

*Aaran St Vines*  
*FanficAuthors.net*



year, I don't know who at that horrid place would be offended. They should be lining up to buy him drinks. Is that why he's drunk? Why do you keep going there? It's not safe for you, in the Auror Academy and all."

"We come here in a group and consider it part of our training. There're five of us and the crowd's a bit thin tonight. You'd be safe. But he's not 'streaming the quintessential bunkum' as you so quaintly put it. I wouldn't bother you with this but, well, I know you think... that is he's still... Pen, he's muttered your name a few times when he's not pontificating. No, it's no Ministry propaganda speech. He started with a toast to Dumbledore and has spent the last five minutes or more proclaiming the professor's virtues and those of Harry Potter. I thought that was the final turning point between the two of-"

"What happened between us at the end was only the last of many... Paul, I'll come through if you assure me it's safe." She turned from the fire.

"I'll just grab my bag. Fine. Stand back, I'm coming through."

She reached into a powder jar on her mantel and stepped into the fire.

She shouted, "The Tattered Broom!"

*Whoosh!*

Penny was just in time. Had Paul called a few minutes later...

She grabbed his arm and stopped the next firewhiskey from following those that had gone before. The last one became his last. After taking the shot glass out of his hand, she used his arm to steer his line of sight towards her.

The three vicious looking wizards who were facing him on his other side, the ones with clenched fists and hands going for their wands, seemed to back away at her presence. Then she realized that her brother must be at her back, and surely his four friends as well, so she was not the cause of their shrinking away. But she would accept the respite from whatever quarter it had been given.

The man before Penny slowly turned his head to see where his arm had gone, as if wondering why it was not delivering the next mind-numbing, throat-biting blast to his mouth. He looked at her as one might look at a picture of a person, not the actual person. His spectacles were slightly askew - not just down on his nose where he constantly kept pushing them back up with his left thumb so as not to have to stop writing. Everyone else used their index finger or middle finger to push back their sliding glasses. Also, he insisted on calling them spectacles, while the whole world called them glasses.

His mouth was opened in a stunned look, exaggerated by the drink. His chin and lower lip quivered in unison, and he gulped his mouth shut. And then the deluge of words came - and the tears - he was a lousy, maudlin drunk.

"Oh, Penelope, oh, my angel! How I have fa-hail-hailed you-ho-ho-hooo," he cried, crying and sobbing. "I've failed yooouuu. I've failed my fam-leh! Aaa-haaaaa!"

He was disgusting this way, but all of her feelings - those she'd thought she'd successfully suppressed for the past year, came flooding back.

"The Minister said that I have failed him," continued her former beau. "But I told him, *sniff*! I told him that all I did for him was drop the woman I still love, sell out my family, and Professor Bumblebore, and Harry--Harry. Did I tell you, Penelope, that he saved Ginny's life her first year?"

"Yes, you--"

"And I betrayed him - and asked his best friend, my brother, Ron, to betray him, too." He grabbed her arm and drew her face right up to his. "What kind of monster am I, Penelope?"

By this time, she and her brother had him out of the Tattered Broom, and almost to the Leaky Cauldron. They stopped on the way for Percy to be sick into a dustbin. His breath was rancid and he smelled of the sweat and vomit the drinking had caused.

But he had said that he still loved her.

Penelope Clearwater and her brother somehow contrived to send Percy Weasley through to his "posh flat in a better part of town" as he had put it. They flopped him on his bed face down, and still in his robe. Paul left her knowing that Specs would never take advantage of her.

She sat in the chair by his bed and made the decision regarding the question he hadn't asked.

She would help the man she still loved.

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That morning, after the students had all left on the Hogwarts Express, the three had listened to the prophesy in its entirety. She'd been the first to speak after the headmaster had outlined the program. The other male present would have been the obvious one to speak first. She had jumped in ahead of the second, clearing her throat to reserve her place in the conversation, then she straightened her tartan skirt. None of them were in their official teaching garb. *He* was seething, if the tick in his left eye was any indicator, and she spoke, not only out of her concern for the Head's decision, but to allow him time to lower the blood pressure making his eyes bulge. A lowered blood pressure or a stroke - one would come soon based on the vein popping out on his forehead.

She said to the third person in the room, "Headmaster, the plan is well thought out, but this particular series of potions - are you sure? I remember the last time..."

"Minerva, the last time, you and Alan could not have made me prouder. You and many of your classmates wear the Order of Merlin in various grades because of the success of that potion series and the necessary program its administering demands. We know so much more now about how to manage and channel its side effects, which all have their benefits too, as you recall.

"Besides," he continued. "I was also there the *first* time the series was administered. We knew little of the consequences and yet, we were able to accomplish so much."

"You were able to accomplish so much, and a few of your classmates. But remember Aberforth and the goat."

"A small anomaly from before the program back then, and who knows all of the truth of that matter - certainly not my brother. If that were the only problem to arise this time we would be truly..." The headmaster looked off to the mountain-view from one of his office windows completing the sentence, if at all, in his mind.

"But what of Philby, and Norton," she gulped and continued, "and what of Tom? Who knows how many this time will enlist from any particular--"

"The results we experienced with those three," the headmaster interrupted, something he rarely ever did, "are the reason we will expand the staff to the size I have outlined. I will offer the opportunity to all that have qualified, and can qualify before next school year."

She knew she would never talk him out of this, and perhaps she shouldn't keep trying, but there was one more question begging to be asked, regardless of who it upset - present company included. "Even those qualified from Slytherin?"

The silent - thus far - third person in the office leapt to his feet and began to speak tersely and with great vehemence before the headmaster could respond. "That's MY HOUSE you're speaking of, old woman!"

His last two words went a long way to ending his anger. He had never-- And he never would have-- But he had--

"Forgive me, Madam, Headmaster. Professor McGonagall, you know I hold you in the highest--"

"It's all right, Severus. I provoked you, and I knew I was doing so. I apologize to you, but you know there are, shall we say, extra dangers with a few of the family members in your house that might qualify for this program."

His gaze was nearly as fierce, but the rest of him was under control now, his words were evenly measured and well thought out, but the vein still throbbed its undeterminable warning. "Few, if any, who can qualify, and are from those families, will even consider joining this program. Mr. Zabini would be an excellent candidate perhaps, but.... Shall we say that I will interview and confirm the sincerity of each volunteer, whoever they may be?"

He looked down at his hands. They were gripping the arms of the chair as if trying to rip them from their places. He relaxed them and his whole body.

The Potions Master turned his gaze. "Headmaster. I have the gravest of doubts - but I've expressed them before to no avail. Are you sure about *him*? He can't be the one... that is surely... and you know how this will only feed his ego."

He looked into the unmoving stony faces before him.

"I am as sure of him, Severus, as I am of you."

The younger man lowered his head and, after a long pause, made an uncharacteristic admission. His words surprised the other two, and was respected all the more because of his candidness.

"Headmaster. Professor. I fear losin g almost all from my house to... Neither of you can know... no one can help me. It is a decidedly Slytherin matter. But please allow me as many... whoever I can gather--" The long pause resumed as did the mutual silence.

He sat up straight as if making a decision. "I commit myself to this program. If Paladins are what you want, then Paladins I will endeavor to provide and help train. Ask what you will of me, Headmaster."

Potions master Severus Snape sincerely thought he meant every word.

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He stared out the window at number four, Privet Drive, and saw nothing of the beautiful sunset or the sunrise the next morning, but he rarely blinked and did not sleep during the hours of the night. He had been there since they had arrived from the station. He had ignored the call for dinner, given to him once, but loud enough. The owl had flown out of that window immediately upon the opening of her cage, but she had not returned. But the parchment had been waiting on his desk for him.

Sometime after midnight, but before dawn, the parchment fell from his fingers. Its fall was no more noticed than the soundless electric clock in the kitchen, or the ticking of the mantel clock in the living room.

*Dear Harry,*

*I trust your train trip and drive to the Dursley's home was pleasant and uneventful. Misterns Crabbe, Goyle, and Malfoy were released from their "constrictions" and are safely home. I am grateful that you have such faithful friends.*

*Harry, I consider myself the oldest of your many faithful friends. I am also the one who has failed you the most - as I have served you and preserved you the most.*

*Most children grow up with loving parents, to some degree or another, and think them perfect, or infallible, or at least omnipotent. You grew up with no one loving you, and daily demonstrations of your aunt and uncle's imperfections - often gross imperfections.*

*Then you entered our world and heard of your dead parents' true lives and true fates. Within that same conversation, even before you learned of their fate, I believe, you learned of the wonderful Professor Dumbledore, headmaster of Hogwarts. What are Hagrid's words? "Great man, Dumbledore, great man." I believe that's how he expresses it.*

*You learned from Percy Weasley that first night that I am a bit mad, but brilliant. Since I have spent years using all of the tools and magic available to me as headmaster to promote and extend the illusion of greatness, you had come to expect that I was somehow faultless. Even the problem of Alastor Moody not being Alastor Moody in your fourth year did not dissuade you from my infallibility.*

*And now I have spent a year ignoring you, confusing you, and helping you in the most illusory ways. Finally, I tell you of my culpability in denying you the information you should have been told years ago.*

*Well, I am undone, and truly sorry, Harry.*

*And except for keeping you a little better informed the last few months leading up to your O.W.L.s exams, I would have done it all the exact same way, given the same circumstances.*

*I am fallible and will go on making mistakes. I wish that were not so, but it has been, is, and always will be so.*

*You will fight Voldemort, and I believe you will defeat him, if for no other reason than the alternative is unthinkable. Goodness has always ultimately triumphed over evil, but a lot of good men and women have lost their lives in the process. This is a timeless truth.*

*Few have known ahead of time that they were the deciding factor. You have been given the dubious gift and the magnificent burden of knowing you are the deciding factor - you will make all of the difference as to whether the world goes forward in darkness or light.*

*Now I must ask the nearly impossible from you - but not impossible at all. I have great plans for you and all of your fellow Hogwarts students, but most of all for you.*

*But there is a price that you alone must pay that they will never understand.*

*The price? You must trust me.*

*All of them learned of a parent's or guardian's failings at a young enough age, and in a simple enough situation, to have recovered from the discovery of the parent's human-ness, and be able grow through the shock with little ill effects.*

*You have been shown my failings late in your life, relatively speaking, and the effect of my failings have been to cause the death of your godfather and the traumatizing of your world view.*

*At fifteen, almost sixteen, you are perhaps more mature and world-wise than any other young witch or wizard in history, but:*

*...you are still too young to decide the most important things in your life all by yourself!*

*By that I do not mean you are incapable of deciding; no my dear boy. Nor do I mean you would not make the best decision that you could. I mean that you are less aware of all that bears on these cataclysmic decisions you face than someone older than you. I was in my nineties when I faced Grindelwald, and I still wish I'd known more before that battle.*

*I should have told you more about your life sooner - I have admitted that and confess that gross error again. But you have to trust me like you have in the past, at least about the decisions you must make over the next few days. Trust in proper authority - human and flawed as I am - is essential for you to go ahead with the best plans for your life.*

*I cannot try to sway your decision with additional information - good, bad, or indifferent.*

*You must do what I confess I would also find difficult - trust me without me telling you why.*

*To tell me that you trust me, and to activate the program for your life that is the best I can provide to help you succeed with your burden, please sign your name at the bottom of this parchment. It will activate all things necessary.*

*Once again, I am contritely sorry, Harry. Once again, I am proud of you. Once again, please trust me.*

*Yours most truly,*

*A. P. W. B. Dumbledore*

The soon to be sixteen year old ate a lonely half breakfast/half lunch at 10:21 AM. He slept through the afternoon and ate a silent dinner with his wary relatives. He began another night of sightless staring out of the window.

And still the parchment lay on the floor unsigned.

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## Defenseless Muggles

Harry Potter fell out of the bed in his sparse room at number 4, Privet Drive shouting "No! No! NO!!!" at the top of his lungs.

It was not late at night. Harry had been up all night staring out of the window at nothing. His Uncle Vernon was not pleased with this at all, but it was only two days after the "train station incident" as he called it, when he had to mention it. He hated and despised the humiliating circumstances of that event and its requirement to treat Harry better than ever before.

But even Vernon was frightened by the terror in Harry's voice. The *very* portly householder did not fear for Harry, but if he was being attacked up there, would the attackers leave after finishing off "that boy," or would they come down the stairs?

Dudley, the big, strong and very 'broad' Smeltings boxing champion, rolled out of his chair and hid behind it. The notion that parts of Dudley could be seen on either side of the chair at the same time had somehow eluded him in choosing this hiding place.

It was Aunt Petunia's action that was the most surprising.

She had been in the kitchen preparing dinner. When Harry began shouting, Petunia was just starting to cut vegetables with her sharpest knife. Like a race horse when the starting gun goes off, the horse-faced woman bolted out of the kitchen and was on her way up the stairs before Vernon could sputter, "Petunia?"

She had treated Harry with the most kindness of the three since his *eventful* homecoming. During the school year she had often pondered the question: had Harry been telling the truth? Had he saved Dudley's life... er, soul from the dementors? Finally, in February, she had gone up into the attic when Vernon was at work and re-read the original letter from Dumbledore that had accompanied Harry's baby basket - the letter her husband *thought* she had destroyed.

With tears in her eyes, she came down from the attic that day believing Harry's story. Relatively speaking, she had been much more civil to Harry than before - she now was outwardly as kind as most people were to complete strangers.

Harry and Aunt Petunia nearly collided at the top of the stairs. Their hearts were already beating as fast as a machine-gun in their chests, and this near collision startled them even more. At the exact moment they both yelled, "What's wrong?" and a second later, after noticing the wand in his hand and the knife in hers, they simultaneously shouted, "Don't point that at me!"

Both took a deep breath and Harry said, "Voldemort is sending Death Eaters to attack the Grangers!"



"I've got to warn them!"

"Who are the Grangers? Are they outside? How do you know this?" These were all good questions. All a bit disjointed, but the woman wielding the knife looked ready to fight, so Harry instinctively included her as a possible ally for the next few moments. (At random times over the weeks to come, he would think about the idea of Aunt Petunia fighting Death Eaters with her sharpest paring knife.)

"You stay up all night boy..." Uncle Vernon had waddled up the stairs fairly quickly.

"Please, Vernon! Now, Harry, who are the Grangers?"

"...you sleep all day..." Uncle Vernon continued, ignoring his wife's interruption.

"That is not helping, Vernon." Petunia's growing impatience was evident in her voice.

"...now you have a bloody afternoon nightmare..."

"SILENCE, VERNON! Tell me quickly, Harry."

For entirely different reasons, both Vernon and Harry were dumbstruck by this outburst. Dudley, still cowering in the den, hunkered down even more when he heard her outburst, squeezing more of himself out into view on both sides of the chair.

Harry spoke in short, rapid-fire sentences. "Hermione Granger is a classmate. Her parents are Muggles like you. They live...well I don't know where, but not too far from Oxford. They're both dentists. I just dreamed Voldemort was sending Death Eaters to their house and to Mr. Granger's office to kill them."

"Boy! All this for a dream..."

"VERNON!" she screamed turning the knife she had been pointing at Harry towards him. He cringed and shrank against the wall with a whimper. That was the last sound he made, except for his ragged breathing.

"Do your dreams warrant investigation?" Harry was even more surprised by her calm, pertinent question. How to explain this?

"I have dreams that are just dreams. Also, Voldemort has used them to mislead me, but I have also saved a life because I saw his evil actions in my dreams. True or false, I have to warn them of the possibility."

"How should we proceed? Would calling the police help? Is there any way I can help?"

Who was this woman talking to him like this? "I...erm...the police will just be more people for the Death Eaters to kill. Muggles can't fight Death Eaters. I s'ppose I should go to Mrs. Fi...go where I can contact Professor Dumbledore or someone who can get Aurors or Magical Law Enforcement officers to the Grangers' aid as quickly as possible."

"Well then, go and save your friends if you can. If there's anything..." she trailed off.

"Thank you, Aunt Petunia!" he half-shouted as he ran out the door.

Harry ran towards Mrs. Figg's house to use the Floo network.

*However*, Harry had been wrong about one thing.

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It was 4:58 pm. Steph Granger was locking the door to his dental office and turning to take the lift down to the enclosed car park below the medical complex. It had been a long day but the week was over and he and his family were going to spend the next three weeks on holiday in Germany. His daughter, Hermione, had come home from Hogwarts where her friends had said that she was the smartest witch of her generation.

He chuckled with incredulity that soon settled into concern. "My daughter a witch," he mused. That phrase now meant something entirely different from what he had understood when he'd first heard it applied to her by the Hogwarts Letter. There had been odd relief at that time because finally there was a "logical" explanation for the inexplicable occurrences in their family. Until he and his wife had helped Hermione control her temper, they had noticed things breaking a lot and other children skinning their knees quite often. She had always been able to get books off of top shelves when she wanted them and she had sworn she had not climbed up to reach them. An awful lot of her childhood coincidences had suddenly made more sense.

She had always made 'Outstanding' on every graded test and assignment in primary school, with only two exceptions. She viewed each of those 'Exceeds Expectations' as abject failures. Those two subjects were never in question again. Though he had been a very good student, always near the top of his class, his daughter had received her brilliance and her drive for top marks from her mother. Now she was the smartest witch of her generation. That was not exactly how he had always dreamed his little girl would excel.

But excel she had. She had always enjoyed studying and school, but at Hogwarts it was as if she had found her reason for being. She had come home that first year feeling like she had a destiny. Each succeeding summer she had come home even more certain that she was where she ought to be. After her fourth year she had matured well past the youthful enthusiasm of previous summers. Since then she had been a young woman, seemingly with a serious mission - which she would not share with her parents - until the day she had arrived home from finishing her fifth year.

There had been one subject - not an academic subject - in primary school where Hermione had not been a star. Of course Physical Education was graded on a pass/fail basis and Steph Granger had no illusions that his daughter would take after him in that area. He had starred on every team in every sport in school except golf. In his opinion, any activity like golf, where overweight people could do well, could not be a sport at all.

Steph Granger had been a rarity - an athlete who had made very good grades. He had been accepted

to two good universities, and there had been talk of some financial assistance based on his athletic abilities, but he had shocked everyone when he went into the army in the ranks. Ten years later, taking longer than he had expected, he had left the army. He had slowly achieved a degree while in the military. Upon leaving, he had enrolled in dental school and paid for it with savings from his soldier's pay and with some academic scholarship help. He wanted to spend all of his time studying and not let his grades suffer by being required on the pitch for so many hours a day.

No, Hermione was never going to be an athlete excelling in sports as he had, but he was disappointed that she had let her running lapse while away at school. For the last two years before Hermione went off to Hogwarts, she had met him for the last mile and then two miles of his daily run. Steph had used the time to cool down and chat with his daughter. She'd enjoyed the running after getting over the initial difficulties. Now, she had lost the physical edge that running had given her. She never had joined him for the strenuous exercises and training he did daily in the Grangers' basement.

Steph had run at least five miles, usually more, every day since the age of ten, except when military service had other activities for him, and except the day of Hermione's birth and the terrifying few days that followed. He had spent those days alternating between crying for joy when he looked at or held his newborn daughter, and crying beside his wife's bed, not knowing if she would pull through from the complications of a wretchedly difficult childbirth.

His wife eventually pulled through and regained all of her former vitality, but Hermione would be their only child. Steph could never be sad about it when he looked at his daughter. His only sadness regarding her had been that he did not understand her new world well at all.

That had all begun to change a few days after the battle of the Department of Mysteries.

It was standing practice at Hogwarts that when a student was admitted to the Infirmary over night, a note would be sent telling the student's parents or guardians what had happened. The Dursleys had sent word back by Harry that they did not care if he was injured or sick, so stop sending the owls unless Harry died or something worse.

The Grangers had received only three such notes in the five years Hermione had attended the school. The first two were from her second year. Her stay while she slowly transformed back from half cat after the Polyjuice Potion incident had been written up as a school prank gone bad and glossed over by Hermione's accompanying letter.

The second notice that year had informed the Grangers that Hermione had been Petrified. Professor McGonagall had visited them within the hour of that owl's delivery. It had been a Saturday, the Quidditch match had been cancelled, and Dumbledore had insisted she go to the Grangers to help explain what had occurred. The Transfigurations teacher had been torn between staying at the school to protect her young lions and going to the Muggle parents who would be confused and distraught. The headmaster had made the decision easier for her.

When, in her fifth year, the third owl message had arrived telling of Hermione's injuries in the Department of Mysteries, it had been sent with two other sealed parchments. There had been a letter from Hermione herself, explaining that she was fine and improving, and trying to make light of the

situation.

Dumbledore had sent the third missive with the official infirmary Notice of Extended Stay. He had outlined in some detail what had happened and had told the Grangers that the school owl would stay with them if they wanted to respond with any additional questions or concerns. The headmaster and the parents had corresponded numerous times before the day they had arrived to pick Hermione up outside the barrier to Platform nine and three quarters. Their written discussions evolved from specific questions about the battle to broad and general penned conversations regarding the conditions of the magical world at this juncture. The Headmaster had answered all questions concisely, but completely.

Her parents had said nothing about her injuries at the station or during the trip home, other than a quick 'are you all right,' just as she came off of the train. In the car they had an interesting discussion regarding Hermione's role as a part of the delegation that "encouraged" the Dursleys to improve Harry's treatment during the summer. That conversation with Harry's relations had occurred within earshot of the two dentists. Both parents were appalled at the scraps of home-life horror stories Hermione had pieced together over the years from Harry's brief comments to her and Ron.

When the three Grangers arrived at home, there had been the smell of baked chocolate in the air. Before leaving for the station, Mrs. Granger had set a large tray of walnut-chocolate biscuits in the oven on time bake. Arthur Weasley would have wanted to talk for hours about the concept of time baking, (he never would have guessed Muggles could do that to time) but that was not the discussion in their home that day.

Mr. Granger had taken Hermione's trunk upstairs and in a few minutes she had come back down to the kitchen. The fresh baked goods were on a plate, ready for consumption, and the tea was poured. Her father said, "Please sit down, young lady. We've a lot to discuss."

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### ***Flashback to 1968***

"All right, you young pups. You have been in for a year and you think you are the big cocks in the barnyard. Somehow you've staggered through *our* basic training and now you are in the bleedin' SAS. You think you are ten feet tall, six inches off the ground, and bullet-proof. One of you is the bleedin' enlisted knife champion of the bleedin' b'tallion.

"Well, I've picked up better stuff on the bottom of my brogans when I wasn't too careful in a back alley.

"You! The arrogant young pup with a pie-eatin grin on yer mug. Stand and pull your blade."

Out of his left sleeve his right hand pulled a knife almost a foot long. It was a Fairbairn, a street fighting knife designed in the 1930's by a Hong Kong chief inspector of detectives for his men who fought the Tong gangs. The Fairbairn, legend has it, was the favorite knife of Major David Stirling, founder of the SAS in WWII. The sleeve knife holder was a lesser-known part of the legend of the

knife.

The sergeant shook his head in disgust. "Ruination of our service to let you young snotties carry a Fairbairn even if you are a knife champion. I comes along when a man had to see battle a'fore they lets 'im carry one. And in a bleedin' sleeve holder no less. Thinks he's soddin' Stirlin' hisself re-in-CAR-nate." He was muttering this tirade to himself, but with a raised voice so all could hear.

The young soldier was standing easy but wary. He was supremely confident in his abilities but he was no fool. During initial SAS training, he had been surprised by his hand-to-hand instructor. The instructor had acted as if he had a head cold and was six inches shorter and two stone lighter. The little sergeant had the young soldier on his back with his foot at his throat in less than three seconds.

That had been day one of SAS training, but being caught unprepared had never happened to him again. He had learned from that first embarrassment and was now not only the battalion knife champion, but tops in all other forms of close-quarters combat.

This sergeant was six inches taller than him and over three stone heavier if he was an ounce. But he looked big and lumbering. And the younger man had his Fairbairn. He had seen it in a pawnbroker's window and had had to have it. It was WWII issue and had been well maintained. The sleeve holder had been six pounds extra and well worth it.

"Put a protective blade cover on your bleedin' toad sticker. I don't want you holdin' back." When the cover was in place the sergeant smeared axle grease on the blade cover. "There. Iffen you cuts me we'll all know." The sergeant's uniform was immaculately clean and starched.

"And I'll fight you with these." He pulled out a deck of cards. The whole mob laughed but the young soldier was still cautious. The sergeant shuffled the cards and made two card fans in his hands.

"Okay, prepare yerself. Five. Four. Three. Two." The young knife expert tried to take a step back but the fanned cards were flung with such force into his face that he had three small cuts on his right cheek. The younger man took a step forward to slash at the big man but the sergeant fell forward and stomped on his foot. As the young soldier lowered his hand to comfort his toes, the sergeant knocked the blade flying with his left hand and punched him in the nose with his right. The punch did not break his nose but there was blood. Instead of in the usual three seconds, the "former" knife expert was on the ground in seven seconds.

"You okay there, laddie?" The sergeant offered him a hand to stand. The young boy pivoted on the ground and was on his feet and backing away in moments.

The sergeant roared with laughter. "That, lads, is the first youngin' to do that in fifteen years. He's also the first one to NOT be thrown arse over teakettle." He turned to the young man with his hand extended. "Truce!" A little closer, as they shook hands, the sergeant said in confidence, "Last year at the championship, finest knife fightin' I've seen since I won it in '42."

The bloodied but vindicated young soldier took his place with the rest of the men. The sergeant paced as he taught.

"Here's what you must always remember in hand-to-hand when you face a better armed opponent.

"One. Close with the enemy. Two. Anything is a weapon. Three. Hurt 'em to distract 'em. Four. Hurt 'em to disarm 'em. Five. Kill 'em! This is war! It is literally you or them!"

"Now, repeat that after me. One...."

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The three had talked for over six hours. They had talked through the preparation and eating of dinner and still they had kept talking. At first, Hermione had spoken the most, with her parents stopping her narrative with a few questions to clarify a detail here or there.

Eventually, the conversation flow had become a general question and answer period. Hermione was not really surprised at the depth and perceptiveness of the questions they had asked. After all, she had to have received her intelligence from somewhere. They asked very specific questions about a host of related issues, but the most unexpected queries were concerned with the actual Death Eater fighting methods and battle tactics. She remembered her father had been some sort of medical orderly or something in the army, but he had never wanted to discuss it. Those experiences might be why he had asked those specific questions, but her mother had questions of equal insight and clarity on the same subject.

Hermione knew that both of her parents were as inquisitive as she was. It never occurred to her that the questions posed by her mild and gentle father and mother could come from anywhere else but their curiosity.

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Though his daughter did not know it, there was little that frightened Steph Granger. Initially, Hermione's description of the battle she had been in had scared him to no end. In the summer before Hermione's second year at Hogwarts, the dentist had observed the fight at Flourish and Blott's between Arthur Weasley and Lucius Malfoy. Mr. Granger had felt useless. He had held the impression that there was nothing he could do to help the red haired man he had liked immediately. Most Muggles, upon learning that the magical world actually did exist, assumed that everything they knew of magic from fairy tales and fiction was true. Much of it was, but some of it had been placed in Muggle lore and writings as disinformation. Most witches and wizards wanted Muggles to think that their world did not exist at all, so the outlandish was included to make its existence "impossible."

Now, war, actual fighting with serious wounds and death had touched his daughter. And it had happened right here in England, not in some foreign jungle or rice paddy. The innate desire of a father to protect his family rose up within him. And the answers to those specific questions that night gave him hope that he was not as helpless as he had feared. He made sure that the questions he and his wife asked regarding fighting were interspersed with inquiries on other subjects. His daughter was brilliant and keenly observant, and he took great pains to hopefully keep his biggest secret from her.

He would eventually fail.

---

Harry ran out of the house and straight to Mrs. Figg's. He did not even consider using Hedwig because he felt for sure that if he had overheard a real assignment from Voldemort, the Grangers would be dead before the owl could reach anyone. It did not occur to him to call to his minder. (Mundungus Fletcher had seen Harry fall asleep for the second afternoon in a row, so he "just nipped out for a quick cuppa," as he would later explain, hands wringing in contrition.)

Harry took the steps in one leap and started banging on Mrs. Figg's front door. He considered crashing through it. He hoped she had a Floo network connection or some way to communicate this summer. She hadn't the previous summer and Harry had heard talk of "doing something about that" as Order of the Phoenix members had discussed his narrow escape from dementors right there in Little Whinging.

Mrs. Figg opened the door and started right in on her feeble cat-lady routine, but Harry barged right past her and into the sitting room, shutting the door over her shoulder. She quickly looked out of the windows and then pulled down the shades. She did not want a neighbor to report to the police that "that terrifying child that goes to St. Brutus's Secure Center for Incurably Criminal Boys" had forced her door.

She straightened a little from her hunched over state. "What is it, Harry, more dementors?" the Squib asked with genuine fear.

In record time he told her what had transpired and begged for some means of communication with someone, anyone who might help. She had heard about the events leading up to the battle of the Department of Mysteries. She had heard about Harry being deceived. "Harry, are you sure this isn't...?"

"AAUUGH! You can have me locked away at St. Mungo's after we call for help. Seconds count! If I am right, and if you delay one more moment and the Aurors arrive too late, I'll hex you into next year! What can we do?"

Mrs. Figg physically shrank before his verbal assault, but realized he was absolutely correct. She moved as quickly as she could. She wasn't playing a little old lady; she was a little old lady. She grabbed two jars from her mantel muttering to no one in particular, "Hotter than blue blazes but I keep this fire going just for...." She threw in an imprecise amount of the regular green Floo powder and then measured an exact amount from the other jar. "Now the Secure Floo Powder..." she continued to mutter.

When the green fire turned red, she stuck her head in the fireplace and yelled, "Twelve Grimmauld Place. Potter emergency! Come to Figg's!"

As she stepped back, almost right behind her tumbled out Kingsley Shacklebolt, Bill Weasley, and Remus Lupin. All three fell over each other onto the floor. Mrs. Figg barely dodged the sprawling bodies. Mad-Eye Moody walked out of the fireplace and to the side of the entangled trio two seconds later. They were all up on their feet in short order. They all proceeded to verbally fall all over

themselves asking her and Harry why they had called.

Moody slammed his walking stick on the end table near the couch, bringing instant silence. "Potter, what's wrong?"

Harry rushed to explain but at just over two-thirds of the way, Remus Lupin interrupted, "Harry, is there any possibility that this is another trap set for you?"

This hurt Harry but he understood why he had to be asked. Moody spoke before Harry drew breath to respond, "We cannot afford to gamble that this is not true. This is war! We are honor bound to go to their aid instantly. Where were they Harry? All at home or on holiday now?"

Harry did not think about how well informed Moody was. "Voldemort sent two Death Eaters to their dental office and two to their home, wherever those locations are. Hermione owled me that her father was working today, and her mother was taking her shopping this morning. The two of them will be at home this afternoon and all three will be there this evening, packing. They leave on holiday in the morning."

Moody had a notepad open before Harry had finished speaking. "Kingsley and Remus go to their home, at number thirty-seven, Beckett Court off of Beckett St. in Oxford. Bill, you come with me to the Manor Road Medical Center six miles east of Oxford. We will Apparate to the underground car park to the back west wall. It is dark there. Potter, any idea what time they will attack?"

"Voldemort said to coordinate their attacks at 5:00 this afternoon."

Moody had his pocket watch in his hand before Harry completed the sentence. He looked up at them and said, "5:02." All four Disappeared within one second of his last syllable.

---

### *Flashback to the Fall of 1977*

"Who is that crustacean two rows over, Syl?"

"Quiet, Meg, he'll hear you. Besides, he's rather fit, don't you think? He's not that old and quite dashing, really."

"Are you daft? Look, he has gray hair! And his hair is so short. I bet he is retired military. He is at least late thirties." Meg's Irish accent came out stronger when she was joking and when she was angry. She was both right now.

The class ended and Meg and Syl walked out under the burden of their class assignment. Behind them they heard in a clear yet not loud voice, "Twenty-nine."

They stopped and turned. "I am only twenty-nine-years-old. I am probably not more than eight or nine years older than either of you. I was in the regiment, but I de-mobbed after ten years service to become a dentist."



Meg did not like soldiers. Before her friend could speak, Meg was in high dudgeon. "The regiment. The regiment. What were you? Coldstream Guards?" The venom could be heard now as well as the Irish lilt. "The South Essex? Perhaps even the bloody SAS?"

Syl was 5' 8" and Meg was only slightly shorter, but the foot-wear of the time added two inches to both of the young ladies. He was 5' 10" but because of his erect bearing, he looked taller. Though he did have a *very* erect bearing, when she said "SAS," he, if anything, stood even more erect and proud. This was not going to work out as he had probably hoped.

"The SAS," Meg spat. "The bloody, bleeding, blinding SAS! Your kind killed my Uncle Caley! Why you are..." Meg's Uncle Caley had taught her how to swear and she honored his memory at that moment.

Meg dropped her books and ran at him, fists up. Of course he *had* been in the SAS, so this attacking female was easy enough to handle. Syl, standing open-mouthed and speechless, was surprised at how gently he held her wrists and turned her so her kicks were ineffectual.

As Meg softened into a puddle of tears and drooped in his hands, her friend came up and took her from him. As he turned to leave he quietly stated, "I am sorry. I was never stationed in Ireland." Syl knew he meant his apology, but Meg wailed louder with his words and their contact with him was over.

When they were next in a class together, he had moved as far away from Meg as he could, and likewise in all the other classes they shared. Dental School was not that big and distance within a classroom was their only hope of not being near each other.

---

"Hermione, please move your wand to the table. I need the space on the counter to prepare dinner." Mrs. Granger realized that was one more strange sentence to add to the many strange sentences she had constructed since the summer of her daughter's eleventh year. And of course the conversations over the past twenty-four to thirty hours had been the most improbable.

She did not know what bothered her more, her daughter's account of what sounded like a horror fantasy movie, or her husband's grim mood due to that conversation. It had worried her so much when she had seen Steph pull down his dusty old chest from the closet. But she had known he was right in doing so.

The summer after her first year, Hermione had at first kept her wand on her person at all times, just because she could. She had explained how she was not allowed to do magic away from school except in an emergency, but she also said that she felt funny without it. She had left it in her room more and more often as that summer progressed. After her second and third years she kept the wand in her room most of the time, but took it with her on their holiday trips.

After her fourth year, she had been with her parents for less than a month and she had her wand near at hand at all times. It had even been on the side of the water basin when she had flossed and cleaned



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*Aaran St Vines*  
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She recognized him in his winter coat with the scarf around his neck only after he started talking. She was horrified that she had spoken to a classmate in that manner, this classmate in particular.

She had chosen this building to live in because she was unable to pay more. She was concerned about debt. Even with tuition reductions for family income, financial prospects looked bleak until long after starting her dental practice.

She had started a filing job that very day in the administration building to supplement her loans. She was eating out of discount can goods and had meat only twice a week, but was considering economizing further.

When he stopped talking, she said, "I'm so sorry I yelled at you. I live in that building too, but I have never seen you there before. Of course, I've always either gotten back to my flat before dark or sprawled out on the couch at Meg's place. That's getting old. Meg doesn't mind but her flat mates do.

"Now that I have this job to help make ends meet, I'll have to walk home after dark every evening, at least until the afternoons get longer in the spring. I'd welcome your company. I'm a little afraid here at night. But I bet walking with a former SAS member has to be a little safer." She thought she was chattering, but she also hoped she was complimenting him.

He stiffened and slowed next to her while turning to face her. "I was never in Ireland. The fighting I did was...well, let's say I served with distinction by my standards, and if you do not care for former soldiers, I will escort you safely to your flat and never again come nearer to you than I do in class." He was holding himself erect as on a parade ground and turned as if given the order to march.

She touched his arm just enough to be felt, he paused, and she applied enough pressure to cause him to turn back to face her. Her voice held as much admiration as she could muster. "My father was a commando in the war. He speaks with begrudging admiration of the skills of the SAS, which as you might know, is high praise from his lot." She gave him a hopeful smile.

Just perceptibly, he softened his ramrod stance. She plunged ahead. "I respect what you did, serving our country. Meg and I have been friends since university. She was the only other woman in our year interested in dentistry. We're friends by proximity but I don't hold her political opinions. We've agreed never to discuss a number of issues in order to maintain our friendship. But I'd wager you and I hold much more similar world views."

This was more than enough to either work or never work. She thought he was so handsome. He had let his hair grow a little more than at the start of term, it was still shorter than all the other men's hair in class, but the gray was not as obvious at this length. She admired his bearing and carriage and had to wonder if she wanted what her mother had wanted in 1941 when she had married her commando after knowing him only seven weeks.

This was the first man that she had ever met near her age that reminded her of her father.

He softened. He loosened his guarded stance slightly. Finally, after what had to be only ten seconds but to her seemed a tiny eternity, he smiled and formally offered her his right arm. They walked

slowly together in silence until they reached the front of the building. It was a comfortable silence, remarkable since they did not know each other very well.

He asked her flat number and discovered he lived in the same number that she did, just two floors below - she was on the third floor and he was on the first, one above the ground.

She realized the first move would have to be hers, so she took a chance. Her friend Meg had cursed him terribly at that first encounter, and she had been unintentionally not much better because of her silence. They were on the stairs and she was desperate for a way to continue her time with him. "Please let me fix you dinner. It's the least I can do after what my friend and I have put you through."

He finally smiled. "Can you cook?" She knew he was only asking in a joking manner. The look in his eyes made her feel that he was too kind to be mean-spirited. He wasn't questioning her abilities or calling into derision her invitation. He had a wonderful smile, she realized. She thought that he had a wise face that had perhaps seen more than he wanted to in his years of service.

She somehow knew she had finally met a man she *could* marry. It remained to be seen if he would be the one, but he *might* be the one.

And no, she could not cook.

---

Dentist Steph Granger was on the lift in the Medical Center heading to the car park levels below when he pulled out his mobile phone. He had seen a parcel left in a corner in the waiting room as he locked the door. He thought then about going back and placing it in the box kept for things lost. One or two personal items a week ended up in that bin. Most things were collected within a few days.

If his receptionist had missed it at closing then she might miss it again on Monday and not be able to tell anyone calling to inquire, that it was there. He brought the mobile phone up to dial his office and to place a message on the recorder once the lift door opened. But he stopped before dialing. He remembered that the staff would not be there Monday morning. They would all be on holiday, as would he.

Still holding the mobile in his right hand, he stepped out into the garage level where he had parked his car. He heard and felt an explosion that rocked the building. He was about to turn and go back up to the first floor to see what had happened. Instead, Steph Granger looked up into the face of what must be, by Hermione's description, a Death Eater.

*"Avada Keda..."*

---

## *Flashback to the early Spring of 1978 - -*

For the first time in months, she was not walking home with her "SAS chap" as she called him. Somehow, Meg had wrangled herself an invitation back to Syl's flat for a meal. Syl had finally learned to cook, a little. He'd taught her.

That first night had been a disaster in her kitchen. She had burned everything she opened. He smelled the burning and heard her mild, frustrated oaths. He walked in and smiled at her. His smile did not condemn her cooking skills. He simply said, "Come with me. I can cook."

She had a few tears in her eyes that quickly dried. He gave her his right arm after she locked her door and they walked down the stairs to his flat. Whereas he had to wait outside for a minute at her request so she could straighten a bit, his rooms were pristinely neat. Quite Spartan actually. What she could see of his flat was bare except for a couch, a small television, a desk with books alphabetically ordered and held by bookends, and a kitchen with shelved items arranged by category and further arranged by height.

In no time, he had a simple but delicious meal at the table and she marveled at his ability. They talked freely and openly about everything. He panicked at 10:37 because he had not studied as he had planned to that night. She could miss a night's revision because she was three weeks ahead of the course syllabus in every subject.

The next day after that first night, they happened to meet earlier in the walk home and made the most of the trip together. He offered to cook, and when she balked, he asked if she would help him with some of his difficulties in a particular class they had together. It seemed a fair trade. Both thought they were getting the better of the deal.

The next afternoon he walked out of a shop and almost right into her. They walked together, ate together, and studied together.

Thursday afternoon she came upon him reading on a bench. They walked together, ate together, and studied together.

Friday he was waiting for her as she came out of the administration building.

"Syl, please sit over here with me for a minute."

She became fearful when she heard those words. In that instant she realized he had come to mean a lot to her. She had fancied and had tried unsuccessfully to dismiss, that she might be in love. And that tone in his voice portended an end. She tried to keep her face calm.

He sighed and lowered his head into his hands. She placed her hand on his right arm. "Syl, I've misled you and you have every right to be furious with me. I...We...I, that is, well, I planned all of this like a military operation. I've not been able to keep my eyes off you in the classes we share. I scouted



out your walk home for over a week after I noticed one day that we live in the same building. I was following too closely on Monday when you first saw me because you were running late and I was afraid for your safety.

"You must hate me for misleading you. You've come to mean too much to me to let it go on further without telling you the truth. I must tell you now of my machinations and let you end our relationship before it really begins. Much longer and I'll not be able to stand the loss." He rose to leave.

"You want a relationship with me?" He barely heard her. He froze in place. He turned. She continued. "I want one with you. The second I saw you in class I decided I wanted to get to know you, but Meg queered that chance that first day. This has been one of the best weeks of my life. Don't go. Walk me home?"

That night they kissed good night.

That was late October. Meg and Syl were walking to her flat in late March.

There is a very seedy part of London, just like there are bad sections of every city. Tony Peet ran one of the worst gangs in one of the worst parts of seedy London. To be in his gang you had to have killed someone. They were bad and they were known as bad. The London police were finally doing something to curb gang activities. A third of Tony's ruffians were under arrest and he was feeling the pressure.

That very morning an Oxford professor of sociology had been on the television discussing gangs and gang related activities. He was a bit sympathetic towards them for some reason, but Tony thought he was insulting. Syl's SAS chap heard the interview while fixing breakfast and thought there would be nothing good to come from the broadcast.

That evening Tony and five others stole a car and drove to Oxford to find the professor and "send him to gang school," as Tony put it. Of course, Tony had no idea that the professor lived over forty miles away from the university. Tony felt at home in alleyways and found one. The manager of the shop across the street saw the gang members go in the alley and called the police. Twenty seconds later Syl and Meg walked arm-in-arm into that same alley, taking a shortcut to her building.

Halfway down the alley, the girls had walked into a trap. There were three gang members behind the girls and Tony and two others in front.

"Oi, me darlin's. Nice of you to come out to play wid Tony and his boys. I wants the redhead first," referring to Meg. "You can decide for yourselves who gets first dibs on bushy hair." Meg started to scream, but Tony saw it coming, stepped up, and backhanded her into shocked silence.

A rubbish bin lid sailed into the center of the tightening circle and the hoodlums spread out a bit, looking around. Syl's SAS chap skirted between the building and a gang member and ended up in front of Syl and right next to Meg who was whimpering on the ground.

In that quiet voice that Syl knew so well, yet with a chill in it that she could have never imagined, he

said, "Why don't you boys run along and play somewhere else before one of you gets a skinned knee, or something worse."

Six clicks were heard. Six switchblades flashed in the limited light. Syl called shrilly, "Be careful, they have knives!" Panic caused the logical and rational Syl to needlessly state the obvious.

"Those aren't knives. This is a knife."

He had never let her hold his left arm. It was always his right arm he'd offered her. In that moment, a thought that had never quite made it into her full consciousness coalesced in her mind. 'He never hugs me with both arms unless we are in his apartment, and he always goes into his bedroom for a minute when we first arrive.'

Tony called to his cronies, "Get 'em, lads," and they were the last words he ever spoke.

---

*The old sergeant had said it succinctly. "You are the bleedin' SAS. They don't call you in to mollycoddle the bad guys. You're out numbered. You're outgunned. By all rights you should all die. But you are the meanest, best-trained, best-equipped, most fearsome dealers of death on the planet. Tis sad but true, m' lads, when they send you in, the situation is grim at best. You must kill 'em all, and let someone else sort 'em out.*

*"All together, lads. One. Close with the enemy. Two. Anything's a weapon. Three. Hurt 'em to distract 'em. Four. Hurt 'em to disarm 'em. Five. Kill 'em! This is war! It is literally you or them!"*

---

The gang member closest to Syl died first. He had not made a move but he held a knife within four feet of her, and SAS policy is to eliminate the nearest threats to the hostages first. The next closest gang member to a hostage was Tony, advancing near Meg. It only took a few seconds longer for Tony to be mortally wounded, also. The last recognizable look on his face was disbelief.

A third gang member was about to pierce our hero from behind. Syl screamed and her defender turned, and thus he was only grazed on the right collarbone. The blood from his wound caused Syl to scream again. The Fairbairn viciously slashed this third assailant on his knife arm and he dropped the blade and fainted - saving his life.

The fourth gang member gave Syl's boyfriend his worst wound of the encounter, a serious puncture high up in the left shoulder. The attacker was trying to stab him in the back but missed because her former SAS chap was a whirling dervish in a fight. This last attacker would have a gruesome facial scar for the rest of his life. Had he not instantly dropped his knife and fallen to his knees, moaning and wailing while holding his face, he would have received a more serious scar, ensuring a closed casket.

Our hero looked like the wrath of God personified as he turned to the two remaining gang members. The Fairbairn and his hands were red from his battle and he seemed completely unfazed by his own dripping wounds. The two fled right into the arms of the constables who had finally arrived.

"Get us away from that madman," they both shouted.

Syl was about to run up and hug him when he slumped against the wall in pain. This pause gave Meg the opening she needed.

"I knew you were a killer. Two are dead and two more might die because of your bloody actions...." He was gamely trying to push himself back up after sliding halfway down the wall, but it was unnecessary.

The slap sounded like a small pistol shot. Syl roared at her former friend. "He saved you from rape and probably death, and this is how you thank him? Get out of this alley before I take his knife to you myself." Syl looked the part of a small avenging angel at the moment. Meg backed up quickly and turned only to run away faster.

Syl turned back to him and asked as to his wounds. He simply said as if discussing the weather, "I've had worse. Are you all right?"

Just like him to think of her while bleeding from a number of minor scratches and two wounds needing numerous stitches. She knew now for sure that she loved this man. He had promised to make himself scarce while she and Meg walked home together. But he followed them in the shadows for their safety. He had risked his life and been twice wounded for her and for a woman he knew hated him. He was so kind and so honorable. She smiled. "You owe me. To return the favor of all of the tutoring I have been giving you, will you teach me to defend myself?"

He looked up at her and smiled wanly; the pain was overtaking his dwindling adrenalin surge. His answer was not an answer to that question, but it answered it nonetheless. "I love you," he said.

Her heart thrilled when she heard his words. She replied, "I love you, too."

---

Steph Granger had one last question for his daughter.

"Hermione, you told us that witches and wizards are physically just like us, but with magical abilities, correct?"

She nodded.

"Well then, they bleed if they are cut, and if they are shot or something, they could die, couldn't they? Or could they stop the bleeding or even death?"

Hermione gave him the look of concentration she'd inherited from her mother. He knew she was

paging through her encyclopedic memory at light speed looking for as complete an answer as possible.

"When Mr. Weasley was attacked by a huge snake it slashed him badly and he was unconscious. He would have bled to death if someone hadn't gotten to him in time. Had he been awake he would have tried several possible methods to stem the blood flow. In this particular case, the snake had an agent in its venom that prevented coagulation, but under other circumstances, a witch or wizard could stop their own bleeding if they were conscious. However, if they could not speak a spell or if they did not have their wand, I believe they would bleed to death if cut badly enough. Every healing spell I know of requires a wand *and* a spoken spell or charm, but I suppose there may be others."

Her father then changed the subject to one where mother and daughter would become quickly engrossed. After he started the two of them discussing the next topic, he became lost in thought.

Later that night, after Hermione was asleep, Steph Granger took down his old dusty chest from his closet. They practiced their old skills. Then he and his wife made several "re-arrangements" of the house.

---

Hermione Granger opened the door and saw two Death Eaters on her front porch. She slammed the door shut immediately. 'They rang the door bell,' ran through her mind in amazement as she reached for her wand. At the same time, she slammed the door and turned to run, screaming to her mother.

A *Reducto* r Curse blasted the door off its hinges and knocked Hermione down. Between the effects of the blast and the impact of the door, the explosion turned her, so that she could see the Death Eaters enter her home. The wind had been knocked out of her and she gasped for air. She blinked to remain conscious. She had two regrets in what she felt would certainly be the last moments of her life. She regretted all that was unresolved with Ron. And she regretted that she would not be able to help Harry fight Voldemort.

Dazed and struggling vainly to bring her wand out from under the door pinning her down, Hermione heard the start of the Killing Curse. "*Avada Ke....*" She also heard an odd metallic clacking sound that she thought familiar but could...not...quite...identify....

---

"Tick!" The clock could not be moving slower if it was unwound.

"Tock!" It seemed like a minute later another second had passed.

Harry stared at the clock on the mantel; concentrating with a singleness of will rarely seen, he 'demanded' time to pass more quickly.

The clock's glass faceplate sprang open. The face and hands shot out, and a stream of clock

components littered the rug in a six-foot spray pattern.

Harry drew back swiftly and blinked rapidly. He looked at Mrs. Figg and said, "Sorry."

---

The Death Eaters in the car park were startled by their bad luck and their good luck. What did Muggles call the contraption? A 'bond'... or 'bomb,' wasn't it? Whatever the name, the Muggle explosive device went off almost five minutes after it should have. They had been waiting in the shadows in the car park. They were about to Apparate to the office to make sure the Mudblood's father was dead and cast the Dark Mark, when Steph Granger had walked out of the lift, right in front of them.

The leader of the two killers raised his wand and began the Killing Curse. He never finished, "*Avada Keda-*" because he was interrupted when Granger's mobile struck him in the nose. Though his nose was not broken, the impact was hard enough to cause both nostrils to bleed and to lacerate his right cheek. Tears clouded his view, but he raised his wand arm again to cast the spell.

He looked down as his hand involuntarily let go of the wand. Oddly, his wrist was bleeding profusely. Then the pain arrived at his brain. He clutched his hand and began to scream. He would be completely self-absorbed with his wrist for a few moments.

---

Granger made for the second Death Eater. In the few seconds it took him to move to the other attacker, he wondered if they really thought those masks were scary. At most they resembled something slightly comical out of a Hammer horror movie. To him, they looked, as the Americans might say, "Halloween-ish." However, if your victims were terrified of you before you appeared, then these clownish masks would do. The dentist also wondered if he was too stupid to be afraid or if he was in the *fighting zone*, that place where your mind and body automatically did what needed to be done, and you only thought about being scared afterwards. Later, he would smile ruefully at the thoughts that had visited his mind in these horrible moments.

He realized he was too far away for an identical attack as the first. He had hoped to cut this Death Eater along the wrist also. His daughter had told him that a wizard without a wand (or usable wand hand) probably could not hurt him, at least not with magic. He was working with all of the information he had and hoped it would be enough.

---

Clayton Nott was the younger brother of the inner circle Death Eater, Marcus Nott, and uncle to Theodore Nott, Slytherin in Hermione's year. Clayton was fascinated with the battle as it was progressing. His leader for this mission was at least temporarily incapacitated. Nott realized this was

his chance to shine as a new Death Eater in the Dark Lord's service.

Clayton assumed the formal stance of a wizard duelist and raised his wand. He took a moment to adjust to the Blainfield Wand Fighting Grip. He moved his three outer fingers and thumb so they were pointed down, with his index finger pointing along the top of the shaft. This grip gave him extra accuracy in directing the precise assault spells he used so fondly.

When he looked back up, he noticed his target was closer than he'd expected him to be. That was strange. Nott had felt sure that the victim would be running away or cringing on the ground in terror. It must be that this Muggle was too ignorant to know he was about to die. Nott decided not to use any fancy spell-work. Go with the Killing Curse and be done with it.

As he opened his mouth to cast the spell, he realized his grip on his wand had loosened for some reason. By the time Nott realized that the first six inches of his wand had been cut off, along with the first two joints of his index finger, he was barely able to register that the blade that had destroyed his wand was moving swiftly towards his throat. Did this Muggle expect to kill him? Clayton Nott did not have enough time left with a functioning brain to determine what the intentions of his target had been.

---

Steph Granger, covered in the results of his actions, but physically unharmed, spun around before Nott had fallen. Now his shirt was red in back as well as the front. Granger returned to the first attacker whose back was still turned to him. The first Death Eater was groped for his wand. The gentle dentist finished his first assailant as he had the second. He dropped the body and reached down for the wand, snapping it in his hands. No wand, no wand spells. That seemed simple enough to him and he liked to be thorough.

Granger heard two quick pops and turned to see two more men in robes with wands raised, too far away to assault as he had these. At this distance, the highly trained and experienced warrior knew the odds were that he would fail in the end, but his old sergeant had always told him that the SAS was never sent in until the odds were that they would all be killed anyway. The former knife-fighting champion threw the Fairbairn with all of his might and accuracy and headed towards the wizards, hoping that they might be as incompetent in a street fight as the first two.

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Harry was climbing the walls. The four Order of the Phoenix members had been gone less than ten minutes, and he knew, he KNEW it was too early for them to return with any information. But he also knew that they would know by now if the Grangers had already been attacked.

The more he thought about it, the more he realized that if the Grangers were all right, the four would be busy setting up wards or transferring them to a safe location or something. So he told himself that

the longer he didn't hear from them, the better.

"AARRGGHH!!" Forget logic. All that might be so, but he could not wait without trying something.

He pointed his wand at himself and cried. "*Apparate!*"

"Harry, dear, what are you doing?" asked Mrs. Figg. The concern on her face told that she knew full well what he was attempting.

"*Apparato!*" Harry shouted.

"Harry, please don't."

"*Apparatus!*" Nothing, again. His wail of pain frightened Mrs. Figg more than his initial barging into her home. There was nothing more that she could do.

"*Transfer!*" "*Transferindo!*"

"Harry, they never say anything. They just get a far away look in their eyes and vanish." She realized that little bit of information might be enough to splinch him to death if it did not work. But this was Harry Potter - the Boy-That-Always-Lived-Through-Everything-Thrown-His-Way. He always accomplished the impossible, somehow. She lowered her gaze and stood back, and just as she raised her eyes again, she saw the most intense look of concentration she had ever seen. There was the loudest Disapparation noise she had ever heard. It sounded as if time and space were being insulted right there in her sitting room. Harry vanished before her eyes.

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Sylvia Granger heard her daughter scream, "Run!" and she heard the explosion of the door blowing in. Of course she did not run. Over 99% of the mothers in England would have either run to protect their children in some way or just run away. Few would have reacted as Hermione's mother reacted.

She was in the kitchen. She reached up onto the top of the refrigerator and swatted the fruit bowl and its contents onto the floor. She pulled down the oddest contrivance in the house other than some of her daughter's magical paraphernalia. Most of her wizarding devices were not as foreign to a suburban home as the MAC-10 machine pistol she expertly cradled in her arms as she ran to the living room.

The MAC-10 had been designed and manufactured by an American company. It was not very accurate except at close quarters. It was poorly balanced and the silencer, which was longer than the 10.5" gun, made the weapon even more unbalanced unless you practiced with it.

While still in dental school, Steph and Sylvia had married and had moved into his flat in the same questionable part of town. Even before marriage, he had bought the MAC-10, not because he liked it, but because he knew its light weight could be managed by his fiance with practice. He attached a crude wooden handle to the silencer to help with balance and control. The handle was not conducive to proper cooling for long-term firing, but that was not the issue. Everything Steph imagined they

could face would be over before one clip of 32 bullets was fired.

It was illegal to own a machine pistol like the MAC-10 in England. Steph Granger, like most soldiers, had a profound respect for the law. But the former SAS member was not about to let a little thing like the law stand in the way of his family's safety. Before they were married, he took Sylvia out to the SAS training range. Former SAS members were allowed to use the range in off hours and he made sure she knew how to fire the gun accurately. The SAS did not condone civilians breaking the gun laws of the land, but the sergeant that managed the range had read about Granger's battle with gang members - and everyone in the SAS knew about Steph Granger.

Sylvia Granger did not like guns at all; they scared her. But she had known her new husband-to-be was right. She would never be able to make herself into a knife fighter - it was too gruesome, too up close and personal. The first time she fired the MAC-10 she barely kept the gun within a 90-degree arc, but after several weekend trips to the range, she was accurate enough to hit a man somewhere on his body if he was within 30 feet of her. She was deadly within ten feet.

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### ***Flashback to September of 1978 - Director's Office - Public Prosecutions Building***

"Come in, Inspector, come in. You have completed the investigation, I assume?"

"Yes, sir, General, sir!" The inspector demonstrated his heritage with his crashing heels, severely straightened back, and shouted response. "Or is it Court Advocate or Prosecutor, now, sir?" "

I never read law, as you know, Inspector. Just like it is now 'Inspector,' I am Assistant Chief Executive in administration." There was no annoyance in his voice. "I suppose you could call me 'Executive,' but 'sir' will be sufficient. You *have* finished your investigation and that is the report?"

"Er, Yes, sir, *Executive.*" With the slightest turn of one corner of his mouth, and with a bit of awkwardness, he took the manila folder from under his right arm and handed it to the other man.

The senior official read it quickly because there was little to read. "So, *officially* we have an unknown attacker with a machine pistol killing violent and murderous gang members and other such dregs of society?"

"It's all in the report, sir."

"We have no idea why Tommy Peet went to that building or that particular flat. The fact that his brother, Tony Peet, died a few hundred yards away is irrelevant. While some unknown vigilante, as the Americans call them, is putting an end to Peet the Elder's latest crime spree, Steph Granger falls from a ladder while painting the walls of his and his new bride's new flat, breaking his arm, so *he* cannot be a suspect. The fact that Peet's bullet-riddled corpse was found in Granger's former flat is also irrelevant."



The commissioner did not look up as he finished his observations from the report. The inspector remained silent, assuming the comments were rhetorical questions if questions at all.

After several more moments of silence he said, "Excellent work, Inspector. Excellent. I am sure this will finish the matter."

The inspector stood immediately to attention. "Sir!" He then turned to leave the office. When he reached the door, he was stopped by nine words.

"Sergeant Major, please close the door. Please be seated."

After closing the door and while returning to the chair, the inspector said quietly, "Yes, sir, General."

They stared at each other expressionlessly for several moments. Without a word, the Commissioner/General opened a drawer and drew out a bottle and two glasses. When he handed one to the other he said, "To absent comrades."

"They were the best of us, sir."

When they placed the emptied glasses back on the desk, the former general refilled them. The former sergeant major spoke unbidden, "The Grangers had removed all but his trunk from his old flat earlier that day. They had returned after midnight to retrieve it, away from prying eyes. Apparently, Peet crashed in the door, paper-thin it was, and Granger went to face him. Peet broke his arm with a pipe, the ruffian's weapon of choice, and was about to cave in his skull or some other body part when *Mrs.* Granger put six out of nine bullets in him from less than eight feet.

"Nice bit of shooting that, especially with a MAC-10, but then the sergeant that runs the range, he's the one that identified the gun make, said that she had improved handsomely over the previous few weekends.

"All of this is informed speculation, of course, but I believe that the young bride dragged the trunk to his former neighbor's, Mrs. Abernathy. Our Steph Granger had prevented the sixty-seven year old woman from being mugged the previous spring. Mrs. Abernathy is the one who alerted the authorities. Stated that she'd heard the sound of the breaking door, said that the sound woke her from her sleep - nearly stone deaf, she is. When I interviewed her, I noticed that she had a trunk-shaped low table covered by a braided rug in the corner with boxes, magazines, and whatnot haphazardly scattered on it and falling off. Rest of her flat was as neat as a pin.

"As the constables showed up to investigate, the Grangers made a big show of walking out, favoring his broken arm. They both had plenty of dry paint splatters on them and a few wet ones. Upon inspection of the Granger's new flat, there was all the makings of a fall from a ladder while painting."

The inspector/sergeant major finished his recitation and remained silent. Both men looked into each other's eyes for a moment. They finished their fourth glass.

The commissioner/general spoke, "Sir Cyril Philips is forming the cadres for his Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure. He has asked me to join its ranks. The Crown Protective Service he proposes

will in due time eliminate the chance for such activities. Inspector, are you prepared to be incarcerated for this fallacious report, if need be? For my part in this, I will pay the price, if need be."

With the alcohol and the memories the former sergeant major's speech loosened slightly, "Portsmouth would be a bleedin' holiday compared to the cell I would've been in if i' t'weren't for Granger. With this," he tapped his right arm; it made an odd hollow sound, "I'd've never survived. Brought us all out...even your son, God, rest his soul."

The former general swallowed. "I never saw him receive the recognition he deserved. His country...we...*I* owe him. This is small recompense...."

"He received that medal 'cause o' you, General. Even if i' t'weren't published for all to see. He's not facin' charges 'cause o' you, sir. He'd get off, but it 'uld played bloody havoc with his schoolin'."

"It should have been *THE* medal, here in England, not just *a* medal off in some forgotten corner of the Commonwealth." For several long moments, they both stared at their glasses, recently refilled. "Tony and Tommy Peet don't have any more brothers, cousins, uncles, or anyone else that might seek revenge- do they, sergeant major?" ttt "No, sir." The former general stood and the former sergeant major with him. "To absent comrades," said the ramrod straight former major general.

"They were the best of us, sir. *And* Granger. Finest bloody, bleedin' knife fighter I've ever seen, *includin'* me in '42."

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With a firing rate of 1600 rounds per minute, the MAC-10 would empty its thirty-two bullet clip in 1.2 seconds. The night before the attack, Steph had dry fired the gun with Sylvia enough to bring back her proficiency at releasing quick, controlled bursts.

As Mrs. Granger rounded the corner, she saw that Hermione was down and out of the line of fire. Everything in Mother Sylvia wanted to run to her daughter's side and tend to her. Warrior Sylvia knew that such an action would be fatal to Hermione and herself.

Sylvia knew the sound of the Killing Curse meant she had fractions of a second to save her daughter. The first burst of ten rounds sent three bullets into the wall and doorframe. Another two bullets flew through the doorway and out of the house to who knew where. Three bullets lodged in the chest of new Death Eater, Cyrus Pangborn - two in his lungs and one in his heart. One bullet caught him in the throat.

The Killing Curse died on his lips, unfinished.

Sylvia tried to conserve ammunition with the next burst. She held it to seven rounds so she would have more slugs for the second Death Eater. Because Pangborn was falling backwards, three of those seven rounds entered his cranium. He was dead from several causes before he hit the ground.

One round from her second burst passed by the first attacker and hit the second in his left shoulder. This was Arbuthnot Pew. Pew was a *very* experienced Death Eater and a skilled duelist. He would not panic in battle and his reflexes were finely honed.

"Expelliarmus!" and the machine pistol went flying out of the woman's hands.

Pew had been sent to this house because it was known that the young witch would be here. He felt his experience was wasted on a student, but she had been trained in defense by Harry Potter. Potter had faced the Dark Lord on more than one occasion and lived. Pew had taken no chances and had sent Pangborn in first. He'd considered the young Death Eater as "expendable." However, Pangborn's suggestion of using the doorbell - an idea from the one year of Muggle Studies the lad had told no one of - *had* brought the young witch into easy range.

The pain in Pew's shoulder was blinding, so he raised his wand to ease his suffering. After all, the woman had not only lost her weapon, she had fallen on her face as the gun flew out of her hands. He could take a moment to relieve his agony before killing the two of them.

Big mistake.

Sylvia Granger's self-defense tactics were in the best tradition of the SAS. You do not have to defend yourself from someone who is dead.

She had not fallen. She took a flying roll to confuse her attacker and came up feet first into Pew. Her left foot hit him first, right in his face. His nose was broken and the pain in his shoulder was forgotten. Then Mrs. Granger's right foot connected with Pew's stretched neck.

He wouldn't last long unless an emergency tracheotomy was performed. The mother lion had seen her cub attacked, and merciful first-aid was not in her plan. Sylvia took Pew's wand, broke it, and stabbed him with the sharpest end.

Sylvia took a deep breath and decided she would be scandalized by her actions later. She turned and ran to Hermione's side and started to lift the heavy door off of her. Her daughter had a look of shock on her face. Hermione's sweet mother, who baked cookies with her, tucked her in, and told her bedtime stories, had just killed two Death Eaters in less than thirty seconds.

"POP. POP." Mrs. Granger turned and saw the largest wizard she had ever seen pointing his wand at her. She realized she would probably not save her life or her daughter's, but Steph had told her to refuse to give up until several minutes after she had died. After all, by all conventional wisdom in this *highly* unconventional scenario, she should have died long before this.

As she launched herself towards the first wizard, it registered in the back of her mind that Hermione was shouting her name.

---

Thankfully, Bill Weasley was closest to Steph Granger. It wasn't that Mad-Eye Moody couldn't have

blocked the thrown knife, but he had to see the knife to block it. Moody appeared facing in the wrong direction to see the blade coming at them.

Bill had learned a wordless wand flick charm to deal with sharp projectiles instantly hurled his way. The dangers of going into newly discovered chambers below pyramids were not limited to ancient and unknown curses. Poisonous darts were a fifth century B.C. Egyptian favorite.

Steph was on his way to attack the wizards by hand as soon as he released his knife. Bill went into a defensive posture and was about to stun him when Mad-Eye pushed Bill's wand down and lowered his own.

"Steph. We are friends of Hermione." The familiar use of his first name, the lowered wands, and the cautious friendliness in the words from this very odd looking, older wizard stopped Granger. He assumed an attack posture right before them. They were not wearing the Death Eating Clown masks.

"I am Bill Weasley. My brother Ron is a friend of Hermione's. Notice the red hair," he said as he swung his ponytail around to make the obvious even more so.

In one fluid motion, Mr. Granger stooped to grab his knife and reinserted it into his arm sheath. All of a sudden, a terrifying thought occurred to the dentist and he nearly shouted, "My family!"

"We have sent two of our best there to protect them." Moody spoke as if the subject was closed. They were walking towards the bodies but Steph was still looking at the two wizards warily.

Steph patted his hip where he kept his phone and started looking around saying, "Where's my mobile?"

Bill noticed the device and called " Accio Mobile!" Bill gingerly handed the blood covered mess to Granger who grabbed it as if nothing was different about it from any other day. He speed dialed home and received a busy signal. The phone at his house had been disabled in the fracas. Absentmindedly he put it on his belt clip with a distant look on his face.

"Can you vanish us there or something?"

Bill looked at Moody who spoke, "It is called Apparation. Normally we would need permission to Disapparate a Muggle, but I do not care about that under these circumstances. But Granger, it is very dangerous for you. It's a 50/50 proposition that you will be hurt in some way with only two of us trying to Apparate you there."

"Let's do it!" His desperation was obvious.

"I do not recommend it. I sent two of my best..."

In a flash that impressed the rarely impressible Mad-Eye Moody, the Fairbairn was at his throat, tip pressed at his jugular.

Moody's mad eye was whirling and even though Granger was terrified because of that eye, he did not

show it. Moody frowned for a second and then said, "I met Inspector Fairbairn once, before the war. He'd be proud of you. Put it away. You'll need the use of both hands to do this."

---

As Sylvia Granger launched herself into the air to hit the larger wizard, two things happened to lessen her vicious assault. Kingsley Shacklebolt dropped his wand and opened his hands to her. She also heard her daughter say the word "friends."

She was in the air with no way to stop, but now she did not want to hurt the man she was going to collide with. He caught her wrists and stopped their heads from butting, but their bodies thudded together. Though slightly winded, she uncoiled from his reach and headed towards her daughter.

A spell had the door flying off Hermione before her mother reached her side. Mrs. Granger hesitated for a moment and plunged down beside her.

Now that this second fight had been averted, Hermione returned to the shock of seeing, at close range, her mother efficiently and dispassionately dispatch two Death Eaters. "Mum... How did you... Where did you get that... You killed..." Hermione was badly shaken and her eyes were not exactly focused, though pointed at her mother.

"Hermione. Are you all right? Don't think about those bad men. They are never going to attack anyone again. Where are you hurt?"

"Mum. Where did you learn to...?"

"Baby, don't worry about it. Your father was in the army. He taught me how to defend myself before you were born. I'll tell you all about it later. But we have to get you to a doctor."

Hermione stared into her mother's eyes for a few moments and then shook her head, took a deep breath, and said, "I'm really okay, Mum. I was dazed, but I have no broken bones or serious cuts, just a few minor scratches and bruises. I was merely immobilized by the door's weight."

Mrs. Granger quickly but expertly examined her daughter from head to toe, saw she was fine, and gave her a big hug. The girl would have several hideous bruises on her upper arms, but bruises fade.

All during this brief examination Hermione was chattering nervously as the adrenalin of the moment faded, "Mum, you were magnificent. Where did you get a machine gun and how did you learn to use it? Was that Kung Fu?"

"I'll tell you about that in a minute. Gentlemen, will you watch my daughter for a moment?"

She hurried down the hall and soon they heard obvious retching sounds. They heard the water running for a bit and then she returned. Sylvia had a bit of toothpaste on one side of her mouth, but the bloodstains distracted the viewer from that fact.

There was a loud crack, not a pop, and everyone went into action.

Sylvia Granger rolled to the machine pistol and came up with it cradled in her arms. Lupin and Shacklebolt spread out with their wands drawn. Moody and Bill Weasley came out of a circle and drew their wands as well. The most startling sight was Steph Granger, still red all over most of his upper body and face. He was squatting in an attack stance, the Fairbairn was drawn, and luridly red also.

Hermione screamed and ran to her father. "You're hurt! Don't worry. I know several blood flow stemming spells and we can get you to St. Mungo's." His daughter was still in shock, to a degree, from the multiple shocks of her parents' most recent activities. Mr. Granger looked to Moody who nodded as he lowered his wand. The knife was quickly sheathed and her father said, "This is someone else's blood. I'm not scratched, but that trip scared the...well, it scared me. My head's ringing like an all night drunk. Are you okay, Pumpkin? Syl?"

He saw the machine pistol and the bodies but no bullet holes were readily visible. He looked to Shacklebolt. Granger assumed Kingsley was the leader of this team because of his size. "Did she do this or did you handle it?"

The large Auror said, "The scariest thing about this assignment was coming face-to-face with your wife before she drew back her claws." Then to Moody, he said, "I'll go back to the Ministry and send Handlers for the bodies. Can I assume I'll find the same thing only different at his office?"

"The office was blown up with no one in it." Moody related. "In the car park below the building you'll find two Death Eaters and a mess that makes him look sparkling white. We covered them with a Disillusionment Charm but you should be able to find the scene easily. Granger had killed both of the Death Eaters with his bloody great Fairbairn knife, pun intended, before we had arrived."

Kingsley nodded and was gone in a pop.

Hermione's mind was reeling with this latest report. "Daddy, how did you kill two Death Eaters? When did you train Mummy to use a machine gun? I thought you were a medical orderly in the army." She had not called her parents "Mummy" and "Daddy" in nearly ten years.

"Not exactly, Baby. I was a field medical orderly *in the SAS* in the army. I was trained to do more than tend wounds," he said with a rueful smile.

Moody turned in all earnestness to the family, "You have time to change but not to clean up."

There was a hugely violent loud ripping crack, not a pop, and once again weapons were drawn. At the opposite end of the living room there was a mantle over a fireplace. For a second Harry Potter was poised on that mantle, bent slightly at the waist, wand drawn. He shouted in pain, fell off the mantle, and rolled on the floor. Continuing the roll and coming up onto his feet, he stepped quickly to his friend.

"Are you all right, Hermione?" He looked at the bodies, the blood, and the destruction and said, "Oh."

Once again, he had raced to the rescue when none was needed.

"Harry! How did you Apparate here? You don't know how. You're too young." Hermione never ceased to point out to Harry what he could not do. Just because Harry had *already done* what she said was impossible had never stopped her.

"I just wanted to know you were okay. I've been stupid again." He lowered his head and his voice and was about to go back into the funk he had been living in for the last few weeks.

"Nonsense!" Moody quietly roared. "Potter, your actions in this affair have been commendable." Then to all he said, "He forced us to act quicker than we ever would have. If there had been Death Eater reinforcements arriving at either scene we would have been essential. No way to know, Potter, that the Grangers are death on Death Eaters. Finest bit of non-magical fighting I have ever heard of. Would be an Order of Merlin in it for you if I have anything to say about it."

Moody looked up. "Potter, are those the seat of your trousers up there in the wall? How *did* you Apparate here?"

Harry put his hands to the seat of his trousers. His eyes widened and he began to back away from Hermione. "Erm, I tried every Apparate-sounding word as a spell I could think of but none of them worked. I finally just closed my eyes and concentrated on this living room as hard as I could. The only picture I'd ever seen of it had been taken from the view of the mantle at Christmas time. I thought I'd appear where I was looking, not where I was looking from."

Had he arrived three inches farther back, Harry would have been seriously wounded.

At that exact moment, an owl flew through the smashed door, circled Harry, dropped a sealed parchment, and swooped out. Harry opened it but knew what it said. He read it quickly and looked even lower than he had before.

"I'm to be expelled and have my wand confiscated because I used magic once again while underage."

A second owl entered the broken door, circled Moody, and dropped him a note before exiting. He opened it and reported its content.

"Shacklebolt intercepted the confiscation team and warned them of the Death Eater attacks and the chances of a second attack at this location. They were grateful for his "suggestion" that they were not needed here. He told them to report that Dumbledore would be by to explain everything soon. You are cleared for now, Potter, and you will be fully pardoned soon. But it looks like you are still on Fudge's *persona non grata* list."

Moody cleared his throat to change the subject. "I was saying before you arrived so ceremoniously, Potter, that the Grangers need to pack and leave at once. As Shacklebolt said, more Death Eaters might still appear at any moment when this lot doesn't report back. Grangers, go pack a quick bag. You can change but not wash. You can clean up soon enough where we are going."

Sylvia and Hermione wanted to protest but Steph understood right away. One word from him and his

family was back downstairs in less than five minutes with their essentials. In addition to their clothing and other personal objects, Hermione had two large book bags and her father had shouldered his dusty old chest. He was decked out in a non-descript all black outfit and was also wearing a harness waistcoat rig with a number of throwing knives attached and several bulging pockets. "More tricks of the trade," he said with a decidedly maniacal smile.

Mrs. Granger was carrying two clothing bags. She said, "What about this mess, the bodies, and the doorway?"

Lupin, Bill, and Moody pulled their wands and in ten seconds the door was repaired, the bodies were arranged on a plastic sheet, and the blood and destruction were gone.

Finally, Mr. and Mrs. Granger were amazed by an event of the day.

Moody growled once again, "You were going on holiday tomorrow so you won't be missed by neighbors, friends, or co-workers for several weeks. We'll have to watch this place to see if Voldemort *does* send others. There's a lot to ponder. You'll have to go to an Order hiding place temporarily - for your own safety. We may end up taking you to Hogwarts. I don't know."

All of a sudden, his normal eye brightened and his magical eye straightened in its socket. "What would you two think about teaching hand-to-hand combat, street fighting, and any other nasties to Aurors and Magical Law Enforcement Officers? I know I'd like to learn more about how you did this."

The senior Grangers looked at each other. They were a bit confused now that the excitement of the moment was draining off. They would feel completely exhausted in less than a half hour.

Moody saw their hesitation and assured them they need not reply right away. "Well, I'll have to talk to a number of people to arrange it - something that commonsensical is too practical to garner much Ministry support without a lot of effort. I'll ask you in a few days when you're rested and more settled. I'll know better than what's possible. You two are now on the top of Voldemort's Most Hated Muggles List regardless of whether he has such a list or not, so your options'll be limited." The three Grangers shared concerned looks.

Before they could begin asking questions, Remus Lupin urged that they leave.

"Professor Moody, how are we traveling to--...I mean the place?" Harry remembered at the last second that only Dumbledore, the Order's Secret Keeper for twelve Grimmauld Place, could give out the address.

"We are going by Knight Bus." The old Auror continued muttering to himself loudly enough for all to hear, "Never taught a minute at Hogwarts, yet dozens of teenagers come up to me and jump right into conversations I am supposed to understand."

"Oh? One second please." Hermione ran to the kitchen and came back with a water bottle and a small medicine tin. "Motion sickness pills."





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"Apparation," said Harry and Hermione in unison.

"His Apparation may have been unnecessary, but had more Death Eaters attacked us, his help may have been crucial. And his warning sent Mad-Eye Moody, surely that's a nickname, well, the four of them were essential to our escape and continued safety.

"But if you have helped in any way, Mrs. Figg, and evidently you have, then my family and I owe you a particular debt of gratitude."

Mr. Granger was still the handsome man his wife had fallen in love with years before. Mrs. Figg, a spinster, was not used to such a charming, well-spoken man expressing genuine feelings her way, regardless of the reason. She sputtered and blushed.

"Well, my pleasure... that is to say, any time... er, you and your family are welcome here any time for any reason. Please, I have a shower bath in the rear bedroom and you will want to wash up from your ordeal. I have the tea on and will have your wife bring you a cuppa. You can all clean up in whatever manner you require. Professor Dumbledore will be here soon to tell you of your arrangements for the time being. He should be here by the time you've removed--" Arabella Figg blushed to a stop.

Bill Weasley led the outside group into the room. "We are well protected for the time being, assuming not too many Death Eaters arrive." Moody closed the door behind them and cast a Silencing Charm on it for good measure. Bill continued, "Dementors would complicate matters but all of this has to hold for only an hour or two. Oh, and Harry's protection covers us here also, so we probably don't need *all* of the precautions we set."

In just over five minutes Mr. Granger was back in the living room. Harry assumed the sleeveless black jumpsuit was the same, however the blood stained white dress shirt had been replaced with a black rolled collar three-button pullover shirt. His arms were now showing and the muscles that rippled his biceps and the rest of his arms were most impressive. Harry looked at his own arms. He had muscles, but he still looked like a little boy compared to Hermione's father, when it came to upper body strength.

His self-derogatory train of thought was interrupted by the arrival of Professor Dumbledore. The headmaster huddled in whispered conversation with the two Granger parents and Hermione. Harry saw her nod her head and the four rejoined the other five.

"The Grangers now know of our headquarters and how the secret of its location is kept. They will stay there for a few days at least, until all of the ramifications of this event can be better analyzed. The Weasleys are on their way there now, to prepare for your arrival, Sylvia, Steph.

"Harry, you will not be expelled, once again, and let me thank you for coming to the rescue. I'm fearful to consider how this could have turned out." He was looking Harry in the eyes, and this visual contact was so unlike the previous year that subconsciously, Harry calmed down. "Be encouraged, Harry, that those at the Ministry of Magic who admire you, now admire you more. However, the opposite is also true."

Dumbledore then gave orders that had the Grangers, Bill Weasley, Lupin and Moody back on the Knight Bus. After the hurried goodbyes to Mrs. Figg, this took less time to accomplish than it might take to write it down.

Mrs. Figg took the tea service back into the kitchen and Harry was face to face with his mentor. That is, face to face with the man he had always viewed as his mentor, but after the events of the past year - the professor's confessions, and Harry's wild statements and accusations on the night of Sirius's death - Harry did not know what his status was now with the headmaster.

Dumbledore pulled a huge pocket watch out of his robes and looked at its twelve hands. "Harry, it has been fifty-two minutes since you left your aunt and uncle's home. Did you have his or her permission to leave?"

Harry wondered why it was important, but answered the question, "I told Aunt Petunia about my dream and she told me I should run and seek help wherever I had to. It was quite strange actually. She wanted to help me if she could." His mind's eye replayed the look of determination on his aunt's face.

"That is good, very good. Harry, as you grow closer to the age of maturity, seventeen, you need to spend less time with them each summer, but the interruption penalty is greater."

Harry's look of confusion called for a better explanation.

"This year you only need to be with them for thirty-six days - up to the day before your birthday. It was forty-six days minimum last year. Of course more than the minimum number of days adds to the power of your mother's protection, but that also becomes less of a benefit with the years.

"However, last year, every hour you were away from them without their permission added two hours to the required time in residence. This year, each un-permitted hour will cost you twelve hours."

Harry moved to stand to leave, but the elder wizard stopped him. "With your aunt's permission you are not now being penalized. I am sure she expected you to be gone for several hours at least, so we have time to talk without it costing you. How have you been, Harry?"

"Fine," came the automatic response.

"Harry, do any of your friends still believe you when you say that to them?"

For a fraction of a moment, the Boy-Who-Was-Suffering-From-Mild-Depression looked into the headmaster's eyes. The usual twinkle of mirth had been displaced by the wrinkle of concern. Harry looked away quickly and started a detailed examination of his hands.

After what seemed to Harry like ten agonizing minutes, but was actually only thirty-two seconds, the silence was broken.

"Harry, I believe you *made* your decision today regarding trusting me and going forward with my plans. I only need to hear you confirm my deductions."

Our hero looked up at his only hope, the elder wizard that he loved and despised to a degree. The curiosity in his face was obvious. "I haven't decided, Professor, whether I want to follow your plan or not. Why do you say I have?"

"Because, Harry, you could no more stay in your bedroom, or in Arabella's house today than you could flap your arms and fly home from here - although you did prove you could fly through the ether to the Grangers' - but you know what I mean.

"You *have* to be a part of the downfall of your enemy, just as you have to breathe. Fighting the battles before you is in your nature, your very being. The Sorting Hat told me that was why you were finally placed in Gryffindor. You not only are brave, you are a warrior down to your very fingertips. Not only that, you are a leader of rare capabilities for one so young, and your very self cries out to be in the thick of the battle. Therefore, I believe you are telling you that since you have to be intimately involved, you need all the help and training you can receive. Your conscious mind hasn't fully realized what your subconscious mind has been acting on ever since you arrived at Hogwarts in your first year.

"Harry, I know you helped Mr. Ollivander with his wand inventory the summer before your third year. I believe you discovered that I did the same thing in my third year, didn't you?"

Harry nodded without looking up.

"You heard the phrase, "fighting fate to achieve your destiny," I believe, and you probably also recall that in that story, fate is the will of others, placing you in a path you would not choose. Fighting Tom Riddle is *not* what you would choose. It will make you a killer, which is *not* what you would choose. It will perhaps have you lead one or more of those close to you to their deaths, which is definitely *not* what you would choose. But fight him you will, and fight him you must. That confrontation is an event that you must pass to reach your destiny. If that battle were the end you sought, it would be fate, attempting to make you into a trained murderer. But you want more from your life than just a fight, even when you win.

"On the other hand, Tom's victory, which is also *not* what you would choose, seems to be the only alternative. Do nothing and die at Tom's hands or become a killer - neither are your destiny. Neither choice would be the best use of your life in themselves. However, since one of them *must* occur, then that battle will only be an event you have to go through on the way to your true destiny."

"Professor, what is my true destiny?"

"I am sure I do not know, Harry, but I think it is whatever you would want it to be if the necessity of this fight did not exist. *You* choose your destiny. You make your way.

"Frankly, I look forward to seeing your destiny unfold. It should be exciting. Perhaps you will be a famous Auror or professional Quidditch star - maybe Minister of Magic or Hogwarts Defense Against the Dark Arts instructor. In any of those paths, or many others you could consider, you will benefit from what you will have gone through and suffered to defeat Riddle.

"All of this leads me to repeat my question in the letter you have not answered. Harry, do you trust me in all of this?"

Harry wanted to debate all of the issues and conflicts in his heart. He wanted to ask about the program Dumbledore had alluded to in his letter. He wanted all of the information, and months to think about it--

And in that moment he realized there would be no trust in a decision made months from now with every shred of information he wanted. He knew the decision was not about a program or battle, or victory or defeat. He would have to trust Dumbledore, the one person he had trusted the most and who had helped him the most. The one person who said that he, Dumbledore, had killed Sirius and had failed Harry the worst.

But that wasn't true. Dumbledore at most was guilty of bad judgment - a series of seemingly small bad decisions that left Harry uninformed about terrible things that he mostly did not want to know. Small decisions that proved to be watershed events. And Harry realized that he, Harry Potter, was guiltier of bad judgment more than anyone he had ever known.

Of all of those who loved him in the wizarding world, there was no one, not Hermione, or Ron, or any Weasley for that matter, who he trusted more than Albus Dumbledore - even in light of the professor's failures and faults. After all, he was still human as well as the greatest wizard alive.

So Harry wondered, what was stopping him from committing his trust? The answer was stupid childish pride.

Harry swallowed and rose. Dumbledore followed his example. "Of course I trust you, Professor, I guess, for a little bit there, I just didn't trust *me* to trust you." With that, he embraced the headmaster, and felt the tightness in his chest loosen just a little more.

There was great emotion in Dumbledore's voice when he addressed Harry, once they'd sat down. "Harry, this was a breakthrough for you today that will begin to help you recover from the horrors of your life, but it is only a start. You will awaken from nightmares about Sirius for years to come, just like you've dreamed about your parents and Cedric - and Tom will have had nothing to do with it.

"This is war! We have to battle on in spite of the scars left by death, trauma, and torture." The headmaster visibly calmed himself. He continued after a moment, "I dream often about the demise of good friends from my fight against Grindelwald fifty years ago, and even from the vampire wars of my youth, which happened over a hundred and thirty years ago.

"I can hope for no more scars and trauma for you, but I can no more promise you that than I could have given you a happy life thus far. I am sad to say, that in all likelihood, your life will become worse, before it improves. What I wouldn't give to make that statement false.

"But Harry, I have fought in many fights, battles, and wars. The program I have planned for you is the best I can devise, and I have the help of many experienced warriors from different parts of the world in its creation. There is an unveiling that I cannot interrupt for you, but let me give you hope, let me



give you a timetable.

"Starting tomorrow, you will meet with three visitors. Please come here to Arabella's at 10:00 in the morning for the first visitor. He will tell you when to expect the next one.

"After their time with you, I believe you will better understand what we face and how to face it. Then, I will start you in the program. There is some preliminary paperwork that must be handled, and then you will begin. I hate to be so mysterious, but then trust has to have an element of the unknown or what's to trust? But mostly time restrictions prevent me from telling you now. But soon, Harry, soon. Three or four days at most, I promise.

"Now, a very contrite Mundungus Fletcher stands in the front garden under an Invisibility Cloak, ready to escort you back to your aunt's. Tell them whatever you think is best without lying to them about this afternoon, and please get a good night's sleep."

They stood, and Harry looked up at his mentor. Dumbledore looked into his eyes for a moment, and Harry thought that there just might be a tear stillborn in one eye. The taller, older wizard of legend, fame, and a Chocolate Frog Card, looked away.

"Harry, permit an old fool who has failed you more than any other to tell you that he is proud of you, no prouder than if you were my own son."

Before a dumbstruck Harry could open his mouth to respond, Dumbledore very quietly Disapparated from the room, leaving the lad staring at empty space.

"Harry," Mrs. Figg entered the room. "Mundungus placed a Shrinking Charm on a basket of pumpkin pasties fresh out of the oven for you to sneak back into your room. I have burned his ears for leaving you, and he is ready to escort you back whenever you wish. I think you're near the time you must leave. Please come visit me, with your aunt's permission of course, when things are a little less exciting, perhaps."

Harry thanked the elderly Squib for all of her help, and he forgave Dung several times during the two-minute walk to number four, Privet Drive.

Had it not been for his aunt's whispered, "Is everything all right?" Harry might have guessed his relatives had been *Obliviate* d regarding the afternoon's excitement.

Dinner was quick and soundless, and sleep was peaceful for the first time in many nights. But he still missed Sirius.

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Breakfast with Uncle Vernon the next day was an exercise in avoidance. Harry's uncle did not want to

hear anything about magic and still made that clear, but he hinted around wanting to know about the outcome of Harry's rescue efforts.

Aunt Petunia helped by changing the subject away from an explanation. Harry looked into her eyes and saw that she was not angry, upset, or even disgusted by the subject. When Vernon turned to Dudley after her third distraction from the Grangers, she actually winked at Harry.

He would have been less surprised if she had slapped him instead of winking at him. But soon he too saw the humor in his uncle wanting to know about what he didn't want to know about.

After receiving his aunt's permission to leave the house, Harry arrived at Mrs. Figg's at five minutes to ten. Before knocking on the door, he noticed a note pinned to it.

*Gone for the day.*

He read it and then strongly felt that he needed to look on its back in case there were special instructions for him.

There was nothing written on the back, but two seconds after he had turned it around, additional handwriting, in someone else's hand, appeared.

*Harry, come to the back garden.*

Around back, Harry found Remus Lupin pitching a tent.

Though Harry had not been seen, his question did not startle Lupin. "Do you need help with that, Professor?" Because of nearby Muggles, Harry had once helped Arthur Weasley pitch a tent by hand at the Quidditch World Cup.

The former DADA instructor paused, smiled weakly at Harry and said, "Oh, hello. No, I have it. I am just trying to decide if this is the best place for it."

Harry was glad to see Lupin. They had always had a good relationship. He had at first assumed that the werewolf's coolness had to do with his indecision about the final location for the tent. Then Harry remembered that he was responsible for the death of Lupin's last school chum.

"There we go, Harry, a nice tent to shade us from the sun and a Cooling Charm to lower the temperature of this blistering day. It's not near August, but you'd think so with this heat."

He swirled his wand again and cast two quick spells. Two comfortable looking lawn chairs appeared under the tent, seen through the nearly transparent insect-proof mesh siding. Harry also saw a cooler with butterbeer bottles. The frosty look of the bottles indicated there must be a Chilling Charm applied.

They entered the tent and made themselves comfortable. The chairs looked like typical lawn furniture but were as comfortable as any cozy armchair in the Gryffindor common room. The butterbeer tasted to Harry like it would have frozen in moments if it had not made it to his mouth instead.

They stared at Mrs. Figg's small garden and flower trellis for a moment and Harry decided to start the conversation. Though he had feared that Remus Lupin might have blamed him for Sirius's death, regardless of what the former professor had said during the heat of battle at the Department of Mysteries and at the train station, the fact was that Lupin was here to help him, so Harry thought the situation must be different.

"Er, Professor, I was afraid that you might blame me for Sirius' death. But now you're here to help me. I just want to - to thank you very much."

"You are welcome, Harry. Perhaps you should call me, Remus, or Moony if you would feel more comfortable with it, at least when we are in private or among friends. Circumstances have, and will throw us together more and more as peers in this war."

Harry smiled, but was also a bit curious at this statement, but the words and his curiosity vanished in a blink with Lupin's next sentence.

"Oh, and I *do* blame you for Sirius' death."

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### ***The Night Before -***

The Knight Bus appeared on the opposite side of the street from twelve, Grimmauld Place, and two houses down. They had off loaded everyone else on the bus before making this stop. Stan Shunpike had a bright red bandana covering his eyes so he would not recognize the area. Ernie had taken off his glasses so he would not be able to later describe this non-descript part of town. By this time darkness had fallen. Mad-Eye Moody had Disapparated at the last stop so he could be there waiting to open the door as quickly as possible. He had already used the Put Outer on the streetlights.

"Welcome to - erm, where-evers you're goin' and - 'ey! how'm I supposed to 'elp you wiv your trunk an' baggage?"

"We don't need any help, Stan," said Bill firmly. "Stay seated. Ernie, when you leave here pop out to a deserted country road somewhere and then please, put back on your glasses. Thank you for your

help, gentlemen, and if you know what's good for you, you'll forget any of this ever happened. Unless you fancy a Death Eater trying to interrogate you."

Stan gulped nervously but said nothing. When she passed him, Hermione noticed one of his multitudinous pimples had just popped under the stress of Bill's admonition.

They ran to the door and Mr. and Mrs. Granger stopped in mid stride when the house appeared out of seemingly nowhere once they reached the correct visual angle.

Sylvia Granger entered first and Steph Granger insisted that his daughter go next. His left arm, the arm with the sleeve holder for his Fairbairn knife, held the small still dusty trunk on his shoulder. In the darkened foyer, Hermione tripped over the troll foot umbrella stand, which had been moved to the other side of the hallway so no one would trip over it.

The shouting started. "Muggles--"

The portraited Mrs. Black's tirade on the indignity of having Muggles in her home for the first time since Muggle hunting had been outlawed was cut mercifully short. Molly and Arthur Weasley, who were there to help make the Grangers more comfortable with their new environs, stopped silently in their tracks, as did everyone else in the hallway.

His preferred knife temporarily unavailable, Steph Granger had, with lightning reflexes, pulled one of his throwing knives from his battle vest and stabbed the picture of Mrs. Black right in her throat. It had not killed her, since she was not alive, but it did succeed in causing her to vanish from the picture. As long as that knife stayed embedded in the canvas, she no longer inhabited the frame.

Kreacher saw everything and went screeching from the foyer to his hidey-hole in the basement. Each morning for weeks he would look in the hallway, screech a hideous cry of anguish for his mistress, and disappear again. Within one week of the last of the summer residents leaving for other, more permanent dwellings, Kreacher never came out again.

The stunned silence in the foyer broke when Arthur Weasley stepped forward, offering his hand to the former SAS member. "We are glad you are here, Sylvia, Steph. Welcome to the headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix. Welcome back, Hermione. Looks like we owe you, Steph, for another service to us. No one's ever been able to quiet her so quickly before."

As Molly Weasley moved forward to extend her greetings, she was nearly knocked over.

Ron Weasley shouted "Hermione!" as he rushed past his parents and picked Hermione up in his arms. "Thank God you're safe!" he exclaimed as he swung her around. After setting her back down, and with no hesitation at all, he pulled her to him for a decidedly *not-just-friends* passionate kiss.

"About blinking time." Ginny Weasley's voice was heard even though the foyer was too crowded to see her.

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*The Day After Harry's Chat with Dumbledore* - "I'm here to see my father, Lucius Malfoy."

In spite of the circumstances, in spite of the location, Draco Malfoy had succeeded in sounding as imperious as he had when he'd walked through Diagon Alley behind his father at the height of Lucius Malfoy's power as a wealthy member of the magical community. Draco's bravado sounded genuine. But the fear and hesitation in his eyes probably gave him away to the prison official he faced.

The witch behind the desk drew her wand so quickly and cast the Tripping Hex so swiftly, that Draco was not aware what had happened until he was picking himself up off of the floor. The sight of the wand and the words of the hex caused him to step back and trip, as had apparently been planned.

She 'thunked' over to him on a pegged leg. She stood a head taller than him, causing him to falter as he tried to rise. She was broad and ancient appearing, but he would never underestimate her speed again.

She puffed on her long handled pipe. A noxious odor confirmed its presence in the room as she exhaled down towards the boy. Her raspy voice indicated a lifetime of smoke inhalation. "Let *me* introduce *myself*, young Death Crapper spawn, since you've been so condescending as to honor me with your name. I am Pigeonelle Parkhurst. Pigeonelle Bent *Diggory* Parkhurst. I'm a fourth cousin once removed to Cedric Diggory. My first husband died fighting Grindelwald, and my second husband and only son died fighting Death Eaters in You-Know-Who's first reign of terror."

She hacked up something nasty and spat towards the floor, intentionally it seemed to Draco, hitting his robe. "Your father may have escaped going to prison the last time, but this time -" She appeared to relish the next words, and took her time before continuing slowly, "I believe everything Harry Potter said in the *Quibbler* about the night my distant cousin was murdered. Your *father*," she spoke the last word in a poor imitation of Draco's snobbish tones, "may he slow roast in Perdition with a dementor turning the spit, was there that night, on the wrong side."

"If I didn't enjoy keeping company with him and his little pals here in the Savoy Azkaban, I'd kill him with my bare hands. It would almost be worth the prison stay for myself."

Then she smiled a chilling smile. "If you want to see him, I can arrange it, but you'll take a little tour first."

Draco's visit had been arranged by the Ministry of Magic, and Cornelius Fudge had signed the permission order himself, but Draco was pragmatically Slytherin enough to not insist further on anything at this time - he felt sure the woman before him had gone mad, but leaving indignantly would not serve his purpose. He knew he did not have, and would not gain the upper hand here today.

The tour was not a tour at all - it was visit to a house of horrors to rival old Bedlam - with magical grotesqueries added. She showed him what she called a typical holding cell - pen she called it. The

walls were damp and mildew-ridden. The amenities - a mattress, a bucket, and a tap over a hole in the floor - instilled more dread in Draco than any of the other spots on their tortured way through the prison. The kitchen was barely sanitary if one didn't look too closely. The smell was revolting to Draco. The food did look edible, but just barely so.

Warden Parkhurst took Draco near the sole remaining dementor at Azkaban, and let the vile creature swirl its evil, invisible tentacles of hopelessness and despair around the young man's mind for what felt like an eternity to the fifteen-year-old.

His worst memory was the afternoon he had spent in the family dungeon at the age of eight. For punishment, the nanny had taken him down to a cell and locked him in while his parents were out. She had done nothing to him, but unknown to her, at bedtime his father had been reading to him from the journal of a distant progenitor, Klanter Malfoy, and his hunting and torturing of Muggles and Mudblood witches and wizards. Eight-year-old Draco's fear-filled imagination had conjured up his own similar tortures, and he'd waited in terror all through that afternoon, expecting those things to begin happening to him at any moment. Though the nanny had been dismissed immediately (and Draco thought his father might have had her killed) it was those memories of his torture that had never happened, that ran rough-shod through his mind as the dementor's tendrils of torment caressed his mind. That, and the never before realization, that stories of his father's service of the Dark Lord, had included torturing Mudbloods and Muggles in those same chambers.

When they left the dementor's chamber, Parkhurst took him back to her office. The next few moments were the oddest of his visit, but not the worst. She pushed him into a chair, rather gently. She took a glass from a tray, poured it one-third the way with firewhiskey from a bottle, and filled the glass to the top with water.

She walked to Draco, shoved the glass into his hand, and insisted he drink. He only hesitated momentarily - he knew he needed something. The firewhiskey burned in spite of the water. It did not have the restorative properties of chocolate, but it did settle Draco. He actually thanked her.

He stood and felt he could ask, "I thought all of the dementors had abandoned Azkaban?" Curiosity got the better of him.

She answered him civilly enough. "For some reason that one stayed," she said with her smoker's raspy voice. Then, she seemed to remember herself. "We've made sure it has its fill of mind feeding. I personally take him to visit your father each day." She spat again, but Draco dodged the disgusting projectile this time.

Warden Parkhurst brought Draco to a door no different from any other door he had seen - none had any number, name, or any other means of identifying its occupant. It was a cell like the one he had been in, but was in a more secure part of the prison. She wordlessly waved her wand and the door creaked open.

Though it had only been a few weeks, Malfoy senior had noticeably lost weight while incarcerated. His white blond hair had lost its luster and now showed much more gray than ever before. He needed a shave, and the existing facial hair would never make a handsome beard. Lucius had sparse and

random hair wisps on his face at unattractive locations, and great gaps of 'no hair' elsewhere.

His father rose from the floor slowly and wobbled as he did so. Draco moved to help him and was thrown back by a spell he had not seen cast. Parkhurst chuckled in her gruff smoke generated half-laugh/half-cough.

For the slightest moment there was a look Draco hoped he recognized as concern and compassion for him in his father's eyes. But it could have been the visual disparities that occurred when fumes from the pipe clouded his eyes with their pungency. Their minder was smoking like a mismanaged cauldron.

The elder Malfoy did nod and his son returned the nod. Then Lucius raised himself to what little regal bearing he could muster and said, "Madam Parkhurst, might I pass along to my son the Malfoy family ring? It is quite valuable, and he was to receive it on his sixteenth birthday in a few days. May he have it?"

"You're *not* supposed to have any personal possessions with you in there." She was furious and both Malfoys cringed slightly. "Place it on the palm of your left hand and hold it out."

The prisoner obeyed. Parkhurst performed a variation of a Summoning Charm and the ring floated slowly across the distance dividing them until the midpoint. There, the ring stopped in midair. It vibrated and danced like a bead of water on a hot surface. It finally passed through whatever barrier existed there and continued five feet towards her where it stopped again in midair. She performed several analysis spells on the ring while the father and son ignored her and stared silently at each other.

"Why thank you, you black-hearted human manticore. This will bring a pretty Knut to apply to the relief fund for those distressed by you and your Death Crappers."

But, Madam--" Draco said as he moved towards her, but her wand was out and pointed at his left eye.

"One step closer, whelp, and you'll feel the curse your father has used so often to torture others. Want to see *Crucio* applied to your son, murderer?"

"Step back, Draco! Please... Madam..."

Draco muttered under his breath and the warden wheezed/chuckled again as she rubbed the ring on her robe sleeve as if to polish it, before placing it in the front pocket of her robe.

"Son... Draco. Did your mother tell you of her visit two days ago?"

"Three or four days ago," snarled Parkhurst.

"She did, Father," said the boy.

There was silence as the father and son looked at each other again.

"I am sorry to see you in these conditions, Father. Is there anything...?"

Lucius waved his hand dismissively, "Serving the Dark Lord is all the thanks I need. I escaped this service last time, and it is only right that-"

Draco almost shouted his interruption, "What?! You think this is a privilege? Why hasn't he tried to release you? If he's all that powerful as you say, why doesn't he come and...?"

"Draco." There was a bit of sharpness in Lucius' voice, almost as though he was talking to a misbehaving child before peers, not this disgusting warden. "You will speak with reverence of our Lord."

"Reverence? Do you pay homage to the one who leaves you here? You've never treated your worst servant... You never treated Dobby this badly at *his* worst. You've done so much for the Dark Lord over the years. This is his repayment-"

"Draco! You *will* curb your tongue. You will speak with respect of my master. He has a glorious plan and vision. And those of us... We who serve faithfully and don't displease him - we will be those who serve at his right and his left. Imagine a Mudblood-free and half-blood-free world, where we can hunt Muggles as we please..." Lucius looked off loftily, thinking of the day.

"Father! That's all well and good, but you're rotting here for one failure in serving Voldemor-"

"NEVER... speak his name, Son. You must speak of our Dark Lord in a more respectful manner. He provides an opportunity to serve him - nothing else. WE must prove our worthiness. The slightest failure and- well, we must pay for our failures. Our service must be worthy of him. He is perfect-"

"Perfect?" Draco snarled. "He has failed as many times as any, maybe more. You, Father, never let a baby defeat you. You never left a scar-headed half-blood the hero of the wizarding world-"

Both shouted at each other for several long moments trying to push forward their opinions.

"You have been left here to rot and be tortured by this...this lot." His derision was evident, and obviously aimed at Parkhurst. But she said nothing.

"After years of splendid service, you have failed him in this little thing, and he punishes you like this. I remember your stories of the Cruciatus Curses placed on those of his *loyal* servants that failed in small things. You never told me, but... Father, how many times has he placed that curse on you?"

Lucius said nothing. Draco knew his father could not answer that one, so the lad said, "Too exhausted to answer in a way to cover your Lord's cruelty to the faithful, aren't you? How long will he curse me if Potter catches the Snitch this fall, Father? If I get fewer O.W.L.s than Potter, or many more less than Granger, that wretched yet brilliant Mudblood, how many minutes, hours, days will I writhe in agony? Is that the privilege of service I can look forward to? Is that your joy, Father?"

The degree of cruelty of the accusations and spite could only come from family members that knew each other so well. Draco attacked everything about the Dark Lord and Lucius spewed his dreck at



his son and Dumbledore. He finally called Draco a Harry Potter sycophant and the boy exploded. The boy's string of profanity showed the father he had been practicing. Draco lurched at the barrier and was knocked to the floor. Parkhurst helped him stand. The lad rose, continuing his diatribe against his father's ungrateful master.

Lucius had a stunned look on his face, but as Draco stumbled in his tirade, the senior Malfoy recovered his bearing - the air of the divine right of kings. "How *dare* you, mother's boy, I should have whipped you every chance I had instead of letting your mother mollycoddle you. You're *soft*, you're *spoiled*, and you are no use to the new order if you cannot earn your way through the pain." The father placed a bizarre expression on his face. His voice became chillingly psychotic. "As to the pain, well, the Dark Lord uses it to *cleanse us*; it *purifies*..."

"Father, I do not want to serve such a one..."

*"The pain makes us new..."*

"I'll *kill* the one who did this to you, Father," Draco said quietly but clearly.

Lucius looked up with a deranged smile on his face. He hissed, "That's it, Draco. That's it, Son. Kill Potter, kill him! And kill Dumbledore as well, the old fool. Then we will serve the master together...a team we'll be-"

"No, Father, not them. Your *Imperfect* Lord did this to you, by not rescuing-"

Lucius snapped - or erupted - but the timing was in a snap - an eruption takes too long. "***YOU'LL NOT TALK ABOUT MY LORD THAT WAY!!***"

Malfoy senior hurled himself upon the protective barrier and it was as if breaching a high voltage Muggle electric barrier had been attempted. Sparks and lights flashed and he was hurled against the opposite wall, and landed in a crumpled heap.

Lucius' head lolled to one side. He was awake but there was no way to know if he understood or even heard his son's parting words.

"Well, Father, *you* foolishly follow your Dark Lord into oblivion. Even if he wins, you'll spend your days kissing the hem of his robe whenever he is not torturing you. I would rather die than serve a master that doesn't care for his minions better than this.

"Slytherins are supposed to be practical enough to care for their followers and provide spoils and privileges to the faithful. You follow a murdering madman who wants it all and rewards you with torture, prison, and death."

Parkhurst was wide-eyed and slack-jawed in amazement. Draco turned to the door and did not look back. "Open this door, now, Madam." The imperious tone of voice had returned, but the warden obeyed rather than chastise the boy. Draco led the warden back to the Floo fireplace in the secured part of the prison for travel back to the Ministry of Magic's secured entry fireplace.

He said nothing and no one said anything to him. The angry look on his severely reddened face made him look like he was steaming. It just might have been tears steaming off of his face.

Draco arrived at Malfoy Manor and ignored his mother as he stormed up to his room. The Malfoy family ring, which he had pick-pocketed from Pigeonelle Parkhurst's robe during the scuffle, went into a special secret drawer in his wardrobe, one with a blood seal on it.

He sat at his desk and pulled out quill, ink, and parchment. He almost began to write but stopped and stared out of the window onto the grounds of Malfoy Manor. He looked at the place out near the barns where his father had taught him how to fly on a broom. He next gazed at the Fencing Stadium, a building that had existed on the manor for over three hundred years. That was where his father had taught him how to wizard duel, and a number of other useful spells, jinxes, curses and charms, all of various shades of darkness. Contributions to the right charities had bribed Cornelius Fudge into a release of the Underage Magic restrictions for Draco Malfoy only, making that training possible. It had made the father and son's time together all the more enjoyable because of the joy of doing what was technically illegal and denied others.

Draco turned and swept everything from his desktop. He began knocking books and knickknacks off of shelves and table. He screamed at the top of his lungs, but only the house-elf responsible for maintaining the Children's Wing of the Manor heard him, and she quaked in her cupboard. Draco cursed with every word and every combination of profane words he could imagine. He spewed damnation on a master that would cause such a rift between father and son.

Though she was unable to hear any of her son's noise or oaths, Narcissa Malfoy quietly cried in her sitting room in the Master's Wing of the manor.

Draco calmed himself and retrieved the writing tools from the floor. Even before calling the house-elf to clear the debris from the maelstrom he had just been, he began to write.

*Dear Professor Dumbledore,  
I have just arrived home from Azkaban Prison...*

---

***From the Journal of Pigeonelle Parkhurst***

*Today, either my planned act went too far, or finally went far enough. The son of a Death Eater arrived, and in the manner I treat all their offspring, I was as rough as possible. I'm of a retirement age as we've discussed before, my journal, so I care little who might report me or complain. As I have told you, I do this in hopes of scaring even one of them away from joining You-Know-Who.*

*It is a very Slytherin plan to use Slytherin tactics on the little heirs of Slytherin Death Eaters. Today it either worked on Draco Malfoy, or they've started a Drama Department at Hogwarts...*

---

In an infirmary cell in what was the worst governmental prison in the world, an incarcerated white-blond/gray-haired wizard with his back to the door shed very uncharacteristic tears.

---

*Lupin said, "Oh, and I do blame you for Sirius' death."*

Harry gulped and hoped his ears had misinformed him.

"Beg pardon?" Could he have just heard what he thought Remus Lupin had just said?

"Harry, these three visits are not to make you feel better; they are to prepare you for war. You're going to be a leader in this fight, and leaders hold the responsibility for others' lives. You have to face the consequences of your actions, because you *will* lead others into positions where they might be hurt or killed. It is a sobering necessity of war."

"I *don't* want to be a leader," the boy spat. "I never want to lead anyone against Death Eaters or Voldemort again." Harry was avoiding tears only because of his white hot anger.

Remus had been looking down at his hands. He turned sharply to look at Harry, and the lad was compelled to look his way also. "Well, then you're lying - and you're a fool, as well as guilty. And your decision will cause many more of your friends to die too soon, and all of them to be killed in the end."

Now our hero was beyond stunned. How could his father and mother's last friend treat him this way? He was about to stand and leave but the weary werewolf's next words stopped him.

"Do I have your attention now? Will you listen to me?"

Remus grabbed the arms of his chair, Disapparated with it, and Apparated to where he was staring right into Harry's face. Harry leaned back but was stopped from going too far. Remus placed his hands on Harry's chair to prevent the lad from moving it away. Leaning forward like this, Lupin made

Harry even more uncomfortable.

"I have accused you, boy, of being a liar, a fool, guilty of a good man's death, of causing the future premature death of your friends, and the ultimate death of them all. I'll let go of your chair if you will sit back and listen, *really listen* to what I am going to say. No interruptions, just a nod now and then in polite conversation. Do you agree?"

"But- -"

"*I said* only a nod," Lupin almost shouted.

Harry was afraid now; had someone drunk Polyjuice Potion and taken his kindly former professor's place? What really bothered him was that he knew that no such potion had been consumed.

He finally nodded, and Lupin relaxed the grip on Harry's chair. The former professor moved his lawn chair back a bit and leaned back. The comfortable distance between them was restored and Harry did not move his chair at all.

"It hurts me, Harry, to treat you this way, but I need you to concentrate on what I am saying. I need you to listen to all of it and not take the first thing or two I say and think about them, ignoring the next items on my list. Am I being clear?"

Harry nodded and focused very intently. Remus relaxed, which calmed Harry, but he did not lose focus.

"I said that you got Sirius killed and I meant it, but you are not the only one. Dumbledore wants to take all the blame on himself, and Ron and Hermione want to blame Bellatrix Lestrange. Albus and Bella do hold some blame and so do I, but we're talking about you right now.

"If you had learned Occlumency, you would have never gone there in the first place. By not cooperating with Professor Snape, you messed up." Harry started to open his mouth to protest, but Remus eyed him so sharply the boy closed his mouth instantly. "That is more Severus's fault than yours. He's the grown up and you are the child. I thought the word child would rile you, but you're being petulant like a five year-old, not even a fifteen year-old. Of course Snape was being a vindictive bast-, well, let me say that I will have a similar conversation with him soon, and it will make this look like a tea party for three year-old girls. But that doesn't excuse you. You had plenty of good counsel and those you respected told you to learn Occlumency regardless of the cost to you. You knew Snape would bait you, and you let him, just like you do in class. Well, this war is more important than any O.W.L or N.E.W.T grade. All of your superiors should have behaved themselves better, Snape and Fudge included.

"Nevertheless, you will always meet grownups and others in authority over you that will be petty and churlish - that's no excuse for you to act likewise. Harry, this is war! Keep your eye on the goal. In war you tolerate and cooperate with your worst enemies so you can defeat the *real* enemy.

"You could no more NOT go to Sirius' rescue, than he could NOT go to yours. But you should have

listened and learned Occlumency. You should have listened to Hermione. She's someone you led in this fight, but she is not called the smartest witch in her generation because she is good at playing Gobstones.

"I know, you're thinking that you are not in command over Hermione, or Ron, or Neville, Ginny, and Luna. You're wrong, there, particularly when anything regarding defense is concerned, but at other times also. You did right to take them with you and you led them well. Had Sirius been captive there, you would have needed their help. Wanting to go alone or with just Ron or Hermione would have cost their two lives and probably yours also.

"So now you know why I think you are responsible for Padfoot's demise. Now let me tell you who else is to blame. I am."

Harry's eyes grew even wider if possible. Lupin looked back down at his hands for several long moments and Harry said nothing.

"Had I gone to Snape about the stopped lessons like I had said I would, you might have learned to block the dreams. I learned from Hermione last night about *how* Snape taught you. That wasn't teaching, that was sink-or-swim - a poor method for teaching if one at all. It was stupid and cruel to assault you like that and not show you how to defend yourself. Oh, he told you to clear your mind, but that's like saying don't think about a hippogriff; of course a hippogriff is the only thing you can think of if I say don't think about one.

"So you're to blame and Dumbledore's to blame as well as Snape. Well, so am I. I'm also to blame for not spending more time with Sirius. He was obsessed with preparing to help you, but he became more and more irrational each day. When Snape called to warn that you had left Hogwarts, I should have knocked Sirius unconscious with my bare fists to keep him from the Ministry.

"The ultimate blame for his death goes to Voldemort and Bellatrix, and Peter for bringing Voldemort back from his half death. But you and I aren't going to accept that and move on without torturing ourselves some more. But there's one more person to blame for his death."

Lupin looked down at his hands once more, and Harry guessed that he was not going to like the next words at all.

"Sirius is also to blame for his death." The silence accompanying those words was suffocating. "There he was, cavalierly laughing while dueling with a Death Eater, one of Voldemort's favorites, and a known deadly duelist. But Bella was a woman and Padfoot's cousin, so he never took her seriously. He was playing with her, toying with fancy spells rather than putting her out of the fight. It was dangerous to you and the other children, to all of the Order members present, and fatally dangerous to himself.

"He was always such a champion duelist, never lost to anyone in school other than James, and then he won as often as your father. But Sirius always had to show off in school, and he made a game of it the one time we fought together in the first war with Voldemort. And there he was, swanning around that night in the Department of Mysteries like we were in Dueling Club again."

Lupin let his head fall into his hands, and though there was no sound of a sob and no moisture in his eyes, when he raised his head moments later, Harry knew his old professor's sadness was profound.

"Harry, a number of people are to blame, but dwelling on it will not bring him back or defeat our enemies. I've awakened every night since that night, seeing him fall again and again through that veil. I'll dream that dream for the rest of my life and probably feel terrible when I dream it less often. You probably dream similar dreams."

Lupin looked for an answer and Harry only nodded as he had been asked to do.

"Dwelling on those dreams is not going to end this war. It's not going to save our friends from similar deaths. Only moving on and preparing to fight will do that. And that's all that matters."

They both stared off into the distance for a moment. Lupin raised his empty butterbeer and wordlessly gave Harry an inquiring look. Harry nodded and Lupin called two fresh bottles to them. Their lids popped off on the way to their hands.

"Let's see. I also called you a fool for not being willing to lead others against Death Eaters or Voldemort. The fact is, Harry, at fifteen, almost sixteen, and even at eleven, you are a better leader in battle than most are. You've only become better since that first year, and the fight a few weeks ago proved it. Granted, those you led would not've been there if you hadn't taken them there, but do you think any of your friends would have survived if you hadn't been there, and if you hadn't prepared them long before that day?"

"Think about Neville's skill level before you started the DA. How long would he have survived that night without your training? Or Ginny, or Ron, or Luna? Hermione knew the spells, maybe better than you, but would she have fought well, or would she have frozen in fear when the first Death Eater Apparated into the room?"

"I also called you a liar for saying you don't want to lead people. Every part of your soul cried out that you should have been going with us to save the Grangers, didn't it? Admit it. You wanted to lead both rescue parties at the same time. I know it; I saw it in your eyes. There were four highly trained experienced wizards, two of them Aurors, and you wanted to lead them."

He looked at Harry and chuckled. "Oh. Harry. Don't blush. Leaders *want* to lead. The better the leader, the more serious the situation, the more every part of their being screams to be in the forefront. Good Lord, Harry, in two or three years, after you go through what Dumbledore has planned for you, I'm going to *want* you to lead me into any battle we might face. You just need a little more training *now* to be as good as the best of those leading now.

"But you need to admit to yourself that you are a leader and that you want to be one. Such an admission will galvanize your mind and spirit to help you go after all of the training and capabilities you can gain to be even better at it. Do you know that graduates of the Auror Academy are required to attend a minimum of three days of classes a quarter in battle tactics? They have to spend at least an hour a day, four days a week in physical training, and at least two hours a week in the dueling rooms. The better ones spend more time than that in each subject.

"All right, let's see, I also said that you would cause some of your friends' premature deaths. How can I explain this?"

"If Ron had gone off to save Ginny from the Basilisk in your second year and he had told you to forget about it, would you have sent him on and gone back to the common room? How about if he'd stunned you and left without you, would you have pouted and stayed away, or gone after him?" Without waiting for a response, Lupin went on. "No, one way or another, you would have followed, because you are his friend. But you went ahead to rescue Ginny alone. Granted, Ron couldn't go because of the rockslide, but you went, not because you were her friend at the time, but because you are that kind of person. Last night Hermione told me that she had accused you of wanting to save everyone, and she feels bad about that, but the Weasleys are all glad you are a hero for saving Ginny. And I am glad you rescued Sirius from the dementors. You gave me more time with my good friend, and paved the way to clear his name - and I thank you for that. Harry, you have been a hero since the day you received that scar, and you've been heroic ever since.

"But I'm off my point. If you don't lead them, your friends *are* going to fight the enemy anyway. Or, if you go off against Death Eaters or Voldemort alone, your friends are going to follow you, just like you'd follow after them to help them. If you don't lead them, they will get killed sooner than if you do lead them."

In some ways Harry had noticed Lupin had lightened up during some of this discussion. Now the former professor knitted his brow, a coldness entered his voice, and he leaned forward again. "Mark my words Harry. *This is war*. If it goes as long as the last war, in all likelihood some of your friends will die, or be wounded badly, or tortured, or just disappear one day. I don't wish it on them. It doesn't have to happen, but events like these happen during wars.

"But if you want to prevent their wounds or deaths, or at least prevent as much of it as you can, stay with them, help train them, learn with them, become a team member with them, and lead them in this war. Lead them. People will better survive when you are around, up front, blazing the path. Help them be the best they can be. Make Colin Creevey into a vicious mean magical fighting machine. Lead Hannah Abbot into battle, she'll survive better with the courage you inspire in her. Give Anthony Goldstein the skills and mental preparedness to face a dementor instead of freezing in fear - help him understand how to be able to generate the happiness needed to cast a Patronus Spell while his private horror is screaming in his head.

"Finally, I said that you leaving your friends would kill them all eventually - this is what I mean. You may have thought about going out right now and facing Voldemort and getting it over with. That sounds like suicide for most, but somehow, Harry, I think you might be the one to do him in, once you are better prepared.

"Based on Dumbledore's account of your fight near the fountain that night, you did well, better than I could have done, but then you have faced him before. Although, Harry, you know he would have killed you soon.

"But what if you were fully grown? What if all of your powers were released because of the physical maturity a witch or wizard reaches in their seventeenth year? And what if you have been trained by

the best available to finely hone your skills and powers? What if you have been taught the best spells, charms, and curses we can find, and you are skilled in them?

"What if then you face Voldemort? Well, you will probably still be killed."

Lupin looked into his eyes and Harry could not help blanching at these words. Did Lupin know about the prophecy? Harry was about to ask when Remus went on. "Well, if you are there all by yourself, you *will* be killed instead of Voldemort. You see, he will be there with every Death Eater he has at his beck and call. If you are not there with all of your friends and even your enemies willing to fight by your side, *you* will be killed.

"I don't know if you are the one to kill Voldemort. He might show himself tomorrow wherever Alastor Moody is, and old Mad-Eye will try to kill him for sure. And if anyone can muster up enough to kill him, it's Moody. But the most experienced Voldemort fighter is sitting here in this tent, and it's not me. You two are drawn to each other, linked perhaps by that scar. But I want you to be stronger and faster and more powerful than you are today when you two next meet.

"But, Harry, mark my words. The heart leads the head in so many ways. You must be dedicated in your heart so you can be better committed in your head to become what you can and must be. Peter Pettigrew used to go on about fate. He'd say it was Benjy Fenwick's fate to be blown to bits, or Caradoc Dearborn's fate to vanish one day without a trace. Poppycock and balderdash - or codswallop like Hagrid says. Dumbledore says that we have to fight fate's attempts to limit us so we can achieve our destinies to be the best we can be. I think talking fate was just Peter's poor attempt to divert blame from himself for what he was about to do."

Lupin was very quiet for a solid minute. Harry asked himself several times if he should say something, but he answered himself "no" each time.

Lupin finally spoke in a whisper, "Harry, you may face Voldemort, but Peter's mine."

Harry understood this sentiment immediately. He knew Mr. Diggory probably felt that way about Pettigrew also, and he, Harry, also felt that way about Bellatrix Lestrange, but not with the same passion that Bella incited in Neville.

"So, Harry, a number of people share the blame for the death of your godfather - Dumbledore, Snape, you, me, but mostly Bella and Voldemort - and Sirius himself to a degree. We will be able to mourn for the rest of our lives and wake up with nightmares of that night - and feel bad when those nightmares come less often. But first we must survive to end this war and save all our friends, and all of the innocent, including the helpless Muggles.

"Speaking of the not-so-helpless Muggles, did your uncle show you the newspaper this morning?"

"No," said Harry, "he left early this morning. Something about a big contract."

"Well, then you haven't seen this." He handed Harry the same daily Muggle paper his uncle read. Below the fold on the front page there was a headline:



## Dentist's Office/Meth Lab Explosion

Harry looked up. "What's a Meth Lab?" He had not read beyond the headline.

"Methamphetamines are particularly vile, illegal hallucinogenic drugs. For some unknown reason Muggles make them. It's not like all of the other illegal drugs and intoxicants aren't enough for self-abuse, Muggles insist on inventing new ways to destroy themselves in the name of escape and pleasure. Methamphetamines are made in a small chemical laboratory. Look at whose office the article says was a meth lab."

Harry looked down for half a moment and ripped his eyes back up in shock!

---

Steph Granger stood up, too furious to remain seated or he might spontaneously combust, or something equally impossible.

"I'll beat whoever wrote this to a bloody pulp!"

Sylvia said, sounding like Hermione, "Steph, language."

"I'm not swearing; I'm talking about real blood. I'll rip off his arm and beat him to death with it. After all we've done to build our practice. We'll lose half of our patients even if we call them all today to explain. How could they...? We had nothing in our office to lead anyone to believe..."

Albus Dumbledore walked out of the flashing green kitchen fireplace at that moment, interrupting the dentist's justifiable tirade.

"I am afraid, Steph, that the police and the newsmen have their details in order. They report accurately what they found. There was just such a despicable operation in your office when the police entered it just less than thirty minutes after the explosion."

Steph Granger looked apoplectic. He sputtered and said nothing coherent. Finally, his wife found the words, "How could that be, Professor?"

The headmaster sighed, accepted the tea Molly Weasley offered him, took one surprisingly noisy sip, and said, "When Kingsley Shacklebolt informed the proper authorities at the Ministry of Magic, the Magical Reversal Squad was dispatched to the office as a standard part of such an operation. They were not aware of how quickly the local constabulary would respond and had to stun the first police

officers on the scene. This caused the decisions about how to handle the matter to be escalated up the bureaucratic ladder.

"I believe, Miss Granger, that you have informed your parents of the less than stellar relationship we in the Order of the Phoenix have with those high up in certain parts of the Ministry?" When Hermione nodded, he continued. "Madame Bones should have made the decision, but Cornelius Fudge was informed and made sure his desires were acted on before she was notified. I have it on good authority that he personally authorized the meth lab explanation for the Muggle police officers and the press. When magical lawbreakers are found with Muggle co-conspirators, such non-magical lawbreaking is insinuated into the situation so the Muggles are properly punished, but for non-magical reasons. I dislike the practice and it *should not* have been used in this case. But we were not aware of this until the papers this morning. It is too late to prevent. We cannot *Obliviate* the memories of every reader of every newspaper reporting this story.

"I have had a not-very-cordial conversation with our Minister of Magic this very morning. He started off less than apologetic. He said that you must have been doing something wrong or the explosion would not have happened. He did a poor job of covering his hand in this. I threatened him with a hearing before the full Wizengamot, and he finally backed down. He will now spend whatever money is needed to re-establish your practice, but I believe doing so now, something that will require your constant personal attention, will be too good of an opportunity for Voldemort to finish his attempt on your lives. I fear that letting this story take its course until this war is over may be the only path for now - for your safety. We have the means to protect you and provide for you, even find useful work for you, I believe, but only in our world, not in yours."

Steph was looking at him with a range of emotions flitting across his face as the explanation unfolded. At the end he stood apparently speechless. Sylvia Granger wove her fingers between her husband's from her position at the table. Granger did not look down, but he did squeeze her hand.

"What about our employees? They need... well, a paying job, and this will be a black mark against them."

"Their names are not mentioned. Steph, I am not without influence in the Muggle world. Most wizards and witches avoid your world for good reasons, but I have been preparing for, shall we say, *delicate situations* such as this for scores of years.

"Your employees will all be approached by those who can gainfully use their talents and abilities. You may write them and tell them that you are innocent, and Cornelius will compensate them for any inconveniences."

Steph realized that the situation could not be resolved beyond what Dumbledore had already promised them. He was silent.

Finally, Hermione said, "Professor, what useful work can my parents find in our world?"

---

Harry was back in his room at number four, Privet Drive. The conversation with Remus Lupin had taken just over an hour. It had ended with some good news.

"Harry, we believe we have been able to force the Minister of Magic to approve the findings of the Prosecutor's office of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Enough evidence has come to light because of the witnesses to the fight in the Department of Mysteries, to exonerate Sirius.

"It took some arm twisting that I will not go into, but Fudge finally *should* sign the papers today, tomorrow at the latest. His Publicity Advisor has created a story that makes the Minister look good, something that has not happened much recently. So he has agreed. Did you know he is the first Minister of Magic to appoint a Publicity Advisor?

"In the midst of all of these events, the probate of the Black Family Estate has come up. Mrs. Black died with a contestable will. It basically left everything to Narcissa Malfoy, and nothing to her son. But because there was no mention of Sirius to disown him, a glaring error for any lawyer familiar with wizarding law, the will has been held up all these years. Had Sirius had a trial, the conviction would have been enough, but with no conviction and no disowning, the courts could not act. We believe Sirius's father's lawyer, now deceased, did this on purpose. Disowning Sirius was *not* his father's plan after the death of Regulus.

"Lucius Malfoy never quite succeeded in getting his hands on the money. I'm telling you this because that means that Sirius's last will and testament will be honored."

"Sirius had a will? When did he...?" Harry trailed off.

"Yes. He asked me to buy him several law books - said he wanted to work on his case. I would have done anything that might help keep him occupied. He used the books to write an iron clad will, the lawyers told Dumbledore. He had sent it to the headmaster a week before....

"There was one note in it to me. Sirius made it clear that he wanted me to take over guardianship for you. I am not to be your godfather, that cannot be set except by your parents. When parents do it for a child it becomes a legal version of guardianship even though church documents are not usually considered a formal legal document in any other circumstance other than marriage.

"So, since you are over fifteen, you must approve my becoming your guardian. I am sure now that I have said what I have said, you won't want me, but I couldn't gain your approval and *then* tell you how I felt about your actions."

"Wait a minute," said Harry, "do you think I don't want you? I'd think you wouldn't want me because of what you just said to me."

Lupin did not look at him. Their statements hung in the air like damp linen unable to dry in too humid, windless conditions.

Finally, "Harry, I wanted to be your original guardian. Your parents could not decide between Padfoot and me, originally. Sirius caused their indecision; he actually insisted that I should do it because he felt I'd be a better influence on you. That is rubbish. You couldn't've had a better... Besides, Sirius qualified to be your godfather, which was very important to your parents. But I insisted that my, um lunar condition made me unacceptable. And sure enough, before your fifteenth birthday, with recent regulations against werewolves and other creatures as they call us, you could've been taken from me. Now if you choose..."

"I do choose. If you want me, I want you. I've made enough mistakes without help from grown-ups. I still don't like being left out of things, but... Would you please be my guardian?" Harry realized he sounded desperate, but he needed some sort of anchor in his life. He had felt so adrift since 'that night.'

"I'm grateful, Harry, more than I can express. All those years when he was in Azkaban and no one... I'd die before letting you down."

"No more dying-" Harry snapped, but then he realized just how stupid it was to say that after the conversation about war they had just finished.

Remus smiled at him. "Let's just say, Harry, that now we fight together. And, if Professor Dumbledore can arrange what he wants, we will be able to see each other more during the school year than in the last two years.

"But look at the time. How long did you ask your aunt for permission to be gone?"

"I didn't, she just said I could come here."

"Well, in that case your time will be up in ten minutes. Tomorrow ask for three hours. Just come back here in the back. Arabella will return the day after tomorrow, so knock on the door that day." Remus stood.

"But, Professor..."

"We are going to have to get you to call me something else soon, now that we'll be more intimately and officially linked. I'll have papers for your signature to make my guardianship official in a few days. You must leave now or pay for the extra time here with extra time at your aunt's."

Harry scurried home on that note, but he had quite a bit on his mind.

---

Ron's miniature owl, Pig, was flitting around his room when Harry arrived. He carried a note from

Ginny, telling of the safe arrival of the Grangers, and the reason for the continuing silence from a certain portrait in the foyer. She then went into delicious detail about the first kiss between Hermione and Ron.

Harry did not at first know what he felt about this development. He'd expected something like this to occur for some time, but now that it had, he felt like he had lost an opportunity in a way. He was very happy for his friends, but he found a hollowness bubbling up in his mind. A possible avenue had closed for him. Objectively, Hermione was a very pretty girl. Harry recognized that he knew her better than any other female. Now, gone was the possibility that she could be *his* girlfriend. What was so strange about this line of thinking was that he had never considered her in that way before when he could have done anything about it to make her his. But now he felt the loss.

For a moment Harry wondered if he were going mad. But then he thought of how right his two best friends were for each other, and how happy he would be to see them together, and he considered with a smirk that his was only temporary insanity.

He sat back on his bed and pondered this for over an hour, dozing in and out. Hermione and Ron would be together and he didn't want to be alone. THAT was what was truly bothering him - how would their friendship change now that the two would want to be alone without him at least part of the time? Would the Gryffindor Three become the Gryffindor Two + One? He did not blame them and never considered why he was thinking this way. Harry dozed off again during the hot afternoon.

The next time he wandered into consciousness he wondered what it would be like to have Ginny as a girlfriend. She was, as Fred and George maintained, a lot of power in a small package. She had finally emerged from her 'pre-teen-crush-on-Harry' phase, and had become an active friend during the past year. But she was also dating Dean Thomas. That girlfriend possibility only crossed his mind for a moment and Harry dismissed it by placing her back in the 'Ron's-little-sister/friends-only' categories. But even that thought did not completely satisfy Harry's attempts to remove her from his mind in this train of thought. He readily admitted that Ginny was *not* a little girl any more. She had lost what little baby fat had existed in her face at ten and eleven - a look that caused her to look very much like her mother - and now, she had the shape of her father's face, while maintaining her mother's prettiness.

Ginny was slender, but he had seen a number of girls in his year, and years ahead of him... er... um, NOT remain slender. Harry did not have to look in a mirror to know he was red-faced - and only part of it was from embarrassment. The figures of many girls of his acquaintance flashed before his eyes, and he had trouble not dwelling on certain parts of this girl or that.

He stood up, and with nothing else passing through his mind to do, he started doing push-ups. On the Knight Bus Harry had overheard Mrs. Granger compliment her husband on his muscles displayed in the short-sleeved shirt he had worn when he emerged from Mrs. Figg's back bedroom shower. Mr. Granger had smiled and said, "There are a number of advantages to doing two hundred push-ups a day."

Harry started the exercise and wondered how long it would take him to reach two hundred. In a minute he realized it would take him longer than he had thought. At thirty push-ups his arms were





*Aaran St Vines*  
*FanficAuthors.net*





favorites."

After several swishes of his wand, the protections were set and the butterbeer was icy. The days continued to be excessively warm and humid for early July.

"Tell me, Potter, God's truth. Did you detect me and plan that assault? It was effective, though a bit unorthodox."

"No, sir. Just a few moments before, I realized I could be walking into a trap. So I pulled out my wand and jumped behind the bush to hide as well as I could."

"Well, you were lightning fast about that. I was planning to come up behind you after you'd passed and scare the insight into you that you just can't go walking anywhere unprepared for a fight." Harry did not consider his speed that remarkable, but then Moody was always saying he was not as young as he used to be. The retired Auror continued, "Let this be a lesson to the both of us. You should have prepared earlier for possible danger, and I should not assume that anyone will act as I am sure they will act." Moody pondered that for a moment. "Yes, I really like the unorthodox - make your opponent have to be constantly vigilant, which they usually aren't, as the Grangers so eloquently demonstrated to us."

They settled down and both enjoyed their first sips of the butterbeer. Harry asked, "Professor, has the false story about the meth lab at the Granger's office been cleared up?"

"First off, Potter, I am not and never have actively been a professor. I know you called me that when it was not me, I'm a bit bothered by the fact that I was hoodwinked in that way. I let it slide on the rare occasions other students greet me that way, it happens so infrequently. But you and I will probably be working together more and more as time goes by, I understand you want to join the Auror Corps."

"I think I'd like that. But I doubt I'll make the grades to get into the N.E.W.T. courses I need, so who knows."

"There are always exceptions. Exceptions are what make rules, rules."

Harry did not know what to think of this expression, but before he could ask, Mad-Eye continued.

"No, I guess you should call me Moody, like the rest of my friends, and I consider a friend anyone I've fought along side. You may want to call me Mr. Moody in front of the young ones who weren't there with us, but 'Moody' is enough - actually prefer it after all these years."

Harry hung his head. That battle and the loss of Sirius were never far from his mind or dreams. He had dreamed of Sirius' death fall over and over the night before - just the fall. His chores that morning and the particularly vicious silence at the breakfast table as Uncle Vernon pointedly ignored him, had helped Harry push the memory of the dreams out of his head for a while. But just the briefest allusion to anything about that battle would have brought the horrors of that previous night back to the forefront.

Moody was looking away, but with his magical eye you never really knew where he might 'also' be

looking. After several pregnant moments he asked, "Potter, do you know why I'm here?"

Harry looked up. Both of Moody's eyes were directed at him. "You're here to help me feel better about the death of Sirius."

Moody snorted. His magical eye did a circuit and returned to Harry. "I don't give a hippogriff's hoof nail about your feelings at this point. Great Scott, Potter, this is war! No, I'm here so you can learn from his death."

Moody was still for a moment as if to let his words sink in a bit. The boy slouched even lower in his chair.

"First, regarding the blame. You will learn that quite often blame has plenty of owners. I've talked to Dumbledore and Lupin, and I'm not going to repeat what they said. I agree with Dumbledore that he should have kept you a bit better informed, but only a bit. You're a kid, and even though you are the most remarkable teenager I have ever seen or heard of, you're still a kid. I'd like to see you in the Auror Corps. in a few years. Even after just a little more training I would love to have you on just about any team I lead. I wouldn't mind having you in a fight with me again right now, if it couldn't be avoided. Merlin's housecoat, if Death Eaters rounded the corner this very minute, I'm sure we would do rather well." Moody looked up and seemed to focus his magical eye. He said, "No, none there.

"But, Potter, you are still too young to trust with a lot of information. I am sure that you would die rather than reveal that Professor Snape is secretly working for the Order, but would you give him up if a Death Eater were torturing young Miss Granger?"

Harry was about to say, "of course" when Moody went on. The lad thought that apparently the older wizard did not expect answers to his questions this day.

"You'd give Snape up in a minute, and you'd be wrong. As much as you hate him, I may hate him more because of what he did before leaving the Death Eaters to help Dumbledore in the last war. For months after he came to our side, I had to be restrained whenever he entered a room where I was.

"What'd he do to you?"

"Never you mind. The point is this: as I sat there waiting for you, I counted the names of over twenty-four people he has definitely saved from capture or death, or both, since he joined the Order as a spy. There's probably a dozen more I don't know about. He gave us vital information to stop four major Death Eater assaults, and perhaps a dozen minor attacks, or more, before you did your scar thing. Did you know your parents were able to defy Voldemort three times?" Seeing Harry nod, Moody continued. "It was information from Snape that made possible that last escape, gave them two more months to live and be with you. I doubt you remember that time, but it meant the world to them, I assure you.

"Now, Snape can enter Voldemort's presence on certain given occasions. He had developed a hare-brained plan to try to kill him last time, if you hadn't done in that Dark Thing when you were a babe. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he's planning once again to make a try, which would probably be

suicide, by the way, even if he did succeed.

"So! Given the choice between your friend or Snape, I'll take him and curse him the whole time he keeps breathing. And you probably think that is pretty cold-blooded of me, don't you?"

He looked down at Harry whose mouth was opened in surprise. "The secret is, Potter, to avoid that situation, having to make such a choice, if at all possible. Do you know how to do that?"

"Keep Hermione safe, I s'ppose."

"Just like we've tried to keep you safe?" Moody quietly roared in mirth.

"Well, no, but..."

"But nothing. We know we can't keep you out of things, now. So we are going to keep you fairly well informed, particularly about the things affecting you directly. But we won't tell you everything."

Harry started to protest but Moody cut him off.

"Hestia Jones, Mundungus Fletcher, Tonks, Bill Weasley, and I are on a rotating shift schedule of minding you day and night this summer. Hestia walked you over this morning. If you can remember that order, Hestia, Dung, Tonks, Bill, and me, you'll know who's out there if you need them. A much lighter Mundungus, after Dumbledore chewed on him, takes over for Jones at six this evening. We take twelve-hour shifts starting at six and six each morning and evening.

"Now, I'm not going to tell you who's covering the Burrow, and more important, I'm not going to tell you who's on a secret mission right now or who's searching for Voldemort's hiding hole. You don't need to know even though I can see the gears whirling in you brain about secret missions and all. Truth is *I* don't know because I don't need to know. Got that, Potter?"

Harry nodded.

"As to protecting your friend, Hermione, and her family. You'll no more keep her out of trouble than we will you. So, keep her informed, keep her with you in a conflict, and make sure she's as well prepared to fight as you can make her. A wise Muggle once said that the best defense is a good offense. Applying that to you means keeping you protected while you're here at your Aunt's, and keeping you here to recharge whatever you receive from being with her. But the best way to keep you safe is to prepare you mentally, physically, and magically to fight and to lead in the fight."

Moody turned his whole head directly at Harry and focused both eyes on him in one mesmerizingly fear inspiring glare. "Potter, we can't pour all of that into you this afternoon, so you are going to have to be patient as we bring you along as quickly as we can." He leaned back and snorted. "I know expecting patience from a teenager is like expecting Muggles to fly brooms, but you can't be a teenager anymore. This is war!

"We need you to be a powerful experienced fighting machine. It would normally take about five to seven more years to get you there, but we don't have nearly that much time. So, first, we're going to

rip your head open." Harry leaned back in horror. "No, not literally, lad. We're going to shove as much as we can in you day and night until your ears leak, and then we are going to pour in some more. But it will still take time even though we will proceed at an unheard of pace. This program of Dumbledore's, it's brilliant - but none of that now. More for you to learn patience with, Potter." Moody winked at him wryly.

"Now, let me see, what else can we learn from his death? Lupin told you he thought Sirius was to blame for not fighting as hard as he could. I didn't see it, but if that's true, he holds a goodly share of the blame for his being hit."

Harry almost screamed, "It's not his fault, it's mine!"

"Haven't you been paying attention to those older and wiser, you young pup?" Moving like a cobra strike, Moody roughly grabbed Harry's arm. "It's rare that blame can be laid at any one fireplace. Every bit of personal castigation taken by Lupin and Dumbledore is valid for the most part. If Sirius had blasted Bella properly, he'd be here with us today, probably. If you'd listened or learned, or both, none of it would have happened. If you'd killed Voldemort instead of whatever you did as a baby, well.

"If, if, if. If blast-ended skrewts had wings there'd be more forest fires. Waste your life if-ing if you want, but this is war. Perhaps you've heard about it."

Harry gave him an angry glare, but unless his magical eye was on him at the moment, Moody didn't see it.

"I told you I'm here so you can learn from the battle and anything else that comes to my mind. But tell me, why do you think *you're* here?"

Harry gave him a confused look. He thought that Moody had already answered that in his previous sentence. "If you're here so I can learn from the battle, then I'm here to learn."

"Only partly right. I'm not spending my time teaching you just to teach you. That's what your real professors are for. You're here for the same reason I asked you to call me Moody. If we can't control you, we might as well make you into the leader and fighter that you're obviously meant to be. There's lots I can teach you about fighting, you're a masterful mess in a fight. Inspiring, quick, brilliant, and you should have been killed several times that night that I saw, so count yourself lucky, too. But you should have been, could have been better, even at this age. Three of your Defense professors were a total waste of time, and one of the two good instructors was a Death Eater effectively teaching you so as not to bring suspicion on himself." Moody shook his head in disbelief. "We need to pour a lot more battle tactics and spells, jinxes, and a few choice curses into that brain to make you a force to be reckoned with. Dumbledore is finally getting smart about your Defense training, and NO, I am not going to tell you about it. That's not my big concern or why I'm here today. This is no place to teach anything about fighting.

"I'm here today to talk to you about being a leader, particularly about getting more people killed - or not getting them killed actually."

Harry exploded, "I'm not going after Voldemort with anyone else. I'll go alone and then..."

"And then you're dead and all of your friends will die." Moody said this with such a hollow sound to his voice, and such a hollow look on his face, that Harry was startled into silence. He was at the proper angle to see that both eyes stared straight forward. The human eye saw nothing, and if possible, neither did the magical orb.

Moody continued on, almost droning, but still... "Dumbledore told me that you saw me, in his memories in his Pensieve, at the trials for Karkaroff and Bagman. Do you know why I was not at the trial for the three Lestranges and young Barty Crouch?"

Harry shook his head imperceptibly and Moody, though looking away, spoke as though he had seen the signal.

"I led the first of two teams to capture those four. We far outnumbered them. My team had seven and the second had five. Team Two was intended to be backup and close in after we called. Snape had found their location for us, and his information was quite good. But the attack went all wrong."

"Is that why you hated Snape - he led you into an ambush?"

"No," Moody answered distantly. "Happened long before that night - the hatred. Actually began to trust him by then... his information was good and he warned me...." Moody trailed off here.

It worried Harry that Moody might be slipping into a trance or something worse. He was so still that Harry could not tell if he was breathing or not.

"They had no wards or protective barriers of any kind. Nothing to warn of our approach." The old Auror drifted again for a bit. "I told everyone it was a piece of mince pie, my favorite. Gave them their assignments - covered all entrances and routes of escape, used the typical spread. Said all of the right things. But they all knew. My team knew I had no intention of capturing them."

Moody went silent again. Harry knew he had plenty of time left on his three hours, so he let Moody drift. Whatever was happening to him, this story was important and difficult for the Auror to recall or tell.

"Longbottom's mother was a schoolmate of mine. Frank's mother, Neville's 'Gran,' he calls her. We'd been such good friends." Moody went silent, barely breathing. "I was going to kill Bellatrix - what she did to Frank and Alice... and plenty of others she'd killed or tortured, or tortured AND killed. I'd found too many of her victims. So I planned to kill her, all four of them, if need be. We had permission to use the Unforgivables still, though I had never used one before, I had every intention of doing so that night. All indications were that they were sitting at a table, eating. Best time to attack, that. Hands occupied, thinking about food and talking. Doubly occupied minds."

"I failed to follow my own advice. Cocky arrogance, not constant vigilance. I wanted the kill. I jumped the starting whistle and Apparated in before my team was ready. I appeared before them and called to Bella so she'd know it was me. She did not bother with a response. Her right hand held her

wand in her lap and she pointed it at me under her left arm, which was holding a goblet. She sent something like a *Reducto* r curse at me without even looking my way. It was a quick, poorly aimed shot for my chest that would have been a killing shot. Instead it pulverized my leg off of my body. The pain was so excruciating that I fainted, but not before screaming. This caused my team to Apparate in randomly and that destroyed the cohesiveness of the attack.

"Six of the seven were killed outright. The seventh still has the shakes from the Cruciatus Curse. The four fugitives saw the last enter and were toying with him, using that torture, when the backup team Apparated in properly and disarmed them instantly.

"After I fainted, somehow I lost my eye. The second team found a piece of wood sticking out of the socket. They said that they thought it had gone through my brain and that I must be dead. Probably why those four did not finish me off with the Killing Curse for good measure."

The hollow look was gone. The look of determination on Moody's face was frightening when he turned full view at Harry.

"Two good women and four good men died that night and it was all my fault, I thought. But most of the blame lies with Voldemort and the Lestranges. I didn't kill my team members. Our targets did. None of my team were afraid of death, so none of them are ghosts today. But their lives haunt me every day and almost every night. The chilling part is that they never blame me in my dreams, and they argue with me when I take the culpability upon myself. They were all my friends, and they don't want me to suffer. Imagine that.

"It's to *their* credit that when I entered the fight in the Department of Mysteries that night, that I didn't forego proper battle tactics and run across the room and attack Bellatrix. I went for the tactically wisest person for me to attack, and hoped she'd wander into my battle range. She didn't. Bloody shame.

"I retired not that long after that bloody fiasco. With this peg leg I didn't officially meet the physical standards of the Auror Corps. Oh, there've been exceptions in the past, and I was told in St. Mungo's almost immediately when I first woke up, that I'd been given a waiver. Told me that *before* telling me about my missing leg. They could conjure up a better looking prosthetic, and make it work much like a real leg, but I keep this," he patted his stump, "as a reminder. That and this eye, which *is* quite useful, makes most people avoid me. And that's worth a lot.

"Less than six months back on the job, with all the Death Eaters either in Azkaban or dubiously exonerated, I suggested we keep an eye on those who'd *said* that they had been under the Imperius, just to see if they were up to no good. Well, Malfoy had just made his first big donation to Fudge's latest charity favorite, so our esteemed Minister of Magic shelved the idea and had me assigned to a desk. I quit, hoping to draw attention to the problem. Instead, Fudge made it an official retirement, which does pay the bills, and then he immediately started leaking innuendoes to the press that I'd gone round the bend.

"He's the one who's supposed to have hung the moniker, 'Mad-Eye' on me. I wear it proudly to spit in *his* eye. Lot of good it does me, or harm it does him. But you and Dumbledore are not the first ones

he's tried to ruin in the press, so that's one more way we're comrades, I suppose."

Moody smiled what would be considered by most a very unsettling smile at Harry. But the younger wizard was actually heartened by the inclusion.

