

*Somewhere in a small city located in World One...*

...a young woman was extremely anxious and about to burst into tears from it. Her name was Lydia Catfish, and she was feeling very sorry for herself.

She was only a teenager, you see, and she had been cursed with an above average intellect paired with zero motivation whatsoever. Sure, when she was excited about new things and all the things she could do with them she could be hardworking, but when it got right down to it she really didn't care either way and was often in it to say she was.

For example, her AP Physics class. She *knew* she was terrible at physics, but when she told her parents she was considering the class and she saw the looks on their faces, she just couldn't let them down! How would she live with herself? If there was one thing she regretted, it was that she could remember every guilty moment she'd ever had. And unfortunately, she couldn't remember much else.

And besides her academic struggles, she had other things to worry about, like her orchestra auditions, the play she had been getting ready for, trying to make her appearance a little nicer (she wasn't exactly the most good-looking girl around, what with her messy brown hair and gigantic glasses and cheeks that were always bright red, making her look like a child...plus there was the fact that she fell into the category of short and chubby...) and trying to get some friends, and--was that a *moving set of luggage* in the window of that store?

Her stress dissipated while her curiosity was held by the store she had just passed and almost hadn't noticed. She took a few steps back to peer through the window properly. Her face fell when she noticed the lack of moving suitcases, but there were several things lurking in the shadows of the shop that she just *had* to get a closer look at.

Deciding to ignore her mounting anxiety for the time being, she pushed open the door to the shop. The entire place seemed to be old and dusty and filled with strange things, a store that you only heard about from your friends at parties when they were all so drunk they didn't mind telling their shameful secrets. (Of course, this was all speculation, as the last party our heroine had been to was when she was twelve and she had to leave early because of a family crisis.) As she browsed through the aisles, she started to notice a strange feeling of light fading.

She turned back around and noticed the door and window had both gone missing and new things had been piled up where they were. She decided to take a closer look.

On top of the pile were some strange sporks that seemed to be made of solid steel and had razor edges. Neat, but not practical. How could you eat with them without cutting your mouth open on them? There were also some jars full of mysterious substances, badger puppets, strange cages with even stranger animals that Lydia didn't feel like getting too close a look at, and other miscellaneous items that held her attention while she sorted

through them.

“See anything you like?” asked a deep, tired-sounding voice. She whirled around and saw a wrinkled man who looked about three feet tall. “If you don’t, I’m sure we’ve got something that will please you.” He gestured to the area behind him.

“Um.” She didn’t quite know how to respond to the man’s statement. “Well. Um. See, uh...how do I get out? ‘Cause this stuff is where the door used to be...” She figured it was the most pressing issue. After all, she didn’t want to be *trapped* in there--how would she survive? Where would she get food and water from? What would everyone think if she just up and disappeared? It was too much to think about.

“Is it now?” The man sounded faintly peeved. “It’s gone and done it again, eh...?” He muttered something unintelligibly to himself. “Well, you might as well buy something. Maybe it’ll show up if it’s given money.”

“Oh. But, it’s, um, it’s a door. Doors aren’t really, um, conscious.” Though, since the one she’d gone through had *disappeared*...

“Are you sure about that?”

“Um, yes.”

“Well, you should buy something anyway. After all, with the door gone, it’s not like you’re leaving anytime soon.”

Lydia stared at the man for a few moments. “Um, okay. Actually, um, do you have any, um, laptops or portable computers?” She had been needing one for quite some time, what with her computer breaking down and her sister refusing to share hers.

“Stop saying that,” muttered the man, turning around to hobble to the back of the store.

“Saying what?” asked our heroine as she followed him. “Um, I don’t think I said anything strange...”

“Look, just...just try to not use that ‘um’ word so much, it’s giving me a headache.”

“Um...”

“Stay here.” The man disappeared behind another aisle for a few minutes, leaving Lydia to look through the things around her. She didn’t want to wander off without what the shopkeeper wanted to bring her, and ended up amusing herself with a cup on a stick with a ball attached to it by a string.

When the man (or was it midget? Well, they were sort of the same thing, just with a

height difference, but still...) reappeared, he was carrying a black case about the size of a binder with a neon green snake design that seemed to wrap around it several times. He put it in Lydia's hands. "Here's your...computer thingy. It's got a charger and all that inside."

"Wow, thank you! That sure was quick! Um, what are its features like? What kind of screen does it have? Does it have good streaming speed for videos? How big is the hard drive? And, um, how much does it cost?" she finished sheepishly, afraid that her questions might have annoyed the shopkeeper. The man just winced at the unnecessary pause word again, but motioned her over to a bare counter with an old cash register on it.

"How much've you got on you?" he asked after she set it down. She dug into her pocket for her wallet and pulled it out.

"Lessee...a ten, plus a five, plus two ones...I've got seventeen dollars." She looked again. "Oh, and this gift card thingy for a bookstore, which I think has about five dollars left on it. But that's it."

The man took the wallet from her, emptied it of its contents, and then handed it back to her with the black case. "That'll do." She stowed the wallet away. "And would you look at that, there's the door. Just hope it's in the right place this time..." he murmured to himself.

"What was that?" she asked. "I didn't quite, um, hear that last part."

"Just get out of my store." She furrowed her eyebrows at the rudeness of the statement. "Oh, but take this." He pulled out a small bottle of white pills and handed it to her.

"What are these?" she asked, as there was no marking on the orange bottle.

"You'll find out." He ducked behind the counter and disappeared.

She glanced over the side to see if he was hiding. Perhaps he was, but it was hard to tell because it seemed as though he had simply vanished.

She shrugged. Well, it was probably all a stress-induced hallucination combined with too many Terry Pratchett books. She assumed she'd be fine once she woke up.

However, wake up she did not. When she stepped out of the store, she found herself in a dull gray hallway. She turned around to go back into the shop and ask the little man to take her home, but she found the door had disappeared and she was completely alone.