"Oh? Oh!" She had used her fingers to squeeze one of her stud earrings, and instantly her eyewear transformed into a high-tech visor. When she had set her eyes back to the mist, she now could see an outline of the monster below, among other things.

"According to this, her hair is made entirely of snakes. Their bites paralyze victims and turn them to stone. Just like Medusa..."

"What about any weak points?" asked Luna.

Phoebe further scanned for information, then shook her head. "It doesn't say..."

A blunt force knocked *Phoebe* from her hiding spot and into a tree on the opposite end of the clearing, where she fell down. The snake-woman had spotted her.

"Where's Sailor Moon?" she demanded.

Phoebe was still trying to catch her breath; the wind was knocked out of her. Luna came to her side.

"Not here? Fine." Rhonda, who was still passed out, was lifted off the ground by the creature. "I can wait. Meet me at the Hillwood Mall in one hour."

The snake-woman clawed at the air, creating a rift in space. Taking Rhonda as a hostage, she slipped through and disappeared, with the rift vanishing just as soon as it had formed.

Fortunately for *Helga*, Arnold left one of his windows open a crack and she was able to enter from the roof. She plopped the unconscious fourth-grader onto his bed, then wiped the sweat from her brow.

"Phew! Arnold, you're no lightweight..." said *Helga* as she collapsed on his red couch against the wall. As she lay there, recovering her strength, she began to wonder: exactly how many times HAD she been in Arnold's room?

"Heh," she thought, "At least this time I'm not trying to steal anything from him."

Helga sat up on the couch and looked at Arnold. Still asleep. Suddenly it occurred to her that she could find out once and for all if Arnold was indeed her masked hero. She got up and began scouring the room for clues – a rose, a cape, a top hat – anything she could find that would connect him with her masked savior.

When she got to the closet, a broad smile crept onto her face. She opened the door and began to snoop around. She got on her hands and knees and inspected the floor. Shoes, more shoes, a baseball bat, a baseball glove, a skateboard, but nothing out of the ordinary. But *Helga*was adamant. "There's just GOTTA be something in here..."

"Hey!"

Helga poked her head out from inside the closet; Arnold was staring directly at her.

She stood up. "Arnold! Oh, thank goodness you're alright!"

She went to approach the bewildered boy, but he recoiled, still apprehensive.

"Who are you?" he asked. "What are you doing in my room?"

"I rescued you. You were attacked, and I saved you and brought you back here. Do you remember?"

Arnold rubbed his forehead. "I think so..." He looked up, directly into *Helga*'s eyes. "You look familiar...have we met?"

"W-what? No, of course not! That's absurd! I've never seen you before in my life!"

"Then how did you know my name? And where I lived?"

Helga was stuck; he got her there. "I...I..."

"Wait a minute," Arnold put his finger up, as if to silence her. "I DO know you...I should've realized the clues before..."

She braced herself. "This is it, *Helga*. He knows the truth..."

"You're her...the blonde Cecile...the girl I met on Valentine's Day, aren't you?"

Helga breathed a sigh of relief in her head. What a break! Even up close, he still couldn't recognize her. She decided to play along. "Uh...yeah. That's me."

"I knew it! I have so many questions - I've thought about it for such a long time, I had to find out."

"About what?" *Helga* asked.

"It was the only explanation that made sense...The little pink book, the parrot...Mr. Hynnh's daughter...it was you all along, wasn't it?"

Helga nodded solemnly.

"Wow. You seem to know an awful lot about me. Have you been spying on me?"

"No!...well, not exactly...maybe...yes...but I have a good reason!"

Arnold folded his arms. "Okay then. Let's hear it."

"Well, Arnold, it's like this..." she began, pacing the carpet floor. "The truth of the matter is..."

There was a long a pause. "Is...?" said Arnold.

Desperate to come up with an answer, Helga looked up at the night sky, at the full moon. "The truth is, Arnold...that...I'm an alien."

Arnold cocked an eyebrow dubiously. "An alien?"

"That's right," she said, slowly approaching Arnold. "I'm...actually from a distant planet...moon of a planet. I've been sent to Earth to protect it from the evil forces bent on turning it into a desolate wasteland...or something like that. I forget the details..."

"You didn't really expect me to fall for that, did you?"

Helga laughed sheepishly and threw her hands up. "Heh...well, it was worth a try..."

"Okay," replied Arnold, a little peeved at the absurdity of her excuse. "Suppose that I chose to believe that you were an alien lifeform dropped from another planet. That still doesn't explain why you've been spying on me."

"Doesn't it? I mean, Earth is so drab and boring compared to the lush, exotic moon where I reside. I was about to wash my hands on the whole "protect and serve" mission...that is, until I met you."

Helga sat on the bed next to Arnold. "You're so honest, so kind, so alive with hopes and dreams....I figured that a planet capable of producing such a beautiful creature had to be worth saving."

They stood there in silence for several seconds. Arnold took her hand lightly into his. "Well...can you at least tell me your name?"

The request caught *Helga* off guard. At the top of her head, she decided to make something up.

"It's....Sera. Sera Mew."

"Sera Mew..." repeated Arnold, still gazing at *Helga*. "I like it."

Suddenly, there was a pounding at Arnold's door; *Helga* jumped at the sound. "It's okay," he said. "It's only Abner, my pet pig. You can let him in."

Helga got up and walked over to the door to let the squealing pig inside. It darted across the room and straight into Arnold's arms. "Hey there, boy. You doin' okay?"

Abner oinked and wagged his tail furiously. *Helga* smiled and watched as Arnold began scratching Abner's pink potbelly. For the first time, she felt at home – at peace. Not just some annoying spectator in her beloved's life, but an actual part of it. It felt so...right.

This moment of heaven, however, was cut abruptly cut short by the ringing of her cell phone. She gave Arnold an apologetic look as she pulled out the phone to answer. "Yeah?"

It was *Phoebe* on the other line. "We need you down at the city mall, ASAP."

"All right – I'm on my way." *Helga* hung up and sighed. "Sorry, Arnold. I gotta go – duty calls."

"I understand," he said, and stood up from the bed so that he could shake her hand. "Thank you, Sera."

"Pfft...oh, please. If anything, it's me who should be thanking YOU."

"Me? Why? I haven't done anything special."

A sharp dagger struck *Helga*. She hid her disappointment with a smile. "You're right. How silly of me." She went to turn and walk away, yet she could not move from her spot.

Arnold was still holding her hand. Tightly.

"When will I see you again?" he asked.

Helga smiled. "Oh...let's just say...once in a blue moon?"

Arnold released her hand and she climbed up the sloping wall-steps to the open window. Then, with a wave, she leapt outside and out of sight, leaving Arnold where he stood and Abner barking at the foot of the steps.

Rhonda awoke, still half in a daze. She shook her head and groaned, "Ugh, my head..."