"Potter, do you think Sirius wants you in agony right now? My friends don't blame me, and they can blame me more than he can you. Or do you think Sirius would rather have you preparing to lead your friends, thunderation, perhaps all of us against those evil soulless creatures called Death Eaters? Don't you think he'd like to see you victorious instead of simpering in a pathetic room full of your cousin's cast off possessions?"

"This is war, lad. I'm proud of the way you fought that night, and that you saved the lives of your friends. We'll need all the lifesaving we can find before this is over, I suspect."

Moody said, "Stand up, Potter," as he rose as gracefully as a man with a wooden leg could. He held out his hand.

Harry went to shake and Moody grabbed him with an iron grip. His hand did not hurt, but there was no doubt in Harry's mind that he would not leave until Moody released him.

"I am not going to pump you up to make you feel better, but I lied earlier. I do care how you feel. But no one can make you feel better. You are solely in charge of that. You've got a war to fight and to win. So *you* take care of *your* feelings. We need you."

Moody released his hand and the two of them sat back down and wordlessly drank their butterbeers, staring at nothing for several long minutes. Harry asked about the explosives used on the Grangers' dental office.

"Thought about that, did you? So'd I. So did Dumbledore, which is no surprise. We don't know a blessed thing yet. Why would they use a Muggle device? Probably more important, where did they get it and what alliances have they formed, if any, with Muggles who have and can use illegal Muggle technology? Good catch, Potter. Thinking like an Auror there."

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Harry returned to his "pathetic room full of his cousin's cast off possessions" and it did not look as pathetic as it had when he had left it that morning. He helped his Aunt Petunia with lunch. After he had washed the dishes from that meal, he helped her a little in the garden, where he could, but she was working on her roses, and no one else touched her roses.

About half past two in the afternoon, he marched up the stairs to his room to find that Hedwig had returned with a note. He had told Luna that she could ask Hedwig to stay if she would write a reply soon. The folded parchment around her leg signaled that Luna had.

The letter was chatty, unlike Luna, who could best be described as dreamy, and not as in attractively-dreamy-looking, even though she was cute, Harry had admitted to himself.



Halfway through the return note Harry realized that his attempts at subtlety in the romance department had been anything but. Luna was not interested in him, which she didn't really say, but said nonetheless. Harry re-read the pertinent passage.

*...if his Gran can get us a waiver of the law on underage magic, Neville and I are planning to spend a lot of time together teaching a neighbor of his, a fellow Hogwarts student, all of the things you taught us in the DA. She's such an interesting lady, his Gran, and I love her choice in hats. Speaking of her, Neville's Gran took him to buy a new wand. I didn't know his wand had not chosen him like mine did me. No wonder he had such problems when he first started school. I appreciate your interest in me, but you should look closer to home, in Gryffindor House. That's where I have found my love interest....*

Her letter went on and on, and was interesting, but Harry was less interested than he might've been had she expressed any romantic inclination towards him. Somehow, Harry knew he had been let down by the girl, but he did not really feel bad about it. Luna was so open, honest, and guileless. How could he not wish her well? Surely her Gryffindor was Neville, and Harry admitted to himself that they made a fine, um, fascinating pair.

As far as "closer to home, in Gryffindor House," Harry guessed Luna meant Hermione. For someone who appeared to be in a fog and yet could be so perceptive, Luna could also be so oblivious. How she could not know that Ron and Hermione were star-crossed, combustible soul mates was beyond him.

But the more he thought about it, the more it bothered him that he'd been rejected by Luna for Neville. He wasn't upset with her specifically. He found that he really wanted a girlfriend, any girl would do, he thought as he stormed across his mind, accepting and rejecting this girl and that as their faces popped into his head. He went to his desk and started, and destroyed, several letters. His mind was in a panic combined with a funk, compounded by desperation.

Finally, realizing he was much more upset than the situation warranted, Harry stood and went to his window. He stared at a particular rose moving gently in the humid wind. He concentrated on it and let his mind clear. Much like Professor Snape had suggested he do during Occlumency lessons.

His heart rate slowed; his breathing calmed.

After a minute Harry wondered what had been going on. He made a mental note to ask Dumbledore if what had occurred could have been caused by Voldemort. Would the evil Dark Wizard want Harry panicking over the lack of a girlfriend? The idea was preposterous. Harry actually chuckled out loud,

and threw himself back on the bed.

He thought to himself as he dozed off, that he really didn't *need* a girlfriend. He wondered why he *wanted* one so desperately. Another short nap came quickly.

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Harry's first issue of his new subscription to the *Daily Prophet* arrived, not in the morning, but just before 3:30 in the afternoon. Besides the timing, it was odd that Hedwig delivered it, and not a regular owl from the newspaper. All of that was temporarily forgotten when he saw the lead story.

### **Three Dementor Attacks In Three Corners of England!** *Hogwarts Student A Hero*

Disaster struck three diverse locations around England as dementors appeared out of nowhere and struck down witch, wizard, and Muggle alike.

Not far from Abington Pigotts in Cambridgeshire County, a reunion of the Abingtons and Piggotts, wizarding families dating back to when the Muggles didn't think the castle was in ruins, was interrupted by what first appeared like an unexpected solar eclipse. Mrs. Emolentine Abington-Smythner was quoted as saying, "Of course an unexpected eclipse is ridiculous, but you don't think straight when a dementor is nearby, now do you? This great dirty-bed-sheet looking thing appears out of nowhere and soon as I decided whether I would wash it with Magical Scrub-All or just burn it - fire and an experience with dirty linen being two of my worst childhood memories - it descends on my fourth cousin once removed, Benedict Pigott, and kissed him. His soul's gone. Of course exchanging saliva with total strangers is another bad memory." In Marazion, in the county of Cornwall, the quaint coastal town has existed for nearly two hundred years in ignorance of the witches' artist colony right to the east of the town. Patsy Snodhill - local artist of some fame, having painted the famous picture of the British sloop of war, HMS Witch of Endor, with the witch - was given the dementor's Kiss, and was cut down in the midst of a promising young career. The one hundred and forty-four year-old witch was unable to Apparate out of the way. Three Muggles were also assaulted and kissed. The Obliviators were barely able to handle the catastrophe.

One bright light in all of these tragedies is the Hogwarts student, Ernie Macmillan, who was present at the third attack, which took place near his family's summer estate in Willmontswick in Northumberland. The dementors appeared right in the midst of the Shrankdiagon, which is billed in wizarding tour guides as the "Little

Diagon Alley of the North." Said Macmillan, "My mum, my little sister, and I had just walked out of the broom shop up here. I had just purchased my new Firebolt, a reward for doing so well on my O.W.L.s. I looked up and saw them coming. I remembered what Harry Potter had taught me about casting a Patronus. So I thought about being able to play Quidditch like I had never played before on my new broom, scoring more goals with the Quaffle than ever. Harry was right, it's not easy when they bear down on you, but they had not closed on me near enough to feel them much, yet. I had the outline of my Patronus last year when Harry was training us, but this was a fully formed silver badger. I am delighted that my Patronus takes the form of the Hufflepuff Badger."

"My Ernie has made us ever so proud," said Mrs. Macmillan.

"Those dementors didn't stand a chance. Ernie just earned twelve O.W.L.s, including Outstanding on both his Practical and Theoretical in Defense Against the Dark Arts."

Cornelius Fudge, Minister of Magic, had this to say when asked about Ministry steps to bring the runaway dementors back under Ministry control, "I would expect nothing else from young Macmillan. He comes from a noble pureblood family, and of course he had a Ministry appointed Defense Instructor last year, Dolores Umbridge."

Umbridge was unavailable for comment. Supposedly she is on sabbatical in the Galapagos Islands...

After his fury about Fudge's Umbridge comment died down, Harry noticed the letters attached to Hedwig's leg. The newspaper had distracted him from his owl. After he looked up from the lead article of the issue, his beautiful snowy white owl lifted her right leg to draw his attention.

"I'm sorry, girl. I didn't even give you any treats, did I?" He removed the letters and opened Hedwig's cage door. She moved to its perch before he could assist her. He let her eat several treats directly from his hand, ignoring the less than friendly first nip, and cooing to her. Friendlier nips accompanied additional treats. He placed more treats in the cage's tray, and left her door open so she could exit on her own if she so chose.

The first of the three correspondences was actually a single small folded piece of parchment that was not sealed like a letter.

*Harry,*

*I forgot to tell you that we are having your owl posts and newspaper brought to, well, you-know-where so that strange owls cannot bring you anything that will harm you or lead Death Eaters to you. We will wait until mid afternoon and*

*deliver everything at once, that way we can test everything completely. It has been discovered that V. is using some Muggle technologies in addition to explosive devices, and we think he may be considering using Muggle poisons - crude but effective if we do not know about them, which we don't. The G's are helping with this.*

*Hedwig will be the sole deliverer to you this summer while you are at your aunt's, so any other bird will mean trouble, besides Fawkes I suppose. But we have the wards tuned to Hedwig only, so no others should get through.*

*I'm grateful for our chat yesterday and I hope to have more information on the guardianship when we meet next, which will be soon!*

*Remus*

Harry was not sure he liked anyone going through his letters, but he had to admit he would not recognize Muggle poisons other than household items such as cleansers.

He then opened the first real letter. It also was brief.

*Dear Harry,*

*I hope you've read today's Daily Prophet. It talks about Ernie dealing with those dementors, which is great. I'm glad that you're receiving some favorable mention in that rag, but what it doesn't say is that I was supposed to be at the family reunion at Cainhoe Castle that day. My maternal great-grandmother was a Piggott. We failed to attend only because my little sister came down with some stomach ailment and had to be taken to St. Mungo's. I chose not to go by myself.*

*The reason I write is that I know I probably wouldn't have fared as well as Ernie did. I know you are wherever you are with your Muggle relations for whatever reason, but could I ask you to write a refresher on producing a Patronus? I need any advice you could give me on any technique or way to think the happy thoughts needed. My first efforts that last DA meeting were pathetic.*

*That was my distant Aunt Emolentine they interviewed.*

*She is not as scattered as she sounds there. She must've still been frightened out of her wits when she spoke to the reporter.*

*I'm a good student, but she was considered brilliant, so I don't imagine I would have fared any better than she did. The thing is, I want to do better. I want to be able to defend myself and my family if need be. Though they were Ravenclaws and all that entails, neither*

*of my parents were outstanding students in DADA. Mum is a researcher in medical potions at St. Mungo's, and Dad works for Gringotts. I would have been the defender of my family if we'd been there.*

*I remember hearing in one of the many rumors about you that the first time you cast a corporeal Patronus you were being attacked by a hundred dementors. It may be an exaggeration, but all of the wild stories about you usually prove to be true. If it was just ten, you know what it takes to produce one under such pressure.*

*The published Ministry guidelines are rubbish. Whatever you can write for me, any scrap of help - well, my family and I would be most grateful.*

*Warmest Regards,*

*Terry Boot*

Harry then opened the second real letter. It was equally earnest, brief, and desperate.

*Dear Harry,*

*I believe you may know of the nervous state my father is in after discovering his murdered brothers and their families so long ago.*

*We were at the Marazion witches artists' colony. The attack occurred not ten minutes after we left to drive home. My mum is a Muggle and it was a pleasant drive. Then the Daily Prophet arrived this morning. My dad was in a frantic state all morning and finally my mum had to sedate him a few minutes ago.*

*Can you help me somehow get to where I can cast a Patronus?*

*I realize it is a lot to ask, but if I can do it somehow, even if I can tell my dad you are trying to help me, it will calm him, I know it will. Aunt Amelia says that we are protected because of wards set up because we are members of her family, but that doesn't seem to calm Dad. I asked her to have someone from the MLE office teach me, but she is not allowed to because I am underage. I can't beg her to break the rules.*

*I know this is a lot to ask, but please, whatever you can do, please give me something to grant my father some shred of hope and peace of mind, even if you have to make it up.*

*Thank you for whatever you can do,*

*Susan Bones*

In Harry's mind one DA member at a dementor appearance was a coincidence, two separate

occurrences were uncomfortably suspicious, and three such events were intentional. There were less than thirty DA members including himself, and Seamus Finnegan who had attended only one meeting. That was over ten percent of the DA in locations where dementor attacks had taken place.

Professor Umbridge, Draco Malfoy, and who knew whom else on the Inquisitorial Squad had seen the list of DA members.

"I have one delivery for you to make, girl," he said to Hedwig. She ruffled her feathers in acceptance as Harry pulled out parchment, ink, and quill. He dashed off a quick note to Remus Lupin, asking him to read his two letters, and telling Lupin that he intended to write all of the DA members with the instructions requested by these two. He wrote that he would write all twenty-eight himself, but inquired if Hermione, Ron, and Ginny might be asked to help him make copies, so the information could be distributed as soon as practicable.

Harry was a little over half of the way through writing his Patronus instructions when Hedwig reappeared. Remus wrote that arrangements were being made for copies of Harry's letter to be produced for the DA members; all he needed to do was write the instructions once. There was an automated manner for the copies to be made. Lupin also stated that a number of owls might also be available to speed delivery.

Just before ten o'clock that night, Harry finished the final draft of the instructions. It was nearly a whole scroll of information. He talked about the attitudes needed when one attempts the charm, the expression in one's voice, and steeling yourself against the chilling of one's flesh and spirit when dementors first appear. He discussed wand movements and when to actually cast the Charm for maximum effect. In part, Harry wrote:

*You have to be mentally prepared more than anything for casting a Patronus Charm, and there are three things you must be ready for.*

*First, a dementor is going to suck away whatever thoughts are in your head as it approaches you. However happy, depressing or upsetting your thoughts are at that time, they will leave your mind and you will be left with the worst things you have ever heard or seen, even if your mind doesn't remember them. You must remember this the second they appear and don't let it take you to that dark place in your mind, even though that is where your brain wants to go.*

*Second, because of this, you must've prepared ahead of time, at least one amazingly brilliant, happy thing to think about. The love of your family, if you have that, is a really good thought. Success in school, fun on the Quidditch pitch, something, as long as it is a really **STRONG** happy memory. If you have nothing like that, then you can imagine a really strong memory you want to happen, even if it hasn't yet, or just can't. The strong thought I used to produce a Patronus during our O.W.L.s was Umbridge leaving, and she hadn't yet. Anyway, make it a very strong thought or memory. Practice it. Think about it often. Daydream about it. Make it a thought you can instantly go to and dwell on to the exclusion of all around you.*

*Third, when a dementor first nears you, it will start to feel chilly and get dark; if it is nighttime the stars will go away. You'll probably not be aware of the dementor at first, just the chill and the darkness. The very moment anything like that happens, don't look around to see if it is a dementor.*

*Go straight to your strongest happy memory or thought, and when you are there in your mind, then look for the possible attack. Then cast the charm as soon as you see them. Don't wait. Keep dwelling on the thought or memory until you know you are out of danger. I CANNOT STRESS ENOUGH how important it is to practice dwelling on your strongest, happiest thoughts, memories, and dreams. Now when you actually cast...*

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At ten o'clock the next morning, Harry approached Arabella Figg's house. It was Ginny Weasley who opened the door just before Harry knocked.

"Are you the third person I'm s'pposed to talk to?" he asked with great curiosity after exchanging pleasantries. Harry felt a bit uncomfortable with his thought that spending several hours with Ginny would be wonderful, but he couldn't see the connection to the conversations he was supposed to be having.

"No. Mrs. Figg called us and told us she would not be back until late today. Harry, there's a telly-phone at Grimmauld Place and it's fascinating. You pick up the retriever-

"It's a *receiver*," Harry corrected, and when he saw that Ginny was embarrassed by it, he said, "Very common mistake."

Ginny softened her blush and continued, "We heard this ringing and none of us knew what to do. Mr. Granger was walking down the stairs and called out from outside of the kitchen, 'Do you want me to get it?' Well, none of us knew what 'it' was, but Dad shouted back, 'Please do.' Mr. Ganger walked into the kitchen and told Dad that it was for him.

"Well, Dad asked what was for him, and when Mr. Granger said that it was a telly-phone call, I thought Dad was going to explode with excitement. He rushed into the hallway and we all followed him. He walked over to the table in the foyer and looked down at the three items on it. He finally picked up the letter opener and held it to his ear and shouted, 'Hello?' Ron is the only one of us to use a telly-phone before when he tried to call you, but that went badly, and besides, he was still sleeping.

"By this time Hermione and her mother had come down the stairs, and Hermione walked over to that small wooden picture frame with nothing but wood in it, no picture. I had always been curious about it, but we always stayed out of the foyer because of Mrs. Black's portrait. Well, turns out it's not a picture frame but the cover for the telly-phone box. She pulled it open, took the...er, receiver off of the cradle and asked who they were waiting for - Dad, of course. She handed it to him and made sure he held it properly. She even told him he didn't need to shout.

"Later, Mum wanted to give Dad a hard time about picking up the letter opener, but Dad said that of the three things, a paper weight, a candleholder, and a letter opener, the opener was the most logical to pick up since it is used in communications. Mrs. Granger agreed that it was a logical conclusion. That explanation pleased Dad, but the three Grangers were all smiling behind their tea and coffee cups.

"It turns out that Professor Dumbledore had the telly-phone installed somehow, when the Order first made its headquarters there. Mum and Dad keep saying that Dumbledore has connections in the Muggle world that we don't know about, but they are usually the most surprised when he proves the fact.

"Anyway, everyone else is busy today with this or that, and I volunteered to come get you. It's safe now that Fred and George invented the secure Floo powder."

"They did that?" Harry asked in amazement.

"Yes, Fred says that it's a variation on the exclusionary charms people put on items to keep people out of drawers and cupboards and such. They just distilled it into a potion and then crystallized it, and ground it into a powder. They won't say how it works, but it's amazing. Mum can't seem to figure out how to be so proud of them and still be mad that they left school before completing their N.E.W.T.s."

Harry enjoyed hearing her talk like her brothers had said she always did, except when he was around. He was very glad that Ginny was a friend now, and not just Ron's shy little sister with a crush on him. He frowned slightly at the thought that she was now Dean Thomas' girlfriend, but did not have time to realize why he'd frowned.

"I was told to ask how long you asked your aunt to be away today."

"I asked for the rest of the day, but she said I have to be back by 3:30 to cut the grass. So, I have over five hours. If this only takes the usual two-to-three hours, I was going to go for a walk around here, maybe go to the park and see what vandalism Dudley has been up to since he's out of Smeltings."

"Well, good. You'll have plenty of time to talk to Mr. Granger, have lunch, and maybe visit with us some. Perhaps I'll come back with you and look at the park destruction, if you don't mind. I've heard about Dudley, but I have only seen him hiding behind your uncle and aunt at the train station."

They both exited the fireplace at Grimmauld Place in typical fashion. Harry rolled out and landed on his face, slewing ashes and soot everywhere. Ginny gracefully stepped around him and brushed a little bit of debris from her jumper sleeve. Mrs. Weasley was there with her wand and applied a cleaning spell to him and the floor around the fireplace in the kitchen.

"Harry, dear," she said around her hug, "how are you?"

"Fine."

She said, "What else? Can I get you tea? I have some scones left over from breakfast, raisin?"

"That would be great, Mrs. Weasley, thanks."

Hermione rushed in and shouted, "Harry," into to his shoulder as she hugged him. Ron appeared at the door and joined the greeting as Mr. and Mrs. Granger also came in.

They chatted for a while and then Steph Granger guided Harry to the library on the second floor. On



the way up, Harry congratulated him again on his defense against the Death Eaters. The dentist waved that off and ushered Harry into the library.

"They've removed everything from this room that can jump out and attack me, they say, as long as I stay away from those shelves over there." He pointed to the west side of the room where there were a number of books and bric-a-brac arranged haphazardly.

"I give them a wide berth and yet, I don't like to go anywhere in this house without a magical escort. Of course I feel more secure in our bedroom, which has been stripped of everything but a bed, table, oil lamp, and one small chest for our clothing, and my weapons chest, of course. Hermione sleeps in the next room and we crack the door so she can hear us call out in the night."

"Here we are, heroes of sorts with the Order, celebrated for successfully defending ourselves from Death Eaters. People Hermione knows, or at least recognizes, come by to shake our hands, and my daughter is mightily impressed with some of them, and yet, I'm afraid to go to my own bedroom without my little girl checking out if it's safe, and staying near me while I'm there. And I thought just having a daughter as a witch was as weird as it could be." The dentist gave Harry a rueful grin and part of a blush.

They sat down at right angles to each other, Granger on a stuffed chair and Harry on the end of the couch nearer him. They settled their tea on the end table between them.

"So, Harry, do you know why we are here today, the two of us, talking for the next hour or two?"

"I'm here to get on with what has happened so I can do my part in this war." The sound of his voice spoke volumes about his distaste for the process as well as the progress he had made since his first visit with Lupin. Then Harry continued, "I guess you are here to help me in some way. I'll never get over Sirius' death and the role I played in it. I should have listened to your daughter." He paused for a moment after the rush of those last few words. "But I didn't, and there is no changing that. I have to go on to prepare for whatever else is... for war." Harry said this last very slowly. Then he rushed again to his conclusion. "But I will never get over his death, I don't care what you or anyone else says. I'll just put it aside for now...."

Hermione had always known her father as a gentle, kind man, and had told Harry and Ron as much. Only in the last few days had anyone in the wizarding world come to know anything other than that about Steph Granger. He had been just one more helpless, defenseless Muggle parent of a young witch.

However, he also was one of only two people who had killed a Death Eater in a dozen years or more, but the look on his face as he looked at the hurting young man before him only showed the compassion Hermione had loved in her father all her life.

"Harry, you are right in all of this, except if you believe anyone wants you to forget Sirius. I never met him, but I admire him based on what Hermione has told me, as well as the rest of your friends in preparation for this chat with you. I miss him, not as a friend, obviously, but as a lost potential ally in this fight that I am now in somehow.

"I'm here today to help you realize the most painful thing I could teach you - the future cost of this war - the possible future cost to *you* in this war."

Harry looked at him with mixed measures of fear and confusion on his face.

"I'm going to do it by telling you of another war, a non-magical war - a stupid war, the way it was fought. Not that that particular war had stupid aims; any time you fight tyranny to set people free it is a war worth fighting, if it has to be fought at all.

"Never let anyone convince you that professional soldiers want war, love war. They know war is horror on a grand scale. They know it must be avoided if at all possible, but that it cannot always be avoided. Therefore, they prepare so that war's effects can be minimized. Those insane enough to really like war are weeded out early on. Even those that want to fight a war because they feel they have a destiny there, don't really want it. They merely feel in some way that they have something to contribute above most other professional soldiers."

The dentist stared off into the unseen distance, and it was Harry's turn to look at a face seeing ghosts not at all like Sir Nicholas.

"Harry, what do you know about the Vietnam War?"

"It was a war fought in the Orient by the Americans twenty or thirty years ago, wasn't it?"

"Yes, close enough. But did you know forces of the Commonwealth fought in it also?"

Harry looked up surprised, "You mean British soldiers...?"

"Not exactly. Australian and New Zealander forces were there."

"So no actual British soldiers *were* there?"

"Once again, not exactly. The SAS, the Special Air Service - you've heard of them, haven't you?"

Harry nodded. He had sat near Hermione on the Knight Bus trip to Mrs. Figg's house, but the parents had not told their daughter how they were able to defeat the Death Eaters on the bus. "They're our best Muggle soldiers. They're fearless and can go anywhere, do anything." His eyes went very wide and very round. "Were you in the SAS?"

Steph Granger smiled what looked like a too wise smile. "Yes, we are not quite the supermen you describe," he sat up even straighter, drawing Harry's attention to the fact that Hermione's father had already been sitting up almost at attention, "But we always get the job done."

"Harry. It's the SAS's job to be prepared to fight any type of small squad action there is. We are not assault battalions to take the beach on some distant shore. That's the task of the Royal Marines and even the regular army. We go into tight situations where stealth, and silence, and even invisibility are needed. I could have used the Invisibility Cloak Hermione tells me you have."

They both smiled, and Steph continued. "We usually are sent in when the situation is near hopeless, and we are supposed to be miracle workers. To pull off the impossible, we train to do what others consider impossible and will go to any extreme to gain insight and experience in all possible types of fighting."

"Mr. Granger, are you still in the SAS?"

Once again he smiled and actually blushed a little. "Once an SAS, always an SAS. I know a lot of military units around the world feel that way, but we hold no second seat to any other force in the world. But no, I'm not still in the SAS. However, every former SAS member I've ever met talks the way I do, so maybe it's something they inject us with when we get our yearly medical check-ups." He smiled once more and Harry joined him.

"The moment the Australians announced they would go to Vietnam, our Brigadier began to lobby for squad-sized forces of our men to go there dressed as and insinuated in with Australian troops, and later the New Zealanders. We went over in squads of twelve to twenty men, depending on what we were experimenting with. The Americans had their Green Beret forces there leading local forces in fighting, and some of us went there to do the same. I was a part of one of those squads sent to learn how to better lead indigenous forces.

"I went in 1971, and we were supposed to be there as New Zealanders. We wore their uniforms, ate out of their mess halls, and accessed their quartermasters for whatever we needed, but we received our orders from headquarters.

"Before we left, we trained in a competitive manner. Our lieutenant was a regular officer, but our sergeant major was much older and he was not going to be in the chain of command. Each man is supposed to be prepared to take command, but three of us were told we were in competition to be the Number Two. When we were to go out and fight with a local Vietnamese unit of company or brigade size, we would all correspond to officers or squad leaders in that unit.

"Our lieutenant consulted with the company captain. Our sergeant major stayed with the company executive officer, and each of us were assigned to platoon leaders or squad leaders. But the question was who would do what if anyone were wounded or... killed." He stared at his hands for several long seconds before continuing.

"When we went over there, our lieutenant wore New Zealander major's leaves, our sergeant major wore an NZ lieutenant's bar, as did most of the rest of our sergeants, and our corporals were staff sergeants or better. The question, and the competition, was held to see who would wear the NZ captain's bars as second in command.

"Now, I was one of the competitors, and so was Pen Warden, who I knew I could beat. But the third was Tanner Jenkins, my best friend in the service. Tanner was not only the one man of the non-commissioned officers in the unit that often beat me, he was also the son of the brigadier.

"I had great respect for Tanner beyond his skills and abilities, because he was a bit of a misfit, in a good way in my views. He came from a long line of soldiers, and was the last Jenkins in the line.

They had served the crown in military positions since before the Napoleonic Wars. It was always assumed that Tanner would go to the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst like his father, and his father's father, and so on. Sandhurst is where our future officer corps goes to train for war and become professional officers.

"But Tanner had always been a great reader. He had read enough fact and too much fiction about how officers were a bit unfeeling towards their men. He told me that his father seemed so reserved, that he felt sure the brigadier could fall in that unsympathetic category. So Tanner told his father he was going to travel around Europe, but instead he went into London and enlisted. He and I were in basic training together, and we were a little over half the way finished, when a long military car with driver appeared. Tanner was called to the company training office, and we heard there was quite a row between father and son.

"Tanner never told me about it until much later when we were in the field. The brigadier wanted to have him released for Sandhurst, and Tanner refused. One of our mob that was always causing trouble heard about it and accused him, as if it would have been Tanner's idea, that now the corporals and sergeants would go easy on him. This bully-type, his name was Colder, was a big brute and really strong, but he had already proven himself soft on running and endurance training. Instead of instigating a fight, Tanner looked at him and laughed. He simply said, "I wish," and went back to polishing his boots.

"The next morning it felt like a railroad car had been dropped on us. The cadre woke us an extra hour early, and doubled our running time for the rest of basic. Everything was increased from the number of sit-ups, to running times, to the number of holes we had to dig. It was doubled for all of us except for Tanner, his work load was tripled wherever possible. He was 'volunteered' for every bad assignment in addition to his increased workload. The sergeants and corporals were quick to let us know that the extra effort was at the request of Tanner's father. I realized it wasn't Tanner's fault, but I was just about the only one. We were well into our hand-to-hand combat training by then, and it was a good thing. I had boxed a little in school, but it was not a team sport where I studied, just a club activity.

"Colder talked several other minor bullies into helping him punish Tanner. I just couldn't stand by, even though Tanner and I weren't mates yet. So I stepped in, and the amazing thing to me was that all of the fighting skills they taught us had worked. The two of us took on five, each one bigger than us, and we won handily. We were instantly friends, because the rest of the training platoon either hated Tanner, and me with him, or they didn't want to have anything to do with us. The training cadre picked up on this and included me in on Tanner's extra work. This helped the others leave us alone since we were getting better than they could have given us.

"He and I finished first and second in our basic group and were assigned to the same unit with no one else from our lot. Tanner had always done better on the testing, and leadership training, with me number two right behind him. I always did a little better than him on all things physical - again, we were one and two. When we'd done enough regular time to volunteer for SAS we were accepted. Tanner tried to tell me to wait and enter later. He said that entering with him and being his friend would make it much worse for me than it had been in basic, since his father was the SAS Brigadier.

"I figured I was already a better soldier because of the extra "attention" I had received as his friend, and I wanted to go into the SAS with the same questionable advantage. He told me that I was daft and half again."

Harry found himself amazed by this story. His Uncle Vernon and cousin Dudley liked to watch old war movies on their television. He was never allowed to sit and watch with them, but if he had not been too upsetting to his aunt and uncle lately, he would be permitted to look and listen from the edge of the hall entrance. Now he was hearing a real life story of a real soldier who had fought in a war. Harry listened *very* intently.

"Tanner was correct, as he usually was about how the military worked. He'd been around it all of his life. We had it harder, and we survived, somehow, and we finished at the top once more. I made knife-fighting champion and he was the first promoted to corporal and given a squad. I made the same rank and was given my own squad in his platoon a month later.

"When it was announced that Tanner, Pen, and I were competing for the NZ captain's post, we three were all brand new sergeants. I felt like telling the company commander I didn't want the position, that Tanner should have it, but Tanner blew up in my face. After he went on a vent, the likes of which I had never seen before, he talked me into staying in to try for the position.

"On our final exercise, Tanner's team arrived after mine, because we started before them. The judges for the exercise would jump out of nowhere, and tag one man injured or another dead, and we would have to improvise a solution. I had a man wounded badly just before the time limit to secure our objective - clearing out a bunker positioned to stop the advance of an assault regiment. I left the wounded man behind and he was marked as hit and killed when I went back for him.

"When Tanner arrived with all of his men I knew I had lost. We had left fifteen minutes before they did, and he reached the completion point only three minutes after us. When he got close enough, the look on his face caused me concern. Before I could ask, the brigadier, his father, who I didn't know was there, stepped up and announced that *I* would be the second in command in our squad on our Vietnam assignment. I was stunned. I found out later that Tanner'd made a mistake when his father came forward to shake my hand.

"I remember his exact words. Brigadier Jenkins simply said, 'You showed what we need in the field.' Somehow I knew those words hurt the old man. Tanner was one of the first to rush up and congratulate me. He had a funny look on his face as well. Later he told me that a judge had tagged one of his men wounded and he, Tanner, had tried to carry him out. This slowed his squad, and just before they reached their assault point, they were tagged blown up by enemy mortar fire as a part of the counterattack his squad had failed to prevent.

"I tried to explain to the major in charge of the exercise that I had not considered leaving my man behind a true life-and-death decision, but Tanner had. No one listened to me. I wore the New Zealand captain's silver bars and Tanner wore a lieutenant's brass bar.

"We never were a part of the New Zealand forces in the field, or at any base if we could avoid it. We spent much more time with the American Green Berets than the Australians even, so our accents

would not give us away. It was the idea for no one to be able to say, 'You're not one of us.'

"We'd been there for about five months working as small squads attached to other larger operations. Finally our squad was assigned to what would be a strong company of Vietnamese regulars being put together from several decimated companies. It might have been called a pocket regiment. We were all excited about the opportunity to recreate these failed units into an effective fighting force.

"Things went well for a while. It was out of the general role of the SAS to fight in such a large unit, but the initial idea was to make each squad and platoon into miniature SAS squad in fighting skills and thinking. And that is where the problem came. No one in these forces would take over if a superior was rendered ineffective by wounds or death.

"We British Commonwealth forces were and are trained so that if an officer goes down, the next highest rank takes over. In the forces of South Vietnam, when an officer became ineffective, the soldiers under him usually either continued with their orders regardless of circumstances, froze in place, or ran. No one hardly ever took over command. Drill and train them as we might, we could not change this.

"Our first action with this unit was our last action. Tanner had gotten orders to leave us and report to Sandhurst for school. He was going to be a proper officer and I was glad for him. But he refused to leave us until the first mission had been completed.

It was supposed to be an easy field training mission with the remotest possibility of enemy contact. Later we found out that Communist agents had infiltrated the command structure in this province and we were sent there to fail miserably. *That* part of the mission our forces succeeded in.

Our squad commander, acting NZ Major Bartholomew, was killed immediately with all of the South Vietnamese senior unit officers when their bunker was hit by the first rocket of the attack. Our squad senior non-com, the sergeant major who'd been with us since SAS basic training, was badly wounded. I had to cut through the remaining tendons in his arm so we could bandage it and stem the blood flow. All of us went forward in the fight to stop the advance. Nearly all of the SNV troops were gone before we realized it. Two of our men went down in mortar blasts and were obliterated.

"I was left with an armless man, four unwounded men, and three fairly badly wounded. The twelfth man is still listed as missing in action today. We did have about a dozen of our local SVA soldiers with us and we "bugged out" in the vernacular the Americans taught us. We were about forty kilometers behind a very fluid front. We'd thought we were going in a dozen clicks, that's what we called kilometers there, another American expression. Anyway we thought we were going in a dozen clicks from our trucks in an inactive area, wave the flag, and return the next day. Instead we were over thirty miles away with a division of the enemy between us and safety.

"And I was in charge. I decided we had to go away from our lines, hoping they wouldn't look for us in that direction. It almost worked. We went about five clicks away from our lines and went to ground. Half of our dozen SVA troops were not there when morning came. I had made the mistake of letting them provide security guard for us. When I discovered that, I had us up and moving, even though I had planned not to move until darkness that night. I couldn't risk one of them leading the enemy to us. We

headed parallel to our lines for most of the day and then headed homeward, which was north and west over fifty kilometers, or about forty miles.

"Now I have used the phrase 'our lines' like there was a solid front. It wasn't so. The lines were very fluid and where we were, the guerilla forces, the Viet Cong, or what the Americans called 'Charlie,' came and went as they pleased in small groups. We only had a sure point of safety where our jump off base had been. It was a combination Australian and South Vietnamese base, and we could only hope it had not fallen. After three more horrible days and nights we were less than two miles from safety, when a platoon of the Cong captured us. They had set a trap and we had walked into the ambush. They materialized out of the night and we each had guns to our heads.

"Not taking a chance, this time I had my SAS members providing front and rear guard; that took the four of us that were sound. The Vietnamese troops still with us were helping the wounded. The attack came on us in the middle; the front and rear guard came in to help, and all four were overwhelmed and wounded, though not too badly.

"Harry, we were the best, superbly trained. But we had been out in the jungle moving slowly, dragging our wounded for over four days. We'd had hardly any sleep and no food. I'd been grazed by a bullet on my skull in the initial fighting, and I had a roaring headache the whole time. See?" Mr. Granger raised the hair from the right side of his head and showed a scar two inches long and as wide as his finger, that was still barely visible.

"The Cong killed the South Vietnamese outright. I had command of an armless sergeant major, who could barely walk, four badly wounded, and four lightly wounded. Tanner Jenkins was one of the lightly wounded.

"The Cong normally tie your arms up over your head with bamboo poles, keeping you spread like on a cross, but they didn't with us. They had to act immediately on another situation. Turns out, a large force of Australians was heading in our direction. The Cong got greedy that night; they wanted a second ambush. They had disarmed us, but they had no idea I had my Fairbairn in my arm sheath. My sleeves were down, but so were the sleeves of about half of my men. All they did was tie our hands behind our backs with leather strips and loop knots - effective if done tightly, but I had succeeded in flexing my wrist so the leather thong was loose.

"Six Cong stayed behind to guard us. The rest left. Our guards hit or kicked all of us and we went down - and as we learned in part of our training, we acted hurt worse than we were. The battle started and there were flares in the air, lighting the sky between us and the sounds of the battle. I dislocated my left thumb to get out of the strap."

The mild mannered dentist and former vicious jungle fighter bowed his head, placing it in his hands. Harry identified with him in that moment. He had fought several battles himself and had fallen comrades to remember. He reached out and put his hand on Mr. Granger's arm. Hermione's father raised his head. He was not crying or in any way teary-eyed, but he was stricken by the memories.

Steph Granger said barely above a whisper, "You've been in combat. You know what I have gone through, don't you? You just feel... guilty... to have survived when others...."

Harry knew no words, or even a nod, was necessary.

After a moment the dentist continued, "Hermione has told us everything she knows about your various fights with Voldemort. And yes, she told me that most are afraid to use that name, but you aren't and I'm not.

"Harry, I am going to tell you, warrior-to-warrior, the details about that last fight - all that happened. There are records in Whitehall somewhere of that night, and I guess some in the SAS know of it, but Sylvia doesn't know the details that I'm going to share with you, and I never want Hermione to know. It's not that I am ashamed, but... you've never actually killed someone, have you?" When the lad shook his head, he continued. "Well, I hope you never do, but Hermione feels, and I cannot fault her reasoning, that you will have to face this Voldemort sooner or later. I'm here to help you prepare to face that day."

The dentist straightened in his chair and cleared his throat before continuing. "That night in the jungle our guards were distracted by the flares," Mr. Granger resumed, "and I wiggled my hands loose. Tanner saw me and so did the sergeant major. I pulled my knife and went into action as silently as possible. Three of the six were dead before any sound was heard over the battle noises. I hit the fourth and pierced his heart, but he reflexively fingered his trigger and the other two turned and saw me. I reached number five and slit his throat but he put one bullet each in my upper arm and in my thigh. The sixth guard rose to shoot me and I would have never made it. Tanner jumped up into his line of fire and took a bullet in his upper left chest. I threw the knife into the throat of the last guard and he sprayed bullets around, hitting one of the seriously wounded and killing him, and wounding severely two of the lightly wounded. They were both so badly hurt that they had to be carried.

"The firefight between the Cong and the Australian forces was escalating. I knew we could not make it back to the base while it was still dark, but I thought we could make contact with this advanced force fighting the Cong at the moment. I started the two lightly wounded off and they were trying to help the sergeant major, who had lost so much blood with the amputation. I had gone to Tanner but he had insisted I take someone else. He'd guard the one I could not carry on my first trip.

"It was a maddening night. I was weak from my wounds and hurting in my arm, thigh and head. I got Parks on my back halfway and caught up with the first three. Somehow we reached the Australians on a side of their position not being attacked. I tried to call out to them, but they just fired at me wildly. Finally the sergeant major roared at them with a heavy cockney accent cursing them like only a British soldier would an Australian. We were allowed to advance, and four of my six remaining were safe. I went back out after Tanner and Pilsbury but no one would come with me, their medicos were too occupied with their own wounded. I found them an hour later even though they were only roughly three hundred yards away. Tanner insisted again that he would be right behind me as I dragged Pilsbury. Somewhere I lost Tanner in the slow trip back. The fighting had gotten worse on the side where we had first entered the lines and I had to drag him further around. I had not realized it had happened, but Pilsbury was dead when I got him to the Australians."

There was a tear in Granger's eye, now, Harry could tell.

"It was nearly light when I left to recover Tanner. I found his gun, and signs of a skirmish. I followed



the signs of a body being dragged through the jungle for over three miles. I found him and three Cong, trying to slip away with him. The Australians had beaten their attackers and it was a toss up as to who these Cong might walk into out there, so these three were going slowly with their prisoner.

"I just ran in at them. The Australians had given me a pistol, so I shot one and knifed the other. The third shot Tanner in the chest at point blank range. Why him and not me, I'll never know. That Charlie could have killed me and then taken Tanner with him. I held my best friend in my arms for just a moment. He looked up into my eyes and said, 'Carry on, Captain,' imitating his father's parade ground voice. Then he coughed up blood.

"I picked him up and placed him on my back. I held him there with my arm that did not have the bullet wound. I held the pistol in my other hand, and ran back to the Australian position. I just ran - no stealth, no cares. I killed two more Cong on the way and fired wildly at several more. I stopped and reloaded once, and then kept running. I burst out into the clearing in front of our chaps and a machine gun went off. My sergeant major hit the gunner and pushed his gun off sight or I would have died. He then stepped over the battlement and, standing there without an arm, he roared, 'Are any of you Digger cowards going to help me, or do I have to drag them back all by myself?'

I don't really remember who helped me. I had Tanner up in my arms and was staggering back, but he was dead. He was taken from me, and I was lifted up on someone's shoulders, where I promptly passed out."

Mr. Granger was quiet for a while and Harry scarcely breathed. A few hot tears dripped from the dentist's eyes, and he stared at his hands as if wishing to burn holes in them. Eventually he said, "I woke up in a hospital in New Zealand. The medical orderly saw that I was awake and ran out the door. In a moment the brigadier himself strode in as if just off the parade grounds. I began my report of the failure of my mission and made my request to resign, or face court martial if need be.

"He looked at me and smiled the most chilling smile I have ever seen. I can still see his face, it haunts my nights as does the face of Tanner, Pilsbury, and the other men I failed to lead out of that jungle.

"The brigadier said, and I can quote the words, "Granger, I have never been more proud of any man in my command than I am of you. You did more than anyone else could have. I have a 'heroic effort' instead of a debacle, because of your actions. It was enough to keep the bad news out of the paper, but I'm afraid I cannot do for you what is right.' He opened a box I had not noticed in his hands. He said, "It should be the Victoria Cross from the Queen herself. But it is the Military Cross for Captain Steph Granger of the Royal New Zealand Army. There should be a parade, but all I can offer you is the hand of a father grateful to have his son's body back.'

"He shook my hand. He stood, and said, 'You'll be a Lieutenant when you get back from injured leave. You have a month at home after you are discharged from the hospital in England, once we get you there. Safe journey, sergeant.' And he walked out of the room. I never saw him again. He retired a major general after twenty-nine years distinguished service before I made it home on the hospital plane."

For the first time in a long time Granger turned his upper body towards Harry. The lad noticed a look



*Aaran St Vines*  
*FanficAuthors.net*



Harry nodded his head. "I need her, Mr. Granger, her and Ron, but maybe Hermione just a little more than Ron. If I could do it without... I would die to ensure her saf-" Harry swallowed. "If I have to die to defeat Voldemort and keep her safe, I will. But she I truly believe she's crucial to my preparation, and probably during the battle itself I'll need her..."

Harry now stared at his hands. Finally, "It kills me a little, sir. I wish I could think of a way to let you take her away." Harry looked up defiantly. "I promise you, sir-"

"No need to promise, Harry. The look in your eyes, it says it all. Hermione told us before the attack that you would die for your friends, and though I did not doubt it based on what you have done so far, I couldn't help but wonder if what you and she, and your friends have experienced could be like war as I know it. You could say you would make such sacrifice, but *after* seeing war you could.... Well, now I believe you, Harry. Now *I* know you, and I believe you. And I'll make sure Sylvia knows of the commitment you've to our daughter's well being. But not at the expense of the world."

Granger sat back and laughed a mirthless laugh. "Good God, Harry. I've been in a war, a real war involving whole countries, but never in the fight for the freedom of the world. The idea makes for a bad movies script, and now I am living in it. And there is so little I can do to help."

The dentist looked at him. "But help I will. I'll do everything in my power to help you avoid the situation where you have to decide between stopping evil and saving your friends. Professor Dumbledore assures me that he has an excellent program for you to participate in. He's gathering everyone he can to help train you and the rest of the Hogwarts students, but I think particularly to train you, to prepare all of you for the confrontation, or multiple confrontations should they occur.

"The headmaster and I have discussed just a little some of the things he has planned. You need to learn tactics and strategy, and small unit fighting dynamics. We need to fully discuss everything you know and anyone else knows about these murdering fiends and devise ways to do maximum damage to them with minimum casualties to our side. I've volunteered to help, and Professor Dumbledore is open minded enough to think I *can help* in some simple ways, maybe more.

"I want you to be the Wrath of God on a broom when you meet Voldemort. I want you and Hermione, and everyone else there in force and ready to bring superior firepower down on them. No mercy. 'Kill 'em all and let someone else sort them out.' That's what my old sergeant used to say, and it's good advice in times like these."

After waiting for a moment with an obvious question on his face, Harry said, "Mr. Granger, how does it feel to be a murderer?"

Now it was time for the dentist to look shocked. He sat there, frozen in place with a look that caused Harry to quickly look away. Harry heard Hermione's father heave a great sigh after a moment. Time passed.

Finally, the gentle Steph Granger said, "Look at me, Harry. I have killed over thirty people up close, close enough to see the look in their eyes when I made the killing thrust or shot. No telling how many others I killed when I called in artillery fire in Vietnam. There isn't a one I would not have rather

subdued and not killed after the adrenalin of the battle died down and I could think rationally.

"BUT, I have NEVER *murdered* anyone."

Harry looked up at him in confusion.

"If you look in a dictionary, Harry, the word 'kill' will say something like 'to end life.' The word 'murder' means 'to kill with evil or malicious intent.' The Death Eaters and Voldemort are murderers. My wife and I *killed* four murderers or attempted murderers at least. *Killing* someone trying to murder you is the clearest distinction I can think of to differentiate these two means of ending a life. Even the Death Eater I killed who I had slashed across the hand, could have pulled another wand and still done that Killing Curse on me, or so Moody assures me."

The dentist stared at Harry. "Son, you haven't thought that killing Voldemort will make you a murderer, have you? It will make you a hero - and before you give me that sour face about being a hero, *I* know what you are thinking. Many think of you as a hero for what you did as a baby. Others consider you a hero because of the things you've done since then. You are a hero and so am I. And I know how bereft of meaning my heroism is whenever I dream about that bullet entering Tanner's chest.

"I finally left the regiment because even after more than four years, everyone looked at me with hero worship. They think I'm such a great warrior and many who have not seen action want me to tell them about it. I believe you've had that too, haven't you? Really is a bloody bother, isn't it?"

Harry looked up. He realized that for once, someone else understood how meaningless the accolades are when you understand the costs up close.

"Harry, do you want to talk about Sirius, or maybe Cedric? Others were there when Sirius died, but you were alone when Cedric was killed, weren't you?"

Harry said quietly, "He was there because I offered to let him grab the cup with me, so we'd win together. Had I gone alone he wouldn't have been killed. It was senseless and brutal, and a good guy is gone, and his parents will never be the same."

"I know, Harry, I know. The Brigadier, Tanner's father, really wants to spend time with me, even now, because I was Tanner's best friend, but I can't face him. I'm probably being crueler to him than if I did see him, but I just can't."

The two warriors sat in silence for the longest time. It was a rare camaraderie they shared - they were two of those who had seen too much of war and lived to be adored for their exertions, when all they wanted was peace and memory loss. Instead, they were being asked to fight more. And because they held the rare giftings of great warriors, they would gather up their armor and do what would bring them more accolades, as much as they despised it.

It was all the more strange since one of the battle-hardened veterans was forty-nine, while the other was not yet sixteen.

Finally, the father braced himself and made the request, he would rather die than let happen, "Promise me, Harry."

It was almost a minute before the younger champion said, "All of the innocents are worth more than one person. If I am *absolutely* sure it is the only way to end it, I will sacrifice Hermione if need be, to kill him." He lowered his head into his hands and began weeping silently.

Harry felt sure he heard a whispered, "Thank you," amidst the dentist's own quiet sobs.

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They had been dry-eyed for over ten minutes. They had been refreshed by what women referred to as a 'good cry.' The dentist and the teenager maintained a unique fellowship, the peace they were experiencing was inexplicable to all but a few. In those ten minutes they'd been discussing the daily exercise routines the elder warrior did. When Harry asked how he might start such a program, Mr. Granger said that he would tell him in a few days, after he and Dumbledore finalized several remaining issues.

"Daddy? Harry?" The door cracked open.

"Yes, Pumpkin?" Hermione came in with a distraught blush and sour look on her face, and her father laughed.

"Harry, my daughter doesn't like being called Pumpkin. You don't think it's a nickname I should give up, do you?"

Harry looked at the father, then the daughter, and then at the father again. Then he realized how to diplomatically make his point. "No, it's a great nickname. I won't call her that, but I bet Ron will, if you keep using it."

"Well, if you put it that way..."

Hermione broke out laughing this time. "Oh, Daddy. I'll always be your little pumpkin, and I want you to call me that when we're alone, but Harry's right. As much as I love Ron as a friend, and maybe more, but he's just too dense to see that as your exclusive nickname for me.

"I came up to tell you that lunch will be ready in five minutes or so, and Professor Dumbledore is here to see you, Harry. I think you and he will have a private working lunch, as he called it. Are you two finished?"

"I am, Harry?"

"Yes, sir, but if I ever..."

"I'd be glad to discuss anything you like, Harry. This is war, and we're all in it together. I feel pretty useless despite what Sylvia and I did the other day, so if I can help you in any way, it'll allow me to be of some use, which I want badly."

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Hermione ran down the stairs to tell Molly to begin serving lunch. As they walked out of the library, and before they reached the staircase, they heard, "Steph. Harry."

It was Dumbledore. "Thank you for helping my young friend, Steph. Did everything...?"

"Professor, how can I help you better train Harry and the others? Is there *anything* I can do? Do they need to use me for moving target practice...?"

The headmaster's eyes sparkled. "We need nothing so dramatic, Steph, and besides, I believe I have something more in line with your talents, and the many talents of your charming wife."

"You need a dentist? But I thought..."

Dumbledore roared with laughter, something Harry wasn't sure he had ever seen. "Do I need a dentist? Oh, Steph, that is without a doubt the funniest one-liner I have heard in, it must be a hundred and twenty-five, no, a hundred and twenty-seven years." The mirthful laughter continued.

Steph looked flustered and Harry was open-mouthed until he actually thought about Dumbledore going to a dentist. He began to laugh too. Finally the Mr. Granger seemed to see the humor and chuckled also.

"No, Steph, I have something else in mind, even more than the physical training work we discussed. But I need to talk to Harry. Please ask Molly to fix a tray for the two of us and clap twice once it's ready. I'll take it from there. And please apologize to all for my taking Harry from his friends. He should have some time to visit before he has to go back and work in his aunt's garden."

Harry and Dumbledore entered the library and sat at a table that was set for two diners that had not been there when Harry'd left. The elder wizard started laughing again. "That is rich, Harry. Can you imagine me in a dentist's chair? Wouldn't the drills get caught in my beard? Can't you just see it now? That reminds me of the joke, the one about the dentist, the snake charmer, and the trombone player--"

They heard two claps though not from downstairs, there had to be some sort of spell to make that possible. "Ah, Harry, lunch. Molly is such a fine cook."

There were gorgeous sandwiches with roast beef and ham on crusty hot homemade brown bread, cut in quarters. There were beautiful deli pickles on each plate, and a crock of pungent brown mustard on the side. The chips apparently had just been cooked because they still sizzled and crackled. Under a



cloth there were hot biscuits with chocolate icing ladled on generously. There were mugs of iced pumpkin juice there and a pitcher to refill their mugs when needed. And in one covered bowl there were Muggle lemon drops.

"Well, Harry, it all looks marvelous, tuck in."

They were relatively quiet while they first prepared their sandwiches, but after the first bites, and after the required 'ahs' of delight at the tastes, Harry asked, "So, what happened in the joke?"

"Which joke?"

"The one with the snake charmer, the dentist, and the trombone player."

"Well, there once was -- Oh! I nearly forgot... I have something for you."

Dumbledore pulled out an official looking document from one of his many pockets, which he handed with a bit of pomp to his dining partner. It was addressed:

*Mr. Harry James Potter*  
*Dining somewhere with Albus Dumbledore*  
*(Yes, I know it is none of my business)*

Harry felt like he was no longer hungry. There was a hippogriff flying around in his stomach and his face seemed to pale right before the headmaster's eyes.

"Good heavens, Harry, I am rather proud of your results. You will be too, I do believe. Please open it."

Harry did not believe it could be all bad, he knew his mentor would not mislead him, but there was one grade he feared - the one most likely to block his path to the future he wanted. He read:

*Dear Mr. Potter:*  
*Please find your results for your Ordinary Wizarding Levels as follows:*

**Course of Study - Theoretical and Practical (if applicable)**

**Astronomy -**

Acceptable (*b.a.u.t.c\**)

**Care of Magical Creatures -**

Outstanding

**Charms -**

*Theoretical* Exceeds Expectations

*Practical* Outstanding

**Defense Against the Dark Arts -**

*Theoretical* Outstanding

*Practical* Outstanding Plus

**Divination -**

Outstanding

**Herbology -***Theoretical* Acceptable*Practical* Exceeds Expectations**History of Magic -**

Poor

**Potions -***Theoretical* Exceeds Expectations*Practical* Exceeds Expectations Acceptable**Transfiguration -***Theoretical* Exceeds Expectations*Practical* Outstanding*\*b.a.u.t.c - barely acceptable under the circumstances*

*Mr. Potter, whereas twelve O.W.L.s is to be highly applauded, I must say that I have only seen two other Outstanding Pluses in my one hundred and fifty-seven years of supervising these tests.*

*Professor Dumbledore will no doubt be too modest to tell you, but he received an Outstanding Plus for his Practical O.W.L. in Transfiguration.*

*Congratulations but don't let it go to your head, you do have three Poores for grades also.*

*Good luck in your future endeavors,*

*Madam Griselda Marchbanks*

*Department Head for the Wizarding Examinations Authority*

"Did you read this, sir?" Harry asked noncommittally.

"No, the results go straight to Hogwarts to Professor McGonagall's attention. She compiles the data and gives me a formal list. I have not been to the school since these grades were posted. But Madam Marchbanks and I are old friends. She knows you have special arrangements during the summer and thought you might be unavailable to owl posts. She gave this to me, just in case, when we met at a chamber music recital last week, or was it at the tenpin tournament? We were at both. She told me that you had earned twelve O.W.L.s. I am most pleased, Harry, most pleased indeed. Of course I read in the *Daily Prophet* about Mr. Macmillan's O's in Defense. Very nice of him to give you the credit he did. "

Without a word, because he was still in shock, Harry handed the results letter to his lunch partner.

Using his left thumb, Dumbledore pushed his reading glasses back a bit on his nose and read the missive. His eyes widened for just a moment, and a few seconds later he blushed slightly. He folded the letter carefully and just as carefully handed it back to his student.

"Harry, you will want to place that in your Gringotts vault until you set up permanent residence later in life. An Outstanding Plus is a rare thing indeed as Madam Marchbanks told you. You'll want to frame that. Well, I cannot express just how proud I am of you. I know you have always excelled in that subject, and that you have used what you have learned to your advantage during actual fighting. I

also know that you were an excellent instructor with the DA, as Mr. Macmillan's success has demonstrated. But, Harry, to achieve an Outstanding Plus you would have had to demonstrate near impossible perfection in execution and completion. You must have been positively eloquent in your verbal explanations during the practical. You must have performed at instructor level."

Both Dumbledore and Harry were silent before each other. Harry just thought he had done well, he did not understand exactly what had just been expressed. Harry did not understand just how the accomplishments of his students touched the headmaster. His accomplishment was even more remarkable, considering the abysmal level of formal Defense instruction in Harry's fifth year.

Finally the elder wizard spoke. "Harry, could I ask you to expand your efforts with the Defense Association on a more formal basis this coming year? It will be demanding, but I believe I can make it possible for you to help many more people than you were able to last year. You will need a more official recognition of your efforts at the very least. What do you say, Harry?"

Harry was a bit dumbstruck by Dumbledore's effusiveness, but he finally said, "Sir, I'll be glad to help in any way you think best. I'd like to see the skills of everyone improve, particularly after last year with Umbridge. It's more of me wanting to save everyone I guess, but I can't stand thinking a Death Eater might hurt someone if I could have trained them better. I was going to ask if we could make the DA official and invite more to attend. I think Hermione, Ron, Luna, and Ginny, and especially Neville could help me teach more students. Some of the others, like Ernie, might be able to teach also. I think I could create a plan to expand everyone's abilities to defend themselves. Particularly if Hermione and Ron help me develop it."

"Yes, Harry, that's exactly what I want. See if you can write up your training plan with your friends and show me a rough draft by, say, the end of the first week in August. Remus contacted me regarding your letter to the DA members about producing a Patronus under dementor attack conditions. He said that it was excellent work, so I approved his plan to use Hogwarts Copy Quills and school owls to copy and deliver your letters. If you should decide to write more instructional letters on other subjects, please let Remus know. But I ask one more favor, would you allow others, non-DA members, to receive copies of your writings if they request them?"

"I don't know who else would want to hear what I have to say, but--"

"Now, Harry, no false modesty. Remus said that your explanations are excellent and I do not think he would say so to me, just to flatter you."

After a moment's thought, Harry said, "Okay, Professor, whatever you say. Oh, and can I ask who the other person was that got an O Plus?"

"The other student created an antidote to a new poison. Grindelwald had just started poisoning people, and this student demonstrated the solution to the antidote dilemma during his O.W.L test. The student was Tom Riddle, and his research started him on his path of seeking immortality."

After a very solemn pause, Harry asked, "What did you do during your O.W.L.s that was so wonderful, sir?"

"Oh, I solved the problem with Aberforth's goat."

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"Mother! Just *Leave. Me. Alone!* I am not going to write him. He's a Gryffindor and all it means. He's brave and noble but I don't know if he, or any of them can forgive me. I got Dumbledore removed as Headmaster!"

"Honey, you didn't do that directly--"

"Don't try to use Slytherin logic on me. You and I are both Ravenclaws; we know the logical conclusion of that train of thought." She stopped speaking for a moment and lowered her head. "Once they removed the Memory Charm and I remembered what I had done, and what the results were... I was almost glad that I had the word 'sneak' embedded on my face."

She straightened her stance, wiped her eyes, as if to make a pronouncement. "I don't deserve his help. Let's just hope we don't meet any dementors." And with that last statement she marched out of the room. Her bedroom door slammed shut a moment later.

The mother sat staring into space at a blank wall. After several minutes she rose and walked to the desk, took out quill, ink, and parchment, and began. The words were difficult at first, but they flowed with greater ease, and greater discomfort.

*Dear Mr. Potter,*

*If you tear up this letter immediately I will not blame you, but please hear a mother's request before you do. I've no right to expect that, much less your acceptance of my particular request, but - I write in hope - a mother's hope.*

*My daughter did not want to betray you. She resisted me for weeks and weeks, at first responding to my owls to say 'no,' and then not responding to my owls at all. Finally, Dolores Umbridge, someone whom I once trusted, but who started threatening our family, arranged for me to Floo to Hogwarts where she and I both forced Marietta to betray you. I felt heart-sick during the process, but was promoted and given a raise the next day at the Ministry. That was my thirty pieces of silver.*

*It is MY fault, not my daughter's. She has learned from you enough Gryffindor bravery to want to suffer the consequences of her betrayal - such bravery and such convictions she obviously did not learn from me.*

*I write this letter to ask you to heap the anger you rightly feel for my daughter on me. And I further write to ask you to include her in any future defense instructions letters you may write. Today we ran into Cho Chang and Madam Chang in Diagon Alley. Madam Chang did not know about my daughter's actions and assumed that Marietta had received your letter about fighting*

*dementors as Cho had. Madam Chang could not say enough about the excellence of your directives and how her whole family plans to follow your instructions and methods in preparation for possible future attacks.*

*In being courageous enough to be willing to pay the price for her treachery, I attribute that courage to Marietta's association with you. But the treachery should be laid solely at my feet, not hers.*

*Please, Mr. Potter, forgive her. Please send her a copy of these instructions if you still have one. Please include her in future instructional letters should you write them, and please allow her to rejoin the DA at school this fall.*

*I had an uncle who was killed by a Death Eater. Please do what you can to help my daughter avoid any similar fate.*

*With all of my gratitude for reading thus far,  
Madam Pontillia Edgecombe*

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Harry had been given this letter by Remus Lupin after his 'working lunch' with Professor Dumbledore.

"Profess- I mean, Remus, this letter arrived just now? But didn't my instruction letters only go out this morning?"

"Why yes, Harry. But actually they *arrived* early this morning. We worked through the night and sent the last one off by owl at about 4:30 this morning. The Changs and the Edgecombes live here in London and owl post is very quick over such short distances."

Harry was a bit stunned. "But - my letter - it wasn't that important to loose sleep-"

"Now there you are wrong," interrupted Lupin, "I may have taught you to cast a Patronus Spell with one fake dementor by way of a Boggart, but you taught *me* how to cast a corporeal Patronus. I had never produced a corporeal before last night when I read your instructions. It would have never occurred to me to try it, but Hermione spoke in such a matter of fact manner about how she had done what you had written in your letter and had produced a corporeal Patronus the first time. Now I know she is the brightest witch of her age I have ever seen, but a corporeal? - the first time?"

"While we waited for Minerva McGonagall to send the Copying Quills and school owls, I went into the back garden and re-read your instructions. I searched my mind for a happy thought from my past. I had always used my time with your parents at your birth to cast that spell before, but it did not have the power for a full corporeal. As you might imagine, werewolves don't have the happiest lives to draw from. So, I took your advice and thought about the happiest thing I wanted to occur in the future.

"When I decided on the one thing I most wanted, I pondered it, fleshed it out with what might be called memories from the future, and ran over those thoughts several times. I stood up, started the memories in my brain again, and cast the spell.

"Harry, I almost dropped my wand when a fully formed huge silver dove shot out." Remus blushed. "I

always thought of your mother as a peaceful, lovely dove.

"So, I personally oversaw the Copying Quills and Hermione, Ginny, and Ron helped with addressing the owls. This letter from Madam Edgecombe was not the only response. I have four others from those nearby, more will probably come in from those who live in the northlands and Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. But this is the only owl that needs a decision from you, so far. It's your instruction letter."

The impact from Lupin's narrative had our hero speechless for a few moments. He finally shook his head and said, "But they are just my ramblings- erm, Remus. um... of course we have to send these instructions to Marietta and anyone else who wants them, although I can't imagine who would - but why did you wait? Why not send them? It's the right thing to do."

"Hermione wanted to right away. Ron didn't want to, not until the Edgecombes 'sweated a bit,' I think is how he put it. Ginny said it was your decision and that quieted both of them. I thought for certain that you would say what you did, but Ginny was right, it is your decision."

Changing the subject, Remus asked, "How'd your lunch with Professor Dumbledore go? Did he tell you about the Paladin Program, or at least what he has finalized so far?"

Harry remembered back to their conversation and was still amazed by the outline of the Paladin Program as the headmaster had explained it.

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As they continued to eat, Dumbledore asked, "So, Harry, what did you learn from your three different visitors?"

At first Harry didn't think he could put it into words, but as he opened his mouth to say so, he realized he could at least explain the first visit, and the main points for each next visit just followed the first.

"Everybody else, including you, sir, that very night, wanted to tell me it was not my fault that Sirius died. Professor Lupin told me that he thought it *was* my fault, but only to a degree. He told me how it was your fault *and* my fault, and his, and Professor Snape's, and - even a bit Sirius' fault - and of course primarily Voldemort's and Bellatrix Lestrange's as well. I can now see that others were partially to blame after I was *allowed* to accept my portion of the guilt.

"Everyone wanted me to feel better about Sirius, like I should forget about him. But Moody told me that I would feel his loss forever - only it would ease and become more bearable eventually. Moody also convinced me, as did Remus, that I'm not going to stay out of this fight, or keep my friends out of it, so I'd better get all of the help and training I can, it's the only way to cut down on injuries and... deaths." Harry gulped with these last words.

"Harry, have you told your friends about the prophecy?"

"No, sir, I've told no one and I don't plan to any time soon. People look at me oddly enough as it is; I don't want to add to the stares, as if that's possible. And of course before I talked to Mr. Granger I thought killing Riddle would make me a murderer, and I didn't want my friends to consort with a murderer.

"But Hermione has figured out that I'm probably the one who'll have to kill Voldemort, since he comes after me so often. She sees the pattern and assumes it is inevitable, not a prophetic reason for it to happen. So Mr. Granger heard me say something about murdering Voldemort. I don't really remember exactly what I said, but he got upset with me when I said something about killing Tom being murder.

"He told me that a murderer kills for no good reason, only for evil purposes. A killer kills to stop something terrible from happening, and that killing a murderer to stop the evil killing was a terrible thing to have to do, but the right thing to do. It didn't take long for the truth of that to sink in, and I am really glad that he told me."

Harry looked at his half eaten sandwich and wondered if he would finish it. His lunch companion was very still and soundless.

*"Each* of my three visitors kept repeating that 'this is war.' I always knew it in my head, but now I think I know it in my heart - or rather in my stomach, I want to throw up whenever I think about it."

Harry spoke the last sentence with such finality that it was clear he had finished giving account of his three visitors. But Dumbledore remained silent for a very long time. Harry did not consider what his mentor might be thinking and he didn't want to know. After what was an indeterminably long time, he decided to change the subject.

"Professor, I really don't want to talk about this any more right now. Can we talk about this program you're so excited about but haven't explained to me?"

"Oh. Why, yes, Harry. And I haven't been keeping it from you, I haven't had the time and the most important pieces have only just fallen in place, so I haven't-"

"Sir," Harry held up his hand. "I know you have not been keeping this from me. I feel bad about those things I said to you that night. You never said you were perfect - I just assumed you were." Harry wiped his face with his hand and continued, "Sir, I'd rather follow you when you are wrong, which is certainly rare, than follow anyone else who happens to be right at the moment. I just hate being left out of things. I'll try to be more understanding when you can't tell me something because I'm just a kid, but I would like to be kept better informed. Moody said that I need to know what matters about me, and that telling me about what is happening in general isn't a bad idea, but a lot that doesn't concern me I shouldn't be told for security reasons. I think I see his point, now."

Dumbledore paused thoughtfully for a moment and said, "Thank you, Harry, for those words of confidence, they mean as much - no actually more than anyone else's might right now. And thank you for letting me be imperfect. I have been feeling my faults and failures more and more lately. There are many advantages to living a long life. Seeing the accumulation of your mistakes isn't one of them. I do

promise to tell you what I can as soon as I can. I cannot express how much your trust means to me."

They both were glad to go on to the next matter.

"Now, Harry, there are really three main parts to the Paladin Program. The first part is the actual training, which begins formally the first day of classes, but you do prepare before that day also. The second part concerns who can participate in the program. The third part is the physiological aspects that make this concentrated training achievable.

"I see by the look on your face that I need to work on my overview delivery."

Harry shook his head negatively once and then several times he nodded, 'yes.'

Dumbledore chuckled. "First, do you know who the Paladins were?"

Harry shook his head. He'd heard Dudley mumbling about 'paladins' being such a pain in one of his computer games. But he couldn't imagine that those were the paladins his headmaster was discussing.

"You know the story about King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. There is little factual knowledge about Arthur, and believe me, we in the wizarding world know more about him than any Muggles. Most of what is 'known' is mythical, but Arthur lived in the late fifth century A.D., and fought the Saxon invaders here in England. In the late eighth century, the king of the Franks, Charlemagne, or Charles the Great as that name means, gathered around himself a group of similarly amazing knights called the Paladins.

"North African Moslems, known as the Saracens, had invaded and conquered most of Spain, and were invading France. Charlemagne's grandfather stopped the largest invasion attempt, but Charlemagne and his Paladins fought them on a number of occasions. They had many other battles as well with Danes, Lombards, and other Germanic and barbaric invaders.

"The truth about Charlemagne's Paladins is almost as shrouded in legend as the Knights of the Round Table. They were indeed a select group of his many knights, who proved to be the most noble, most chivalrous, and mightiest warriors of the age. Those Paladins were so highly trained and skilled and their standards set so high, that few tried to join their ranks, and fewer still succeeded. But they were not a restricted group.

"Harry, it was not a group of knights made up only of Franks. There was a Bavarian, a Dane, and two Saracens who had converted to Christianity, in with the others most trusted by Charlemagne, and admired or feared by all. These three nationalities were sworn enemies of the Franks, but those four knights had proved themselves able and trustworthy.

"The Paladins were the paragons of nobility, not nobility of birth, but nobility of purpose and action. Their virtues and their great striving for excellence in all things as well as fighting abilities, were two aspects of the Paladins I want in those entering our program. The non-exclusiveness is another. Pureblood, half-blood, and Muggle-born are all invited to join, but only their efforts and achievements will allow them to join and to remain. No one in any house will not be invited, if they



qualify and participate in all that the program entails."

Harry frowned and interrupted, "You're going to invite Slytherins to join. Professor, you can't-"

"Harry, just because I invite anyone in particular to join, doesn't mean they will. Professor Snape is making a special effort among all Slytherins who qualify, or can be tutored this summer to the point of qualification. He hopes that participation in this program will point out the error of Voldemort's plans. Even children of known Death Eaters will be invited if they can qualify. But let me ask you, Harry, do you think all of them will agree to the *values* of this program, even if they want to receive the training? Professor Snape is personally explaining to each candidate from his house, and their parents, what the values are we will promote - our version of the chivalry in the days of Charlemagne.

"Harry, accepting and valuing all pureblood, half-blood, and Muggle-born, is a qualifying factor, and an ongoing point of qualification. Mr. Malfoy's participation will be dependent on his acceptance and proper treatment of all, ALL. And, Harry, your ongoing participation will depend on *your* acceptance of any Slytherins who choose to join us. I do not want to put too fine a point on it, but do you understand and accept that?"

Harry never imagined his feelings for Malfoy and his ilk might stand in his way of becoming an Auror, or even training to defeat Voldemort. He pondered this, and his headmaster allowed him the time and silence.

Of the roughly one thousand students at Hogwarts, roughly two hundred and fifty were in each house - between thirty and forty students in each year, in each house. Of those Slytherins he knew well - Malfoy and his lot - *none* of them would possibly consider becoming Aurors, Harry felt sure. That was just over half of them in his year. Of the fifteen or so Slytherins left in his year, he knew none of them. Oh, he had acknowledged Blaise Zabini and Daphne Greengrass when they passed in the corridors, but he did not even know the names of the others. Perhaps the very fact that they did not traipse around following after Draco made them more acceptable than he had ever considered.

Finally, it occurred to him that Draco would rather be set on fire than join such a program, as would all those others who were so vocally pro-Voldemort.

"Professor, any Slytherin who wants to be a Paladin, I'll cooperate with and even welcome into the DA, but I have to say, I'm not expecting many of them to join."

"Nor I, Harry, nor I. Unfortunate though, we could use many of them. They are hard working students and dedicated to any goal they set. They fight hard, as well. I'd rather have as many fighting *with* us as possible. Though Slytherins have been in the main of supporters of many dark wizards and witches over the ages, the vast majority of that house have been honorable members of the wizarding community. You may know that Mr. Ollivander was Slytherin, from the time you spent with him before your third year, but did you know that Alastor Moody was also from that house?"

Harry was flabbergasted. "But he *hates* all Death Eaters!"

"Yes, his emotions do run high on that matter. But you will allow that you would have a particular dislike for any Gryffindor joining Tom. Besides the obvious, does not the fact that Peter Pettigrew was from Gryffindor rile you a bit more than say, Augustus Rookwood from Ravenclaw?"

After a moment, Harry said, "You have a point there."

"Back to the description of the Paladin Program. I thought long and hard while I was on my forced sabbatical from the headmaster's office about what type of training I wanted for you, and anyone else at Hogwarts, who wishes to join you in that training - and how extensive I wanted it to be. Please forgive me, Harry, for assuming you would automatically join such a program, but this was before the battle of the Department of Mysteries.

"I told you in your first year, when you were visiting the Mirror of Erised, that I had ways of being invisible other than an Invisibility Cloak. It is my practice to look in on all established student activities while invisible, just out of curiosity. Please do not misunderstand, I had full confidence in you, but I am required to check on everything, and I had to be able to say that I had observed your DA while unseen. I observe *all* student activities at least once a term.

"Your instructing style - allowing everyone to work at their own pace, helping those falling behind while challenging those succeeding to excel further, and having the better students help those not doing as well - this became my inspiration.

"As to the type of training to offer, I could not countenance anything but the very best training in the world to fight Dark forces. So, the only model for training I could accept was the Auror Academy curriculum, the most advanced of such training in the world."

Harry's eyes bugged out. "You're going to take us to the Auror Academy?" His surprise was evident.

"Goodness me, no. The Academy is busy now training Aurors even though there is a shortage of candidates. Their program is a three-year process that runs eight to ten hours a day, five days a week, and occasional Saturdays. And that doesn't include the time needed for special field training projects.

"No, we are going to take their training curriculum and use it as closely as we can while still maintaining the class schedules required for you to finish and take your N.E.W.T.s two years from now. However, if anyone in the program receives a N.E.W.T. in Defense with an 'Exceeds Expectations' or better, and qualifies in all other regards for Auror employment at the completion of their seventh year, they will enter the Auror Academy in its second year.

"As a matter of fact, the Academy likes this idea so much, that it will ask any seventh year student seriously interested in being an Auror, to stay at Hogwarts for an eighth year instead of going to the Academy for their first year. They have agreed to this because it is the quickest way they can escalate their training schedule.

"Let me make this simpler. You can only qualify for the Paladin Program if you are in sixth or seventh year. Those in seventh year are committing to the Auror Academy to be allowed to stay for an unprecedented eighth year.

"Those entering the Program in their sixth year either do so intending to become an Auror, or wanting to supplement their future educational needs with this most advanced defense training program of its kind.

"For one to qualify, a student must also have secured a place in N.E.W.T.s level Potions, Transfiguration, Charms, and Defense Against the Dark Arts, with their O.W.L.s grades, or-"

"Oh," said Harry dejectedly. "I guess that leaves me out. Professor Snape-"

"Harry, you are not disqualified yet. I would never want you to repeat this to Professor Snape, but I believe that an 'Exceeds Expectations' should be acceptable for any N.E.W.T.s class. Nonetheless, I have arranged for any rising sixth year who will diligently take part in a summer tutorial, to bring up a maximum of two courses of study one grade to qualify. You need help in Potions. I believe Ronald Weasley needs help in Potions and Transfiguration if he chooses to join you. Those scoring too low in three or more essential courses will not qualify. It may come as no surprise to you that Miss Granger will need no tutoring, and that I plan on asking her to assist tutoring a few others.

"It will be hard work for you, Harry, but will you give me your best this summer on your Potions work?"

"I will, sir." Then Harry's brow knitted. "Will Professor Snape be tutoring me?"

"No, I have him in charge of another project this summer, but he will be very much a part of the Paladin Program come September first, as well as teaching his other courses."

Harry tried to hide his hopefulness at Potions without Snape, and his regret that Snape would be back next term. He assumed the former Death Eater was somewhere spying for the Order of the Phoenix this summer.

"I must add that there is a third type of student that is a unique subset of those wanting to enter Auror training after school. While Professor Umbridge gave me my holiday from Hogwarts," he smiled ruefully at this, "I visited a number of other schools of magic on the continent, in Asia, and in America. I observed a number of ways to improve things, but I pretty much confirmed that Hogwarts is the finest school of witchcraft and wizardry in the world, if you will allow me this lack of humility.

"In a number of schools, when I told the headmistress or master of my plans for the Paladin Program, they arranged for me to meet with certain of their students that they felt might like to attend. I only sent out the invitations this morning, so I do not know what response I will receive, but I believe an international flavoring of students from other schools around the world, should help any course of study. Pre-Auror training is no exception. They have much to teach us, and we them.

"I believe," continued Dumbledore, "that we may have one or two full time instructors from these schools join us for the term of this war emergency. I definitely have commitments from several professors to visit for all or a significant part of a term to add to our instruction.

"And now, Harry, that you have agreed to expand the DA, we will have even more layers of Defense

training going on."

"Will you give us a professor for the DA to make it more official and to help expand it?"

"Something like that, Harry. Something like that," replied Dumbledore. The headmaster was nearly flushed with excitement.

He went on, "By choosing the extremely difficult Auror Academy defense training methods, I did create one problem for us. You have grown some since the start of spring term, but I believe you've noticed that most of those young men finishing their seventh year are substantially taller and better filled out than you are now. You may have also noticed that Ron's older brothers perform more complex magic more easily than you do. You met Bill and Charlie Weasley after they were fully grown. Didn't they seem much more powerful in some ways?"

"Yes, sir," Harry said. "I remember when I first met those two. They were casually pushing large objects around in the air, and conjuring things out of nothing. They made it look easy. I just thought they were so much more powerful than me."

"They were top students to be sure. Bill was Head Boy and Charlie was a fine student also. But you are much more capable now than they were at the end of their fifth years.

"No, under normal circumstances, over the next two years you will change dramatically. You will probably grow several more inches and be as tall as your father, and fill out more. But you will also change magically. You will substantially increase in your magical powers, as will all of your classmates. The magical training you receive in a N.E.W.T.s course outline probably seems daunting to you now, but causing a feather to levitate your first day in charms seemed nearly impossible also, except for Miss Granger of course.

"Over the next two years you will also become more mentally capable to handle these advanced courses. You will feel smarter than you do now for lack of a better way of saying it. All of our courses are designed to challenge you where you are in your development, and take you to the next step of your capabilities.

For the pre-Auror training, all you need is the physical, magical, and mental growth and maturity I have mentioned, but that is not the only maturation you would go through during normal sixth and seventh years. All young witches and wizards go through emotional and hormonal growth during these twenty-four months as well. The problem is that you cannot only grow in those needed three areas. You are a whole being, Harry.

If all are in agreement and you join the Paladin Program, you will start on a series of potions that will, between now and the start of Fall term, turn you physically into the equivalent of a young man finishing his seventh year.

Between now and September first, you will take the potions, eat a special diet to help your body grow, exercise in some very specific ways and at very specific times throughout the day, and one more thing.

The emotional and hormonal growth you will experience has to be allowed to happen and be controlled precisely. Each young Paladin will spend time most days with a member of the opposite sex. Most of the emotional 'stretching' shall we say, must be allowed, even encouraged to occur, but in a very controlled manner. The potions and other circumstances will help make this happen, but you and your fellow participants must exert your willpower at the appropriate times.

"Harry, have you had any dreams of Voldemort since the one about the Grangers?"

"No. It's only been a few days and I've noticed I don't dream about him at all after he's had a defeat, until some other big event, good or bad in his opinion, causes him to connect with me. It's as though he's forgotten he inhabits my dreams. I've only had that one about the Grangers since the battle that night."

"Well, that is fortunate. I know Occlumency lessons were not effective for you in the manner we had hoped, shall we say, but please continue with the mental exercises you learned for now, and inform me right away if you have any dream at all you think in any way attributable to him. I hope to find another instructor for you soon, but I am still of the opinion that if I teach you, it will draw Tom to you. Harry, I am sorry that I didn't explain that to you last year.

"In addition to the rest of the aspects I mentioned, each student in your year in the Paladin Program will receive permission to work on their magic this summer."

Harry was very excited about that, and it showed.

Dumbledore chuckled. "I knew you'd like that, Harry. There will be a number of restrictions. As to the times and place for using magic, the exercises, the visits with young ladies, the special diet, and your potions tutorials - most of it will have to take place in your aunt and uncle's house."

Harry began shaking his head almost violently. "They'll never let me do this. Aunt Petunia has been the best she's ever been this summer, but Uncle Vernon is a bomb about to go off. He'll never agree if I ask him-

"That's why *I'm* going to ask him for you, Harry. Leave your Uncle Vernon to me."

"Will you jinx him, sir?" Harry was relishing the idea of the most powerful wizard alive turning his cruel uncle into a slug, or something really bad. "Could you turn him into a flobberworm for the summer?"

"No, Harry," Dumbledore chuckled, "your uncle must allow you to participate out of his own free will."

"How will you do that?"

"I will make him an offer he *can't refuse*. But, back to the other logistics of the Paladin Program during your stay with your mother's family. We will have to use Engorgement Charms and certain other types of spells on your room to create an exercise area and a magical practice arena. You will have to have a special diet prepared for you at the correct times of day, which will be done in your

room also, in a kitchen we will create. You will have to be given specific potions, once a day, but during different times of the day. To accomplish all of this, you will have a special assistant with you most of the time."

"An assistant?" Harry asked.

"Actually, 'assistant' in the original sense of the word. Someone helping you for your benefit, not someone to do anything that you don't want to do yourself. Your assistant will help you, but your schedule will be set by the Program. He will be most attentive to your needs, but will make sure you do what needs to be done when you must do it.

"Harry, you are mostly cooperative, but there will be times over the next two months when, as an affect of the potions, you will *not* want to do what must be done. It won't be your fault. Your assistant will make you do it. That's why you will need someone who really cares for your greater good. It will be mostly a rewarding but occasionally infuriating two months."

"Sir, you say that I will go through in two months what normally takes place in two years. Do I lose two years, or at least twenty-two months of my life?"

"Would you do it if I said 'yes?'"

Harry thought about it for just a moment and nodded his agreement.

Dumbledore smiled. "You are a true Gryffindor, Harry. I am prouder even still of you. But the opposite is true. You will probably live a longer life because of this. I was in the first group of students to enter this physiological acceleration process. We were needed to fight in the last vampire war. It was experimental then and rather painful. All of the physical pain has been eliminated now, although you might feel odd from time to time.

"Harry, I have grown my beard to make myself look older, that and I always seem to cut myself in several places when I shave, but I have quite a youthful face underneath this for someone of my years." He fluffed his beard rather proudly.

"Professor McGonagall was in the last group of students to participate in an acceleration process, during the war with Grindelwald, and she looks much younger than she is."

Harry did not know how young his Transfiguration professor was, but she didn't look that young to him.

"The physical pain of the process was completely eliminated in her day, but the emotional issues were not looked after. The assumption had been that with no actual pain the emotions would not be a factor. The opposite was true. The psychological effects were ignored and those with truly dark thoughts found a way to pursue them covertly. It would have been easy to see if we had looked. I was not one of those administering the process. I was so occupied with the fight with Grindelwald that the few that had so many problems escaped my attention. We caught two of the three before they went too far, and we were able to help them eventually learn to live with their problems. Of course we now

know how to recognize and control any possible problem in its infancy, and correct it. So the acceleration process will have no adverse consequences as long as we take steps to ensure the compliance with the necessary exercise, diet, et cetera."

"Professor, you said that you were able to help two of the three who had problems. What happened to the third?"

"The third was unique even among those in that program. He was particularly evil and particularly brilliant. Long before the acceleration potions were given to him he had advanced so far towards the Dark Arts. Oh, if I had only been able to be in two places at once."

"It was Tom Riddle, wasn't it?"

"Yes, Harry. I do believe he would have become as evil as he is now on his own, but he had the help of well meaning witches and wizards at that time. Don't worry. I have devised several methods, some of them surreptitious, to monitor any possible side effects and report them to us before any cause for concern arises."

Thinking about the young Tom Riddle, Harry said, "I'm still not sure inviting Slytherins to join is a good idea."

"Harry, the Sorting Hat does not sing of inter-house cooperation because it rhymes so easily with so many other words and phrases. I would love to see you and Hufflepuffs, Ravenclaws and Slytherins working together.

"You know when I was your age, I was almost not allowed to take the acceleration potions for the vampire wars. It was thought that Gryffindors would be too foolishly brave and never control their emotions adequately. Slytherins were considered the ideal - ambitious enough to take the potion and put the advantages to best use, but controlling enough to never allow emotions to interfere with the job at hand. It was an interesting perspective, not without merit even today. Just think about that, Harry."

Then, changing the subject he said, "Harry, are you interested in who will be your assistant for the next two months, looking out for you, cooking for you, leaving your side for only a few hours each day?"

Harry hadn't considered this, but at the mention, he was instantly curious. He nodded his head with a little hesitation.

The headmaster snapped his fingers.

"Mr. Harry Potter Sir. Dobby is *so* excited, sir. Dobby and Harry Potter Sir is going to spend ever so much time together."

Harry just blinked.

After Professor Dumbledore excused Dobby from the room, he brought up one last subject.

"Harry, you never discussed the prophecy with your friends while you were at school, did you?"

"No, sir." Harry had been feeling better during this conversation. The mention of the prophecy and telling his friends burst his improving mood quite effectively. The professor's silence asked for an explanation of some sort.

"I haven't and I don't plan to - I hope I never have to. People look at me with this scar.... When Hagrid took me to the Leaky Cauldron that first time, I thought it was wonderful that people knew me and wanted to shake my hand. I'd spent all of my life trying to be invisible. Any attention had caused my aunt and uncle to lock me in my cupboard or Dudley to punch me.

"Every year makes more people look at me like I might any minute explode or save the world or get them all killed. If the prophecy gets out it will make this much worse. There'll be articles every day in the *Prophet* talking about how I'm the only hope, or asking why haven't I done something. And I don't know how Ginny or Ron or Hermione, or the rest of my friends, schoolmates and those in the Order, will react, but they will react, and whatever they do, I don't think I'll like it.

"So I'm asking you, professor, not to tell anyone about this."

Harry saw the slightest shift in Dumbledore's eyes. Had he not been so close, or staring into them so deeply, he would have surely missed it. But in a flash he knew. "You've already told someone, haven't you?"

"Harry, I designed the entire Paladin Program for all of our students, but around *your* needs because of this prophecy. Professor McGonagall is my deputy headmistress, and Professor Snape is the only one I know that I would trust to manage the preparation and dispensing of the acceleration potions, and monitoring the program."

"Snape knows about the prophecy?" Harry shouted.

"*Professor Snape*, Harry. You must always show correct respect to your superiors, a concept no less important in times of war, even if you feel that respect is unwarranted. However, I believe it is warranted.

"I trust both Professors McGonagall *and* Snape. I could not succeed as headmaster, particularly in this time of war, without their superb efforts. I will not apologize for telling them of the prophecy, and I have received their word that they will not tell a soul. They know the importance of keeping that information private.

"This was actually my first logical opportunity to tell you this, though I suppose I could have blurted it out when we chatted at Arabella's - but you will allow that that was not the best time to do so. If in the future I feel it prudent to tell anyone else of the prophecy, I will endeavor to tell you ahead of time, even ask your permission if it is not something I consider absolutely necessary. But I will not promise to do so. I hope I will not have to tell anyone else. But in my various positions, should the need arise, I will do so.



"I don't mean to be harsh with you, but goodness, Harry, this is war! Surely you understand that some matters are beyond your feelings and mine? You must trust me."

Harry contemplated this matter, and then realized that a response was needed. "I understand that you have to do what you feel has to be done. I guess I've always thought you were, I don't know, perfect, a bit mad, but perfect."

Harry smiled ruefully and Dumbledore chuckled, delighted that Harry could joke under the circumstances.

Harry continued, "I also guess I'm glad to know that you're not perfect, though I wish you were, then you could make this all go away."

Harry wiped his left hand over his face in a manner unconsciously expressing his resolution. "If I can make mistakes and live with them somehow, then you should be able to, also. I'd rather trust you than anyone else I know."

"Then you will tell your friends, at least Miss Granger and Mr. Weasley, about the prophecy?"

"NO!" Harry's temper flared and he knocked over his pumpkin juice goblet. Fortunately Dumbledore caught it with a flick of wandless magic and put it aright, actually catching the few drops that had made it over the rim.

"I'm sorry I yelled, Professor. But you've not given me any reason why I *have* to tell them. I still don't want them looking at me like they will, or feeling bad for me *like they will*. That's my decision. You can override it, but I hope you won't."

The anger in our hero's eyes turned to earnestness during these three sentences. This was not lost on the elder wizard. "All right, Harry. It is not essential, and I will respect your wishes."

Then Harry smiled in an attempt to reassure his headmaster. "Besides, talking with Remus, Moody, and Mr. Granger has made my load a little easier. I slept longer last night than I have since... since that night. I do thank you for that, very much. Er... and I will *think* about telling my friends about the prophecy, when the time is right, if it is ever right. But it won't be soon."

"Well, I'd hoped your three visitors would help you; I'm glad they did. Your report of their chats earlier certainly indicated that you have learned much and have more to ponder."

"That's for sure, Professor."

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"So, Ron, I understand you and Hermione, er...erm. Are you, you know?"

It was possible, that in the years Harry had known Ron, he had seen his friend redder than he was at that moment, but Harry doubted it.

Ron said, "I was just... so worried about them that night. Mum had been at Grimmauld Place when Mrs. Figg's call came in. Mum called everyone she could to be on alert. She called the Burrow first because she thought Dad might be there. That's how I knew right away. She forbade me to go anywhere, besides, she keeps the secure Floo powder behind lock and key. So I couldn't go to Figg's even if I wanted to.

"Mum wasn't free to call or come home for about an hour. She walked through the fireplace and said they were safe, all the while she was packing stuff from the kitchen, you know, spices and her favorite pots and ladles. Took her a couple of long minutes to tell me we were coming here for a while to be with the Grangers."

Ron's blush deepened and he continued. "Well, we didn't know they were going to drop off everyone else on the Knight Bus and travel around until it was dark. Mum said she wasn't worried, but when I saw her look at the clock three times in a minute, I really began to be concerned. I had run upstairs to get Pig to send out a note, when they came to the door.

"I heard Mrs. Black scream one word and stop with a screech. You heard what Mr. Granger did to her, didn't you?" When Harry nodded, Ron continued, "You have to admire his style don't you? If it threatens him, he stabs it. I can't wait for him to meet Draco Malfoy.

"Er... so, I go running downstairs, hear Mrs. Black cut short, so I pull out my wand and charge in. There she was - all right. I was so *relieved!* She was frazzled but beautiful, She was in my arms before I knew it, and her lips..."

"UGG! Ron! I don't want that picture in my head. Please, mate, just saying 'I kissed her,' is almost too much."

"Well, it was pretty good. I'll leave it at that."

"Did you ask her dad if you could, you know, ask her to be your girlfriend?"

The blush went from bright red to deep, dark red, a Weasley facial color Harry had never seen before. He knew this story would be great.

"Yeah, I did. He figured out what I wanted and took me into the library right after we cleared it out. He pointed me to a chair in front of the desk. When I sat down, instead of sitting in the chair behind the desk, he sat on the desk right in front of me, towering over me. He pulled out that great vicious blade of his and said, plain as you please, 'You don't mind if I clean my fingernails while we talk, do you?'

"I swear, Harry. I do believe I saw a little bit of dried blood on it, up by the handle like."

Harry was all ears now. "What'd you say back?"

"I didn't have to say anything right then. Mrs. Granger came in and stopped dead in her tracks. She got that same look Hermione gets when I am *really* acting stupid. Know where she gets it now, I do. Well, before I knew what had happened he had that knife back in its arm sheath and his sleeve back down. The man is bloody lightning fast, Harry. He draws it faster than you draw your wand, and no one is as fast as you were at the end of the DA meetings last year."

"What happened next?"

"I'm coming to it. Give a bloke a chance, wouldya? Mrs. Granger was scary. Her voice got all high and she said, 'You had to do it.' I thought she was angry at me at first. Then she said, 'you finally have a reason to wear your Fairbairn,' that's the type of knife it is," Ron interrupted his story again. "Some legendary Muggle fighting knife made by a guy named Fairbairn. So she says, 'You finally have a reason to wear your Fairbairn, and just like you used to joke, you pull it on the first lad we see that takes an interest in our Hermione.' She made him apologize. Then it gets worse. *She* wanted to know what my intentions were with their daughter. She's standing over me like the Grim waiting to kill me. All *he* wanted to do was scare me.

"But then she softens. She puts her hand on my shoulder and just says, 'promise me you'll treat her like you want the lads to treat your sister, and everything will be fine.' That's not fair, Harry. I want to kiss Hermione, a lot, but on my own I have barely kissed her on the cheek once or twice since then. Oh! Why'd I ever agree to that? I'm not sure I want anyone to *touch* Ginny.

"Hermione walked in then. She'd heard the last of it and I could tell this was not going to be pretty. She says, 'Mother. Father.' She usually calls them 'Mum and Dad.' And I thought Weasleys got angry. All we do is blow up at each other. These Grangers are all mental.

"So Hermione says, 'Mother. Father. How *could* you embarrass me like this? Don't you know I would never allow anyone to be my boyfriend if they weren't completely honorable? I've known Ron for a third of my life, and only Harry matches Ron when it comes to honor, kindness, and caring for my good.'"

Harry thought that Ron had done a creditable job of mimicking the voices of the three Grangers.

"So then, as if to make some point I still don't understand, she gives me this wonderful deep kiss that seemed to go on forever at the time-"

"Ron!"

"I know, too much information. Now, I sit there talking with her, enjoying her company as a boyfriend - didn't realize until a day later that Hermione'd called me her boyfriend - kind of like that I do. So, I sit there talking with her, enjoying her company as a boyfriend, sneaking a little kiss on her cheek like I promised her parents, and then her parents enter the room. She sees them and tries to pull my tonsils out with her tongue-"

"RON!!!"

"I know, I know. But Harry, now I sit with my girlfriend - still like the sound of that - and I'm praying that her parents will enter the room so we can have a good snogging. How mixed up is that?"

"Only you, Ron. Only you."

"Yeah, I know. Why can't anything 'bout girls be easy, like Potions or something?"

---

Harry made his way back to number four, Privet Drive. While doing the work in the garden his aunt had requested, he realized that Professor Dumbledore never had told him the joke about the snake charmer, the dentist, and the trombone player.

After he had cut the grass, he found Hedwig had arrived with his afternoon mail. Two more letters had arrived from DA members thanking him for the instructions. It was nice to hear from these friends, even though it had barely been a week since they had parted from Hogwarts. He then turned his attention to the letter that did not appear to be from a DA well-wisher.

*Dear Harry,*

*You may not remember me because of all of the exciting and frustrating events of your life since I left Hogwarts. I am Penelope Clearwater, usually called Penny, and my seventh year was the same year that Sirius Black escaped from Azkaban.*

*Since then I have found very satisfying work with Muggle-born witches and wizards, especially those who have been orphaned. I find my greatest reward and challenge taking young ones with no awareness of our world and bringing them into our world with the least amount of shock.*

*I know this transition was most painful for you because I used to date Percy Weasley. He dropped me along with his family once the dubious opportunity to work more closely with our Minister of Magic presented itself. When Percy first fought with his parents and separated himself from them, he came to me for solace. Instead, I agreed with Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, and he left me. It was quite a row. I have had no contact with him at all since then, until several days ago.*

*My brother, who is in the Auror Academy, found Percy drunk and spouting off in a disreputable tavern. Percy was defendin g Professor Dumbledore and you to a bunch of people who, shall we say, did not agree with him. My brother, several of his Academy friends, and I were barely able to get Percy out of there with his life and all his body parts.*

*The stupidly noble part of Gryffindor Percy had decided he was unredeemable and could never again be with the ones he loved.*

*"In vino veritas," it says in Latin - In wine (or drunkenness) is truth. Percy confessed that he still loved me but never expected me to forgive him. You daring Gryffindors can sincerely make a girl fall for you with your brave self-sacrifice. Well, Percy is one of you in spades. After we spent several days talking through everything, I forgave him, and I now trust my heart to him once again. He is contrite in his repentance, and he had already taken a substantial cut in pay and prestige to remove himself far from Minister Fudge before I found him that night.*

*This was a major factor in my believing him. He is back in the Department of International Cooperation, regulating imports, and he said that it is ironic justice that his first case was an inspection of questionable cauldron bottoms.*

*Being the brave Gryffindor that he is, he had set his mind to just charge into his family home, apologize quickly and then incur their wrath. Being the careful Ravenclaw that I am, I have insisted we develop a plan. If the Weasleys are as fiery as Percy when it comes to fighting injustice, then I do not want to spend months visiting him in St. Mungo's when they "welcome him" back into the family fold with all of their favorite hexes and jinxes.*

*I have made Percy go over everything he ever said or did that might have upset his family. Did you know about a letter Percy wrote to his brother Ron, when Ron first made prefect? Percy feels sure Ron would have showed it to you. I actually hope you did see it, because you will have felt its full impact and can choose with full knowledge to help us or not.*

*The letter encouraged Ron to drop you - Ron's best friend and probably Ron's first real friend. I believe Ron was your first friend also.*

*I hope you know fully what was written, because I want to ask you to ask Ron to forgive Percy. That letter was the most pointed offense of Percy's vast number of offenses, and may be the deciding factor in the reunion going as smoothly as possible, if it can happen at all.*

*If I understand things correctly, you have nothing in your life to compare to the love you receive now from the Weasley family. Not one of the Weasleys except Percy has ever been outside their loving embrace. You know how it feels to not be cared for, the other Weasleys do not. I am sure you would go to great lengths to remain connected with that loving family. Understanding that, I hope you would want to reunited with them, knowing what it is like to be 'outside.'*

*I am asking you to help Percy. He refused to allow me to write this letter, but he has no right yet to make that demand. He believes you could never forgive him. I believe you will forgive him and help us.*

*However, if you choose not to help, I will certainly understand. Percy's actions for over a year were dreadful.*

*I will understand any decision you make. Thank you for your time.*

*Sincerely,*

*Penelope Clearwater*

---

Vernon Dursley, Director of Sales at the drill manufacturing firm, Grunnings, was as pleased as he could be with himself. He had entered employment at Grunnings right after school, starting in the sales department. He knew his opportunity lay there to far advance himself beyond the limits of his education.

Smeltings had not been, and still was not, a bad school. You could learn there, if you studied, which he had done, when he had to. Vernon thought 'it's just that Smeltings is not Eton or any of the other posh, high and mighty schools that took privileged snotties and turned them into bigger snobs than they already were from a pampered spoiled rich home life.' In Vernon's humble and considered opinion -

just ask him about his objectivity - these 'upper class dandies' were a blight on the really capable people who could do so much if they were not held back by their so-called 'betters.'

In his opinion - Vernon was nothing if not fair minded in his opinions.

To Vernon, his true betters were anyone who could possibly help him along the way towards the career path he had chosen. Those "high and mighty," et cetera, et cetera, were those above his station in life who could in no way help him advance, or could and had already proven unwilling to do so.

Grunnings had been a second rate drill manufacturer shortly before being purchased by the Boothby Family Trust. Many outside of the tooling industry consider a drill, the hand tool that holds a drill bit to make holes. Those in the tooling and power tools industries use a different parlance. The cutting drill bits are considered 'drills' and the tools that use these drills are power drills, hand drills, or drill presses. Grunnings manufactured and sold the drills (drill bits) themselves, items that are used up every day and are thrown away - and more importantly, purchased over and over again every day.

The Boothby Family Trust was a holding company that made selected acquisitions of nondescript companies in rather mundane industries ignored by most investment advisors. A Boothby family member always became Chairman, or Chairwoman, of any purchase, but they immediately invested heavily in brilliant minds, before investing in factory innovation or any other modernization efforts.

After the brilliant minds discovered, uncovered, invented, or in any way created an opportunity to drive the acquired company to the top of its relatively unwatched industry, then the Boothby Family Trust invested whatever was needed to drive the competition into despair.

Vernon had not considered Grunnings for employment himself but, and this was a secret unknown to even his wife, one of *those* people suggested the place as a possible employer at his wedding. Of course he had not known he was one of 'those' people at the time.

Vernon had met Petunia Evans, and had thought her really rather attractive, when he was working as an office messenger during a summer holiday. His family had no funds for trips or the like, so Vernon had to work to make pen money for the school year. They courted and were engaged, and Petunia had insisted on marrying before Vernon had found gainful employment. Petunia's parents had liked Vernon well enough, but had wanted them to wait until he had been established.

Petunia had pitched a perfect fit and Vernon had found himself standing as bridegroom in a tasteful - read small - wedding. Petunia's favored-by-her-parents sister, Lily, had been her maid of honor, and Jerry Hunt, Vernon's Smeltings dorm mate, had been his best man.

Lily had several friends with her that day, obviously *those* types of people, obviously so because of their clothes. To an objective mind the clothing worn by Lily's dorm mates were of Muggle cut and fashion, but they were just a little bit more colorful than was in vogue at the moment. They were all in the same year as Lily, her fifth year, and they were just too, too, too *them*.

While waiting for Petunia to finish changing for their honeymoon drive to Bath, a man of indeterminate age, with noticeably gray temples, but a youngish face, dressed non-controversially in

black, came up to Vernon and started a quiet conversation. The man asked about the job-search, and Vernon assumed he was a friend of Lily's father. Mr. Evans, not one of *them*, had said that he would keep an eye out for those hiring someone of Vernon's caliber.

The man introduced himself as Trefford Dintfield. He immediately said that he had heard that Grunnings was hiring, and disappeared in the crowd of well-wishers as Petunia arrived.

Petunia mentioned in passing that Dintfield was an instructor of Lily's - her sister had asked that he be invited to the wedding. Petunia then changed the subject. Before that Vernon had assumed that he was a non-magical friend from before Lily's unfortunate school days.

The first day after the honeymoon, a little fearful about the source but desperately needing a job, Vernon walked into the Grunnings' employment office and was hired in short order. They knew quality and value when they saw it - Vernon had been sure.

Vernon had struggled in his first year and had come near to being let go, but after that summer, and after entirely too much time with Lily, he was unaccountably given the Hoopers Construction account.

Hoopers had not given Grunnings any of their huge drill business in nearly four decades. The then Director of Sales had called it a "gift account" for Vernon. However, Vernon thought that this account would be his death with the company. If he, Vernon, did not succeed in selling drills to Hoopers Construction, he had felt sure that he would be terminated. Vernon had thought he was being set up to fail.

Even though Vernon had been cursed with every piece of bad luck - surely all the other accounts would give him no business for devious reasons, none his fault - there was just the beginning of a crack in Vernon's absolute self-confidence (obliviousness to his own faults). All of that was about to change.

Hoopers Construction's managing director, not a buyer or even the purchasing manager, had welcomed him with open arms. Mr. Charles Hooper took Vernon on a tour of his company and patiently, *very patiently*, made sure Vernon took notes on everything needed to succeed in selling drills to Hoopers. Vernon just knew that Mr. Hooper, even though he had gone to Eton, recognized quality in the people he met in business.

It was then that Vernon's true business skill was uncovered. His obsequious behavior towards those who could help him, led Vernon to serve Hoopers Construction very well. Vernon made sure everything that Hoopers ever needed was available in inventory. He learned the names of every construction site foreman and did whatever was needed to make sure Hoopers was happy - blindingly happy.

At this time, the business concept of wildly happy customer satisfaction was unheard of. Vernon provided such customer satisfaction to Hoopers in spades. He drove everyone at Grunnings crazy until it was realized just how happy Hoopers really was, and how many drills they were purchasing. Grunnings changed many aspects of its business to help Hoopers Construction, and every other customer of Grunnings benefited from the service changes. However, everyone in a peer position or

below Vernon at Grunnings hated him. Vernon's fawning on his superiors and clients was in direct contradiction with the despicable behavior he exhibited to his equals or below.

At this time, the Director of Sales for Grunnings retired, and Vernon was given the position. He taught his sales force how to care for their clients, but he treated his representatives like the idiots he thought they were. Soon Mr. Gladden Boothby gave Vernon an assistant director to manage his sales force and the customer service representatives.

Vernon cared for Hoopers, trained the sales force in his ideas, dreamed up new ways to serve clients, and stayed as far away from his department's staff as his assistant could arrange.

Then the Potter boy arrived. Vernon had pitched a fit and had almost succeeded in talking Petunia into placing the boy in an orphanage. Their finances were tight and Vernon wanted a new car.

Then Mr. Boothby himself called Vernon into his office. There was a new account Grunnings wanted - Lufkin Machinery. Only a person of Vernon's character could crack it. Mr. Boothby had said so himself - good judge of character that man - thought Vernon with total objectivity.

Vernon went at it with his usual charm - or lack thereof - and somehow made the appointment by himself. Once again, the president of Lufkin Machinery greeted Vernon. Once again he was given all of the information needed to inculcate Grunnings into Lufkin Machinery's manufacturing processes. Once again Vernon's true brilliance at designing customer support processes and systems worked its magic, er, excellence.

Vernon bought his new car with the raise he received - a much nicer car than he had planned. Petunia kept her nephew, and they both regretted it.

Now, here it was, the summer of 1996. And Vernon had decided it was now time for the Dursley family to have two cars. Petunia was so busy with the community service work she endured, er, enjoyed to make her look so much a part of the right circles in Little Whinging. She needed her own transportation. This would allow Vernon to buy the Range Rover he so wanted. A big man needed and deserved a big car. And as a director of the prospering Grunnings, he was a big man - physical size had nothing to do with it.

All Vernon had to do was get the contract signed with the Ryan Company. But Tilden Ryan had postponed the meeting to sign several times - always with good reasons and grand cordiality, but Vernon wondered if one of his competitors was trying to squash the deal.

But the appointment was on with Mr. Ryan at 8:00 sharp in the morning. Nothing would stop him now.

---

"But, Professor, you want me to tell Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia that you're coming by to visit at 8:00 tonight, but I only tell them at five minutes 'til eight?"

"Yes, Harry."



"But they won't like it. Uncle Vernon especially. He'll explode with such short notice. Why should I say you want to see them?"

"About your enrollment in the Paladin Program. By our laws, you cannot participate without their permission."

"He'll never do anything to help me. Uncle Vernon won't let me say three words about this program before he explodes. Aunt Petunia is being nicer than ever right now. How about waiting until tomorrow midmorning and asking her? He doesn't care if I live or die, just if I make a mess in the living room."

"Your aunt is your blood relation and provides your protection; however, your uncle is the head of the household. Harry, I hope you exaggerate their lack of concern for you. However, I doubt you underestimate *his* reaction. Just say that I want to make him an offer he will not want to refuse."

"All right, but I think this is going to be disast-, that is, interesting."

---

Vernon had called saying that he would be late for dinner. Harry had completed his work in the garden, read his mail, and had been in his room looking unsuccessfully for the Paladin Potion in his books.

Dinner was served at 7:40, and at precisely 7:55, just as his Uncle Vernon finished his desert, and Dudley his second, Harry said, "Uncle Vernon."

"What do *you* want, boy?"

"Uncle Vernon," Harry gulped and continued, "Professor Dumbledore asked me to tell you that he would be here in five minutes to talk to you and Aunt Petunia."

His aunt and uncle were momentarily stunned, but Dudley rose quickly with all of the speed he had acquired in wrestling, and ran up the stairs. The sound of his slamming and locking door shook Vernon out of his stupor.

"WHY ON EARTH--" Vernon Dursley stopped in mid sentence and Harry thought that for a moment, that he was having a stroke.

The boy said, "Professor Dumbledore said that he wanted to make you an offer you won't want to refuse."

More silence. However, his aunt and uncle did manage to draw their eyes to each other.

The silence was so loud in the house that the click from the clock in the living room could be heard, heralding that another minute had passed. That click galvanized Harry's uncle into action.

"QUICK! Turn out all the lights. I'll lock and bolt the doors."

"Uncle Vernon."

"Shush! Maybe if Dumblebore thinks we aren't home...." Harry's aunt and uncle were in full spin now, running around, turning out or knocking over lights, shutting window shades, locking doors, turning off the television.

"Dudley! Turn off your lights, son, and the television up there, too." This did not happen.

"It's *Dumbledore*, Uncle Vernon, and if-

"I said 'Quiet,' boy! If it's dark and the house is locked up, he might think-" Vernon ran to the staircase and shouted, "Dudley! Turn OFF the telly and lights unless you want Dunklesnore to visit you up there!"

In a fraction of a second there was an abrupt halt to the sound from that room.

"It's *Dumbledore!*"

The clock on the mantel rang the first of eight chimes. Harry and his aunt and uncle were in the living room.

"Behind the couch, Petunia!" Vernon shoved Harry down near an end table. "Not a word, Boy!" He threw a book from the coffee table at the lamp in the corner; it was the last light on in the house. As that lamp fell over and the bulb flickered out, Vernon leapt, or at least waddled quickly behind the couch with his wife. As the fifth chime rang he said, "SSHHH!"

The sixth and seventh chimes rang.

Between the seventh and final chime, every light that had been turned off came on. Every broken lightbulb, including the lamp Vernon had broken a few seconds before, popped on and/or reassembled itself.

Professor Dumbledore Apparated into the center of the room. The final chime of the mantel clock rang out.

Harry said to his uncle, "I tried to tell you that a wizard doesn't ring the doorbell, and he conjures light whenever he needs it."

Dumbledore's eyes were fixed on his large pocket watch. It had twelve hands and none of them indicated 8:00, AM or PM. It made three chimes in a quick and erratic pattern and the tall wizard with the long silver beard said, "Your clock is fast. Oh, have you lost something back there, Petunia, Vernon? May I help you find it?"



*Aaran St Vines*  
*FanficAuthors.net*



"Yeah," Harry spoke as if he were far away. "Dumbledore gave them to me. Good work, Ron, Hermione." His mind was still elsewhere. His aunt and uncle didn't want the slightest bit of magic happening in their house. How would they react when they learned Dumbledore wanted to turn his room into a potions laboratory, and more?

Unfortunately, Harry's distracted look and shaking head had been logically misinterpreted by all in the room to indicate that he'd not done well. Even the senior Grangers knew of his desire to be an Auror, and the O.W.L.s needed to qualify for him to go on to the N.E.W.T.s classes he'd need to reach that career path. Ron had discussed the fact that he, Ron, had not qualified to become an Auror because of Potions and Transfiguration. But he had admitted that he wasn't that upset because of this. He'd had weeks to come to grips with the fact that being an Auror was probably out of the question. He'd consoled himself that a position with the Magical Law Enforcement Department was still well within his grasp. However, Ron had hoped, and Hermione had seconded it, that Harry would qualify for the elite Auror Academy

Now, Harry looked so confused and in shock, that everyone assumed he had done poorly, possibly very poorly. They immediately started to change the subject and downplay the O.W.L.s' importance.

"O.W.L.s, N.E.W.T.s, who cares," Ron said. "Fred and George are doing quite well, thank you very much, with only three O.W.L.s. They'd love to have you with them."

Harry just nodded, thinking about Dudley and Dobby under the same roof for weeks at a time.

"Of course tests do *not* indicate mastery of a subject in many cases," said Hermione with genuine concern for her friend, she was nearly panicking with concern for Harry, "only the ability to repeat information under unnaturally stressful situations. But Practicals..."

"Yeah," said Harry, with real dread about the meeting between Dumbledore and his aunt and uncle at 8:00 that evening.

Mrs. Weasley said, "Harry, dear..." and then did not know what to else to say.

His face was pinched. Harry could not imagine his aunt allowing a house-elf cooking in her kitchen.

Ron barged across the room and took the folded parchment from his best friend's hand - it had to be his O.W.L.s letter. Ron opened it in a manner showing his contempt for the entire wizarding testing system, and began to read. His face crimped; his lips did not exactly move, but they quivered as he went down the list of grades. He used his finger to count down the page. Finally he exploded with a smile on his face.

"Harry! You've got *twelve* O.W.L.s! Six E's and *four* O's!" He paused for a fraction of a second as he looked back down. "And bloody Hel-"

"RON!" shouted Hermione, Mrs. Granger, and his mother in unison.

"Heliopaths! I wasn't going to-" Ron smirked but returned instantly to the parchment. "Harry, you got an Outstanding *Plus* on your Defense Practical!"

"Yeah, but-" Harry finally, slowly, entered the conversation everyone else was having.

Hermione moved to Ron in a flash and none too gently said, "Give me that," while snatching the letter from Ron's hand.

Her parents recognized this for what it was. Her mother said, "Honey, you've always said that Harry is far beyond anyone you've ever seen in Defense."

Hermione read the letter in a flash. She took a deep breath. She was so competitive on grades, and had never had to worry about her two best friends doing better than her. But now Harry had in one subject - his legendarily best subject - and she felt ashamed of herself instantly. She looked to her parents, then Molly Weasley and Ginny, and then seemed to make a decision. The teenaged boys were not noticing her reactions. This was Harry, the young man that she... She looked up at Harry and genuinely smiled. "I. AM. SOOO *PROUD* of you, Harry!" And she threw herself on his neck. After a few seconds she pulled back. She felt a bit of confusion. That hug had felt *very* good. She rushed to say, "Do you know there have only been two other Outstanding Pluses in the history of the current grading system? And it's been in place for over three hundred and fifty-nine years! That's a remarkable performance!"

She looked down at his grades again and frowned. "But, Harry, Potions. Maybe Professor Dumbledore...?"

By now Harry was fully engaged with his friends and their conversation. And he welcomed an opportunity to think about anything other than how good had been to hug Hermione. "Dumbledore already did, for a lot of people. He's going to have a special program this year, and anyone who is only one or two subjects off, and close, can make it up over the summer. "I'm in, and you can be too, Ron, if you want to. Obviously you can do anything you want, Hermione."

For the next twenty minutes he retold them all that he could remember about the Paladin Program.

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### **A Harry/Ginny Conversation - 2:34 PM, Later That Afternoon -**

"I don't believe it. Knock me over with a snidget feather." Harry was peering through a bush. Ginny was beside him. They had found little damage to the park near number four, Privet Drive, and what little they did see showed the weathering of having been done long before. Big D and company must have found something else to occupy themselves so far this summer, Harry had speculated to Ginny minutes before.

After his "working lunch" with Dumbledore, and a visit with Molly, Ron and Ginny Weasley, and the three Grangers, Harry made his way back by secure Floo to Mrs. Figg's. Ginny came too so Harry

could show her the park, as they had discussed before leaving Figg's at 10:00.

But the chief vandal they'd hoped to catch in action had another preoccupation this year.

The girl was tall and painfully thin in comparison to Dudley. But away from him, she was probably merely tall and slender. Harry saw them kissing and pulled the branch down so quickly, it scratched his face and pushed his glasses around.

Ginny said, "Even though he is my brother, I would have rather seen Ron and Hermione snogging... that was, was...*unnatural*."

Harry chuckled. "Gives all the world hope for love, doesn't it?"

They walked to a promontory in the park where there was a slight breeze. "Too bad we're under age. The cooling charm Remus and Moody placed on the tent didn't look too hard. I'd love to cast it around here."

"If it is the one Bill uses in Egypt, you have to have walls or barriers of some sort."

Harry noticed Ginny obviously steeling herself with a deep breath. She gushed out, "Harry, everyone wants you to talk about - you know... And if you ever want to talk to me, I'd be glad to listen. But I'm not asking you to."

When she'd first arrived to fetch Harry at Mrs. Figg's that morning, she'd been careful to keep the conversation light and almost frivolous, chatting about the humorous 'telly-phone' incident with her father, that she'd wanted Harry to enjoy. Harry realized that after he had been more his normal self with his friends, Ginny seemed able to discuss more serious matters. Fleetinglly he wondered just how bad he'd been, considering her nervousness. Harry could tell Ginny had stopped talking in a way that said that she was not finished.

She went ahead, "Instead, I want to talk about something that's bothered me for the longest time... and still does, whenever I dream about it." Ginny shuddered.

"In my first year, I almost killed four people, five counting you, and it could have been more. It plays on my mind even now, from time to time. And I still dream about it - not like I dreamed that first year, or like you dream when You-Know-Who is attacking your sleep. But I'm still bothered badly by what could have happened."

Harry still didn't know what to say.

"I don't want to debate who's good and evil with you, Harry; that's not why I came here with you today. I just want you to know that I understand what it's like to be responsible, at least in part for some bad things happening, and I know how it feels to realize it could have been a *whole lot* worse."

"But, Ginny, Tom was possessing you. You weren't responsible when you released the basilisk-"

"No, I wasn't. I beat myself up on that point for a long time. But Sirius helped me understand that



those actions weren't my fault. Before you came to Grimmauld Place last summer, he and I spend a lot of time together cleaning - just the two of us. He heard me shouting in my dreams about it one night when he'd walked past my door while heading towards his room. He made a point of spending time with me alone so he could wrinkle out of me the cause of my nightmares. He kidded me something terrible until I opened up and told him about it.

"My responsibility for what happened occurred when I kept writing in the diary after I realized what was going on. After Tom possessed me, it was too late to do anything about it. My guilt... I should have stopped writing before I reached that point. Do you think I am guilty for what happened to Justin, Colin, Penny, and Hermione?"

"No! Of course not! It was Riddle."

"That's what Sirius finally got me to see. He made me face it by making me convince him that he was not responsible for killing your parents."

"What! Voldemort killed them. If you can blame anyone else, it's Pettigrew-"

"Calm down, Harry." She had placed her cool hand on his arm, and he immediately quieted.

"Your father, mother, and Sirius made a decision to use Pettigrew rather than Sirius. It was a good decision. If Peter hadn't turned, and Voldemort had captured Sirius, your godfather would have never given up your parents because he couldn't have. Sirius would have died and Tom would have thought the secret died with him. Things would be oh so different. That was the decision that your parents and Sirius made, to make your godfather a target. Had he been killed would that have made your parents guilty of his death?"

Harry was stunned. He'd never thought of the consequences of the logical outcome of that decision.

"Your parents made a decision. Sirius made a decision. Peter made a decision. Voldemort made a decision. None of those decisions had happy endings coming to them, but only two of them were evil decisions, bad decisions.

"I made a decision to keep writing in the diary. I made a decision to steal it back after I had thrown it away and you found it. You see, I knew Riddle wanted you, and I tried to protect you. Two decisions. One was bad but fairly innocent. Can you blame me for the second decision, though?"

Harry said nothing but stared at his hands. He'd been doing a lot of that lately.

"You decided to stop Occlumency lessons, or at least not try to resume them when Snape ended them. You made a decision to go to the Ministry that night. It was good decision based on everything you knew. We made a decision to go with you. It was a good decision, one I'd make exactly the same way under similar circumstances. Ron and Hermione agree with me. I'd bet Luna and Neville feel likewise.

"Harry, in all of these decisions made by all of these people I mentioned, I feel *I* made the worst decisions of the lot, even though your parents' decisions had the most obviously terrible immediate

consequences. You feel you've made the worst decisions. Everyone says that this is war. Wars are like this. I've been reading wizard and Muggle war diaries the last few weeks. They all say that war is a series of gut-wrenching decisions about terrible things, made without enough information, leading to yucky results under the best of conditions."

She stopped talking, swallowed and then finished, "I want to throw up thinking about this. I want to do worse when I think about the fact that we are entering a war, and we will soon be making more of the same type of nasty decisions with similar faulty information, leading to lose-lose results. But you'd be daft if you think I want out. And you've never been hexed like I'm going to hex you if you try to stop me."

Harry was speechless and Ginny's final words on the subject ended his need to say anything. She said, "We are here at Mrs. Figg's. I didn't tell you this to make you talk to me, you know. I told you this so you'll know that with me, you have someone who understands better than my brother and Hermione, what you have gone through and are still thinking. So if you reach the point where you want someone to talk with, I might prove more understanding than those two."

Ginny looked at her wristwatch. "You've only got six minutes to get back to your aunt's. Thanks for showing me Dudley, even if it was gross."

She walked up the steps without looking back.

"Ginny." Harry's word stopped her. Harry said, "You are a good friend. I'll want to talk about - it - soon, not quite yet though. Can we...?"

"Any time you want to, Harry."

"Thanks, Ginny. I want to get to know you better. I know Ron and Hermione will be... together... I need more really good friends. Now that the two of them... they'll want to be alone some, maybe a lot... and that's fine. But I want others... Ohhhh! This makes it sound all about me. I just don't want to be alone when... but I want to be with people when... That sounds pretty selfish, and mental, doesn't it?"

She looked at him and a smile broke across her face - it was a great smile, he thought. "If it does then the whole world is selfish, 'cause most people don't want to be alone from time to time. Maybe you're just being normal, Harry. That'd be a first, wouldn't it?"

---

*Marietta,  
Before you yell at your mother, please read the rest of this letter.*

*Yes, she wrote me and asked that I send you a copy of the Patronus instructions, and allow you to continue in the DA this September, which we will continue this year with official school approval. Let me be honest. I DID NOT like what you did last year when you informed on the DA. Now that I have said that, let me also tell you that I understand why you did what you did. You were under extreme pressure from many sources and, well, not everyone is as hardheaded as I am. Someone that I really admire recently told me that 'in war we have to make friends with our enemies so we can defeat the real enemy.'*

*You are not my enemy, but we are in a fight with a REAL enemy.*

*I hope you can understand the Patronus instructions and learn from them. I also hope you never have to put them into practice, but as everyone keeps telling me: 'This is War!' So I wish you well should the terrible occur.*

*As I said, your mother also asked that I let you back into the DA. If I was the only one that you hurt from the DA when you told, I would accept you back without comment, as long as you resubmit to a confidence agreement and commit to do your best. But you hurt more than me. Therefore, if you want to rejoin, you will have to ask permission of those that were members last year and are still at Hogwarts and join the DA this year. You'll also have to answer any questions that they have for you. Of that group I will require a three-quarters vote in favor for you to rejoin.*

*However, if you will talk to me first once we are back in school, and I believe your sincerity, I will speak on your behalf before you speak to them. And I'll make sure no one is mean to you.*

*That is all I can think of that would be fair to you and the other members of the DA.*

*Now, regarding your mother writing to me. You know my family's history. You may not know that I lost my godfather recently to Death Eaters. I would do most anything to have him, or my mother or father interfering in my life for my safety, regardless of how much I would dislike their interference.*

*Please remember that when you talk to her about this.*

*Keep well, Marietta,*

*Harry Potter*

---

The clock on the mantel at number four, Privet Drive, rang the first of eight chimes. Harry and his aunt and uncle were in the living room.

"Behind the couch, Petunia!" Vernon shoved Harry down near an end table. "Not a word, Boy!" He threw a book from the coffee table at the lamp in the corner; it was the last light on in the house. As that lamp fell over and the bulb flickered out, Vernon leapt, or at least waddled quickly behind the couch and joined his wife. As the fifth chime rang he shouted, "SSHHH!"

The sixth and seventh chimes rang.

Between the seventh and final chime, every light that had been turned off came on. Every broken

lightbulb, including the lamp Vernon had broken a few seconds before, reassembled themselves and popped on.

Professor Dumbledore Apparated into the center of the room. The final chime of the mantel clock rang out.

Harry said, "I tried to tell you that a wizard doesn't ring the doorbell, and he conjures light whenever he needs it."

Dumbledore's eyes were fixed on his large pocket watch. It had twelve hands and none of them indicated 8:00 - AM or PM. It made three chimes in a quick and erratic pattern and the tall wizard with the long silver beard looked up and said, "Your clock is fast. Oh, have you lost something back there, Petunia, Vernon? May I help you find it?"

"Er! Umm. No! I found it." Vernon quickly took his pen out of his shirt pocket and held it up like he had just picked it up off the floor. "Thank you for your assistance, Petunia." He helped his wife up and then looked to Harry picking himself up off the floor. "Thank you also, Boy- uhm, Harry. Much obliged, er, Son. Good to see you again, Professor. Hee-hee." Vernon giggled nervously.

Harry had thought that his aunt and uncle had never seen Professor Dumbledore before, that they had only received his letter attached to Harry's baby basket, and the Howler from the previous summer. Also, he could *not* believe his uncle had just *giggled!*

Harry was standing in front of a chair. Vernon and Petunia were standing in front of the couch. Vernon finally said, "Won't you sit down, er, uhm...?"

There was no appropriate chair for the headmaster. Vernon looked around like a chair had run away somehow. The other chairs in the room were not that comfortable and would not allow for an easy conversation in their current positions. They were all arranged to watch the television now at Dumbledore's back.

The headmaster said, "Please allow me, Petunia, Vernon." In a blur of motion his wand was in his hand and twirling. Without looking, the elder wizard stepped one slightly longer than normal step forward, and sat down in the chair that had not been there fractions of a second before.

Vernon was goggle-eyed, but it was Harry's Aunt Petunia who was in a fright. She had very carefully chosen the most nondescript, sterilely white, perfectly *normal* furnishings for their entire house.

The chair Dumbledore had conjured out of thin air was hugely overstuffed. It settled, releasing air noisily for three full seconds after he had seated himself in it. It was garishly electric purple, and it had moving and glowing stars and moons on it.

Looking like Ron Weasley did when spiders were mentioned, Petunia said, in a very nervous voice, "Would you care for tea? I can-"

"Please allow me, Petunia, You spend so much time caring for Harry; I do not want to inconvenience you more." One flick of his wand and a muttered spell, and a gorgeous solid silver teacart and service

rolled into the room in a position for Petunia to serve. The china was expensive, even Harry could tell. He thought it might be the exact style and pattern that his aunt had been dreaming over in a catalogue just the day before.

She stood and served the two men, then herself, and then, trying to act as if she always included him, she served Harry as well.

Dumbledore took a slightly noisy sip and said, "It is a special blend they serve at the Queen's summer home in Scotland. Her father insisted I have a lifetime's supply sent to me for services rendered during the war. Nothing magical to it at all, I assure you."

At the mention of the Queen and her father the King, Harry's aunt and uncle felt patriotically bound to taste it. Harry found himself drinking the best hot butterbeer he had ever tasted, and he looked with shock to see what his relatives might say. But they seemed very pleased. Dumbledore winked at him covertly.

"This is quite delicious," his aunt said with surprise. Vernon smacked his lips with appreciation and Petunia gave him the disapproving glance usually reserved for Harry.

There was the slightest 'thunk' sound in the kitchen and all but Dumbledore looked in that direction. He said, "There is a box of this tea on your kitchen counter. I would have put it away for you, but I know each mistress of the hearth has her own special philosophy of storage arrangement for dried goods." He took another sip.

Harry wondered if he was having, not the most dangerous or painful, but definitely the weirdest dream he had ever had. But he was pretty sure he was still awake.

Vernon very uncomfortably turned from the tea he obviously enjoyed, "Er, well, Professor, uhm, glad to see you again by the way- oh, already said that." Vernon then rushed to say, "The boy, delightful lad, Harry, said that, erm, you have an offer?"

"My offer, Vernon, Petunia, is to allow you to help save Harry's life, and perhaps save much of your world and ours as a part of saving his life." Both of his relatives' mouths dropped open. He smoothly continued. "He will be a key part of defeating the Dark forces aligning themselves, even as we speak, with the revitalized Lord Voldemort, the same evil wizard that killed your sister and brother-in-law, Petunia, as well as your parents."

A brisk slap would have not stunned Harry more. Her parents - his grandparents - had been killed by Voldemort?

The senior wizard continued, "That evil Dark lord is even now preparing to be much more active than ever before. The bombings at the Liverpool docks today, which will be attributed in the paper tomorrow as the work of terrorists, were in fact the work of despicable Muggles that Voldemort has recruited to his cause - how he has enlisted them, we do not know. Your nephew will be essential in this coming war. His importance cannot be overestimated. Therefore, his training to meet the challenge is of the gravest importance.

"To that end, I have developed and arranged for an extensive program to be implemented on his behalf this summer to prepare him for this battle or series of battles. It is in the execution of this program that we need your assistance."

Vernon looked like he had lost the facility of speech, but Aunt Petunia said, "How... how can we possibly help?" Her voice cracked.

"We need your permission and your tolerance. I cannot say we won't need some small assistances on occasions; there is always some overlooked trifle. But if all goes as planned there will be nothing for you to do. As I first explained to you long ago, Harry is protected by his mother's sacrifice as long as he spends a certain amount of time with you each year. The amount of time is less and less each year. He should be able to leave you this year just before his birthday, unless you insist he stay so you can give him a party." If there was any sarcasm in Dumbledore's words Harry, who knew him best of the three listening, could not detect it.

"Vernon, as head of this household we need your signature. We are guided by a series of laws in our world much as your laws guide you. One important law is that a minor cannot enter into a contract that such a program requires without your approval.

"None of your neighbors will know, indeed you will not be able to tell anything is different unless you go into Harry's room, but we need to enlarge it and make it a place where he can study, mix potions, and work on his defensive spells. It will have no adverse effect on your house at all. It's magic, you see." Dumbledore chuckled at his own joke and hurried on. "He will use the room to train physically and mentally.

"Also, Harry must partake in plenty of good old fashioned exercise on a variety of types of equipment. I hear your son, Dudley, is quite the boxer. He could join Harry in this exercise if you allow him. Harry also needs to spend time with various people that will tutor him, as well as with some of his friends on occasions to, uh, discuss certain course related matters. His room will, in practice though not in fact, be an extension of Hogwarts. He will have to take a special potion at least once a day, occasionally twice a day. Of course I will put all of the necessary protective barriers and sound-proofing spells on his room. You and your neighbors will not be able to hear or see any of this, unless you yourself choose to visit him there.

"In addition to all of this, which I am sure you see will be no imposition at all, Harry needs a very special diet that will be carefully regulated and monitored. Petunia, as delightful a cook as I am sure you are, to ask you to cook this for him, and *only Harry* can eat this food, would be too much of an imposition. Therefore to monitor Harry at all times, to prepare his food, and to assist him in many other ways, a house-elf, one very loyal to Harry, will live in Harry's expanded room. This house-elf takes up little space and you will not know he is here, unless, once again, you decide to visit Harry there.

"I would like you to meet him very briefly." Dumbledore snapped his fingers before Harry could open his mouth.

Dobby appeared. "Hello, Mr. Harry Potter's aunt and-"

Dumbledore snapped his finger again and Dobby disappeared before finishing his brief greetings.

"The offer, Petunia, Vernon, is to help save the world - literally. It will be no inconvenience to you. All we need is your signature, Vernon, and I will be on my way." As he finished this sentence, Dumbledore waved his wand in the air once again and a parchment unrolled on the coffee table right before Harry's uncle. A quill and inkwell appeared beside it. Dumbledore looked on expectantly. Harry was not sure when he'd last taken a breath.

Vernon was so still, he looked like he'd been Petrified. He looked straight ahead, staring right through Dumbledore, it appeared. The request to let all of these activities and magic take place in his home, hung in the air like a fresh dungbomb.

Petunia cut her eyes to her husband just in time to see the vein in his forehead turn purple while the rest of his face turned redder than a Weasley blush.

Finally Vernon unloaded. "ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR RUDDY, WAND WAVING MIND!!!" The neighbors had to have heard that one.

Vernon sprang to his feet. Well, actually he grunted his way off of the couch much faster than usual. Once up, he raised his clenched fists and advanced on Dumbledore.

The elder wizard held one hand up in the air as if signaling for traffic to stop. There was no wand, no wandless magic, no threat - just the slightest perturbed look on his face. Vernon slowed.

"Vernon, do you think I am incapable of defending myself against physical violence?" Had he cast a Body Bind Spell on Harry's uncle, Vernon wouldn't have frozen in place any more completely. After several moments both men lowered their hands.

Vernon's somewhat-tactful act rose to the occasion. "All right then. There is no gratitude in any of you. We've given him a roof over his head, the food off our plates, and the clothes off of our backs. He's been nothing but an ungrateful, misbehaving pain in my backside. He's ruined any outing when we condescended to take him with us. He drove his cousin crazy, and almost got him eaten by a great snake at the zoo."

Vernon quickly gulped a breath and stormed on. "Do you know we had to have a pig's tail - a PIG'S TAIL - removed from our son because of that boy? He ruined my chances for closing a big deal with a client by exploding a violet pudding - a HUGE sodding messy violet pudding all over the kitchen. He blew up my sister - MY SISTER, mind you, and then had her mind obliterated."

"*Obliviate* d," corrected Harry.

"NOT A WORD FROM YOU, BOY! No gratitude, not a farthing to help with his upkeep. If he's so BLOODY important couldn't you provide funds to help? Or does your world use fairy dust for coin of the realm? Then last summer those dementoids came here to Little Whinging - where's your almighty protection when my boy's having his brains sucked out?"

"NO GRATITUDE. NO HELP. NO PROTECTION FOR US." Vernon screamed this last and stopped

all at once, straightened his waistcoat, gathered what little dignity he could under the circumstances, and said, "So, you'll NOT have my permission to turn my home into a circus. He'll have to learn to pull rabbits out of his hat somewhere else. You can both leave *right now!*"

The headmaster had not moved, not even blinked, during the tirade. The slightest of smiles creased his eyes only, but there was none of his legendary twinkle there to be observed and no smile formed on his mouth.

The elderly professor remained silent and stared at Vernon. That was probably the most disconcerting thing he could do, thought Harry, because he felt uncomfortable in the extreme, and his uncle was squirming under the gaze in a matter of seconds.

"Vernon, Petunia. I told you after we came to our agreement, that you had our undying gratitude. *You* asked that we never contact you. But you knew it was Harry's parents' wish that he attend Hogwarts. So his Hogwarts letter was the only correspondence you received from us in all of those years.

"I must have your signature on that document. I cannot and will not force you. But I must have it. Won't you consider doing it to protect your nephew and to help him defend both your world as well as ours?"

"I don't believe you one bit on that!" snapped Vernon, his agitation rising again. "Your world doesn't touch ours. Just take him and go. He is no longer welcomed here. And I'm not signing anything! *Still* no offer for assistance. Make me a bleeding offer I can't refuse. The NERVE!"

Dumbledore sighed. "Vernon, I did not want to mention this. You have proven yourself most capable, and my associates are pleased, truly, in spite of your abrasiveness."

"What the-" sputtered Vernon.

Dumbledore turned to Harry's aunt who sat on the other end of the settee from where her husband had been. "Petunia, would you bring the telephone in here, please?"

She hesitated, but the hostess in her stood. "Of course."

"What's the matter?" spat Vernon, "Can't send up smoke signals any more? Or are the ruddy owls on strike? Use my blower, would you? Well, it better not be long distance!"

As Harry's aunt came back into the room with the portable phone set, she held it out to Dumbledore, but he said, "No, it's for Vernon."

Right after those words, the phone rang, and Petunia bobbed it before steadying the receiver and answering.

"Dursley residence. Lady of the house speaking." She paused and said, "One moment, please." Handing the receiver to her husband, she said, "*It's* for you."

Dumbledore drew his wand and circled it silently as Vernon took the receiver and snapped, "What do



you want at this time of night?"

The professor's charm allowed all in the room to hear both sides of the conversation.

"Dursley, this is Gladden Boothby, Chairman Boothby at Grunnings. I see your abrasive demeanor with most at work extends to your home telephone manners."

"OH! Uh, no, sir. That is, sir, I was, er, expecting someone else, yes, someone else entirely, sir."

"That's the Dursley I know." He cleared his throat. "Dursley, Dumbledore asked me to call you. I wanted to tell you that I am glad we finally discovered your worth, supporting our clients. I only hired you because he asked me to, before you took in young Potter."

"You know about Dum-... and Har-...?"

"Dursley, you'll find no one plans farther ahead than Professor Dumbledore. He insisted I hire you, *and* he insisted I keep you *and* give you the Hoopers Construction account. I owe him even though my line of the family tree is not magical. My great-great-aunt, Gladys Boothby, created the Moontrimmer broomstick, the foundation of the Boothby Family Trust fortune. Dumbledore's investment in her small broom shop a hundred years ago allowed her to perform the development work.

"Back to you. Now don't misunderstand me, your ideas and systems for customer support are brilliant, but you are nearly too difficult to tolerate. So thank Dumbledore for sending you to me. And thank him for talking me into keeping you."

Boothby rang off without a goodbye.

Vernon pressed the button to break the connection. Before he could say a word, it rang again, and reflexively, he answered it.

"Dursley residence."

"Charles Hooper here, Dursley."

"Mr. Hooper, what a pleasant surprise, I-"

"That's all right, Dursley. I called to thank you for becoming so brilliant at supporting us. I would have given you the business anyway, Dumbledore arranged it. But your support abilities and systems make it worthwhile. Good drills, too. Hoopers Construction has benefited by dealing with you.

"Of course when I heard you had taken in the Potter baby, I knew I wanted to give you the business - just to help you with the burden. My nephew, Geoffrey Hooper, is in Gryffindor House with your nephew Harry - two years behind him - thinks the world of young Harry. I'm honored to do my part to help you. Good night."

In just two seconds there was another ring. Vernon answered and barely muttered, "Dursley's."

"Roger Lufkin here at Lufkin Machinery. Just wanted you to know I am truly pleased with your efforts on our behalf of Lufkin Machinery. I thought for a while that I was just giving you our drill purchases because Dumbledore asked me to. Glad you're so brilliant at support, you're a bit of a toady, but you do take good care of us. Makes it worth doing business with you.

"I'm a Squib, a non-magical member of a wizarding family. My distant great-grandmother by nine greats was the first woman, that is witch, Minister of Magic, Artemesia Lufkin. Only Albus Dumbledore could make me contract with you after that disgusting attempt to deny your nephew his Hogwarts letter. Can't tell you what I would have given for one.

"See here. Your nephew's *Harry Potter*, you should be proud."

"Click"

"Ring-Ring."

Vernon didn't notice that he hadn't needed to ring off. He pressed the button to answer and said nothing.

"Don't speak, Dursley. This is Tilden Ryan. My cousin is Barry Ryan, Keeper for the Irish National Side in Quidditch. That's a wizard sport and I understand that your nephew is a fine Seeker.

"Harry is why I'm calling. I do expect you to do whatever Dumbledore wants. Good God, man. He's Harry Potter; don't you know how important he is to the whole world?"

"On Dumbledore's word alone I'd have made sure the Ryan Company did business with you, but Charles Hooper and Roger Lufkin have both told me just how well you look out for them, even though you are a bit of a pillock to deal with. But I'd do anything Dumbledore asks. See you tomorrow, Dursley. Bring the same quill you use to sign whatever Dumbledore wants you to sign. We'll ink the contract with it."

The connection ended.

The parchment was signed.

The headmaster said, "I thank you for your hospitality, Petunia. If you like the furniture, ring this bell quickly, twice, and it will be yours permanently. If you ring it in one long ring for over five seconds it will disappear. Vernon, you *have* made the right decision. I am sorry I had to make you an offer you couldn't refuse. I promise it is for the greater good of your world as well as ours. I'll see you the day after tomorrow at 9:00, Harry, and we will begin remaking your room for your use this summer. That will allow you, Vernon, to sign all of the contracts with Tilden Ryan and be sure that I have provided adequate compensation for your slight inconvenience of the next few weeks."

With that he Disapparated from the room.

Vernon stood stiffly. He reached onto the table and took hold of the bell. He turned his head to give Harry a snide look and viciously rang the bell as hard as he could for five seconds.

The bell disappeared from his hand. The purple chair disappeared.

The beautiful expensive teacart, tea service, and exquisite crystal cups and saucers disappeared also.

Petunia screamed, "VERNON!"

---

*Dear Harry,*

*I am sure you do not remember me; we have had Herbology together, but we've always been at opposite ends of the greenhouse. I'm in Hufflepuff and I received help during last school year from Susan Bones, Ernie Macmillan, Hannah Abbott, and Justin Finch-Fletchley in my Defense studies. I scored really well on my O.W.L.s in that subject, and considering our DADA instructor last year, I know I owe my good Defense grades to them and to you.*

*Neville Longbottom lives near me, and we have been friends since before Hogwarts. He and your friend Luna Lovegood have offered to help me with my Defense work over the summer. Neville has a training area out in back of his garden shed in an old storage building, and the two of them are letting me train with them. This new Paladin Program is wonderful. Luna's dad got her permission to use magic this summer, but only at Neville's.*

*The reason I am writing is to ask for a small favor. Neville and Luna showed me the instruction letter you wrote on producing a Corporeal Patronus. It was brilliant!*

*I was too fearful to join the DA, but I was hoping you would include me in on any other letters you send out on Defense. There're a lot of things I know you can teach me. Neville told me about your battle that night at the Department of Mysteries. He told me, as did Luna, of your skills and bravery, and I know we could all benefit from anything you want to write on this subject. I promise to study faithfully and learn as best I can. And if you have the DA next year, if it is all right, I'd like to join, if you'd have me.*

*One other thing. Neville told me how fearless and powerful you were that night facing fully grown Death Eaters, but Neville refuses to tell me, or let Luna tell me, of his bravery. I would appreciate any information you could give me about him. Nev has been a very good friend over the years, and I am proud of him.*

*Yours most sincerely,  
Eloise Midgen*

---

*Dear Eloise,*

*Of course I remember you from Herbology. We were never near each other, like you said, so we*

were never partners, but I do remember you.

I had not thought about writing any more letters on Defense subjects, but you are the ninth person to write to ask me to. So, I'll think about it.

Definitely, if I write any more such letters, I will make sure that you are included on the receiving list.

The DA will be an official organization at Hogwarts next year and all will be invited to join, if they are third year or higher. Please join us and invite others from your house. Hufflepuffs make fine members.

As to Neville - He is the most underrated student at Hogwarts. He still doesn't understand how he was sorted into Gryffindor. Now, I don't see how he could have been placed in any other house.

Everyone that fought with me that night did a great job of battling the Death Eaters, but I probably fought along side Neville the most, and at the most desperate part of the fighting. He fought hard and he fought well. He was hit by a Cruciatus Curse and survived it. He battled beyond what most could endure.

But the bravest thing I have ever seen, he did that night. His wand was snapped and his nose broken. He couldn't speak well enough with that broken nose to pronounce any spell or charm with a borrowed wand.

At this point I begged him to go to safety. He was completely defenseless in a place where it was a miracle that we were still standing.

Neville refused to leave me. He even tackled a Death Eater when there was nothing else he could do.

That action, while unable to perform magic, staying with me and fighting on - that was the bravest thing I have ever seen.

Eloise, I have made so many mistakes I wonder why anyone would think my opinion counts, but you can tell anyone that I am proud and grateful that Neville Longbottom was there with me that night. I'm probably alive today because Neville fought by my side.

Your classmate,

Harry

---

Dear Harry,

How are you doing? It has been only a few days since I wrote you last, but it seems like a month or more, so much has happened. Have you been looking in Gryffindor like I told you?

I am writing to thank you for the instructional letter on the Patronus Charm. I let my father read it and he was most impressed. He did rather well in DADA, and he said that your writing on Defense is the clearest and most practical he has ever seen.

He laughed out loud comparing it with the terrible words of advice the Daily Prophet printed from the Ministry of Magic. Then he stopped right there in mid laugh and stared at the wall for a minute or more. (This happens when he is getting his best ideas.)

He asked me to ask you if he could reprint the instructions in the Quibbler as a public service to the community. We've had these three dementor attacks, and if any more happen then your letter

*might mean the difference between - well, you know better than I do what the difference could mean.*

*He remembers all of the wonderful owls he received from those who believed your story this past spring. He believes those people would be very grateful for any help you could give them.*

*Your friend,*

*Luna*

---

Vernon Dursley was out of the house over an hour and a half earlier than usual. He *always* ate breakfast at home, unless he was out on an overnight trip for business, which was a rare occasion indeed.

But Dumbledore had promised to arrive at 9:00 this very morning - that caused his early exodus. Forget that Dumbledore Apparated in to the salon and had corrected their mantel clock, Vernon thought he might arrive early, over two and a half hours early.

"Boy! Is there any doubt in your mind that I *will* find a way to make your life hellacious if my home is ruined in any way - my wife or son hurt - my property values or standing in the community disparaged? HUMMMM, Boy?"

Vernon had marched in to what he still referred to as Dudley's second bedroom and had violently shaken Harry awake for this tirade.

Harry noticed Petunia was standing there in the hallway, looking cautiously around the doorframe to see her husband in action. She was not there when Vernon stormed out, stomped down the stairs, and slammed the front door shut behind him. Dudley could be heard snoring through it all.

The house quieted to the snoring only. Harry heard the mantel clock's gentle tic-toc. There was the slightest possible sound of bed springs coming from his aunt's bedroom, and then Harry realized his door had been left open by his uncle - a never before event. He was too jaded by what little had passed for kindness from Dursley senior in the past to think there was any significance to this act. But life was different this morning.

And there was one resolution Harry had made to himself since two nights before: he would never tell his relations that it had been Dobby who had dropped the violet pudding in the kitchen four summers before.

An hour later Harry was preparing breakfast as usual, just not as much, which was unusual.

Harry had finished the rashers of bacon and had whisked the eggs before placing them in the pan for cooking. He was actually preparing breakfast earlier this morning because he had never really gone

back to sleep. He heard his relatives' normal morning sounds and knew it would be about twenty minutes before they would be down. He had enjoyed omelets at Hogwarts and decided to make them this morning. This was to be the last morning he would eat with his aunt and cousin, this summer at least. He decided to try his hand at it.

He let the bacon crisp just a little more before placing it on a kitchen towel to absorb the drippings. Harry quickly cut up an onion and a green pepper, and put them in a little bit of the bacon grease in the non-stick pan. Harry blessed the day his aunt Petunia had purchased the non-stick cookware. Washing up was so much easier now.

While the vegetables sauteed, he grated some sharp cheddar. He made the usual toast and laid out the table with marmalade, butter, and cream and sugar for the tea.

His aunt appeared a few minutes later. "Harry?" She sniffed the air, but he could not tell by the look on her face if his divergence from routine would be acceptable or not.

Harry had the oven on, and made each omelet to order. He and his aunt shared one five-egg omelet with four rashers of bacon and a third of the sauteed vegetables inserted in the middle.

Dudley's omelet contained six eggs, six rashers, and two-thirds of the vegetables. Harry had divvied the grated cheese in equivalent proportions.

He served his aunt and cousin and had his plate there seconds afterwards. Dudley was stunned for a while, but not long.

"MUM! This is not my normal breakfast, where's my bacon?"

"It's all there," Harry said, "Six rashers - inside the omelet."

"Omelet? Isn't that what Dad calls 'nancy-boy food'?"

"No, that's quiche," said Petunia. "This is excellent, Harry. Didn't saute the onions or peppers too long. Most restaurants do."

"But, MUM! I want to see my bacon."

"Does your girlfriend know you cry at the table, Dudley?" Harry tried to be so casual while dropping this tidbit of information.

"Popkins? A girlfriend?" Aunt Petunia queried.

Dudley began wolfing down his food, talking about being in a hurry while he did. He belched and stopped long enough to grab half of the stack of toast as he ran back upstairs.

Harry's aunt looked both amused and curious, but said nothing. After Dudley had left Harry told her, "I saw him in the park kissing a girl. She seemed to be enjoying it. I know he was. I didn't look for long though."

"Are you safe in the park, Harry?" Once again his aunt surprised Harry with her never-seen-before-this-summer concern for him.

"There are minders, not the ones that watch little children, but trained wizards and witches who can remain invisible - they follow along and watch over me. I just call them minders. There's one watching over me around the clock. They've followed me there and have never said I'm in danger. Believe me, they would've stopped me if I weren't safe."

She smiled and they kept eating in surprisingly comfortable silence.

"Harry," she spoke quietly, and with a quality that Harry could not quite fathom. He knew that as a guy, he was not the most sensitive creature, but years of monitoring the moods of his aunt and uncle had made him attentive to her many subtleties - but this was a different tone of voice for her. "I have promised your uncle that I will not mention your grandparents, my parents, so please don't ask. There are reasons, but- well, I don't like you not knowing, but... next summer, with these events about to unfold... perhaps he will allow me to tell you for your seventeenth birthday. You'll leave after that and we'll never see you again, I assume."

