

The Fool

Miss Cloverbottom had to stand on the tips of her toes and stretch to reach the only available space and finish scratching out the complex sequence of equations. Her lecture is a slurry of words and concepts which immediately fly over my head. She drones on about the structure of arcane sigils in the same way Mr Brown spoke about the order of operations last year. I was trying to pay attention, I really was, but trying to pay attention when you're bored is like trying not to think of an elephant when someone says "don't think about elephants" - your own mind betrays you.

I only remember to even grab my pen when the teacher began erasing. I scribble out a few short lines of the sequence before she sweeps her arm across the board. She was a bus that stopped for no one. Nothing to do now but try to catch the next one.

Thirty unproductive minutes later, Miss C. wraps up the lesson and addresses the class. "Before I dismiss you all to your next class, I should let you all know that the first practical exam of this course will be in three days' time!" She smiles while she delivers the news. "Each of you will be assigned a random, simple sigil you will need to construct within the class period." I close my notebook and follow the rush of students out of the classroom. Most form into clumps, and I hear chatter about the upcoming test. I step to the side of the hallway and check my schedule. Two more classes left for the day. I can worry about the exam after I survive those.

Back home, tests had never been very stressful. My grades suffered not because I didn't know the material, but because I "didn't hand in a single assignment on time" ... at least,

according to Mr. Brown. Here at the Cambridge Academy for the Arcane Arts, it was so much worse.

Classes like Potions, where I've been trapped for half an hour, are twisted versions of the classes I struggled with at home. The teachers give vague instructions that are closer to riddles than lessons, and we were expected to either already know what to do or figure it out ourselves.

Take, for example, the potions we were being "taught" to brew right now. A supposedly simple brew according to Professor Langdonworth, who had only written a few instructions on the board.

Elixir of Retention

1. *Begin with a base of The Essence of a Cloud's Tear*
2. *Heat with a fire which has been Kissed With Forbidden Knowledge*
3. *Stir in the Soul of a Pen*

Comparing my cauldron to my neighbor's was not doing my confidence any favors. Hers was beginning to shimmer with a soft green light as she stirred in some shiny black flakes she had grabbed from the supply closet. My pot currently contained about a cup of water, an old feather I had snapped off a spare quill, and exactly zero magic.

Another botched potion. In my defense, I had no way of knowing what exactly any of the ingredients were. The containers in the closet are scarcely labeled. The few that are marked are in Latin, and I hadn't paid enough attention to Mrs. Gray's lessons in middle school to help me now. How was I supposed to know she was right about Latin being useful! I thought it was a dead language until last week. Even if I could read it, I doubt that would help - half of the

students left the room for supplies, rather than using the communal source. What baffled me more than that was that they all came back with different items! I glared at the professor, who sat at his desk reading a book.

I marched up to him. It was hard to tell when you were sitting at a desk, watching him lecture on his raised platform, but the man was remarkably small. I broke the silence when he failed to notice - or perhaps failed to acknowledge - me. "Professor, I'm having trouble with this potion."

He turned his page. I continued.

"I'm not sure what it is that I'm doing wrong, could you maybe help me out a bit?"

Silence.

"I really don't know what I'm supposed to do! What do I do if mine doesn't start glowing?"

"Figure it out." He spoke calmly, but his words filled me with dread, like a soft snow that chilled down to the bone. He flipped to the next page,

"... or fail." In the end, my potion was a failure, and I had learned nothing. My professor gave me three days to try again and brew it successfully, but no guidance on how to do so and no clear punishment if I failed. Now only one more class until I'm free.

Of my five classes, I think Divination is my favorite. I'm not just saying that because there's no written work! Well, that's part of it, but the main reason is how easy it is to bluff my way through it. See, unlike the other teachers here, Professor Wildflower actually explained how divination magic works before she threw us into the deep end.

The professor explained on the first day that divination magic “allows its user to perceive the future. The infinite, sprawling chaos of that which lies beyond the horizon of the present day.”

Divination is even more fluid than other disciplines. When one perceives the future, they change it. Knowing what will happen almost always changes how one will act, and therefore the result shifts. This effect is compounded whenever another person perceives an overlapping event. Therefore, it is important to remember that when you peer into the future, you are actually viewing events which will likely never come to pass.

