

THE LAWYER

“Grandad, why do you keep popping over to the land of the mortals?” Young Ezekiel asked of his grandfather, Old Ezekiel. “Is it to listen to the words of wisdom of their judges?”

“Not entirely, my boy.....in fact, not at all. Not that they’re not worth listening to, I’m sure.....if only for the comedy. No, it’s *Costa Coffee* – I can’t get enough of it. The flavours are so rich and dark and deep. Even our best apothecaries fail to achieve anything close to it. Oh, I know you’re not really ready yet, but one day you’ll understand.....”

But Young Ezekiel’s attention had already diverted elsewhere. They were out with the family dog, Nimrod. Nimrod had just spotted a squirrel which had been foolish enough to cough while on open ground. Urging Young Ezekiel to follow him, Nimrod charged after the squirrel.

“All right then, Nimrod,” shouted Old Ezekiel, “But make sure you bring the boy home in time for tea.”

“OK. We’ll be there,” Nimrod called back, and dog and boy disappeared in hot pursuit.

Old Ezekiel was quite relieved to be free to return to the office. He needed some time to prepare for his next client, Lady Dudgeon.

Old Ezekiel, who had inherited the title when his father died, stood for a moment surveying his place of business from the other side of the road. His emotions were mixed. The building was beginning to look a little shabby, a tiresome hint that physical labour would be required. But the sign above the door still shone out as boldly as it had since it had first been erected:

Ezekiel Wigglesworth & Son, Lawyers & Bookbinders to the World of Wizards.

Established 738 AD at 3 o'clock.

Yes, for over twelve hundred years the Wigglesworths had been providing legal advice and remedies to the wizards of Arcania. And for over twelve hundred years they had sired at least one Ezekiel in each generation to avoid having to change the sign, fixed so enduringly by the original Ezekiel. The Wigglesworths who followed him were brilliant lawyers. They ensured this by requiring every new generation to take an apprenticeship in bookbinding, specialising in law books. Binding volumes of magical law led them to assimilate their contents osmotically. Unfortunately, their powers in other areas of wizardry did not always match up and none had possessed the confidence to tackle the enchantments on the sign (although there was a legend passed down through the generations that Ezekiel the Eleventh (also known as Ezekiel the Tippler) had added '*at 3 o'clock*' with the aid of a barrel of Dutch courage).

Old Ezekiel heaved a sigh heavy with centuries of familial pride and crossed the road to the office. He nodded at an old man who was passing by with a young boy. Another grandfather, he guessed, although a lot older-looking than Ezekiel. Did he know him from somewhere? There was a certain familiarity about his face - and the boy's too, for that matter. Anyway, no time for that now.

"Hallo, Dad. You're back early," said Middle Ezekiel, greeting his father.

"Yes, well spotted. I thought I would take the time to compose myself in mind, body and spirit for a visit from Lady Dudgeon."

"Right, fair enough. Shall I bring you the bottle?"

"Yes...no. No, I must be sober. Just let me go into the library and reflect quietly. Get your sister to tell me when her ladyship arrives."

For although the family firm was vested in the male line, Old Ezekiel had no objection to letting his daughter run the front-of-house stuff. She was efficient and presentable – and a lot cheaper than employing someone. Middle Ezekiel acceded to his instructions and went off to the fecund fug of the bookbinding department while his father stepped into the library.

The Wrigglesworths' library was tucked away at the back of the building and accommodated a pretty comprehensive selection of the laws of Arcania as well as pronouncements from the Rules Congresses of the last few centuries. About once every decade, as new law books were always coming out, it had to be expanded, although only internally, of course.

Old Ezekiel went to the ancient dining-table in the centre of the room, the only table they had which was big enough and strong enough to support the oldest, heaviest tomes, and chose the least comfortable chair. He had no desire to sleep. Well, he had, but he realised meeting Lady Dudgeon before he was properly awake would not be wise. He thought for a moment and then, drawing his wand, he summoned one of the newer books from the shelves.

