

Chapter 1 — The Scholarship

The hot late afternoon sun bore down on Lindsey Barron as she raced along the gravel road towards home. She had passed sixth grade and school was out for the summer, a fact which filled her with both immense relief and happiness. No longer would she have to go into Plano and the one room schoolhouse each day. Plano, population 500, was located in the high plains of eastern Colorado, some hundred miles east of Colorado Springs. Completely off all major roads, Plano had the school, the grocery store, the rundown gas station, the hardware store, but very little else, excepting the Dairy Queen, run by her aunt Leona.

Commercial cattle ranches surrounded this tiny town for dozens of miles in all directions. Cradled in a ravine lay her mother's tiny ranch and her home. Isolated, their nearest neighbors were in Plano, other ranch homes were even farther away. One of the last actions her father had done was gravel the mile road that led from Plano to their home. The Barron ranch, consisting of nearly fifty acres of useless gully land, snaked along the Nike Creek, which was dry most of the year. Each late spring after the rains had gone, Lindsey loved to hike its length, collecting arrow heads and spear points. Her growing collection now boasted over a hundred, carefully arranged in the display case her late father had made for her.

Lindsey ran swiftly along the arrow straight road, running had become her passion, ever since that first day in school, six years ago. Sweat streamed down both sides of her face, her long brown hair bouncing with each stride, along with her heavy book back pack. Six minutes usually separated her home from her school, though she had to walk to school to avoid arriving soaking with sweat. Only when she was heading home could she pour on the speed. Home was her sanctuary, relief from the snide whisperings, the gooey sympathy, and the endless taunting and teasing from a number of her classmates. Lindsey had no hands.

She was born with a perfect body, just there were no hands at the ends of her arms. In school Lindsey had finally discovered why. Thalidomide. In third grade, she had found out about this chemical and its effects on pregnant women and asked her mother about it. Crying, Lena Barron explained to her what had happened. Evidently, a chemical company, had illegally disposed of a number of barrels of the chemicals up the creek from their ranch. Over time, the barrels rusted out, leaking the chemical into their shallow water well. Lena had drunk the tainted water and Lindsey was born with the birth defect.

She explained how lucky Lindsey was to be perfectly healthy in all other ways, so many others like her were in far worse shape. Indeed, she had seen some images of other Thalidomide children on the school's Internet computer and counted herself very lucky indeed that all she was missing were her hands. Nevertheless, because of Lindsey, both parents were terrified of having other children, unwilling to take a gamble. She was an only child.

As she ran along the road, she remembered her father, how he had loved her and doted on her. Yet, all too soon, her memories returned to that fateful day in July when she was five. It was Lindsey who had discovered the accident, found her father crushed beneath the overturned tractor. She remembered how she just stood there, helplessly. All she could do was scream and scream. “I miss you daddy,” she explained to the tumbleweed beside the road as she raced passed it. There was a catch in her deep breathing as she ran.

“Poor, but proud,” her mother reminded her often. While Lena could have applied for welfare and food stamps, she flatly refused. “We may be poor, Lindsey, but we are thankful for what we do have and what we can earn for ourselves.” Still, Lindsey would have loved to have “real” clothes, a “real” dress, just like all the other girls at school, or even jeans and a plaid skirt. Instead, Lena made her clothing from homespun cloth, dirty white in color and without any hint of fashion — functional pants and shirts. Twice a year, Lena took Lindsey into Plano for a new pair of shoes, but they were always yellow work boots, a necessity for her chores around their ranch.

Because of her father’s untimely death, she had missed kindergarten. Still, she remembered vividly that first day of first grade, six years ago. Her mother had walked her into Plano and to the school, even opening the door for her to enter. Terrified, Lindsey had walked into the room with twenty other children ranging in ages from six to fifteen. All of the other children had hands, had new fashionable clothes, fine shoes, even good backpacks. Many had cell phones as well, though now everyone but her had a cell phone which did text messaging and could take and send pictures.

Terrified beyond belief, she just froze that first day. The kindly Mrs. Higgins had to help her take off her back pack and jacket, help her with her books, and countless other little things all that day. She had suffered the total embarrassment of having to have Mrs. Higgins feed her at lunch time from the sack lunch her mother had sent along with her. All day long, other children teased her, taunted her, made silly rhymes about Little Miss No Hands, or stared at her, as if she was somehow poisonous or full of cooties, whatever those were. (One girl claimed that Lindsey had them.)

