

**FREE**

PREQUEL TO  
IT HAPPENED  
ONE DOOMSDAY

MAGIC  
CARPET  
RIDE



SHORT STORY BY  
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## *Magic Carpet Ride*

Dru squinted through her glasses at her latest customer, who just happened to be on fire.

His name was Ruiz, and this wasn't the first time he'd visited Dru's shop, The Crystal Connection. But this *was* the first time he had stood in front of her cash register with his entire body crackling with magical flames.

“Okey-dokey.” Dru drummed her fingers on the counter top. She did her best to look fierce, but being kind of nondescript, with messy brown hair and an “I Heart Darcy” T-shirt, she didn't really project fierceness. She decided to go with withering disapproval instead. “So, Ruiz, are you *absolutely* sure you weren't trying to cast a magical spell? Because you're not a sorcerer. We've had this conversation.”

Ruiz shoved his hands deep into the pockets of his dumpy stained work coveralls. “No, I don't know how this happened.” He averted his gaze. “I was just hoping you could put out the fire, you know? No questions asked.”

“Oh, I'll have some questions for you, all right.” Dru peered meaningfully over the top of her glasses at him, then called over her shoulder. “Opal? Can you give me a hand with this?”

From the back room, expensive heels clicked as Dru's assistant Opal came up front. She was large and black, and every bit as fashionable as Dru wasn't. Her endless common sense and deep magical knowledge meant that she was the one person Dru could rely on in situations like this, no matter what.

But when Opal saw Ruiz on fire, her eyes went round. She let out a hysterical scream.

Ruiz pulled one hand out of his pocket and waved a little. “Hey, Opal.”

“Oh, my word!” Opal hustled away with a clatter of heels. “Where’s the fire extinguisher?”

“It’s *magical* flames,” Dru called after her, “A fire extinguisher won’t—”

A resounding crash echoed from the back room, followed by the sound of something metallic rolling across the floor. “Don’t worry, Dru! I got this!”

Dru sighed and turned back to Ruiz. “So, tell me. How did this happen?”

He blew out a breath, puffing his cheeks out, and shrugged both flaming shoulders. “I dunno, man.”

“*Really.*” Dru looked over the top of her glasses again, but he wouldn’t meet her gaze. “You weren’t flipping through your grandmother’s spell books again?”

“Rest her soul,” he said quietly, and then cleared his throat. Clearly, he wasn’t going to admit anything. “Can you just, you know, make all these flames stop? It don’t hurt or anything. But everything I touch, you know, it goes up in smoke.”

“First I have to figure out what caused this.” Before he could deny anything again, Dru changed tactics. “So how’s work going?”

“Work?” It took a moment for Ruiz to switch gears, but when he did, he shook his head. “Man, you know the company just got bought out? This new guy comes in and starts changing everything around. Now we’ve got to do mandatory drug testing. Can’t smoke in the van no more. Got to ask permission just to go to the bathroom. It’s like being back in prison, you know?”

“I’ll take your word on that. So this new guy, he’s a big problem?”

“Huge, man. Nobody likes this guy. I can’t work like that.”

“By the way, are you on the clock right now? Did you drive down here in your work van?”

“No, I had to walk, man. When I tried to get into the van, you know, I set the seat on fire. I don’t know how I’m going to explain that. Not even supposed to smoke in there now.”

With a clatter of heels, Opal reappeared, holding a fire extinguisher like a loaded weapon. “Don’t move.”

Ruiz put his hands up as if he was being robbed.

“Opal, put that down, please. It won’t work.” Dru was relieved to see that the safety pin was still in place. So at least they could avoid making that particular mess.

Ruiz bent one hand at the wrist to point at the fire extinguisher. “You got to pull out that little red ring.”

“No, no,” Dru said. “It won’t—”

“You mean this?” Opal said, and with an ear-popping blast, the fire extinguisher sprayed an explosion of foam across the entire front counter area. When it was over, dollops of sizzling foam slid down the side of the cash register, pooled on the counter top, and soaked into Dru’s stack of papers. But the whole time, Ruiz’s flames crackled like a cheery holiday fireplace, untouched.

Dru slung cold wet foam off of the ends of her sleeves and wiped solid white circles of lather off her glasses. Slowly, she turned to Opal and fixed her with a look.

Opal set the empty fire extinguisher down with a thunk and brushed off her hands. “You know, you’re the one always saying we need to use the scientific method. Well, now we know

for a fact that fire extinguishers don't work on magic flames. I just proved your hypothesis." She sighed. "You're welcome."

With an effort, Dru bit her tongue and turned back to Ruiz. "Anything else you care to tell me?"

"Well, I tried water. I don't have a pool or nothing like that. But I did try taking a shower. Didn't work." He grimaced. "Now I got to get a new shower curtain."

Dru folded her arms. "Let me tell you what I think. Okay? I know your grandmother was a sorceress."

"Rest her soul," he murmured.

"And now you have a new boss that you can't stand. Any chance you went flipping through your grandmother's old spell books, trying to find something to fix your work situation?"

The guilty look in Ruiz's eyes confirmed her suspicions. "I was just trying to give him, you know, a step up in his career. So he can move on to somewhere else. And leave us alone, okay?"

"You were trying to take away his *job*?"

Ruiz folded his arms defensively. "What's the big deal, all right? Mr. Big Shot will land on his feet. He's the one with the fancy business degree. So he keeps reminding us. Meantime, the rest of us can get things back to normal. I need this job, Dru. I'm an ex-con. Very hard for me to find another job like this."

"Ruiz. Listen to me. You tried to get him *fired*. And now you're on *fire*."

He shrugged. "Yeah. So?"

“Do you see the connection here?”

Ruiz’s gaze pinballed around the shop as if the answer was printed on a sign somewhere, until he finally turned to Opal with a helpless look.

