

A Shortage of Magic

by H. Dean Williams

"And Que lights." The studio lighting came up to broadcast levels. "And music, and Que Hurst."

Instantly the man's face on stage split open in a huge smile. A smile was so big that it was obvious that the man wanted viewers to see all 32 teeth. Mission accomplished. "Welcome all you wizards and witches and magic users of all kinds. Thanks for being part of the WMAG family for your nightly news." The man continued beaming at the camera. "She's Greta Lewis and as always, I'm Hurst Thompson." He turned toward his co-host, "Greta, I'm betting everyone out there has heard the rumors."

If she hadn't had a slight look of disgust on her face vanish when she turned from looking at Hurst, Greta's tooth display would have rivaled his. "Well Hurst the rumors may not be rumors they look like they are true."

Hurst looked horrified and said, "Greta, you can't mean..."

She gritted her teeth and through her now forced smile, "Yes Hurst, I mean, it looks like the universe is running out of magic! Let's go to Tina Morecroft at the corner of Merlin and Copperfield."

The young women in the blue knee length overcoat nodded, "Thanks Greta, the first sign anything was wrong occurred here in the Pearson's back yard. The neighbor's dog dug under the fence to chase the resident cat, and Mrs. Pearson promptly zapped the highly dangerous Pomeranian back into its own yard." The reporter shook her head, "Greta, that's when it started."

Giving her best quizzical look Greta asked what we were all thinking, "Tina, was that the first signal, did the vicious guard Pomeranian not re-appear?"

Tina threw her head back and snorted, "Oh it reappeared Greta, well most of it. I'm here with the owner now." She turned to face the obviously distraught women next to her, "Mrs. Pearson, what happened after you transported the dog to its own yard?"

Mrs. Pearson was not smiling, forced or otherwise, "Well, everything seemed normal until Mr. Black, he's our neighbor, came over demanding to know what I'd done to his dog."

Tina tilted her head slightly, "What was wrong with the dog, Mrs. Pearson?"

"Oh, nothing... except its tail was missing." She scrunched her face up in distaste, "And it looked like someone had glued googley eyes on a feather duster."

Hurst broke in alarmed and sounding stern. Pointing at the camera, "Ah, we should note that Mrs. Pearson's views on dogs are not necessarily the views of this station or it's employees."

Greta smile was gone, she was staring daggers at Hurst, "Yes Hurst, thank you for that public service announcement. Pretty sure the producers here at WMAG would have done THEIR job and handled the PSA, but now back to MY story." The daggers continued flow, daring him to respond even though her news anchor smile was starting to return, Hurst just snorted and stared back.

Facing the camera again, and back in full smile mode, smiling Greta returned, "People at home we're looking into this further. We have noticed other indicators of this same issue. This morning at the Brew Bats bread company factory, reports are all their bread burned. We're going live to Greg Young, who is there on the scene."

"Thanks Greta, about 6:30 this morning one employee smelled

smoke and went to investigate. Smoke was everywhere, the entire evening's bread batches burned." He stopped and held his hand to his ear piece, "What's that Hurst? Say it again." He started shaking his head as he repeated what he heard in his ear piece. "Brew bats bread batches burned, try and say that three times fast!" Greg continued shaking his head and continued, "Further investigation revealed this happened due to all the magical timers all stopping 10% late. That failure to stop the batches caused the loss."

Greta's face, now turning a dark shade of red asked in clipped tones, "Greg, do they know why the timers stopped?"

Greg's head shook, "They're working on that Greta. Preliminary reports indicate the timers were simply low on magic and stopped."

"Now that's a crying shame." Hurst started making large circles with his hands, "I love a Brew Bats barley bread bowls full of bacon and..."

"Hurst!" Greta's face was into red shades that indicated grave danger was near, even under her makeup. "This could be the most important story in HISTORY! No one cares you can't get a bacon, barley, cheese bread bowl after work."

"Greta, I'm astonished that you think no one is interested in bread bowls." Hurst finally dropped his smile and pouted up, "And after all this time and you think I get my cheese bowl?"

Greta turned to someone off camera and shouted, "Can we just shut his microphone off? Come on Mr. Producer how about doing our audience a favor?"

Hurst laughed and smacked the desk. "Apparently Greta, you haven't read the 'No silencing' clause in my contract like I have."

Trembling Greta turned back to the camera, "Well, Hurst while the audience and I sit in wonder you could read your contract at all," more daggers in Hurst's direction, "Let's go to Renee Asher at the Castle and Moat bank. Renee has anything happened their that might tie into MY story?"

Renee looked a little startled. No doubt since Greta was practically screaming at the camera. Renee raised her hand indicating everyone should hold on as she turned her head to listen to a last bit of a conversation. She turned to the camera and smirked, "Greta hello, yes gold, silver, paper money, jewels have all disappeared this morning from the vaults. I just

overheard conformation that gold and silver stored in non-magical banks is missing as well. The non-magical folks are launching a full-scale investigation into what they are calling the theft of the century."

"Renee, from here in the studio, you look skeptical."

"Well, of course Greta. Who among us didn't conjure up a stack of gold in our youth? News of the magic shortage is all over social media. The prevailing thread there was, get yours before the magic completely runs out."

Hurst slapped the table again startling everyone, "Well, what's wrong with that? Create as much gold you want, I say." He managed to look reflective while still showing every tooth in his head. We'll need something to tide us over during this awful bread bowl shortage."

Greta squeezed the desk so tightly the white of her knuckles matched the white of the anchor desk. "Hurst, we don't live in a universe that allows you make things from nothing. You can conjure gold, but that gold has to come from somewhere. Looks like this time it came from the banks. Do you understand Hurst or do I need to speak slower?" She batted her eyelashes at him.

Hurst just looked confused, "I can't just make gold? What's the reason for that?"

"Well, Hurst." Greta, grinning in triumph, turned back to the camera, "I'm glad you brought that up. Let's go to Thomas Hilnap chief communication officer for the Council for Ethical Use of magic. Mr. Hilnap."

The man on screen pulled his glasses down and lifted his chin.

"Thanks, Mrs. Lewis, if you've conjured wealth recently, on behalf of the Council, we request you return it immediately."

He paused, waiting for questions, but Hurst only tapped the edge of the papers in front of him on the desk. Satisfied, he continued. "Second, we still don't know the cause or length this shortage will endure. We ask you to ration your use of magic for everyone's benefit. If you use magic, prepare to extend an additional 10 to 15% energy-wise because of the shortage."

"Humph." Hurst spat, "The only shortage we'll have is those delicious barley bread bowls."

Greta leaped up grabbing her wand. Her chair shot across the

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stage and fittingly the chair stopped and 10% short of it's target. That only served to further enrage her. "Hurst! I'm going to throttle you or my name isn't..."

"Greta Lewis!" He smiled at the camera while dodging a WMAG coffee cup flying toward him. "Greta Lewis is her name and as always I'm Hurst Thompson. Good night, everybody."