

Chapter 2 — Late Summer

“It’s organized chaos, that’s what it is,” Lena Compton said, laughing her head off as the children made a mad dash to the front room teleportation device that took them over to the Whitewater ranch. It was Saturday mid-July, she and her husband Lloyd, along with Polly and Fred Betts, sat at the kitchen table sipping their late morning coffee. “How did I ever get along without it. I will miss them something awful when they all go back to school.” She was referring to the last week of August when all of the children would be returning to Arthur Bradbury’s School of Magic.

Lloyd Compton, who worked for the Department of Defense, Magical Branch, Denver, Colorado, smiled. “I know, I’ve never had so much fun in my life. I’m so glad that I met you, Lena. Look what you’ve done for my life!” He had been assigned to protect Lena Barron from retribution by the evil wizard, Dominus Malefic. Her first husband, Samuel Rabnor, had been instrumental in his capture many years ago, as one member of the famous Rat Pack, a group of four who finally brought Dominus and his Death Stalkers to justice. Back then, he swore vengeance on those who captured him. Some of his men still on the loose had murdered the remaining family of Mabel Pruit, the Diviner of the Rat Pack. Sam had changed his last name and gone into hiding along with the other two members. Calling himself Sam Barron, he’d married Lena and they had a child, Lindsey. Sam was murdered some five years later, though until last year, his death had been attributed to an unfortunate farming accident. With Lindsey’s true identity now known, Lloyd had been sent to protect Lena and also Lindsey, when she was home from Bradbury’s. Lloyd had also fallen in love with Lena and they married last summer.

During these past two years, Lindsey had demonstrated over and over the budding skills needed to become a Dispeller, one who can easily counter nasty spells so that others could apprehend the evil doers. Lindsey was born without hands and lived a perfectly miserable childhood, completely friendless. However, during her first year at Bradbury’s, Doctor Caterwall had re-grown her hands, and she had made lasting friends, for the first time in her life.

One of those friends was Pam Betts, a homely girl with black hair and hazel eyes. Her two front teeth had a noticeable gap in them, only adding to her lack of self-image. Pam, however, was a computer genius and had already demonstrated that she had a knack for sleuthing. Indeed, her sleuthing last year had been instrumental in uncovering a dire plot to have the head master of Bradbury’s fired. None other than the Governor General Albright, a crony of Dominus Malefic, had been behind it, her testimony led to his arrest and lengthy jail term.

He, too, swore revenge on Pam and Lindsey. In fact, Dominus supporters attacked Pam’s home in Sterling, Colorado, ransacking it. Her father, Fred Betts, was the director of the Department of Magical Misuse, Sterling. Her mother, Polly, had narrowly escaped the thugs who broke into their home. Because of the ever growing crime wave being fostered by Dominus, the

department's forces were now stretched very thin. As a result, the Betts family moved in with Lloyd and Lena, so that their families could more readily be protected.

In these hard times, Lena and Lloyd opened their home to another young girl in Lindsey's class, Audrey Lemon, whose parents had been killed by Dominus many years ago. A very level headed orphan, she had managed to get by on her own, living with many foster families. Now, she was staying with the Compton's, which she loved. She was an incredible wood carver, producing absolutely fabulous carvings of animals from blocks of wood. Fred had helped her set up a Web site from which to promote and sell her carvings. For the first time in her life, she had money coming in, carvings were selling from one hundred to five hundred dollars each. Audrey also was a plant expert, plants had been her only true friends for much of her childhood until now. Audrey fit in perfectly here, helping Lena with the many garden plots.

Their new ranch and home was on a five mile square of rangeland, just north of the tiny high plains town of Arapahoe, near the Kansas border. Their nearest neighbors, the Whitewater ranch, lay on the small Indian reservation, north of Arapahoe. The Whitewater family were Apaches and their four children were also close friends of Lindsey.

