# Chapter 3 The clock

It took Posk three days to return. He’d disappeared into the forest to work out his sorrow and embarrassment over accidentally threatening his own life at the demonstration of the horses. He was not clever, but knew when others laughed at him, and was wise enough to know why.

Six days later it was Fifthday. He always knew when it was Fifthday, and he loved to join in the battles and competitions of the afternoon. He’d spend the morning with the younger children pretending to learn how to read. He seemed to just like the teacher, because there really wasn’t much point teaching him to read. He also liked the work very much, and would take to colouring pictures of turtles, sticking cup cake holders onto tissue boxes, or grouping noodles by size and colour with great aplomb.

When it came to school, it was what Posk was good at.

So it was a bit of a surprise when he noticed the clock. Kialessa and the others were having a morning tea break that Fifthday when he’d burst in, a frazzled teacher hurrying in behind.

“No, Posk, put the clock back please!” She begged.

“Not him!” Allastassia mourned, and her friends giggled.

He ran right up to Kialessa. He always did. He shoved the clock right under her nose and grunted in a happy, curious way.

“What’s up Posk?” Kialessa asked.

The teacher scurried up.

“Oh, I was teaching them about time and showed them the clock.” She stated, a little out of breath. “And as soon as I showed him the clock he gets all curious about the ticking noise. So I took off the back to show him the gears and it’s a little internal spring clock that uses one of those new spring things instead of a pendulum and he just won’t let me have it back now.”

Posk was shoving the clock in Kialessa’s face.

He was giddy with delight.

They’d pulled off the back of the clock all right. Inside, there were dozens of gears and little springs and pullies. It was a fascinating machine, but very very small.

“Mrrrmrum!” He chortled in delight.

“Yes Posk, it’s a clock.” Kialessa smiled. “Now we need to put it back.”

But he wasn’t content to do that.

“Apparently,” Kialessa laughed, “He’s just discovered the most amazing thing in the universe and needs to show everyone. “

“Perhaps he has not yet connected the clock with its humanoid origins?” Piex explained.

“You mean he doesn’t know we invented it, that he thinks it just turned up and organises us all?” Darrix translated, walking up with some of the other boys. Posk happily shoved the clock into his face and pointed in great excitement at the little cogs.

By this time, all the children from the school were gathering, and Posk was lapping up the attention, thrilled at the discovery of a little clock. The teacher was flustered. He was showing it to all of them one at a time, taking great care to point to the little machinery parts within. Then, sitting right in front of Allastassia so that she couldn’t *not* look at him, showed it with great interest and sincerity to her.

“It’s just a clock, Posk.” She said derisively.

He shook his head as though he actually understood, and with incomprehensible muttering pointed to the various parts as though he was confidently trying to explain it to her.

She rolled her eyes. “You like the little clock? Here, look at this!”

Perhaps she was tired of him getting all the attention, perhaps she just really was a highly talented enchantress, but with a wave of her hand she magically projected a translucent and fabulously life like image of the clock up into the air, dozens of times larger and able to display every single moving cog and spring in intricate detail.

Everyone oohed in amazement, even the lights seemed to dim in the area in respect of the image Allastassia conjured without effort. Posk pressed his face right up to it, comparing it carefully with the clock he held in his hand, greatly impressed.

“Well, does that satisfy you Posk?”

He grinned.

But Piex shouted as though he’d only just found his voice. “How did you do that!?” the young wizard demanded to know.

Allastassia hrumphed, “It’s not like it’s very hard, I’ve been able to do it since I was six you know. Actually, not even my mother can cast…”

Piex pushed his way to the front, toppling a student in his enthusiasm.

“Go in closer, show us how far it can g-go in.” He ordered enthusiastically, and Allastassia, ever willing to be the centre of attention, obliged.

One gear grew in size and detail until the tiny scratches and pits on its surface were visible. “More, more!” Piex ordered.

“It’s not that easy…” She muttered, concentrating.

The scratch grew till it filled the entire floating image, and then it didn’t look like a little scratch at all.

“It looks like a mighty chasm.” Darrix wondered. Students oohed. The scratch did look like a giant had taken a huge stencil and scratched a mountain range into some bronze ground. Everything looked very different at that size.

“Can you do skin?” Piex asked, “Or the leaves of plants.”

“Well of course I can, I imagine.” Allastassia boasted. Suddenly Piex grabbed her hand and scattered the image.

“We have to take this to the Loremaster immediately!” He shouted like he was suddenly part of the castle guard or something. He dragged her up protesting. “You don’t know what you’ve just done here. We’ve been working on a spell like that for years …”

He continued on as she let him drag her away. Her friends laughed, and some sighed as the mystic vapours of her miraculous clock dissipated. But none sighed deeper, or looked longer, than the enchanted half troll boy Posk.

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“Apparently, they’re all making a great fuss about it now.” Allastassia boasted after they returned for lunch. Everyone was used to Piex skipping class because he knew it all anyway, but Allastassia was always on time. This time, however, she was busy with the wizards. She had been made to cast the spell three, four more times for the Loremaster and his apprentices, who’d all immediately set about trying to decipher the arcane lore that made seeing into the very small so easy.

“Apparently,” Allastassia continued, “it’s something those wizards haven’t been able to figure out for a while now, yet I managed to do it in my spare time as a baby.” She sighed happily.

“You’re very proud.” Darrix smiled.

“Am I?” she pretended to be innocent, “perhaps, but it’s not often we enchantresses manage to pull one over on those bookish wizards. They’re usually the snobby ones with their ‘you might be able to do it, but we *understand* it’. Humph!”

It was the afternoon now, and the five were chatting while they prepared for another battle against the senior students.

“We do understand it.” Piex argued, drawn easily into her argument. “But you seem to have broken several rules to do what you do…”

“Maybe you just don’t’ understand all the ru…” Allastassia began.

[main plot]

The lights went down.

“I have a new spell to show you today.” Piex boasted.

“As do I.” Allastassia challenged.

“Can you turn me invisible yet?” Kialessa asked hopefully.

“No.” They both replied, lost in their own concerns. Kialessa huffed impatiently.

They’d been battling the senior students for several months now, and gotten better at it every time. So it was, in some ways, no surprise that the confident and talented junior students made quick and decisive work of the senior students. It wasn’t supposed to be all twenty of them versus the young students, but it might as well have been.

Piex new spell caused a massive explosion of spider like strands to form that trapped almost a dozen of them, and Kialessa ran around shooting them with arrows and laughing while they tried desperately to break out. Those few that did were knocked out quickly by Posk. Piex had developed the web spell simply in response to the near disaster with Posk and the horse the other day.

Allastassia’s new spell filled the area with bright scintillating sparkles that blinded just about half the people in the area, and she used it with great effect and enjoyment. As an added bonus, it covered them with little glittering dust that made it virtually impossible to hide. Darrix took the other flank and held a lone board single handed, defecting padded arrows with his shield and braving every spell that went his way.

So they hadn’t even gone for ten minutes before the action suddenly stopped.

“Is that it?” Darrix laughed.

“Guess that’s all they had for today?” Kialessa teased, pretending to sound sad.

The teachers were in a mess, the juniors had beaten all the senior students so decisively that they all but refused to face them again. Some even threatened to call in their noble parents if this ‘inappropriate threat’ was not handled to their liking. The five were actually quite disappointed, who would they train against now?

Maybe they’d have to face the teachers…