“Don’t look at me,” Opal said. “I already tried the fire extinguisher. You’re on your own now.”

Dru took off her glasses again and pinched the bridge of her nose, trying to ignore the burning stench of her floorboards smoldering underneath his feet. “Ruiz, any time you try to cast a spell against another human being, that’s dark magic. And it comes back on you instead. Much worse.”

“Three times worse.” Opal held up three fingers and gave Ruiz a scornful look. “See what you did to yourself?”

The slow look of understanding that spread across Ruiz’s face was priceless.

His shoulders slumped. “Oh, man. I made this happen, huh?”

Dru nodded. “Pretty much instant karma.”

He shook his head, making the flames swirl above his black hair. “I really screwed up, didn’t I? All I did was read this one incantation, I swear, that’s it. I thought it was no big deal.”

“But you’re not a sorcerer. So it *is* a big deal.” Dru gave him a strained smile. “And now you’re burning a hole in my floor.”

Ruiz blew out a long breath and shook his head. “Sorry. Now what do I do?”

“First, you have to promise me that you’ll never so much as look at your grandmother’s spell books again. *Ever.*”

He drew a cross over his heart. “Promise. I swear. Totally.”

Opal planted her hands on her ample hips. “Matter of fact, you should bring those books down here for safekeeping.”

“I’ll do it. I will. I promise.”

“I’m going to hold you to that. This is serious,” Dru said, coming around the counter. She headed down one aisle of the shop, pulling out cardboard drawers full of crystals.

“Sardonyx is what you need. It has powerful cooling properties.”

“What’s that, like a pill?”

“It’s a crystal.” Dru tried another cabinet. “A kind of red onyx.”

“I thought onyx was black?” Ruiz said. At Opal’s sharp look, he added, “What? I read books, too.”

“Actually, most onyx is naturally kind of peach-colored. ‘Black’ onyx is usually artificially colored.” In the last drawer, Dru finally found what she was looking for. The sardonyx crystal was a polished red oval slightly smaller than her palm. Fine lines ran through it like wood grain, creating alternating bands of cotton candy pink, blood red, and inky black.

Dru clasped the crystal in her hands, closed her eyes, and let her own innate magical energy flow into the crystal. She wasn’t a full-fledged sorceress, not like Ruiz’s grandmother, but she had enough power to energize crystals.

When she finally felt a ghostly tingle in her fingertips, she knew the crystal was ready. Opening her eyes, she walked directly up to Ruiz. “Close your eyes.”

He did.

“Now take a deep breath, let it out slowly, and hold out your hands.”

He turned his flaming palms up, and she dropped the crystal into his hands, careful not to

scorch her fingertips.

The effect was immediate. The red sardonyx sparkled, snuffing out the flames around it. The effect spread up Ruiz's arms, down his legs, and up to the top of his head, where the last flame went out with a soft pop and a curl of smoke.

"Okay. You're all set."

Ruiz looked down, delighted, and a huge grin spread across his face. "All right! Dru, you are some kind of miracle worker, girl." He moved to hug her, but she stopped him.

"Nope, nope. You're still smoking."

"Oh." He backed away. "Sorry, man."

"It's okay." Dru wiped off the cash register with a wad of paper towels and rang him up for the crystal, making him promise to bring in his grandmother's books in the next day or two. He left with a smile, whistling.

After he was gone, Dru sighed and started mopping up the mess around the cash register. "Maybe a little help?"

"Oh. Sure, honey." Opal picked up the yellow pad they used as a shopping list for store supplies and scribbled on it. "New . . . fire . . . extinguisher."

"Thanks," Dru said dryly, and hurled a wad of dripping paper towels into the wastebasket.

"No worries. Oh, hey," Opal said with a sly smile. "I know *exactly* what to do about that burned spot."

"No. No crazy schemes." Dru grimaced at the pumpkin-shaped black mark on the floor in front of the cash register, where Ruiz had been standing. "I'll just deal with it somehow."



“Hold that thought.” Opal got out her jingling car keys. “I’ll be right back. Don’t worry, I know you’ll love it.”

Dru groaned. This wasn’t going to be good.

A few hours later, pounding 80s dance music thumped through the windows as Opal pulled up to the curb in her purple Town Car and shut off the headlights. Something tube-shaped and colorful hung out the trunk of the old car, like a giant psychedelic blintz.

Opal got out and waved to Dru through the shop window, her white teeth shining against her dark skin. Dru propped the front door open and went to help her.

“What is this?”

"It's a rug," Opal said, as if that explained everything.

As they wrestled it in through the front door, a blast of Frank Sinatra singing ‘Fly Me to the Moon’ sounded from Dru’s phone, still in her purse by the cash register. It was the ringtone she had assigned to her dashing boyfriend, Nate, with whom things had lately gotten extremely hot.

“Wait, hold it,” Dru said. “I’ve got to get that.”

“Dru, don’t let go!”

“Don’t worry. You’ve got this.” Desperately wanting to catch the phone, Dru started to let go.

Opal staggered. “I don’t have it. I don’t have it!” The front door came loose from its prop and threatened to clamp onto the rolled-up rug. Opal squeaked.

Groaning, Dru let the call go to voicemail and rescued Opal from the misbehaving front door. With a considerable amount of difficulty, they got the rug inside and unrolled it in front of

the cash register. It did, in fact, completely cover Ruiz's burn.

But instead of the subtle, rich, classic colors and patterns Dru expected, the rug assaulted her with an eye-popping combination of lime-green zigzags over flaming-orange swirls, cut through with lagoon-blue stripes and electric pink starbursts.

Dru took a step back and pulled off her glasses. Averting her gaze, she busied herself with rubbing the lenses on her shirt. "Oh. Wow."

"That's what I'm *talking* about." Opal beamed. "Now, isn't that something?"

"Something that proves I'm not color-blind."

"Oh, come on. It's not that bad."