A secret observer looking upon Old Ezekiel for the next few minutes – such as Merlin the mouse, for example, who was gorging on dust mites at the time – would have been struck by how fitting to his calling Old Ezekiel appeared. As he sat there reading *Reflections on 'A Decree on Social Equality' (Or 'You're Just As Good As They Are')* by Barnaby Woodmouse, Old Ezekiel radiated scholarliness from top to bottom. His hair was so long, thick and matted, it resembled a powdered wig. (In fact, it was a wig, but keep it under your hat.) Perched on his long, thin nose was a pair of pince-nez, inherited from his grandfather, Ezekiel the Hyperopic. His long, thin frame would have seemed almost emaciated were it not for the apparent bulk supplied by his many-layered black robes, black being *de rigueur* for

the legal profession. But if the observer concentrated on Ezekiel's eyes, just before they closed in a doze, he (or she) might have been astonished by their clear blue vivacity.

"Father? Father! Oi!" Cordelia finally got through to her father. Old Ezekiel awoke with a start, precipitating his pince-nez on to his lap.

"Eh? What? I wasn't asleep. Where are my glasses? Eh? What is it? Oh, hallo Cordelia."

"Lady Dudgeon is here, father," said Cordelia, smiling, for she had a soft spot for her father, even if he did treat her like a skivvy.

"Oh, ah, right." Ezekiel stretched and started to gather in his long, thin legs. "I'll come now. Perhaps you'd bring us some tea, dear."

Cordelia only minded a little. She was relatively content with her lot for the time being. She had long since realised that her enthusiastic dusting of the library books was giving her an extensive education in magical law. Dad had not suspected yet that she was correcting the letters he dictated to her – just a touch, here and there, where her knowledge had surpassed his.

Lady Dudgeon was already seated in Old Ezekiel's office when he arrived. He bowed. She half-turned in his direction and sneered.

"Good afternoon, my Lady," said Ezekiel. He regarded 'Milady' as too obsequious. "A pleasure to see you again. How may I be of assistance?"

He sat back in his padded leather armchair and put his fingertips together, peering at Lady Dudgeon over his pince-nez. He was a lawyer of the old school.

Lady Dudgeon turned slightly in her seat again so as to fix Ezekiel with her sharp green eyes. She was thin and small but her almost luminous lime green robes gave her an impression of majestic magnificence out of all relation to her size. She exuded a green glow

which rendered Ezekiel's office brighter and oddly cleaner than its usual state. Spiders cowered into corners, taking cobwebs and dust with them. Law books organised themselves into tidy ranks. Quills stood at attention. Even Ezekiel's back straightened as he awaited her opening words.

"Master Wigglesworth," said Lady Dudgeon, who also preferred the old conventions, including the use of appropriate appellations, "I am fed up."

"I am sorry to hear that, my Lady," said Ezekiel, although he was not surprised. Lady Dudgeon was always fed up about something. "What seems to be the trouble?"

He waited for more.

"It's not a case of what *seems* to be the trouble, Master Wigglesworth – it is a question of what *is* the trouble – and has been for centuries."

Lady Dudgeon paused again to build up the dramatic tension. She was accustomed to commanding an audience. Few would attempt to interrupt her or display inattention. She was not one of Arcania's High Dudgeons for nothing.

"It is a travesty," she went on at last, emphasising each word with meticulous clarity, "That we should be treated this way. Even on your own shop sign...*the World of Wizards*. Pah!"

Ezekiel winced. Not because Lady Dudgeon had spat in his eye – she was too lady-like for that – but because of the offensive reference to his 'shop sign'. Pah, indeed, he might have added, had he wished to intervene – but he didn't.

"Why *wizards*?" Lady Dudgeon was continuing. "Why always *wizards*? Why not the World of *Witches and Wizards*? Eh?"

Ezekiel stayed silent, still waiting. He knew perfectly well Lady Dudgeon expected no answer.