She lifted her head and looked around. She was in the mall, on the ground level, tied up to one of the sliding gate-doors used to lock up stores at night.

"Oh, no - it's finally happened!" Rhonda gasped. "I'm being held for ransom!!"

As she pulled and attempted to free herself from her restraints, there came the sound of a low chuckle. Rhonda looked ahead and saw the woman with the braids standing just a few feet in front of her.

"Wait...I recognize you. You're that woman who sold me the perfume the other day!"

The woman grinned.

"Release me this instant!" demanded Rhonda. "My Daddy is a very powerful man in this city - when he finds out I'm missing he'll lock you in jail and throw away the key. You won't see a red cent."

The woman chuckled again. "Silly girl...your money is of no use to me..."

"Then why are you holding me against my will?"

The woman turned so that her back was facing Rhonda. "I needed bait to lure my prey."

"What are you talking about?"

"You'll see soon enough. For now, just hang around..." the woman walked away, leaving Rhonda hopelessly bemused.

Running across the empty parking lot, underneath the steady glow of lights, *Helga* and *Phoebe* arrived at last to the mall. At the entrance, the doors were locked. To the right of the entrance, a huge hole had been blown into the wall.

"She's here..." whispered *Phoebe*.

"Oh, gee," remarked *Helga* sarcastically. "What gave you that idea - the petrified mall cop at the entrance, or the path of hopeless carnage and destruction left in its wake?"

"Stay alert, girls," warned Luna, who leapt into the makeshift entrance. "We don't want to be taken by surprise."

The two scouts followed Luna, who followed the path of broken glass and debris all the way to the section of the mall where Rhonda was being held captive.

Helga scoffed. "Is this some kind of joke? What is SHE doing here?"

"Don't worry, Rhonda," said *Phoebe*. "We've come to rescue you."

"Hmph - well, it's about time," Rhonda said haughtily. "What took you so long?"

"Well, *excuuuuuuse* me, princess!" accosted *Helga*. "What do you expect? We just came from the other side of the freakin' city to just save your sorry, pompous butt! A little 'thank you' would be nice!"

"Pompous? POMPOUS?"

"And spoiled, and materialistic...!"

"Do I know you from somewhere?"

"Uh...don't mind my partner," apologized *Phoebe*. "She's just a little highstrung."

"How dare you! I may be spoiled, but at least I'm not the one dumb enough to walk right into a trap."

"What?"

Before *Helga* and *Phoebe* could react, a band of snakes had wrapped around each of their waists and bound them together, back-to-back. Rhonda watched as they were both lifted in the air by the woman, who had now transformed back into a medusa-like creature.

The two girls kicked and struggled, but they could not break free from the monsters grasp; rather, its grip on them became tighter the more they thrashed about.

"That's right!" she laughed. "Keep struggling! The more you fight to get free, the tighter my snakes will constrict! They will squeeze you both to the point of asphyxiation – say your prayers while you still can, HAHAHA!"

"This looks bad," said Luna aloud.

Rhonda's jaw dropped. "Did you just TALK?"

Luna bit her tongue. She looked at her scouts, who were obviously in peril, then back at the

surprised girl. Finally, she sighed and approached her.

"Yes, Rhonda. I can talk. And I can get you down from there. But you have to trust me."

Rhonda laughed nervously. "I've been hanging here WAY too long..."

The medusa-woman was busy crushing the life out of *Helga* and *Phoebe*, and not paying attention to Luna and Rhonda. She began to laugh, when a purse suddenly bounced off her head and onto the floor. She turned around and hissed. "Who threw that?!"

At that moment, she realized that Rhonda was no longer in bondage, and was in fact standing a few feet away from her.

"Hey! For the record, your perfume stinks! I want my money back!"

"Impudent little brat! How did you escape?"

Rhonda didn't reply; instead, she used one hand to apply lipgloss and the other hand to check her reflection in her compact vanity mirror.

The monster rolled its eyes. "No matter...you're not worth the hassle anyway. I'll deal with you last..." She went back to the task at hand, ignoring Rhonda.

"Now!!" yelled out Luna.

Snapping the compact mirror shut, Rhonda flung it towards the creature so that it landed just a few inches from its feet. Looking at the case of the mirror, the monster noticed the small engraving of a symbol on top and went pale. "It can't be..."

The compact had suddenly popped open. A blinding white light shone out, stunning the snake-woman and causing her to release both *Helga*and *Phoebe* from her grasp. The monster staggered about in confusion as Rhonda crossed both hands across her face, palms spread out, the hand with the ring in front.

"***MARS POWER, MAKE-UP!***

In an instant, her red sweater and black pants were swapped for a sailor uniform not unlike Sailor Moon and Sailor Mercury's. The only differences: red was the primary color of her suit, and she was wearing high-heel shoes in lieu of boots. Her hairstyle remained unchanged save the decorative red hairclips adorning it. A pair of white gloves covered her hands, and a glittery red charm bracelet dangled from her wrist, containing her favorite lipgloss.

Helga and *Phoebe* were now struggling to get to their feet, but with great difficulty; the snake-woman had already recovered from the attack and was now glaring angrily at the new challenger.

"You'll pay dearly for that!" she hissed.

Rhonda looked behind her shoulder for assistance. "Hey talking cat, it didn't work! She's still alive!"

"My name is Luna, and that device was only suppose to stun the monster temporarily, not destroy it!"

"So what do I do now?"

"What do you mean 'what do you do'? You fight!"

Rhonda stared at Luna in disbelief. "Fight? Are you crazy? I don't know how to fight!"

The creature launched an attack, sending a snake flying in the duo's direction.

"Look out!" cried the fearless feline, jumping in the way of the serpent that was heading straight for *Rhonda*. As she swatted the snake away, Luna fell to the floor with a hard thump; she had been bitten. *Rhonda* backed away in horror from the stiff hunk of stone that used to be her only chance for victory.

"And now, you're next..." the monster hissed, launching another venomous snake from her scalp.

Rhonda watched helplessly as the distance between herself and doom began to close.

Suddenly, the projectile was intercepted by a flash of red light. It took awhile for *Rhonda* to realize that a red rose from an unknown source had pinned the snake to the floor. It writhed violently for several seconds before vanishing in a murky, black cloud of smoke.

"Sailor Mars!" *Rhonda* looked up; standing on the railing of the second level of the mall was the boy in the tuxedo. In one hand, he held his cane; in the other, a remote. He pointed the former at the girl. "Don't be afraid. Believe in yourself and BE yourself...trust the music."

With his other hand, he pointed the remote at an electronics store which currently displayed television sets in the front window. With the click of a button, all of the TVs were turned on to the same image of Ronnie Matthews.

The pulsating beat of pop music filled the area. *Rhonda* gasped – she knew this song all too well. As if possessed, she closed her eyes and began moving in sync with the dancers in the music video, following the lyrics...