"Really?" Dru put her glasses back on. "Because I think my eyeballs just imploded."

Opal kicked off her ruby-sequined platform sandals and stepped onto the carpet, scrunching the fabric beneath her toes. "Ooh, this is nice. Super comfy. They don't make carpets like this anymore, I'm telling you."

"To the disappointment of optometrists everywhere. Listen, as much as I want to cover up Ruiz's little present, I'm not sure this rug is the right choice." Dru tried to think of a tactful way to get out of this. "Really, the floor doesn't look that bad."

Opal dropped her chin and fixed Dru with a serious look. "I had to dig through the attic all afternoon to find this rug. It belonged to my dad. It's a beautiful rug."

Dru's breath caught in her throat, and she swallowed. "Oh. I didn't know." She cleared her throat. "It is, um, a *really* nice rug. But—"

"Do I have to tell you how big of a sorcerer my dad was in his lifetime? Can you tell me a better place to put this rug? No. It's perfect."

An idea struck Dru. "Considering your dad owned this rug, you never know if there's something magic about it. Right? We don't know where it came from originally. Maybe we shouldn't mess with it. We'll just put it in back until we have a chance to check it out."

Opal's penciled eyebrows furrowed dangerously low. "What are you so worried about, exactly? If this rug is magical, we'll figure it out. Just imagine how cool it would be if it really *was* a magic carpet. You could just walk in here and say: *Take me to Starbucks!*" She spread her arms wide.

Silently, the carpet rose a few inches off the floor, as if some ethereal gust of air had inflated it from beneath. Opal's eyes went wide, and her lips shrank to a pink-lipstick-ringed "o" of surprise.

Dru backed away, flapping her hands at Opal. "Off the carpet! Quick!"

Opal took a step, but too late. The carpet shot through the shop, dumping Opal face-first in its pillowy psychedelic fabric. With a rush of wind, it flew out the still-open door, carrying Opal screaming all the way.

"Put me down!" Opal yelled, to no avail. "Stop! Help!" Her voice faded into the night.

Dru stood alone for a moment in the empty shop, slack-jawed. "Oh, fudge buckets."

Then she raced to the door, just in time to see the flying carpet flutter past a streetlight and turn the corner. Precisely in the direction of the nearest Starbucks.

Quickly, Dru grabbed her purse and, since she didn't have a car, Opal's keys.

Seconds later, Dru had the purple Town Car rolling down the street like a plum-colored parade float. She tried her best not to hit anything. How Opal could see the road around the jungle of junk hanging from the rear view mirror was a mystery to her. Especially with the

stereo pounding out the ear-splitting dance hits of the Miami Sound Machine.

Dru turned the stereo off, letting in the sounds of horns blaring as she swung the massive car around toward Starbucks, like an oil tanker turning in the middle of the ocean.

Silently, she cursed herself for not checking out the carpet before it started causing trouble. It could've been worse, though. At least she knew where it was taking Opal.

Dru pulled into the parking lot just in time to see the carpet zip through the drive-through, its psychedelic stripes momentarily lit by the window as it flashed past.

And kept going.

The carpet flew across the street, just over the headlights of oncoming cars. It took a sharp turn down the alley and disappeared.

Dru's stomach dropped with fear.

*Where was it going now?*

She tried to follow, but the traffic light turned red, cutting her off. She pounded on the steering wheel in frustration, as traffic crossed both ways in front of her. There was no way she could continue the chase until the light turned green.

But where? Opal had said, *Take me to Starbucks . . .*

Dru snapped her fingers. She knew. As if on cue, the traffic light turned green. But Dru made a U-turn and floored the gas pedal.

There was only one person she could count on for help at a time like this. Someone who had the strength to handle this situation, the daring to jump in with both feet, and the willingness to listen to the crazy plan that was taking form in Dru's head.

She dialed, and Rane answered on the second ring, breath puffing.

"Dude," Rane said, "Can't talk now. I'm running." Through the phone came the sound of feet rhythmically pounding concrete.

Dru cringed. "Running, like, chasing something? Or something chasing you?"

"Running, like, you know, cardio."

"Oh. Oh!" A welcome flash of relief shot through Dru. Six-foot tall, blonde and solid muscle, Rane constantly trained, pumped iron and guzzled protein shakes to stay fit enough to fight any monster that came her way. "Good. I can pick you up. Opal's in trouble."

"What kind of trouble?" Rane asked.

"Magic carpet."

"Oh *man*. Seriously?"

"She told the carpet to take her to Starbucks. But she didn't specify *which* Starbucks. And considering there's something like . . ." Dru had to think about it. "Like maybe 13,000 Starbucks in America, and another 8,000 worldwide—"

"How do you know this stuff?"

"I read. A lot. Anyway, she's going to be airborne for a *while*." Dru had to turn right, but before she did, she craned her head around like a fighter pilot to see around all of the junk in Opal's car. Luckily, traffic was sparse, so she didn't bulldozer anything.

Rane's breath puffed. "So what's your plan?"

It gave Dru a little tingle of pride that Rane automatically assumed she had a plan. Because she did. "Here in Denver, at least, I know where all the Starbucks are."

"Let me just look up a map on my phone—"

"We don't have time. Trust me, I know where *all* the Starbucks are."

For a moment, the only sound through the phone was Rane's heavy breathing. "You have some kind of unique addiction. You realize that?"

"That's not the point."

"It's kind of disturbing," Rane said.

"Can we focus, please?" Dru snapped. "You know that Starbucks down by the river? Where we got all those lattes to bribe the troll under the bridge?"

"Cost me a fortune," Rane muttered. "That thing had a belly."

The truth was, actually, that Dru had paid for all of those lattes that the troll had guzzled down. But this was no time to argue. "If the carpet takes the most direct route to that Starbucks, it'll have to cross that bridge."