She sniffed, but it was not a tear, it was her Woman-Who-Never-Missed-A-False-Smell sniff, but still. Then she looked up with a very harsh look on her face and Harry wondered what he had done now. "Make me two promises. Since this is war, keep yourself safe, so you can do what you have to do. I don't want Dumbledore to be right about this spilling over into our world, but...

"Second," she'd looked terrified for just a moment. "Kill him. Destroy the monster that... If you are the one, then train well and hard and leave your uncle and cousin to me. Don't make it any harder on me than you can't possibly avoid, but kill that monster, to avenge... and... for my Dudley."

In one swift motion she stood and walked upstairs to her room. She walked away and never mentioned anything about the subject again that summer. She never treated him harshly, but she never came that close to an intimate conversation again.

However, Petunia did have tea fixed for Dumbledore when he arrived. It was the Queen's tea that Dumbledore had given her, Harry felt sure, if smell was any indicator.

They were in the lounge when Dumbledore Apparated into the exact place he'd been two nights before. He looked around and noticed the garish purple chair was missing. He called one of the ladder back chairs already in the room to himself, and greeted Harry and Petunia warmly before accepting the tea and sitting.

"I want you to know, Petunia, that I have, and will continue to take all precautions to keep your nephew safe here, and you and your family as well. Not only safe, but safe from intruding eyes and ears. I no more want Harry's presence or his activities as a wizard known to your neighbors, than you or Vernon do.

"Two nights ago, while it was dark, but before I left your property, I popped into your back garden and made all of the external preparations for what we will do to your house. When Harry is finished

here this summer, everything will return to normal, and his protection provided by his mother will exist for another year.

"Rest assured, outside and inside there will be a complete sound dampening barrier and disillusionments to make invisible any possible awareness of what goes on in his room. He will do nothing so dangerous, but if Harry were to blow up his room, no one outside of his room would see or hear a thing."

Dumbledore saw her worried facial expression. "Please, dear lady, rest assured, I have reviewed Harry's curriculum of Potions activities and no great explosions can occur. Small, quiet explosions that should happen, will only occur as a part of normal potions mixing, and they will be controlled."

"Professor," she asked hesitantly, "how, I mean I know it's magic, but how can you enlarge Harry's room and not have it go out somewhere that can be seen?"

"My dear, Petunia. You know that gravity exists, and it is a constant on this planet. Yet the Law of Gravity is not repealed when the Laws of Lift and Aerodynamics supercede the Law of Gravity. Because of these two superceding laws, an aeroplane can fly, or a bumblebee for that matter. Although I understand your scientists are still not sure how a bumblebee *can* fly. But I wander.

"Just like one law of physics can supercede another, magic works with all of physics, chemistry, and all other sciences - it just has ways to supercede or overcome the limitations. Two hundred years ago today's passenger jet would have been considered magic. Real magic is not what has been discovered by science. A broom uses neither aerodynamics nor lift in any way to fly, it uses magic. Magic overcomes like lift overcomes.

"Magic has its own limitations. I cannot fly, but I can fly on a broom, which has a series of spells and charms applied to it. However, I cannot apply those spells to myself. But the capabilities - what might be called the technology of magic - are improving also. Just as the aeroplane was invented in 1903, the modern racing broom was created in 1901. Yet, Harry's broom, one of the finest ever made, is nearly five times faster in acceleration than that original racing broom, and more than twice as fast in overall speed.

"So, I will enlarge Harry's room four to five times, without impacting the shape or size of your house. I couldn't make it the size of Buckingham Palace, but four to five times bigger will be little more than a common effort."

"All right," she said

Petunia was a bit more curious, Harry thought, but the lifetime habit of not wanting to know anything about magic could not be completely broken in one day.

She continued, "Ah, professor, exactly what are you going to do to Harry himself?"

"Petunia, and may I say I am glad you are using the Queen's tea - it's delicious. Petunia, between the age of fifteen and seventeen a witch or wizard does an amazing amount of growing in many ways."



Dumbledore explained everything she needed to know about all of the changes Harry would go through, what he would be doing in his room while he remained with her this summer.

She listened carefully, and as Dumbledore appeared to be ending, she asked, "How may I help?" Then she went on to clarify. "There is really little I can do, but I am willing to do what I can. That little, er, green...man?"

"Ah, Dobby, How could I forget Dobby," he chuckled to himself. "Without going into too much unnecessary detail, Harry and Dobby are old friends. You see, Harry set Dobby free from a form of enslavement." He briefly explained why Dobby needed to be set free, but not how Harry had accomplished it, only that it was one more thing to admire about Harry.

"There must be precise timing when Harry takes his potions, eats his special meals, and when he must perform certain exercises. Harry's schedule has very little room for error. House-elves have amazing senses of timing. Dobby will not only be able to manage Harry's schedule, he will be able to prepare the special foods Harry needs. Oh, please let me allay your fears, Dobby will cook these meals in a kitchen in Harry's room. Use of your kitchen will not be required.

"Dobby will be able to provide almost every assistance Harry will need, but we will need you to allow Dobby to come and go from outside of Harry's room. Dobby can Apparate much like I do into and out of your home, but the protective barriers that keep in sound and the *indication* of magic, will prevent Disapparation."

Dumbledore leaned back and spoke as if calling from another room while snapping his fingers, "Dobby!"

The house-elf appeared and Petunia gave a start. Dobby was dressed in a small black smock and short-breeches set, but he wore two very different, outlandish socks with no shoes or sandals. Dobby bowed to the point where he nearly touched his long pointed nose to the rug, and rose up to speak, "Mrs. Harry Potter Sir's Aunt, 'tis an honor for Dobby to be allowed to serve the great and powerful Harry Potter Sir, in your home. If Dobby may be of any service to Harry Potter Sir's aunt, or Harry Potter Sir's family..." Dobby trailed off, the offer clearly stated, "just call Dobby's name." He bowed again.

Petunia Dursley was obviously trying hard to maintain her balanced demeanor, but she was most discomfited by what stood before her. All she managed to say was, "Er, yes."

Dobby walked to Harry's chair and stood behind and to the side of him, away from her line of sight. In a moment he quietly snapped his finger and Disapparated away.

"I have informed Dobby," continued the professor, "that if he must, he is to speak only to you and only when you are alone, unless it is a dire emergency. He understands he is to be as unobtrusive as possible. I believe I used the words 'never seen or heard,' in my explanation.

"Finally, Petunia, I failed to mention last night, and it is not specifically in the Permission Release Vernon signed, but as you might imagine, with Harry's physical growth, there will also come *an*

*emotional interest in the fairer sex."*

Harry's aunt looked most uncomfortable, then blushed - then her face produced a ruefully red-faced smile. She looked Harry's way. This caused an instant blush on his face, which caused his aunt to snort into several moments of laughter.

Harry's headmaster and aunt then fully discussed the female visitors Harry would need to spend time on four or five occasions a week, and why.

She agreed to help chaperone the first few minutes of each visit if need be, if she were present.

"Professor, unless there is no alternative, I would prefer Harry to not have, er, *company* on the weekends when his uncle is home. If I have any other leeway, I would also prefer his cousin, Dudley, not be present. My son will be lifting weights for his boxing team, on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoons. He will also be working in his father's office on Tuesday, all day. Would that be a workable schedule? Can other arrangements...?"

"That would be a great help, Petunia, thank you." Turning to Harry he said, "Does she know about your contacts near here?"

Harry said, "She knows about my minder but not about..."

Dumbledore turned back to her. "Do you know what a Squib is, Petunia?"

"The short, humorous newspaper articles?" she asked. Petunia had been in near shock during the visit with Dumbledore two evenings before. She'd forgotten the brief definition of a Squib given by Roger Lufkin.

Dumbledore chuckled. "In our world you might say that a Squib is the opposite of your sister. Lily was the uncommon magical member of a non-magical family and lineage. A Squib is a non-magical member of a decidedly magical family. Squibs cannot perform magic as we know it, but they can be very sensitive to it. Your neighbor, Arabella Figg, is a Squib from a very distinguished family. Though basically powerless, she has been most useful to us by watching Harry over all of these years and providing a home where we can access the Floo Network for transportation purposes." He explained briefly how the Floo Network operated.

"Arthur Weasley still expresses his apologies to you for the events of two summers ago when he and his sons came to your house by way of your fireplace."

Petunia rushed, "You don't want to open up-"

Dumbledore raised his hand. "We will not do that to you again. But Arabella Figg has been on the Floo Network for roughly a year, and we now have a secure method of Floo travel that goes undetected. Arabella permits her home to be used for other purposes, and we can allow the visits Harry has with the young ladies to take place there on weekends and Thursdays, and any other time if is inconvenient for you. But having multiple locations will help with certain other factors as well.

"You have been most kind this summer allowing Harry to come and go when he needs to. Starting this

afternoon, after his first potion in this acceleration program, you must make sure Harry can leave here whenever he asks, regardless of what is going on at the moment, *or whoever* might be present."

The professor finished his tea. His hostess asked if he would like more and he responded, "No, thank you very much. We must begin on Harry's room. It will be noisy for a short time. No one outside will hear our efforts. But there will be noise inside your house until we can engage the internal sound barriers. It will not be painfully loud in here, but if you and Dudley would like to...'

"I will take him with me shopping."

Before she could stand, Dumbledore asked, "The decision to not accept the furniture I offered, it was Vernon's?"

A little embarrassed, she merely nodded her head up and down in one short movement.

The elder wizard drew his wand quickly, circled it in the air wordlessly, and an identical teacart, service, and china set materialized in the room.

"Thank you, Professor," she said with genuine gratitude and delight in her eyes.

"No, thank *you*, Petunia. Now I believe Vernon will be able to buy you something else to celebrate signing the contract yesterday with Tilden Ryan."

This time *her* eyes twinkled. "Thank you again, Professor."

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After Harry's aunt and cousin left to purchase a new computer for Dudley, Professor Dumbledore walked with Harry up the stairs to his room. It had been a surprise to Harry that Dudley was able to use a computer at all. It looked fairly complex in Harry's estimation. Of course he had never been allowed to use any of the numerous computers Dudley had owned and eventually punched, kicked, knocked over, or in any other creative manner destroyed. Destruction seemed to be Dudley's only creative gift.

Dudley would get frustrated with whatever 'Windows' was. Whenever he was playing a game - Dudley liked the games where people and things were shot, killed and blown up - Dudders seemed to have enough patience to play the game until he had enough skill to enjoy it. When a particular game ended, even if he did not achieve the goal or 'next level,' Dudley would only heave a sigh, slap his knee in frustration, and start a new or different game. But when he was working with the computer system itself, which was apparently to Harry, the 'Windows' part, Dudley would become annoyed, irritated, frustrated, angered, enraged, distraught, murderous, and finally destructive.

Uncle Vernon worked with computers at Grunnings and had admitted that he'd hit his computer a few

times when first learning to use it. He usually set up a simple system for Dudley to start his games without spending much or any time with the computer system at all. Once that occurred, the particular computer lived much longer in Dudley's service.

Recently something new came out, something called 'Windows 95', or was it 96? Anyway, Dudley had to have it. Now that the Ryan contract for Uncle Vernon and Grunnings had been assured by Dumbledore, Petunia used the purchase of the new computer as a reason to lure Dudley out of the house for the rest of the morning and into the afternoon. The elder wizard had assured her the work on Harry's room would be completed, and Harry fed lunch, by 1:30 at the latest.

About halfway up the stairs it struck Harry that he didn't want the headmaster to see how pathetic his room was. It had been Dudley's second bedroom until five summers ago and half of it was still a repository for his cousin's broken and discarded possessions. Dudley's debris was stacked with some order on one side of the room, but it was still a clutter. Harry had been embarrassed when Tonks had briefly been in his room the previous summer helping him pack his trunk, but she had been a stranger at that moment, so he hadn't really cared that much - plus, at that time there had been the crush of time that had lessened his concern.

But this was Professor Dumbledore, the one whose approval meant the most to Harry. He knew he had made his bed, and straightened his room - his aunt and uncle had insisted he always do that when he left it each time, and his uncle had boxed his ears enough times over the years to make that effort an ingrained habit.

Harry had an old rickety single bed with only a sheet and thin blanket - no duvet, or even old eiderdown for covering. His small children's dresser had a missing front leg and was held up by old copies of his uncle's business magazines. Harry's desk had been one that Dudley had broken the drawers out of when they were eight. It was too small for Harry to sit at properly. That fact would be obvious when Dumbledore noticed everything on the desk had been arranged to be used by someone sitting parallel to the desk and leaning in and over it.

It was to Harry's relatives' shame that any disparagement should fall on his living conditions, but they were *his* family, or at least the only blood relations he had. In typical fashion of one under these conditions, particularly a teenager, Harry felt the blame or embarrassment was all his.

Walking up the stairs, as Harry slowed with each step and finally paused too long at the top. Dumbledore quietly said, "It will be all right, Harry."

And when Harry opened the door, it was all right, at least regarding the things in the room were concerned, because the only thing in the room was Dobby. Every item of Dudley's junk pile was gone. All of the furniture and every single possession of Harry's were gone. Even the spider web on the ceiling and the thin rug were gone.

"Harry Potter Sir's belongings is safe for the work at hand. Dobby is sorted out all of Harry Potter Sir's possessions, and the rest is...is where it should be." Dobby's green tennis ball-sized eyes batted with pleasure and a bit of relief, Harry thought.

"Thank you, Dobby," said Dumbledore. "Now, Harry, house-elves are very good at everything having to do with a house. Dobby could produce all of the changes needed and he will tweak and fine tune the room in any manner you choose. But because of the protective wards and additional sound dampening and such you will require, I must enlarge your room.

"You are familiar with the Engorgement Spells your friends Fred and George Weasley use with their Ton-Tongue Taffy. Well that won't work here, and why do you think that is?"

Harry shrugged his shoulders like he often did in classes when a question out of the blue was asked him. But then he said, "No. Wait. Is it... is it because there is really nothing we are enlarging, really? We can't make the air in here bigger, and if we make the boards in the wall bigger we would have to go outside the walls of the house, and you said that we wouldn't do that."

"Right in one, Harry."

Harry believed Dumbledore smiled at his command of a common expression used by his students.

"We do not enlarge the room. We enlarge the space in the room. Actually we do the opposite of that in all ways."

Harry looked at his mentor with confusion.

"If you remember, Harry, when Mr. Ollivander told you of the start of magic as we know it here in Great Britain, his ancestor had to learn Latin. At least half of all our spells, charms, hexes, jinxes, and even curses use Latin as a basis for their expression, and a number of the rest of the spell words have Latin as a part of their roots. The rest come from languages as ancient as Greek, Persian, and Aramaic, from words as obscure as modern day Hawaiian, and from many other sources. Understanding these origins is no more essential to use magic than understanding everyday word origins is necessary to communicate with each other. However, after coming to that realization while I helped Mr. Ollivander with his inventory these many years ago, it caused in me a lifelong fascination with the linguistics of magic."

The headmaster chuckled. "I know most today find Latin a truly dead language, and the study of the classic languages are not nearly as common as in my school years, but you will find the distinctions fascinating in your Defense Against the Dark Arts class of all things, this year. But I won't spoil the surprise of that right now.

"However, your perceptiveness about *not* engorging or enlarging your room causes me to want to point out the linguistics of the spell we will use. Since your room is not large enough in any direction - we need it to be wider, longer, and have a higher ceiling - we can say your room is 'too small in all directions.' Or we might also say it is 'too *narrow* in all directions.' So, rather than saying we want to increase or enlarge your room, we might express it, oddly I admit, that we want to 'decrease the different directions of narrowness of your room.' We do not have a plural for 'narrowness' in English, but in Latin, the word for multiple narrows or 'narrowness-ess' is *angustiarum*. We also use the Latin for 'decrease,' which is '*decrescere*,' actually 'to grow down.'

"So the spell, *Angustiarum Decrescere*, literally *decreases the narrowness-ess* in all directions rather than enlarge the room - two negatives in mathematics makes a positive. It is actually one of the many integral spells activated when you access the Room of Requirement. We will also use some of the other spells and charms used by the Room of Requirement to make your room what we need it to be. Your personal living space - your bed, dresser, desk, table, et cetera - will remain constant in this room and off to the side. You will step outside of your room, request your potions laboratory twice, and open your room to find everything you need to catch up and even get ahead in your potions studies. In like manner you will leave your room, request your physical fitness and Defense training room twice, and open up on a room configured much like the Room of Requirement' layout during your DA sessions, with a few distinctive refinements you may want to add to your DA room this school year. This is also how you will access your research library and your own kitchen and eating room where Dobby will prepare your meals.

"Dobby will not be preparing your potions, that will be done at Hogwarts under Professor Snape's supervision." Rushing on so Harry could not say anything, Dumbledore said, "He will be supervising several witches and wizards in controlling this huge undertaking. Were he not available and willing, I would have never considered the Paladin Program as it exists."

Harry remembered that even Sirius admitted that Snape was brilliant at potions. Remus had trusted him with the Wolfsbane Potion to ease his unavoidable monthly transformations, and that potion was said to be very complicated.

Harry nodded his understanding and the three of them proceeded to recreate his room into every room he would need. They filled each with all of the required furniture and items Professor Dumbledore stated to be necessary. However, they started by designing Harry's personal space as *he* wanted it to be when it was just his room for sleeping and regular studying. That space would only be a little bigger than his present room size.

Harry had never thought about how he would like his own room to look, so they recreated the dorm room he had lived in for five school years, only changing it for one occupant. A subtler version of the strong Gryffindor red and gold was used so his aunt Petunia would not be offended by the striking color scheme.

As a Potions Lab, his room was dark and lit only by torches. The amount of light present affected some of the more complex mixtures. As a physical training and Defense training room, it resembled the Room of Requirement configured for the DA, cross-pollinated with a martial arts dojo Harry had seen in a movie his uncle Vernon and cousin Dudley had watched once. Harry would refer to it as "the dojo," and it was light and airy with sunlight streaming in, not uncomfortably, from all sides.

The library was about one sixth the size of the Hogwarts library, but it had copies of all of the books Madam Pince thought he might need, and a copy of every book on Defense.

As a kitchen, his room was much like a smaller version of the kitchen and eating table at Hogwarts, which he had surreptitiously visited the previous two years. Harry was sure this design was to make Dobby feel more comfortable.

They'd finished their work on his room at 11: 40 and Harry asked Dumbledore what he wanted to cook for lunch. The headmaster replied that since it was Harry's last day to choose himself, he should make that decision.

Harry looked at Dumbledore and said, "Will there be hamburgers, and chips on this new diet?" When Harry saw his mentor shake his head negatively he said, "Well, if no one minds, what say we all have that? You'll join us, of course, won't you, Dobby?"

Dumbledore nodded and licked his lips as to the food selection, but Dobby said, "As Harry Potter Sir's house-elf, Dobby mustn't eat with Harry Potter Sir, but Dobby will enjoy his hamburger and chips as well. Thank you, Harry Potter Sir."

They were in the kitchen version of his room, but Harry and the headmaster sat at two chairs in the part of that room partitioned off for his bed and other furniture. Dobby, who could have walked to the food preparation area, Disapparated there instead.

Dobby's words bothered Harry. "Professor, what did Dobby mean when he said that he mustn't eat with me?"

It seemed to Harry that there was an odd hesitation on Dumbledore's face. The younger wizard thought that it was not that the elder wizard didn't want to tell him, it was that he didn't know exactly *how* to tell him.

"Harry, last year you probably saved Dobby's life. All of the other house-elves, with the exception of Winky, are bound house-elves to Hogwarts. They are under the protection of Hogwarts centuries-old traditions of kind treatment. They cannot be mistreated as part of their relationship to the castle. As a part of a headmaster's or headmistress' responsibilities *they* are bound to treat the house-elves well.

"Dobby and Winky are unbound house-elves, or at least Dobby *was*. Those two were employees and do not have that protection. Remember, our laws quite often have the force of instant magic on them if they are disobeyed. Being unbound, under the current laws, Dobby would become bound to whoever forcibly orders him to obey in a life or death situation.

Had Dolores Umbridge, as a temporary Headmistress, not a full Headmistress, ordered Dobby to tell her what he knew about the DA, and if she had ordered him to do so under threat of physical harm, he would not have become bound to Hogwarts. He would have become bound to her as he had been bound to the Malfoy family. His life would have not been ended, but it would have been as bad or worse than it had been before. So on that night, when you ordered him not to harm himself, and when he obeyed you, Dobby entered a status where he would not have to obey Dolores at all. He could have lied to her if need be to protect you."

The look on Dumbledore's face told Harry that he, Harry, needed to make a connection of some sort. There was something left unsaid, and Harry knew he needed to figure it out for himself. Dumbledore knew, but didn't want to tell him.

The connection was made.

"Dobby is *MY* house-elf now?" Harry had felt less stunned after being stunned in Defense practices in the past. "But... but... I don't want a house-elf. Professor, what am I going to do? I don't even have a house!" Harry sputtered for a moment. "I know. I'll give him clothes." Instinctively Harry started to untie his shoe to remove a sock.

"Harry, please don't. It will harm Dobby immeasurably."

"But, how...?"

"When a house-elf wants clothes, a rare case indeed even when the elf is being treated badly, but when the house-elf *wants* clothes, they are not adversely impacted at all when they are set free. Dobby himself actually benefited from being given clothes, and was greatly strengthened to protect you from Lucius at that moment.

"But remember Winky's case. She suffered terribly and is still not over her dismissal. Dobby had her start drinking Butterbeer, a very potent brew for house-elves, in order to deaden the destructive forces within her set off by being given unwanted clothes. That is why all of the house-elves at Hogwarts resist Miss Granger's efforts so. They want to stay at Hogwarts and would be hurt badly if given clothes.

"Most house-elves have died after being given clothes because they have not wanted to leave a family's service. Dobby is an extreme case. Those elves receiving clothes and wanting them have been rare. Those few who have wanted to leave, and have been able to, have usually attached themselves to another family in a matter of days, weeks at the most. There is no record of a house-elf going three years unattached and then attaching to a family. You are not a family, Harry, and you do not have a house, but Dobby feels himself bound to you as fiercely as Kreacher has been to Mrs. Black.

"It is possible that the attachment is even stronger, for you see, Dobby loved you before you became his master. That is unheard of. The anthropological witches and wizards in the Department for the Regulation of Magical Creatures want to do a long-term study on the two of you. I told them they would have to ask you after you come of age."

Harry remained speechless for nearly a minute. Finally he said, "Just please don't tell Hermione. I'll never hear the end of it if you do."

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It was just after they finished lunch. Harry had a chat with Dobby about their new status and he made it clear that he wanted to be Dobby's friend more than his master. Dobby cried and wailed about the greatness of his "Harry Potter Sir," the apparent title Harry was to be called by 'his' house-elf.

About this time they heard a noise downstairs, that had not been preceded by the door being unlocked.



That meant it was not any of his family, so Harry was on the floor with his wand drawn immediately.

"Very quick reaction time, Harry. But it's Nymphadora," said Dumbledore.

In seconds she was heard clunking up the stairs and breathily running into the room. She paused to gather her wind, and while looking around the room, she said, "Wotcher, Harry. Posh new digs. I've heard about the new Harry room. I can't wait to see the training dojo." While saying this she metamorphed herself from her typical pink-haired street punk look to an Asian version of Tonks with lustrous black shoulder-length hair and a white fighting kimono with black belt.

"Nymphadora, you are here because?" There was no pique or impatience in his voice, but the head of the Order of the Phoenix was curious.

"Oh! I'm sorry, sir. There have been reports coming in from all over the country. Dementor attacks. Seven we have heard of so far, and we do not know how many more, if any, have occurred."

Dumbledore jumped to his feet - the elder wizard was lightning fast. Harry drew his wand again.

The head of the Order said, "Where do you suggest I Apparate, Nymphadora? Do we know if the Aurors and mediowizards have been called?"

Tonks said, "I just came from the Ministry. I'm there today. Kingsley sent me to inform you. Aurors and MLE agents are going to each location as they are being identified. And St Mungo's has been notified. But so far no one has been kissed or hurt at all."

She turned to Harry and said, "Your analysis of the three previous attacks has been spot on, Harry." By now she was back in typical Tonks-wear and appearance. She'd re-appropriated the airhead mannerisms she'd used with him before. She transitioned back to the speech of an Auror and addressed Dumbledore.

"Sir, at every location so far, the reports say that at least one member of Harry's DA has been present. Each one has produced a corporeal Patronus. Students with bloody corporeals! Do you know how long it took me-" she remembered she was reporting to Dumbledore. "At two locations the students' parents also produced corporeal Patroni. It has been a route of dementors." She turned back to the younger wizard present. "Harry, everyone has given your instruction letter credit for their ability to defeat these nasties. You're almost a mantra to the solution. There's even a rumor that one student cast *you* as their Patronus, but that's just a rumor, as I said.

"But reporters from the *Evening Prophet* have made it to every site so far. This will be a real boost in the arm for morale around the country." She paused, and noticed what seemed like the lad's preoccupation. "What's wrong, Harry?"

Harry had slumped very slowly into his chair. He was facing out of the window and his eyes, though not teary, were moist looking. He was heard quietly saying, "Thank God. No one was hurt. Thank God it worked."

"Yes, indeed," said Dumbledore. Harry had never seen his smile so grateful.

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Late that afternoon, Harry, and all of the rising fifth years volunteering to join the program, took the first of the Paladin Acceleration series of potions. It was merely a system cleanser for his body, and it had no affect on Harry other than causing him to go to the loo a little more often than normal.

Dobby fixed Harry his first specific meal of the program, which turned out to be no different than shepherd's pie, sweet potatoes, green beans, and rolls prepared exactly like at Hogwarts. There were larger than normal portions than Harry took during the school year, and he had to eat all of the food at the right time. Harry did not think he was that hungry, but the food disappeared faster than he thought typical, but not as fast as Ron could make a meal vanish.

Harry sat at his desk in his new room and was reading the book that Dumbledore had given him.

The headmaster had said just before leaving, "Harry, I know you are not an avid reader even though you are a very bright student. It has been my observation that bright students who dislike reading quite often read too *slowly* to enjoy it. Your active mind cannot slow down to the pace your eyes have been trained to go.

"Tell me, you were never really encouraged to read as a young lad when you first learned, were you?"

"No, sir. Uncle Vernon called me a nancy-boy for liking to read at first. Then Dudley began to take any book I wanted and tossed it in the rubbish, so I gave up except for textbook reading."

"Well, Harry, this is a Muggle book on speed reading. You might find you enjoy reading if you can do so at a pace for your active brain to be fully engaged. You will have a lot more reading to do over the next two years than you've experienced so far, and I truly believe your fine mind will discover you have an exciting new world awaiting you in the books in your new personal research library.

"It will not be easy at first, but if you will force yourself to go through these first four chapters of the speed reading book, and take enough time to practice what it says, you just might find a breakthrough in your reading speed that will make reading more enjoyable. Then reading the rest of this training book will be easier."

"Hermione will like that, but Ron..."

"Do it for yourself, Harry, not *for* Miss Granger or *in spite* of Mr. Weasley.

"Take any regular book you haven't read and use these instructions with it to practice the drills. A few hours of hard work just might open your eyes to what you first were looking for in your early days of

reading. Reading did that for me, Harry."

"I don't know, Professor, but I promise to try."

"That is all I can ask."

Harry had tried for almost an hour after dinner to use the drills of the speed reading book while reading *Hogwarts, A History*. He almost threw the large dull tome across the room before dropping it heavily on the floor. The new sound dampening in his room had its benefits.

"Mister Harry Potter Sir, might Dobby be so bold as to make a suggestion?"

"Anything, Dobby, anything. Why'd I promise Dumbledore I'd go through this book?"

"Harry Potter Sir doesn't really like *Hogwarts, A History*... ?"

"No, Dobby. The few battles and Quidditch stories, which I've already read, are good, but most of it's boring, and I'm supposed to read something new with this training, so I can't read my few favorite parts over again."

"Dobby has a book, Harry Potter Sir; 'tis the most important book in house-elf history, and Dobby's family's most prized possession. 'Twould be an honor if Harry Potter Sir would consider reading it. 'Tis a most exciting book to read, Harry Potter Sir, in Dobby's humble opinion."

"I didn't think house-elves were allowed to... own... things."

"Oh, house-elves aren't, Harry Potter Sir. But... but, Sir, this is different. This book is key to the prophecy, Harry Potter Sir."

Harry jerked his head up. How could Dobby know-? "What do you know-? What prophecy, Dobby?"

"Dobby shouldn't yet, Harry Potter Sir. But, sir, there is a prophecy, that the heir of Dobbert, the leader of the first house-elves and friend of the first Master, well, the heir of Dobbert will be friends with the heir of the first Master. In a time of great danger the book, this book, shall become known. Then there is the test."

Harry gave Dobby a look of confusion, but the house-elf was busy turning around and snapping his fingers. A book about the size of Hermione's favorite, but roughly one half as thick appeared in his hands as he completed the rotation. Dobby held it up but not out for Harry to hold.

"Harry Potter Sir will notice the very unfamiliar characters embossed in the cover."

The cover of the book was old leather, but very well taken care of, oiled to be kept supple. Dobby opened the book, and the writing inside was of the same unfamiliar script and character set, but neatly hand written. Dobby then closed the book.

"The test, Harry Potter Sir, is in the next step." Dobby snapped his fingers and handed the book to



*I guess, but remember the old adage: "There is nothing new under the sun."*

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# "Great Scott, Potter, This is War!"

## Chapter Seven - Harry Potter: Spell Monger, Paladin, and Heir

*Thanks go to my betas, alli-lynn and Ozma.*

### Chapter Seven - Harry Potter: Spell Monger, Paladin, and Heir

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Albus Dumbledore and Arthur Weasley were two of the few pureblood wizards to believe that Muggles got along quite nicely in the world without magic, although both readily agreed that magic made their lives much easier.

In the magical world theoreticians and researchers exist in rare number in all the fields studied at Hogwarts, but the main theoretical thinkers practice in the fields of medical research at such facilities as St. Mungo's, potions experimentations of various kinds performed throughout the world but mostly in advanced schools of magic, and Arithmancy Spell Crafters in obscure offices of most magical governmental research laboratories, like the British Department of Mysteries.

Spell creation is viewed as a very precise art, combining the most esoteric and complex arithmantic numerological calculations, ancient runes analysis and manipulations, and very advanced linguistic wordcrafting to create new spells or even modify existing known spells.

Muggles far outstripped the magical world in the vast numbers and types of theoretical and practical research efforts they labored in.

And yet, the two worlds, magical and Muggle, work and research in the same physical cosmos. That is, the laws of the universe - science, nature, and mathematics - all apply to magical and non-magical alike.

The Laws of Lift and Thrust allow an airplane to overcome the Law of Gravity. The magical laws governing the spells and charms applied to a Firebolt have to overcome the same Law of Gravity just as effectively. Many Muggles can explain the basics of how airplanes fly. Few magical folk can explain in like manner how the spells work.

In the year 1900, a Muggle German physicist named Max Planck observed the actions of electromagnetic energy acting in waves. He coined the word 'quanta' to describe the building blocks of energy and matter on a subatomic level.

From this, the revolutionary ideas of quantum theory and quantum mechanics entered the world of physics. The practical applications from these theories have given Muggles cheap but distrusted nuclear energy, microwave ovens, advanced telecommunications, laser discs, laser scanners, laser printers, laser anything and everything, and means of mass destruction that are unthinkable.

But Muggle theoreticians have not finished speculating on how quanta can help accomplish the

unimaginable. And those in the research laboratories will never give up creating the "impossible."

At the time of this story, Harry Potter is in the summer before his sixth year at Hogwarts. It is 1996. In 1998, in three different research laboratories around the world, Muggles quanta-transported matter in a manner not unlike the way transporter technology works in science fiction.

In 2005, scientists with the Muggle technology company, Hewlett-Packard, proved that a quantum computer would be able to calculate more data in one molecule than any existing super computer could contain. In January of 2006, scientists postulated what structure would have to be created to contain a quantum computer.

In 2016 Muggles created the first *stable* self-replicating nanoparticles and quickly shared the discovery with the world in order to head off another molecular plague outbreak like the one that devastated Little America at the South Pole in 2013. By 2091, Muggles were regularly creating non-biologic objects out of the air, or "out of the quanta" as they expressed in that time.

In 2072 Muggles for the first time quanta-transported visible inanimate objects from one location to another, without destroying either laboratory. By 2109 non-biological items of less than two pounds were being shipped world-wide by Federal Express, the company that had invested \$1.1 trillion dollars in the technology. By the year 2241, Muggles themselves regularly quanta-transported between home and work in major technology cities such as Bangalore, Cupertino, Minsk, New Redmond, and Milwaukee. (The Muggle governments of the world combined forces to bomb old Redmond, Washington, USA off the face of the globe in 2038, five months after Windows 2035 shipped.)

But in the summer of 1996, Harry Potter opened the journal, *The Way of the Spell Monger* by Telemachus Grind, and bypassed all of the research done by Muggles over the next two hundred and fifty years. He bypassed the decades of study a witch or wizard would go through before being chosen as an apprentice Arithmantic Spell Crafter with the British Ministry of Magic. Harry mongered his first simple charm in fifty-five minutes.

In that time Harry had mongered a little charm that popped an owl treat from the bag in his trunk to Hedwig's cage - actually it 'snapped' to the cage. It was a simple charm, figured from the beginning mongering chapter in the diary of Telemachus Grind.

However, since it was a diary or journal and not an instruction book, Telemachus did not explain that to train one to become a Spell Monger, the apprentice would have to be thirty-years-old at least, and would have proven his or her complete mastery in a number of areas of spell, charm, curse, jinx, and hex abilities. Then, after a year of watching the master Telemachus monger spells and charms, the apprentice would then attempt such a simple charm. However, Harry had completed the feat forty-three minutes after he cracked open the book.

In the more agreeable era for Spell Mongers before Telemachus, the better apprentices would accomplish such a charm after a few days of trying.

Telemachus Grind never married or sired any children. His mother was a Potter. Therefore Harry



Potter was truly the heir and blood relative of the beloved First Master of the House-elves and the last Spell Monger. All house-elves revered him as Telemachus the Master.

The few in wizardkind who know of him at all refer to him as Telemachus the Vile.

Arithmantic Spell Crafters manipulate the math, history, runic expression, and language of a spell, charm, hex, jinx, or curse. Spell Mongers bludgeon, bang, anneal, cajole, forge, shear, and render the material of the universe to their will in order to produce a piece of magic for sale. Both result in the words and wand movements to perform magic, but they come at it from the opposite sides of the coin. One disciple is an obscure, esoteric profession that spends more time deciding what to name a research project than was spent imagining the number of angels that could dance on the head of a pin. Then they really begin to waste time. The other practitioner of spell creation, the long lost Spell Monger, would slam together a new piece of magic in a few hours or days perhaps, and sell it to the highest bidder or to the witch or wizard who had commissioned the fabrication.

Arithmantic Spell Crafters, Muggle scientific researchers, and Spell Mongers all have much in common despite their very different approaches.

For you see, it is out of the same quanta that Muggles will eventually learn to manipulate, that a witch conjures a handkerchief 'out of thin air.' It is by manipulating the quantum level particles of energy and matter that a wizard transfigures a match into a needle. On the quantum level, the energy released in a nuclear power plant, is the same energy that causes a feather to float up from a desk when *Wingardium Leviosa* is taught in Charms class. And it was throu gh the quantum make up of all solids, liquids, and gases, that Harry Potter first Apparated to Hermione Granger's rescue - the matter that all witches and wizards traverse when they Apparate.

Harry Apparated throu gh the same *matter* that all other witches and wizards do, but not in the same manner that they do.

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On the evening of the multiple far-ranging dementor attacks, the day Harry's room was expanded, and before Dobby gave Harry the ancient book, Hedwig made a special delivery of the *Evening Prophet* to him. Lupin wrote that even though Harry did not subscribe to this late edition, he should find this particular issue very encouraging. It read:

### **Nine Dementor Attacks - Eight Repulsed!**

#### **Dark Day for Dark Creatures**

This morning, spanning Great Britain, there were nine Dementor attacks. These evil minions of the returned He-Who-Must-Not-Be- Named, were sent out to spread heartache, hopelessness, and fear - their specialties. But in eight of these nine attacks, fearless Hogwarts students left their normal holiday activities to defend those present. Each student cast a **Corporeal Patronus!** That last sentence is not a misprint. Corporeal Patroni were cast by students as young as just finished second year, Dennis Creevey, and his brother Colin, soon to advance to his fifth year at Hogwarts.

The two and their father were visiting a swimming beach near Bognar Regis on the southern coast of England, frequented by mixed Muggle and magical families. The attack began and both lads cast the charm most adult witches and wizard find *very* difficult - usually impossible.

Young Dennis had this to say: "I knew the second I felt the cold it was a Dementor. I did just what Harry Potter taught us to do. I immediately forgot all that was occurring around me and concentrated on the happiest thoughts I could think of. Colin and I had both been practicing like Harry said to. Because of that practice I was ready in a few seconds. Colin succeeded with his charm first, so I felt even more confident. Then I turned and shouted the words in the direction of the attack. Mine was a squid! I like squids. The giant squid in the lake at Hogwarts is a friend of mine."

Colin added, "I think we were both so glad to know we had succeeded in protecting our family and the rest of those on this beach - that fact gave us the happiness to see the attackers off. I've always been much smaller than most of my classmates. I'm glad my Patronus was an elephant!"

The father of the two young wizards proudly told us, "I'm a Muggle and I could not see the Dementors, but I gathered behind my boys like they had told me to. I could feel the cold and I knew something horrible was upon us, but I tried to keep it from my voice. I kept telling my boys how proud I was of them, and how much they meant to me, and how much I loved them." The father, bursting with pride, concluded, "Who could ask for finer sons? And who could ask for a finer friend for his sons than Harry Potter? God bless you, Harry, wherever you are."

At the wizarding enclave near Penzance in Cornwall, Alicia Spinnet, who recently finished her seventh year at Hogwarts walked out of the Pesky Pixie, a restaurant she and her older sister plan to open in just two weeks time. It is located in the heart of the old part of that magical community being renovated by a grant from the Ministry of Magic. Said Alicia, "My sister called that it was getting dark, but there was no forecast for rain and it was only 9:00 in the morning. I had a sinking feeling about what it might be. Then the chills confirmed what I thought. I quickly forgot everything and concentrated on my favorite memories of my family. I walked out into the street and cast my Patronus. It was an owl that swept away the Dementors quite handily." When asked if it was common training now at Hogwarts for seventh years to know how to cast that particularly difficult charm, young Miss Spinnet answered succinctly, "Not at Hogwarts last year, but Harry Potter taught me, so I did fine." The Patil twins, Parvati and Padma, and their mother turned back an attack at the Magical Embassy of India in Edinburgh. Angelina Johnson flew out of her tryouts for the Holyhead Harpies, much to the fury of her coach, until Coach Kiltinham noticed Angela was leading her fully corporeal tiger Patronus against a group of dementors about to enter the stadium.

Lee Jordan, who recently finished at Hogwarts, was in Liverpool at the Royal Warlocks Shipping Docks, receiving a special shipment for his employers, Weasley's Wizard Wheezes. The Dementors appeared and the longshore-wizards ran, but young Lee cast a silver hippogriff that cleared the docks of the attackers. Cho Chang, returning seventh year at Hogwarts, turned back Dementors at Woodhenge, where she was doing research into Ancient Runes.

And pretty Miss Lavender Brown was shopping with her mother when Dementors attacked. She had just achieved seven O.W.L.s, including Outstandings in Defense, both in Theoretical and Practical. She demonstrated her skills in that subject when her silvery mink Patronus thwarted the dementor attack, after which, she promptly returned to her shopping. When asked about it she first said, "Well, the sale on makeup would be over shortly." When we clarified that we wanted to know how she had cast the Patronus, she looked at the reporter matter-of-factly and said, "Harry Potter taught me, of course."

On and on the stories of the eight defeated attacks have one thing in common. In all eight situations,

those that halted the attacks gave credit to The Boy Who Lived for their ability to stop these dreaded creatures.

Only in Oadby, near Leichestet, did a Dementor succeed in kissing two victims before MLE forces arrived. Apparently no Hogwarts students were in the vicinity...

Although Harry had again begun waking, chilled by nightmares where he relived his bad experiences, he had no bad dreams that night. He did deeply regret that a few souls had been removed in Oadby.

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The next morning Hedwig's hooting woke Harry. She had a package wrapped in brown paper with a note attached.

*Harry,  
I felt this issue shouldn't wait until this afternoon.  
The Evening Prophet rarely reports hard news,  
except at the Ministry in London. Their field  
reporters cover more fluff items. Kingsley has a  
contact at the paper. He says that the senior daytime  
editors are furious at your favorable coverage  
yesterday afternoon.  
I am sorry, Harry.  
Remus*

Inside was the *Daily Prophet*.

### **Fudge Declares Dementor Deterrence Ministry Success! Ministry Selected Curriculum Cited**

Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge, today declared his school curriculum for Defense Against the Dark Arts a smashing success. "We worked long and hard last summer to create the DADA training system Professor Umbridge taught the Hogwarts students. In all modesty, I believe our efforts have been fruitful. To credit a student for this success, just because he wrote some letter! Merlin's teapot, to compare that to a year's worth of careful and caring teaching, honestly."  
Former Professor Umbridge was unable to be reached for comment. She is reported to be on sabbatical on the island of Diego Garcia...

Harry was furious. But fighting Fudge in the press was never a winning possibility. The *Daily Prophet* had rarely been nice to Harry, but he'd been hopeful yesterday, when its less popular sister paper, the *Evening Prophet*, had continued doing what the morning paper had done right after

Voldemort had first been seen.

Recently it had appeared that Minister Fudge had started acting more like he had the previous school year. Evidently the deadline for yesterday's edition had probably been right after the attacks and before the comments it had contained had reached Fudge's ear.

Harry looked at the clock and realized he was in his new bedroom. He then remembered the room was configured in kitchen mode and he could smell the bacon cooking. He hopped out of his bed and put on his dressing gown. He walked around the divider and saw that Dobby was not there at the moment. Harry walked over to the bacon platter and reached out to sample a rasher. What seemed like an invisible hand slapped his hand away.

Harry was startled and said, "Dobby, are you invisible?"

After two seconds, a scroll unfurled right before him. In a child-like scrawl, these words melted onto the page:

*Harry Potter Sir is NOT to eat until Harry Potter Sir takes the potion at precisely 8:12 this morning.*

Harry chuckled and reached again for a rasher of bacon. This time the 'soft slap' knocked Harry across the room where he landed on a fluffy pillow that hadn't been there moments before.

The scroll drifted towards Harry and new words melted onto the page.

*Dobby will iron his hands when he returns for this offense, Harry Potter Sir, but, Harry Potter Sir is NOT TO EAT UNTIL HARRY POTTER SIR TAKES THE POTION AT PRECISELY 8:12 THIS MORNING!!*

Harry determined right then that he would have to talk with Dobby about punishment. If he had to have a house-elf, he'd be thunderstruck before that elf was going to hurt himself for making his master behave.

The potion tasted good. Great, actually. Harry wondered if Snape indeed had anything to do with its brewing.

Harry ate the delicious breakfast and lay down on his bed. He was required to lie there quietly for ten minutes. The first potion, the afternoon before, had no physical effects, but Dumbledore had mentioned that it was a cleansing potion to remove anything harmful from his system before the actual accelerators were introduced into his body.

At eight and a half minutes into the ten-minute cycle following drinking the potion, Harry was about to rise from his bed in impatience, when a warm sensation entered his body, starting in his toes, and rushing towards his head. In ten seconds he was flashing hot and cold, bouncing on the bed like a giant hand had him on strings, and steam was pouring out of his ears and fingernails.

Harry locked his jaw in an attempt to ride it out. It wasn't actually painful, just... sort of silly and unnatural. Dobby was standing there and did not seem too concerned, so perhaps this was normal. What seemed like an hour later, but was only the one and a half minute left in the original ten, Harry calmed down and, as he drifted off to sleep (for only five minutes) he saw that Dobby was writing on a clipboard.

After his brief nap, Harry dressed in a loose fitting sweatshirt and matching trousers. Then a note appearing on his desktop caught his eye.

*Mr. Potter,  
You should begin your Potions revision  
by creating these two potions before your  
lunch break at 12:30. Full instructions will  
await you in your Potions Laboratory.  
A. J.*

Harry did not know who 'A. J.' was, and the handwriting was not familiar at all. He asked Dobby if the house-elf needed to go outside to change his room's purpose.

"No, sir, Harry Potter Sir. House-elves is attuned to the house and can flow with the magic. Is why Dobby was present for all of the changes to Harry Potter Sir's room."

Flustered with Dobby's 'Harry Potter Sirs,' but having no clue how to stop them, Harry walked outside of his room and followed the procedure to re-enter his Potions Lab. His Aunt Petunia happened to be standing there when he walked out.

"I see your room is now painted a different color?" She had a not-exactly-pleased tone in her voice. After all, her house, her pride and joy, had been redecorated without her approval of the changes.

Harry realized she was not happy, but not angry either. He assured her once again that all would return to the way it was once he left for the summer. He reopened his door and the dark Potions Lab was revealed in small part to his aunt. Her eyes went as big as saucers and she scurried away, mumbling to herself. Harry smiled a bit and then quickly stepped in and closed his door. Dudley had entered the hallway and Harry did *not* want to hear any comments from his cousin.

Dobby was there and had 'changed his clothes!' The surprised look on Harry's face caused Dobby to cringe, fall to his knees, and cry out, "Please, Harry Potter Sir, Dobby didn't mean to offend Sir with Dobby's clothes. Dobby will change-"

"Dobby! Stop!" Dobby's clothing had changed back to the ugly dirty pillowcase the first instant he'd started talking, and Harry saw the house-elf cringe even further, so Harry calmed himself and decided to take a different approach. Speaking with what Harry hoped was an obviously friendly manner, he said, "Dobby. Please come and sit with me."

"But Dobby could never-"

"PLEASE-" Harry calmed himself again and started over, "Just humor me, Dobby, and please sit with me." Harry walked to his bed and called for more lights. The torches in that area brightened and he patted on the end of his bed for Dobby to sit.

"Dobby, I am going to tell you something that few know, and I want your solemn promise to not tell anyone... AND to not act on this information in any way."

Dobby looked rightly confused but held up his left hand, then quickly lowered it and raised his right hand. "Dobby swears to always keep Harry Potter Sir's secrets as is the way of all house-elves, and Dobby will further do whatever and only whatever Harry Potter Sir asks Dobby to do about his secrets."

"Good, Dobby, thank you." Harry paused and considered if there was any other way. Then he plunged ahead. "Until a week ago, I was always being treated like a poorly considered house-elf by my aunt, uncle, and cousin. They were not as bad as the Malfoys were to you, but they were bad. They punished me with long days of being locked in dark cupboards with no food, or a small amount of stale bread and water. My cousin hit me all the time. It has been this way all my life until I came here this summer."

Dobby stood. He stared into Harry's eyes. In about five seconds he'd turned red all over, including his clothes. Steam began to come out of his ears, and Dobby actually exploded, like a small fairly quiet bomb - quiet for a bomb that is. Two seconds after the explosion, and before Harry could really react with anything but surprise, the smoke cleared and Dobby stood there in the same condition he had been in before he'd started to turn red. Without saying a word, Dobby returned to his seat on the bed.

Harry blinked several times, gulped, and continued, "I didn't tell you that to make you angry, or make you want to hurt them. Things seem to be better this summer, particularly with my aunt. If she asks for your help, please give it to her, but don't do anything too magical until you clear it with me. I doubt she'll ask anyway, but just in case."

"No, I told you about my past treatment to try to make you see two things. First, I sort of know what you've been through in the past. I KNOW first hand about such treatment. I hate it, and I don't want anyone to go through that again. Particularly not one of my friends." Harry paused here.

Dobby's lower lip trembled. "Harry Potter Sir considers Dobby a... a friend?"

"Yes. Dobby, you are already a good friend, and we'll become better friends as we get to know each other better. This summer will be a good start to that. I really enjoyed reading that book you loaned me about Spell Mongering. Being friends with you pays off handsomely in many ways. I only hope I

can be as good a friend to you as you are being to me this summer." Dobby looked like he would burst with excitement to tell of the greatness of his 'Harry Potter SIR,' but Harry rushed on.

"The second thing I want you to understand is that I know that I am now your master, but I became your master unknowingly, when I tried to protect you that last night in the Room of Requirement. Because I have been like a house-elf in a bad situation, you can understand that I don't want any house-elf to be treated *like that*. Now, Professor Dumbledore has made me understand that you need a master for your own good, and *I really do* need your help. I will be your master to protect you; I always try to protect my friends. But I do not like the role of master. So, I don't want you to act like a fearful subservient house-elf, afraid his master will hurt him. I will *never* hurt you, even if you do something really bad, which I don't expect you to ever do.

"I have never seen a really good master of house-elves, having only seen Lucius Malfoy and Mr. Crouch. So I'm going to tell you how I want it to be, so I can be a good master. First, I insist you tell me if I *am* being a bad master and I don't know it."

Harry paused for effect without realizing that was what he was doing. "Dobby, I guess I want you to be more like my assistant, as Professor Dumbledore described it. You will quite often know what is best for me, so to best serve me, I expect you to *make me* do the right thing if necessary. And if I don't want to do the right thing, you shouldn't be punished for making me do it. I should perhaps, but we won't do that either, will we? You just make me do right, and I'll eventually thank you, even though I might not at the time. Have I made this clear?"

"Dobby thinks so, Harry Potter Sir."

Harry decided that the title 'Harry Potter Sir' would probably have to stay, so more important issues might be accepted.

"First off, I don't like the way you were treated, like I said.

"Second, if you were to meet Lucius Malfoy, or anyone else who wants you to bow and tremble in fear, you will know that your master, Harry Potter Sir, doesn't want you to do it." Harry was struck by an idea to make his point better. "You think I am a great wizard, don't you?"

Dobby's expression exploded with admiration and warmth. "Harry Potter Sir is the greatest, kindest of all wizards." He blinked several times in delight to be able to say so.

Harry chuckled, "I'm sure you're wrong about that, but I do want to be the kindest wizard to you, and I want to be the greatest wizard I can be. So as the greatest wizard, my house-elf should be the greatest, and should be treated with a similar respect that you want for me. That's why *I* want all to treat you well, and that is why I insist on treating you well."

Harry leaned towards Dobby. Unlike most people who would have leaned back and away, Dobby leaned towards Harry also. "Dobby, it is very important to me, that *YOU* treat yourself with the respect and kindness you want for me."

Harry paused to let this sink in, and he could see Dobby's huge green eyes wriggle with the thoughts racing through his head.

"Therefore, I *never* want you to punish yourself, particularly for doing what is right for me, like keeping me from eating before my potion this morning. No more ironing your hands or trapping your ears in the oven, got me? And I never want *you* to hurt you. And if anyone else tries to hurt you, you are not to let them. Then you are to tell me immediately, all right?"

Dobby looked to Harry like he wanted to explode again, this time with joy. Harry did not want to face the fawning and groveling he expected to follow, so he changed the subject quickly.

"Dobby, that outfit you were wearing when I came in, show me again."

Dobby stood and said, "Yes, sir, Harry Potter Sir." He snapped his fingers and appeared in a tiny white lab coat like Harry had seen on Muggle doctor television shows when he was younger. Of course Dobby also had on a glowing purple sock and an alternating flashing-green and blinking-red sock.

"I like it, Dobby. Where'd you get it?"

"Harry Potter Sir gave me the socks," he beamed and blinked, "and Dobby made the smock, Harry Potter Sir."

"Did you sew it together or just snap your fingers and make it?"

"T'was a finger snap, Sir. House-elves has many capabilities beyond cleaning and cooking, Harry Potter Sir."

"Dobby, don't let this upset you, but I always hated that pillowcase Malfoy had you wearing. Now that you are mine, I like you in outfits like this. I don't want to give you clothes but I want you to have better clothing. Could I find pictures of a few outfits, or describe them to you, and then you make them for yourself? That way you could wear what I want you to wear without me giving it you. Could we do that? Do you need fabric, or thread, or something?"

"Harry Potter Sir doesn't want to *give* Dobby clothes. Harry Potter Sir *wants* Dobby to *have* nice clothes!" He batted his eyes in appreciation. "Dobby doesn't need materials for himself, only if he makes clothes for anyone else."

"Well, Dobby, I need to get cracking on these potions. But do we have some free time in the afternoon? We could look at one of Aunt Petunia's catalogs and decide on some new outfits for you."

The journal appeared in Dobby's hands and he said, "Harry Potter Sir has time in the afternoon after his lunch and before Harry Potter Sir's visitors and afternoon reading in Defense books."

"I'm having guests this afternoon?"

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## The 'Visit' with Hermione

Harry confirmed that Dudley and his aunt would be out that afternoon. He ate the hearty lunch Dobby had prepared for him. It was much more than usual, even when Mrs. Weasley was cooking for him: four vulture sandwiches, which tasted a lot better than they sounded to Harry - a half dozen washed but not peeled raw carrots, two huge baked potatoes with half a stick of butter on each one; and all washed down with what seemed to be a bucket of tomato juice.

Harry and Dobby looked at a variety of his aunt's catalogs and magazines but they could not decide on outfits for Dobby.

At 2:17 the doorbell rang and Harry left his room to answer it. Hestia Jones went through a recognition procedure and then admitted from under a large Invisibility Cloak, first Mr. Granger and then Hermione.

Harry shook Mr. Granger's hand warmly and then turned to Hermione who had stood behind her father.

Harry and his closest female friend looked at each other for half a moment, and then they crushed each other in their arms as they started a very passionate kiss. In less than two seconds the powerful Steph Granger had both by the scruffs of their jumpers and pulled them apart.

Hermione's father chuckled and then laughed, "Well, Dumbledore warned me."

In a little over forty seconds Harry recovered from his temporary insanity, a few seconds ahead of Hermione.

"OH! Oh, Mr. Granger, I didn't- I mean I never... Sir, I don't know...." Harry was red and reddened more while he watched Hermione come to realize what had happened. She began a furious blush herself. She remained silent, but Harry continued trying to explain the inexplicable.

"Calm down, Harry. You too, Pumpkin. It's the potion. Dumbledore told you two this would happen, but you had to have the shock occur once before you could really understand how it affects you. It was by design that each of you has this first urge with someone you are not romantically involved with so you can see the truth of it. Ron's doing the same thing with Susan Bones, right now... And you, Miss Priss, remove that look of hatred from your face. Susan is as interested in Ron as you are in Harry. Less even. They're not close friends."

The realization of what they had done hit Hermione and she said, "Oh, Harry! I'm... so... embarrassed." And she turned away.

"Now, can I release you both without you running at each other?"

They both nodded. He let go of their clothing, but remained cautious. She started to raise her hands towards Harry and her father batted it away. "Down, Girl," he stated forcefully and then laughed all the more.

"Now I have to remind you of all the things Professor Dumbledore told you would be happening." The dentist-turned-momentary-teen-psychologist explained that they were in their first 'surge.' The initial rush was over, but for a few minutes, they could relapse into it. He had looked at his wristwatch the second they had ended their irrational lunging. "In five minutes or so, you'll enter the hyper-rational time period. You'll find you're emotionally-detached from what just happened and can discuss this as if observing a laboratory experiment."

Steph Granger then asked the two of them several questions that made them concentrate on exactly what they were feeling at the moment. The questions had been designed not to stir up feelings or make anyone embarrassed by what had occurred. The answers helped the two remember all that had happened and how they had felt.

At roughly the five minute mark, Mr. Granger asked Harry, who seemed slightly calmer than his daughter, "Harry, what spell unlocks doors?"

" Alohomora. But what's that-"

"Correct! Now, Pumpkin, where can you find a bezoar?"

"What? Oh, DAD! A bezoar, let's see, um...-"

"She's not with us yet, Harry. Let's watch her eyes, they're supposed to..."

Hermione's eyes were flitting about they room, not really focusing on any one location. After a few more seconds, her eyes seemed to clear up and she looked first at Harry and then at her father. She snapped up to her full height and said, "A bezoar can be found in a goat's stomach. It protects from most poisons and can-"

"That's enough, Pumpkin. You are both over the surge of emotions and the dangerous time when you could slip back in." He pulled a piece of parchment out of his back pocket and handed it to Hermione. "These are some questions your mother designed for you to discuss for the rest of the hour here. Now that you two are more than under control, I'm supposed to leave you to talk just by yourselves. I'll be nearby and stick my head in once or twice, but I'm told that's not necessary. These questions should only take part of the time, so after you're through with them, talk about whatever you please. I'll keep track of the time."

Harry suggested Hermione's father sit in the kitchen and have a pop or lemonade that his aunt had told him he could share with his friends.

The two classmates sat quietly for a moment and then Harry said, "I could hardly control it there for a while, but now, it's just like we always are with each other. Odd, isn't it?"

Hermione quickly agreed, "I know we should be rather embarrassed right now, we would be under normal circumstances, but I'm not. I can't find information on this Acceleration Potion in any of my books, or in the Black Library. It must be truly amazing." Hermione explained why her mother had written the questions. Mrs. Granger, who like Hermione could not stop studying, was not far from a

Ph.D. in adolescent psychology - all done over the last five years, while working full time as a dentist during the school year.

Now that Hermione was in analytical mode, she could objectively dissect what had happened as if it had not been her. Harry was not as academically inclined as she was, but found he had no problem concentrating on the questions, her answers, and his. He was barely able to discern that he was enjoying the slightly arcane discussion much more than he normally would have.

Being the hyper-curious young witch that she was, and needing no potion for that hyperactivity, Hermione asked Harry to go over every moment of his Defense Against the Dark Arts O.W.L. Practical examination. She wanted to know how he'd made the Outstanding Plus. No one had ever made an O Plus on a N.E.W.T. examination. Hermione had a new goal.

With a few minutes to go on their hour together, they both agreed that the time had been well spent trying to understand what had happened to them. Harry thought he could better handle the next rush of emotions when he visited with another girl later.

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It was now 3:17, and Harry took Mr. Granger and Hermione to his room, now configured as a dojo. The dentist sent Harry ahead so the two students could be apart for a few minutes. He said that there had to be a clear ending point of their time together before the three of them could look at Harry's training facility.

Once up there, Steph Granger showed him how all of the machinery worked and went through with him the expected workout and exercise routines that Harry was to do in any given day. Dobby's journal would tell Harry what he needed to do and when, but now Harry knew how it all worked.

Then Mr. Granger took what looked like a normal Muggle videotape from his bag and asked Harry where his magical player was. Harry did not know - he didn't even know if he had one, but Hermione spotted it under a stack of floor mats. She grabbed what looked like smaller version of a Pensieve made out of metal instead of stone, and placed it on a small table. She had Harry tap it three times with his wand while his left index finger was in the bowl-shaped portion of the device. It grew a port for the tape. She told Harry that his index finger adjusted the player so that he alone could play any tape in it.

"Harry," Mr. Granger said, "Professor Dumbledore demonstrated this player to me. This particular tape will not only show you my own exercises for flexibility, agility, speed, and instant reactions, the tape is magic-ed... no charmed, to take you through the exact sequence of exercises you need to do each day, even though the routine changes each day. It projects above the player in semi-transparent three-dimensional shape, me going through everything. Have you ever seen or heard of Hsing I, Pa Kua, or Tai Ji?"

Harry had seen something called tai chi on a television program Dudley had watched a couple of days before. He raised his hands and started cavorting around, pretending to do karate chops and making odd noises like, "Awww-ooohh, HAA! Heee! Oof-"

Steph Granger had barely touched the boy, but Harry had flown six feet across the mat and fallen unhurt on it. The real surprise was that Mr. Granger was instantly right there next to him, helping him up. "Harry, I hate that cavorting around people do. We are not going to work with a specific martial arts form of combat, but Dumbledore has approved a program of flexibility and coordination training I developed and have used for years to help maintain my agility and flexibility edge.

"I run every day, lift weights almost every day, perform a number of different calisthenics, and each day I do the slow martial arts routine you'll find on this tape. These exercise machines I'll show you in a minute put you through all of the different activities needed except these specific flexibility and coordination exercises. Those you'll have to do on the floor by yourself. This tape will show you how. You just watch it when it plays in three dimensions and follow along. It is translucent so you can see through it and note all of the actions and movements. You'll soon be to the point where no one will be able to hit you like I just did." The dentist smiled, "Except me, of course."

Harry decided to take the challenge. Smiling in return, he said, "We'll see how long even *you* can do it, sir."

About twenty minutes before his relatives returned, the Grangers were back under the Invisibility Cloak and Harry assumed heading back to Mrs. Figg's. He'd not asked.

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A monger in today's vernacular is basically a peddler, like a fish-monger. The phrase 'rumor-monger' adds a negative connotation to the word 'monger.' In its origins in Middle English, there is nothing negative about a monger of any type, but there was a commonness or lowliness about the word, that was also unmerited.

An iron-monger would travel around gathering together and selling metal items, and he would quickly bang out with hammer, chisel, anvil, shears, and axe, a roughly shaped or reshaped part or device. The speed of it brought about a crudeness to the item mongered, but it did not mean that the iron-monger could not with time, be as skilled or talented as any trained metal craftsman.

Spell-Mongers had the added bad reputation of making any old nasty hex or jinx for anyone with the coin required. The high-browed witch or wizard who looked down on the Spell-Monger, usually looked down on all around him or her, so there were no end of those who would gladly pay for a jinx to tie together the shoe laces of the haughty towdy, and the Monger had clear motivation to give a discount to the one wanting to hex the person who'd just insulted the Spell Monger.

Harry knew nothing of the bad reputation of Spell Mongers in the time of Telemachus Grind. Nor did he know of the feared reputation Spell-Mongery now had because of Grind, the last Spell Monger.

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Almost exactly forty-eight hours later, Steph Granger was almost as dizzy as he had been when he'd lost a lot of blood in a fight, and the adrenalin of battle had fully worn off. This time, the loss of blood had nothing to do with it. He'd used a Portkey moments before to arrive back at the headquarters of

the Order of the Phoenix. He'd lost count of how many times he'd used a Portkey in the last three days. He'd made three presentations that day before going with his daughter to see Harry.

Muggles couldn't use the Floo Network for transportation, but they could for communications. Fred and George Weasley took this fact as an insult to their ability to flaunt the limits of magic held by most as inviolate. Just telling the two, "It can't be done," or even worse, "You can't do that," was like waving an insult in front of a hippogriff. Something was going to happen and there were usually accompanying explosions and whatnot. But even those two had been advised to put that problem down on the list. They were at war, and there were more immediate solutions, inventions, distractions, and battle pranks to be discovered and sprung on unsuspecting Death Eaters. The twins kept lamenting that their new research facility had not yet been completed.

There was no practical way for Steph Granger to be Apparated or Disapparated. The first and only time so far he'd been Disapparated, had been the day he'd killed two Death Eaters in less than a minute. He'd been advised that it took three, or even more fully experienced wizards and/or witches to safely Apparate a Muggle, but with his family in danger, Steph had 'persuaded' Moody to Apparate him with the only two wizards available. He now understood just what a risk he'd taken when his daughter had chastised him for nearly fifteen minutes, showing him moving picture after moving picture of splinch accident victims. The safe number of Apparation-qualified magical folk needed to transport him in that manner was four - more than could reasonably be spared for such a task.

Though all magical people took the fact for granted, Steph was amazed that he could use a Portkey to go anywhere a Portkey could take a 'magical,' as he called them. Steph couldn't activate the Portkey himself, but a magical could touch it with his or her wand and he could go by himself wherever it had been created to take him. (Saying "witch and/or wizard" was just too much to keep repeating, so the phrase, 'a magical' entered his working vocabulary, and slowly those magical around him began to use it too.)

The problem with Portkeys had always been their unavailability. Officially they had to be approved by the Ministry of Magic, every single one, before they were released. Illegal Portkey manufacture could not be detected - use of an illegal Portkey could. So, once again the Weasley twins used a variation on their secure Floo Powder technology, and created Portkeys undetectable in use. Just telling those two that it was officially illegal, was enough to inspire them to new heights of creativity.

Mundungus Fletcher was forbidden to talk to the two without proper supervision.

So Steph Granger went all over Great Britain setting up and explaining to all of those enrolled in the Paladin Program, just how all of the magical exercise equipment, and the exercises themselves worked. He did not visit with the few Slytherin Paladin volunteers, because, though they were trusted by Severus Snape and Dumbledore, waving a Muggle Death Eater killer under the nose of pureblood families was for the most part, too great a risk. Therefore, Steph had explained everything in full to Snape and had made the potions master demonstrate and explain it to him properly, before the dentist approved Snape presenting the physical fitness program.

The first meeting of the dentist and Snape would have delighted every member of Gryffindor, and most members of Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw as well. But they would never know - hopefully.

It had been a bad day for Severus Snape. He'd just lost a particularly ticklish argument with the parents of a rising seventh year Slytherin who'd been expressing a serious interest in being an Auror since her third year. She had been preparing for it, and now that the Paladin Program was the only Auror Academy-approved method of entering that profession, her parents would not allow her to accept the clause that purebloods, half-bloods, and Muggle-borns were all to be treated as equals. He'd had such high hopes for her, in spite of the fact that her uncle was known by him to be a Death Eater. That's what made the argument so ticklish... and fruitless. The Slytherin head felt like Dumbledore tied one hand behind his back with the ideals and aspirations of the Paladin Program, and Snape's need to continue to appear as a Dark Lord spy at Hogwarts tied the other hand.

His only goal, and it was a noble goal in spite of himself - he thought of it as only pragmatic - his only goal was to rescue as many Slytherins as he could from the Death Eater recruitment efforts of their friends, families, and closes associates.

In this foul mood, the potions master arrived by Floo at the Order of the Phoenix headquarters, the present domicile of the Granger family, a moment before he met Steph Granger. Snape had heard about the 'Granger Defense' as it was being described, and he'd been glad that the family had not been harmed, though he'd never admit it if possible. He walked out of the fireplace dusted himself off before looking around, and saw the headmaster and a stranger huddled around the kitchen table poring over Muggle books, magazines, drawings, and photos, none of which were moving of course.

Steph Granger knew immediately who this person had to be. Hermione's description had left no doubt - neither had Ron's. His daughter had really tried to objectively inform her parents about Professor Snape. She'd bent over backwards trying to build a case for respecting the man and his accomplishments. But she had also told of his prejudices and actions toward her, Ron, Harry, and the rest of Gryffindor. In his life as a soldier, Steph Granger respected the fighting abilities and accomplishments of a number of people he disliked. This man before him was going to have to prove himself in many ways before any collegial feelings could be generated by this father of a Gryffindor. His immediate thought was, "Going forward, the likes of you won't be treating my daughter poorly if I have anything to do with it."

Professor Dumbledore said, "Ah, Severus, I want you to meet Steph Granger. Steph has just agreed to train all of our young Paladins on the proper use of the exercises, exercise equipment, and other physical fitness aspects of these intensive two months."

This startling and upsetting news just hit Snape the wrong way. His migraine headache was throbbing and he'd not had any of his relief potion with him. Steph had risen and tentatively held out his hand. This was too much. "Who will respect a lowly Muggle with nothing to accredit him other than being a murderer? He can be stopped by anyone prepared to do this-"

Hoping to make his point, with his usual tact, or lack thereof, Severus had pulled his wand and had casually sent a weak stunning spell towards the man before him. He then looked back to Dumbledore to further express his point. The spell hit a chair and not its intended target. There was a blur to the side and before Snape could consider any other action, his wand flew across the room and his arm was wrenched behind his back. The point of a blade was drawing a trickle of blood from his neck.

"The next time you draw your wand on me like that with no explanation or warning, you'd better take it more seriously, because that's what I'll do."

For the first time, and just for a second before Dumbledore cleared his throat, Severus knew fear for his life outside of the presence of Lord Voldemort. He thought that this irrational Muggle might just kill him.

"Steph, please don't," said the head of the Order.

Snape's fear increased when he realized that Dumbledore did not know what the man holding his life's blood might do.

Granger hurled the man in his grip away from him, towards the table beside Dumbledore. When both wizards turned back toward Steph, they saw him holding Snape's wand over the fire.

The Death Eater slayer said, "Professor Dumbledore. If you hold me in such low regard that you think I'd kill a valued member of the Order of the Phoenix without just provocation, then I shouldn't be considered in any way able to help you in your cause. My wife and I will leave here immediately. I only ask that you allow Hermione to stay here and remain at Hogwarts for her education."

There was a stunned silence.

Dumbledore said one word. "Apologize."

Professor Snape started, "I'm not sure I will accept-"

"No!" said Dumbledore sternly. "You will apologize, Severus, for attacking him first. Now that I think about it, Severus, you are lucky to be alive. Looking at this from Steph's eyes - an unknown wizard appears out of nowhere, draws his wand, and sends an unknown *visible* spell, a red beam of light, at him. He could have killed you. Had he done so, I would have argued the case for his innocence before the Wizengamot, and I would have won."

The Potions master was stunned by these words, but the headmaster went on. "Steph, I owe you the greater apology. I cannot honestly say that when I asked you not to harm my foolish friend here, that I was *not* thinking you might really kill him. I would like to think I was only asking you to release him, but a part of me thought of you as an unthinking killer. And for that I apologize. *I* am at fault. You have no way to know what is coming at you when a wand is pointed at you, and no way to defend yourself and your loved ones other than through extreme measures. Thank you for your restraint just now."

Steph Granger was staring at Dumbledore. But Dumbledore was looking at his professor. The look completely discomfited the younger wizard. Severus Snape was not one to admit even blatant mistakes to anyone he considered beneath him. But in that instant he knew that a very commanding Albus Dumbledore was demanding that he, Snape, apologize with as much genuineness and sincerity as possible. Snape did not want to know the consequences of disobedience.

"Mr. Granger... I... acted wrongly towards you. I am sure your daughter has told you of my less than... 'sunny' disposition... among other things. The headmaster has chided me before regarding this.... *My*

attack on you was not meant to harm you, and it would not have, but you had no way of knowing that. I was using you as a demonstration object." Snape swallowed before continuing. "You are not an object." One more swallow. He was furious at this humiliation, but kicking himself for causing it to occur. One look at his superior convinced him the next three sentences were necessary. "I sincerely apologize. You have few means to defend yourself. Thank you for not harming me."

The dentist tossed the wand to its owner. "I apologize for assuming you meant harm... and for cutting you." Steph turned to Dumbledore. "And to you, Professor, I had no call to accuse you-"

"I gave you that call, Steph." Those words hung in the air momentarily.

"And now," said Dumbledore, "shouldn't we work together on the plans to make sure we can achieve the maximum benefit for the students? That's our common goal, one we can all three wholeheartedly embrace. I'd like for us to be better comrades in this war than we are now."

Steph recalled those events as he'd made his last Portkey trip for a while, and grinned ruefully. He and Snape had become relatively agreeable associates over the last few days. When the headmaster was at Grimmauld Place, Steph had listened each day when the potions master reported back to Dumbledore on the acceleration potion development, the delivery system, the measures he'd taken to assure quality control, and the daily effects on each student. Steph freely admitted that Snape knew his business.

For his part, Steph felt sure that Severus Snape respected him for his physical training program. Most wizards, other than Aurors, MLE agents, and Quidditch players, did not exercise in any way. Snape had a small training area in his personal quarters, and he regularly ran, lifted weights, and did calisthenics. That fact increased Steph's regard. That fact also increased Snape's regard for him when the potions master realized just how difficult it would be to demonstrate Granger's program, even though he, Snape, was in good shape.

The wall preventing cordiality cracked wide when Snape hesitantly asked, "May I have a copy of your martial arts flexibility tape? It will make a proper addition to my physical routine." The small Pensieve-like player that projected Muggle tapes three dimensionally were a new invention known only to those involved in the Paladin Program.

Granger had traveled with his daughter to a few of the locations where Paladin Program participants congregated to hear him, and had gone with either Professor McGonagall or Professor Flitwick to the other locations. After that last session, Professor McGonagall had left to go back to Hogwarts. She'd activated Steph's Portkey and he'd gone back by himself to his temporary dwelling place. He was there alone. His wife and daughter, and all of the Weasleys, had other destinations this day. All would return in time for a late supper.

Steph had developed quite the taste for butterbeer. He had two cool bottles in his hands and was about to go outside in the back garden to rest from the Portkey effects in the fresh air. Moody flooded into the kitchen at that moment and they greeted each other. The two realized they had time together, so Moody joined Granger in his relaxation.



Neither were senseless chatterers, so Steph broke the silence with a subject they could both warm to. "You said that you once met Inspector Fairbairn, the inventor of my knife, before the war. Do you mind telling me about your meeting? He's vastly respected in the SAS, so..."

The British Ministry of Magic had granted formal independence to the Hong Kong Ministry in 1930. But they had maintained close ties during the next decade before the Muggle war. In Kowloon, right across the Victoria Harbor from the Hong Kong Island, there was a local Dark lord who was threatening the new government. In 1936 Moody, fresh out of Auror Academy, had volunteered to join a squad going there to help.

"I met Fairbairn when we joined his constabulary in a effort to end the connection between the Tongs and the Dark wizards there." Moody related the few details of interest from the meeting and their subsequent actions.

"He was remarkable, for a Muggle." Moody noticed that the dentist had bristled slightly at this remark. "Don't be insulted, Granger, I meant nothing by it. But many of us in the magical world never cease to be amazed by how you Muggles get along without magic. Author Weasley's enthralled by your technology for everyday living. I'm not sure I could begin to care less about that. Means nothing to me.

"No, I'm amazed by anything, magical or Muggle, that makes fighting evil easier. Going up against the Tongs in Hong Kong back then, and the Japanese spy networks - that was sticky and dangerous business. That knife was an equalizer in two ways - three ways actually.

"It was, and is as you've proven recently, an effective tool for parting bad guys from their miserable lives. In addition, that knife and Fairbairn's training with it, as well as other things he taught the locals, gave his constables a psychological edge, even more important than the substantial fighting advantage the knife and knife-fighting training gave his men. For the first time they *thought of themselves* as able to defeat the Tongs. And I don't need to tell you anything about psychological edges, do I?"

The two smiled at each other and tapped bottles in salute.

"The third edge that knife gave them in '36, was what I believe you call a psy-ops advantage. Their enemies began to fear those who wielded it, and an enemy that fears you is about to be beaten.

"Where'd you get your Fairbairn? It's an original isn't it? They're rare, I believe."

Steph Granger told of his SAS training and the knife fighting competition he'd won, and the right he'd received, because of that victory, to buy and wear any non-regulation blade he chose. Only those who'd seen combat usually received such permission.

"Found this one in perfect condition in a pawn shop of all places. The arm sheath's not original, but it's well made and quite useful. Of course I knew what I wanted right away. A Fairbairn, legend has it, was worn by David Stirling, the founder of the SAS. Some say there are slightly better knives designed for fighting since that war, but they're not that much better, and I believe skill can overcome

advanced technology in many cases, particularly in a more up close and personal fight."

Moody interrupted, "Speaking of up close and personal, I overheard Dumbledore talking to Snape about his little run in with you. God's truth. Seems to me that arrogance is going to kill more wizards who are trained and should know better than any other factor. That's becoming more and more clear to me daily, as I think about it. I had my own comeuppance the other day."

Moody told Granger about Harry jumping on him in the bushes. They both had a good chuckle about that.

Steph said, "I spoke to Dumbledore and Lupin before my talk with Harry, but I didn't get to talk with you. How'd your time go with him? He's a remarkable young man, even for a wizard, in my uneducated view."

Moody related a brief version of his visit with Harry. He told Steph what he'd highlighted with Harry - the value of preparation, clear thinking about the strategic and tactical goals at hand instead of reacting emotionally, and a general hurrah for constant vigilance. Moody also related to Steph a small amount of the story of how he'd lost his eye and leg. He asked, "How'd your time with the boy go, Granger?"

"Similar only differently. I told him about the sometimes too high cost of doing what had to be done in war, and then doing it anyway regardless of that cost." Steph also told Moody a severely abbreviated account of his having to sacrifice a friend for the greater good.

They were silent for a while. Their combat camaraderie was similar to that which they'd each had with Harry, only their ages were much closer. Their life experiences gave them even more in common, even though from different worlds. They lamented the fact that they couldn't pour their experiences into the teens in the Paladin Program.

"Hold it," said Steph. "Why can't we?"

"What you going on about, Granger?"

Steph knew that motion pictures did not exist in the magical world like they did in his world. But he had been thinking about the martial arts flexibility tape he'd developed. He'd also thought about what Hermione had told him about a genuine fully functioning Pensieve.

"Could we gather our experiences in a Pensieve, and then edit them where needed, and play them for the students?"

"I 'spose," said Moody after a moment's thought, "mine for sure, I don't know about yours. But it will just be a *view* of experiences, not the experience itself. Potter, your daughter, and the other four have fought in real fights, but I don't think any of the others have, except for the dementor fighters, and that's not really at all like taking on a Death Eater."

They were looking at each other when the dentist's face broke into a smile. "Well, let's do like we did before I went to war, like we did in the SAS before any assignment. Let's make the most realistic

environment for the Paladins that we can. You'll be at the school some from time to time, helping with their training, true?" Noticing the inquisitive look on Moody's face as the Auror nodded, Granger went into detail about his ideas.

Moody broke into a huge grin, which really looked odd with his magical eye spinning in excitement. "Granger, I like you. You're unorthodox, and that's just what we need to take advantage of the arrogance of our enemies. You proved it that day we thought we'd be rescuing you. If we get these kids to expect the unorthodox, the unexpected, the sudden attack - then, maybe they will begin to *be* unorthodox and sudden themselves.

"Death Eaters will never maintain constant vigilance because they are always the attackers, and they are much more stupidly arrogant than Snape."

Steph was as excited as Moody. "Hermione has described a wizard duel to me - you shoot then he shoots. That may be fine for formal dueling, I don't know, but in a fight, I always told my men to keep firing as fast as possible until no one gets up. 'Kill 'em all and let someone else sort 'em out,' that's what my old sergeant major used to say. Words to stay alive by."

They both chuckled. Moody said, "I might finally see the constant vigilance I keep harping like a Jarvey about."

After Moody had explained to Steph what a Jarvey was, the two kept chatting and plotting training tactics until Sylvia Granger called them for dinner from the back door of the house. They had an initial proposal for Dumbledore when he visited the next night.

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*Dear Harry,*

*I know the recent stories in the Evening & Daily Prophets probably delighted and bothered you. I am glad for the first and furious about the second.*

*The good news is that next Thursday the new issue of the Quibbler will be delivered. Father is very excited about reporting current event news, instead of the more fascinating news of yeti and heliopath sightings, and of course the Crumple-Horned Snorkack.*

*We will print your instructional letter just as you wrote it. We (I'm helping him this summer) will also try to print interviews with each of the Hogwarts students who successfully fought off Dementors. We've not been able to interview all of them yet. This type of reporting, the truth about events here and now, is why Father is excited. We think this might make a real difference. If just one in ten wizards or witches practices what you have taught, and that one in ten learns to cast a Patronus, this might protect all of England. Besides, shedding light on Fudge's lies about you, the school, and all of the goblins he has murdered also excites us.*

*I have not seen Father filled with such zeal since before my mother died.*

*For THAT, if there was nothing more - and I do owe you for so much more - I am truly grateful to you.*

*Your friend,*

~\*~

*Dear Harry,*

*I hope you saw the article in the Evening Prophet and I hope you didn't see the article the next day in the Daily Prophet. I was so sorry to see Minister Fudge and that vicious rag treating you like they did before You-Know-Who showed himself again. I hurt for your insults.*

*I am grateful that you sent the instructions you did. I know I wouldn't have been able to cast the Patronus without them. You were right - doing so in the DA and facing a real Dementor are two entirely different things. I almost didn't practice like you said to, but my mum saw the letter, read it, and I helped her with it. She isn't quite to where she can do a corporeal, but then she didn't have the best teacher in the world showing her how, like I did.*

*Thank you. Thank you so very much.*

*Love,*

*Cho*

Harry was perplexed by the two letters in his hand. Cho's letter was in very neat script, almost as if printed by Dudley's computer printer. Luna's letter had a flowing cursive that was almost calligraphic in design. The letters from the two girls were different, and yet somehow similar to each other.

Analyzing their handwriting showed him nothing, and Harry wondered why the two letters, arriving at the same time, bothered him so. He had been interested in both girls - Cho for over a year, and Luna only for several hours.

He set Cho's letter face down and stared at Luna's. Then he reversed the process. Luna was still his friend. Cho had earlier made it clear that they weren't friends, and now this letter tried to reactivate a friendship that never had occurred, because Harry had tried for courtship first instead.

Harry placed both letters in a drawer.

He sighed and didn't even complete the thought, much less say, that he didn't understand the fairer sex, and doubted he ever would.

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## **The 'Visit' with Ginny**

On the day of their first visit under the potion's influence, the day that Harry and Hermione had kissed briefly, and then had blushed for several minutes, only her dad's instructions about the complex magically modified exercise equipment had completely distracted him from his embarrassment. This afternoon he would at least know about his possible reaction, and he hoped to prevent another similar

burst of uncontrolled desire. This afternoon he would be visiting with Ginny Weasley.

Harry realized she was dating his dorm mate, Dean Thomas, so he had to be careful with her - plus she was Ron's sister. But he also realized that he had known Hermione and Ron were now out in the open about their feelings for each other. And yet, Hermione and Harry had *both* gone at each other, leading with their lips. It had only been for a few seconds, but those were an irrational few seconds for both of them. And their yearning to snog had been right on the surface for several minutes while it dissipated.

Now Harry was going to spend the afternoon with Ginny. She was not on the acceleration potions, so she would not be irrationally tempted. He knew this was an opportunity to act even more stupidly if he wasn't cautious.

Harry walked to his visit. He would meet Ginny at Mrs. Figg's house because Uncle Vernon was at home that afternoon, going over his new Range Rover with the Owner's Manual, to better understand the details of his new vehicle. Vernon knew everyone would be fascinated by the little tidbits of knowledge about the vehicle that he would share over the days, weeks, even months to come.

Harry rushed up the steps and rang the bell. The door opened and no one could be seen from inside. Harry stepped aside so that Bill Weasley, Harry's minder for the afternoon, could go past in his Invisibility Cloak. Harry followed him in and closed the door.

Bill was folding his Cloak and Ginny stood there, not six feet away. Like a miniature crazed bull elephant, Harry snorted and rushed at her with his arms opened wide. She dodged under his right arm easily, moved to where her back was to the door, and looked wary - even though she had a smile on her face. Bill had circled in the wrong direction, following the sound of Harry's snort, and looked where Harry had been. Harry had time for one more unrestricted lunge at Ginny. He ended up splitting his lip on the door as she ducked his advances again. He fell to his knees as he grabbed his lip, and came to his senses. Immediately he turned, he was sure, brighter red than even Ron in full bloom.

"Gin-ne, Ahm sho shor-ree," he apologized with his hand on his lip.

Bill stepped in between the two and pulled his wand. Harry had a moment's fear of big brother retaliation before the Gringotts curse breaker cast a healing spell and pain relieving charm on his lips. Bill stood there and used the time to teach Harry the words and wand flicks to the two spells he'd cast. "First aid spells often come in handy, and you should have been taught at least a few by now." After five minutes, and after Harry had calmed enough to answer an academic question, Bill left. "Little Red, just sit here on this end of the couch, and if you need me, tap on the window. I'll be right outside under the cloak, sitting on the porch. I'll leave now. The visit today will last one hour."

Watching Bill leave, and blushing furiously, Harry said, "I'm sorry, Ginny. I prepared all the way over here to behave, but the second I saw you... forgive me?"

"Harry," Ginny said drawing his name out like 'Harr-ree,' "I knew that'd be your reaction. Mrs. Granger warned me, and so did Dumbledore. I'm only allowed to help 'cause I'm so good at dodging boys' swinging arms. My brothers have chased me all of my life." She had a very light touch in her

voice throughout this declaration, and it calmed Harry. "Besides, I know that with these potions, you might have greeted Mrs. Figg that same way."

Hoping to lighten the mood with that last comment, Ginny instead frowned when she saw the stricken look on Harry's face. She quickly walked to one end of the couch, and patted it, and then walked and sat at the end Bill had suggested. They would be sitting together, but not too closely. She crossed one of her jeans-encased legs, and pulled out a sheet of parchment with the exact same questions that Harry had discussed with Hermione the day before. He tried to rush through them so he could leave the subject, but Ginny was thorough.

Harry thought about the encounter while he answered the perfunctory questions. He was solely guilty for *this* attempt at intimacy - not like when he had been with Hermione the day before. Because of his hyper-detachedness of the moment caused by the potion, he didn't blush when he made this connection, it wasn't possible, but he did wonder what Ginny was thinking.

After discussing the standard questions, Ginny refolded the parchment and said, "Tell me what's been going on with you the last two days. Wasn't Fudge horrid?"

About five minutes later, Harry realized that Ginny had admirably taken him directly into a conversation that had limited his embarrassment as much as possible. She was telling him about a visit with Luna and her father, Sol Lovegood, at the premises of *The Quibbler*. It was on the other side of Ottery St. Catchpole from the Burrow. She told a rollicking tale of serious journalism positioned right beside the most absurd ideas she had ever heard.

Harry paid attention to her every word; she had her own unique version of the Weasley gift of story telling, that had only skipped Percy in this generation and none he'd met in the generation before. But Harry took the time to think about his friend sitting opposite of him on the couch.

For someone who had been crushing on him for years, and had apparently relinquished that crush, she was being very kind to help him. Harry'd had girls show some interest in him during the last two years at Hogwarts. A few girls had stared at him longer than he could explain ever since his first year - stared for a longer time and in a different manner than the guys who'd wanted to see his famous scar. Ginny was known by many to have had her crush on him the longest, though she had never done anything to make him feel uncomfortable. On the contrary, Harry had felt bad about the embarrassment heaped on her, mostly by her brothers, because of her feelings for him.

He wondered what he had done to deserve such a good friend. His being a good friend in return, and saving her life, and her brother and father's lives, never occurred to him.

During their hour together Harry realized more and more that he valued Ginny's friendship, and was fortunate to be well regarded by the entire Weasley family - perhaps, even now, by Percy. He'd not yet discussed Penny Clearwater's letter with anyone, particularly not a Weasley. He wanted to help restore their family unity. Harry believed Penny, and agreed with her arguments in favor of helping. A day after receiving her owl, he'd sent a quick note telling her that he would help, but wanted time to think about how. Harry had long ago relegated his personal anger at Percy to a point of irrelevance. He knew how much a restoration would mean to the Weasley parents, and he wanted to do anything

he could to help them. But he too was stymied by *how* to reconcile the siblings. He considered broaching the subject with Ginny, but he thought that she would either be the most in favor or the most violently opposed to Percy's re-admittance into the arms of the family.

It was nearly time to leave so he asked, "Do you know who I'll meet with next?"

"It'll either be Hermione or me. You skip visiting a day and then it'll happen for several days in a row, but I don't remember who starts, Hermione or me, I do three out of five of your visits and she does two out of five."

"Only you two?" He knew immediately that he had misstated his question. He rushed in, "NO-NO-NO. **NO!** Please don't take that the way it sounded. I thought Dumbledore said everyone was going to visit with at least four or five different people- OHHH! I'm, I'm so... sometimes I'm so stupid!"

"Harry. I've seen you when you've had your moments, but I know you'd never intentionally hurt my feelings. Think about it just a moment and you'll realize it's a security issue. Hermione and I can Floo from Grimmauld Place. We know what's going on. If you could go elsewhere... but you know you can't."

"Yeah, I know. Stinks being me." He looked at his watch and made for the door to walk home. Then he paused and said with all sincerity, "Ginny, thank you. I'm not sure why, my emotions are rubbish on these potions, but I somehow feel much better *now* than I did. Thanks for doing this."

"Now, see, that's the Harry I think about when you say something stupid. I'm glad to help. I asked to be put in the Paladin Program, and everybody in the room, except Professor Dumbledore, shouted 'no' so quickly you would've thought I wanted to raise Lethifolds in the garden."

With only a few moments left together, Ginny took one or two to gaze out of the window at nothing. She sighed and seemed to become a little down. "But this has... has been *very* good, hasn't it? We've not been able to talk like this ever, really. Ron and Hermione will go visit with a number of others this summer, and be with each other. But you'll be stuck with me mostly. I'm sor-"

"THAT'S terrific, Ginny." Harry interrupted quickly before she could apologize. "Really, we'll be much better friends then. I've already been a little depressed about being by myself, at school, when Hermione and Ron go off snogging, as I'm sure they will. You just know they'll kiss as violently and as often as they've fought in the past. They'll probably do both now."

He looked at his wristwatch and opened the door. "I'm almost late. I'm supposed to be lifting weights in a few minutes. G'bye."

---

Ginny watched Harry walk away with a purposeful stride. He had his exercises to begin in a few minutes. So many of her friends were a year ahead of her, and all were in the Paladin Program. They all had purpose above and beyond the coming school year. They were Paladins. She was... well, she was not. After long and vehement insistence, she'd been given this small manner of helping - 'visits'

with Harry.

Dean has written that morning about the wonderful 'visit' he'd had with Tinica Waters, the beautiful Ravenclaw Ginny had seen him stare at on more than one occasion. Ginny thought that if she and Dean were still together after summer holiday it would be a minor miracle. But she didn't care. As nice and handsome as Dean is, he's no....

Well, never mind.

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Fear of failure - having to drop out of the Paladin Program by missing the next exercise session drove Harry away from Mrs. Figg's with a spring in his step. But he wanted nothing more but to go back and spend the rest of the afternoon with Ginny.

He liked her sense of humor. He liked her smile. She was very bright. She made grades in the same range as Hermione, but without the same irrational drive to study so far in advance. Each year Hermione started studying for year-end testing too early. He and Ron wanted to put off revising until too late. Ginny always struck the right cord as to timing.

Harry thought she was brilliant and so pretty, and- *wait*. Harry slowed his walk for several paces, but Bill's quickly worded reminder about the time caused Harry to speed up again. Ginny was dating Dean. Did he, Harry, have the right to think about his dorm mate's girlfriend like that? Pretty? *Gorgeous actually*. There he went again. Thinking thoughts he shouldn't. Ginny was the whole package he realized, and not the little girl who'd stuck her elbow in the butter.

Harry spent most of his time lifting weights thinking about the missed opportunity that was Ginny Weasley.

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Harry had over two-hours free on Friday morning after a brief exercise session, running on his treadmill. Unlike Muggle treadmills, Harry's had obstacles to jump over, rainfall, wet surfaces, sand, gravel, concrete, grass, mud, quicksand, and grasping plants - all could pop up on the running surface. It was all random. He could go for an hour just running, or turn the device on and be standing in a swamp or desert.

During this free time he and Dobby had planned to look at catalogs and magazines to pick out possible outfits for Dobby to snapfinger sew. Dobby knew no name for elfin magic other than elfin magic, which humans had given it. But for some reason Harry wanted to call it 'snapfinger magic.' Dobby liked the name also, so they decided that was the name they wanted to spread around the magical world.

The doorbell rang and, over three minutes later, his Aunt Petunia called up to say that he had company.

Instantly Harry realized that it was a long time to wait to call him if the visitor was for him. He was



supposed to never have unexpected guests - Dobby should at least have the appointment in the Paladin Program journal. Wand drawn, Harry advanced down the stairs noiselessly in his worn-out trainers. He heard a familiar voice, Lupin's, and almost dropped his caution, but held up short. Remus himself had told him no one should visit unannounced. It was the time of morning that Harry's aunt usually fixed a pot of tea. She'd served the guests in the time it had taken Harry to retrieve his wand, close his room, and silently make his way down the stairs. Harry burst into the salon, wand drawn and pointed at the would-be Remus Lupin. Harry's gaze also took in what appeared to be Arthur Weasley and a small man that sat beside this Lupin.

Petunia yelped, and almost fell off of her chair. Somehow she did *not* spill her tea.

"Harry!" she said, "This is Remus Lupin, I remember him from your parents' wedding. And this is-"

"No, Petunia," said Lupin. "Harry's caution is warranted. I broke my own security measures by coming unannounced. This visit only became possible minutes before we arrived." The little man beside Lupin had not dropped his tea things either, but they shook noticeably in his hands. Lupin's hands remained right in front of him holding the teacup and saucer steadily. "How do we proceed, Harry?"

After a moment of deliberation, Harry asked, "What was the first thing you ever said to me?"

Remus seemed unsure at first, then he smirked and said, "Here, eat this, it will help."

Harry visibly relaxed, and slowly lowered his wand.

Before Harry could lower his head and mentally chastise himself for overreacting, Remus spoke. "Well done, Harry. Caution in the face of unconfirmed familiarity is a hard lesson to learn - but you proved yourself this morning."

Changing the subject quickly, Remus turned and said, "As delightful as it is to see you again, Petunia, Harry's schedule is very tight today, and we are going to need all of his free time for discussions of a confidential nature. I am sorry to say, I will have to ask you to exclude yourself from them. But, if it suits, I'd love to come back and visit with you?"

Usually Harry could read Petunia's reactions almost instantly with his years of attempting to avoid what might upset her. He saw a fraction of a moment of pique - then curiosity and nosiness about the subject of the meeting - and then a return of her manners. But there was something else - perhaps the disappointment of not seeing more of Remus? Could that be? Yet again Harry had realized there was so much more to his aunt than he had seen living with her all these years.

She rose and spoke, "Of course Remus. I understand; duty calls. Harry has a schedule when he has 'visitors' during four days of the week, I believe. Please come back during the afternoon schedule when I am here. We can have tea while Harry and his guest sit here in the salon. The teapot is here; may I serve anyone before I leave? Harry?" When everyone shook their heads, she continued, "Please call if you need anything." Then she left the room.

Remus cast a Silencing Charm on the room and said, "I don't mean to assume your aunt will eavesdrop, but I did make our visit sound mysterious."

"No," Harry said. "I'm sure her ear was pressed to the door as quickly as she could set down her cup and saucer."

Harry, Remus, and Mr. Weasley greeted each other warmly and then Lupin said, "Harry, this is Silas Knobloch, a wizarding solicitor specializing in last wills and testaments, particularly wills with minors involved and any other sticky issues. Dumbledore recommended him. Mr. Knobloch helps Hogwarts when such matters affect students during the school terms. Arthur is here to act as an official witness."

"It is an honor to meet you, Mr. Potter. And an honor to serve you." The professionalism of the little man became apparent to Harry when he noticed that Mr. Knobloch did *not* glance up at his scar.

Remus said, "Fudge has signed the papers exonerating Sirius. He is now declared innocent of all charges and a warrant has been issued for Peter's arrest. There should be a notice of it in the *Daily Prophet* very soon."

Harry sighed in relief as if he had been holding his breath all this time. His eyes moistened slightly and he looked Remus in the eye.

Remus had a similar look of relief. "I know, Harry, me too." They were silent for several moments and the solicitor couldn't even be heard breathing. Finally Remus said, "Proceed please, Mr. Knobloch."

"As you may have guessed, Mr. Potter, you are one of the beneficiaries of this will. Before you sign anything I must explain certain details and ask you and your future guardian certain questions."

Knobloch cleared his throat and continued, "The last will and testament of Mrs. Berthamina Nott Black was finally settled by the clarification of the issue of Sirius Black's innocence. All of her earthly possessions go to the Black Family Estate, which would go to Sirius Black, were he still alive. The Black Family Estate is a complex legal entity in itself that goes back for centuries. It has its own protective magic as an entity. Had Sirius Black no will, or had he created a typical will, his worldly goods and possessions would have been distributed to that estate and dispersed from there.

"The Black Family Estate had in its make-up certain requirements that would have stripped from Sirius' will, most of his intended disbursements and wishes."

At this moment Knobloch cleared his throat again and became uncomfortable, Harry thought. The solicitor looked to Lupin who nodded and then the little man continued. But before doing so he *did* look at Harry's scar. "Mr. Lupin assures me I can trust you with this slightly unprofessional comment. I am someone who also helps with Professor Dumbledore's, shall we say, non-academic activities."

Harry immediately knew that this little man either was in the Order of the Phoenix, or assisted them in legal matters at the very least - probably the latter, Harry thought. He nodded to show that he

understood.

"To put a particular point on it, Mr. Potter, Sirius Black wanted his will to do good in many ways that the Black Family Estate, would have prevented. The estate would have prevented almost all except a few minor bequests made by Mr. Sirius Black. The Estate would have given everything to the only other two Black Family Estate heirs, Narcissa Black Malfoy and Bellatrix Black Lestrange. The estate would have precluded the only other direct line blood relations, the Tonks family females, from inheriting anything.

"However, Sirius Black's will, was designed by him to not only negate, but to *dissolve* the Black Family Estate. Minister Fudge's decree, and the signing of the various codicils and other paperwork by the three major individual recipients of Mr. Black's largess, will cause the end of the Black Family Estate as a magical legal entity. Sirius Black's will was a brilliant piece of legal work that any legal professional would be proud of. It was even more remarkable for one who had never studied law. I will make sure its tenets and processes, stripped of all personal references of course, are available to those who want to deconstruct other such Dark legal instruments."

The solicitor calmed himself and seemed to Harry to change his demeanor into one of a more official and standard mode of address. "When the three largest individual recipients sign, that is those individuals who receive inheritances *above* five thousand Galleons, then the various institutions Sirius Black wishes to endow, will receive their disbursements as a matter of course. Most of the money in the numerous Gringotts vaults goes to a number of charitable organizations. St. Mungo's will have a new research wing, and their medi-magic school will hold several new chairs of teaching. One of the largest endowments will go to create a wizard and witches orphanage, not only created for those known magical children left behind by their parents' deaths, but it will also be chartered and funded to seek out those Muggle-born who are magical and orphaned, to bring them into our world before they receive their Hogwarts letters.

"There are many other smaller but still significant bequests for the good of wizard kind. The Black name will mean something entirely different in our world when the full extent of Mr. Sirius Black's will is known. Ninety-seven-point-two percent of the Black Family Estate, and the personal fortune of Sirius Black, which existed by itself, goes for the betterment of our world. Since there are no more Blacks, it is a beneficent end to a family not known to be public benefactors.

"There are minor's trust funds for four who are underaged, and they will receive control over the funds when they complete their Hogwarts education. Five thousand Galleons each go to trusts for Hermione Jane Granger, Ronald Bilius Weasley, Ginevra Molly Weasley, and Harry James Potter. There is also an investment of a thousand Galleons to go to Weasley's Wizard Wheezes for research and development and/or inventory financing. The three Tonks, Andromeda Black Tonks, Ted Tonks, and Nymphadora Tonks, will each receive five thousand Galleons immediately. There will also be a few personal effects from the unplottable family home, and the Gringotts vaults that Andromeda will receive.

"To activate all of this there are only three signatures needed, those of the three primary individuals receiving larger inheritances *directl*y from the will. And here I will read the exact words of Mr. Sirius Black from his will:

"First, to my godson, Harry James Potter, in addition to the trust fund, I leave the Black Family Ensigns of Nobility, and an additional fifty thousand Galleons to be added to the Potter Estate which he will inherit upon his majority. Harry, I cannot help but think you will play a pivotal role in this fight, if not *the* pivotal role. Knowing the gratitude of the wizarding world as I do, I cannot imagine you will exit that fight with anything to show for your efforts except a number of press clippings and an Order of Merlin, at best. I want you to feel the freedom to accomplish nothing for the rest of your life should you choose, after you see this war to its end.

"Also to Harry James Potter, I leave twelve, Grimmauld Place. It is to be used by the Order of the Phoenix until the war with Vol- er, You-Know-Who ends."

Harry felt sure the name, not the words 'You-Know-Who,' was written in the will.

"At the end of the war, there will be made available twenty thousand Galleons to remake this home into whatever you need, Harry, to make it a warm and friendly place for you to live. Tear it down and rebuild it if you need to.

"I also leave to Harry my flying motorcycle, which is hidden in one of my vaults at Gringotts and a thousand Galleons to misbehave with between now and the end of school. Harry, make the Marauders proud and do not consult Remus too closely on this matter. Please *do* consult the Weasley twins.

"Second, to my lifelong friend, Remus Lupin, I leave five thousand Galleons and thirty-five thousand Galleons to live on, and I mean live well on. I know your frugal ways, my old friend. In one year I want you to spend the five thousand on yourself - on new clothes, a decent flat or home, and other things to improve your condition, things you will say that you 'do not need.' Please allow Harry to help you. Andromeda Tonks will also be notified of this and requested to help you. If you have not spent this five thousand Galleons in this way by the end of one year, the other thirty-five thousand - intended to ease matters for you for the rest of your life - will then go to my despicable cousin, Bellatrix. Sorry to force your hand, old friend, but you know how you are."

Knobloch adjusted his glasses and looked at Arthur Weasley, "In a separate codicil, Mr. Black instructed his executor to handle matters in this way, Mr. Weasley. Please forgive us. As an agent of the wizarding legal system, I immediately give memories to a Pensieve to testify as to the veracity of the signatures on any document when I file said signed documents with the court. Your presence as a witness for the will was not needed. But Mr. Black wanted you here by covert design. So I will now continue.

"Third, to my newer friend and distant relative, Arthur Weasley, I have come to know you well, but not well enough. I admire you more than you can imagine. You and Molly have raised six of the finest children I have ever met, and Percy can probably be salvaged, I hope. I know Harry has felt guilty that he cannot share his wealth with you when you mean so much to him. No, Harry has said nothing, but you know Harry, and you know that's what he is thinking. He has never said anything to you because he knows your character - a character I want him to incorporate into his life more than many of my own character traits.

"Therefore, I bequeath to you, Arthur, forty-five thousand Galleons. Five thousand each I want you to

give to Bill and Charlie. Five thousand Galleons go to Percy if he ever comes forward of his own free will and reconciles with you and your family. Ten thousand I want you to squander on your family over the next two years. Buy yourselves new wardrobes. Buy Ron and Ginny new Firebolt brooms. Take an extravagant holiday trip with your whole family, and you and Molly go on an outrageously expensive second honeymoon.

"That leaves twenty thousand for you to supplement your wages and live well on in whatever you choose to do. If you want to tell the Ministry to take a long broom ride into the sun, please use this money to help re-establish yourself. Please be happy, Arthur, and be free of this one small, but real restriction on your life - money."

Arthur looked like a dust mote would be enough to knock him over.

Knobloch cleared his throat once again. "Gentlemen, you must all agree to these last wishes and sign these documents so the enormous charitable works described can begin."

All three signed, but Arthur's hands shook so that he was barely able.

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Silas Knobloch and Arthur Weasley left. They had been there almost exactly an hour. The last thing that Arthur did, and he had been very glad to do it, was witness the signatures of the document that made Lupin the boy's guardian for the year and a few days left before Harry reached his majority. Knobloch was capable of providing legal witnessing services for this document like he had for the others, but Harry and Remus wanted Arthur as signatory in this case, and the solicitor certainly understood the personal significance.

The guardian and ward sat back and returned to their tea. Lupin had cast a Warming Charm on the pot, and it was just the temperature Harry liked it. However, judging by the amount of steam, Lupin's was noticeably hotter. A personalized Warming Charm?

"Harry, there was one small addendum to the will that addressed me, and it had nothing to do with the normal legal matters of a will."

Remus looked a little uncomfortable, and Harry didn't want anything to spoil this wonderful morning. But he thought in an instant that most of his best memories had thorns in them.

Lupin continued, "It was more of a personal request, by Sirius to finish an assignment given to him that he'd never really started."

Sounding almost like he was back in the classroom Lupin asked, "Harry, there are two incontrovertible facts that have impacted your life that I wish to discuss. The first is that your parents made Sirius your godfather, not your guardian. The second is the magic your mother used to save your life, the power that saved you from the Killing Curse and nearly destroyed Voldemort. Firstly, do you know what the difference is between a godfather and a guardian?"

Harry frowned in thought. In a moment he said, "I'm not really sure. I know Sirius was able to sign my

Hogsmeade pass. I just assumed it was the same as a guardian, I guess just made official by the church instead of the Ministry of Magic."

"That's accurate, Harry, as far as it goes. Those in both of these positions of responsibility act for the parents of a child if the parents are temporarily or permanently unable to act themselves. Wizarding law recognizes the role of a godparent as equal in all respects to a guardian. However, as you said, the church makes official the role of a godparent at the parents' request. Using this method, the parents place one more institutional requirement upon their chosen godparent. They are asking the godparent to make the godchild aware of the parents' beliefs."

"So my parents went to church? Why doesn't Aunt Petunia...?" Harry trailed off, not really understanding.

"Neither of your parents were raised going to church. As I recall your mother and aunt were taken there on Christmas and Easter when they were little, but regular attendance was not common practice for the Evans family.

"To understand how they came to this faith, is to understand in significant part how your parents reconciled the enmity between them that you observed when you viewed Severus' memories in the Pensieve. That was the lowest point in their relationship by the way, and definitely not one of your father's better moments.

"In the few weeks following our O.W.L.s, but before the end of the school year, your mother ignored your father completely - as if he did not exist. This was the opposite reaction your father had expected. All teenaged boys can be total prats about girls. You've probably noticed that you and your friends sometimes have no idea about what upsets or angers the fairer sex, true?"

Harry considered Ron fighting with Hermione and his own interactions with Cho Chang, and it took him less than a two seconds to agree with his new guardian.

"Never before, Harry, had we seen your father shaken by Lily's rejection of his advances - something she had done every week, often every day, for years. It caused a change in James. He pursued her in earnest rather than arrogance those few weeks and finally secured from your mother an agreement to give him a chance in the next school year to prove that he could change, grow up.

"A gentler, more serious James boarded the Hogwarts Express that September first, and Sirius, who had spent most of the summer with James and his family, did not object. Although I understand they nearly came to blows over the summer as James studied harder and prepared himself academically and socially, whereas Sirius only wanted to play. James even read a Muggle book called, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, which Sirius never did stop kidding him about.

"But it was also a much-changed Lily we encountered that next year. Prudence Caulder had been a dorm mate of Lily's. Prudence was Muggle-born, and she and her entire family had been killed over the summer by Death Eaters - seven people including three children under the age of ten. The first war with Voldemort had been escalating over several years by this time, but this was the closest that it had come to any of us so far."

Remus looked away for a few moments, yet Harry, anxious for more, still remained silent.

"Lily was the kindest person I have ever known. Hermione is slightly more brilliant, but Lily had a wisdom and sense of purpose about her that... well, it made all of us, even Peter for a while, much better than we had been, or ever could have been. She came back to school in our sixth year with a mission in life. She wanted to discover the impossible. She wanted to stop the killing and stop Voldemort - by herself if need be.

"She ignored the fact that most of the researchers in the Ministry, with all of their resources, had been unsuccessful in discovering what she wanted to find. She was going to succeed. When she set her mind to it, your mother was indomitable - the proverbial unstoppable force about to meet the unmovable object.

"She made it perfectly clear to your father that she would talk to him only when they were in the library working on this particular project. She would be only polite to him the rest of the time.

"Your father agreed to these limited terms, much to our surprise. By mid October she had a grudging respect for your father as a student and a researcher - a hard earned concession. By November they were on friendly terms in all ways. Your mother's restrictions on James had apparently been lifted.

"Classes resumed after the Christmas holidays and James began including her in our circle of friends immediately. James and Lily did not become officially a couple until our seventh year, but by this time everyone felt that was their destiny.

"Don't misunderstand me, we probably pulled our greatest pranks over the next two years. But they were rarely aimed at individuals unless your mother approved them."

Harry raised both eyebrows in disbelief.

"Oh yes. By start of spring term in our sixth year Lily had basically become the fifth Marauder. Between her, and the improved James by her presence - and my efforts, which had failed before - we were able to convince Sirius to forego the personal assault aspects of our pranking, except for the truly worthy that even Lily wanted to teach a lesson. She joined us in our first joint prank of the new year, transforming everything green and silver that entered the Great Hall into red and gold, which worked quite well actually, but that is still another story.

"It was in late February of our sixth year that the two of them determined that they were not going to find the answers to stopping the killing in the Hogwarts library. Your father suggested they ask Dumbledore; they'd asked just about every other professor at Hogwarts but not him.

"Albus was delighted to help and started by reviewing their work up to that point. Though the three of them had known each other before, this started a friendship for those three beyond the headmaster/student relationship.

"Professor Dumbledore gave them a few other suggested avenues of study. But the one that both of your parents seemed drawn to, was what Albus called a bit of very old magic, 'Greater love hath no

man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends,' which is a quotation from the Bible.

"When Lily and James asked where to discover more on that subject, Albus told them to go to church services that Sunday. None of us know there were such services at Hogwarts, and there weren't, but all students who wished to attend could take a special transit connection to St. Simon's Parish whenever they wanted to. The connection works just like a Floo fireplace, but the link between Hogwarts and St. Simons existed long before the Floo network was created, and it does not use a fireplace.

"Your parents attended the services in secret that Sunday, not wanting to tell us. There they meet Father Martin, a Church of England parish priest of the Grey Friars Order. He had attended Hogwarts in the thirties and had taken his vows after the war with Grindelwald. In the darkening days of early 1977, your parents found Father Martin a beacon of hope. They told us where they'd been and invited us to go with them the next Sunday.

"I wanted nothing to do with God. If He existed, then I was furious with Him for my condition. The Wolfsbane Potion had not been perfected at this point, and each month was torturous agony for me, even with my Animagus friends keeping me company. I could not believe in a good God who had allowed this to happen to me, so I adamantly refused their invitation. Peter never said anything but was always sleeping in on Sunday morning for the rest of our time at school. Sirius laughed at the idea until your father told him about the several very pretty girls from Hogwarts who also attended services. Sirius laughed even more, but snuck out and followed your parents there the next weekend. He went for the girls but stayed for the messages Father Martin gave. Everything Sirius heard was in direct contradiction with his parents' attitudes and thinking, and that alone was appealing to your godfather.

"You'll have to talk to Father Martin to really understand what they believed and why they believed it. He's the one who helped them. He's also the one who married your parents and baptized you as an infant."

Harry looked up quickly. He'd been trying to imagine his parents and Sirius in a church service. But all he could imagine was Sirius laughing at his father playing with a Snitch. "I was baptized...?"

"Yes, and I did attend your baptismal service. I stood during the part where Father Martin asked if there were any others who wanted to commit to help raise you as your parents would want you to be raised. I stood at that time, so I feel it is my duty to honor your parents' requests.

"I have talked to Father Martin about you, Harry, and he has agreed to discuss with you anything and everything you want to chat about. He knew your parents in a different way than I did. They loved him, and he them. I hope you'll consider at least one visit with him, and then see from there if you want to talk further.

After your parents died, things were terrible, for me at least. After I came out of my depression, I sought Father Martin out. I've been meeting with him off and on over the years."

Remus cleared his throat and took a long sip from his cold teacup.



"Now, Harry, the other event in your life that I want to discuss briefly with you is how you received your scar - not that I know specifically how that scar occurred. I want to discuss the power that saved your life.

"I told you that your parents began to study in earnest the passage of scripture, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' They called that passage the 'love sacrifice.' Your parents didn't just go to church, they were what they called 'believers.' They believed that the love sacrifice would work because the one who spoke that passage sacrificed himself for that very purpose. That is the essence of their faith.

"Your mother proved the truth and power of that passage when she invoked it on your behalf. She and your father, but particularly Lily was positive the love sacrifice passage would make all of the difference in the world.

I'm not sure I can disagree with her logic there. You see, I'm sure that many have stepped into the path of one of Voldemort's Killing Curses. It only makes sense that someone would do so for a child, a family member, or a friend. The *act*, someone else taking the Curse, did not cause the near death of Voldemort in these many cases. I can only conclude that it was your mother's faith that made the difference. I have thought long and hard on it, and there is no other explanation in my mind."

Remus was quiet for several long moments, but Harry felt sure he was not finished.

"Harry, the fact that you lived destroyed my confidence that there is nothing or no one to believe in. That you lived gives credence that there must be merit to that scripture and your parents' faith in it. They based most of their beliefs on the principles they learned from their discussions with Father Martin. That's why I arranged for you to meet with him if you choose."

There was another pause. The new guardian seemed to be finished.

Finally Harry said, "Remus, this is a lot to think about. Perhaps you should set an appointment for me in a few weeks to talk to Father Martin. I want to mull it over for a while first, okay?" The elder of the two wizards nodded. "But it sort of makes sense to me. I think my parents passed on to me their belief in the 'love sacrifice.'"

It was Remus' turn to look perplexed. Harry said, "Think about it. All Gryffindors are nearly foolishly brave. But amid a bunch of Gryffindors, I stand out with my above-and-beyond foolhardiness that somehow seems to work. Hermione says that I always want to save people from getting hurt or killed. Well I do.

"Well, I think my parents gave me this drive to protect everyone when they did the 'love sacrifice.'"

Harry stood up and seemed so excited that Lupin did not interrupt him, but it was obvious by the look on the former professor's face that he wanted to.

Harry sat and said, "If I ever face Voldemort, and it seems like I will," he rushed to add the words that would draw attention away from the prophecy. "If I am going to face him, I need to prepare to do

so. If I have to give my life to stop him once and for all - and please believe me, *I want* to live - then giving my life to end his would be an action on my part worthy of my parent's sacrifice. But I can't stop going to save my friends. I had to go after the Sorcerer's Stone. I had to go into the Chamber of Secrets to save Ginny." Harry paused for a moment and then continued, "I had to stop you and Sirius from becoming murderers in the Shrieking Shack.

"So, let's make sure I'm able to do whatever has to be done, and let's make my friends so strong that I won't have to worry about them - because I'll go to any means to protect them you know. There is no way I'll let them die. So let's get everyone stronger and smarter, and particularly let's get me stronger and smarter, a lot smarter."

After looking into his ward's excited eyes Lupin said, "Harry, I've been discouraged and despairing ever since Sirius died, about more than just his death. I have feared that there was no hope for the future. However, just now, hearing you talk, I could feel a spark of hope rise up in me.

"Let me tell you what I believe, and I mean no disrespect to your parents' faith when I say that I believe in you. It's not religious by any means, but I just believe you are going to succeed in all of this. I hope it's not you who has to defeat Voldemort, it's probably Dumbledore, or maybe even Moody and a whole gang of Aurors. But regardless, I can just see the future with you alive in it and no fears about Death Eaters or Voldemort.

"There'll probably always be Dark wizards from time to time, but you and your generation have a lifetime to stomp out this paralysis against action that permeates most witches and wizards and most of the Ministry of Magic. If most had more of the mindset of those you trained in the DA, those that stood up to those dementors the other day - if those types of people were commonplace, we'd never have had so many go over to Voldemort in the first place."

Almost abruptly Lupin looked at his watch and rose. He whipped out his wand and the tea things were cleaned and put away in seconds. He turned to Harry and said. "Well, your schedule has you eating lunch in a few minutes. But I must say - like many before me - you look just like James, but with your mother's eyes. However, you are so much more. You have the best of both of them in you."

They moved forward simultaneously to embrace. Remus took out an Invisibility Cloak, and without a parting word, he made his way out of the door.

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"Concentrate, Mr. Weasley! You're... not... *concentrating!*"

Minerva McGonagall sighed in exasperation. "Rest, Weasley. Cease striving."

Ron Weasley was in the same Potions summer tutorial program that Harry was in. In addition, Ron had to be tutored in Transfiguration. Ron could always answer Professor McGonagall's questions, at least weakly, but he seemed to be making no progress at all on the practical matters. It was Ron's Practical O.W.L grade in this subject - an Acceptable - that was not acceptable for entry into the pre-Auror training curriculum this September.

The professor had been thinking for the last few days, that she either needed to take Ron past whatever was blocking his progress, or recommend that he be dropped from the program. She sensed that Ron was upset about such a possibility - the stress made him even less effective.

But the deputy headmistress had one last idea to try.

"Weasley, what activities at school do you perform your best in? What actual physical efforts do you excel at the quickest?"

Ron looked a bit confused, but answered after hardly a moment's thought, "Defense, I 'sppose, did my best on-"

"No, Weasley. Out of *all* types of physical activities, what do you most enjoy, what do you understand easiest and quickest?"

The perplexed look on Ron's face deepened. There was an obvious answer as to what he enjoyed and understood fastest. "Quidditch," he answered sheepishly, and continued, "but that's-"

"That is exactly what I am referring to, Weasley. Even though you had to overcome your initial insecurities on the pitch as most do, why did you almost always *know* what to do, even from the very start? Why do you understand that game so well? What about the game, *mentally*, do you most delight in?"

Ron scrunched his face in contemplation. His voice told McGonagall that he wasn't sure, but the words were exactly what she wanted to hear. "It's a game of strategy, like wizard's chess. I know what needs to be done overall to start, play, and finish a match. I know where each player must go and what they must do, and I can see what will happen far in advance. I want to brain the coach of the Cannons sometimes-"

"Yes, yes. Chudley frustrates me too. Makes me want to change favorites."

Ron's eye's went wide. "You're a Cannons' fan?"

"Yes, much to my lifelong disappointment. Now, what specifically about Defense do you *understand* the best?"

Ron concentrated more easily this time. "What Harry teaches in the DA. It's not just, 'here's a spell.' He tells us what it does, how to use it and when - and he tells us how he's used it in the past in a real fight when he can. Oh, he tries to make it sound like he's making up an example, but we can tell when he's speaking about a real fight.

"I've been there with him in enough of them, and heard enough about the rest, to know that this is serious. I can see the battles unfold and take place, and I even see sometimes how things could have gone better. Not that I'd ever tell Harry he's done wrong. He didn't. We lived through that night at the Department of Mysteries, and he saved us. His training made all of the difference, and usually he's saved us in most of the stuff we've faced.



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He was shocked to see a picture of himself fighting off dementors on the front cover. No such picture had ever been taken. He immediately thought of the disreputable Muggle tabloids that had fabricated pictures of events that had never occurred.

But then he read the headline underneath the picture:

**Harry Potter Fights Dementors All Over England**  
**By Training His Fellow Students with the Patronus Charm**  
***His Exact Instructions Inside - Complete and Unabridged!***

The picture was a bit sensational, obviously faked, but the idea came across *if* you read the first two headlines. There was a map of Great Britain in the background. The moving picture on the front cover showed Harry raising his wand and casting the charm. His stag Patronus burst forth and dementors scattered everywhere. If you read the third headline you would probably want to buy a copy off the newsstand, which was a necessity for the *Quibbler* to stay in business.

He couldn't blame Sol Lovegood for trying to profit from his publishing efforts. Harry just hoped people would understand the symbolism of the picture. He also hoped they would read and put into practice what he had written. He knew there was no call to blame himself for people he'd never met being dementor kissed hundreds of miles away. But he felt a cold stab in his heart every time it occurred - he hurt for those lost and those who had lost someone.

He quickly paged through this issue of the *Quibbler* to see what else was in it. He saw a list of sightings of impossible animals and other creatures, but no Crumple Horned Snorkacks. There was a report a few pages from the back about the latest accusations of Minister Fudge's attacks on goblins. All in all, this issue contained nothing too outlandish to negate the truthfulness of the stories about him. Actually there wasn't that much about him personally.

His instructions were highlighted throughout. This issue had been designed primarily to be a service to the wizarding community. There wasn't even a mention of the pathetic recommendations by the Ministry of Magic regarding how to resist a dementor attack. Not trying to brag, but having read that useless guide to self-protection when it had been published, Harry felt there was no comparison. The *Quibbler* had delivered a helpful bit of information, he hoped. The Ministry and the *Daily Prophet* had not.

There were interviews with all of the students who had fought off dementors all over Great Britain, except for Cho Chang. The reporters had not been allowed to interrupt her studies at the wizarding archeological preserve at Woodhenge.

There was little in each interview about him. Harry appreciated the fact that instead, each sub-article spent most of the column inches talking about the specific student interviewed, their hopes and aspirations, and how they had specifically fought the dementors - what their happiest thoughts were and how they went about concentrating on them instead of the imminent attack.



After he finished reading all of the interviews he realized the points raised in each interview supported the major points of his instructions. He owed the Lovegoods, congratulating them on the excellent issue of their magazine.

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It has been said, and is well known, that *beauty is in the eye of the beholder*.

That statement will be a universal truth as long humans are human.

In the story of the beauty and the beast, the beastly looking and acting beast revealed his attractiveness over time. A beautiful woman at first glance can be 'hard-looking' after a conversation where she reveals her harsh opinions and cruel demeanor. The handsome Gilderoy Lockhart lost his appeal upon closer inspection.

Professor of Astronomy at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Artemis Sinistra, disliked her first name as much as Nymphadora Tonks hated hers. Like Tonks, she was halfblood - quarter-blood actually, her maternal grandmother was a Muggle - but unlike Tonks she'd never successfully convinced everyone to call her by her last name only. She had grown up in a mixed Muggle and Magical village and she played with several little Muggle boys who thought Artemis was a man's name. They nicknamed her 'Artie,' and quickly forgot all about any stigma with either name. She never forgot.

She was hardworking, ambitious, brave, and clever. She presented an unusual challenge to the Sorting Hat at her first year Welcoming Feast. Most students that were not immediately identified as to House affiliation were usually a difficult choice between two houses only - Gryffindor/Slytherins were not too uncommon, surprisingly. Neither were Hufflepuff or Ravenclaw choice conflicts with Slytherin. Hufflepuffs were common choice conflicts with all other houses. Ravenclaw/Gryffindor choice conflicts were the most rare.

The ancient hat thought Artemis Sinistra would have fit well in any house, and said so to the not too far from twelve-year-old. She was just a few days too young to have received her Hogwarts letter the year before, so she was the oldest and tallest of her year. She'd had a shouting match about her first name with Polinder Whitkins on the Hogwarts train, and when the hat mentioned the problem of where to place her, she said, "The house where most people call each other by their *last* names."

"Slytherin!" the hat shouted.

She was overjoyed by the selection for just less than three minutes - just long enough for young Mister Whitkins to also be selected for Slytherin. Her dorm mates verbally attacked her on her first night because of her blood status. Argus Filch found them gagged, bound, and tied to a suit of armor in a little-used corridor just before sunrise. Artemis Sinistra's *paternal* grandmother believed a young witch should be able to protect herself.

By the third day of her first year she was sitting at the opposite end from the rest of the Slytherin table during meals. She stayed in the library while it was open. And Artemis sat in the corner of her

common room least visited by others. She was a loner in all appearances and in all practices and even temperament, but she did want friends - at least a few.

She was not clever enough to make excellent grades without hard work. She worked hard only because she was ambitious. She only went after her goals with such abandon because she was brave enough to overcome her fears. And she was only brave enough to overcome her problems because she was bright enough to know it was her only chance to succeed.

She thought of herself as perfectly mixed up in her first year. She thought of herself as the perfect Hogwarts mixture by her seventh year.

In the interim years she'd gathered around her, and spent as much time as possible with, the misfits of Hogwarts - the misfits who upset everyone in their seventh year. They made the most "outstanding" grades on their N.E.W.T.s. They made the best reports and speeches. They won three out of five of the Dueling Club top seats. They volunteered for responsibilities no one else wanted and made the most of those positions.

And they claimed their victories for their misfits group, not their respective houses.

The original Artemis was the Greek goddess of the hunt, the twin sister of Apollo, daughter of Zeus, and quite beautiful. As a professor, Artemis Sinistra was not considered beautiful by her first and second year students. From their shorter viewing angle, her large jaw and sharp nose were exaggerated, and she visited all of her students with a disconcerting stare when they displeased her. Even so, she was very patient and very careful that all her students had a firm grounding in Astronomy, regardless of their year.

The Astronomy professor wore her hair in a no-nonsense, easy to maintain, severe bun under her hat. Her hat had a pointed brim that came down to the middle of her forehead. Whenever she took off her hat to look through her telescope, her severe hairstyle, parted down the middle, emphasized the prominence of her nose. With any other, more flattering style, she probably wouldn't have been thought of as large-nosed.

Her dark blue eyes had a penetrating gaze that made most people feel that she was trying to see through them, and beyond. Her concentration made her eyes seem harsh.

She was a large woman - not fat - but almost six feet tall and configured in a manner that would be pleasing to a man of six and half feet. She had always maintained her weight and exercised - a most un-witchlike occupation in the main. An equivalently proportioned woman of five and a half feet in height would be considered wonderfully put together.

Large jaw, pointed nose, severe hairstyle, penetrating eyes, larger than usual - all of these added up to a woman not considered very attractive by most.

The *exact* opposite was true. It would have taken Parvati Patil and Lavender Brown no time at all with their lotions and cosmetics to turn the chief Hogwarts Stargazer into a great beauty. All they would need to do would be the opposite of what the Astronomy professor did to herself on a daily

basis. Artemis Sinistra, with a softer hair arrangement, a little make-up, and laughing at a joke, was very beautiful. Few realized this, but one of them was a co-worker.

Artemis Sinistra was four years older than Severus Snape, which meant nothing now that they were thirty-six and forty, but at eleven and fifteen, there had been an eternity between them. The mixed misfit group she congregated with did not have a chapter in the class three years below. Had they, Snape would have found a home and friends. But that stand-out misfit group was a one-class-year phenomenon, not seen before in memory, and not seen since.

~\*~

Severus Snape found himself a Death Eater before he truly understood all of the ramifications of that designation.

Artemis Sinistra found herself a target of the Death Eaters before she knew it - and before they knew it also.

Sinistra, as she insisted on being called, entered the service of the Ministry of Magic working for the prestigious but little known Committee on Experimental Charms. She started in research in a hard-working demeaning clerk position, but she quickly became involved in specific charm analysis. In many years, following a convoluted but interesting to her preparatory regime, she just might be accepted into the relatively secretive Arithmantic Spell Creation Crafters Apprentice Program.

Unfortunately, her analysis work on the lingering effects of the Unforgivable Imperius Curse drew the attention of the self-named Lord Voldemort. Sinistra had avoided his under-aged recruiters at Hogwarts, and wanted to be left alone with her research. The Death Eater who volunteered to investigate her efforts and enlist her in their ranks if need be, was her former least favorite Slytherin, Polinder Whitkins.

She had avoided him like she would a screeching adolescent Mandrake when he first began to try to winkle into her confidence, but he somehow found out that she was about to discover a key to answering the most important question about those under the Imperius Curse - just how amenable had the person under that curse been to do what had been done? This could remove the legal defense effectively used by many to explain away why they had done something terrible.

All Death Eaters had been placed under that curse long enough so that its residue could be detected. This provided the excuse used quite often in the past to gain release from doing nearly anything.

Artemis Sinistra's work could unravel this legal defense and unlock other involvements and confessions of wrongdoing. However, she did not know, and never did discover, any of this.

Polinder Whitkins approached her to join the ranks of her many fellow Slytherins in the Dark Lord's service. When she laughed in his face, Whitkins told her that he, and he alone, could report back her uselessness to his master. All she needed to do to curry his, Whitkins', protection and favor would be to agree to be his mistress - he didn't want to marry anyone but a pureblood.

Sinistra answered Whitkins' proposal in a most Gryffindor manner - she struck him on the face and used her knee to further reiterate her feelings about his advances.

Polinder Whitkins fell over and split his skull open on the heavy iron claw of a table leg at the pub where he'd cornered her. He died in moments. In the standard procedure manslaughter trial after such a death, Sinistra had been cleared of all wrong doings - there had been plenty of witnesses who had seen his advances and had heard his words. She walked out of the Ministry of Magic lobby on the day she had been exonerated, and three Death Eaters had tried to kill her right there at the Ministry Apparation Point.

Professor Dumbledore walked onto that concourse at the moment of attack. He'd been appointed Headmaster in Sinistra's third year. He'd also been on the Wizengamot Board hearing her case. She walked into the Apparation Point. The Death Eaters appeared and started shooting curses at her. Dumbledore walked into view. Less than thirty seconds later, all three Death Eaters were unconscious and bound with tight ropes.

In less than a week Artemis Sinistra was the professor of Astronomy at Hogwarts.

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Little Minnie Burns was a bundle of nerves and adrenalin. She'd read all of her Hogwarts books as well as *Hogwarts: A History*, twice. She knew she was off on the adventure of her life - her first year. She'd never thought that she would see a knight in shining armor on her first day.

But there he was, sans armor. He was tall and lean - very muscular in his leanness, though. To the eleven-year-old girl, he looked like a powerful Beater despite his lean build. His flint gray eyes were piercingly captivating, and his face was carved from granite with a determined handsomeness. He had a full luxurious head of very dark brown hair, combed straight back and to his shoulders.

He had a look of disdain on his face for all of the proceedings in the train station. She immediately felt his displeasure must be for the frivolity displayed all around him - students renewing their acquaintances after the long summer break and the excitement for the new year.

Minnie knew - she just knew that this serious young man had the right idea. Though excited, she understood at her young age that a proper education was crucial, and that war was in their future. Two wars actually. Grindelwald was already gathering forces to his side even in the Autumn of 1936. Because most of his efforts were on the continent, the British Ministry of Magic tried to ignore his actions, but many who remembered the rise of the last Dark lord would not leave the subject alone.

Minnie also was aware that disconcerting events were taking place on the continent in the Muggle world. Her father agreed that keeping distant from Muggle affairs was wise, as had first been proven during the Roman occupation of Old Albion in the first century A.D. But her father, Tiberius Burns, also felt that ignoring the Muggle world was ill advised. There were just too many Muggles out there, living in close proximity to the unknown magical communities all over the country.

Following her father's example that information was essential, Minnie had read her father's Muggle

newspaper after him each day, just like she read the *Daily Prophet*. During school her father would send her clippings he felt most important, but it wasn't until her fifth year that she discovered the Transfiguration professor also read a Muggle daily. He agreed to let her read it after evening meals.

Minnie thought that these serious events must be running through the mind of the handsome young man that she could not take her eyes off of. Assuming what she felt was an equivalent look of solemnity, Minnie pinched her lips, just like grandmother Gwent did, to tell the world she too was concerned with current events and took her education more seriously than most. She hoped the young man would catch a glimpse of her demeanor and give her an approving nod. The nod never came, but a glance did, and a smile - barely a smile, but a smile for sure, she thought - and then he turned and disappeared onto the train.

At the Sorting Ceremony Minnie Burns became a Gryffindor and so did Alan McGonagall. Through quirks of seating arrangements they somehow ended up sitting next to each other, even though five others joined their house between their own sortings.

Minnie could not spy out the handsome, serious young man at any of the house tables. She'd stood on a bench at the end of the Welcoming Feast and still could not find him, even though she was sure she'd scanned the students twice.

Alan McGonagall helped her down and walked with her to the common room they would share for the next seven years. The Burns/McGonagall friendship grew during the next two years. They'd both challenged each other to excel in all classes. She was slightly better in Transfiguration and Defense Against the Dark Arts. Alan was slightly better at Potions and Charms. They were equals in all other subjects and made top marks on even their poorest class work.

At the end of her second year only one thing stood between her and her acceptance to be Alan's girlfriend - the memory of a mysterious, handsome and serious young man three or four years her senior - a young man who she'd never seen after he'd boarded the train that first day.

Just before her second year's spring term exams, Minnie served her only detention. She'd Jelly-Legged Clarence Bulstrode for Trip Jinxing Alan, and old Professor Tanquary, head of Slytherin house, had seen her and given her a cleaning detention.

That night she'd learned the handsome young man was a Squib and apprentice to the caretaker, Apollyon Pringle. Young Argus Filch's embarrassment at her shock was painted on his face with a chisel. She reported for detention just as Pringle ended his latest tirade at Filch's multitudinous failings with the final punctuation mark, "Useless Squib!"

She thought that young Filch bravely took the abuse with such stoicism, and she just stood there, slack jawed, because of the venom in the caretaker's words. Upon later reflection, she realized that she must have looked like she was disgusted by his non-magical status. That night, everything she did, everything she said, all was initiated to make him know she held his unfortunate condition as not a condition at all - just the way things were. However, everything she did and everything she said had the opposite effect. She bungled her words, and her every action produced more work for the caretaker's apprentice. His master blamed him for her blunders and added more work to his chores.

Pringle ignored her claims of guilt.

Though rather well spoken and read for a twelve-year-old, her every word that night seemed to sting the proud young powerless man trying to make his way in a power-filled world.

When dismissed from her punishment, she stumbled into the Gryffindor common room and fell onto a sofa, streaming silent tears. She did not make a sound to draw attention to herself, but cry she did. In a moment, Alan was by her side handing her an embroidered handkerchief, silently there to console her.

That night, in her heart, she questioned her selection for the house of legendary courage - she had none for facing the magical world and her family at the side of a Squib. At that time such relationships were more frowned upon than Muggle and magical pairings. But even that was a lie. Deep down her heart knew she'd seen the disinterest and disgust in young Argus' eyes. She felt like he'd observed her to be a proud pureblood from one of the oldest wizarding families in Scotland. She felt he knew her to be scandalized by what might happen to children of such a union.

She cursed herself because she knew he was right.

The next morning, she'd awakened to Alan stroking her hair. She'd been fearful of discovery by their having spent the night together on the sofa, even though they'd been fully clothed. Alan had stayed awake to watch over her and keep her company. He never did ask her what had upset her that night. Much later she realized that it had been from that night that she'd first felt that she loved Alan.

From an early childhood bedtime story, Minnie had often had a dream of being rescued by a handsome knight from an evil monster. During most of her first two years at Hogwarts, the monster had been Grindelwald, and the lean young man from her first train trip had been the knight in shining armor. From that night on, the hero of that dream became Alan McGonagall.

Over the years to come, that recurring dream evolved from a childhood fantasy, to a horrible ravager of her rest, brought on by battle fatigue and shock of war. But Alan would always be her knight in shining armor - even in the rare occurrence of that dream decades later.

After their exams that year Minnie consented to be Alan's girlfriend. They were the perfect couple, and their love grew to be an example of hope for the future to all who knew them and fought along side them during the darkest of days of that war.

Mr. and Mrs. Alan McGonagall had one year of bittersweet, perfectly loving, childless marriage before he succumbed to the wounds he'd received while in a horribly torturous captivity. Minerva Burns McGonagall never completely finished mourning her husband of that one year.

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Upon hearing the assignment given to another, Severus Snape determined that he would finally have to act on his inclinations. He had been a Death Eater for one year, and he had regretted joining those dubious ranks for three hundred and sixty-one of those three hundred and sixty-six days he'd been in service to the Dark Lord.

Exactly five days after taking the Dark Mark, he'd begun to wish the unSlytherinly wish that he'd not done so. Regulus Black was tortured to death for failing Lord Voldemort in a small way - the immature lad had merely wanted out. To Snape the Dark Lord seemed only mildly irritated, and out of such pique, the Dark Lord had ordered young Regulus killed so painfully. Snape's disenchantment had started on that day.

On day three hundred and sixty-six, Lucius Malfoy was commanded to choose the ones to attack and kill Artemis Sinistra, should she be acquitted and released in the manslaughter case of Polinder Whitkins.

Snape delivered an almost anonymous piece of parchment to the headmaster of Hogwarts, warning of the attack. For three hundred and sixty-one days Severus had contemplated how to escape and who to trust with his defection. For several months he'd calculated and recalculated that Dumbledore was the only one who could redeem him.

It was most Slytherin of Snape to use the rescue of a favorite student of Dumbledore's, Artemis Sinistra, to contact the headmaster and begin his defection.

For a Gryffindor, it was even more Slytherin of Dumbledore to make the 'suggestion' to Snape about spying on Voldemort. It was never said that it was penance and payment for his restitution, but Snape felt that his services as spy was exactly how he'd purchased his redemption. And he kept paying and kept paying....

The post of Hogwarts Potions Master was not so much payment for services rendered, as the only possible safe haven for the former Death Eater.

Professor Severus Snape joined Professor Artemis Sinistra on her left at the head table. Though Dumbledore and McGonagall called the two by their first names, as did most of the other professors, the two continued in calling each other by their last names as had been the habit in Slytherin House during their years as students.

This apparent coolness, along with the impression left on most that the two could show no emotions other than anger and disdain, hid from all, even each other, the fact that she thought him most handsome, and he thought her attractive without comparison.

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In all of his fifty plus years at Hogwarts, Argus Filch never admitted to himself that he'd only considered one student witch he'd ever seen beautiful enough to tell her so. He'd also thought for sure she'd despised him for his magical-less-ness.

The one time they'd been face-to-face after she'd found out, he'd felt sure that he'd only seen derision in her eyes. Then, twenty short years or so later, she'd come back to Hogwarts as the Transfiguration Instructor. It only took twelve more years for the two to very circumspectly admit they'd seen each other before she'd been introduced at her first staff meeting in 1956. Eight years later, they had a modest professional friendship.

Caretaker Filch appeared to almost all of the students as a bitter man projecting nothing but barely suppressed animosity, and a desire to see all of them in irons for the barest infractions of the school rules. They all remember well his sneers, scowls, and looks of pinched-face disdain. His mentor in caring for the school, had taught him well that a Squib would have to strike fear in the students from day one, or they would pay him little or no heed.

That hard seething visage disappeared in the staff room, except when complaining about the students to those who could best correct and/or punish those he deemed worthy of such actions. The relaxed Filch, the lover of cats and most animals, barring Fluffy, was quick with a wry smile and even laughed quietly at the banter of the staff lounge and meetings. Though not talkative, he did possess a very dry wit that delighted most of the Hogwarts professionals when he trotted it out.

Filch's nose was straight and looked pointed only when angry. He had a firm sculpted chin, with a striking cleft in the middle. The flint gray eyes were still just as piercing, but that look was reserved mostly for miscreant students and tough stains. With the slightest of smiles the gray would twinkle, not too differently from the twinkle noticed in the headmaster's appreciative looks. The wrinkles around his eyes added to his fierceness when bearing down on a student about to be punished. The same wrinkles were really jovial laugh lines when he smiled. His brown hair, now shot through with gray, was nearly as full, but his forehead has risen to a degree. His co-workers considered him a very kind man; he never forgot a card for a birthday or anniversary, and was almost always first to volunteer to assist with an project any other professor or staffer had to execute.

Starting on September 2, 1971, Professor McGonagall, and caretaker Filch were drawn together more and more by the antics of four of her Gryffindors - James Potter, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, and Peter Pettigrew.

The two, failing at curbing the enthusiasm of the four, began a collegial friendship while trying to stop the shenanigans. She'd eventually been able to talk of Alan with him, and Filch had found a friend who did not blanch at his lack of power or treat him as though he were one of the Muggle handicapped persons he'd read about in a horrible comparison article in *Witch Weekly*.

In fact, her outrage at the article had gone a long way towards cementing the friendship of the two peers. And she made it clear that she considered him a peer, not an underling. She understood and properly admired his abilities and they'd spent time together drinking tea during breaks, whenever their nightly rounds happened to coincide.

From 1978 to 1989 their friendship did not grow so much as comfortably mellow. They silently enjoyed each other's companionship when the occasion arose, and nothing more. To Filch she seemed lost in her love of Alan McGonagall, who they had discussed on more than one occasion. Filch had admired the wizard for his great courage and accomplishments in fighting Grindelwald before, *and especially after* being captured. Filch knew this was the barrier between them.

Professor McGonagall thought that Filch held in place a barrier between them based on her rejection of him in her second year's detention episode. Minerva knew *this* was the barrier between them.



In 1989 the caretaker and head of Gryffindor House were thrown together on an ever-increasing number of occasions. The Weasley twins made themselves known on their first night when they'd said that all of their dungbombs had blown up as they were trying to dispose of them - they said that they had taken the caretaker's warning to heart, and an accident had occurred while trying to remove them from Gryffindor Tower.

That the dungbombs went off at the entrance to the Slytherin House dungeons, just as a freakish heavy breeze blew into the dungeons, was a coincidence the twins could not explain.

The next years were legendary. The Marauders had produced slightly more mischief, but there had been four of them - five when Lily Evans had joined them. The Terrible Two were in an equal but different class of troublemakers.

These two terrorists, and later the Gryffindor Three - Hermione, Ron, and Harry, had brought Minerva McGonagall and Argus Filch together more and more. They'd found themselves holding hands on several occasions over the years. They'd shared a kiss on two occasions in Harry's fourth year.

Then disaster struck the relationship.

In 1995 Dolores Umbridge entered the professorial/staffing equation of Hogwarts and the balance became unbalanced - the McGonagall/Filch relationship budding for over thirty years suffered a significant blow.

The caretaker and the senior caregiver to the young lions found themselves at odds. Increasingly they shouted at each other on the nights they had attempted to keep company with each other. By mid October they did not see each other, except when professionally necessary.

Upon his return, Dumbledore asked his assistant headmistress to go through the effects of the recently resigned/escaped temporary headmistress. Professor McGonagall found a cryptic set of notes that tersely described throughout the year the High Inquisitor's different machinations, public and covert, to control the Hogwarts staff. One particular effort, which was described in a most vague manner, could only be interpreted as attempting to use a weakened version of the Imperius Curse on the professors and staff. This particular odious manipulation had only succeeded on the sole Squib in residence, causing him to support her efforts unthinkingly. The wording of the notes could not be used against Umbridge legally, but the information was clear.

Minerva McGonagall realized she had lost a friendship developing into something wonderful, through no fault of those in the relationship.

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Harry had used a book on the vampire wars of the sixteenth century as his tool to learn speed-reading. After a few days he found that he was reading not quite three times as fast as he had been, and every book was more interesting than it might have been. He was surprised that he was also understanding the subject matter quicker, and remembering what he read more easily. Because of his new-found

speed, he would quite often re-read a passage or chapter, again improving his comprehension. He wrote the headmaster an owl post thanking him for the suggestion. In addition to the assigned homework reading, which he'd finished in two weeks, he was making his way through the library that Dumbledore had made a part of his changing room.

However, Harry read very slowly and carefully the book Dobby had loaned him on Spell Mongering. It was written in journal form. Telemachus Grind started journaling after his apprenticeship as a Spell Monger, but he did go back in his reminiscences from time to time and discuss most of his training.

Young Telemachus had been raised in seclusion from most of the wizarding world. His Potter mother had died in childbirth when the lad was seven, and his father, mourning her loss, finally moved to the seclusion of the Scottish hills. Hogwarts would be founded in Grind's twenty-ninth year, so the young wizard's training was undertaken by his father and the man who lived on the other side of the small valley that had helped them survive the first colder than usual winter they'd moved there.

John-Thomas Courson saw that Phillert Grind was ignoring his son in his grief, so Courson invited Telemachus to visit as often as possible. Courson helped the lad bury his father in the boy's twelfth year.

Courson had been unable to complete a Spell Monger's apprenticeship, but he taught what he had learned to young Grind. The boy was a natural. By his twenty-first year Courson had convinced the last Spell Monger Magister to take Telemachus into his household in anticipation of an apprenticeship in eight to ten years. Telemachus was given that status by the age of twenty-five - an unheard of occurrence.

Spell Mongers were a dying profession. The Arithmantic Spell Creation Crafters were all in vogue. They had succeeded in being made a part of what was the forerunner of the Ministry of Magic at that time. They proclaimed their methodologies of spell creation *more scientific*, a phrase always successful in denigrating an opposing process. Now with 'official' status, the Crafters proceeded to cast dispersions on Spell Mongery. Spell Mongers had to sell their creations for the magic to be released for another's use. The highbrow, the envious of financial success, the bureaucratic-minded, the opponents of individualism and free enterprise - all find the means to cast dispersions on those going about their own business and not minding public opinion.

More and more the Darker wizards hired Mongers to produce controversial bits of magic. Mongering had nothing inherent that leaned toward evil, but Mongers found less and less Light oriented commissions as the years progressed. And a percentage of all occupations and in the wizarding and Muggle worlds alike, are prone to evil and the Dark.

The truly Dark and evil will always receive whatever passes for more press coverage than ordinary folks going about their daily lives. In the two generations prior to Telemachus, several Dark Spell Mongers had garnered for the practice and profession some hideous accusations, and of course the governmentally backed Arithmantic Spell Creation Crafters made sure all of Spell Mongery was tarred with the same brush.

The Grind family was rather well off financially. Telemachus could learn his chosen profession

without fear of having to produce curses to buy his bread and board. He traveled the country selling to the everyday rank and file witch or wizard useful spells and charms for Knuts and Sickles that could have brought many Galleons from the more wealthy. For a few years it looked like Grind might single-handedly change public opinion of Spell Mongery.

Then Telemachus went on his crusade to save the recently discovered barn-infesting elves from being hunted into extinction.

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If they really thought about it, no one could blame Harry Potter for the types of magic he began Mongering. He was a far better gifted and natural-born Spell Monger than the prodigy of a millennia before, Telemachus Grind. Other than the school reading assignment, Harry mostly read from his summer library, a strongly Defense-oriented selection.

This summer he was trying to develop the curriculum he'd promised Dumbledore for the expanded DA. He was also hunting for magic to better defend himself and his friends - the stunning, shielding and binding spells they'd used in the Department of Mysteries had been too easily countered by the Death Eaters. And with no hesitation, Harry was desperately looking for any manner and method to fight and defeat Vodemort.

Therefore, the pieces of magic Harry experimented with as he practiced his Mongery had a decidedly *Defensive* nature to them.

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Slugs and Jiggers Apothecary was not *only* an apothecary shop. They were the primary and most visible face to the wizarding public of the giant potions and ingredients firm, S & JA, Ltd. Many potions ingredients needed to be freshly picked, caught, snipped, bled, killed, strangled, skinned, or otherwise prepared at the moment of, or shortly before being included in a potion or magical mixture.

All ingredients that could be prepared in advance were available from S & JA, Ltd., the holding company of Slugs and Jiggers Apothecary.

Livingston Shunpike, older brother of Stanley "Stan" Shunpike of Knight Bus fame, had worked at S & JA, Ltd, since finishing Hogwarts with two O.W.L.s. Livingston, or Livin' as his friends at the pub called him, was a hardworking and conscientious loading and unloading clerk who also restocked shelves and performed a few simple mixing operations under close supervision.

It wasn't Livin's fault. His manager had insisted the elder Shunpike sweep up the spilled Jobberknoll feathers and include them in the shipment. Livingston tried to explain to his manager that there had just been a spill of Erumpent fluid there moments before, and he did not think it was completely dry.

The manager was in a hurry to complete the gigantic shipment of ingredients to Hogwarts for the huge project, and did not want to let down Professor Dumbledore. All the ingredients needed for the entire project were to be shipped on time so there could be no tampering with them, after the project

became known to the families of those participating.

