

Chapter 1

The Mystery Journal

On a late Sunday afternoon in October of 1998, Jennifer Dawson and Nicole Kelley stood amongst the towering book stacks of the Woodside Park International School library located in the heart of the school's campus in London, England. They had been students of the school for the past four years after having chosen to study abroad thousands of miles away from their homes in the United States.

Now, at the tender ages of eighteen, they were tending to their senior and final year of studies, whereupon afterward, they would be returning to the states to proceed with their college education; Nicole was vying for a graphic arts degree, while Jennifer's interest rested in the medical field as a doctor. The two girls were best friends, inseparable since the first day they met after being placed with the same homestay family, the Watsons, four years earlier.

The School library at this particular time of day and year was bustling full of students all struggling to cram in some much needed last minute studying, or preparing for important class assignments due the following morning. Jennifer and Nicole were no exception to this verity. Such a blatant demonstration of procrastination was rather a customary event for the two likable lasses, who preferred to spend the greater portion of their free time tending to the chasing of boys, or chatting merrily away with one another while pounding down lattes in the local café situated down the street from the school.

Now, standing next to Jeni and tucked away between the aisles of neatly stowed texts, Nicole fingered over a lengthy row of leather bound books, searching for biographical information on an Edgar Allen Poe for an English essay she and Jeni had been assigned to pen. As her deep cerulean blue eyes raked over the titles stitched into the bindings, she twirled a lock of her long dark hair around her right forefinger.

"P, P-o, P-o-e ..." she murmured aloud. "Ah, here we go. Edgar Allen Poe, a history." Turning her head and calling over to Jeni she said, "Here, Jen. I've got one."

"Excellent," said Jeni, her delicate hand reaching to retrieve the textbook from Nicole's grasp. Jeni's deep green eyes sparkled with the intensity of two flawless and brilliant shining emeralds as they scanned the contents of the pages. She brushed her shoulder length amber locks lightly out of her face and said, "This will do, Nick. Here, come on, lets go find a table, then."

"Mind if we find one on the second floor?" inquired Nicole, tugging uncomfortably on the belt loop of her hip-slung, battered jeans.

"Why? We usually sit over there," said Jeni, pointing to a table in the far back corner of the space before them, a few meters from where they stood.

Nicole leaned forward, and pointing subtly off to her left, she whispered out of the corner of her mouth, "I know, but Danny and Chrissie are just over there snogging their lives away. I really don't feel up to dealing with that right now." (Danny and Nicole had been going steady for the past few months, up until last week, when he so ruthlessly dumped her for Chrissie, the school's resident jezebel who was willing to do it with just about anybody who bestowed upon her a wink and a half-assed smile. Originally, when Danny had ended their relationship, he told Nicole that he needed space, that the break was merely a temporary "setback" for them, that his studies were suffering and he needed to see to it that his schoolwork took precedence over his social life for the time being. Much to Nicole's dismay, however, by virtue of a whirlwind of rumors that literally stormed her way, she discovered that the real reason he had ended their relationship was because she wasn't willing to "put out".)

Jeni scoffed the instant she caught sight of the couple's relentless "spit swapping" spectacle and said irritably, "Ugh! You'd think that pig would at least have the decency to take her some place private. What does he see in her anyway? I swear, that girl's mouth has been on more things than the universal seal of approval has!"

Nicole snorted loudly.

"Indeed. Let's go upstairs then."

"Yeah, let's. My gag reflex is in overdrive watching those two go at it!" Stomping up the spiral staircase behind her, she said further, "I'm telling you, Nick, once those two are finished with each other, the board of health will have to quarantine the both of them to keep them from spreading their nastiness any further."

Nicole snorted in amusement again, finally reaching the landing at the top of the second floor and stepping into the space with Jeni following swiftly behind her. The small loft-like area was peppered with nearly a dozen large round wooden study tables and numerous matching chairs. Off to the far left, there stood two open archways; one lead to the boy's loo, while the other lead to the girl's loo.

With the exception of the occasional student stalking through the space to use the lavatories, the second floor was nearly devoid of any sign of human life. Most everyone who utilized the library generally gathered about the first floor to study, since that was where all the reading materials and card catalogs were located.

"Let's sit over here," said Nicole, motioning off to the far back table in the center of the space.