"But the troll's long gone," Rane said.

"Never mind that. I'm saying we know where we can catch the carpet. And I think you're strong enough to hold it down while I get Opal off safely."

Rane's feet kept pounding the concrete. "That troll drank a *lot* of lattes."

"Forget about the troll! Are you with me? I need your help. So does Opal."

"Dude," Rane said, louder as she picked up speed. "I'm on the trail right now. I can see Opal's car from here."

Dru was so deep in conversation that she nearly drove right past the Starbucks. Which would've been sort of a first, for her. She stood on the brakes, making the tires screech in protest as the boat-like car lurched to a stop on the bridge.

She left the engine running and got out. The bridge spanned the river below, whose currents sparkled with reflected moonlight. Along the near shore, widely spaced pools of yellow

light marked the bicycle trail that paralleled the length of the river. A lone figure pounded up the trail toward her, arms and legs pumping.

Even at this distance, Rane looked imposing. Her power gave her the ability to turn into solid elements like stone and metal just by touching them. But right now, she was in human form, six feet tall and lithe muscle head to toe. Her blonde ponytail bobbed side to side with every long stride.

Rane charged toward Dru like a runaway train in hot pink shorts and a T-shirt that read FLIRTING WITH DISASTER in giant letters.

From another direction, a frantic scream carried thinly on the wind, growing louder by the moment. Dru peered down the night-darkened street, searching for the source of the sound.

Down the road, a multicolored dot streaked beneath one streetlight after another, quickly growing into the rippling shape of the rug, with Opal hanging on for dear life, screaming her lungs out. Headed directly toward the Starbucks.

Behind Dru, the glowing green mermaid on the sign seemed to smile reassuringly. But Dru was definitely not reassured.

Rane left the bicycle trail below and charged up the grass embankment toward the guardrail where Dru had stopped the car. But she wasn't coming up fast enough. She wouldn't make it in time.

Opal was coming in too fast. It didn't look like this plan would work.

Dru cupped her hands around her mouth and shouted to Rane: "Incoming!" Then she dug in her purse.

Dru always carried crystals with her, everywhere she went, just in case. Unfortunately,

they had a habit of collecting at the bottom of her purse. She dug through a fistful of coupons, folded napkins, and a half-used miniature tube of toothpaste before her fingers finally brushed rocks.

She found a shimmering gold-streaked lump of tiger's eye, which was good for protection. And a chalky pink chunk of rose halite, a kind of rock salt, that was good for dissolving old patterns. Plus a handful of others, but she had trouble distinguishing them in the poor lighting. Nothing that could help her.

It didn't matter anyway. She was out of time.

The magic carpet hurtled toward her, just above head height, the edges of the psychedelic weave rippling with the wind. Opal clung to the top like a yolk on a sunny-side-up egg.

"Hold on!" Dru yelled to Opal.

"What do you think I'm doing?" she yelled back.

For a brief moment, just before Opal flew past, Dru locked gazes with her. Dru could plainly see the fear in her eyes.

She wished she could take Opal's place. At least then, maybe Dru could work some magic with her crystals. But Opal didn't have a chance.

Dru's heart dropped as Opal flew right over her. There was no way to stop the magic carpet.

In a flash, Rane reached the guardrail. As she vaulted over it, her body sizzled and transformed into galvanized steel, leaving dark handprints behind in the metal.

Rane leaped, her shimmering body stretched out to its full length. As the rug flew by, her



long arms reached the trailing end of the rug, and her broad hands closed into fists around the rug's multicolored tassels. She hung behind it like a caboose on a runaway train.

Dru stared, slack-jawed, as the rug hauled Rane away.

Legs kicking in the air, Rane managed to get one ankle hooked over the top lip of the guardrail. A fountain of sparks shot up from her metal foot as it slid down the length of the guardrail. Seconds later, her body smacked full-on into the mast of a streetlight. A metal clang echoed out across the river, not unlike the sound of an old mission bell.

But still, Rane held onto the carpet. Temporarily immobilized, it flapped from her fingertips like a bizarre flag.

Impossible as it seemed, Rane had done it. She'd caught the magic carpet.

Dru raced down the street toward them. "Opal! *Opal!* Tell the carpet to land!"

"I tried! It doesn't do any good!" Opal appeared at the edge of the carpet, bobbing up and down with its movement. "Help me down!"

The streetlight creaked ominously, slowly bending. "BTW, I'm fine," Rane muttered, her voice echoing as if she were speaking through a metal pipe.

Dru paused at her feet, confounded. The carpet was more than ten feet off the ground, putting Opal well out of reach. And there was nothing to stand on, or climb up.

"Let me go back-up the car," Dru said. "I'll climb up on the trunk. Just hang on!"

"Don't step on my ride," Opal said, "I just had that paint detailed!"

"No time to argue," Rane grunted through clenched metal teeth. "I can't hold on. You have to climb up me, girl."

Dru hesitated, looking up the length of Rane's metal body to the bent light pole, and the

magic carpet fluttering wildly over the hard concrete. "Um, I don't know."

An ominous fabric-tearing sound split the awkward silence. The carpet was starting to fray under the strain.

"Hurry," Opal said. "I--I'll try to meet you halfway." She didn't sound so sure.

Dru had no choice. Awkwardly, she wrapped her arms around Rane's waist, then stepped on her knee. With a heave, she climbed up on Rane, one hand-hold at a time. Rane stayed as motionless as a statue, though her metal skin felt surprisingly warm to the touch.

A moment later, Dru stood on Rane's shoulders, one arm wrapped around the light pole for dear life, trying not to look down.

Opal crawled toward her on hands and knees, sinking deep into the fluttering carpet with each step. They couldn't quite reach each other.

Dru leaned as far out as she could, until she grabbed Opal's outstretched hand and helped her stand up.

"You got me?" Opal said.