“It disgusts me that this state of affairs has been allowed to continue virtually without comment. It has long been established that all witches and wizards have equal rights in the face of the law – so how can it possibly be justified that wizards still discriminate against witches in this way? I want something to be done.” At this, Lady Dudgeon sniffed and began to drum her fingers. Ezekiel took his cue.

“I fully understand what you are saying, my Lady, but how can I help you precisely? This seems to me more a matter for the Council of Elders – a political issue rather than a legal one.”

Lady Dudgeon sniffed again. Ezekiel refrained from offering his handkerchief.

“You know very well that the Elders are nearly all men, and men who are very stuck in their ways. I have no intention of waiting for them, Master Wigglesworth. I want action now.”

“Yes,” Ezekiel answered slowly, stroking the point of his chin, “I take your point. But what do you propose?”

Lady Dudgeon leaned forward, resting an elbow on Ezekiel’s desk.

“I want you to apply to the Supreme Court of Arcania for a declaration that, henceforth, the names ‘witch’ and ‘wizard’ should be abolished. Instead, we should all be called ‘witchards’.”

“Ah,” said Ezekiel. It was all he could say, at first.

Lady Dudgeon scanned Ezekiel’s face, scouring it for a sign of his reaction, so that she could rapidly deploy one of her rehearsed retorts to slap him down. He might be a clever lawyer but he was still only a man; and he was not of her class.

But Ezekiel’s first response was in the form of a question.

“May I ask, Lady Dudgeon, why you did not take this to your family lawyers? Surely, Mordaunt & Graveley, with all the resources at their disposal...?”

“That is hardly your concern, is it, Master Wrigglesworth?”

“Well...professionally speaking...I don't want to tread on any toes...and this would be a very high profile case...”

“Master Wrigglesworth, you know that Mordaunt & Graveley have faithfully served my husband's family for centuries?”

“Ye-es.”

“And that Master Graveley sits on the Council of Elders?”

“Naturally.”

“Frankly, there is nothing natural about it – however, to return to my point...you are aware, presumably, that Mordaunt, Graveley and my husband are all wizards?”

“Well – so am I, my Lady.”

Lady Dudgeon gave Ezekiel a look that clearly expressed her doubts of his standing in the magical world, but then continued as though he had not spoken.

“So, you can take it from me that I considered it entirely inappropriate to consult Mordaunt & Graveley in this matter. In the circumstances, you are the only practicable alternative. So – will you take this case on, or do you seek to hide behind some labyrinthine lawyer-ish excuse?”

“Hmm,” said Ezekiel. “Yes.”

“Yes?”

“I mean ‘yes’ as in ‘hmm, yes, I see, hmm’, to signify I am giving the question serious thought,” Ezekiel clarified, hastily.

“I see...so, are you approaching a conclusion? I would like to be home in time for dinner.”

“Well, your proposition certainly raises food for thought. Of course, one can envisage a few problems. For example...Yes?”

“I’m sorry, father, my Lady,” said Cordelia, following up her knock by opening the door and slipping her head around it, “But I had no choice.”

“Well?” snapped Lady Dudgeon, taking over the scene. Cordelia steadfastly maintained eye contact with her father, however.

“You see, it’s Master Izzard, and he says he’s here on urgent Council business.”

“Which Izzard?” demanded Lady Dudgeon, before Ezekiel could ask the same question.

“It’s Master Lionel Izzard.”

“Oh, Lionel? Very well. I will wait for you, Master Wrigglesworth.”

But Ezekiel was already on his feet. Lady Dudgeon may be hot stuff but to keep Lionel Izzard waiting was to risk very nasty consequences.

There were several members of the Izzard clan on the Council of Elders. They were all powerful wizards. They ranged from the kindly to the scary. Lionel was at the latter end of the scale.

Ezekiel found him in the library, flicking through the pages of *Reflections on ‘A Decree on Social Equality’*, his nostrils flaring with contempt.