That’s why it’s so easy to bluff my way through. So long as I can plausibly guess something close to an accurate truth, it seems like I’ve predicted the future. It was a lot more like back home, when Mr. Brown called me up to solve a problem on the board; so long as I could solve a piece, it seemed like I was paying attention. The trick was to seem like you were dumb but trying your best. Teachers genuinely prefer that over smart and lazy.

Professor Wildflower always spoke with so much energy that it was infectious. However, today’s lesson was losing me. Even her enthusiasm couldn’t get me to care about the proper way to shuffle a deck of Tarot cards. Each day it was a different topic; yesterday, we were reading tea leaves, and tomorrow we’re going to be using a crystal ball. I’m actually excited for that, it’s something I’ve always wanted to try ever since I saw one of those .

“Harriet? Are you paying attention?”

I snapped to attention at the sound of my name. I heard hushed laughter from kids around me.

“Yes of course!” I lied.

“You’d better be. This is important. You wouldn’t want to invite forbidden knowledge into your visions; it’s one of the most serious dangers of divination magic. Rather than just seeing your future that knowledge can actively try to show you information that will harm you. Now, once more, make sure you shuffle in blocks of four! Not only does it help to make sure the cards are randomized, it keeps the magic focused on the person or event you’re trying to read and away from dangerous forbidden knowledge.”

The mention of ‘forbidden knowledge’ got me focused again. It was an ingredient from the potion today. I still didn’t know what the other two ingredients were, but maybe if I could figure it out, I could brew that potion late for partial credit!

The rest of Divination went by as usual- we broke into pairs and practiced reading each other. We would each do a reading based on three cards our partner drew from our deck. One each for past, present, and future.

Tarot cards are even more interpretive than most forms of divination magic. The professor says this makes them harder to interfere with, but I say it makes it easier to bluff. I used a bridge shuffle, which managed to impress my partner. I think her name was Agnes... something. Being the one non-magic transfer student this year, I hadn’t really talked much to anyone outside of my dorm since getting here.

I’d learned how to shuffle ages ago, at an after school program for kids whose parents weren’t home when school ended. I don’t even remember who’d taught me, just that my dad hadn’t found it too impressive. He was always mad when I learned a new trick like that. When I learned to solve a Rubix cube he was livid. He said I should’ve been getting my homework done instead. I don’t really get why he had gotten so riled up about it, I doubt it would’ve kept me from failing Mr. Brown’s class if I had.

I finish my fourth shuffle and Agnes actually gives me a light applause. After an awkward bow I held out the deck for her to draw three cards from. I set the deck down when her selections were made and began my reading, doing my best to remember what the Professor said about each card's meaning.

Tarot reading isn't all that hard. You draw some cards - in this case three, one each for past, present, and future - then interpret the art of the card and its known meaning to predict something about the person you are reading. Similar to a normal deck of cards there are four suits - cups, swords, wands, and pentacles - with ten numbered cards and a small number of face cards. A tarot deck differs from a normal deck in two major ways, there is an additional face card - the knight - and a set of twenty two cards called the Major Arcana which don't fall into any of the normal suits. In addition, when you do a reading there is a chance for cards to be drawn upside down. This card is then referred to as **(Reversed)** and has its meaning twisted in some way, usually to some kind of opposite interpretation.

Past - The Hierophant - "Ah yes, the Hierophant. This card is representative of a very ethical person. You clearly did some good deeds some time in the past!" Good, she seemed to buy that. The card depicts a man in elegant robes sitting on a throne within a church. His right hand was raised and making a symbol I don't understand the meaning of, with his thumb, index, and middle fingers raised to the sky, and his ring and pinky fingers closed. Seems like I guessed right about religious iconography being good.

Present - Four of Wands (Reversed) - "Next is the Four of Wands, but it's reversed so be careful. This card is indicating that your community is falling apart, probably troubles with your friends." Hopefully I got that right. This card shows some kind of party or celebration, so I

figure the reversed meaning is about a group falling apart, which feels like a safe guess. She frowns. Shit, that might've been wrong; gotta move on and deflect.

Future - Knight of Cups - "But that's ok! Your future looks bright with the Knight of Cups here to help. Follow your heart and it'll work out." This card shows a knight riding a horse at a leisurely pace, the whole scene has a calm atmosphere. I can't get much more than that from the art though, so I leave my description vague. A smile twitches at the edge of her lip. Good, solid recovery. Now it was my turn to have her guess at my fate.