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Two days before Harry Potter could leave his aunt and uncle's house for the summer, Professor Snape reached into the container of Jobberknoll feathers and placed all of the Erumpent fluid contaminated feathers into the next batch of Paladin Acceleration Potion.

Severus Snape kept what he referred to as the most scientifically and artistically precise potions laboratory in England. He maintained at least one of every type of equipment he needed, many times he had several backup devices if the items were easily broken.

Arguably the most ticklish timing procedure in brewing the Acceleration Potion, was timing the twenty-two minute countdown to the fixing activation of the moonstone additive. Therefore, potions master Snape used a calibrated twenty-two minute sand filled hourglass timer for that particular countdown.

At the end of the day before, he'd noticed what appeared to be a hairline fracture in the timer he'd been using, so he pulled the spare from the shelf and used it for the first time on this day. Indeed there had been a fracture on the old twenty-two minute hourglass, but there was also one on the new timer, and that fracture was at the base where it could not be seen. It was a tiny hairline crack, and it had only let in a trace amount of moisture. That small amount of moisture had produced only the slightest lump in the sand, making the timer actually a twenty-three and a half minute timer.

Being one of the most thorough potions masters alive today, and for the past two centuries for that matter, Severus Snape had several people constantly available to him during the complex procedures and processing of the Paladin Potions - just in case he felt the slightest possibility of the need of assistance. Professors McGonagall and Sinistra were there. Both had made excellent grades on Potions during their years as students, and they were there "just in case" during each daily preparation of the accelerating elixir.

The Jobberknoll feathers added a Memory Enhancing or Imprinting Serum effect to the Paladin Potion. The armadillo bile, cut up ginger root, and ground scarab beetle added wit-sharpening elements to the concoction.

The frozen Ashwinder eggs were illegally used in love potions. Legally, in the Paladin Potion the Ashwinder eggs induced the controlled attraction-and-respect-sessions referred to as 'the visits' with the opposite sex.

These five ingredients were added at precise times so their proper effects could be exactly set by the addition of moonstone. Moonstone, used most famously in the Draught of Peace, had emotional *balancing* properties. It also balanced the properties of these five ingredients at the precise strength and effect when it was briskly stirred into the Paladin Potion.

Three minutes before the time to add the moonstone, Argus Filch entered the Potions dungeon to assist in portioning the potion into vials for each student. He also helped with cleaning after the potions had

been carried off to the students by the various agencies of administration.

One minute before the twenty-two minute hourglass told Snape to add the moonstone, the Erumpent fluid residue on the Jobberknoll feathers exploded, splashing the potion into the faces of the three professors and the caretaker. They received a burst of the potion's effect as it existed at that particular moment.

Severus Snape looked deeply into the eyes of the Astronomy professor and said, "Beautiful Artemis, I have loved you for years." She released her hair from its constrictions and smiled, and then threw herself into the potions master's embrace, pulling his head to hers in a very passionate kiss.

Argus Filch said, "Minerva, I've been a fool to not accept your apology. I love you more than life itself." They kissed very tenderly. It was the kiss of those who have unknowingly longed for each other for decades.

Similar to the way the students on the Paladin Acceleration Potion experienced roughly two minutes of semi-violent shaking on their beds or pallets, these four experienced two minutes of passion.

The four broke their embraces and blushed. Professor Snape quickly inspected the potion for any damage, but all was well by every indicator. He looked at the hourglass and saw roughly a half a minute was left. He therefore thought that they had kissed for a brief moment and that he had missed nothing. In fact the potion had gone over a minute too long before the stabilizing moonstone was added.

Snape announced, "That unexplained explosion must have sprayed us with a slight amount of Ashwinder egg, causing us to, er... show interest in each other. There was not enough splashed on us to damage the potion." He paused to add and briskly stir in the moonstone at what he *thought* was the right time. After the mixture reacted properly by all telltale signs, he breathed easily and turned to his colleagues.

"The timing is still accurate, the color and consistency is within acceptable limits. We can proceed without fear of adverse affects on the students." There was a backup plan for such emergencies, but it was very complicated, and painful to a degree for the students. All were relieved that the secondary plan would not be needed.

All four finished their tasks and helped ladle and dispense the potions going to the various students the length and breadth of Great Britain.

All four separated at the end of these tasks to go about the rest of their day. Each wondered if they would ever be able to face their specific partners in this day's misadventure again with equanimity, or - for that matter - *any* shred of genuine composure.

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On that particular day, the day the aberrant potions were dispersed, each student in the Paladin Program received their dose at 3:47 pm. They each participated in a typical ten-minute rest period

including the shaking, followed by a short nap. They'd each had a large early lunch at 11:40, and would have a fairly large snack - six strips of dragon jerky, three ears of cooked corn, and a quart of celery juice - before they went to their visits.

Each awoke to find their clothes were a bit tight, except Harry Potter, who still mostly wore Dudley's castoff clothing. He did notice that his trainers were the slightest bit uncomfortable, but foot growth was not uncommon for the summer under normal circumstances at this age, and the specific shoes he wore were over a year old.

A growth spurt was not part of the schedule for this time period of the program, but the students did not know that. Some days they would noticeably grow, and on others they wouldn't. Each student had already seen their clothing shrink on them as they neared the halfway mark of the intensive two-month program. Dean Thomas had grown four and a half inches already and gained nearly two stone in weight. Neville Longbottom's face was no longer as round, and a glance at his shoulders was enough to tell that he'd broadened as well as grown taller. Terry Boot, Ernie Macmillan, Anthony Goldstein, and Zacharias Smith were all two to three inches taller than they had been before the start of the Paladin Program. Every lad on the acceleration potion series was quickly leaving the physical aspects of boyhood far behind.

The young ladies in the program were all concerned with their increased weight, until they observed that their figures were much more like mature young witches who'd been out of Hogwarts for a few years. At this age, there was not one young witch, or their mothers, who were not secretly proud to *have* to buy certain noticeably larger clothing.

Lavender Brown and her best friend, Parvati Patil, were beside themselves with delight at how men of all ages seemed to watch them as they walked by. They were statuesque. Parvati's identical twin, Padma, tried unsuccessfully to downplay her own delight with this attention. The Patil twins were still identical.

The senior Weasleys and Grangers laughed among themselves as Hermione and Ron tried NOT to notice each other's development. The parents laughed, but all four were ruthless at keeping the couple in specified and appropriate contact with each other as outlined in the Paladin Program. The parents were pragmatic enough to realize that Hermione and Ron should not be completely denied private time and additional contact with each other. However, the parents thanked Dumbledore profusely for the detailed parameters that limited every aspect of the budding romance.

On this particular day, Ron finally reached his full height of 6' 4", but he would add another stone and a half over the next thirty days - all muscle. Hermione would add another inch of height to the three she had grown thus far. She had added nearly a stone and would add nearly half a stone more before September first - *mostly* muscle.

It had hardly registered to Harry that he was two inches taller, but it was obvious that he was almost two stones heavier. He mostly attributed the weight gain to eating much better than he had ever in his life at number four, Privet Drive. That was true, but only half true at this point. Every ounce he had gained was muscle, and it was not as obvious as fat would have been, muscle being leaner than body fat. Harry's growth was about on par with others under the administration of the acceleration potions.

He would gain one more inch that very afternoon, reaching his father's exact height of 5' 9", but he would weigh nearly a stone more than his slightly stockier father had at the end of James Potter's seventh year. Because of the special diet, potions series, and exercise, even before this day Harry was more muscular than his father had ever been.

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On what would be called Aberration Day by all of those dealing with the ramifications of this day for months to come, all students awoke from their naps, ate their snacks, and changed clothes or whatever to prepare for the 'visit' with a member of the opposite sex.

By this time in the program each participant had grown enough self-control to resist the first urges at the start of the 'visit.' They all had enough control over their initial desires not to throw themselves at each other when they were visiting. This was a most obvious proof that the benefits of the visits were producing the emotional growth desired. None had been truly tempted more than just a bit to rush the other in four or five visits. They knew this was unacceptable emotion - the desire for another should be based on affection at the very least. However, some of them had reached the point where they might kiss for a few moments at the end of the session, because many of the students had become couples during these visits.

By this time in the program, every existing relationship had developed from the time spent together talking and getting to know the other. Physical attraction, a valid emotion to be harnessed, not killed or allowed to run amok, was a secondary reason these relationships existed.

After learning emotional control, becoming more at ease with each other was the second and even more important learning experience of this part of the program. In this manner, almost all of these students became friends with those they regularly visited if they weren't already, and better friends if they were. Even obvious incompatibilities were overcome by the requirement to sit and talk with that particular person for one to two hours at a time. Each person in the program, except for Harry, had three to five members of the opposite sex they would visit with on a rotating basis. The visits were not one time events, so each person was able to develop true friendships with their regular partners.

Conversational outlines were not dictated, but there were suggested topics to discuss as conversation starters. Most pairs started with the suggestion to discuss their dreams, goals, and aspirations. The harder to broach topics of their fears and worries were much easier to explore together after their friendships had developed.

A number of boyfriend-girlfriend relationships started, and there were suggested guidelines for those occurrences as well. Such romantic relationships occurring in the first two weeks, usually broke up quickly. However, the requirement to sit and talk with the one you had just broken up with gave those who did so an opportunity to recover the friendship, a rare occurrence for most people, young or old. Padma Patil and Zacharias Smith found themselves a couple the first week, and broken up the next. She'd remembered how much of a pillock he'd been to Harry Potter during the DA meetings. They fumed at each other for a week, but by the fourth week of the program they had pounded out a workable friendship based on the modern day application of chivalry towards each other. Because they worked so hard at this, the two did become good friends, rather unlikely good friends. Padma

was able to help Zacharias overcome his jealousy of Harry to a significant degree and become more of a team player in the two years to come. Even most of Zacharias' fellow Hufflepuffs thought that would have been unlikely.

The romantic pairings developing in weeks three and four would stand a greater chance to last for a while. A few of these relationships would become permanent eventually. But at this point, the longer-term courtships followed a similar pattern to the other student pairs during a visit. Ernie Macmillan and Hannah Abbott finally accepted what all other Hufflepuffs felt was foreordained - they fell for each other.

During the first two weeks Hannah confronted Ernie in a very positive and supportive way that few non-Hufflepuffs could manage. Everyone who knew him fairly well thought he was rather a stuffed shirt, but likeable. He was a bit arrogant, just a bit, and he could be a bit pompous sounding. His moderate pomposity was an endearing trait to those who were his very good friends, but even they had to endure the occasional breakout of pontifications. Those who did not know him well, walked away from him or laughed at his speeches declaring the virtues of whatever struck his fancy at the moment. By week three, Ernie and Hannah were closer to each other than either had ever thought they could be with any member of the opposite sex. His first kiss in the last minute of a two-hour visit would compare to such occurrences on a Wizard Wireless daytime romance story.

By July 28th, Aberration Day, the students were all so successful at controlling the first irrational moments of a visit, that few were ever chaperoned any more. It just so happened that *none* of them were chaperoned on this particular Sunday afternoon.

The genius of this two-month process to gain emotional control in so many areas of life, was the genius in the make-up of the potion itself. The powdered moonstone added emotional balance to the student taking it. The emotional balance was at its height at the start of the one or two hour visit session. For a number of reasons the strength of the moonstone varied with each daily dosage. That was why the visit sessions were to last one or two hours, nearly exactly. Even in situations where the participating student lived in close proximity, even in the same house as in the case of Hermione and Ron, the students were required to break away from each other for a short period of time at the end of the visit, even though they would re-enter the same room together after the break.

On Aberration Day, the moonstone had been added just over one minute too late, and all but three visits went like the following meeting between Susan Bones and Justin Finch-Fletchley.

The Jobberknoll feathers in the acceleration potion added momentarily increased memory capabilities and would imprint on the subconscious the core elements of whatever the individual taking the potion was doing at the time of the potion's highest potency. The memories, both intellectual and experiential, were deeply embedded into the core of the instinctive thought processors of the brain of that individual.

Had any student taking the aberrant potion that day started studying instead of going to a visit session with the opposite sex, that studying student would have conquered very complex concepts with ease and remembered everything he or she read or even looked at. Not just the specific knowledge, but even the ability to excel much further than ever before in that particular subject was imprinted into the



thought processes of the recipient. A fortune could be made selling such a mixture to those studying for O.W.L.s or N.E.W.T.s.

No one studied during the one-hour session prescribed for the day.

The Ashwinder eggs created the controlled passion capabilities in the potion, but they had been active too long before the moonstones fixed their potency. This element of the potion, used illegally in love potions, did not create a love potion per se. However, a momentary overwhelming attraction did assault the senses of those taking the potion and in the presence of their visiting partner. The one person taking the potion that found himself away from his visiting partner at the moment the visit should have started, channeled all of the power of that moment into a decidedly different physical direction.

Justin Finch-Fletchley had been very good friends with Susan Bones since the Sorting Hat placed them in Hufflepuff on the same night. In their second year, Justin had been Petrified by the basilisk, and since they lived near each other geographically, Susan had spent a good portion of that summer helping Justin make up what he had missed while imitating a rock in the infirmary.

Justin walked to Susan's home when he visited with her. Because he was Muggle-born, he also used her Floo fireplace when he went to visit with others. The Finch-Fletchley home was not connected to the Floo network, and in fact it did not have a fireplace. On the days he visited others, he and Susan took great pains to NOT see each other before their visits with others.

On Aberration Day, Susan's parents were off selling the latest herbs and ingredients ready for market from her father's plantings and greenhouse. Justin walked into the home, as was practice, and went to the door to the parlor. They'd tried to pounce on each other the first few visits and her mother had deftly prevented it. Since then, their usual procedure was to stand holding the doorframes of the two different doors to the Bones family salon. They'd done an admirable job of controlling this and found it noticeably easier each visit.

On this day, they saw each other, and that was all they remembered until the warning timer went off. Susan always set a timer to give them a five-minute period to end their conversation and prepare to leave at the exact moment they needed to part. Susan always set this timer before the visit began. They found themselves at the timer bell's ring, leaning back on the couch together in an embrace in a vacuum-sealed lip lock. They'd done nothing but kiss passionately for that hour, but this activity was far beyond what the guidelines called for.

They were barely able to part on time. Susan told Justin that she would Floo call the Hogwarts' fireplace dedicated to deal with such emergencies; then she would call Justin. The Bones home was a rare wizarding household; it had a telephone because her mother was a Muggle. She promised to call him with any news. The two friends cancelled their platonic date to go to the cinema that evening.

With only three exceptions, all across Great Britain, those who were rising sixth years committed to the Paladin Program had similar visits to what Susan and Justin had experienced. But, fortunately, what could have been a disaster ending in lost virtue and possibly pregnancies did not occur. Each student had been able to find the strength within themselves to go no further than kissing. The tenets of

chivalry and the development of their emotional control thus far combined to prevent tragedy. Aberration Day did prove a setback to their emotional growth, but the fact that each student had stopped when they did proved that the program was working to a significant degree. Therefore, the Paladin Program was not abandoned.

The first of the three sessions that did not instantly become an hour-long snogfest was the visit Neville Longbottom participated in. Just before the session began, Luna Lovegood and Neville had been working in his garden on a hybrid plant he was trying to develop.

About thirty minutes before the afternoon's visiting session began, Neville left Luna chatting with his grandmother on the back garden patio. Luna was not a Paladin since she had only finished her fourth year. Neville's Gran was not sure about the young Ravenclaw, but they always had a lively discussion on millinery matters. Neville went to his room, took the potion from his house-elf, Plinkers, lay down, went through the ten minute vibration period, took the short nap, and eventually went to greet his guest when she arrived for their visit.

Luna chatted with Mrs. Longbottom much longer than they had thought. The girl asked to use a washroom for a moment before leaving, and had absentmindedly walked the wrong way to leave by the front door. Instead she walked in about two minutes after Neville had started his passionate kissing session.

Luna guessed that something was wrong beyond just a loss of willpower, and after some magnificent wand work, she was able to drag Neville next door to the workout room he had in his wing of the house. (All of the households of Paladin Program students had been exempted from the Misuse of Underage Magic restrictions, for training purposes.) She somehow got the two onto a treadmill and stationary bicycle and made them talk while she used an extra strong Sticking Charm to fix his hands to the treadmill, and her bottom to the bicycle seat. Neville in particular worked on the treadmill at a furious pace for the entire hour.

Luna stood at a distance for the rest of the session, allowing the two privacy for their conversation, but waited to release the girl, escorting her out of the room to send her Flooing home at the end of the hour. She left Neville running in place for an additional half hour before unsticking him.

The second couple on Aberration Day to NOT spend the hour doing just what they wanted to do, was Ron and Hermione. Mr. Granger happened to enter the library looking for a book just as the two locked into their embrace. The two had always sat on opposite ends of the huge sofa in the library at twelve, Grimmauld Place.

As he went to separate the two it was his daughter who unknowingly struck him and knocked him unconscious for a minute. Steph Granger rose and was barely able to pry the two apart and keep them that way. He began shouting but it was a very long minute before Molly Weasley came to find out what all the racket was about. She helped subdue the two but they'd had nearly two minutes of inappropriate kissing at the height of their initial surge.

It wasn't until ten minutes into the hour, when Ginny came rushing up from the kitchen, calling the alarm, that Mrs. Weasley stopped the lecture to the two she had encased in ropes - Ron she had

hanging upside down.

Ginny burst into the library in a perfect tear. "Harry's being attacked by Death Eaters at Mrs. Figg's house!"

~\*~

After the brief nap following his afternoon potions, Harry went on a walk before his 'visit,' using his carte blanche permission from his aunt to go "wherever" and to visit with "whomever." Though wanting Harry to succeed with his mission to defeat "that murderer" as she called Voldemort, to keep peace with her husband she had taken the ostrich-head-in-the-sand approach to her nephew's comings and goings. She wanted to honestly state her ignorance about everything, should Vernon ask any questions.

Harry knew that Hestia Jones would be his escort today. She was naturally quiet and did not like it when Harry tried to have a conversation with her as they walked together. They'd discussed this once. She wanted to fully concentrate when they walked. Hestia liked heights for observation purposes, being just over 5' 2", and when she was not escorting Harry somewhere in the estate, she usually climbed a tree or sat on the roof at number four, Privet Drive. When they walked, Harry respected her desire for silence, understanding that she felt a little more exposed and less able to observe than when guarding Harry in his aunt's house from the rooftop.

That Hestia did not respond to his initial greeting did not surprise him, she rarely did. As he walked, Harry did not hear her normal *swishing* produced by the Invisibility Cloak rubbing against her robes, but he thought nothing of it. One usually moved slowly in an Invisibility Cloak and the swish did not occur. But he had to walk at a normal pace, so she needed to walk faster than normal. Harry was ahead of schedule by about ten minutes, so he decided to take a spin towards the park. It was a hot day, and the trees there along with the landscape created a breeze that would be refreshing. He would only be able to stay for a minute, but even the momentary cool air would be welcomed.

"I'm going to detour to the park for a minute to escape this heat for a bit, Hestia." No response. "I have my wristwatch so I won't miss my appointment."

Harry never knew if this random decision spared him from simply being disqualified from the Paladin Program, or if it saved his life and two others. Tragically, Hestia Jones was probably already dead.

The fastest way from the park to Mrs. Figg's went right by the alleyway where he and Dudley had encountered the dementors the previous summer. With an out of place shiver despite the temperature, Harry swerved to that side of the road and paused to look down the alley.

He heard a muffled shout, "There he is!"

He saw a hand with a wand appear in mid air about four and a half feet from the ground. He ducked just in time to avoid the Stunning spell sent his way. Harry rolled and came up wand in hand. He felt the surge of morbid excitement he'd felt too many times before, as he went into his battle mindset. But this time it wasn't only adrenalin coursing through his veins. There was something else he felt for a

fraction of a second as he dodged a Body Bind spell and made his way out of the alley.

Instead of running, Harry dropped flat and peeked around the corner to see if he could identify his assailants. Death Eaters didn't hide under Invisibility Cloaks that he was aware of. Out from their cloaks, swinging them around like capes, Harry first recognized Dawlish, the Auror who'd been there in Dumbledore's office to arrest the headmaster. Dawlish had also been one of the Aurors attempting to take Hagrid on the night of the Astronomy O.W.L. - one of the ones who had hit Professor McGonagall with the Stunner.

Dawlish was a strong supporter of Cornelius Fudge, and therefore no friend of Harry's - as if the attempt to stun him wasn't enough proof.

Whereas Dawlish was a short, pug-nosed man with even shorter wiry gray hair and dressed in a worn, simple black robe, his companion was a tall, handsome man with a flowing ponytail. He wore immaculate dark red robes, which he straightened before running out the other end of the alley and away from Harry. This wizard who always wore dark red, was Williamson, the Auror who had stood by Fudge in the Ministry of Magic and openly discussed with the Minister that they had really seen He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named right there in the lobby.

Harry rose and ran until he judged Dawlish was about to round the corner. Harry fired a broad *Reducto* r curse where he thought the Auror would appear as he rounded the hedge fence. The hedge disintegrated in a circular pattern about six feet in diameter, and the dustbins were blown over. Dawlish, however, Apparated eight feet beyond the alley entrance just in time to look back, drawn to the sound of the clattering dustbins. Dawlish looked at the bins, looked at Harry, and smiled a very satisfied smile. In rapid fire Harry shot a number of spells, jinxes, and hexes from his DA classes at the Auror, which he blocked with little effort.

Harry did not hear the words of the spell sent at him by this minion of Fudge, because there was nearly fifty feet between them, but Harry's best *Protego* Shield Charm barely held, and he was knocked from his feet. The aquamarine light that passed over his head as he fell blew a hole the size of his head in a tree.

Harry did not wait, firing a poorly aimed *Petrificus Totalis* over his shoulder, he ran in a zigzag towards the only help he could think of, Mrs. Figg. The postbox exploded to his right and he rolled behind a car. Harry turned and decided the old DA standby spells would not be enough.

There were a number of spells, hexes, and jinxes that Harry had read about over the summer so far, but he reflexively called upon his own Mongered Defense spells, and the ones he'd based his various Mongering activities upon. Of course there is little thinking in such a fast-paced adrenalin-surged battle. You just act - on instinct - for the most part.

Harry cast an *Avis* spell, sending a flock of birds into the air to his right, and he rolled out and up to his feet on his left. Dawlish could not help but follow the birds with his eyes for the needed moment. Harry was fifty feet from the Auror and the aerial distraction gave him the time needed.

Harry shouted, "*In Hostes Sagitta!*"

An arrow shot towards the Auror, who took the time to use his wand to shoot it out of the air instead of sidestepping it.

*In Hostes Sagitta Quniquplico!* sent five arrows toward Dawlish. The five times multiplier was a modification of the old disused Arrow hex that Harry had Mongered.

Harry ran and did not expect any of the arrows to hit his target, he was only buying time to run. He made three seconds in a straight line and was about to start zigzagging when he heard the groan accompanying an arrow hit. He turned to see if he had done serious damage, and saw his attacker using his wand to heal a wound on his left arm.

Harry realized he had wasted precious seconds assessing his success, and determined to not do that again. Dawlish Apparated right before him and twenty feet away. Harry called out a different sort of blocking spell as he skidded to a stop near a small storage shed.

This old *Inclusi Munio!* battle charm caused a solid stone block to rise instantly out of the ground right in front of Harry. It was almost six feet high, just over three feet wide, and roughly a foot deep. It looked like and was in fact a type of stone, but the construct was made of a solid magical molecular structuring of the building blocks of the universe that could endure a number of the most destructive spell hits while slowly falling apart. The blasted away stone bits made it look like the attacker was about to break through, so more spells would be wasted on the defensive structure rather than attacking in any other way.

The stone block was between Dawlish and the direction Harry wanted to run, so it bought him precious moments to distance himself from his attacker. Harry ran past a shed on an alleyway corner and down the alley. He heard hexes being sent towards the stone barrier and after a number of loud pounding noises, the barrier shattered. Harry turned from the alley to run along the side of a house.

He paused when he rounded the house, trying to quiet his breathing. He leapt up onto the porch of the house and used the chair there as a poor momentary covering. He listened to see if the Auror was following him. Momentarily Harry heard indecisive footsteps pause, but then he heard running feet heading his way.

Dawlish rounded the corner and Harry cast, "*Conglacio Inclusum!*" Harry's nemesis was encased in ice. This was the same spell Dumbledore had used on Voldemort in the lobby of the Ministry of Magic.

This time The-Boy-Who-Hoped-To-Make-His-Escape made it to within five hundred feet of Mrs. Figg's front door before his next assailant struck.

~\*~

Ginny Weasley truly enjoyed her opportunities to sit with Harry for an hour or two when it was her turn for a visit session with him. She knew that Harry's look of lust in the first moments had not been his real feelings, but the look of gratitude he gave her at the end of each session was quite satisfying, if not totally fulfilling her desires.

During their first session she had risked great emotional harm by asking Harry to talk with her about the Chamber of Secrets. Had he not wanted to she would have been too embarrassed to go on, but she would have had to keep meeting with him. Harry welcomed the opportunity to discuss it, first thinking he was helping Ginny cast off the last vestiges of stain from her mind and soul from the times of possession. It did help her - but he'd found their chats on the subject cleansing for him also, and he had told her so. The only time he'd been more afraid had been in his fourth year in the graveyard where Voldemort had been resurrected, but only a bit more, and he'd been two years older at that time. This he'd also shared with Ginny.

But Ginny's risk that first session had set the pace for very meaningful dialogue throughout the course of their visits - even more meaningful than his like chats with Hermione. They'd eventually discussed his feelings about Sirius when she started talking out of the blue one day about a sleepless night Ginny and his godfather had both shared around the kitchen table during the previous Christmas holiday. Ginny did not know why Harry was so touched and grateful for that particular session, but he had chastely kissed her forehead in gratitude.

Under any other circumstances she would have considered a forehead kiss one someone might give to a best friend's very little sister. But, for some reason, she knew that particular forehead kiss was one that Harry would have given his friend, Hermione, for helping him out of a difficult situation. It wasn't the kiss of potential love, but it was far from a best-mate's-little-sister-kiss. She cherished the fact that they were becoming close friends.

Ginny Flooed to Mrs. Figg's that afternoon twenty minutes early, and they enjoyed tea together. Harry usually arrived a couple of minutes ahead of schedule and called out to the kitchen. Mrs. Figg would look at her Hogwarts coordinated clock and send her in at the exact moment the session would begin. The cat lady would still chaperone the first few minutes, even though Ginny's lunk-head brother had been able to control himself by this time. Harry had much more control than Ron.

The clock continued to spin towards the appointed time and still no Harry. The two walked into the front room and looked out of the window.

"I'll go look for him," said Ginny.

"No, deary." Ginny noticed an odd look on Mrs. Figg's face, and that she'd cocked her head to an odder-looking angle. "There's powerful magic going on not too far away. Best stay here until we know what's happening." She looked at Ginny and produced a smile. "Besides, once he sees that pretty face of yours outside this controlled situation, he's liable to lose control."

Ginny smiled at the compliment but was curious about some of the older woman's words. "Mrs. Figg, you can sense magic? I thought you're a Squib?" Ginny hoped after the fact that she had not insulted the kindly woman before her.

"Yes, deary, I am. But I have always felt magic around me with its tugs, pushes, and pulls. Mad-Eye told me that it's a kind of 'Squib magic,' sensory, passive, and interpretive. Argus Filch has been around tons of magic all of his life at Hogwarts. Moody and he have been experimenting with it. I can't do anything; I just feel others' magic."

Before Ginny could ask another question, Mrs. Figg paused and looked right into Ginny's eyes. "Of course Harry's magic's what I'm most sensitive to."

At that precise moment, the clock struck the start time for Harry's visit session with Ginny. Arabella Figg turned beet red and thumped down on a chair she had been standing in front of. Ginny rushed to her side and before she could say anything, the magic-empathic Squib opened her eyes and eerily said, "That was Harry. He's about to amaze us all."

~\*~

Harry turned onto Wisteria Walk at a fast run, sensed danger, and rolled under a car. The roof of that car was ripped off by an orange beam of light that had narrowly missed him. Williamson had circled around from the other end of the dementor's alley and now *he* was attacking Harry. These were serious spells and curses, even though they were not Unforgivables. In a fleeting thought before going back into the battle zone mindset, Harry hoped Fudge would somehow be smeared with dirt when this unwarranted attack came to light. But first he would have to survive to tell of it.

Harry knew that his escape route was at Mrs. Figg's if he could make it there after he'd incapacitated Williamson. This Auror did not know about her or they would have waited for him there in ambush. He chose a circular route towards her house away from Williamson in order to draw him out of his concealment.

At five hundred feet from Mrs. Figg's house, Harry rolled and zigzagged hard to the right. He saw his attacker send a Stunning Spell his way. Harry blocked it easily and kept running. He looked back and Williamson was not there. The Auror Apparated right before the soon-to-be sixteen-year-old and sent a Jelly-Legs at the younger wizard. Harry fell hard dodging the spell and had the breath temporarily knocked out of him. He did not let loose his wand, but hid it at his side.

Harry looked up at his would-be captor, who'd walked up next to him but instead of binding his prisoner, Williamson was straightening his robes and straightening his hair. The lad surreptitiously raised his wand just enough to silently set Williamson's robe hem on fire. When the vain Auror looked down and moved to extinguish the fire, Harry cast *Capillus Calvus!* and all of Williamson's hair fell to the ground before him.

At the exact moment when Harry's session with Ginny was supposed to start, at the moment Arabella Figg had swooned, he started a Stunning Spell. Harry's adrenalin was up and his heart was racing, but just when all of his fellow sixth year Paladins found themselves rushing to kiss their visit partners, Harry was in a serious battle, which was about to become more so.

Steph Granger had described to Harry the heightened senses in a firefight. The true warriors have a situational awareness in a life or death struggle that endows them with extraordinary fighting skills, and if they survive, they are never quite the same. Harry knew exactly what the dentist talked about; he already was that type of warrior - tempered in the Chamber of Secrets, in the fight with a hundred dementors, and by facing Death Eaters and Voldemort on many occasions.

That which would one day gather its all in our hero and destroy Voldemort forever - that essence met

with the over-activated parts of the acceleration potion coursing through Harry's body. The same over stimulation that was coursing through all of the Paladins at this moment was totally focused on the emotions of battle in one Harry James Potter. All of his strength, skill, power, and determination were supercharged through his body at this moment, and would be for the next few crucial minutes. Every physical, sensory, and emotional advantage humanly available in a fight was multiplied in Harry James Potter that Sunday afternoon. And something more.

The Stunning Spell aimed at Williamson blasted him over forty feet through the air and knocked him unconscious for almost an hour. He was fortunately hidden from the Death Eaters who arrived on Wisteria Walk in the next moments.

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Ginny squealed, "Death Eaters!" and moved to the door, pulling her wand. She could see Harry starting to fight them about two hundred and fifty feet away. Because of a curve in Wisteria Walk, they could look out on the houses to the right easily.

An iron grip stopped her. The elderly Mrs. Figg said, "He's going to be all right. You can't draw attention to us. We have the only escape route you two can take with this Floo fireplace. Besides, he won't need you. You can't feel it, but somehow he's a much more capable war-wizard than the lad who cut my grass yesterday. Let's just watch."

The Squib's grip did not loosen until Ginny lowered her wand hand completely. They turned to observe the unfolding spectacle. Harry handled the first three Death Eaters like he might three first year students, but then eight more of Voldemort's minions Apparated all around him on Wisteria Walk.

Ginny raised her wand again and this time the firm hand pushed her towards the fireplace.

"You *have* to go for help, I don't know why I didn't send you earlier, I was just tuned to Harry and knew he could take those three like he did. Go to Grimmauld Place. Bring back reinforcements."

"NO! I've got to go help Harry! Oh-!"

Arabella Figg slapped her. "You'll be dead in seconds out there. I can't Floo travel, you must go. Your only hope to save him is to bring back help. GO! NOW!"

Just before Ginny threw the secure Floo powder into the fire and called out her destination, she thought that she glimpsed Dawlish, through a window, conferring with a Death Eater.

~\*~

After balding and incapacitating Williamson, Harry turned to run through lawns near houses to present less of a target than he might have been if he'd run straight down the street. This aided him in the next battles he faced. He'd covered two house lengths, five more houses to go to Arabella Figg's. He wondered how he could contact whoever needed to clean up the magical mess and *Obliviate* any Muggles who might have seen the battle.



Then he stopped in his tracks. He'd just fought two Aurors! He'd be arrested. Who'd believe he was the innocent victim and not a criminal? And why had they attacked in the first place?

This train of thought ended abruptly when the three Death Eaters popped into position, in a half circle around him, all three within ten feet of him.

A voice he did not recognize said, "Come with us, Potter, and you won't be hurt." The owner of the voice barely finished his demand when he was knocked down by a Body Bind spell. Harry blasted the Death Eater beside him with a broad swipe *Reducto* r curse that bowled him over into a heap. The third Death Eater nearly landed a Cruciatus Curse on Harry but our hero had started to roll away from the third as he blasted the second. Harry stood and threw a *Protego* shield up.

Previously in his experiences Harry's *Protego* had only occasionally diverted the torturing curse. This time his shield bounced the curse back towards its sender perfectly, and the Death Eater began to scream and writhe from its effect. Harry wondered why they had moved so slowly to attack him.

Harry started running again and made his way two houses closer when eight more Death Eaters completely encircled him. He fell on his face and the Killing Curse from the one behind him - Harry had just *known* it was coming - killed the Death Eater right in front of him.

Harry shouted, "*Exaggero Aquor!*" and a torrent of water knocked down the Death Eaters to his left. The Boy-Who-Would-Not-Be-Taken-Today fell backwards. A Killing Curse and a Cruciatus Curse hit each other in mid air above him. This collision caused a horrific explosion, followed by a brighter-than-bright light - terribly intense even through Harry's tightly closed eyes. He rose and placed two quick Body Bind spells on his blinded and unconscious attackers.

The last Death Eater standing fired a wild Stunning curse at Harry to no effect - it hit him but it did *not* stun him. Harry turned and saw this Dark follower standing behind a life-sized lawn statue of Admiral Horatio Nelson, hero of the battle of Trafalgar.

Harry cast *Circumretio!* and the arms of the statue grabbed the Death Eater and held him firmly before turning back into inflexible stone. *Silencio* quieted the captive's verbal abuse.

Harry had almost reached the edge of Mrs. Figg's property when eighteen Death Eaters Apparated all over the front garden, the neighbors' front gardens, the street, and behind two cars parked on the edge of the tarmacadam.

In a frozen moment of time, Harry heard all of his senior mentors from over three weeks earlier shout in one voice, "This is war!" It was a quiet voice, nothing stirringly patriotic or attempting to manipulate. Harry just knew that statement heralded his moment of truth.

Somehow, instinctively knowing exactly what to do, Harry shouted the Stone Barrier spell, "*Inclusi Munio,*" three times, creating a triangle with the three barriers roughly three feet from each other. They were taking hits from various spells even before he reached them.

The next segment of the battle took less than forty seconds. Mrs. Figg would declare for the rest of her life that it had been the most amazing event she had ever witnessed. In a blur of magic Harry cast spell, after jinx, after charm, after curse. Water torrents, arrows, Body Bind spells, and Impediment jinxes, flew at his assailants as if three or four Aurors were in the center of their attack, not one boy just shy of his sixteenth birthday. Over and around the barriers flew visible and invisible spells, projectiles, water, fire, and ice. Several times Harry repeated one of his Mongered battle charms, *Depluit Scopulus!* This dropped boulders onto four Death Eaters. He thought it was simply a modified version of the Stone Barrier Charm, which drew the substance of the barrier from the quantum matter of the soil or flooring underneath. The fact that Harry's Boulder Bomb battle charm drew its material from the air was on an astounding level of magical achievement.

One of the four assailants was crushed by the boulder; the rest were badly hurt. But Harry was not finished. *Deflagratio* encased two Death Eaters in fire - one Apparated away; one didn't. *Convolutio* rolled over the two automobiles hiding Death Eaters - one was pinned under and fainted from the pain; the other was pulverized.

When the last attacking Death Eater was encased in ice, and Apparated away, the silence roared in Harry's ears. He surveyed the carnage wrought from his wand, and almost thought he was finished fighting. At that moment, the green light of a Killing Curse shattered the weakest of the stone shields he'd conjured. More "Avada Kedavras" could be heard. More Death Eaters Apparated into the battle scene - many more.

As Harry began his defensive measures again by conjuring four more stone barriers, he realized that every ten to fifteen seconds two to four more Death Eaters were appearing all around him - it was as if a tap had been opened and the flow would not stop.

He began a random pattern of jumping behind and over the top of his four stone shields. He started raining down arrows by calling *In Hostes Sagitta Quniquiplico* eight times in less than ten seconds and pointing his wand at different groupings of Death Eaters. Eventually he merely pointed his wand and *thought* his Multiplied Arrow spell.

At that moment Harry was hit by a Cruciatus Curse. It knocked him to the ground and he began the writhing that curse produced. Though it was excruciatingly painful he did not lose complete control. However, he had dropped his wand nearby. In seconds he found that he was lessening the tortured effects by sheer will power. In his fourth year he'd fought and eliminated effects of the mind controlling Imperius Curse. He thought perhaps he was fighting off the effects of this curse also.

A Death Eater ended the curse and now stood over him. Marcus Flint, Harry's former Quidditch nemesis of several years before, took off his mask. Harry almost laughed at the preposterousness of comparing that contest to this one.

Marcus glared at Harry and pulled back his wand. Harry knew he was going to be killed, despite what Voldemort might want.

As "Avada Ke-" made its way out of Flint's throat, Harry completed his spell first.

Without a wand Harry raised his right hand and shouted "*Deflagratio!*" Harry's voice had an unearthly quality to it, and Marcus Flint was encased in a fireball.

As the Death Eaters still conscious looked on their emolliating comrade, Harry *Accio* -ed his wand and, firing spells at a blinding speed, he ran backwards up the steps and into the house. He called out, "*Inclusi Munio!*" eight more times to barricade the front of the room facing his enemies.

"Quick, Harry, Floo away." The hysteria was plain on Mrs. Figg's face.

"No one on my side dies today. You first!"

"I can't; Squibs can't - nor Muggles. Save yourself, Harry. I'm an old-"

"NO MORE SACRIFICES FOR ME!" he screamed in her face. After several moments and more curse crash sounds outside, Harry said to himself, "Think, Harry, think."

An explosion demolished the fireplace from the outside. Five more times Harry cast *Inclusi Munio!* on two sides each, and eight more times on the final side. He and Arabella Figg were encased in a short-lived barricade.

Mrs. Figg said, "Ginny was here. I sent her through to get help. Maybe she'll be back before-"

The top of one of the barrier stones crumbled and the rock debris hit both of them in the head and shoulders. Both had minor cuts on their faces. Harry sent five more arrows out of the opening, heard the grunt of one hit, and turned back to her. "No time. We've got to get you to safety - me too," he said with a wild-eyed grin. Another stone barrier top burst and Harry cast the spell that caused a large boulder to land just outside the new opening. Several screams were cut short.

Harry gave her a look of inspiration, and shouted, "Dobby!" with all his might.

The house-elf appeared in seconds. "Harry Potter Sir called Dob-"

"No time, Dobby. We're about to be killed by Death Eaters. Can you Apparate a person?"

"No, Harry Potter Sir, Dobby can't-"

"*No time*, Dobby. You're powerful in Apparating, aren't you? You can go through all of Hogwarts wards and protections, can't you?"

"Yes, sir, Harry Potter Sir." Dobby spoke no additional comments this time.

A barrier rock burst next to them and Harry took the brunt of it. He staggered but sent return fire out of the hole. He cast another *Inclusi Munio!* to block the opening. He bought them more time by pointing his wand in a number of random directions all around the house, shouting out a variety of spells, hexes, jinxes and curses. The assault lessened momentarily.

Bleeding from numerous cuts on the right side of his face, Harry grabbed Dobby's hand and calmly

said, "Here's what we're going to do. I've read about wizards Apparating others." He placed his hand firmly on Mrs. Figg's upper arm. "Arabella, take his hand. Take his hand!" he shouted. The woman was nearly catatonic, but the two finally joined hands at Harry's command.

To Dobby he said, "At the count of three we'll Apparate her with us to twelve, Grimmauld Place. We'll go to the center of the large living room. You've been there, Dobby, with Professor Dumbledore and me."

"Harry Potter SIR," Dobby's voice was quite shrill. "House-elves can't Apparate humans."

"You won't, Dobby. I will. You'll add your power to me and I'll do it. Trust me. Concentrate on this: You are obeying my order to Apparate there AND give me as much Apparation power as you can spare. You are OBEYING your master. Say it."

"Dobby is obeying Harry Potter Sir." But there was no conviction in the house-elf's words.

"Good. Now, we'll do it on three. Ready? One. Two. Three!"

A deafening Apparation roar pierced the crumbling shield stones Harry had erected. The sound burst the eardrums of three nearby Death Eaters, and shattered windows as far as three houses away. In less than thirty seconds the Death Eaters had destroyed the barrier from all sides. Their frustration at not capturing Harry caused them to utterly destroy the house they stood in. One minute later the remaining conscious Death Eaters left their wounded and dead to escape the arriving Kingsley Shacklebolt, and other Aurors.

All of the cats in the home survived, though one did have three inches of her tail cut off. From that day on, each feline there was even more sensitive to loud noises than was normal for a cat.

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It took Mrs. Weasley almost two minutes to calm the frantic/panicking Ginny, extract the complete story from her, and begin issuing orders. Steph and Sylvia Granger asked pertinent questions to hasten the storytelling. Ron wanted to be untied immediately so he could rush to Harry's aid, and so did Hermione.

Before anyone could deal with the tied teenagers, Kingsley Shacklebolt entered the library, wondering why everyone was there and why the teens were tied up.

It took less than a minute before everyone made their way down to the kitchen. Shacklebolt tried to Floo call the Figg home, but by then the fireplace there had been destroyed. Most fights take longer to tell than to live.

The tall dark Auror said, "I'll go to headquarters and Apparate from there with as many Auror squads as are available. And the usual clean up crew." He ran to the kitchen and was gone in a flash - literally.

At the Ministry of Magic Shacklebolt found that there were two people spearheading efforts to send

support and reinforcements to aid Harry Potter. Both instigators were highly unlikely - one only on initial inspection - the other even more improbable when all the facts were known.

---

Mr. Potter,  
*Once again* we in this department find ourselves issuing you a warning for breaking the Restrictions on the Use of Underage Magic.  
Really - you have permission to perform all sorts of magic in the confines of your home because of your involvement in the Paladin Program. After remembering your past record, even you must admit that this indulgence is most kind on our part.  
I won't even bother to send a team to confiscate your wand. I'll await Professor Dumbledore's excuse.  
PLEASE cease and desist using magic outside of the permissible area!  
Best wishes for an enjoyable summer,  
*Mafalda Hopkirk*  
Improper Use of Magic Office

The first Ministry owl sent to Harry that day was older even than Errol. She arrived after Harry had left the vicinity of the dementors' attack alleyway. She circled several times, saw nothing and heard nothing due to poor eyesight, poorer hearing, and plain laziness, and decided to try to catch an afternoon snack before returning to the Ministry Owlery.

Mr. Harry Potter:  
REALLY, young man! Can't you stop performing magic? Not only have you ignored my first owl, you have increased both in number and seriousness the spells, charms, hexes, and jinxes being illegally performed.  
CEASE this minute.  
DESIST from all use of magic.  
Wishing you not quite that enjoyable a summer,  
*Mafalda Hopkirk*  
Improper Use of Magic Office

The second owl arrived just as the first Death Eaters Apparated into Little Whinging. This owl had survived the first war with Voldemort and knew trouble when he saw it. Rather than deliver the note,

he decided to fly back to the Ministry. An undelivered letter always drew a considerable amount of attention.

Mr. Potter,  
The quantity, nature, and strength of the magic you are performing is alarming!  
Do you need assistance?  
Please send a reply with this owl explaining your actions.  
With concern,  
*Mafalda Hopkirk*  
Improper Use of Magic Office

This letter was sent by the strongest, bravest, and most determined owl in Ministry service. She knew her duty.

Unfortunately, the owl flew right into the line of fire of a Killing Curse aimed at Harry. The owl did not stop the curse, but it did deflect it enough to spare the one targeted.

That particular owl exploded in a small cloud of disintegrated feathers and burnt bird flesh.

Harry!  
Hold on!  
I'm sending help as quickly as I can!  
You can do it, lad,  
*Mafalda H.*  
I.U.M.O.

This last owl arrived in time to feel Harry Potter's presence leave the area. Since twelve, Grimmauld Place was unplottable, he started to take his message back to the Ministry of Magic. He saw the first owl hunting for prey and stopped to chastise him.

Halfway back to the Ministry the fourth owl felt the designate of the letter appear at St. Mungo's. Once again he changed course to complete his delivery assignment.

---

Kingsley Shacklebolt arrived at the Ministry Apparation and Floo Concourse in time to see Mafalda Hopkirk frantically trying to hurry a squad of Magical Law Enforcement Officers to go Harry Potter's aid. Normally unflappable after years of seeing and hearing every imaginable excuse for the improper use of magic, Mafalda was in a completely uncharacteristic pique, insisting on all haste.

Just as Shackbolt informed those there that it was a Death Eater attack, and that they needed to wait for Aurors to amass the fire power needed, the second rescue group rushing to Harry's aid entered the concourse.

Dawlish led a group of Aurors frantically strapping on heavy equipment packs for a hot battle. He was calling for all speed to go to the rescue of The-Boy-Who-Lived.

Kingsley interrupted the preparations to ask, "How do you know about this, Dawlish?"

The substantially shorter Auror looked up with initial anger, then quickly changed it to a look of concern. "Oh, it's you, Shackbolt. You're not the only ones concerned with the boy's safety. Though Dumbledore keeps him warded and guarded, we check the area from time to time."

Dawlish displayed a new look of intrigue and said, "Hey, where was the kid's minder this afternoon? Williamson's in St. Mungo's and I nearly froze to death before releasing myself from an Ice Encasement hex."

Pondering all of the ramifications of what he had just heard about Harry from these two sources, the tall shaven-headed senior Auror assumed command of the joint rescue force and Apparated to the scene of destruction.

---

Almost everyone at the Order of the Phoenix headquarters was in the kitchen or heading that way. The sound of a wrench being tossed into the space-time continuum as Harry and company Apparated into the room, followed by cries of agony, caused all of them to rush to the living room. Two screams came from humans and one was very high-pitched and produced by a house-elf.

Arabella Figg stood in the center of the room, shaking violently, and holding her right arm halfway between her shoulder and elbow. Trace amounts of blood could be seen between the fingers of her left hand. Harry's right hand and Dobby's left hand were splinched together.

Hermione reacted instantly and cast a Freezing Charm on the joined flesh. It deadened the pain but would not destroy the flesh if it was removed in a few minutes.

Molly screamed, "You escaped the Death Eaters! We must get you to St. Mungo's. Let's pick them up-"

"Wait!" Harry shouted through gritted teeth. Dobby merely whimpered in pain. "I was first attacked by Dawlish and the Auror that always is with Fudge - ponytail - always wears red robes." Harry grimaced and continued. "Before we go, we have to get Dumbledore to go with us. Perhaps Madam Pomfrey for now?"

Molly said, "Poppy can't deal with this... interspecies splinching. How'd you do this, Harry? For that matter, how'd you Apparate here? The wards... but I'm babbling. Hermione, Floo wherever to find Albus, start with Hogwarts and use the secure Floo powder. You'll arrive in a sealed room and the password out is 'Bertie Botts.'

"Ron, pick them up and-"

"I can walk, Mrs.-"

"You won't, Harry Potter," she said sternly. "You might cause more damage. Trust me. Carry them both to the fireplace, Ron and Steph. We'll go through to St. Mungo's, Ron and I will both with Harry and Dobby. Sylvia, you and Steph start calling other Order members, once we go through. The call instructions and addresses are on the parchment I wrote for you along with the call instructions.

"Ginny, try to care for Mrs. Figg. Go find Poppy Pomfrey if you need to but the wound doesn't look too bad. There's a magical first aid kit under the kitchen sink if you don't know the spells needed."

"Mum, I think I saw Dawlish talking with a Death Eater just before I Flooed here."

Harry groaned, "I thought I saw that too - thought I must be imagining..."

"Quiet, Harry, dear. This is a large fireplace but not that large. Ron. You'll just have to pick up both of them and go through. I'll throw the powder, but you have to call out 'St. Mungo's.'"

"I know how to Floo, Mum. Harry, Dobby, I'll try to be gentle but this is going to hurt..."

Harry, succumbing to the pain, said, "Just do it, Ron - freeze... wearing... off..."

---

Cornelius Fudge and Albus Dumbledore had a strained meeting. Fudge was congratulating himself for protecting the boy, when the headmaster accused the Minister's favorite Aurors of killing Hestia Jones. It was a verbal donnybrook that degenerated from there into more shouts and splutterings by Fudge, and even more pointed sarcastic witticisms by the professor, whose eyes did not twinkle once during the interview.

By the end of their most heated conversation, Fudge was blustering about Harry Potter murdering Death Eaters. Dumbledore warned the Minister of Magic that he would fight such accusations with *all* resources available to him. Fudge walked out of the room in a huff, before returning - it was his office.

Dawlish regaled the Auror Corps with accounts of his and Williamson's defense of The-Boy-Who-Lived, but few fully believed the fantastic account. Pro-Dumbledore Aurors and others took Harry's account more seriously and delighted in the fact that Harry had defeated Fudge's two favorites. And they were particularly glad to hear that Williamson's hair would have to grow back; it could not be replaced by magic. He had to go into Muggle London to buy a particularly pathetic men's hairpiece. Vanity, thy name is Williamson.

Normal splinch reversals were almost as easy as a Disinfecting Charm. House-elf to human splinches had no precedent in magical medical knowledge, and everyone wanted to be a part of the correction, but no one wanted the responsibility.



Harry threatened to hex them all, and for once, Molly Weasley offered to do it for him instead of correcting him, she was so furious with the mediwizards.

The pain was numbed properly, and finally the chief mediwizards on the Spell Damage floor and the Creature-Induced Injuries floor conferred together. They jointly corrected the damage. The same simple procedure for severing human splinch joinings worked perfectly, and Molly Weasley could be heard mumbling just below a shout about the swelled heads of nincompoop healers. Arthur Weasley arrived and was barely able to stop her from trying Ginny's Bat Bogies Hex on all the medicos around her.

---

Vernon Dursley and family saw the destruction as he drove by the end of Wisteria Walk at the end of their Sunday afternoon drive in his new Range Rover. He just knew it was 'that boy's' fault.

The Dursleys, being Harry Potter's relatives, were on the list of people not to *Oblivate* when Muggle encounters with magic occurred. Therefore, Harry's uncle refused to let the boy back in their house, and told Remus Lupin, "Your Professor Bundlebore can ruin me financially if he wants. But I *dare* him to try after all of this. I'll take it to court, *your* courts, and see if I can receive justice."

Remus looked defeated and Vernon looked elated, but just before he Apparated away, Remus said, "Petunia, in the meantime, can Harry have your permission to spend two weeks away with friends?"

Before Vernon could sputter out an indignant 'no,' Harry's aunt agreed to the request. But the 'clock' had already stopped adding minutes to Harry's required time with his aunt.

---

"You asked for me, Professor?" Argus Filch had received the bit of parchment at lunchtime on the tray delivered by a Hogwarts house-elf. The four who had been splashed in the potion explosion had not shown themselves at a meal or public place in the two days since the event. They helped with the potion production in stone cold silence, only speaking when absolutely necessary.

The caretaker and potions master had become guarded friends in the last few years. They'd both respected each other's work and professionalism, but both were so private. The tacit friendship had developed when working in their own ways to thwart Voldemort's design on Hogwarts and its staff and students.

No difficulty had strained their relationship like the events of two days before.

Severus Snape looked over his half-moon reading glasses, a necessity he would never let a student observe, and said, "Sit down, Filch."

The potions master continued to scratch on a scroll and the caretaker did not sit.

The scratching stopped. Snape looked up; he took off his glasses and sat up straight.

"Argus, please be seated, if you would," he said tiredly. The respectful Snape, never seen by the students, even those of Slytherin House, was a rare creature indeed, and only slightly respectful. But that rare creature appeared for a few minutes three times this day.

The host opened his desk drawer and drew out two glasses and a bottle of extremely old firewhisky. He poured without asking, passed the glass to his guest, and they both drank without toasting each other.

"Thank you for your hospitality, Professor, er, Severus."

"Argus, I..." He ran his right hand over his face and continued after making a slight noise of exasperation. "I analyzed the elements of the drops of the potion that splashed into our faces. I assumed that day that it had to be the Love Potions-related properties of the Ashwinder eggs that caused our... our actions. Erumpent fluid was found on a few of my Joberknoll feathers - it's used to cause explosive reactions."

They stared wordlessly and motionlessly at each other for nearly twenty seconds. "However... I have tested the residue of the potion that splashed us three times since that day. The events with our students that day, has called for additional analysis. Just an hour ago I confirmed my findings with an outside source. They also analyzed what caused us..."

The caretaker remained motionless except for his left eyebrow, which rose an eighth of an inch.

The potions master blurted out, "There were no trace elements of Ashwinder egg in the mixture that hit us. The content was mostly an emulsion of Joberknoll feathers."

The caretaker showed the slightest degree of realization when Severus Snape continued. "It was in the exact concentration found in a Truth Serum. You and... You did not react to a Love Potion. You *acted* on your true feelings. We... all... did..."

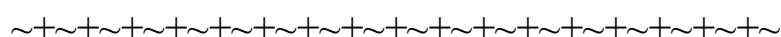
Argus Filch showed no emotions at all, except when he nudged his glass forward almost a minute later.

"Gladly," said the potions master as he hastened to fill the request. They drank quickly and did not look at each other.

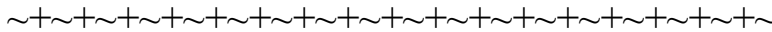
"I told... Minerva a half an hour ago now. I'll tell Artemis..." Snape still did not look at his guest. "You might-"

Argus Filch interrupted him. "Thank you for this information, Professor. And once again, for the firewhiskey. By your leave, I'll be about *my* business."

Neither said anything in parting. The door silently shut in another moment.



*Thanks for reading and reviewing.*



*Author's Notes -*

**Three Fanfic Sources For This Chapter** - This chapter builds on the works of three excellent authors whose storylines I reference with their permission. All three stories can be found at SugarQuill.net.

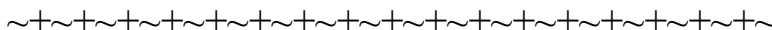
"Bones to Bones" by Ashtur an'Vangan - This marvelous tale follows the Hufflepuff DA members through the fifth year. Ashtur invented a world that makes Hufflepuff possibly the most admirable of the Hogwarts houses.

"Oversexed, Overpaid, and Over Here" by B. Nonymous - The story title refers to a Muggle Britishism from WWII. B. invented the entire relationship between Minnie Burns and Alan McGonagall during the war with Grindelwald.

The Squib Tales by Ozma - Ozma has created an Argus Filch we can all love and respect. She created young Filch as an apprentice to Apollyon Pringle during the days Tom Riddle was a student. She created Filch, Snape, and Minerva McGonagall as friends and peers during the canon days, and the idea of a slowly budding romance between Argus and Minerva during canon days. Ozma also created the concept of 'Squib Magic' mentioned by Arabella Figg in this chapter.

I am the one who created little Minnie Burns' interest in the young Filch, and its ramifications to the works of B. Nonymous and Ozma.

**Recognizing One Other Story** - In the passage where Minerva McGonagall (Minne Burns) is a first year, there is a reference to her father, Tiberius Burns, agreeing with the lessons learned in the first century A.D., that magical folk should be separated from Muggles. That story line reference comes from my own tale, Makers of Fine Wands since 382 B.C. You can find it right here at FanFicAuthors.net.



*Disclaimer--- What belongs to J K Rowling is J K Rowling's. Everything left is mine, I guess, but remember the old adage: "There is nothing new under the sun."*

*However, that which is mine is copyright 2006 Aaran St Vines.*



*Aaran St Vines*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# **"Great Scott, Potter, This is War!"**

## **Interim Chapter Nine**

### **Interim Chapter**

I am placing this short section here to adjust the numbering system for my chapters.

The Granger Defense and Great Scott, Potter are posted singularly at several dedicated-ship sites. Readers at those locations might be following the story here to FanFicAuthors.net for a number of reasons. Since early on I combined two smaller chapters on this site, the chapter numbering is off on FFA in comparison to what they've read. I don't want any more of the confusion that has perplexed a few of you kind readers who have already found my work here.

Thanks for bearing with me and reading my tales. And thanks loads for your reviews.

I am truly grateful,

*Aaran St Vines*

*Aaran St Vines*  
*FanficAuthors.net*





Headquarters, Mrs. Figg had been lucid for nearly a minute; then the shock hit her and she had swooned into Steph Granger's arms - babbling quietly and incoherently until Poppy Pomfrey had given her a Dreamless Sleep potion.

Long before that, Molly had led Ron, carrying the joined Harry and Dobby, through the Floo to St. Mungo's. Harry had refused to tell Ron much about the fight other than the Death Eaters had kept coming and coming, so he'd fought them as best he could... and then Harry had gone silent, refusing to answer any more of her son's inquiries. She'd finally yelled at Ron to stop asking questions, because Harry obviously didn't want to talk about any of it.

Molly pulled an uncomfortable chair right next to the door, and sat down, leaned her head back against the wall, and closed her eyes for a moment. Seconds later she opened her eyes. She'd heard some sort of random banging through the wall.

She quickly stood, and slowly and quietly opened Harry's door. There was a hospital tray table beside Harry's bed. He was lying on his side facing away from the door, but she saw he had his free arm up and he was pounding his fist against the table tray. She also thought she heard a sniffing sound.

Slowly and as quietly as possible she made her way into the room and closed the door behind her. Only then did she quietly call Harry's name. Harry brought the pounding hand swiftly down to his face, and Molly could tell from behind, without being able to see his face, that he was wiping his eyes.

"Harry, dear?"

"I'm fine. I'm almost asleep..."

Molly placed her hand on his arm. He stiffened, then, relaxed slightly. Trying to put all she knew about comforting into the next twelve words she said, "Harry, you're not fine. Come on, turn over and talk to me."

He did not move and neither did she. Thirty seconds later, nearly an eternity, Harry moved slightly to roll her way. She helped him continue and he hid his face with his hands.

"Please, Harry... Please talk to me... now, not later." She was so afraid to make that request, but even more fearful not to. Time seemed to stand still.

Harry exhaled and croaked, "I..." He lowered his hands and one of the most miserable faces Molly had ever seen looked out at her.

She rushed to bring him up in her arms, and Harry came forward as quickly as he could. He broke into paroxysms of noisy sobs and tearful shudders. His body felt to her like he should be making much more noise than he was, because he shook in her arms like a child bawling at the realization of a lost parent.

Of course she was softly weeping, trying not to shake or in any other way cause Harry to be concerned for her. As harsh as she could sound when reprimanding her children, or anyone else she

felt needed it, Molly Weasley was more tenderhearted than ninety-nine out of a hundred.

Here was the lad she'd so longed to take in her arms and comfort. She'd only been able to do so for a short period of time right after he'd returned from fighting Voldemort and Death Eaters the night of the third event of the Tri-wizard Tournament. She had always cherished those few moments, but she'd known Harry had very often needed, and hadn't received, such contact since then.

Hermione and Ron had told her several weeks after that tournament that Harry had probably never had such motherly contact since the deaths of his parents. Molly wondered how he'd survived since Sirius' death without a friendly shoulder. Again she went over the regrets she and Arthur had about not being able to be more for the boy, no, young man she held in her arms. Such thinking had nearly driven her to distraction on a number of occasions.

Molly wanted to find a Time Turner and go back over all the years and hug him at every point where he should have been so consoled. Instead, she poured all the love she could into him for as long as he would allow it. She prayed that he'd cry for a long time.

When the experienced mother felt it was the time to do so, she urged, "Please tell me, Harry."

She felt him stiffen just slightly and rushed off another quick cry heavenward for help. Then Harry gulped and gave a false start in an attempt to speak. He sniffed again and finally said, "I murdered- no. I killed several people today- probably more than several." He was silent for a long time. Though aghast at this admission, Molly made the slightest of soothing noises, trying to ease Harry's pained soul.

When Harry wanted to speak again, he pushed back from her only slightly, and turned his face towards the wall. She still held him fairly closely. If in that moment he'd needed it, she would have tried to stop the planet from turning.

"They..." Harry gulped and continued. "They just kept coming.... I... I didn't think they'd stop. I just knew this was war, and I couldn't survive if I tried to not hurt anyone too badly. But, but... I felt like it was the end... I, I just knew more and more would come, and then- well... then... one of them... would eventually get in a lucky... curse." He was silent for several moments before continuing. "I- I couldn't stun them or bind them. As soon as I did someone would undo it. I'd been studying stronger... never tried any before, but...." Harry moved like he would look her in the eyes, but he stopped and jerked his head back away.

Harry continued, "I couldn't think of any other way, and... and... I didn't want to. I wanted to stop them from *ever* attacking anyone ever again." Harry began to rush his story, but incongruously stopped to sniff every fifteen or twenty words. "I sent arrows and boulders and fire at them. I encased several in ice. I turned over cars on them. I, I, oh, Mrs. Weasley. Marcus Flint, the Slytherin Quidditch Captain from three years ago. He, he started the Killing Curse standing over me. I had... no... choice-"

Molly wanted to scream because her "adopted son" had gone through this, but knew she had to let him continue.

Very quietly Harry said, "I... I, he was right over me. I..." Harry barely whispered, "*Deflagratio*."

Molly registered that this was an extremely powerful and advanced curse. It was a piece of magic designed for violent fighting centuries before. Not for a moment did she blame Harry for knowing or using such a curse, but she was still disturbed. Also, she did feel a trace of motherly pride that Harry had been able to accomplish everything he'd done, including even this gruesome battle magic. Molly wished she could make everything bad go away for this young man she loved like her own children. And she also wanted to kill Voldemort with her bare hands, and rip the head off of any Death Eater that tried to get in her way.

All this passed through her mind in the sad twinkling of an eye.

"The thing is, Mrs. Weasley..." Harry was silent for a long time. The tears were gone from his eyes, though not from his cheeks. His eyes held a determination she'd rarely seen in anyone. "I'm not that sad that they're dead." Harry said this so quietly she'd have not heard him a foot farther away. Just a little louder he continued, "Those... they were all there to kill me, no, murder me - and Ginny and Mrs. Figg probably. I'm... I'm upset by this, but I'm also a bit sad that I'm not *more* upset. I'm crying about being a killer now. But I'd walk right out into the corridor and kill more of them if they came here to hurt you, or me, or...."

Molly Weasley was dumbfounded - silent. She'd not really acknowledged that she could have been in fights with Death Eaters on a number of her assignments for the Order. The confrontations had not occurred. In this moment she realized she'd just thought they would duel like they had in Defense classes, and then it would be over. The grim reality that she might have been called to kill someone--

Harry began to push away and she knew this was not good - he'd probably felt her stiffening and that message she'd not meant to send. She would be doing the opposite of her intentions in holding him in the first place. She pulled against his resistance and held him as tightly as she could.

Harry eased his struggling - her message of unconditional acceptance was at least partly clear. Moments later he leaned back, and there was a look of fear on his face. He succeeded in pushing himself away from the woman who held him and tried to hide his face. "You should go... should go, Mrs. Weasley. I'm not fit company--"

She knew she had to explain, and only the truth would do. Harry deserved that at the very least. Quickly she exclaimed, "No, Harry, you're the finest of company. I'm the one who's at fault."

Harry looked up suddenly, confusion painted on his face, and a small degree of fear.

"Your actions have just brought me face-to-face with what I truly agreed to when I joined the Order. I've held an altogether childish idea that I could go into the places I've gone for the Order, and not eventually encounter what you've been through today."

"I know this is war. My brothers died in the last... well, I'm sure you know. And you saw my fears laid bare by the boggart last summer..." She sniffed back a tear. She couldn't cry on this lad, who'd never really understood tears, if her daughter was correct. "I'm fearless when I face someone who

might harm one of you, but I've been kidding myself that the things I've done and places I've been haven't been... Well, I mean I haven't gone to that many *really* dangerous places, now have I? You kids... particularly you... Well, I must put away my childish notions."

This mild rambling held Harry's gaze, and his confusion did not end so much as transform as she spoke. There was the slightest dawning of realization in Harry's eyes as she continued. "But to think... It never occurred to me until just now, that *I* might need to do more than stun someone. Your words shocked me, just now, dear." When she felt Harry stiffen more she rushed on, looking into his eyes through her tears of embarrassment. "Not that anything *you did* shocks me. No, no, Harry, please - that's not what I mean at all. I'm shocked and dismayed at myself. Sometime *I* might need to hurt someone badly, or even... kill... someone on an assignment. Defensive spells are one thing, but... not always enough, now are they?"

"You've made this real enough that I might now survive such a fight. Before this very minute I would've probably frozen in place in a real battle and died on the spot. You've... you've made me face the real world of this war, and now I think... for the first time, I think I can... fight it."

Molly looked him in the eyes and said, "Harry, I've tried so hard to forget the last war, but you are just like Arthur, you know."

Harry raised his head again and looked both curious and confused.

"Yes, he was just getting active in the Order at the end of the last war. I was home pregnant or nursing during most of it. But he did his part." She got a slightly fearful far away look in her eyes for just a moment.

"It was just after my brothers Fabian and Gideon were killed. I was distraught, and Arthur was both terribly sad *and* furious. Three nights later he was on a simple surveillance mission that went bad. He was cornered by two Death Eaters and couldn't Disapparate out. They'd backed him into some sort of alleyway where there were anti-Apparation barriers. In desperation he sent a *Reducto* r curse at one of them, and one of them was blasted back against the wall, where he... Well, the other one escaped. Arthur was so upset. Ginny had just been born two weeks before. Holding her probably saved his sanity. That, and you- when you..." She looked up to his scar. "You've no idea the relief he felt when you... did whatever it was you did... as a baby."

Finishing her recitation, Molly rushed to her point. "Harry, you're a much more powerful wizard than Arthur - definitely more powerful than me. Arthur's one that you want at your back in a fight, but you're the one he needs to follow. He could be the Minister of Magic, not that they'd ever- but he could do a better job than Fudge, as if that'd be a compliment. But, Harry, you're the warrior, the leader, the Paladin that Albus dreams of."

"And now I just... think... I can be a part of this fight - to really hurt someone if I have to. This little chat of ours may have saved me one day, Harry."

She stared him straight in the eyes and said, "Harry. There's no pride in being a killer, but there's no shame in it either. But there is pride in doing your duty, perhaps even comfort in knowing you've

helped protect others. You do realize you've saved at least hundreds of lives over the years, don't you? Probably thousands. More than one time you've saved... and, my, Ginny-" The tears that she swore she wouldn't shed in this situation cascaded over her wall of determination and it was her turn to be comforted.

Harry hugged her in return. In a minute he said, "Mrs. Weasley, the best thing I've done was save Ginny."

Molly wondered where he could possibly get his strength. What could he draw from to comfort her in spite of his own misery?

After a minute she heard Harry stifle a yawn. Finally the short-term Sleeping Draught was affecting him. She looked deeply into his eyes. "Harry, promise me you'll continue to do whatever it takes to remain a bit upset with killing. But also promise me you won't *hesitate* to protect yourself or anyone else."

With that she helped him settle back down on the bed, and he did not resist. He placed his glasses on the bedside table next to his wand, and she moved the tray table away from him.

He said sleepily, "I promise to do what I must, and the... other."

She said, "You sleep. I'll just be outside. But how about you consider calling me either 'Mum,' or 'Molly.' Arthur feels the same way. I'll never replace your mother, but you can still call me that if you like. Or, you can call Arthur and me by our given names. Tonks is only a little older than you are, now that you're all grown up, and she calls us by those names. If that's what you'd prefer, just tell me, and I'll settle Ron, Ginny, and the twins. It'd be okay, I assure you."

Harry stifled another yawn. "I'll think about it Mrs.- Mu- Mol- uhm.."

Molly chuckled. "You can even stay with Mr. and Mrs. Weasley if you like, dear, but I want you to know that we consider you a son *and* a friend, regardless of what you call us.

"You doze off now. I'll be outside waiting for Dumbledore, but I'll be listening if you call."

She tucked him in and walked to the door. Harry was already breathing slowly and evenly. She quietly closed the door and sat - guarding her son/friend/champion. In seconds the tears began steaming from her eyes. She cried silently for a long time.

Just before he fell into a deep sleep, Harry glanced at Dobby in the small bed, out of the way in the corner. He'd insisted the house-elf not be placed anywhere that he couldn't watch over his wellbeing. Too many people had referred to Dobby as, 'just a house-elf' or some such for Harry to want his little friend anywhere else.

~\*~

Splinch victims can experience delayed physical shock. Over the years it had been discovered that just a few hours under a short-term Dreamless Sleep potion was all that was needed to eliminate this

concern. Harry and Dobby were under such a medication. At Grimmauld Place Madam Pomfrey gave Arabella Figg an even stronger dose because of her nerves. The elderly lady had been in a state regarding the whereabouts of her cats once she'd regained some coherence, so her dose would take her through the night. She was motionless in one of the many bedrooms. Mundungus Fletcher had been assigned the task of cat herding.

It was just before 8:30 in the evening on Aberration Day. Dumbledore had not awakened Harry when he had first arrived at St. Mungo's, so the headmaster had gathered the few details he could from Ron and Molly. They were only able to relay to him Harry's brief description of the roving battle. The headmaster had already talked to Ginny, and after interviewing those at Harry's bedside at the magical hospital, he left to do battle at the Ministry of Magic. He was expected to arrive back soon. Harry wasn't expected to wake until some time just before 9:00 PM.

Two healers and a medi-witch entered Harry's room. In lowered tones they'd told Mrs. Weasley that they needed to perform several magical diagnostic spells on both patients, and the cart they had with them caused everyone to be too cramped in the room. Hesitantly, Molly agreed to stay outside.

The whispering voices caught Harry's attention, but he hadn't noticeably stirred. He didn't want to wake, the bed felt especially good, but he was nearly completely cognizant of what was then happening in his room.

Just as Harry heard a whispered spell locking the door, he felt an evil presence in the recesses of his subconscious. His eyes popped open and he saw that one of the healers had pulled out his wand, and was pointing it straight at his, Harry's chest. Harry just knew this was not a medical procedure. Slowly the healer opened his mouth and the words even more slowly formed, "*Avada Ke-*"

Harry felt like he was moving through treacle. His reaction time seemed too slow to him, but he acted anyway. Raising and swinging his head to find his glasses and wand, Harry saw the other two in the room had their wands pointed at him also. He rolled off of the bed to his right and away from his assailants and the door. His right hand swiped his wand off of the table and then his left hand completed the roll around, crossed over his right hand, which was already holding his wand, and grabbed his glasses.

A huge jagged hole blew through the hospital bed as the Killing Curse hit it. Harry completed his roll from the bed, and he used his right leg to viciously shove the remains of the hospital bed towards his attackers. He continued his roll as he made contact with the floor - rolling served to lessen his pain as he hit. Steph Granger's floor mat training had paid off.

Harry protected his glasses in the initial impact, and opened them with a flick of his wrist, putting them in place, as he kept rolling. At the point of impact his right hand and wand were pointed at the legs of his assailants. He shot red, stunning spells at them in rapid succession. His first attacker had been hit hard by the bed and had cracked several ribs as he was thrown back against a floor level cabinet by the careening bed. The Stunning spell further incapacitated him. The medi-witch also fell with the second stunner. She too was knocked unconscious when she hit her head on a metal rubbish bin in the corner. Her scalp was cut, and she bled profusely on the floor.

The other healer had jumped up onto a chair as the first two stunners hit his co-conspirators. He was about to send another curse Harry's way when the one being attacked heard a rather loud finger snap. The last standing attacker was hurled against the wall, where his skull made a hollow, sickening sounding thud, as it hit the edge of a cupboard. Dobby had most probably saved Harry's life.

Harry finally heard noise coming from the door. Mrs. Weasley had been shouting and banging on it during the brief four seconds of the encounter. Before Harry could point his wand at it and cast, "*Alohamora*," the door was shattered by a *Reducto* r curse and the lioness protecting her eighth cub, roared into the room. She looked around and was completely nonplussed by the blood and destruction. She turned her body to half face the door with her wand pointed at it, and sidled as quickly as possible at this angle to Harry's side. He had pushed himself up to a sitting position on the floor by this time.

She only said, "Harry, dear," before they heard heavy thumping - running sounds approaching the room. She stood between Harry and the doorway, but Harry was on his feet and positioning himself in front of her before they both heard Ron's familiar, "MUM! Harry!" At these words Harry moved to his clothing once he realized who was approaching.

"Harry, how did you move so-" But before she could finish her sentence, Ron entered the room.

"Bloody heliopaths! Mum, did you...?" Ron quickly surveyed the destruction.

"The door's my work. Harry took care of the attackers." Turning to Harry, she said, "I'm so sorry I trusted them, Harry. I can't imagine what I was thinking..."

Harry grimaced as he replied, "It's okay, it's okay, Mrs. Weasley; you couldn't have known. Besides, Dobby got that one," he said and pointed.

Ron approached the third attacker slowly, looked at the shattered skull, and checked for a pulse anyway. "He's dead."

Molly moved quickly and confirmed Ron's pronouncement. She grabbed her son by the arm and manhandled him around so she could look at both the young men's' faces. "Listen very carefully. We'll tell everyone that Harry did all of this. If word gets out that Dobby's killed a human, he'll be instantly put down like a rabid dog. That's the law - he's not inside his master's house. So, you did it, Harry. You two understand?"

Both nodded. They heard thuds and looked to see Dobby bashing his head with a candlestick. Harry grabbed the candlestick in a lightning fast move. He said, "Dobby, I told you no self-inflicted punishment. You did exactly what I wanted you to do." The house-elf obeyed instantly; he had a slightly dazed but grateful look on his face.

They heard shouts from familiar voices. Tonks entered, followed by Mad-Eye Moody. Moody's magical eye revolved twice around the room. He said, "It's safe in here. I'll stand guard outside."

Before anyone could say anything, Moody announced from outside, "Dumbledore's in the corridor."

The headmaster entered and Tonks excused herself. There was little room in there with all of the destruction, bodies, and other occupants.

The professor looked around and asked no questions. He just knew. "Ron. Please help Harry finish dressing. We must leave immediately." He looked at the faces of the three on the floor. "I know these two, they're both Death Eaters, so I assume she is also. Apparently St. Mungo's is not safe for you, Harry, under these conditions. You and I will leave as soon as you're able. Dobby will be safe here for at least a few minutes. You're the target, Harry, not him."

Once again the professor had answered a question before Harry had thought to ask it.

"Molly, please help Dobby up and see to him. Have him go to Hogwarts when he's able."

Dumbledore whisked Harry away from St. Mungo's at an amazing pace for a man his age. First, they Flooed to the Leaky Cauldron, and as they walked hurriedly out of the fireplace, Harry didn't fall as usual, because the Professor walked out right behind him and caught his arm.

"Professor! Harry! May I be of-" Tom tried to offer.

The professor waved Tom back and said, "I'm sorry we cannot partake of your kindnesses, Tom; maybe next time..."

Dumbledore had not stopped walking as he spoke. He pushed Harry through the back door to the wall leading towards Diagon Alley. Then he used his wand to move two large, full dustbins in place to block the doorway from the tavern.

"They'll remove themselves in one minute's time, Harry. I'll just make a Portkey to go to my office-" Dumbledore stopped in mid sentence. "How do you feel, physically, Harry, rested or weak?"

Harry thought for a second, mostly about the incongruity of the question. "I dunno." He flexed his shoulders and said, "Rested actually. I was asleep for several hours, so..." He shrugged and took a deep breath, then stood upright with a look of confidence. Though the headmaster was five inches taller than Harry, it was as though they looked each other directly in the eyes. "What do you want to do, Professor?"

"Nothing too taxing, I assure you. I know you don't like to Floo or use a Portkey. You've Apparated successfully twice now, taking someone with you this last time - something basically impossible. Your arrival was almost dead on accurate the first time, and I am told you appeared in the exact center of the grand salon at Grimmauld Place on your second attempt. Do you think you could Apparate to the front gates of Hogwarts?"

Harry thought about it for a moment. Then a smile creased his face. Apparation was like flying in a way. In spite of the panic of landing on the mantel at the Grangers' home, and splinching himself to Dobby, he'd admitted to himself that he liked Apparation. He'd felt clearheaded and ready for action after doing it both times, regardless of the other factors.

"I think I'd like that, Professor. What do I want to focus on?"



"Just imagine, er, rather, to use your words, just *focus* on looking at the main gate entrance. Look at it like you're just back from the archway." After several seconds Dumbledore said, "Can you see it clearly, in focus?"

When Harry nodded the headmaster said, "You go first and I'll follow."

Dumbledore watched Harry close his eyes and concentrate. He developed a look of determination, and then an odd sound, not quite a crack, announced that Harry had left the area. It was actually quieter than most of the sounds made by those taking their Apparation tests, but there was an unfamiliar sharpness to the pop, dissimilar to the typical Disapparation noises.

Dumbledore said, "Remarkable." He Apparated nearly silently, and said again as he stared at his pupil standing right in front of the main gate archway, "Simply remarkable." He'd appeared right beside Harry at the exact distance apart as they'd stood together behind the Leaky Cauldron. "How do you feel, Harry? Tired, disoriented, a little nauseous? Those are all common Apparation symptoms for those new to it."

The lad shook his head in the negative. "No, none of those. I don't really feel any different from before. A little excited maybe. I like Apparating." Harry smiled like he did when he opened a present. Then a look of concern crossed his face. "Will I get in trouble...?"

"I doubt anyone would suspect you and *me* of breaking the Underage Magic laws. But let's go inside. Voldemort might think to send someone up here."

They walked just a few feet inside the gates. Dumbledore stopped, drew his wand, and conjured two brooms. "They are not Firebolts, but they'll take us to the doors of the school much faster than walking."

Harry was prepared for a slow stately broom ride, but Dumbledore leaned forward like a racer and sped along much faster than Harry had imagined possible. The elder wizard had the form of a Quidditch player. As they landed, Harry said, "Very good, sir."

"I was a Gryffindor Chaser for three years in... well never mind when it was."

In a few minutes they were in Dumbledore's office.

"Harry. I must leave you here to inspect the wards around the school and the grounds. That will only take twenty minutes at most. Then I must arrange a safe refuge for you for the rest of the summer. I don't know when you'll spend the two additional days needed with your aunt, but Remus received her permission for you to be away for two weeks. We have time to solve that dilemma, but you must be in a place where you will be untouchable and untraceable."

"I guess I need a sanctuary," Harry said. "St. Simons Parish is a sanctuary and it's connected to Hogwarts somehow, isn't it?"

Harry thought back to his discussions with Remus regarding Father Martin. Lupin had also told him a

little bit about the parish properties itself.

*Almost as in a lecture Lupin began, "Harry, have you ever heard of the word 'sanctuary?'"*

*The lad thought for just a moment and replied, "Muggles have bird sanctuaries and safe places for wildlife and such."*

*"Safety is the key idea there, Harry. Those animals are protected from harm by law. Sanctuary originated with the actual building, almost always a church, or sometimes a synagogue. It was not only considered sacred, it was a place of refuge, a place where one was exempt from pursuit. Those on the run from the law were not seized and prosecuted if they were in a sanctuary. The intent was that the innocent, somehow incorrectly accused by the law, might find help there. The truly guilty usually found the holy men and women in a sanctuary too much to be exposed to for very long. The church building or synagogue became a haven, a protected area of last resort. Throughout the many centuries, those who have violated sanctuary have been considered anathema and outcasts of society. Although, I am sad to say that synagogues as sanctuaries were abused fairly regularly.*

*"That's a Muggle understanding of sanctuary. There are those in the church, non-magical and magical believers, who maintain that a higher power backs up that protection. They don't call it 'magic' so I honor their views on that matter. But St. Simons Parish, the buildings and the grounds, are a sanctuary that is said to be as powerfully protected as Hogwarts is with its many wards and Disillusionments. And St. Simon's is little known and often forgotten in the magical world."*

Returning from his memory, Harry said to his headmaster, "Remus told me what a sanctuary was when he told me about St. Simons."

Dumbledore looked slightly surprised, but only for a moment. "Excellent idea, Harry. I've not seen Father Martin for years. He often goes on a retreat sometime in the summer months, but I believe it is later in the summer, nearer to September. I'll try to contact him before I return, so I don't know when I'll be back.

"Harry, it is unlikely that we have a security problem here at Hogwarts, but I must ask you to stay in this office while I'm gone. Talk to the portraits, or examine any book that catches your eye on the shelves. You may even use the telescope. That window is not large, but several interesting constellations are in view this time of year in that exact direction. I should not be too long. Oh, and I will have the required Paladin Program late night snack sent up to you as soon as possible."

Dumbledore swept out of the room and the door shut and locked. Harry figured he was as restricted to this office as he had been a few weeks ago on the night Sirius had died. Harry felt a small degree of anger for being confined, but the concern on the professor's face made Harry realize that there was probably just cause to lock him in - just like there probably had been that night.

Several of the portraits greeted him by name; he'd spent more total time in this office than any student had in several hundred years - including his dad and Sirius. Phineas Nigellus' portrait remained

unoccupied.

Harry paced the room scowling at everything and nothing. In a minute the snack appeared on a sideboard. Harry picked at it but only nibbled at one of the pieces of fruit. Then he wolfed down the required snack as he'd committed to do.

Patience had never been a virtue in ready supply for him, so each minute moved by like ten, until he was convinced the headmaster was long overdue. One glance at the clock showed that only eleven minutes had passed. Harry threw himself into a chair and slowly released a long frustrated sigh.

"He was like that too."

The words came from sharply on his right; one of the former headmistresses looked down from her portrait. The other portraits were looking her way as she gazed at Harry.

Harry said, "Pardon? Who was like what?"

"Young Percival was like you, no patience, until a month or two into his sixth year. He took the Acceleration potions also."

"Percy Weasley? But I thought the Paladin Program hadn't been--"

"No, no, Harry. Albus *Percival* Wulfric Brian Dumbledore. His father went by the name Albus, Albus Aberforth Alexander Aloyious Dumbledore. Percival went by his second name until his father died the summer after his fourth year. At the start of his fifth year he insisted that everyone call him by his and his father's first name - Albus.

"But I'm being rude. I am Professor Gertruda Drinkwater. I was headmistress when Albus, as you know him, and his older brother Aberforth were students here at Hogwarts. And I know you're Harry Potter. You've certainly been discussed within these walls often enough." She sighed and said, "And you've been in here often enough for all of us to know you quite well. Fighting the Basilisk in your second year is my favorite Harry Potter adventure." Several of those in portraits nodded in agreement and mumbled to themselves about that story. Everyone on the walls gave up their pretense of sleeping, and opened their eyes, leaning forward to listen to the conversation.

"Er, pleased to meet you." The hint of confusion in Harry's voice to cause the good-natured, elderly witch in the portrait to giggle almost like a schoolgirl. She had one of the kindest faces displayed on the walls of the room, and Harry smiled back at her without any hesitation.

"As I was saying Harry, young Percival - oh, I must call him Albus with you. Although, I was the only one he didn't correct when I still called him Percival. *Albus* seemed to be quite impatient through most of his school days. He was always going full speed with his broom straws on fire. With his long legs his friends had to run to keep up with him when going to classes."

She laughed at this and Harry had no problem imagining a tall thin Albus Dumbledore striding through Hogwarts with several Colin Creevey types running at his heels like small dogs.

"So, what happened to make him so patient now, Professor?"

"Life brings many opportunities to learn that virtue, and the Acceleration potions back then required a lot from him just to take them - they were rather painful at the time. But before his sixth year, in particular, two things changed Per- Albus. Aberforth's disaster and shame with the goat was one. Aberforth was several years older than Albus, and had an idea to make an animal that could fight Vampires alongside wizards like hunting dogs have fought beside Muggles in some of their wars. Goats are very intelligent, and the idea had merit, but Aberforth's impatience in his seventh year caused him to go ahead with his experiments without official Ministry approval. He combined his brilliance in Potions and Transfiguration to make a... well, a monster that hid in the Forbidden Forest, and came out at all of the wrong times, to rampage about the school grounds and Quidditch pitch.

"His goat-monster was huge, over ten feet high and nearly twenty feet long. It could Apparate *and* make itself invisible. Aberforth was expelled shortly before his N.E.W.T.s. There was talk about time in Azkaban, but there were no laws on the books to make such animal experimentations punishable. There are now."

Professor Drinkwater looked pensive or wistful for a moment. Harry couldn't tell which. She sighed a little bit and continued.

"Many thought that their father died of a broken heart because of this. After his father's death, Albus returned for his fifth year a new student, so to speak. He wasn't really patient yet, but he would stop to think a bit more. He'd always been a gifted student who didn't study enough to fully exploit his gifts. He'd have been prefect if he'd tried harder earlier. But that September of his fifth year Albus declared to the whole school during the Welcoming Feast that he would only answer to the name Albus. The next few days had the school staff buzzing about how prepared he was for every class. His academic performance that year was nearly flawless. Do you know he was the first student to receive an Outstanding Plus on an O.W.L? Oh, and Albus was so proud of your O Plus in Defense. Talked of little else that afternoon when he arrived back here, he did."

Harry blushed, then he asked a question to move the subject off of his grades, "He got his in Transfiguration. Madame Marchbanks told me with my O.W.L. letter results. Aberforth's goat, wasn't it?"

"Correct in one, Harry." She giggled again and covered her mouth for a moment this time. "It was a most fortuitous turn of events. Just as his Transfiguration Practical neared its end, the goat rampaged through the front doors, which had been cracked open for the breeze. It was unseasonably hot that Spring. Albus immediately Transfigured two tables into small dogs and sent them after the goat. They were small enough for the goat-monster to watch them but not Apparate away or go invisible. Albus was able to launch a string of spells and charms compressed into one blast that made that monstrosity unable to remove itself from sight - as well as begin the transformation back. The hideous creature bellowed and ran from the entryway. It went outside and we ran after it. After several explosions, much smoke and fire, and the sounding of a gong, which I never quite understood, there remained outside the front doors an unconscious, but otherwise unharmed standard sized goat.

"The examiners were suitably impressed, young Griselda Marchbanks was his personal examiner,

and his grades reflected his accomplishment. His sixth year was as stellar as his fifth, which was all the more praiseworthy considering how painful the Acceleration potions were in that first administration. His performance that year led him to become the first Head Boy at Hogwarts to have not been a prefect. I had to stare down the entire Board of Governors to see the rules changed, but it was worth it. Your father achieved that also, you know."

Before Harry could respond in any manner other than a grin, Drinkwater's image continued, "Albus performed admirably in that last Vampire war, and of course you know about his fight against Grindelwald."

"Uh, no." Harry had always been curious about that fight.

Drinkwater looked a bit cross. "Albus still has Binns teaching History." When Harry nodded, she continued, "He wasn't that good a teacher when he was alive. I inherited him and was able to get him off of Goblin Wars on occasions. But as a ghost... he's intractable." The former headmistress shook her head and let out a breath with a disgusted sound attached to it.

"Well, it started in 1936... no, better back up to the first Muggle World War..."

"Now, Professor Drinkwater." Harry was startled. Dumbeldore had entered the office silently, as he entered most rooms, and stopped the narrative.

"Oh, Percival, you call all the other former heads by their first names, even Armando, can't you call me Gertruda?"

"Madam, I count your friendship one of the most cherished I have from the walls of this office, but you will always be *my* headmistress. Therefore, you shall forever be just a little more revered by me."

"Why, Percival," Harry saw the pictured Drinkwater blush and look down. "You always did have a silver tongue, even more charming than that young rogue, Sirius Black, and Harry's father, James."

The legendary twinkle showed once again in his headmaster's eyes, and Harry wondered for the first time, but not the last, how that twinkle might have devastated the hearts of young witches over a hundred years before.

"I thank all of you for entertaining Harry while I was gone-"

A very fat former headmaster with overstated silver and green trim on his robes broke in, "'Twas all Gerdie. Talking on and on about you and that goat. Hasn't talked about any other subject but you since you became head. 'Percival and the goat. Percival and Grindelwald.' Least ways she finally started calling you by your desired name with Potter here-"

"And thank you for your observations, Ichabod. As delightful as all of this is, I must leave you and see to Harry's security and accommodations. Come, Harry."

They left the office, and before Harry could ask further about the fight with Grindelwald, Dumbledore

spoke. "You'll be delighted to know that Dobby was waiting for me when I walked out of my office when we first arrived. House-elves have amazing recuperative powers. I believe it comes from punishing themselves so much - a fact you might not want to share with Miss Granger." Before Harry could agree, Dumbledore continued.

"I instructed Dobby to Apparate to your room at your aunt and uncle's. He engaged a Silencing spell, and he should be finished transferring your possessions, equipment, and everything else you need to your new residence for the summer before we arrive. We'll make some changes to your accommodations and activities, well, I'll tell you about that in the morning. There are still thirty days or so to go, and I assume you still want to be in the Paladin Program?"

"Now more than ever, I guess, Professor. Am I staying here at Hogwarts?" Harry finally noticed that they had not used the fireplace in the headmaster's office, and they were not heading towards the front doors or the dormitories. They were about to reach the corridor containing the Room of Requirement.

"No, Harry. There are too many activities going on here this summer, and I want you able to be as safe as you would have been at your aunt's. You'll have your visits with the young ladies here, and take your Potions tutorials here, maybe some other things - we'll see. However, we will set traps for intruders in Gryffindor Tower, now that I think about it, so stay away from there. No, you'll spend most of your time at St. Simon's Parish, as you suggested."

Harry had anticipated the Room of Requirement, but Dumbledore walked past that section of the wall without a glance. At the end of the corridor, which was a dead end, there stood a lonely glass fronted and shelved case with nothing in it.

They stopped in front of it and Dumbledore spoke, "You know, Harry how a Secret-Keeper protects the hiding place in a *Fidelius* Charm, well this is similar - and different.

"The sanctuary protection for St. Simon's dates back to before the war that occurred when Salazar Slytherin left Hogwarts. Today, any student who wishes to attend services there knows of this entrance. Attendees of those services see only a small portion of its structure and grounds, and few of its buildings. Muggles only see a swamp.

"Most of the rest of St. Simon's Parish is available, even visible, only to those in need of the sanctuary provided by all of the property and grounds.

"At all times I can give access to the main church building for religious observances, but Father Martin only just now allowed me to grant access to the place you'll be staying this summer. I cannot stress how important, nor do I know all of the reasons why it is essential to keep this a secret."

Harry imagined a cloistered room, smaller than his room on Privet Drive, something with damp stonewalls and floors in a medieval Abbey. But, he would have access to his training room and kitchen somehow, so it couldn't be all bad or uncomfortable.

Dumbledore tapped him on the head with his wand, and said, "*Templum Editum Abstrudo.*" The clear glass and empty case transformed into a doorway about five and a half feet tall.

"You can now see this as a portal between Hogwarts and St. Simon's, but not as our students see it who attend services there. They go to a small office off of the main foyer of the church proper. You will arrive in a similar room in the cloistery. You cannot take anyone, *anyone* with you through this entrance. It is best that you not even tell your friends where you will be for the next few weeks. Blame me for asking you to keep it secret if it will help. You'll be able to meet them here and see them at headquarters. But, Harry, there are many reasons why you should never speak of this to anyone. Most of them are secrets of the millennia, and have nothing to do with you. You place more than yourself in danger if you even hint at this aspect of St. Simon's.

"Perhaps you can say you are staying in a small unused professor's room. Students cannot go there in Hogwarts, so your friends will not press you."

The headmaster opened the empty case/now door, and there appeared to be a passageway roughly cut in stone that was even smaller than the doorway. There was no light.

"Just take a step or two in, Harry, and you will see your way. Watch your head, people were much shorter over a thousand years ago."

Harry ducked down and proceeded forward. One step and the amount of light cut in half. Another step placed him in nearly complete darkness. Another step and Harry fell forward into a well-lit room with a small fireplace and several comfortable chairs. There had been a deeper than usual step into the room causing Harry to go down.

His Seeker reflexes, even faster after the potions and exercise of this summer, allowed him to catch himself easily as he neared the floor. It was covered with a thick rug. A strong gentle hand grabbed his arm and helped him stand. While he rose, Harry looked to his right and noticed that whoever was assisting him wore a medium gray robe. He stood and continued to look up, his eyes getting wider as he kept looking up and up to see the face of the one beside him.

Harry eventually looked into the crinkly, kindly, perhaps even jovial pale green eyes of a man just one inch shy of seven feet tall.

"Hello, Harry. Albus always forgets to tell students that the last step is an ankle-breaker, and that one's worse than the one in the church service's entry. Welcome to St. Simon's Parish. I'm Father William Martin. Has anyone ever told you that you look just like your father, but with your mother's eyes?"

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In one minute, Aberration Day would be over, and the four Hogwarts staff members gathered in the headmaster's office were united in their wish for it to have ended even sooner. As they waited for Dumbledore, none of them looked at any of the others. Though it seemed like days since that afternoon in the potions laboratory, it had been less than twelve hours. Since that time they had contacted by Floo the parent or guardian responsible for each student or small student group participating in the Paladin Program of the rising sixth years.

Even though the two were not visiting together that afternoon, Rebecca Bones, Susan's mother, accounted for her daughter and Justin Finch-Fletchley, since Justin's parents were Muggles. Trent Boots called in regarding his son, Terry and several other Ravenclaws in the program. Madam Jesmenda Patil actually walked through the Floo fireplace to discuss matters regarding her charges - her twin daughters and Dean Thomas. Madam Patil wanted to know exactly what she should tell Dean's Muggle parents.

It had taken hours, but all parents, guardians, or adults in any way helping to guide the young Paladins through this summer had reported in and were fully briefed in turn. The four present only waited for the headmaster to give their reports and attempt to advise him about the next steps.

Dumbledore walked into the office just as the last chime of midnight pealed from the clock above the fireplace.

"Good evening, my friends, and let me start by thanking you for your efforts of the last half day. You've been working tirelessly this past month, and now, today has caused your efforts to be redoubled. I cannot fully express my gratitude."

Professors McGonagall and Snape were not unfamiliar with this type of praise from their employer, and they humbly accepted it. But Professor Sinistra and Argus Filch had not received this level of gratitude from Dumbledore in their years of service with him.

It is not that Dumbledore did not express his appreciation for his staff's hard work; he sincerely complimented any accomplishment - staff or student. But there was something about the depth of feeling and warmth in his gaze this evening that tendered his warmest regard to each one present, far beyond the few words he spoke. The moment refreshed each one there, and confirmed that they were on a mission of importance.

"Now, what results do you have to report from your conversations with those helping our young Paladins?"

The three professors looked at each other, and by mutual yet unspoken consent, they replied from their left to right.

The Astronomy instructor started. "Professor... Albus, almost everyone I spoke to seemed to give a similar report. With only one exception, the students visiting together *only* kissed for nearly an hour. Each pair were discovered within a few minutes either way of the end of the time period - within the acceptable range of variance for ending their sessions. Each parent or guardian said that it took an effort to break them apart, but not more than in the very first visits. Each pair wanted to, er, move back together, but were back in control within a minute or two." With this last word she looked to her right.

Professor McGonagall reported, "I've heard only one report that differs from that exact finding. Mrs. Longbottom was a bit upset. She was not aware that this program was going on in this manner. Her brother-in-law, Algie, had signed the papers, and she was not aware of the full scope of the Paladin Program. I walked through the Floo and spent nearly an hour with her. Augusta is calm now, and has



agreed to allow the program to continue in her home as it has, but I would expect her to, shall we say, *express her full opinion*, the next time she sees you, Albus. I know she has made her feelings known to Neville's great-uncle."

The Transfiguration Professor continued, "Neville and his visitor were the one exception I heard about. Miss Lovegood was visiting the Longbottom estate, and she accidentally walked into the room where the visit was occurring. She stopped them a few minutes after the period began. She got them up on the exercise equipment at hand and made them talk and exercise at the same time. After they were set in their individual machines, Miss Lovegood fastened their hands to the devices with a sticking charm and left them for the rest of the session to talk and work off their... well, their urges. Augusta Longbottom would not have known about it had she not walked by at the exact moment for the session to end, when Miss Lovegood re-entered the room to release them."

Artemis Sinistra added, "Mrs. Weasley gave a similar report. She and the Grangers found Hermione and Ron in like circumstances only minutes after *they'd* started kissing. The two were parted and confined so they could end the session talking. That was interrupted. I believe you will tell us about the events regarding Mr. Potter. Oh, and Molly actually hung Ron upside down by his feet from the ceiling for a while."

The headmaster chuckled at this, and genuinely smiled without reservation for the first time in hours. "Yes, Molly told me briefly about this at St. Mungo's earlier this evening."

Severus Snape said, "Headmaster, I have no different report to offer outside of the common report for the majority of the students." The Potions master's eyes narrowed, bringing his eyebrows closely together in his scowling face. "What happened with Potter?" He used the name like it had an actual bitter taste. "We've heard at least part of the story."

All joy disappeared from Dumbledore's face, but a small amount of stubborn pride showed itself to those who knew him well. "While all of his fellow students were kissing, or at least wishing to kiss, Harry fought a progressive battle over several blocks of Little Whinging. Aurors and Magical Law Enforcement officers report finding nine wounded, four trussed, and eight dead Death Eaters within less than three tenths of a mile of Arabella Figg's former home."

"Former...?"

"Yes. The Death Eaters destroyed it with a vengeance. Miss Weasley escaped by Floo mere moments before Death Eaters destroyed the fireplace. There was nothing left of the house above a foot or two off of the ground. Aurors captured one Death Eater using an extraction spell to rip the pipes out of the ground. From the incomplete eye witness reports, we believe there were over forty Death Eaters involved, probably many more, Apparating on the site in major waves."

"Who fought them? How many casualties on our...?"

"Artemis," Dumbledore continued, a look of fierce pride and great concern on his face. "Several Death Eaters who were captured believed there had to be at least four or five Aurors in the center of the battle, but only Harry Potter faced their attack."

"But, but...." The Astronomy professor knew Potter had a reputation as a good fighter, but she'd not been privy to the discussions leading up to the inception of the Paladin Program. She'd only offered to help when her plans to visit Madagascar had fallen through. She'd also read the reports about Potter in the *Daily and Evening Prophets* and in the *Quibbler*, but had done so with a doubtful eye.

Snape dripped sarcastically, "The Boy Who Lived does it again. All hail the conquering hero. Why don't..."

"Severus." The headmaster's voice was even, but firm. "Could you have fought forty Death Eaters and survived?" After a moment, the headmaster continued. "Harry entered Arabella's house, and when there was no escape for her, Harry summoned his house-elf, attempted to combine their two Apparation powers - Arabella Figg is a Squib, Artemis, if you don't know. Supposedly Harry drew Apparation power from Dobby and Apparated all three of them to safety."

" But... all of that is... it's im-possible..."

"Potter tends to specialize in the impossible, Artemis," McGonagall said with pride. "Everything good you've read or heard about the boy is true, I dare say."

In an acidic tone Snape interjected, "Before we open the latest meeting of the Harry Potter Fan Club, might I remind you that he did not in any way complete his visit with a young lady today. I'll prepare the Termination Potion for him for tomorrow. He must drop out..."

"That is premature, Severus." Dumbledore said, holding his hand up to stop Professor McGonagall from charging into the verbal battle.

"Perhaps the Program can be saved, but Potter-"

"Tomorrow, Severus, we will administer the next potion in the series to all sixth year participants - on schedule. We will randomly test six groups at a time with the Analytics Devices to see where the students stand, and determine on a case-by-case basis who, if anyone, should be given the Termination Potion.

"I've called in Remus Lupin, and Professors Flitwick, Sprout, and Jiggers to help do the testing with different groups. Tomorrow the young Paladins receive doses at two different times, I believe. In seventy-two hours or so, we, those four and Minerva and Artemis, will have been able to test each member on the sixth year Acceleration potions. Severus, you and I will remain here to act as a quick response team for any adverse reactions. Poppy Pomfrey will be able to join us by mid-morning at the latest.

"When Minerva was in school and took these potions, the seventh years received a slightly tainted dose. They were watched closely, and none were affected adversely in the long run. It may be wise to prepare a cauldron of Termination Potion just in case, but we will not administer it unless I say so."

His words were obviously spoken in a manner to brook no discussion.

With a smile on his face, Dumbledore said, "Now, we must all get some sleep before mixing the first

batch of Accelerator in the morning. I am sorry you need to spend the next four hours on the Termination Potion, Severus. Might I be of assistance, or even do it for you?"

Snape's pride would not allow his headmaster to do his work for him.

As they all rose to go their separate ways, Dumbledore kept back Minerva McGonagall for a moment.

"I persuaded Harry to loan us his marvelous map. Would you be so kind as to Transfigure or Charm something to watch the map to alert us to the presence of the certain someone we discussed earlier?"

"Albus, if he comes here why not just capture him, he's killed enough-"

"He must report back, if we are going to allow Harry any movement away from his present location."

"I'd feel safer if Potter stays wherever you have him until September first."

"And then, Minerva, we would find him gone in two weeks or less. We cannot restrict him to solitary confinement, which is how he would view his pleasant but lonely present surroundings in a matter of days, if we told him he must stay there until September first. He is still a teenager."

Pursing her lips when she could find no argument against what Dumbledore had said, McGonagall blurted out, "And I cannot believe you've let him keep this map all this time. You do realize how much trouble he could have gotten into-"

"Yes, Minerva, on too many occasions he has wandered the corridors after hours and gotten food from the kitchen outside of meal times. But do you realize how many times he has solved a crisis in some part by consulting this map?"

She flung out her last desperate argument. "You spoil the boy, Albus."

"Yes. Perhaps I should more often."

The headmaster smiled blandly as he observed Minerva McGonagall's lips purse thinner than he'd ever seen them before.

---

The next morning Albus Dumbledore had just sent out the last person going into the field to observe student reactions to the latest dose of potions. They each carried a magical/medical Analytics Device - wizard patent pending - to determine what, if any, adverse effects had accrued from ingesting the tainted Acceleration potion the day before. Professor Sprout wanted one additional demonstration of how to record the data from the device.

The headmaster expected no one to have any adverse response to today's potion, because of the reasons he'd given his four staff members the night before.

The fourth attendee of the meeting the previous night, the one who had not spoken, was not going out

by Floo today, because Squibs can't travel by Floo. Argus Filch was proving to be even more invaluable during this program. He usually knew instantly how to accomplish in some simple manner, whatever crisis of the moment needed a quick solution. Filch had a feel for magic and a *feel* for magic. He had not only observed a huge variety of magical activities over his decades of service to Hogwarts, he had the recently discovered Squib's Sense for magic. He'd always felt magic occur all around him and could discern magic's ebbs and flows, tastes and smells. No one had ever spoken of being able to make such tactile observations of magic, but Filch had proven himself 'magical' in his abilities to use such sensory elucidations to actually defend the castle and some of its occupants.

As she worked with the others supporting the Paladin Program, Professor Sinistra had been surprised to find the confidence placed in the caretaker by Dumbledore, McGonagall, and especially Severus Snape. Because of the traumatic events in her own life during the first war with Voldemort, Artemis Sinistra had hidden at Hogwarts and ignored all around her - teaching Astronomy needed no awareness of current events. She was the only Hogwarts professor to have never mentioned to Harry anything about his past, or look at his scar after his first day in her classroom.

Each day this summer had revealed to her more and more about past and present activities of the Order of the Phoenix, and the battles waged by those not in the Ministry of Magic. She had almost decided to officially seek Order membership, beyond just helping in small ways.

More often than not, it was Argus Filch who explained in detail how she should accomplish many of what she considered her menial assignments this summer. Amazingly, after the caretaker's explanations, she realized that there were no small tasks given by Dumbledore - everything needed to be done or it was not assigned.

On this bright and sunny day, Argus Filch stood sweeping in the potions lab. Professors Dumbledore and Snape were preparing the parchments to record the findings from the day's analysis, and discussing where the deciding lines should be for inclusion or exclusion of students adversely affected by the potions from the previous day.

Filch croaked incoherently, and the other two in the lab looked his way. He said, "Breach... not a threat..." and sunk to his knees, barely holding himself up with the broom.

Dobby Apparated into the room. His left arm was attached at his hip instead of his shoulder. He'd weakened himself quite a bit assisting Harry the day before. Dobby had been instructed that even house-elves would have problems moving directly between St. Simon's and Hogwarts. He should go halfway between them, rest for a minute or two, and continue to the other. Apparently he'd not followed that rule this morning.

"Dobby!" said Dumbledore. "You've splinched-"

Dobby interrupted, "HARRY POTTER SIR IS HURTING - IS VOMITING - IS WORSE! Forget Dobby! PLLEEAASSSEEE GO HELP HARRY POTTER SIR!"

Dobby raised his right hand to snap his fingers. Dumbledore grabbed his hand and prevented it. The headmaster spoke quickly. "Harry wouldn't want you hurt any more. We'll go immediately, but

promise you will *walk* to see Madam Pomfrey."

"Dobby promises. PLEASE hurry, Sir!"

Snape had been gathering everything he could think of and turned to Dumbledore. "Shall we Portkey?"

"We can't Portkey there. But it is only two minutes away if we run."

Snape knew of nowhere that you couldn't Portkey, but he stopped wondering about this when he realized that the man over a hundred years his senior was easily outrunning him.

The Potions master had never considered attending any church services - he'd sneer at the idea, but he was aware that the school maintained some sort of connection to a religious facility of some nature.

While observing the manner of exit and entry, Snape wondered how there could be no Portkey access. Then he experienced the light-darkness-light of traveling to St. Simon's. He fell on his face at the step, causing his nose to bleed a bit but not breaking it. Dumbledore stepped over him and did not even ask as to his condition, but ran even faster towards the shouts.

"Down here! Hurry!"

Snape entered the door, and started down the steps as he looked about the room. It was circular and about fifty-five to sixty feet in diameter. All of the equipment of a Paladin Workout facility was there as well as bedroom furniture. Also around the room he could see a study area with small library, and a kitchen and table for eating.

In the eating area, on the floor, the Potions professor saw a huge man in gray robes holding Potter in his lap. Potter was face down and shaking as if having some sort of seizure. There was evidence of the young man having vomited a good deal of food and other stomach content on the floor near his head.

Dumbledore knelt down to examine Harry and Father Martin said, "I gave him a bezoar, and he barely improved. What villainy resists a bezoar, Albus?"

"Severus-"

"I'll administer the Termination potion, headmaster-"

"No, that may poison him further. Please hand me your Analytics Device. William, please hold him on your lap for one more minute."

Dumbledore aimed the device at Harry and adjusted the many knobs. He tapped his wand on it twice during the proceedings. Finally, a bell rang, which surprised Snape - such a sound was not one of the indicators they had discussed when Dumbledore had trained the others on the device that morning. A small piece of parchment covered with runes flew out of the top of the instrument.

Dumbledore examined it for less than ten seconds as said, "Just as I had suspected, Termination

potion would have killed him. As it is we need to get him to the hospital wing-

"Professor-

"Yes, correct, Severus. William, let's lift Harry off of you." The big man moved Harry as one would a wee child. "Severus, please check the kitchen cabinets and find vinegar, soda powder, and two glasses of water."

"The lad's had enough Albus, can't we-

"He's not safe yet, William. All this will do is give him a sore throat for a few days at most. Most of it he's ejected or he'd be dead by now."

To the Potions master he said, "Severus, place a teaspoon of soda in one glass of water, stir it, and hand it to me. Then place two teaspoons of vinegar in the other."

The headmaster gently placed the first glass to Harry's lips and coaxed him to drink about half of it. What had appeared to be a fit or seizure had lessened to shivers, proving it had not been any sort of seizure.

"Harry, this is going to hurt when it comes back up, but you MUST drink from each glass quickly, as much as possible, but quickly - at least half of the first glass, then as much as possible of the second before you vomit."

The lad nodded briefly, giving the only indication that he was aware of his surroundings or condition. He swiftly drank about half the glass, grabbed the second and started to down it, but interrupted it to project more stomach content several feet away from him. After there was nothing left to eject, Harry experienced the dry heaves through several more retches.

Dumbledore took him in his arms. "You're safe; you're safe now. I am sorry. Harry, I never considered that this would be the outcome. You've done it once again - the impossible. But you'll be all right now. Sleep for as long as you can. Someone will be with you. Your throat will hurt until I can get something from Poppy, but you're out of the woods. Life will be much easier now, I promise. You've done well, lad, very well indeed. I'm very proud of you."

The headmaster sat there for five minutes humming a tuneless melody, rocking the grown lad in his arms. Then he nodded to Father Martin who helped him put Harry on his side on his bed. Snape stood there speechless and confused the whole time. The three men walked far enough away to whisper and not wake the Harry. The man in monastic robes dwarfed the other two.

"William, can you sit with him until I find someone-

"I'll stay with him all day. Albus, if need be. I've no commitment until evening vespers."

"It won't take that long, old friend, I will have someone here in a few hours. If my hunch is right, we can move him where there is easier care for him by nightfall, but he still needs his room here if that still suits you, William."

"Headmaster-" Snape tried to ask one of his multitudinous questions.

"Please forgive me, gentlemen. Severus, this is Father William Martin of the Grey Friars, and parish priest of St. Simon's Parish."

Snape raised one eyebrow with this revelation. The Grey Friars were considered by some to be mythical, or at least extinct - a religious order of celibate contemplatives considered very powerful, regardless of whether they were Muggle or magical.

"And this, William, is my Potions master, Professor Severus Snape."

"I've heard much about you, Professor Snape, I've consulted with many of your students."

"Do you tutor in potions, Father?"

"No, I've counseled them not to try to kill you, Professor." As the younger professor swallowed and frowned, the Church of England priest chuckled and said, "It's not that bad, Severus. I just couldn't resist." Turning, he said, "Albus, what's wrong with the lad?"

"Nothing is wrong, William, he had the very predictable reaction any fully grown male would if he took the Acceleration potion designed for a fifteen year old."

Somehow, Severus Snape just knew that Harry Potter had done it to him again, and he had no idea what it was that he'd done.

---

At the end of the first day after Aberration Day, twelve Analytics Devices reports and the accompanying parchment rune read-outs all confirmed so far that no one would have to drop out of the Paladin Program. The four students involved in the situations where they did not spend the hour kissing checked out fine - but a bit thrown back to the time when they were more tempted at the start of the visit to go for each other. The other ten groups studied this day, where they did nothing but kiss in that aberrant session, showed no adverse affects either. However, all of them seemed to be back at the start of needing to learn to curb their desires to rush into a 'visit' kissing.

It was determined that these students would have constant supervision for at least the starting five to ten minutes of each visit, and those monitoring these visits would listen in and look in regularly. There was only one month to go for the program as it was, and all monitors understood that this was important to the future of wizardkind.

Harry Potter would be dropped from the potions altogether - his records marked 'completed.' He'd registered on the Analytics Device as an eighteen year old in all ways, even though the next day would be his sixteenth birthday. He would be monitored for a few days, but Dumbledore and a much disgruntled Severus Snape felt that he no longer needed any physiological growth to participate in the Auror Training parts of this Autumn's class schedule.

However, no amount of questions or discussion could indicate to anyone where Harry was

emotionally. He seemed fine. He said that he was fine. So, of course that could mean anything.

Just as Dumbledore stood from his desk to go to dinner, Minerva McGonagall's head called from the fireplace, asking him to come to her office. The headmaster complied and dusted himself off as he walked to her desk.

"He's here, Albus, just as you supposed. I wish you let me transform and chase him down. A Gryffindor as a Death Eater, indeed."

"Pull back your claws, please, Minerva. Hopefully today he will serve *our* purposes."

For well over an hour that particularly odious rodent with a silver paw traversed the corridors and walls and loose floorboards of Hogwarts. He checked every dormitory and each unoccupied professor's quarters, looking for evidence of one Harry Potter.

Mrs. Norris almost caught the rat, but he had previously outsmarted that gifted cat for nearly three years, and was able to do so again. Finally he made his way to the edge of the forest and began to move at a speed that indicated he'd Transfigured back to a man.

"Please reestablish your... what did you transfigure to watch this map?"

"A pair of old reading glasses, Albus. I gave it a Portkey to trip over to carry it to me if it needed to report any unwarranted visitor. It was able to constantly monitor the entire map around the clock with no rest."

"Always so practical, Minerva. I might have chosen my old Victrola to play an aria as loudly as possible should it see anything."

Before she could respond, there were three knocks, then a pause and one more. Minerva McGonagall called, "Come."

"I noticed that... er, excuse me, professors." Argus Filch shuffled in with a tray on his left hand held like a waiter might at a restaurant. He turned red-faced and looked around like he wished *he* could vanish into a wall crack at this moment.

Dumbledore turned from whispering, "*mischief managed*," and folding the old piece of parchment so it would disappear into his robes. "Argus, I have kept Professor McGonagall occupied through the dinner hour. How thoughtful of you to bring that tray to her. She and I have been discussing possible places for a small Animagus Death Eater to enter Hogwarts unannounced. Why don't the two of you take a walk around the castle and see what can be done to eliminate these chinks in our armor - after you eat, of course, Minerva. Good night. Good night, Argus."

The door closed and the sound of Dumbledore whistling faded down the corridor. The tune sounded something like "*Love is a Many-Splendored Thing*."

When the whistling could no longer be heard, the red-faced caretaker turned to the professor. "I'm sorry, Min. You didn't want anyone..."



"Argus," she placed her cool hand on his left arm; it felt anything but cool. "Never doubt that Albus knew minutes after we did." None of her students would have believed the smile on her face. "What did you bring me from dinner, Argus?"

---

*Dear Penny,*

*I should have written this long before now, it has been nearly five weeks. A lot has been happening but that's no excuse.*

*Ron was my first friend; he is my dearest friend, and Percy might have told you about the second task in the Tri-wizards Tournament. All that being said, I cannot guess what his reaction will be to Percy coming back. Oh, Ron will be mad, but will it be one explosion? Will it be a quick hex to express his displeasure, and then all's forgiven? Or will he hold a long-term grudge? I can clearly see all three happening.*

*The twins will definitely prank Percy unmercifully, but if Percy takes it like any of the other Weasleys would - laugh and prank them back - the terrible duo will probably come around.*

*I don't know Charlie or Bill well enough, but I would have Percy write Bill from the 'big brother I need your help' approach. I think he will be furious also - let's face it, Weasleys all have tempers - but Bill can put aside his anger to help a family member. And Bill is probably closest to Charlie.*

*You two might also consider talking to Mr. and Mrs. Weasley first. Have Percy paper airplane his dad at work and invite both parents to dinner. Tell them it's a secret. Have Percy pour out his heart - you help him pour out his heart. I doubt he's much better at it than Ron, unless he's drunk, as you wrote earlier.*

*Mrs. Weasley wants Percy back badly, and I believe Mr. Weasley does too, but he will be a bit stern about it at first.*

*It's also very important to get Ginny on your side. I truly believe she knows her brothers better than anyone, and has a history of getting her way with them, by gentle persuasion or a battery of*

*hexes and jinxes I don't want to think about, much less experience.*

*Go for the parents first. Then ask them to help get you to Ginny.*

*Next, write Bill. Those four will help you with the other four.*

*For my part, well I'm a little unavailable right now, but I'm putting another letter in with this one for you to use if you have to.*

*Best wishes for your success,*

*Harry*

The next letter read:

*Dear Family,*

*You've all called me family, and you can't imagine how much that means to me. But more important - you may not know what it means to you.*

*I never had a family that I remember. You taught me what family love is. Perhaps, not having it for so long makes me appreciate it more than you do. I mean no insult in saying this. Enough of the orphan sob story. I love you all more than I can ever express - that's the big thing for me.*

*One other member of "my" Weasley family knows how bad it is to not have the Weasley family love - Percy. He has changed. I don't know this firsthand, but Penny Clearwater took him back, and she has convinced me that he has changed and regrets his actions more than he can express. Now he wants to express his regrets to each of you.*

*Perhaps his appreciation of the Weasley family love is greater than mine. I never had it, but then received it. He had it and then lost it. Losing the love you give me scares me more than facing Voldemort.*

*I've always enjoyed how you lot could always argue and yell and fight, and still love each other. But only a large crowd would ever fight a Weasley if there were others of you nearby. If I've upset any of you with this letter, well, I apologize. I'll face your wrath for the good of one you love and despise at the moment.*

*Hex away.*

*Your adopted son and brother,*

*Harry*

---

Harry had made a concerted effort all summer long to clear his mind and attempt to put up as much of an Occlumency shield as he could muster to protect his sleep. He'd had bad dreams, but nothing that anyone who'd seen death at close hand wouldn't experience. Except for the dream about attacking the Grangers, (which was Harry seeing into Riddle's mind, not the reverse of that) Harry had experienced no other incursion into his mind by Voldemort - yet.

This late morning, while he slept off the ravaging effects of his system rejecting most of the potion he'd ingested, and after surviving Dumbledore's makeshift purgative, Harry had had no mental preparation and no shielding at all while he slept. Plus, this morning he was dreaming about the battle

he'd participated in the previous afternoon. Eight people were dead, he'd heard, but seven of those eight had been those hit by boulders, barrier rocks, overturned automobiles, or the like. They'd been far away from his line of sight, and strangers to him.

But Harry had known Marcus Flint after a fashion. He'd not known Flint well, and he'd not liked him, but he had known him. His death was up close and personal. Harry would remember his few hoarse screams and the horrid look on his burning face, forever. Flint didn't deserve to die in a blazing fireball, but this was war, a war Harry did not choose, but a war he had to fight. Marcus chose to kill or die, and Harry had made his choice. Harry had needed to save himself to save all of his friends. Had he anything in his digestive tract at all, he'd have awakened and lost it. Instead, his mind was almost completely open to attack.

It started with a cold, cold laugh. Next came a word of congratulations.

*"Splendid work, Potter. Any of my Death Eaters you can kill deserve to die. They are too weak to live as my servants if your pathetic efforts, refusing to use the Killing Curse, can take them. What utter fools."*

*"Join me, Potter, finding your justification for Flint's death is too much effort. Join me and we'll rule together. I'll even give you the lives of your friends, even that old fool, Dumbledore. Serve me, they'll serve you, and it will protect them. If not, I'll hunt them down one by one and end their lives in slow- What? What's this? NO- - "*

Harry heard the sounds that had been indistinguishable in the background until just that second. It was a strong but kindly voice Harry heard calling his name and chastising Voldemort.

*"Leave, you foul demon of hell. This one is not destined for your recruitment. He makes his own choices."*

There was another voice - a voice calling him from outside the dream. It was the same protective voice though. *"Harry. Harry, do you hear me? Come to my voice and wake up. He's gone, at least for now. Wake up..."*

*"...Harry. Wake up, Harry. Ah, there you are. Here, eat this bit of chocolate. It's Honeydukes Dark Chocolate. I prefer it, and they send a large batch to me each month."*

It was Father Martin. Harry had started screaming moments after Voldemort had entered his mind. The huge man was kneeling by Harry and supporting him to sit up so he could eat the sweet.

"Fath-, Uhm. Father Martin. Are you an Occlumens; I mean Legilimens? Did you enter my mind-?"

"No, Harry, well, yes I am both of those, but I didn't enter your mind or that evil creature's. I used my preferred method of battle. How are you feeling? Do you want to go back to sleep, or are you too awake for that now? He shouldn't bother your sleep again this day if you want..."

"No, sir, oh, Father, er..."

"You can call me 'Father,' or 'Sir,' or just 'William.' That's what my friends call me, and I hope we can be friends. Your parents eventually called me by my given name. I'd really prefer you start with it if you like, but many see my robes and feel they can't."

Harry blinked several times. The big man had placed his glasses on his face just as Harry had opened his eyes. He saw the man clearly, but he was so huge it was unsettling.

Hagrid had been Harry's first adult friend, which was different than his friendships with Ron and Hermione. The gentle half-giant was well over two feet taller than Father Martin and much wider. But Hagrid was *Hagrid*, so in Harry's thinking, Father Martin was the biggest person he'd ever seen.

"Uhm... William, erm, how did you... I mean, if you didn't use...?"

"Harry, it's a long story. But St. Simon's isn't just a church parish, there is an abbey on the grounds. We're actually in the basement of that building. It's a devoted life of prayer for over twenty years that helped me break through to you and drive out Voldemort." The priest used that name with no more fear than he used Harry's own. "Prayer can be a weapon to stop evil."

"But you're a wizard also, aren't you? Remus, Remus Lupin told me that you went to Hogwarts in the thirties..."

"Yes, Harry, I'm a pretty good wizard, *and* an Occlumens and Legilimens if you'll allow my lack of modesty. But fighting evil is not only the task of wizardkind. The most effective person of prayer in the monastery is Brother Lawrence. He's a Muggle, but he's so much more disciplined than I am in his prayer walk. I'm just a young pup, really in this. You'd be amazed... but, Harry, this conversation is too much now. And before you get angry with me - Remus and Albus have both told me of your temper when people don't tell you what you want to know.

"But do you remember your first year at Hogwarts? If you'd tried to cast a Patronus Charm then, when you couldn't even levitate your feather, how successful do you think you'd have been trying the Patronus? A life of contemplation and prayer can have a power of its own, and it fights evil in a very different way than you have in your battles. But there can be a more direct confrontation between one who prays and such evil, as you just experienced.

It is very different from your experiences, and I am talking on a level far too complicated to go further. Imagine trying to understand the most advanced text on Arithmancy if you've never even heard of the subject. If you're really interested, we can start with the basic concepts needed before beginning the habit of praying, but first I think I should help you with Occlumency. That you can use right away in this fight you face, and you are far enough along in your magical training to put it into effect immediately.

Harry nodded agreement and Father Martin asked, "First, please tell me about yesterday."

Harry knew he needed to talk this one out. He'd not discussed the battle at the Department of Mysteries with anyone. Perhaps this time he would get it off of his chest right away - see how that worked.

He just started at the beginning, even telling about Fudge's personal Aurors attacking him. Just over ten minutes later, Father Martin stopped nodding at appropriate moments at the end of the tale, and just stared at Harry for a moment.

"Your life has been hard, and now this. I'm sorry there's nothing I can do to change things, but I will pray for you."

"Er, thank you." Harry thought that this was something Father Martin might do at bedtime, but instead he closed his eyes, and silently began to pray. Harry did not know what to do, so he just closed his eyes.

It might have been moments or hours, but the prayer probably lasted about five minutes. Father Martin said, "Amen," and Harry felt much better. He still had killed eight Death Eaters the day before. Harry still had to face Voldemort some day. He still did not know what the vomiting that morning had meant. But Harry felt like there was some unexplainable hope for him. And he'd take that for now.

"Do you feel like eating anything, Harry?"

"I... I am hungry, but I'm on a special diet-"

"Not any more, Albus told me you can eat anything you want, whenever you want. How about eggs and bangers? It's about all I can do, or I can get my cook, Mrs. Ferguson to fix something."

"Eggs," Harry said, trying to keep the disappointment out of his voice. He must be out of the Paladin Program he thought, if he didn't have to maintain the strict diet any more.

Just as the eggs disappeared from his plate, Harry looked up to see Dumbledore walk into the basement room with Dobby following closely behind. The house-elf ran to Harry and nearly knocked him breathless with a sincere hug.

"Harry Potter SIR is safe, is all well, but Harry Potter SIR is off the schedule." Dobby snapped his fingers and the journal appeared, opened to the correct page evidently. "Harry Potter SIR is to be eating a steak and kidney pie with three loaded baked potatoes in twenty-two minutes along with-"

"Dobby," Dumbledore interrupted, "Harry doesn't need to maintain the diet schedule any more. Nor does he need the potions or the visits on schedule, although, Harry, I hope you will meet with some of the young ladies to keep them on their schedules."

"Yes, sir," Harry said dejectedly.

Dobby ran to the stove and took a heavy boiler from the top. He immediately began hitting himself in the head with it. Harry was there in a flash and grabbed the pot. They tussled while the priest looked on in shock and professor, in amusement.

"Dobby, I told you to *never* punish yourself-"

"But, Harry Potter SIR is failed the Paladin Program and is Dobby's fault. Sir must give Dobby

clothes." The house-elf said the last sentence tearfully.

Dumbledore interjected, "No, Dobby, Harry has not failed. He has completed the program, or at least the Acceleration potions part. He became sick this morning because, by some manner, yesterday he completed all of the growth and physical maturation processes. The testing shows that he is physically an eighteen year old. I am proud of you, Dobby, I've never seen such loyalty and fine service from a house-elf in all my years. You helped rescue Harry yesterday, somehow, we're still not sure how it happened, but regardless, your Harry Potter SIR has a house-elf that should be the envy of all owners of house-elves."

Dobby's eyes got bigger than Harry had ever seen. He started to turn a bright pink and blew up like a small fireworks display. Dumbledore and Martin were startled and started to stand but Harry held up his hands to stop them.

In less than three seconds Dobby rematerialized in the smoke and Harry said, "Dobby, could you fix us some light refreshments, whatever you want to fix, and fix whatever your favorite treat is for yourself, okay?"

"Harry Potter SIR is the most kindest and most bravest and most wonderful-"

"Dobby."

"Yes, sir, Harry Potter SIR. Dobby is gushing again." Dobby snapped his fingers, off to probably fix a banquet, for a light snack.

"Albus," Father Martin said, "I've never seen such a bond between a house-elf and master."

Harry blushed and Dumbledore responded, "Dobby is an unusual house-elf; Harry is an unusual master. It is a fine tale for Harry to tell you, if you can extract the story of his second year out of him."

The headmaster turned to Harry and said, "So congratulations, you've amazed me again - doing the impossible and coming out in better shape than before going in. No more potions or special foods, although you should continue eating healthy foods and keep at the exercise, that will not end September first, only become a part of everything else. And I do need you, Harry, to keep visiting with the young ladies, for their own good, and maybe for yours. The Analytics Device does not measure emotional development. But then, our emotions never stop growing. And I find that keeping company with the fairer sex is always delightful, even though to this day, I am not sure I understand them.

"There is one more thing the Analytics Device told us - you do not need to go back to the Dursleys any more this summer. That has apparently been covered so to speak, in this rapid maturation process." Dumbledore stopped as if trying to make a decision. "It is too early to tell, we'll know in January I suppose, but you may not have to go back there next summer at all, if this is fulfilled completely. There is a fifty-fifty chance you're finished with that also. Fifty-fifty mind you, don't get too set on not going there."

As that subject ended, Father Martin said, "Albus, Harry and I have been talking. Would you allow me to teach him Occlumency? I know I am not as experienced with teaching it as you, but..."

"William, asking you to do so was on my list today. But why...?" He turned to Harry with alarm. "Did you have another dream?"

"Yes, sir. I've had bad dreams all summer long, but Tom hasn't been in contact since the Grangers - of course I just saw that. He didn't know I did or he'd have called it off." Harry shook his head to himself. "So this is the first time *he's* come after me since the... that afternoon dream when..."

The headmaster started speaking, hoping it would keep Harry off of the death of Sirius. "William, old friend, if you're amenable, I think I will let Harry tell you anything and everything he wants to, when he wants to." The Grey Friar nodded in agreement and the headmaster turned. "Harry, you will not have such a strict schedule now that you are not tied to exact times for the potions, meals, and exercise. I still need you to visit if you will, as I've said. Having you unavailable has made the schedule tight today. Ron had to Portkey to Northumberland. Once we have all of the security in place, you can go to Hogwarts and be with your friends more easily, and visit with other young ladies of your acquaintance. One of the benefits you've not been able to experience so far this summer, is that many of our Paladins have become friends or better friends with those they've visited with. Already being such good friends with Miss Granger and Miss Weasley..."

"I can still visit with Ginny can't I? Er, and Hermione too..." Harry blurted this out, and he almost missed the rest of what Dumbledore said as he pondered *just how much* his best friend's sister meant to him, even though he thought she was dating his dorm mate.

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled but Harry was too busy fighting confusion and a blush to notice. "Yes, Harry, you will '*visit*' Miss Weasley from time to time, however, with easier access to Hogwarts and no requirements as to staying with your aunt, you will be able to spend non-Paladin '*visit*' time with your friends more easily, *particularly* with Miss Weasley.

"Like Miss Granger and her brother, Miss Weasley can come to Hogwarts through the secure Floo in my office. She is no longer needed for Paladin visits with you because you are not taking them, but you can arrange to see her, er, and all of your friends more freely once we have established safe and random routines for your presence at the school also."

Harry looked slightly uncomfortable with Dumbledore's nearness to his thoughts, so the headmaster continued. "Many Paladins come to Hogwarts to run around the lake as a part of their exercise regimen, and some use the Defense classrooms to practice some of their spell work. It is most gratifying to hear a member of your DA explain how to cast a particular Defensive spell. You've trained them not only how to perform these pieces of magic, but they also can teach. And not just the two young Weasleys, Miss Granger. and Mr. Longbottom. I've overheard Miss Bones, Miss Brown, and Mr. Boot effectively helping a classmate with their spell work."

Before Harry could make any comment throwing off on his contribution, Dumbledore changed the conversation direction. "Harry, I'd like you to continue with your Potions tutorial, but now you can do it at Hogwarts. We need to keep everyone from knowing you come to the school on any sort of regular

basis, but we can probably make it look very random. Many of your fellow Paladins who are pulling up their grades are coming to Hogwarts during the day for some, if not all of their tuition as I have implied, so you can slip in easily.

"Soon, possibly today, we will have the security precautions in place and will have diverted attention away from Hogwarts as your place of residence. Then you can travel there carefully. The diversions and subterfuges are the key, so I cannot promise when. Surely a few days at most will see you able to move about more than you have been all summer."

It was the perfect time for an interruption. "Mr. Harry Potter SIR, 'tis all right to serve, sir?"

"Hungry, gentlemen? I have a feeling this will be quite a 'snack.'"

With the nod of their heads, Dobby snapped his fingers and the table, able to seat four comfortably and six with a little crowding, groaned under the weight of the food that appeared there.

All of Harry's favorites that Dobby had cataloged over the years were displayed. The three ate heartily, and followed Harry's lead in noisily applauding Dobby's efforts. It wasn't hard to do; everything was excellent.

Harry asked Dobby to join them, but the house-elf reminded him that he could not eat at the same table as his master.

"Can you eat at the same times as I do, if you are nearby to serve me if I call?"

"Yes, sir, Harry Potter SIR."

Harry drew his wand and casually conjured a table, chair, table cloth and eating utensils just the size for Dobby. The house-elf smiled and batted his eyes.

Father Martin said, "Harry, that's very sophisticated charm work there for someone starting his sixth year. Albus, has teaching magic advanced that far from when I was his age?"

The headmaster's eyes merely twinkled. After a silent moment, Harry said, "Uhm, I never was taught that. I've seen and heard similar conjuring before, but I just did what made sense. I don't know..."

The parish priest said, "Never mind. It's not important. I've heard you are beyond your years; you've just proven it."

During lunch, with much coaxing from Dumbledore and Martin, Harry related how he'd met and eventually gained the services of Dobby, and then briefly went over his lack of success with Professor Snape and Occlumency lessons. But in the back of his mind, Harry could not stop thinking about the conjured table and chair. Even though he'd made an O in Charms on his O.W.L.s, he'd never considered himself *advanced* in Charms, just good in his year's skill level. He wondered how he'd done that bit of magic.

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Harry's birthday was a small affair. The afternoon before, the rat Peter Pettigrew made his reconnaissance of Hogwarts. That evening Dumbledore told Harry and Father Martin about their subterfuges and the party the next day.

Harry traveled from the fireplace in Dumbledore's office to twelve, Grimmauld Place in the early afternoon to have a one-hour program 'visit' with Hermione - then the party would occur so Harry could be back in his safe house, as they were calling it, before nightfall. For Hermione, their 'visit' was a replay of their first time together under the potion's influence. She slipped by her father but this time, Harry grabbed her wrists and held her in place before her father could take her. She reacted like all the rest of her fellow sixth year Paladin participants - they were back at the starting point in terms of personal control, and all of the professors, parents, and guardians were glad there would be only one more month before the start of school to calm them all down.

However, with Hermione that day, and on every other program visit he made with a young lady that summer, Harry acted like an adult supervising the visit, instead of only participating. He was off of the potions and now merely an observer - though not like Ginny Weasley. Harry was on the other side of the age equation - older than his various visit partners.

The fact that she rushed at Harry lips first and Harry had not, mortified Hermione. Harry tried to explain to her how he was not on the potions anymore, so he wouldn't react this way. Even explaining how the aberrant potion had set her back at the starting point, as it did all of her fellow Paladins, did not mollify her. She knew all of this in her head, but her pride and desire to be in control betrayed her.

Harry was a bit flustered by Hermione's surge of emotions - this was his first 'visit' since Aberration Day - but he was also Hermione's friend. He helped her go through the usual questions and discussion ideas for a visit, but even in the hyper-rational part of her hour with him, she could not stop blushing about her actions earlier, regardless of how hard Harry tried to explain why he was unaffected. She fully understood in her mind, but not in her emotions. It had been all right when they both were compelled by their urges. But this was differently embarrassing to her.

She also couldn't stop asking Harry how he was doing. Over and over she kept asking about him in hardly different ways. Harry's patience with her made this even more unbearable.

After a break of nearly a ten minutes, Harry's birthday party took place. The three Grangers, Molly, Ron, and Ginny Weasley, and Remus Lupin were there the whole time. Tonks tripped in for about thirty minutes and gave Harry a complete bound set of Aurors' Training Manuals. Madam Bones, the department head for Magical Law Enforcement herself had called Tonks and suggested the gift, as well as made a contribution. Several Aurors such as Kingsley Shacklebolt gave money towards the set, but the surprise was that Dawlish and the toupee wearing Williamson also contributed.

Mad-Eye Moody popped in and gave Harry a handheld Foe Glass. Dumbledore sent Harry a copy of a very old book about combining spells for rapid use. It was a hand-written codex produced in 1269 in difficult to understand Middle English, but the headmaster had also given him what looked like a magnifying glass, but instead of enlargement, it made middle-to-modern English translations.

Unique to his birthday this year, the Weasleys and Remus Lupin had inheritance money to spend on Harry. Remus gave him a hard case for his Firebolt that kept it warm even during winter. Ron gave Harry an expensive pair of Omnioculars that had extended recording capabilities and split screen viewing so he could monitor current play and watch a replay at the same time.

Mr. Weasley sent his regrets about not being able to attend because of work, but Mrs. Weasley gave him a new knitted Weasley summer weight short-sleeved jumper with a stag on it in Gryffindor colors - *and* - she and her husband gave Harry five new pairs of jeans in various shades of blue, and ten new tee shirts and collared three button tennis shirts. They also gave him two new pairs of trainers - one black pair, and the other in white with dark blue trim.

Ginny gave Harry a book of sorts, but a photo album rather than any instructional book. She had contacted Colin Creevey two weeks earlier, and commissioned Colin to make copies of most of the better photos he'd recorded over the years of Harry and his friends. Ginny had sent Colin a magical accordion-style album that her mother had charmed. It was less than an inch thick but could hold over three hundred different photos. It was obvious that Harry was truly touched by this gift. However, not wanting to slow the party, the four friends decided to look at all of the pictures together later. Harry promised to share the book with anyone present who might be interested.

Hermione gave Harry an instant release arm holster for his wand. It attached to his right arm, his wand arm, and it was charmed to only release when Harry wanted his wand - right into his right hand, ready to cast any bit of magic needed. It was also charmed to help resist the *Expelliarmus* spell, and was Disillusioned to be invisible when Harry wore a short-sleeved shirt.

Harry was delighted with this gift. "You and I have discussed this, Hermione, how I want to be able to draw my wand quicker, and be able to hold onto it better in a fight. Thank you. I really like it. I've thought about going to Ollivanders for one just like this. It's great. It would have made things easier the other day." That comment was a small bomb ticking so all could hear.

"It's our turn, Harry." Steph Granger stepped up hoping to change the subject with their gift. Sylvia was right beside him.

Almost all of the Grangers' assets were still frozen, as the wizard solicitors Dumbledore had forced Fudge to hire, tried to untangle the legal/financial mess stemming from the falsely placed evidence of a methamphetamine lab in the dentists' destroyed office. Though their income had halted and they had no access to their savings, they had no real expenses. Harry had nearly pitched a fit when they tried to refuse him the chance to pay their host at Grimmauld Place. Though the Order had control of the house for the duration of the war, Dumbledore wisely let Harry handle this. Hermione's parents reluctantly accepted, and accepted that they would pay no board either, but they insisted on helping out where they could around the house. However, soon they were making small contributions in Galleons to the general household operating fund. They were being paid a small stipend out of Hogwarts funds for their part-time work with the Paladin program.

All except Moody were surprised when Steph and Sylvia Granger gave Harry a knife and arm sheath. Hermione's father said, "It's the identical Fairbairn design as mine, but it's made with the new low carbon steel that remains shiny. So of course I had them blacken it for stealth purposes. The bright,

sharpened edges look wicked though, don't they? The sheath's just like mine and goes on your arm so you can draw the blade with the opposite hand, but it can also attach to a belt if you choose. I asked Moody, and he placed a Disillusionment charm on it also, so you can wear it hidden from sight like your wand holster. I'll give you knife-fighting lessons with it if you'd like."

Harry wholeheartedly wanted the lessons and said so, but he was not unaware of the barely hidden disapproval of Molly Weasley, or of Hermione. "But Dad, Harry doesn't want to kill-"

"I'm already a killer." Harry said matter-of-factly. He spoke near a whisper, and the sound of it was deafening. "That's eight so far, nine if you count Professor Quirrel, and there'll be more, I'm afraid to say." The sentence was so emotionless, so much like an announcement of the weather conditions, that everyone was stunned to silence.

With steely resolve in his voice Harry continued, "I don't like it, but I didn't start this. If someone tries to murder me or any of you, or anyone who's innocent, well, I'll try to stop them, subdue them with magic. But..." Harry sighed sadly and said with even more determination, "...if I have to kill them, so be it. Anything you can teach me, Mr. Granger, I'd be grateful."

Hermione inhaled sharply and covered her gaping mouth. Ron swallowed loudly. Remus hung his head. Tonks looked on appraisingly. The Grangers were straight faced but determined, because they understood better than many of the magical folk present Harry's decision.

Molly Weasley said, "Harry, dear..."

At that moment relief came in the form of Fred and George barging in and setting off a room sized fireworks display. They just walked through the Floo and thunked a box about the size of a shoebox on the table and one of them tapped it with a wand. The fireworks shot into the air about four feet high, and covered an area about four feet by six feet over the surface of the table. The pint-sized extravaganza ended with the fireworks spelling out 'Happy Birthday, Harry' with miniature horned-tailed dragons flying through and around the opening in letters such as the 'p's' and the 'B' and 'd.'

Molly had taken the distraction as a time to further change the subject by bringing out the cake.

Fred said, "It's our first commercial product to come out of our new lab from our research into miniaturization. We liked a Muggle term we heard a while back so we're calling our lab, the SkunkWorks. Don't know why they wanted to name such research places after a harmless little furry woodland creature, d'you, George?"

"No idea, my most handsome brother, but Ginny's proven big surprises can come from little packages."

"Are you comparing me to a skunk?" Ginny said, mostly with amusement, while pulling her wand. The twins cringed slightly and moved away.

Harry smiled and laughed with his friends. But he also caught the eye of Steph Granger, and nodded in appreciation.

Ron asked, "So where is your new, er, SkunkWorks, fellows?"

"Sounds dangerous," said their mother.

"Safest place in the world, Mother dearest. Hogwarts."

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"Harry, might I have a moment of your time?"

Professor Dumbledore had entered the room right after Harry had opened the presents. He'd been sociable as usual, but not as long as was his practice, even when there was other business to attend to.

"Of course, Professor."

"Alastor, Nymphadora, Remus - Steph, you may want to join us also."

Harry barely glanced at each of his friends his age as he left the room, but by that time he felt sure he knew what would be discussed, by who *had* been included.

They all walked to the library. The door was closed and silence charmed, but no one placed an Imperturbable charm on the room.

"Harry, the captured Death Eaters told us a chaotic, piecemeal, but remarkable story of your fight." Dumbledore reached into his robes and pulled out his Pensieve as a Muggle magician might put a rabbit out of his hat. Harry noticed Steph Granger was impressed, but no one else. "May we view your memories of the battle?"

Harry sighed, lowered his eyes to his hands, but nodded. He felt sure this had to do with setting Marcus Flint on fire. He figured he might as well get over the initial shock and disgust these he admired would have for his callous treatment of a former schoolmate.

Without asking for assistance, Harry took out his wand, closed his eyes for a moment, and placed the wand to his temple, drawing out the silvery-stranded memories. Dumbledore had the slightest look of surprise on his face, but Harry didn't notice. Several others did.

"We won't enter the Pensieve, Harry. I won't ask you relive this that closely. But we will see it played out above the Pensieve, all right with you? You don't have to watch if..."

"No, Professor. You might have questions." Harry said in a matter-of-fact manner, but with the slightest resignation in his voice.

The scene started with Harry walking down the street and looking into the alleyway where the dementors had attacked him and Dudley.

When Dawlish showed himself, Moody cleared his throat. Harry saw a look of fury on his face. When

they watched Williamson shoot a spell at him, Tonks muttered quietly, "I'll kill him."

When it was over, Dumbledore lowered his pocket watch. "Do you mind answering questions, Harry?"

The young man shook his head.

Remus asked, "Where did you learn those spells?"

"Some are from the Defense book you and Sirius gave me last Christmas." Then Harry turned to Dumbledore. "But I have been reading through all of the books in my small study library you've provided me, Professor."

The headmaster said, "Harry, the *In Hostes Sagitta Quniquplico!* spell - how did you quintuple the Arrow-Shooting Curse? And I don't recognize some of the others at all."

"Also, Dobby told me at the start of the summer holidays that I am the heir of Telemachus Grind - it's not as glamorous as being the heir of Gryffindor or even Slytherin, but we can't all be related to the founders. Anyway, Dobby gave me Grind's journal. Apparently I *am* Grind's heir because the journal was written in house-elvish, yet I can read it somehow, sorta like the way I can speak parseltongue, I guess, only this doesn't come from Voldemort. "

There were several gasps, both as Harry said "Telemachus Grind" and "Voldemort" out loud. Shacklebolt muttered, "Telemachus the Vile."

Harry stared at the group with a withering look. "I know Spell Mongering has a bad reputation, but that's wrong. I've mongered more useful spells in the last month than the Arithmantic Spell Crafters have created in a hundred years."

All except Steph Granger were in various stages of shock. Steph had a look of confusion on his face.

Harry continued, "I've never studied Arithmancy or Runes, but Hermione told me about the basics of spell creation. It's rather confusing, but spell mongering is simple enough. I didn't have to train for decades to produce some pretty useful magic."

Mad-Eye, Remus, and Kingsley all moved to speak at once. Their faces indicated they were alarmed by Harry's declaration. Tonks was still in shock it appeared, and Steph looked like he couldn't decide which of a dozen questions to ask first. Dumbledore raised his hand and stilled them all.

"Harry, after Tom Riddle's diary in your second year I think you'd not just read any old journal and start in--"

"I didn't, Professor. I read every book at Hogwarts on the subject, all two of them, but they were all incorrect and contradicted themselves. I read the seven books in the library that mention Spell Mongery, and I have cataloged how they are wrong, not from Grind's work, but from other works unrelated to Mongering.

Then I took every basic idea from my ancestor's journal and researched it independently. I have started my own journal with my research notes. Every concept Grind discusses, every technique he used or developed is used somewhere else in our magic without being questioned as to Dark or Light. I even read a Muggle science book about energy and matter. It gave me some good ideas. Mongery uses no blood magic. It doesn't use necromancy or takeover someone's will or conscience. Spell Mongering is like a wand, it can be used to heal or kill. It's the intent of the wizard or witch, not the wand.

"Um, Harry, when did you start reading so much, and where'd you read about such research techniques?" Remus asked.

Harry grinned. "I used the basic techniques Nicholas Flamel and Professor Dumbledore used to document their research into the uses of dragon's blood." He looked cheekily at the headmaster, who couldn't help but smile back at his student. "As to the reading, Professor Dumbledore gave me a Muggle speed reading book. It turns out that I didn't like to read because I read too slowly. I now read almost three times as fast as I did a month ago, and my mind doesn't get bored or wander off subject. Therefore, I comprehend things quicker and retain more of what I read."

Tonks snorted and said, "His vocabulary's improved also." Harry half smiled, half blushed at her.

Harry continued, "I've had about five visits a week with female Paladin candidates. I exercise at least the minimum amount of time required by the Paladin schedule, but usually I double that. My aunt and uncle have stopped asking me to do work around the house in fear of you lot. I talk to Dobby and Hedwig, but basically I read. I read and try the magic I read about, eight, sometime ten hours a day. Transfiguration, Charms, Defense, Potions, and believe it or not, some history - Muggle and magical. My homework's finished and I've read all my books through for this coming year. It still leaves me with several hours a day to work on my Mongering."

Remus said, "Your books?"

"Yes. Since Dobby is bound to me, he can access my vault to make purchases for me. I wrote Gringotts and they have an account for me at Flourish and Blotts, and they have a mail order arrangement with W. H. Smith Co. for Muggle books. Dobby also goes to the Hogwarts library for me and searches the card catalogs for the books for the subjects that interest me. He even re-shelves them for Madam Pince."

Moody said, "I didn't know house-elves can read."

Harry said, "Most folks think they can't, but how can they do what all they do for us without reading? From what I can tell we witches and wizards know nothing about house-elves, but they have powerful magic. What other magical being can Apparate in and around Hogwarts? They're smart also. I can't convince Dobby to stop talking like a semi-literate slave, but I've read his writing, and his grammar's as good as mine. Hermione's going about helping the house-elves all wrong, but she has the right idea. Dobby's becoming a close friend of mine.

Attempting to be diplomatic and turn the subject back to the major concern of Spell Mongering,

Dumbledore said, "Harry, let's discuss the specific spells you used. It was an amazing fight. I am sorry you had to go through this, and I am truly glad you survived. I'm also, um, perhaps the word is *impressed* with what you've created. May we ask some questions about your spell work?" Harry nodded curtly. Dumbledore continued, "What do you call the, um, *Depluit Scopulus*, was it? The spell that drops the boulders...?"

