

Hidden Within The Pages

'Under the watchful eye of the restless dragons, Anthony raised his hand in friendship. His voice carried far and wide across the desolated realm of Ksemn; awakening the spirit in some, motivating others into action. "Dear friends, we have Hope. Let us gather and mount these majestic creatures in a final stand against the Dark Prince. We shall prevail." Cheering met his words. Armor was strapped on. Swords clashed. Dragons roared. The war began.'

When it came, the continuous monotone bleeps of the alarm clock were expected. Sighing in exasperation, Anthony Hilscher sat up. For a moment, he let the bleeps penetrate his mind and brace him for the dull day that was sure to take place. Like yesterday, he would drag himself out of bed. School would be typically dreary, as usual; language, math, science – when was he ever going to learn something useful? Like how to fend off Giant Trolls? Back home, his parents and two little sisters would be pesky, asking how his day was...over and over again.

"Jeez, I could be a fortune teller," he mumbled aloud.

For Anthony, the best part of the day would be his three hours at the library. Three hours spent perched atop his favourite stool – overlooking the pond that sometimes rippled, though no visible disturbances could be seen – with a book of his choice. At those times, he was dead to the world. Believing in the power of imagination and the written word, he existed in a daydream; a wisp of determination, eternally searching for some excitement, some magic, in this world.

It had been seventy years since the last time anybody saw the Book for what it really was. A one-way ticket, an enchanted portal, to your wildest dreams. It was made to captivate, to enthrall, and to mesmerize all that laid eyes on it. Greediness reigned. Friendships fragmented, promises were broken, and blood splattered over this Book. That was before.

Now, after the magician, Christopher DiCaprio III put the Spell onto it (out of pure selfishness), its powers are no more. Its ability to pull readers *into* – I mean it literally – its story were, alas, destroyed. It lay now, deformed and ugly, on a shelf shrouded in dust. Forgotten. When the Book learned of Anthony and his love of books and magic, its pages brimmed with hope...it could detect the signs. The boy's aura told it all. The Book wondered if he knew, if he could help. Remembering its former glory, the Book formed a plan, took action. In this way, little by little, it began restoring its past brilliance.

Marilynn DiCaprio had never had high opinions of her pig of a brother, but putting that Spell on the Book was crossing the line, it was an act of defiance against the entire DiCaprio family, it was stooping lower than the lowliest low.

As if it made everything better, Marilynn had offered a single wish to the Book.

“A new binding, perchance? A replacement for that horrendously ripped page?” But for reasons unbeknownst to her, the Book graciously but firmly refused.

So she was flabbergasted to find the Book Calling to her, now, seventy years later.

When Marilynn answered, a gigantic surprise awaited her. The Book had decided on a wish.

Surprised, but nevertheless delighted, she settled down to listen. Well into the night, the Book was still dawdling on and on about a boy named Anthony and his supposedly great magical power. Marilynn, knowing the Book's usual get-to-the-point way of speaking, couldn't see where the conversation was going. At last, it finished its rant with the slam of its cover and a great flourishing 'pshhh' as all the pages flipped open again.

“I want you to give Anthony your wand,” The Book murmured in his soft, dry voice, “I have high hopes for him...I believe he just might be able to reverse the spell!” With a silent nod, she was gone, pondering the Book’s bizarre decision.

Early the next day, Marilynn swept out in her best cloak, ready to fulfill her promise.

As Anthony hauled himself to school – unaware of the magician tailing him, waiting – he felt a thrill of supernatural adrenaline. The Book was perplexed; it had never imagined the boy had enough power to be able to sense a fellow magician from such a distance.

Sneakily, with precision – though there was no need since she was invisible anyway – Marilynn blew a gust of magical wind over to Anthony, blowing his hat off his head and landing it behind a prickly bush at the end of the road. No sooner had he run after it, Marilynn teleported with a *pop* and swiftly exchanged his ordinary baseball cap for the extraordinary wand.

She beamed and *popped* her way back to the castle. Her work here was done; now, it was only a matter of time and luck.

But what she didn’t see was the tiny spark that flew out of the tip of the wand when Anthony’s hand came into contact with it. What Anthony didn’t know was that that tiny blue spark indicated his magical blood. Anthony was a magician...and a powerful one at that.

The Book was beside itself with excitement when it sensed Marilynn’s wand in Anthony’s hands. Now all it had to do was Call.

Anthony was feeling most peculiar as math class came and went. Power coursed through his veins, his heart pounded twice their normal speed. By lunchtime, he could hardly stop himself from bouncing off the walls.

The Call came unexpectedly.

One moment the wand was the woody, twig-like thing he picked up when he was at the bush, the next, it was a glowing, two-foot-long, jeweled staff. The sapphire let out a bolt of lightning, directing Anthony to the double doors. Without hesitation, he followed it. Magic will never lead him astray! His personal lightning storm ended at a little rundown bookstore. Anthony could almost imagine tumbleweeds rolling around in the place.

A sudden urging brought him to a low shelf. The Book breathed a sigh of relief that made some of its pages rustle as it was found and purchased by Anthony.

Later that day, shielded by the walls of his bedroom, Anthony pulled out the wand – which in its twig form, looked a lot less intimidating – and the book. Both were bathed in a white light. Eyes bright with excitement, he thumbed through the pages of the glittering Book. When it began to speak, to tell him of his destiny, his history – for now the Book *knew* – Anthony wasn't even taken aback. He had known it all along. He was special, and he was magical.

His life unfolded before him, slowly, as the Book began to remember the ancient tale...and realized it was talking about Anthony the whole time.

“It was just a myth before you came along.” whispered the Book, “passed from generation to generation of powerful magicians. A Seer had predicted that one day someone like you would come along. Your parents are Magic. Yes, Magic themselves. The Seer had said you

would be left in the care of Mortals. And one day, ‘you would set a wrong, right’. So go on, now, set me right. Return me to my previous magnificence.”

With that, Anthony brandished the wand, tapped once lightly on the brown-grey cover and an amazing transformation began to take place. Gold sparks swirled around the Book. Its tattered yellow pages were alive with colors. A rich, sturdy hardcover had taken the place of the thin paperback.

“Thank you,” the book laughed. Its voice was no longer thin and reedy, but deep and majestic, “now get ready to have the time of your life!”

The Book flew open. Pages were flipped with astonishing speed. “Jump in!”

And that’s how Anthony began his unlikely friendship with the Book; how he visited almost every place and time in the world; how he came to enjoy reading even more.

Twenty years later, when Anthony had completed his magical education at Karah Academy, he went back to his home town, Milton, and lived the rest of his life there. “Magical life and everyday life sure are different,” he thought to himself, “but not one is significantly better than the other.”

With that thought in mind, Anthony donated the Book to the Milton Public Library – so that Mortals would be able to experience magic too – and it became a secret among Miltonian children. The Book spoke to each child and taught them how magical reading really is. It helped them through the hard times and laughed with them during the good. The children never forgot even as they got older. The book was recommended to their children and their children after that. The end.

The real Anthony smiled and closed the book. “If only that was real,” he thought wistfully. A prickling sensation began at his pocket. Puzzled, he pulled out a gleaming wand. Huh?