"Sure thing," said Jen, examining the space. "Man, it's totally dead up here."

"I know. Just the way I like it," said Nicole, tossing her knapsack onto the table, unfastening it and spreading its contents over the table's surface.

Jeni followed suit, plopping the heavy bound Poe book among the debris. As she moved to sit down, she caught sight of a lofty stack of assorted brown boxes packed with hundreds of mutilated textbooks and manuscripts that were stowed away in the far left corner of the room.

She pointed to them and said with profound interest, "Hey, look at all that stuff!" She stepped over to the pile, immediately taking to picking through it.

"Hm," said Nicole, trailing after Jeni and scrabbling through some of the contents as well. "Looks like this stuff is headed for the rubbish bin."

"Let's have a look through some of it then. You never know what kind of treasures you can find when people take to weeding out their possessions and tossing them to the curb. My Mum told me that my Gran once found an antique porcelain tea kettle at a garage sale that ended up being worth like more than a thousand pounds or something."

Nicole smirked and said, "Treasures? Jen this is nothing but a bunch of torn up rubbish." Wrinkling her nose, she added, "Besides, this mess just reeks of mothballs and filth. Do you really want that stench emanating from your knapsack?"

In spite of of Nicole's opposition, and with a gentle shrug of her shoulders, Jen brushed Nicole's opinion away and proceeded to tunnel her way through the boxes, pulling out old music books, which had missing and torn pages; encyclopedias, which were plagued with broken and shredded bindings; and abandoned notebooks, their covers caked in senseless doodles. She sniffled and sneezed as billowing clouds of dust began to rise before her while she sorted through the boxes' filth-ridden contents.

"Hey, look here; it's a journal of some kind!" she said excitedly, raising a small black article in the air and lightly dusting off its muck-ridden cover with the sleeve of her white pinafore blouse. It's golden colored pages were layered in stains the color of dried blood, and the center of it bore a sizeable hole. With a squinting of her eyes and a swiping of her finger to clear the grime covering the gold embossed lettering that was plastered across the bottom front cover, she managed to make out the inscription.

"It says ... Tom Riddle," she said aloud. "Wow. It looks ancient."

"What could you possibly want with that, Jen? It's got a great hole in the center of it," scoffed Nicole. "Put it back and let's go sit down. We've got loads of work to tend to."

"Hang on, look at this!" she said, plucking a strange charm from within the crease of the binding. It was in the shape of a silver hourglass and was attached to a thin tarnished silver chain. "And there's a note attached!" she said with excitement, holding up a small square of parchment with a series of words inscribed on it.

Noting that Jeni was thoroughly engrossed in eyeing over the note and the necklace, Nicole snatched the journal from her hand and flipped impatiently through it. "What kind of journal is this? The pages are all blank and covered in nasty stains!"

"Here, listen to this," said Jeni, her eyes wide with wonder as she read over the note she had had just retrieved.

*“A turner rare and precious too,
for this is one of only two.
One swift spin and ye shall share
a life of magic beyond compare.
Turn from Muggle life to wizard ye,
and make your mark on history.
Take heed! For time is but a fickle friend,
taking much and giving less.
But lo, eternal joy you’ll find,
whence he returns to set things right....”*

Nicole made a face and spat, “What the bloody hell is that all about?”

“Dunno. It sounds like it’s some kind of magical time travel thingy. It says that it will turn us from a Muggle life into a wizard life and allow for us to change history....bringing us eternal happiness.”

“Yeah, right! Like a piece of jewelry can do all that. And what the hell is a Muggle anyway?”

“Dunno. Let’s give it a whirl though. It could be fun!” said Jeni excitedly.

“Yeah, right, weee!” said Nicole in a mocking fashion, snatching the necklace from Jeni’s hand and spinning the hourglass in succession. “Hey, look we’re magical now!”

“Ha, ha,” said Jeni dryly. “Maybe you’re not doing it properly,” she said, grabbing hold of the chain by the opposite end and spinning the hourglass figure several more times.

Nicole laughed.

“Oooooo! I wonder what year it is!” she said sarcastically, looking about the room and noting that absolutely nothing about their surroundings had changed.

“Stop being such a prat,” said Jeni, slapping playfully at her.

“What rubbish!” scoffed Nicole, flicking the hourglass in distain once more and causing it to spin and spin and spin and spin....