Only Melissa Stokes, a year older than Lindsey, felt sorry for her and tried to help her whenever possible that day. They became best friends, until last year, when the Stokes moved to Colorado Springs. When that first the day was finally over and Mrs. Higgins helped her into her jacket and backpack, Lindsey began running the mile home as fast as she could possibly run, tears flowing as fast as the sweat. She had not shown one tear at school, but now she was free and she cried all the way home. “Please don’t make me go back there ever again, mommy!” Memories of that day were still vivid.

Cradled in her mother’s arms, she recalled what Lena had said to her. “There, there, Lindsey. Remember, be proud of what and who you are. I am very proud of you, my dear. You didn’t give in to those kids, now did you? Your father would be so proud of you, Lindsey. I’ll

make you a promise. When the snows come, the drifts will be too deep for you to walk to school; so while the snow covers the road and the freezing winds come, you can stay home and I will be your teacher. Just remember to always bring all of your books home with you each night. No telling when the snows will come. How's that?"

That was perfect. At least half of the school year, Lena taught Lindsey at home and she did not have to suffer the endless taunting and teasing or the sickening sympathy of others. Besides, writing caused Lindsey major problems in terms of speed. She insisted on learning how to write with her arms, yet she was very slow at it and made rather large, uneven letters. Still, she did it and that was all that mattered. At home during the winter, no one could see that she took an hour to do what her classmates did in five minutes. When she was actually at school, they did, which often resulted in more teasing. Lindsey seldom allowed Mrs. Higgins to write out her answers for her. She was too proud to allow that to happen, when she could avoid it.

Life on their ranch was difficult. If Lena and Lindsey worked very hard each day, they were able to make ends meet. There was no money left over for a TV, computer, cell phones, or even games. Their only outside contact with the rest of the world was through the radio that her father had bought her for her fifth birthday. Even without hands, she could easily operate the radio. She loved to listen to the news, the classic rock station, and the PBS station which played baroque music.

Each morning, she had a number of chores to do, feed the dozen chickens, gather up their eggs, and milk their two cows. For her seventh birthday, her mother got her a small quarter horse mare, which Lindsey named Betsy. Once her mother had saddled Betsy, Lindsey managed to ride very well, and began assisting her mother with the other cattle and chores on their long, narrow ranch. Now that she was twelve, Lindsey was quite the horsewoman, though she still needed someone to saddle Betsy for her. However, she now could put the hackamore onto Betsy's head and ride bareback just as easily.

Yet, something had changed in Lindsey. It happened in the spring, just after her seventh birthday. The spring thunderstorms hit. She always loved to sit on their large porch and watch the sky show. However, this year, when the lightning arced from cloud to cloud, she felt energy flows at the ends of her two arms, strange tingling sensations. Then, she found little arcs, like miniature lightening bolts, going from the ends of her arms outward toward whatever she pointed them.

Lindsey didn't know what to make of this interesting effect at first. Slowly she discovered that she could make things happen around the ranch after that. One day, when she was milking the cows, she began using imaginary hands instead of her arms. Next, she discovered that she could somehow levitate and move the silver milk pails without using her arms. She spent hours seeing if she could make a pencil move and write for her, this would be extremely useful to her if she could. Then one night the pencil began moving at her command! The next day, she proudly showed her mother what she could do.

“Lindsey! That’s fabulous! You must have a bit of magical powers in you!” her mother exclaimed. Indeed, the world was full of wizards and witches, just none anywhere around Plano. Lena had often told her of magical things she had seen in Colorado Springs many years ago. This was one reason Lindsey listened to the news each night so intently, gathering information on the occasional magical happenings that were reported. This year, she had learned from her American History class at school that at least ten percent of the people in the US were wizards or witches, living in harmony for the last hundred years now.