“Ah, Wrigglesworth. Come in.”

Ezekiel would not have dared even considering upbraiding Lionel Izzard for the cheek of inviting him into his own library.

“Master Izzard?”

“Stuck with her ladyship, are you? Never mind, you can thank me later for giving you a break. Now, take a seat. There is something I must discuss with you that is of the greatest possible import.”

Ezekiel resumed his seat in the uncomfortable chair. Lionel looked around the room for a moment, then muttered an incantation. Instantly, a luxuriously upholstered leather armchair appeared behind him, and he sat down. Ezekiel cast an envious eye at such casual magical power. He had to point his wand directly at an object to make it move, and even then was not uniformly successful.

Lionel sniggered as though reading Ezekiel's thoughts.

"I hope nobody was sitting in it just now," said Lionel, chuckling a single chuckle. "It's my favourite chair from the Elders' lounge. Anyway, to business." Immediately, his expression changed to one of utmost seriousness.

"I have just come from a Council meeting. As you have possibly noticed, our island is under threat."

"Eh? I mean, is it?"

"Surely you have heard the rumours."

"Well, I did overhear something about a few mortals catching a glimpse of our shores...."

"Yes, yes, for sure, that has been happening. But the more fundamental crisis is that we are shrinking."

"What? All of us?"

"The island, man. The island is shrinking. The expansion spell is beginning to crumble."

"Crikey! I mean, good heavens. How fast?"

"It is barely noticeable as yet, but we cannot afford to be complacent."

"No. No, I suppose not."

Ezekiel paused, taking in the worrying scenario. In order to accommodate its growing population over the years, the island had been expanded to four times its original size. The

thought of what would happen to their homes, their communities, their whole way of life if the expansion were reversed was so unthinkable it was virtually taboo. The old lawyer's mind began to wonder why he was being told. He certainly would not have volunteered for such information. He was not normally a confidant of Arcania's leaders – especially one so august as Lionel Izzard.

An idea struck him, one inspired by his surroundings.

“I say – you don't think I can help, do you? I mean, I know we have to expand our library from time to time, but that spell is very location specific, and I really don't know that I could.....”

“For goodness' sake, man. It's not your skills as a sorcerer that we need. If it were that, frankly, do you think we would come to you? No, it's your abilities with text that we require.”

“Text? I don't understand.....”

“The fundamental spells which govern our island – its creation, its maintenance, its expansion, its concealment – were written down, centuries ago, by the original Elders. Unfortunately, over time, the ink has begun to fade. And the lettering was not that clear in the first place, not to modern readers, anyway.”

“But surely someone thought to fix the words, to secure them for the future. After all, even the founder of our little firm, the first Ezekiel, did that with our sign.”

“Yes, well, obviously it was a mistake not to put your ancestor in charge of the old spell books, but it's a bit late to harp on that now, don't you think?”

“Well, I suppose so.....”

“Look, it is widely believed on the Council that you are as skilled as anyone on the island when it comes to the interpretation of ancient writings. Having no evidence one way or

the other, I have to take the others' word for now, unlikely as it seems, looking at you and your tiny little shop.”

“Hmmm, well.....”

“So, we need you to come up to the Council building – the books cannot be removed – and cast your *learned* eyes over one short phrase in particular. It runs something like – now you must keep this entirely confidential, at pain of death – ‘*ye islande shall stay forever safe when the somethings of something are united*’you see?”

“Um, yes, vaguely,” said Ezekiel, although he was surprised the original Elders were so imprecise.

“One or two think it must say ‘*Bands of Heather*’, others argue for ‘*Hands of Leather*’ or ‘*Wands of Feather*’. One even suggests ‘*Sands of Weather*’ and there is another who believes quite firmly it says ‘*Yards of Peaches*’, but that seems rather fanciful. I’m not sure peaches were even available around here in the Dark Ages. Anyway, there is no point my expounding on the subject now. Will you come? Now? To serve your community?”