She clearly didn't have much practice handling cards. She almost dropped them when I handed them to her. When she started to shuffle, however, she was slow and methodical. She spread the cards across the table and then reformed them into a pile. Again, and again, and again. Four times. After the fourth shuffle she spread the cards across the table in a semi-circle and gestured for me to take my pick. I take a card at random, two to the right of the center. Feels like a safe pick.

"Past" she says. Her gaze is locked on me. For a moment it feels like she really can see my past. The next card I take is from the far left, one away from the final card.

"Present." Has she blinked? I feel a shiver race down my spine. I take a deep breath before grabbing the last card. The first card I drew knocked its neighbor out of place. For some reason I feel drawn to that, and pull it from the deck.

"Future" she says, before collecting the remaining cards and setting them to the side.

Past - Page of Cups (Reversed) - "You disappointed someone in your past. It seems like you did it a lot. Your immaturity and insecurity then made the issue worse. You still haven't fixed it, and that has led you too where you are now." I stiffen in my seat. She isn't looking at me anymore. Her focus is on the cards. This one depicts a girl on a calm shore; the cup she is

holding has a fish leaping out of it to greet her. From my perspective it's upside down, and the fish looks like it's falling. It's like she could see my soul there, read all the details of my past. All of my mistakes. My fall.

Present - Nine of Swords - "All of those struggles until now have left you as a big ball of anxiety. You feel hopeless, though you're trying your best to ignore that. Your mistakes have left you with deep scars, deeper than you'd like to admit. All of this is keeping you from fixing the mistakes of your past. What you need is a change." As she speaks she keeps on inspecting the cards. It seems to me like she sees more than I do in the drawings. Where I see a man crying beneath nine swords, does she really see me?

Future - Death - "It looks like things are going to look up for you, though. Like the Professor said, death sounds scary, but all it really means is change, which is just what you need. It doesn't seem like it'll be easy, but I'm sure once everything is settled, the change will be beneficial to you. Though I can't quite see what that change will be." The card staring back at me is the reaper riding a pure white horse. She breaks her intense eye contact with the cards and shoots me a slight grin. I feel sick. Sometimes I forget the other kids here aren't faking.

One of the most surprising things about going to magic school was discovering that the classes end much earlier than American high schools. Divination ended just after noon according to my watch, which is one of the few pieces of modern technology the administration allowed me to keep. It was also one of the few presents my dad ever got me. He always says that no gift should come for free, so I had to earn things like birthday gifts. He was ecstatic when I got into this weird school. I didn't have the heart to tell him I thought watches were tacky. I mean, who in

today's day and age doesn't use their phone to check the time? People who go to weirdly archaic magical institutions, I guess.

I got lunch in the dining hall after class. The food there was a full buffet with most British dishes you can imagine. Everything from Fish and Chips to Haggis. It was all set up on infinitely refilling silver and gold platters. The plates we used were indestructible china, decorated with insignias of the various magical houses - the archaic royalty of the magic world - who funded the school. I learned to get used to the ostentatious display quickly. People looked at me like I sprouted a second head whenever I asked about it, student and teacher alike. The one part I couldn't get used to were the cups.

Where everything else seemed to be made of the most expensive materials available, the cups were totally normal. Plastic, translucent, a middling shade of gray, and with texture added to the outside these were nearly identical cups to the ones I used back home. Additionally, as I just discovered on my walk around campus, they don't magically refill when you aren't in the dining hall.

I've wandered into a part of the castle I've never seen before. It's a walkway separating two of the towers, with only a roof, a railing, and some supporting pillars protecting me from the English weather. I figure rainwater can't get me so sick magic won't cure me, so rather than returning to the dining hall I hold my cup out over the rain and let the rain fill the cup halfway before moving on.

Eventually I make my way to the library. Studying has always been my weakest academic skill. Worse than taking tests. Worse than finishing assignments. Worse than paying attention in class. Sitting down, opening a book, and learning is next to impossible. I've tried

many times in many ways, and I can never get myself to focus. If trying to focus during a lecture is like trying not to think of an elephant when someone tells you not to, then focusing while studying is trying not to think of an elephant when you're watching a nature documentary on the subject. It simply cannot be done.

Was this the change I needed to make; to figure out how to study? That doesn't quite feel right. Whether or not that's right, I've made my way here, might as well try to study.