Lindsey heard marvelous reports of how a wizard had rescued a small boy who had fallen down a deep mineshaft, levitating him up some hundred feet to safety. One girl had been thrown from a horse and broken her back. The healing witches in Denver had completely healed her. Then, there was the big fiasco at the New Stapleton International Airport. The new mechanical baggage handling system had become a total failure, with passenger’s baggage routinely getting damaged or put on wrong flights. A wizard, the news reported, had volunteered to get the system repaired. One day later, the baggage system finally began working as it was originally intended, much to the relief of the airport officials.

However, last year, Lindsey heard of another magical miracle, one that hit close to home for her. A child had gotten his hand caught in a corn picker and it was so mangled it had to be removed. His parents took him to the Denver Department of Magical Healing and a week later, he had somehow grown a new hand! Naturally, Lindsey asked her mother about this.

“Yes, your father and I had planned on taking you there to see if anything could be done for you. However, the cost was just too prohibitive, honey, we just could not afford it. I know your father was saving a little each month toward it, though.” She sighed. “Now, with Sam gone, Lindsey, I’ll never be able to afford it. However, I have a small life insurance policy. When I die, it should cover the cost of burying me and have enough left over for you to go to Denver and see if they can somehow grow the hands you ought to have had. Don’t get your hopes up too high, Lindsey, they might not be able to help you.”

“I’d rather have you alive, mom. I’ll take you over hands any day!” Lindsey proclaimed and gave her mother a big hug. She noticed the silent tears of her mother though and sensed that Lena would have given anything to have Lindsey “repaired,” so to speak.

Of course, at school, when Lindsey made the pencils do the writing for her, the other kids teased her even harder, calling her a witch and making fun of her all the more. Still, she endured their taunts because now she could get her schoolwork done many times faster than before, though she was still twice as slow as the “normal” kids. Actually, she realized, that her classmates were becoming slightly afraid of her. She overheard several talking about her turning them into toads or snakes, when they thought she was not able to hear them. As much as their incessant teasing and taunting hurt her emotionally, Lindsey had no desire to turn them into toads or worse.

This hot early summer day, Lindsey raced on down the gravel road towards home and freedom from her classmates. She had a whole summer to herself and her mother, free from teasing, taunting, and tricks played on her at her expense. Freedom!

Ahead, she saw their barn, the corral with Betsy looking up at her. Mom would be out in the gullies with the cattle, it was nearly noon. As she reached the log rail fence that her father had built around the outer edge of their homestead, she spied a calico cat sitting on one of the wooden, split-rail fence logs. Breathing deeply, she stopped to look at this new arrival.

“Hello cat. Are you lost? This is the Barron ranch. I haven’t seen you around here before. It’s pretty hot sitting out here on the fence. I bet you are thirsty. Are you thirsty, little cat? I suppose that you must be, I sure am. Come on. I’ll get you a cold drink of water with me.” She gently picked up the cat, cradling it in her arms and walked on up to the front of her home, where she gently lowered the calico onto her porch. With effort, she got her book bag off of her shoulders and sat it by the door.

“I’d pet you, kitty, but — oh well.” She stroked it gently with her forearms. It purred. “Okay, let’s get you and me a drink and then I will show you to Betsy. She’s my horse over there. If you need a home, this is a fine place. We have lots of mice in the barn.” Carefully, she sat the cat beside the water trough. Years ago, she would operate the pump handle by using both of her arms, rather clumsily. Now however, she pretended she had hands and the handle went up and down, operating by invisible hands. Her invisible hands lifted up the tin cup from its metal hanger at the side of the pump and soon it filled with cold, clear water. Using her arms, she took a drink, showing the cat that it was safe to drink and then floated the cup down to the ground in front of the cat. She didn’t trust lowering it with her arms, she often spilled half of the cup before she could get it to the ground. Besides, doing it this way would not startled the cat, she thought.

The cat graciously accepted the drink. It was a scorcher day, already in the high nineties. When the cat had its fill, Lindsey picked her up again. “Miss Calico — that’s what I am calling you until I can think of a proper name for you — this here is Betsy, my mare. She’s a quarter horse, you know, but I expect you see her as a really big animal, don’t you? Why don’t I show you the barn? I should do some chores so mom doesn’t have to do them later and you can watch me. Maybe you will see a mouse. Come on, follow me.” This time, she let the calico walk along behind her, just to see if the cat liked her and would want to follow her.