Amanda had long black hair, thick lips, and black eyes. She was demonstrating Tracker skills, the ability to see residual magical energies left from the casting of magical spells. Amanda was Lindsey's very best friend. Amanda's sister, Fern, a year younger than Amanda, was also a plant lover, and was now a close friend of Audrey's. Her two older brothers, Jim and Tom, were also good friends. All were on the Bradbury track and soccer team. Indeed, Jim, Tom, Amanda, and Lindsey were the long distance runners and had helped the team win second place in the National Track Meet last may, their specialty was the twenty mile relay race. Fern ran in the mile relay race portion.

Tom, now a sixth year student, had just announced his engagement to Sandy Rains, an Arapaho who lived in the tiny town. She worked part time at the Indian cassino in town, the biggest money maker for hundreds of miles in all directions. Both Sandy and Tom were Yellow Hall Floor Monitors, helping the new students during orientation week and at all other times.

Jim, now a fifth year student, had a crush on Lindsey from the first day he had met her, two years ago. However, this summer, his world was turned upside down. Another Special Needs student had been accepted on a full scholarship to Bradbury's, Ashley Stokes. Lindsey had agreed to become a Yellow Hall Floor Monitor especially to assist her. Indeed, she would be bunking with Lindsey, Amanda, and Pam in their school dorm.

However, Ashley, an orphan since the horrible car accident when she was two, had been kicked out of every foster home she had live in, and now had been kicked out of the Twin Cities School of Magic as well. Having nowhere to stay for the summer months, Governor Alister Broadwell, head of Bradbury's, had asked Lena and Lindsey if Ashley could spend the summer months with them. Both had agreed.

Ashley was fiercely independent, taking nothing from anyone. When she arrived, she had numerous black and blue bruises from the fights she had recently gotten into at Twin Cities. She had no money and wore only a tattered school dress, badly mended. Ashley had a violent temper when she arrived, along with her physical disability, no arms. She had lost them in the car accident which killed her parents.

During her first six weeks here at the Compton ranch, Ashley, at last, found people that she could respect and would respect her as well, so much so, that her entire attitude towards life began to soften. Lena was the only non-magic user here, yet Ashley found that she could talk about her deepest feelings freely and openly to this normal woman. Lena gave her the love and encouragement that no other woman had been able to do. Lindsey, who had assumed the responsibility for her as Yellow Hall Floor Monitor, because of her childhood, knew how to handle Ashley with dignity and respect. A strong bond of love sprang up between them as well.

Three weeks ago, Ashley volunteered that she wished that Lena could be her mother! For Ashley, this had been an enormous change of attitude and Lloyd had already begun the formal adoption process to make Ashley part of their family.

Yet with the constant increase in crime, due to Dominus Malefic and his now famous manifesto declaring that wizards ought to rule the world, no one was safe anywhere. Hence, families began to band together for mutual protection. Indeed, Running Bear Whitewater, or R. B., had helped design the new ranch home for the Compton family, based upon his own unique design. Totally energy efficient, the home was mostly underground, with three feet thick earthen walls and a sod roof that was really part of the ground. The new Compton ranch home was only forty feet by twenty on the outside, but five times that size inside, a magically altered space.

Further, since his children and those at the Compton ranch were together nearly all of the time, R. B. created a permanent teleportation device in both their front rooms, allowing them to go back and forth with ease and safety, though often they all chose to ride their horses back and forth as well. Both R. B., Lloyd, and Fred were planning for the future. If things got worse, which everyone predicted, they would have a secure home base from which to operate and take in others who may need their assistance.

When Ashley first came to live with them, Pam began to use her sleuthing skills, inquiring into the past of Ashley. She discovered an old bank account of Ashley's mother, and Lloyd had helped her obtain her inheritance, a little over ten thousand dollars. A byproduct of this was Ashley learned that she had paternal grandparents, Samson and Bertha Stokes, who were now living in an Assisted Living complex. Once a week, Lloyd took her to visit them.

During this summer, Polly and Lena decided that, since their girls were now fourteen, it was time that they learned how to keep house. Specifically, how to plan, cook, and serve meals, deal with housecleaning, laundry, and other domestic duties. Ashley was very proud that Lena allowed her to learn how to do these herself, letting her have the time to work out how she could

accomplish these in her own way. Ashley continued to insist on her independence, fiercely so.