"I've got you. Come on. Step off the carpet."

Opal hesitated, looking more sad than scared. "It's my dad's carpet. Once we let go, it'll be gone, won't it?" She looked down at the multicolored fabric flapping around her feet.

A sympathetic ache pierced through Dru. She realized that this was about more than just saving Opal's life. It was also about saving her memories, too.

She bit her lip, not sure what she could say to make this all right. But really, there was no way to make this easy. She shifted her stance to pull Opal closer.

"Easy, monkey feet," Rane growled. "You're mushing my face."

"Sorry." Dru had nowhere else to put her feet. "But you're metal."

"Dude, I still have a *face*."

Without warning, a horrible tearing sound cut through the night. The tassels at the back of the rug, wrapped tight in Rane's fists, frayed apart and snapped.

The recoil from the abrupt release sent Rane's rigid metal body pivoting around the light pole, catapulting Dru through the air. For one terrified second, Dru tumbled headfirst, weightless. She didn't even have time to scream.

When she landed, though, it wasn't the hard, bone-breaking impact on concrete she expected. Or the cold deluge of the river far below.

Instead, she got a musty face-full of psychedelic carpet.

As she rolled over onto her side, disoriented, she caught a glimpse of Rane below her, catching Opal in both metal arms. The two of them collapsed onto the grass at the side of the road.

But the tableau quickly shrank away from her as the magic carpet carried Dru away through the air at breakneck speed.

A moment later, the carpet rocketed through the drive-through, and she caught a momentary flash of her favorite barista's face, a puzzled expression just beginning to form.

Then she was gone, as the carpet shot away through the night.

Dru stifled the scream that built up in her throat. "Put me down!" she shouted at the carpet, to no effect. "Land! Go down! Sit!"

When that didn't work, she knew she was in real trouble. From what she had read about artifacts like this, they were simple constructs. Once given a command, they could do nothing

else until that command was complete.

"Take me back to my shop," she ordered the rug, knowing that it was useless. Still, she had to try.

As she feared, the carpet ignored her, still bent on its original mission of heading to Starbucks. *Every single Starbucks in the world.*

It carried Dru across the whispering waves of the river, through a draft of cool, clammy air. Then it soared over a chain-link fence on the far side of the river and zoomed across some kind of industrial storage lot, where the suddenly warmer air stank of chemicals.

Dru held onto the rippling carpet and blinked into the persistent wind, trying to keep her eyeballs from drying out. Tiny bugs bounced off of her glasses.

She had to find a way to land this thing, and fast, before she accidentally fell off. She briefly considered just diving off one side of the carpet and hoping for the best. But at this speed, she was sure to end up in the hospital.

Not a great plan. But what else could she do?

She had to find a way to break the spell on the carpet. Or, failing that, at least reset it somehow, so that she could give it a new command.

In the passing lights of parking lots and streetlights, she could clearly see the eye-popping patterns woven into the carpet. Multicolored stripes, starbursts, wavy lines. Something about them seemed more than random. The carpet wasn't just an explosion of psychedelic colors, she realized.

The magic spell was woven into the pattern itself.

And that meant the spell could be broken. Or at least interrupted.

Dru snapped her fingers. She had a bunch of different crystals in her purse, including rose halite. A form of salt crystal, it was particularly effective at dissolving old patterns, especially those of an enchantment. She just needed to create a magic circle to power up the crystal.

Ordinarily, at the shop, she would encircle the rug in copper wire, research her books to put together the right sequence of complementary crystals around the perimeter of the circle, and then meditate until she activated all the crystals in the circle.

But she wasn't at the shop. And she didn't have any copper wire.

The carpet cut across the street at an angle, over the tops of oblivious SUVs and pickup trucks. Their headlights illuminated long triangles of pavement in front of them, but didn't reach the carpet flying overhead.

Without warning, power lines sizzled directly ahead. She ducked, and the power lines passed over her head, like a whip cracking just over her ears.

The carpet carried her through a residential area, past back porches with golden glowing windows. It banked sharply side to side to dodge around trees. Dru held on tight with sweating palms.

One undulating edge of the carpet clipped a tree branch, spraying her with leaves and a handful of tiny apples. She gasped in surprise, and one of the apples lodged in her open mouth.

She took a bite and spit away the rest of the sour apple, chewing madly in frustration. This rug was going to get her killed. If she didn't fall off into someone's rose garden first.

But having an apple stuck in her mouth, like a pig at a banquet, gave her an idea.

She couldn't place the crystals exactly in a circle around the carpet, because the constant

wind and frantic motion would surely fling them off. But she could still put them into position, if she could just manage to hold them there.

With considerable difficulty, she dug through her purse for the crystals she needed, letting her coupons and spare napkins fly away into the night. She found her gold-banded lump of tiger's eye, which was good for protection. She needed that, if the carpet enchantment resisted her efforts. She stuffed the tiger's eye into the toe of her left shoe.

Next, she found a rust-colored specimen of staurolite, also known as the fairy cross, because it naturally formed in the shape of a plus sign. At the shop, it was one of her most popular good luck crystals. And right now, she needed all the luck she could get. She stuffed that into her right shoe, careful to avoid jabbing her toes.

Dru still needed two more crystals to complete the circle. She kept digging.

She came up with a clear crystal, and thinking it was ordinary quartz, she almost tossed it back into her purse. But then she remembered dropping a Herkimer diamond in her purse weeks ago for purification purposes. In most cases, it wouldn't do her any good with a spell like this, except that circumstances were forcing her to create her crystal circle as quick and dirty as possible. With the luck of the fairy cross, the Herkimer diamond might just purify the mishmash of crystal energies long enough for the spell to work.

Finally, she found a glittering black stick of tourmaline. "Bingo," she whispered. In addition to lining the inside of really expensive hairdryers, black tourmaline was also a powerful grounding crystal. It brought energies back into physical contact with the Earth.