Feeling free from school, Lindsey tore through the chores that her mother normally did for her while she was at school. The calico cat hopped up onto a horizontal support beam and sat there all the while Lindsey went about her tasks, as if watching her and interested in what the human was doing. Several time, Lindsey stopped to pet her new friend, though. Then, she heard hoof beats approaching. “That’ll be mom. Come on Miss Calico. You can meet mom and she will fix us both something to eat. How about a slice of cheese, Miss Calico, or a saucer of cold milk? It’s fresh from the cows this morning, not pasturized and all that, the real deal. Come on.”

Outside the barn, Lena rode up and dismounted. She was thirty-seven, with blue eyes and long brown hair, tied back in a pony tail. She wore homespun clothing identical to those the Lindsey wore, she made their clothes herself during the long, cold winters. “Hi Lindsey. School’s out. Did you pass? In seventh grade next fall?”

“Yep, I passed. Look what I found sitting on our fence when I got home! Miss Calico. I think she is lost. There isn’t a house anywhere around here. Plano’s the closest and that is a mile away. Could she have walked a whole mile mom? I bet she is hungry. Can I give her a bit of cheese and milk? She won’t eat much.”

“Sure, dear. Next, you will be asking if you can keep her. We’ve already got three barn cats, so what’s one more, eh? She is rather pretty, isn’t she. Come on inside.”

Lindsey picked up Miss Calico and followed her mother inside, opening the door with her illusionary hands. Lena was quite comfortable with Lindsey’s unusual skills, she thought there might be some trace of magical abilities in her daughter, though she did not know from where she could have inherited it. No one on her side of the family had ever shown any trace of magical skill. Unfortunately, she knew nothing about Sam’s side; he had never spoken of it.

Her mother poured a small pudding dish with milk and Lindsey carefully carried it to the table in her arms, again not wanting to startle the cat with her invisible hands. While Lena began making sandwiches, Lindsey asked, “Mom, tell me again how you met dad.” Her mother had told her the story countless times before, but she loved hearing it again. She also saw how much pleasure Lena had when telling her about those happy times. Miss Calico licked the milk while Lindsey sat at the table, awaiting her lunch.

Lena brought a plate of liver sausage sandwiches to the table along with two glasses of milk. “If you feed yourself, I’ll tell you again,” her mother teased her. Ever since she discovered that she could make her invisible hands work, she had been able to feed herself, relieving Lena from this awkward task.

“Fourteen years ago now, golly how time has flown, Lindsey. I lost my first husband, he ran off to Denver, but he did leave me this ranch. I had been struggling to make a go of it and one summer’s day, this young man in his middle twenties came walking down the dirt road up towards the house. He was tall and handsome, black moustache and the most enchanting green eyes. You have his eyes, you know. Anyway, he said that he was looking for work and heard that I might need a ranch hand. I was pretty desperate in those days so I took him on. He carried nothing but a carpetbag with some clothes and personal things in it, I figured he was down on his luck as well.”

“Right away, I could tell that he had never worked on a ranch, but he worked hard and was a very fast learner. You so take after him, you know, Lindsey. Anyway, he was so charming,

so kind, so romantic. Do you know that he used to pick wild flowers each day for me?”

“Yes, I remember too, mom. He’d always bring in a fresh bunch as we sat down to breakfast, didn’t he?”

Lena and Lindsey were both lost in their private memories for a minute. Lena sighed, “Yes, Sam was the finest man I have ever known. He would be so proud of you, Lindsey, seventh grade this fall!” Lindsey smiled, she longed for one more hug from her father, but knew that it would never come.

Just then, both women were totally startled, shocked by the sight. Miss Calico began growing in size right before their eyes! They both blinked and saw the cat was looking more like a person and then a woman appeared where the cat had been sitting! She wore a fashionable calico colored print dress, her blonde hair was tied in a bun and she had pale blue eyes. The woman was in her mid thirties. “Forgive my sudden appearance. I am Loretta Lasgrove, a Magic School Seeker from the Arthur Bradbury School of Magic. You can call me Lottie, though, everyone does. Lindsey, thank you for your kindness today. I was really thirsty, it was a long trip from the Bradbury School of Magic here. My, but this place is hard to find. Am I correct in assuming that you are Mrs. Lena Barron and this is Lindsey Barron?” She held out her hand to Lena.