All of the sudden, she and Jeni felt an invisible force, similar to that of a giant hook, jerking them by their waistlines....the space before them was blurring horribly, fading, swirling, their bodies were now twisting and jerking fiercely. They tried to scream, but the force of the tornado-like motion drew back the sound.

In a flash, the unruly force ceased, and they were left scattered about in the center of a strange torch lit space, surrounded by hundreds of leaning book stacks, many of them floating magically in midair. Several groups of odd-looking teenage boys and girls sat gathered about dozens of antique looking study desks dressed in black robes and pointed hats. They held long feather quills in their hands and were penning words on scrolled parchment. A few of these odd looking teens possessed long pointed sticks and were waving them in grand flourishing motions causing things to transform into new things, then causing them to disappear and reappear.

"Nicole, Jeni! There you are, you lot!" rang a cheery voice from behind them.

Nicole and Jeni leapt to their feet and swung around, their faces lathered in disillusion as they met the strange redheaded and green-eyed girl who was calling them by name. She was thin, of average height, and rather pretty, too, donning a set of long black open robes, a grey vest over top of a white pinafore blouse, and a matching pleated skirt. Around her neck, she wore a scarlet and gold tie. The knot at the neckline had been loosened slightly, but the remainder of it was tucked neatly away beneath her vest.

Nicole turned to Jeni and rasped anxiously, "What the fuck just happened? Where are we?" She teetered slightly as she fought to steady herself, still feeling the effects from the full twirling motion they had experienced only moments ago.

"I dunno, the last thing I remember was you flicking that hourglass thingy and then we were spinning so fast I thought I was about to retch ... and now ... this," whispered Jeni, clearly equally as disoriented and stumbling slightly as she fussed nervously with the hem of her red and black plaid-pleated-skirt.

"What's with you lot?" said Lily as she approached them, wrenching her face in bewilderment as her gaze passed over their openly faltering forms, "And why are you dressed in Muggle clothes? If Dumbledore catches you prancing about the castle like that during school hours, he'll have your head. You're already in enough trouble for setting off those dungbombs in potions class to get us out of this morning's exam."

"Dungbombs?" said Jeni and Nicole in unison, each with an air of perplexion consuming their faces.

"Yeah," said Lily. "Slughorn is still ranting about it. He can't manage to rid his classroom of the stench. That Lingering Liniment you laced them with really helped to maintain their effects. I tell you, it was brilliant magic. But, somehow Slughorn found out it was you lot. I reckon you'll both be receiving at least a month's worth detention once he gets a hold of you. Nick, you definitely should watch it, he's your head of house."

Jeni and Nicole exchanged intense and thoroughly befuddled looks.

"Are you two feeling alright?" said Lily concernedly. "Avery and Rosier and didn't hit you with more of their homemade memory charms in their sick attempts at trying to get you to go out with them, did they?" asked Lily, eyeing Jeni and Nicole over as

though she was expecting the pod people to burst forth from within their flesh at any given moment.

Nicole leaned into Jeni and whispered quietly, "What in bloody hell is she going on about? Memory charms, dragon dung, Avery, Rosier?"

"I dunno!" rasped Jeni. "But I'm starting to wig out a bit here, mate."

"You and me both!" said Nicole to Jeni in reply.

"C'mon, Jen, let's go back to Gryffindor tower and get you into your school uniform. Nicole, you should go on and do the same and we'll catch you in the Great Hall for supper in a bit, okay?" said Lily.

"Erm, can't I just come with you now?" said Nicole anxiously, her blue eyes blossoming with terror as she tugged frantically at the sleeve to Jeni's jumper.

"No. You're in Slytherin. You're to head that way, toward the Dungeons," said Lily slowly. Then, noting the look of desperation practically screaming from behind Nicole's frightful expression, Lily said further, "God, Rosier must've really done a number on you this time around, you act like you don't even know who you are!"

"Gee, is it that obvious?" mumbled Nicole sarcastically, rolling her eyes.