Additionally, Lena obtained the majority of her income from their ranch crops and horse breeding. Lloyd, a city slicker, was slow to learn the ways of ranching. Hence, Lena also had given the girls various chores to do. Pam and Lindsey were in charge of the many animals, milking the cows, collecting the eggs, feeding and watering the animals, cleaning out the stalls, and so on. Pam's experience at milking cows convinced her to make a deal with Lindsey. She'd collect the eggs, if Lindsey would milk the cows.

Audrey, the plant expert, was put in charge of the several garden plots. Ashley was given the chores of cleaning the house and doing the laundry on Fridays. Of course, Fern dropped by nearly every morning to help Audrey with the plants and garden. By now, Audrey and Fern had become close friends, sharing many mutual interests.

Already this summer, Ashley had demonstrated several times her uncanny ability to sense when someone was in trouble, a key aspect of a Diviner. She had sensed that Lloyd was in trouble when some irrigation pipes fell on him, pinning him to the ground. Later, she had sensed that R. B. was in dire peril, when he had gone off to help the reservation police capture the men responsible for beating up Grey Eagle. She also told them just where to find the man had taken R. B., that is, in an abandoned line shack. Lindsey, Amanda, and Pam now suspected that lovable Governor Alister Broadwell already knew that Ashley displayed Diviner traits and had worked to get her to their school and into their lives.

However, Ashley's appearance created a new problem for Jim, who had a crush on Lindsey for the last two years, ever since he had met her. Now, he just could not keep his eyes off of Ashley! She was so much fun to be around, so feisty, so independent, so like himself, rowdy and playful. He had a large photo of each girl posted on his bedroom wall. Jim was confused, he liked two girls very much. In fact, he had kissed Lindsey twice now, after the last dance of the Formal End of Term Dance at Bradbury's. Twice now, Amanda had chided him for trying to have two girlfriends. Still, he just couldn't bring himself to choose one over the other.

Mid-July was exceedingly hot here on the High Plains. Nevertheless, the track runners continued to race every third day, pushing themselves to run at least twenty miles. All four long distance runners were intent upon winning first place at the Nationals this year. Jim had even convinced Ashley to try becoming part of their mile racing team, along with Fern. Indeed, with two of their team members having just graduated, they had to find two new replacement runners or they would not be able to even field a track team or soccer team.

Around ten each morning, either the girls came over to the Whitewater's ranch or vice versa. Chores done, today, Lindsey, Audrey, Pam, and Alison headed over to Amanda's. On days when they were not running, Pam and Audrey came too, neither was interested in running. Today, however, Sandy had scheduled time to meet with Lindsey to go over her duties as Yellow Hall Floor Monitor.

Sipping sodas, Lindsey took notes on her laptop, while Sandy outlined all of her new duties. “With the first years, it is pretty clear. You go with them a week early, show them to their rooms, show them around the dorms, where the bathrooms are located, those sort of details. Next, you take them to the Bookstore and help them get their supplies and schedules. The House Mother usually hands out the new laptops and cell phones, though you ought to be with them as well, in case of troubles. Next, you take them around to their classes, just as they will be doing on the first day. You are allowed to do anything that you believe will help ease them into the school routines.”

“On the bus, at each stop, you do a head count. I’ll have the official boarding list with me, and I check off each student as they get aboard. Now, in your case, you will also be responsible for getting Ashley familiarized with the campus. First, though, go to Cho Lin to get her schedule, this is the first year that students have the option for an elective. Ashley might want one instead of a Study Hall, though I found them very useful. I swear each year the courses get harder and harder. Also, you will need to assist her at meal times. Actually, anytime there is something that you think she may need a little help with, then you should be there for her.”

“Now, anytime that there is trouble, as you have seen, Governor Alister puts we monitors in charge, so be alert for that too. Also, third years go on a lot of field trips, US History trips. You get to see lots of historic places, it’s rather fun. On those bus trips, you are responsible for making sure all Yellow Hall students are aboard and none get left behind. If anyone gives you any guff, you have the right to assign them detention.”