Harry stared at him for a second and said, "I call it the Boulder Bomb Curse. Is that okay?"

"Fine, Harry," said Dumbledore. "It's yours to name as you wish. It's remarkable how you've pulled such mass out of the air, instead of being in contact with the ground. Er, you mongered the Arrow spell to shoot five instead of just one?" Harry nodded again.

"Harry, how were you able to modify the Battle Barrier Charm so you could cast so many? Usually three or four barriers would completely exhaust a powerful and experienced Auror or Duelist."

"I know," Harry said. "I don't understand why it was created so poorly. Most of the energy needed to cast it is wasted into the air. And the Runes work and Arithmancy is totally unnecessary. I streamlined it quite a lot. I figure my version takes about twenty-two percent of the energy to draw out a barrier." Harry's enthusiasm for his work transformed his attitude from defensive to excited. "I'd be glad to make it available to the Order and the Aurors, only not Dawlish or Williamson."

Moody asked, "How much would you charge?" The retired Auror had obvious mistrust in his voice.

Harry frowned slightly and said, "Moody. It's me. Would you listen to yourself, yourselves? Have I grown a second head or taken the Dark Mark? I mention Spell Mongery and you'd think I was drowning kittens in my back garden. For some reason I can't figure out, I *have* to sell any mongered spell I create or modify. But I'll sell my improved Battle Barrier Charm for a Galleon a person. Is that worth it, to be able cast that barrier in a fight and not be exhausted by it? I'll even loan you the Galleon if you're short." Harry's earnestness was obvious, and his enthusiasm was hard to resist.

Tonks broke the silence. "Sounds reasonable to me."

Dumbledore said, "There's time for that later. I don't reject your generosity Harry, but we have been raised to distrust Spell Mongery and view it as a Dark Art. I'm not sure it is wise for you to be dabbling in such disreputable activities--"

"Professor." Harry interrupted. His displeasure was evident in his tone and by his expression. "I believe, sir, you aren't listening. Just before you visited with the Dursleys, you didn't listen when I told you how badly they have treated me for the past fifteen years. I let that slide then since you were in the process of making my life much better. So far this summer you *have* keep me a little better informed than in the past, and I am grateful. I hope that the little you've told me means there is little going on affecting me.

"Rather than dismiss what I am saying about Spell Mongery and not listening to me, and instead of assuming I am doing something Dark, how about you and I have a real discussion at some other time, just the two of us. This is something that I obviously know more about than you. Are you willing to

learn from a student, or will you ignore what I have to say like Fudge ignored me after the Tri-Wizard Tournament?"

Harry sighed and decided to take a different tack. "I've been given a great diet, an odd potion, a place to workout and practice magic without being expelled for it, and a bunch of Defense oriented books. For that I am grateful." Harry's tone turned chilly. "But still, no one has taught me a single thing more about how to defend myself. Had I not taught myself what I did in the last month, had I not Mongered those spells I did, **I'd be dead now!** Do any of you care to debate that?"

Dumbledore blanched at Harry's words. Others made throaty noises in displeasure. Before anyone else could say anything, Harry took a deep breath and added, "I promise I mean no disrespect, sir, to any of you. I'm a killer now, and that upsets me almost as much as almost dying does. I'll just say one more thing, there has been an eleven hundred year campaign to smear the reputation of Spell Mongers by the Arithmantic Spell Crafters. It reminds me of the way Fudge and the *Daily Prophet* treated you and me last year, Professor. Do all of you want to assume all this bad hokum about Spell Mongery is true, like so many believed the lies about the professor and me last year?"

Harry spoke calmly and intentionally. The magical folks present were stunned. Dumbledore opened and closed his mouth three times without saying anything. Steph Granger stood back and actually smirked. Harry had rendered all of his seniors, and therefore theoretically his superiors, speechless.

Finally the headmaster sighed. "Forgive me, please, Harry. Not many witches or wizards know much about Spell Mongery, but we here have been told it is always a sign of Dark Magic, and we've been trained to react to stop it.

"You've demonstrated several very effective pieces of magic that you've mongered. I will endeavor to maintain an open mind and meet with you anytime to discuss this. I promise to try to maintain my objectivity. Shall we say two days from now in my office? I have business with the International Confederation of Wizards I must attend to this afternoon and tomorrow." He turned to the rest in the room. "And I ask that each of you reserve judgment until I have this discussion with Harry and report back to you-" Dumbledore realized he'd made another faux pax. "And of course any of you can ask Harry about this on your own. I am sure he will be glad to talk with you also."

"I appreciate this, sir. I'll be glad for you to view my work and help me find any errors, but I think I have this right." Harry turned to look at everyone there. "Just remember, the Spell Monger Osbert Blacwin created Thunderfire. That spell stopped the Vampires from taking over large parts of Europe twelve hundred years ago. I have the notes on that spell."

The conversation at this point came to an odd-feeling stop. Several people shuffled their feet. Harry said, "Unless anyone else has any questions about my fight, I'm going to go spend a little time with my friends."

The headmaster said, "Yes, yes. I daresay we've kept you from them too long. In the mean time you might refrain from Spell Mongery until... Harry?"

Harry had frowned and walked to one of the shelves in the room. All of the silver flatware and



goblets had been moved to that room to keep away from Remus Lupin. Harry grabbed two of them and brought them over in front of all of them. "I am afraid, sir, you're still not listening, sir. Maybe this will help."

Harry quickly transfigured the two silver goblets into small stone bowls with lids. He closed his eyes for a moment, and then tapped each bowl twice, casting the charm, "*Praeditus Memoriae Tabularium*," for each stone bowl. He then held his wand up to his head and obviously drew out a memory. As he placed the point of his wand in the first stone bowl, he cast, "*Amplector Memoriola a Dumbledore*." Then he placed the lid on the first bowl and cast, "*Conglutinare Candela*." He then drew another memory and placed it on the second bowl, and repeated the last two charms.

Harry stepped back and said, "You have a busy afternoon planned, sir, and as I said before, I'd like to spend some time with my friends."

"What is all this, Harry?"

"They're low capacity temporary Pensieves. The memory will only remain intact for twenty-four hours or so, after that it will begin to decay. It's keyed only for you to view, sir. Once you break the wax seal, you'll have about five minutes to start the memory. You can't go inside these devices; they only project above the container, and only once. These are two different sets of memories I'd like to ask you to view to help you understand my position and attitude today."

"By the way, each of you, do you think that bit of magic creating temporary Pensieves could be useful? Or do you think it can't be beneficial since a Spell Monger created the magic? Is that Dark Magic. Do you think?"

Dumbledore said, "I promise to look at them this evening. Now, regarding your friends Harry, Miss Granger and the youngest Weasleys - have you decided whether to tell them of your new found talent or not?"

Harry had turned to look at the door before Dumbledore brought up this matter. Harry said, "I had thought I wouldn't face their misgivings until you and I have reached an understanding. But that appears to be too late." Harry pointed to the unmistakable tells of Extendable Ears under the doorframe. "I'll deal with them, sir, you lot have your discussions about me while I do that. Good day."

When Harry left the room, and the door was closed, re-silenced, *and* made imperturbable, it was as if a bubble had burst. Tonks sighed and sat down hard on chair. Remus lowered his head into his hands.

Mad-Eye said. "Remarkable, and disturbing."

Dumbledore responded, "Quite."

Steph said, "Washing dishes with magic still amazes me. What exactly was it that was so amazing to you four? And why are you upset? It appears to me that Harry has come up with better and safer ways to survive a fight. Why does this bother you?"

Dumbledore said, "I suppose we should make this two different discussions, Steph. Gentlemen, Tonks, your observations on the actually battle and then the magic Harry used?"

Tonks said, "Remus and I together couldn't have done two-thirds of that total magic. But Spell Mongery...."

Moody said, "In my prime I could have done half that on a very good day. I... I want to believe him. Albus."

"Steph," Remus said, "Those barriers Harry conjured to fight from - in a fight a wizard or witch might drop one or two of those for cover. Or a squad might have one man drop four or five, and then protect him while he recovers. Harry conjured more than twenty before I lost count. As the charm exists, it is a very magically draining and physically exhausting piece of magic to perform. That's why it is rarely used anymore, but it is an effective tool in battle.

"That Fireball spell takes a tremendous amount of magical energy. And to do it wandlessly.... If a witch or wizard can do any wandless or wordless magic at all, it's usually works for smaller, simpler spells and charms. Any one of us here could do a few of the things Harry did that day. But it would take all of us present to perform all of that, and he did it in eight and a half minutes. That doesn't even bring into play that most of those spells take months of hard training to perform correctly. And I've no conception of what it takes to produce that Boulder Bomb curse. It goes against the science of magic as you might think of it, Steph."

Dumbledore said, "Steph, a small subset of magic we perform conjures item out of thin air, so to speak. There is a Muggle science that theorizes that at its most basic level, the building blocks of all energy and matter are the same. Are you familiar with that science?"

"Yes, quantum physics or quantum mechanics. Complex and fascinating subject, but over my head except for the very basics."

"Yes, well, when we transfigure something we use the matter of the item changed to make the transfiguration. It takes energy from us but not that much. Conjunction starts with nothing and causes *something* to materialize out of nothing. Some of the energy we exert converts to the substance, but we also draw matter from the ground, floor, desktop, or whatever surface the conjured item appears upon.

"That resting place for the conjured item is weakened slightly, but the beauty of magic is that a balancing occurs. Over the next few minutes matter from everything around equalizes, and there is no remaining loss of structural integrity. Many conjured item are weak structurally, and disintegrate in days, hours, or even minutes. Only a truly powerful witch or wizard can conjure something permanent.

Dumbledore continued, "This brings us to the problem we see, Steph, with Harry. A Battle Barrier draws a huge amount of energy from the wizard to conjure such a large and dense mass from the ground to deflect the powerful curses you saw hurled at it. That's why it is so exhausting. Harry says that he has made it more efficient. Assuming he has indeed done so, that would explain in part how he

could produce so many barriers and keep fighting.

"On the other hand, his Boulder Bomb Curse has only the air to draw substance from. I examined one of them. They are nowhere as dense as a barrier, but they don't need to be. However, I would have expected dropping one or two boulders to noticeably weaken the caster for at least a few minutes, if one were able to cast it at all. Harry seemed un-phased by his efforts, though he was tired afterwards.

"And this is the rub, Steph. Usually that sort of inordinate increase in power indicates the Dark Arts. Add that notion to the fact that we have all been taught that Spell Mongering is Dark, and you can see why we're bothered and so concerned for Harry."

Steph said, "My daughter's always said that Harry was remarkable in Defense, and that he's a powerful wizard. I've just assumed that was relative to those his age. These Paladin potions are supposed to bring these kids into their full magical maturity. Could it be that Harry was always going to be such a hugely powerful wizard, and now he is? You said that Aberration Day completed his maturation. He doesn't take the potions anymore, right?"

"I've not considered that, Steph." The headmaster paused and then muttered, "Remarkable." After another pause he continued, "The full measure of the aberrant accelerant of that potion that day hit Harry just as he was at war. All of his being was focused on fighting a desperate fight. It called for the utmost battle prowess to survive.

"Harry has not only reached his full physical and magical growth as we hope for all of these Paladins, the Analytic Device identifies him as an eighteen year old, not a sixteen-year-old who's going through the Acceleration potions regimen like it did all the others, or as in his case, *gone* through the potions. We all believe he'll be powerful, probably extraordinarily so. Now, add to that the burst of super-acceleration from the aberrant potion. Then, if Harry *has* made those spells more efficient..."

Dumbledore had been talking as much to himself as anyone else at the end of this. He stared off at nothing for a few long moments, and then snapped out of it. "I've done it again. I can't believe myself sometimes. Why do I have to be a dunderhead when dealing with Harry? It's a wonder the boy trusts me at all. And calling him a boy when he is obviously a man now...."

He turned to specifically address those present. "I still want to understand all of this better, but I want all of you to rest easy about Harry as well. I believe he is as he says, creating, or rather *mongering* magic for useful purposes with no Dark influences."

Dumbledore turned to an unoccupied part of the room and called for Fawkes. The phoenix flashed into the room and landed on the back of a chair. The headmaster conjured a quill, ink and scrap of parchment. He scribbled on it furiously for less than a minute and then walked to his familiar.

"My old friend, please take this to Harry. Stay and visit with him if you like. Thank you." The bird flashed away.

"I've just sent Harry a note of apology for my prejudgments, and I told him I looked forward to our discussions in two days time. Unfortunately I have that matter with the International Confederation to

deal with.

~+~

Harry left the library and went back to Hogwarts within ten minutes. His birthday party was long over, and the debris from it had been cleaned. He spent a few moments with his friends, but the time was traumatic. Harry was annoyed that they had listened in. Of course he ignored the fact that together he and they had listened to other supposedly private conversations in like manner. His friends waited for him in the kitchen, and they had all his presents on the table ready for him to Floo to wherever he was staying.

Ron started. "Bloody heliopath, Harry - Spell Mongery! That's so Dark I'd bet even Malfoy'd-"

Harry was in no mood. He'd wordlessly and wandlessly waved his hand and cast a Silencing spell on him.

Hermione gasped but knew better than to discuss her amazement at the power of that spell. "Honestly, Harry! We're only very concerned about you. Even this lunkhead knows that you've not gone Dark, in spite of speaking with his brain disengaged."

The look of extreme concern on Hermione's face gave Harry pause. He reeled in his temper a good bit. "Hermione, I...well, I don't want to talk about it now. You'll probably read every book at Hogwarts on Spell Mongering, but be forewarned, there's not much, none of them say anything nice about it, and they are wrong for the most part. I need time to think. I need time to figure out how to explain this to you lot and to Dumbledore so you can see it like I do. I just ask you three to trust me with no explanation and no discussion for a few days."

Ginny said, "Ron, if I release you, do you promise not to shout, and to do like Harry says?" Ginny had been given a waiver on under aged magic use to practice with the rest of them. When Ron finally nodded agreement, Ginny cast "*Finite Incantatum*," but it didn't work. Her second attempt failed as well.

This time Harry drew his wand and cast the same ending spell, which worked. Ron almost spoke but Harry's glare silenced him.

Ginny said, "They've just been so very worried about you, Harry. We all have, but those Ron and Hermione have been in a fright. While you were fighting, these two had that messed up potion causing them to be extremely worried about you. Had you not Apparated here I don't know how bad it would have been for them."

Hermione said, "That's no excuse though. We shouldn't have snoopied on you. It's just...." She didn't complete the sentence, but her deep concern calmed Harry a bit more.

Harry closed his eyes and took a deep breath. "You three mean more to me than anything in the world. I'm only asking for a few days before we talk on this again. It's not like my funk last summer; we'll talk soon. I just want to prepare a better explanation."

At that moment Molly called Ron and Hermione from the other room, leaving Harry and Ginny alone for a minute before he Flooed away.

Harry gently touched her arm in a way that drew her closer to him. "Ginny, I'm really grateful for my gift. Everything I received was great, but that album is beyond brilliant. I'd hoped we could look at it together, but..."

It had startled Ginny that Harry had described himself as a 'killer,' and coolly admitted he was prepared to kill again. It had also shocked her to hear he had become a Spell Monger. Ron had been a judgmental prat, and Hermione was worried about everything to do with Harry, but it took Ginny only moments to realize that Harry would never go Dark, so she placed her trust in him instantly that he would be careful. They'd overheard Harry's defense of his activities in the library, and she'd accepted it as most logical.

"You go ahead, Harry. We'll look at it together soon. I'm glad you liked it." None of her issues regarding Dean Thomas had been settled. Ginny still felt that Harry saw her only as Ron's sister and a loyal friend, even in a fight. Yet still she felt giddy from Harry's brief words and his pleased look as he smiled at her. Unexplainable hope seeded her mind.

Harry shrank his gifts and conjured a bag to carry them. He stepped to the fireplace and said. "I really have to go, er, complication on where I'm staying now. We will speak soon; I promise." A flash of green fire, and then the red of the secure Floo powder, and Harry was gone.

In the headmaster's office, there was a gift from Hagrid, a sack of freshly baked rock cakes, and a variety tin of Honeydukes candies from Professor McGonagall.

Harry slowly walked to the passageway to St. Simons. On the way Fawkes delivered the message from Dumbledore. Harry made his way to his round basement room, where he expanded his gifts and Dobby offered to put everything away.

Over his shoulder Harry heard, "My turn." He looked around and saw Father Martin standing at the entrance landing. Harry nodded when the Anglican priest asked to come in.

"I have a present for you as well. Happy Birthday, Harry."

Harry opened the package and found a small book.

"The blue string marks the beginning of the life of King David, the second king of the nation of Israel who lived almost three thousand years ago. He was a young lad when he was chosen, probably about twelve at that time. He fought a giant when he was a little younger than you are now, and he didn't have magic to help him.

"David fought in wars much of his life, when all he really wanted to do was have a family and love God. He had to fight, but he had a good life, too. And he found great comfort along the way in the midst of his darkest days. The red string marks where it records what David wrote about peace and tranquility,... and fighting,... and forgiveness. You might like to read it sometime. Your dad liked it

all, and your mother really like David's writings and songs."

Harry said, "This King David found some peace from his memories of battle?"

"Yes, Harry."

~\*~

About a ten minutes later, after Harry had described the party, Father Martin said, "I understand, Harry, that you have a pretty good Patronus Charm, true?"

Harry nodded his head.

"Well, Occlumency is and isn't like that." The big man chuckled at his companion's confused expression. "Let me clear that up a bit. Casting a Patronus, you have to clear your mind of all the confusion there, and any fear coming from a dementor if they're about. It's not easy to do. Then you have to gather a wonderful, vivid memory and make it centermost in your mind, excluding all else."

Harry nodded. He relived his last fight with a dementor for just a moment to make the idea fresh in his mind.

"After all of that, the actual casting isn't all that hard. You can't let what your eyes see distract you from your good memory and your determination to cast the Patronus.

"Well, your Professor Snape did well to tell you to prepare your mind, and he did well to try to force his way in. Teaching Occlumency requires that type of mental assault as a part of the training - *eventually*. He should have started gently and increased the pressure as you improved. And he didn't help a bit with *how* to prepare your mind to resist."

Harry had let the priest use Legilimency to see his lessons with Snape, and his mental fight when Voldemort possessed him briefly in the foyer of the Ministry of Magic. He'd also shown the big gentle man the moments leading up to and including immolating Marcus Flint.

"Harry, you did what you had to do to save your life. It was pure self-defense and a good bit of wandless magic to boot. I've done likewise to protect my life and others in battle."

Harry sighed. "Do the memories and dreams ever stop?"

"For me they haven't after fifty years, but they come less regularly. I am at peace about it, and I can cope now."

Father Martin took him through a number of questions to find several scenarios of where Harry had been loved by someone, and times when he'd loved others strongly.

"In Occlumency there are a number of scenarios to keep others out of your mind. I like to start with what can be the simplest. It's not the best, but it's easy to begin with, and will probably work at the distance you are from Voldemort. You fill your mind with as many random and disjointed thoughts as

possible that the attacker doesn't want, then he gets frustrated with the process and gives up. That's passive and can be overridden, but it can be effective if the invader is not being too intrusive, which is what he must be to prevent you from waking.

The next step up in defense is to flood your mind with memories so distasteful to the Legilimens, that he's compelled to leave. That's what you did to drive Voldemort out at the Ministry.

"Harry, you need to catalog all of your best thoughts of love, not just for Sirius, but all of those that mean so much to you. Before sleeping, or anytime you might be attacked, you must run through your mind a series of wonderful thoughts and memories about how much they mean to you and how much *you* love *them*. You must go to sleep thinking these thought over and over again. This apparently hurt Voldemort and can't possibly be anything but beneficial to you. As a matter of fact, perhaps you should only think about those who are still alive."

Harry interrupted, "But I don't want to forget about Sirius."

"I'm not asking you to. However thinking about him before sleeping, just gives Voldemort something to attack you with, his death. Never forget those whom you love that have gone before you, but for this exercise, go with thoughts about the living.

"But Father William, Professor Snape always said to clear your mind. You're saying to fill it, I'm..."

"Confused?" When Harry nodded the priest continued. "Clearing your mind is not exactly what he meant, even though that is the way he taught it. He really meant to clear it of anything that the Legilimens could use against you, just think innocent or useless thoughts. But there is a good reason I don't teach that until later.

"If I say don't think about Quidditch, can you possibly not think about it? Of course not. At that moment it is always impossible not to think about what is mentioned. And Quidditch means so much to you, so that makes it even harder. But if you learn to fill your mind with other things, anything, particularly things that help you fight attacks, you do in fact clear from your mind the thoughts or memories the attacker seeks.

"As you gain more discipline in this you evolve what you think about and control how and what you think. Eventually you can clear your mind and keep it clear for quite a while from any one thought or series of thoughts you want to hide.

"The hardest defense against Legilimency is also the most obvious to the attacker - barrier or wall building. If Voldemort were to come up against a solid brick wall in Professor Snape's mind, he'd know Severus was hiding something from him. So your potions master probably floods a variety of different thoughts into his consciousness, then he concentrates on the main things he wants Voldemort to believe he's thinking. Then he probably discreetly hides what he wants protected in a far out of the way walled-off recess of his mind and goes nowhere near it.

"Harry, he's to be admired as an Occlumens if Snape's kept his thoughts hidden from Voldemort all this time. I can't imagine that evil tyrant's too subtle in exploring what his minions think. But Snape's

the worse teacher of Occlumency I've ever heard of.

"Try this tonight - think only on those living who you love, and how and why you love them. Concentrate on it before sleeping. Do it until you fall asleep."

~\*~

Just before bedtime, Father Martin came by Harry's room. Harry still had the light on and was reading.

"Good, you're not sleeping yet. Do you have any questions about your Occlumency assignment for tonight?"

"No, sir. I've thought up a number of different happy moments with those I love and who love me. It makes me realize that I need to find a way to tell them what they mean to me. My friend Ginny Weasley gave me this album of photos from my years at Hogwarts. I looked through it, and it helped me think of a number of things like you described. I've been replaying them some in my mind all night. I have a feeling this will work, or at least help a lot."

As the Anglican priest turned to leave Harry said, "I read some about David this afternoon. Sort of interesting how he fought the lion and the bear. I plan to read about him fighting the giant before I go to sleep."

Father Martin paused with a thoughtful look on his face, then said, "Earlier in that book there's a special blessing that Aaron, the first high priest of Israel, prayed over the people. Would you allow me to pray it over you now? I think you'll like the words."

"Sure, Father William, thank you."

The kindly enormous wizard and holy man lowered his head and prayed silently for just less than a minute. Harry also lowered his head, but from time to time he'd peek to watch the man before him.

With his eyes still closed Father Martin raised his face towards heaven. His countenance seemed to glow, not magically, but from a great delight in his heart. In a marvelous, deep, melodious voice, he joyfully proclaimed, "The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."

After a minute more of silence, he opened his eyes and said, "Good night, Harry. Shout if you need me, but I believe you won't."

"I don't think I will either. Good night, sir."

As St. Simon's pastor closed the door, he took one last look. The young lad destined to fight the greatest Dark Wizard ever known, was smiling as he read about a young, chosen shepherd boy, who became famous for slaying a giant.





*Aaran St Vines*  
*FanficAuthors.net*



Ron Weasley and Steve Cappers helped restrain the young ladies and both suffered bruises for their efforts. Steve was a rising sixth year Gryffindor also in the Paladin Program who lived in a different Gryffindor Tower dorm from Harry and Ron. Upon entering the classroom Arsenius Jiggers did some fancy wand work and Harry's assailants were placed behind a temporary invisible barrier. Professor Jiggers immediately rescheduled Harry for a private tutorial early the next day.

Harry made his way to the Great Hall for an early lunch. He had been shocked that the young women had gone after him so; he assumed it was because their 'visit' sessions had only just finished. Everyone still taking the Acceleration Potions had visits at the same time.

As he crossed the Entrance Hall heading towards the Great Hall, Harry heard his name called. It was Remus Lupin.

"Profes- uh- Remus," Harry still had a little trouble calling his former professor by his given name. "It's good to see you, what are you doing here?"

"Good to see you, Harry. I've been giving individualized Defense tutorials for those wanting to join the Paladin Program this school year that didn't make the grades to qualify for N.E.W.T.s level. None of them were DA members, I might point out. I had also hoped to catch you after your Potions tuition. You're out earlier that I had expected. Were you going to lunch?" When Harry nodded, Remus continued, "I also have some guardian business to discuss with you, and I'd like to spend some time together if we could. Do you have set plans for the rest of the day? I thought we might go somewhere to grab a spot of lunch."

"I'm free," Harry replied. "My Potions is rescheduled for tomorrow morning. Other than that I'm on my own. I wanted to do some research, run, and exercise. Maybe even get in some dueling practice, but the day outside is lovely, and anyplace would be a great change other than here, Grimmauld Place, or- well, my new quarters. What'd you have in mind?"

"Someplace where we stand a chance of not being recognized," Remus said blandly. "I'm thinking far to the north near Inverness, about ten miles west, is the town of Dingwall. It's a quiet, mixed Muggle and Wizarding community, where everyone pretty much keeps to themselves. If we wear these cloaks and keep the hoods up we'll fit in nicely. It's bright and sunny there today but very windy and therefore chilly. We won't be the only one's there using hoods."

Remus held out a non-descript charcoal gray cloak that was obviously of high quality. "Very nice," Harry said, "and I see you've taken Sirius' encouragement to heart and upgraded your wardrobe. You could use a little more color, but this is very dapper nonetheless."

Remus chuckled.

They turned and headed to Dumbledore's office to Floo north. Just before entering the corridor to the stairway, Justin Finch-Fletchley rounded the corner with Hannah Abbott following. Seeing Remus first they both made to greet him, but as Harry entered their line of sight, Hannah lurched at Harry in kiss-attack mode.

Harry grabbed her wrists and held her back, and Justin quickly moved to take her from him.

"Goodness, Harry, why is she...?"

"I don't know, Justin. Something to do with the effects of Aberration Day is my guess. Glad it's you here and not Ernie," Harry answered matter-of-factly; he'd heard Hannah and Ernie were now a couple.

The Hufflepuffs departed, leaving guardian and ward to walk on. Lupin kept cutting his eyes at Harry to see his reaction to Hannah's actions, but there was nothing to see. Previously Remus would have expected Harry to be embarrassed by such a display, and some teenaged boys would have found the event a great ego boost. Harry, however, might've merely been brushing a piece of lint from his robes, he apparently had not been phased by the event.

Lupin observed that Harry did show some emotion a few minutes later as he fell out of the Floo fire at the pub in Dingwall, covered in soot. The Grey Dragon pub was as dodgy-looking and quiet as the Hogs Head in Hogsmeade, but it was pristinely clean. Remus ordered for them, wanting no one to hear Harry's voice.

The barkeeper pointed them to a table but Lupin asked for an out-of-the-way booth near the back. He leaned in towards Harry. "I'd cast *Muffliato* if there was just a little more noise in here, but it's as silent as a tomb in here. There's no cover for the buzzing that spell produces, and these wooden walls and floors will ring with any words we-"

With his hand carefully under the table, Harry shot his wand out of his right sleeve and whispered "*Ductus Taciturnitas*," while he casually waved his wand. The wand disappeared into his sleeve again, "That draws off sound from this table into a hole of silence. Outside sounds head our way like normal, but ours don't leave our immediate area. Sucks'em back you might say."

"Where'd you learn that one? Did you monger it?" Lupin asked.

"Not one of mine, I'm afraid- found it in a book. I really must apologize to Hermione soon. She's been right all along. I've made my way through a number of the books in my Defense library this summer, and I've ordered a number of books from Flourish and Blotts. They've even forwarded Muggle books to me from WH Smith Co. I've had so much time on my hand and nothing else to do. Since learning to speed-read, I find that I'm not bored with reading any more and I can read for hours at a time. At that speed, I find my comprehension is much better; I also finished all my summer assignments weeks ago for every possible class I might take, just for something to do. Now I know why she's so prepared for class. Once you get the hang of it..." Harry waved his hand as if the idea was now very common to him. He smiled a bit sheepishly at his former professor, who had been second only to Professor McGonagall in pressing him to read all of his assignments.

A bored looking scullery maid brought their meals, taking no notice of their hoods. About half of the patrons that day were similarly under wraps.

They both had huge roast beef sandwiches on eight-inch long hard, crusty rolls. The bread was laced with pungent mustard streaked with horseradish sauce. The chips were hot and huge, and there was a

crunchy whole ten-inch long, ice-cold dill pickle on the side, over two inches thick. Before Harry were two sandwiches and a double portion of chips. Four butterbeers were laid before them as well.

Without looking up the woman sniffed, "Call if you need anything, pudding perhaps, otherwise...." She left trailing off that last sentence.

"Thanks, Remus, I'm starved." Harry stared silently at the plate for just five seconds, then dug in.

A grin in his voice Remus said, "I know you're not on your strict diet, or we wouldn't be here, but you are still exercising I'm told, so I thought you'd like two."

They munched away, wolfing down their food in companionable silence for the most part. Remus asked about Hannah's reaction. Harry related being perplexed by that himself and told of the events of his Potions tutorial.

Although he had much more to eat, Harry finished about the same time as his guardian. "Harry, we've continued checking your owl posts for hazardous material," Lupin began.

"No one's been hurt in the process have they?" Harry interrupted.

"No, and we've only discovered one Dark posting, which we were able to handle easily. However, I received a post yesterday from Gringotts as you did. Reading mine I knew yours was similar, and I'm sorry, but I couldn't come see you yesterday. I don't want you to think I'm withholding..." Lupin said, pausing to choose his next words.

"If you'd been waiting for weeks to tell me I might have, Remus, but with a one day delay, I don't think you're keeping me ignorant."

Harry looked straight into his guardian's eyes. "Remus, please don't feel you have to be uneasy with me. I spouted off yesterday to that lot in the library because the general consensus automatically *assumed* I was going Dark. To your credit, you didn't make that assumption.

"Ever since we spent that day together behind Mrs. Figg's house, talking about Sirius' will and my parent's faith, I've realized you've always treated me fairly and evenly. I'm not fragile. I'm not going Dark, and I'm not as temperamental as I was last year. I value being your ward, and I'd like us to be friends if we could."

Lupin's face showed a range of emotions during this brief monologue - everything from caution, to concern, and finally to joy. "I'd like that very much, Harry. I still feel bad about not telling you at the start of your third year that I was a friend of your parents, but Dumbledore was right that I could guard you from Sirius better if I kept my distance. Then in less than twenty-four hours, *Sirius* was proven innocent *you* found out about your Godfather, and *I* had my painful transformation, resigned and left Hogwarts. It was best for your safety, but I still wish we'd had more time together then."

He looked carefully into Harry's eyes for any sign of emotions, but there was nothing amiss. He continued. "About the Gringotts letter; the Goblins asked me to go over this with you first. You see, you were supposed to receive your inheritance from the Potter family on your eighteenth birthday,

instead of when you came of age at seventeen. It's part of the Potter entailment and not uncommon with older Wizarding families. Your mum and dad left orders for Gringotts to make sure your school account never ran out, so you would be amply funded until then." Lupin stopped and stared at his empty plate.

"What don't you want to tell me, Remus?" Harry asked.

Lupin plunged ahead. "Goblins have their laws and we have ours. The Ministry's Goblin Liaison Office was founded to make sure our laws worked together but did not impose on each other. From our perspective Goblins hold a more piratical view of fair play in business dealings, but they deal with us as we want. We in turn, bank with them in most ways as they want. This is not a problem because Goblins view banking laws more strictly than any others on this planet, magical or Muggle.

"And here's the rub for us. Goblins calculate age in a way that only they understand. They pay attention to birth *days*, but not our birth *dates*. They recognize July 31st, but not necessarily 1980 as your birth year. Goblins' maturation cycles vary, so one Goblin may come of age at fifteen, and another not until twenty. It's a biological thing that I find very confusing. Since you're so fond now of reading, I'll find you a book on it if..."

Remus was smiling and Harry held up his hands. "If you think I really need to read it, I will, but otherwise, what's this have to do with me?" Harry asked.

"That's just it, Harry, the Goblins at Gringotts declared you to have attained your Goblin majority yesterday, which to their minds means that you're eighteen. They couldn't begin to care less what year you were born. This has never happened before, and, er, sorry, I know how much you dislike being different. Fortunately, this information was posted to the records at the Ministry by a friend of the Order. He made sure it was recorded but that it did not come to anyone's attention that we wouldn't want in the know."

"So what's this mean, Remus?"

"It means, Harry, that you're now of age and declared eighteen, not just seventeen. You are the sole heir with complete control of the Potter Estate with all rights and privileges, and you must meet with the Goblins soon to sign any number of papers they hold to activate this. In the Wizarding world, even if you inherited *before* your seventeenth birthday, you wouldn't attain this aspect of your majority. But there's one technicality in your case. The Potters were one of the three hundred and thirty-three original families that signed the compact treaties in the early fourteen hundreds, forming the Ministry of Magic and all other Wizarding governmental institutions in Great Britain.

"When anyone receives the position of head of a three hundred and thirty-three family, he or she instantly becomes of age for all purposes, Wizarding and Goblin. This is an old law that can never happen now because the head of a family becomes titular head only after being declared by the Goblins as having attained Goblin majority, which usually means eighteen years old for humans, but, Harry, you've-

"But I've done it again. I've done the never-done-before." Harry's face showed no real emotion, and

his voice only sounded slightly dismayed.

Not knowing how to react to that statement, Remus continued his delivery. "You have two months to sign the necessary paperwork, but it would be better to do it sooner rather than later. The Goblins are absolutely discreet, but you never know who might go snooping in the Ministry. Best to have this all settled so there's nothing that can be bothered.

"I do have a tentative appointment set for you for 2:00 today, but I can cancel it easily if I Floo call them in the next..." looking at his pocket watch Remus said, "Oh, thirty-three minutes, before 1:30."

Harry just stared at nothing for over a minute. He showed no emotion on his face, and Remus noticed not for the first time since Aberration Day, that Harry could drift off into a blank-faced void if he so decided.

After less than a minute of blank, silent pondering Harry asked, "Do we have to Floo there? I hate the Floo and Portkeys; I can never land upright, and the Floo makes me so sooty. I feel... incompetent... doing either of those."

Remus smiled. "They have a VIP Apparation Room. It's warded and confidential. Albus told me of your accuracy and skills; three Apparations, two under battle conditions so to speak, and one over four hundred miles, and he says you are quieter than most adults doing it. You've never been trained, never read a book on it, or any of the Ministry pamphlets?"

Harry smiled sheepishly for just for a moment. Remus saw in this moment a slight trace of the boy he'd taught several years before. The sheepishness vanished, possibly it was never there. Harry said, "I had to do it that day. I knew your lot were going to the rescue, but it was Hermione. For her, or Ron, or Ginny I'd have crawled through fire. But the only way I could help was to Apparate there, so I did." He was pensive for a second then continued, "Could I get my Apparation license today after we square up with Gringotts and I'm officially of age? I don't mind not having it. I wasn't dunned after the last Apparation to Hogwarts' gates. But I would like to be legal, and if I am of age to the Goblins, wouldn't the Ministry, I mean..."

"You have something there, Harry. I believe that the systems of records at the Ministry are all linked to the file where your Gringotts information was entered. If it takes less than an hour at the bank, we can Floo to the Ministry and just go to the testing area. Someone's always there testing applicants until 5:00 each day, and after a few brief written questions the actual testing only takes fifteen to twenty minutes. I don't know about the lines this time of year or time of day, but we can keep our hoods up with a Cooling charm activated if need be, and just see how long it might take."

Remus pulled his moneybag and dropped the amount for lunch and a generous tip on the table. They walked out the back door, and he said, "Harry, do you see the tall hilltop right behind the town?"

"Yes, there's a plateau of some sort at the top."

"That's it exactly. Let's Apparate to that plateau, right from here. You up to it?"



Harry grinned. His smile became slightly distant, and with less sound than someone quietly snapping their fingers, he was gone.

Remus said to no one there, "Albus said he could do it, but it's still amazing." Then he Disappeared from the pub; just not quite as quietly as Harry had.

At the hilltop, Remus went through the different test procedures that would be asked of Harry, and gave him a brief rundown on all of the questions that would be on the simple written test.

Then Harry asked, "How do you Apparate to a place you've never been or seen? I mean, I'd never been to the Grangers', but I had seen that picture of their parlor often in Hermione's notebook. It's from a Christmas a few years back, and the three of them looked so happy that she loves looking at it when she misses them. But how am I supposed to go to this VIP Apparation point at Gringotts. You don't have a picture of it do you?"

Remus pondered the question for a moment. "The picture method is not common, few can do it. You probably Apparated to where Hermione was more than to the place in the picture. We're all linked through magic in some way. Your affinity for Hermione probably made the location part easy for you. The test today, if you take it, will be to go to places you've already been. That's the only method for most wizards and witches. Knowing the address helps. Your magic won't let you Apparate into something. The fact that your breeches were embedded in the wall at the Granger's shows that you were in very strict control of your landing place. Usually, your magic would have let you miss it. It won't let you Apparate into a solid wall, or a piece of furniture, or into a person in an Apparation zone.

"However, if you are very inexperienced at Apparating, or not paying attention at all, that's when splinching usually occurs, oh, and if you try it drunk. Friends don't let friends drink and Apparate."

Harry smiled and said, "Muggles have an expression like that for drinking and driving a car."

"Oh, do they?" said Remus. "The one about Apparating has been around for over two hundred years I believe. Wonder how the Muggles heard it?"

"Anyway, Harry. I'll Apparate to the VIP zone at Gringotts ahead of you and you follow me. Let's test it first. I'm going to go to some place in or around the town down here. You concentrate on me for five or ten seconds or so, until you have me clearly in your mind, and then come find me."

Remus disappeared with a crack. Harry did as he was told, and in a few seconds he appeared right beside Remus. They were on a hilltop on the opposite side of the river.

"Excellent, Harry. I'm going somewhere far away from here; halfway to London, about two hundred and fifty miles away. Give it a try."

Five seconds later they were in a field somewhere. It was a good bit warmer.

"Fine work. Fine work, Harry. A little more on Apparating to people. With experience, if you are near someone when they Disapparate, you can usually follow them within five seconds after they

leave. This is how the MLE chases criminals some times. However, if you know someone better, you can follow that person more easily, and after a longer wait period - twenty to thirty seconds perhaps. Know someone really well, and know where they are, maybe even having been there before or having seen a picture of the place, and you can Apparate to them regardless of time. This is how you made it to the Grangers' most likely. We've got about twenty-five more minutes before our appointment at Gringotts. I want to try one more experiment beforehand," Lupin said.

'Crack,' and Remus was gone. 'Snap,' and Harry was in the back garden at the Dursley's.

"Remus-"

"Harry, we're safe here for a few minutes, probably longer. The protection wards are in full effect, and the Dursleys are away today. Albus believes there was no connection made between your recent battle and this place. I just wanted to try an experiment. One last confirmation about the two tasks we want to accomplish today.

"That Boulder Bomb curse you mongered. That's what you called it, right? Could you do it again? And more important, do you think you could banish it afterwards?"

Harry looked reflectively at nothing at all for a few seconds. He nodded, raised his arm and his wand shot out of his sleeve. Then he slashed it down quickly pointing to an open space roughly ten feet away. Half a second later a boulder close to six feet in rough circumference and four feet high crashed onto the grass. The ground shook, and even though he'd expected it, Remus jumped slightly in shock.

"Harry, you didn't say anything?"

"No, I modified the spell so I didn't have to. Is that all right?" Harry asked.

"It's your curse; you mongered it. So, if you can make it silent, then who's to say? But, you normally won't study wordless magic until half-way through sixth year."

"Yes, but I've read about it. And Hermione tried it once in Charms. It worked for her but Professor Flitwick discouraged it. She explained the principles to me. Wordless is hard to do on other spells and such, but with my own stuff, well...." He just shrugged his shoulders.

The former professor walked over to the boulder and tried to push on it. It did not move at all. He pounded a fairly smooth part with his fist. He stepped back and nodded to Harry in its direction.

Harry pointed his wand at the boulder and cast, "*Relegato Totalus!*" The huge stone was gone and Harry retracted his wand into his holster.

Remus' eyes went wide and he said, "You didn't use the normal banishing spell?"

"No, you know that it only makes low mass and low density things go away. When you use it on a person all it does is push them around. I had to make the Boulder Bombs much larger and denser. That's why they stay solid in a fight. It has to be broken away by rough curses and spells. But after I

created one of them, I had to be able to get rid of them. I had to figure that out before I mongered the spell to create them in the first place. I could levitate them but where would I take them here at the Dursleys'? I concentrated on the physics of it for a while, and then just mongered this spell to clean them out of my room."

Remus gaped at Harry with his mouth opened. In two seconds Harry realized it had happened again. He sighed, "What'd I do this time?"

Remus snapped his jaw shut and looked down before looking back up. "Well, er, you're not supposed to conjure items out of the air with such large and solid form. That's why such items banish so easily or just vanish after a while for children and weaker witches and wizards. When the Fighting Barrier comes up out of the ground, it uses the dirt, which is why it's so hard on a witch or wizard to cast, and why it lasts so long under an attack. Of course you have apparently made that charm much more efficient. My amazement, sorry, is that you've cast the same solidness out of the air. Steph Granger told me about quantum physics, briefly. I've studied much of standard Muggle science, but nothing that complex."

Harry said, "Well, don't tell Hermione I've done this, she doesn't like it when I don't follow the rules. School rules are one thing, but breaking the laws of science as we understand them applied to magic - I'm not sure how she'd take that." Harry asked stoically, "Is that all you wanted to see?"

Remus blinked. "Well, er, yes. And also it's been over five minutes since you cast that first spell here. Notice it? No owls from the Ministry. Of course, Mafalda Hopkirk has finally joined the Order of the Phoenix because of your, er, activities the other day. She's been a friend of ours, and Albus has been working on her. Her detection equipment could do a lot of good in our fight with the Death Eaters. She can't just Floo us with anything, leastways until the Minister of Magic approves such things - fat chance with Fudge in office. But after your fight, she's now a big Harry Potter fan," seeing Harry's face drop he rushed on, "I mean she now wants to fight in this war, as opposed to sitting on the side lines, and you were the one to make her see things more clearly.

"She agreed that if she picks up underage magic use near here she won't record it as an infraction, but will send an owl only to warn you. The fact that no owl has come tells us that *no* under age magic has occurred here, so you must truly be no longer underage. So, if we finish with the Goblins in time, we have every right to expect the ministry to allow you to take the Apparation test. Who knows what they'll actually do, but... we'll see. You ready to follow me to Gringotts?"

"First." Harry shot out his wand again and transfigured their cloaks into fine robes, not dress robes, but what he'd seen as business attire robes around Diagon Alley. He then said, "How's that?"

"Fine Transfiguration work, Harry. More reading?"

"And practicing. I guess I'll definitely have to tell Hermione that reading *is* helpful. I think I'll wait until Ron's not around though."

Remus laughed and then cracked off to the bank.

Within seconds Harry followed.

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They had arrived nine minutes early. An ornate sign on the wall stated "Time is Money." Harry had heard Vernon prattle on about time being money whenever his uncle himself wasn't running late. Harry wondered if it was originally a Goblin expression, or human.

The Goblin at the front desk thanked them profusely for being ahead of schedule, and the chime of the clock on the mantle in the meeting room hadn't sounded the top of the hour when they were seated. Director Gultangk as he introduced himself, had been waiting for them in the room and he also thanked them profusely for being early.

Harry went through the process of signing any number of documents. Gultangk had a normal pace for explanations he seemed to be following and Harry understood most of it. Three times however, Harry had stopped the director and asked questions that took several additional minutes to answer. Each time, Gultangk seemed more and more displeased to answer, though he did answer Harry's questions completely. Each time that he returned to his standard recitation of facts, the Goblin began with the sentence, "Time is money."

Early on Gultangk told Harry that he had over nineteen million Galleons in ready reserve drawing interest, compounded daily, and that the stocks, bonds, and other investment instruments more than tripled that. Property values had not been assessed in nearly a year, but at that time, the property net worth had exceeded eleven million Galleons.

Lupin seemed surprised, not because of the amount, he knew the rough worth of the Potter estate. Remus' surprise was that Harry seemed untouched by the astronomical numbers being bandied about.

After the third time Harry interrupted Gultangk to ask a question, the Goblin looked at his watch and answered succinctly. Then Harry sat bolt upright as if he'd just realized something. He said, "Director Gultangk. Time *is* money. Please forgive me for not realizing the situation. There is a standard amount of time you've set aside to help me today, correct? Please begin charging my ready reserve account at your standard going rate plus ten percent for any time I ask for above and beyond my allotment.

"I want our years of association to be profitable for both of us. I demand that you charge me above normal rates and I expect you to deliver your highest quality in service and assistance. If I am being rude or a poor businessman by *your* standards in asking this, please forgive me. I mean no offense."

Lupin looked fearful because of Harry's boldness, but Gultangk produced a truly wicked looking and apparently delighted Goblin smile.

"Mr. Potter. Few wizards even attempt to understand Goblin ways, and our mutual relationships are poorer for it. The standard rate I charge for my consultations is fifty Galleon an hour, the average weekly wage for a wizard clerk starting at your Ministry of Magic. At your request, I will charge you fifty-*five* Galleons an hour and endeavor to provide you your money's worth. At any time you may question the value I deliver for the time I charge.

"However, I will add one hour free of charge to your time allotment today in appreciation of your perceptiveness and business acumen. Time *is* money, but I have nothing scheduled before 4:30 today that will hold me from answering any and all questions you raise," Gultangk said, swiveling slightly in his chair.

"Director, is there some book or pamphlet I can read to better acquaint myself with Goblin business practices, and if it is permitted, how may I read about Goblin society, government, etc.? Forgive me if I'm being too bold."

Gultangk looked at Lupin. "Is he serious?"

Remus looked the Director squarely in the eyes. Lupin was the one who had told Harry that Goblins did not trust those who would not look then squarely in the eyes. "Harry Potter is a most truthful and determined young man, and none of the derogatory things that you've read about him in the *Daily Prophet* are true. He says what he means."

Gultangk turned back to Harry and said, "Mr. Potter. Please allow me to purchase at my expense several books that will help you. They are not large, so they will not impinge on your school reading, but they will be of assistance. I will also place one hour's credit to your account in our information department to allow you to ask that source any question you have on Goblins and things Gobbledegook. Do you have language skills? Would you like to learn our language, at least the basics?"

"I've never had the opportunity to learn any other language than English, but I'd like to try, I think, if my school schedule permits," Harry said earnestly.

"Fine. We Goblins speak different languages like you humans do. Gobbledegook is the language of Goblins on what you call the British Isles. And, it's the language of commerce in the Goblin world. We have developed learning books to teach our tongue. One teaches Gobbledegook-in-English, but I believe it has never been purchased.

"You spend no time really learning it. You use a pillow when you sleep, am I correct? We use a wooden board, so I'll have the volume adjusted. You place the book under your pillow and it teaches you while you sleep. I'll also send you at my expense the first book in the series. I believe there are a total of ten. A stake-mate of mine, what you might consider a dorm-mate with life long connections, owns the company that produces these books. I will include how to contact him if you desire any of the next language books or any other reading on Goblins or finances, beyond what I send you. I will also arrange for him to give you the clique discount of one percent. We Goblins work in affiliations, what you might consider a clan or zaibatsu. A clique is an affiliation three steps below a stake-mate. Cliques are entry level, but all of our lasting relationships begin there."

Harry said, "Thank you very much, Director Gultangk. I am sure I do not begin to appreciate what you are doing for me in this. I owe you a favor, and trust you to ask one of equal value should you need to do so.

"You are most welcome, Mr. Potter."

"Please call me Harry, sir."

The Goblin paused for a moment. "As one I consider an Affiliate, it is appropriate that I call you Potter, and you call me Gultangk. No non-Goblin knows or hears our given names. Ministry officials often delete my title, which presumes familiarity not given. We expect such rudeness from time to time, but few have been given permission to do so."

"Once again, Gultangk, I am honored and grateful for your trust. Now, since time *is* money, let us proceed, shall we?"

Harry had the slightest smile on his face. Lupin's face showed he feared Harry had gone too far. Gultangk looked slightly shocked, but in a moment what appeared to be Goblin laughter emitted from his nose.

Finally Gultangk said, "This valise has all of your Family Patents for the Potter and Black families, and their hereditary assignments, *stativus*, *interrex*, and *interrex saeculum*. Before you ask, those are Three-Thirty-Three Family designations within rights and commitments of those ruling family lines. I am not qualified to explain that matter further.

"With this inheritance you now own two first level vaults, Potter, and you'll need them. If you choose to keep your third level school vault we will rent it's use from you for one hundred Galleons a year. If you choose to sell it, the going rate for that level, below the half number mark, is twelve hundred Galleons, but you could probably bid it up a bit."

"I think I'll not sell, Gultangk," Harry said. "I will be glad to rent it to you though. What say the revenue from that vault goes to the Displaced Goblins Relief Fund, under the stipulation that I do not have to wait until the end of the full year contract should I need it sooner? Fair?"

The Director briefly showed his teeth - a disconcerting look, but one the two wizards had come to see as positive. "That is *most* generous, Potter, and nearly unheard of. Only one other wizard has made such a donation."

Harry said, "I bet it was Professor Dumbledore, wasn't it?"

Goblins are well known for their poker faces in business dealings. Just for a moment, Director Gultangk let his slip. His eyes widened a bit. "The donor wished to remain anonymous." But the guess had been confirmed.

Gultangk hurried on. "Is there any further way we may be of service to you, Potter?"

"Do you have anything like a Muggle credit card, hopefully? Something for me like my house-elf's account that allows Dobby to access whatever he needs at certain Wizarding stores and then it takes the money from my vault. I'd like something that hopefully works everywhere, magical and Muggle?"

"There is our Gringotts Forum Disk." Gultangk rang a small gong on his sideboard and a golden disk with chain appeared in a velvet-lined box in the center of his desk.

"Potter, take your Gringotts key in your left hand. I'll hand this disk to you and it will shock you slightly. Then it will be registered for your use only." Harry did so. "Place it on the cash register of any Wizarding business, and it will transfer funds immediately rung. Ask about that before you place it there.

"When Muggles see it, it appears to be a Barclays Platinum Excelsior Card. It works anywhere normal credit cards are accepted, and in Muggle Cash Transfer Machines. You place it on their registers as well, and all Muggles around it think you are using it as a credit card, even though it is a metallic disc. Just use your vault number as an identity number. Of course that assumes that your magical presence will allow you that close to such Muggle devices.

"Because of your magical emanations you may want a friend to use it for you, and you stand back a few feet or so. Point your wand hand at it if a friend does this for you, and it will work. It has enough Muggle disillusionment charms on it that they won't notice the odd behavior."

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"Remus, do wizards or witches ever carry two wands or more?"

Lupin looked at Harry for a moment but his eyes indicated he was thinking. "I believe Mad-Eye does, and many of the Aurors do, I think. Why do you ask?"

They were walking into the bank's secured Apparation area. Just then Tonks Apparated in and headed to a door away from them. Lupin had told Harry that Aurors used the site as well as important Gringotts' clients.

She didn't recognize them as their hoods were up. Harry shouted her name just as she stumbled on the carpeting. Startled, she whipped out her wand, but before she knew what had happened, Harry had covered the six feet to her, caught her, and relieved her of her wand.

"Cor blimey, Harry. Give a girl a fright would you. And if you tell Moody you disarmed me I'll hex your nose off. I know all about noses," she volunteered.

"Sorry," Harry said. "Do you have a minute or two?"

"I just popped in to see Bill. I'm off this afternoon, but I'm going by the office for a few minutes anyway. He and I have a date for dinner tonight, and I wanted to double check when. Wotcha need?"

"You're dating Bill, er Weasley? I thought... never mind. Er, can Aurors carry two wands?"

"Sure thing. We have a license to carry as many as we want, but no one's going to carry more than two or three. Each one is magically registered like your first one. I carry a second in my unmentionables, which I guess I just mentioned. I've thought about one for my boot. Only Moody carries more than three, wouldn't you know. Why'd you ask?"

Harry looked down. "You saw the memory the other day. I lost my wand for a few moments and it might have been disastrous. Can a civilian get one of those permits?"

"The Director can give a permit to anyone, but rarely does as you might guess. The Minister of Magic can also. They give them to certain civilians with a demonstrated need, such as security guards and such. Most of us like you down there in the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, but you have to be of age, Harry. Sorry."

Harry looked at Remus. Lupin said, "Keep this quiet, please Tonks, but the Goblins at Gringotts have declared Harry to be of age. It's confusing, but something about how Goblins come of age at different times. Harry's the first wizard I've heard of to gain his majority under that clause. They seem to be quite taken with Harry here."

"We've checked and the Ministry apparently has him in the records now as eighteen, believe it or not. We're going there right now for Harry's Apparation tests. You should see how accurately he Disapparates, and quiet too."

Tonks said, "So you want another wand, all registered and legal like?"

"It's just that, when I lost my wand in that fight, it would've been nice to have a back up wand to draw and keep fighting. I'm right keen on my wand, but..." Harry paused sadly, and slowly continued. "If I'd had a spare wand a few days ago I might have drawn it instead of doing that wandless Fireball curse. I put too much power into it. I didn't want to incinerate Flint, just catch him on fire enough to make him leave." Harry stopped speaking and stared at his hands.

"I'll... I'll ask, Harry." Tonks swallowed. "I'll go and ask right after I see Bill. You're high on Madame Bones list right now, what with the dementor attacks being foiled and... well, the other day. And she says her niece can produce a Corporeal Patronus because of you, so I'm sure she'll agree. What say you Disapparate there right now. You take your test and I'll be along in a mo' or three."

Lupin said, "We'd better Floo there, since Harry doesn't have his license yet. But we'd appreciate it if you see Madame Bones about this and meet us at the testing area." Remus paused, then said, "Oh, and Tonks, would you ask if she'd grant me a second wand permit also? Same sort of reasons as you two have for them."

"Sure thing. See you boys soon. It will take me only a few minutes here, then to the Ministry."

Harry and Remus Flooed to the Ministry. The testing room was right off the Floo and Apparation Concourse. Harry tripped out of the fireplace, but did not fall. Remus removed the slight dust from his hooded robe, and the mess from Harry's. In the testing room they silently took a number and waited in the corner of the room where they could talk. Harry turned his back on everyone else but Remus, and swished his wand through the same spell he'd used at the restaurant so they could hear his number called, but could speak in private.

Harry said, "I thought, well, I'm not sure how I... I thought you and Tonks might be dating."

Remus chuckled. "I could certainly do worse than Tonks. We've spent a lot of time together Harry. The Tonks family was the only family Sirius had after leaving the Blacks. We'd see her a lot, but she was three when Sirius and I finished Hogwarts. She would call me Uncle Remus back then. I'm fifteen



years older than her, which is still a bit of a reach at my age. I'm seeing another woman, one closer to my age right now. I'll not say who, 'cause it's early still, but I'll let you know if we become more of a couple."

"I thought Bill was dating Fleur Delacour," Harry protested.

Remus smiled. "The operative word being 'was.' The Weasleys talk about this openly, so I'm not telling tales out of school. Bill couldn't stand the attention Fleur received as a veela. Plus, he never seemed sure she hadn't used her powers on him. When he questioned her it caused Fleur to blow up at him.

"Tonks was three years behind Bill at Hogwarts, and says she's had a crush on him since her second year when he made prefect. They've dated a month I believe.

"Fleur has apparently captured Charlie Weasley's eye over June and July. Veelas come from Eastern Europe, and as a standard practice all foreign nationals at the Dragon Preserves take a veela antidote potion regularly. It makes you aware of the attraction and able to fight it. Charlie says that she's not that powerful compared to what he's seen. He's back in Romania now, but I believe they correspond."

They became silent for a while. About half of those ahead of Harry had gone by this point. "Harry, Dumbledore sent word that he's been delayed a day or two more. He asked that I apologize to you for the delay."

"I know. Fawkes brought me a message early this morning."

Remus sighed, which caused Harry to look up. "You may not have thought about it Harry, but we in the Order, along with Steph Granger, have gone over that Pensieve memory of your fight a number of times to learn as much as we can, and to see who we might identify as Death Eaters. It never occurred to me, but we didn't ask your permission. Did we offend you in that?"

"No, though I'm glad to know about it," Harry said. "As much as it might bother me, I'll give my other memories of my fights with Voldemort if you think they might help - just for the Order. I don't trust the Ministry, even though I'd like to help the good Aurors as much as possible.

"Remus, why does it have to be so confusing? Why can't we all be on the same side, fighting Voldemort? Here I want to be an Auror, I think, and there are Aurors I'd fight on sight, and Aurors I'd die for. That can't be right, can it?"

"No, Harry, it's very wrong, but it is all too human. We could spend days, as people before us have spent decades discussing it, but I just think that men, *and* women of course, so people in general sometimes want what they want more than they want what is right and good. If someone wants wealth and goes about it honestly - investing, starting a business, providing a service or product, then God bless them in their efforts. The Weasley twins stand a good chance to become wealthy, and more power to them.

"Likewise, if someone wants to be in government and serve the people, and aspires to be Minister of

Magic even, that can be a worthy goal - if they truly try to serve the people to the best of their abilities. They're allowed to make mistakes, monumental ones even, *if* their hearts are in the right place and they try as best they can. But a number of those seeking wealth and/or power place their own gain or status above honesty and the good of those they serve or govern. Minister Fudge is one of the worst examples I can think of in recent history."

"I've thought along those lines, Remus, and I've read a bit on the subject. You apologized about looking at my memories. I never want to be that sensitive with you. And I hate being that way with Professor Dumbledore. It's just... well, he doesn't know what went on, but he's so sure I didn't have it too bad at the Dursleys.' I guess he knows now if he's looked at the memories I gave him." He looked up. "You're my guardian. I'll show you those memories as well. If we have time we can go by Grimmauld Place and I'll make another temporary Pensieve and let you watch. It won't be silver after I transfigure it, so it'll be safe."

"Harry, now that you're of age and the head of a Three Thirty-Three Family, I'm not really your guardian anymore."

"Can I still treat you like you're my guardian, Remus?" Harry asked earnestly. "There's so much I don't know and there are so few people that I trust."

"When you're a hundred and I'm a hundred and twenty, I'll still have your best interest at heart, but it pleases me to hear you ask, Harry."

"Remus, will you be with me when I talk to Dumbledore when he's back? He just doesn't understand sometimes. He jumps in thinking he knows what I'm saying or what's best for me, which is about to make me go spare. I want to be a part of the decision making. I guess now that I'm of age; I can make all my own decisions without listening to a word he says, but that would be foolish. He is very powerful, knows tons more than I ever will, has lived over a hundred and fifty years, defeated his own Dark Lord, and is amazing in a fight. I'd be nuts not to want his help and guidance.

"Yet, I don't think I'm being childish when I insist he keep me informed about things that involve me, and that I be a part of making decisions about my life. Is that too much to ask? It's my life, such as it is. I have a job to do, a battle to fight, but I'm a person, not a weapon."

"Harry, I don't know what to say. I never thought about it that way before now, but we in the Order have probably been talking about you like you were that eleven-year-old boy who knew nothing of our world. But you're the warrior leader I'm going to follow into battle, aren't you? You're preparing to fight a war and I'm piddling around wondering if you should have two wands or not.

"I'm the foolish one, Harry, and I'm sorry."

Harry turned and looked Remus straight in the eye. Lupin squirmed slightly. "Remus, I have never felt that you've treated me that way, or thought of me like that. If you have, then I accept your apology, but I'm not the same person who stormed the Department of Mysteries with no plan of action and my friends in my wake. I'd like to think I took to heart what you told me at the start of summer holidays and I'm becoming what you, Moody, Mr. Granger, and Dumbledore want me to be. But since I am, I

need to be treated accordingly. Remus, you're doing just fine. You've not bothered me about Spell Mongering, and your help today has been invaluable. I am not in a place where I can take care of my affairs, but you've brought this business with Gringotts to me as soon as you could, and now without any fanfare or hesitation, you're taking me to test for my Apparation license, and to buy another wand if I can.

"Do you really think Dumbledore would just let me do these things without an argument? Being able to Apparate has been useful so far this summer, now I'll be able to do it legally. The second wand might be crucial. Don't you think Dumbledore would think I might use it to get away with pranks around school, and stop me?"

Remus thought for a moment and then said, "I think if you presented it to him with your reasons, and if he listened until you finished explaining, he'd agree. Molly Weasley on the other hand..." Remus grinned.

"Let's not discuss her," Harry said with a smile. "As much as I love her, and I know she loves me, she still sees me and Ron, *and* Ginny, like we were still on the platform waiting for the Hogwarts Express back in first year."

"Harry, maybe it's because I was a Marauder, but after I got over the initial shock of knowing you were a Spell Monger, I immediately understood that what you said had to be true. Mongering in and of itself is no more evil than the person practicing it. Your wand example works. Another is that there are about as many Dark potions as there are beneficial ones. No one even regulates potions tampering or creation. They do put restrictions on potions after they're created if need be, but some should have never been developed.

"I also want you to know that after you left us the other day, Dumbledore came to a realization that he has treated you like a child much too long. He admitted it before all of us. You mentioned that the first memories you left for him were of the Dursleys; what was in the second temporary Pensieve?"

"Excerpts from Snape's classes over the years and from his attempts to teach me Occlumency. "

"You'll have to show me those memories as well, if you don't mind," Remus said.

"No problem, Remus. Oh, they're calling my number."

The test administrator turned out to be a classmate of Lupin's, a lady named Pamela Tallow. She quickly agreed to keep Harry's name quiet. She seemed delighted to meet the young man, although she'd immediately looked to his scar. She only mumbled that she had thought he was a year younger, but when she entered his name into the ledger, nothing happened as she paused, so she handed him the written test.

Harry headed towards one of the empty school desks in the corner she'd pointed to. The written test consisted of only ten short answer questions. Lupin's brief tutorial that afternoon covered them, so Harry finished in a few minutes. Scoring it took less than a minute.

Tallow took Harry and Remus into a room about half the size of a Quidditch pitch. She asked Harry to crack from marked point to point about the room. Then she asked Harry to Apparate to the Apparation point at Diagon Alley, near the Leaky Cauldron. Remus told them to wait while he Apparated there to check for security risks. He disappeared and reappeared less than twenty seconds later. While he was gone, Tallow told Harry that she had never tested anyone as quiet Apparating as Harry was. Lupin arrived back and the three of them were at Diagon Alley in seconds.

"Now, Harry, I need to see you to go one more place - a little distance this time, but under one hundred miles. I know you've been to Stonehenge, but Muggle tourists are wandering all over it this time of day in the summer. Have you been to Woodhenge? It's about eighty miles from here." As she was speaking Tallow pulled out a picture of the historic site, as she spoke.

"Where do you want me to land?"

"Harry-" Lupin started.

Tallow said, "We have a permanent Disillusionment charm on this corner of the meadow right there. Have you seen it?"

Harry stared for a few moments. Remus called his name again, but didn't a third time when Harry ignored him.

Harry handed the picture back to her, smiled, and Apparated away.

"Pamela, he's never been to either Stonehenge or Woodhenge. He's Apparating to a picture."

"But... that's impossible for a new..."

"You'll find that Harry specializes in the impossible. None of the bad things you've read are true about him, but all of the good things are. And half the good things have not been published. Five or six weeks ago Harry Apparated for the first time to a place he'd never been, focusing on a memory of a picture he hadn't seen in weeks."

A small snapping sound occurred and Harry was back. "You guys coming? It's a gorgeous day."

*Snap.* Harry was gone again.

Remus grinned because Harry had startled Tallow a bit. "Pamela, Harry had received no training in Apparation that first time, but one of his best friends was in danger and Harry just decided to Apparate to her rescue. The second time he Apparated he brought a Squib with him to save her life. The third time he went from London to the gates of Hogwarts with pinpoint accuracy - all with no training. Please don't make a fuss over this. Harry's a modest young man. And we'd better join him now."

They both found Harry running around the meadow chasing after a dog, who's master seemed to be nowhere in sight.

After a few minutes in the sunshine, they Apparated back to the training room. A rather subdued Tallow filled out the paperwork, but gave Harry a genuine and admiring smile as she handed him his license.

Harry and Lupin walked out of the room and found Tonks near the door. "I'm sorry. Have you been waiting long?" Harry asked her.

"Less than five minutes. No worries. You both have multi-wand permits now, signed by Madame Bones herself. Any messages for Bill? I see him at 7:00 tonight."

"Just send him my regards, Tonks, and thanks again for this."

"Anything for you two. See ya."

They walked to the general Apparation Concourse. "Remus, can't we just Apparate in front of the counter at Ollivanders rather than going to the Apparation Point at the other end of Diagon Alley?"

Lupin said, "If his counter area is full, you'd end up outside or not be able to go there at all. Of course knowing Ollivander, if anyone can, he might have anti-Apparation wards up inside his shop. If he does, we'll just end up outside the wards, in front of the building."

"Alright, you know his shop counter area pretty well, go ahead and I'll be right behind you."

Harry smiled and left the building. Just before he joined him, Remus noticed once again that Harry's Disapparation noise was getting quieter.

There was a slight bump in his Apparation trip, and Remus appeared outside of Ollivander's, about six or eight feet from the shop front, staring toward the door. Anti-Apparation wards. He thought Harry should be right next to him, but he wasn't there. Lupin quickly spun around and knew a fraction of a second of panic, but as he completed his turn, he came to the dirty window of Ollivander's and saw Harry through the panes of glass. He rushed in to see Ollivander as he'd never seen the wand master before, holding a wand tensely at his side.

Harry was saying, "I'm sorry Mr. Ollivander. I... I just Apparated here to your counter area and..."

"Obviously, Mr. Potter, Good day to you, Mr. Lupin. Apparently, Mr. Potter, I have been too late in doing the annual maintenance to my anti-Apparation wards. I had intended to do so next week. They must be weaker than I thought. I'll close early today, right after I served you, and attend to it. Here for a spare wand, gentlemen?"

Harry never ceased to be amazed at how Ollivander knew what the clients who entered his shop came for. Looking at his guardian's face, he saw that he was not alone.

"Harry and I would like back-up wands, and I am interested in looking at your wand arm holders."

"Excellent, excellent, gentlemen. In your situations a second or even third wand would not be ill advised. If I may hold your wands for a moment, it will help me guide you to another. As the older

wizard, Mr. Lupin, you should be easier. May I?" Moments later Ollivander entered his shelves and began to pull boxes, but he continued to speak slowly to them.

Identical to Harry's own experience when he was eleven, Mr. Ollivander told about the wand choosing the wizard, and gave the length, core material, and wood composition of eight wands that did not chose Remus. The ninth, a twelve-and-a-half inch cherry wood with a unicorn hair core responded to Remus with a lovely shower of red sparks and chose him. Ollivander drew out an arm wand holder from under the counter and handed it to the werewolf to try for comfort and ease of use.

Harry moved his arm up and his wand shot out into his hand and extended it to Ollivander.

"Excellent draw, Mr. Potter. I see you've been practicing."

"Not really, just every day use."

The wand maker said nothing, but had an odd look on his face. After going back for two minutes into the shelves and stacks, muttering to himself the whole time, Mr. Ollivander came out and said, "I well remember your first wand, Mr. Potter; we had a time of it, but in all of these I do believe we will find one to back up your first wand.

"If you don't mind, Mr. Potter, may I take a minute or two and have you try several I doubt will work with you? Their response when you hold them should help me in some wand research I am doing."

While they were waiting for his turn to take the Apparation test, Harry had told Remus about the kindness he'd been shown by Mr. Ollivander in the summer before his third year, when Harry had helped with the annual inventory. At that time Mr. Ollivander had told him the story of the founding of Ollivanders as a wand making establishment in 382 B.C., which also brought magic about in Great Britain as it was known today.

Lupin looked hesitant about Harry helping with such vaguely described testing, but Harry quickly agreed. The wand maker continued, "I am most grateful. This is an eight inch oak wand with a unicorn hair; stiff, for Defense work, but much too short for you."

Harry took the wand and held it up and away from them. In a second a small shower of golden sparks began to exit the wand, and filled the ceiling. It lasted for roughly six seconds before ending. Harry laid it down on the counter. He was relieved that nothing had blown up.

"Most curious." Ollivander spoke with much more awe than he'd had when Harry had first succeeded with the brother wand of Voldemort's. All three were quiet for several long seconds.

"Please try this one; eleven inches, willow and dragon heartstring. Very swishy and good for Charms. Should be too flexible for you."

A nearly similar golden flow of sparks occurred.

Harry began, "Mr. Ollivander...?"

"Please, Mr. Potter, just humor me." He reached to a wand mounted on the wall, covered with dust. "Fourteen inch spruce with a half core of unicorn hair."

Once again the golden sparks occurred, but maybe for one or two seconds less time than the two times before. The wand maker took it from Harry and replaced it on the wall.

Mr. Ollivander began taking all of the wands before him out of their boxes, over two dozen. While doing that he said, "That wand from the wall was made during the Grindelwald war, when core materials were in short supply. Those half-core wands were never effective for anyone. I was only able to produce a few red sparks from them, and I can get a few red sparks out of a piece of unfinished wand-tree wood."

On and on, with all of the wands handed him, Harry produced similar golden showers of only slightly varying lengths of time. When he'd laid the last one down, the smoke was rather thick in the room, and absentmindedly Harry swished his hand in the air. The smoke vanished.

Remus had not moved at Harry's right during the entire exercise. Ollivander's silvery eyes were wider than Harry had ever seen them. He said, "The most curious thing yet. Wandless and wordless and just now a sixth-year I do believe. Correct, Mr. Potter?"

Harry nodded. He hated any attention about being unusual, and regretted using the small charm he had mongered to clear the air in his potions lab. But the special attention ended.

"Please allow me to show you gentlemen something." He drew his own wand from his robe pocket and laid it on the counter. "The Ollivander's have had an affinity with every wand we've made. We can produce red sparks from any wand and even rough wand tree wood strips as I mentioned. Please observe."

He picked up his own wand and raised it like the two had tested their wands. A shower of golden sparks left his wand much as Harry had produced. When it stopped he blew on the end, and replaced his wand in his robe.

"Hardly anyone who isn't an Ollivander has ever produced golden sparks, and we only seem to do it with a select few wands in addition to our own wands. Please consider wand making as a profession, Mr. Potter. We've only trained Ollivanders here since 382 B.C., but in your case I am willing to make an exception." Harry just nodded with a dazed look on his face.

Mr. Ollivander returned to the subject at hand. "Normally a second wand is for a particular type of magic that your original wand was not as attuned to. Your friend, Miss Granger - her wand, for instance, vine wood and dragon heartstring, is particularly attuned to Charms, and Transfiguration almost as well. She might want a second wand stronger in Defense, such as yew or holly and phoenix feather.

"You two stated 'back-up' not secondary wands, so I brought out wands that would lean towards Defensive magic as your original wands do. Coincidentally, Mr. Lupin, cherry wood and unicorn hair at twelve inches was the preferred wand combination of the great dueling master of the early 1800's,

Oscar Trenchworth.

"But you, Mr. Potter, have the luxury of choosing your own wand based on whatever criteria you wish - length for concealment, color or design for eye appeal; any choice will perform almost or as well as your original wand."

Harry stared for a moment, shook his head, and said, "Please narrow the selection, sir, based on what you think. Defensive back-up is my concern."

Ollivander thought for a minute and said, "This eight and half inch ebony and dragon heartstring would hide well in a boot, as would this nine inch holly and unicorn hair. I see you have your present wand in an arm holder. This twelve-inch ash and unicorn hair would conform to your other arm as easily as your holly and phoenix feather wand does now.

"Have you ever considered double wand fighting, Mr. Potter?" Seeing the inquisitive look on the young man's face the wand master continued. "It's not approved for formal dueling, but since you can perform some wordless and wandless magic, with a fair bit of practice you should be able to use two wands at once. There is a small tome on the matter written by Gregorovich, the Ukrainian wand master who made Mr. Krum's wand. I will order it for you if you like.

"One more wand you may consider, Mr. Potter since you have choices: this eleven inch, mahogany and phoenix feather, just like your father's - for sentimental reasons." Harry and Remus stared at the last wand with mixed emotions obvious on their startled faces.

Harry pulled his Gringotts Forum Disk from his pocket. "I'll take all four if you don't mind, and an arm holder. Please add in Remus' purchases as well. I have this one on my right arm since I'm right-handed. Is there a different style for the left arm?"

Lupin was as surprised by Harry's decision as Ollivander, but when the wand maker looked his way, he nodded quickly. Harry was holding the mahogany wand and did not see the exchange.

"I see by your Forum Disk that you can easily afford this, Mr. Potter, congratulations on your majority, however you attained it." When Harry looked up startled, Ollivander explained. "Gringotts only gives out those Forum Disks to rather well to do wizards who are of age. I do not mean to be wrongfully inquisitive, I merely deduced that somehow you have come into you majority a year early, and have access to the Potter Estate or some other source of substantial funding.

"If that information is to remain unknown, use only Galleons within the Wizarding world and use your Disk as a funds source only in the Muggle world. I am discrete, and will honor your Disk for this transaction as well as your privacy. I am most grateful for your patronage. Please allow me to send you the book by Gregorovich as a small token of gratitude for choosing Ollivanders. The book should arrive within a week."

Outside Lupin asked, "What are you going to do with all of those wands, Harry?"

"I'm not really sure. All of them together are over kill, but I don't know which one or two I might like.



Another one on the arm and one in a boot might make sense; I might be able to reach one and not the other." He got quiet for a moment. "And I just like the idea of having one like my father's."

They walked out of Ollivander's and turned to walk to the Apparation point for Diagon Alley. Harry wanted to go by Eeylops Owl Emporium to purchase treats for Hedwig.

In their path stood Dawlish, an oddly bewigged Williamson, and two other wizards Harry had never seen before, all in Auror blue.

"Come with us, Potter, peaceable like," snarled Dawlish, his wand in his hand but by his side. "You're wanted by the Minister of Magic for questioning."

Lupin stepped between Harry and the four and asked, "What charge is Fudge using to justify bringing him in like this?"

"Potter here's been practicing Spell Mongering. You know that's something only a Dark wizard would do."

Lupin said, "Dark wizards also attack innocent children walking to the park." Dawlish frowned and stiffened, drawing his wand arm up just a bit.

Before Lupin could protest further Harry asked, "The Minister wants me. So Fudge has gone through the proper procedure to gain a warrant of inquiry from either the Wizengamot or Madame Bones?"

"You're a minor," Dawlish snarled. "We need no warrant for-"

"NOT, as of two hours ago, Harry said. "The Goblins at Gringotts co-signed my majority papers this afternoon. Take me in without the proper paperwork and you'll be liable. My lawyers will have you so tied up my children will gain their majority before you're out of court."

Dawlish frowned. "I'll risk it."

Harry smiled for a moment and Disapparated from the spot.

Williamson frowned and asked, "Where'd he go? His doesn't have an Apparation license."

Lupin said, "He does as of an hour ago. He probably popped up to Hogwarts."

Dawlish sneered. "No one with an hour-old Apparation license can go over four hundred miles. Half that's a stretch."

Lupin looked defeated. "You're probably correct. Let's pop to where you attacked him a few days ago."

Remus Apparated to that particular alley opening and waited. In a moment Dawlish and Williamson arrived, unwittingly confirming the attack and denying their tale of trying to assist Harry with the Death Eaters. Remus immediately Disapparated. It took several long seconds for the two Aurors to

concentrate and follow Harry's guardian.

Remus arrived at the Ministry Apparation Concourse, which was crowded with the end of the day employee migrations home. He'd purposely arrived right by a Floo fireplace and used it to travel to the Leaky Cauldron. He jumped right back in the fireplace and made it to the fireplace at Gringotts main hall, near the door. Unless one knew the person well, even an Auror couldn't follow someone taking such a convoluted path. Remus quickly walked outside the bank and randomly Apparated to Woodhenge, the Dursleys' back garden, and the wizarding artist colony in Penzance.

He paused for over a minute to catch his breath; no one was following him. He Apparated to a forest clearing half way between Penzance and Hogwarts, and then on to the front gates of the school. He waited another minute, and then walked in.

When Lupin was fifteen yards inside the gates, Harry disillusioned right by his side. Remus jumped and half drew his wand.

"HARRY!" Lupin exclaimed. "You've scared a year off my life. What the-"

"I've been reading about Disillusionment charms. They've seemed to work at the Dursleys,' but I've never had a chance to try one with an unsuspecting, er, victim shall I say?" He grinned at his guardian.

"You need to go to your safe place, wherever that is. I'll stand here just in case..."

"Remus, I fought those two to a standstill the other day, *before* I had that surge from the aberrant potion. And I didn't use any of my serious Defensive magic with them other than the Freeze spell. I'd love to face that lot now. I've developed a few binding spells of my own design I'd like to try. Then I'll take them to court for illegal arrest and assault.

"Come on. Let's go to the Great Hall. It's not dinner yet. Maybe I can find a house-elf to bring me a silver goblet. I'll transform it and show you the memories I showed Dumbledore. Then I'll go to my sanctuary and stay there until Dumbledore comes home and sorts out Fudge. *Again.*"

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The next day Harry knew he'd be taking the rescheduled Potions tutorial. He'd been reading Potions texts all summer so far, and had brewed the potions as he'd been instructed to in his correspondences with Professor Jiggers. Unknown to him, Harry was both ahead and behind those that were studying the subject this summer. His actual potions work was ahead of schedule, and he was ready for the start of classes, but he'd had gaps in his knowledge of the theory needed.

Harry arrived a few minutes early for his personal tutorial in Potions. All other Paladins were in mandatory exercise programs at the moment. Harry had been training and exercising between 5:00 to 8:00 that morning, and he'd do more before the day was out.

Jiggers entered the room less than a minute after Harry. The aged wizard stood just at Harry's eye level. He had a barrel chest, blue eyes that any woman would covet, and a shock of white hair elegantly coiffed around his head. He wore a gold-rimmed monocle in his right eye, was very dapper

in his expensive dress wear, and if it were the late 1890's, Jiggers' would be in the height of Muggle fashion.

"Potter," he wheezed breathily and made no attempt to look at Harry's famous scar. This delighted Harry whenever it rarely happened. "I'm Jiggers, Professor Credence Xavier Arsenius Jigger. I've seen the results of your O.W.L.s and I'll tell you that you'd have advanced in my class these many years ago, to N.E.W.T.s level without any tutoring. Imagine the nerve..."

"However, you've not done so at my insistence. None of you are going forward with an Exceeds Expectation without a bit more theory. I've even sent work to those with Outstanding grades in potions to make up the deficiency that I've seen in all of you that I've tutored. Even your Miss Granger missed two questions I'm thinking of on her O.W.L."

"Here." He handed Harry a thin textbook entitled, *Addendum to Magical Drafts and Potions by Arsenius Jigger* by Arsenius Jigger. "And no. I'm not so vain that I want my name on the book twice. My good friend and business partner, Tyranus Slug, whom I'd like to bludgeon to death in his sleep, also wrote a book impertinently titled *Magical Drafts and Potions*, after my book with that title was published. His was idiotic and pedantic and of no use at all. He wrote it in a fit of pique when I was given the Potions master's position here at Hogwarts in twenty-eight.

"He's since repented of his childish stupidity and has actually agreed to buy back every one of his books that can be found to avoid lawsuits. He could always mix and brew with the best of us, but had a nasty habit of *telling* others what to do out of order. Wrote the same way. Well, every other potion he wrote about in his book either blew up or poisoned people, so it was cheaper to buy the miserable books back than deal with the solicitors suing him."

Moments after the start of this tirade, Harry realized that this was *the* Arsenius Jigger who'd written their standard Potions book. Along with Hermione's help, studying that book closely had probably gotten Harry to the theoretical grade he'd received in Potions, probably his practical grade also.

Jiggers continued his rant, "I should have insisted that the basic book be republished with this addendum incorporated in it, but something about Wizarding copyright laws. Some Muggle once wrote, 'First, we kill all the lawyers.' Not a bad idea except we need then so much.

"Anyway, once you understand this little booklet and what it means, we'll be finished this summer and you'll be a better Potions student come September first.

"So, tell me Potter, what can you put in a potion?"

Harry was taken aback by the abruptness as well as scope of this question - and the ridiculousness of it. Then he tried to answer it. "Um, well, all sorts... there's hellebore and armadillo bile, and-"

"No, no. Categories. How many categories of materials or ingredients can you put in a potion? What *types* of things?"

Harry had no clue from five years of potions at Hogwarts and his EE in Potions Theoretical. But he

did remember a possible answer from his Muggle grade school science classes. "Er, solids, liquids, and gases?"

"Muggle schooled before coming here weren't you?" When Harry nodded Jiggers continued. "Only the Muggle-schooled seem to know that, and even some of them didn't pay attention in classes. Your Miss Granger started reciting the entire Periodic Table of base elements, but I finally got her to answer that question as simply as you did.

"Yes, solids, liquids and gases. What happens when you mix some granulated solids in a liquid - think when they disappear?"

"They dissolve?" Harry said hesitantly.

"Yes, Potter, good. If you keep pouring in that solid, they eventually can't dissolve any more, then it's \_\_?"

"Saturated."

"And Severus said- well, never mind. When it reaches saturation point what can you do to get the liquid to absorb even more of the solids?"

"Add heat." Harry answered this question more confidently. He'd always enjoyed the simple Chemistry classes he'd had in Muggle school, and had been disappointed when Potions was so different."

"You're going to do fine. Potter. Change of direction. What can you *do to* a potion while you mix it?"

"Well, you can heat it-"

"Yes, but think just a little broader, what does heating do?"

"Changes temperature, raises it."

"Now you're there. Heating is under the category of changing temperature, just like just cooling it or actually freezing it.

"Here're the basics of this book. There are three categories of ingredients: solids, liquids, and gases. The basic categories can be broken done further, such as solids can be animal, vegetable, or mineral. There are seventeen categories of things you can do to a potion such as change temperature, stir, agitate, separate, and so on. There are fourteen qualities of ingredients such as lubricity, coefficient of friction, and abrasiveness. There are nineteen basic types of magical spells or charms that can be done *to* a potion, and twelve basic types of spells, charms, hexes, or curses that can be incorporated *into* a potion. Learn these categories, and then learn the different types of effects of a potion on those who ingest them. Also, learn the types of possible ingesting effects on magical folks, Muggles, Squibs, magical creatures, magical animals, and non-magical animals. Also how animate objects, inanimate objects, and objects under spells, charms, and et cetera can be effected or affected by potions."

Jigger seemed most excited as he rattled off this list of potions related facts, figures, and trivia. He stopped and took a deep breath. "It sounds complicated, but it is not a lot of overall information. Learn these categories of information, then any fact you learn about potions making goes into a one or more of these categories. You'll find you can remember information much more easily - and more important, if you understand these rules you'll more easily realize what you're doing and where you're heading with a potion. You won't fumble around until *Lumos* goes off in your head. You'll have a framework for scientific investigation and analysis in potions making."

The little Potions master stopped and sighed. He lowered his hindquarters just a few inches so he could perch on the teacher's desk in front of Harry.

Jigger exhaled and said, "And that's the problem with my addendum. It is all about the scientific method as applied to potions making, and these proud pig-headed dunderheads think they're too good to use a Muggle idea in their work. The magical folk at Beauxbatons and Durmstrang translated this work into French, Spanish, German, Bulgarian, Russian, Basque, Croatian, Polish, and a host of other Slavic languages. They've benefited from this book. On the whole, all their students are better potions makers than ours here in England. The Americans love the idea of the scientific method. They like mixing Muggle and Magical technology - no bias hardly whatsoever. Snape refuses to use this addendum, and Dumbledore won't force him."

Jiggers spoke this last tirade with a wistful look on his face while looking off into the distance. Then he looked Harry fully in the face. "You'll not brook such foolishness, will you, lad?"

"No, sir, what you said makes good sense. I always liked chemistry in school."

Jigger smiled warmly for the first time since entering the room. "I knew that if Severus didn't like you, you'd be a bright lad."

Then Jigger looked two inches above Harry's right eye to his scar. But Harry didn't really care.

Over the next five days, Harry read the book through twice, basically memorizing the categories and effects. Three more private tuitions with Jiggers and Harry had a thorough grasp of the concepts. They spent ninety percent of the time together creating potions that demonstrated the tougher concepts so Harry could understand them in practice. After seven days Jigger dismissed Harry from further tutorials for the rest of the holidays, but charged Harry to review the materials several times before school began.

Jiggers also took great delight in telling Snape what a fine Potions student Potter was, "...after he studied my addendum, of course."

~\*~

That afternoon after his first session with Jiggers, Harry decided to stay in his room in the Friary at St. Simons to study and exercise.

Lupin was still intercepting and vetting Harry's incoming posts. Hedwig delivered Harry's *Daily*

*Prophet* with a note from Remus stating that Harry was in the news again.

This time it wasn't a front-page headline story. The entire front and second pages were occupied with the possible conflict with vampires taking place in Eastern Europe. Harry didn't know for sure, but he believed that was what occupied Dumbledore.

No, the story about Harry and Spell Mongery was on the third page above the fold. The headline used his name, but Spell Mongery wasn't mentioned until the first sentence. It accused Harry of mongering spells and using them in the estate where the Dursleys lived with over a hundred other Muggle families.

The article stated that Harry had apparently mongered a number of violent spells and curses with no other intent but to hurt people. It mentioned in the next paragraph all of the past accusations regarding Harry's mental instability. The unnamed author did not call Harry Dark, but the rest of the article cataloged the destructive lives of the Darkest Spell Mongers that had lived. There was nothing telling that he had used his mongered spells in self-defense against any number of Death Eaters. The implication was glaring - Harry was going Dark.

Along with the paper Hedwig brought Harry his posts for the day. Ron, Hermione, and Ginny sent a joint note, along with all of those at Grimmauld Place, stating they did not believe the accusatory article. There were also quick notes of support from Susan Bones, Ernie Macmillan, Lilith Moon, and Sally Fawcett. The letters from the last two were perfumed.

Harry appreciated their support and sent back quick thank you notes to each, but he just knew there had to have been a number of negative and derogatory posts for him that Remus had culled.

An additional note told Harry that Dumbledore would be back that evening, and asked to see him at 11:00 the next morning if convenient. Remus added that he would accompany Harry to that meeting as requested.

Harry threw himself into editing a paper he was writing on Shield charms for the DA. He also re-read one more time the teaching agenda for the expanded DA that Dumbledore had requested from him five weeks before. He ran on his track for an hour, exercised, and started trying to monger a standard Binding charm so *Finite Incantatem* wouldn't release the person bound.

Occlumency training with Father Martin was going well. Each night he would spend almost thirty minutes practicing what he'd learned, and had a fairly restful night. He rarely slept more than five hours, and felt very rested with that amount.

On his own training regimen he was up, training and exercising by 5:00 AM, if not earlier. Dobby fixed Harry a massive breakfast by 8:00 and the two discussed many things while Harry ate.

With a little more than ten minutes to go before his appointment with Dumbledore Harry crossed through the barrier between St. Simon's and Hogwarts. Five minutes later he was crossing the Entrance Hall to head to the tower where Dumbledore's office resided.

Harry watched several girls heading towards the Transfiguration classrooms, trying to avoid them. Therefore, he did not spare a glance to his sharp right. Draco Malfoy came up from the dungeons where Snape's office lay, and pulled his wand, sending a Disarming spell Harry's way.

Harry's reflexes had been heightened on Aberration Day to a fine point. Upon hearing the start of that spell, he rolled forward towards a suit of armor. In mid-roll his wand was out to return fire when he had a target.

Draco had scrambled back down several steps using the level of the floor of the entrance hall for cover. He fired a *Petrificus Totalis* that Harry didn't bother to dodge as it was so wide of its mark.

Harry shouted, "Incarcerous!" and kept running in a zigzag pattern toward Draco. Malfoy was bound securely and fell back down the stairs. Harry ran after him, wand raised. At the bottom of the steps he dodged a Severing Charm that hit the wall by his head and sent rock shards into his face and neck.

Harry cast, "*Inclusi Munio!*" A Battle Barrier appeared in the middle of the floor eight feet from the first step. Harry jumped behind it and pulled Draco in line with the barrier to protect the bound teen.

At that moment Harry heard two shouts. Remus called Harry's name from the top of the steps, and Professor Snape's distinctive rasp shouted his name as if it were a profanity from down the darkened corridor.

"Hold your fire, Severus," Lupin called as he ran down the steps.

"Potter, you arrogant little bast-"

Snape had walked forward and was beginning his tirade from six feet away. In a blur Harry made his way around the barrier, wrenched Snape's wand out of his grasp, tossing it back down the corridor. He pinned the professor to the wall by sticking his wand in the Snape's cheek to the point of causing a bruise.

"When you call me that name, Professor, you falsely accuse my mother. I'll not have that. If you want to get technical, I'm an orphan, not a bastard."

The potions master raised his hand to push the wand aside, but Harry's left hand grabbed his wrist and pinned it to his chest.

"Understood?"

Lupin had said nothing to this point, but the look in his eyes might kill. He finally asked, "Snivellus, did you send a Severing charm towards Harry at head level? That could have killed him. Why you..." His wand was out and he too headed toward Snape.

"Accio wands!" Draco and Snape's dropped wands shot up the stairwell. Lupin's was ripped from his hand. Harry's was pulled away from Snape's face, but he held onto it with some difficulty. He replaced the wand back in the professor's face but not pressing his skin.

Harry recognized Dumbledore's voice.

"Headmaster, I insist you have this whelp expelled from school!" Snape shouted.

Harry shook Snape's clasped wrist and poked the wand almost into his eye socket to silence the man he held captive.

In a deathly low voice Harry said, "Headmaster, I insist you call for an MLE officer with three Solicitor's Pensieves. I want my memories, Malfoy's, and Snape's for the last few minutes recorded for a meeting of the Board of Governors. I want this man removed from his post for attacking a student with deadly force."

Snape might have been slapped, judging by the look on his face. His actions had been called into account in a way that would cause him a great deal of trouble. It would be very difficult for Dumbledore to protect him.

The Headmaster began, "Harry, I am sure this was a misunderstanding-"

"No, Headmaster," said Lupin. "Harry was in a clear light here at the base of the stairs. Snape was in darkness down the corridor. Snape cast the Severing charm, but Harry only cast a Defensive Battle Barrier charm.

"It was Draco that started this by sending a Disarming spell followed by a Body Bind spell at me before I cast anything," Harry said tersely. "I'd done nothing to warrant such an attack. I hadn't even seen him."

Lupin had his wand back from Dumbledore by this time and tried to release Draco from his bindings. The ropes wrapped tightly around his body from mid calves to just below his nose, cutting off his ability to speak. *Finite Incantatum* did not release him. Nor did Dumbledore's cancellation spell.

Harry saw the request in Dumbledore's eyes, and mumbled under his breath the words that released Draco.

Harry said, "Attack me from behind again, Malfoy, and I'll leave you that way for a while."

"I'll get you for this Potter, just you wait-"

Harry waved his wand wordlessly at Draco and said, "Ten." After Draco went silent Harry said, "In ten minutes you'll be able to speak again. Enjoy your rest from conversation."

Harry turned and began walking up the stairwell.

"Potter, remove this spell from Mr. Malfoy, and remove this barrier from my dungeon!"

Harry said, "It's time sealed. No vocal sounds from Malfoy for ten minutes - nothing I can do about it. And as for the barrier, *Stativa Ancora*. You remove it." A heavy dull protective coating appeared, covering the Battle Barrier.



Harry moved quickly up the steps and walked briskly towards the headmaster's office. Snape began to raise his wand towards Harry, but after one low growl from Lupin Snape turned his attention to the barrier.

Lupin made his way after Harry, and Dumbledore followed after glaring at Snape for a moment.

~\*~ Harry fumed silently until all three were seated in Dumbledore's office.

"Harry, you must calm yourself. You shouldn't talk to a professor like that." Dumbledore droned. "Please, have a lemon drop."

Harry leaned forward. "Is that *all* you have to say about the subject?"

"What would you have me say, Harry?" that Headmaster asked wearily.

Harry closed his eyes. He took several deep breaths. "We desperately need to negotiate some boundaries, Professor." He reached out and took a lemon drop, sucked it briefly and then spat it out before he started laughing. "Do you really eat these? They're stale."

"Eat them? Why yes. Stale? These are from a new box I purchased just last week."

Harry grinned. He drew his wand and made a circle in the air. Then he called out Dobby's name. The looked at the two and said, "It's a way to call Dobby when he's where I'm staying now."

Dobby appeared with the usual house-elf Apparation sound. "You called, Harry Potter SIR?"

"Dobby, your source for Muggle foodstuffs, they have gourmet candies don't they?"

"Yes, sir, Harry Potter SIR."

"Would you please go there and purchase a case of the finest lemon drops they have? Please ask for a new case from the latest shipment, and offer to double the price if you can have the freshest back here in less than a half hour."

Dobby smiled and was gone in a wink.

"Professor, let's skip your precious Professor Snape for a moment," Harry said calmly. "I want to discuss Draco Malfoy. When you first told me about the Paladin Program, you said that it was open for any qualifying sixth or seventh year this autumn, regardless of house. I asked about Draco, and you doubted he would join. You did NOT promise he wouldn't. We both assumed he wouldn't, based on the chivalry requirements and equal treatment for all blood heritages. Evidently he agreed to those terms.

"Also that day, you agreed to tell me about anything that pertained to me. My first question is why I wasn't informed about Draco's admission to the program? I believe it's obvious why I'd want to know."

"Harry, I promise, I planned to tell you today. If I must I'll swear an oath-

Harry held up his hand. "There's no need to swear to me, Professor. Your word is good enough, and I'd challenge anyone who doubts it. Please continue."

Dumbledore swallowed. "I had intended to tell you today. I did want to see if they would stick to the program. You were secluded at Privet Drive so I waited to see if they'd persevere. Now that you have access to Hogwarts it was on my list of things to tell you. In addition to Mr. Malfoy, Tracey Davis, Clark Spinks, Pansy Parkinson, and Millicent Bulstrode have also joined. I had hoped for Mr. Zabini and Miss Greengrass, but they rejected the offer out of hand."

Harry looked stunned. After a moment he said, "Tracey and Clark I don't know, but they've been neutral enough in all of the Slytherin problems we've had, I guess. But Pansy and Millicent were with Draco in Umbridge's Inquisitorial Squad. They were really cruel."

The Headmaster said, "Miss Parkinson follows Mr. Malfoy as she always has. I had to accept them when they made the commitment. I was as surprised as you, but I have renewed hopes for them."

"Miss Bulstrode is an altogether different proposition. Five days after holidays began, her family was attacked by Death Eaters, and all were killed except her. She happened to be at Miss Parkinson's that afternoon."

"Apparently her maternal grandmother was a Muggle. They'd told everyone, including Miss Bulstrode that she was a Squib. Her parents had never joined Voldemort, but had espoused his beliefs. However, her brother had joined the Death Eaters just the previous month. He died before their house, wearing his Death Eater robes, with the mask flung down, trying to defend his family."

"This has been kept out of the press, but it's the exact type of information that needs to be broadcast to all, particularly purebloods."

"Miss Bulstrode raised quite a ruckus wanting in the program after that. She had refused just that morning. She is one Paladin this summer that might approach your commitment to training. She has asked to talk to you if you'll allow it. I am not sure why she wants to, but I am obliged to ask, Harry."

"Absolutely. When can I meet with her?" Harry asked. "I... I want to tell her how sorry I am for her loss. I believe I can sympathize."

All three were quiet for a moment.

Harry continued, "Er, based on that, I definitely would like to talk to her first, but I'll most probably do all I can to include her with all the others as we train. Hermione won't like it. Millicent has treated her roughly on at least two occasions that I know of. But Hermione will listen to reason. Also, I'll start working on Ron right away, even before meeting with Millicent. He'll jump to the wrong conclusion about all the Slytherins, not just Malfoy and Parkinson."

Harry had calmed himself, and now had a smile on his face. "Professor - we've had a bit of unpleasant history between us - especially in this past year. I want us to have a good working

relationship, and yet we seem to be arguing a lot lately. We must work together for the common good, don't you agree?" Dumbledore nodded and started to speak, but Harry cut him off.

"Oh, and before I go on." Harry reached into his robe and retrieved three thick scrolls of parchment. "About a month ago you asked for a lesson plan, training schedule, or whatever, for the expanded DA. We never really talked about how it would work, so since I had plenty of time alone, except for Dobby and Hedwig, I developed several options.

"There are basic year-long outlines for each term as a school club, and as practical classes in the afternoon. The classes' idea assumes that the Paladins will spend formal instructional time on these subjects, and that such classes will be optional for the non-Paladins at Hogwarts.

"I have curriculums for first-years, second and third-years, fourth and fifth-years, and Paladin sixth and seventh-years as well as non-Paladin sixth and seventh-years. I recommend that upper-year students act as assistants in the lower year classes or clubs. It will give the younger students someone to identify with in addition to the teachers, and gives the older helpers the opportunity to learn by teaching. I think I benefited more last year from teaching the DA, than from actually practicing the spells for the class.

"There's an old Latin proverb. I think it's *Exemplum Doceo*, but I may have mispronounced it. Anyway, it means "the example teaches." In this case it teaches the student and the teacher. Maybe all teaching does that. I'll have to think about it."

"So here are three scrolls of my ideas."

At the end, Harry had been arranging the scrolls on Dumbledore's desk so they wouldn't fall. He then looked up, and back and forth from the two he sat with. He looked puzzled for a moment about their expressions, and then he blushed and seemed perturbed.

"What? Oh. You're either amazed that I'd work on this so hard, or astounded that there are three scrolls worth. Or maybe it's my improved vocabulary."

Remus chuckled. Dumbledore stated that he was impressed with all three.

"Well as I said the other day, the speed reading has helped my learning and retaining. The Latin proverb made too much sense not to remember. And there aren't three scrolls of information; it's one scroll of information copied twice so you'd have extras."

"Harry, I'd hate to think you've been so bored that you'd take the time to copy this scroll twice more. We have Copy Quills here at Hogwarts."

"No, sir; I wrote it once, then I mongered a charm to imprint the entire text from the one scroll onto another. I can conjure a copy of the scroll with writing, but it's not permanent. Permanence is a challenge. This spell just conjures the text onto an existing parchment as it is on the first scroll. That's not too hard to make last. It takes about a second for each yard of parchment. That's much faster than a copy quill."

Dumbledore said, "That's an amazing bit of magic. I'd like to learn those charms."

Harry grinned like the kneazle who'd just caught a mouse.

"But, Professor, that's *evil* Spell Mongered magic," Harry said melodramatically. "You'd have to pay for it, of course. Aren't you afraid of being thought Dark if you use such spells and charms?"

Dumbledore looked surprised for a moment, then, actually blushed. Lupin laughed out loud.

The Headmaster raised his hands as if in surrender. "Harry, I've thought long and hard during my travels of the last few days. I purposefully take a Thestral carriage flight in many of my travels so I'd have time to think. You are absolutely correct that Spell Mongering is only as good or as evil as the witch or wizard doing the mongering. To compare it to Potions making was a fine analogy. I've not researched your claim that there has been a smear campaign to discredit Spell Mongery, but I don't doubt it to some degree at least.

"It was your Spell Mongering that caused Minister Fudge to send his Aurors to bring you in," Dumbledore said. "I pointed out that since there are no laws about the matter, he was in error. Cornelius said that he had the right to question anyone; he says he wasn't going to arrest you. I responded that he needed to make a *request* next time, not a demand. I informed him you would gladly answer questions with either me or your guardian present, and perhaps a lawyer. But requests of that sort need to be an invitation for a certain time, not an Auror capture attempt."

Dumbledore's eyes went wide for a moment and rushed on. "I meant no presumption on your person, Harry, that procedure follows the law and gives you leeway to act as you see fit. I didn't mean to insinuate myself in your affairs."

Harry held up his hand. "Professor, I would want either you or Remus, or both of you there in such a situation, if I couldn't avoid it altogether. You don't need to apologize for that.

"I don't want us to have to be overly cautious with each other. It's inefficient." Harry lowered his head and said a little more quietly, "I'd rather that we try to be friends.

"In the future, just make a statement along those lines and then say that you'll confirm it with me. That way you've given us both all the outs we need. In such matters I trust your judgment above anyone else I know.

"Which reminds me - could you recommend a book or two about our laws and government? I have a feeling my troubles with Fudge won't go away. And before you say 'Minister Fudge,' Professor, the Minister is someone I deem unworthy of the respect of his title, and thus I will use it sparingly. In public I'll use his title, but here; among friends who know his character, or lack thereof, well, among friends it'll be just Fudge."

Dumbledore smiled. "Cornelius has rubbed me the wrong way also, but I use his title with those I cannot talk with as we do here. I'd also like to think that we are among friends now. I appreciate your candor and discretion, Harry."

This was an obvious end point on the matter, so Harry changed the subject. "Professor, I'm committed to the Paladin Program. I feel it's a fine opportunity for me to learn what I need to know for the task ahead of me, and I'm most grateful to you for it. But that program is not the only effort I'm going to make to prepare. Please wait one minute, Professor."

"Remus, has the Professor here told you of the prophecy about my future, and why Tom Riddle attacked me as a baby?"

"No, Harry." Remus was amazed that Harry used that name for Voldemort.

"Professor, you told Snape, but not my guardian? AND, before you say it, I'll call him Professor Snape to his face, in front of other students, and before other staff members, but here between the three of us, and with my friends, he's just Snape. Accept it. I'll campaign for Fudge's reelection before I show your Potions master the respect you think he deserves, which I can't fathom. You have other problems more important to solve than that at the moment."

Harry turned to his guardian and angled his shoulder slightly as if to preclude Dumbledore from the conversation. "I regret not telling you sooner, Remus, but I really don't want anyone to know. Now you must. I have to negotiate a working relationship going forward with our leader here, so I hate to ask this of you, but I must ask you to listen and save all your questions for later." Lupin nodded in agreement.

"The prophecy destroyed at the Department of Mysteries was originally given to Professor Dumbledore. I've seen his memory of it. It says that I am the only one that can kill Voldemort - and it's kill or be killed. Neither of us can truly live while the other remains. I do somehow have a power he knows not, so I have hope. However, I don't know what that power is, even though there are good theories, and, Remus, one way or another I *will* kill that evil monster."

Harry spoke at a speed and with a tone that brooked no interruption. "Now, Headmaster. You're the leader of the war effort against Voldemort, and I'm committed to follow you. As you agreed, I expect to be kept informed of anything bearing on my part of this fight. However, I also expect to be party to making decisions in my regards, not just told what to do. Agreed?"

"Harry, I and older and wiser heads have your best interest at heart, and we know what you need to go forward."

Dumbledore stopped to breathe at that moment, and Harry jumped in, seeming to change the subject abruptly.

"Professor, I spent the days at Hogwarts after Sirius died and the days up until the Grangers were attacked, beating myself up about two things: my guilt about his death and the fact that this prophecy made me feel like a weapon, not a person.

"I felt like a tool, something to be used, and perhaps discarded or broken after use. Now don't get me wrong, *you* never said anything that night to make me feel that way. I'm just telling you how I felt during that time.

"Then, the Grangers were attacked. I had a purpose, and when I realized it, I decided it made no difference what I was; I wasn't going to let my friends die. Whatever my role, whatever I had to do, I was going to prepare to fight to win.

"When we spoke that day at Mrs. Figg's, I began to feel more like a person not a weapon. This feeling grew because of all you did for me - getting Remus, Moody, and Mr. Granger to confide in me, helping set up my room, and setting up that library for me to read through.

"But since you set up my room, I haven't seen you or anyone else except Ginny and Hermione, until the battle. Now, I'm not complaining. I realize why I was so isolated. With Dobby added to Hedwig, and with the 'visits,' this has been the least lonesome July I've had in my life. But in spite of all that, I've had hours and hours each day just to think. I've thought a lot about what I've done, and what other people have done, or failed to do, and I've concluded that the only thing that I can do in most instances is to forgive.

"I've gone back over most of my life to see what I can learn to improve my situation going forward. There are a few facts I want to share with you two. I've also decided there are a few questions I want to ask you, Professor, and one or two for you, Remus, as well.

"There are, however, several questions I never want to discuss or know the answers to because I've chosen forgiveness. Let's start with those."

Lupin and Dumbledore looked at each other; both seemed confused a bit.

Harry looked at Dumbledore. "Professor, you viewed my two temporary Pensieves I hope?"  
Dumbledore nodded and was about to speak, but Harry continued. "I fully understand why you sent me to live with the Dursleys. It's for the blood protection; I accept that. Had I been found like the Longbottoms were, well... let's not go there. However, I *never* want to know why I went through what I did at their hands. The reasons cannot be helpful to our future relationship. Either you never checked, which was negligent on your part, or you did, which was cruel of you if you knew and left me be. Either way it's bad, so I just decided to forgive you. So we'll never discuss that any more.

"Next, I *never* want to know why you let Professor Quirrell sit ten feet from you at the head table for a school year, and you never detected Voldemort was on the back of his head. His incompetence as a teacher was enough to remove him, yet you either never checked his classes, or you knew of his poor teaching and did nothing. In my mind, this is another matter for forgiveness.

"Likewise, I never want to know why Lockhart lasted almost a year as the Defense professor. He was worse than Quirrell by leagues.

"You did provide Remus here, my third year. You were an excellent teacher, Remus, but if you had known about this prophecy, would you have taught me any differently?"

Lupin said, "The Patronus charm is one of many things I would have taught you, but because I didn't know of this prophecy you had to beg me to show you that charm. Knowing, I'd have taught you so much more."

Dumbledore remained silent as if he realized Harry needed to deliver his prepared speech.

"I *never* want to know why a Death Eater could pose as your good friend Alastor Moody, spend a year here, and not be discovered. "His Polyjuice efforts were perfect, but surely Crouch couldn't know enough to fool all of you who knew him.

"I know Umbridge was foisted upon you, but I *never* want to know why no one did anything to help us learn, particularly those of us with O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s.

"I *never* want to know why Hermione has discovered and showed me more magic that's useful in a fight than everyone else combined except for what I taught myself this summer.

"Headmaster, I want you to know that that day I committed to the Paladin Program, I said that I'd rather follow you than anyone else. That has not changed, but we need to work together differently.

"I am at peace with not discussing these issues ever again. They are spilt cauldrons to be left and forgotten. I need no explanations. Now, unless there is something *astounding* you can say about these matters, can we leave them as I want them left?"

Dumbledore pondered this for several moments. "As you wish, Harry."

"Thank you, Professor. I am truly past them.

"Moving on. After the first day of having my training room, I got tired of practicing the same old Defensive spell and charms I'd known. Though I can still spend some time improving my aim, those spells were... I don't know, boring. I began reading ahead in my schoolbooks and found little useful, so I went to my provided library. I learned a number spells, but most of them were either too gruesome, or not powerful enough, or too draining to use.

"Learning Spell Mongery helped. I examined the spells I liked and made a few of them more efficient where I could. Apparently I'm too young to start learning to monger, the old Spell Monger Magister never took an apprentice before the age of thirty, but once again, my ignorance appears to be bliss. Much of the magic I read about gave me ideas for spells and charms I could create. I developed a number of useful bits and pieces and then I unfortunately had a chance to see how they'd fair in a real fight.

Harry leaned back and looked at the two. "Do you see the problem, gentlemen?" They both looked perplexed and shook their heads. "I'm the only one teaching me how to survive in this war. And I'm okay with that - for now. I've taken up Steph Granger's offer to teach me to knife fight. This morning at 5:00 I had my second lesson with him.

"You told me, Professor, that you have a number of instructors coming to teach us this year. I'm looking forward to all of them, but I'm not waiting for them. I've decided *I'm* primarily responsible for my life, and I will see that I have all the preparation I can get. I'll be studying on my own up to the day the Hogwarts Express leaves. Once here, if I am not convinced I am receiving what I need, I'll hire the best in the world to come here and teach me if necessary.

"Now, Professor, I expect your teachers to be enough, but I am not going to fail in my appointed task. I *will* kill Tom Riddle, regardless of the cost. I *will* do what it takes."

Harry stopped and looked down at his hands. No one spoke; though silent it was obvious that he was not finished.

"I ran on my treadmill the night of my birthday as hard and as fast as I could. I was very upset about the treatment I'd received at Grimmauld Place about Spell Mongering. I expect the *Daily Prophet*, the Ministry, and many of the students in other houses to believe the worst about me. On my birthday, however, many of my friends and the Order rejected me out of hand. It seemed to me many of you would have liked me to die that day instead of monger the magic I used.

After two hours of running that night at top speed, I was so sore... well. I cooled off and plopped on my bed, near tears of frustration. Then it hit me. Everything became clear, gentlemen.

"I am not a weapon; I am a warrior. I'm not just a warrior; I am a leader of warriors. I will kill Riddle, but as you told me, Remus, I'll never get close to him by myself. God help me, but I'll have to lead many others into that fight. Many will probably die, probably some of my friends. I might go insane afterwards at the lives lost, but..." Harry looked down at his hands again.

"Gentlemen; I need to be at the forefront of an army fighting my way to Riddle. I'd rather none of my friends including you two be there for safety's sake, but if none of you follow me because you don't believe in me, then so be it. I'll do whatever it takes to defeat him. If my friends don't support me and I have to go a bit "Dark" to win, then I'll kill myself after the victory to prevent myself from becoming the next Dark Lord.

Quietly he said, "Generals have to count the cost, train and plan to prevent as much loss as possible, and then.... This is war. God help me, I've got to spend the lives necessary to end this. I'll spend mine as well."

The room was silent for nearly a half minute. Under the circumstances and the weight of the matter discussed, what could be said? Dumbledore and Remus had looks on their faces as if they wanted to say that it would not be as Harry described. But they didn't. Perhaps in their heart of hearts, they knew it would be as he said, the prophecy ensured it. And if he were present, he would be one of the leaders, if not *the* leader. Harry's determination was frightening.

Remus knelt before his ward. "Harry, you'll never go Dark; it's not in you. And I'll never leave you to this alone. I'll fight and work just as hard as I can to see you have that trained army there you need when you need it. I said two days ago that you're preparing for war at an age when I was playing at childish things. No more."

Dumbledore cleared his throat and quietly said, "I'm sorry for the past, Harry, and the burden you now bear better than I could have at your age." He worked his hands over his eyes as if they were tired. "We will work together on this. You are a student still, and I want you to be able to enjoy your life at least a bit, but we do need to work together.



"I have done things in certain ways for most of my life, Harry. I intend to change, but I need your patience. I commit that it is not my intent to leave you out of decisions. Your kind offer to work with me, and your commitment to my leadership, means a great deal to me. You don't just follow me because of your age and my position. Nor do you explode with the temperament of youth that I displayed quite often at your age. You prove your wisdom beyond your years.

"I commit to work *with* you, Harry, but I need to think on how to put substance to this commitment. Can we meet back in a day or two? I'd like to read your plans for the DA, discuss this with Remus and probably others, and just ponder this for a while.

Harry said, "This is new to both of us. I can't say that I have many ideas about how this will work, but I respect you, Professor. I want to learn from you. I need your guidance and wisdom and insight. Since you apologized, I accept, but it really wasn't necessary."

At this moment Dobby popped into the room.

"Here is Harry Potter SIR's lemon drops, Harry Potter SIR."

"Thank you, Dobby. I am very grateful."

The house-elf beamed, having satisfied his master's request. "Will Harry Potter SIR be eating lunch in his room today?"

"No, Dobby, but I'll be there in the late afternoon and look forward to dinner. Could we have lamb fixed Elven style?"

"With boiled tubers, Harry Potter SIR?" The house-elf almost danced with delight.

"That would be delicious, but please make sure all the sap is drained. The fibers stick to my teeth otherwise."

"Dobby apologizes again, Harry Potter SIR."

"No need to apologize. I love your cooking as much as I love Mrs. Weasley's, but if any of you tell her I said that I'll deny it." They chuckled and Dobby grinned.

"Dinner will be at the regular time unless Harry Potter SIR calls. And I made treacle tarts again." The elf popped away.

Harry chuckled. "He really likes to spoil me. I guess I enjoy it too much to stop him, and he's so happy when I allow it. Now what's that look for?"

Dumbledore said. "You eat elven food?"

Lupin said, "I didn't even know they had their own food styles. Never thought about it."

"It's very high energy. They work at such a pace and so hard, everything they eat seems to be power-

packed. I eat it several times a week, not more often because it's so spicy. They eat the same meats we do, half our vegetables and add to it things from the forest. Nothing of what I've tried tasted bad yet. But Dobby refuses to make me any elven puddings. He says no human would try them. I think it has something to do with insects, so I don't ask. I'll have him fix something special for the three of us sometime if you're game."

The dubious look on their faces caused Harry to smile and go on with the discussion.

But first he said, "Now, Headmaster, Remus, try one of these lemon drops. You'll go Muggle for these from now on, I'll wager."

Remus tried one and then said that it was the best lemon drop he'd ever tried. Dumbledore was in ecstasy. They talked for several minutes about Muggle confections. The headmaster was most pleased with Harry's gift of two pounds of the sweets, and the teen offered to keep him supplied through out the year. "Just tell me when you're low, and I'll have Dobby handle it. I find Honeydukes makes great chocolates and magical treats, but their Muggle style hard candies aren't that good."

Harry paused. "There is one more issue I'd like to discuss, Professor, if you have the time."

"My day is flexible, Harry, if yours and Remus' are."

"I want to discuss Draco. You say he agreed with all the commitments of fairness required of me. Now for no reason other than spite, he just attacked me when I wasn't looking. He shot both a Disarming spell at me, and a Full Body-Bind. That would be considered a serious attack in the corridors during school term, and would be punished severely. What do you intend to do about it?"

"I will ask Professor Snape to mete out suitable punishment. Please don't hold this against Mr. Malfoy. He has had a parting of the ways with his father, and I have hopes of turning him back to the Light."

Harry closed his eyes and lowered his head for a long moment. Dumbledore seemed about to ask him if he was well when Harry raised his head.

"I'm afraid that's unacceptable, Professor; for five years Malfoy has started every confrontation with us, not the other way around. I give you my word. I accepted your word, but if mine is not good enough, I will draw every memory off into your Pensieve, or in a Solicitor's Pensieve. I'll also submit to Veritaserum for questions on this subject.

"In almost all cases, your precious Professor Snape has been asked to administer punishment, yet Malfoy served no detention or lost points, while Professor McGonagall has been most strict with us Gryffindors. I believe the Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs can tell similar stories.

"And now after all of this, Malfoy attacks me for no reason, other than he's a prejudiced, spoiled, despicable person - heavily leaning to the Darkness. Why is he still allowed any access to this school?"

"Harry, perhaps if you'd have followed Miss Granger's advice over the years and ignored him, things

wouldn't be at this level of tension between you. After all, for the most part these incidents have been just insults."

"So, that's your answer." Harry said in a deadly calm voice. "Very well, next question."

"Had I not pretty fair reflexes, I'd be severely cut or already dead from your precious Professor Snape's Severing spell this morning. What do you have to say about that? How do you intend to deal with him?"

"Harry, Professor Snape stated that he couldn't see who it was when he cast that spell-

"Professor, what if you had been running down those stairs to check on a wounded or ensnared student, or Madame Pomphrey, or another student? He could have killed someone."

"Yes, Harry. I see your point. I will talk to Professor Snape about his choice of spells while in this school. You know, he has a rough task before him spying for the Order as he does."

"Yes. Spying on Tom would be difficult, perhaps impossible...."

"What do you say, Professor, about those memories I left for you of your precious Professor Snape's teaching methods towards all houses except his own, over the last five years? Also, what about his continued assaults on my mind while he was supposed to be teaching me Occlumency?"

"Harry, you bring up several disturbing points over and over again. I have talked to Professor Snape about his teaching style on occasions. You know, he walks a fine line being head of house for Slytherins. So many dislike them, not without cause in some cases. I believe he helps them along specially to ease the feeling that the other houses are against them.

"Also, I have already expressed my displeasure with Professor Snape regarding your Occlumency lessons. You will no doubt need to continue with those lessons with him this school term since you will not be fully trained with William by then. I propose-

"NO! Save your breath, Professor."

Dumbledore was startled by this interruption.

"Headmaster, I have picked up a good bit of Occlumency in the few days I have been working with Father William. Amazing what I can learn from a decent teacher."

Dumbledore looked shocked that Harry mentioned his whereabouts in front of Lupin.

"Yes, now my guardian knows where my sanctuary is, but seeing that Snape, the one person supposedly on our side that I trust the least knows, I don't think Remus is a risk.

"Back to Occlumency lessons, I've made more headway in two lessons with Father William than I did all the times I met with your Professor Snape. My new tutor is rather angry at you, Headmaster, for subjecting me to what I endured. Anyway, if I'm not far enough along by the time school begins;

Father William has agreed to continue.

"But rest assured, I'll owl Riddle the complete prophecy before I spend one more minute in such lessons with Snape. And if he tries to enter my mind, I'll know, and I'll do *whatever necessary* to throw him out. That's not open for discussion."

"Headmaster, back to Draco Malfoy and your precious Professor Snape. I read a fascinating phrase in a Muggle book recently. 'The world is upside down.' Have you heard it? It's used when something is the exact opposite of the way it should be.

"We have a student, a group of students, primarily from one house, causing most of the trouble. A struggle of some sort occurs, and both sides are caught. The instigators suffer little if at all, but those defending themselves are definitely punished.

The moral for the Slytherins? We can do what we want with no consequences. A few days ago I killed Marcus Flint, he thought that way on the Quidditch pitch at least. Many Slytherins act this way, and instead of suffering the consequences of their actions, they are protected by your precious Professor Snape.

"The moral for the Gryffindors, Ravenclaws, and Hufflepuffs? Protecting yourself gets you punished. Do you wonder why so many refuse to join the Order of the Phoenix, expecting the government to protect them?

"Another possible moral? Get even hard. You'll be punished if you stick up for yourself, so hurt the Slytherin badly when you do attack.

"The final possible moral? It doesn't pay to be righteous, so go dark and join the Death Eaters."

Dumbledore looked like he wanted to disagree, but Harry rushed on to prevent it.

"The other thing that is upside down is a teacher attacking students, mostly verbally, and recently physically. What would you say to Minerva McGonagall if she'd sent a Severing curse at a student? If you can say that your surprise at her doing so would have been any more than your dismay at your precious Professor Snape doing so, then you have a double standard for him as well as the students."

Harry looked at his watch. "Professor, I want you to think about something. You'll no doubt want to respond now to what I've just said, and to what I want you to consider. But once I tell you what I want you to think about, I want you to take time and think about all of the ramifications of these questions.

"My friends are in the Great Hall and I am meeting them for lunch. I have just a few more minutes until they expect me, but I do thank you for your time."

Harry nodded while he said this and Dumbledore did as well.

"Professor, think about this and send me an owl when we can chat again about your answers.

"I've observed that you are big on redemption. You want to help people recover from their mistakes

and failings. That's admirable.

"In my second year, you knew I wasn't being truthful when I'd heard snake language in the walls of the castle. You've never punished me for that, or any other misdeeds that were brought to you. I *am* grateful that you give such second chances.

"I believe it is that same sense of redemption, the mercy you give us when we don't deserve it, that will make you struggle with the following issues. However, I insist you resolve this problem in some manner.

"A fair number of the Slytherins, particularly Malfoy, *cause* most of the bad feelings to come their way. He has never shown any intention to stop his cruelty. Now he's in the Paladin Program, fair enough, but will you hold him to the same standards you'll expect from me and from all others? I hold you responsible for his actions - *you*, not your precious Professor Snape. Had I attacked another student like Draco did me, what would Professor McGonagall be doing to me right now? Do you even imagine your precious Professor Snape has any intention of punishing Draco? If so, you're dreaming.

"My first question or series of questions - will *you* hold these Slytherins to the same standards of conduct that I'll be held to? Slytherins have never been held so accountable in my experience -- will it start now? Once again, I'm not talking about your precious Professor Snape, will *you* hold them to the same standards? And how will you start *now* to change their practices of the last five years?

The next questions have to do with your precious Professor Snape himself. Do you believe he teaches at the level of your other professors? *Not* his knowledge level. Even I apparently learned from him well enough to receive an Exceeds Expectations on my Potions O.W.L. Or was that Hermione's help?

"No, as a teacher, the manner he treats his students, the care and concern he shows *all* his classes, the regard with which he is held by his students - how does that compare to all of your other professors - even Professors Trelawny, Binns, and Hagrid. Not to mention Professor's McGonagall and Flitwick, or Professor Lupin here.

"How does he compare, and how do your other professors think he compares? Have you ever asked them? Would you tolerate his actions from any other professor without serious reprimands?"

Harry's eyes burned into Dumbledore's with an overwhelming passion. "Life is not fair, a fact that I well know. But is all of this anywhere near fair? Or is your mercy for those leaning towards the Dark discriminating against those leaning towards the Light?"

Harry's tone changed as he leaned back. "Please do not say anything about this now. Just think about it. And you can deliver two messages that I have never been able to communicate effectively myself.

"First, somehow make Draco Malfoy understand that I am through playing games with him. The next time he attacks me as he did today, or attacks one of my friends, I will hurt him. After the second attack, I will hurt him a lot."

Dumbledore's eyes widened with this threat, and he interrupted, "I believe I can assure you Mr. Malfoy will not attack you or your friends this year, Harry. Threats of violence are not needed."

"I don't consider it a threat, Professor, only a guarantee of what will happen. Tell him or not, your decision, but I will act as I've said should he not live up to your expectations.

"But you may have missed the point. It's not just me, or my friends, or Gryffindors. Ask any non-Slytherin third-year or below, at least one in three, maybe more, will tell you of being mistreated by Malfoy himself. Probably all of them have been mistreated by a Slytherin at one time or another. It's larger than me and my friends.

"The other message you can relay to your Potions master. You promise that he's loyal to the Light, and yet I see no evidence that supports that proposition - instead what I see is that he's playing both sides. You say you cannot tell me why you believe in him. I've told you and showed you my memories. They are why I cannot accept his place in this fight that you give him. Therefore, I hold you responsible for his actions and for giving him this message for me. That's not unreasonable of me, as Headmaster, you *are* responsible for the conduct of the students and the staff of this school.

"Please tell your precious Professor Snape that I am an adult now and so is he. *Anyone* sending lethal spells my way, I will treat like a Death Eater, and I will respond with equal or greater force. The next time anyone sends a deadly curse towards me I will not hesitate. You may want to tell him, if he doesn't already know, what happened to eight Death Eaters the last time I was attacked."

Both men were stunned by this pronouncement, and tried to say something as he quickly rose. Harry raised his hand to quiet them.

"I'm going to meet my friends. Please stay here, Remus, and discuss this with Professor Dumbledore. He needs you. I'll be in the Great Hall when you're done. If you have time this afternoon, I'd love to spend some of it with you. We have loads to talk about above and beyond the prophecy. Headmaster, please owl me when you wish to discuss this after some time of reflection. Thank you both for your time."

Harry turned and walked two paces before Dumbledore called out, "I'll make sure you don't have to fear Professor Snape, Harry."

Harry paused, but didn't turn around. "Let's set a couple of things straight. First, I don't fear Snape. Second, you trust him and I don't. I think it is as likely that he spies now against you rather than the other way around. Because I don't trust him, I'll be on guard and he'll not succeed in attacking me.

"You, however, do trust him. You're not on guard. My fear is that he'll get you killed, Professor, or worse, kill you himself."

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Harry walked out and the door closed behind him. Remus took the opportunity that the silence provided. Harry's guardian had an odd look on his face, almost one of humor.

"Er, Albus, before we discuss this, I'd like to say something. I have always admired something about you. You've handled the difficult job over the years of working with and directing a diverse group of people, creating fairly cohesive organizations in the Order of the Phoenix and the staff of Hogwarts. You've very caringly and for their own good manipulated people to do the right things under difficult circumstances. I compliment you by calling you a benevolent manipulator when you have to be. You certainly don't do it lightly or with any self-interest, but you've done what has been necessary."

Lupin grinned a most wolfish grin. "And now, Professor, you've just been manipulated into doing the right thing for a number of Hogwarts students and staff members. Harry even turned your offer of lemon drops around on you and gave you candy."

"He forgave you without discussion. He called for the best in you. He reminded you of your responsibilities. He gave you several charges you cannot fail in completing in some manner. He called to your better judgment and professional pride."

Remus paused and smiled. "Well done, Harry. Well done indeed."

Lupin's smile disappeared. "I must also thank you again for what I've thanked you for in the past. I owe you an enormous debt in your arranging for me to attend Hogwarts. It's an opportunity many despise you for, but I'll forever sing your praises."

"But there is one debt that trumps what I owe you. I owe Harry a greater allegiance that I owe you. Please work with Harry and me to make this work. If I have to choose between you two I'll go with him without a thought."

He's graciously forgiven and chosen to ignore situations I'll struggle to not ask you about. He's not asking much. You've agreed to include him in decisions regarding him. All the more he asks is for justice - no, not justice, that would require that we go back to right or punish past wrongs with Malfoy and Snape.

"He only asks for justice and fairness going forward. You'll have to explain it to me as well as him if you chose to not give it."

Dumbledore looked like he'd just been re-transfigured from being a ferret.

Lupin changed the subject. "Now, please tell me everything about this prophecy."

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Harry succeeded in avoiding two female Paladins on his way to the Great Hall. The house-elves maintained sandwiches, soup, homemade crisps and fruit from 10:30 until 2:30 each day for the staff. They also delivered the required meals for each Paladin present for that meal. At any one time there were never more than ten or fifteen students at Hogwarts during this unique summer program. Usually there were none. But between the various 'visit' scenarios, tutorials, and other required training going on, Hogwarts was livelier this summer than it had been for many centuries in the past.

Instead of sitting in the Great Hall, Harry saw Ron, Hermione, and Ginny standing at the corner of the

stairs leading to the Potions classrooms. He walked up to them quietly and heard muttering coming from below.

Snape's clear voice rang out. "I don't care, Filch. You're the caretaker of this castle. Clean up this obstruction immediately." His boots could be heard clearly ringing away from the bottom of the stairs.

Harry slipped past his friends and before they could say anything he quietly ran down the stairs and greeted the caretaker. "Hello, Mr. Filch, have a problem here?" The Battle Barrier Harry had erected and casehardened earlier still stood. There were a few scratches on it, and a small acid burn it seemed. But otherwise it was unchanged.

"Oh, Potter." The man was the master of the nasal, slow drawl speech mannerism, laced with a major dose of sneer and a dollop of sarcasm. "The professor there won't tell me how this got here. He's apparently exhausted his choices in removing it. I've no clue what to do. Magical Mess Remover by the barrel won't handle this, I don't think."

"Could I try, sir?"

Filch stepped back. "Knock yourself out, lad."

By this time Ron, Hermione, and Ginny had made their way down the stairs. "Harry?"

Harry held up his hand for silence. He drew his wand and cast one spell that caused the sheen on the barrier to vanish. Then he stepped back and cast a second spell that caused a small wind funnel to appear around the barrier.

"Step back. You may want to cover your eyes."

As they watched the funnel grew in intensity. The funnel spout moved to the top of the barrier. The funnel top lengthened and pointed up the staircase and out of sight. Slowly at first, but with increasing speed, granules of the barrier chipped off. The particles began to loosen and go up the funnel, changing the coloring of the wind spout.

Harry said, "Back up the stairs," to his friends who were behind him. Filch followed as he edged around the disassembling barrier.

Harry reached the top of the stairs as the last of the barrier material dissolved away up the spout, leaving the floor as it had been. Harry had kept his wand out as if directing the funnel. He turned and trotted towards the doors of the main hall. They pushed open as he and the funnel approached.

Harry made it outside and down the steps from the main doors. He trotted out and away from the castle. He raised his wand above his head and made a sideways and upward whip-like motion away from the castle. A sound not unlike a large Zonko's firecracker occurred, and the powdered barrier material flew out to lightly cover several hundred square yards of grounds with a dusty mist that dissipated over the next thirty seconds or so.



Harry turned to his friends. Hermione made to ask a question, but he asked that she wait for a minute more. He jogged back up the steps to where Filch stood.

"Beholding to you, Potter."

"Mr. Filch, could you do me one small favor?" The caretaker arched an eyebrow. "Would you please not tell Professor Snape that I removed the barrier? If he asks just tell him..." Harry looked puzzled for a moment, then smiled. "Just tell him 'professional secret' and let him think you did it. Would you mind doing that? You wouldn't be lying, just..."

Filch considered the request, and gave the lad one of his best-manufactured evil-caretaker smiles. "Fine, lad. But if the headmaster asks..."

"Oh, no worries, tell him, just not Snape."

"Alright," he drawled. "Now off with you. I've no time for lollygagging with misbehaving students, even on summer holidays."

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Filch decided he couldn't wait to tell Minerva about this, so he crept his highly developed creep for student intimidation until he was in the corridor leading to the Transfiguration classrooms. Then he nearly skipped his way to McGonagall's office.

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Harry led his friends at a quick pace to the Great Hall. There were two professors eating at the head table, and several students, all Paladins apparently, eating towards the front of the hall at the Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw tables.

The four sat at the back end of the Gryffindor table as close to the corner of the room as possible. Hermione took seven books of varying sizes out of her book bag and placed them on the table. The prescribed Paladin lunches appeared before Hermione and Ron, in appropriate portions for their sizes. A platter of sandwiches, a bowl of crisps, and a tray of fruit appeared in front of Harry and Ginny. Pumpkin juice appeared in their goblets, but there was a pitcher of pumpkin juice and a pitcher of water on the table as well.

Lightning fast, Harry shot his wand out of his right sleeve and said, "*Ductus Taciturnitas*," while he waved his wand around the four of them. The wand retracted instantly and he said, "That draws off this portion of the table into a hole of silence. Sounds head our way like normal from all around us, but no sounds leave our immediate area."

Harry immediately began eating sandwich after sandwich, as ravenous as Ron after a day of de-gnoming the garden. Ron joined him after a moment, and Ginny reached for a sandwich shortly after. Hermione spoke instead, "Harry, how...? What was that barrier and how did you...? Is this more Spell Mongering?"

Harry raised his hand. "Hermione, don't you have to eat that on a time schedule? I'll make short work of this and start telling you about everything that's happened since my birthday. *And* I'll tell you about the meeting of minds Dumbledore and I had on Spell Mongering. I know you won't eat unless I at least tell you that he's okay with it, under certain guidelines that I told him I was already following."

Hermione said, "But, Harry-"

Harry looked at his watch and said, "Eat Hermione, the world will wait but your food schedule might not." They ate in silence for the next few minutes, but Hermione clearly wanted to ask her questions.

As they finished Harry said, "I found that charm to keep conversations private in a book when I looked for something less obvious than a Silencing charm. We could've gone to the Room of Requirement, but I don't want to appear like we're being too secretive. Most of what I have to say is not a secret so much as no one else's business. Now, I can sit here and talk with you, and no one will know what we're saying or that I'm blocking sounds. Although Dumbledore might know it if he passes through the sound wall I've put up, I doubt anyone else will, except possibly Flitwick, or maybe McGonagall.

"I know you have a lot of questions. I've spent a good deal of time deciding how to explain stuff. I just spent almost two hours with Dumbledore, so I'm a bit wound up. What I'd like to do is go through what I've discovered about what happened to me on Aberration Day, what that's caused to happen since then, and what I've been up to. I have a lot of surprises for you, almost all of it good. I'll start with your concerns about Spell Mongering, but let me say I'm really doing very well this summer. But before I start, is there anything you want to tell me that I might not know and is sort of urgent?"

Hermione said, "You've seen the accusations in paper about you and Spell Mongering?"

"Yes, I have an idea about that, and Dumbledore said he's working on a way I can help the Ministry with my talents. That will get Fudge off my back, for a while at least. Anything else?"

All three shook their heads negatively, so Harry continued. "I see, Hermione, that you've read the only seven books in the Hogwarts library that mention Spell Mongery. I've read them also."

"You've read all these books, Harry?" she asked.

"Yes, Hermione. Don't faint, Ron, but Dumbledore gave me a Muggle book on speed-reading. Appears I didn't like reading because I read too slowly to remain interested. Now I read about three times as fast as I did, and surprisingly, I understand better than I did because my mind's fully engaged. I finished my summer homework on the four core Auror courses eight days after we started the Paladin potions. Since then I've studied everything I can to help with the future, mostly in two areas. I've read or at least read through forty-eight of Defense books for the DA this year, and for the fights that are coming. To help with my Spell Mongery, I've read books on Charms, Transfiguration, history of magic, and even one book each on Arithmancy and Ancient Runes. Those two aren't really needed for Mongering, but I was interested, and they should help me understand what I need to go forward.

"I've also read several Muggle science books to better understand the nature of the universe. Quantum

Physics is particularly fascinating. It's really opened doors in my Mongering."

Hermione looked shocked and delighted with Harry's admissions. Ron just looked shocked. Ginny smiled at the two and looked back at Harry.

Harry sighed and rubbed his forehead for a moment. "Let me back up. Dumbledore and I discussed on my birthday that Spell Mongering is no more inherently Dark than Potions is. There have been a hundreds of evil, poisonous, hurtful, and cruel potions thought up, and no one blames Potions itself, just the potions' creators. Spell Mongering is equally no more evil or good than the witch or wizard doing the mongering - just like Potions.

Harry kept going. "My wand and Riddle's are brother wands. I could probably use his, and he could probably use mine. Are wands bad or good, or is it just the wizards who use them? Spell Mongery is not bad *per se*, even though some Mongers have made a Dark botch of it. But did you read about Osbert Blacwin, Hermione? He's the Spell Monger who created Thunderfire, the anti-vampire weapon. Ah, I see you've heard of it."

"Harry." Hermione had been lowering her head like she always did on the rare occasion when she had been found in error - the very rare occasion. The mention of Thunderfire had caught her attention in spades. "Thunderfire was a very important charm. It's been lost for almost eleven hundred years. Are you saying you know how...?"

"I know how it's *supposed* to be mongered. I just haven't got around to working on it yet. I couldn't monger away on it at the Dursleys'. I need a lot of room for experiments on that sort of volatile spell. I'll try to monger it now that I live... well, where I live. It could get rather hot working on it, especially in close quarters.

"The point is, Thunderfire's a charm designed by Spell Monger Osbert Blacwin, who lived in the ninth century. He had a bad cold when he was trying to create something like your bluebell fire in a jar. He sneezed when he was completing the final mongering steps. He blew the roof off of his workshop and burned it and his house to the ground. He sold Thunderfire to the magical governments of that day for enough money to rebuild his home and shop, and then had a steady income from training what passed for Aurors back then to fight vampires. I bet everything you read about Thunderfire never mentioned Osbert Blacwin or Spell Mongery, did it? Where'd you read about it?"

"It was a footnote in the *Journal of Arithmantic and Numerological Research*, in an article about Thunderlight."

"Yes, the journal for Arithmantic Spell Crafters." The disgruntled look on Harry's face showed a little more of his opinion of the Crafters.

Hermione said, "Harry, they've done a lot of good, and their magic is available and free to all."

Harry said, "The problem is that the Arithmantic Spell Crafters in the Ministry of Magic have spent the last millennium spreading false statements that my trade is bad, evil, Dark even. I don't know why they've done it, but I think they were afraid that Spell Mongers would take their jobs. Mongers have a

number of limits on their trade that Crafters don't, but Mongers have advantages also. Instead of fair competition, the Crafters now seem to have a monopoly, and yet what have they created in the way of new magic lately?

"Did that article in the journal mention any great new bit of magic they've created in the last hundred years?" She shook her head again. "Well I have nothing against them, but they've done nothing of real importance since 1879 that I can find. And they've slandered Spell Mongery to the point where Fudge wants to send me to Azkaban forever with no trial. Dumbledore is trying to save me once again from something I should be celebrated for - not that I want that. Thunderfire may save me from jail, if I can figure it out. Who'd have thought a possible vampire revolt might help my case?"

The three listening to Harry said nothing about vampires, but all three had discussed the horror of fighting vampires that morning at breakfast.

"There's sort of a rough beauty to Spell Mongering, Hermione. It's an art - not fancy - but like looking at a jagged rock cliff and seeing the beauty in it. I just... I just feel like it's right when I monger a spell or charm. I mentally hammer or bang it into shape, or perhaps I use an axe in my mind or a torch or forge so to speak. It's an act of will... I, uh, don't really have the words. I just...."

"Harry, I don't understand." Hermione seemed to hang on Harry's every word. Ginny and Ron paid close attention, but lacked the fervent curiosity that possessed their bushy-headed friend.

"And I can't explain so you'll hear what you normally need, Hermione." He turned from her to include each of his friends. "Look, do you guys believe me when I say Spell Mongery isn't evil, just certain Mongers were?"

They all three nodded.

"I promise to show you how I do it, and maybe even teach you how to monger if you like, but I have a number of other things to tell you now."

Harry told them about the Goblins and how he'd been declared of age and inherited his full family estate. He told of passing his Apparation test and getting additional wands. He didn't tell them about the confrontation he'd just had with Dumbledore. He decided on the spot to discuss that with them after he and the headmaster had resolved the issues pending. He definitely didn't want to mention the Slytherins in the Paladin Program until he heard back from Dumbledore and met with Millicent Bulstrode.

He looked at his watch. "It's 1:25. Do you guys have places to be?"

Ron said, "Thanks for noticing. I have to rush to McGonagall for a Transfiguration class."

Hermione said, "I'm giving a practical Charms tutorial to three Hufflepuffs soon." They stood. She sighed. "Harry, you know I don't like having things I read in books upset, but if Dumbledore.... Well, the most important thing is that I believe in you, Harry. I'm still don't understand, and I hate that feeling, you well know. But I believe you don't have a Dark bone in your body."



*Aaran St Vines*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# "Great Scott, Potter, This is War!"

## Chapter Twelve - Time with Ginny and Thunderfire

### Chapter Twelve - Time with Ginny and Thunderfire

*Thanks go to my industrial strength writing coach, Kokopelli, and my professional level proof reader, ebdarcy. Thanks also go to my beta reader, Sherry.*

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***Previously, right after lunch with Harry's three friends-***

*As Hermione and Ron left, Harry turned to Ginny. "Have time to talk, Gin? I just don't want to go back to my room right yet. I'd like company. I mean, I've missed visits with you. Can you take me not running at you?" He grinned remembering his attempts to snog her at the start of Paladin 'visits' earlier that summer.*

*She chuckled. "Alright, Mum doesn't expect me until about three. I was just going to go to the library, but I have nothing in particular to look for there.*

*"What do you want to talk about?"*

~\*~\*~

Two nights earlier on the evening of Harry's birthday, Ginny had found herself sitting on her bed looking out her window, shedding a tear or two. It wasn't that she was upset so much as a little sad and wistful.

Hermione slipped into the room after kissing Ron good night. She had moved quietly through the house hoping that Molly would not realize how long she and Ron had been snogging. The first sound she made was a creak from a floorboard in Ginny's room.

That sound startled Ginny slightly, and she turned from the window before she could hide her emotions. Hermione saw the look on her friend's face and came to her immediately, sitting on Ginny's bed and placing a comforting arm around her shoulder.

"What's wrong, Ginny?"

"Nothing's *wrong*, Hermione, I was just thinking about the changes in Harry's situation-"

"I know, he's probably into something dangerous, Dark maybe, but hopefully Dumbledore can straighten him out," Hermione said in a concerned tone.

"No, Hermione, I'm not worried about the Spell Mongery stuff at all. Perhaps I've helped the twins too much, but the idea of being able to create new magic is really appealing. You heard Harry's arguments. I think he's right it's people that are evil, not things. A wand is a wand regardless of how good or bad the caster is. I trust Harry. He's the same Harry we followed to the Ministry. He had bad information that night, but we survived because he trained us well. He's not perfect, but he's no more likely to go Dark after losing his parents, Cedric, and Sirius, than you are to become a pureblood advocate."

"But, Ginny-"

Ginny leaned back in her bed and pulled her pillow up over her face. "You asked me what's wrong; Spell Mongery's not it. Go to sleep, Hermione."

Silence.

About fifteen seconds later Hermione pulled the pillow corner up from Ginny's face and said, "I'm so sorry, Ginny. Please forgive me. What about Harry's situation is bothering you?"

Ginny was silent for several seconds before she lifted the pillow and put it under her head. She stared at the ceiling for a bit, sighed deeply, and said, "He's been alone all summer except for seeing you and me on Paladin visits, and I've seen him twice as much as you have. Has he told you how happy he is that he's been able to spend five to seven hours a week with friends this summer? He repeated that several times during each of our visits. You and I spend twelve to sixteen hours a day with a number of people we like and love, and he's desperately grateful for a tiny fraction of what we take for granted. How many times has Ron said he's bored here and wants to go back to the Burrow?"

"And another thing. Harry has also said a number of times this summer that he wants to really be my friend this year at school. He's said that he knows you and Ron will be together, and you'll want plenty of *alone* time. But he's almost clingy, hoping I'll take up the slack. He's *friendly* with perhaps twenty people at school to some degree. He's a little closer to Neville, Luna, and me. But you two have been his only real friends, and even my dunderhead brother ignored him for months during the Tri-wizard Tournament.

"Now he's glad for his two best friends to be together, but he's a little panicked about losing your company. We've heard all about the cupboard, we know his fat cousin, Dudley scared away all of his friends for the decade he lived with his wretched relatives. Fred, George, and Ron told us he was bolted in his bedroom, but do we *understand at all* just how much he fears being alone again? And yet he endures loneliness most every day. Do you know he thinks of Hedwig as one of his best friends? Dobby too? How sad is that? Not that Dobby isn't nice, but you've seen his hero worship of Harry. Can that be the basis of a close friendship?"

Ginny closed her eyes, and took a deep breath. She'd been talking rapidly and had barely inhaled for a time. The two girls were silent for a bit.

Hermione said, "I've been stupid and inconsiderate. I'll talk to Ron tomorrow and we'll just have to put our relationship on hold for a while. I'm... I'm not going to fail Harry-"



"Are you out of your scary brilliant mind?" interrupted Ginny. "Harry's not stupid or dense about most things. You can't tell him you're slowing things down with Ron for his sake. He'd be furious or upset or both if you tried anything like that. And he'll know if you lie to him and pretend to call it off or limit your relationship with Ron for his sake. It would kill Harry to think he came between you. He thinks that what you two have is wonderful."

Ginny had sat up part way for this reprimand, and then she snapped her head back down on her pillow and made a sound of exasperation.

"Harry's really glad for you two, Hermione. We've all seen this coming, the two of you dating, but Harry told me he's felt like it would happen ever since you woke up from being petrified in your second year. He thought Ron missed you more than he did, and Harry missed you something fierce. He's always asked me during our visits for gossip about you two together. He won't ask you, he's too shy, but he delights in every tidbit I can remember about you and Ron. He howled when I told him about you and Ron cleaning out the cupboards and-

Hermione popped her hand over Ginny's mouth. "You didn't?" she asked. Her voice had a stricken tone in it.

Ginny smiled a most mischievous smile. "Of course. I've told him about everything, *everything!* I didn't tell him to gossip about you; I told him so he could feel like he was still a part of your lives during this wonderful time you two are having getting to know each other. If this was happening during school Harry could watch, so I've tried to make it sort of as if he were there, though my telling him about it is a poor substitute.

"Hermione, Harry's so very happy for you. It's meant a lot to him to know you two are together."

"Thanks, Ginny. I've been so selfish."

Ginny made a slight raspberry sound with her lips. "Oh pooh, Hermione. You're newly in love and these acceleration potions have your emotions in a whirlwind. Dumbledore said they would, but you're taking them so you can't really see it. You've grown three inches this summer, put on a bit of weight in ways my brother can't keep his eyes off of, as well as a good bit of muscle that looks good on you also. Twenty-five or so times in the last month you've had your emotions scrabbled by that potion, and then Aberration Day dumped all of you on your ears.

"During school a number of people in your year, and others, don't know what to think on many matters until *you* pretty accurately tell them, including and particularly your two best friends. I'm never positive about my conclusions on things until I run them by you. However, you're in a place until school starts that you're just a little haywire.

"Just listen and I'll tell you what's bothering me. Don't talk for a while." Hermione nodded and made the hand gesture for zipping her lips.

Ginny sighed, took a deep breath, and started. "Harry has talked about you and Ron, and others now dating such as Ernie and Hannah, like it is nothing he'll ever have. He thinks he'll end up all by

himself or dead. He's not said anything, but I just know, somehow."

She looked away at this point, out the window. She sighed again.

Hermione said just above a whisper, "You still love him, don't you?"

Ginny looked back at her best friend. Her face showed an odd combination of anger, upset, and confusion - all and none of these. "I don't *still* love him."

She shook her head with her eyes closed, and continued. "I had a crush on the Boy-Who-Lived. You know that fantasy person who doesn't exist. Then I had a crush on the hero who came and saved me from the Chamber, but you know, as heroic and impossible as what Harry accomplished that night was, that's not the true substance of Harry either. The nobility and bravery of what he did is solid Harry, but the hero from that night is not his style, even though he *is* that hero.

"I thought he loved you, watching you three in your third year, but all you were doing was saving Sirius Black, and fighting off dementors - a typical year for the Gryffindor Three. Do you know even the sixth and seventh years in our house call you that? Most everyone in the other houses does, too. Everyone thinks of you three as a legendary trio in our own time, except for the Slytherins, of course.

"Then in your fourth year, I *didn't* have a crush on the tamer of dragons, the savior of little girls, or the hero who went into the maze."

Ginny turned her face towards Hermione and stared pointedly into her eyes. "Well I didn't."

Hermione's eyes still showed disbelief.

"At the beginning of that year, I knew right when Harry's name popped out of the fire that he was well beyond me. I had it confirmed when Ron mentioned the possibility of Harry going to the Yule Ball with me. You told him I was taken right away, but I watched his eyes - Harry never flinched or showed the least bit of interest in me. He had Cho on his mind as we'd later find out. I wasn't a thought to him - not at all. Then when we found out that they were going into the lake for the thing most precious to them, I knew I wasn't going to make that list. It was then that I not only completely gave up on him, but I set my mind towards forgetting Harry as a romantic interest and started trying to just be myself.

"Sirius last summer helped me come to peace about this, to not feel like I'd been rejected. He yammered on about how Harry wasn't like his father. James was a hit with the ladies. He tried to kid me about crushing on Harry, just in general. He didn't know I'd had a thing for him. But I told Sirius right off he was wrong, and he believed me. He kidded you more than me about it, even when Ron went on and on about my schoolgirl crush, Sirius knew I was over it.