Lily sniggered, and catching sight of a tall male figure heading in their direction, she said, "Hang on, here comes Severus Snape. He'll show you to your dorm, where you can get into your wizarding robes. Then, get him to take you to see Madam Pomfrey. She'll fix you a potion to counter that dreadful spell Rosier's cast over you." Motioning to Snape, Lily called out, "Severus! Over here! Rosier's done it again! Only this time, Nicole can't seem to find her way back to her dorm! Can you help her? Then, get her to Madam Pomfrey? I'll meet you in hospital at quarter past five."

"Excellent," grumbled Snape. "Just how I wanted to spend my free period—babysitting Rosier's bird."

"I'm not Rosier's bird!" snapped Nicole in reproach, smacking Snape in his arm.

Snape sneered, then pointed his wand in Nicole's face and growled out, "Watch it, Kelley! Hit me again and I'll curse you with a permanent Hag Jinx. That pretty face of yours will be covered in warts!"

Nicole threw her hands to her hips and snarled out, "You touch me with that ghastly stick and that's not the only accessory that I'm going to break in two! And I guarantee you, there isn't a spell in existence that will be able to put it right again, either. I reckon you won't be too much use to the girls without it, so I'd take extra care if I were you, *Snake!*"

"*SNAPE,*" barked Severus, correcting her.

"Oh, but I disagree. I've known you for less than a minute, and I assure you, I've already found otherwise!" snapped Nicole.

Lily sniggered.

"Ah, even a memory charm couldn't keep those two from going at it," she said. "When are you lot going to put an end to everyone's misery and just get together already. Everyone knows you fancy each other. I mean, why fight it?"

Nicole nearly fell over upon the receipt of Lily's bizarre proclamation.

"Me? Fancy him?" scoffed Nicole. "You've *got* to be joking!" Her eyes swept from the top of Snape's shoulder-length greasy hair, to his dead-eyed glare, pallid complexion, hooked nose, and prominent scowl, all the way down past his heavily robed figure and his pointy jet-black boots, and she said, "I'd rather date the Green Goblin! At least *he* has some fashion sense!" she snarled.

"The who?" said Lily with a snort.

"You know, the Green Goblin, from the American Spiderman movies," said Jeni wide eyed and innocently.

Lily snorted loudly and said, "Ugh, you lot and your fixation with the Muggle world. I'll never understand it and I'm a muggle-born!" Then, tugging gently on Jeni's arm she said, "C'mon, let's get you into your school uniform and then to Madam Pomfrey. She'll set you right."

"B-but," stuttered Jeni, looking nervously to Nicole as Lily attempted to drag her away. Jeni mouthed the words to Nicole, *What do we do now?* Nicole shrugged her shoulders in anxious reply.

"C'mon," said Snape shortly, grabbing Nicole by the hood of her ivory jumper and shoving her rudely before him.

"Hey, watch it! This is a Juicy Couture! I paid over a hundred and fifty pounds for this jumper!" said Nicole, jerking away from him and tugging sharply on the bottom hem to adjust it.

"Yes, Muggle attire and Muggle money...how fabulous for you," muttered Snape, unmoved. "Now, let's get moving. I've got things to do."

Nicole scoffed and said cheekily, "Oh, like showering, perhaps?"

Snape's upper lip contorted into an ugly grimace and he elbowed her in her side.

"OW! I'm warning you, SNAKE!"

"That's SNAPE!" howled Severus.

"Hey, I just call 'em as I see 'em," said Nicole snappishly, trailing off beside him.

Lily chuckled, and turning to Jeni, she said, "C'mon. She'll be fine. He really does have a thing for her."

"He's just awful! Did you see how forceful he was with her?" squeaked Jeni with worry.

"Typical male hormones. I'm telling you, if those two ever got together, they'd probably raise the roof off the castle!" said Lily with a chortle.

"That's just gross," gagged Jeni, cringing at the disturbing thought of her best mate being intimate with such a dreadful bloke. Then, examining the space around her as they trailed down the dimly lit stone inlaid corridor, she said apprehensively, "So where are we going anyway?"

Lily smiled indulgently and said, "7th floor, Gryffindor tower. You know, our dorm."

"Ah, yes, our dorm. Sure thing," said Jeni, rolling her eyes and thinking to herself, *It's going to take more than a potion to help me adjust to this insanity.*

As they rounded the corridor, Jeni looked back over her shoulder, catching the last of Snape and her best friend, Nicole, as they disappeared around the curve opposite her.