“We didn’t know about the field trips. That sounds interesting,” Lindsey replied, finishing typing in Sandy’s list of things for her to do.

“Oh, there is one more thing that has just come up, Lindsey. Perhaps you would take this one for me as well. We have another new third year student who has just transferred to Bradbury’s. Since I will have my hands full with a hundred first years, could you also handle this new third year as well?”

“Sure, glad to,” Lindsey replied. “Who is it?”

“Andy, Andy Rains.” Sandy said rather quietly. Lindsey looked up at her, she added, “Yes, my little brother. He wants to be an archaeologist and spent his first two years at Boston School of Magic and has been on two school digs with their archaeology faculty. He’s kind of weird, you know. I don’t think he liked Boston at all. He’s, well, you will just have to meet him and see for yourself. I’ve asked him to come over here and meet his new Floor Monitor, unless you don’t want to deal with him.”

“I guess I should meet him first, Sandy. After all, it does make more sense for me to handle all the new third year students, since you have a hundred first years. When is he coming by?”

“If he follows orders, which he seldom does, he ought to be along anytime now. I told him to come around 10:30 so that I could have time to hat you up on your duties,” Sandy explained, clearly relieved that Lindsey would handle him.

“Is Andy an Arapaho too? You two don’t get along?” Lindsey asked the obvious.

“Yes, he is and no, we don’t. He’s always bringing in dirty things into the house, making a mess, and I have to clean up after him. Just be glad that you don’t have a little brother around.”

Just then the magical owl announced, “Friendly visitor arriving at the corral.” The two girls headed outside, after Sandy said it was probably her brother. Lindsey’s first impression of Andy was mixed.

He wore his hair overly long, for a boy. Thick black hair came down to his shoulders. Andy had the same slightly darkish skin tone as his sister and the Whitewaters as well. He was about the same height as Lindsey, tall and thin, but he wore blue jeans and a western shirt, both were slightly dirty.

“Andy, this is Miss Lindsey Barron, your Yellow Hall Floor Monitor. She’s going to be your guide when you go to Bradbury’s. I’m warning you, if you give her any trouble, I’ll see that you get detentions,” Sandy said slightly antagonistically.

“Hello, Miss Lindsey Barron. I’m glad that you will be my Floor Monitor and not my stupid, bossy sister.” Sandy glared at her brother. “You into archaeology?”

“Er, no, I’m afraid that I don’t know anything about it, Andy. What is it anyway?”

“Oh no, Lindsey. Now you’ve done it! He’ll talk about old bones for hours now. I’m off to find Tom. See you later.” Sandy quickly headed back inside, as the other girls were coming out to see Andy.

“Oh, here’s more of our third years. Andy Rains, this is Pam Betts, Audrey Lemon, and Ashley Stokes. You already know Amanda and Fern, I suppose.” Lindsey did the introductions. “Andy is going to be a third year with us this fall.”

“Pleased to meet all of you. Gee, Ashley really doesn’t have any arms! Wow! I didn’t believe Sandy when she told me. Sorry,” Andy replied.

Ashley’s face took on a distinct look of anger, though she forced herself to remain calm. Lindsey was pleased that Andy was observant. He hastily added, “Ashley, don’t misunderstand me, I think that it is just fabulous that you have carried on and become a third year witch. You must be better than the rest of us to have gotten so far. After all, casting all those grade 0 and 1 spells in forty-five minutes was tough for me and I’ve got two arms.”

“Thanks, I think. Usually, they ask me if I cheated and didn’t do all the spells or someone gave me a pass on having to cast some. I’ll have you know that I did get all of them done in the forty-five minutes my first year. Last year, I got them all but the necromancy ones, I hate necromancy,” Ashley replied on the defensive.

“Wow! You mean others think you got a pass on doing spells? Not doing them all? That’s down right idiotic of them, Ashley. At least I think so. After all, we are supposed to be learning how to do magical spells. What’s the use of giving someone a free pass on them? Makes no sense. You must be using your feet like we use our hands,” Andy observed.