We're all alone now; won't you let me in?

It's raining outside; my heart is crying inside

I'm on my knees now – you open the door;

I can't ask for much, I can't take anymore

At last, *Helga* and *Phoebe* were able to help each other off the ground. Mesmerized, they watched the mysterious scout in red dance to the music, mimicking every nuance and gesture from the video flawlessly, as though it were an art.

Your crystal blue eyes electrify me

My pulse is racing – girl, is it not plain to see?

I need you baby; forever, j'adore

And I just can't take it no more

"What are you doing?" cried the perplexed snake-woman. "Stop dancing!"

All of the snakes on her head stood on end as they shot out for their target. But *Rhonda's* dance, while graceful, was also evasive; try as the monster might, she could not get a hit on the girl.

Girl, don't you know that I'm hot for you?

Don't you realize I'll always be true?

Open your heart and please let me in

'Cuz my burning love conquers all fire within

Touch my heart, baby, and make me fly

Without you, woman, I'm sure to die

To you, my darling, I will belong

'Cuz you know that you set my soul on

FIRE!

(fire, fire)

FIRE SOUL!

On FIRE!

(fire, fire)

FIRE SOUL!

On FIRE!

(fire, fire)

FIRE SOUL

"FIRE SOUL!"

She yelled out the final line of the song, standing in her finishing pose. This time, however, an orb of fire materialized in her palm and shot directly into the snake-woman, sending her flying through a window of a nearby store.

Broken glass strewn everywhere, the creature slowly got to her hands and knees. Her snake-eyes, which were originally yellow, were now red with fury, glaring accusingly at her assailant.

"YOU...!!!" But then she paused. She looked to her right, then to her left. Surrounding her from all angles was the same wretched image of her hideous face, scaly and lacerated.

"My reflection...no...no...not that...anything but that....! NO.....!!!" The monster tried to flee, but the damage had already been done. Almost immediately, she was turned to stone. She was frozen in a pose where she was on her knees with one arm stretching outward, as if to plea for mercy.

Helga and *Phoebe* approached the store cautiously, and peered inside at the statue. Helga then looked up to read the sign above the shop. "Mirror, Mirror. Heh...so *that* was her weakness."

Since the monster was now defeated, its magic was reversed, and Luna was instantly re-animated. She shook her head, as though she were snapping out of a daze. "What on Earth...?"

The statue then crumbled into dust, disappearing forever. *Rhonda*, meanwhile, was still standing in the same spot, looking at her hands as if seeing them for the first time.

Rhonda crinkled her nose and frowned. "Well, I don't know..."

Luna and Phoebe exchanged nervous glances. For an hour, they painstakingly attempted to win over their reluctant new recruit, but to no avail.

"Well," said Luna, sighing in defeat, "I really don't know to convince you-"

"Here, let me take a crack at it."

Unexpectedly, Helga led Rhonda away from the group to talk to her in private.

"Look at it this way: if you join us, you'll be part of the most exclusive club for miles around. A secret society where its members – rather than, I dunno, go shopping around for frilly, girly

things and gossiping about boys – use super powers to restore the natural order, while sporting a trendy, fashionable uniform that can't be bought in stores."

"Well..." said Rhonda. "Those outfits *are* pretty boss..."

"So what do you say?" Helga extended her hand out to Rhonda who, after careful deliberation, smiled and accepted it, shaking it slowly. She then turned to the others and gave them a thumbs-up.

"Okay, I'm in."

"Wonderful!" said Luna.

"We're glad to have you as part of the team," added Phoebe.

Rhonda beamed. "That's to be expected. And as president of the club, I decree that..."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa – time out!" interjected Helga, making the "T" sign with her hands. "Who died and made you boss? I'm the leader of this group!"

"Ha! That's hard to believe. Every true leader knows that red is the color of authority. Besides, I'm obviously better suited for the position; I deserve to be in charge!"

"You know, you're *reeeeally* pushing it, princess..."

As the Rhonda and Helga began to bicker amongst one another, Luna and Phoebe sat silently on the sidelines.

"I hope you've realized what you've done, Luna..." said Phoebe.

"So do I..." she replied.

Later that night, on the roof of Sunset Arms, a young football-headed boy stood outside. He said nothing, though he looked plaintively at the full moon, a red-heeled shoe cradled in his hands.

Chapter 5: Chapter 5

Note: For the sake of clarity, whenever a character is in their transformed state, their name will be given in italics.

For example:

Helga G. Pataki: Helga

Sailor Moon: *Helga*

Wally loves you, all you little girls and boys...

HI-YAAAAAAAAAH!

Wally loves you, and he loves it when you buy his toys...

Helga swung the baseball bat she held in her hand with all her might, sending the life-sized blue alligators hurtling into a toy display. Several more giant Wally dolls surrounded Helga as she attempted to fend them off.

"This is insane, Luna!" she said angrily. "There's too many of them...! YAHH! And they won't stay down...!"

It was midnight, the scouts were on evening patrol of the city when they found themselves at the Mega ToyWorld located downtown. Apparently they had stumbled upon something, for as soon as they went inside, they were taken by surprise and ambushed by over a dozen Wally dolls.

"WATCH OUT!" cried Luna. A Wally had snuck up behind *Helga* and wrapped his big blue stubby arms around her.

"I just want a hug..." it said in a deceptively-goofy voice.

"Hug this!" *Helga* placed her martial arts training into action and threw the toy reptile clear over her head and into a group of other Wallys. By now she was getting exasperated. "Hey, I can use some help over here!...HELLO?"

"In a minute!" called out *Rhonda*. She was out of the fray, talking on her cell phone. "So anyway, Nadine, I was at the nail salon the other day, and you will not believe who I saw..."

"Anytime would be nice...!"

Phoebe was at the sidelines, analyzing the situation with her high-tech visor. "*Helga*, go for the defected one – that's their weak point!"

Helga looked to her right; sure enough, amongst the crowd stood a giant Wally slightly darker in color than the rest, with only one eye. She cracked her knuckles and smiled. "Alright – now we're getting somewhere!"

When she peered to her left, she saw a nearby display stand for the product "My First Javelin Set". *Helga* grabbed a javelin and charged, pointing the business end directly at the defected abomination. Without hesitation, she impaled her target, effectively shish-ka-bobbing a couple more onto the javelin in the process. As they fell to the ground in a sea of tattered fluff, *Helga* slammed her boot forcefully into the purple Wally's eye, shattering it. This time, the other Wallys stopped dead in their traps, also falling over. Black smoke emanated from the dolls, and they transformed back into their harmless, cuddly forms.

"Good work, Helga!" congratulated Luna.

But *Helga* was on the war path. She stormed over to *Rhonda*, who was still heavily engrossed in her phone conversation.

"Uh-huh...yeah...HEY!"