I do a lap of the library searching for books that might help. Despite the fact that Melville Dewey lived in the US, the library seems to have adopted a modified version of the Dewey Decimal System to organize their tomes. I find the sections for Arcane Sigils and Potions, grab a few books that seem to be within my reading level, and make camp at one of the vacant desks.

I start getting to work. Taking a look at what's in my bag, I confirm I brought my notebook, with the few sparse pages of notes from class, the deck of Tarot cards we were given to practice with in Divination, a portable cauldron Professor Langdonworth had loaned me to make up my work, and three pens I brought from home.

With all of my materials now in front of me I could get to work. I grab the top book from the pile I've created, "Fundamentals of Glyphs and Sigils", and crack it open, looking for any sort of index to reference.

As I read I started to notice the silence of the room. I feel as though I can hear my own heartbeat. Has it always been that loud? I lost my place on the page. After finding it again I resume.

A minute later I realize I need to take a sip of water. Lost my place again. I shut the book. It's no good, I can't focus.

I think maybe switching subjects will help, I start by flipping to my notes from Potions. Hopefully I wrote down the ingredients... Yes! Here they are.

1. Begin with a base of The Essence of a Cloud's Tear

Last time I used water, but that didn't work at all. Maybe it was some weird magic ingredient I didn't know about. I began to sort through my stack of books. It was about eight books tall so I needed to make room on the table. I picked up my glass and-

My glass.

RAINWATER! Of course! That's why all the students went outside, to collect rainwater for the base of the potion. It's been drizzling all day. I take my pen and scribble out the 'Cloud's Tear', replacing it with 'Rainwater.'

2. Heat with a fire which has been Kissed With Forbidden Knowledge

This one was a bit trickier, I think I know how to get 'Forbidden Knowledge' now from Divination, but how do I get that to 'kiss' a fire? I saw the other students burning things so maybe I should burn the Tarot deck. I make a note of that next to step two.

3. Stir in the Soul of a Pen

I was the least certain of this one, but I have an idea. If I'm right about the first two, then that means my impression of Professor Langdonworth was more accurate than I thought. His instructions genuinely are more like riddles than direct instructions. With that in mind, I write in my notebook my best guess as to the identity of the third ingredient - pen ink -, pack up my things, and leave to go find a place to test my theory.

I managed to find a single Alchemy lab that was open for use in the west wing of the school. I got some weird looks from the older students who frequent this section of the building, but nothing I'm not used to from home. Let them think what they want.

I set up the cauldron on a safe burner surface and collected my three ingredients. The cup of rainwater, tarot deck, and pen were nicely lined up on the right of my station. Taking the ingredients one by one, I went through the motions I saw other students perform this morning.

I added about a half cup of rainwater. Then, once it had settled I shuffled my tarot cards three times, ignited the burner beneath the cauldron, drew a card from the deck, and placed it above the flame. To my amazement the card did not burn - in fact, the flame made contact for only a moment before the card seemed to repel it. The flickering light pulled back, then dulled for a moment, before the color shifted to an ever so slightly red hue.

I pulled the card back and looked to see if it was burned. The card seemed unmarked, but I noticed for the first time the card I had drawn. **The Tower**. I didn't quite remember what the Professor had said about this particular card but the art certainly didn't inspire confidence in me. It depicts a tower of stone brick crumbling under the might of a great storm. I look away as I hear the wind pick up outside, but then it passes. I put the card back in the deck and grab the pen, ready to finish this.

I wait a few moments for the water to heat up. As it begins to bubble - the water in these cauldrons seems to do that eerily quickly - I snap the pen in half and shake the ink inside free. Without its ink the pen is a lifeless shell. Some, I hope Professor Langdonworth, would say it was soulless.

No time to wonder what the professor thinks. I grab a glass rod and begin to stir. A few moments pass with no reaction. Finally, the water in the cauldron glows dimly with a brown

light. Then the color shifts, it grows a tad brighter and becomes orange. Then yellow, growing brighter still. I bet the strength of the light means that it's a strong batch!

As it begins to approach white, I grab a large potion flask and pour the concoction into it. Then I take off for Professor Langdonworth's classroom.

"You fail," was all he had to say upon seeing my concoction.

I had arrived a few minutes into his Toxins and Poisons II class, while his students were brewing up something called "Scaled Scurvy Drops" with a list of ingredients that filled the blackboard. He wanted me to leave and come back after but I had insisted on him seeing my work now. Why did I do that? Now a class full of students got to watch as I begged for an explanation.