For once, Ashley was taken aback. Andy was on her side, most unusual, especially for a boy. She had always been on the defensive, especially when changing schools. Maybe things would be different at Bradbury’s, she thought.

Andy continued chatting, “Say, are you the Pam Betts who got the Governor General arrested for all those crimes? We heard about it on the news in Boston,” Andy asked, genuinely interested.

Pam blushed, “Yes, that’s me.”

“Way cool! Some of us cheered when we heard about it. Say, can I ask you all something? I’ve heard all sorts of rumors, bits from the news, and Sandy’s emails. Are you a Sleuth, a Tracker, and a Dispeller?” Andy inquired. “I mean beginning ones or whatever.”

“We are,” Lindsey decided to answer for them. “This fall we get an elective or Study Hall. Pam is taking Sleuthing Theory I, Amanda is taking Tracking Theory I, and I am taking Dispeller Theory I. Ashley is already a Diviner, at least we think so and I will be seeing if I can get her some theory course for Diviners, if there is one.”

“Cooler than cool! Say, do you all hang out together, like studying together and all that?” Andy asked.

“Sure, Audrey here is the resident plant expert. There is nothing that she doesn’t know about plants,” Lindsey put in a good word for Audrey as well.

Andy grinned. “Can I join you? I mean studying together. I’m good at math and science, naturally, though I’m really most interested in archaeology. Not many are, you know.”

The girls looked at each other, Pam answered for them. “Sure. I could use some help with these folks. We’ve got Algebra II this fall and I am about the only one around who can do it. You have to promise to help the others though, especially Emilio and Kathy. They are really bad at math.”

“Sure thing. Say, do you have chemistry this fall? I know back at Boston, I was supposed to have chemistry this fall,” Andy asked. All nodded that they did. “Good, maybe I can help out there too, I already know quite a lot about chemistry. I did a lot of playing with chemistry sets when I was in grade school. All the field trips to excavation sites has taught me more. You know that I’ve been on two school sponsored digs? That’s how I normally spent my summers, on archaeology digs with the professors. Kind of boring this summer because I’m not. Does Bradbury’s have any archaeology digs or even classes?”

“I have never heard of either, but then that is my job, Andy. When we get there, this fall during orientation week, I’ll check and see if there is anything like that. Is that what you would want for your elective?”

“You bet! Thanks. Say, does Yellow Hall have a soccer team? I played goalkeeper in PE class,” Andy ventured.

Amanda let out a war hoop! “Eureka! We just lost our goalkeeper, she graduated. We’ve been looking all over for a new goalkeeper. You absolutely *have* to try out! Unless someone crawls out of the woodwork, you’re it! Wait til I tell Jim and Tom!”

Lindsey added, “You are looking at more than half the team here. All four Whitewaters are on it, plus myself. Jake and Emilio are also on it. We have two openings and Ashley is going to try out for one and you can try out for the other. If you can play at all, you are probably on the team.”

“Cool. Golly, Ashley, you play soccer too? Now that is impressive indeed!” Andy praised her.

Ashley smiled for once, “Well, I play, but no one ever wanted me on their team. I’ve been practicing for the mile relay race too. I think I will be better at that than sprinting the short distance.”

“Cooler than cool, Ashley. I think I would be better at sprinting short distances. I really don’t like to run around that much. That’s why I like being the goalkeeper,” Andy admitted.

Amanda took them all inside, she was sweating already. Drinking sodas, they congregated in the living room. Lindsey asked him, “How come you left Boston? If they had all those digs, how come you are coming to Bradbury’s?”

“Er, I’m a Native American, I just did not fit in at all well with those Bostonians. I found them awfully stuffy and picky. Snobby, really, like they were God’s gift to mankind or something. I also got into a few too many fights, too,” he admitted sheepishly. “They didn’t like my hair either.”

Ashley giggled. “Me too. I got into so many fights that I got kicked out of two different magic schools already.”

“What? You? Little old you? Fights?” Andy asked, very impressed.