Lena gapped and mechanically shook Lottie’s hand. Lindsey exclaimed, “Wow! A real wizard mom, right here in our house!” Lindsey didn’t offer her arm, no one but her dad had ever dared shake her handless arm. Lottie, however, took hold of her right arm with both her hands and shook Lindsey’s arm, surprising her.

“Yes, I’m Lena. I don’t understand. Why should a wizard come here? Are you lost?” Lena grasped at straws to find some earthly reason why a magician should suddenly appear at her dining room table.

“Witch, if you please. Men are wizards, we women are called witches. As I said I am a School Seeker.” Lottie realized that neither knew what she was saying. Hastily she explained, “A School Seeker is responsible for finding new students for our magic school, Bradbury’s in this case. I go all over eastern Colorado looking for new students for the fall term. Most are easily found in the large towns and cities. So very few are out here on the high plains. Had a devil of a time finding Plano, it is not on many maps. No matter. However, Lena, by now you have probably realized that your daughter, Lindsey, has been displaying quite a bit of magical talent.”

“No, not unless you, well, she was born without hands, my fault, Thalidomide got into our water well when I was pregnant with her. She makes up for their absence in other ways,” Lena tried to explain the unexplainable. She had always just accepted the “special” skills Lindsey had as being the result of the birth defect from the chemical.

“I’ve been watching her for an hour now and believe me, Lindsey is most remarkable. She has an amazing command of magical skills already, simply amazing. Perhaps, it is as you say, a result of her birth defect. Yet for whatever reason, Lindsey is very blessed with magical skills, which should be nurtured and trained. In six years, she should be a most powerful witch indeed. I would like to offer her a chance at learning all the magic she possibly can. I wish that Lindsey would come to Arthur Bradbury’s School of Magic this fall. This is one of the best magic schools in the country. We have top instructors and excellent facilities.”

Realization struck Lindsey, while Lena sighed and said, “I guess I’ve suspect she had it ever since she was seven. First, I failed her by accidentally poisoning both of us, though she has born the brunt of that. Now, when she really needs this school, I fail her again. I, I have no money to pay for this special school. It is all that I can do to keep us both alive. We don’t have anything of value and the ranch is pretty much worthless too.”

“I understand, Lena, you have been doing a fine job keeping both of yourselves alive and so healthy too. Money is not a problem. Each year, we grant a full six-year scholarship to the most deserving young students, who could not otherwise afford Bradbury’s. It gives me the greatest of pleasure to announce to both of you that Lindsey Barron is this year’s recipient of the Bradbury Scholarship for Apprentice Wizards and Witches!”

“What? We don’t take charity,” Lena protested.

“I’m sorry, this is not charity, this is an *academic* full scholarship, awarded to the most deserving young students. Lindsey has *earned* this scholarship by her performance in her school in Plano and by her skills that she has already learned on her own. We are most proud indeed to award her scholastic achievements, Lena.”

“Oh, well, then that *is* different,” Lena decided that her daughter had somehow earned the scholarship and this was not a charity handout. “Still, we cannot afford it. We have no money for her clothes, books, food, and whatever else a witch might need. I can just barely afford to send her to our simple Plano school.”

“Oh dear me, no, no, no. You misunderstand me. I said a *full* scholarship. This includes her room and board, her books, supplies, a clothing allowance, even a small personal expense allowance for her to spend as she sees fit. Oh yes, even transportation is provided to and from your ranch here. She will need absolutely no dollars for the next six years, as long as she keeps her grades up, mind you. You see, this will even save you some money as well, since you will not need to provide anything for her for the next six years. Besides, once she graduates, she will be a top quality witch, capable of earning quite a lot of money for her services.”

“You mean it will cost us nothing at all?” asked Lena in complete disbelief.

“Well, not exactly. She will have to live nine months of the year on the Bradbury campus

in our dorms, but she will be allowed to return home for Christmas break for two weeks. Then, she will also be returning home for the three summer months as well.”