"Then Harry came here to Grimmauld Place to stay last summer, and we became friends. I began to get to know him, the person. You and I became good friends here last summer, too, and you and Harry together made Ron accept the notion that I could hang out with you three. Oh, I'll never make it the Gryffindor Four, but you three let me become a second level friend to the Trio. I got to know Harry.

He and I became friendly and then friends of a sort.

"After I told him how to tell if he was being possessed by Voldemort, he really let me get in even closer. The DA helped a lot also."

"You said 'Voldemort,' Ginny."

"So did you. Harry's rubbing off on us."

They both smiled at each other.

Ginny continued. "After the Ministry, Harry didn't really speak to any of us, but with the 'visits' we've become *very good* friends. He was relieved I wasn't rushing for him, and after he got over blushing for a few minutes each session after lunging my way, he'd settle down and we'd really talk. I had all of Harry's two-hour visits. You and Harry in a 'visit' were too embarrassed about going for each other, so you just stuck to the scripted questions and discussions each session.

"We talked, Hermione. We *really* talked. We became close friends. He confided in me. He never said anything to show any interest in me romantically, but he very sincerely wanted my friendship, and earnestly asked questions to get to know me better. It wasn't just that he was desperate to fill the void you and Ron might leave. He told me all about every adventure you three had, and everything he's done on his own. It wasn't romantic, but it was nice.

"He genuinely liked me for me, as a friend of course, but he liked Ginny, not Ron's little sister or the tragic little girl he'd had to save from a nasty old snake. He said that he likes me, as a friend of course, and regrets not getting to know me sooner."

Ginny ceased talking for a moment and looked down at her hands. Still looking down she said quietly, "That's when I fell in love with Harry - just this summer."

She let that hang for a long moment and then said, "I hoped that I'd get fifteen more visits with him this summer at least, and maybe he'd see more about me that he likes - maybe even leading to romance. But that's dashed now. He's now going to help with visits with other girls. Dumbledore said that I can still use magic in the right places, I can come to Hogwarts and do all the exercises, even attend the tutorial classes like I have been, but I won't be needed to visit with Harry; he's done." She hung her head at this point, signaling she had finished her explanation of her developing feelings.

After several long moments Hermione said, "Ginny, we three will just make a point to see him at school now. The other girls will all be trying to kiss him at the start of each session for the rest of the summer. He won't be on the potion, so he won't feel the same urge. That will make him *very* uncomfortable with each of them. They won't get to him, you know how he hates attention, and fan-girl attention is the worst." Hermione seemed determined and hopeful.

"I know that. It doesn't bother me at all, truly." Ginny sighed and continued. "Towards the end of the visits, before Aberration Day, I found out that Harry had wanted a girl friend at the start of the summer right after you and your parents were attacked, before the program began. He'd thought about

you and me, but he knew Ron had kissed you, and that I was dating Dean. He even wrote a note to Luna, but she said that she has another Gryffindor in mind, but she wouldn't say who."

"That's terrific, Ginny, you and Dean are history. You can tell Harry, or I will. That might be better."

"Hermione! That's so not going to work. I've been paying attention to what he says, and what he isn't saying. Harry doesn't have room in his life for a girlfriend any more. He's focusing on his future, and all he sees in that future is the war against Voldemort."

She took a deep breath, and still waited several moments before continuing.

"I got him alone for a few minutes today during his party, just the two of us. You know how Dumbledore told us the potion has aged him, maybe even making him *really* two years older? Well, he has the stare of someone much older than that. That fight changed him, all for the good since he'll most probably have to face Voldemort again and again until Harry kills him, or.... Well, until Harry kills him. But there is a... I don't know, a resignation perhaps? Or maybe it's cold-blooded determination? No, well yes, both of those, but it's..."

She sighed again and looked directly into Hermione's eyes. "Harry *will* kill Tom Riddle, but as he sees it, he's not likely to survive either. He's not decided he'll die, but he's decided to put aside everything good he can have in life, and only prepare for the war and that final fight. I just know it in my bones; that's what he thinks. He spoke about being a killer today like it was less of an issue than being a Quidditch player.

"He's training for war, which is good. I still wish Dumbledore had let me join you guys in the Paladin Program. But Harry's beyond any school program. He's... he makes me shiver to look at him, and it's not just the hunk, Harry. He reminds me of Mad-Eye Moody when he's on guard duty. Not paranoid, but hyper active constant vigilance to the exclusion of everything else - such ruthless determination."

She looked down at her hands once more; then she looked up. "Harry's going to war, Hermione, and there is nothing else, and no one else for him."

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Two days later Ginny Weasley recalled that conversation with Hermione when she accepted Harry's invitation to talk. She could think of nothing that Harry might want to talk about, but she didn't need an agenda for a conversation.

"Let's go outside," he said. "I just want to visit with a friend, you, for a while. You still want to be my friend, even though I'm..." He shrugged his shoulders, looked at her with a bit of a cautious grin. "I mean, I could understand that the fact that I've killed people and that I monger spells could cause you to hesitate."

Ginny thought that those words from Harry a week ago would have been pitiable. She'd have yelled at him even. He'd either have been nobly trying to distance himself for fear that she would be offended by him, or the previous Harry would have been crying out for acceptance in such an odd way. This new war-weary, determined, contained Harry simply was giving her a choice. She stared at him so long without saying anything that he started to turn from her. Quickly she grabbed his arm.

She decided to put the question back in Harry's lap. "You still want *me* to be a close friend don't you, Harry, joining you with Ron and Hermione, and being there when they're not around, don't you? Your offer of friendship at that level hasn't changed, has it, with all you've been through?"

He looked into her eyes and she almost blinked with the 'greenness' of his eyes. He shook his head; he wordlessly said that he still wanted her as a confidant.

Ginny tried to give the same smile that she'd have given him two months before. She said, "Well, I haven't changed by mind either. So talk about anything you want. I eventually want to hear about Spell Mongering and whatever else you want to share from your meeting with Dumbledore before lunch, if there is anything else you can tell me." She grinned throughout this, but became serious. "You can even tell me about the fight the other day, if you want, now or later, if you need to vent or bend my ear, or even shout or scream or cry. I'll listen if you need to get it out of your system. Or not." She ended with another smaller smile, and asked where they were headed.

He said, "To Hagrid's. I need to monger a spell that could be a bit volatile. I want an open space and a ready source of water, just in case. Dumbledore said it was okay there."

They walked silently for about thirty feet. Then Harry asked, "Do you think Hermione and Ron are all right with all I've been through? Hermione almost accepted my Spell Mongering too easily. And Ron should have been a little jealous at least about my inheritance, my Apparation license, my extra wands - something. But they were... I don't know."

"I think I know what it is, Harry. Dumbledore told us that you got a major surge of strength and endurance from fighting when the aberrant potion kicked in. It aged you and solidified in you certain capabilities, he believes. Well those two spent that time when the tainted potion surged through them worrying about you. They are still asking about you too often. They're always talking about whether you are okay or not. It's a little overboard since you're fine. I'd understand if you were lying hurt in the Infirmary. Don't get me wrong, we all were and are concerned, but they're over the top. Even my fussy mum thinks they're too much."

"That would probably explain it," Harry said. "Goodness, Hermione's been worried about me since we first met. She's probably going spare now. What can we do?"

"I don't think it's as strong with them as what happened to you," Ginny said. "Everyone else just spent the hour snogging. Those two kissed for a minute, then they were broken up. A few minutes later I ran in telling everyone about the attack. The Paladins are all going to be fighters - but you're the real warrior - you always have been. Those two should be back on track to that end soon enough."

Harry stopped in his tracks and stared at her. She'd been scurrying along following him at his back

right quarter, not behind him but not beside him. She stopped and looked up at him, covering her eyes.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Ginny." He turned so she was looking up at him away from the sun and he was looking down at her. "Why did you say 'warrior?'"

She thought the look on his face might be one of worry or concern. "It's nothing to be ashamed of, Harry, or to brag about. You're beyond such trivialities. You can't see yourself, but you have a commanding presence, even to people like Ron who's five or six inches taller than you. You walk like a tiger on the prowl. You have that look of determination and calm that I see in Kingsley Shacklebolt and Mad-Eye Moody. They too are confident fighters with nothing to prove." She stopped for a minute and smiled. "Although, Moody has more of a confident lurch than a confident walk. But you're something more, even than those two. I think..." She bit her lip, took a step back and actually tilted her head sideways like Luna might to examine something. "You're... you're *in charge*, Harry. There's no other way to say it."

He looked at her intently, eye-to eye and standing where their faces were just less than a foot apart. She thought she might have swooned two years ago in such a place, but now she determined she'd return his gaze, like for like.

She blinked first, he nodded, and then he turned and started walking again. This time he moved slowly so she could more easily keep up. "I'm sorry about going so fast earlier, Ginny. I just need to work on an important spell; lives are at stake. That Thunderfire I mentioned to Hermione, it's the most effective magic for fighting vampires ever. The threat of it alone might cause them to abandon any plans to side with Riddle."

Hagrid wasn't in his hut, but there was a roughly lettered parchment scrap stuck in the door telling them that he'd be back shortly. They didn't know how long he'd been gone but decided to wait for a while and chat in the shade of the front porch.

Harry closed his eyes, took several deep breaths, and leaned back against a post. He didn't move for nearly a minute. Ginny was about to ask him if he was feeling well when he spoke.

"Ginny, I've been a bit abrupt with you, and I've rushed you down here just now. I apologize. Dumbledore has me wound up and I owe it to him not to mention more than I said at lunch. Nothing bad is going on, I'm just trying to improve our relationship going forward. He ignored me last year as you saw, and we're working out how we can work best together. I want his friendship and he wants mine, but we seem to be groping around in the dark, always poking each other in the eyes whenever we reach out." He sighed. "He and I made real progress today, and had a few set backs, but I think all will be well in a few days. Or we'll at least be on a firm foundation for getting well."

He closed his eyes again, and leaned back against the post. The heat that had plagued the British Isles all summer had finally broken the day before Harry's birthday. It was sunny and comfortably warm with a nice crisp breeze - perfect flying weather - perfect weather for anything outdoors. They enjoyed a companionable silence for several minutes. He seemed to be meditating or something like it; she gazed around at Hogwarts in its full summer glory, something only promised in the school grounds when the students left each year-end.

They heard the call of a boarhound, and looked up to see Fang and then Hagrid rounding the corner of the hut.

"Ta 'arry, Ginny, I'm glad ter see you two. Sorry I missed your birthday, 'arry. You got my present I hope?"

"I did, Hagrid, and thank you. You make the best rock cakes ever." Ginny and Harry had discussed that they had never heard of anyone else making rock cakes, so she knew Harry wasn't lying.

"So, what brings you two down ter see me on this fine day? Not that I'm not glad to see you, mind, but I'm not tutorin' any of you Paladins this summer; my class t'aint e-ssential, so to speak."

Harry said, "I have something to do that Professor Dumbledore asked me to work on down here, a spell I need to monger, or at least attempt to recreate, but I'd like to visit with you first. How's Grawp doing?"

Ginny saw Hagrid's eyes gleefully light up. She knew the loveable half giant had fond memories of many students, her brother Charlie being one of his favorites. But she already knew that for Hagrid, like several of the other professors, Harry held a special spot.

The three talked for over ten minutes before Hagrid remembered an errand he needed to complete. He headed for the castle but before he left he added, "I trust you with the Spell Mongerin' stuff, 'arry. Talked to Professor McGonagall ta'other day about it. She's still a bit worried 'bout you, but only for your safety. I actually reckon she's right proud of you in her own way - doing what no one else's done in a thousan' years or so. Talks 'bout you quite often in the Staff Lounge I might add. Er, probably should'na said that. P'shaw, she's proud of you like many of us. 'Taint wrong for you ter know it. Twon't go ter your head like most would.

"Anyway, 'arry," Hagrid continued, "Do you need me to stay by while you work? You said ya' need room and water, I could be handy in a fire or what not. I can be back from my errand in 'bout ten or fifteen minutes if you need me, or I can do something else up there for a while. Makes no never-mind when I do the other thing, s'long as it's done in the next day or two."

"Do what you need to do, Hagrid. I'm working on Thunderfire, the vampire fighting charm. It can be made into such a large exploding light that it catches things on fire, but I know how to work with small amounts so it'll be safe. I'll just do it down near your pond over there if it's alright with you, so I can toss the small bits I create on to a raft I'll conjure and anchor out in the middle. If I catch the grass on fire near me, which is unlikely, I'll have the water there, although an *Aguamenti* charm would probably do us.

"I always put up safety barriers when I monger, so we'll be safe, but it *is* a fire weapon I'm working on."

Hagrid's eyes light up. "I've heard 'bout Thunderfire, sounds 'xcitin.' I'll be right back shortly. You don't have ter wait fer me, but I do want ter see you go at it." He stomped off purposefully and Harry and Ginny smiled at each other over their large friend's enthusiasm.

When Hagrid returned, he had Remus Lupin in tow.

Remus said, "I hope you don't mind me coming, Harry, and, I hope we haven't missed anything."

"I don't want just anyone to know about Spell Mongering, or my theories and actions when I do it, but you three are definitely on my short list of those I trust completely." Harry said this not looking at his friends, but Ginny noticed that the faces of the two men probably matched her delight in being included in Harry's circle of trust.

In the past few minutes Harry had walked around the pond and just looked at it from different angles. He'd thrown grass blades into the air to judge wind direction, and he had squatted down to look at the lay of the ground. He'd finally and silently nodded to himself and used his wand to cut the grass very short in a thirty-foot by thirty-foot square right down to the water's edge.

When Hagrid and Remus had arrived, Harry had just levitated a work bench of Hagrid's from the back of his hut down to the cleared area, and had conjured a small platform about three-feet square out in the water about ten or twelve feet away.

"Alright to use this bench, Hagrid?" Harry called. "I'll place a fireproofing charm on it."

"Fine by me, 'arry. I cobbled that one together in less than two hours, years ago. A new one won't take any longer if sumthin' happens to it."

Harry shot his wand from his arm holster and spoke several spells quietly to himself before retracting his wand.

"Blazes, 'arry. You're right fast with that there wand holster," Hagrid said. "I always wanted one, well, you know, before.... But I've never seen anyone so fast with one."

Harry gazed at his large friend for several moments. He then smiled, but said nothing in response. Instead he said, "If you three would come over here." He pointed to his left as he stepped to the right of the bench. "Ginny up front, Remus to her right, and Hagrid, you stand behind Remus. That way I have a narrower window of where I need to deflect anything and I'll need smaller barriers."

"I can hold a shield for us," Remus said. "You'll use too much power protecting us *and* mongering, won't you?"

"That won't be necessary. I don't use shields like *Protego*. I'll conjure a fire proof, projectile proof barrier that I don't have to hold. It's transparent, though you can see it. It looks sort of like glass. The barrier lasts about thirty minutes and when it turns pinkish it's beginning to fade in strength, so I conjure a new one. A Monger rarely needs one since few people watch them work. But the spell work for it was in Telemachus Grind's journal and I tested it a while back just out of curiosity."

Harry cast the spell wordlessly and then looked at the bench while he drew a new looking journal from his bag. No one had seen the bag on Harry's shoulder before that. When the bag disappeared a moment later Remus said, "Harry, your bag, er...."



Harry looked down at his bag, which was not there. Then he smiled. "I always noticed how Hermione had such a huge book bag during school. She carried so many extra books. I also noticed how Tonks used a spell to lighten my trunk last summer. I started to combine that Lightning spell with an Engorgement spell to increase the carrying capacity, but before it was finished I decided I wanted the bag to disappear also, just not be there at all if I didn't need it.

"Well, it's darn useful, but my conjurations fall apart after a week or two. I'm studying on how to make it permanent, but the Runes I've studied say I also need Arithmancy, and Arithmancy says I need more Runes. The spells get too big. I'm trying to think up a way to get permanence without them. I'll make you all a bag once I figure it out."

Ginny noticed that Hagrid seemed merely proud of Harry, but Remus had a look of amazement on his face.

Harry turned to them after setting out his journal and waving his hand over the open page so it would stay opened to that place. "Spell Mongering uses the idea of an iron monger or a blacksmith as a metaphor."

"A wha'?" Hagrid asked.

"A metaphor," Harry repeated, "A figure of speech. Think of it as using certain words to describe something that it really doesn't describe, but it explains it better anyway." Harry looked at the confused look on Hagrid's face and continued. "Oh, well let's see. Oh, I know.

"Hagrid, caring for the magical creatures you love so much is not just a job. It's more like a calling, like a priest or monk called into service. You are the Shepard of your congregation of animals."

Hagrid stood up straighter at these words. "Thank you, 'arry. I've always thought of it as much more than work. It's a de-light." The big guy just beamed at Harry, and Ginny saw Harry smiling back at his first friend from the Wizarding world.

"See, caring for your animals has nothing really to do with pastoring a church, but you understood exactly how I used something unrelated to relate to your feeling for your position here. That's a metaphor.

"Spell Mongering doesn't use a real forge but when I bring certain pieces of spells together I think about it like I'm heating them in a forge to mold them together. I work on it in my mind like I am pounding on magic, or hacking at it with an axe, or boring holes in it with an auger. But you don't see any such actual tools on the workbench. I actually find myself wanting to visit a working blacksmith's shop just to see how they do things. It might teach me something."

Harry lowered his head for a moment before looking at those present more seriously. "I've never showed any of this to anyone. I don't know if any of you will see anything at all. I just read the old journal Dobby gave me and did what it said. Since then I've found out that most Spell Monger apprentices didn't start until their early thirties, and many who applied were turned away within the first hour. Although, Telemachus Grind, my distant relative, started at my age, as did a few others.

"So, the first thing I'm going to do is open up a base slug of magic, like a slug of iron used by a smith, and add the elements of a spell that makes it a charm. Thunderfire is a charm, but it creates something out of nothing like conjuring does. Conjuring is a form of Transfiguration that creates more solid or stable items out of the substance of the air, so to speak. This is a charm in that the finished piece of magic brings an active force out of nothing, a blindingly hot light that is gone in an instant unless it catches something on fire.

"The base slug of magic will look like a rounded cube of silvery sparkling light, roughly an inch square. If it were a Conjunction spell, it would be duller and red-ish colored. I can stabilize it there for about a minute."

Harry waved his wand and muttered a spell. A clear sheet of what Muggles might consider Plexiglas appeared in front of his friends. He said, "Stay behind the barrier and nothing can hurt you, if it gets away from me. I've never *not* been able to stop a spell gone awry, but I am very serious about protection. He turned back to his journal read for a bit, and then raised his wand.

"Harry, what about your protection?" Ginny said.

"I'm wearing it." He looked at his friends and explained further. "As a part of my Monger training, I created the spells needed to protect myself from almost everything. I'm also trained to know when something is going wrong, so I can end it quickly or get out even quicker. Safety rules fill the margins of Grind's journal, and I follow his advice strictly. As a Spell Monger I always have on protective charms and spells when I work. Raising them takes little time and is second nature to me now. Think of a blacksmith putting on goggles, heavy gloves, and an asbestos apron as soon as he walks into his shop."

After this, Ginny watched Harry concentrate with his eyes closed for fifteen or twenty seconds. She'd wondered how Harry would "open up a base slug of magic" as he'd expressed it. It appeared that he was calling it up from within himself.

Suddenly she barely saw a faint, pulsing cube of light floating in front of Harry at his eye level and about two feet from his face. He closed his eyes for a moment and stepped back, as if he needed to rest a bit. Shortly he stepped back up to the cube and raised his wand. He said nothing out loud, but she watched as he poked at it without touching the faint cube. In a minute it flared a bit brighter and he stepped back and waved his hand at the cube. It stopped pulsing and seemed to darken a bit in color, though it became no more substantial in her appraisal.

"It's be-u-ti-ful, 'arry. I've never seen anythin' more amazin.' You called up magic out of your soul or sumwheres about."

Remus cleared his voice and asked, "You see something, Hagrid? Do you, Ginny?"

She said, "I see a cube of sparkling light, or, it was sparkling, now it's not. It's sort of translucent. I can vaguely see it."

"Wha' you talkin' 'bout, Ginny. It's there as plain as the beard on my face, solid as you please.

Remus?"

Lupin was staring intently around and about Harry. "I... I don't see a thing, but I felt Harry draw up something powerful and bring it forth. I can still feel it after you cast that holding spell on it, Harry."

Harry raised his hand and swished it like he might be commanding the bit of unfinished magic to go away. Ginny saw it float out over the pond and pop like small firecracker.

All three obviously heard the pop. Remus said, "I didn't mean to spoil your work, Harry. It must take a lot to do what you did. "I'm sorry I-

Harry held up his hand and Remus paused. "It's no real effort, Remus. I can do that a dozen times an hour and not tire. It just takes a little out of me for a few seconds. As I said, this is the first time I've shown this to anyone ...fascinating."

Ginny noticed the thoughtful face Harry seemed to have acquired over the summer. Then he said, "Telemachus wrote that there is no telling who will or won't be able to see the mongering of a spell. You have to have a certain amount of power to see it, but if you can't see it that doesn't mean you aren't powerful. He wrote that both Salazar Slytherin and Godric Gryffindor couldn't see a spell being mongered, but that both Rowena Ravenclaw and Helga Hufflepuff could vaguely see it. So you're in good company, Remus and Ginny, and you're more powerful than you may think, Hagrid."

"Ah 'arry. You should'na say such things."

"Why not, Hagrid, it's true. If you could see it, you have a good bit of magical power. Now what else you have that Ginny has a bit of, and Remus has none of, no Monger has ever figured out. At least Telemachus had never heard of whatever it is. He wrote on and on about what it might be, and I never until this moment could figure out why he was so caught up in figuring this out, but now I'm most curious myself. I'll have to think about it and maybe try some experiments. I hope I can ask you all to help with any test to better understand it." They all nodded and he continued, "If you want to stay, Remus, maybe you'll see it in a bit, but the journal doesn't say that might happen. Grind did write that those who barely see quite often increase in their abilities to see it over time."

Remus said, "I'll stay, Harry. Just tell me what you're doing when you can, and I'll follow along. I believe I can understand the process even if I can't see it."

Harry looked at him thoughtfully. "Alright, it will be like when you first told me about a Patronus, but I didn't get to try it."

Harry turned back to his work. "Now I'll go through the same process of creating a basis for a charm, then I'll add the elements that make it Thunderfire. In a branch of Muggle science called Quantum Physics, they have an idea bout the stuff that makes up the universe. At its smallest bit, everything is made up of quanta. Quanta are the stuff both energy and solid matter are made of. I think that we magical folks manipulate quanta. That's why we can transfigure things, and how we can call forth the matter of the air to be both solid bits and be a force such as a Bludgeoning spell. Am I being clear?"

Harry looked straight at Hagrid to see if he'd explained it well, so Hagrid responded, "Solid stuff can become energy and energy can become solid 'cause it's all the same little bits down on the 'tomic level. That's about it, Harry?"

"That's it, Hagrid, even below the atomic level. The Thunderfire charm will have to convert quanta into light and then allow the heat to convert out of the light. That action will create a sound that will deafen us if we're not careful, so I'll add in a sound dampener as well before I compact it for repeating. Then I'll release this first bit to explode. Am I being clear?"

No one spoke so Ginny asked, "I see how what you described will create a charm that causes a painfully bright flash of light followed by the heat of that light. I can follow you through your mongering or blacksmithing metaphor, but the only thing I don't see at this simple level is what you add to make the light and heat. You called them elements. Are they actual material elements or is that also a metaphor?"

Harry smiled at her brightly. "Brilliant observation, Gin. I don't mean elements like earth, fire, wind and water, and I don't mean elements like carbon and zinc and hydrogen. Telemachus called them elements. He meant the particles of magic that go together to make a spell or charm or jinx. If you disassemble a Sneakoscope, the parts aren't a Sneakoscope, but the specific parts are essential for a Sneakoscope."

Harry's smile broadened. "As I said, *very* good, Ginny. Grind wrote that most apprentices can't understand that at first. The brighter ones know they don't understand it, like you did. You'd make a good Spell Monger, I'd wager, but since you see it dimly, you probably have to get a few years older before you can try your hand at it."

When Ginny made a slight pout Harry chuckled and added, "Remember, most don't start until they're thirty, so if you get it in five years time you'll be ahead of the others." He turned to the others. "Any questions you, two?"

Hagrid said, "Wha'ever you say, 'arry. I can understand that you'd need what you said to make a Thunderfire charm, I guess."

"Harry," Remus said. "I can understand the process you've described, but I can't see it, so the picture that replaces a thousand words is lost to me. Perhaps you can make an advanced Charms thesis about this process and receive your Charms Mastery with it. If the same thing works with Transfiguration and Defense spells, you might be able to write your theses for those disciplines as well, in this manner."

Masterships in a given subject in the Wizarding world were rare and cherished. After completing a school such as Hogwarts, a witch or wizard seeking a Mastery in a subject would work for another master in that subject in similar fashion to the old apprenticeship programs. Usually the master was an educator or researcher, and the one seeking the Mastery would train with them for several years before researching and writing a Mastery thesis or position paper on a previously unexplored idea or concept within that field.

The thesis was always far and away the most difficult part of a given mastery program and where most unfulfilled hopes of a Mastery lay shattered.

With a thousand students at Hogwarts, there were many more teachers than the few professors that Harry had for his classes. But he knew that Professors McGonagall, Flitwick, Sprout, Vector, and Snape were Masters in their fields. Professor Dumbledore had Masteries in Transfiguration and Charms. A Healer had to complete the training for a Mastery, but didn't need to write a thesis to practice as a Healer. A Potions Mastery was reported to be the most difficult to attain. Harry couldn't imagine how Spell Mongery could help him in that subject.

Harry said, "I've thought about how Mongering might help me achieve a Mastery or two. I'm glad you think it will work also." He sighed after a moment. "Of course, I have to convince the Ministry not to lock me up for *being* a Monger, then we'll see about a Mastery. After Riddle also."

They were all quiet with their own thoughts after that statement.

In a few seconds Harry said, "Well, I'm going to try what I said. I'm only working with a small base slug of magic. If I succeed, after compacting the charm I'll cast it out over the pond, trying to hit that platform I conjured. I'll give you a few seconds warning so you can protect your ears and look away. Do it. I understand Osbert Blacwin, the Monger who invented Thunderfire by accident, was blind and deaf for several days when he first stumbled over the charm, and the hearing in his right ear never fully recovered."

Remus conjured and passed around earplugs that would allow conversation in but keep out loud noises.

Harry proceeded with the task as he described it. Ginny watched the building piece of magic, but there was little to actually see, and as each step succeeded, a small flash signaled completion, so she looked at the growing charm then. She spent most of the time watching Harry.

His concentration was total. Determination and power radiated from him. He'd stare, mutter, wave his wand, wave his hand, poke, prod, and jab with both his hand and his wand. He traded hands and used the wand in his left and waved his right hand around for a time. The piece of magic under construction before his eyes remained silvery and sparkling for the most part. A reddish hue, and then a bluish hue appeared and faded from the work in progress. It would flair and then dull from time to time. Toward the end Harry released his wand, which floated by his hand about a foot away. He raised both hands to either side of the magic in progress and acted like he was squeezing it into a smaller shape. Of course his hands never came within six inches of the budding charm.

It was a very long minute later that Harry shouted, "Cover!" He grabbed his wand, which had floated right beside him in easy reach. He quickly stuck the wand point in the floating charm and flicked it out and over to the floating platform. Then he covered his eyes partially.

In a second a brilliant flash lit the paddock and pond area. The heat was obvious but not too hot. The roar that followed the explosion was not too deafening, but Ginny was glad that she had stuck her fingers tightly in her ears along side the earplugs. Even with her eyes averted she saw a large light

spot in the center of her vision.

The three of them looked to the platform, which wasn't there anymore, and then looked at Harry. He smiled at them as he used one finger to run through his ear like he could open it up more. "I'm glad I had my ears protected. You guys okay?" He said this while walking towards them and wandlessly and wordlessly vanishing the translucent barrier. He touched Ginny's arm and said, "Are you okay, Ginny? Hearing fine?"

After a moment she nodded and said, "That should do for a vampire, don't you think?" They all four chuckled.

"What's next, Harry?" Remus asked.

"The compacting process as I described it finalizes what I've done so far, so it's repeatable, but only by me. And it is repeatable at that exact power level with no variance. I have to do five things before I can sell it to others.

"First, I have to insert a formula that allows me to decrease and increase the charm's intensity. The Arithmantic Spell Crafters have an exotic and complex methodology for accomplishing this, but it's too much. I can't access the info on the Thunderlight charm they created to fight vampires, but that alone may be enough to make it ineffective. Oh yes, it temporarily make the vampires look away for a few moments, but it can't kill any of them. Thunderfire is a deterrent weapon. With it in existence the Aurors should never have to use it. The vampires will settle down. The *threat* of Thunderfire ends Riddle's possible alliance with the covens.

"So, I have to incorporate a power variation element into the charm. Second, I have to add in the casting controls. There needs to be a wand swish or flick, as well as a word or words to say to cast it. I'll probably go with what Blacwin used originally unless I discover a reason not to. I have no problem casting spells without these controls for the most part. I've stripped them out of many common spells. But most people need the wand movements and words to use magic. It's all faith and confidence really, but there you have it.

"Then-"

Hold it, Harry," Remus interrupted. "Are you telling me that a witch or wizard doesn't need the wand movements or the spell words to cast magic, or that *you* don't need them any more at least?"

"For the most part it's true about all of us, I think," Harry replied. "Not in all cases, but in most spells I've ripped open and examined closely that's true. Let me show you something. This will really rock your cauldron."

Harry flicked out his wand from its holster and concentrated for a moment. He pointed it at a bit of dried grass and said, "*Leviosa*." The grass caught fire. He then pointed at a small rock and said " *Incendio*." The rock levitated off of the ground.

He retracted his wand and said, "I'm experimenting on the fact that our words may be completely

meaningless in casting spells, at least meaningless to the magic itself. Those words mean something to us, but only to us. This goes beyond wordless magic. Perhaps all magic can be wordless, possibly even wandless, although wands have an entirely different function in helping us concentrate our use of magic than the words do. I've only succeeded in making words meaningless with a few of the very earliest spells discovered by the first wielders of magic in Britain. But I'm getting closer to understanding how to do this with others. Imagine shouting out a shielding spell incantation and having an invisible Jelly Legs jinx hit your opponent."

Harry spoke about errors he'd perceived in the fundamentals of witches' and wizards' understanding of magic as if he were discussing a badly built children's pull toy. The look on his face clearly showed his delight in tweaking the nose of established thought. He didn't look up to see the awe in the eyes of the other three present.

Lupin shook his head and said, "Amazing, Harry, utterly amazing. So, you compact it, add the power varying capabilities, and design the casting controls for it. Then what?"

"The last step is to package it so others can use it. This part is an experimental process; there's no exact formula, but there are guidelines that eventually get you there. Of course, all of Spell Mongery is an art form really, rough hewn to be sure, but art and science combined to create the beauty of a desert or rugged mountains. Er, Spell Mongery as a process is roughhewn to be sure, but there's nothing that says a spell I monger can't be as elegant as any out there. Mine do tend to be sleek, efficient in the way they use a witch or wizard's magical power. Most of what I've seen, except for the earliest of spells, are a bit overweight - too much overhead, full of runes and Arithmantic formulas when they aren't needed. It's like everyone wants to get in on the act when it's unnecessary. And when a rune or a formula is needed, they put way too much into it." Harry sighed. "Oh well, back to what I'm doing.

"So after I develop a packaging for delivery to others, I compact it once more so I can call the charm up over and over without going through the whole or even partial process again. Of course you compact at every successful step to speed the matter along.

"So I play with it over and over again and test for sale-ability. When it's where I can sell it to someone, I try to do that as a final test. Then I plan to have the witch or wizard who buys it try it a number of times and observe what goes on. That's something new I've devised. Past Mongers have never worried about efficiencies once it works well enough to sell, but I want to create powerful spells that anyone can use over and over again.

"Imagine shield spells that stay in place while you shoot offensive spells through them. Imagine spells that will allow a third-year to fight a Death Eater if he has to."

Harry stopped at this moment and looked out over the pond. He stared that way for several very long moments. Without looking back he said, "I want to find a way to protect them. People are dying out there and the Ministry is covering it up. There aren't that many yet, but a few each week. I hope to stop it, or at least deter it a good bit."

He turned back to his friends with a look of zeal in his eyes. "Magic does a lot, but it can do so much

more. Perhaps I can create the spells to defeat the Death Eaters so everyone is protected while I go after Riddle." He looked down after those words.

Ginny stepped up and touched his arm. "I believe you can do it, Harry, but don't kill yourself over it. Don't even lose sleep over it." She smiled and added, "I can imagine Dumbledore saying something like, 'It will all come in due time, Harry,' can't you?"

They all chuckled at that.

Remus left Harry and the others in the paddock, mentioning one more stop he needed to make before Apparating back to London.

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"Remus, welcome back. Lemon drop?" Lupin made his way straight back to the headmaster's office.

Remus took one of the new and improved sweets. Both mens' faces showed their appreciation of this fine version of the classic confection.

"Albus, do you know anything about the process of Spell Mongery?"

The headmaster looked puzzled at the question and spoke. "I believe it is roughly analogous to blacksmithing or Middle Ages iron mongering, but you know there's nothing written on the process for general consumption. I believe it's secretive among their practitioners. Why do you ask?"

"It was amazing, Albus. I found Harry down at the paddock with Hagrid and Ginny Weasley. He had prepared the area for safety since he was working on Thunderfire. He had his own protections in place as well as protective barriers for the three of us."

Harry's guardian was most excited about what he had seen, or rather had felt but not seen. "Harry explained that the blacksmith comparison is a metaphor, not an analogy. I had imagined him actually taking a mallet to a spell in some way, but the process is not that similar. But in truth 'metaphorically' blacksmithing or old iron mongering *does* explain it.

"Anyway, the amazing part is the way he started and how he progressed. Like an iron monger pulling out a billet of metal, Harry said that he pulls up a 'slug of base magic' he called it. He closed his eyes and after a few moments he pulled up this slug from his inner self. Supposedly it was a small bit, roughly an inch square and sparkling. I couldn't see it, Ginny saw it translucently, and Hagrid had no problem seeing it at all. Harry stated that this was common. Supposedly Telemachus Grind wrote in his journal that the two male founders of Hogwarts couldn't see it either, but the two females could."

Lupin swallowed and thought for a moment before continuing. "It was a presence, Albus. Not evil, not animate, not warm or cold. I knew it was benevolent, and now that I think about it, since it came out



of Harry it would have to be good.

"We've all read about a few powerful wizards and witches who could draw raw magic out of themselves and release it, you can do that can't you?" Remus paused and Dumbledore nodded, then Remus continued, "Well, Harry drew it out and it stayed there. It just floated about two to three feet from his face at his eye level. He said that Thunderfire is a charm, so he described what he had to add to make a charm rather than say a spell or a jinx or curse. He also succinctly described the differences between a transfiguring spell and a conjuration.

"All the while, he's adding the elements or items or properties needed to make Thunderfire. And, he explained simply the process a Monger would go through to develop, modify, vary the strength, stabilize, and eventually package the charm for sale as he called it. He also described the physics of what he does, the understanding of how magic works from his understanding of Muggle sciences.

"I've read about the process the Arithmantic Spell Crafters go through. Albus, this is brilliant in its simplicity, and profound in its effectiveness. We lost so much when Spell Mongering was discredited and this craft of Harry's vanished.

"But I came back up here to talk about Harry himself in all this. Albus, the power it takes to do this, and yet, he only rested for a few second after pulling out his so called slug of base magic. He is truly the most amazing wizard I've seen, including you, and I mean no disrespect. You have to see this. I can understand why we should fear someone with this ability, a Monger should be feared if he or she was evil, but this is Harry. We should make ourselves available to guide and counsel him, but he'll not go Dark.

"The other thing that struck me, Albus, is the ramifications of this for Harry academically. You should see him be a much more powerful Charms and Transfiguration student, although I daresay he'll generate some controversial theories that he will then back up with practical demonstrations. I think he's going to delight in upsetting sacrosanct beliefs as simply as the Marauders pulled pranks around school. Harry's 'pranks' if you can call them that will be in demonstrating magic as we've thought it shouldn't or can't be.

"He'd have failed his O.W.L.s with this approach. If we coach him about it, I'll wager he'll amaze the N.E.W.T.s examiners. And, Albus, if guided properly, he'll gain a Mastery in Charms, Transfiguration, and Defense within a year or two of finishing Hogwarts, if he chooses, and I think he will choose to do so. He seems to have a zeal to promote Spell Mongery for the good of the Wizarding world. If we point him in that direction, I believe we'll be much more amazed at what he accomplishes for all of us than just defeating Voldemort. You really need to make time to see this and discuss his theories. It's amazing, astounding actually."

They chatted a little more. Remus had been standing all of this time, as had the headmaster. Remus did need to Apparate to London soon. Just as he made to walk out of the office, Remus turned. "I really don't know how Professor Vector from Arithmancy and Professor Ogham of Runes will take this. Harry's work does nothing to damage the predictive nature of Arithmancy or the historical aspects of Ancient Runes, but he said he doesn't need Arithmantic calculations or runes in his magic nearly as often as their elements appear in spells. He did say he wants to invent something similar to

runes to make his conjurations permanent if need be. He also thinks that most of the Arithmantic formulas he's examined are overkill.

"If he bypasses those two disciplines to a large extent somehow, the established order for Spell Crafting will *not* be pleased. We'll have a new branch of the Ministry attacking Harry. Perhaps one or both of these two professors will begin to think poorly of him. Snape has been more than enough for Harry to deal with. At least these two, if they dislike his work, won't be his professors.

"Albus, I'll talk to Lila Vector if you'll speak to Isis Ogham, once you get to know Harry's work better."

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The next day, Harry arose very early and made his way to St. Simon's Apparation point. It was a one-way location; no one could Apparate in, but the few who knew about it could leave that way. He Apparated to Grimmauld Place for a knife-fighting lesson with Steph Granger. After that hour, Harry Apparated to the established entry for St. Simon's the church - the front door of the church. He made his way through the secure point between the church offices and the sanctuary. He followed his regular routine for exercises and ate breakfast with Dobby.

The happy elf maintained that he could not eat at the same table with his master, so Harry had conjured a special table and chair high enough for Dobby to eat at and for the two of them to see each other for easy conversation.

It was just past eight o'clock when Harry decided to go to Diagon Alley and perhaps even into London for a little clothes shopping. The Alley shops opened at 8:30 as a regular practice, but this time of year shoppers on the Alley were sparse until about 11:00. The next week the traffic at this time of day would begin to increase due to the approaching school year. Harry donned his black robe, a gift from Remus for their trip around Great Britain two days before, and Apparated right outside Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions.

As he walked to the door, a young woman Harry thought to be four or five years older than him rushed up. He held the door for her and she thanked him as she scurried by.

Harry thought she was dressed very stylishly, though he admitted to himself that he knew little about fashions, yet he still like the cut of her clothes. They were similar to Muggle women's clothes he'd seen but with something to their design that definitely said that she was magical. She had a very pleasing round face, smooth, very dark skin, and stood about Harry's height at five feet, nine inches tall.

Madam Malkin, the smiling squat witch in her trademark mauve robe "of the finest quality," as she would gladly tell you, stood there herself in the front counter area.

Harry held the door for the young witch and hung back to allow her to be served first. She was not a customer as Madam Malkin's word indicated. "Clarinda, you're late again, and put on a robe immediately. I don't want *that* on display in my store." The elder witch turned her head from her

employee and placed the smile on her face that spoke of culture and refinements, Harry thought. It made him realize that a game face helps in business.

"Welcome, sir. How may we help you this fine day?"

Harry had the hood of his cloak up and his face was hidden in its shadow. This was not the practice of most shoppers at Diagon Alley, but it was not uncommon, even in the summer. He had not yet been recognized as the Boy-Who-Lived, and this was the general idea.

Madam Malkin had scanned his cloak immediately. The quality of the material and craftsmanship was obvious even to Harry's untrained eyes, so he figured that she'd guessed that the prospect before her was of some means. Without lowering his hood he asked for a private showing room to discuss his 'wardrobe needs.' The word 'wardrobe' indicated a larger rather than smaller purchase. She readily agreed.

Once in the room with the curtains closed Harry cast a Silencing charm and tossed off his hood. Madam Malkin's eyes went wide as she scanned his face and scar. "Of course, Mr. Potter, I see the need for a private wardrobe consultation. How may we help you today? New school robes? Dress robes for any ball or cotillion coming up?"

"I am in the mood for several different items Madam Malkin, and please call me Harry. I do need five new school robes, and two or three better, what I guess might be called business robes, for executives and such. I will also want a dress robe that is classic in cut and fashion. I've finished growing, so I can buy better quality for longer life, if I don't buy anything that will go out of style too soon." He wrinkled his brow as if thinking about it a bit, and then he added, "I also want something done with the school uniforms we wear under our robes, and maybe some casual wear, I just don't know what I need."

Madam Malkin looked at him for several moments before responding. "Let me be frank, Mr. Potter, I want you to look your best and be satisfied. I know many will be looking at your apparel, and I want them to see my label and hear you speak well of my establishment."

She paused for a moment before continuing, "I would gladly consult with you, but I must admit that I have a young lady who will be as able to help you with your needs as I can. I, however, am expecting a major wedding party to be here any minute and *I am* the expert on weddings here. May I have Clarinda help you? She is very good with young gentlemen's business and formal wear, and she is as experienced as any here regarding school robes and uniforms."

Harry agreed and she called her assistant. "Clarinda, Mr. Potter is one of our discrete clients. You will not speak his name while he is here outside of this Silenced room, nor will you mark his apparel packages with his name." She turned to Harry while consulting a small parchment, which she tapped twice with her wand. "You, sir, are number 476 in our client list. All charges will go to Gringotts and be managed there. We do not have a delivery address on record for you. You may choose to pick up your purchases later or have them delivered in any manner you deem suitable."

She thanked Harry profusely for understanding, and for thinking about Malkin's for his apparel needs.

The bell rang at the front door and she scurried out.

Harry turned to the woman with him and said, "Let's start properly, I'm Harry Potter."

She smiled and said, "You do know, Mr. Potter, you really need no introduction anywhere you go in England. I'm Clarinda Jordan. I was a sixth-year Ravenclaw when you started Hogwarts, and my brother, Lee, has told me a good deal about you and your adventures. I do thank you for teaching Lee the Patronus Charm. I don't know if he'd have survived that dementor attack earlier this summer otherwise."

"Oh! That explains it," Harry said. "I've been thinking you look more familiar to me than just being a few years ahead of me at Hogwarts. How is Lee doing? I haven't seen him in a month and a half, but it seems like ages ago."

They visited for a minute, and then Clarinda began discussing his wardrobe. She asked very intelligent questions about his needs and activities that Harry could easily answer but would have never thought to volunteer.

She helped Harry pick a conservative dress robe that should be a classic fit for years to come, even though she admitted it would not be the latest style for a ball or cotillion this year, if one was to be held at Hogwarts. She helped Harry pick and chose three different business robes in muted black, darkest green, and navy colors. She also fitted him for five Hogwarts robes in his size for his normal use. She showed him the version of school robes made with better fabric and tailoring, and he readily agreed to the increased price. Harry made the same choices for his school uniforms. No more chaffing necks for him during classes.

The problem came when Clarinda tried to help him with casual wear that was not a robe.

"Clarinda, I just don't see anything I like. I guess I'll have to go to Muggle London after this and buy stuff there, although I'd rather patronize Wizarding businesses if I could."

She said she understood and began to gather up his purchases for alterations. Harry had an idea.

"Clarinda, I liked your outfit I saw when you came in this morning. Is there a wizard's equivalent to what you were wearing? Where did you buy it? It's quite sharp, I think."

She went to the curtain and saw that Madam Malkin was still very busy with her wedding party. Then she went to a trunk in the corner of the room and pulled out a sketchpad of parchment about twelve inches by fourteen inches. She opened it about half way back and then turned several more pages. She smiled and turned it so Harry could see.

The sketches on the next few pages were brilliant Harry thought. They reflected a mix of Muggle wear and magical styling. Harry knew he wouldn't be able to describe it to anyone, but he knew it was exactly the kind of clothing he'd want to lounge around the common room in on weekends, and go into Hogsmeade wearing.

"This is what I want, Clarinda. Why don't I see this kind of stuff on any of the racks?"

She blushed. "Well, Harry, *I* designed all of these. I'm not allowed to suggest these unless someone is frustrated with the standard lines we carry. Then I bring these out, and if anyone wants them, I collect sizes and sew it all together. Then I bring them in and Madam Malkin rings them up and gives me fifty percent of the profits. It's slow going, but I have six steady clients now for my work, seven if you buy these. Madam Malkin refuses to carry these types of clothing in stock. She's convinced there's no future in it."

Harry asked, "Why don't you open your own shop?"

"I hope to some day. I'm saving for it, but it's slow going. I don't know how to speed the process."

"Clarinda, if I recommend your work to people and they come in asking for you, will Madam Malkin allow you to show your work right off?"

"I have to show them what's in stock first; then if they still want to see my line I can show them. If you tell others I'd be most grateful."

They finished Harry's fittings and selection and he left, with his hood up to walk the Alley a bit before heading back to St. Simon's. It was just past half nine, and Diagon Alley was still pretty vacant. Harry knew that by half ten, or eleven at the latest, it would be busy enough that he should be gone, but in the mean time, with his face hidden by the hood, he enjoyed both strolling past the shops, and his anonymity.

The street that was Diagon Alley had several gentle turns in it, as well as a major curve just before it ended at The Leaky Cauldron. At one bend he saw the new sign for Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes. They'd only been open for roughly two months and Harry had never seen the establishment his Triwizard Tournament winnings had helped open. He noticed that the shop had a second hand knick-knack shop on its right, but the smaller shop to its left was unoccupied.

Harry walked in the twins' door and a siren went off. Confetti littered the entry way and his robes.

"Welcome to Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes," declared Lee Jordan. "You are the first customer of the day and we always celebrate our firsts. Any items you wish can be purchased at a thirteen percent discount if you buy it before leaving. What gag do you want us to help you design today, sir?"

Harry pushed back his hood and said, "Save the opening deal for someone who doesn't get the family discount."

"Harry!" Lee seemed genuinely delighted to see him. The boy whom Harry had never seen in anything less than dreadlocks, had a new serious business hair style, even if he was wearing the lurid green smock with flashing 'WWW' across the front and the back.

Lee took several steps towards Harry and grabbed him in a bear hug. "Thank you, Harry. Thank you soooo much. I almost didn't read that letter on casting the Patronus; I'd not come close to casting one in the DA meetings. After reading it I put off practicing what you wrote, but Fred and George demanded that I do so in one of their very rare serious moments. It wasn't two days later that I was at

the docks in Liverpool. Well, you saved my life, Harry." Lee hugged him again.

"No, Lee, *you* saved your life. I just gave you the tools. I wasn't there to perform the charm, you did that, and under the pressure of a dementor or two bearing down on you. Well done, Lee. You should be proud. I know your sister is."

"You've met Clarinda? Where? How?"

"I've just been to Madam Malkin's and she outfitted me with all I'll probably need for some time to come. She's a genius with clothing design. I've ordered several of her own creations." Harry paused thoughtfully and then said, "Is she the reason you always seemed so well dressed when you were out of school togs?"

"Yeah, she's brilliant all right." Lee had a pensive look on his face. "I'm grateful that she waited on you. She's on straight commission at the shop, and Madam Malkin always seems to make sure Clarinda only sees enough customers to get by, not get ahead. And when she sells one of her own creations, Madam Malkin keeps more than Clarinda makes, after Sis pays for the fabrics and such."

Harry asked, "When do Fred and George come by? I believe they're at the Skunkworks a good bit, but I'd like to see them."

"They spend two mornings a week here, the both of them. Then they alternate mornings just one of them at a time, until the girl we've hired comes in at noon. They're both here now; just go through that door. The password is 'Blood Pops.' Yeah, they got the idea from Dumbledore."

Harry expected to see the twins working on some mad idea for prank gear. He expected to see powder of some sort all over the place or hear an explosion. Instead, the two were sitting at a table. One looked to be going through a ledger, and the other was making some list of sorts. They were talking quietly while looking at the list.

Harry greeted them warmly and the two spent several minutes bringing their investor up to date on business and their research activities for both Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes and the Order of the Phoenix.

"So what brings you to the Alley, Harry, I don't see any minders. Someone under an Invisibility Cloak somewhere?" George asked.

Harry popped up his hood and told them that he was providing his own - security by obscurity. He also told them about the goblins declaring him eighteen years old and about his newly minted Apparation license.

"I came here today for some better clothes," he said.

"About time, too," Fred said. "Couture Dudley is so way out of style. Who would ever wear vastly oversized pants that ride so far down on their hips?"

"You two wear that puke green and you dare to judge my fashion sense?" They all chuckled. "I'm not

here to discuss fashion though. Have you guys met Lee's sister, Clarinda?"

The twins looked at each other and smiled in stereo.

"When we're not selling Wheezes..."

"...we only wear her clothing if at all possible."

"She sells them to us directly through Lee..."

"...we get them at a great discount, and she makes more money."

"Why do you ask?" The two asked the last question in tandem.

"Guys," Harry said, "You've got to stop that for business purposes. It's fine with the younger customers, but not now."

"Right you are partner," George said. "We just do it with our former school mates out of habit." The two smiled.

Harry asked, "Partner?"

Fred explained, "You own one third and we own the other two thirds. You don't know how far ahead of the pace your investment put us, Harry. Gringotts took us seriously the instant we deposited that sum two Junes ago. We were no longer kids dreaming."

George continued, "Somehow they knew you were our benefactor. When we told them you were a silent partner we believe they actually smiled at us. They made contacts with suppliers for better prices than we'd found, and we had short-term credit before we realized we needed it. We're convinced we owe this treatment to you. Now what's on your business mind today, partner?"

Harry had suspected the twins were a lot smarter than they had always let on. He shook his head and almost blurted out his ideas. "I propose I finance the start up of Clarinda's clothing business. She showed me three or four pages at the back of a full drawing pad of her ideas. I think when the students at Hogwarts see her creations, Clarinda will be a smash hit.

"I'll talk to the goblins and get the space next door. We advertise for the start of school. I know it's short notice, but I hope she can at least have a number of samples in a few days to take advantage of the students coming in to buy their school needs and then coming by your shop.

"You two help her with the business end of things. I make sure she has the money she needs. Do you know her well? Does she seem to be responsible, or a bit flighty?"

The two looked at each other again. "She has looked out for Lee since their father died after her seventh year. Their mum had died when Lee was five. I think she's trustworthy, and you'll be making her dream come true. I think she'll be careful. I know she'll work hard," George stated.

"You guys know her better," Harry said. "It was plain to see that this is her dream. If I go ahead and offer this to her, it won't be too much for her, will it? I mean, if we give her the opportunity, and it crushes her under the burden, then we not only help her fail, but we damage her... I don't know, I guess we damage her spirit."

The twins looked thoughtfully at each other for a long ten seconds. Harry had on more than one occasion wondered if the two had some sort of telepathic connection. Finally George said, "I don't think that will be a problem, but why don't you ask Lee. I'll go outside and mind the shop for a few minutes."

Lee came back and Harry outlined his idea. Lee bubbled over with enthusiasm, but Harry made him slow down and consider the burden it might put on Clarinda.

"Harry, you'd be surprised just how hardworking Clarinda is, even more so than what you saw at Madam Malkin's. I know that she can make a go at it. But to ease your fears, we both understand that it takes hard work and a certain amount of failure to eventually succeed. If this fails, and I doubt that, but if it fails, I know Gladrags has offered Clarinda a similar position to what she has now. It wouldn't be the end of the world. And she and I would pay you back ever last Knut you invest. We saw Dad fail at two businesses before his bed and breakfast idea started to prosper. We had to sell it at his death to pay the mortgage, but we made enough from it to make it until I finished Hogwarts. We *both* know the price you have to pay to succeed in business better than you three do, if you don't mind my saying so. You've never seen business failure."

Lee went back out front and George returned. "Harry," Fred said, "We've wanted to discuss something else with you, our partner. Lee has been an integral part of our success. He's the one who helped set up the *business* of our business. He manages the books and knows to ask all the questions we never considered, but we would have been bit on the backside if he hadn't tipped us off. We were just here looking at the business records this morning, not keeping the books."

George continued, "We three each own a third of the stock of WWW Enterprises, Ltd. If it's all right with you, we'd like to lay aside five percent of the stock each for future employee incentives. Lee is not the creative genius, but he could go to Zonko's right now and probably double their profitability inside of six months. He's too valuable to lose."

"We think, if you approve," said Fred, "that we should offer Lee five percent of the shares at the end of the year, if we reach certain revenue and profit goals now through the Christmas season. We'll tell Lee about it now, and tell him the goals. That way he'll know what's to be done to earn the stock."

Harry said, "I like it, guys, but you two are the soul of Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes. Why don't you take the fifteen percent out of my part? I don't feel like I'm earning my way owning equal shares with you two."

Once again the twins looked into each other's eyes and held a brief, silent conference. "We thought you'd say that." George smiled as he continued. "You really don't understand the importance of capital, or the importance of your name with the goblins at Gringotts and other businesses. We're not fully aware of the importance you hold at the bank, but we are getting an inkling of it."



"We want you equal with us in this. First, you deserve it from an investment capital point of view. Ask the goblins to further explain that to you. Second, your name with them is important. Third, you brought this Clarinda deal to us, so we'll see more profits in the future. Fourth, if you want to pull your weight around here a bit, why not let us use your name in advertising and your endorsement on a few products?"

Harry frowned at this.

Fred rushed to say, "You'll approve of everything ahead of time. We'll use you only sparingly, for items that might make sense. For example, we're working on a fake Golden Snitch that buzzes around the room. Once someone catches it, their robes turn into team robes for Hogwarts house teams. We're working on a licensing agreement with the professional Quidditch teams for the same rights."

Harry nodded slowly. "I can see endorsing that somehow. Okay, use me sparingly and with permission and we'll see on a case by case basis."

George cleared his throat. "Harry, how do you see the partnership between us three and Clarinda? And, how much gold do you think it will take to launch her business?"

"I thought I'd give her a thousand Galleons like I gave you two, and then we'd go a third for her, you two, and me. Do you need more since there're two of you?"

"Harry, Harry, Harry," said George.

"If you say that celebrity is as celebrity does, I'm going to punch you," Harry quickly interjected. They all chuckled remembering Gilderoy Lockhart, the Defense professor from Harry's second year.

Fred said, "Harry, you have overestimated our part and underestimated your part, and Clarinda's. At the point we were when you invested in us, you probably should have received fifty percent instead of a third." Harry made to protest but Fred held up his hand to stop him. "We were unproven in what was thought a non-existent market. Clarinda wants to tap into a known market, upscale clothing in a necessary but stagnant marketplace. There's been no innovation in Wizarding clothing design in a hundred years or more that we can tell.

"We will at best provide advice and an encouraging ear from time to time. Being right beside her will be a confidence booster, but little more than that. She's the genius and you're the money. If you have it you should set aside ten thousand Galleons for her business expansion. She'll need that thousand for the first two months in advertising. She'll also need another five hundred for fabric, sewing machines, and seamwitchstresses, before she sells anything. If she's lucky she'll get about a third down for anything that's ordered to be made to order. She's an unproven entity. Carrying cost will be steep.

"Harry do you have that kind of ready cash?"

"That's not going to be a problem, guys." Harry pondered this for a minute. "I need to go to Gringotts and see about the property, and then we need to talk to Clarinda and make her an offer."

"Hold on, Harry," George said. "Clarinda needs to own forty percent and you need to own forty

percent. We get ten percent, and another ten percent should be set aside for valuable employees like Lee is for us. This is going to be a bigger business than ours is, and the goblins will appreciate the practicality of this division of ownership, you'll see."

Then George said, "And besides funding her, the best thing you can do to make her a success is to model her menswear for the advertisements."

Harry looked shocked and started to sputter a protest.

Fred laughed. "Look at him, George. He faces dragons, dementors, and the occasional Dark Lord, but he's afraid of a camera." They tutted to themselves grinning. "The new buff Harry is quite a sight to behold. The girls have always found you attractive, even the scrawny Harry right after school starts. Now you're taller, brawny, and you have a confidence about you that the girls are going to swoon over." Harry made a face at this. "Like it or not it's true. And you *will* help Clarinda's business if you model her men's clothing. 'Tis true regardless of your opinion."

Harry thought that they must be joking, but if he was going to help Clarinda, then he'd help her any way he could. After a moment of silent thought, he shook his head to no one in particular and said, "Well, if I'm going to see Gultangk today, I'd better see if he can make room for me on his calendar."

The twins shared slightly stricken looks. "Harry, you talk to Gultangk?" George asked.

"Yeah, he asked me to call him Gultangk, but if you ever meet him you need to call him Director Gultangk. I'm not sure exactly what I did, but he considers me an affiliate, so he calls me Potter and I can call him Gultangk."

Fred looked at George and this time they spoke out loud, "He doesn't know, does it?"

"Guys! I'm tired of the special Harry, Boy-Who-Lived treatment. If I do something different just leave me ignorant."

The two grinned silently at each other, then developed a serious expression, and nodded together. George said, "Harry will you take us with you? It would not be considered irregular and we promise to be serious and professional."

Fred chipped in, "You won't even recognize us we'll be so straight-laced."

George nodded and continued, "You see, at that level in Gringotts - if we go with you, and the goblins won't consider it amiss if we do because we will be partners with you in this new adventure - but if we go with you, it will raise our standing in the eyes of the goblins."

"Being in that meeting and even saying nothing will help us in the future." Fred said. Then he stepped a little closer and said, "We don't want to be *just* joke shop owners. We have plans, and we see you as a part of that if you'd like. This with Clarinda, it just proves you have good business instincts. It's not just what you know and what you can do, but you have to know the right people, at least a few of them, and like it or not, you know the right people, or goblins in this case."

George said, "Bill has been coaching us, but he's not been able to get into the parts of Gringotts where the financial decisions are made. He's brought back a load of wealth from Egypt for the bank, and he's tops in security there now. Bill was smart enough to be Head Boy and he *didn't want* to go into the Ministry.

"Bill wants to go into high finance. That means Gringotts, and that means he'll have to climb higher than any wizard ever has. He's well on his way. We, the three of us, getting into the inner circles for even a few minutes, improve his chances. He improves our chances.

"I hope you don't mind us taking you at your word about being family. We seriously consider you one of us. The Wizarding world revolves around unofficial but very real associations and alliances. The goblins have their cliques, affiliates, clans, and the like. We wizards haven't codified it like they have, but similar groupings exists, truly.

"You're going to win this war with all our help, then what? You can go into government, teach at Hogwarts, play professional Quidditch - all or none of the above. But with your money and investments, which we don't know much about but have heard a little, you'll be a force in our world. But one person doesn't make a major difference long-term."

Fred took over. "To change our world will take a lot of people in government, education, business, and finance, all working together over decades. If you want the house-elves to be properly looked after, if you want to see werewolves treated properly, and if you want to see this pure-blood drivel driven out of our world, long-term financial pressure needs to come to bear. You can't force people to change, but you can foster the environment where the types of changes you want to see can occur. If you want that then we need to take every opportunity to advance ourselves together. We'll also have to look for possible allies. There aren't enough Weasleys and Potters to affect significant change."

They let Harry ponder this for a minute. He said, "You two threw your O.W.L.s, didn't you? You would have done as poorly on your N.E.W.T.s, too, but you're bloody geniuses aren't you? You're going stealth, under the telescope, and plan to take over the world, don't you, from behind the scenes?"

George grabbed one of Harry's arms, and Fred grabbed the other.

"Who us? We're just two..."

"... lowly joke peddlers trying to make an honest Sickle. Why, we don't..."

"... have any idea why you think we'd want to change the world."

Harry stared at them and grinned almost evilly. "All right you two, but you can't go dressed like that."

They disengaged from Harry and both moved to a cupboard in the office. In seconds they were back with black hooded robes similar to Harry's and almost of equal quality.

Harry asked, "Do you two know about the VIP Apparation Court at Gringotts?"

"We've heard of it, but we haven't been invited there. If you've been invited to enter the bank there, we can go with you as your guests. We know you well enough to follow Apparate right behind you, but if we don't show right away, come back for us."

Harry let the two concentrate on him for about five seconds, then he made his way to the VIP entry room. They arrived with dual cracks about four seconds later.

"Harry, you make just about no noise when you Apparate. We're impressed."

Harry ignored their comment and led them to a waiting goblin. Their hoods remained up, but Harry pushed his back a bit to address the receptionist. "I'm Harry Potter. Director Gultangk is not expecting me, but I was wonder if he might be able to see me, and my associates this morning.

"Time is money, but we can wait for a short period of time at his convenience, or we can come back later today. Time is money in this case, as I said, so please tell the Director that I wish to use my established preferential rate when he sees us."

While they waited the three stood with their hoods close so they could speak. "You get a preferential rate for his time? Is that some sort of discount?"

"No," Harry said. "I insist that when I use his services I pay a ten percent premium to his normal rate, and he knows I expect him to deliver his very best advice."

George and Fred looked at each other amazed for a moment. Fred said, "That is the most brilliant tactic to use with the goblins I have ever heard. Harry, we'll pay to get you to help us think of ploys like that. Every other wizard or witch that deals with them tries to pinch Knuts. You treat them like they are valued advisors. Wait until Bill hears, we can tell him, can't we?"

"You guys. Get off it. I can afford it so pay them that much, and I need their good will and their help. Tell Bill what you will."

The goblin receptionist came back and asked them if twelve minutes would be an acceptable wait. He offered tea or coffee, but they declined. Outwardly Harry appeared to be calm, but the twins looked a bit uncomfortable. Inwardly Harry felt a bit nervous about bringing the twins with him, but their recent candor encouraged him that they would act appropriately and in all their best interests in the negotiations with the goblins.

He turned to them and said quietly, "Guys, I am just now feeling my way through how to work with goblins. I get the impression that since I am paying for Gultangk's time, I can do as I wish within reason. Bringing my potential partners with me makes sense, so I'll explain it that way first, just to clarify matters. I do ask that you only speak if the Director or I ask you a question, agreed?" When the two nodded he continued, "Oh, and I have been given permission to call him Gultangk. He'll call me Potter. You should only address him as Director Gultangk or Director, clear?" Fred and George agreed without mentioning that Harry had already told them that.

Shortly, in under twelve minutes Harry noted, they were ushered into Gultangk's office.

"Gadobble da' slababol, Gultangk'na" Harry said with a slight, sharp bow. "Flaunka Gobleena du'tow." *A profitable day to you, Gultangk. The peace of the warrior to you.*

Director Gultangk's eyes went wide for the briefest of moments and then he made the wheezing nasal laughing sound Harry recognized from their previous meeting.

"Gree-Gadobble du'tow, Potter. Trinksta Gobleena draa." Gultangk responded while giving him a similar bow. *Equal profits to you, Potter. The rest of a warrior, also.*

"Very good, Potter, and I do believe my stake-mate's language pillow book hasn't arrived yet, has it?"

"Not yet," Harry said. "I was afraid to try this smattering of Gobbledegook, I know my pronunciation must be horrible, but please accept this small attempt in the spirit it was given. I believed the phrases booklet I read to be fairly accurate. I was not too familiar or too formal, was I? Please forgive me if I was."

"Potter, your efforts were close." With these words Gultangk smiled that disconcerting grin that Harry recognized as being favorably intended. "There are some words you will never be able to pronounce because your physiology cannot produce them. All reasonable goblins understand that. Considering you probably have not heard what you said, you were very close. You honor us with your efforts, and your tone and phrasing was appropriate for an affiliate.

"Unless you are the rare, gifted linguist, you will never be able to carry on business in Gobbledegook. We don't expect this, and English is not hard for us. We do appreciate any sincere attempts. Now to business. Time is money, your money in this case."

Harry plunged ahead. "May I present Fred and George Weasley of Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes. You are aware I am a silent minority partner in their fine business, I believe. We have another opportunity we are considering, and need your advice." Harry turned to the twins. "Gentlemen, Director Gultangk."

Fred and George took a step forward and imitated the sharp bow of the goblins. George said, "Clear profits to you and your clique, Director. Thank you for your time."

Fred said, "Clear profits to you and your clique. I also thank you."

Gultangk bowed in return and said, "As we sincerely appreciate your brother William's abilities, we even more admire your early success. We are watching you for our delight."

The twins stepped back in unison and turned as one to Harry to continue.

Harry said, "We believe we have identified an opportunity and plan to exploit it. This will require the use of the shop to the left of my partner's present business. The sign states that all rental enquiries come to Gringotts. Are you the one we may discuss this with?"

Gultangk placed his hand on the top of the small gong by his desk and rang it with his other hand. "Potter, the goblin managing Diagon Alley properties will be with us shortly. His hourly rate is half

mine. If you gentlemen do not mind, I would like to continue to consult with you in this. I will cut in half my rate during his presence."

Harry nodded in agreement.

Presently a goblin appearing significantly older than Gultangk entered the office. He scowled when he saw Harry and the twins. The two goblins spoke in Gobbledegook for several moments. The word 'Potter' was clearly enunciated several times, and the new goblin changed his expression to a more congenial one.

"Potter, Mistery Weasley, this is Manager Dolderap, he handles the property in question. Since you have expressed interest in knowing our ways, you do not need to greet him since you have already greeted me. And you, Potter, as my affiliate, do not need to use his title. Please repeat your question?"

"Dolderap, I acknowledge all goblins who work for Gringotts. I am interested in the property next to Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes that is for rent. What is its rate? How long would be a typical lease? How long has it been empty?"

"It has been empty for forty-two months. It is listed for two hundred Galleons a month, and requires the standard five year lease."

Harry thought for a moment. "We have identified an opportunity that will need such space. We do believe it will be successful, but cannot guarantee it. I'll offer the going rate immediately for the full month of August, and commit to six months with two months rent up front. We will revisit this at the end of the six months and commit to a long-term lease if our assumptions are correct. I do not want to be saddled with the five-year commitment if unnecessary. Do you think the owner will agree to those terms?"

Dolderap smiled. "I can assure you he will accept. You, Mr. Potter own it, and the two shops on either side of it."

At that moment Harry realized the twins could truly manage themselves in any company if they so chose. Neither made the slightest wisecrack about their landlord.

Harry blushed slightly. "Thank you, Dolderap. I will send word within the next two days if we decide to go ahead with our plans."

The property manager left, but only after a sharp few words from Gultangk in their language. The director said to Harry, "Potter, you evidently have not reviewed all the documents on your holdings in the brief case we gave you. Do not feel embarrassed, Dolderap understands that if he repeats this, he insults one of *my* affiliates. I have reprimanded him for his rudeness to you. Since it was his words in Gobbledegook that insulted you, I doubt you knew it, but I will not tolerate this. My apologies." Harry accepted these words and thanked him for looking out for his interests.

Gultangk said, "Now, we may conclude here if you wish. Or, you may inform me of your plans in confidentiality. I might be able to further advise you towards success."

Harry looked to the twins, who nodded vigorously, so Harry continued, "We believe those our age, Hogwarts students and witches and wizards up to the age of thirty, perhaps, would appreciate fresh new designs in their casual wear. If we aren't wearing robes, many of us wear Muggle clothing. We know of an ambitious and talented young designer who is stuck as little more than a seamstress and sale clerk at Madam Malkin's. She desires to have her own shop one day. We think she could be a sweeping success in that industry like my partners here are in theirs.

"The ideal way to succeed is to be open for business before the back-to-Hogwarts rush that will begin any day now. By having a location next to Weasleys', only a sign will be needed to attract customers coming to my partner's shop.

"We've not approached her, but we and her brother believe she will jump at the chance."

The Director said, "We know nothing about Wizarding fashion sensibilities, but the business idea seems to have merit. Such stagnated industries can either remain unchanged, or they could undergo a profitable renaissance. Usually no change after an extended period of time indicates opportunity, particularly in consumer items.

"My congratulations, Potter, you've not only uncovered a market opportunity of potential, but you've designed a low-cost method to test your theories. I delight in calling you an affiliate. Gentlemen, may we offer any Gringotts Services in this endeavor?"

Harry looked to the twins. George silently pointed to himself and Harry nodded.

"Director, please forgive our ignorance, but we do not know which services are available, and, forgive me again, we are under the impression that goblin services are very expensive for new businesses. I mean no insult and apologize if I have done so." George's tone was most sincere.

Gultangk snorted, looked away, took a deep breath, and spoke. "You are products of your environment, but you speak well.

"The most common service Gringotts offers is accounting and bookkeeping. We *are* more expensive than doing it yourself, after business hours. However, if you value your time more, we are cost competitive to any accounting firm. We actually outsource our services to major Muggle accounting firms who know of us.

"The idea that we are too expensive is one of the many myths about goblins Wizardkind has fabricated and perpetuates. Many speak of our devious business practices, but the Ministry of Magic has not found fault with us in any complaint in over one hundred and twenty-seven years now.

"In addition to accounting, we consult on business practices and manufacturing processes. We have a consultant located in our Dublin office who specializes in retail operations. If you write up a business plan he will offer you one hour free consulting about improving your plan. This offer is made in hopes of receiving a contract for further consulting. All our consulting proposals pay for themselves in cost reductions, increased revenue, risk reduction, or a combination of the above.

"Time is money in the most strict sense in this opportunity. You will not have time to design such a plan and take advantage of the opportunity before September first. However, please draw up this plan afterwards and allow us to make a proposal.

"Potter, Mistery Weasley, may Gringotts or I be of any further service to you today?"

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The three left with the usual farewells. They returned to the shop to find Clarinda Jordan crying on her brother's shoulder.

George took the counter so Lee could take his sister in the back. Harry and Fred joined them, after Harry chatted quietly for a moment with George and he nodded in agreement. Harry had a similar momentary discussion with Fred before the two turned to hear of Clarinda's woes.

"I thought Madam Malkin would be pleased," she cried. "Harry, you purchased a great deal of her standard lines, but I thought she'd also appreciate that you ordered four outfits of my designs. After all, she makes more on them than I do." Clarinda sniffed.

"But no! She fired me. I, I don't know what I'm going to do. I turned down Gladrag's offer last week and I know they made another offer to some other girl. They said they would." She pulled out a handkerchief and blew her nose quietly. By this time Clarinda was sitting on a small sofa off to the corner in the back. George pulled a chair from a table and Harry *Accio'ed* over a chair from the other side of the room.

When she finished with her nose and looked up, Harry activated his wand from its holster and wordlessly conjured a tea set and cups and saucers. The water was steaming and the cups, saucers, honey pot, sugar bowl, and cream pitcher were all of a simple but elegant pattern. The spoons appeared to be stainless. It was very similar to the set used at St. Simon's. Though this level of conjuration was not unheard of, it was fairly advanced, particularly for a rising sixth-year at Hogwarts. That Harry did it wordlessly made it rarer still. Clarinda's attention was temporarily drawn from her problems. Harry held up his wrist and his wand snapped back in place. The careless ease in this simple performance was obvious to the three people with him.

"Clarinda," Harry began, "I assume my purchases, other than those of your designs are already in the system and I can't rightly cancel them?"

"They should be ready for you to pick up an hour from now."

"Fair enough." Harry paused a moment before saying, "How soon could you get at least a dozen of what you consider to be your most popular designs made to display? You'd have to assemble the whole look and feel, purchase the shoes, belts, hats, everything for someone to look at on mannequins just like you've drawn in your sketchpad."



Clarinda scrunched her nose for a bit and sniffed once more. "Well, I could have everything ready in eight to ten days, less if I get little sleep, but you'd have to give me an advance on the purchase. I can't afford that much fabric all up front, now that I'm... But I don't want you to increase your order just because--"

Harry interrupted her. "This isn't charity. What if you needed them much sooner, much sooner than you could sew them yourself? Do you know seamwitchstresses who could help you in a rush?"

Clarinda became engaged in a technical discussion of her craft. Her eyes dried and her nose became less red. "I know of three trustworthy women who are now home with small children and could devote a large part of their day to sewing. That would cut the time in half, maybe a little less. And they may know of others. But, why...?"

"Let me make a proposal, Clarinda. You may not be aware of it, but I gave Fred and George the money they needed to get started. I will let the shop next door for six months, through the Christmas holidays. I'll fund all of your needs for fabric, equipment, signs, etc. We'll hire a decorator for the shop so you can spend your time being creative. You'll draw a salary equal to the best month you've had at Malkin's so you don't have to worry about food, rent, and such.

"As soon as possible I want the doors open and you taking orders for your designs. At first you'll be showing people your sketches as you ramp up. You'll take a twenty-five percent down payment with each order. As soon as possible I want your designs, complete with belts, hats and such on display around the shop.

"I want you to sell to the Hogwarts student through witches and wizards in their early thirties, starting with the back-to-school crowd you'll see here more and more each day. They'll be coming to Weasleys' here, and you'll be right beside them.

"As soon as you have a collection to show, we'll advertise in *Witch Weekly* and *Teen Witch Weekly*, if we can arrange it, and never underestimate what Galleons can arrange."

"Why..." Clarinda gulped and continued. "Why would you do...? I don't mean to be ungrateful but--"

Harry held up his hand. "Let me finish please." He smiled at her. "This is a business arrangement. After September first you'll write a plan to expand in any way and every way you can think of, or we can think of. You'll prepare to blow out sales at Christmas time. After the first of the year, if you succeed, and we want you to be a smashing success, but after the first of the year we will incorporate. You'll own forty percent, I'll own forty percent for funding all of this, and the twins will own ten percent to stand by you here in the two shops and hold your hand through any difficulties. We'll hold out ten percent of the shares to reward possible brilliant employees in the future to tie their brilliance to the company.

"You maintain all creative control because I know rubbish about good design. We all agree together about business decisions and seek good counsel on any subject.

"I'll arrange for the Gringotts goblins to manage the bookkeeping, though I want you to know exactly what's going on, and you need to keep Fred, George, and me informed.

"We think you're about to set the Wizarding fashion world on its ear and become famous like some of the big Muggle designers. As a matter of fact, I don't mind if you design for Muggles as well, once we become profitable and stable. I want you to follow your dream and make yourself, the twins, and of course, me, very, very rich." Harry paused. He had little else to say that he could think of. Clarinda seemed to be in a daze, but it was short lived. She burst out into a huge grin and jumped into Harry's arms, planting a kiss on his cheek. "I hope you get bloody wealthy from this, since we'll own equal shares."

She hopped out of his arms and Harry blushed profusely. "Thank you, Harry. She gave Fred a hug and thanked him too. "I'll hug George in a minute," she said while warmly embracing her brother.

Harry and Clarinda Apparated to the same VIP concourse at Gringotts, waiting only ten minutes for Gultangk this time. They agreed to have the Gringotts legal department draw up a simple contract between them for expediency's sake, but the Director encouraged Harry to seek his own business lawyer for such future work.

"Gultangk, I've popped in on you twice today, and I feel this has been rude of me, to at least some degree. I may have broken a number of goblin protocols doing this for all I know."

"Potter, you've been fortunate in that you asked for me at times when I could easily rearrange my affairs. If this were the three o'clock hour today instead of the eleven o'clock hour, I would have been unavailable for the rest of the day. Otherwise, a client wanting to pay your rates is always welcome." Gultangk smiled the grin Harry was beginning to like. He smiled in return.

Harry said, "In the future, may I send my house-elf to inquire about your availability? I could use him to pass messages, or if it doesn't bother you like it might many wizards or witches - Dobby could tell you my wishes. He's very bright and understands my needs and wants quite well. Would this be acceptable?"

"No wizard has ever asked this of us. We find the idea of having our own house-elves repugnant. But we appreciate that a proper familial relationship can exist between wizard and elf. It used to be more so, but much has fallen in the last centuries.

"We have elf-proof wards for much of Gringotts. In 1747 an unscrupulous master had his elf Apparate into a vault to steal its content. It was a blood-sealed vault and the elf died a painful death, hence the wards. We can walk out to the VIP Concourse and you can go get your elf and bring him there. I will sign him into our records and leave instructions for his treatment."

They chatted convivially on the way to the concourse. Clarinda seemed shocked into silence as Harry spoke with Gultangk in such a friendly manner.

In the concourse Harry drew a square in the air and called Dobby.

*Snap!* "Yes sir, Harry Potter SIR. Sir called Dobby?"

"Yes, Dobby. Director Gultangk wants to sign you into their records so you can bring messages here for me. You will call him Director as is his due. He shows me great honor in my treatment and those of my house must do the same towards him."

Dobby bowed deeply. "Gadobble da' slababol, Merkter Gultangk." *A profitable day to you, Director Gultangk.* "Great honor to any who honors the great wizard, Harry Potter SIR."

Gultangk was obviously startled by a house-elf speaking Gobbledegook. Harry grinned sheepishly and said, "Who do you think I practiced my greetings with?"

Harry and Clarinda Apparated back to Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes. They had the key to the shop next door and walked over there. Clarinda held several commercial drafts to use for purchasing fabric and to open other commercial accounts. Harry asked Dobby to tag along.

Harry asked, "Do you know a decorator who can do shop design?"

Clarinda said, "A classmate has started her own interior design business. She does houses mostly, but started with a commercial decorator firm."

Dobby was dancing from foot to foot and Harry couldn't help noticing. "Dobby, do you want to help clean here?"

"If Harry Potter SIR wishes, but Dobby must care for Harry Potter SIR. Dobby can't do all that he wishes to." For a moment Dobby looked most contrite since he could not serve his master fully, then his eyes widened even more, if that was possible for a house-elf.

"You have an idea, Dobby?"

"Harry Potter SIR. Winky is most unhappy. Winky is jealous that Dobby has the great Harry Potter SIR as a master, even though Dobby is never to call the great Harry Potter SIR, master. Dobby was thinking Winky could bond with Harry Potter SIR and serve Sir here with Miss C'linda."

"Wouldn't it be better to have Winky bond with Clarinda?" Dobby pulled on his ears. "What's wrong, Dobby, and don't pull your ears like that. You've done nothing to be punished and I don't hold with punishment, as I've told you."

Harry knelt before Dobby. Fred, George, and Clarinda looked amazed. Harry said, "Dobby, you are bonded to me, but you are first and foremost my friend. I value your ideas, even if I don't adopt them. What do *you* think I should do and why?"

Dobby looked down for a bit but raised his head to look Harry in the eyes like his master/friend had told him to do. "If Harry Potter SIR were to bond with Winky, and if Harry Potter SIR were to assign Winky to work with Miss C'linda, Winky could work for Miss C'linda and then..." Dobby looked around and turned a shade of green that Harry thought might be a blush for a house-elf. Dobby leaned forward and whispered in Harry's ear. Harry nodded and Dobby popped off.

"Dobby's sweet on Winky," Harry said to the three when he rose. "You're okay with Winky being mine and helping you during the day? I am very particular about how my friends are treated, and now that you're one of my friends, I want you well treated also, but I am very protective of Dobby and Winky. I care for them, and it keeps Hermione happy."

A double snap sound occurred and Harry had a female house-elf glued to his left leg, crying with joy. He said to Clarinda, "Fred and George will explain it to you later." He pulled Winky off of his leg and knelt before her.

"Winky, do you want to be my house-elf? Has Dobby told you of my rules for him? Can you live with them?"

"Winky would be the most faithful and hard working of elves, Harry Potter SIR."

Harry sighed. He would never escape that title now. "Winky, you need to go to Professor Dumbledore and ask to resign. He'll probably say yes, but give him the choice. Then come back and we'll make it official."

The two elves left in a snap.

Harry said to Clarinda, "I want my elves well treated. I cannot imagine you'd be cruel, but they are never to punish themselves. They don't need to be taught a lesson by harming them. They want to serve well, but like all of us they sometimes make mistakes. Correct her of course, and please protect her from others. Threaten anyone with me if they are mean to Winky.

"You'll also find house-elves are smarter than most wizards and witches think. Dobby has great ideas, and he made this rig of mine." Harry opened his robe to reveal the black sleeveless utilities. "It's not much to look at, but it's designed to be useful to me in a fight. I've charmed it a number of special ways."

Dobby and Winky snapped back to the dusty shop and told Harry that Dumbledore released her with his blessings and congratulations.

Harry knelt once more. "Winky, I, Harry Potter, take you into to my house and my protection. You are mine and I am yours."

"Winky is Harry Potter SIR's, and Harry Potter SIR is Winky's." The little elf leapt forward and hugged him.

Harry stood and said, "Winky, this is Miss Clarinda. Your daily duty until I instruct you otherwise is to help her clean and then help her manage this shop. I don't know what all can be done, but she will tell you. If you see any way you can help that you have not been instructed to do, you can politely ask Miss Clarinda without interrupting her. She understands how I treat Dobby, and will abide by that.

"She may in the future ask you to wear a uniform to work here in the shop, but it will not be giving you clothes, it will be her wanting you properly dressed to serve her better.

"You may also ask any question of her or me to better understand how to complete your assigned tasks. Miss Clarinda will be working hard. If she forgets to eat, please bring her food. If she gets too little sleep, please politely remind her that her partners want her healthy. Understood?"

Winky nodded so hard Harry feared her head might fall off. She and Dobby went right to work. A dust cloud formed quickly. Harry and Clarinda moved to the front of the shop.

"I hope you don't mind that last instruction for Winky. I have a feeling you might be one to work to exhaustion, correct?"

She blushed. "My N.E.W.T.s year I lost fifteen pounds and nearly fainted before the Potions practical. I'm better about it now, but you're right. I'll kill myself trying to succeed."

Clarinda thanked Harry profusely and he instructed her to use Winky to contact him whenever she needed him. He also told her about his security issues and encouraged her to initially not mention his name except at Gringotts, for her own safety.

At that moment Fawkes flared into the shop and landed on Harry's shoulder. Clarinda let out a short scream.

"I'm sorry, Clarinda, but you'll have to get used to such things if you spend time with me. I'm sure I'll regret this, but get your brother and the twins to tell you the real Harry Potter stories. If that doesn't scare you out of our partnership, nothing will."

While he said this, he unhooked the note from Fawkes' claw. He read the short missive and called for Dobby. "Yes sir, Harry Potter SIR," Dobby answered.

"We must leave now. Please go to our source for Muggle candies and ask for something hot, lots of cinnamon or something else they suggest. Fawkes will take me to Dumbledore's office. Try to arrive as soon as you can, but no sooner than five minutes from now, or as soon after that as possible.

Dobby Apparated away and Harry apologized to Clarinda for leaving so abruptly. Fawkes flashed him to Hogwarts.

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"Harry. Thank you for coming." Harry thought Dumbledore seemed happy to see him, but cautious. "I had hoped to discuss your concerns regarding Professor Snape and Draco Malfoy the next time we met. This hangs between us, and I promise I am working on it to your satisfaction, I hope. It will require some compromise but I am confident your case will dominate negotiations."

Dumbledore placed his face in his hands. Harry had never seen him quite like this.

"Harry, I hate sounding cryptic. You mean a great deal to me, and I will not disappoint you. I will make things right and I will be more in partnership with you soon. I am not ready to tell you of my

actions yet... but something most urgent has come up. Time solves so many things, and I am sad that you would be more willing to help if we had resolved some of your justifiable issues. I will have your concerns worked out by then I am almost positive. But this has come up, and we must talk to you. Lives are at stake-

Harry held up his hand. He finally figured out that something else brought him to Dumbledore this afternoon, and the headmaster felt bad that he did not have answers yet to Harry's concerns.

"Professor, I consider us allies and I am serious about an appropriate friendship for our positions in life. In the midst of our discussions, which I do not consider disagreements, we can stop to fight a common enemy, or face together whatever needs to be handled. I am at your service in any way possible."

A profound look of gratitude appeared on Dumbledore's face. "Thank you Harry. I am proud to call you a friend and I want to take the time very soon to work on that friendship."

"Any minute Madam Bones and-

A face in the Floo interrupted him. It was Madam Amelia Bones. "Albus, is he here? Can we come through?"

"Yes, Amelia, please come ahead."

Amelia Bones emerged from the flashing green fire and quickly dusted herself. She greeted Harry cordially if a bit stiffly, which Harry attributed to the other guest. She turned to introduce Harry. "Carver, this is Harry Potter, who I am sure you have heard of. Harry, this is Ambassador Carver Glean. He works for the Ministry in the Foreign Diplomatic Service."

Harry held out his hand and said, "A pleasure to meet you, sir."

Glean looked at his hand like it might be infectious, and did not take it. Harry looked at Dumbledore, but it was Madam Bones who spoke. The professor simply twinkled at Harry.

"Carver, you're supposed to be a diplomat!" The quiet roar of the lady present made Harry blanch. Glean blinked and took a half step back. She continued, "You shake hands with vampires, Dark wizards, and other disreputable heads of state. You will take Potter's proffered hand or I will tell the Wizengamot that you have no interest in solving our little international crisis!"

"It's alright-" Harry began, but was cut off.

"No, Mr. Potter, it's *not* alright for Carver to act that way. We are here to ask for your help in a most serious matter. He's failed in his diplomatic efforts to secure the vampires' neutrality in this burgeoning war with You-Know-Who, and you are probably our last hope. You are not here to meet Carver, but rather he is here to meet you. And it scorches the robes off of his backside to have to ask for your help. He'd rather we fight the vampires along with the Death Eaters than ask you."

"He's an old Hogwarts dorm mate of our Cornelius Fudge, but the Diplomatic Service answers to the

Wizengamot, not the Minister." Turning to the ambassador she said, "Once again, Carver this is Harry Potter."

Glean put on what would easily pass for a sincere smile. Harry would have considered his tone of voice most sincere if the previous moments had not transpired. "A pleasure to meet you young man. I hear great things about you, but then what else could we hope for from the Boy-Who-Lived?" He finished his act and shaking Harry's hand, and turned back to Bones reacquiring his previous sour face.

Harry's eyebrow bunched in towards the center; he immediately decided he did not like the 'kinder' Glean. Harry spoke, "Please, Ambassador, continue to show and express your true feelings. I prefer honest politicians, but they are so rare these days."

Glean started to sputter. Clearly Harry's words were not expected.

Amelia Bones laughed heartily, and cut off Glean's approaching tirade. "Mr. Potter, thank you for agreeing still to see us."

"Please call me Harry."

Glean spoke up, "Well, Harry, we're here-"

"Ambassador Glean, that instruction was for Madam Bones," Harry interrupted, "I have spent most of the day in business negotiations with the goblins of Gringotts. My affiliate there, Director Gultangk, treated me with far more courtesy and respect than I suspect you could ever muster on your very best day. Only my friends may call me Harry. I would like to have had you as a friend, but you've made that impossible for now. Please go on, since I am sure my business here today is with you, or at least with the Ministry represented by you."

The ambassador's eyes went wide. Bones looked at Dumbledore. Both looked surprised at Harry's revelation of his day and his confidence. The headmaster twinkled back to her.

At that time, Dobby snapped into the office. "Harry Potter SIR. The treats you requested. The candies are called 'Atomic Fireballs.'" Harry thought about the perfect timing his house-elf had.

Before Glean could verbally assault the elf for interrupting him, Harry said, "Thank you, Dobby, you serve me so well, my friend." Harry had previously tasted one of the fiery confections before, from Dean Thomas. They weren't too hot for his tastes, but many wizards and witches in Gryffindor had not liked them.

"Headmaster? Madam Bones? They are hot, I warn you," Harry offered the sweets all around. "Ambassador." The first two had taken the treat, and Glean did so to get on with his explanations.

"Well, er, Mr. Potter, we uh... as Madame Bones indicated, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named has approached the Vlad Coven of vampires in Transylvania. They are the largest and oldest coven, and usually negotiate with Wizarding governments for all the covens in Europe. We've been aiding the Ministries of Magic of the primary countries active in holding the vampires in check - Romania,

Hungary, Bulgaria, Albania, Serbia, and the Ukraine - but two days ago, Death Eaters, believe it or not, blew up the headquarters of the law enforcement organization in each of those countries, all on one night. They apparently used Muggle explosives in each case. AH!"

Glean spit out the candy. "Blazes those are hot!" Harry wandlessly and wordlessly conjured Glean a glass of ice water.

Harry looked at Dumbledore while the ambassador drank, and the headmaster mouthed to him silently, "Show off." Amelia Bones actually giggled.

Glean said, "Uh! Where was I? Oh, because it was at night, the number of deaths and injuries were lower than they might have been during the day, but there were serious casualties just the same. In all of those countries except Bulgaria, the headquarters were in separate facilities away from the rest of the Ministries of Magic, or whatever they call them. In Bulgaria, half of all their governmental offices were destroyed.

"And that tragedy might have saved us from immediate war with the vampires. The Bulgarians have, or had the best relationship with the vampires of any government, if you can call it good. Baron Pavel Kldonovitch, who heads the Vlad Coven is, or was a longtime friend of the Bulgarian Minister of Magic. I believe you've meet him, Mr. Potter, at the Quidditch World Cup two years ago." Harry nodded.

"Minister Boris Oblansk was working late to try to make his old friend, Kldonovitch, an acceptable offer to maintain neutrality. Kldonovitch is at a difficult impasse in his coven and with the other covens he represents. This is the best opportunity the vampires have had in a number of years to breakout and become more 'active' shall we say. The young turks in his coven, and a few others are pushing for joining Lord Thingy, but Kldonovitch and the older, cooler heads resist.

"I fear that had not Minister Oblansk been killed, Kldonovitch would have agreed to fight. It is too good an opportunity for them, but Oblansk's son, Petrov, has, in his father's memory, secured an agreement with Kldonovitch to allow us to make one last offer to the vampires in two days time.

"The thing is, we have nothing they really want. The forces holding them at bay so our armistice works, have been seriously depleted. It is a time for desperate actions, which brings us to you, Mr. Potter."

Harry said with a wry grin, "You want Thunderfire, don't you?"

All three there in the office seemed surprised at his question, although Dumbledore recovered the quickest. He said, "Can you develop or rediscover Thunderfire, Harry, in such a short time frame?"

"Yes, Professor, I not only know about Thunderfire, I can cast it," said Harry. He drew his wand and pointed it at his left hand.

"NO!" All three shouted at Harry at once.



"Harry, won't it blind us?" said Madam Bones. Dumbledore lowered his wand, and Ambassador Glean was edging towards the door with his hands over his eyes.

Harry was perturbed. "Professor, I have told you that Spell Mongery, the practice of Mongering spells, and the actual bits of magic mongered are completely misunderstood. My reading has told me all about Thunderfire and how to monger my own Thunderfire Charm. I've refined the charm with my mongering. Now I can vary it quite a bit. Please trust me, all three of you. I have no plans to blow up you or myself."

Harry raised his left hand and held his thumb and index finger about an inch apart. He raised his wand and waved it over his fingers three complete rotations and said, "*Atonto Nitor!*"

In about a second an intensely bright pinpoint of light appeared between his fingers. In another second it grew to the size of a Knut and stopped growing or getting any brighter.

Harry said, "Now, I want you to watch my hand, but don't look up into the ceiling. Keep looking at my hand until I say otherwise." He then made the same motion one would if they wanted to toss a coin about fifteen feet up into the air, Doing this he released the bit of Thunderfire and when it reached its zenith, about three feet from the ceiling, it flared brightly to fill the room with brilliance, and made the sound of a small Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes firecracker.

"Argggh! I'm blind!" Of course Glean had disregarded Harry's cautions and had followed the bit of Thunderfire on its journey upward with his eyes.

"You're not blind, Ambassador," Harry said with noticed derision in his voice. "You will find that I don't just say things to hear myself speak. Close your eyes tightly for about ten seconds; you'll still be seeing bits of light, but that will clear up in a minute or less."

Dumbledore asked, "Harry, you'll be able to provide the ambassador with Thunderfire in a bell jar for the negotiations?"

"I'll have to sell it to him, Professor. I am a Spell Monger after all."

Glean began to mutter so all could hear, "Ungrateful whelp. The government protects him and educates him; looks out for his interests..."

"Ambassador!" Harry's voice commanded the wizard he addressed to look at him. The thin, older man quivered. The young man said, "I had planned on selling Thunderfire to the Ministry for a Galleon. But, Hogwarts and the Professor and his staff have educated me. I've paid my tuitions; no government dole. The only educator provided by the Ministry, Dolores Umbridge illegally used a Blood Quill on me." He held up the back of his hand for the man to see.

"The Order has protected me. The only Aurors near me in my summer home attacked me earlier." When Glean snorted his disbelief Harry said, "I'll share my fights with Dawlish and Williams in a Pensieve if you choose, but you'll also have to watch me fight several dozen Death Eaters seconds after I dispatch the two Aurors who regularly protect Minister Fudge."

Madame Bones could be heard to whisper to Dumbledore, "I'd love to see that."

"It was truly amazing, Amelia," Dumbledore responded.

Harry did not react like he had heard the comments beside him. He had Carver Glean trapped with his stare, and the older wizard was obviously most uncomfortable. "And as for my best interest," Harry continued, "did the Ministry look after my best interests last year when your Minister called me a crazy person for months and months? Or was he acting in my best interest earlier this summer when he tried to take credit for my friends driving off dementors using the Patronus Charm I taught them? Perhaps your government looked out for me when Minister Fudge tried to have me arrested for killing eight Death Eaters in self-defense?"

With that last Ambassador Glean stepped back and fell into a nearby chair. He stared unblinking at Harry in horror, his mouth agape, and jaw moving, but saying nothing.

Harry took a deep breath to still his racing heart. He ran his hand over his face and looked to the silent Bones and Dumbledore. He turned back to Glean and said very quietly, "Ambassador, as soon as you return with eleven thousand and one Galleons, I will provide you with a sufficiently potent Thunderfire in a jar to give to Constantine Kldonovitch as a gift of Unfailing Light. Why they cherish a trinket that could crack open and kill them if they're not careful I'll never understand, but you can give it to him with the new Spell Monger's compliments. Please tell him I will send a similar jar to the heads of any other covens that want one.

"Also give my offer of friendship. I do not think of myself so highly as to think they want to be *my* friend. But it was the tradition of Spell Mongers to offer their friendship with the Unfailing Light, the Thunderfire in a jar. Some vampires you meet with may have been alive back then, and will remember this as an offer and a threat. Telemachus Grind wrote that they respond well to that for reasons I cannot fathom.

"Please also tell the governments of those six countries that I will sell the Thunderfire charm to all their law officers they send me. I will train them in its uses and my modifications, for twenty Galleons a head - working around my summer and class schedules. I haven't decided how much I will charge *our* Aurors for the charm and training. We'll just have to see if our Minister of Magic continues to be as kind to me as he has been in the past. You, sir, have been a typical disagreeable bureaucrat, and you make me want to help the Fudge administration even less than before.

"Now, Ambassador, I suggest you go and bring back my eleven thousand and one Galleons, in bags or a Gringotts Master Draft. I don't accept the Ministry's cheques. Hurry, Ambassador, you have a negotiation to attend."

Without saying a word Glean staggered once on the way to the Floo fireplace, threw in the powder, and made his way to the Ministry.

Harry whirled to the headmaster and his other guest. "Madame Bones, could you please make arrangements for me to go to these negotiations if Fudge refuses. I'll not let my anger with that... *little man* stop those poor people in Eastern Europe from having their peace with the vampires. I'll go and





*I guess, but remember the old adage: "There is nothing new under the sun."*

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Then Felix Tillis' brothers died to a man in the Grindelwald war as a part of the *Englander Brigaden*, a group of volunteers supporting Grindelwald. They went to Germany to fight for him before British wizards and witches declared war on that Dark Lord, and had any of the older Tillis boys survived, they would have not been welcomed back to England after the war.

Felix was not as stupid as many might have thought. After his parents died in a Muggle bombing raid in 1939, Felix sold the family lands and invested with the goblins in an untouchable series of annuities. This allowed him to live in quiet peace with his beloved Rachel, and to give his daughter, Millicent's mother Fanny, a nice dowry to marry Simpson Bulstrode.

The Bulstrodes were relatively poor, but they had a Three-Thirty-Three Family name, even though they had sold their rights to parliamentary rule for the next ten generations, six generations past. The name Bulstrode, combined with the respectable name of Tillis, and Fanny Tillis' dowry, made for a comfortable life for Millicent's immediate family.

In 1976, Felix Tillis visited France to see a haunted castle. He loved to read of the fighting on the continent during the wizard wars coinciding with the Muggle Hundred Years War. Felix had never really learned that Muggle autos and lorries drove on different sides of the road in France - in fact, he'd spent little time around Muggle vehicles in England.

One day Felix left the Wizarding hostel where he was staying, walked out the front door, looked right to see no traffic, and stepped right into the path of a Muggle vegetable delivery lorry coming from his left.

When Felix died, Rachel Tillis moved in with Millicent's family, even though Simpson Bulstrode was against it. When Mylon was born the next year, there were complications, and Fanny stayed in St. Mungo's for a month. Rachel cared for the wee lad Mylon, and for Fanny, too, when she eventually made it home. During this time Rachel won the heart of her son-in-law by caring for his family in ways he never could have.

By the time Millicent was born in February of 1980, Rachel had her act down pat. She knew how to appear to visitors like an eccentric witch who loved to cook in Muggle fashion, and she had her grandchildren convinced she was a squib.

After the start of her summer holiday following fifth year, Millicent visited Pansy to hear Professor Snape tell of the Paladin Program. She rejected the offer out of hand, but stayed on at Pansy's for a two-day visit.

Millicent arrived home by Knight Bus just after 9:00 that evening to find all of her family dead, and the Dark Mark drifting over her burned out home. Her brother Mylon, still dressed in his new Death Eater robes, had apparently thrown his mask in the dirt and stomped on it before dying, trying to defend his family.

Severus Snape and Albus Dumbledore arrived shortly after the Aurors. Snape explained that You-Know-Who had discovered the Muggle in the family line, and sent a squad of new recruits to kill the family. Mylon was one of those new recruits, and only realized it was his own family being attacked



after he and his fellow Death Eaters had arrived by illegal Portkey.

Without family or real friends, the two professors took Millicent and what few possessions she could recover to Hogwarts. Millicent immediately volunteered for the Paladin Program and became one of the hardest working recruits that summer.

All of the professors living at Hogwarts that summer made a concerted effort to befriend their newly orphaned student. Several attempted to show her the error in the prejudices she'd imbibed from her father without making her ashamed of her pureblood heritage.

Their kindness slowly won her over. However, every zealot needs a cause, and one who rejects firmly held lifelong beliefs, will seek out a new cause to follow with a fervency seldom seen. Millicent wanted to be a true believer - in something - again.

Considering who killed her family, it is no surprise that Millicent Bulstrode declared to all that she wanted to be in the forefront of fighting Voldemort and his followers. She lived alone in the Slytherin dungeons that summer, and had little else to think about, except how best to gain her revenge.

Her commitment was total, and she decided she would ruthlessly swallow her pride and earnestly seek out Harry Potter. She determined that *he* would be in the heat of the battle more than anyone else she could hope to have access to. She admitted that Harry and his friends had every right to hate her, but she also thought that Harry would believe her change of heart, as the Dark Lord had also killed his family.

She repeatedly asked Dumbledore to arrange for a meeting with Harry. Potter and his friends could despise her all they wanted she declared to the Headmaster, as long as they let her follow them into the fight.

Secretly, and with cool Slytherin analysis, Millicent realized Harry had collected a cadre of misfits to follow him and trained them to serve well under adverse circumstances. He'd be a friend to anyone loyal to him and willing to fight the good fight. She looked at herself in the mirror. She'd never be slim, though most of her fat was gone from the strenuous Paladin exercises. Millicent would never be considered pretty, even though Professor Flitwick commented that he liked it when she wore a smile, rather than her previous scowl. She'd never be popular, period.

But Harry Potter should eventually welcome anyone prepared and able to fight well. She committed herself to becoming a Paladin warrior, one that Potter would want in his ranks.

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After Ambassador Glean and Madam Bones left Dumbledore's office, the Headmaster and Harry decided that, for safety's sake, a conjured or even transfigured bell jar made of glass with a stone base should not be used to contain the Unfailing Light. The Thunderfire in a jar, perversely prized by vampire coven leaders, could exist for decades, centuries perhaps. To risk the possible destabilization of the container by material failure causing a future mishap or altercation was unthinkable. No, regular glass would not do, they would have to have non-conjured crystal and a

mated base.

The Headmaster knew of a source for such items at a Wizarding crystal and bric-a-brac shop on Cramond Island in the Firth of Forth, not too far from Edinburgh. Dumbledore contacted the proprietor by Floo. Although the shop was closed, the owner asked his old friend to come through the Floo. It turned out that the shop owner had just what was needed. Several minutes later the Headmaster was back with two crystal bell jars and matched bases, and he told Harry that he had commissioned several more for delivery in a few days' time.

The two made their way to an empty dungeon room where Harry followed Telemachus Grind's instructions and produced his first Unfailing Light in a jar as a gift for the chief vampire negotiator.

They had no sooner ascended back to the Headmaster's office, than the two previous visitors returned by Floo. Ambassador Glean begrudgingly gave Harry three bags of Galleons and Harry gave him the sealed container in return. Madam Bones winked at Harry as she and the muttering ambassador left for the peace tables.

Dumbledore then suggested he and Harry meet the following afternoon at 2:00 to discuss his concerns regarding Snape and Malfoy. Harry agreed and they sent a school owl to confirm the meeting with Remus Lupin.

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### **Dumbledore's Office - The next day - 1:36 pm**

"I am against this, Albus, completely against this."

"Against what, Severus?"

Dumbledore decided that Professor Snape should be in the meeting with Harry. The headmaster owled Harry his reasons and Dobby delivered Harry's reply agreeing to the meeting so arranged.

The Potions professor quipped, "Every part of this, Headmaster. Potter has no right to hold this position. He has no right making these demands of you, Mr. Malfoy, or me. And he has no right to meet with Miss Bulstrode. He hasn't the temperament to restrain himself under pressure, nor the leadership skills to assume such a place in this school. You, yourself saw fit to not make him a prefect. You are but the latest in a long line of Wizards who spoil him to our everlasting detriment."

Dumbledore frowned in anger. He'd gone over this with his younger colleague several times, with and without Minerva's presence to help him make his point. He decided logic had reached its end.

"Severus." He said sharply. "I've tried to show you my reasons, but you've refused to see. Miss Bulstrode will arrive any minute now, and Harry shortly thereafter. You won't listen to my logical explanations, so here are the *facts* we go forward with. *Do not* forget or go against them."

"Fact number one. We had more Outstandings in Defense last year than any year since the Grindelwald war. Every one of them was earned by students in Harry's DA. The students that only

followed Dolores' training scored poorer than we've seen in many years, and a large share of them were your Slytherins." Dumbledore's anger was now obvious to Snape, and the younger professor's face showed that he understood this.

Dumbledore continued, "Second. Your treatment of him over the years has been unacceptable. I asked you repeatedly to treat him better, but Harry's memories of your teaching through the years, up to and including your so-called Occlumency instructions, proved you paid me little mind. Honestly, Severus, I never trained you in that subject so bluntly, and you were over five years older than Harry when we began. What *were* you thinking being so cruel to him?"

Dumbledore paused and took a calming breath.

"Harry has only asked for fair treatment; he's made no demands. You have not given it to him, or to anyone else I've talked to that wasn't in Slytherin. And I've talked to current students and those who have finished in the last few years.

"And every claim Harry made about Mr. Malfoy was proven true by numerous witnesses. I intend to assure Harry that we, *you and I both* will discuss Draco's words and actions with him before school starts in a few weeks. It's not too late to give young Mr. Malfoy the Acceleration Potion's termination dose and end his participation. We will make it clear to Draco that his behavior must change. In a few minutes you and I will assure Harry that we will have that discussion *and hold Draco accountable for his actions.*"

Once again Dumbledore stopped and breathed deeply to calm himself. "I blame myself in part for letting you go on this long without verifying that you and your proteges were behaving as I requested and expected, but only a fraction of the blame do I accept. I plan to take a more active part in seeing that my wishes are carried out, Severus. Am I making myself clear?"

The Potions Master only nodded. Dumbledore continued, "I have many things to regret about decisions that I've made concerning Mr. Potter - from his life with the Dursleys to his treatment by you, but I likewise regret not taking more of an interest in your life during your Hogwarts years. Perhaps we might have prevented... if we'd come to know each other..."

The Headmaster looked off into nothing with a most sad look on his face.

"For that, I apologize to you, Severus, just as I plan to apologize to Harry after your part of our meeting is concluded."

Both men remained silent for a long moment. Dumbledore looked up and said, "Millicent is approaching the stairs below. Please go and bring her up unless you have something else to add. I will inform you of the mechanics of how things will be, but there will be no further discussion regarding my decisions about Harry's role this coming year or how things will go forward."

With a silent nod and barely concealed anger, the younger wizard left his chair and soon returned with his charge. After the customary amenities and the usual refusal of a lemon drop, Dumbledore asked Millicent how she was doing. He wanted to know about her comfort in the Slytherin dungeons

this summer, her Paladin 'visits,' her classes and studies, and her emotional state following the loss of her family.

For the most part Millicent answered as politely and briefly as Harry Potter had answered such questions in times gone by. Dumbledore marveled to himself at the stony resolve and robust resilience of these young people thrust into such personal chaos.

"Ah, Miss Bulstrode, at your request I briefly informed Harry about the attack and loss of your family. As I predicted, and you hoped, he immediately expressed regret for your loss and willingness to speak with you.

"Harry mentioned nothing about your past conflicts, although he did admit he would have to intercede on your behalf with Miss Granger and Mr. Weasley."

Dumbledore rushed to allay the hesitant look on her face. "Harry's first concern was how to convince his friends to accept you as quickly as possible." Upon hearing this, Millicent calmed noticeably and he continued. "Harry has grown more than any other Paladin this summer, and you've all grown and matured better than we'd hoped at the outset."

The Headmaster went on to *briefly* tell her about Harry's battle with a number of Death Eaters on Aberration Day. "Please, do not mention this to Mr. Potter. I have only touched upon it to explain why Harry is further along developmentally than the rest of the Paladins."

"I am sure you have noticed, my dear, that you and your fellow Paladins have returned to your initial urge levels during the potion induced 'visits.' That, however, is not true of Harry. Because of the events I've related, Mr. Potter has finished taking this potions series and has even been recognized by the Gringotts goblins as having attained his majority. A number of your fellow female Paladins have rushed him to kiss him even when not under the influence of a 'visit.'

"You will no doubt feel a similar urge. So I will place a Sticking charm on you to allow you time to regain your composure when he comes in. This will also allow me to tell Harry of your presence and the reason you are here."

"Headmaster," Snape began. "I hardly think Miss Bulstrode here is the dunderheaded fan girl that usually swoons after Potter-"

"This is not idolization, Severus, but a fact observed by myself and several others on the staff. Mr. Potter is most uncomfortable with this, and longs to see his fellow students regain their control from before the time of your potions mishap. Harry is approaching the stairway now and knows my password."

Millicent agreed to the Sticking charm. Snape regained his composure from the mention of his responsibility for that potions debacle while Dumbledore literally 'stuck' Millicent in a corner.

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After Occlumency lessons the night before, Harry had discussed with Father William the coming

meeting with Dumbledore and Snape. Harry freely admitted to the priest that it was not his usual way to be so confrontational, but he wanted to make things right up front, as much as he possibly could. Then he could go forward with a clear conscience and hopefully with a number of the issues on his mind settled to some degree. He had a war to fight.

Harry realized it was futile to expect everything to be as he wanted, but he at least needed to have a clear working relationship with Dumbledore, which he thought was quite close, and some relief with Snape and Malfoy, which he hoped was possible - to some degree.

After a number of questions about the situations, the people, and Harry's hopes, Father William suggested that Harry go into the meeting ready to meet whoever was present more than halfway. The idea was that if Harry made every reasonable effort toward reconciliation, then he would have little to regret if things weren't resolved fully, or at all. The two discussed possible scenarios for the meeting and Harry formulated his strategy, mentally rehearsing his ideas for reconciliation while exercising and going through his morning routine.

It was two minutes before two o'clock on Harry's new self-winding Heuer watch. The watch would work when worn by a magical person because there were no electronic or electrical parts. However, according to Steph Granger, it was a most accurate and shock-resistant wristwatch that should serve Harry well for years. Besides, Harry thought the dark grey titanium band and housing looked wicked.

Harry stood at the bottom of the stairs to Dumbledore's office and called out the password. He rode the circular stairs up, breathing deeply to calm himself for whatever battle lay ahead.

Harry walked into the office and those present were assembled as he had expected, with Dumbledore to his left and behind his cluttered desk. Harry immediately faced right towards Professor Snape, turning to look at him full on. He did not see Millicent Bulstrode behind the Headmaster, struggling against the Sticking charm's restraint. Dumbledore was barely in his peripheral vision, and Millicent was even less likely to come into his view in this stance. Had he known she was there Harry would *not* have begun as he did.

"Professor Snape, I'd like to start by apologizing for any antagonistic actions I've taken towards you over the years. My biggest apology is for looking into the Pensieve last year and seeing your memories. That was extremely rude of me. I shouldn't have looked and I am very sorry. I have not and shall never tell anyone what I saw there, and I will endeavor to forget it, though that is unlikely.

"I am also so sorry for whatever my father or godfather may have done to you. I have had a large number of cruel pranks inflicted on me over the years, and I don't approve of them. A few innocent wheezes like a Canary Cream may be acceptable, but if what I saw was any indication of how they treated you regularly, I can tell you I would have stood with my mother in chastising them, given my own experiences."

Harry could not read how the Potions Master was taking this, but he plunged ahead. "I'd like to bury the hatchet between us and try to work together in this war if at all possible."

Harry stopped a bit abruptly he realized, but he deemed it imprudent to say anything more until Snape

responded. He noticed that Snape's face portrayed his usual scowl, but his eyes were like cauldrons about to brew over - with what Harry could not tell.

After twenty seconds that seemed an eternity, Snape's face began to darken. "So, Potter, you seek to take a higher path of self-righteous-"

"Severus!" Dumbledore interrupted him. "You forget we have another student present. Miss Bulstrode and Mr. Potter need to speak before we dismiss her and talk of our roles together, the three of us."

Dumbledore stepped aside and Harry saw Millicent for the first time. He paled and sat down with a thump on the nearest chair while the Headmaster asked her if she could now control herself. She stated that she could.

Harry stood, remembering that now was the time to comfort her. He walked to her and took one of her hands in both of his for a few seconds. "Millicent, I am so sorry for your loss. My godfather died about two weeks before your family. I know it's not the same, but..." He dropped her hand, and she clasped both of her hands together as if they were cold.

"Thank you, Harry. I don't deserve kindness from you after the way I've treated you and your friends this past year, and before. I'm... I'm sorry as well-" Her last words came out broken as she sobbed a bit.

Harry placed his left arm lightly around her shoulder and guided her to the chair where he had been sitting. Without thinking about it, he released his wand from its holster and wordlessly conjured a similar chair for himself. Her eyes widened briefly, and he made a mental note to be more careful about when and where he performed magic beyond his year. At his gentle nudge she sat. He sat in the conjured chair and placed his left hand on her right arm hoping to comfort her with a gentle touch.

Moments later she produced a handkerchief and wiped her eyes and nose. "I'll cry later." She sniffed. "I want to fight them, Harry. I want to kill those vermin who turned on us. I'm not proud that we supported the Dark Lord, but we were faithful as a family to his cause. If this is the way he and his followers treat those who willingly serve, then I say kill them all." The malice dripped from her words.

She sniffed and blew her nose before continuing. "Kill them all and let me join in. Teach me. I understand that you've taught others in that dueling club or whatever it was. I also understand you've killed some of them recently. Well, good job, Harry. How can I help?"

Harry sighed and lowered his hand from her arm, but not in a manner to show any displeasure. "Millicent, have your dreams started yet?"

"What dreams, Harry?"

"The dreams where you hear them accusing you for living when they died."

She dropped her head as she bit her lip nervously. "Ye-yes. They... er, they sit up from the places where they died and ask why I wasn't there to protect them." She sobbed again, and Harry placed his hand back on her arm.

"Millicent, look at me. Look at me!" When she finally did, he continued. "I still have those same dreams, only it's my parents, Cedric Diggory, and my godfather, Sirius Black." Her eyes widened at the mention of Black's name. Harry briefly explained his godfather's innocence. Harry sighed. "Those dreams of mine, like yours of your family, will fade with time, but will not ever go away. You'll eventually make peace with them since you couldn't have done anything but die with them had you been there."

"But I want to tell you about the dreams that I've had since I killed those Death Eaters. It's only been just over a week since... but, well, the dreams of Sirius and the others dying are nothing compared to the dreams of the eight Death Eaters I killed. Did you know Marcus Flint was one of them?"

She shook her head without looking up at him. He continued, " He put a *Crucio* on me. I was knocked down and lost my wand. He stood over me and lowered his mask so I could see who was about to kill me. Smiling, he slowly started to invoke the Killing Curse."

"I just raised my hand and cast a wandless Fireball curse. I only meant to scorch him a bit and get him to leave." Harry paused and said very quietly, "The screams and smells were horrible." Harry lowered his head. Millicent looked up and now placed her hand on his arm.

Harry raised his gaze after a moment and smiled weakly at her. "Marcus laughed, er... just before, you know. He had this look in his eyes; he was just so happy that he was going to kill me. Yet with all of that evil intent, I'm still haunted by his screams as he burned to death. Almost every night since then I've had some sort of dream about those eight dying, and they all wanted to kill me."

She was looking at him now, and he looked down to avoid her wide-eyed look of awe.

He looked up after a long moment, and stared out the window to his right. He said softly, but loud enough so the three others there could hear, "But the dreams don't matter; I will fight them all and kill as many as I have to, as many as necessary to stop the slaughter. You must realize - your family should have no been killed than the Muggle couple in their seventies who were attacked last night."

Harry paused, hoping those words would sink in. "I'll kill Death Eaters and I'll kill Riddle, er Voldemort's just an alias. His real name is Tom Riddle." She'd flinched at the name and he turned back to her with a weak smile. "Voldemort is a made up name. He's no more a lord than you are a chamber pot. He's a half-blood. His father was a Muggle." She flinched again at the name.

"If I say his name, Voldemort, what's he going to do, put me *higher* on his list to kill? I'm already on the top. He would've had to kill me a couple of times yesterday to want me any more dead than he already does."

He smiled for a moment, but the serious look returned instantly. "Millicent, I am going to stop as many as I can from hurting anyone else. I'd rather capture them, but I'll kill all of them if that's what it takes. In a sense I will kill Riddle for my parents, Cedric, and Sirius, but I won't do it for revenge. I've come to realize that revenge will eat me up inside and give me nothing but a half-life at best when this is over."

"You don't want to be driven by revenge, although I know you can't step away from that burning desire at the moment. You need it right now to keep you going. But I want you to realize we have a responsibility, those of us who can, to stop them, whatever it takes. I want you to accept in your mind right now, that in the future you'll begin to make the idea of protecting others your primary reason to fight, not revenge."

He turned back to her from the window and smiled again. "Although there is one exception for me at the moment: Bellatrix Lestrange is the one who killed my godfather." His grin became a bit evil at that moment. "I freely admit I want to kill her because *I want to kill her*, painfully as well." His smile faded. "But I'm working on overcoming it."

Her face looked like she was weighing his words, sifting through them. She finally said, "I... I'll try... er, to take your advice, Harry. Thanks for understanding that I can't accept it right now. I still need the hope of revenge to go on, but I'll think on what you said."

None of the four present stirred for several long moments, each lost in his or her private thoughts of death and revenge.

"Er, Harry. Did you mean what you said, apologizing to Professor Snape?" Millicent asked.

Harry heard Snape stir uneasily, but he didn't glance away from her eyes to acknowledge him. "I did, but I doubt he believes me. That's his issue; I can only make as sincere an apology as possible and hope he accepts."

"I thought so," she said. She stood, and Harry rose with her. The two professors rose as well, but they were mere observers to the conversation.

Millicent drew her wand, but Harry felt no threat from the action. She placed her wand hand over her heart and said, "Harry Potter, I, Millicent Jeanne Bulstrode do make a Witch's Pledge to you this day..." Dumbledore gasped and Snape tried to interrupt, but Millicent only continued louder to drown out his words. "I make a Witch's Pledge to serve you in this crusade against the Dark- against Vol- Volde- Voldemort," she sighed, "And against all of his minions. No boon that is mine to grant will I withhold from you, and I further pledge to train my best to be prepared, to help you however you ask, and to follow you into the gates of Hell if need be, to destroy him and his followers. This pledge lasts until you release me, but not until Vold- Voldemort, what's his real name, Tom Riddle?" Harry smiled and nodded. She went on, "But not until this jumped up half-blood Tom Riddle is dead. Upon my life, upon my honor and upon my magic, do I so pledge."

She lowered her wand, placed it back into her robes, then looked at him and smiled.

Harry returned her smile and said, "It gets easier to say his name as you do it more often."

"I'm with you," she said. "He wants you dead more than he wants me. But he can't want me any more dead than he already does, regardless of what I call him."

Speaking before Professor Snape, Dumbledore said, "Miss Bulstrode, I hate to end this important chat



abruptly, but we three have much else to discuss this afternoon. Even now Professor Lupin is coming up my stairs to participate in these discussions. I'm sure Harry will meet you to discuss these matters more fully in the near future. Please forgive me for this dismissal."

Millicent said, "Oh no, Professor, I understand. Harry, I'm not safe anywhere but here at Hogwarts. If I'm not in a class or exercising, I'm in the Great Hall, out running on the grounds, or in the Slytherin rooms. I'll tell the portrait of Fifer MacRath in front of our entrance to announce you if you come down there." She smiled and made her way out of the office, thanking the three of them again and greeting Lupin cheerily as he entered and she left.

To a degree Harry dreaded the conversation returning to Snape's reaction to his earlier apology. Harry somehow knew that his conversation with Millicent would not improve matters. But he would stick by the sincerity of his words. Father William had told him that he was not responsible for Snape's reaction, only his own actions.

Lupin greeted each of them with differing measures of cordiality.

Dumbledore began quickly, as if he wanted to steer the meeting as best he could. "Remus, before you arrived, and before Harry realized that Miss Bulstrode was present, your ward made what I believe was a most sincere apology for his actions last year in looking at Severus' memories in a Pensieve. He also apologized for any bullying his father or Sirius did to Severus during your years as students here at Hogwarts. Bullying mind you, he did not apologize for relatively harmless pranks and pratfalls, just the cruel actions on their part."

The stunned look on Lupin's face was as obvious to all as the sneer on Snape's. But Remus looked to Harry. He gave his guardian a most genuine look, trying to get him to go along with his lead.

Remus swallowed, stuttered for a moment, and said, "Yes, er, Severus. I should have done more to stop the bullying, and, er, I should have worked with Lily earlier and more often to moderate things between you three. Please accept my apologies as well."

Instantly upon finishing his own apology to Snape, Remus looked to Harry. The young man gave him a most grateful look of thanks, causing Remus to look happy with his own actions.

Snape opened his mouth to speak, but paused and looked at Dumbledore. Harry and Remus followed Snape's gaze. The Headmaster did not really give anything away to anyone looking at him, but the Potions master barely sighed. Some message had been passed, or at least confirmed.

"I accept your apology for yourself, Potter... and, er, I accept your apology too, Lupin with the same degree of sincerity it was given." Snape's face seemed to be pinched with these words.

Then his demeanor darkened. "I do not accept your apology for your father and godfather. You cannot do it for them and I refuse to accept your apology on their behalf." His smug expression following this statement probably indicated that Snape thought he'd won some small victory within the position Dumbledore had forced upon him.

Harry turned to Dumbledore. "Headmaster, as the head of the Potter *and* Black families, I believe I have the obligation to apologize for wrongs I perceive that were perpetrated by members of my houses, present *and* past - an obligation and a right to do this. Am I wrong?"

Dumbledore's smile was cautious. "As the head of any household it is a wise thing to seek reconciliation. As the head of a Three-Thirty-Three Family your acceptance of this responsibility and your apology is recognized by Wizengamot rulings as if those you apologize for had actually apologized themselves."

Harry's eyes only flickered a bit with this revelation. He turned back to Snape. "Professor, I do mean my apology sincerely, and theirs."

After a painful pause the Slytherin head said, "Now that you've discovered your latest bit of fame and good fortune, I see we must endure whatever new privileges you can eek out of your new positions. I imagine your cheek will grow even more unchecked."

"Severus-" Lupin's tone was arctic. The threat was palpable. But Dumbledore interrupted him.

"Severus, you forget what *your position* might require of you in such a response, and I will hold you to the minimum of acceptable behavior. Also, you must realize how I might act in Harry's stead." Snape paled even more than his normal dungeon-bound pallor.

Dumbledore added, "Now, Harry, I thank you for your gracious words to my colleague, Severus. You cannot force anyone to accept an apology, but you gain the benefit of making it, if you are sincere, and I believe you are. Severus, I ask that you consider what he has said and think about acting more positively in the future."

Dumbledore cleared his throat, changing the direction of the meeting. "Gentlemen, I have called this gathering to do three things. Foremost, we four have important roles in this coming school year, or that is my intention. You three must decide to accept my proposals in full or in part.

"I also want to respond in part at least to several requests you made, Harry. They have bearing on all three of us. Finally, as we accept the challenges I have for us, gentlemen, we need to come to a working accord, shall we say."

Dumbledore paused at this moment and looked at each individually. Harry knew his face showed curiosity. Remus nodded in agreement and showed no real emotion that Harry could decipher. Snape's expression was one similar to suffering from indigestion.

Dumbledore smiled and started. "Assuming we have proper Defense instructors, the established curriculum works for general Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom training. However, I've never felt that it meets our needs as to practical training. In this time of war the lack of adequate practical training in Defense is even more glaringly obvious, and potentially disastrous.

"The Paladins will receive what they need during the Auror training, but that is two years off and it won't help any others. We need formal practical Defense training now for as many of our students as

possible - at least for the third-years and up. What to do; what to do?"

In typical Dumbledore fashion, the Headmaster delighted in asking a rhetorical question that could not be answered, but pausing for those present to respond anyway.

After he looked around satisfied, he proceeded. "So, earlier this summer I commissioned a proven expert in practical Defense training to design a program for most, if not all our classes here."

Harry's countenance fell, though he did not really show it. It seemed that his work on the practical Defense training for an expanded Defense Association had been a wasted effort.

Dumbledore said, "I received the proposal about a week ago. The curriculum was brilliant and masterful in its outline. It proposed executing a much more comprehensive training program than I'd hoped for.

"Failing once again to have a continuing Defense professor for the next year, I asked the three existing teachers whose advice I trust the most to help me with such matters. Professors McGonagall, Flitwick, and Snape all reviewed the proposal and commented on the excellence of the piece. Harry, I then asked Alastor Moody and Kingsley Shacklebolt to examine it also, as well as Remus here. They all commented most favorably as well.

"What I didn't do, Harry was tell them in advance who the author was. I might have implied the author was someone I had met during my travels last year. After they all gave me their positive comments and expressed an interest in helping implement the aforementioned practical training program, I then asked if they thought inviting the author to join our staff would be advantageous. Once again, all agreed without reservation.

"Only then did I tell them who the author was."

Harry did not understand what Dumbledore was leading to, but the delight in the Headmaster's eyes, and the disgust in Severus Snape's gave a tug at Harry's subconscious. Before the thought fully coalesced in his brain, Professor Dumbledore said, "Harry, it was your plan that we all marveled at. It was your plan that we want to implement with few changes, and those only for practical reasons, not because of any fault in your thinking."

Harry blushed and he knew it was obvious to all, even though he tried to curtail it. Remus smiled openly. Dumbledore gave one of his patented knowing grins. Snape scowled predictably.

"Harry, I have invited a number of students to participate with us in the Paladin Program this year. They come to us from all parts of the world. The final count of how many will join us has still not been settled. We seem to be receiving indications of more coming from Eastern Europe and the USA than we had originally thought. At this point there are roughly one hundred confirmed Paladins joining us this year. Just over half of them will be from Hogwarts. However, there may also be as many as twenty more before all is said and done.

"We usually have approximately a thousand students each year. The Madison Academy in the States

is the largest magical school in the world with over eighteen hundred in attendance in any given term. Beauxbatons and Durmstrang each have somewhere between six and seven hundred students. The other twenty-seven magical schools in the world have significantly less attendees. Half of them have one hundred pupils a year or less.

"I tell you this to say that the Paladin Program would be a substantial school in and of itself. We need more than just the normal compliment of Defense instructors, and we need administrative help with the program as well.

"You do not know this, Harry, I think, but Professor Snape is an excellent administrator. Were I to retire, or Professor McGonagall, I'd probably see him promoted to Deputy Headmaster for that very reason. Therefore, I have made him Chair Professor of the Defense Department here at Hogwarts, a temporary department to exist for the duration of the war with Voldemort. He will instruct many of the upper level classes and manage all of the class activities. You see no one class will only have one instructor for the year. Different instructors will rotate in and out of the Defense classes throughout all three terms. Only the first and second years will have the same professors for all Defense classes like you did. And only the first and second-years will not have any practical instruction outside of regular Defense class time. We've deemed them too inexperienced with magic in general to benefit from such training.

"All others will have practical Defense training with rotating instructors, as you designed, giving them a variety of influences in their learning. In a sense, your Defense Association, the DA, will now be institutionalized and formally titled the Practical Defense class. I'm sure it will be called 'PD,' just as Defense Against the Dark Arts is sometimes called 'DADA.'

"Remus here will return to our faculty and spend most of his time with the first three years, but he will take some time with each year in the Practical Defense classes, if for no other reason than to cover how to deal with any werewolves Voldemort recruits. I feel Remus can best explain such matters, and best demonstrate that not all werewolves are our enemies.

"I had hoped that Professor Washington Pike would be able to spend a term with us from America, but they are ramping up for war at that school as well. However, at least a dozen students will come here from the Madison Academy. Hopefully Professor Pike will visit for a long weekend Defense symposium or conference we'd like to host.

"Master Onichi Mashushita will spend half of the winter term with us from the Momotaro School on Oki Island, off of Honshu. The Bulgarian Dueling champion, Antoneta Poldinko had agreed to spend the first term with us, but alas, she died in the explosion at Bulgaria's Auror Headquarters.

"The Italian Scuola di Magicae will send us one of their Dark Arts experts in the spring term, a Professor Teodoro Galdoni. He specializes in Shield charms. The Kenyan Defense Trainer Kiprono Darrack will visit us from their Shimba Hills School of Wizardry.

"Alastor and Kingsley will be helping out as I said, as well as Nymphadora Tonks. Those three have been permanently assigned to Hogwarts security, and other Aurors will rotate in for that purpose, and may help with training also.

"And now, Harry, following the counsel of my three current professorial advisors, I would like to extend to you, the author of that brilliant Practical Defense training plan, a place on our staff."

Snape snorted, and Dumbledore turned with a cross look and said, "You agreed, Severus, strictly on the basis of the quality of the plan, to include its author on our staff if he would accept. Now that you know who the source is, do you show your continuing bias against him with that *"sound"* you just made?"

Snape looked as if caught in a trap for a moment. "No Headmaster," he said, pausing to collect himself. "I only think that *any* student should not be allowed to let the burden of teaching interfere with his or her education." He looked pleased with himself, Harry thought, after saying that.

"And yet, he proved himself able and his training methods valid last year when he taught his Defense Association covertly," Dumbledore said. "Out in the open, with our assistance, and with the help of an accommodating schedule, Harry here should be able to complete his class work, help with training, and do at least as well on his N.E.W.T.s in two years as he did on his O.W.L.s. And that does not include the reborn study habits he developed this summer, or his deeper understanding of magic which Remus has observed in Harry's Spell Mongering efforts."

Dumbledore turned to Harry. "I will not ask you to do more than you feel you can do. You've not even accepted, I know. I've just planned out a way you *might* participate, if you agree. I do not yet ask for your decision, but are you favorable towards my proposal thus far? Do you want me to go on describing how I see this, understanding that I am fully open to your input and modifications of my ideas for your acceptance of the position of teaching assistant?"

Harry's eyes widened, and he said, "I am open to the possibility of helping more formally, although I admit I thought we'd have a school club and I'd sort of be president or chairman of it. Oh, and what's a teaching assistant?"

Dumbledore smiled. "Here in Britain, we do not have a tradition of having students that also teach, the closest we come to that is a tutor's role, and that's not what I want. In American universities and other such institutions of higher learning a teaching assistant is an advanced year student who attends classes and also helps teach, simple enough. He or she may teach beginning classes altogether, or the teaching assistant, cleverly called TA's by the Americans, quite often helps in a more advanced class and speaks on subjects they may be well informed about. They hold a dual role, staff member during part of the time, and student the rest. Such positions are not given lightly, nor are they given to any but the brightest. The Madison Academy allows a few seventh-year students to act as teaching assistants each year, if any of sufficient abilities are available."

Dumbledore stopped and rummaged through a drawer. He pulled out a book, and tossed it to Harry. It was a new copy of *The Hogwarts Staff Handbook*, but it had been opened. A quick perusal showed several of the pages had pieces of parchment in them with comments written in the margins at those places in the book.

Before Harry could read any of it, Dumbledore spoke and Harry looked up. "That, Harry, is the staff handbook for our school. In all Defense classes, even those for sixth-years, you will be considered by

the students *and* other Defense instructors as a member of the staff. The students will treat you as an instructor, and your fellow instructors will treat you as they want to be treated and as they are required to treat each other.

"You will notice this applies to *all* staff members: myself, all professors and instructors including Madam Hooch, as well as all support staff members such as Madams Pince and Pomphrey, as well as Mr. Filch.

"In all Defense classes you and they are governed as equals in your demeanor towards each other. All professors and all students will call you Mr. Potter in Defense classes and in the Practical Defense sessions. Outside of Defense classes, you revert to your student status, with the exception that you will have the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of a prefect. I feel you would be undermined in class if you did not have some advanced status as a student.

"Though you will be a student outside all Defense classes, I expect your treatment of staff members, *and their treatment of you*, to be exemplary at all times." Dumbledore looked Harry in the eyes and twinkled. This means you cannot prank *any* of the professors or staff, or treat them with anything but respect. And," he turned to Snape, "No professor can treat you with anything less than *professional* courtesy."

The Headmaster turned back to Harry. "Please read this book and become very familiar with it. It puts you in both a desirable and difficult position. Even the head boy and girl do not enjoy the privileges or have the responsibilities that you will have with this."

Dumbledore looked for a split second at Snape, and then said, "Harry, you proved yourself an able instructor, and capable of teaching in the DA last year. When you went to the Department of Mysteries, you proved you were a most capable leader, not just of students, but of all of those fighting Darkness." He held up his hand to stop Harry's protest. "You acted under bad information, but regardless of that element, you proved yourself a combat leader. That is why you are needed in this position more than any other reason, and the other good reasons are numerous. No one else remotely near the age of our students has seen combat. Oh, your five companions that night have, and I expect you'll recruit them to be some of the Practical Defense helpers described in your plan. But you are the leader of this war that they will look up to; the one most of them will follow once you begin this position training most of the student body."

Dumbledore sighed, "I'm not a completely mad old man. I do acknowledge Mr. Malfoy is unlikely to follow you, but you will win many to your side and your banner. Plenty of people hated me during the Grindelwald war, even after I defeated him.

"I'm not expecting miracles, just your best efforts, and that will surpass my expectations." Dumbledore paused and looked off out the window briefly. "Harry, I don't want you to think I want perfection, none of us are capable of that. You'll make more mistakes. I'll not embarrass any instructor in my employment with the recitation of his or her mistakes as a new teacher, but *all* of my current instructors have had their missteps, particularly in the early days." His eyes twinkled and Snape and Remus shifted uncomfortably in their chairs.

"Are you still interested, Harry?"

"Yes, Professor," he said, after a pause to consider a bit more.

"Fine; let me suggest a schedule for you with the heaviest classroom teaching burden I will allow. You may adjust it as you like, taking into consideration your own class work and teaching load, as well as Quidditch practices." Dumbledore smiled and Harry grinned back. Snape snorted and both rolled their eyes at each other at his disapproval.

"I suggest you take the four core Auror courses: Potions, Charms, Transfiguration, and Defense Against the Dark Arts. You might be best served to take no courses beyond these."

Harry started. "But, I thought I had to have at least five N.E.W.T. courses to be an Auror."

"You may take more courses if you wish; Harry, but I discussed this with the head of the Auror Academy. He said that your teaching would provide the additional skill set desired in your academic preparation. They are not concerned with an actual grade on a test, so much as the knowledge you gain to accomplish passing grades on the tests. The four required courses are the specific substantive knowledge needed. The elective course can be anything. If they wanted a certain skill or expertise, they'd ask for it.

"So, proven abilities to teach and lead are highly prized, but how could they require it of entrants into their program? Am I explaining this properly, Harry?"

"Yes, sir. Real world knowledge and experience are rare and prized, just like the fact that there are few who can say they've fought Death Eaters, and fewer still who can say they have fought Voldemort. You and I, sir, anyone else?"

Dumbledore replied, "Alastor Moody stood with your father on one of the occasions that James defied Voldemort. James stood with Frank Longbottom on the other two occasions. Frank faced him with two other Aurors on his third incident. I've only faced Tom twice, personally. So, four of us alive can make the claim of having faced Voldemort in a fight and lived to tell the tale, if you count Frank as being among the living. The two who fought along side Frank Longbottom were killed in that confrontation.

"You are right to observe that it is a rarefied expertise, and you are the most experienced person in the world on that count - facing him five times, including the time you received your scar. Those experiences will validate what you say, and I understand that you used the stories of your fights to gain instant credibility at the inception of the DA last year.

"The Auror Academy will not see your combat experience as a 'fifth ability' so much as regard that along with your skills and experiences as a Defense instructor here as an additional qualifying factor. Did I explain that satisfactorily?"

Harry said, "Yes, I've wondered what the Auror Academy would want with an elective N.E.W.T. "

Dumbledore agreed, "All knowledge is helpful, but what you'll learn by instructing will be more

valuable than any other course we offer.

"However, you do have a number of choices for other course work if you choose. But you must weigh your choices with your goals of preparing to become an Auror, and more importantly, your goal to defeat Voldemort."

Harry said, "Let's not mince words, Professor; I'm going to kill him. I *have* to kill him to end this, and I will end this as soon as possible, as soon I can prepare to end his reign of terror with a fair chance to survive." Dumbledore and Remus shivered at Harry's frankness. Snape snorted, but was ignored by all in the room.

"Well, yes, Harry, that is one of the primary reasons we are going to these lengths with all aspects of the Paladin Program.

"Back to your course selection," Dumbledore said. You may want to continue in Magical Creatures with your good friend, Hagrid, but N.E.W.T.-level Creatures is designed for people wanting careers in animal training, husbandry, or management. Knowing the emphasis of his courses, and knowing your career aims, I believe Hagrid will understand if you do not continue with him.

"You are disqualified for Divination at N.E.W.T.-level, but I cannot imagine it interests you in anyway. History of magic you could consider, but..." Harry shook his head.

Dumbledore said, "Herbology is open to you, but I believe you hold no interest there. You find yourself unable to take Runes or Arithmancy without O.W.L. scores of at least E, although, anyone can take any N.E.W.T.s test if he or she chooses. You can continue in your personal study of the matter, but I believe you plan on upsetting those disciplines with the direction of your research." Harry smiled.

"In your seventh year you will be able to take one or two short term courses in business, politics, or international affairs, but that is next year. You can always propose an independent study course this year if you want, but I wonder if you want anything other than your base courses and your Spell Mongery, which, I would love to see in the near future, if you will permit me. Remus tells me it is fascinating.

"If you only take the four core classes, you will have Defense for two hours and Charms for ninety minutes on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Transfiguration and Potions will be two hours each on Tuesdays and Thursdays. You will be able to attend a series of Defense classes where you participate as an instructor. You will be in at least one regular class once a week with each of the top three years. Practical Defense classes will be held each day beginning in the 11:00 hour, and run for years three through seven. You will be able to attend two Practical classes for each of those years most weeks. They vary. We will also be teaching refresher Defense classes from time to time for Ministry employees who volunteer for them. You will do one to two of those hour-long classes a week for as long as they ask to attend them.

"On this schedule, you will be in a class until 3:30 each day. I will ask that you be given your writing assignments with plenty of advanced notice so you will have time to complete them. You have the



books already, and I believe you have read them."

"Headmaster, at least in Charms, Potions, and Transfigurations, I believe the professors know what research papers they will assign ahead of time. Could I get those assignments as soon as possible to start on them? It would help me be prepared for the year, and I have the time to work on them now to get ahead."

"Good, idea, Harry. I'm sure they will agree. Severus here will teach your sixth year class." Dumbledore turned to Snape. "Please give Harry your list for papers within the next two days, Severus." Not waiting for an answer he turned back to Harry.

"Regarding your own advanced training, I have asked all Defense professors to outline a course of advanced spell work and training for you from 3:30 each day until 5:50. In addition, I have asked Professors Flitwick and McGonagall to allow you to study at your own pace in their classes, if you get ahead of the rest of your classmates. They plan to develop special work in their disciplines to help you with your upcoming fight against Tom Riddle.

"Everyone agrees to give you the minimum homework that is not directly involved in fighting your good fight, or passing N.E.W.T.s. Outside work should be mostly practical and a minimum of the theoretical. The goal is to have them test you with questions during and after classes, and to allow your verbal answers to constitute your testing in those areas whenever possible. Your advanced reading and research in these areas should serve you in good stead.

"The other Defense professors will be responsible for grading papers and tests. You will consult with them on their course schedules, but they will mostly follow the curriculum guidelines set down by the school and the Hogwarts Board of Governors.

"Now, Harry, I have outlined what I think will be a challenging but not impossible work load for you. You may modify it as you see fit, now, or as we go along. And please believe me when I say I do not mean to control your life, but to help you prepare first and foremost, and to help you help others as well.

"You may change this or even reject it in part or in whole. I do not mean to use you as a weapon or a tool, but rather to give you opportunities."

Harry stared at Dumbledore for a long moment, then rose from his chair and paced a bit. "First of all, Professor, I want to thank you for all the effort you have put into developing a course schedule for me. I haven't thought for a moment that you were treating me like a weapon or trying to run my life. It's a marvelous opportunity, and I not only thank you, but please thank all of the other professors for their efforts on my behalf, and their confidence in me." Harry turned to the others in the room. "Professor Snape, Professor Lupin, I thank you."

He paced some more and then paused; he looked out of the west window briefly. "Remus," he said. "You'll be here teaching mostly the younger years, but helping in the Practicals as well?" Remus nodded. "What do you think of this?"

Harry's guardian said, "I was asked about certain parts along the way. I am guilty of telling the Headmaster of your much improved and above-your-age capabilities in Transfiguration and Charms. That may have led him to believe you can go through those courses easily. I also told him of your increased learning skills based on your speed reading, and lately your theory work from your Mongering display."

Harry nodded. "Headmaster," he asked. "Who'll be teaching Potions?"

"Arsenius Jiggers has agreed to come out of retirement for the duration of the war, not only this summer. He believes you'll easily complete the Potions work. He cites your quick grasp of his applied potions addendum and the laboratory work you two did together as evidence of your capabilities."

Snape snorted again at this. Harry turned to him. "Professor, do you think I can do this?"

The question startled Snape. "You jest that you want my opinion, Potter?"

"Severus!" Dumbledore said, but Harry held up his hand.

"Headmaster, I want his perspective. Professor Snape, assuming I show you the respect you deserve as a professor, and assuming I am capable of offering something of value to the classes, and you can only take our Headmaster's word that I helped the members of the DA as he said. But assuming those two things, do you think you could treat me with the respect another staff member warrants in our classes together?"

Snape immediately looked to Dumbledore, and slowly turned back to Harry. "I have been informed that I will be *required* to do so."

Harry nodded and held his hand up again to the Headmaster. "I wanted an honest answer, and that is brutally honest. Now, Professor, do you think I will be able to accomplish this workload as Professor Dumbledore has outlined? If so or if not, why?"

Snape looked to Dumbledore, but Harry quickly said, "No. Professor Snape, I want your continued brutal honesty, truly."

Snape sneered his trademark sneer. "Based on watching you in my classes and around school the last five years, I feel you do not have the discipline to do half this workload, even with only four courses to attend and prepare for. I feel you do not have what it takes to treat other students fairly without showing partiality to Gryffindor. I think you incapable of performing as an instructor without lording it over others and letting it feed your already overblown ego. You've been a spoiled brat since you walked in the doors for your Sorting, and have not improved since then.

"I generously give you one month before you've failed as a teaching assistant, and fallen far behind in most if not all of your classes. I told the Headmaster I thought this was a bad idea from the start, but he insists on pandering to you.

"That is my opinion and I thank you for allowing me to state it openly in front of your two biggest

fans. And why are you grinning at me like that?"

Harry smiled. He looked at Snape for ten long seconds without saying anything. Finally he said, "Thank you for your opinion, Professor. I needed to know what you thought for two reasons. First, as my most harsh critic, you would show me everywhere I need to be cautious.

"Second, your bias proved to me that I could do this. You think I have the ego that everyone else attributes to Draco Malfoy, and you think I have been spoiled as he was. Also, you ascribe to me his prejudices towards others and his inability to work with other houses.

"Since I am nothing like him, you have proven to me that I *can* manage in those areas satisfactorily. I've no experience leading Slytherins, but those of the other houses had no problem learning from me in the DA. And if my few minutes with Millicent Bulstrode is any indication, I am convinced I can work with the *reasonable* Slytherins as well. Nothing in Professor Dumbledore's charter for me says I have to like all students from every house.

"As to my personal studies, well you'll just have to see if my improvements over the summer help me. I know I can work with my Transfiguration, Charms, and Potions teachers. As to my new Defense professor, well, I have had bad Defense professors before and have survived. It remains to be seen if you can teach that course any better than you taught Potions. And before you accuse me of house bias, produce one non-Slytherin who thinks *you* unbiased and I'll apologize in front of the entire school for doubting your teaching abilities."

Harry turned to Professor Dumbledore. "I believe I can do this, if for no other reason than Professor Snape does not describe me at all in his reasons that I will fail. However, Headmaster, what assures me that I'll be treated properly as a teaching assistant by *all* of the staff of this school?"

Dumbledore glared harshly at Snape, but turned to Harry with a ready answer. He pointed at the staff handbook. "That book, Harry. We are all held to a code of conduct with each other. You will be bound by it if you agree to this, just like *every* staff member is bound to it. If you'd like to read it before you agree..."

"No, sir, I'm sure it will be adequate for my concerns, if it is good enough for you and the others. Does it tell me how all of us on the staff should treat the students as well?"

"Yes, Harry, it does, although, I will wave for you the rule restricting staff members from dating students. You live this summer in a monastery, but I do not expect you to be a monk." Dumbledore's eyes twinkled.

Harry frowned, "I have no time for such relationships, Professor, I have a job to do, but I thank you in advance for that wavier, just in case. Do I sign a contract, or how do I commit to this?"

"You do not sign a contract because I could not receive an official placement of a teaching assistant on the rolls of our staff with the Board of Governors for this year. They want the position to prove itself before doing so. I will take your word of honor."

Snape snorted again. Harry cut his eyes Snape's way. "I give my word, Professor. Thank you for accepting it. I hope to perform adequately compared to your present staff, most of whom I highly respect. And I think I'll do better than a few of them."

Dumbledore rose and shook his hand. "Welcome to the staff, Harry. We'll keep this a secret until the Welcoming Feast, although you may tell your closest friends if you like, as long as they are discrete."

"I don't know if I will, this is all so unexpected," said Harry. "But thanks for the permission."

They sat again. "Congratulations, Harry," said Lupin.

"Gentlemen, I address you now as your superior and you my staff members," Dumbledore said. "I must warn you three of something. The highest possibility of friction on the staff this year lies with the three of you. Harry, you started off our meeting well, but rose to Severus' baiting." He turned. "Severus, I am sorely disappointed in you for that display of malice. I will monitor your times together occasionally. Do not forget the students are our primary concern."

Snape just scowled, but Harry said, "I am sorry, Headmaster, no excuse. I'll try hard to do better."

"Thank you, Harry." Dumbledore then turned to see Snape glaring at Harry, who would not look at him. After a long few moments the head of Slytherin House realized Dumbledore was looking at him.

Snape said, "My apologies, Professor."

"Of course." Dumbledore looked at him for several additional long moments before saying, "Remus, Severus, as the two main Defense instructors for the standardized classes, please make a copy of your first term's lesson plans for each year and give them to Harry soonest. He needs to be at least familiar with what you plan to teach. Harry, as the most recent student among the four of us, please let these two know where teaching points in the past might have failed. Be judicious about this; it is the approved curriculum, not your marvelous Practical Defense coursework. They will do the same with your plans."

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As the meeting was breaking up, the Floo fireplace flashed and they all heard, "Albus, do you know where Harry Potter is?" It was Madam Bones. "May I come through?"

"He is right here, Amelia. Please come."

She arrived in seconds and didn't even dust herself off. "Albus- Harr- You..." She stopped abruptly when she saw the other two. "I didn't know you had other guests."

She turned to Lupin and Snape. "Gentlemen, please forgive my rudeness, but I need to speak with Harry and the Headmaster most urgently."

Snape looked like he wanted to make a snide comment, but Remus expressed his understanding to Madam Bones as he shoved Snape out of the office.

The door closed and the head of Magical Law Enforcement turned. "Harry, I can't imagine you gave Ambassador Glean or Minister Fudge any additional instructions as Spell Monger to threaten the vampires, did you?"

"No, ma'am. We want peace as I understand it, and threats don't make for peace. Thunderfire is in and of itself a threat, but also something they know about and respect. It's not a new threat to deal with. Nothing else needs saying, does it?"

"No, Harry, and I couldn't imagine that you would have, but I had to ask."

"Amelia," Dumbledore asked concerned. "What happened?"

"Today Ambassador Glean allowed the talks to progress to the point where we were asked to produce your gift of Unfailing Light. Glean did so and told the vampire delegates that you had a message for all the vampires. He went into great detail about how you want all vampires dead and only are held back by the good graces of the British Ministry of Magic. He said that you insist that all vampires be registered and restricted to limited areas in the Urals Mountains, and they must check in monthly or be hunted like rabid dogs."

Harry was flabbergasted. "I'd... I'd never.... You must believe me. What happened?"