Helga snatched the phone from <i.Rhonda's hand and flung it several yards away. *Rhonda* was mortified. "Are you crazy?! That's a $300 phone!"

"I'm getting butt kicked by a mob of oversized pincushions, and all you care about is catching up on the latest gossip?!"

"It was important!" defended *Rhonda*. "And anyway, why couldn't Luna just use her timekey-thingy to slow them down for you?"

"Oh, gee – I don't know...maybe because it doesn't work! Even I know that, and so would you if spent more time listening and less time yapping on that stupid phone!"

"Uh, you guys..."

"Not now, Phoebe!" shot *Helga*, contradicting herself.

"Well, what do you expect me to do?"

"Oh, gee – I don't know...maybe NOT answer your phone for a change?"

"Ha! And not have any more friends? Yeah right – I'm not like you..."

"Oh, that is IT....!"

With that remark, *Helga* finally lost it. The two girls argued heatedly as *Phoebe* and Luna

looked on.

Helga was fast asleep in her bed. The sun was shining through the curtains of her window, and a few scattered beams fell on her face and brought her out of her slumber. As she awoke, she found herself face-to-face with a pair of enormous red eyes.

"AAH!" Helga screamed and fell out of her bed onto the ground, startled. The pair of eyes had actually belonged to Luna, who had been sitting patiently on top of the bed, waiting for her to get up. Helga got to her feet, her heart racing. "What? WHAT??"

"I just wanted to remind you of the scout meeting tonight," said Luna.

Helga groaned and rubbed her eyes. "Criminy...you nearly gave me a heart attack. You woke me up for THAT?"

"Sorry," apologized Luna. "Actually, I wanted to talk to you about something else. I've noticed that you and Rhonda don't get along particularly well."

Helga scoffed. "That's an understatement..."

"I realize that you two aren't as close as, say, you and Phoebe are, but could you at least pretend to like each other? After all, you are still a team."

"Ugh...fine, fine. Just quit sneaking up on me in the morning, okay?"

"I appreciate it. See you at tonight's meeting," And with that, Luna disappeared through the curtains.

Helga sighed. "I got to start remembering to close that window..."

Class was starting in Mr. Simmons' room, and the students were taking their seats.

"People, people! Let's get started, please!" advised Mr. Simmons as he was taking roll call.

At that moment, Rhonda and Nadine entered the classroom and went to their seats. Rhonda glared at Helga as she moved past her desk.

"Why don't you take a picture, Rhonda-loid? It'll last longer," shot back Helga.

"Whatever," said Rhonda, matching her scowl.

"Alright, then," said Mr. Simmons after completing attendance. "Looks like everyone is here today. I guess we can get star...yes, Eugene?"

"Mr. Simmons, can I sit up front today?" asked the red-headed geek. "I left my glasses at home."

Helga raised her hand. "I'll switch seats with Eugene, Mr. Simmons."

"Uh...okay, Helga..." said Mr. Simmons, a little surprised. "How nice of you to volunteer."

Helga grabbed her book and walked to the back of the room, taking the seat next to Phoebe; Rhonda eyed her suspiciously.

"Why so charitable today?" inquired Phoebe.

"I have my reasons," replied Helga, smugly.

"Okay then," said Mr. Simmons. "Today we're going to learn about a topic that I find very special: the wonders of municipal law. Everyone, take out your social studies textbooks and turn to page 52..."

The class groaned, but reluctantly obeyed. As Mr. Simmons began his lecture, Helga also opened her book, but then ripped away a corner from one of its pages and placed it into her mouth. After forming the paper into a wad, Helga pulled a straw from out of her bow and firmly placed the wad inside of it. She then – while aiming the straw at the back of Rhonda's head – took a deep breath, and blew. The wad sailed across the room and hit Rhonda, not sticking but bouncing off and landing on the floor. Perplexed, Rhonda felt where the wad had struck her and looked around the room in confusion.

The intercom mounted on the upper portion of the wall crackled as Principal Perky's voice chirped through. "Mr Simmons, could I see Phoebe, Rhonda and Helga in my office, please?"

"Uh, certainly – girls?"

"Ooh," taunted Harold. "Somebody's in trouble! Ha ha ha!"

"Put a sock in it, pink boy," warned Helga as she stood up from her seat.

"Okay class – settle down," said Mr. Simmons as the girls exited the classroom.

"Nice going, Helga" muttered Rhonda as they made their way down the hall towards the Principal's office.

"What are you talking about?" snapped Helga angrily. "I didn't do anything!"

"Then explain why we're going to the office. Come on, who'd you beat up this time?"

"I didn't beat anyone up!" Helga then grabbed Phoebe by the elbow and brandished her as if

to prove a point. "Look who's with us. Have you ever seen Ms. Straight-As here get busted for anything?"

Rhonda looked away. "I guess not..."

"There you go," concluded Helga, releasing her friend from her grasp.

Phoebe cradled her elbow with her other hand. "Still...it's odd. Why do you suppose she wants to see all three of us?"

"Well, there's only one way to find out," Helga said, opening the office door. She then looked at the other two, motioning in a grand gesture. "After you."

Rhonda rolled her eyes as she walked past Helga. Phoebe followed and Helga closed the door behind them.

Principal Perky was sitting behind the desk, and welcomed them with one of her trademark grins. "How nice to see you, girls. Please – have a seat."

The three girls complied, each taking a seat at one of the three chairs situated before them at the desk.

Perky purposefully clasped her hands together, her gaze never leaving them. "So...you're probably wondering why I called you here?"

Rhonda's hands shot up in defense. "I swear, whatever she did, I had nothing to do with it. We don't even hang out."

Helga shot an angry glance at Rhonda. "WHAT?"

At the same time, a guilt-ridden Phoebe stood up. "All right, I confess!" she blurted out, on the verge of tears. "Last Thursday, I made an unauthorized trip to the washroom without a hall pass!"

Perky chuckled softly. "Relax, girls – you're not in trouble."

Helga and Rhonda turned their attention back to the principal. Phoebe slowly sat back down, relieved. "We're not?"

"Of course not! In fact, I called you here because I wanted to congratulate you. Out of all the students here at P.S. 118, we've narrowed it down to you three as the best candidates to represent our school on a diplomatic trip to Spain!"

"Spain?" exclaimed the girls, simultaneously.

Principal Perky nodded enthusiastically. "Of course, we can only send one of you..."

Helga sighed and folded her arms. "Criminy, here we go..."

"But whoever we choose will be awarded with many unique opportunities."

"Like?"

"Well, an all-expense paid week-long stay at a five-star hotel in Madrid...."

This piqued Helga's interest. "Go on..."

"Not to mention numerous scholarship opportunities, a nice spending allowance, and an audience with the country's president."

Phoebe and Rhonda's eyes widened at the mention of all the lucrative perks. Helga, however, retained her skepticism. "So, when is this decision going to be made?"