Lena looked at her daughter in a new light, but then another dark cloud came over her face. “But she, well, she, ah, Lindsey has no hands. She needs so much special care, surely this is going to cause her immense, if not insurmountable problems. She came home from her first day at school in Plano in complete tears. I know that every day she has to endure so much teasing that she dreads going there at all. Who will look after her needs, like brushing her hair, the simple things that require hands?” Lena was trying her best to not embarrass Lindsey, not making her appear to be some freak of nature. Yet, Lena well knew just how much help Lindsey did require.

Lottie replied happily, “Well, were we not all teased at one time while we were in school? I was called Miss Ugly Wart all through my first six grades. I had this ugly wart right on the tip of my nose in those days. Most embarrassing. Yet, Lindsey has managed to perform very well in school in spite of the taunts. As far as her needs go, that was taken into consideration by the Board of Governors before they awarded her the full scholarship. Her special needs will be met by very caring, loving people. I assure you that her scholarship was not done in haste or without proper thought and consideration for her needs.”

She continued, “Now that that’s settled, the real question is for Lindsey. Dear, would you like to come to Bradbury’s School of Magic and learn all about magic?”

“Wow! Yes, yes!” she replied. After a moment, she realized and asked, “So that’s what I am doing when I used my invisible hands to do things around here?”

Lottie smiled, “Yes, dear child. You have an impressive magical talent within you. At Bradbury’s you will learn to do so many more fabulous things.”

“Wow! Like turning into a cat? Like you did?”

“Yes, even that, if you choose to learn that bit of magic. Now then, that’s all settled. School begins on the first day of September. However, new students are obliged to attend Orientation Week, where you will be shown around the school, pick up your supplies, and learn all about it. You will report to Bradbury’s on the twenty-fourth of August this year. The term ends on the last day of May. On the 1st of June, she will return here.”

“Okay, but where is this school? How does she get there?” Lena asked.

“The school is not on any map. We take the safety and security of all of our students *seriously*. There are many enchantments on the school so that no one can easily find it. Lindsey will be safer at Bradbury’s than she is here, though indeed she is pretty safe here. Plano is awfully isolated. When she is fourteen and if you sign her parental consent form, then she will be

allowed to visit Telluride a couple times a year for relaxation and a get away from studies for a day. You might suspect that Bradbury's is not too far from Telluride, if that helps any." She winked her eyes knowingly, as if revealing a secret.

"Oh, that's an old mining town in the Uncompahgre Forest, right?" Lena asked.

"Yes, that's the place. Now there is a free Magical Bus that will come directly here to your door to pick you up on the twenty-third of August. Let me enter you into the bus route and tell you when to expect the bus." Lottie waved her wand and a handheld computer appeared in her hands. She punched several buttons in rapid succession.

"But I cannot hold a wand, Miss Lottie," Lindsey suddenly realized a horrible problem she would have, assuming that she too would be given a magical wand.

"Don't worry, Lindsey, something will be worked out for you, I'm sure. Now it looks like you will be the second passenger to be picked up that day. The bus should arrive here at ten o'clock sharp. You must be ready, we cannot hold the bus up, you see. There are twenty others that must also be picked up on this trip," Lottie explained.

Lena wrote the information down and asked, "What should she bring with her? What should I pack?"

"Oh, just little personal items, nothing bigger than will fit in a back pack — hair brush, photos, that sort of thing." She waved her wand. A stylish plaid dress materialized, along with undergarments, socks, and a pair of nice, black shoes that were slip-ons, not with laces. "Here are your traveling clothes. During Orientation Week, you will be given more clothing and your official robes. You see, you need not worry about your clothing, my dear. It is all taken care of in your full scholarship."

Lindsey gasped! She had never owned a real dress before, just the homespun made by her mother. "It's so beautiful!" she exclaimed, tears filled her eyes. Even Lena's eyes watered.

"Well, a beautiful dress for a beautiful young woman, I always say," Lottie replied.

"Now then," she went on in a more serious tone, "we must determine in which dorm hall you will be living. We group like minded, like personalities together, makes for a better living arrangement. There are five Halls at Bradbury's. We have to decide which is right and best for you, Lindsey. To help us, I have this little survey for you to take." She waved her wand and a four page test booklet appeared along with a marking stylus.