“Of course,” said Ezekiel, with only the most minute hesitation when he realised the last bit probably meant he could not expect any payment. “I will be with you as soon as I have got rid of...or rather as soon as I have bade farewell to Lady Dudgeon.”

“All right. Do you want me to deal with the old hag?”

“No, no need, thank you. I would be a poor lawyer indeed if I could not circumvent an unwanted client.”

Ezekiel returned to his office to find Lady Dudgeon lecturing Cordelia on why she would never attract a husband until she got her hair under control and conjured up a decent wardrobe. Ezekiel coughed. Cordelia glanced up at him and charged out of the room, her eyes

moist, her cheeks a study in deep pink. Lady Dudgeon, in contrast, looked up and smiled at him – possibly the first he had ever received from her.

“How is dear Lionel? Did he ask to see me? Or didn’t he know I was here? Why on earth didn’t you tell him? Oh my – I suppose he was too busy, was he? The poor darling. He takes on too much, you know. So, he consults you, does he? How interesting.”

By this time, Ezekiel had made his way back to his side of the desk. He did not sit, however. He placed his palms on his desk and leaned forward slightly, his eyes fixed gimlet-like upon Lady Dudgeon’s. A less confident person than she might have felt nervous. But Lady Dudgeon merely sat back, still smiling complacently, and waited for the resumption of their conference.

“Lady Dudgeon,” said Ezekiel, his voice strong and steady, “I have indeed been consulted by Master Lionel Izzard on behalf of the Council of Elders on a matter of extreme importance and sensitivity. It demands my urgent attention. Even if it did not, I would not waste my time with the pointless and frankly infantile nonsense you brought to me today. I am quite sure that you have already consulted Mordaunt & Graveley and given them a thoroughly good laugh. Were I not so busy, I should in all probability also indulge in a healthy chortle.”

Lady Dudgeon, her smile now quite vanished, made to speak but Ezekiel held up a commanding hand.

“Chortle, I say. Quite possibly a guffaw. And finally, before I call my son to show you out, let me tell you why I would not ask my daughter to do so. I would not ask her to bear your company for a moment longer. You try to tell her how to conduct herself – *you*, who would not know civilised, polite behaviour if you tripped over it in the street. Of course, you would never trip over in the street, would you, because some poor, enslaved minion would be

carrying you on his back, like the parasite you are. Ha! Yes, go on, go on, and don't hurry back."

It was perhaps fortunate for Ezekiel that Lady Dudgeon had risen and made for the door around the time he said: "And finally". Mind you, he might have not said as much as he did had the opening door not revealed a small audience. Cordelia was there with Middle Ezekiel, and they had been joined by Young Ezekiel and Nimrod. Nimrod had a little bit of red brush trailing from the corner of his mouth. They were all beaming at Old Ezekiel.

And so it was that the visit of Lionel Izzard, a man who neither liked nor respected Ezekiel, to the premises of Ezekiel Wrigglesworth & Son led to a dénouement which neither would have envisaged. Never again would Ezekiel bow and scrape to the high and mighty. He would not have to. He was now to become a trusted adviser to the Council of Elders. And his son, having witnessed his father's fortitude, would step easily into his shoes when the time came. Cordelia, despite recognising the hypocritical advice she had received from a self-proclaimed feminist, took control of her wayward hair and expanded her wardrobe (in every sense), with pleasing results in terms of suitors (one of whom was Lady Dudgeon's son). At the same time, however, she would argue fiercely for a change in the firm's name to '*Wrigglesworths*', whilst becoming an esteemed lawyer in her own right.

The most gratifying consequence of all, though, to Old Ezekiel was the look in his grandson's eyes. He had always had his grandson's love; that he knew. But every time their eyes met henceforth, he could detect and acknowledge the admiration and respect Young Ezekiel felt for him. Every man needs to be a hero to his grandchildren.

And Nimrod? Well, he kept his own counsel.