"I'd like to start interviewing you first thing tomorrow," said Perky. "I want to get a feel for the type of unique energy you each bring to the table. You know - see what makes you tick."

"Well, that shouldn't be too hard," said Helga as she stood up from her seat. "Are we done here?"

"Yes. Hope to see you girls bright and early tomorrow morning. Oh...and good luck."

Perky walked over to the door to let them out, and the three girls filed into the hallway.

After the door closed, Helga turned to Phoebe. "I don't know about you, but that lady gives me the creeps..." she confided out of earshot.

But Helga was given no reply, as both Phoebe and Rhonda were lost in their thoughts about possibly being chosen for the opportunity of a lifetime.

The rest of the day went by fairly uneventfully, and in no time the dismissal bell rang. Luna waited at the foot of the school building, and the four of them made their way to the Pataki household for the much-touted scout meeting. Helga disguised the true intention of the gathering as simply a "play-date amongst friends", to which the scatterbrained Miriam willfully accepted, and was so excited that she decided to whip up something special from her cookbook for the occasion (this plan, of course, fell through as soon as she got to the 'Smoothies' chapter).

The meeting took place in Helga's room, with Helga lying on the bed, Rhonda sitting on a chair, and Phoebe sitting cross-legged on the floor; Luna sat in the middle of them and cleared her throat.

"I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you all for coming."

"Pfft – yeah right," muttered Helga under her breath, her head dangling upside-down from over the bed. "Like we had a choice..."

Luna ignored Helga's comment and continued to speak. "I think we might be nearing the end of our goal. Since the night at Toy World, there have been no recent monster sightings anywhere in the city. The negative energy, which I could literally feel permeating through the air, has now receded to an all-time low. I sense that it's only a matter time before-uh, yes, Rhonda?"

"Yeah, I was wondering if I could have Nadine take my place doing all this Sailor-stuff for a while? I'm going to be in Madrid in the next couple of weeks."

Luna was nonplussed. "I beg your pardon?"

"Madrid. Oh, don't act so surprised – you both knew that I was the one Principal Perky was going to pick, right?"

"I-I don't think I quite under-"

"Oh, come off your high horse, sister!" said Helga, sitting up from the bed. "What makes you so sure?"

"Well, I'm the prettiest, and the most popular, not to mention the most worldly. Granted, Phoebe is the smartest, but I'm very personable, and I've got the most connections. And let's be realistic, you really wouldn't stand a chance."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"Well, let's face it – you're not the prettiest or the smartest. And your fashion sense is just...yeuch. What business do you have in one of the trendiest places on the planet?"

"You guys, maybe we should just..."

"Zip it, Phoebes." At this point Helga was standing so that she could stare down Rhonda just inches from her face. "Just what are you trying to say?"

"I'm saying you're a fashion reject. End of story."

"Oh yeah? Well for your information, I doubt spoiled bratty princesses top the criteria for ideal diplomat material!"

"Excuse me?"

"Oh, you heard me, Rhonda-loid. I think Phoebe and I have just a good a chance of being chosen as you, not that we'd want to go on any dumb trip to Spain..."

"Actually..." interjected Phoebe.

"Not now, Phoebes!"

"Wait a minute!" yelled Phoebe, this time standing up from her spot on the floor. "I think I

have a say in this, too! And I wish you'd interrupting me, because it's really starting to...to...it really vexes me!"

"Girls please...." pleaded Luna, but she was drowned out by the three girls bickering.

Downstairs in the living room, Big Bob was sitting in his favorite armchair, reading the newspaper, when he was distracted by the commotion upstairs.

"Keep it down up there! Miriam! Tell Olga to pipe down!"

As usual, Miriam was fast asleep in the kitchen, this time still clutching a bottle of Tabasco sauce in her hand.

Big Bob grumbled to himself. "I never get any peace and quiet in this household..."

Things came to a fever pitch as Helga yanked on Rhonda's designer sweater while Rhonda played tug-of-war with Helga's hair. Phoebe groped around helplessly on her hands and knees; her glasses had been knocked off in the confusion.

"You're ripping it!" screamed Rhonda. "Let me go!"

At the same time, both girls released each other from their grasp, both falling to the floor.

"That's it!" yelled Rhonda. "I've had it!" And with that she stormed out of the room.

"Girls PLEASE control yourselves! You're a team!"

At last Phoebe had found her glasses and, before Luna could convince her to do otherwise, exited the room in the same fashion as Rhonda before her. Luna trailed behind. Helga was undeterred.

"FINE!" she yelled. "Who needs ya?!!" She hauled the closest object in her vicinity (thankfully, a pillow) at the door, which shut with the force of her throw. She then ran over to the window and stuck her head out to yell at the girls on ground level. "That's right, get movin'!"

Luna stood at the top of the steps of the Pataki household and watched helplessly as Rhonda and Phoebe went in opposite directions down the sidewalk and Helga continued her tirade from above.

"Oh dear..." she said quietly to herself. "What's happened...?"

Not long after the incident had unfolded, Helga sat on the couch in front of the television, vegging out on pork rinds while watching wrestling.

"Mad Dog Kalhoun has the Surgeon General in a submission hold!" barked the announcer on the screen. "But wait! The Full Monty just struck him with a chair!"

Helga stuffed her face with a handful of pork rinds and chewed noisily. "This match is fixed." Luna had not returned since the ordeal, which both surprised and relieved Helga; the last thing she wanted right now was to be lectured.

Eventually, she got off the couch during the commercial break and made an appearance in the kitchen, where Miriam was still napping. Only when Helga removed a glass from the cupboard and set it on the counter next to her did Miriam finally rouse from her sleep.

"Huh? Oh...hey, sweetie...." Miriam said, somewhat drowsily.

"Hey, Miriam," replied Helga flatly, pulling a bottle of Yahoo! from the fridge.

Miriam yawned, then stretched. "Whatcha doin'?"

"Just pouring something to drink."

"Mm-hmm..." Miriam held her head with her hand as her elbow rested on the counter. Suddenly her eyes shot wide open. "Oh hey, maybe you should ask your friends if they were thirsty? I can whip them up a nice smoothie."

Helga paused between gulps of her chocolate soda.

"There still here, aren't they?"

Helga cautiously lowered the glass, looking down at it. "No. They left a while ago. We had a fight."

To Helga's surprise, Miriam came up behind her, wrapping her arms around her in a hug.

"You know...you were 6 the last time you had a play-date. My little girl is growing up..."

"Uh..."

Miriam stood in the same spot for several seconds, still hugging her daughter (who was taken aback by this unexpected display of affection). It was almost seemed as if she had fallen asleep again, and Helga opened her mouth to speak, but Miriam spoke first.

"Take care of your friends, Helga. You'll have your fights and your disagreements...but that's part of being a friend. You have to take the good with the bad. Okay, honey?"