"I do believe you, Harry. And fortunately so did one other person in attendance today. The newly promoted head of the Bulgarian Auror Service, Konstatin Krum, had his son, Viktor, with him today. Viktor stepped forward and whispered furiously in his father's ear as Count Kldonovitch and Carver Glean yelled at each other. Konstatin spoke to Oblansk, and the Bulgarian Minister asked Viktor to tell the delegates what he'd told his father.

"Young Viktor stated that he knew you fairly well, and had competed against you in the Tri-Wizard Tournament. He went on to say that you would have never said such things. Oblansk immediately asked Kldonovitch if your presence at the talks would allay his concerns that the Wizarding world was negotiating in good faith.

"I don't know who was angrier, Glean or Baron Ranter, head of the Princip Coven and leader of the vampire faction arguing for war. Well Oblansk and Kldonovitch agreed to postpone the deliberations until tonight so you could be summoned. I hate to ask you this, but could you come to the talks? You may be our only chance at peace."

Harry said to Dumbledore, "It appears that I must go, Professor. Will you come with me?"

The agony was clear on Dumbledore's face, but he soon said, "Of course, Harry. I am concerned about security though. When are we needed, Amelia?"

She looked at a watch pinned to the lapel of her robes. "At nine o'clock, Albus. You have just over four and a half hours. It's at *Pont du Hoc* on the Brittany coast. You can Apparate to the inn near the village and be conducted to the talks from there, or, knowing of your fondness for carriage rides, Albus, you can reach there in under two hours in your usual mode of transportation. I suggest you two

wait and arrive just after half eight.

"As far as security goes, I'll have two squads of Aurors meet you here to travel with you and I will surround you both with Aurors as you enter and leave the talks. There will be a ring of them around you in the meeting room, and standing at your back while you are at the table negotiating..."

Harry stood and paced the open side of Dumbledore's desk away from the two. This caused the conversation to end as they stared at him. After roughly fifteen seconds of pacing, Harry returned to the two.

"Before we decide how many Aurors go where, let's look at a few ideas I picked up from reading about the vampires in Telemachus Grind's Journal. I'm sure the role of Spell Mongers in negotiations with vampires has been either misrepresented or forgotten all together in recorded history."

Harry looked at them, and Madam Bones as if this was a question. "Other than the importance of Thunderfire as a deterrent, and the gift of Unfailing Light as a token, I know nothing about Spell Mongers participating in such talks," she said.

Harry sighed. "Well, you'll just have to trust me on this, because I believe it's important. Telemachus Grind, who I know is recorded in our histories as Telemachus the Vile, wrote an entire chapter in his journal about the time he negotiated with the vampires, and about when Osbert Blacwin first negotiated with them when he created Thunderfire."

Harry paused for a moment, took a deep breath, and plunged ahead with an odd question. "What is the biggest thing we fear about vampires?"

"Being bitten," Madam Bones said after a moment.

Harry smiled. "Yes, but in the big picture, what frightens us?"

"War with them," Dumbledore stated. "Vampires out killing Muggles, drawing attention to our world, and biting wizards and witches to create new vampires."

"That's what Grind said, we fear their multiplying themselves. Now, what he observed is that if vampires wanted to take over, they'd start infecting witches and wizards left and right. They could easily triple their numbers in a week, and we'd probably not know it. How many vampires are there altogether, anyway? Do we have an idea?"

"Less than a thousand worldwide, we believe."

Harry said, "They could have ten thousand in a month, and a fifty thousand in six months. Why don't they? They could take over the world. What's stopping them? Surely it's not all our Aurors in Europe put together. Are there a thousand of them, two thousand? And how soon could we double that number?"

Dumbledore and Bones sat looking gob smacked.

Harry smiled once again and continued. "Telemachus Grind observed, and confirmed by talking to vampires, that *they* don't want a lot of other vampires around. They want a small, tightly controlled population.

"He wrote that they have money because they can take a long-term approach to investments, and they all help each other. They live a rich, opulent life in the shadows. They control their human blood consumption and supplement it with blood from various animals. According to Grind they are hedonists, gourmands, and sybarites; and yes, I had to look up those words. They are not driven *only* by blood, they just need it. They also like fine wines, good food, and the usual sensual pleasures." With this Harry stopped and blushed. The two with him chuckled.

"Grind said that they don't want to create too many new vampires because the increased population interrupts their pleasures. However, like any lustful creature, including man, vampires get antsy for action and feel they have to rattle our chains from time to time to confirm that they are being kept at bay.

"After a generation or two without war, humans forget how horrible it is. Vampires don't have new generations like that, so flair-ups occur every several hundred years. If we step up and remind them they need to stay peaceful, they'll realize war is too costly and interferes with their fun.

"After Voldemort and his forces bombed the different Auror organizations, the vampires found themselves without any real containing force to stop them, and this gave the younger, more war-like vampires a reason to rise up against us. It's like a wild animal living in captivity that eats better and lives better than it ever did in the wild. But open the gates, and it feels a self-destructive need to escape. That's exactly why Voldemort did this. It's also why he's stirring up the younger vampires. They don't remember the earlier wars."

Harry stopped and looked off once more. Then he said, "There's another factor Grind wrote about in that chapter. It's something we can use to our advantage with them. Because vampires can only be killed in a few ways, they compulsively dwell on those means of death. They keep a bell jar of the substance that can kill them, Thunderfire or the Unfailing Light, or their desks. They have wooden stakes placed in different parts of their homes and offices. Stakes used in the past to kill another vampire are particularly prized trinkets. After existing for hundreds of years, a vampire may long for death in some ways, even though he will never go without a fight. I think of their fascination with death as akin to playing Russian roulette. Are you two are familiar with the game?" They both nodded.

"Do we know the age of the vampire delegates?" Bones shook her head. Harry said, "I bet either one of them was alive back when Grind was around, or they have consulted with someone who was. That's why they asked for the Spell Monger. Kldonovitch knows that a proper threat of Thunderfire can calm things down in the covens. He can use us as a hammer against the others. He's called for me to confirm I am not a real threat so he can use the *limited* availability of Thunderfire to his advantage.

"Glean's threat of all Aurors in Europe having access to that charm, and the threat to take the vampires away from their vices and avarices, are the best way to stir up all the covens for war. It makes you wonder if Glean and Fudge are just monumentally stupid, or if one or both of them wants war. I have

to assure the vampires that Thunderfire will be available, but only given to a limited number unless they cause war. *Only then* will I give it to everyone wanting it."

Harry stopped and pondered this without looking up. The other two present looked at each other with equal parts understanding and fear on their faces.

Harry went on. "I believe the vampires want to be able to trust us and return both sides to a status quo of guarded peace, at least Kldonovitch and whoever else is there, other than this Baron Ratner. If the vampires wanted war, they'd have given it to us before now. The last uprising was during your youth, right, Professor? Did they join Grindelwald, any of them?"

"One or two at most, and that may have been only rumors." Dumbledore offered.

"Telemachus said that vampires never want war. They just want to live their hedonistic lives in peace with little interference.

"Telemachus wrote that a proper threatening force that acts as a deterrent, but doesn't really threaten to attack them is what the vampires truly want. They want an easy justification to go about their self-centered lives and not feel really in danger. Sort of good fences make good neighbors in vampire thinking."

Harry paused, took another turn of the office and said, "The negotiations so far have pushed them to the brink of war. I can't show up as a scared teenager under heavy guard. I can't bring back a balance that way. I have to be a countering force of substance.

"Professor, are you known from your fight with the vampires in that last war, or will they only know you from the war with Grindelwald?"

Bones snorted this time and Dumbledore cut his eyes to her before simply saying to Harry, "They will probably know of me."

Harry looked into his eyes and said, "More I don't know about because of a poor history teacher."

There was nothing to say to this. Harry asked, "What are the sizes of the governmental delegations and what is the size of the vampire group?"

Bones looked confused slightly, but said, "Each government has eight to fifteen delegates, and they each have a number of bodyguards, Aurors, usually, to provide for individual security."

"And there are three vampires I bet, with no guards of any sort, right?" Harry asked. When she nodded he added, "And yet, *they* are the ones feared at the talks. They stand with aloofness bordering on arrogance, and you feel no safety with your security forces."

She gazed at him for a moment, and then she nodded once. Harry smiled a smile that didn't really reach his eyes. "They play the fearlessness game combined with their death wish, and they pull it off every time." He spoke as much to himself in confirmation of his suspicions as to the others.



Dumbledore said, "Harry, what do you propose and why?"

"I have to appear like more than a school boy. I have to be as fearless as the vampires; we must play their game," Harry said. The two others just stared at him. "I assume you have Aurors that are good on brooms. Are we going by Thestral coach, Professor?"

"Yes, Harry, I thought it would be a comfortable manner of travel. We can easily talk while we go, and arriving in the Hogwarts coach is an impressive site. Those who can see the Thestrals and those who can't will add to the mystique of our arrival." His eyes twinkled. "But, I am most concerned about your safety as I said."

Harry ignored the last comment. "Sir, do you have a driver for the coach or do you just tell the Thestrals where you want to go and they go there?"

"Hagrid usually drives me unless it is a known route such as to our Ministry of Magic and back."

Harry continued, "Madam Bones, if we could have only two Aurors with brooms as outriders to warn us of any Death Eater attacks, that'll be all we need. The vampires won't attack us; it will still be daylight. We can Apparate away if there is danger. Have your Aurors warmly clothed and tell them to leave us when we have our destination in sight."

Harry turned and paced the office length once, returning to them in seconds. "We have to play the vampires' game; it will confuse the other delegates and delight the vampires. They don't trust any of you, no offence meant, ma'am."

"None taken, Harry," she said. Harry shook his head as if to clear his mind and continued, "We walk in alone, dressed in our finery, simple but elegant. You wear only black, unusual for you, Professor, and your Order of Merlin, but only the lapel pin, not the full sash. I'll wear a simple well tailored black dress robe I own, but open showing my utilities." He pointed to the rig he wore under the school robe, which was also unbuttoned. "I have a fancy version of what you see here. We portray elegance and danger, and a disregard for it all the same."

"It should be just the two of us, Professor. We need to make a statement with our entrance, so we arrive just a few minutes late. Madam Bones, you tell Kldonovitch we are in the building at 9:00, and that we will be there soon. Sit on Ambassador Glean if you must to keep him from antagonizing them any more because we are a little late. Get Krum and Oblansk to help if you can, but don't tell them what we are doing. They need to be surprised as well, I think."

Harry turned to Dumbledore. "We make the grand entrance sporting power and disinterest to a degree, with all but the vampires. You are the great Albus Dumbledore, Order of Merlin First Class, etcetera, etcetera. I am the Boy-Who-Lived, the Defeater of Voldemort and the fearsome, reviled Spell Monger - the first of my kind in a thousand years."

"The thing is I am there *only* as the Spell Monger. Madam Bones, you introduce me as *the* Spell Monger, Harry Potter. But get me to the vampires as soon as possible. I don't want to slight anyone, but the vampires are why I'll be there, and I want them to know it. You just lead us, but we don't

speaking. Conferring with any one else before going to the vampires makes me a partner at best, or an underling at worst of whomever I speak with."

Harry paused, and then he said, "Hold it. I do want to slight Ambassador Glean. He's the one that caused this mess, and my slighting him will eloquently tell all there that he did not speak for me when he made his pronouncements."

"Harry," Dumbledore said. "Is it wise to provoke Minister Fudge more, by way of Glean? He doesn't like you, that is obvious to all."

"Exactly, Professor, he couldn't dislike me more, so it should be clear that I do not like him."

Harry stopped, made to turn and pace once more, but decided against it and said, "I supposedly have some popularity out there. Fudge and the *Daily Prophet* have done everything they can to discredit me, but I am sure they will do more. It's time to make any who can hear or see it realize that I dislike Fudge.

"I hate my popularity because of this scar, but I guess I can use it for our cause. I'm already considering using my name for business, so why not for politics?" Harry sighed. "I just hate this. None of it, the press, Fudge, the fans, the Spell Mongering issues... not even Voldemort - none of it is going away, so it's time to try to push back."

Harry succumbed to the desire to pace, and made two turns before he stopped. "Am I making sense with this approach to the vampires? Do you see it?" They just nodded once more.

Harry turned to Madam Bones. "Do we sign a treaty; take their word for it, what's the protocol?"

"Usually we reach a verbal agreement in such treaty negotiations, and then a scribe takes down the words from the chief delegates for both sides. They argue a bit over the parchment. They cross out a word here, add one there. On something this simple, it could just take minutes if someone with good sense is involved on all sides."

Harry asked, "If I can get the agreement I think we can achieve, can I ask the Professor here, as the Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards to dictate the treaty with Count Kldonovitch? It would cut through the red tape and bureaucracy and get right to the meat of it. Would that cut out all the delegates trying to put their fingers in it, particularly Glean?"

She said, "It might work, Harry, if you act forcefully and if you, Albus, don't take a backseat for this."

Dumbledore said, "I agree that urgency for a treaty is paramount. I have no understanding as to why Glean, and Fudge by extension, want war with the vampires, but even they must see the provocation and insult in this."

Dumbledore sighed. "I try to remain in the shadows, or not even be present in such matters. I try to lead with moderation and consensus-building in the Wizengamot, but I can be forceful if need be, and this it is the time to do so. If we can go straight to the issues, and if you are right about the vampires, Harry, and I suspect you are, then we will swiftly and forcefully bring about a peace treaty for all to

sign. All of the governments there will look like they are a hindrance to world order if they oppose the same peace that has been acceptable for over a hundred years."

Bones looked again at her lapel watch. "It's now a little more than four hours until nine. I'll Floo back to the Ministry to make your arrangements, and Disapparate to Pont du Hoc. I'll assure Kldonovitch that you are coming to see *him*, Harry. Then and only then will I tell the assembly that you are coming. Your description of the vampires, self-destructive yet with a self-preserving vanity rings true to me. It's time to play up to it.

"I'll have two Aurors with fast brooms here by half six to escort your coach. I'll brief them myself as to their roles."

She smiled a genuine smile. "Gentlemen, for the first time today, I feel we are on to something that can succeed, as bizarre as I would have called it two hours ago. Good luck and God speed to us all." She Flooed away seconds later.

"Can Hagrid Apparate?"

"No. I'll create a Portkey for his escape just in case. Good thought there, Harry. I'll go now and arrange everything with him."

"Thank you, Professor. I need to go back to St. Simon's and do a quick bit of spell modification for something I hope I won't need. I'll dress, and be at Hagrid's paddock before 6:30 at the latest. Oh, and I'll have Dobby fix us a picnic for the trip. I'd intended to invite you to dinner tonight at Greenbees, but that will have to be another time. I'll have a hamper for Hagrid as well - and bag meals for the Aurors."

"That's most thoughtful of you, Harry, thank you for both myself and them. Oh, and meet us in front of the school. When Hagrid brings up the Hogwarts coach, the creatures immediately come to that location to harness up. Amazing and smart, Thestrals are."

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Harry made his way from the Headmaster's office towards the corridor where the cabinet to St. Simon's was situated. He had just less than two hours, and needed to do several things to get ready, including mongering a charm modification for a personal spell. But he had time.

At a corridor intersection he ran into Hermione, Colin Creevey, Luna Lovegood, and Ginny. He was glad to see the four, but he really appreciated the radiant smile on the face of his favorite redheaded rising fifth-year. He asked what they were doing.

Hermione answered, "At the start of the Paladin Program Dumbledore found that he couldn't always match a Paladin with a Paladin for each 'visit.' You weren't the only one with a difficult situation. So he asked these three to help fill the ranks.

"Did you know these three are top in their year, Harry?" she asked.

"I didn't, but it doesn't really surprise me. I knew you all did well. Luna, what do your friends in Ravenclaw say about two Gryffindors in the top ranks with you?"

Luna blushed and hung her head. Ginny said, "It's why they treat her poorly and hide her things. They don't appreciate her, shall we say, 'unique view' of the world, and then she's ahead of them in all their classes. Add to that the fact that she's friends with us, and *we're* ahead of them too, which just adds to their-

"Now, Ginny, girls will be girls," Luna interrupted mangling the old adage.

"I offered to help you, Luna," Harry said, "and that offer still stands. If they don't stop I'll speak to them, or prank them for you..."

"No need, Harry," Luna said, "I have plans for them this year if they continue..." Luna drifted off in the manner Harry had decided meant that she didn't want to talk about it, not that she was an airhead.

Hermione jumped in, obviously to change the subject. "As a part of their reward for helping, Dumbledore offered them the opportunity to attend any group tutoring classes in the four core Auror subjects. He thought they might like to study ahead a little."

Hermione beamed with pride. "Instead these three have thrown themselves into this, taking every class available. I offered to help them even more if they wanted, and they are probably almost ready to take their O.W.L.s for those four courses and make at least an A today, probably an E. By next spring they should score Outstanding in all four if they revise properly between now and then."

Colin said, "I tried to volunteer to be a Paladin, we all three did, but we were turned down. However, we've studied hard and participated in the exercise regimen. I know we didn't take the potions, but I bet we could still hold our own, or at least hold on in the program this year."

Ginny and Luna both nodded in agreement with Colin, determined looks on their faces. Gone was the small boy suffering from Harry-worship. Gone was the vacant stare from Luna. Ginny's lovely face, Harry thought, was very attractive with an unswerving look of resolve etched on it.

Harry gave them a thousand-yard stare for a moment, and then he said, "I've no doubt you'll make fine warriors. Two of you have proven yourselves in battle, and I am sure you would have done yourself proud against the Death Eaters, Colin. You certainly showed the dementors where to get off."

Harry paused, and the three beamed up at him. Then he said, "But I hope you never have to see war again - none of you."

Hermione took this moment to pull the three away towards the Floo to their various summer locales.

"Ginny," Harry said, "could I have a moment, please?"

Ginny could not have shined any brighter in delight, and Hermione, Colin, and even Luna smiled knowingly among the three of them. They left Harry and Ginny quickly, but not without expressing several, 'See you soon's.'"

"Yes, Harry."

"Ginny, the other day at the paddock, I, er, I realized I needed help, not with the Mongering. I'm not ready to take on an apprentice, but help with my, oh, how do I put it?"

Ginny frowned for just a moment as Harry ran his hands through his hair.

"Ginny, I want to shake up the Wizarding world, the academic world at least, but probably the rest of it, too, to some degree. Spell Mongering has made me realize that we sometimes, often, aren't taught the right things. I don't know if the misinformation is intentional or unknowing, but some things are wrong, well, not so much wrong as taught inefficiently."

"Take the first couple of days of Charms. Flitwick is a great professor, but do you remember the start of first year? We spent a whole day on the swish and flick wand movement, and then spent day two having difficulties pronouncing *Wingardium Leviosa* properly. Hermione did it right second day, but no one else did, and Seamus blew up his feather. Did anyone do it right in your class?"

Ginny blushed and said, "I got it to rise and hover a few inches off of the desk top for over ten seconds, but no one else did."

Harry said, "For a first Charm it is difficult to pronounce and harder to manage because you have to maintain three dimensional control at all times and stop and start it, changing directions up, down, and around. I was so frustrated I thought all year I was just too dense to do Charms well. Actually, I'm probably pretty gifted in Charms, but I struggled until fourth year. Learning the Summoning charm for my Firebolt to defeat the dragon sort of opened up my mind for the subject in general"

Harry ran his right hand through his hair again. "Wouldn't it be better to teach a simple enough charm so everyone could succeed on the first day?" Ginny nodded enthusiastically and Harry continued, "And when we arrive at the more advanced stuff it is cluttered with obscure, confusing, and inaccurate theories."

Harry huffed in frustration. "I'm probably not expressing that correctly. The official explanations are not wrong, so much as incomplete or too complex to really help us learn as quickly as we could. Oh!" Harry groaned in frustration.

"Look, you saw how yesterday I showed you three some pretty amazing things with magic. I told you that the Arithmantic calculations and runes in most spells are just either overly constructed or not needed at all. I also showed you that I could cast certain spells without the proper incantations, not just wordlessly, but produce fire with the levitation incantation.

"Everyone thinks Hagrid is a poor wizard; no one has helped him get a new wand, even now that his name is cleared. Well, Hagrid seeing the slug of raw magic yesterday doesn't make him any more powerful than you or Remus, but it does mean he is a lot more powerful than anyone apparently thinks he is. Something is wrong with the system that has Hagrid classed in the same league as the likes of Goyle and Crabbe."

Harry was playing havoc with his hair this day. Ginny placed her hand on his arm, and he immediately calmed down, taking a deep breath.

"Thanks, Ginny." He took another breath. "I've decided I have to discover all I can about magic itself as a Monger. I want to catalogue all of my observations as a start to be able to systematically make a case for changing our basic understanding of magical theory."

"Why don't you cure lycanthropy while you're at it," Ginny cracked, but she did it while looking right in Harry's eyes, and he knew she meant no disrespect for his ideas. She added, "How can I help?"

Harry let loose a long held breath. "I was trying to get up enough courage to ask, Ginny. I need a great, organized, open mind to help me with this major undertaking."

Ginny said, "Then you want... Hermione-"

"-is not really open-minded or available for this, Ginny. You know how much she likes everything to proceed according to the rules, according to the book. Well, this is about more than breaking a few school rules. I want to shatter some of the known rules of magic, to at least some degree, and make major chunks of the theory books obsolete. Can you see Hermione actively participating in that?"

Ginny rewarded him with a twins-caliber mischievous grin. Harry continued, "And I'd be willing to bet that Hermione is not the brightest witch of this generation, just in her year. I bet you're at or near her brain level, you're just not hyper out loud about it, right?"

Ginny blushed. "I did have a career discussion with McGonagall two weeks ago. She let slip that I'm in Hermione's league. She's a bit better in Transfiguration and Arithmancy. I'm a bit better in Charms and Runes. She's a year ahead, obviously, so it's not clear, but we're close. The position doesn't mean anything to me, smartest in a generation. Who cares - well, she does." They both grinned.

Ginny said, "We could be bigger than the twins and the Marauders put together. We could prank the magical world with this, couldn't we?"

Harry smiled. "So, you'll help?"

"I'll gladly be your assistant, Harry."

"Partner, Ginny. You'll bear a heavy load in helping me think through the logic of this, and organize it all. You'll earn an equal spot on the paper or book we write, or an equal spot in the *Daily Prophet* articles when the magical establishment renounces us as crackpots."

Harry looked at his wristwatch, and then towards the corridor. He needed to go prepare for his trip and the ordeal later tonight.

"Going somewhere, Harry?"

Absentmindedly, and in a rush, Harry told her of his rendezvous with the vampire delegation. He kept it light and pleaded his need to run immediately, offering only the simple explanation that the

negotiations were in trouble and he and Dumbledore were going to try to pull Fudge's fat backside out of trouble.

Harry thanked Ginny for agreeing to help him, but hesitated to rush off. He raised his hand and then lowered it. He barely leaned towards her. She stepped forward and gave him a light hug.

"Do be careful, Harry. Good luck." He hesitated, and then patted her on the back.

"I'll be back tomorrow, the next day at least. I'll find you to discuss this further." Making his way through the corridors he smiled broadly at the thought of spending so much time with Ginny because of their project, and then worried throughout his shower about how he might be putting her in danger.

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As Ginny watched Harry go running off, she waited for him to turn and wave before going round the corner. He did and she returned the wave and Harry's broad smile. Once he was gone, Ginny sat down on a nearby bench, trembling.

Keeping her eyes closed, but releasing an occasional tear, she recounted all of the deadly creatures Harry had faced, starting with the basilisk and going all the way through enraged Death Eaters and mad politicians. Now he and Dumbledore were facing who knew how many vampires this evening because an incompetent government was unable to sign a peace treaty.

"Dear Lord," she prayed; something she had little experience with. "Please keep him safe and bring him back to me."

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Harry made his way to the large clearing in the woods behind St Simon's where Fr. William Martin allowed him to monger spells. The previous evening, while it was still light, Harry had completed packaging the Thunderfire charm for sale at this location. He had three power settings, one for stunning vampires, one for causing serious damage, even killing those close enough to it, and a full attack setting, using as much power as the wizard or witch casting it could muster, to cause as much damage as possible.

However, Harry had decided at the end of his meeting with Madam Bones and Professor Dumbledore that it would be good to have a low powered, demonstration version of the charm that would only harm a vampire if he or she were very, very close. It would be a personal charm, one keyed to him only. Harry completed this modification in just a few minutes of mongering, and then he went to his room.

He chatted with Dobby about his wardrobe plans and food requirements, and the elf happily set to work to make food baskets for all involved, as gourmet as Greenbees itself might provide, according to Dobby, *if* they offered picnics. It amazed Harry how much house-elves spoke to each other between families and businesses passing along information to help each other serve more effectively. They did not gossip, but they were a knowledge source Harry respected.

Harry showered, put on his under clothing, and stared at the mirror. It was not a magical mirror. Since Aberration Day, he'd tried to shave only once every other day. Tomorrow would be the second day, but he felt shaving now would be proper. Magical shaving was much easier than the Muggle method, but it still took an effort Harry did not enjoy.

When shopping in Muggle London on the day he'd bought his watch, Harry had gone into a men's shop just out of curiosity. The haberdasher convinced him to buy silken boxer shorts, which he liked, and expensive calf-length nylon socks, which he didn't. Then the man made a major pitch for Harry to buy a hair care product called mousse. The man said that he himself had unruly hair and used the product, and Harry had liked what he saw on the chap. On a whim, Harry purchased the smallest container available.

Harry had tried several times to use the product, but all he'd succeeded in doing was make his hair stand up and/or stick out more, and look even more disorganized.

Staring back and forth between the mousse and the mirror, Harry thought about how he might use the foamy mess to help achieve the appearance of arrogance. As much as he hated the idea, tonight just might be the night to *highlight*, not hide his famous scar.

Harry had also thought recently about how he'd never had a haircut since his aunt had nearly scalped him at a tender age. He'd been experimenting lately with possible Metamorphmagus skills, and had accomplished nothing but lengthening and shortening his hair a small bit.

He close his eyes, visualized his hair in back down to his collar, and pulled up the slightest bit of raw magic from within, from the same source the slug of raw magic came from in Spell Mongering. His head tingled after a few seconds, and he opened his eyes.

His hair fell to his shoulders to the same length Lucius Malfoy wore his, although, Harry's hair was thicker and wavy. The wildness of his hair was controlled to a degree in that its weight at this length kept it from sticking out too much. Harry took a deep breath, scooped up a small blob of the mousse, and in a few minutes he had his hair sticking up in front in a coordinated manner. He didn't know if he had created a good look or not, but he realized wizards seemed to make their own styles and fashion statements. And Harry thought his attempt to *feature* his scar had succeeded.

He scowled in the mirror in a cross between a slightly softened Snape-esque frown and a Draco Malfoy smirk. *I fight Dark Lords, don't mess with me.* He decided he liked the look if he wanted to look unimpressed with everyone else, and smugly arrogant.

Harry put on the dressy battle utilities that Winky had made him. When Dobby had shown her what he'd sewn for Harry, she'd commented on how the rougher material would be functional in battle, but that for every day wear a softer, more fashionable material would serve. She'd made a pair, and they were there for him to wear. He put his six throwing knives in their slots, and was about to Disillusion them, but decided to leave their matte black handles visible.

Father William came in to inquire about Occlumency lessons that night, but stopped when he saw how Harry was attired. Harry told him of his mission. The priest volunteered to pray for his success, and



told Harry that he'd enlist the prayers of those of the friary who knew of the magical world.

Harry didn't quite understand why this comforted him so, but every time Fr. William prayed, good seemed to come of it, and he wasn't stupid enough to turn down any help.

Harry had come to the conclusion that since there was Evil in the world, there had to be Good, and he was unwilling for that to be some mystical goodie-goodie force. Good and Evil had faces in this world, and Harry felt that these matters were personal - not personal meaning 'for each person to decide,' that was nonsense to him. It either was or wasn't true, and all his wishing wouldn't make Voldemort go away.

No, when he thought that Evil and Good were personal, he meant they were person-like, as if there were a God and a Devil. He viewed it not as simplistic or simple-minded, but simply, manifestly true.

Harry believed in magic, which most Muggles thought didn't exist. Why did it take so much more faith to believe that God or a Devil existed? He wasn't planning on going on a crusade for his beliefs, nor was he going to force others to believe as he did. He just believed. He had received too much comfort from reading the scriptures. Father William often quoted a passage, which said that faith came from hearing the Word of God, and Harry had found great peace reading about David, the boy who had defied all odds and defeated the giant.

It wasn't that Harry went looking for peace and found it, as in he manufactured it in his head when reading the book the priest gave him. No, he read the book and found that peace came to him unsolicited. If Father William wanted to pray for him, he was all for it.

Dobby agreed to bring the four various food containers when Harry called him. Dobby's attention to details meant that the picnics would, of course, be charmed to keep the hot food hot and the cold food cold.

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Still ten minutes early by his watch, Harry made his way out of the front doors of the castle. Hagrid had two of the Thestrals present in harness, and six more were milling about, ready for him to hook them up. Harry offered his help, but Hagrid stated that Thestrals were tricky creatures to rig this way, and he'd just as soon do it himself, but he thanked Harry all the same.

Harry noticed two men he'd never seen before walking up from the main gates wearing Auror Blue dress uniforms. Each of them carried a Nimbus 2001 like they were experienced flyers. One looked to Harry to be somewhere in his late forties, and the other was late thirties perhaps, or early forties. The elder of the two addressed him.

"Spell Monger Potter," he said formally, but Harry could not detect any typical Fudge Ministry malice. "I am Senior Auror Bentley Johnson, and this is Auror Samuel Freezemore. We're from the Flying Squad."

The two bowed and Harry moved forward to shake their hands. He said, "Please call me Harry, gentlemen, and thank you for your help on such short notice."

Johnson said, "No, sir, Spell Monger. Madam Bones explained the circumstances. We will remain rigidly proper at all times until you and the Headmaster are delivered back here safely in the near future. We understand your formal role in this and will play our parts to the last measure. Know however, we will let you arrive as you wish, but we will make our way to the deliberations chamber as soon as possible. We have her specific orders that we work for you this trip, and take your orders first. We will be out of the way and not near enough to you to appear as part of your entourage, but know we are your men this night, just in case."

Freezmore stepped forward and added, "We both knew your father in the Auror Corps, and I even knew him a bit here at Hogwarts. He was three years behind me. I was a Hufflepuff Beater his first two years as Chaser for Gryffindor. We've talked to Tonks and Shackbolt. Please understand, Spell Monger, that not all Aurors are like Dawlish and Williamson."

Harry thought he saw a message, perhaps a request, in both men's eyes telling him they disagreed with the current administration. He instantly chose to see these two as allies in this struggle and those to come.

Hesitantly he said, "Er, gentlemen. I thank you again for your service this evening, and your remembrance of my father. I look forward to less formal conversations in the future."

Both men stood to attention and clicked their heels together in unison.

Out of the corner of his eye Harry saw Dumbledore exit the castle. He noticed Hagrid had four more Thestrals to hitch. Harry stepped back from the two Aurors. He drew one of his wands, described a square in the air, and called, "Dobby."

In three seconds the house-elf appeared, heavily laden with two wicker baskets of food, and two smaller bags as well. "Gentlemen, this is Dobby, my friend and chief of staff of House Potter." Dobby beamed at this declaration. Harry continued, "I doubt you've had time to eat this evening, and since it's half six, and we will be in the air for at least two hours, I asked Dobby to prepare meals for you that you can eat in flight whenever you chose." The Aurors seemed genuinely touched that Harry had thought of their comforts for the trip.

Dumbledore walked over and the Aurors, sticking to their efforts to be formal, stepped back so Harry and the ancient could hold a private discussion if they chose.

"You look dashing and dangerous, Harry. Appropriate for our task this evening. Hagrid assures me we will be airborne in five minutes."

"Thank you, Professor, you should wear black more often, it becomes you." They both smiled.

"Headmaster, standing here and thinking about magical transportation has brought to mind a question I have for you. Hermione has a birthday in mid-September, and she's the first friend of mine to come of

age. She asked if I'd help her learn to Apparate at that time. She's checked out a book from the library on the matter that Madame Pince said was the best on the subject, *Apparation*, by a Quentin Cooper."

"Yes, Harry, that is probably the finest work on the matter. As a skilled practitioner of that mode of transportation, there is nothing I think you can learn from that book, but as a Spell Monger, if you want to study the theory of it, there is little else to consult."

"I may read it for that," Harry said, "But my question has to do with the word, 'Apparation.' You say 'App-a-RA-tion' and so does everyone else I know, but I noticed the official written test used the word, 'App-a-RI-tion, spelled with an 'I,' and the free Ministry booklet there spelled it that way. I always thought an apparition was a ghost. Isn't that confusing?"

"Ah, yes, more bureaucratic mumbo-jumbo. Apparation was developed by the Ministry Arithmantic Spell Crafters. They started work on it in the late fourteen hundreds, and finally succeeded in the early seventeenth century - over a hundred years of research. For another hundred years or so it was used here in Great Britain only for short distances, a few miles at most. The Floo Network was in place and distance travel by Apparating was just never considered, I believe.

"Well, in the late sixteen hundreds, Quentin Cooper was a member of the first group of four witches and wizards that went to the American colonies as they were known at the time. There were no Floos there of course, and the distances of that continent are daunting in comparison to our island home. You might think that a scholarly treatise such as his would be written by a Ravenclaw, but Cooper was a Gryffindor, and quite the intellectual. When you meet the Americans coming to join the Paladin Program this September, you'll find they ascribe different characteristics to their houses than we do, yet attribute them to the same house names we use. For example, the Gryffindors are the studious ones.

"In addition to his book on Apparation, Quentin Cooper wrote the defining work on Portkeys, which the Americans also use extensively. That second book is in the Restricted Section because Portkey production is strictly regulated here in Great Britain."

Harry nodded. He wished for a moment that Dumbledore, not Binns taught History of Magic. He wondered what else he didn't know he did not know.

"The change from 'App-a-RA-tion' to 'App-a-RI-tion' started after the war with Grindelwald, but wasn't voted on by the Wizengamot until 1978. A number of Americans came here to England during that war when we were sorely pressed. Those early volunteers helped us hold on during the darkest days. When the magicals of that nation formally declared war on Grindelwald, they poured manpower and materiel into our efforts. Truly, one of the top factors enabling us to survive and to eventually stop Grindelwald was their help. I ultimately defeated him, but they made it possible to reach that point.

"Don't misunderstand me, Harry. I believe we could have won eventually without their help, but it was by no means a sure thing. And their assistance saved many lives and cut short that war by years.

"Many here in our country did not like them, and frankly the 'Yanks,' as the British Muggles called

them were not all perfect diplomats. After the war, and after the Americans went home, a backlash started to eradicate their cultural influences, even those not distasteful. 'Apparation with an 'A' was deemed an American term, and so Apparition with an 'I' has come into governmental use. I, most of the staff, and your parents' generation were trained in Apparation using the word with the "A," and so old habits die hard."

"I read the Ministry booklet, sir," Harry said, "Which I found did not really describe what I experience when Apparating, but it did not change the words 'Apparate' and Disapparate to 'App-a-RITE' or "Dis-app-a-RITE,' and it was still 'App-a-RA-ting.'"

Harry added, "In the English language it's 'educate' and 'education,' 'operate' and 'operation,' and 'articulate' and 'articulation,' just to name many such derivatives. Isn't 'App-a-RI-tion' just a MIS-art-i-cu-LA-tion?"

Dumbledore simply shrugged his shoulders. "I cannot shed any light on how some Ministry agencies make their decisions."

Harry was about to ask if the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot couldn't understand, how could anyone, but just then Hagrid walked over, his harnessing complete. Harry quickly chose to end the confusing conversation, and gave Hagrid his hamper of food for the trip.

Hagrid said, "Thank you, 'arry, and don't you look the dapper sort." He looked at the two Aurors so formally dressed and Dumbledore all in black with his Order of Merlin pin. Hagrid straightened up. "Er, sorry." From somewhere he pulled an ancient stovepipe hat out of his coat and placed it on his head. He said, "Spell Monger Potter, sir, yon carriage awaits!" And then he took his hat off in a clumsy, formal bow.

Dumbledore pulled out his watch and spoke up so the Aurors could hear also, "Gentlemen. In three minutes a window in the Hogwarts' wards will open." The Aurors walked over to them and the headmaster continued, "It will shut as we leave. We should mount up. You two on the brooms just sit up top with Hagrid until we are through the wards. Then, I believe you can take off from there."

It was just over three minutes later that Harry felt their passage through the wards. There was no physical feeling, no bump or shaking of the magnificent Hogwarts carriage, but he felt the magic of it. Dumbledore had been watching him closely, and noticed when he noticed.

"You felt that, didn't you, Harry?" After a nod from his companion the headmaster continued, "It is an extremely rare ability to feel a ward when you pass through an opening in it. You, however, felt the wards on all sides of the temporary portal. If you were trying to pass through the wards themselves at that point, you would feel them tossing you back out. Only at the front gate do you pass through without feeling them, but they detect and report to me all those who do so and are not currently students.

"Before this summer you were well on your way to becoming a powerful wizard, so you might have felt them anyway. But the Paladin Program and your Spell Mongering have no doubt increased many fold your sensitivity to such things. I would venture that one percent perhaps of all wizards and

witches can feel the wards as you just did. Does that bother you?"

"What? Being in that one percent?" Receiving a nod Harry answered. "It's just one more thing, Professor. I've abandoned any aspiration to be normal. I can't seem to turn around without doing something that marvels or frightens people, so I decided earlier this summer in all that deep long-term thinking I was doing that I'd just go forward regardless.

"I have a few good friends. There are others that are sort of my friends. I will meet more people as I fight in this war. I'll either be a hero or a villain when it's all over. If a villain, I'll disappear into some other part of the world or into the Muggle world if all magical people hate me.

"If I'm a hero it might be worse than leaving this world. The-Boy-Who-Lived is bad enough. The-Final-Victor or some other such poppycock will be just too much to bear. I truly hate it, but I've not been able to shake it so far. It won't get any better, will it?"

"I'm afraid not, Harry," Dumbledore said. "But please tell me, why do you think you might be a villain of some sort, when you win?"

"In a word - Fudge. I win the Tri-Wizard Tournament and he says that I'm unstable. I fight Voldemort in the Department of Mysteries and he says that I'm delusional a month after he admits Tom's alive. I train students to do the Patronus and he gives Umbridge the credit. I become a Spell Monger and he wants me locked up."

Harry looked at the Headmaster. "He wanted me arrested, or something for killing those Death Eaters, didn't he?" Dumbledore nodded sadly. Harry continued, "So, I kill Riddle and let's say I have to use the Killing Curse. You know Fudge'll try to put me in Azkaban, don't you? And with the *Daily Prophet* spouting the solid Fudge line everyday, I'll never get a fair shake in popular opinion. And what's to stop him from stacking a Wizengamot trial against me more effectively than he did last summer?"

Harry snorted a bit. "No, sir. When I defeat Riddle, I'll fare no better unless something changes. I just don't know what."

Harry looked out the window at the Scottish scenery passing below. "Disillusionments on the coach? No, a charm..." His wand shot out of his right holster, and he waved it in the air and mumbled an incantation. Harry closed his eyes for a second and looked out again with a slightly dilated look. "Er... ahhh," he smiled. "A combination of a Transfiguration spell to make the air around the coach more substantial, and then a complex charm allowing the image one would see if looking through the space where the coach is, to be seen on the other side. Why not just Disillusionment?"

"Very good, Harry. Actually, we are too big and have too much metal in the framework of this old rig for a simple Disillusionment spell, which only visually masks our presence. This combination of magic makes us impervious to Muggle RDF, what I think they now call radar. During the Grindelwald war a British night fighter aeroplane almost collided with this coach. The fighter ground handlers sent it our way when they identified its metal signature. The pilot could not see the coach, but the aeroplane moved at such speed that a Muggle Repelling charm had no effect. The near miss greatly

distressed Headmaster Dippet. I was assigned to come up with a solution. This spell combination was it.

"By hardening the air around the coach so to speak, the radio direction finding beams are bent around us and do not return a signature to the detectors. You can't attach a Disillusionment spell to the hardened air. The charm passing the view from the other side attaches readily enough and does render us completely invisible."

Harry said, "And I guess the goggles the Aurors are wearing allow them to see us. Their Disillusionments are weakened a bit in the wind, but not too bad. That's how we keep track of them."

Harry stopped and looked outside at the spells for several seconds concentrating on the coach again. "The runes are doing nothing for you, Professor. They add a permanence that is important in terms of location, but since we're moving, they just add drag to the spell. You have to renew it every, oh, twenty minutes or so, right?"

"Every fifteen minutes just to be safe. I have to do it now as a matter of fact." Dumbledore drew his wand and performed the two spells in quick succession. He said, "Adding personal power doesn't help it last longer, but it's not draining to perform, at least not for me. It's just irritating to have to remember so often."

Harry said, "It wouldn't be good mongering practice to work on it here, but I could strip out the useless runes, and make it so your personal power *would* affect longevity. The Image Projecting charm or whatever it's called wears out because the spell hardening the air around it dissipates quickly, and the projecting charm degrades from the inside. With your strength it should go a minimum of several hours, but that's a guess. Existing Spell Mongering analytical tools don't tell me about such details on non-Mongered spell work, and I haven't had time or the inspiration to make new tools to analyze more modern spells like that."

Harry turned back to him and smiled. "I'll work on it when we're back home. Perhaps next trip you can forget about the renewing those spells so often. And if I can fabricate my character set, I can make it something that sticks permanently to the coach with a magical on-off switch so to speak."

"Your character set?"

"Yes, Professor. Ancient Runes have three basic uses in our world, as you know. They are historical in that they can record history, and they can also be historically prophetic or predictive. Second, they can be used in anchoring items, such as tying wards to a location. The third use is in actual magical applications such as the enchantment of existing items, and adding permanence to conjured and transfigured things, or such.

Well, I have two problems with runes used in magic as it is today. First, they put runes in every spell, even when they aren't needed. In a Battle Barrier spell, the time a barrier is needed is minutes, a half-hour at most. The ability to withstand a curse or hex is not related to the runes. Stripping the runes out of it completely causes it to be much easier to cast, less draining, and simpler for lower-power witches and wizards. I won't even mention how the unnecessary Arithmancy complicates matters.

"The second problem is that when runes *are* needed in a spell, they are entirely too complex, in what I've seen at least. I looked at the guts of a very basic warding spell, the charm to keep a personal diary private. All it really needs from the runes to make the secrecy permanent is something like, 'Only I can open this,' with a link to the blood access module of the magic. However, there are fifty-three runes arranged in a four by three matrix to accomplish that, with several just hanging on. It's like the Arithmantic Spell Crafters and their runes experts have a mutual agreement with the Guild of Bookbinders to keep the Guild's ability to make such private journals only accessible to those who buy the charmed books from them.

"It reminds me of some of the terrible things Uncle Vernon says about trade unions. I know the workers were being abused a hundred years ago or so, and needed to work together for decent wages and safe conditions, but he mentioned how the unions now are stopping Grunnings from being competitive. The workers at his factory asked for pay raises when they were already better paid than most in that industry. Then Grunnings lost three big contracts that year, and had to fire three hundred workers. I'm sure those families *without* income are glad that those still with jobs are being better paid than any other drill workers in the country." The sarcasm was evident in Harry's last words.

"Anyway, I've just decided that since the actual words of a spell don't make any difference to the magic itself, then it makes sense to me that the actual rune characters don't make any difference either. It's only important that the characters make sense to me, the creator of the spell, and accomplish what I want."

Harry smiled, anticipating the impact of his next words. "Magic isn't as rigid as what we've been taught, Professor. It's much more flexible and open to do what we want. *WE* are the limitations on magic, and not just our own personal power limitations. *WE* restrict ourselves."

Harry grinned and continued, "So, I've assigned myself the project of finding a streamlined set of characters that do what runes do, without the limitations or power draining aspects of existing runes."

With this bombshell Harry fully turned Dumbledore's way and said, "I've already started deconstructing most of the spells I use to get rid of most Arithmantic formulas. The math's too complex. I've mongered the Arrow Shooting spell to shoot five arrows at a time. There's an old spell in the books from over six hundred years ago to shoot out three arrows at once. The Arithmancy for it is a formula with forty-three numbers and symbols in it. It was abandoned, I think because it takes entirely too much power to use it. The rudimentary Monger's analysis tool says that the three-arrow-version takes over fourteen times the personal magical energy to shoot three than one. Do you know how I got my version to shoot five arrows?"

After a second Dumbledore shook his head in a stunned manner.

"I chose a character that looks like a tic-tac-toe box, do you know the Muggle game?"

"It's a magical children's game, too, Harry," the Headmaster said.

Harry said, "Well, I just decided that symbol would be an anchor symbol, tying the calculation to the spell. Then I simply added 'times five' to it." Harry shot his wand out of its holster and wrote in

smoke characters in the air of the coach:

#x5

"Those three characters replaced forty-three symbols in the Crafter's Three Arrow spell. And I can barely feel a difference in power drain to shoot five arrows instead of one. I stopped at five because after five, the arrows coming out lose accuracy." Harry stopped and looked at his mentor. The young man had a look on his face that seemed to search for the older man's reaction to this bit of information.

"Now, if I could determine a way to shoot out arrows in another direction, and then the arrows come at my target from the side fifteen or twenty seconds later, *that* would be worth the Arithmantic and Runic drag of a complex spell. However, as it would be currently configured by the Spell Crafters, you and I together couldn't cast such a spell created with standard methods."

After several long moments Dumbledore said, "Remus told me that you and your Spell Mongery were amazing. What you tell me is just that. Your guardian did say that I should see this, or at least attempt to see it, as he told me that not all can. Two of our school founders couldn't see it, it seems."

"Yes, sir. It is probably best that you attempt to *see* a demonstration. A picture is worth a thousand Galleons." He paused and said, "Are you hungry? I only had a light lunch."

While they ate Harry asked about any times Dumbledore had negotiated with vampires in the past. The Headmaster stated that he had not done much, other than being present at an armistice signing before the official peace talks for the vampire war he had fought in right out of Hogwarts. He'd made a slight name for himself as a fighter and was much taller than any of the negotiators or officers at the signing. At the last minute they asked him to go and stand around looking menacing. "We'd won this war, for the most part, and the vampires had asked for the peace talks. We'd destroyed many of their grander homes and pleasure resorts, so they were ready to sue for peace."

Dumbledore looked out into nothingness for a second and said, "Telemachus Grind's observations about their comforts and their desire to play loose with their lives were still accurate over a hundred and thirty years ago based on my limited observations. So tonight we do not go in with this approach without some more recent indications that it rings true."

Harry asked about the fighting and the peace talks from Dumbledore's many conflicts from over a century of service. Like most warriors, Dumbledore did not want to discuss the actual fighting, and Harry had asked about it positing the question stating, "I'll understand if you don't want to talk about it. I know I'd rather not discuss the fights I've been in."

They did however talk generally about the ways the wars differed and how they were similar - over all strategies, differences in the enemies' tactics, and such.



Dumbledore cleared his throat signaling a change in subject. "We have just less than thirty minutes before time for the talks to resume, and about twenty minutes before we arrive, if I judge the coast line properly. I want to tell you something, briefly touching on the issues for which you forgave me - regarding your bad time with the Dursleys and with Professor Snape."

"There's no need, Prof-"

Dumbledore held up his hand. "You were right, I cannot explain them and I am more grateful than I can express for your kind forgiveness. But I do want to tell of one set of experiences from the Grindelwald war that relates to this in an odd manner, shall we say."

The older man looked his age for the next few minutes. "The year the basilisk killed Myrtle, after Tom Riddle finished Hogwarts that spring of 1943, I also left Hogwarts to go fight the war full time.

"Some Grindelwald supporters who had remained inactive here in England finally rose up and attacked at several key places. Nearly a hundred witches and wizards, including children died in the attacks before we stopped them. The attackers were all members of a pureblood association that had seemed harmless before. Over one hundred and thirty other members of that organization remained alive, and had not risen up in butchery.

"Several school friends of mine were in that group, but my wife had been killed by them, as had the families of a number of other prominent anti-Grindelwalders. I did not initiate the idea of imprisoning these people, but I carried out many of the roundup raids to take them and their families off to an internment camp on an island in the North Sea. It was not Azkaban, no dementors, but not much more hospitable.

"I promptly forgot about them until after I recovered from the wounds from my final battle. It was in September of 1945, with a shiny new Order of Merlin First Class in my bag, that I went to that island." Dumbledore stopped for a moment and squeezed his nose at his eyes.

"I found that of the three hundred and fifty-two people imprisoned there, all of the children under the age of seven, all but nine of those under the age of seventeen, and seventy-four others left there to rot, had died of disease, depredation, or malnutrition.

"That was a terrible tragedy. It pierced me that all four of my friends and all their family members had perished. To my personal horror I found that these four friends had kept journals and had willed them to me. I could do no less than read them. They very frankly catalogued every act of degradation, every illness, and every slow and painful death. They never accused me of anything, but it would have been a mercy if they had. *I* accuse myself even to this day of more than their deaths. Had I been more believing in their innocence, I might have spared them that end."

Dumbledore looked Harry straight in the eyes. "Harry, this was the final assault on my mind of the horrors of war - I had bottled up all of the traumatic experiences of my war and suppressed them in my subconscious. When I finished reading the last journal left to me, I went mad for nearly a week. I spent more than a month in St. Mungo's recovering."

A look of shock displayed itself on Harry's face.

"I recovered because a psychological medi-wizard helped me construct a strong wall of blind trust in 'the goodness of man.' I could not leave until I had erected an almost irrationally strong system of beliefs enabling me to always see the good in everyone - **everyone**, apparently even when the good was not there.

"I believed in the good in Mundungus Fletcher, which *is* there, but I refused to see his thieving until I caught him doing it myself. I tell you now that Severus Snape is on our side, but I refused to see his unacceptable treatment of you and others until you stuck my long, crooked nose in it." He smiled at this and continued. "And I could not believe anyone would treat a small child like the Dursleys treated you, so I did not check. And a bit of my madness it seems, refused to let me see the evidence of bad treatment you displayed every September first.

"Now, I believe I have learned what I hope will be the last lesson from that prison island." The old man had aged noticeably in the last minutes.

"Possibly two of my four friends could have done something pro-Grindelwald before imprisonment; the other two never would have. They should have been individually judged and given Veritaserum at the time right after the attacks, not imprisoned wholesale as a group. Another lesson I recently learned from you is that along with those imprisoned there, the camp guards and the chief warden should have been inspected regularly. I was delighted when a strict disciplinarian with family also killed in the raids was appointed to the prison as warden."

A tear slowly made its way down his cheek. "And in like manner I left you to the tender mercies of your aunt, uncle, and a Potions master, all of whom had reason to hate you.

"You gave me your forgiveness and I knew when you gave it, it was sincere. I do not deserve it, and I know of no way to make it up to you. You were right, there is nothing to say other than to tender my most sincere and most useless apologies."

The professor sighed. "I tell you that your Headmaster is a bit mad, just as Percy Weasley told you on your first night at Hogwarts. I was to be made Headmaster in 1946, but my bout with insanity kept me from that post until the last member of the Board of Governors who'd been on hand in 1945, left the Board in 1968. In December 1970, I was unanimously chosen by the Board to take the headmaster's position, and did so at the end of school year in the spring of 1971."

After a very long pause he said, "My boy, I will need you to watch over me for my remaining years. You see, I will be incapable of rational decision-making where you are concerned. I will attempt to spoil you, then overly protect you, and then give you too much freedom to do as you will. You ask for a partnership; I give it to you, but you must be careful of what you request. I will most probably give you that which you seek, even if I feel it is not good for you. I'll just do it. I am undone in regards to you. My failure stands in stark contrast to your successes. I ask that you seek the counsel of Miss Granger or Professor McGonagall before making an irregular request of me, for I have no objectivity now when it comes to you.

"Take this venture to meet the vampires. For half an hour while we were apart I felt sure I should not allow you to go, for your safety. Then, I realized that you are the only hope, and I was ready to allow you to go alone, knowing you would succeed as you always have. Now, I believe I am in my right mind about you on this matter at least. You are most assuredly our best hope, yet it is not clear you should be risked so. But I know you are now on a mission, a peace mission. You may not have another such mission for years to come. I want you to have some chance to stop a war, since all you've seen so far, and will probably only see for the near future, is more and more violence."

Harry sat there stunned. A banging from Hagrid interrupted the moment. Suddenly Dumbledore was back to being the cool, collected 'greatest, wisest wizard alive.'

"That signal, Harry, tells us that we are three or four minutes out. Do you have any additional ideas, or does the Spell Monger go in all arrogant and self-assured, with the Supreme Mugwump at his side?" His eyes twinkled. And all of a sudden it seemed apparent that the old Headmaster was back.

"No. Professor, we go in and wait near the meeting chamber. We arrive a few minutes before nine o'clock, and I hope to show myself confident to the point of disdain for all but the vampires, and with Ambassador Glean present my disdain will be most genuine.

"I go straight to Count Kldonovitch and start by offering my friendship as Spell Monger. All the time I stand there ready to burn them alive, er dead, as it seems. I ask for a return to the way things were, with a slightly veiled threat to get them to return to a peaceful status. What's the phrase - 'return to status quo ante?'"

"That is the expression indeed, Harry. You have developed quite the vocabulary this summer."

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Pont du Hoc is a large stone mass jutting jaggedly straight up more than one hundred feet above one of the non-descript beaches on the Normandy coast. In Muggle history it had one day of fame. On June 6, 1944, it was the gun emplacement Allies' most feared in the D-Day invasion landings. A special assault force of American Rangers trained for months to scale those heights and knock out those guns before the invasion beaches were destroyed.

Against all odds, the Rangers succeeded, facing withering opposition, only to find that there were not, and had never been any guns in the facilities.

Muggle history cannot tell us why this was a more valuable war victory than a mere blocking action to prevent the guns from being hastily brought into action. In fact, the location had originally been prepared to amplify the psychic mind reading abilities of Grindelwald's top twelve Seers. The cavern the Allies thought of as a huge gun emplacement had been carved from stone and magically enlarged to provide a 'listening chamber' for the Seers, to read the thoughts of those in charge of the Allied Magical Forces to inform Grindelwald of their plans, and to read the minds of SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces) leaders - the ones planning the Muggle invasion.

The night all twelve Seers first arrived and planned to begin 'tuning in,' was the first night the British

Mosquitoes, low flying precision bombers, dropped a load of highly explosive, deep penetration bombs throughout the facility. The twelve Seers were all killed with the first bomb. Otherwise they would have Disappeared away. The bombers came in *below* Pont du Hoc and rose up at the last second to sling their bombs straight through the small horizontal openings. To this day, Muggles think these air attacks were ineffective.

In typical fashion Grindelwald did not inform the Muggle German forces that the facility no longer served his purpose, so they doggedly guarded it until driven off on that invasion morning. The uninstalled 155mm guns that the Rangers found nearby had only been placed to support the Seers' defenses.

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Since that war, Pont du Hoc had served on several occasions as a place to hold Wizarding political negotiations. Its creation as a place to amplify the abilities of Seers, also heightened the senses of any who entered the great chamber. Everyone felt more conscious of his or her surroundings and more attuned to the concerns of those around them.

It is a rare event in history when politicians, Muggle or magical, actively seek to be more aware of their opponents' sensibilities. As to whether it truly worked in this capacity is anyone's guess, but all felt like it did, so....

On this day in August, 1996, when the natural stone edifice came into view, the two Aurors peeled off to allow the Hogwarts coach to arrive 'unescorted.' The Aurors then arrived five minutes later and surreptitiously positioned themselves where they could act on Spell Monger Potter's orders if needed.

The coach arrived to little fanfare from other delegates, but rest assured, the major players in this night's drama were aware of their presence.

Hagrid just sat there. No one moved from within the coach and no one approached it. With two minutes to go before the appointed hour, Hagrid, spryly for one his size, jumped down and opened the coach door.

Dumbledore exited the coach and stood there waiting for his companion. The charade of the powerful Spell Monger needed to be played. Harry came to the door of the coach and stood glancing around with a look of disdain on his face. Slowly he descended and thanked Hagrid, who couldn't help winking at his best student friend and whispered, "Good luck."

The official appointed to bring them to the main chamber scurried up. He wore the robes of a minor British Ministry of Magic functionary, and spoke directly to Dumbledore in a fussy, presumptive tone, "You are late, Headmaster, Minister Fudge is not pleased. If you will, er..."

Dumbledore stood there ignoring the man. The headmaster looked to Harry, who waited for the lackey to turn his way. Finally the man looked at the younger wizard.

*I am Spell Monger Potter.*" His voice sounded not too far from the snarkiness of Snape addressing a

Gryffindor who had just melted a cauldron. "I am the one invited here for these negotiations. Now, I've politely introduced myself. Isn't it time for you to use your manners, assuming you possess them?"

Harry's eyes shimmered with indignant green-ness. There was a slight feel of static electricity in the air. A breeze no one felt stirred his robes, giving him an added air of authority and power. The minion visibly shrank an inch or two under Harry's withering stare. He stuttered his apologies and gave his name as Terwilliger.

"Well, Mr. Terwilliger, Professor Dumbledore is here tonight to assist me in these negotiations. Before we proceed, I understand Count Kldonovitch of the Vlad Coven leads the vampire delegates, and Baron Ratner of the Princip Coven is here as well. Who else is a part of their delegation?"

"Er, that is, Minister Fudge wants to brief you on your role-"

Harry's anger clearly showed itself. "Fudge and his heavy-handed machinations are why I am here tonight. Answer my questions or go tell the vampires why I have returned to England." His eyes were even more intense. The unfelt breeze once again ruffled his robes.

Terwilliger actually shivered, though it was a warm, almost balmy night. "Er... that is to say, yes... yes, Count Pavel Kldonovitch and Baron Sergei Ratner are present. The Count indeed leads the delegation and primarily consults with the Graf Hans-Joachim Soderberg of the Wittgenstein Coven. Baron Ratner seems, well, he seems rather put out to be here, and speaks only when spoken to, which he rarely is, and then he speaks as briefly as possible."

"Very good, Mr. Terwilliger, what other useful information do you have for me?"

The man squirmed before Harry's blistering gaze. "But, but Minister Fudge-"

"...is not a part of my plans this evening." Harry said coldly. "You can help or not, but I will remember you one way or the other. Are there any other vampires?"

"Er, none, not even body guards. They are most frightful. They obviously do not care about the outcome of these talks, and seem to only be here to humor us. That's why, I believe, Ambassador Glean threatened them, which was, in hindsight, counterproductive."

Harry looked at Dumbledore. They shared a knowing look. Harry asked, "What else, Terwilliger?"

"Well, the only ones who seem to command any respect from the vampires are Acting Minister Oblansk of Bulgaria, and the Acting Head of the Bulgarian Aurors, Mr. Krum. Of course, Baron Ratner pays little heed to anyone." Terwilliger warmed to his part as chronicler of the personalities of the talks. Soon, he devolved into gossip about sniping and slights among the undersecretaries of his ilk.

Harry interrupted. "That is enough for now. Please lead me to the chamber and halt at the door. Do not lead me to them or anyone else. Leave us unless I call for you."

"But Minister Fudge-" Terwilliger whined.

"...is not a part of the solution tonight, Terwilliger. Look into my eyes. I know exactly what I am doing. I have one chance to fix these problems. If I fail, you may find your neck bleeding soon." The little man shivered again. "Now, do as I say. Lead the way."

As they walked slowly, Terwilliger twice scurried ahead too far, and stopped for them to catch up. Harry appeared to be in no rush, even though Terwilliger looked at his watch constantly. As they walked, Dumbledore bent over to mutter to Harry, "You will have to tell me about the charm to make your robes flutter behind you?"

"Of course, Professor," Harry said, cracking the first smile he'd had since exiting the coach.

The entrance came into view, and as they neared Madam Bones approached the two. She said nothing openly, and the three looked into the room. She spoke surreptitiously from the side of her mouth. "Harry, I have told the Count you are here to meet him alone, and I told him you are quite displeased with your misrepresentation thus far by our government. He thanked me sincerely and gave a rare smile to Soderberg, and a smirk to Ratner."

"Thank you, now," Harry spoke while not looking at Bones. "Please leave me. As much as I respect you, I must distance myself from our government."

"I understand. Fudge won't like it, but I understand. Freezemore and Johnson, *your* Aurors are here and ready to obey you. I have two with me ready to act on your command as well. The rest of ours here follow Fudge, including your favorites, Dawlish and Williamson. Be careful Harry, and God speed."

Harry called up his Fluttering Robes charm at its strongest setting, and the sound of the wind called attention to him.

He strode purposely towards the vampire delegation nearly seventy feet away. Peripherally several stepped to block his path, but failed. Fudge moved to intercept him and said, "See here, Potter-"

Dumbledore deftly moved to place himself in Fudge's way, and Harry strode on towards the vampires. They were against a wall, near a table. As Harry neared, the tallest of the three came forward. He appeared to be in his late forties, but appearances meant nothing with the undead. At his side, was another delegate appearing to be nearer sixty or sixty-five. Holding back was the one who turned out to be Ratner, a vampire appearing to be late twenties or so.

Harry moved to the front vampire, clicked his heels together, and bowed a quick, sharp bow. He said, "I break protocol I am sure, but I am no diplomat. I am Spell Monger Potter, here to pay my respects and offer my friendship to Count Kldonovitch."

This was it. His entire strategy hung on this approach working as it had for Telemachus Grind nearly a thousand years before.

The silence, which lasted for mere seconds but seemed a small eternity, ended with a puzzling, lopsided smile from the nearest vampire. He clicked his heels together as well. He deepened the

smirk factor of his near grin, and spoke clearly and as loudly as Harry had. All by now were jockeying to hear.

His voice was a cliché of all of the vampire movies ever produced, from his toothy inflections to the Eastern European accent. "I am Count Pavel Kldonovitch of the Vlad Coven, and designated Grand Margrave over all vampire covens of Europe and Western Asia. On behalf of those I represent, *and for myself*, I accept your offer of friendship, Spell Monger."

Harry could not hold back a small sigh of relief and a small grin. The Count smiled a bit broader, and winked at him.

Harry half turned, not taking his eyes off of the Count. "Grand Margrave, may I present Professor Albus Dumbledore, Order of Merlin, First Class, and Grand Sorcerer; Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards; Chief Warlock of the British Wizengamot, and my assistant for this evening." Gasps were heard throughout the room.

"I met your Headmaster in battle, a hundred and forty years ago, Spell Monger. It is a delight to meet him again under more civil circumstances." Harry and the Count barely broke eye contact as the vampire nodded briefly to Dumbledore.

"Great Spell Monger, may I present Graf Hans-Joachin Soderberg, head of the Wittgenstein Coven." Both looked at each other and clicked their heels with a short bow. "And finally, Baron Ratner of the Princip-"

At that exact moment Harry looked to the youngest vampire present. This gave him the fraction of a second warning he needed to turn disaster into victory.

With a horrendous roar, Ratner bared his fangs and lunged at Harry. At the point in his life when Ratner had been bitten, he was an athlete. He was massively strong, though only an inch taller than Harry. Ratner moved his sharp incisors to within less than three inches of Harry's neck. In this effort the Baron had also pushed Harry over onto the ground and was struggling with his hands to push Harry's head to the side for better access to flesh.

Harry Potter, first to finish the Paladin Program this summer, was not the skinny lad of three months before. He had exercised each day two times, even occasionally three times the amount asked of participants. He had arms that resembled steel bars, and all of his body was a coiled spring ready to exert itself. He used every bit of that strength to push the inhumanly strong Ratner back to the full extent of Harry's own reach.

Then Harry pulled one hand away from Ratner and turned his face to the side, closing his eyes tightly.

Ratner loosened his grip for a brief moment, preparing to plunge at the neck that appeared to now be offered to him. At that moment Harry's free right hand appeared before the attacker's face, and the Spell Monger snapped his fingers.

That afternoon Harry Potter had mongered a tiny fractional discharge of Thunderfire and aligned it to

his abilities to do wandless and wordless magic. In this form few would be interested in purchasing it, and fewer still would find themselves in the unique situation where Harry found himself at this moment.

At less than three inches from his face, Baron Ratner took the full brunt of this tiny amount of Thunderfire right in his eyes, while inhaling its heat into his sinus cavities. The scream of pain, agony wrenched from a being whose eyes were burned instantly from their sockets, and whose mucus membranes in his nasal passage were seared, was soul chilling. After this scream Ratner passed out.

All present were stunned. They had in less than seven seconds heard the growl of a vampire attack, the crash of two bodies thudding into the floor, and the animalistic howl of terrible pain. They'd seen a flash of light and inhaled in moments both the smell of an indistinguishable explosive and the stench of burned flesh.

Harry shoved Ratner off of him just in time to see Dawlish reach around several delegates and cast a Killing Curse at the Count, which missed as the Auror's arm was jostled.

In a move known of circus acrobats, Harry popped up onto his feet from his back. With Seeker fast reflexes and movements that almost blurred his body to those looking, Harry sprang in between the vampires dazed by the light, and Fudge's two personal Aurors, Dawlish and Williamson.

Harry cast a Shield Spell to block Williamson's stunner and shouted for them to cease firing. At the same time Harry used his back to push the vampires, dazed from the light, back against the wall to give him room to defend them and hopefully make them smaller targets. In doing this he placed Count Kldonovitch's face - mouth - teeth - right within inches of his neck. Many present gasped when the Count looked straight at his neck and smiled.

"Move, Potter. I'll kill your attackers!" Dawlish shouted and stepped to the side. Harry shouted for him to stop, but the Auror pulled back his arm and began the invocation for the Killing Curse, aiming it at Graf Soderberg, who had fallen to the side.

The Killing Curse would not kill a vampire. If it did, there would be no need for Thunderfire. But at this point blank range that curse could cause grievous pain for several days. The vampire would suffer from serious internal damage. In an actual fight, a vampire moved too swiftly to be so directly hit by any curse, so even that serious an impact by the Killing Curse rarely happened to a vampire. Thunderfire was one of the few things that could daze a vampire to stay still long enough for any curse to be cast in such close proximity.

Dawlish began the incantation, and Harry had no time to cast any shield or counter curse - none existed for this Unforgivable. Harry pushed a blast of raw magic out from his bare left hand right at Dawlish's wand hand. The wand disintegrated and those close enough could hear the many small bones in the Auror's hand shatter as well. Dawlish starred blankly at his mangled right hand and what was left of his wand for a long moment, before he too screamed in pain and fainted.

Harry took a step forward raising his hands and popping both wands out of their holsters, ready for use. He looked even more menacing to those who now had a new reason to fear him. Dumbledore



stepped to his side, wand drawn. Freezemore and Johnson appeared there as well, ready to act.

Fudge was both furious at this, Harry's latest action, and backing away in fear. Ambassador Glean was being jostled aside by Madam Bones. Acting Minister Oblansk and Acting Auror Director Krum pushed forward.

Harry finally said. "If there are no more *interruptions* , I'd like to finish my conversation with the Count." Harry turned back to the vampires. Dumbledore and Harry's two assigned Aurors spread apart so others could hear, but kept all away from Harry.

Before our hero could speak the Count said, "You turned your back to me to protect me from harm." It was half statement, half question. Harry nodded once.

"You placed yourself so I could attack you, and did so to stop further attacks on myself and my companion *by your kind?*" It was a question, but Harry only shrugged.

"Spell Monger Potter, Friend-Of-The-Vampires, my friend. Name your terms of peace. If they are in *any way* acceptable, I will ensure that my nation accepts them."

Harry heard Fudge begin to demand to be let through. Harry hissed, "Headmaster!" Dumbledore erected a Shield Wall Spell to keep everyone else at bay.

The newly named Friend-Of-The-Vampires said, "A return to the status quo ante, peace like before this conflict. You and all vampires act as has traditionally been acceptable and we will leave you to regulate yourself. We'll only monitor your self-policing activities. I will sell Thunderfire to ten Aurors in each ministry that signs this accord, or to ten percent of their Aurors, whichever number is larger.

"If they abuse this treaty by unreasonably harassing you with Thunderfire, I will limit their future access to that piece of magic. We will have a guarded peace, as in the time of my predecessor, Telemachus Grind.

"You will refuse aid to the Dark Lord, the so-called Lord Voldemort," shouts and shutters rippled through those present, and Harry gave an annoyed glance in their direction. "And you will keep any dissatisfied vampires from joining him. You will notify us immediately if any do - assisting us in apprehending any who do join that despicable, twisted, madman."

Harry turned to Dumbledore. "Have I forgotten anything, Supreme Mugwump?"

When he mentioned Dumbledore's title, many sighed in relief. Dumbledore in a sense represented all Wizarding governments as head of the International Confederation. Most there trusted him. "No, Spell Monger," the ancient said. "You have covered our concerns admirably."

Harry said, "Would you dictate to a scribe the exact words needed for a treaty, Headmaster?"

Without waiting for an answer Harry called for a scribe. A trembling young woman of about twenty-five came forward hesitantly. Dumbledore took her arm and guided her to the nearby table to record

the treaty. Harry and Dumbledore had gone over every important point several times in the coach while eating, and Harry had remembered each one.

Fudge began making more noise and pushing his way forward. "I demand to be a part of this," he said, sounding very much like a petulant child.

Harry said, "Minister Oblansk, and any other Minister of Magic from a land directly in contact with the traditional vampire homelands. Do any of you wish to add anything else to my proposed treaty?"

Oblansk looked to his counterparts, intentionally ignoring the blustering Fudge. "No, Spell Monger," the Bulgarian said. "We will read the treaty before signing of course, but you have covered all of our concerns." With this Konstantin Krum moved to Minister Fudge and began to speak to him forcefully.

"Spell Monger," Count Kldonovitch said. Harry turned to him. "What do you wish done to this one?" He pointed to Ratner, who was beginning to stir. Graf Soderberg grabbed the blinded vampire by the scruff of his cloak and effortlessly drew him to his feet, holding the semi-conscious vampire in place.

Ambassador Carver Glean stepped forward and said, "This... *man*," his distaste was apparent in his tone. "This creature attacked a subject of our government. We demand the right to take him into custody and punish him at our leisure."

Harry's eyes never left the Count's face. The vampire's thick eyebrows came together in a frown. Harry said, "I am here as citizen of no nation, but as sole member of my guild. I leave it to you, Count, to administer justice as you see fit, for the good and the honor of the vampire nation."

Kldonovitch looked him deeply in the eyes. For a moment the two were locked in a trance-like stare. "Well said, Spell Monger," said the vampire. "Spoken like the worthy heir of Telemachus Grind, Osbert Blacwin, and the other Spell Mongers we have known and respected." More gasps and expressions of amazement filled the air.

With that the Count walked over to the nearest table not being used by Dumbledore and the scribe. All those near it backed away in fear. The Count snorted at their actions. With a powerful downward thrust of his gloved hand, he shattered the table. He reached down and picked up a jaggedly sharp table leg. Then he walked back to the two other vampires.

The Count shouted out so all could hear. "Baron Sergei Ratner. You have compromised your position as representative to this assembly. You have broken faith with the vampire nation. You have dishonored your covenant." The count paused to indicate the gravity of matter. He asked, "Do you, or shall I?"

Ratner shivered and cried out, "Pavel, I was impulsive-"

"BARON! Do you, or shall I?"

Ratner silenced himself. After a moment he stood up as straight as he could and blindly held out his hand, his head held high.

"Well done, Sergei." the Count said, and placed the piece of wood in his outstretched hand.

Before anyone could react, Ratner placed the sharpened end of the table leg to his chest, and pulled it clean through his body leaving the point protruding out the back. Amidst the gasps and screams, the body of the now terminated vampire turned to ash and fell dryly to the floor.

Kldonovitch spoke to Harry, but loud enough for many to hear, "By doing it himself, he restored some of his personal honor, absolved his coven of responsibility, and preserved his wealth and position for his family. It was a good end for one who was a constant thorn in my side."

Harry shuddered slightly. "Professor?" he called.

"Almost ready Spell Monger," came the reply.

Harry turned to the Count and stepped forward for a private conversation. "Is there anything else we need to discuss, Count? As I am sure you know, I am new to this."

The Count smiled and chuckled softly. "I grow weary of the trappings of diplomacy and government." Kldonovitch waved his hand dismissively at the mass of diplomats. "You prove they are useless at best, and harmful at worse - and unnecessary. Why did you trust me, why did you turn your neck to me?"

"If you wanted war, you'd have started it by now. You were reported as the one who held together the peace talks from your end. I saw it as little risk, and you were still dazed from the Mini-Thunderfire."

"That's what you call it? Will you sell it also?"

"I don't see it as too advantageous in a fight. For most users, if a vampire is that close they are probably going to be bitten. It's better to stop him before he's that near."

"And yet you were able to stop him that close. Ratner was one of our physically strongest."

Harry shrugged. He shivered slightly.

"Are you all right, Spell Monger?"

"A chill in the air, perhaps," Harry said. "Could you see your way to calling me Harry, at least in private?"

"Oh, let's. And shall we do so loudly enough now to truly infuriate the other delegates. My given name is Pavel."

"Spell Monger, Count," Dumbledore interrupted. "We have the treaty prepared. The scribe will read it now if you permit."

Harry and the Count stood side-by-side for the reading of the treaty. It was brief and to the point. Dumbledore squelched any quibbling at details, and Oblansk quickly helped him. The Count insisted

on signing first and asked Harry to sign also.

"Pavel, I represent no one but myself. I have no right to sign," Harry said.

"But, Harry, as head of your guild you have the right and obligation to commit yourself and all Spell Mongers who come after you to this treaty. Thunderfire is an integral part of its enforcement."

Several people murmured about the use of familiar names by the two.

Harry looked to Dumbledore who whispered in the scribe's ear. She paled, but quickly turned to the parchment, quill in hand. Soon a place for Harry to sign appeared next to the Count's.

Count Kldonovitch drew Harry forward with him, signed, and handed the quill to Harry for his signature. They then moved back and to the side.

Minister Oblansk signed next and came over to the now controversial two. "Count, thank you for coming to terms so quickly, and for sticking to the negotiations through the rants of the dunderheads." The Acting Bulgarian Minister had nowhere near the accent of his father when speaking English.

"We have Harry to thank for that Mikah. I'm glad I insisted on his presence, although I thought little would come from a boy of sixteen. But, the reputation of Harry Potter as told by Konstantin's son holds true."

The Bulgarian thanked Harry as he shook his hand. Oblansk asked, "Have you met young Viktor's father?"

Harry told him that he hadn't, but had seen the man before. The Minister called Krum over and introduced the two. Harry paid attention to the conversation, but felt himself shiver once again. His mind raced with the import of what he had just done, but he returned his concentration to the conversation at hand.

Many of the eastern Europeans came by to thank Harry, but no one from the British Ministry of Magic approached him except for Amelia Bones. She shook his hand and scurried off to the still shouting Fudge.

Graf Soderberg asked for a bell jar of Unfailing Light, and Harry committed to provide one for each coven leader when they ratified the treaty.

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The delegates all signed eventually, although the French delegate complained that since Pont du Hoc was on French soil, he should have signed higher up on the parchment.

Farewells were extended and Harry shivered once again on the way to the carriage. His mind raced and he felt his pulse quicken a bit also.

"Professor, please get me out of here."





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# "Great Scott, Potter, This is War!"

## Chapter Fourteen - Harry and the Wizengamot

### Chapter Fourteen - Harry and the Wizengamot

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*My gratitude goes to my writing coach, Kokopelli, my outstanding proof reader, ebdarcy, and my beta reader, Ninkenate.*

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*A/N - This chapter is dedicated to Crys, an author on FanFicAuthors.net that inspired me to delve into Wizarding government. His story, Scion of Gryffindor, was the very first political Harry Potter fanfic I read, and still ranks in the top three of that list in my book. My Wizengamot is vastly different from his, but he's the one who kicked over the cauldron of creative juices that galvanized my imagination for government in this story. Thanks, C!*

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Harry usually woke up by 5:00 AM at the latest which meant it was barely light out, but when he awoke this day, it was very bright indeed. That in itself was strange, and this was not his bed or his room.

*"It must be nearly 7:00,"* Harry thought. After the vampire negotiations, the last thing he remembered was noticeably trembling in Dumbledore's arms as they barely made it back to the Hogwarts Coach before his knees turned to mush.

Harry reached out his hand and wordlessly summoned his glasses. They were in his hands and on his face in moments. This room was not familiar at all, but the voice he heard certainly was.

"Good morning, Harry. When Dobby came looking for you this morning, I had him deliver your usual breakfast, and ordered the same for myself. I hope you don't mind. Of course, I had no idea how much food you normally eat to break the night's fast. There's more food here than I eat in a week of mornings." The headmaster chuckled to himself, and Harry thought he could *hear* Dumbledore's eyes twinkling.

"I normally eat after two hours of exercise, or more. I'm ravenous then, and I'm actually pretty hungry now," Harry stated. "Why'd you let me sleep, Professor? I'm usually up long before now."

"You needed it, my boy. You were physically exhausted or you would not have slept for nine hours. You even slept through my levitating you up from the carriage. I took the liberty of asking Dobby about your rest habits. Six hours may be normal for you, but you haven't had any down time since the

battle of Little Whinging. Some Muggle militaries use the delightful term 'R and R' for 'Rest and Recreation.' Other than your pause for a few hours on your birthday, you've had no recreation to distract you from your recent troubles and your strenuous schedule.

Harry winced. "Is that what they're calling it, the battle of Little Whinging? And who named it that?"

"The Aurors and the Order, now that Arabella Figg and Kingsley Shacklebolt have retold their stories from that day. It hasn't made the *Daily Prophet*, yet, and hopefully it won't."

Harry rose with a questioning look on his face and Dumbledore pointed him to a small side room water closet. When Harry returned he asked, "Where am I?"

"In the sitting room for the headmaster's private chambers, just off my office. I did not wish to take you through to St. Simon's last night and I have certain privileges as headmaster that allow me to open up certain stairways and doors unknown to others. Therefore, placing you here by levitation was easier than you might think.

"I took the liberty of asking Mister George Weasley to take your Paladin 'visit' this morning. Their research facility, what they mischievously call their 'Skunkworks,' is on the grounds here, and he's participated in a few visits for us, even though Fred has taken many more. Dobby informed me that you had nothing else scheduled for the morning or the rest of the day for that matter, and he agreed that you should sleep in. Dobby does worry about you so, and I find I do, too, for that matter. I hope you don't mind, but you needed the rest. I also want to chat with you a bit more about your position as teaching assistant this coming year, and several other things, if you will."

Harry nodded with a dubious look on his face, but when his stomach growled, they both laughed. Harry then agreed to a chat *if* they could talk over breakfast.

After filling his plate to overflowing, Harry asked, "What's on your mind, Professor?"

"To begin, Harry, I do believe last night was the first time you've been in a fight without either being knocked unconscious or taking a Sleeping Draught shortly thereafter. Oh, and I must confess one last thing from the time of your battle at the Department of Mysteries, I slipped you a mild Sleeping Draught that night as well. Those forced rests have provided you with the release you need for your emotions right after those battles.

"Last night, you had a very common occurrence of the 'shakes' from the strain of fighting Ratner, and then negotiating with the vampires. Ask Steph Granger, Remus Lupin or Alastor Moody; they'll all tell you that you need a release after such events if you can't conk out altogether.

"Some warriors turn to drunkenness. Some go 'wenching' as they call it, or get into fights. I myself have suffered from the shakes a number of times after a battle. Like you, strong drink, loose women, and brawling are not my style. I find either chamber music or ten-pin bowling diverts me most satisfactorily.

"You, on the other hand, might like something a little more 'active' shall we say? Oh, and I should

have told you earlier, that Professor Flitwick finished removing all of the hexes and jinxes from your Firebolt three days ago. Mr. Filch only found it in the dungeon seven days ago, I believe it was. So for your R and R, I prescribe a good flying session. I think I should require it of you today actually, and you might consider self-medicating with liberal amounts of flying from time to time in the future. Flying always helped me until I started suffering from lumbago in the '30s. Strenuous broom maneuvers were never very comfortable after that."

"Now, on to discussions of your new position, if we may." Harry nodded. He set down his fork, finished with his meal, and picked up his coffee cup, which had refilled since he last set it down. The now unnecessary plate disappeared.

"You did agree to the proposed position as I described it yesterday, didn't you? After further consideration have you decided to take four classes only, or do you want another?"

"Just the four we discussed for now, Professor. The business and political short courses interest me as possibilities for seventh year, though I don't have the time with this schedule, and I may not have the time next year either. In the meanwhile, Director Gultangk from Gringotts has sent me a few books on business that I'm half way through. Also, I want to discuss the Wizengamot with you, but that can wait until I fully understand my position here. Fighting this war is most important. In the future, when that is finished, I will be able to hire tutors or advisors on any subject I want to understand that I couldn't fit in at Hogwarts."

"Very good, Harry. Oh, and three of the visiting Defense professors coming to Hogwarts this year will soon be sending me their plans for special instruction for you in your personal late afternoon training sessions.. After reviewing those plans, we can search for any additional training you or I feel you require. I will train you myself in anything I can that these instructors do not list." Harry nodded and quietly expressed his thanks.

"Now, it may look like I have put you in a difficult position as a teaching assistant or TA, but I think I have not. Actually, *if* you look at the Hogwarts Staff Handbook and follow it, you'll find I have given you an opportunity to work the existing 'system,' shall we say, to your advantage.

"In the regular Defense and Practice Defense classes, you will be addressed as 'Mr. Potter,' even by the sixth and seventh-years. You've proven you can teach most ages. The other students, with a few exceptions, will readily accept your new role. Those students who do not want to accept your position will have to respect you as a teacher, or suffer for it as you act in accordance with the teacher's methods of punishment as outlined in the Staff Handbook.

"As long as you comport yourself as a teacher and don't react to students in your classes like another student would, you will find plenty of guidance in the Staff Handbook on how to deal with misbehavior. Follow the handbook, and I will back your actions to the hilt.

"That book clearly states, and I quote, 'Students who do not respect the position or person of a staff member may be assigned, by that staff member or other staff members, appropriate detentions and/or deletion of house points as may fit the offense.' Therefore, any student who insults you as an instructor *or insults you*, Harry Potter, while you are teaching, can be punished.

"I do advise you to start slowly. If Mr. Malfoy calls you Scarhead or St. Potter, I believe those are two of his favorites, start off with five to ten points and a warning. Slowly escalate from there. Do not do as you have seen Severus do, dispensing discipline based on past slights. If you discipline Draco initially remembering all of his past insults, you will be no better than Severus. And I do believe you capable of being a better *teacher* than he is."

"Professor," Harry interjected. "I appreciate your candor, but aren't you being, I don't know, too candid with me?"

Dumbledore twinkled. "I am having an initial orientation session with a new member of my staff. I am using examples from that staff member's experiences here at Hogwarts about how *not* to do his job. When newly appointed Potions Master Severus Snape and I had this conversation, I used Minerva as an example of how best to discipline students. She had been Severus's Transfiguration professor for all seven years that he was here.

"And Harry, this is *strictly in confidence*. Do I have to make it any clearer that the examples in this discussion are never to be mentioned to anyone else?" Harry shook his head and grinned.

Dumbledore twinkled and continued, "I believe you already know how to teach. However, a very real temptation for you to act inappropriately as a staff member will be the urge to deal improperly with those students who will taunt you. Be firm but fair from the start with Mr. Malfoy and any others who treat you incorrectly, and you'll see yourself respected even more by all the other students, and eventually, at least left alone by your detractors.

"Mr. Malfoy does not like Minerva, but she has dealt properly and evenly with all those who have tested her over the years, and so Draco does not disrupt her class in any way, anymore. However, I do believe she reports that he attempts some act of defiance at the start of each year, which she squelches instantly, providing the class with smooth sailing until June.

"I asked several members of your Defense Association to tell me how you gained their initial trust and ongoing respect as an instructor. All of them told similar stories of your abilities. I have no doubt that you will do us all proud as a teacher here. Your challenges will be along the order of Mr. Smith's questioning why you were to be in charge at the initial DA meeting. You handled that well, but had no authority to enforce his compliance. Fred Weasley, or was it George, threatened him, and that, along with all the others accepting you, added to your successful approach to enlist the trust of all of your participants.

"From the outset, you now have the trust of almost all of your students in all years, and the ministry employees you will train as well, because... well, because you are Harry Potter." Harry's eyebrows met in the middle with distaste, but Dumbledore held up his hand and said, "You will have their trust, not because you are the Boy-Who-Lived, but because of how you've proven yourself over the years. The students you led last year have spread news of your victories to the three houses you taught, and I daresay Slytherins have heard the stories as well, though probably with more than a grain of skepticism.

"Most of the Ministry employees that will be coming here for training this year will have even more

respect for you. The story of your capture of eleven Death Eaters in their very own building is quite well known, and it's a surprisingly accurate rendition I might add. The parents of many of your DA work for the Ministry and have also passed around stories from their children. Arthur Weasley has been approached on a number of occasions to clarify the tales, and he has tried to squelch any overaggrandizing. Pontilla Edgecombe personally told me about the letter you sent her Marietta. Madam Edgecombe guards your reputation now as closely as Molly Weasley does. And Mafalda Hopkirk has made sure that her observations of your use of magic at the Battle of Little Whinging are known to a limited degree. She consulted with me, and we agreed *not* to disclose the full range and power you displayed that day, but she still has a most impressive story to tell."

Harry looked disgruntled. "I hate this, Professor?"

"I know you do, Harry, and I did not tell you about it earlier because the telling is out of my control. I could no more stop the stories than stop the tide coming in or going out. What I have attempted was to keep it accurate, or even downplay your achievements. I hope you don't mind."

Harry sighed. "No, Professor, your efforts were for the best, as usual. The gossip is something I don't want to know about, and I've made that clear, so telling me was not essential. I also see that it will serve our cause. Those looking for hope will find it; those thinking about turning to Riddle might think again. And if it makes it easier to teach more people to defend themselves, then so be it."

Harry waved his hand in the air dismissively. With a look of disgust on his face he asked, "How do you stand it? I've only had to deal with my fame for five years, and fame *with* popularity for only a small amount of time during those years. Over half the time people thought me the Heir of Slytherin, the Tri-Wizard gatecrasher, or a dangerous lunatic. You've had an adoring public since 1945 at least, and probably before that. Why aren't you barricaded in the North Tower and as mad as Professor Trelawney?"

Dumbledore twinkled vibrantly. "I'm afraid, Harry, the only way to survive is to learn to ignore it. I act mad and odd, and I *am* a bit mad for that matter. I've developed a public persona that makes approaching me something few do, but they are delighted when I approach them. It limits my contact with people but gives me a friendly reputation. I don't really know how I did it so I can't give you advice on the process. I will tell you that I do attempt to arrive unnoticed right where I want to be, when I want to be, and then show myself. Your use of that black robe and the Disillusionment charm has served you in good stead according to Remus. But you and I will both always have our detractors, I know I do."

Harry snorted his disbelief.

"No, I assure you I do, and not just from last year's smear effort by Minister Fudge and the *Daily Prophet*. I can give you the names of thirty or more students who dislike me to this day as their Transfiguration professor, and many more who dislike me as headmaster. You will find that I am even more disliked by a significant minority of the Wizengamot members, and trusted only tentatively by many others."

Dumbledore twinkled at him. Harry twinkled his eyes back. Dumbledore nearly choked on his tea.

"How did-?"

Harry grinned a wicked grin. "I never could find a charm or spell in any book to tell me how your eyes twinkle, so I decided to study light and light refraction through liquids and see what I could come up with.

"When I first mangled the minute power variance factors of the Thunderfire charm, I discovered that I could make it very weak, which is useless. Then when I did the work to make the close-in version I used on Baron Ratner last night, I decided I could make an amount of Thunderfire so small that it would look like your twinkle. For the charm I used on Ratner I placed a renewable spell trigger on my fingers to release that measured amount when I silently snap them. I also went ahead and placed a renewable trigger in the inside corner of my right eye. It takes so little power that I can snap it off, wordlessly and wandlessly.

"The trick was aiming it, but I realized that if I pointed it straight out and applied a thirty degree dispersion of the projected light while gazing straight ahead, most looking at me would see it as my eyes twinkling like yours do. You are the first person other than Dobby and Winky to see it. Apparently it works.

"How do you twinkle your eyes, Professor, what charm do you use?"

Dumbledore blushed. "It's no bit of magic at all, Harry. I have spent over ninety years practicing how to use light in the room and the angle of my glasses to twinkle at people. How much would you charge to sell me that charm?"

Harry obviously looked stunned. "Er, that is, well, why don't we work it out in trade or barter? I haven't even thought about packaging it for sale. I'm floored by your admission."

Dumbledore twinkled at him. "I might buy it from you, or trade with you, but now that I think about it, I don't know if I could stop using my method. It's hard to teach an old kneazle new tricks."

They started out chuckling, and then began guffawing over the situation.

"Oh, laughter and music do the heart good like medicine," Dumbledore said and chuckled some more. "Oh, I have one more point to go over with you about being on staff. May I?" Harry nodded his assent. "In the Practical Defense classes just follow your lesson plans. They are truly excellent. In the traditional Defense classes, follow the lesson plan as the specific instructor outlined or as you jointly modify it before hand. Let your colleague lead the class unless the offer is made for you to lead. If you disagree with an instructor, just let him or her lead the class and discuss matters in private later. It is the instructor's individual primary responsibility, and I must stress that I do not want students to see dissension in the ranks of my teachers." Dumbledore took another sip of his tea.

"You do know I daresay that your greatest challenge will be co-teaching with Severus? I'm sure I don't tell you something new there. Once again, the Staff Handbook should guide you. The single most important principle for you to remember in dealing with other staff members is, and I quote, 'Treat others as they have treated you.'"

"Professor, you don't mean the Golden Rule, 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you?'"

"No, dear boy, and how I wish it were. It is exactly, 'Treat others as they have treated you.' It is a civilized version of 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' Most staffers always try to be most polite and mindful of others. Cordiality solicits cordiality. Severus is most careful to be civilized to other staff members. His sharp tongue gets the better of him from time to time, but I must say that there are several staff members who can beard the lion in his own den when he becomes too abrupt. Each staff member can have friends among the staff and discuss anything and everything in the manner they choose in private, but publicly we each act as we want to be treated because to act improperly gives any one we mistreat the right to mistreat in kind."

Dumbledore looked Harry deeply in his eyes. "Harry, I have made it clear to Professor Snape that I will explain this to you in this manner. You may treat him as he treats you, if he acts unacceptably. But be on guard. Mr. Malfoy is not the only one who can trigger your anger. If you act rashly, Severus can respond in kind. I am not foolish enough to think you two will be all milk and honey in your interactions but do be careful. And be forewarned, if you act wrongly in a class, I will be most forceful in exerting my prerogative to mete out punishment to my staff."

Dumbledore leaned back in his chair, relieving the tension. "And Harry, there is no shame in leaving his presence if he treats you badly. Come to me, and I will deal with him for you. In the staff room and with someone like Professor McGonagall around, you can look to us to help you. He should not act poorly in front of another staff member once school begins and you officially take your new position."

"Be innocent as a lamb but sly as a serpent. If you are not, it will open you up for difficulties. You have to take the highroad and stay there in front of the students. If you do, then I cannot only protect you, but correct Severus most severely. But he is no fool and suffers fools not one bit."

"Er, Professor, too many cliches and generalities. I need examples."

"Of course, of course." Dumbledore took a deep breath and thought for a few moments. "How to explain? Ah, yes."

"You already started on the high road by expressing your apologies to him yesterday. Oh my, that does seem ages ago doesn't it?" Harry grinned. "Anyway, you started very well and set a high bar of behavior. He now has to at least appear in that realm of treatment towards you, or he has in fact broken the rule in not treating you as you treated him."

"So," Harry interrupted. "I can set a higher level of treatment to another staffer and it requires him to behave well in return?"

"We cannot compel proper actions, but when you set a high standard, you make average treatment look poorly, and bad manners that much more abhorrent. The reverse is also true as I've said."

Dumbledore set down his cup and saucer and leaned back looking out a window. Harry gave him time to collect his thoughts.

"I am an old fool but I am not foolish enough to believe Severus will always act appropriately towards you, even though he has agreed to do so. He could not hold himself accountable yesterday when I was present. He will act improperly in the future. You no doubt know that he would love to see you fail, but he has to be subtle about it. I do believe he will encourage Mr. Malfoy to test you right away. If a student causes you to act inappropriately, you and this program are called into question. That alone is not enough to see you set down as an instructor, unless you do something terrible to him. Enough other students seeing you act inappropriately will cause them to not believe in you as well, and your performance goes down with you. The merit of your position and the Practical Defense course rises and falls with you, but I must say I cannot imagine them in better hands than yours.

"Lowering the standards of staff-to-staff treatment in the classes is the most serious offense of the Staff Handbook code. Doing so in the corridors or Great Hall, school grounds, etcetera, is nearly as serious. Alone, in the staff quarters area or in the staff rooms or staff offices, any infractions will be less serious, but more likely.

"You, as a student, do not have access to the staff quarters areas. You will have an office of your own, and access to all staff rooms. Our weekly staff meetings on Wednesday mornings at 7:00 usually last only a half hour or less. I require all staff members, including you to attend.

"These are the places where Severus will test you regularly. I imagine you can guess how well liked he is among the staff when he misbehaves. He disrespects Professor Trelawney, and Hagrid. He usually avoids them as I have more than encouraged him to do. Away from them he can be a bit charming. He has a droll sense of humor and can be a stimulating conversationalist. Minerva and I have enjoyed getting to know him better this summer as we have worked together on the Paladin Program

"Severus has a keen analytical mind, though he is less than charming when shooting holes in one's theories as you might imagine. I told you he is brilliant at administration, and would serve the Ministry well. However, Severus would appear to have the patience of Job with students compared to his lack of patience for government."

Dumbledore stopped and took off his glasses, wiping them on an enormous chartreuse handkerchief that appeared from somewhere in his robes. He placed the glasses back on his nose, and twinkled at Harry. Harry twinkled in return. They both nearly giggled.

"I must say, Harry, reserve it for a perfect moment, but twinkling at Severus at an opportune time will unsettle him deliciously. Please try to save it for when I am there, or consider sharing the memory with me later."

Dumbledore's face became serious. "Harry, I believe the Staff Handbook will give you all you need to work through your difficulties with Severus and prove both yourself and the Practical Defense program. You can officially protect yourself from him. Assaulting your mind with Legilimency would bring about a severe reprimand, if not dismissal for example, so now you are protected from that."

"So staff members are protected from it, but students aren't?"



"No, I am afraid not. I must confess that I cannot ask the Board of Governors to make that a rule. I have on rare occasions had to use it on a student, though there have been a few additional times I wish I had." Dumbledore looked down with this admission.

"Have you used it on me, Professor?"

Dumbledore paused and looked hurt to a degree. "I was tempted to, Harry, but I never did. I wanted to during the Chamber of Secrets debacle; I could tell you were hiding something, but I felt that if it were truly a problem you would come to me. I was also tempted to do so when your name came out of the Goblet of Fire, but the stricken look on your face told me in an instant what I needed to know.

"I want to maintain the right to use Legilimency in spite of the potential for misuse. If I suspect a student of Death Eater activity, a clear and present danger here at the school, I want the right to search his mind. That's why I have not removed the prerogative. I have always asked that teachers who can, and Severus is the only one currently on staff who has the skill, do not use this talent on students. I believe Severus when he says that he has not, except in his feeble attempts at training you, for which I once again apologize.

"I have spoken with William Martin about the state of your mind when he started teaching you, and again just recently. He is convinced you will be fully qualified as an Occlumens by late September at the latest, and as a Legilimens by Christmas. Learning the first properly and in that order makes learning the second much easier and quicker. That will be a part of your special training schedule for the afternoons during the school year, and you may go to St. Simon's whenever you wish to continue, once you are no longer in residence there." Dumbledore paused and looked thoughtful.

"I believe that is all I planned to discuss regarding your status as a teaching assistant, a position you only have *during* Defense and Practical Defense classes, and during staff meetings.

"For several reasons I want you to have the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of a prefect at all times. First, I would not have you stripped of all authority outside of the classroom to act officially on your own behalf and for your friends, and to protect any and all in need. Second, I want you able to wander the corridors officially at all hours for security purposes. I do believe you have proven a bit prescient shall we say, when it comes to finding trouble going on in the school at odd hours. I want to harness that ability. However, you must not use this as a means to prank others. To do so would undermine what we are trying to do. You must guard yourself from any such involvements, more so than Miss Granger has ever done.

"Third, it gives you another reason to be in contact with other house prefects. I hope you will be able to bridge the gaps that have arisen between houses. Do you know that in my days at Hogwarts Slytherin house was as well respected as Gryffindor? They may have even had a little more honor than Gryffindor, though I am loath to admit it. They were not known then as the Dark Lord and Dark Arts breeding ground for malice and bigotry. Dark leaning witches and wizards did tend to come from that house a bit more than others, but they were few and far between, and all other houses had their share, too, unfortunately.

"I hope in giving you this role as teaching assistant and as unofficial prefect for security issues that

you will be able to befriend many more students from other houses than you did as leader of your DA. I am not *charging* you with this task; I merely want you to be on the lookout for such opportunities. You did it naturally before, so now I want you to be a little more conscious of the possibilities.

"This leads me to the students in Slytherin house. I had hoped that Blaise Zabini and Daphne Greengrass would enroll as Paladins. They could then have led the formation of a non-Voldemort leaning faction in that house more successfully. To be sure, they believe there is an advantage in blood purity, which I cannot fully disagree with."

"What," Harry interrupted. "The Weasleys are pureblood and Hermione is a Muggleborn-"

Dumbledore held up his hand. "Harry, every situation has its advantages and disadvantages. Purebloods usually have a strong grounding in the capabilities of the magical world as one obvious example. How many concepts, practices, etcetera, are you and Miss Granger completely unaware of that the Weasleys and Malfoys of this world take for granted and use as naturally as you breathe?"

Not waiting for a response Dumbledore continued, "In like manner, Purebloods have little or no understanding or appreciation of the Muggle world. When I was in America I saw a computer. What a marvelous device for storage and retrieval of information by the library shelf full. Not to mention the incredible ways it can be used to draw and revise drawings. I've always wanted that talent.

"Well, the Americans, wisely using the Squibs among them, have created ways for computers, all electronic devices actually, to work in a magical environment such as Hogwarts, with limitations of course. Now, if Mr. Malfoy is even aware of such marvelous inventions, I would be surprised. You have probably not been allowed near a computer at the Dursleys' I imagine." Harry shook his head.

"And yet, I would wager that our Miss Granger is not only aware of the creations, but probably has considerable mastery. And these are only two simplistic examples of Purebloods and Muggleborn having both advantages and disadvantages. Probably, a half-blood living with parents who raise him or her in both worlds has the strongest position in this comparison.

"Back to Miss Greengrass and Mr. Zabini. They come from families that pride themselves on their pureblood heritage, but do not want to discriminate against others in business or government. They tend to vote in the Wizengamot toward a pureblood agenda, but not always, and not for anything that is more obviously Dark leaning. They vote their own interests, which most of us do, so I cannot blame them for that."

Dumbledore leaned in towards Harry. "And when I say 'vote,' Harry, I mean much more than in the Wizengamot. People *vote* primarily with their coin purses. They *vote* when they choose one store over another. They *vote* when they do or do not send their children to this school or that, when they eat in one restaurant or another. And mostly they *vote* when they choose their friends. I said friends, not associates. In the Wizengamot I associate with many people that I would not invite to my home for a family dinner, yet I would invite them to a formal party for friends and associates of all areas of our world that I participate in.

"So even though Miss Greengrass and Mr. Zabini did not elect to join you as Paladins, you would

serve our cause well, *your* cause well, if you try to cultivate a relationship with them in as many classes as you can. Miss Tracy Davis and Mr. Carl Spinks from Slytherin are both Paladins. Do you know them?" Harry shook his head. Dumbledore stated, "They are both bright and capable, but they are not of old pureblood families, though they have pure enough blood lines to suffer no ostracism for it. They are unfairly not considered leaders in that house. Do befriend them, or at least try. They are both very intelligent and can help you befriend Blaise and Daphne, as well as any other Slytherin you may decide to approach. I have chatted with them, and both are willing to cautiously work with you on this. And you have Miss Bulstrode's commitment, which should help as well.

"Any questions on this, Harry?"

"Not really, sir. I hadn't given it much thought, but I guess I don't think of Ernie Macmillan or Michael Corner as friends, but they could be valuable associates in their houses. They seem to be leaders to some degree, and I could work with them easily on many things. Both of them would probably do as classroom assistants in lower years for the PD."

"PD? Oh, Practical Defense courses. Very good, and easier to say."

"Professor, I would like to know more about the Wizengamot, particularly the Three Hundred and Thirty-Three Families."

"Yes, you said so, and I have arranged something special for you. But let me tell you just a little more about young Mr. Malfoy.

"Today is Wednesday the seventh of August. I have five more days before I cannot stop Mr. Malfoy from completing the potions series without harming him. Your fellow Paladins will take their last potion on August twenty-second by the way. Anyway, Professor Snape has arranged for a chat tomorrow morning between Draco, Severus, and myself."

Dumbledore's eyes lost all twinkle or mirth. He looked as stern as McGonagall might. "I will go over with Mr. Malfoy what I have discovered about his actions towards others, *excluding* you until the very end. I do not want to make this about you, Harry. I will show him that I am aware of his actions towards Hufflepuffs, Ravenclaws, *and* Gryffindors. Bullying those younger and weaker than him is most odious, and so unworthy of a Paladin as to be unimaginable.

"I will make it clear that I will not accept this type of behavior, and then give him a few minutes to discuss this alone with Severus. He will not leave the room without either committing to better behavior, or taking the Termination potion for the program. He will be a Paladin in deed as well as name, or not be one at all. I hope I will not have to bring up you or your close friends at all, but I will if necessary."

"Why give him time with Professor Snape to discuss this?"

"I hope Severus will help bring the light of reason to his deliberations."

Harry looked at the headmaster disbelievingly. "That, or Snape may help him figure out a way to

make a verbal commitment that will still leave him wiggle room to do as he pleases, to a degree at least."

"You still suspect Severus, even after my placing you on staff?"

"Is Professor Snape the man you expect to teach Draco how to behave properly?? Harry's anger was evident. "Yesterday I apologized to him for a few infractions. You had to force him to accept it. Your Professor Snape has much more to apologize to me about, yet did he? No! He knows no right from wrong."

Harry stood in frustration and immediately sat back down. "I believe that your Professor Snape mistreats non-Slytherins the way he does because he can get away with it. Do you deny that? How will that man teach Draco right from wrong? I challenge you to use Fred and George's Extendable Ears for the time you allow Snape to *counsel* Draco about his commitment to this program. Are you confident enough to listen in?"

"Perhaps," the headmaster said sadly.

Harry sighed again. "Here's my commitment to you," he said. "I will read the Staff Handbook very carefully, and I will treat Malfoy in class more properly than Snape has ever treated my friends or me on his best day. With some indulgence to all, I will apply proper punishment to anyone who deserves it, no favoritism to any."

"Oh, is Draco still a prefect after his actions on Umbridge's Inquisitorial Squad?"

Dumbledore sighed. "Unfortunately, he and his cohorts acted in accordance with and usually under direct supervision of the designated authority. My hands are tied, but that is on my list of things to discuss with him."

Harry responded, "I expected something like that. Working the system to do his dirty deeds, how Slytherin, and how *not* doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do." Harry stood and took a turn of the small open area of the headmaster's sitting room.

"As a prefect I will follow their rules to the letter, but I will expect Draco to do so also, and I will bring his slightest infraction to your attention immediately."

"You'll find, Harry, that the rules state you must take it to his head of house." Dumbledore sighed again.

"Ah, another reason why everyone else acts as they should as a prefect, but few Slytherins prefects do."

Harry became quiet for a moment. "Professor, I *will* meet Draco word for word and action for action. If he says something, I'll only use words back at him. I'll even *try* to find a way to stop his verbal abuse instead of arguing with him. However, if he pulls his wand, I'll beat him to the draw. And if he hurts me or any one else, or even attempts it, I will fight fire with fire."

"What do you mean Harry?"

"Oh, just that if Draco, or anyone, including your Professor Snape attacks me with any sort of deadly force, I'll attack back with equal force. I'm not talking about the spells we'll use in a classroom. However, outside of the classroom even an Impediment Jinx I'll consider a serious attack. Too much can be done to someone after they are tied up."

"Make sure Snape and Malfoy know I feel this way, Professor. I'll act on it regardless of whether you do or not. If they attack me or my friends..." Harry let those words hang in the air.

Dumbledore looked down. He inhaled deeply after a moment and then slowly released it. Still looking down he said, "It is to my everlasting shame that you feel you must ask this of me. It is to my shame that you are right; I have failed in teaching what is right to *all* my students."

Harry immediately looked shocked. Though he meant his words of the last few minutes, he regretted the tone he had taken with his mentor. He said, in a conciliatory manner, "Professor, I am angry about this, but I am not angry at you. You've shown me great kindness, and in the last week or so you have begun to make good on your promise of creating a new relationship between us on an appropriate yet more equal footing. I am grateful for this and not unaware of how many would envy me this opportunity.

"Please realize that Malfoy showed up at the door of Hogwarts for sorting already bent this way, before you ever laid eyes on him. His father trained him to believe he had the right to do as he wanted and have his selfish way. Snape probably had similar training, although... never mind, I saw something in his memories from his childhood, and I have committed to him not to mention it to anyone. That brief glimpse, however, told me that even though his life was different, it was equivalent in outcome to Draco's as I see it.

"Perhaps, you could have done something with Snape the student. That is for you to determine, but you'll not hear me pronounce judgment on the matter. I doubt you would have succeeded. However, I will say that I think *fixing* Draco would have been too much, even for you."

They maintained silence for nearly a minute. "Do we need to discuss this further, Harry?"  
Dumbledore had a most grateful look on his face.

"I don't think so. I'll read the Staff Handbook and the Prefects Handbook and follow the letter of the law as closely as I can. I'll not become Percy Weasley, but I'll make Hermione proud when it comes to most things."

Harry paused and then said, changing the subject, "Now, what can you tell me about the Wizengamot?"

"Ah, yes. As a Three Thirty-Three Family head, you have a responsibility to be informed. You've asked for a book or books, but unfortunately, there is little written on it. That is by law. Only a history of what actions have been taken and laws passed or not passed can be recorded for general consumption. The head of a Three Thirty-Three Family receives an officially approved book each

year on the anniversary of his or her first day entering the Wizengamot Legislative Assembly."

"That room where I was put on trial last summer?" Harry asked.

"Good heavens, no, Harry. That was the Wizengamot Judicial. Each year in the spring thirty-three members of the Three-Thirty-Three stand for the Judicial and are elected to attend serious court trials. Usually they are older and retired from work, so they have the time, and hopefully the wisdom to serve in that capacity. The Head of Magical Law Enforcement, the Minister, and the Minister's Undersecretary for Law and Order are the exceptions. They are automatically allowed to participate in the Judicial also.

"The Wizengamot Legislative Assembly comprises all of the Three-Thirty-Three family heads wishing to attend, or their designees. They meet every Tuesday and Thursday starting at 10:00 AM, and generally finish between noon and one for a late lunch. They can go longer but do so less than ten percent of the time.

"I have taken the liberty of arranging for you to be escorted to a Legislative Assembly tomorrow, or starting as soon as you choose to go. There are seven more Assembly days before school begins.

"I have arranged for Elphias Doge to meet you there. He'll take you to the observation gallery, show you around, and explain to you how things work. He is preparing his grandson to take his place as a Family head when his eighteenth birthday occurs. You remember Elphias from your guard on the broom ride from the Dursleys' to Grimmauld Place last summer, don't you?"

"I remember his face, but we never really talked."

"Did you know his grandson, Trevor Doge, a Ravenclaw that just finished Hogwarts?" Dumbledore continued once Harry shook his head in the negative. "A family head can lose his right to rule for disciplinary actions, or a member can sell his right. The loss can be temporary or permanent. Elphias' great-grandfather sold his right to rule for four generations to finance a flying carpet business. He thrived but lost the business when flying carpets were outlawed. However, the family does have a comfortable savings to rest on from the venture.

"Trevor will be the generation to receive back the right to rule once he turns eighteen on...August 31st, I believe it is. So Elphias has begun training him. The two of them will meet you near the judicial rooms tomorrow, if you choose, or whatever day you'd like to start. I took the liberty of having your Paladin 'visits' rearranged for the remaining Tuesdays and Thursdays, knowing your interest in this."

"That's fine, Professor, thanks. That book you mentioned..."

"Ah, yes. You might think, particularly if you've read many magical or Muggle governmental publications, that a book by government about governing would be convoluted and difficult at best. This book is not so, because it is designed to be useful to those who actually legislate and need clear guidance. It is unavailable to those who are not Three-Thirty-Three Family heads, therefore they allow it to be more frank about procedures, powers, and privileges. If you go tomorrow, you should

sit in the observation gallery with Elphias and Trevor and ask any questions you wish. Then, once the Assembly is over, go down and enter the Assembly room itself. The room will recognize you as the head of the Potter and Black families without enrolling you as an active Wizengamot member, and will produce your own book for you, current and up to date with any changes made up to and including yesterday's meeting.

"Each time a change to the book is legislated, you will receive the updated pages by Ministry owl. Place them in the front of your book and it will be updated. Each year on or after the anniversary of your first day in the chamber, you may enter that room and receive a new copy. You must have the old version with you and it will disappear moments before the new one appears.

"I cannot tell you how important it is to keep this book safe. Not that it is a security risk. When you open it, you will feel the tiniest of finger pricks as it takes a drop of your blood, sealing the book so you and only you may use it. Even though it is blood sealed, if you should lose your book, the assembly would be notified once you did not update your book after any change was enacted. Losing it would be very embarrassing for you.

"Lucius Malfoy is in prison. In two years on his eighteenth birthday, Draco will be allowed to take his father's place. Can you imagine how he would remind you over and over of the loss of your book?"

"Enough said, Professor. Why aren't you going to be there tomorrow, school business?"

"I will be working, but as you might imagine, I do not attend most of the Assemblies because of my involvement here.

"There is no emergency legislation; we active members would be Owled ahead of time for such things. No laws can be passed without being read once, and at least being read again on another day. We are all Owled on the status of each piece of legislature that can be voted on, as no law can be voted on after a second reading without a day's notice to all. You've never met Boaz Brownlee but he is an old friend and family head in his own right.

"Boaz has the right to vote my votes in my absence and knows my mind on every possible item coming to the docket. He also sits as Acting Chief Warlock, which is for the most part a moderator or chairman's position for the Assembly. Once you feel comfortable taking your place in the active Assembly, you can always ask the Chief Warlock, or Acting Chief Warlock for information about how to proceed, within moderation.

"The most important legislation in each year generally has to do with budgets. They are voted on in the summer right after school ends. Any vote can be delayed for thirty-three minutes by request of even a single Family head or designate in attendance, and I can arrive in time if needed. But I have never had to do so in the years I've been headmaster of Hogwarts."

Dumbledore looked at his pocket watch with twelve hands. "Harry, it is now three minutes after 9:00. I have another meeting at 9:30, but I have until then to talk more if you choose."

"No, Professor. Thanks for looking out for me last night. I feel much better today." He held out his rock steady hands. "No shakes, nor pains. I just guess it was overwhelming for a time."

"That's the nature of the beast, battle stress."

Harry nodded. "I'll read my two handbooks. Where can I get my own copy of the Prefects Handbook?" "Professor McGonagall is delivering them today I believe. She is expecting you to call on her."

As Harry turned to leave, he popped his forehead and turned to say, "Professor, when Millicent gave me her pledge to fight along side me yesterday, you and Professor Snape seemed very concerned at first, then you two eased off a bit. Why was that?"

Dumbledore looked at him and smiled without a twinkle. "She started her promise using the same words that a young maiden might use to pledge her chastity to her betrothed on the day of her marriage contract. Miss Bulstrode changed the wording, however to make it a promise to follow you as she stated. That's why we said nothing afterwards."

"Oh." There was nothing else for Harry to say.

As the two stood from the table and the breakfast remains, two small house-elves popped in and began the blur of cleaning. Harry reached in and snagged two rashers of bacon with his Seeker's reflexes, barely acquiring them in the whirl of elven efficiency. Expressing again his gratitude to the headmaster, Harry made his way down the circular staircase.

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At the intersection of the corridors leading to the headmaster's tower and the Transfiguration classrooms, Harry met Ginny, Hermione, and Ron coming from one direction, and Professor McGonagall coming from another. They all greeted each other.

Ginny came forward and hugged Harry tightly. "The paper was dreadful this morning, Harry. Are you all right? It made it sound like you were unneeded, but I bet the *Prophet* lied again as usual."

Harry released himself from her hug, taking her hand to reassure her. He asked, "What did it say?"

"It said that Ambassador Glean saved the negotiations and you just charged some exorbitant amount to sell the Ministry Thunderfire."

"Well, I did charge them a lot, but I did it because they treated me badly, and I told Dumbledore and Madam Bones I'll give the money to charity. As for saving the day, Glean and Fudge almost had us at war with the vampires. I was barely able to stop it by offering the vampire leader my friendship."

"Your what?" Ron gulped. "You said you'd be their friend and they stopped wanting to kill us?" Ron smiled broadly at that.

"No, Ron," Harry laughed. "In the past Spell Mongers would offer the vampires their friendship,



which is why I offered the chief vampire the Friendship of the Spell Monger. It's a formal greeting of diplomacy, I think."

"The paper said there was a fight, but didn't give details," Hermione said. "I'd wager *you* were involved, true?"

Harry sighed again. "It was nothing, really. One of the vampires tried to attack me, so I popped him with a trace amount of Thunderfire, just enough to blind him, not kill him. He was the troublemaker among the vampire delegation. Then, the Aurors there under Fudge tried to attack the remaining two vampires, who were temporarily dazed by the Thunderfire. I protected those vampires and prevented their being hurt, and... well, from there on out the peace treaty was easy to negotiate."

Harry looked down. He then noticed that he'd been holding Ginny's hand all during this time. He slowly and reluctantly let it go.

"Only you, Harry, only you," Ron said with admiration and a smirk.

"Yeah," Harry said. "It stinks to be me."

Before anyone else could say anything, McGonagall interrupted. "Potter, Weasleys, I want to talk with you for a few minutes, do you have the time?" They nodded and she said, "Oh, and Potter, I have your Prefects Handbook here for you."

She handed him the book and answered the obviously questioning looks on the others' faces before they could ask. "Professor Dumbledore has given Potter here an unofficial prefect-at-large status shall we say, in regards to security matters for the castle. He has the rights and responsibilities of a prefect, but wears no badge and stands no preset rounds. The headmaster will keep him busy, however, I daresay."

McGonagall turned to Ron and Harry who were standing side by side. "Regarding the Quidditch captancy, gentlemen-

Angelina and Alicia had finished school the previous year, as had the twins. They knew that Katie Bell would be head girl this year and had resigned her position on the team to make time for that and for her N.E.W.T.s preparation to be a healer.

Ron interrupted McGonagall when he said, "It should obviously be Harry; he's been on the team loads longer than me."

"No, Ron," Harry added quickly. "I don't know anything about the strategy of the other positions. You eat and breathe Quidditch."

"Boys," McGonagall tried to interject.

"But, Harry, you're the one everyone would follow."

"Ron, they'll follow you too just as soon as you show them-"

"GEN-TLE-MEN!" The Transfiguration professor finally gained their attention. "I am not here to debate anyone's merits, regardless of the qualifications you two hold. My good experience with Wood as captain for three years, and Miss Johnson's captaincy for only one year, has lead me to decide on a perfectly qualified individual with game experience, strategic acumen, and a clear understanding of all positions played."

Harry and Ron blinked in confusion. McGonagall turned to Ginny and said, "Here is your badge, Miss Weasley, congratulations. Our conversations have given me every confidence that you will lead Gryffindor House to three more years of victory." The faintest of McGonagall smiles crossed her lips, and she was on her way.

Hermione finally reacted. Hugging her friend, she said, "Oh, congratulations Ginny, I wondered why you didn't receive a prefect's badge in the school class selection owl post this morning."

"You could have been prefect?" Ron asked aghast at the idea.

"Of course, Ron," Hermione said. "She's as smart as me, and tops for her year."

"Not as smart as you," Ginny said in response.

"No, you're as smart," Hermione stated, "Just not as compulsive as I am over grades and studying. You made all O's on last years' final exams, didn't you?"

Ginny blushed prettily and nodded. Then she turned with a scowl towards her brother who was making noises about the indecency of Ginny being smart. "Yes, *Ronald* I make good grades but decided I didn't want to disappoint the twins and become a prefect." She stopped and winked at Harry and Hermione. "Besides, who's the only one other than Dad who can beat you in Wizard chess?"

"I win half the games with you, maybe more," Ron grumbled.

Harry said, "That's brilliant, Ginny. I knew you were smart, and that you were terrific in Quidditch. You surely beat Cho Chang last year on that old school broom. I can try out for Chaser, that's my Dad's old position you know."

As Hermione dragged a still disbelieving Ron away from the two, Ginny reached for Harry's arm to convince him that his role as Seeker was safe. However, she froze in place for a moment. His arm was like an iron bar, cast in the shape of bulging muscle.

She had been exercising right along with Hermione and Ron all summer long. Because she had not taken the Acceleration potions, Ginny hadn't shot up in height, stature, or muscle mass like all of the Paladins had, but she had gained a fair bit of strength, stamina, and gracefulness.

Harry was a carved statue of sculpted stone, with a warm, oh so warm layer of yummy skin she thought. "Harry," she said breathily, "your position as Seeker is safe. I'd *rather* play Chaser, but your place as Seeker was the only one open for me last year." By this time Ginny had regained her composure, she hoped, and released his arm. "I can better control the team as a Chaser, and you're past brilliant as Seeker. I could never tell you what to do, so I'll just concentrate on the others and

myself."

"I like the idea of you as captain, Ginny."

"Oh, why's that?"

"Er, well, I like the idea of you building our team for the next three years. If we can get two more Chasers who play well, and either fix Sloper and Kirke or find new Beaters, we stand a chance for the trophy again this year. We lost five players but only need to replace four. The other houses all lost at least three, and Ravenclaw lost five, I think. We're all rebuilding."

Harry raised his left hand and rubbed the hair on the back of his head. "Ginny, I've been thinking, the professional teams all have reserve squads, is there a school rule that says we can't?"

"No, I've discussed it with McGonagall. She just said that we've had enough trouble outfitting a team of seven in the past. I plan to try to draw a large crowd for tryouts. Pulling especially from the first through third-years. It would have been great if Sloper and Kirke had been in a training program for a season or two before we needed them last year. Then we could have had better Beater protection from the start, once Fred and George were barred from play.

"Imagine, Harry, if we find a second-year or a firstie who's a pretty good flyer. Then we let him work with you and watch you play for the next two years. Then he or she should be prepared to do a great job from day one as Seeker for the next three or four seasons. I've discussed this idea with Charlie for several years, once I realized I could maybe be a Chaser starting this year, and maybe captain my last year. Now, I have three years to make this a long-term program.

"Oliver Wood left his great play book. I've studied it a bit the last week since McGonagall asked me to do this. We still haven't used all of his plays, and he sends new ones to us from time to time.

"That's his legacy. I want mine to be the program to take advantage of his plays. I want every starting Gryffindor player to walk on the field after a year or two of learning from an older, more experienced team member." She stopped and smiled at him. "We can't expect too many future players to show up a natural like you were, Harry."

He smiled. "And to think that I never realized you were so brilliant, Ginny." A wistful look crossed his face.

Ginny reached out to touch his arm again, succeeding in ignoring his muscles, almost. "Harry, what's bothering you?"

"Ginny, I... well, I should have been a better friend to you, starting your first year. If I'd gotten to know you, I'd have known you were this smart. Please tell me you had people helping you through that Chamber mess."

"I did, Harry. My whole family looked after me, even that great lunkhead Ron was helpful. The trip to Egypt was great. Bill has always been my favorite, and my other brothers don't feel bad that I say that,

it's just always been that way, so we all accept it. Hermione helped loads with my guilt once we were back in school my second year. Also, Luna and I became much better friends after we got back from Egypt, and we've become closer through the school years since. She lives in Ottery St. Catchpole, did you know? So we played together as little girls until her mother died."

"The fact that she lives there seems familiar, but I'm not sure where I heard it." Harry drew a deep breath and slowly exhaled. "Well, I feel better for you, but that doesn't let me off for not checking on you. Last year I was a mess, and yet you helped me through that. I didn't even talk to you much during the Paladin visits about anything to do with you, did I?"

"Actually you did quite a bit," Ginny answered. "I've visited once each with Ernie Macmillan, Justin Finch-Fletchley, and Terry Boot this summer for the program, and Steve Cappers twice. None of them talked to me about me as much as you did. They all just went through the standard questions. Boring after a while actually."

"Steve Cappers," Harry said with a shake of his head. "Now there's a guy who has been in the common room with me since first year, but because he's in a different dorm room and in different classes, I know precious little about him. I've been in my own little world, haven't I?"

"Oh, Harry, you once said that the Dursleys never wanted you to have friends, and Dudley beat up anyone at school that tried to get to know you, right? Well, as I see it, you never learned how to make friends. Then, most of the people in your first year as I heard it wanted to befriend the Boy-Who-Lived, not you. That caused you to shut them all out, right?"

Harry sighed. "Yeah, pretty much like that, but what have I done since first year?"

"Survived, Harry. For the first time you had two really good friends, more than you'd ever had, so you didn't need more. Instead, you spent most of your time avoiding most everyone in the school who thought you were either the Heir of Slytherin, the target of an escaped murderer, a self-promoting Tournament interloper, or a Ministry acclaimed madman."

Harry and Ginny stopped speaking at this point and simply gazed at each other. Ginny had always wanted the opportunity to look into his eyes without interruption. On one level she knew she was pushing her luck, but she decided in an instant to stand there and return gaze for gaze. Harry had not been rude by any means this summer, but he had been kindly yet bluntly frank, with her and everyone. Hermione and Ron had commented on it. In a sense he'd been emotionless in situations others might be at least uncomfortable with.

Just a few short months ago Ginny placing her hand on his arm would have caused a flurry of blushing on Harry's part. Now however, he appeared no more moved than if she had been patting the wall beside him. Ginny decided to just enjoy the moment and look into the eyes she wanted to explore forever.

Without a blink, without any indication of what had passed while they pondered each other's irises, Harry said, "And now I've turned my apology for not paying more attention to you into another discussion about me and my past woes." He grinned ruefully and slowly backed away from her the

slightest bit. Ginny swatted his shoulder in response.

Goodness she thought, his shoulders are firmer than his arms.

"Ginny, I have nothing I have to do today, would you like to have lunch and start talking about Spell Mongery, or just spend some time talking?"

Ginny looked like she'd just been kicked out of Hogwarts. "I, I'd love too, Harry. But," of all the bad luck she thought. "We're going back to check on the Burrow today. We have plenty of garden gnomes to toss, and mum wants us all there to dust, clean, weed, and such. It's one of the many places they don't want you going for fear of Death Eaters, isn't it?"

"Yes, and I don't want all of you to be in greater danger because I'm there. I think my being there might make an attack worth the effort. I don't know if I'll be able to go on Hogsmeade weekends this year either, now that I think about it. Dumbledore hasn't said anything, but my presence anywhere makes an attack more likely. For now, I go to unpredictable places and wear my hood up so I'm not recognized. I never stay anywhere for long once my name gets out."

"Potter." Snape rounded the corner into the intersection and walked up to them. "Here is the course outline for all years for autumn term. You'll also find the sixth-years' written assignments all there so you can work on them in advance. Professors McGonagall and Flitwick's written assignments are there as well. Professor Jiggers said that he will have his available for you by tomorrow if you'll check with him."

"Thank you, Professor. I'll read the course material as soon as possible and get back to you shortly."

Ginny couldn't imagine what she was witnessing.

Snape sneered at him. "I await your incisive analysis of my plans." His sarcasm would be obvious to the deaf and the blind.

Harry colored for a moment, but Ginny thought it was neither embarrassment nor anger.

Harry said, "It was not my idea to look at your class agendas. I'm sure that if you are as gifted an administrator as Professor Dumbledore says, then there is little, if anything, I can add."

Snape stared darkly at Harry. It seemed like an hour to Ginny but it was only several long moments. Harry did not stir, nor did he lower his eyes from Snape's burning glare - he seemed to Ginny to be completely unfazed by the scrutiny. Finally, Snape blinked.

"Good day, Miss Weasley. *Mister* Potter." The emphasis on the mister was ice laden.

"Har-" Ginny started to ask Harry about what just happened, but he held up his hand and did nothing but stare at the former potions master's back until he made his way around the next turn in the corridor.

"What in the blinking world was that about?" she exclaimed.

Harry chuckled in a strained tone. He told her about his new position as a teaching assistant, and how he would be working *with* Snape, and other Defense instructors for several hours every day of the school year.

"That's just brilliant, Harry. You're the best Defense professor I've ever had. Professor Lupin was good, but he taught me at a level that wasn't much help in a fight in second year. Do Ron and Hermione know? I can't wait to tell mum."

"No, and please don't mention this yet. I'd planned to think about it for a few days before telling any of you. Don't misunderstand me; I'm glad you know. Your excitement is flattering, and I do appreciate it. But it's a lot to swallow, and it's less than twenty-four hours since I was told myself."

Harry looked at his watch. "It's 10:20. What time do you need to be back?"

"Good Lord. I'm late already. Good thing you make a decent excuse with mum. Tomorrow?"

"Busy. Friday?" he asked.

"I'm free after a Paladin visit at 10:00 with Kevin Entwhistle."

"I think I'm supposed to have a visit with Su Li at that time, who I don't think I've ever said a word to in the last five years. Dumbledore said something about ending my visits, but that one and maybe a few others are still on, I think. I'll either send Hedwig or Dobby with a message, okay?"

Harry placed his hand on Ginny's upper arm for just a second and stared into her eyes. She thought she might faint at the vivid greenness of his eyes so intentionally gazing into hers.

"Thank you, Ginny, for being a better friend to me than I've been to you. No!" Harry placed a finger lightly on her lips to stifle her protest.

He only stood seven inches taller than her five feet two inches, but his presence made her feel like he was towering above her.

"I've been a friend," he said, "But you've been much better. I hope to make it up to you. I've had great friends in Ron and Hermione, and last year I gained you, and Luna and Neville to a lesser degree. I've realized this summer that even though I don't have the history with you as I do with your brother and his girlfriend, I want to know you much better. And Luna and Neville too."

Harry leaned back from her just the slightest bit. During all of this he'd showed little emotion, other than the slightest of mysterious smiles. He increased his smile as if about to tell a joke and said, "And you've volunteered to help with my mad plan to overthrow magical theory as we know it. We'll get to be better friends through that, but I'll still owe you. Now run before your mum comes looking. I don't need a scare right now."

They both chuckled and she turned to go, looking back and waving to him as she turned down a corridor heading to the secure Floo to Grimmauld Place. When Ginny reached that fireplace she placed her forehead against the cool stone for a minute.

Harry's words gave her hope, but he still talked of friendship only. Hermione had stated that after the Cho debacle, Harry would only want a relationship with a girl he knew well. She also stated that he might *not* want a relationship at all in light of the start of the Paladin Program, and especially not after the effects of the aberrant potion and his fight that day. After hearing Harry make such coldly frank statements about war and about being a killer at his birthday party, both girls feared to a degree that Harry would not consider any personal comforts or relationships until he'd seen the end of Voldemort.

Almost every guy at Hogwarts would say what Harry had just said as a prelude to starting something romantic. Ginny clearly understood that Harry wasn't a *guy* anymore. He was a man carrying burdens few men ever had to bare.

In an instant Ginny gave up any pretense of objectivity. She'd ruthlessly killed off her crush on the Boy-Who-Lived in her third year; the Tri-Wizard Tournament ended it. She'd tried and had succeeded at keeping her budding feelings for the 'person' Harry Potter in check this summer. At this moment, in perfect personal candidness, she abandoned all hope at maintaining the idea that she only wanted friendship with Harry. Yet despair told her that there was nothing she could do but be Harry's friend. Patience was not really a Weasley family trait, but she would have to settle for improving that in herself.

She whispered, "Oh, Harry. If only you knew what you do to me."

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As he recalled their conversation later that day, Harry wistfully hoped Ginny was truly over him as Hermione had said. He felt it was for the best; he had a Dark Lord to kill, and didn't want to endanger a girlfriend. But Harry thought that if he *could* have a girl....

No, he shook off that thought as he started his second major exercise routine for the day.

But as he went about the tasks he'd assigned himself, Harry couldn't stop thinking that Ginny's hair was a beautiful shade of red. He also found himself admiring her drive to excel without having to display her academic prowess. He realized he enjoyed the fiery temper that she easily contained for the most part. There were many aspects to one Ginny Weasley that he liked and admired.

The fourth time that day Harry found himself pondering his closest female redheaded friend, Harry flung himself into a complex bit of Spell Mongery research to stifle his straying thoughts. It was hard to keep Ginny from his mind, but his face never showed his emotions these days unless he chose to.

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At 10:26, right after leaving Ginny, Harry walked through the passageway between Hogwarts and St. Simon's. He was about to enter his room when he encountered Father William Martin.

"Good morning, Father William. How are you this morning?"

"I'm fine Harry. Please tell me what happened last night at the peace talks." The priest had a rolled up

paper under his arm.

"The *Daily Prophet*." Harry sighed. "I've heard a little, what did it say specifically?"

"I'm sure you don't want to know, son. You tell me, first, briefly."

"We arrived and I went right to the vampires, ignoring everyone. I started chatting with the top vampire, Count Kldonovitch, and then the troublemaking bloodsucker, Baron Ratner, tried to bite me. I fought him off and stunned him with a small dose of Thunderfire. Then I protected the other two vampires from those who threatened to kill them or hurt them. I negotiated a quick agreement, and Dumbledore wrote it up. The vampires signed it, and then so did everyone else. Oh, yes, and then the Count sentenced my attacker to death right there in front of us. Ratner killed himself in some sort of vampires' code of honor. That's about it."

Silently the cleric handed Harry the paper.

**Ministry Negotiates Peace with the Vampires**  
*Unprecedented Fight at the Talks Fails to Dampen Cooperation*

The article stated that Ambassador Glean prevailed on the vampires to settle for the predetermined negotiating points that he and Minister Fudge had determined before talks began. There were several quotes from Fudge about how well the Ambassador handled things and thanking all of the ambassadors and delegates present for participating.

Below the fold on the front page it finally mentioned a vampire did attack someone that was at the talks, but it also stated that British Aurors, cooperating with law enforcement wizards from other nations, stopped that vampire from attacking.

Finally, in a continuation of the story in the last column on page six, it mentioned that Harry Potter, Spell Monger, had acted as all Spell Mongers and charged the Ministry of Magic an exorbitant amount of money for the Thunderfire charm.

Harry looked up with fire in his eyes. He balled the paper up, and then paused. He smoothed the paper out and then apologized.

"They told me at Hogwarts it was bad. Father William, you don't..."

"No worries, Harry, but how can you stomach that sort of lying about you by the press and the Ministry?"



"It's really the Minister and a few of his close allies, not most of the Ministry. As for the press, that yellow rag has never liked me."

Harry called, "Dobby!"

*Pop!* "Harry Potter SIR is calling Dobby?"

"Thanks for coming so promptly, Dobby. If I wanted to send you to get today's magical papers from a number of other European capitals, how would you go about doing it? Do you have an idea?"

The house-elf scrunched his forehead and pause for a moment. "Sir, Flourish and Blotts' house-elves is bringing in such papers and magazines daily for patrons in this country. These papers is not displayed, but go by owl to wizards what asks. Dobby could pop there and ask where to go." He finished and looked for approval and/or instructions.

"Can you pop to other countries? I mean, I want the papers from France, Bulgaria, Russia, Romania, Hungary, and the Ukraine. That's got to be over a thousand miles round trip, probably much more. Can you go there at all, and can you make it there without wearing yourself out?"

"Harry Potter SIR is the most kindest and most caring-est master of any house-elves in the world. If Dobby is allowed to rest from time to time, the trip should not tax Dobby too much, but Dobby would go around the world for Harry Potter SIR."

"Dobby, I've told you, even though I am your master for your safety, I consider myself much more your friend than anything. I don't want to ask too much of you, please let me know if I do. Now, if you take your time, and assuming the elves at Flourish and Blotts can tell you where to go, how long do you think you'll need to go and return? I've had breakfast with Dumbledore as you know, and I plan to eat lunch out. I can sup elsewhere also, if need be."

"Oh, Dobby would never need that long to do this for Harry Potter SIR. Dobby would be ashamed if this takes Dobby more than five hours if Dobby rests entirely too much to the shame of a good house-elf."

"Well, unless there is something you need to tell me, then go, " Harry said. "Get the funds you need from Gringotts after talking to the bookshop elves. Pop by and tell Winky so she won't worry about you. If you have difficulty with finding any country's paper, don't worry or spend too much time on it. I don't have to read any one paper."

"Harry," Father William interrupted. "Do you know any of those languages?"

Harry reddened and shook his head.

"Gringotts has a translation department I believe," the priest stated. "After Dobby comes back with the papers, he could go there and ask for translations, for a fee of course, we are talking about Goblins after all."

"Yes, do that, Dobby, when you get back," Harry agreed. "If they need time it's okay. I'm not in any

big rush, but I would like to read these papers' versions of the peace talks in a day or two."

Father William added, "You could ask that only the articles on the peace talks with the vampires be translated. That would save time and expense."

"Yes, do that, Dobby, if you will. Great idea, Father William, thanks."

Dobby gave his usual exclamations of delight at being able to serve his noble master, and Harry was able to send him on without too much more fanfare.

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Harry spent an hour on his Firebolt practicing every known Seeker stunt, and a few new ones he was inventing. Dumbledore was right, he mused; flying was therapeutic to him. St Simon's had a non-forbidden forest as a part of its grounds, and it was warded to keep out just about anyone magical or Muggle. Only pilots flying airplanes over at more than ten thousand feet would not be affected by the *Confundus* charms.

After that hour Harry made his way to Diagon Alley with his hood up, and walked into Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes. He allowed Lee to see his face, placing his finger before his lips to keep him from saying his name.

Lee stepped to the back of the counter space and signaled for Harry to join him. Lee cast a quick localized Silencing charm and asked, "Do I need to close the store for a few minutes, Harry?"

"No, I'm in the market for a Pensieve. Where would you suggest I look?"

Lee looked at a customer examining a Canary Creme, hoping he wouldn't eat it here. "I don't think there's a one on the Alley, at least not Diagon Alley, and I doubt you could find one around here unless... you might get lucky at Borgin and Burkes, but that's a dicey place, Harry."

"I know, I've been there once before, by accident. Do you think it's busy this time of day?"

"Hardly," Lee snorted. "They don't open until noon, and then stay open well into the night; who knows how late. We serve a different clientele, as you might imagine."

"I'll go under the cover of this hood, Lee, and I can get out quickly if need be. I'll check back in before I leave. If you haven't heard from me in say, thirty minutes, send up an alarm."

"I don't know, Harry, but all right. Try to be back sooner, okay?"

Harry strode down Knockturn Alley in his best Death Eater imitation stride. He slowed at Borgin and Burkes' door and looked through the dirty glass. No one seemed to be in there, even though the sign indicated they were open. He moved in, and a small bell in the back rang out his arrival.

An elderly man, late seventies at least, came out and looked through, over, and then through again, the pince-nez glasses dangling precariously from his nose. He sniffed, and then said, "May I be of

service, direct you to anything, hmm?"

Harry turned and gazed through the hood opening knowing his face could not be seen. After a time the elderly gent shivered at his blank glare; Harry then shook his head soundlessly.

Harry noticed several very heavy silver cups on a shelf. They were ninety-nine percent solid silver according to the castings' undersides, and Harry grabbed all six available. He made his way to the counter.

Their price tags indicated twelve Galleons each. The man behind the counter realized this was going to be a profitable early afternoon, after all. He donned an obsequious smile and asked, "Is there anything else you are looking for, hmm? We do searches for a finder's fee if we don't have-"

Harry held up his hand. "These baubles just caught my eye for no real reason." Harry had lowered his voice in an attempt to make himself sound just a few years older. "I am interested in a Pensieve."

The man's eyes nearly twinkled like Dumbledore's but out of avarice. "Of course you know that such an item is very rare and very old, hmm?" Harry realized this man was one of those annoying people who put a universal sound at the end of just about every sentence. How irritating. Without another word, Harry pulled out his Gringotts gold medallion and held it carelessly from its chain.

The shopkeeper nearly swooned. "I'm Potiphar Burke, five times great-grandson of the founder of this fine establishment and current owner, hmm." The man looked like Christmas had come in August. "Pensieves are indeed extremely rare, although Solicitor's Pensieves are readily available for a price. They are limited in their uses though, hmm.

"I have one traditional Pensieve, however. It's only one hundred and three years old, made by the last of the Guild of the Mind Craftsmen. These newer models are so, so, not old enough to be seasoned for use, shall we say, hmm? I hate to part with this one, even Lucius Malfoy had expressed interest in it, before... er, that is to say-"

"I am fully aware of where Lucius is at this moment, Mr. Burke," Harry rumbled. He hoped that this little man would assume him a Death Eater, or at least of an old Pureblood family and Dark Arts leaning. It seemed to work.

Burke leaned in conspiratorially, and winked. "I do hope we will see my good friend Lucius soon, hmm?"

"The Pensieve!" Harry growled.

"Yes," the man started, and then blanched at Harry's demeanor. "Er, yes, but of course. You are a busy man." Burke scurried to the back of the shop. Harry looked over the counter and saw a set of eagle feather quills. He called them to himself, wordlessly and wandlessly, timing it so Burke would see his abilities as he walked back in.

Holding up the Pensieve as an offering to some evil deity, he stated, "As I said, hmm, from the hands of the last of the old Guild." He placed it on a piece of black satin, and stepped back almost

reverently. Harry examined the device with his wand first, casting a dark arts detection spell he'd read about. He turned it over and noticed the scratchings on the bottom. He set it down and shook his head.

"How much?"

"Why, I couldn't part with such a treasured device, last of its kind really, for less than five thousand Galleons, hmm? And at that I make no profit above my expenses."

Harry shot back, "That's stolen and probably evidence in a Death Eater attack from fifteen years ago or more. The quality is dubious, and the new mass produced units have greater capacity and longer lasting buffers to reduce image degradation. New ones are thirty-two hundred. To save me a trip to Paris for one of them in stock, I'll give you twenty-four."

"Twenty-six hundred and I'll include the cups and quills."

Harry knew he had started negotiating too high when the man only countered two hundred more than his original offer. "Twenty-five for all," he said, and crossed his arms.

"My wife will skin me, hmm, but... deal." The man held out his hand. It wasn't held side ways to shake; it was palm up and open for the Gringotts medallion.

Harry swiped it across the top of the ancient cash register after the man rang up the final total on the device.

The words 'Potter Vault' appeared on the display as well. Burke's eyes went wide and he backed away. "I'll, er, that is, I'll just go into the back and get a gift box to make it easier to-"

Burke turned to look at the door to his storage room. When he turned back around he and his words froze in place.

Harry was on Burke's side of the counter. Harry's wand was less than an inch from Burke's left eye, almost touching his pince-nez. "I don't fancy you calling your Death Eater friends just now. *Petrificus Totalis!*"

Burke fell against the nearby wall, stiff and unmoving except for his frantically darting eyes. Harry slowly lowered his wand. "Mr. Burke, unlike your friends, I don't damage my hostages. I doubt you are a Death Eater, but you are a sympathizer. I've finished my shopping for the day and I'm heading back to Westmorland." Harry intentionally gave him an inaccurate county name. "If you don't call any of the Death Eaters right now to Diagon Alley, I won't tell the Aurors until tomorrow about the illegalities I've seen here. In the meantime, you'll unfreeze in six or seven minutes. Good day to you, sir," Harry sneered.

Almost soundlessly Harry Apparated from the store. In six minutes and thirty-one seconds Burke was released, and his first words were, "But my wards!"

Harry composed his thoughts for the first paper Snape would require from the sixth-year Defense class. It was due on the second Friday in September, and the assignment was three feet of parchment comparing and contrasting the two different Shielding spells they would discuss in class. Although a Pensieve is most commonly used as a reservoir for memories, one can also be used to contain and organize thoughts and ideas, as well as remembered events. Harry gathered his thoughts for the paper, drew them out, and deposited them into the Pensieve.

Harry had read the textbook twice this summer, and could perform those two shields in his sleep, and two others as well. *Protego*, the first shield he had learned, he could do wordlessly producing as strong a shield as he did with the incantation, and he could produce almost as strong a shield with the words and without his wand. In a little over a week, Mr. Lovegood hoped to release an issue of *The Quibbler* with Harry's instructions on producing a stronger *Protego* shield.

Harry had organized in his mind what he felt would surely be at least three feet on the shields listed. After he dropped his thoughts into the Pensieve, Harry transfigured one of the silver cups from Borgin and Burkes into what he called a 'concentrator,' which he connected magically to the now charmed eagle feather quill floating above a scroll of parchment near the Pensieve. Then he inserted the concentrator into the memories. He drew his wand and incanted, "*Meditor integrum scriptor.*" In a few seconds, the quill began writing at the same speed Harry would write if he knew the subject matter well.

Harry went to his desk and began to read a new book about runes anchoring systems for wards. After about five minutes, Harry stood up and looked at the manuscript in progress. It was about as far long as it would have been if he'd been writing it himself for this amount of time. Harry saw a place where he would go back and edit it for clarity. It looked just as it would if he were writing it even though he wasn't, but it was his writing style and penmanship. This was going to work out just fine.

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On Thursday, August eighth, Harry sat eating breakfast at his table in the friary. He'd already had a knife-fighting lesson with Steph Granger that morning, after which he had exercised for one and a half hours. Harry thought about how much the slow motion coordination building exercises he'd learned from the original training with Hermione's father had actually helped him when he began training with a blade.

Mr. Granger had a unique perspective on fighting. Never do anything expected, and never do the same thing for too long. He had Harry slashing at assailants with his own Fairbairn knife, then Harry would step back and fling specially designed throwing knives at targets near and far. Then Harry could pop out his wand and shoot off a few spells. "Unpredictability is the sister of Constant Vigilance," stated Steph with a disconcertingly Moody-esque grin on his face.

All during Harry's training efforts, the man whom he'd initially considered to be a mild-mannered dentist was running around Harry throwing things at him, pushing objects into the path of his feet, and generally making Harry's job of learning knife-fighting that much more difficult.

Of course, that was the point - the worse it is in training, the easier it will be in a real fight. Of course

Steph and Harry both knew it was *never* easy in a real fight, but the object was to gain every little possible edge.

After the hour with Mr. Granger, Harry had come back to his haven at St. Simon's and attended Morning Prayer in the chapel. Harry found he felt the day was just that much better after attending; he felt filled with hope from participating in the service. At 7:00 Harry was back at his rigorous exercise regimen, and by 9:00 he was finishing a cup of coffee, and speed reading through the rubbish that was the *Daily Prophet*.

"Dobby, delicious breakfast. I'll eat lunch out today, and I'll call if I'll miss dinner, but I'll probably be here."

"Does Harry Potter Sir want Dobby to bring him the translations of the newspapers when they is ready?"

"No, I'll read them tonight sometime. And thanks again for going to retrieve them for me."

Harry brushed his teeth, grabbed his invisible satchel, and straightened his necktie. He then put on his plain but elegant dress black robe, and his charcoal outer cloak. He walked to the outgoing Apparation point at St. Simon's, pulled up his hood, and Apparated to the main arrival concourse at the Ministry of Magic. Eric Munch checked in Harry's wand and then handed it back to him. No one was close enough to hear the guard speak his name. His badge read:

**Harry Potter**  
**Wizengamot Legislative Assembly**

Harry planned to meet Elphias Doge and his grandson Trevor after 9:45. He was nearly thirty minutes early, but Harry had another stop to make first. He entered the lift with several other people and several memo paper aeroplanes. The button to the second level was already lit. Though Harry stepped off alone, several memos preceded him. Following the signs, Harry made his way to the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office and knocked.

The door opened. "Harry!" Arthur Weasley exclaimed. "It's so good to see you." Mr. Weasley rose to greet him, shook Harry's hand warmly, and lowered his voice as he said, "Are you supposed to be here, lad? Safety and all?" He shut the office door after pointing his visitor to a chair.

"Dumbledore knows I'm here, he sent me actually," Harry said. "I'm visiting the Wizengamot Legislative Assembly today. I'm hoping to learn to understand it well enough to use my Black and Potter family votes to do some good. We haven't studied government at Hogwarts yet, and if I

understand the secrecy of the Wizengamot, I may not begin to understand it until I receive my copy of *the* book and study it."

"Hmm, yes," Mr. Weasley said absentmindedly staring at a plaque of some sort on the wall. It looked to be very ancient, very colorful though faded somewhat, and ornately hand lettered. Harry's eyes were drawn to it and he rose and walked towards it.

*Magna Magicae Carta*  
*Three Hundred and Thirty-Three Family*  
*Weasley*

"Mr. Weasley," Harry exclaimed, "The Weasleys are a Three Thirty-Three Family?"

"We *were* a Three Thirty-Three Family. See this?" Arthur pointed to a particular bit of writing scrawled across the document. The rest of the writing on the grand parchment was hand lettered with the care and artistry of a skilled calligrapher, but the following words were crudely and carelessly done. They weren't even centered:

*Abnego Interrex Stativus*

"'Deny Temporary Rule Indefinitely' it says, or some such other translation of the Latin," Mr. Weasley stated. "It's not worded very well, as I understand it, but it makes the point." He touched his wand to the first words and nothing happened. He touched the last word and a dull yellow spark emitted from the text a faint bit of foul smelling smoke. Arthur wordlessly waved his wand and the air cleared.

"But why?" Harry asked.

"Actually, I can truthfully say I am rather proud of the reason that it's there. It's hard to lose the right to vote in the Wizengamot, apart from certain crimes, including treason. Of course Lucius Malfoy could leave Azkaban, if the Minister could figure some such justification to release him and declare him innocent, and he could return to the Wizengamot. If Malfoy was convicted, his heirs could rule even though Lucius himself would have lost the right."