And getting back down to Earth was exactly what she needed right now.

With the Herkimer diamond gripped tight in her left hand, and the tourmaline in her

right, she gently placed the chalky pink chunk of rose halite between her teeth.

Trying not to gag on the sharp salty taste, Dru lay flat on her stomach, and bent her arms and legs out to the side, like a skydiver.

Blindly trying to get the crystals aligned equidistantly around the edge of an imaginary circle took a considerable amount of effort, especially with the constant motion of the carpet. After some trial and error, waving her arms and legs around, she eventually got the crystals arranged properly. When the spacing was just right, a hum of energy ran through the crystals.

It started out as a mere tickle, then slowly grew into a stronger buzzing. Dru squeezed her eyes shut and concentrated. It took all of her core strength to keep her body as motionless as possible on the bucking magic carpet.

Finally, it seemed, those painfully awkward yoga lessons were starting to pay off.

Dru concentrated on blotting out the chaos around her. The buffeting wind, the rippling carpet, the gut-wrenching dips and bobs as they weaved around trees and houses at high speed.

She put all of that out of her mind and focused only on the crystals. Only on the special energies that each one of them emanated. She listened to them, let them flow through her and combine into something stronger, something new.

She wove a spell, formed of the most ancient kind of magic, drawn from the heart of the Earth itself.

That's where she focused her energies. On bringing the carpet back down to the ground. Down from the air.

With her eyes shut tight, she could see nothing, but she could perfectly picture the clear starry night above her, the white orb of the moon shining down with silver serenity.

She held onto that thought, let it calm her, drive away the chaos. She let it guide her out of the constant adrenaline of fear, and let it fill her with serenity and peace.

She focused on her breathing, and the almost-audible hum of the magical energy. The clear, pure music of the crystals singing through her.

For an eternity, it seemed, she drifted, half-conscious. Floating through the energy of the crystals.

And then a whisper of rustling grass roused her as the carpet settled down onto the ground.

Blinking, Dru lifted her head up, hardly comprehending what she saw.

An endless expanse of cool green grass, rendered by the moonlight into shades of emerald and jade. It shimmered in waves as a gentle breeze ruffled the grass. Here and there, walking paths meandered through the night.

A city park. In the distance, lamp posts shed warm pools of light evenly spaced along the sidewalk.

As Dru watched, the long silhouette of Opal's purple car charged up the street and screeched to a halt at the curb.

Rane was out of the car before it stopped moving, streaking across the park at breakneck speed, her hot pink shorts practically glowing in the half-light. Behind her, Opal followed at a more relaxed pace, her bright smile splitting the night.

Arms and legs aching and stiff, Dru rolled off the side of the carpet into the grass. Only then did she dare relax her pose, with a groan. Relieved, she spit out the rose halite, wondering if she would ever be able to get the sharp mineral taste out of her mouth.



Footsteps pounded closer. Rane leaned over her, her face upside down, ponytail flopping to one side like a wagging tail. "D! You OK?"

Dru meant to say, "I'm fine." But with her mouth dried out from the rock salt, it came out more like, "*Aha-nnn*." She coughed.

For some inexplicable reason, Dru expected Rane to give her a moment to rest. But instead, Rane hauled her up from the ground and crushed her in a sweaty hug.

"Water?" Dru croaked.

Rane pushed a sport bottle of lukewarm water into her hands. Shrugging aside her reservations about germs, Dru drank. It was better than letting her mouth taste like she'd been chewing on a salt shaker.

"So did you short-circuit this thing, or what?" Rane asked, nudging the carpet with her toe.

Dru nodded. "It's temporary, at best. I sort of just hit the reset button. But the carpet is still dangerous. The moment someone speaks another destination, it could take off again."

"Huh. I'll be sure not to make any vacation plans within earshot of this thing."

"Good idea."

Opal made it across the park in bare feet, carrying her sky-high sequined platform sandals in one hand, and gave Dru a warm hug. "Now *that* I did not see happening."

Dru's phone rang, sending out of that jazzy notes of Frank Sinatra singing '*Fly Me to the Moon*.' It was Nate, calling back. Finally, she had a chance to talk to him.

Dru snatched up her purse from where it lay in the grass, but her phone wasn't in it. Too late, she realized the phone had fallen out onto the rug, where the psychedelic patterns were now

lit by the glowing screen.

Immediately, the rug rose up off the grass. With a whoosh of air, it rocketed skyward, toward the steady silver face of the moon rising in the starry sky.

"Fly me to the moon?" Opal wondered out loud.

Dru stared up, slack-jawed, as the rug dwindled to a rectangular dot and finally vanished altogether. She turned to her friends, seeing the same shocked look mirrored on their faces.

"*In other words*," Rane crooned in a surprisingly resonant baritone, "*who loves you, baby?*" She spread her arms wide.

"That's not how the song goes." Dru ducked underneath Rane's arms and headed for the car. "Well, I was thinking about getting a new phone anyway."

"Better hurry." Opal fell into step beside her. "Those are going to be some *serious* roaming charges."

"Listen, I'm really sorry we lost your dad's rug. I am."

Opal nodded sadly. "Guess there was a reason he kept it locked up." Her eyes shone as she stared up at the pure white circle of the moon.

Dru put an arm across her shoulders. The three of them walked across the grass together, surrounded by the soft buzzing of summertime cicadas. A gentle evening wind stirring the tree branches. No one spoke.

Finally, Opal dropped her gaze from the night sky and nodded, almost to herself. "You know, I like to say my sense of style is a true original. But the truth is, I probably inherited it from him. That man had a fashion sense like nobody's business."

Dru tried to block out the memory of the eye-searing color pattern on the psychedelic

magic carpet. "Trust me. Your fashion sense is way better."

"You really think so?"