"Um...sure," despite her mother's somewhat detached state, Helga couldn't help but agree with her. Though she was still angry at the others, deep down, she felt it necessary for their fight to happen. She couldn't explain why...but she felt that she had to make things right.

Helga removed herself from her mother's grip. "Thanks, mom. I gotta go." She ran out of the

kitchen and towards the front door, leaving Miriam to sit back down at the counter and fall asleep.

Just as she was descending her porch, a luxury car pulled up next to her house on the street. The backseat window rolled down, revealing Rhonda on the inside.

"Hop in," she commanded..

Reluctantly, Helga obeyed, and opened the car door to enter. As the car drove away, they both sat on opposite sides of the backseat, looking through opposite windows to avoid each other's gaze; neither girl insisted on breaking the silence. Helga was eager to patch things up with her best friend; with Rhonda, not so much.

"I..." began Rhonda, not looking at her seatmate. "I'm...sorry I pulled your hair."

The air was tense for several seconds.

"It's cool," responded Helga, also still avoiding eye contact. "Sorry about your sweater."

"Yeah, well...I didn't like it that much, anyway."

She turned her head slightly to look at Helga and smiled faintly.

Helga turned to look at Rhonda, and slowly returned an equally faint smile.

No more was said for the remainder of the drive.

Helga knocked on the Heyerdahl's front door and was surprised to see that when Phoebe answered, Luna was with her.

Helga scratched the back of her head with her hand. "Listen, Phoebes...about what I said...I've been a real jerk to you..."

"Well, at times you can be a little pigheaded," Luna interjected.

"Uh, right....anyway, what I'm trying to say is....uh..."

"It's okay, Helga," said Phoebe. "I understand. And I forgive you."

Helga gave a sigh of relief as she was hugged unexpectedly for the second time that day.

"Do you really think I'm pigheaded?" she asked during the hug.

"Only a little," replied Phoebe.

"And she's not the only one."

Only when she looked over Helga's shoulder did she notice Rhonda was waving in front of

the parked vehicle.

Luna blinked incredulously. "Are you two still fighting?"

Rhonda smiled and approached the rest of the group. "Not anymore."

"Look at us, you guys," said Phoebe. "Quarreling over a little trip."

"I got a plan," chimed in Helga. "What say the three of us go back and lay it on the line for Perky? Either she chooses the three of us, or none at all."

"All or nothing?" asked Phoebe.

"Sounds good to me,"concurred Rhonda.

"Then it's settled – if we leave now, we might be able to catch her before she goes home. You coming, Luna?"

"Guess I don't have much of a choice," Luna quipped.

Helga smiled. "You catch on fast."

In no time, their ride pulled up in front of P.S. 118; the three girls and Luna promptly exited the vehicle.

"Don't wait up," Rhonda told the chauffeur, who nodded and drove down the street.

As they ascended the steps of the building, Luna began to hesitate. "You know, girls, I don't think I'm permitted on school premises."

"Relax," said Helga. "This school's seen stranger things than you behind its walls. Besides, what's Perky going to do about it?"

Classes had been out for several hours; the other students had since filed out from their after-school programs, and the janitors had completed their nightly maintenance, so the main hallway was eerily quiet as they made their way to Principal Perky's office.

"Do you think she's still here?" asked Rhonda.

"Only one way to find out," said Helga as she placed her hand on the doorknob. "Huh. Déjà vu."

Helga pushed the door open. "Whoa!" she yelled as she was seemingly yanked inside of the office.

"Helga!" the others exclaimed in surprise.

The door flew wide open as a mysterious force with the strength of a vacuum pulled Rhonda, Phoebe and Luna unexpectedly inside, then shut tightly when the hallway was once again empty.

"Helga....Helga, wake up..."

"Luna, she's not getting up..."

"Helga, can you hear me...?"

"Uh...my head..."

In a daze, Helga opened her eyes to find the rest of her team hovered over her with concerned expressions on their faces.

"Are you okay?"

"I think so..." slowly she sat up. "What happened? Last thing I remember is opening the door and..."

At this point Helga realized that they were no longer in P.S. 118, and that the office the girls had visited merely hours before was now a vast, endless void of nothingness. "Where the heck are we...?"

"We're not quite sure..." admitted Phoebe.

"Well, is there a way out?"

Rhonda was staring into the horizon, seeing nothing but dark purple space. She turned to look at Helga and shook her head. "Doesn't look like it..."

Frustrated, Helga stood up. "Yeah, well I'm making a way. ***MOON PRISM POWER, MAKE-UP!***"

She held her hand in the air, expecting to transform, but nothing happened. "Huh?"

"Your powers are useless here," came a familiar voice. "And you can forget about escaping – you'll never leave this space."

There, in the suffocating nothingness, emerged Principal Perky, still sporting a pleasant smile, which seemed all the more disturbing given the circumstances.

Perky chuckled softly. "I must give you girls credit. I thought by creating that phony trip I could split you apart. It would have certainly made thing easier. Destroying you all...One. By. One."

"Who are you?" demanded Luna.

"Why, I'm just an individual trying to keep her home," Perky motioned to the void that they currently occupied. "It takes a lot of energy to maintain a space of pure Negative energy – but you already knew that..."

"So, it was YOU all along..."

"Yes. And I've tolerated your meddling long enough. It was cute at first, but now if I don't get my energy I'll cease to exist. So, I'll transform you all into pure energy to feed to my space, then *you'll* cease to exist. I hope you don't mind."

"Like heck you will!" roared Helga, as she charged towards the woman with unrestrained fury.

But just as Helga was inches from her, Perky held out her hand and blasted her several feet away.

"You're not very smart, are you? In this realm I have the advantage. You can't win."

Phoebe and Rhonda came to their fallen teammate's side, but Helga wasn't having any of it. She got to her feet and prepared to charge again, only to be restrained by the others.

"Are you crazy?" scolded Rhonda. "She's just going to throw you again!"

"I'm not going down without a fight!"

"Oh, I beg to differ," said Perky.

A strong gravitational force pulled the three girls downward onto their stomachs.

"Don't worry, this won't hurt a bit," Perky raised her hand a second time, this time pointing a lone finger at the girls as if to fire at them. Luna looked on as a dark beam of light escaped from her fingertip; she couldn't believe it would end like this. Desperate, she did the only think she could think of at that very moment.

STOP!!

The beam froze in place, as was Perky, her gaze still fixated on where the girls were to be vaporized.

Luna couldn't believe it! A miracle? No...unless?

She looked down. Sure enough, the item she was wearing around her neck, the crystal key,

was faintly glowing.

The key was working.

REVERSE TIME!!

Suddenly the beam that Perky had shot receded back into her. When this happened, time resumed to normal.

Rhonda, Helga, and Phoebe, who were sitting ducks just seconds ago, found that they were able to move again under their own weight.