“Yes, I don’t take anything from anyone, not even professors. I kicked our necromancy professor in his privates when he was giving me a hassle about learning those awful spells of his.”

Lindsey vouched for her, “Yes, she had all sorts of bruises when she first came here. So you better watch yourself around Ashley. No monkey business, Andy.” He grinned and promised that he would do no such thing.

Pam then made the mistake of asking him about archaeology. He began telling them all about it, for the next hour! However, he was so passionate about it, that the girls sat there listening to him, until Jim and Tom finally interrupted them, asking him about becoming the goalkeeper.

A bit later, Andy asked them, “Say what do you all think of the trouble that is brewing in Arapahoe?”

“What trouble?” asked Pam, suddenly curious. Perhaps there was a mystery here to solve.

“Sandy hasn’t taken you to see our house? She hasn’t told you?” he asked incredulously. Even Amanda shook her head no.

“It’s all this Dominus Manifesto bunk. You see, Arapahoe used to be a tiny town. Heck, it still is! Like there are four east west streets and four north south streets, but half of those don’t go all the way through town. Population is only a hundred or so. It used to be nothing but a train grain elevator stop, back in the old days. My dad, he runs the grain elevator company there. It’s been in our family three generations now, but I sure the heck am not going to take it over after dad. Then, the government came and confiscated some mostly worthless rangeland just north of the town. All of the irrigated farms lie to the south, well mostly so. They put the Apache reservation there, you see. That kind of angered most folks, but then the real reason for doing that surfaced, the Tall Wolf Cassino. Big gambler draw it is, provides good, stead work for over half the town. Sandy works there.”

“Anyway, these days it’s a mess. Hot heads on the reservation think that they ought to control everything and have been causing no end of trouble, vandalism mostly. Half of the town thinks that the reservation should go, the other half thinks it should stay. Hot heads think the town should go. It’s like a three way battle that’s going on. I think it is stupider than stupid to be fighting over *the* gas station, *the* hardware store, and *the* tiny grocery store. But then, they think that I am now an outsider, a Bostonian.”

“Say, what are you all doing for fun around here?” Andy finished and then asked.

“Oh we get together for a formal dance every Saturday night,” Amanda replied at once. “We also play a lot of Scrabble, listen to records, watch movies, and eat pizza. Want to join us, Andy?”

“Sure. Any time. I’ve got my old Monopoly set if you want to play that too. That reminds me, I’ve been looking for a job, but there’s nothing around here, excepting the cassino and I refuse to work for them.”

“Maybe mom could use another hand in our fields,” Lindsey suggested.

After lunch, she took Andy over to visit her mother and see about the chances for a job. Since he would work for minimum wages and knew about ranching, Lena gave him a part time job clearing the brush from the edges of the fields. The circular centers were irrigated. The former owner ignored the land outside these circles letting them grow wild. Lena had long range plans to alter the irrigation so as to make use of these areas. However, they needed to be cleaned up first.

For the next month, Andy rode his horse over around nine in the morning and worked until noon, clearing the brush. Of course, Lena insisted that he stay and have lunch with them as well.

At the next Saturday night dance, Andy showed up dressed in his soft suede suit, brown of course. He had his long hair tied back into a pony tail. Jim now danced almost exclusively with Ashley, who wore her beautiful, long, blue silk gown. Thus, Andy shyly asked Lindsey to dance. She loved the feel of his jacket and he danced far better than Jim, she noted. Although no one paid much attention, Andy always chose Lindsey as his dance partner after this. Of course, when Monique appeared and danced exclusively with Pam, Andy became very curious about the pair, though he said nothing. Lindsey caught him watching them several times.

On the first of August, Audrey took Lena aside and said, “Mrs. Compton, if I were you, I would lay in a large store of food and fodder for the animals. I have a feeling that the winter will be bad this year.” Lena knew enough not to pressure her for additional facts or for reasons why. Even if she had pressured her, Audrey would not have been able to say much more. It was just those self-preservation premonitions Audrey occasionally had. By now, Lena knew enough to trust both Ashley and Audrey’s future hunches. She agreed to stock up, and Audrey felt relieved.