"But I did everything right! I got rainwater for the cloud's tears, a wrongly shuffled tarot deck for the forbidden knowledge, and the ink of a pen for its soul; what did I do wrong?"

"... well, your potion is far too strong. You were supposed to use the *essence* of a cloud's tear, not a cloud's tear itself. You should have washed your cauldron in rainwater, then used normal tap water for the recipe. If someone were to drink that, the potency of it would put them into shock before it did anything beneficial. You're lucky you didn't hurt yourself, or someone else. Because of that I can't give you credit."

"So you're saying I did everything else right, and just messed up on one small detail, and because of that I'm getting a 0% on the assignment?" When I finished my sentence I realized I had raised my voice. He finally looked up from his book and met my gaze.

"You seem to misunderstand, you did not fail an assignment, you failed the class. You'll need to retake Potions and Basic Alchemy next semester. If you can't follow the simplest of

instructions for the most basic of potions then you are not fit to brew any potions more advanced than this.” To accent his point he raises the flask of my failed brew. It was now glowing as bright as a flashlight.

I snatched the flask out of his hands and stormed out of the room. I could feel the students’ gazes on my back as I shut the door behind me.

The exam Cloverbottom had just handed back to me was face down. Black and red ink bled through the parchment. Tests back home had never been quite this stressful. I found math boring but at least I could understand it. All this magic stuff didn’t relate to reality at all! I spent all week studying for this exam since I failed out of Potions; I could not afford to fail this too. Taking a breath, I turn the paper over, ready for my first - hopefully - non-failing grade. As I suspected, the sigil I had drawn has been scored with corrections. Dozens of blurbs correcting my line work, Latin phrases, and geometry. Yet among all of the comments I don’t see a single letter, nor a percentage or even deducted points!

Glancing up from my paper, I see that none of the other students are shocked. Some students smirked at their result. Others buried their faces in their hands. Was I the only one not to receive a grade? Had my work not even been worth a score?

The professor returned to her desk, pulled out a stack of papers to work on, and left us to reflect on our results. Students slowly filed out of the room. I half-jogged up to the teacher and cleared my throat.

“Yes, Harriet? What is it that you need?” she spoke, her voice gentle yet threatening, like a bee resting on your arm ready to sting.

“Um, I was wondering why I didn’t receive a grade and how I did on the assignment?”

“A grade? Harriet you shouldn’t rely on such archaic, technical methods to assess your skills! I left plenty of constructive advice on your glyph.”

“Alright, but I *am* being assessed on how well I did, right? Even if you don’t call them grades you have systems here to tell how students did and if they can advance to more difficult courses. That’s what my Potions professor said at least. I’d like to know how I did so I know what I need to improve on.”

“Harriet my dear, you shouldn’t need a grade to tell you how you’ve done in this class! Simply follow the corrections I’ve given you on your paper and work on those. As for how advancement to further courses goes, on the Sigils track it’s mostly done by teacher recommendations rather than strict grades. You need to change how you think a bit dear, or you won’t make it at this school.”

I was getting dizzy. I look down at the paper in my hands. Half of the professor’s comments are in Latin, which I still can’t read. The others are nearly illegible because of her handwriting. I thought back to the hours I spent mindlessly reading through the dusty old tomes in the library. I felt like I would never escape that maze of insanity.

Finally, I cracked.

“I can’t do this.” I said, and walked out of the classroom, leaving the professor calling for me, asking where I was going.

My dad was livid when he learned I had dropped out. It took him a full month to stop threatening to kick me out.

“That school was your last chance!” He threatened.

“You go back there right now and beg for your spot back!” He ordered.

“Why can’t you just do this? It’s in your best interest!” He wailed.

But for the first time in my life, I was free. I was not going to return to Cambridge, or any other school for that matter.

I took a part time job as the receptionist for a local mechanic. It was good, simple work. I answered the phone, told them how much repairs or maintenance would cost, and made appointments. It paid fine, but I still felt like I was at a dead end. I needed some more change. Now that I’m free of the pressure I realized there are parts of Cambridge I miss. I think that’s what led me into the small witch and magic shop in town.