"We're still alive?" said Phoebe. "But how?"

They looked to see Principal Perky hunched over, hit by her own attack. Suddenly the area around their feet began to shake and tremble, and bolts of electricity splayed overhead. The world was collapsing.

"Luna, we've got to get out of here!" yelled Rhonda.

"Don't worry," reassured Luna. "I've got a plan. Form a circle – quickly!"

The girls did as they were told, and held hands to form a small circle, of which Luna stood in the centre.

"Now concentrate on your energy, and call out your respective planets!"

MARS POWER!!

MERCURY POWER!!

MOON PRISM POWER!!

The key around Luna's neck began to glow brightly as red, blue and pink energy began to flow from the girls, respectively. Eventually, the key's bright white light engulfed the entire team, and, in an instant, they disappeared.

When Perky regained her composure and realized that her only means of survival had spirited away, she displayed no anger. Rather, a wide grin spread across her face. She then threw her head up to the infinite dark sky and, arms outstretched, began to laugh with reckless abandon as the world closed in around her.

A white light appeared in front of the building of P.S. 118, and from it the girls and Luna materialized. Almost immediately, Helga patted herself as if to check that she was still in one piece. Rhonda leaned on Helga, still shaken from the close call they had encountered.

"Luna," asked Phoebe. "What was that place?"

Before she could respond, Luna was interrupted by a tremor beneath her feet, its source being the school.

"Hit the dirt!" yelled Helga.

Everyone leapt to the ground. A loud, cacophonous *BOOM/CRASH!* erupted as the windows of P.S. 118 shattered and its entrance doors were blown clear into the street. Dark plumes of smoke seeped out of the building.

Helga lifted her head to spit out debris. "What was THAT?"

Luna sat up and cautiously surveyed the smouldering wreckage that was once P.S. 118.

"I think...that was the Nega-space."

Rhonda got to her feet. "Luna....what happened to Principal Perky?"

Luna didn't reply. This upset Rhonda, who decided to push the subject. "Luna...where's Principal Perky...?"

"Rhonda..." said Phoebe as she placed an empathic hand on her shoulder. "I don't think Principal Perky was actually who we thought she was."

Rhonda turned to look Phoebe, obviously agitated. "I think I need to lie down..."

Phoebe comforted her by giving her a hug.

"Criminy..." said Helga. "Feels like a bomb went off..."

"I should think so," replied Luna. "We just destroyed the source of the city's negative energy. Or, rather...she destroyed herself."

Helga scoffed and put her hands on her waist. "Heh...figures that this school's the root of all evil..."

During Phoebe's attempt to console her, Rhonda's eyes wandered to something of interest. "Hey Luna, your key-thing is blinking."

This caught the others attention. "Luna, your key! Is it working now?" asked Phoebe.

Luna nodded. At this news, Helga let out an emphatic "YES!!" and grabbed Phoebe's hands as she did a celebratory dance.

Rhonda frowned. "Why on Earth are you so happy?"

"Doi - don't you know what this means? We did it! We've won!" laughed Helga. "No more Sailor crap! We can have our lives back!"

"Which means," Luna said, finally smiling at the girls. "I can finally go home."

Chapter 6: Chapter 6

It was dark; night had fallen over the bustling city of Hillwood. It was also quite late, and most of the city's younger inhabitants were by now asleep in their beds. The only exception was three girls and a black cat, standing in a deserted playground at the City Park.

Luna surveyed the area. "This looks like a good spot," she decreed, stretching her feline body.

"Luna," asked Phoebe. "What is it like the 30th century? Is the technology significantly advanced compared to what we have today?"

"Yeah, I bet it's really neat," added Rhonda. "And I bet everyone has stylish futuristic outfits and flying cars..."

"...And everything's covered in chrome and robots have crappy jobs as civil servants," snapped Helga. "Can we hurry this up already?"

"What's your problem?" said Rhonda. Ever since the group made the trek to the park, it was obvious that Helga was noticeably irritable, but no one could pinpoint the exact cause of her hostility.

"Nothing!" said Helga, crossing her arms. "I'm fine, it's just...I don't see why we've got to make a big ceremony out of this and everything."

"Well, the key tends to work best when the moon is out," explained Luna. "Also..." she paused humbly. "I wanted to say goodbye to you all personally before I leave. I can't thank you enough for what you've done and the lengths you've taken just to return me to my proper place in time..."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," interrupted Helga rudely. "Are you gonna talk or are you gonna leave? Honestly, for someone who couldn't WAIT to leave this place, you're sure taking your sweet time to go back. And frankly, MY time could be better spent – somewhere else. I'm outta here."

Helga stormed away from the group.

"Helga!" chided Phoebe harshly.

"It's okay, Phoebe," said Luna. "This must be hard for her. Actually, I feel rather guilty, relying on you girls. You're all so young to undertake such a great responsibility as your own. I just wish I had a better way of repaying you than with my gratitude."

"Trust us, Luna," said Phoebe. "It will be all the reward we need to see you get back home safe and sound."

Luna smiled warmly.

Rhonda approached Luna and stroked her gently on the head. "We'll miss you, Luna."

"And I, you," she replied, taking a deep breath. "Well, I suppose this is it..."

"Good luck, Luna," said Phoebe as the black cat darted away from the playground and into the grassy opening, directly beneath full moon. She turned pensively to look at the girls one last time, and then looked upward at the moon resting in the night sky.

The crescent moon on Luna's forehead emitted a light beam that shot up into the air, towards the moon. Just then, a swirling white gateway appeared high into the sky; beneath Luna a platform of light formed that slowly ascended her toward the large halo.

But when she was up about halfway, the light on her crescent started to flicker, then dim...and finally ceased to glow completely. As a result, the platform on which she stood vanished, causing Luna to plummet toward the ground.

Phoebe and Rhonda watched in horror as the cat fell to her imminent doom.

"Oh no! I can't watch!" cried Rhonda, shielding her eyes.

Suddenly, out of the corner of her eye, Phoebe caught a pink blur race past them at lightning speed towards the falling feline.

"LUNA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Helga sprinted as fast as her legs could carry her. Then, in a move that would put most linebackers to shame, dove with all her might, snatching Luna out of the air just before impact.

Helga hit the ground hard, rolling several times before finally coming to a stop, her cargo still cradled tightly in her arms. Her arms and legs were cut up and scratched, her dress was muddy and torn, and the pink bow she usually wore was literally ripped from her head.

Luna was still in shock, and could only let out a groan.

"LUNA!" she yelled, shaking her. "Don't you dare die on me, you hear? I swear, if you die on me, I'll kill you!"

"Ugh...I'm not dead..." Luna replied, hoarsely.

"You're not? Oh, Luna, I'm sorry!!" Helga embraced Luna in her arms. "I didn't mean those things I said! I was only acting like I didn't care in front of the others, but I...Luna, I really will miss you!"