Jeni trailed along reluctantly at Lily's side until they reached the foot of the moving staircases. Her eyes widened with wonder as she examined the grand space, her sights scanning the hundreds of moving and talking portraits scaling the walls of the vast, heavy stone stairwells, which, every so often, would shift and reattach to another landing.

"WOW," whispered Jeni in awe.

Lily shook her head in amusement.

"This way, silly," she said, dragging Jeni up the staircase and into the 7th floor corridor. "I swear, if you don't find yourself a boyfriend or give Avery a shot at a date with you, he's bound to wipe your mind clean for all eternity. I think it's about time you report this to McGonagall. I mean, quit feeling sorry for the guy, he's such an arse. You've told him no like a hundred times, and he's jinxed you to pieces every time."

"You mean, I've allowed for this to happen before?" said Jeni in astonishment.

Lily laughed.

"I must say, mate, this is the worst I've seen you." She stopped before a life-sized portrait of a fat lady, who was dressed in an elaborate and bright pink renaissance frock, and said, "Here we are."

Suddenly, the fat lady lowered her head to address them, and speaking stiffly, she said, "Password."

Jeni shrieked and took several steps backward, startled.

Lily burst out in hysterics.

"Tempus Temporis," she said, still laughing haughtily as the door swung open.

Jeni shrieked again, stumbling slightly and clinging to Lily for support.

Again, Lily sniggered.

"This way," she said.

Behind the portrait stood a rounded enchanted entryway that opened into a vast open space bedecked with brilliant hues of scarlet and gold décor. Jeni stepped over the threshold in complete awe of her surroundings. She noted a roaring fire off to her right; a scattered collection of scarlet couches, squashy armchairs, and several wooden side tables gathered before it; and nearly a dozen study desks lining the edges of the room. She noticed a few moving portraits and numerous scarlet and gold printed tapestries papering the walls. Off to her far left stood a wide archway leading to what appeared to be some sort of wide stone staircase.

"Evans, Dawson, over here!" called an attractive male bespectacled figure stooped over one of the rickety wooden desks in the right corner of the space. He was surrounded by two other handsome boys; one was quite tall and strapping with dark wavy hair that fell into his grey eyes with a sort of casual elegance, the other was slightly shorter and medium built with light brown hair and enchanting deep blue eyes.

"Hey, James, Remus, Sirius," called Lily, taking Jeni by the hand and dragging her along behind her.

"Hey Jen," said Remus dreamily.

Jeni looked to him, her eyes meeting the sensational warmth of his sky blue ones, and she felt an instant quickening of her pulse. She swallowed hard, and inadvertently, her attentions began to dart anxiously about the group; they moved to James, to Sirius, to Lily, and back to Remus again.

James took one look at Jeni's "deer-caught-in-the-headlights" expression, and chuckling lightly, he said, "Ah, Avery's gotten to her again, has he?"

"Yeah, memory charm. It's rather an intricate one too. She seems to have forgotten nearly everything about herself."

"God, why can't he just leave her alone!" snarled Remus, kicking angrily at the desk where James sat.

"Hey, ease up, would you, Moony," said James, sliding the desk back into place.

"Perhaps if you'd finally gather up the courage to ask her out, Avery would get the hint and leave her alone. You've only been pining over her for the past six years now. It's maddening, really. Make a move already."

Jeni's eyes rested heavily on Remus, who warily raised his eyes to meet hers and he blushed severely. Jeni blushed too and quickly looked down to her trainer-capped feet, which she noticed were now involuntarily treading the floor in nervous alternating strides.

"Ah, young love," said Sirius teasingly as he noted Jeni's bold show of timidity. "Looky there, Moony, I believe Jeni feels it too."

"Would you lot cut it out!" snapped Lily. "Can't you see what a wreck she is? She's gotten enough grief from Avery, today. She doesn't need any more from you lot."

James shook his head, and with a smirk he said, "You and Nicole oughta just go on and tell Dumbledore about all of this Memory Jinxing business. I mean, as long as you lot are single, Avery and Rosier aren't going to stop until they get what they want out of you."

Noting that all eyes were resting intently on her, clearly awaiting her reply, Jeni cleared her throat and croaked out nervously, "Yeah, yeah, I'll-uh-I'll be sure and do just that."