It was one of the small businesses that operated just off of the main street. I passed it every day on my way to work. The sign hanging in the window read “Jezebel's Emporium” in red neon lights, but the b failed to light up. It was filled with crystals, dream catchers, candles, and half a dozen other items of supposedly incredible power. I’m no expert, I only went to magic school for two weeks, but I was pretty sure most of this stuff was trash.

The lady at the counter - presumably Jezebel - calls out to me as I judge her wares.

“Like what you see?” She’s covered in tacky jewelry. Clearly fake gold and silver chains embroidered with equally fake gems.

“Not really, got anything else? Most of this seems pretty fake. I mean, come on, a literal monkey’s paw?”

“Oh, did you have something better in mind dear?” The way she emphasized dear made it clear she did not mean it in a matronly way. I answered mostly on instinct.

“Got any tarot decks?” She grinned at that. A creepy grin, like she knew something I didn’t.

“Sure, we have some on display in the other corner but just for you I’ll get one of the special ones from the back. They have nicer art.” As she walks into the back her mess of frizzy hair bounces so much it seems to move on a slight delay. A Moment later she emerges from the beads blocking the view to the back holding a sealed deck. She breaks the seal and slides them out of their container.

“Are you sure you should be unsealing them already? I haven’t paid yet, or even told you I want them.”

“Oh I’m sure, in fact, you can have these in the house if you do me one small favor. I’ll even give you a job here if you’d like.” The store is empty, and a quick look out the window confirms there is no one on the street near us. If this woman tries anything weird I’ll have no one to call to for help. For some reason though, I feel like I want to see where this goes.

“Why would I want a job here?”

“Because you still want to learn about magic, Miss Harriet, and a stuffy old school is not the only place to do that.” My breath catches in my throat.

“How do you know about that?”

“Divination magic is a useful thing my dear.” I think for a moment before snatching the deck from her outstretched hand.

“Before I agree I have a question of my own.”

“And that is?”

“How much do you pay?” She pauses for a moment before erupting into a cackle.

“Oh my dear, money is no object but I’m sure we can work out specifics later. First you’ll have to prove you’re up to snuff. Do a drawing for yourself, just a single card is fine.”

“Fine.” I place the deck on the counter and shuffle the deck.

Once.

Twice.

Thrice.

Four times. Jezebel grins and whispers, “wonderful” before I draw a card. Depicted in the beautiful watercolor of the deck’s art is a boy carrying a small sack across his back. He has a broad smile as he moves to take a step over a grand cliff. The first of many of his trials on the journey he has set out on.

Present - The Fool

Nicolas Lande
 Self Reflection
 12/9/2021

In revising story two I had two large goals: fix issues in my prose and address the lack of a clear dramatic question. To address the former I cleaned up many areas with shifting tense, as well as addressed grammatical issues and punctuation. I also went through and found areas with too many fluffies and a lack of thisness and did my best to address those. Specifically, I added senses like the alchemy lab with a strong focus on specific descriptors and interesting locations, and added more descriptions to the location itself to make the atmosphere of the school more defined.

To address the lack of a strong dramatic question I had to rework many parts of the story, adding and removing several scenes and drastically changing the ending. I felt that the happy ending did not make sense for Harriet as a character and wanted to end on something more mixed. In my first revision I liked the trajectory of the ending better but still felt it was off. My final draft has a much more hopeful ending than the last version, where Harriet finds herself back in the magical world on a new path.

I feel that in future revisions I could spend more time describing the school itself, its appearance and what the other students are like. I would also like to add more to Harriet's flashbacks to her life before Cambridge. Both of these elements would help to define the Dramatic question and open up the world more, which are elements of the story I feel still need a lot of work. This would also allow me to cut down on parts of the story which feel bogged down with weaker attempts at opening up the world.

More broadly as a writer I feel as though I can still greatly improve on my consistency. My first drafts are riddled with errors of tense, grammar, and often don't make logical sense. To work on this I plan to work on my editing skills and ability to spot these errors and quickly fix them.

I was most strongly impacted by the very first work we read, Karen Russel's *Reeling for the Empire*. It left a strong impression on me because of the strong uses of fantastical elements to tell its story. At the beginning of the course I feared that we would be reading mostly 'realistic' stories with little to no fantastical elements. However, this story quickly dissuaded me from that and in fact encouraged the idea that literary and genre fiction could support each other strongly. After reading *Reeling for the Empire* I was more prepared to enjoy every other story we read for what they were