"Helga..."

"Truth is..." she continued, her eyes red and her face wet and sticky from the mixture of tears and dirt on her cheeks. "As crazy as it sounds...this group is the closest thing I've had to a real family. And you..." she laughed to herself. "You're kinda like...like the mother I never had...ya know?"

It was then that Helga finally broke down. She buried her face into Luna's body and sobbed, matting the poor cat's fur with her tears.

"Are you two alright?" asked Phoebe as both she and Rhonda came to inspect the damage. When they got close, Helga abruptly stood up, letting go of Luna. She turned away from the others so that they couldn't see that she was crying.

"I'm fine," she lied. "You should be more concerned about Luna."

"I'm alright," Luna said. "Thanks to Helga."

"I guess you'll have to try again," sighed Rhonda.

"I don't know if that will make a difference," replied Luna, a defeated tone in her voice. "The key is supposed to work optimally under moonlight. If the full moon wasn't even enough to activate the gateway, then I doubt the key has enough power to transport me through time."

"So...you're stuck here?"

"I'm afraid so," Luna said sadly.

"No..." They looked at Helga, who decided to turn and face them. She quickly wiped her nose with her arm and checked herself before speaking, lest her voice crack from emotion. "We're sending you home."

"But, Helga..."

"I'm still the leader of this team," Helga said sternly. Determination poured from her as she clenched her fist with conviction. "And I say you're going home. Give me that key."

Phoebe helped Luna remove the key from around her neck and handed it to Helga. She then walked away from the others so as to give herself space and closed her eyes. "Now...I want you to make me mad."

Phoebe was perplexed. "What? I don't under-"

"Call me names, insult my clothes, anything. Just do it."

Still confused, Phoebe struggled to think of something that could possibly upset her best friend. Then she had an idea.

"Rhonda – tell me your thoughts on Lila."

Rhonda looked at Phoebe quizzically. "My thoughts on Lila?"

"Yes. What do you think of her?"

"Um...I think she's a nice girl...friendly...got a wicked sense of style..."

"Would you say she dresses better than Helga?"

"Oh, no doubt about it! But Phoebe, what is this all abo-"

"And you would say she's popular, correct?"

"Yeah – well, not as popular as me, of course, but I can tell you she's got a ton of admirers."

"You mean the boys in our class?"

"I guess, yeah..."

"Could you name a few of them?"

"Well...there's Stinky, and Sid...and Iggy and Joey...and then there's Arnold..."

Helga's face tensed slightly.

"Would you say that Arnold really likes Lila?"

"I think so. He's always helping her carry her books, he lets her cut in front of him at the water fountain, he's always sharing his lunch with her..."

"Grr..." Helga gritted her teeth.

"So...what you're saying is, they would make a good couple."

"Absolutely! I can't think of anyone better for Lila. They're obviously made for each other."

"*GrrrrrRRRRRRR!!!*" Suddenly a glowing white aura surrounded Helga as she held the key high above her head.

It was at that moment that Luna understood what Helga was doing.

A beam shot out from Helga's body towards the moon, then seemingly refracted so as to shine onto Luna, creating an energy transfer. The swirling halo of light re-appeared above Luna, as did the platform, and once again, she was lifted off the ground.

As Luna made her way towards the gateway, Helga released one hand from the key to give her a thumbs-up.

Luna eyes glimmered plaintively, and she bowed deeply out of immense appreciation for Helga's actions.

"Goodbye, girls," she said, almost inaudibly. "Thank you."

Phoebe and Rhonda waved; Luna ascended higher and higher until she eventually disappeared into the other side of the gateway. The halo swirled slower and slower, fading away from the sky.

And then she was gone.

The energy bridge receded. Helga held her head in her hand and began to wobble to and fro, but luckily the other girls were there to break her fall.

"Look!" pointed Rhonda. The time key which Helga held in her other hand softly crumbled in her grasp, its dust swept away with the light breeze of the night.

"Helga, speak to me!" cried Phoebe.

As she regained consciousness, a smile crept on Helga's lips. "Goodbye, Luna..." she said weakly.

"Are you sure don't want to stay here tonight?" asked Phoebe, standing at the entrance of her house.

Rhonda was kind enough to have her driver drop the two girls off at Phoebe's place. Initially, Helga had planned to spend the night (she didn't want to have to explain the bumps and bruises to Big Bob), but at the last minute had a change of heart.

Helga leaned gingerly on the side of the stoop. "Nah...I think I need some time to myself for a while."

Phoebe nodded solemnly and watched as her friend carefully made her way down the steps of the porch, then limp away down the block.

Helga was quite the pitiful sight when Arnold spotted her hobbling along the sidewalk. She had a sprained ankle from rescuing Luna (hence the awkward gait), and her dress was wrinkled, covered in dirt and blood from the multiple scratch wounds she had acquired on her limbs. Helga had since reattached her bow to her head, but left her hair as is, splayed over her face and tousled erratically.

"Hey, Helga!" he called to her from across the street. "Wait up!"

Helga pretended not to hear Arnold, but he ran over anyway from across the street to greet her.

"Hey, football-head," she grimaced.

"Helga..." Arnold said. "...you look terrible."

"Nice to see you, too."

"Here, let me help you..."

"No, I'm fine," declined Helga gruffly.

"Come on, Helga - you can barely walk. Let me just..."

"No...hey!"

Helga resisted vocally as Arnold tried to offer his assistance, but for some reason Arnold was refusing to back down. Eventually, Helga relented and begrudgingly allowed Arnold to somehow wrap her arm over his oddly-shaped head.

"There now. That's better, isn't it?"

Helga said nothing as the two of them walked down the sidewalk together.

She looked at Arnold intently, her expression a cross between awe and bewilderment. A million thoughts raced across her mind at that very moment. She braced herself: it was now or never. This was her golden opportunity.

"Arnold..."

He paused to look at her.

"Thank you."

Arnold smiled.

They turned the corner and continued to walk down the sidewalk in silence, the only one bearing witnesses to their brief camaraderie was the full moon in the night sky above.

And that's my story.

I wish I could say we all lived "happily ever after", but things don't always play out as they do in fairy tales. Cripes, I'm amazed that life was able to go on normally after what we've been through.

Phoebe sat in her room at her desk, finishing her homework. She adjusted the glasses on her face, then tapped them slowly and thoughtfully.

I still have many questions. Some I want answered, others...I'm not so sure. Sometimes I drive myself crazy trying to make sense of it all. For now, I guess I'll have to be content with the memories.

Rhonda sat in front of her mirror in her room. As she was brushing her hair, her eyes fell on the ring adorning her hand. She set her brush on the dresser, then sighed, peering wistfully at her reflection.

But I do know this: I'll think twice next time a black cat crosses my path.

~~Helga~~

Sailor Helga

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