"I do. So hey, let's celebrate. Who wants to go shopping for a new rug for the shop?"

When she saw their darkening expressions, she added sheepishly, "What if we stop for lattes first?"

They both shook their heads.

As the three of them trudged across the moonlit grass, Dru looked up one last time at the silvery glowing face of the full moon. She wondered if someone, someday, would find that rug out there among the stars.

And she couldn't help but wonder where it would take them next.

**THE END**

**(But read on for more!)**

### *Author's Note*

Dear Faithful Reader,

I hope you enjoyed Magic Carpet Ride! The adventures of Dru, Opal, and Rane continue in IT HAPPENED ONE DOOMSDAY, the first novel in the Dru Jasper series. Read on for a free preview.

For more stories and books, be sure to visit my website, [www.LaurenceMacNaughton.com](http://www.LaurenceMacNaughton.com). You'll find links to contact me personally or sign up for my newsletter and receive free bonus chapters, sneak previews, and other cool stuff in your email.

Happy reading!

Laurence MacNaughton

[www.LaurenceMacNaughton.com](http://www.LaurenceMacNaughton.com)

P.S. Dru and her friends are back to save the world in **IT HAPPENED ONE DOOMSDAY** — here's the first chapter!

### *Preview: It Happened One Doomsday*

#### **CHAPTER ONE:**

#### **THE PERFECT RING**

Dru Jasper had no idea that the world was prophesied to come to a fiery end in six days. All she knew was that she had to ring up enough sales to pay the rent, or her shop, The Crystal Connection, would get evicted from its cramped storefront between the pawn shop and the 24-hour liquor store.

Worn out from a long day of cataloging rocks and hoping that one of her scarce customers would actually buy something, Dru pulled her brown hair back into a ponytail and carefully cleaned her glasses.

The crystals, ancient artifacts, and leather-bound books that packed the shelves of her shop all seemed to accumulate dust that had an obnoxious way of clinging to everything. Especially her glasses.

As she misted her lenses, a rumble of thunder rolled down the street. Which was odd,

because although the sunny Denver afternoon seemed unusually bleak, there was no sign of rain. A moment later, looking out her front shop window, she realized it wasn't thunder at all.

With a snarl of exhaust, an old muscle car pulled up to the curb. Every inch of it glistened black and smooth as volcanic glass, from the sinister point of its long nose back to the spoiler wing that rose up in back. The car rolled to a stop behind the old purple Town Car belonging to Dru's sole employee, Opal.

At that moment, Opal got out of her car, a heavysset black woman in a sassy orange-crush-colored knit top and a necklace of polished crystal tiger's-eye beads big enough to be actual tigers' eyes. When she stepped up onto the sidewalk in gumdrop-red platform sandals, one of them wobbled, and she accidentally dropped her paper cup of coffee, spilling it everywhere.

Opal paused in the process of picking up her now-empty cup to stare at her car's back tire. Which was slowly going flat, a nail sticking out of its sidewall.

Inside the shop, Dru winced in sympathy. This day just kept getting worse. She came out from behind the counter to help, quickening her pace when she saw the guy get out of his black car and approach Opal. With his thick dark hair, stubble, and black motorcycle jacket, he looked like nothing but trouble.

But much to her surprise, Mr. Motorcycle Jacket actually made Opal smile brightly. He walked back along the length of his long black car, opened up the trunk beneath the tall wing, and brought back a tire iron and a jack. Without preamble, he got down and proceeded to change Opal's flat tire.

Through the scratched front window, Opal made eye contact with Dru. Her lifted eyebrows and pursed lips clearly expressed that she thought this guy was fabulous.

Then something around the corner, outside of Dru's line of sight, spooked Opal enough to make her hustle in through the front door of the shop. The bell jingled.

"Is that guy fixing your tire?" Dru asked in disbelief. She hurried to follow Opal toward the back room.

"Yeah, if I was single right now, we'd already be making plans, him and me. But whatever, you can be jealous later. You've got bigger problems." Opal turned and pointed out the window. "Here comes your friend."

Dru's customers were mostly furtive sorcerers who shunned attention. But Rane was impossible to miss in a crowd. Six feet tall, built like a professional athlete, with a high blonde ponytail that bobbed with every stomp of her feet. Even when Rane was in a good mood she looked ready to smash something.

Rane marched straight toward the front door of the shop. And she was obviously not in a good mood.

"Oh, fudge buckets," Dru whispered. "Quick, hide anything fragile."

Opal rolled her eyes. "Everything in here is fragile. Including me."

In fact, nothing about Opal was fragile. Loud, sarcastic, and voluptuous, maybe. At least, 'voluptuous' was the current word she used to describe herself, formerly *full-figured*, *fluffy*, and (briefly) *goddess*. But certainly not fragile.

"She breaks anything?" Opal said, "I'm not the one cleaning it up this time. Thought you should know that."

Outside, Rane marched past Mr. Motorcycle Jacket, close enough that she nearly made him drop Opal's newly-removed tire. She banged through the door the way she always did, the

force threatening to tear off the bell that hung from the wall. It jangled in protest.

“Girl’s got issues. Good luck with all that,” Opal whispered. “And let me know when Mr. Hunky is done with my tire. I want to thank him properly.” She ducked into the back.

Dru took a deep breath and slipped behind the counter again. “Hi, Rane,” she sang out, trying to sound cheerful. And failing.

“Dude. You should totally tighten up that bell before it falls off. You don’t want it beaming some jack-wad on the head and getting you a lawsuit.” Rane marched up to the counter and planted both palms on it. “Listen. I’m in big trouble.”

Dru’s smile froze. Rane had the singular ability to stir up trouble anywhere, even where there wasn’t any. And she had a tendency to bring it into the shop with her. “What kind of trouble, exactly?”

“I need a new ring.”

“Come on, Rane, give me a break—”

“Don’t give me any crap, D. I had to try like fifty different rings last time before I found this granite one.”