"You just take the stylus and mark your choice for each question. If you make a mistake, just mark the new choice and it will automatically remove the previous choice you've made.

Simple. Answer each question honestly. Your mother and I will be outside so you can have peace and quite in which to take the survey. Come on, Lena, how about showing me around your ranch? She will need a while to answer the questions.” Lena and Lottie went outside, leaving Lindsey to take the survey.

At first, Lindsey tried to open the booklet with her arms, but found that was too difficult, so she used her invisible hands to open it to page one. Holding the marker in her arms, she began. “What is your favorite color? Yellow, red, brown, blue, black” She marked yellow. “Are you cheerful? Yes or no.” Lindsey marked “yes.” “Are you an important person? Yes or No.” She marked “no.” On she went answering the one hundred questions about herself.

At the precise time Lindsey finished marking the last question, Lena and Lottie re-entered the home. Lindsey wondered if Lottie somehow knew that she had just finished. “Now we will compute the results,” Lottie explained, again waving her wand. The test booklet disappeared in a flash and a small piece of paper floated back down on the table. Lottie picked it up. “Here is the result. Ah, it is as I suspected. Lindsey, you are going to be staying in the Yellow Hall.”

Since neither knew what she was saying, Lottie explained. “The Yellow Hall is for those wizards and witches who are brave and fearless, who prefer thought as a means of solving a problem, who are cheerful, who like light and air. In contrast, the Blue Hall is for those who love water, who are compassionate and caring, who believe that emotions should be used to solve problems. Many in the Blue Hall are healers, succoring those in need. Now the Red Hall is fiery for those who believe passions rule, who believe love is what rules, hot emotions should be used to solve problems. The Brown Hall represents the earth, here are those who love to grow things, both plants and animals, they are stalwart and dependable to a fault. They believe honest efforts solve life’s problems. Those in the Black Hall stand for pure logic, they see themselves as all important, some are foolhardy and take risks to solve problems. Might and strength, effort in other words, is their hallmark.”

“I suspected that Lindsey would be in the Yellow Hall. Myself, I was in the Blue Hall. She will be living with those who are like minded.”

“Well that’s good. I sure wouldn’t want her staying with those foolhardy, might makes right, children,” Lena commented.

Lottie smiled. “Now, I really must be getting along. I have three other young people to visit yet today. I am sure that Lindsey will have a million questions to ask. That is what Orientation Week is for — to get all these answered. Once again, let me congratulate you, Lindsey, on earning a full scholarship to Bradbury’s! You should be proud of your academic achievements and I look forward to hearing how well you do during your next six years. Oh yes, one final detail, Lena. During Orientation Week, Lindsey will be given a special cell phone which she can easily operate. She will be able to phone you here and will be encouraged to call

you at least one a week. She will be able to give you her phone number the first time she calls you. That way, if an emergency arises, you can contact her too.”

Lottie rose to leave. “It has been a pleasure meeting both of you.” She shook Lena’s hand and then Lindsey’s arm. Lena showed her to the door and once outside, Lottie waved good bye, waved her wand, and said something. Poof. She disappeared.

Once the shock of her sudden magical departure wore off, Lindsey began jumping up and down excitedly! “Mom! I get to go to magic school! Wow!” Lena gave her daughter a long, loving hug. In her heart she knew that if anyone deserved to learn more about magic, it was her daughter. Somehow the scholarship had given her daughter what she could not otherwise have given her. The untold hours she had patiently spent with Lindsey, helping her with her homework had actually paid off handsomely. However, she knew that she was going to miss Lindsey something terribly come this fall. She was not prepared to have her daughter leave the nest so soon. If only Sam were still here.

“Now let’s see what you look like in your new school clothes, Lindsey,” her mother suggested, just as excited as her daughter over the “real” clothes.

“Mom, I can never manage getting myself dressed in these,” Lindsey admitted, when Lena was done.

“I suppose that they also know that and will have someone there to help you. Now let’s see how you look, dear,” her mother answered. Lindsey pirouetted around a bit. Lena, holding her hands to her face and wiping a tear, added, “You look like a little princess, Lindsey. I am so proud of you. Sam would be too. Just look at you!” Lindsey beamed, she felt like a real person just now — well, dressed like one anyway.