Tugging lightly on Jen's sleeve, Lily said gently, "C'mon, Jen, we'll get you into your school uniform, and then I'll take you to see Madam Pomfrey."

At that moment, Lupin stepped forward and stuttered, "Uh ... um, I can-I can take her. I-I'm headed there anyway — for the Wolfsbane Potion, you know."

Lily smiled kindly and said, "Certainly, Moony. If it's alright with Jeni, that is." She looked to Jeni, whose whole self was now so entirely numbed with the burden of absolute disorientation, she realized she couldn't find the occasion conjure up the strength to contest Remus' offer, even if she wanted to. Oddly and inexplicably enough, however, she didn't want to contest it ...

Back in the dungeons, Nicole and Snape tread the flagstone-inlaid floors until they came upon a vast slate of flat layered stone protruding slightly from the surface of the wall. Severus stepped to a halt and took Nicole by the hand. Much to Nicole's surprise, his touch was almost kind in nature, not at all the way it had been earlier when he had grabbed her by the scruff of her jumper. She blushed as his onyx eyed stare met her blue somber gaze, and he blushed in return.

Quickly, however, he released his affectionate hold on her, clearing his throat and mumbling softly, "Sorry. It's just — this is the doorway — the entrance to the common room." He turned to face it and said quietly, "Serpentine Argente." The stone slowly slid open, revealing a dark, damp space consisting of low ceilings, green lit lanterns, and matching furniture in similar shades. Nicole looked off to the far back of the space where a modest fire crackled subtly in the grate. She noted that even its flames

appeared an unusual shade of green. Off to her left, there stood a vast floor-to-ceiling glass space that looked as though it were concealing a giant aquarium.

"Wow, that's some fish tank," she said in amazement.

"Sorry? Fish what?" said Snape.

"You know, aquarium, a large fish bowl where fish swim about."

Severus gave a light chuckle.

"What's so funny?" scoffed Nicole.

"Boy, Lily wasn't kidding when she said Rosier charmed you good." Then, pointing to the vast aquarium-like fixture, Snape said, "That's not an aquarium, it's a window. The Slytherin common room is located under the Black Lake ... remember?"

"Nicole's jaw dropped as she moved toward it and smoothed her fingers along the glassy reflective surface of it. Then, catching a brief flash of a something darting past the window, which looked very much like a human sporting a rather lengthy fish tail, she gasped lightly and said, "That's a—a—"

"Mermaid," finished Snape.

"Hey, you lot," came a sober voice from a darkened archway off to their left.

Snape and Nicole swung around to discover that it was Rosier, taking lengthy, confident strides toward them and plopping heavily down upon a green leather couch in front of the fire.

"Well, well, Rosier, so brave of you to show your face after all the mayhem you've managed today. Perhaps you can spare me a trip to Madam Pomfrey by removing this ridiculous Memory Charm you've placed over Nicole. I'd attempt to remedy it myself, but no doubt you've laced your magic with some sort of enchantment that would likely backfire on me, forcing me to cluck like a chicken, or crow like a rooster, or something of that nature."

"What are you going on about," snapped Rosier. "I haven't done any such thing to her. I've given up. She's said she won't go out with me, and I reckon I'll just have to deal with it."

Snape raised his brow with interest. He had rarely known Rosier to lie about anything. More importantly, on the rare occasion that Rosier did lie, Snape possessed the powerful gift of Legilimens to see right through it.

Nicole began to fumble nervously with a long silver chain and hourglass charm she had cupped in her right hand. It was the same mysterious piece of jewelry responsible for causing hers and Jen's entire dilemma. In the midst of all the commotion, she'd completely forgotten she still had it. She opened her hand wide to get a better view of the piece.

The instant Snape caught sight of it, he inhaled sharply and said, "Where did you get that?"

Nicole clamped her hand shut, stuffed the necklace into her pocket, and replied shakily, "My Mum, it's-a-it's just a silly old necklace my Mum gave me."

But, as her anxious gaze met his fixed-with-a-purpose onyx glare, his Legilimency skills kicked in. The once supple blue color completely drained from her eyes as a whirlwind of images flashed through her mind....

She and Jeni were at the Library ... Jeni pulled a diary from the towering stack of ruined books ... the name across the cover read Tom Riddle ... the hourglass was spinning ... and spinning ... and spinning ...