“It’s flint, actually.”

Rane planted one fist on her hip and shot Dru a dark look. “Seriously? This is *flint*? Like the sparky rock?”

“Well, yes. Although we, um, we don’t usually call it that.” Dru pointed to the mottled brown and gray stone ring. “Flint enhances strength and healing. And it’s been used since prehistoric times to make tools and weapons. Considering how you spend your days, you know, hunting monsters and all, I figured it was apropos.”

“Ugh.” Rane rolled her eyes. “Well, that explains it.”

“‘It’ what?”

Rane planted both palms on the counter again and leaned across it. Dru pulled back in wide-eyed wariness.

“Dude,” Rane said somberly. “I’ve been fighting this infestation of little stinky gremlin types down by the river.”

“Stinky?”

“Some kind of gas they put off. Nasty, slimy little beasties. But when they all jumped on me, and I punched one, super hard, it made sparks. And these guys lit up like the Hindenburg.”

“That must’ve been... disturbing.”

“Almost burned my face off. *Not* cool.” Rane said it in a way that indicated that she clearly blamed Dru. “So I need something a little less sparky and a lot more kick-ass.”

“You’re putting out a lot of magical energy when you transform. Probably too much for just one little ring. Out of all of those rings we tried, this is the only one that really seemed attuned to you,” Dru said.

“You mean the only one that didn’t blow up in my face?”

And it was the only one that Rane had actually paid for. An important line-item in Dru’s bookkeeping universe. She folded her hands in front of her and forced a smile. “I’m thinking maybe rings just aren’t your style. How about a nice amulet instead?”

Rane let out a long sigh. She stared deep into Dru’s eyes, as if to let her know what a vast disappointment she was. In her flat monotone, Rane said, “It’s like this. You know my transformation power only works if I’m actually touching something. If I want to turn into rock,



I have to be touching rock. If I want to turn into metal, I have to be touching metal.”

“Yes, I know, so—”

“So if I get grabbed up by some *gi-normous* creature and I’m hanging upside down by my ankle, and this *amulet* is dangling over my head and it’s not touching my skin? I’m totally hosed.” She stared harder. “Get it?”

Dru nodded. “All right. I get it.”

“Don’t hose me, Dru.”

Dru solemnly shook her head. “I would never hose you.”

“Good.” Rane clenched her right fist, the one with the flint ring. With a faint stone-grinding sound, patches of her skin took on the salt-and-pepper mottling of the polished stone ring, growing and merging until Rane’s body had transformed into solid rock.

“You know, one of these days, someone is going to see you do that in public,” Dru said. “You really want to end up on YouTube?”

“Already on there. No one cares. Help me out, Dru,” Rane said, her voice coarse and hollow, as if it echoed up from a deep cave. “Seriously. I don’t know who else to go to. You’re my best friend.”

Two incompatible thoughts competed for Dru’s attention. One, that no one had called her a best friend since grade school. And two, if this is what it was like to be Rane’s friend, what was it like to be her enemy?

Still, Dru couldn’t help but feel just the tiniest bit warm and fuzzy inside. Even if Rane was more than a little scary as a living statue, and probably Dru’s only paying customer today.

“Okay.” Dru smiled. “Let’s get you back into the storage room and see what we can

find.”

Rane turned human again with that stone-grinding sound and shot Dru a bright smile.

“Thanks, D.” She punched Dru in the shoulder and headed into the back room.

Dru was still rubbing her shoulder when the bell jingled up front. The solidly-built guy in the motorcycle jacket pushed his way inside and took off his sunglasses. Dark hair, stubble, and a swagger that some women might find cute. Or so she assumed.

But here in this shop, he looked completely out of place.

“Hi,” she said, when he got close enough. “Did you just change Opal’s tire?”

He nodded dismissively, as if it were nothing. Puzzled, he frowned around him at the tall shelves crammed with minerals and crystals, charms, statues, candles, rare herbs, and everything else her supernaturally-oriented customers wanted.

“Um, what kind of car is that?” Dru asked, not out of any particular interest, but just to avoid having to explain her shop to someone who was so clearly not a customer.

“1969 Dodge Daytona,” he said. When she didn’t reply right away, he seemed to mistake her silence for interest. “It’s basically an aerodynamic, Hemi-powered Charger. When it was built, it was so fast, NASCAR outlawed it. I restore old cars, especially Mopars. That’s what I do.”

“Hmm.” She nodded, trying to look fascinated.

“Sign outside says 'The Crystal Connection.'” He looked around again. “What’s with all the other stuff?”

Inwardly, Dru sighed. Anytime someone had to ask, the conversation never went well.

“It’s a shop for people who know magic.”

“Card tricks, coins behind your ear, that sort of thing?”

“Not exactly, no.” This was the part that always got awkward with people who wandered in off the street. “Mostly, this is a very specialized store. We help people who have unusual problems that can’t be solved any other way.”

Much to her surprise, he turned and looked directly into her eyes with a warm intensity.

“Then maybe you can help me. I’m Greyson, by the way.”

“Oh. Um, Dru.” Trying to mentally reclassify him as a customer caught her off-guard.

“So, okay. Absolutely. What seems to be bothering you?” She pulled out her notepad and reached for a pen, but she accidentally knocked it across the counter.

Greyson caught it at the same time that she reached for it, and when her fingers brushed his, a spark flashed between them, like static, only brighter and somehow intensely cold.

The jolt of energy made the fluorescent lights above them sizzle and flare. Then a pop echoed from the breaker box in the back room, and all the lights went out, plunging them into deep shadow.

The only light came from Greyson’s eyes, which glowed like red-hot coals as he gazed down at her. “I guess you could say I have an unusual problem.”

***[Find out what happens next in IT HAPPENED ONE DOOMSDAY! Click here.](#)***