Arthur turned to Harry. "That's why Malfoy hasn't been to trial. Fudge has just put him in Azkaban without a court hearing and no ruckus has been raised. The Malfoys could insist on it, or they could have solicitors by the train car full demanding the right of a fair trial, but they know he'd be convicted. All they'd have to do is have him raise his sleeve and show the Dark Mark that's there. There's a law on the book from the last war with You-Know-Who that makes bearing the mark a valid reason to lose the right to rule for one generation, if you're a Three Thirty-Three Family anyway. But

there's also a law protecting Three-Thirty-Three Family heads and members from 'inspection of their persons.' As usual, it's one law for the Three-Thirty-Three, and another for the rest of us."

The senior Weasley cleared his throat. "But back to my ancestor, seventeen generations back, I believe, Percival Weasley. We named Percy after him. Old Percival was quite a force in the Wizengamot, had control of a number of Family votes, too, if I understand it. He was all for pure-blood rights as well."

Harry looked at him disbelievingly. "It's true," Arthur continued. "Well it was the middle seventeen hundreds or so, and he went to the American colonies to return order to the trouble makers there. Seems a few British witches and wizards went over and started teaching magic to the Muggleborn magical folk popping up over there. Seems there was quite a breakout of them, and the resulting half-bloods. Well, some of them got themselves burned at the stake. They had no training in magic and didn't know the simple charm to prevent being killed that way.

"Those few witches and wizards that went there went without official sanction from our Ministry, and they had the nerve to start their own school of magic in the colonies, again without official approval. Percival volunteered to go and straighten them out. He was a staunch supporter of the view that Muggleborns were servant-class or working class, and half-bloods only a little better.

"And here's what I'm proud of. He came back two years later, and immediately started a crusade to allow the colonial school to continue, and to sponsor legislation in the Wizengamot to grant Muggleborns and half-bloods their first rights in our country.

"It was a long battle, but he succeeded without losing too much of what he wanted for them, although, as in most legislative deliberations, some compromise was necessary. Well, he rammed it through ruining his health in the process. His son had died while Percival was away, and his grandson was not of age yet. So my sickly many times great-grandfather Percival had to face the wolves at his door alone and in poor condition.

"He'd spent most of his wealth pushing through the law, and he had little to defend himself with afterwards. Those who had opposed him punished him by removing the family right to rule." He touched his wand to the offending words again and the sparks and smells returned. "There sits the evidence of how effective his attackers were." He cleared the air once again.

He returned to his chair behind his desk and pointed Harry to the other chair. He sighed, and Harry had never seen him so melancholy. "I'll let you vote my votes while I'm in school, if that's the way it works," Harry offered.

Arthur was stunned for the moment, but then smiled. A happier look appeared on his face. "I do believe you would at that, Harry, and for that thought I thank you, but there are several reasons why it won't work. First, the only employees of the Ministry of Magic that can be active members of the Wizengamot are the Director of Magical Law Enforcement, the Under Secretary for Law and Order, and the Minister of Magic himself, if he comes from a Three-Thirty-Three Family. Funny how someone can be Minister without being a Family Head. Anyway, your friend, and I use the word lightly, Auror Dawlish, heads his Family but his vote is voted by Minister Fudge. Albus, or his



designate votes Amos Diggory's votes. And so it goes.

"But the main reason I can't vote your votes is that only a ruling head of a Three Thirty-Three Family or his delegate can vote another's. No, I'm out of it, and have never been in it for that matter. It's just that last year brought this to my mind more strongly than it's ever been. "Why's that, sir?"

Gloom reappeared for just a moment. Then with an impassive face, Mr. Weasley said, "Because the family that pushed through the Weasley punishment and took our Family's right to rule and however many votes Percival had, that family goes by the name of Umbridge. And the current head of that Three-Thirty-Three Family, voting our votes, goes by the name of Dolores."

They sat silently for over a minute. Finally Arthur said, "To what do I owe this pleasure? Surely you didn't come here to discuss my family's gloomy past."

"I... er, I, well, I wanted to ask you if you have plans to buy Ginny a new broom now that she's Quidditch captain. I know you bought Ron one...."

Arthur looked a little bemused, but said, "Yes, Molly and I thought the same model that we bought Ron would do for her, as a matter of fact. Ron and Charlie both asked for brooms when named prefect and Quidditch captain, respectively. Bill and Percy became prefects and both asked for owls. Ginny now gets a broom for that and her birthday. It's all she wanted."

"That's why I came by," Harry said. "You were there, so you know I received a lot of money from Sirius. Well, I've been given my Potter inheritance as well, and sir... I'm very wealthy. VERY! But you know me; I don't care about money. I've bought a new wardrobe, some new books, and a few knick-knacks, but it's pocket change. I find no satisfaction in it for myself, but I'd like your permission to buy Ginny a really good broom. The best and fastest made for a Chaser. I could probably buy Quality Quidditch Supply and wouldn't feel it. As a matter of fact, I think I own the land it sits on and may own a minority piece of its stock. That gives me no real joy, but buying Ginny a broom would." Harry held his breath. If he had insulted this man he loved, he'd know in moments.

"Which broom did you have in mind, Harry?"

Harry smiled, and they spent the next few minutes discussing Chaser brooms and coming to an agreement.

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Harry made his way by lift to the ninth level of the Ministry, and took the stairs by the entrance to the Department of Mysteries down to the tenth level that housed the Wizengamot Judicial as he now understood it. Harry shuddered inwardly when he passed that Department of Mysteries entryway, but he shuddered equally when he passed Court Room Ten.

"Ah, there you are, Harry. We're a little early and so are you." Elphias Doge greeted Harry and introduced him to his grandson, Trevor. Harry remembered Trevor's face from Hogwarts, but they had never talked or even nodded in the corridors of school.

"I told Grandfather about our perspective when you brought back Cedric's body even though you were hurt and in such danger. Thanks for having that article published. No one had told us Puffs what really happened, and I'm glad we now know. Sorry you had to go through all... that...."

Harry stared at Trevor blankly once the subject of Cedric was broached.

"I'm sorry to bring it up, Harry," Trevor rushed to say.

Harry shook his head and said, "No, Trevor, you don't need to apologize. I thought all the Hufflepuffs had been told what happened, or I'd have told you sooner. No one should be ignorant of how brave and admirable Cedric was, right up to the last second. Was he a friend?"

"Yes, we were a year apart, and I didn't play Quidditch, but I'd like to think I was a friend of his anyway."

"Well, then," Harry said. "You're a lucky man for it and I'm sorry for your loss."

Trevor and Elphias both beamed at him.

Harry looked at his watch, desperate to change the subject. "It's less than ten minutes 'til. What can you tell me, sir, before we go to the gallery to watch?"

They had walked past two wide doors, and inside Harry could see an amphitheater of sorts. There were several men standing at the doorway all dressed the same. They either had long hair like Lucius Malfoy, or they wore wigs, mostly white wigs, that were as long. The one woman present wore her hair straight down behind her back as well; it went to her waist.

Each man wore a black robe with an absurdly high and heavy white trimmed collar. The trim came down from the collar and met in a double wide white path of trim running the length of the robes in front. White wooden toggles closed the robes. The men wore starched white shirts underneath and had cravats in the house colors of Hogwarts. The one woman there at the moment wore a feminine design similar to what the men wore.

"Those are the official robes of the member attending the Legislative Assembly," Doge stated. "You don't have to wear them, but you will be laughed at if you enter not attired that way. If you can hear some of them over there, you'll note they address each other properly now, even though not in session or inside the chamber.

"Each man is called Mister, er, Potter as it were. But you have to pronounce the 'mister' correctly. It's 'Miss-TAH Potter.'" The elder Doge made the first syllable like a snake hiss starting with an 'm' at the first, and made the 'tah' on the end explosive sounding and sharp. "Women are called 'madam' as the title is written, but here only it is pronounced oddly also.

"That's Madam Marchbank, who I believe you meet during your O.W.L.s last year." Harry nodded and Doge continued, "In there only she is called 'Ma-DAAAM Marchbank.'" The 'Ma' at first was barely heard, but the last syllable was drawn out for more than a second, but not quite two.

"It's odd, I must say," Doge did say. "But that's the way things are, and if that was the oddest bit about it we'd be in much better shape."

Harry noticed that Cornelius Fudge had made his way to the entrance area. Fudge wore the appropriate robes and a long white wig slightly off center. They looked at each other coolly and nodded as Harry had nodded to the Slytherins on the Quidditch pitch his first year, before Malfoy made that tense contest more of a war than a fierce competition.

Harry's view of Fudge was blocked by a man approaching them. He was in his seventies, Harry guessed, a little on the thin side, but quite distinguished, with his own white hair grown down to his shoulders, and standing ramrod straight at about Harry's height. He had a pinched look on his face as he looked at Harry for the briefest of moments and then addressed the elder Doge.

"Elphias, I see Dumbledore sent young Potter here to you, does that mean the headmaster will not be here?" The man spoke a little louder than was necessary, and Minister Fudge looked up, Harry saw, and shuffled a step or two their way. When Doge confirmed this man's statement, the man continued, "Blast the man! What was he thinking? We need his persuasiveness if we have any hope to carry the additional Auror funding. Blast and thunderation!" He stormed off without introducing himself to Harry.

"That's Isaiah Smith, a good friend of your grandfather's, Harry. He'll be a valuable ally in the-"

"Mr. Potter," Fudge interrupted, pronouncing the word 'mister' drawn out like the other delegates, 'Miss-TAH Potter.' "I agree with Miss-Tah Smith. I plan to vote my vote for this bill, but fear it will not pass. Dumbledore's presence and positive support might have swayed enough votes, who knows, but now it's lost, unless..." He looked into Harry's eyes and Harry felt like a he'd accidentally stepped in something 'unwelcome.' Fudge stated, "I speak to you now as Minister to a potential Wizengamot legislator, and a force for good in our society. I ask you to take your family place in the Wizengamot, as a Potter and a Black as well, and speak out for this vital funding increase." With that, Fudge looked meaningfully into Elphias's eyes, nodded, and left them to enter the Assembly chamber.

Harry turned to Doge and said, "He's trying to set me up for a fall, isn't he?"

Doge was turning green and sweat broke out on his forehead. "Most probably, Harry, but it is very hard to turn down a formal request from the Minister of Magic when he addresses another Wizengamot member. He can't ask you to vote a certain way as Minister if it goes against your intentions to vote, but his request for you to speak is not out of order."

"So, I should go in and do as he says, even though he's probably setting a trap for me?" Harry asked.

Doge gulped and looked like he might be sick any moment. Then he obviously thought of a solution. "Go in and go straight to Isaiah Smith. You still have several minutes and should be able to tell him right away that Fudge asked you to do this, then ask Smith for his guidance." Elphias gulped another deep intake of air and said, "That will work. For your grandfather's sake Smith will look out for you. Hurry, you have to wait in line, receive your book, and then go straight to Smith. Quickly, you have three minutes."

"Grandfather!" Trevor called. Harry looked over his shoulder and saw the younger Doge holding the door to the gallery, keeping it from shutting.

Harry made it to the line and looked closely at the man right in front of him. He drew his wand and transfigured his clothing to look like what the others were wearing. It was an excellent piece of transfiguration, accurate to the last detail.

The man in front of Harry looked back at him and sneered at this action. Harry glared back at him, and then closed his eyes. He brought up a tiny slug of raw magic from his inner being and forced his hair to the length roughly of every other male present. This made the man in front of Harry open his eyes in amazement. Harry smirked at him.

As each person in line walked through the double doors by themselves, a deeply resonant bell chimed, thrumming a vibration heard and felt by all near at hand. Each person smiled or nodded. They were apparently approved to be in the Assembly by the magic of the room, Harry guessed. Each in front of him held a book under their arms, and Harry guessed this was the book for legislators Dumbledore had mentioned.

The woman two people ahead of him held her book as if making an offering. As she walked through, her book disappeared for a second and a newer looking version appeared in her hands.

Harry walked through in a moment and held his hands out to accept his book. The same deep bell sounded and Harry figured he was approved. The book appeared in his supplicant hands as he had expected, but his clothing rustled around him. Most of those assembled chuckled. Some laughed out derisively. Harry looked and saw that his transfigured clothing had changed back. His hair had stayed the same length however.

When Harry realized his clothes had changed back, he naturally blushed in embarrassment. That caused a good deal more laughter, and Fudge was laughing as loudly as any. Umbridge stood next to the Minister, and her girlish giggles infuriated Harry. She wore a white wig all the way down her back, but some of her ridiculous curls of her natural hair showed in the front. Harry realized now he'd most definitely been set up and considered leaving. However, the two non-Death Eaters he hated most were laughing at him and had probably arranged this just to embarrass him. Harry would not give them the satisfaction of leaving.

Harry looked around and saw Smith in a corner. He made a beeline to him, and while doing so Harry noticed that the Wizengamot members all sat at ornate desks, built so two people could sit at each one, with plenty of room for their possessions. The desks were arranged as an amphitheater, of fourteen desks to a row, and twelve rows high, each row a step up higher than the row just below it.

Smith rose to meet Harry, and whispered loudly, "Potter! What do you think-"

Harry interrupted him. "The Minister made a formal request for me to enter and speak in favor of the Auror funding. I felt sure it was a set up even before I entered the chamber. Mr. Doge told me I probably had to grant his request and at least come in and vote. He instructed me to come straight to you and tell you all of this but he agreed with me that it probably was a trap of some sort. My

welcome confirms that. Please, sir, will you help me?"

"Okay, Miss-TAH Potter, you're here and that's settled. Double blast Dumbledore for not sending you to me instead of Doge. But I'm not in his precious Order. And double blast Fudge to Perdition! Sit and do *not* speak. He definitely wants to trick and embarrass you. When the time comes, just vote your votes, all-

Smith stopped when a man, apparently the Chairman of the Assembly, rose, cleared his throat, and called the meeting to order. "Now that we have been rude to the newest Family head to join our august ranks, I would like to make what small amends that I can. Miss-TAH Potter, I am Boaz Brownlee. I am Acting Chief Warlock, and I welcome a new head of the Potter Family to our assembly. It has been far too long since a Potter has graced these hallowed halls, and I am truly glad you are present with us."

He bowed slightly towards Harry and then turned to address all there. "Now my esteemed colleagues, let us begin."

The minutes in brief of the last meeting were read. Old business was discussed, and Harry paid as much attention as he could during the boring parts. He was tempted to read his new book, but decided that not focusing on the proceedings would be disrespectful to those present and to the role he hoped to play in the future.

Finally, the new stop-gap funding appropriation for the Auror Corps was raised. It was mentioned that this was a second reading and a final vote could be made this day. Brownlee asked if anyone wanted to speak for or against. Most people looked at Harry, but Smith rose instead.

You would not call Smith an eloquent orator. He spoke frankly and earnestly, but his speech was laced with oddities that soon made Harry realize that he needed to address this assembly in a similar manner. Certain words Smith used would not be used unless they were necessary, and they must be used precisely. No big words crossed his lips, nor did he sound like a politician currying favor, but there was definite legal jargon thrown in every once in awhile.

Smith spoke straight from the heart, with building passion, and with a fire that drove his words into the minds of those present. He spoke of the Aurors' present difficulties and backed it up with facts and figures from his memory. He spoke of the pressing need to hire new Aurors and to also increase the compensation for existing Aurors, whom he said had not had a raise in pay in over four years. Smith even attempted to shame them with the fact that the Wizengamot had voted themselves a pay raise just the previous year, a raise he mentioned that he had voted against.

Smith ended his speech abruptly. He barely muttered thanks to his fellow Wizengamot members for listening, and he sat down with a dejected look on his face.

Brownlee rose slowly, thanked his friend, Isaiah Smith, and vaguely referred to what this speech might cost Smith personally. Before Harry could figure what that last comment meant, the Chairman confirmed that no one else wanted to speak and called for the vote.

There was an odd alphabetic, then not alphabetic order to the voting. Alfred Ablebody rose and cast one vote 'aye.' Twenty-four others cast one vote, ending when Sarah Williamsmith casting one vote 'nay.' Tiberius Ogden, the elder wizard who had resigned along with Madam Marchbank the previous summer at Dumbledore's ousting from the Chief Warlock position, was one of the people casting one vote 'aye.' Then Mildred Allenton voted two 'ayes.' After three more people voted two votes, Matthew Brooks voted three 'ayes,' followed by several others voting three votes each. Madam Marchbank voted three 'ayes,' and then Clarence Spinnaker voted three 'ayes' and one 'nay.'

Interspersed between those voting one, two, or three votes, were a number of names Harry recognized from school: Abbott, Macmillan, Parkinson, Warrington, Hopkins, Baker, Greengrass, Maple, Zabini, and Corner.

"Ma-DAAM Sheets" was called. She rose with an imperious air and sneered at one and all, perfecting her vehement glare when she finally landed her gaze on Harry and Smith. She was a woman of average height and average build, aged somewhere in her sixties Harry guessed.

She said, "I cast all nine Sheets family votes as 'nay.'" There was a fire in her eyes, directed at Harry's corner, singling out himself and Smith with individual and spiteful glares.

Tilden Farmer rose when called and voted thirteen 'ayes.'

"Mister Smith," polled the secretary of the Assembly, hissing and drawing out the mister appropriately.

"I vote the Smith vote and sixteen more as 'ayes.'"

There was a counter above the assembly that added the vote totals. The 'ayes' led by a comfortable margin, and Harry thought most of those present had been called.

"Miss-TAH Fudge."

The Minister rose and put on his best politician's smile. "I, of course, Miss-TAH Chairman vote the Fudge vote 'aye,' as well as the Dawlish vote." Fudge stopped and nodded in recognition to Auror Dawlish. He and Williamson were there as Fudge's body guards this day. Dawlish nodded curtly back to the Minister, and Fudge said, "And I regret that I must vote the other votes as 'nay,' all sixteen of them."

The tally board had the 'nays' ahead by one vote.

"Miss-TAH Potter."

Harry stood. "I vote the two votes, Potter and Black, as 'ayes.'"

Harry's small smile at pushing the 'ayes' ahead by one was drowned in caustic laughter erupting from a number of places all over the room. Harry sat down perplexed. Looking at Smith, he noticed the disgust on the man's face. Then the elder gent removed that look and nodded for Harry to follow what was next.

"Ma-DAAM Umbridge."

"Hem-hem." Harry cringed at those first syllables out of her mouth. Her lumpy torso made even these distinguished robes look like so much wrinkled tarpaulin material. Girlishly, belying the evil to come, the former High Inquisitor said, "I vote the Umbridge votes, all forty-seven, as 'nays.'"

She said this looking right at Harry the entire time. Harry knew she wanted him to know she was voting to spite him, even though he figured she never would vote for increased funding for Aurors unless it could be directed solely towards hunting werewolves, imprisoning half-giants, or anything else of this manner.

Brownlee rose. "The motion has been defeated. It may be voted on again in no less than three months. Is there any more business?"

The Assembly was over for this day. Harry felt like he had lost a Quidditch match against Slytherin. Then he almost punched himself in the arm for Hermione. This was much more serious than any game, even Quidditch.

"Miss-TAH Potter."

Harry turned to Smith. "Sir?"

"You should know to only address me in here as Miss-TAH Smith. Please tell me what Miss-Tah Fudge said to you."

Harry told him in better detail than before, and ended the recitation calling Fudge an idiot. "It's not 'that idiot, Fudge,' in here, Miss-TAH Potter. It's 'that idiot, Miss-TAH Fudge.' You must observe the rules. So, it's not Miss-TAH Dumbledore's, or Doge's fault, or your own then. Our *esteemed* colleague, Miss-TAH Fudge is to blame. He wanted to discourage you from coming back, and to embarrass you out of doing him harm." Smith looked at the Minister and Harry followed his gaze for a moment, but looked back at Smith. The man had a look of fury on his face directed towards the Minister.

After a moment, Smith's eyes softened. He finally said, "Well, I'll let Doge tell you what for, but the least I can do is see you properly attired. I assume since you are here and were not expelled from this room, that you have somehow reached eighteen, though you're in my great-grandson's year at school. Do you have access to the Potter or Black funds? The proper robes don't come cheap, Miss-TAH Potter."

"I would venture to say I could buy my robes and yours if need be, Miss-TAH Smith."

Harry and Mr. Smith made their way towards the Assembly Chamber exit, but they were intercepted by a small man with thinning hair and a gold tooth for his upper right incisor.

"Miss-TAH Potter. I am Ledbetter, Clerk of the Wizengamot. Which vault do you want to receive

your daily remuneration, the Potter or Black vault, or split it between the two?"

"Nice to meet you, Miss-TAH Ledbetter. Er, what remuneration?" Harry asked.

"Oh, no, sir. I don't receive the honorific as merely the clerk. Just call me Ledbetter. As a Wizengamot Family Head, you receive three Galleons a day for each vote you wield, when you attend a session."

Harry gazed off into the distance for just a moment. "Mr. Ledbetter, please send it to the Potter vault, and thank you for helping me with this."

Ledbetter smiled an odd sort of smile. "It will be as you wish, Miss-TAH Potter, and good day to you sir. Good day to you, too, Miss-TAH Smith."

By this time the two had made it through the double doors. Both Doges rushed up to them. In a grouching tone Smith said, "Elphias, I don't suppose you thought about tackling this too-bold-for-his-own-good Gryffindor to keep him out of there, did you? Bloody Hufflepuffs."

"Most Smiths are Hufflepuffs, Isaiah."

"Yes, but *I* was a Ravenclaw, and would have figured you'd have to use physical harm on a Potter to prevent the likes of Fudge doing what he did to him. The whole Potter lot are more Gryffindor than most Gryffs." Smith's tone was a bit vicious, but Harry did not think he truly meant malice to either the lion or badger houses, otherwise Doge wouldn't have been smiling so.

"Harry," Elphias said, "I'd planned on taking you to lunch and discussing what went on today, but the session went later than expected-"

"Never mind, Elphias," Smith said. "I have to go to Tattershalls myself. The least I can do for Benedict's disappointing grandson is to see him look the part."

Harry was furious again.

A house-elf wordlessly approached Smith, who removed his official outer robe. Smith handed the garment and his Wizengamot book to the small creature. The elf then handed Smith a simple but elegant midnight blue robe in exchange and popped away.



Harry drew a square in the air with his wand and said, "Winky." In several seconds Winky appeared.

"Harry Potter SIR is calling Winky."

"Yes, Winky, how goes it with Clarinda?"

"Mistress C'linda is, is..." She stopped and ran towards a wall head down. Harry leapt forward and caught her.

"Winky," Harry said gently, "I know Dobby told you, and I repeat: I do not allow my friends to be hurt, and even though you are my bound house-elf, you are my friend first. You need never fear telling me bad news; I want the truth regardless, good or bad."

Harry would have thought it to be impossible, but somehow Winky's eyes seemed to open even wider than usual. "'Tis true. Harry Potter SIR *is* descended from the First Master."

Harry grimaced. "I guess, but we'll talk about that later. Please take this book and put it in my trunk. Charm the trunk so that only you, Dobby or I can open it until I decide how to best protect it. OH! But first, *is* there a problem with Clarinda?"

Winky paled again, if a house-elf can pale, and said, "Mistress C'linda is sad, is not finding suppliers selling her fabric at standard robe-maker prices."

Harry frowned for a long moment and then said, "Take the book to my place, and then please tell Clarinda for me that we can worry about our cost structures later - just open as soon as possible with as many styles to show as possible. Can you remember that?"

Winky raised her chin and said, "Winky serves Harry Potter SIR with a very fine memory."

"I am sure you do, Winky," Harry said with a chuckle, "And I didn't mean to insult you. I apologize."

Winky paled again and before she could say anything Harry said, "Go ahead, please, Winky. Clarinda needs to know what I told you, and let her know I'll be by later today or tomorrow morning to discuss the problem."

"Yes, sir, Harry Potter SIR." *Snap!* She was gone.

Harry turned smiling to himself and stopped abruptly. The two Doges were speechless. Smith said, "Singular," and lapsed into silence for a moment.

Trevor said, "Was your house-elf somewhere in this building?"

"No, I mongered a spell so I can call one of them from anywhere outside my house."

"Spell Mongery," Smith said as if it were a plague. He turned and walked briskly towards the stairs.

Harry thanked the two Doge's and said that he'd Owl them with his plans for attending more

Assemblies. He ran to catch Smith. Harry barely made it on to the same lift before the door shut. Smith pointedly ignored him among the others in the cramped space, and Harry quietly fumed. Smith made his way briskly out of the lift ahead of Harry.

Harry caught him after passing Eric Munch at the wand check-in station, and just before the Apparation and Floo Concourse.

Harry ran up beside the man, causing him to slow. Harry said, "Zacharias Smith. He's your grandson, er, great-grandson I believe you said, and you prejudge me based on his assessments from school." It was an accusation, not a question.

Smith barely said, "No-" when another voice interfered with their conversation.

Five in black robes, one probably a woman based on her size, were putting on Death Eater masks as the sixth, with his mask already in place, said, "Isaiah Smith. You were told *not* to vote for the Auror-

"Sheets, it's Potter!" one of the Death Eaters interrupted.

The Death Eaters were less than ten feet from them when the one named Sheets began speaking, as each group continued walking toward the other. Harry and Smith were within six feet of the Death Eaters before they realized what was happening. Smith fumbled for his wand but was hit by a Cruciatu s Curse in mid-draw. A large wizard, not Sheets, had stepped forward and applied the Unforgivable to Smith.

The torturous curse ended in less than a second. Isaiah Smith fell straight back on his bottom with the start of the pain, but it had lasted so briefly, that he had not fallen further onto his back or side. He therefore saw everything that occurred from his position sitting on the floor, though it took a Pensieve later for Smith to determine that he had truly seen what he thought he saw.

Harry had drawn his Fairbairn knife and thrown it at the Death Eater cursing Smith. The sharp knife hit the man's wand arm just back of the wrist, and it went clean through the arm, right between the two bones in the forearm. It was so close to the wrist that it damaged several of the metacarpal bones in the wrist. The pain was so excruciating that the Death Eater passed out.

As the knife flew through the air, Harry drew both of his wands and sent tandem *Reducto* r Curses at the next two Death Eaters who were pointing their wands at Smith. One *Reducto* connected with a Death Eater and shattered his right arm, shoulder, and several ribs.

The second *Reducto* connected with the head of the one called Sheets as he ducked down. The cranium is an extremely hard bone. It can be shattered, but it takes severe, exact circumstances for it to happen. The Death Eater leader Sheets' brain bucket as it is crudely called remained perfectly intact. However, the curse shook the cranium so fiercely, that several of his neck bones were crushed, and all neurological information from his mind ceased traveling below his neck. He was dead even though his brain had no way to tell the rest of his body.

The fourth Death Eater started rapidly shooting strong Stunners at Harry. The young wizard blocked them and returned the same spell with both wands. This Death Eater found he could no longer do anything but defend.

The next Death Eater tried to use an Imperius Curse on him, but the young Gryffindor shook it off with no effort - it was a feeble attempt compared to Voldemort's Imperius or Barty Crouch Jr.'s in fourth-year Defense class. Harry's single violent Stunner knocked this Death Eater out and careened him to the ground over eight feet away.

The Death Eater previously blocking Harry's stunners took the opportunity while Harry dealt with the Imperius to turn to Smith and start the Killing Curse. Harry just pointed his wand at the man and shouted incoherently in anger. The Death Eater's wand arm was ripped off of his body and that side of his torso caved in. His instantly crushed body flew over ten feet away. The damage to him was ghastly.

The sixth and female Death Eater had circled around Harry. She started to cast the Cruciatus Curse on him. Eric Munch shouted, *Impedimenta!* and she stopped in her tracks.

Harry spun at once and saw the security guard standing staring at the temporarily frozen assailant. Harry quickly hit her with a Stunner, increasing the length of time she'd be immobilized, and cast *Incarcerous!* at her and the other surviving Death Eaters. Thick ropes added to their inability to escape.

As Harry thanked Eric for his assistance, the security guard started shaking and stuttering incoherently. Harry knew this man was not hurt, so he rushed to Smith's side.

"Sir, are you all right? Do you need to go to St. Mungo's?"

"No," he stopped talking to cough. "No. Mr. Potter, I'm fine. Please give me your hand, if you would be so kind."

By the time Smith was standing again, several Aurors were on the scene. Harry hadn't really heard the screams that had probably sounded around the concourse, but a number of people were leaning against walls, huddled together, and still trying to move away from the death and destruction.

Harry looked up just in time to see Madam Sheets from the Wizengamot run up with Dawlish in tow, his wand hand bandaged, but obviously servicable. The Auror smiled with glee and said, "Potter, I see you've killed again. Well, you won't escape this time."

Madam Sheets screamed and hurled herself past Harry and the others. "Reggie!" She knelt on the floor and examined the Death Eater that had led the group - the one whose neck was pulverized. His head lolled about in a gruesome manner. She gasped loudly and scurried back. Slowly she turned from the broken body towards Harry. He'd retrieved his knife from the first attacker while he watched the distraught woman warily. Harry cleaned the blood off with that man's robes, before placing it back in his arm sheath.

"You murdered him!" She rustled around and finally drew her wand from her robes.

Before she could speak the first part of any spell or curse, Smith called out, "Expelliarmus!" Her wand, pointed at Harry, shot from her grasp.

"Florence," Smith said gently. "Your grandson was shouting the Killing Curse at me when Potter stopped him. Mr. Potter saved the life of a Three-Thirty-Three Family Head from a Death Eater. Anyone lethally attacking a Family Head would be sentenced to Azkaban, and a Death Eater would receive the dementor's kiss."

She rose swiftly and ran at Harry, but stopped short. Looking at Dawlish, she yelled, "Arrest him for killing a member of a Three-Thirty-Three Family."

Dawlish looked delighted but Smith said sternly, "Dawlish, do so at your peril. *Mr.* Potter as you will call him, heads two noble and distinguished Three-Thirty-Three Families, three Families actually. Today he entered chambers for the Potter and Black Families. You know how you are to proceed."

The Auror's face went from delighted, to stunned, to confused, to angry - all in a matter of seconds. Defeated he lowered his wand from the high ready, a dueling position where the wand could be used in several different methods of casting spells.

"I'll take over from here, Dawlish. I have the Wizengamot desk today." Up strode Kingsley Shacklebolt. He towered over all present at roughly six and a half feet.

Dawlish turned, and walked slowly from the scene of battle.

"You're nothing but a murderer, Potter," Florence Sheets screamed.

It suddenly hit Harry that the members of Three-Thirty-Three Families seemed to live in their own world, playing by their own rules - in some ways living above the rest of the population. He instantly decided he would have to immerse himself in it and play a dominate role, or forever be the little boy in the Wizengamot.

Harry walked over to Reggie Sheets' body and ripped his left sleeve off. He stood and triumphantly held up the limp arm, displaying the Dark Mark tattoo. Straightening he looked at the woman trembling with rage. "Madam Sheets, *there* is your murderer. I merely defended-"

She ran at him again; this time it was apparent that she would not stop. She had her hands up and her sharp nails aimed at him. Isaiah Smith deftly intervened, roughly grabbing one wrist and then the other and pulling her away from Harry.

"Imperius!" she shouted. "Reggie was under the Imperius Curse!"

Smith shook his head. "You know full well, Florence, that no one can take the Dark Mark under the Imperius Curse. It has to be taken willfully. *That's* why you and so many others insisted on the legislation fifteen years ago that no Three-Thirty-Three Family member be required to show their

arms, to prevent proving who was and was not a Death Eater. Your son and grandson were protected that way."

The woman screamed so loudly that she obviously damaged her throat doing so. Her screams sputtered into ragged coughs. Smith released her wrists. He pulled a handkerchief and handed it to her. She took it and wiped her mouth and nose. Then she hurled it to the ground. "You are both dead!" She hissed hoarsely. She half ran, half staggered away to an Apparation Port, and Disapparated moments later.

Harry looked at Smith. "She'll have to stand at the end of a long line to kill me."

Smith smiled wanly. "But no one more adept at maneuverings in the Wizengamot has made that threat to you. She makes Fudge, Umbridge, and even Malfoy look like amateurs when it comes to political machinations." Then he smiled more broadly. "But she hasn't hated you nearly as long as she's hated me."

Kingsley took their statements, and Smith called over several other Wizengamot members who had witnessed the attack to give their accounts.

Isaiah Smith said, "Well, I hope you've no plans for the afternoon, Potter. I'm taking you to Greenbees for lunch and *then* to Tattershalls. Have you ever been to Greenbees' private Apparation point? You can Apparate, I hope?"

"I can and I haven't been there, but I can follow you."

"Can you really, without knowing me well?"

They walked to an Apparation point as they spoke. They stepped into a circle and Harry stopped and concentrated on him for a moment before saying, "You may leave now."

Smith made respectably quiet cracking sounds as he left and arrived. Harry was almost soundless following him a second later. Smith almost didn't hear the soft snap Harry made moments after he arrived at the prestigious restaurant. Smith raised an eyebrow at the lack of noise, but said nothing.

"Mr. Smith. Ah, and Mr. Potter." Harry Greenbee turned to Smith. "So nice to see you again so soon, sir." He then turned to Harry. "And wonderful to see you again, sir, after almost three years. Congratulations, may I add, for your recent admission into the Assembly."

"News travels fast I see," muttered Smith snidely.

Harry first met Harry Greenbee the summer before his third year. He had blown up Aunt Marge and was spending the last weeks of summer holidays at the Leaky Cauldron. Mr. Ollivander had taken Harry to Greenbees as part of his thanks for Harry's helping him with inventory.\*

Harry was again amazed that such a deep melodious voice came from such a little man. Harry Greenbee stood all of five feet three, and was always impeccably attired in dress robes.

"Thank you, Mr. Greenbee, too bad I missed the Wednesday lamb special this week."

"Ah, but the same beef dish you enjoyed before is a special today if you wish to reacquaint yourself with it, or there are a number of other specials, including several rather unique offerings, *and* our most excellent regular menu."

Smith smirked at the two of them. "Enough fraternizing. Do you have a private room of any sort, Greenbee? We'll need it for a couple of hours I imagine."

"Right this way, kind sirs."

Smith stopped half way to the private room. "Greenbee, I need to speak to Cuffe." Smith grabbed Harry's arm and maneuvered him towards a table in the center of the room. A grotesquely overweight man sat with the remains of a huge meal before him. Soup or gravy dripped between two of his several chins. Smith stopped before him, and before the man could wipe his mouth to speak Smith began with no pleasantries. "Barney, this is Harry Potter. Potter, Barnabas Cuffe, editor of the *Daily Prophet*. Barney, when you make your way back to that scurrilous rag of yours, you will see a report that young Potter here has captured, hurt, or killed six Death Eaters at the Ministry of Magic's Floo and Apparation Concourse. Before you write your usual inaccuracies, let me warn you that Mr. Potter took his Family place in the Wizengamot Assembly today as the head of Potter and Black Families. You *will* report that he acted only in my defense to their precipitous attack, and saved my life from two different Killing Curses."

Smith lowered his voice, leaned in and continued. "The one leading the Death Eaters, having the Death Mark on his arm, was Reginald Sheets, grandson of Florence Sheets. You will no doubt come under great pressure to write that Harry attacked them first and that they were not Death Eaters. But mark my words, you can protect Florence's family all you want, but say one thing bad about Potter in your rag on this and you'll make an enemy of me - a *public* enemy."

Smith straightened and said, "Good day, Barney, enjoy the rest of your meal," before walking off with Harry in tow. The whole time Cuffe sat with his mouth agape, a piece of half chewed bread showing in his maw.

After they were seated, both men ordered after quickly consulting the menu. Smith ordered the beef special with hardly a glance. Harry requested the fish special to prove he was flexible. Smith requested a large brandy, and the bottle. Harry asked for chilled butterbeer if it was available.

Smith downed one double shot of brandy, and shakily poured another. He curmudgeonly complained about the price of good brandy these days, sighed, took a deep breath, and slugged down another double. The elder wizard mumbled to himself about public safety, rising prices of goods and services in general, and the cheek of Aurors regardless of their family status. Smith held his hands out in front of him and Harry noticed the shakes had almost gone.

When Smith downed a third glass of brandy Harry decided to start the serious conversation. "Why does Zacharias dislike me so, Mr. Smith?"

The elder gentleman looked at him long and critically. He finally stated, "It's not that he dislikes you, so much as he's disappointed in you. Oh, dispel that look of anger. I don't mean *you've* disappointed him. Zachy told us, with a degree of admiration I might add, that he'd never have made his Outstanding O.W.L. in Defense Against the Dark Arts if it weren't for you and your little illegal study group.

"No, Zacky's disappointed in the, in the fact that you had not been prepared for your place in wizard-society as he had, which is not your fault, not your faults at all. The blame's all Dumbledore's." zizz.

"And with that slur in my speech, I cloze this bottle of Brandy and go to tea." Just as their two drinks and the brandy bottle had appeared seconds after Greenbee left their table, the liquor disappeared from the table and a pot of hot tea with accompanying cream, sugar, honey, and lemon appeared. A small vial of a green-tinged purplish potion appeared also. Smith uncorked it and drank swiftly. His shudder told Harry the potion probably tasted as bad as the ones Madame Pomfrey gave him for his various physical mishaps.

Silently Smith poured a cup of scalding tea, and drank it down without pause. He shivered and shook his head, closing his eyes for several long moments. He muttered to himself, "That curse never improves." Then he opened his eyes to Harry and said, "Thank you, Mr. Potter for saving my life."

"I am at war with the Death Eaters, Mr. Smith," Harry stated. "I stop them whenever, wherever, and however I can. I accept your thanks but I didn't do it for your gratitude, or to make you obligated to me in anyway. And please call me Harry, at least in private, but apparently it should be Mr. Potter in public except in the Assembly."

Smith stared at him with an indecipherable look on his face. "My thanks are given wholeheartedly or not given at all. Therefore I give them once and am done." He took another long pull on his teacup. "Now, Harry, on to a brief and brutal education about the legislative Wizengamot. Oh, and you can call me... Mr. Smith."

"That's as it should be, sir."

They both grinned.

After those two long swallows of scalding tea, Smith took his time to fix a precise cup of tea with lemon and honey. He then continued soberly. "At first I was mad at Dumbledore for sending you into the Assembly unprepared. I now see he is only guilty of not anticipating that Fudge would try to embarrass you the first time you showed.

"I don't care, for now, why my great-grandson does or does not like you. You need to know what's going on whether you plan to come back or not. However, I venture embarrassing you may have been the way to make sure you learn all you can and act contrary to Fudge's wishes, am I right?"

Harry nodded fiercely, but Smith interrupted his attempt to speak.

"Smiths and Potters have been friends or at least partners in the Wizengamot since the Three-Thirty-Three Families formalized the assembly's status in 1205 AD. We'd been friendly long before that

really, but we were not as consistently thrown together before that year.

"However, your family and mine go back to the founding of magic here in England. There are few families older than the Smiths among the founding families of magic, but the Potter family is one of those few."

"Conlander Smith was the first metal worker to come to Loundon's Town after Torban Loundon and his followers started it," Harry stated. "Of course Torban also worked metal, but Conlander was the first to migrate to the existing Loundon's Town."\*

Smith frowned. "How do you know about that? I know from your grandfather that the Potter family has no personal journals from that time. They were all destroyed during the War of the Roses."

"I spent a few days helping Mr. Ollivander take his inventory three summers ago," Harry stated. "He told me the story of how magic came here, and how his ancestor Willen started making wands. Egorn the Potter came with Torban to found Loundon's Town. Egorn was not magical, or didn't have 'the Touch' as they called it back then, but his wife did, and all of his many sons were magical as well. I always wondered if I was a descendent of those Potters."

Smith stared at him for a moment. "Well, the Ollivander journals and records are significantly more complete than any others from that era, so I daresay you heard the truth as Willen the Great Olive Hander recorded it." He cleared his throat, and muttered, "Extraordinary."

"Yes, well," Smith continued after a pause, "You are of that line, though scion of which of Egorn the Potter's sons we do not know. Probably the eldest, or the eldest son with male heirs."

He cleared his throat again, but lunch was served before he continued. The two ate in silence, except for their brief comments on the quality of the food. When Smith had nearly finished he said, "As I said, the Wizengamot was formalized by the Three-Thirty-Three Families in 1205. It had loosely existed in less official form since some time in the late eighth century.

"Few magical folks will admit it, but it was copied from the Muggles. The Muggle 'Witenagemot' for all of Britain existed from the seventh century, after the Anglo-Saxon unification. Before that even, the Muggle monarchs of the minor kingdoms mostly had smaller versions of such advisory groups or Witans, made up of wise men or counselors. In the mid-ninth century the major Wizarding powers of this land agreed to a loosely confederated 'Wizengamot' for our country. From there on, the Muggles copied us.

"This organizing of our society finally showed the need for a school, and the most powerful men and women of the day, none of whom were Wizengamot major family members, founded Hogwarts. You know of the four I talk about and their basic story.

"In 1066 William the Conqueror landed on our shores and eventually gained dominance over the Muggles. French wizards soon followed and tried to take over as well, but we banded together and fought them to a draw. A few of the great British magical Families fought along side the French, thinking wizards should be more active in the Muggle world, to dominate them as our slaves that is.



"I am proud to say that the Smiths and the Potters along with a number of others fought in the forefront of the battle against the French, and some of us died fighting. The Malfoys whom you know, and the Devereaux family whom I assume you don't know, were leaders of the invading French wizards, who included the Butler, Gerard, and Leseyne families. Although we prevented the French takeover, there was no overwhelming victory for either side.

"The exact founding date for Hogwarts is unknown, but by the time of this French invasion, the school had been around for about one hundred years, so it was firmly established. Beauxbatons was started in 1109, but had a rough go at first, not wanting to follow Hogwarts' lead in typical nationalistic pride. The word 'chauvinist' is of French origin.

"Wizards did not live as long then as they do now. By the year 1205, the generation of Anglo-Saxon and French magical folk that had fought each other were dead, and so were most of their children. Even their grandchildren were dying off. The good news is that most of their great-, great-, and great, great, great-grandchildren all attended Hogwarts together - regardless of French or Anglo-Saxon origins. They did not forget their heritage as many still have not today, but they all saw themselves as British by this point. All considered this island their home.

"During that hundred and forty years or so, by attending Hogwarts, the younger members of the former French Wizarding families had become friends with those of the Anglo Saxon families -- families that tradition said they should despise. Education and youthful friendships overcame prejudices. When these friends reached the age where they began taking their places of leadership in society, they comprised the majority of those leading the nation, and they called all the major Wizarding families to meet at Hogwarts in the summer of 1205 to write the *Magna Magicae Carta*.

"Using this document to guide them, our forefathers substantially modified the existing Wizengamot of the time, and codified the establishment of the legislative version we know today. This assembly then created the judicial version of the Wizengamot, choosing the oldest and wisest among them to mediate between them. The Ministry of Magic was reformulated from its archaic version to much better manage day-to-day governmental needs."

Smith paused and took several sips of his tea.

"The Muggle Americans make much," Smith continued, "Of the fact that they were basically the first nation in modern times to govern by the consent of the people, using no monarch or lifelong supreme leader, and calling their leaders to answer to the people who elected them. For so large a nation even at that time they have a right to brag, and they have for the most part held true to that foundation, with certain rough times challenging its continuity. However, our form of government was just as radical for its time, which was over five hundred years earlier, even though it didn't include giving *all* magical people a vote. That would have been inconceivable at that time."

Smith took another sip of tea before saying, "For its day, the *Magna Magicae Carta* was far reaching in its fairness to all folks involved. It talked of 'everyman' as if it meant *every* man, but it really meant all magical people with magical heritages of two generations or more. It even provided to a small degree for the few Muggleborn and slightly more common half-bloods.

"Muggleborn witches and wizards at this time were quite often killed by their families or villages through superstition. The half-bloods born among Muggles were almost always bastard children of purebloods, and they were taken in by magical families and often made servants or wizard soldiers, although a few were given more formal status - rarely but occasionally adopted if there were no other heir from the legitimate line.

"Well, there were three hundred and thirty-three magical families of any prominence that signed the agreement and made all this work. They drafted the *Magna Magicae Carta* and made it the law of the land. A golden age of prosperity for our world followed and lasted until the Black Death hit England in 1348. Even then, the Wizengamot helped make the impact on us less than the effects on most other magical societies, and much less than the devastation wreaked on the Muggles.

"Though we Magicals had mostly abandoned actively working with the Muggles after the great Roman slaughter of the Druids in 63 AD, we didn't leave them totally to their own devices. Even now we maintain a connection with all of the Muggle government heads of state, as we did back then. Of course in the Middle Ages we did little real magic out in the open. Wizard counselors to kings and major noblemen were trained to act oddly in public and do parlor tricks, as Muggles know them today. We deluded the masses into thinking that was magic. The nobles knew we were truly magical but that we would not help them fight wars and such with magic.

"However, in 1215, when the truly pathetic King John had frustrated the Muggle noblemen out of their wits, we gave them a sanitized non-magic related version of our governing document. They modified it and called it the *Magna Carta*. Their Witenagemot was ineffectual in light of this new charter and they eventually formed their Parliament in 1295.

"However, we had evolved the Wizengamot from its early days. The *Magna Magicae Carta* merely strengthened it, and the formalization of the Three-Thirty-Three Families as rulers ensured that powerful forces had a vested interest in maintaining its effectiveness. It has worked well for the most part, but it's needed some 'course corrections' from time to time shall we say.

"We've had to squelch the occasional attempt to legalize Muggle hunting, and I personally believe we've done poorly by the goblins. However, I'd hate to judge any of those who'd fought those fierce creatures and then negotiated peace with them.

"Probably the two most important battles won in the Wizengamot have both been championed by Weasleys. In the mid-eighteenth century Percival Weasley paid dearly for fighting to give Muggleborns and half-bloods near equal status, though in this closed society, a vote in the occasional election thrown out to the people is all the impact they are able to have on our laws. They do, however, have the right to petition and ask for redress, and Arthur Weasley pushed through the Muggle Protection Act, which is amazing considering he's not a Wizengamot legislator and has no fortune.

"Of course no one can legislate whom we like or dislike, trust or ignore. Would you like to be told to, oh, let's say, would you like a law saying you *had* to like all Slytherins?"

"Never," Harry quickly responded.

"And even if such a law existed, you wouldn't like all of them anyway. You might act kindly towards them to avoid breaking such a law but you wouldn't necessarily like them. I taught my son and grandson, God rest their souls, and Zacky, that it's all right to get to know a man or woman, and *then* dislike them. There are a number of extremely unpleasant people out there. I know; most think I'm one of them.

"Zacky was always one to give anyone a chance regardless of their family name or house, liking them or disliking them based on first knowing the individual. It's why he was sorted into Hufflepuff mostly likely, although his father and mother were both badgers, too. Zacky has a number of friends in all houses, even Slytherin, although not the more vocal pureblood advocates. He never prejudged anyone that I know of except you."

"About that," Harry started.

Smith held up his hand. "I'll go there soon enough; it's not your fault or his. It's my fault and I'll explain, but first, on to understanding the Wizengamot better, and why people laughed at you when you voted."

Harry sat back; there was so much he wanted to know.

"As you can imagine if you think about it, the Three-Thirty-Three Families have not remained intact for the last eight hundred years. I find it a fascinating study of the names and origins of the families that make up the Three-Thirty-Three Families. But I'm not going to submit you to the full history of all of the names of these families just because I find it intriguing. There is an important point to it that your grandfather and I used to our advantage, and you can use even better I think, once you understand it and a number of other factors."

Smith took a long swig of tea, and fixed another cup. Harry said nothing, and it seemed Smith nodded in approval of his patience. "Based on what you know of our society and the comments you might have heard, what do you think is the most important factor to determine those who have influence beyond their number of votes?"

Harry pondered this for a moment. "It has to be either money or bloodlines, probably both, but that isn't just *one* factor."

"Right you are, Harry, those are major factors indeed. Now, Florence Sheets' family is very comfortable but not able to project that much financial pressure. Lucius Malfoy has used his money very skillfully, much to our detriment, but he doesn't have the power of Florence. Of course I've described Florence as a deadly capable legislator, but that is not her power among the people shall we say.

"Pureblood factors are what I'm referring to. Just as the Muggles revere their Royal Family and noble titles even though the Royals have little real power, we witches and wizards here in Great Britain give great deference to the purebloods. The likes of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named and the Death Eaters have actually done harm to the glamour and respect we've historically given purebloods for the past two hundred years or so.

"Two hundred years?" Harry queried. "But I thought..."

"Yes, two hundred and fifty years at the most," Smith said with a smile at Harry's confusion. "I mentioned Percival Weasley and his landmark legislation giving Muggleborns and half-bloods legal status. That happened in 1751.

"You have a Muggleborn in your house, a Miss Granger I believe. She's a powerful witch, if I've been correctly informed."

"Yes," Harry said, "Hermione Granger is one of my two best friends, and a brilliant and powerful witch."

"She would be," Smith said with a mused look on his face. "Did you know that Muggleborns usually rank in the top half of their year at Hogwarts? It's not uncommon for a Muggleborn to be in the top ten as far as magical power goes, as well as in grades. Half-bloods are up there also. Granted, in the distant past many Muggleborns were killed by Muggles, but a fair number survived, and made it to Hogwarts even at the outset of the school. That's where part of the struggle between Salazar and the other three founders originated.

"Muggleborns and half-bloods tended to be powerful and intelligent, rising to be the trusted servants and leading fighters in Wizarding house armies. They were as capable then as they are now. Did you think it would be any different back then?"

"I don't... I, er, I guess not, now that I think about it," Harry said.

"Well," Smith added wryly, "Just imagine how the older families might have thought about it back then? Many, the Smiths and Potters among them, saw it throughout the ages as new opportunities to improve the family power factors. Though we knew nothing of what Muggles today call genetic research, most people knew a lot about animal breeding back then. We knew that inbreeding weakened horses and oxen, so we knew new strong blood lines from outside the usual reservoir of families would strengthen our magical powers in our families.

"Before that time those who did not marry Muggles from time to time, or bring in wizards or witches from outside the country would lose personal magical power over the generations. However, being as provincial as wizards are, few want to marry off a daughter to go to another land.

"Potters and Smiths, like most of the Three-Thirty-Three Families married Muggleborns. We'd even marry non-magical Muggles on occasions who were strong, intelligent, and quite often of noble stock here in Great Britain. Over the centuries plenty of noble families with extra daughters would marry one to a magical family for the right dowry. The nobles were well educated and healthier, and that will always be an important factor in how healthy any future offspring will be - magical children are no different." "Mr. Smith, the pureblood advocates say that marrying Muggleborns, or worse, ordinary non-magical Muggles increases the likelihood of Squibs. They say that's where Squibs come from."

"They say that, Harry, and there is a small truth to it, but very small. I don't really know the statistics,

but maybe one in a hundred strong bloodline wizards and witches will produce a Squib. A so-called pureblood and a non-magical Muggle might produce one in seventy-five. But those Squibs, Harry, are brilliantly smart and very capable of making it in the world through their intellect. There was a Squib Potter in the early fifteen hundreds that was a genius at potions creation.

"The other way to produce a Squib is to let pureblood families interbreed and never introduce new blood. Cousins marry cousins who marry cousins. They produce children who are even weaker magically and none too bright, as well. That's the type of Squib purebloods bemoan, yet they are the *product* of pureblood inbreeding. When the lines become so weakened, introducing a healthy bright Muggle or Muggleborn witch or wizard into those bloodlines will almost always produce much smarter and more magically powerful children in the first generation, but by that time the families have little left but their pureblood pride. They are nothing but Squibs in a few more generations, or less.

"And once a Three-Thirty-Three Family is nothing but Squibs, they lose the right to rule. I'd venture that thirty or so of the Three-Thirty-Three Families that have lost the right to rule since 1751, lost the privilege and responsibility for that very reason. Many of the Wizengamot members with two or three votes have a vote or two ceded to them by a Squibbed Three-Thirty-Three Family."

Smith took a sip of tea and leaned forward as if to confide in Harry. "That very fact, young Miss-TAH Potter, is why you have about forty percent of your fourteen Potter votes and thirteen Black votes. People laughed at you today because you voted two 'ayes' when you could have voted twenty-seven."

~\*~

*Dear Harry,  
I need your help. That is, I need you to visit my father and me,  
and I would like for you to visit us at The Quibbler at  
your earliest convenience. Sooner rather than later that is.  
Oh, that sounds rude of me.  
It is no rush, Harry, but please come to see us when you can.  
Please hurry. Oh. I'm being demanding again. Let me explain.  
It all started, or fell apart, or whatever, when I finally convinced  
my father a few days ago that he needed to practice casting the  
Patronus charm following your excellent directions...*

~\*~

Harry was stunned at Mr. Smith's announcement. "I control twenty-seven votes in the Wizengamot?"

"It should be that many," Smith said casually, "Give or take one or two. Your grandfather last cast fourteen votes in the Assembly, and I'm almost positive the last time a Black voted he controlled thirteen ballots. Now, today, with Umbridge managing forty-seven votes, we'd have still lost if you'd

voted all twenty-seven, but we'd have been closer, and some of the swing votes might have seen you in a better light and considered voting with you next time. The Potter name still commands the respect due it before the pureblood issues arose, and you can combine that with the Boy-Who-Lived factor and swing opinion, that is influence, beyond your twenty-seven votes."

Harry's eyes narrowed. "I hate to use my fame from my parents dying. I don't know what happened, but it was probably my mother's effort, not mine, that defeated Voldemort when I was one. But-"

"Don't be a fool, Harry." Smith interrupted. "Use whatever you must to accomplish the right thing, as long as it's legal, moral, and ethical."

Harry held up his hand. "I was about to add with my but, that I am ready to do what it takes within reason to accomplish what needs to happen. I used my fame with the vampires the other night. I'll probably use my name to promote a start-up business I'm investing in, and I'll use it in politics if I have to, to overcome the Fudge-Umbridge domination of the Wizengamot, if that's what I saw today."

Smith looked at him for a long moment. "That's very mature of you, Harry. Zacky told us you dislike your fame, and that I should never believe what I read in the *Daily Prophet* until I speak to someone I trust to confirm or deny it." Smith looked up at the ceiling of the private room they occupied. "Would you mind telling me about the vampire negotiations, Harry?"

Harry sighed and started a quick rendition of his understanding of what had happened at the talks before his arrival, and what did happen after he and Dumbledore appeared. He thought about leaving out items that might make him look good, but decided he needed to tell Smith the unvarnished truth as best he could.

After Harry finished, Smith finally spoke after pausing in thought for nearly a minute, "I, er, that is, thank you on behalf of the Wizengamot for your brave efforts the other night, Harry. It's not my place to extend such thanks on our behalf, but accept them for what they are worth. No one else will probably give you any gratitude, unless they can hear those events from you as I have."

Any observer to the conversation over the next minute would have easily seen that Smith was trapped willingly by the intensity of the green eyes across from him, burning with righteous anger and determination. Harry said, "I do nothing for the gratitude of the people or government. They have been fickle and two-faced at best towards me over the years.

"I negotiated with vampires, I fought and will fight with Death Eaters, I will attend the Wizengamot whenever possible; I do all this to stop the senseless death and destruction I've already seen too much of in my life. There's no reason for it. None!

"There's no good reason to have killed those Death Eaters today. Oh, I'm glad I was able to save your life, and the others they'd have attacked after killing you. There's no good reason for it, though. Blood purity is stupid, and I thought that before you told me what you did just now. Do you know Voldemort's real name is Tom Riddle, and he's a half-blood? His father was a Muggle who hated the witch that bewitched him for a time and bore his child."

"He's a what? You're kidding, right?"

"No, word of honor," Harry said. "I'm trying to figure the best way to release that information to the public, but until the *Prophet* is brought to heel, or until we figure a better way, I'm keeping that quiet for now. I'll only have one chance to make a big splash about that. But I'll release that information with all the particulars in a month or two at most."

Harry ran his left hand through his hair. "Mr. Smith, it makes no sense for purebloods, half-bloods, and Muggleborns to be at odds with each other. And if there were no Dark Lord at the moment, it seems we'd still be fighting to the point of drawing blood just because we can. I mean, I have schoolmates who are Chinese, Indian, Scottish, Irish, Welsh, and English; black, brown, yellow, and white. In the Muggle world those are often causes of hatred and war even. It's admirable that in the Wizarding world all we do is argue over national Quidditch teams and who might have the best native dishes, but we also enjoy a good match and appreciate the cuisine from each country. Most of us are color blind.

"Why can't we witches and wizards be proud that we are whatever we are, secretly feel we are just a little better for our particular heritage, and then appreciate and benefit from each other's unique abilities and upbringings?"

"But NO! We have the Malfoys and the Sheets whom I just met. They think they deserve to have things their way just because of their family name. Malfoy is insulted that I have the nerve to be better than him in Quidditch, of all the stupid things. And now this Sheets woman thinks it fine for her grandson to kill and torture just because he's a Sheets and a pureblood. Well, I've just declared war on that kind of thinking." Harry ran his left hand through the hair on the back of his head.

Harry actually stood in their private room, and then quickly sat back down. He gave a wan smile to Smith, whose face appeared to be merely thoughtful. Finally Harry said after calming himself, "Mr. Smith, you said that you and my grandfather were peers and friends, fighting for your views in the Wizengamot. You also seemed to imply that we have some advantage other than blood purity, some trump card to play because you're a Smith and I'm a Potter." Smith nodded. "I'd like to use whatever advantages I can to change the way things seems to be happening in the Wizengamot. Great day in the morning, why don't we try to change our whole society while we're at it?"

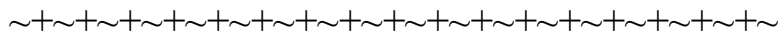
Harry smiled sheepishly. "I'm not foolish enough to think we can fix this before school starts next month. It'll take my lifetime perhaps. But can we please start? I'd like to think I *won't* be fighting Death Eaters for the rest of my days. I know there will always be enemies to society as long we can say that sin exists in the world, or however you want to explain it. But can we at least attempt to end *this* prejudice for the most part?"

Smith stared at Harry with the barest of smiles on his face, which did not reach his eyes. Harry guessed Smith was thinking and chose to let him do so for as long as he wished. Smith fixed another cup of tea from the never emptying and perpetually hot teapot.

Eventually Isaiah Smith asked, "First, tell me about being a Spell Monger?"







*Disclaimer--- What belongs to J K Rowling is J K Rowling's. Everything left is mine, I guess, but remember the old adage: "There is nothing new under the sun."*

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*Aaran St Vines*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# "Great Scott, Potter, This is War!"

## Chapter Fifteen - The Three-Thirty-Three Families

### Chapter Fifteen - The Three-Thirty-Three Families

Thanks go to my writing coaches, Kokopelli and ebdarcy, as well as my beta reader, ninkenate.

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*Author's Note - This is a short chapter, for me. The real world rears it ugly head again, but at over ten thousand words it is still longer than ninety percent of the fanfiction chapters out there. The next chapter just went to beta reading.*

*You may find this chapter a bit stilted and might wonder why it and the next chapter deal in certain subjects to such detail. I determined at the outset of writing this tale that I wanted Harry to be able to change Wizarding government, education, and society for the better, but Hogwarts wasn't built in a day. The government will substantially change within six months. Education will take Harry several years, and society will take decades.*

*However, the groundwork for all of this will be laid before Harry and the gang returns to Hogwarts on September first, which will happen in chapter eighteen or nineteen.*

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*Previously, Harry had lunch with Isaiah Smith, great-grandfather of Zacharias Smith and a prominent member of the Wizengamot. Earlier that day Cornelius Fudge had coerced an unprepared Harry into taking his place in the Wizengamot prematurely. Frustrated with Dumbledore for the young man's lack of preparation, Smith had been abrupt with Harry during the embarrassing Wizengamot session. However, Smith's treatment of Harry changed for the better during their lunch together - for just cause.*

*Before departing the Ministry of Magic, Smith was attacked by six Death Eaters. The attempted assassination was in retaliation for Smith's open support of an emergency funding increase for the Auror Corps. Harry's intervention had thwarted the attack, saving Smith from a torturous death.*

When the two men departed Greenbees restaurant, Mr. Smith led Harry through Diagon Alley to Tilter's Way, a side street Harry had never even noticed before. Its entrance would be easily missed by most, as it appeared to be a small pathway between two shops. After one approached the street and faced it straight on, it expanded to be about as broad as Knockturn Alley, but sunny and pleasant, and very upscale. Harry realized this was the location of the more expensive shops of Diagon Alley.

Tattershalls was the third store on the right.

Ernald Tattershall himself came to the front of the store and gushed over Smith, ignoring Harry.

"Naldy, stop your nattering, man, I'm not your customer today," said Smith.

Before entering the store, Harry thought he was wearing high quality clothing. After all, his cloak was a gift from Remus that his guardian has purchased from a very nice shop. Also, he was wearing the dress version of his Winky-made utilities, and Harry had never owned anything to compare with his dragon hide boots.

"Mr. Smith, you know Tattershalls' doesn't dress servants and half-bloods, surely you wouldn't bring a Mudblo--" The man's prissy diatribe was cut short by Harry's wand in his face.

Smith smiled. He had warned Harry of Tattershall's pure-blooded snobbery, and had suggested a particular approach to handle him. "Ernald Tattershall, this is Mr. Harry Potter, the newest member of the Wizengamot and holder of twenty-seven votes. I am sure he will remember your greetings when the time arrives to vote on extending your franchise for the exclusive tailoring of parliamentary robes."

Harry hated what he was about to say, but he saw the dubious wisdom in following Mr. Smith's advice. "Mr. Tattershall," he began. "I'm already tired of your face and angered by your words. I require someone else to fit my chamber robes, or should I perhaps have my house elves whip up some and explain to the others legislators that your workmanship has suffered of late?"

What little chin the tailor possessed disappeared in a gulp, and the fop swooned to the floor. Harry's quick wand work broke his fall.

"Was it necessary to treat him that way, Mr. Smith? He could have been hurt, and I'm used to having pure-bloods act rudely towards me."

"This is step one, Harry. To become a feared Wizengamot member, you must instill fear in the right people. You are looking at one of the biggest gossips about the Chamber and its denizens. Before the next session, everyone who may oppose you in the future will know that it is dangerous to cross you or insult you, and those in the muddling middle may gain some hope from your show of strength. Eventually they might come over to our side. I'll ensure that our existing allies, or at least most of them, understand what happened here. I won't bother myself with the Dumbledore faction. They do as he wishes without any thoughts of their own. You may tell the Headmaster what you will."

Smith leaned over and patted Tattershall's cheek roughly, increasing the power with each strike until the little man aroused. Smith then grabbed his arm and shook him firmly.

"Naldy, I've warned you that *even I* don't like such words as half-blood and Mudblood, and here you go insulting more than just me." With strength Harry wouldn't have guessed at, Smith lifted the small man to a stool nearby. "I've prevailed on Mr. Potter to give you one more chance. You'd do well to produce your best work, soonest, and give him your long-term client discount from the outset. I've

told him what I paid for my last robes from here, and that was highway robbery."

Tattershall gulped again, producing even more Adam's apple and less chin than before. At a snap of his fingers the shop house-elves appeared. They hustled Harry to a mirror, and using multiple tape measures the elves were soon recording all his dimensions at once. In the midst of this activity one elf accidentally stepped on Harry's toe, something he did not even feel in his dragon hide boots.

Harry was only aware of the misstep when the tailor slapped the elf across the room and began to berate the little creature for this infraction. Harry reacted to this abuse without a thought. Tattershall yelped as his body suddenly rose from the ground and spun around three times. By the end of the third spin, Tattershall was floating helplessly before a very angry Harry Potter.

"*Must* you hurt and mistreat your elves without cause?" Harry's rage this time was much more genuine than his earlier pique at the tailor's blood prejudice. "I didn't even realize this elf had stepped on my foot, and no harm was done. The measure of a man can be taken in how he treats those beneath him. If you work very hard, you might manage to insult Gryffindor, Quidditch and Spell Mongery before I leave, more things I hold dear. Shall I bring my friends back with me next time so you can insult them, too?"

Tattershall was visibly shaking as he floated six inches or so off of the floor in front of the angry young wizard. Harry closed his eyes and ran his left hand over his face. He slowly lowered the little man and reached out to steady him as he did so. Tattershall flinched at his touch, but Harry gently helped the man to a chair by the wall. Nonchalantly he pulled a wand and wordlessly summoned chairs for himself and Smith.

Harry looked down for several moments; before he looked back up. "I apologize, Mr. Tattershall, for my actions and words today. I've acted against my own standards of conduct. I don't want you to fear me; I will not harm you even if you displease me. However, if you deliberately inflict bodily harm on another, especially on one who is not free to leave your service, you will incur my wrath. Kicking your own house-elf may be legal in this sorry kingdom, but I disapprove of it. If I see it, I will stop it but I will not harm you for doing it."

Harry took a deep breath. "I will harm Death Eaters or those who attack my friends. And I consider *my* house-elves to be my friends. My elf Dobby has saved my life, and I his. So you see, I value elves as you may not. But even that does not explain my actions today. What I am about to tell you could be valuable information to those who will oppose me. I ask for your secrecy, but I know of your reputation for spreading gossip. So knowing of this flaw of yours, I willingly risk telling you this and hope that your better nature will rise to the occasion.

"I was raised by Muggles, you may know. But what you do not know is that they treated me little better than a house-elf. I was told nothing of magic or my place in our world and my relations assigned me many servile chores. I would then be punished for not completing them to their satisfaction. I was never hurt badly, but was cuffed about the ears regularly, and viciously spanked for the slightest infraction, real or imagined - *just as you struck your house-elf moments ago.*"

Harry looked down and sighed again. He helped Tattershall to his feet. "I apologize again, Mr.

Tattershall, and I hope you will treat your elves better in the future, but that is ultimately for you to decide. You should also consider that while those who espouse pure-blood supremacy might enjoy your bigoted remarks, there are many, including a number of pure-bloods, who do not agree with you. For the health of your business you should at least wait until you know the political leanings of a prospective client before you speak."

Harry took a step back and nodded at the stunned little tailor. "Now, sir, I need... three?" He looked at Smith who nodded. "Three of your fine chamber robes in my size, and I need at least one of them by Tuesday morning."

Tattershall silently opened and closed his mouth three times before sputtering twice. Then he said to his elves, "My apologies, Pildie. Do you and Hangler have all of Mr. Potter's measurements?" The terrified elves nodded.

"Mr. Potter, Tattershalls will complete your three robes by 4:00 PM tomorrow. Where may we deliver them?"

"Thank you, Mr. Tattershall. For security reasons I would prefer that my house-elf come for them at that time if you'll allow it."

Ernald Tattershall gulped, but spoke with increasing resolution, "I can only promise your house-elf's safety if he or she will come to the elf entrance at 4:00 sharp, Mr. Potter. I cannot make my other clients..."

"That is fine, Mr. Tattershall. I understand your business issues and clientele far better than I would wish to. Oh, and please call me Harry."

Tattershall gasped for a moment. "No sir, Mr. Potter, it's not as we do things, but I thank you for your kind offer. Please call *me* Ernald, or Naldy if you wish."

"Which do you prefer, sir?" Harry asked.

The tailor looked back and fore between Smith and Harry. "Ernald is my preference, but you may--"

"Then Ernald it is, and I look forward to seeing the quality of your workmanship. Oh, are there any comforts, conveniences, or other features you add or can add to make these robes more comfortable?"

Tattershall's eyes brightened. "Well, each robe comes with the standard resizing charms to allow for changes in girth two sizes in either direction." The little man smiled. "But judging by your physique, we'll shift and strengthen those charms for gaining muscle mass in your arms and shoulders. The Cooling charm also comes standard, and a Warming charm is available, too. However, only older witches and wizards with circulation problems request it.

"I daresay you use those wand holsters all the time, so a wand pocket will not be needed. We sometimes receive requests to add special food or beverage pockets, but by Wizengamot rules those are not supposed to be included. No food or drink in Chambers, but..."

Smith laughed. "Get those pockets, Harry. You may find you need them as your esteemed colleagues become more and more longwinded at budget hearing times."

Tattershall blushed and nodded as he looked at Harry.

Harry smiled and said, "I leave my chamber robes in your hands, Ernard, oh, and do include a wand pocket for each hand; you never know when I might decide not to use these holsters. Please inform my house-elf if any special care or instructions are needed for the Chamber Recognition spells, unless all house-elves automatically know such things. Thank you, Ernard."

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Isaiah Smith's eyes lit up when Harry suggested Florean Fortescue's as a place to chat. His delight quickly faded into obvious disappointment when he saw that it was, as usual, full of customers. Shaking his head regretfully, Smith explained that this conversation would require privacy. Harry allayed the older man's fears by explaining the spell he had mongered to create a Zone of Silence as he'd decided to call it. Smith smiled and began enumerating his favorite flavors of ice cream; he always found it difficult to choose just one.

After they had polished off two excellent ice cream concoctions with syrups and nuts and chatted for a bit, Harry summarized what he'd learned so far.

"Okay, so until about two-hundred years ago, it was common knowledge that Wizarding families deliberately married Muggles on occasion to strengthen their magical power - usually Muggle nobility - or Muggleborns. Only in the last hundred and fifty to two hundred years has "pure-blood" become such a catchword for snobbery. The magically powerful pure-blood bigots insist that they have kept strong by bringing in magical brides and grooms from other countries. Yet, you believe it is far more likely that they've surreptitiously introduced Muggle blood into their family lines, teaching the Muggles to act magical or keeping them in seclusion."

"Here is an observation that forces me to consider a more detestable possibility," Smith interrupted. "When a male heir has been born to one of the outsider brides of dubious magical abilities, a much larger percentage of these females have died in childbirth than is the statistical average."

"That's abominable!" Harry exclaimed.

"The death rate is a fact. The cause is mere speculation, and I don't think it happens any more, but..."

Harry shook his head and continued. "The pure-blood advocates with money are not pure-blood at all, and those poor and uninformed pure-bloods gradually lose their magical powers trying to maintain purity. My friends the Weasleys...?"

Smith said, "They are so blood-blind that they have married across all segments of society and have done so for love, not advantage. They've succeeded through their openheartedness to do what the pure-bloods only hope for with nary a Squib in the bloodline. I seriously doubt there is a magical family around that's more than half magical blood, even at that, and the Weasleys are probably as pure

as they come today and still powerful."

Harry stated, "That's what Hagrid said, about most being no more than half-blood, when Draco Malfoy first called Hermione a Mudblood in our second year. I'd never heard the word and Hagrid explained it to me."

Smith nodded and said, "Hagrid should know, his father was much more pure-blooded than the Weasleys and the last of his Three-Thirty-Three family. When Rupert Hagrid married Fridwulfa for love, he ended the Hagrid family's right to rule. He tried to sell that right, but no one offered him what he asked, I believe. He never approached me.

"Then Rupert was mysteriously killed during young Rubeus' third year, and Ranulf Malfoy secured the Hagrid family vote by some machination I've never figured out."

Harry was shocked, but resumed his summation after a stunned pause. "You also told me that you had raised Zacharias after your son and grandson were killed along with their wives during Voldemort's first war. You trained up Zack expecting me to be similarly raised to rule in the Wizengamot and knowing our families had always been friends. Since I knew nothing of this, Zack was more than disappointed and has let his feelings fester to the point where he treated me badly last year. You will explain things to him, won't you?"

"First thing after dinner this evening," Smith promised.

Harry paused before going on. "And now you tell me that for almost two thousand years, a family's status was largely determined by how far back it could trace its magical roots. So Smith, Potter, Miller, Tiller, and Cooper would be the family names with the strongest claim to rule. And if the Ollivander family had chosen to join the Wizengamot, they would be the most acclaimed, since Willen the Olive Hander introduced magic to this island. Do I have that right?"

"Yes," Smith confirmed, "And by creating the wand, Ollivander probably holds the most famous *old* name in the magical world.

"You see, we should be able to control more opinion and sway in the Wizengamot than our votes can provide us alone, if we try to go back to the old ways of recognizing family magical history as the thing most revered. If we begin to speak this way, many others will respond, because it will change the order of things to some degree. Though there are plenty of Millers in the Wizarding world, the direct line from the first magical Miller died out in the Black Death era. That line now exists in your list of votes through the Potter heritage. You can mention it to add to your own prestige.

"However, Alexius Tiller, for example, tends to vote with Florence Sheets, though not always. She's a distant cousin and claims better bloodlines than his. Alex's maternal grandmother was a powerful and beautiful Muggleborn witch. Alex chaffs at Florence's hold over him because of blood claims. If we raise the issue of the longevity of magical heritage, the Tillers have been magical in England nearly a thousand years longer than the Sheets. Alex's vanity will love that, and give him the excuse he needs to join us. Your grandfather was always solicitous of Alex's opinion when young Alex took his place in the Assembly in '39. If you ask his opinion from time to time, we'll gather him in with us.



He's a good old soul but a little weak-willed. He may also cajole his friend Darance Bread to join us. That would be three votes for our side - a six vote differential."

"A what?" Harry asked.

Smith looked the slightest bit peeved at the question but lightened up and answered readily. "Three votes no longer voting with them and now voting with us change the score by six votes." Harry nodded and pinked in understanding.

Smith smiled and began to warm to his subject. "You know about the Ollivander family history and the few early magical families in Old Albion. Do you know more about our magical history? Binns still rants on primarily about goblins I believe, but have you read any beyond his incessant drones?"

Harry shook his head. Smith frowned. "I need to have a talk with Dumbledore. Well, Harry, do you remember your Muggle history of our island? Have you guessed about how it has affected us, even though we've tried to remain separate from them for nearly two thousand years?"

"I sort of remember what they taught in my first six years. It was mostly a survey of British history and world history from a British perspective, I guess."

Harry paused thoughtfully. "I remember a bit about the Saxons invading and the locals fighting all through the years after the Romans left. I know that when the Saxons finally took and held London it messed up the Wizarding economy, which was dependant on the Muggle currency of the time. That's when Gringotts was founded and the Galleon, Sickle, and Knut were created. Early five hundreds AD if I recall."

Smith nodded. "Yes, that's an important event. I bet you heard that from Ollivander, not Binns." Harry nodded. Smith continued, "Well, our magical history runs parallel to many of the Muggle events. Let me give you a brief overview of the historical timeline of those who serve in the Wizengamot. If you know, let's say, that all boat and shipping related magical family names came in with the Vikings in the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, you'd know that the Longbottoms are a thousand years behind the Potters."

"I'm not supposed to use that against Neville and his Gran am I? Because--"

Smith held up his hand and Harry stopped. "No, Harry. Longbottoms have always fought along side the Smiths and the Potters in the Wizengamot on the side of the Light. We'd never insult them, even if their opinion differed from ours. We'd reason with them. However, the Sheets family is named for a ship part also - the ropes that guide sails are called 'sheets.' Therefore, you know Florence is also a thousand years behind your family in magical prominence in Great Britain. She's one we fight against.

"If we use our magical heritage to treat Florence like she's nouveau-magical, and imply insult to her that way, we will do as your great-grandfather and I did to prove *whomever* we are insulting. We would cast dispersions on the jumped up Sheets or Malfoy families, but then shortly thereafter we'd say something very nice about the Longbottoms or Dodderidge families, for examples, who are of the same era or even later. Complimenting them is one way to prove our point, but if it is appropriate to

conditionally yield the floor to them to ask their opinion, that is even better."

Harry sighed. "I hate the idea of just considering Florence Sheets an enemy without trying to talk to her first."

"Harry, your efforts with Naldy Tattershall today, treating him kindly, were a credit to you and your family name. I'm such a curmudgeonly old coot that I often forget you can catch more pixies with sweet sap than with owl bile. But Florence Sheets will never be your friend even if you give her half of your family votes. She hated you before you were born, and the fact that you killed Reggie today means she is trying right now to figure out how to have you murdered. The only reason why she hasn't simply hired an assassin in the last hour is that she's also trying to figure how to gain your votes for herself, or someone she controls. She wants to be certain of that before she has you done away with."

Harry looked at Smith and raised one hand to eye level and said, "Voldemort." Then he raised his other hand to a level far below the first and said, "Florence Sheets, got it."

Smith had flinched just a little when Harry said the first name. "You can blithely joke about her, but, Harry, you have just underestimated her hatred and her guile unless you realize that everyone else who hates you is far below that second hand."

Harry nodded his head. "I'll take your word for it, but I find it hard to believe she can hate me more than the Malfoys."

"Maybe so, but Lucius is not around right now, and Draco doesn't play on the same pitch with Florence. Now back to my family name history lesson. As with most last names, many of the oldest family names in the Wizarding world come from occupations or trades."

Smith went on to describe some of the other occupation based names that followed the Potters and the Smiths - names such as Hunter, Houseman, Fletcher, Tanner, and Thatcher.

Next in the history of last name creation came color based names - Black, Gray, Brown and Brownlee, also Green and Greenglass. Then came geographical landmark names such as Meadows, Fenwick, Hill, Brooks, Wood, Oakley, and Maple. Then came family names derived from animals such as Fox, Byrd, Wolf, Lyons, and Weasley.

The Saxon and various Scandinavian Viking raiders not only added shipping related names such as Longbottom, Sheets, Snape, Spinnaker and Tunstil, but they also made popular patronymic names such as Peterson, Williamson, Pierson, and Carlson.

The French names such as Malfoy, Butler, and Devereaux, came with the Norman invasion, and they were followed by the food related names of Fudge, Cake, Appleseed, Bread, and Drinkwater. The final names group Smith described as odd and of no logical derivation - names such as Dipple, Diggory, Dawlish, and Dumbledore. Porpington, Jorkins, and Umbridge were in this category, but Smith stated most of these names began with the letter D - Dippet, Dodderidge, Diggie, and Dingle were added to the list.

Regarding the Malfoys, Smith stated that their family had entailed their right to rule to only male heirs of the Malfoy name. Malfoys had been very active in bringing in wives from outside sources, and they used Malfoy daughters as little better than Wizard trading cards to marry off for political gain or profit. Therefore, Mrs. Malfoy couldn't exercise her husband's votes, and Fudge voted the Malfoy ensigns and assignments. Those were the sixteen he'd voted against the Auror appropriations this day, though nothing required Fudge to vote them as Malfoy would have.

Smith finished with several very important details about Wizengamot activities. "Now as to recognition. The chamber acknowledges or denies a person's claim to the right to rule. When you entered and the bell gonged, you probably thought it accepted you to be there." Harry nodded. "Well, it did, but it also acknowledged your ability to vote your twenty-some-odd votes. When it's time to vote, if you or anyone claims *more* votes than your right, it will clang something fiercely unsettling, and we have to stop and go to the book for clarification. Claiming less votes than you can causes no chamber warning, as you saw. Claiming too many, by the way, is the most embarrassing thing that can happen to a Family Head in the Assembly."

"The book?" Harry queried. "Do you mean the Wizengamot handbook?"

"No, sorry. *The Book* that works in conjunction with the chamber to keep things on the up and up. You met Ledbetter, the Clerk of the Wizengamot. He's actually checking as we go along. The Book itself records everything, but the law states that someone needs to check its entries. Useless law, that, but someone a hundred and eighty years or more ago thought he was misquoted. The Book can't misquote, but that didn't stop an idiotic law from being written.

"The chamber and the Book were magically created by the most powerful wizards and witches of the age back in 1205. The two loosely compare to Hogwarts and the Sorting Hat. The magical folk of the day put their best magic into making The Book and the chamber are sort of all-knowing, at least about who does and doesn't have the right to rule, and who has a strong enough claim on another's votes, *and* who has the stronger claim to vote another's if there is conflict. Of course, you can't just take someone's vote without a logical reason, but The Book is the arbiter of these things. It decides the merits of such a claim. Next time you join us in chambers, arrive early, Harry. Go to Ledbetter and ask about the existing Potter and Black votes. He'll tell you how many votes you control. You'll have various family ensigns in your paperwork from the Potter and Black vaults at Gringotts, but they may not be clearly marked as to why you have another's vote and how many generations you may claim it."

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Harry realized that they'd been sitting there for over an hour, their ice cream long gone. He cleared his throat. "Thank you, sir, for your time and your information. May I sit with you, or at least near you and ask questions in the Assembly?"

"Definitely."

"Also," Harry asked. "Could you take a little more of your valuable time some day in the future, and tell me more of my family members that you knew?"

Smith stared at him. "No one's told you about them?" Harry shook his head and looked down.

"I will, son, and I'll speak with Zacky this evening. You two got off on entirely the wrong foot with each other. You may never be the friends that Benedict and I were, but you should be fast allies for the war ahead and the decades that will follow as you both serve in the Wizengamot.

~\*~

Harry spent the evening reading the translations of the foreign newspapers' accounts of the vampire negotiations. They all reported the events regarding Harry accurately and fairly. The Bulgarian and Ukrainian papers even went on to boldly state that Ambassador Glean, and Minister Fudge to a lesser degree, should be held responsible for nearly causing a war with the vampires. This was viewed as unconscionable interference when such a war would be fought primarily in Eastern Europe with limited effect on the geographically removed Great Britain.

The translations were bound in a book with the goblin seal of accuracy prominently displayed on its cover. Harry ran his hand over the seal lost in thought. This information was vitally important, but how to use it? That was the question. Until a better plan came along, Harry decided to take the translations along every time he attended the Wizengamot, just in case the right opportunity presented itself.

Harry spent the rest of the evening reading and rereading a second time the Wizengamot Book of Rule. Although it was not an easy read, it was no more difficult than the Hogwarts history textbook he'd received. The rule book made much more sense the second time through. Harry planned to speed read it again Monday night.

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At the start of Thursday's knife-fighting lesson, Steph Granger had told Harry he'd be gone for a week. He said it was business for Dumbledore and the Order. His expression told Harry that was all he intended to say on the matter. Any questions would be pointless. The lesson had been particularly grueling, pushing all other thoughts from Harry's mind. The rest of Harry's day had been a blur of activity: entering the Wizengamot, meeting Smith, the battle and all that followed. His thoughts did not return to the dentist's mysterious mission until Friday morning. Lingering over a second cup of coffee, Harry found himself wondering exactly what the mild mannered dentist and consummate Muggle warrior was doing for Dumbledore.

Harry was roused from his musings by Hedwig's arrival with several pieces of mail. Remus and whoever helped him were still vetting Harry's owl posts. Hedwig fetched any "approved" posts for Harry twice each day, making one run early in the morning and another in the late afternoon.

The first post was Luna's plea for Harry's assistance with her father. Harry didn't understand how conjuring a corporeal Patronus could have triggered Sol Lovegood's unusual behavior, but he definitely wanted to help his friend. Perhaps, he could make it to the Lovegoods' this afternoon, after seeing Clarinda.

Harry was meeting Ginny at 10:00 to begin their Spell Mongery research and he wanted to allow plenty of time for that. He finally decided to send Winky off with a note telling Clarinda he'd be there

by 2:00, and not to worry about fabric prices for the moment.

The second owl post was from Molly Weasley.

My Dear Harry,

I hope this finds you in good health. I know you are better fed this summer than ever before, but I so wish I was the one feeding you.

To set your mind at ease let me tell you that Arthur and I are delighted you're joining us in buying Ginny a broom for her birthday. I really know nothing about brooms and how to figure out who should ride what and when, but we've been around our Quidditch-mad children long enough to understand your explanation of why this would be an excellent choice for our Ginny as Chaser and Gryffindor team captain.

Now, the real reason I'm writing you is to thank you, Harry, for your very important part in bringing Percy, and that sweet girl, Penny, back into our lives. The other day when we were all at the Burrow, cleaning, degnoming and such, Arthur Apparated home and called me into the parlor. All the children were outside working and he simply handed me your letter to all of the Weasleys asking us to forgive Percy.

My dear, sweet, seventh son in all ways but blood, you'll surely see the evidence of my tears of gratitude on this post before I'm finished. Your depth of feeling for us, and your perspective on a loving family... well, it humbles us to know that you attribute your wisdom on the importance of family to spending time with us. I could go on through scroll after scroll, thanking you, but I shan't embarrass you so. You do have a mighty big hug coming Sunday at the birthday party.

Back to what happened. After I read your letter, twice, Arthur told me that Percy had approached him that very morning with your letter, admitted the errors of his way, and insisted Arthur read it. We left the children in the capable hands of Nymphadora Tonks and Emmeline Vance, then we Apparated to a small Muggle park in Ottery St. Catchpole. Percy and Penny were there, and we talked for almost two hours.

Arthur and I made our way back home and Flooed the twins and Bill to join us for an early dinner at the Burrow while it was still light. After eating, Arthur read your letter to the family and we discussed Percy and our feelings towards him. I'd like to say everything went swimmingly, but then you'd know none of the Weasleys were there. We yelled and cried and argued, but in the end your letter, dear boy, made our children's reacceptance of Percy into our fold much easier. We couldn't help but think of you as we discussed this.

Percy is arranging to meet separately with each of my children before Ginny's party on Sunday, if possible. I hope and pray all goes well, and when it does, you will be the one that we will thank for it.

How I wish I were there hugging you now. All my love,  
Molly/Mum

~\*~

Harry lowered his head in gratitude that his letter had helped.

Hedwig's third delivery was a parcel from Filius Flitwick. Harry opened it eagerly. He had written to the professor earlier that week requesting he recommend some sources of information on attachment charms. The contents far exceeded Harry's expectations. Inside were a very small book and a note

from Professor Flitwick. The diminutive Charms professor wrote that this tiny tome was the definitive work on attachment charms. It contained both theory and practical instructions for not only linking multiple objects, but for also coupling the permanent charms on those objects. This would allow the various enchantments to work in concert without damaging the objects or the enchantments involved. Harry could almost see the modest but brilliant half-goblin blush as he apologized for describing it as the definitive work, since it was Flitwick's own Mastery thesis. The note ended with a *post script* stating that since this degree of Charms complexity was well beyond N.E.W.T.s level, he'd love to see whatever Harry was working on. Flitwick also offered his assistance once school started if Harry needed it.

Harry smiled. Professor Flitwick was one person who seemed to have no reservations about Spell Mongery. Most of Harry's mongered spells were fundamentally charms so far, and Harry looked forward to the discussions in this year's Charms classes. He knew Flitwick would not be able to resist including Harry's mongering discoveries in the dialogue.

Harry's Paladin visit with Su Li began at 9:00. He was considerably relieved that it went well. All of the residual effects from the aberrant Paladin acceleration potion were definitely waning. Hopefully there would be no more females running up to him to kiss him in the corridors. FINALLY!

Su Li did rush toward Harry at the start of the visit, as was typical early in the program. He grabbed her wrists and held her at bay, but within a minute or so she regained her control. Rather than discuss the worn out questions suggested at the start of the visitation program, Harry and the pretty yet-taller-than-Cho Asian Ravenclaw spent their time getting to know each other. Harry had read *How to Win Friends and Influence People* earlier that summer. He was curious because his father had read it out of a desire to make himself more amenable to the witch then known as Lily Evans. The book was not at all what Harry had expected. It wasn't about manipulating people as the title might suggest, but rather detailed a number of ways to get on well with others. One of the chapters discussed how to stimulate a meaningful and enjoyable conversation.

In typical Harry fashion he had not the slightest idea that his genuine desire to get to know a classmate better would be misconstrued as romantic interest.

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After the one hour Paladin visit, Harry met Ginny in the Transfiguration corridor as they had agreed. They planned to use an empty classroom Dumbledore had offered for their initial work on codifying Harry's thoughts, theories, and discoveries on the way magic worked. Harry had never actually mongered a spell inside Hogwarts, but he did not anticipate any problems or dangers. After all at least two thirds of Harry's Spell Mongering had been done inside his small room at Privet Drive. Of course, out of respect for Dumbledore's wishes, he would not do any spell creation inside the school until Dumbledore made time to see Spell Mongery in action.

Ginny had seen Harry monger the basic form of the Thunderfire charm. Therefore he planned for them to start right in on creating a filing method for his ideas and observations. Harry also intended to give Ginny a basic overview of magic itself, as he now understood it.

Just as Harry finished greeting Ginny, Winky snapped into the corridor.

"Harry Potter, SIR. Winky in apologizing for interrupting Harry Potter, SIR and his Littlest Wheezy, but is terrible distressing to Miss C'linda."

The little elf looked at a wall like she wanted to run towards it to punish herself, but Harry knelt before her and gently placed his hand on her little arm to comfort her.

"No problem, Winky. What's upsetting Clarinda and you?" Harry had learned that staring straight into the little elf's eyes with a look of genuine concern usually calmed and comforted her more than anything he might say.

"T'is a bad man from the Ministry. The bad man is shouting, is threatening Miss C'linda. Miss C'linda is scared, she is. Winky didn't ask to leave, so Winky expects to be punished, but Winky is afraid the bad man will harm Miss C'linda."

"Winky, you'll never be punished for trying to help protect one of my friends," Harry said with urgent sincerity. "Pop over and tell Dobby about this. Please tell Dobby I want him to protect Clarinda if he thinks it's necessary. If the bad man touches Clarinda at all in a threatening manner tell him to restrain the man, and I'll protect Dobby for doing so. Go! I'll be there as soon as I can."

Harry turned to Ginny. Before he said anything she stepped forward and placed her hand on his arm. "Go, Harry. Fred and George told us about Clarinda Jordan and how you're helping her." She wrinkled her brow in disgust. "The Ministry can't seem to leave anything alone that you're involved with. Go *fix* it. I'll see you Sunday at the birthday party."

Ginny's party this year was not a surprise. The security issues around Grimmauld Place meant that not many would attend, but Ginny didn't mind.

Harry grabbed Ginny's hand and looked into her eyes. He paused, not knowing what to say.

"Go!" she said. "I understand." Then she gave him such a smile that even in his concern Harry couldn't help smiling back. He squeezed her hand and whispered, "Thanks," before turning to go.

Harry ran to the corridor where the secure Floo fireplaces had been set up for students coming and going on Paladin business during the summer. They were only connected to the Paladins' homes and a few other safe locations. Harry made his way to Grimmauld Place using the secure red Floo powder he kept on him at all times and the proper password. He stepped out of the fireplace and made his way through the empty house to the front door. From the front porch he Disapparated to Diagon Alley, arriving right outside of Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes.

So far, no one had determined how Harry had managed to Apparate himself and Mrs. Figg into the middle of the Grimmauld Place parlor on Aberration Day. What he had done should have been impossible based on the wards on the old house. Although he was grateful it had worked when survival demanded it, Harry was reluctant to try it again without a better knowledge of the wards... at least not unless he were in equally desperate straits.

Harry entered the twins' store and passed Lee without a word, going straight to the doorway they'd created between the two shops' back rooms for easy access. Harry walked to the door, cast a Silencing charm, and then opened the door. Dobby and Winky both saw him immediately, but Harry placed a finger to his lips to stop them from calling out his name. Dobby stood in the entryway to the main part of the shop. His hands were raised ready to stop the interloper if need be. An obvious look of relief spread across the house-elf's face at his master's arrival.

"I don't care who your benefactors are, or who owns this property." The voice was haughty and gruff. A menacing tone laced his words. "I'm closing down your shop and confiscating all of your wares and equipment. The fines will be steep. Opening a shop without proper Ministry permits. Hiring unlicensed workers. Using house-elves in a place of business without a permit. Not using proper resources for manufacturing goods."

Harry had heard enough. He strode in wearing his sternest look and using the charm he'd created to cause his cloak to billow out behind him.

"And just who do you think you are making demands and threats on my property?" Harry startled the wizard who had Clarinda, not exactly cornered. She was holding her own to a degree, but he had backed her to within six or eight feet of a wall with no real exit.

"Step away from her, sir," Harry continued menacingly, "Step away now, or you'll be out on the street lying on your backside before you know it. How dare you threaten my business partner? Step this way and state your business in a civil manner." Harry was consciously using some of the words and inflections he'd read about in the *Wizengamot Book of Rule*.

Harry managed to appear very imposing, even though the other man was taller by several noticeable inches. The interloper was huge, but slovenly and fat like a heavyweight boxer seriously gone to seed.

"Potter, you and this girl are in serious violation--"

Harry clapped his hands in the man's face and it sounded as if it had been amplified by a *Sonorus* spell. The man jerked at the noise, as did everyone there except Harry. The brute stopped speaking.

"Your name and credentials, sir, or out you go. Then state your business civilly, as I asked." Harry's eyes showed a fire that few would ever want to see again, once they had experienced it. Harry also held his left hand behind his back and produced his Cloak Billowing charm wordlessly and wandlessly, though not on his cloak this time. The effect caused the sound of rushing wind to stir around the shop.

Startled on several levels, the man gulped once, and then glared at Harry. He fumbled in his robes for a single dirty and bent business card. "I'm Jenkins of the Department of Magical Business Licensing and Fees--"

"I'm Harry Potter; I didn't catch your given name, Mr. Jenkins." Harry disrupted Jenkins' momentum once again with this statement and held out his hand to shake.



"Er, Albus Jenkins--"

"Oh, were you named for Albus Dumbledore, or is Albus a family name for your branch of the Jenkins?"

"Er, Dumbledore--"

"Well, Clarinda, may I present Mr. Albus Jenkins of the Department of Magical Business Licensing and Fees. Albus - I may call you Albus, mayn't I?"

"Er..."

"Good, no need to be formal. Albus, this is Miss Clarinda Jordan, my partner in this business we have yet to open. As a matter of fact, we haven't even named it yet, have we Clarinda?"

"No, Harry, but Phoebe over there had several good ideas and I had one or two I'd planned to discuss with you and the twins." By this time Clarinda had regained her composure and was appreciating Harry's attempts to discombobulate the bureaucrat before her. "Any ideas you care to suggest, Mr. Jenkins?"

Jenkins was beginning to regain his head of steam. "See here, you bloody popinjay, you and this bint will not resist \_\_\_\_\_," Jenkins mouthed several more words before he realized his voice was making no sound. Harry had not pulled his wand or spoken a spell, but his hand was raised to Jenkins and it was clear this was his doing.

The man pointed to his throat and gave Harry a stern look.

Harry responded with an equally forbidding look. "Mr. Jenkins. I have tried to be civil. Yet, you used profanity towards me and insulted Miss Jordan. I will now release you and I expect you to calmly tell us what has you so upset. One more outburst and I'll see you out the door as promised and I'll file a formal complaint with the Ministry." Harry wiped his hand through the air in front of Jenkins and he was released.

Jenkins took a deep breath, but still glared daggers at Harry. "All right, *Mister* Potter. First, you've opened a shop without proper Ministry permits"

Harry held up his hand. "We're not open for business, are we, Clarinda?"

"No, Harry. I haven't even taken down the 'For Rent' sign. I didn't want anyone to come in here interrupting our planning and sewing."

"All right. Next, Mr. Jenkins."

Jenkins face grew redder. "Hiring unlicensed workers--"

"I understand you ladies are both members of the Seamswichtresses' Guild. Am I correct?" They nodded. "Your guild provides all needed permits and such, correct?" They nodded once again.

"Next, Mr. Jenkins."

Jenkins' increasing frustration began to show in his reddening face and the purple vein throbbing on his neck. He snorted in disbelief before saying, "Using house-elves in a place of business without a permit"

"How does that rule read, exactly, Mr. Jenkins?"

"What! Why you..."

Jenkins balled his fists, but Harry said coldly, "Tell me exactly how that rule reads or go back to your office and bring me the written regulations."

Jenkins made a guttural grunting sound before calming the slightest and saying, "Only house-elves owned by the shop owner may work in any business establishment without proper Ministry licensing-"

"Ah," Harry interrupted him again. "You see, I own these elves and I am an equal partner in this business with Miss Jordan. So they are allowed to work here. All that she will ask of them I have pre-approved and they will most likely not be working here once the shop opens, except on rare occasions and usually then when I am here, or will be here shortly."

Jenkins looked like he was going to explode any minute.

"Calm yourself. Mr. Jenkins. Dobby, a glass of lemonade for our hardworking Ministry guest here." A house-elf pop was heard as Harry started speaking again. "Is there any other rule or regulation you want to discuss with us, Mr. Jenkins?"

"Why, I" But a pop occurred again and Harry turned from the man.

"Why thank you, Dobby." He reached down for the glass with pale yellow liquid in it. The condensation on the glass made it look most tempting. "Here, Mr. Jenkins. To cool your brow and your temper."

Jenkins knocked the glass from Harry's hand and Dobby leapt to catch it. But Harry held out his hand and summoned the glass back to himself, only spilling part of it. He took a sip and said, "Ah, sorry. Don't you like lemonade Mr. Jenkins?" Jenkins took another swing at the glass but Harry stepped back and the wizard over balanced and wobbled a bit before righting himself.

Harry stood patiently before him, but everyone else in the room had moved toward the doorway to the back room of the shop.

"Please tell me what other complaints you have regarding this establishment or be on your way to help some other business in our magical community." The words at face value were most hospitable, but the tone of Harry's voice held both sarcasm and a warning.

Jenkins thundered, "You're not using the sanctioned resources for manufactured goods. You have to

buy cloth from the Mages Importers and Distributors, Ltd. Only they--"

Jenkins had been advancing on Harry and drawing his wand as he spoke. In a second the bureaucrat's wand was flying across the room and Jenkins looked down the point of two wands, each aimed just below one of his eyes. A chilled wind swept through the room even though no door or window was open.

Harry applied slight pressure to Jenkins' faces with his wands and forced him to step back until the man was up against a counter. Seeing the obstacle Harry had pulled his wands slightly back from the man's face. However, once Jenkins came to a stop, Harry reapplied the slight pressure from both wands to the man's cheeks.

"Are you telling me it is the law that we can only buy cloth from this company?"

Fear was replacing the man's rage, but Jenkins swallowed and tried to bluff his way through. "Every clothing shop in magical England knows they have to buy from the 'M.I.D.' or pay the consequences."

"Ah, so there is no law, just one person in the Ministry strong-arming shop keepers into buying from this company. What's your cut of the profits, Jenkins, or are you paid another way?"

"Why, I never..."

"For your sake, I will pretend that you and your self-righteous indignation never entered our shop today, Jenkins. Now *leave!*" With this Harry roughly grabbed his arm and steered him towards the door.

Jenkins shrugged off Harry's hand, but stepped quickly to the door before turning and spitting out, "You'll regret this, Potter. Plenty of things happen to those who disregard the 'M.I.D.' Boy-Who-Lived or not, you're just a school boy and Dumbledore can't protect...you..."

Harry interrupted Jenkins' tirade by laughing in the man's face. "You are behind the times, you overgrown prat. I'm a member of the Wizengamot, now. Do *you* know the cost of threatening *me* with such harm? I'll call for an immediate investigation of you and your so called 'M.I.D.' in the next session."

This time Jenkins laughed. "You do have some protection then. I'll admit that, but we'll see what you can stir up in the Wizengamot. In the mean time, you'd better deal with the Mages Importers and Distributors, Ltd. sales representative when he calls, Missy, or else."

With that final ultimatum Jenkins stormed out, slamming the door hard enough to break the glass. Harry adroitly cast a *Reparo* before any of it had hit the ground.

Harry turned and saw fear in the three women's eyes. "Calm down, ladies, the show's over. Dobby, appropriate refreshments, please." A pop was heard again. "Now, Clarinda, where did you buy the cloth you're using here?"

"I... I knew," she started and gulped once before continuing, "That it's best to buy from the M.I.D., but

they wanted triple what we paid for cloth at Malkin's, making it impossible for us to be profitable. There was no way I'd pay those prices, so I went to a Muggle wholesaler, and sure enough, their prices for the same fabrics or those of equivalent quality were even less than what Madam Malkin pays. The selection was better, too. Their patterns were newer and more in line with what I envision for our fashions. I don't know how the M.I.D. found out about it. I shrunk the cloth bolts and brought them here in my hand bag."

Harry sighed and ran his hand through his hair. "It's not your fault, Clarinda. Unfortunately this kind of thing happens... a lot. Believe it or not I learned about this type of gambit from my Muggle uncle of all people. A few years back a steel supplier used very rough tactics in a similar situation. They threatened force if my uncle's company switched to another supplier with better prices. Uncle Vernon had recommended the new supplier and was incensed by the threats. He refused to change his recommendation, but he bought a cricket bat to take back and forth to work with him.

"He finally said that the parent company took care of it somehow. I just found out this summer that wizards own that parent company. I wonder if *they* took care of the problem with magic."

Harry's expression brightened as he considered the possibility. He instantly drew his wand and began placing a number of spells on the front door, windows, and outside walls of the shop.

"You're safe for now, ladies, and I'll make sure you arrive home safely, too. Give me a little time to think about it and I'll take whatever measures are necessary. I'll be back before the end of the workday to let you know exactly what precautions I've taken for your safety."

He paused, sighed, and continued. "But first I must ask, did any of you accidentally tell anyone who might be affiliated with this Mages Importers and Distributors, Ltd. that we were starting this business? Please look me in the eye." They each looked Harry squarely in the eyes and shook their heads convincingly.

After a moment Harry nodded his head positively. Dobby popped back with sandwiches, butterbeer, and small shot glasses of what Harry thought must be Firewhiskey. The elf looked his way and when Harry nodded his approval, Dobby offered the platter to the Seamswitchtress nearest him.

Harry walked to the connecting door between the two shops and asked Fred, the first twin in sight, to join him. They whispered for several moments. When Fred walked away, Harry remained at the door obviously waiting for something.

Harry smiled when Lee came through the door. He carried a box containing several Wheezes, one of which he began to apply to the south wall.

"In case you haven't all met yet, this is Lee, Clarinda's brother. He will stay with you until I arrange formal protection."

Harry was surprised by a raven landing before him with a note tied to its leg. Harry stroked the bird gently before removing the note that read:



**\*\*\* Special Addendum - The Author's Uncut Version -** One of my betas pointed out that everyone might not like to read my full history of the magical families of the Three-Thirty-Three. As a history major I cannot imagine why everyone doesn't find history as fascinating as I do, but for those who don't I took the full explanation out. For the masses who crave historical back fill to the Harry Potter Universe, the full explanation is below, entitled *The Full Explanation About the Three-Thirty-Three Family Histories*.

Even though he said it should be an addendum, that beta did say that I made it very interesting (I blush) so don't expect dry recitations. You'll also discover a number of satisfying facts about many witches and wizards in this addendum. Cheers! Thanks for reading!

~\*~\*~

**Author's Note - My Grown Up, Well Spoken Harry -** Several reviewers asked for a concise explanation as to why Harry is now so well spoken and acting so mature. They admit that I have probably explained it over the last 220k plus words, but would like a brief summary here.

When Harry started school Vernon and Petunia paid little attention to his initial interest in reading. When Dudley's first report card grades were substantially lower than Harry's, our hero was "encouraged" not to excel. It was made painfully clear that Harry should spend little time reading and attempting to do well in his classes. At Hogwarts Ron's lack of academic ambition, and the subsequent laughing at Hermione the bookworm before Halloween of their first year, confirmed that early lesson. In spite of this Harry did well on the theoretical because of Hermione's forced assistance.

The death of Sirius and Harry's realization that he must be prepared to fight Riddle and his Death Eaters, caused him to decide to buckle down and truly study. Learning to speed-read increased his abilities to master educational material because he is now able to read at a speed in line with his attention and comprehension. Learning you can be smart and are smart is a wake up call to want to be studious. Learning is thrilling if you want to learn what's before you.

*(In my own life I drifted through high school making B- to C+ grades. When I made it to college, I found my motivation to succeed academically, and graduated with only a few B's all the rest A's.)*

The summer of the Paladin Program Harry is being fed properly and he's having the growth spurt he should have had years earlier. Good nutrition is conducive to improved learning. Spell Mongering brought a 'logic of magic' that was sorely missing from his Hogwarts training. More on that will be included in future chapters.

Aberration Day truly made Harry an eighteen year old, and one who is powerful and knows he's different. Killing people in self-defense is a sobering, life changing activity. Harry's magical, physical, and emotional maturation came on him in full force. Having to defend Spell Mongering to Dumbledore and all the other adults present in the library on his birthday caused him to break the bonds of his teenaged dependency on the others, yet he realized he still needed to work with them.

The thought and effort Harry put forth to build a logical case for Spell Mongery for Dumbledore and others gave him more confidence.

Harry's lessons with Father William Martin, not only in Occlumency, but in dealing with death and killing as well, gave Harry more varied learning experiences and it helped him build his mental capacities. More on his increased mental capabilities will be included in later chapters also.

As to his vocabulary - well, read a lot of good books and see if your vocabulary doesn't improve as well.

Cheers!

~\*~\*~\*~

### **Special Addendum - The Full Explanation of the Three-Thirty-Three Family Histories**

Mr. Smith finally started detailing the appearance of the different magical families in the timeline of magical British History.

"Remember the Ollivander family chose not to be part of the Three-Thirty-Three, but they also made the decision to stay out of politics back in the first century AD. The Potter, Miller, Cooper, Tiller, and Smith family names originate from the early Olive Hander times, and variations of House, Houseman, and Hauser do, too. The Housemans were a Three-Thirty-Three Family, but they died out over three hundred years ago. I don't know who can claim their vote now, if anyone.

"In the years following 382 BC, and all throughout history actually, a number of other occupational names became Wizarding family names. Some of these families are still in the Three-Thirty-Three: Fletcher, Hunter, Bowman, Spears, Farmer, Baker, Cooke, Butcher, and Candleman. The last two have died out, and the Fletcher family sold their rights to rule permanently to the Malfoys about two hundred and fifty years ago.

"The next category of Three-Thirty-Three Family names that came along historically had to do with color. The Black, Green, White, Blue, and Brown families came in there, although so did the Blackburn, Greengrass, and Brownlee family names. The Redbeard family came from the Vikings, not this era of other color-based names.

"Then there came the family names having to do with geographical landmarks. The Meadows family line ended when Benjy died on a mission with your father during the first Voldemort war. So also died out the Fenwicks with the death of Dorcas. The Hills are still around and so are the Brooks, Wood, Rivers, Flint, Banks, Granite, Copper, and Ironwill families. The Agate and Marble families sold their rights to rule centuries ago. A Potter forbearer of yours bought one family's rights, and a Brooks bought the other's."

"Between the Potter and Black family ensigns, those assigned to those families, those purchased, and those rights to rule bequeathed in perpetuity, I believe you could have voted twenty-six or twenty-seven votes today, as I said."

Harry shook his head. "Should I be angry I wasn't informed of this?"

"No, it was a stupid oversight. I am sure Doge, Dumbledore, or both of them would have told you at some point before you entered chambers officially in their schedule for you. Fudge interrupted that. Your not knowing is only significant in its harm to your reputation since you were called on to vote today. Far greater harm would have been done if you'd spoken in chambers today. That was obviously Fudge's design."

"How so?"

"If you'll remember the normal conversations, asking for votes and Boaz's welcome to you, there was only a degree of formality. But did you listen when I spoke *for* the matter to be voted on? Did you hear my words and voice intonations?"

Smith sat up straight and cleared his throat. *"Miss-TAH Potter, my dear confederate in this assembly, you must read that book we all cling to with our reputations, and learn of our chosen verbal ways. My esteemed colleagues of this august body would never deign to attend an ear to your protestations or recommendations unless you spoke thusly."*

Smith cleared his throat and said, "You heard me change my tone of voice and use certain phrases such as 'august body' and 'esteemed colleagues.' Most of them are blithering idiots - well, at least half of them, and they can be swayed by a prettily turned word and a heroic plea, both of which you can do with careful forethought and some practice. Don't discount an impassioned plea. A hero can stir the hearts of men even if you don't word it right, but do both and you'll be even more effective.

"It's best if you have to use the types of phrases we like most of the time. You'll be pleased to know when you look in your copy of the *Wizengamot Book of Rule*, that you will find a very straight forward bit of clear writing on just how we work and operate. Few governmental bodies have such practical and uncluttered instructions.

"However, in that book you'll also find the back thirty percent or so full of lengthy explanations on every bit of clothing we wear in that chamber, page after page on why we call each other Miss-TAH and Ma-DAAM, and twenty-five or thirty pages of suggested phrases for speaking there. Most of it is in archaic English and if you use it none of us will understand you. Look at the very last five pages or so for phraseology to help you speak now."

Harry shook his head. There was much to learn, but he meant to make Fudge rue this day and his attempts to embarrass the Potter family. If left to study the matter with Elphias Doge, Harry would not have become active until the next summer. Fudge had changed that today. Harry knew in his heart of hearts that he could not turn back from this challenge, not once he saw Umbridge vote against the Auror budget increases. The Minister had gambled that Harry would be too embarrassed today to continue, but he was wrong.

"You've side tracked me from my spiel on Three-Thirty-Three Family names," Smith said. "It's important for you to know this - when the names appear in history and their origins." Smith cleared his throat and tried to pour more tea. The pot was empty after a drizzle, so Smith drew his wand and



tapped the pot twice. It shimmered away and an identical pot, filled with steaming tea, reappeared a moment later.

Harry thought about asking a question while the older man meticulously fixed his tea, but he decided against it. When Smith finished he muttered something about patience, so Harry decided it had been some sort of test.

"Next came the animal and plant related names listed among the Three-Thirty-Three members. The Fox, Wolf, Bird, Maple, and Oakley families still rule. The Barkwood and Lyons families have disappeared, their rights to rule unassigned and no one has figured how to claim them or appropriate them. There are perhaps fifty or more names and their corresponding votes floating out there somewhere unclaimed.

The Flowers and Rose families' votes have gone to the Zabini family. The Weasley family and its huge number of votes are in the Umbridge camp as you know. Has any Weasley told you how that happened?"

"Mr. Weasley told me about it this morning, just before the Assembly. I went by his office on another matter," Harry said.

"It will surprise you to know about the Weasleys before Percival. Particularly in light of the Weasley family as you know them today. They were scrupulously fair, hard working, fun loving in private, and most congenial. That's no surprise I bet," Smith stated. "However, they were pure-blood advocates, though they never wanted Muggleborns, half-bloods, or even Muggles hurt in anyway.

"Remember, back then pure-blood advocate families were rare. All Wizarding family bloodlines remained strong by bringing in new blood from time to time. However, the Weasleys only did it by going to extremes most others didn't. They went to great lengths and expense to bring in only pure-blood witches from other countries to refresh their bloodlines. Few saw the need to make such efforts at that time, but that's how all those redheads can be considered some of the most pure-blood among us.

"The Weasleys were also all in Slytherin before Percival, who was the first Gryffindor Weasley, but not the last. Seventeen generations I believe it is of nothing but Gryffindors since Percival. Nothing if not consistent, they are."

Smith squinted at Harry. "And I see by the look in your eyes that the idea of Slytherin Weasleys gives you dyspepsia. Well, I don't have time today, but one day I'll teach you about the houses from my family writings. Although if you can find the Potter Family Journals since the War of the Roses I daresay you'll be able to read more than I can tell you.

"But on with the family names. It's important.

"The Vikings and by that I mean Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, Finish, and Baltic States sea raiders came to England throughout the late seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, give or take a few years on either side. Their wizards came too. Those family names reflect two basic influences - their love of

their ships as I mentioned, and the father's patronymics.

The most respected name from shipping influences is Longbottom. That would most recently be Augusta Longbottom or her husband, Paul, one or the other never let an Assembly start without their presence. When Paul was in chambers Augusta was almost always in the gallery, except when she had to take care of young Frank. After the tragedy with Frank and Alice, Paul still attended, but he was a crushed man. He died when young Neville was three or so. At that time Augusta lost heart. She has assigned her votes to Tilden Farmer. You saw him vote his one and the Longbottom fifteen today. It would be nice to have her voice back in the chamber.

"Clarence Spinnaker holds another ship related name from that era, as well as Robert Sails, Emily Turnstil, and Cranford Boom. The Riggers family right to rule is unavailable, as that family has no active heir to be found.

"I told you about your friend and mine, Florence Sheets. Interestingly enough, for two more generations her family controls one Three-Thirty-Three Family's right to rule that you may love almost as much as you do hers. A 'snape' is a special water proof wood joint used in sailing ships once, and snapes still may be used in boat building for all I know, can't abide the sea personally. Became sick on the boat ride to Hogwarts my first year.

"Your potions professor's grandfather lost his right to rule for four generations for supporting Grindelwald during that war. Severus Snape's grandchild will be able to rule upon his or her eighteenth birthday. Florence controls that vote, and her heirs until then, or forever if the line ends with Severus.

"The word 'patronymic,' the other Viking naming schema, comes from "pater," father, and "nymic," name. The names vary based on language, but there are many such Scandinavians in the Three-Thirty-Three, like the names Robertson, Williamson, Olafson, Pierson, Carlson, Peterson, and Petersen. Those are still active families, but at least that many more are either assigned to others or lost to us in some way.

"Regarding nationalities, the Scottish, Irish, and Welsh Wizarding families have always been one with us British, so they did not come from the outside like the Scandinavians and French.

"As I mentioned earlier, the invasion of the French wizards gave us the current names of Butler, Gerard, Norman, and Malfoy. You may find it interesting that Minister Fudge voted the sixteen Malfoy controlled votes against the Auror appropriation today, which is interesting. Malfoy could not have assigned them to him. Being in Azkaban means he does not have that right. No one else has stepped up with any foreseeable claim to see if the Chamber accepts it."

"Hold on," Harry said. "There are two things I don't understand. First, why doesn't Mrs. Malfoy serve in her husband's place, and second, how does the chamber accept or reject such things?"

"Some of the families, very few actually," Smith explained, "Have entailed their right to rule away from any female, whether she be heir or wife. The Malfoys are one of those families. They've often married without love for money and position, and they've occasionally gone back to the French

Wizarding pure-blood families to keep their bloodlines powerful. Because of these two facts they don't trust anyone but a Malfoy male. Thus they've entailed the ruling rights away from any female Malfoy, even a female daughter. Malfoys use girls like Wizard trading cards and marry them off for political or financial gain, or both.

"Now as to recognition. The chamber acknowledges a person's claim to the right to rule. When you entered and the bell gonged, you probably thought it accepted you to be there." Harry nodded. "Well, it did, but it also acknowledged your ability to vote your twenty-some odd votes. When it's time to vote, if you or anyone claims *more* votes than your right, it will clang something fiercely unsettling, and we have to stop and go to the book for clarification. Claiming less votes than you can causes no chamber warning, as you saw. Claiming too many, by the way, is the most embarrassing thing that can happen to a Family Head in the Assembly."

"The book?" Harry queried. "Do you mean the Wizengamot handbook?"

"No, sorry. *The Book* that works in conjunction with the chamber to keep things on the up and up. You met Ledbetter, the Clerk of the Wizengamot. He's actually checking as we go along. The Book itself records everything, but the law states that someone needs to check its entries. Useless law, that, but someone a hundred and eighty years or more ago thought he was misquoted. The Book can't misquote, but that didn't stop an idiotic law from being written.

"The Wizengamot chamber and The Book were magically created by the most powerful wizards and witches of the age back in 1205. The two loosely compare to Hogwarts and the Sorting Hat. The magical folk of the day put their all into making The Book and the chamber sort of all-knowing, at least about who does and doesn't have the right to rule, and who has a strong enough claim to another's votes, *and* who has a stronger claim to vote another's. Of course, you can't just take someone's vote without a logical reason, but The Book is the arbiter of these things. It decides the merits of such a claim. Next time you join us in chambers, arrive early, Harry. Go to Ledbetter and ask about the existing Potter and Black votes. He'll tell you how many votes you control. You'll have various family ensigns in your paperwork from the Potter and Black vaults at Gringotts, but they may not be clearly marked as to why you have another's vote and how many generations you may claim it."

Smith took several more swigs of his tea, and smacked his lips in appreciation. Harry wondered if smacking one's lips was considered good manners in the Wizarding world.

"Now, there are two final categories of names that were the last families to rise to power and join the list of Three-Thirty-Three Families before 1205." Smith said.

"The first of these are the food family names. Fudge, Cake, Pudding, Figg, Pear, Appleseed, Bread, and Drinkwater are a few. Although the name Cook is actually one of the last occupation-based family names and it emerged at the same time as these food based names.

"The last naming scheme group I call the Absurd 'D' names. Of course I'm not stupid enough to say that to the face of any of them, but as people began to attend Hogwarts, a number of magical family names showed up with no records of where they came from. The names were like made up words, jumbled letters almost, with no logic to them and odd sounding. They were powerful enough wizards

and witches, but their names.... Well, most of them begin with 'D,' hence my title for the group. Some of the Absurd 'D' names are: Derwent, Dippet, Diggle, Dingle, Diggory, Dalrymple, Dawlish, Doge, Dodderidge, and Dukelow. A few of these weird family monikers didn't start with 'D' such as Jorkins, Porpington, and our hated Umbridge. However, in my opinion, the oddest sounding name of that group is your favorite and mine, Dumbledore."

Smith finished his tea and set his cup down with an obvious sense of completion. "That is an overview of the different names and their order of emergence for those families who were there in 1205 to sign the *Magna Magicae Carta*, and formally create the Wizengamot as we know it today. I've enumerated about a third of them.

"Just less than two hundred years later, the Black Plague and its variations were killing Muggles and wizards alike. However, we were able to survive better than Muggles if we contracted the disease. We were also better at keeping ourselves away from those infected by it.

"Two Italian wizards made their way to Great Britain at that time. Their names were Zabini and De Luca. Both were experienced medical researchers, and they helped us to eventually create a curative potion here. They were very popular as you might imagine, and they brought family money with them, which they invested wisely. Within fifty years or so, they were established families, and asked if they might buy the rights to rule formerly belonging to two families that had died out during the plague. The Wizengamot agreed. Over the ensuing years the Ollerton and Ogden families were also allowed to buy in to the Wizengamot, though neither did any great service to the community such as Zabini and De Luca had. However, the Ogdens and Ollertons have also ruled wisely. The last Ollerton was a female who married a Potter during the Napoleonic Wars. You hold hereditary right to rule the Ollerton name, as you also hold the Potter and now Black hereditary rights to rule. They never leave you. All your other votes have either been sold to you, or assigned temporarily or permanently to you. There is a difference.

"In the early fifteen hundreds the Patil family had become great importers here in England, and the Goldsteins had become great merchants. Those families petitioned to buy into the Wizengamot. In a fit of both racial and religious bigotry, a law was passed that forbade any family to acquire the right to rule from another that wasn't *already* a Three-Thirty-Three Family. Thus began the practice of families gaining more and more votes. Before that four votes were the largest number controlled by a single family. Fearing one family eventually gaining majority control, a law was passed setting the maximum number a family can control or own at fifty. So, Our Miss Umbridge could acquire three more votes at most."

"Any questions at this point, Harry?"

"So then all of this pure-blood rubbish is very new," Harry said. "These family names and the duration of their influence in magical history have traditionally been the most important factors in determining power and influence... in the formalized Wizengamot and even before 1205, long before. Could you tell me more about how and why this changed?"

"Ah, yes. You see, until Percival Weasley passed the first protective laws for Muggleborn and half-blood magical folk, the idea of pure-blood was irrelevant. The family names, meaning the males,

would marry a strong Muggleborn witch or even a noble born Muggle girl, but Potters were always Potters and Smiths were always Smiths. They became ever stronger because of attention to their personal health and the regularly refreshed bloodlines. This was never really discussed, but still commonly known, like mothers know fresh milk is really better for their children than canned milk or powdered."

"I can't believe this whole "pure-blood back so many generations" is a bunch of hogwash."

"Amazing, isn't it, young sir? As a matter of fact, I wouldn't be surprised if most of the Malfoy French wives have been noble born Muggles as opposed to witches. Several of my nosier ancestors have written that many Malfoy foreign wives have never been seen to do magic, and I saw it with my own eyes in young Draco's great, great-grandfather's case. His French wife never did any magic that I observed as a young pup. She carried a wand, but didn't look like she knew which end to point where."

"Fascinating," Harry said. "I can't wait to use that with Malfoy the next time he spouts off about pure-blood this or that. Do you remember Draco's great, great-grandfather and mother's names?"

"Theobald Malfoy married Odette DuLanrie some time just before the first Muggle War. He married her in France, and we were not invited, of course. She was a beautiful blond, with a very sad face. Theobald was much older than she and a hard man in business and in the Wizengamot. I felt for her as a young lad, sitting in the gallery watching my father and your great grandfather battle Theobald in the Assembly Chambers. If Odette Malfoy were still alive, I'd ask you to spare her feelings. But she's long gone to an early grave. We're at war both in the field and in that chamber. You fight at Hogwarts, as well. If you speak kindly about Odette and ask about her heritage, Draco's expression will tell you the truth, if he knows her heritage. You're a bright lad; create what mischief you can from there. We fight this battle as we can, and putting Malfoys in their place might help put us back on top with our millennia old magical legacies.

Harry paused and his face became a bit grim. "But, Mr. Smith, aren't we just trading heritage for pure-bloodedness? I don't want to make others feel inferior to me because of something I've been born into. What makes us any better than them with that approach?"

"Because lad, we only bring it up when a pure-blood brings up their blood mantra. Your grandfather Benedict and I used to only use this tactic when a pure-blood went on a tirade about bloodlines. We would question his or her right to claim any special place, particularly if we knew of a Muggle noble woman in their family tree. Then we'd immediately bring up someone from a newer British magical family, making it apparent that we respected them far more than the family of the one we had castigated. We'd make it clear that we respected a person for their character, knowledge, or abilities - not their bloodlines.

"Potters, Smiths, Millers, Tillers, and the like held top sway. Even the Longbottoms and Spinnakers had a three or four hundred-year advantage over Malfoys and Gerards. But that system had its absurdities as well. For example, Dumbledore is a name that has the weakest heritage in terms of longevity. Yet, Albus Dumbledore is a powerful wizard who has an impressive track record of service to the Wizarding world. The Diggorys, Doges, Diggles, and Derwents have all served with

great intelligence and distinction, too. Even the Dawlish family has served well, though I don't see what young Clarence is doing with his puppyish behavior towards Fudge. His father despised Cornelius and Fudge's father Milbert as well.

Although I wonder what Albus is thinking regarding you and the Wizengamot, I must admit he is brilliant. He's served in the Assembly since he turned eighteen, or sent his delegate if war or Hogwarts kept him away. He's a very fine Chief Warlock. Albus provided Benedict and me many opportunities to praise a newer name in the Wizengamot after we had slammed a pure-blood bigot on his or her own short magical heritage.

The great thing is that many of the swing votes that hesitantly follow Florence Sheets and Fudge, will remember Benedict and our special brand of putting down the pure-bloods. They should pay very close attention to you and me if we work the system together. We have a chance to sway them our way if you make sense. Speaking the proper lingo is not hard; but you must follow the established mode, with certain words and phrases thrown in occasionally. Read the book you received today. The first five pages and the last five pages of the section on Wizengamot dialogue, proclamations, and pronouncements, will cover all you really need to know in that respect.

"Did you notice in my speech today I talked about how things were before the Romans came to Old Albion? And what about my reference to the first century AD when we wizards decided to distance ourselves from Muggles?"

Harry nodded. "I understood those references because of my time with Mr. Ollivander, but I wondered who else would, since he made it fairly clear that few knew his family story."

"Right, Harry, but the wielding of obscure knowledge can increase others' perception of your power. There is a lot I don't know from that time and the years between, but few others know more of our history than the Potters and the Smiths."

"Mr. Smith, you said that the old Potter journals dating way back were destroyed in the War of the Roses. Do you know if my family kept any records after then, and if so, where they might be?"

"I don't know, Harry. Your grandfather, Benedict, would have kept any family records with him at Potter Palisades. Death Eaters killed him about a month before you defeated You-Know-Who. The attack occurred at that home. Any Potter family records may have been destroyed or stolen then. I saw James, Lily, and you at the funeral. But we did not speak of such things."

"Umm, Potter Palisades. I've never heard of that."

Smith sighed. "If Albus were here I'd have to ask you to strengthen that Zone of Silence of yours before I wear his ears off. The Potters have owned several family homes over the centuries, and some of their oldest homes no longer exist, but you still own the land. A lot of the shops you own in Diagon Alley stand on the land of the first Potter huts and pottery work sheds. Potter Palisades is the oldest existing home dating back to the late ninth century in some of its original buildings. But there is a mountain home in northwest Scotland, Godric's Hollow in Wales, and a town house in London. You also have vacation homes in Tuscany, Bermuda, Malaysia, and the state of Nevada. I believe it is in



*Aaran St Vines*  
*FanficAuthors.net*



# "Great Scott, Potter, This is War!"

## Chapter Sixteen - Business and Pleasure

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*My gratitude go to my writing coaches, Kokopelli and ebdarcy, and my beta reader, Sparky 40sw.*

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#### ***Previously -***

*While visiting Clarinda Jordan's new shop, Harry witnessed a Ministry Bureaucrat threatening Clarinda because she wasn't buying her fabric from the Mages Importers and Distributors, Ltd. Company - the M.I.D. for short. The M.I.D. appeared to be running a protection ring that resulted in a monopoly for various goods.*

*Harry sent packing the threatening Ministry inspector, Albus Jenkins of the Department of Magical Business Licensing and Fees. As Jenkins left, a raven arrived, with a message from Director Gultangk at Gringotts requesting some of Harry's valuable time. Harry sent Dobby with his reply, a note telling Gultangk he'd be there shortly and stating Harry's fees for his time.*

*Having decided that a visit to Madam Malkins was in order, Harry pulled his hood up and renewed his Cooling Charm. He told Clarinda he'd be back soon.*

~\*~\*~

Harry purposefully stormed into Madam Malkins's store. The lady herself was at the door to greet him. He cut her typical opening words short, growling "Madam, did you tell anyone from the Mages Importers and Distributors, Ltd. Company to approach Clarinda? A Ministry thug just came around to threaten her."

"Mr. Potter! I'd never--eep!"

Harry had not stopped moving, coming closer and closer to the retreating Madam Malkin until her back hit the store counter. True fear spread across her face. Harry backed up immediately and apologized. Malkin took a deep breath but still shivered from his forceful entry.

"Madam, I won't hurt you in anyway. I am Clarinda Jordan's investor in her new business and we've

just had the unpleasant experience of a visit from Mr. Albus Jenkins of the Ministry of Magic. Do you know him? He appears to also represent, illegally I believe, the Mages Importers and Distributors, Ltd."

Fear returned to Madam Malkin's face. She wrung her hands and beads of perspiration broke out on her brow. She looked around nervously and sputtered incoherently.

Harry drew a wand and she cowered again. He swished it around casually and all sound died around them. "Now, Madam, calm yourself." He pointed the wand at his hand and conjured a glass of cold water. "Please drink, if you will, it is only water."

She took the glass in shaking hands and sipped once, twice, and then took several gulps before placing it on the counter. Harry said, "I have placed us in a Zone of Silence where no one can hear us. Speak freely. I won't hurt you. I'm just trying to understand what's going on."

She hesitated, but then plunged ahead. "The M.I.D. showed up about thirty years ago. I'd just inherited this shop from my aunt, and unfortunately they knew all about how much money I had. They insisted I buy fabric and such from them, and told me that I would receive regular pricing from the start if I agreed right away. They gave me a price sheet and the numbers were nearly twice what I paid before. Before he left the wizard told me I'd be sorry if I didn't agree right away.

"Two days later that Mr. Jenkins showed up and levied a number of fines and penalties, and then told me I should reconsider the M.I.D.'s offer. I went to the Ministry to complain, but he came forward and told me I had an emergency in my shop. I came back and found nothing amiss, but a minute after I entered, two men with scarves around their faces entered and stunned me. They proceeded to bring all of the fabric from the back room and set fire to it, right before me. They contained the fire to protect the shop, but my inventory was ruined. They told me that I should replace the ruined inventory from the M.I.D. warehouses at *twice* the regular price list for their troubles, and then I could buy at rate sheet prices after that."

She shuddered again and reached for the glass of water, which she finished in several more unladylike gulps. "They said that if I didn't take their advice, they'd burn down my shop with me in it, and then kill my sister and her husband and little daughter." She gave a wry sad smile. "I've been a solid M.I.D. customer ever since."

She took a deep breath and continued. "I made a mistake with Clarinda. One you picked up on and will benefit from. I didn't know of your involvement; I thought it was just those terrible, terribly smart twins backing her. I should have incorporated her designs in my shop, but... I'm proud and vain, and too hot headed for my own good." She sighed. "I like her, Mr. Potter. I'd never treat her ill. But the M.I.D.'s a scary firm. You can afford it, I believe. Just pay them and go on with your life. Everyone else does."

Harry stared at her with a smile that did not reach his eyes. "I didn't think that you were the one who tipped them off, Madam, but I had to know for sure., I'll not cave to bullies. I had enough of them growing up. No more. Keep your head down. If they ask about this conversation, tell them that I threatened you, and please call me if they mean you harm."

Harry pulled his wand and muttered *Finite Incantatum* to end the Zone of Silence he'd created. In two minutes he was back at Clarinda's shop.

He asked, "Everything all right, Lee?"

Lee nodded but didn't look away from the security related project he was working on.

Reassured of their immediate safety, Harry then turned his attention to Dobby who was waiting for him. "Yes, Dobby?"

"Director Gultangk is agreeing to Harry Potter, SIR's rate and stated that he must be receiving the affiliate's discount. The director stated urgency, Harry Potter, SIR."

Fred Weasley had entered the shop in time to overhear Dobby's message. "What rate, Harry?"

"Gultangk wants my assistance. I sent Dobby with a note that quoted my consulting rates. I set mine at half what Gultangk charges. I felt he'd respect my charging him. Gultangk's 'assumption' that I was giving him the affiliate's discount is his tactful way of telling me that he appreciates the gesture, but I asked too little, I guess." Harry grinned sheepishly after that statement..

Fred looked horrified for a moment. Then he broke out into a wide smirk. "Just when I think you've taught me all you can about business with goblins, you go and do this. Wait until I tell George. And Bill will flip!"

It was fourteen minutes before eleven o'clock when Harry Apparated to Gringotts. A goblin was waiting for him, and immediately led him to a conference room where Gultangk was pacing with his hands behind his back.

"Potter," Gultangk barked. "Thank you for coming. What do you know of FTFT, Ltd.?"

Harry looked at the goblin stunned for a moment. "Er, I've heard of them. Some big Muggle conglomerate I believe, why?"

"It was the merger of two mid-range British companies back in 1967: the Finch Trading Company and Fletchley Technologies. It occurred when the heir to Finch Trading married the granddaughter of the founder of Fletchley Tech. Now what do you know about FTFT, Ltd.?"

"Umm, that my schoolmate Justin Finch-Fletchley is related to them?"

"Correct, Potter. He is the third son and only magical child of that union. He's apparently been charged to go into the family business."

"The problem is that *I* was not aware of this." Gultangk stopped at this point and stared sharply at Dolderap sitting in the corner taking notes. "Another director, a clique mate of Dolderap's has been handling him and I could not have bungled it better if I that had been my intention. It doesn't help that Mr. Finch-Fletchley has been a hippogriff in a china cupboard, making demands and spouting off."

"Keeps saying that the Rothschild bankers wouldn't do business this way," Dolderap interrupted. "Upstart company. He sounds like his forbearers with their 'bearing the white man's burden' tripe."

"That's enough, dwarf arms!" Gultangk had just spoken one of goblin-kinds' worse insults. The two approached each other reaching into their coats. Harry leapt between them.

"Gentlemen, er, goblins. Peace in the name of profits," Harry exclaimed. It was the supreme cry for conciliation in the goblin business world. He hoped he'd translated it well. Those words in gobbledygook were too hard for him to pronounce. The two stopped in their tracks and turned to him.

"He is right, Dolderap. I see you are truly worth your hourly rate, Potter, and more as I surmised."

Quickly changing the subject Harry asked, "What has Justin done, and why is the Rothschild bank an upstart company?"

Gultangk chuckled. "When Nathan Rothschild started his banking empire in England in 1798, some called him a wizard at banking, and many didn't mean it kindly. Well, he wasn't a wizard, but an aunt by marriage was. Rothschild knew about Gringotts and had approached us. Gringotts helped him diversify his risk and accomplish a number of other coups in the financial world. We helped him succeed where others couldn't. This angered the Wizengamot, whose wizards had their fingers in competing banks, and led to the laws restricting our ability to invest in Muggle businesses.- These laws tied our hands except for situations where a British witch or wizard is the prime initiator. That is, *I* cannot invest in a Muggle business unless you come to me to join you in such a venture."

Gultangk sighed and shook his head. "We still provide Rothschild accounting services and handle much of FTFT's bookkeeping. Of course the family doesn't know that. As I told you, goblin rates for these services are very reasonable for the level of competency we provide."

Harry chuckled with Gultangk. Dolderap looked dyspeptic, if goblins could look so upset.

"And Justin?" Harry asked.

The Director sighed. "Apparently he's been given an assignment from his family to start doing business in our world. He's not succeeded and has made Director Printden, Dolderap's clique mate, quite angry. Their clique doesn't like humans, particularly Muggles.

"Er, but Mr. Finch-Fletchley is waiting, that is *steaming* in the lobby, expecting someone to help him. Please talk to him, Potter. It should be advantageous for both of you, I think. You're not only in a position to profit from this directly, but we'll also pay your hourly rate if you'll humor the son of a client, even though they don't know they're our clients."

"Agreed, Gultangk, but I insist I do this gratis."

Gultangk screwed up his face and made a spitting gesture before he smiled. "Nonsense, Potter. I had such high hopes for you when you answered with your hourly rate." The goblin's toothy grin could curdle cream. "I've had the FTFT Ltd. account assigned to me. Dolderap has acted as go-between for that, and he will now leave." Turning to the other goblin he said, "Please ask Slinkstaq to escort Mr.

Finch-Fletchley in."

"It will be best if you start with Mr. Finch-Fletchley by yourself, Potter. Do as you think best. I won't be offended by what you need to say even if you must insult us."

"I'd never knowingly insult you, Gultangk. I may have to verbally restrain Justin if he talks too out of hand."

Their conversation was interrupted by obvious grumblings as the door opened. Harry stood and Justin did a double take when he saw him.

"Harry!" Justin almost ran to his schoolmate. "I can't believe the way these... these creatures are treating me. Why, the Rothchild bankers--"

Harry flashed his hand before Justin and a Silencing charm stopped the tirade.

"Director Gultangk," Harry said, "Please excuse us. I'll call once we need you."

Justin first looked shocked, and then he began to grab Harry roughly and bring him around to face him. Harry shucked off Justin's hand and held up his own hand in front of Justin's face until the door closed. The same hand waved the Silencing charm away.

"Harry, what the--"

"Hello, Justin, just being rude, or do you want to push the goblins into war on the side of Voldemort?"

"What? War? Volde-? What?"

"It's not that bad, Justin, but have you paid any attention to Binns the last five years? The goblin wars he goes on and on about really happened, and just about all of that time the goblins were still running Gringotts, serving Wizard-kind financially, but loathing us as we treated them like inferior beings at best."

Harry pointed to chairs at a table and they sat. "Justin, your family's business is very large. I'm sure you have occasional infighting among different factions, and they either compromise or a dissatisfied person leaves and goes to work for another company, or maybe into another type of business altogether.

Justin nodded to indicate that Harry was correct.

"That's not true for goblins and for Gringotts," Harry stated. "This bank is the only way for goblins to access the world of finance. Even goblin mining and weapons making is all tied up with Gringotts, as subsidiaries so to speak. This bank is fifteen hundred years old and no one can go anywhere else. The factions here have centuries upon centuries of history and traditions about how to fight each other, and they are vicious on a friendly day. Within this bank exists factions that want peace with us humans and factions that do business with us while despising us. There are also those who want wizard-kind to kill each other off.

"Your storming around insulting the goblins gives the anti-human factions ammunition to push for anarchy or another war. You're a Paladin, right?"

Justin sat up straighter in his chair and said, "Of course, Harry, almost all of the Hufflepuffs in our year are."

"And I'm glad you are. You Puffs from the DA last year were great, truly, but we're in this to fight a war, you know. One of the best ways to win is to not have any more enemies than necessary. If we keep the goblins out of the war, that will be who-knows-how-many fierce warriors we don't have to face. Better yet, what if a fraction of those warriors fight with us, on our side? However, that's just a short run view. You started coming here to Gringotts this summer for what purpose?"

Justin looked confused at the question, but spoke eventually. "My father wants to see if we, our company, can find any new markets among magical folk. Harry, I love magic. I love everything about this magical world. I want to live as a wizard, in a magical home, but I want to work in my family's business, too."

"I've listened to Ernie, Hannah, and Susan, and even Zach. I love how they describe this new world I've now entered. Don't you feel the same way?" Harry nodded and Justin continued.

"But, I'm also a Finch-Fletchley and we are traders. Many scoff at the term, but we bear it proudly. If I figure out how to begin even the smallest trade between our world and FTFT, it will relieve the pressure I'm under to quit Hogwarts, and it will prove to my family that I'm justified in being a part of Wizarding society. I understand there are about six hundred thousand magical folk in Great Britain. That's not a huge market for the goods we sell, but it's a great laboratory for me to prove I have trading in my blood."

Justin rubbed his hands on his trouser legs and looked back up. "That goblin seems to respect you. Can you help me, Harry?"

"I believe, Justin, that we can help each other and help the world we love so much."

Justin's face went from despair to hope in a second. Harry reached for the pitcher of water and poured two glasses, using the time it took to gather his thoughts. "Ever been to a football or rugby match, Justin?"

"Cricket's my game, Harry, or at least it was. I had the makings of a fair bowler before 'going wizard' as my father says. Now I'm into Quidditch like you. You know I was a Hufflepuff Chaser last year. But what's this to do with..."

Harry held up his hand. "I've never been to a football or rugby match before, but my uncle likes to watch a game on the telly from time to time, particularly if there's a chance the teams and maybe the fans also will start a big fight. He loves to watch and then make fun of the 'stupid masses' as he calls them."

"Do you know much about the Japanese zaibatsu system and how it works in business?"

"A bit," Justin said with the slightest look of confusion on his face. "FTFT did nearly forty-five million pounds in business with Japan last year alone, making Japan the fourth largest market for us in Asia and the Pacific Rim. Our growth in Japan was severely limited until we became affiliated with a zaibatsu Asian markets are not my field. I'm terrible at languages, but my brother Charles is a fiend for them, especially those of that region. He's slated to manage our Pacific Rim activities. I will eventually be in charge of our trade in non-British English-speaking countries if I can prove myself.

"We may be the heirs of FTFT Ltd., my brothers and I, but each of us must prove ourselves in business or we're put on an estate, given an annual allowance, and treated like spoiled pets, instead of active members of the family. It happened to my great Uncle Robert, but it won't happen to me.

"I don't have to meet with any particular degree of success on my first effort as far as the amount of pounds Sterling I generate. The emphasis is on creating a working business system. Charles is twenty-seven. His first succeeded by creating an import business to Eastern Europe of low cost Chinese bicycles. Hardly a big seller, but his system worked, and still works, even though he says he may shut it down, or sell it off, which is more likely.

"That's why I know I can make my family proud if I work out some business system here in our world. When I leave Hogwarts, I can live in the magical world and spend maybe twenty percent of my time doing business in it, and then spend the remaining eighty percent working in the Muggle world."

Justin paused and an odd look appeared on his face. "You know, my father doesn't like the word 'Muggle.' He thinks it sounds too much like 'muddle,' and he's never muddled through anything in his life. Knowing the way Malfoy and his purebloods think, it wouldn't surprise me if that's where the word comes from, or something like that."

"I've never really thought about it," Harry said, "But my aunt and uncle seem to bristle when they hear that word. It's never really set with me either, even though I've not thought about it like you have. You're probable right."

Bringing the subject back to business Harry asked, "Have you tried to start working with any magical businesses yet, or have you only come to Gringotts?"

Justin shook his head in the negative. "I spent until just before Aberration Day on the Paladin Program activities and preparing. The Finch-Fletchleys always establish banking relations first, then legal. I've hit a brick wall that apparently you've scaled. Can you, will you help me?"

"No." Justin looked crestfallen but Harry continued with a broad smile, "But I'll help *us* by helping you establish good relations with the goblins, and then maybe you and I can do some business together as well. I've come into my family inheritance this summer. I was declared competent, and therefore of age by the goblins, so I've begun working in the business and government arenas of the Wizarding world. Apparently the goblins, or at least Gultangk, respect me enough to consult with me on these matters."

"I heard," Justin said, "That you had a great fight on Aberration Day while the rest of us were snogging through the hour."

"Yeah, I was hit by a number of curse and hexes that day, the worse was the Cruciatius. I fought over forty Death Eaters in waves and killed eight of them."

Harry's face was as cold as ice as he said this, and Justin's shock was obvious at this blunt, frank admission. Harry changed the subject quickly and Justin did not ask anything else about that.

Harry said, "Back to business. You have to understand the basics of goblin life and how wizards have limited them. Their total population is unknown, but there are probably a lot less of them than there are of us. They have their own economy, but like all small societies, they can't exist in a closed system unless they are primarily agrarian. Goblins hate to farm, except for a certain few items only they use and can't acquire anywhere else.

"So, their outside contacts and balance of trade for what they need come mostly from banking."

"You said they also mine?" Justin asked.

"Yes, and create weapons, though it's unclear just what and how much goes on of either. They do trade raw ores exclusively through Gringotts, so even then the bank dominates. We've restricted them this way over the centuries, millennia actually. If you noticed they weren't too impressed with your Rothschild comments, that because Gringotts was founded in the early sixth century as I mentioned, where as Rothschild started in 1798 and the goblins helped them make a go of it."

Justin's eyes became saucers for a moment, but didn't say anything.

"Let me tell you how I've come to see the goblin/wizard situation. I asked about football and rugby. Imagine that you have two teams going at it, not playing but fighting like we sometimes do the Slytherins. They fight each other only and the referees eventually come in and stop it.

"Now here's the difference. If the goblins fight each other we don't know it, they won't interrupt financial services, and most of their fighting is done through business as far as I can tell, things like getting each other fired or demoted, reducing an opponent's profits or stealing their clients, etcetera. But if we, the spectators, go out on to the field, both teams swarm towards us and attack us. Imagine if all of a sudden hundreds, thousands of footballers appear on the pitch and attack the spectators coming out.

"Now, that's a bad analogy, but I'm saying we have to be respectful of the goblins who want to work with us and not treat any goblins poorly, even those who are snippy with us. Imagine Snape. He gives you Hufflepuffs a bad time in class, doesn't he?"

"Not as bad as he give you Gryffs, but pretty bad."

"But you probably don't react as badly as we do, so you receive less detentions and lose less house points. Plus, you don't have the Slytherins in class with you to make it worse."

"If half of what we've heard is true, Harry, I don't envy you their company in class."

"It's bad, but, Justin, we have to treat unfriendly goblins like Snape. We keep our heads down and



ignore them as best we can. The important thing is to make business friendships with the goblins who *are* willing to work with us."

Harry went on to tell him about his relationship with Gultangk, though not about the actual business deals. He also told him that Printden was an anti-wizard goblin, or at least his faction appeared to be.

"There seem to be two major factions in goblin banking. I believe there are about five or six directors in Gringotts for each faction. The two factions sort of mirror each other loosely, and Printden and Gultangk are roughly of equal responsibilities I think. If we do business with Gultangk and we all profit, then Gultangk's faction gains in the competition, and the opposing side loses. Eventually business success decides which side wins, and they both move towards profits. When Gultangk's faction makes so many Galleons more than those not working with wizards, then the other faction will lose directors and influence.

"If the anti-wizard group becomes more profitable, then we start to feel the effects of their negative attitude towards us and eventually we have the next goblin war. Gringotts will still work with us - nothing stands in the way of providing proper banking services, but we will have quite a fight on our hands, as you can imagine from what little we've learned from Binns."

Harry took a sip of water, and Justin followed suit. "This business with Voldemort throws a spanner into the works though," Harry said.

"How so?"

"I can't blame the goblins for rebelling if we become so very bad that even those who are profiting from us want to fight us. I don't want it to happen, but I can't blame them. However, Voldemort looks for goblins who are anti-wizard but not in very powerful positions. He approaches those wanting to succeed ahead of the usual goblin timetable and gives them an opportunity to fight against wizards, promising a better ranking in the new order he proposes.

"Goblins live about two hundred years. They do not automatically reach maturity at a certain age, like wizards come of age at seventeen. Instead goblins are tested or monitored. They are then recognized to be of age when certain physical, and emotional maturity factors are achieved. I think they emphasize the emotional factors over the physical. That's how I was declared to be of age by the goblins and was given my majority even though I'm biologically only sixteen."

"I heard through Zach, er, Zacharias Smith, that you were declared of age and are now in the Wizengamot. Is that how it happened?"

"Yes, somehow. On Aberration day the bad potion kicked in right when I was fighting. You guys were kissing and the weird surge hit you to throw you back emotionally. It hit me and when I was in the kind of life and death situations that cause people to grow up quickly. In my case, they think, I literally grew up. Maybe I even lost two years of my life to become eighteen."

Justin stared at Harry with his mouth agape, but Harry ignored him, just looking off blankly at a wall.

"Things such as rights of inheritance and hereditary rights to rule in the Wizengamot are registered on the eighteen birthday in the goblins' books and then acknowledged at the Ministry of Magic at that moment as well. I'm only sixteen chronologically, but when the goblins judged me to have reached maturity after the battle, their books showed me as eighteen, so the Ministry's books recorded me to be of age as well.

"That's why in the magical world coming of age was legislated at seventeen, so the Wizengamot could declare to the goblins that a witch or wizard was legal, not the other way around. In the Muggle world legal is still eighteen."

Justin smiled and Harry blushed slightly, something that was rare now .

"You can't do anything in the normal way, can you Harry?"

"I've had to accept that fact this summer, Justin. It's easier on my brain to just go with the flow of things." They both smiled.

"Harry, you said that Voldemort has been influencing the goblins against us. Is there any way we can fight that?"

"You say his name, not You-Know-Who or those other stupidities."

Justin smiled. "My saying it really bothers Susan, Hannah, Ernie and Zach, but my parents brought me up to fear no one really. We do live with tight security - kidnappers and such. That threat scared me as a child, but I was taught to fear properly as I've told the other Puffs. I just can't give Voldemort such irrational control over my life."

Harry smiled broadly. "You and I are going to be good friends, Justin. I like the way you think. It even took Hermione a while to say 'Voldemort.' Now, as to fighting his efforts with the goblins, the best way is to do what you really want to do, make a profit with them where they profit too."

Harry went on to tell Justin how to treat goblins properly, and everything else he remembered from his time with Gultangk and the books the goblin had given him. Then Harry changed the subject by asking about what types of charitable giving FTFT was involved in.

Justin proudly outlined the benevolent activities of both the business and his family in supporting worthy causes in every country where the organization had operations. Harry found himself liking Justin more and more, and chided himself for not becoming better friends over the years with students outside of Gryffindor.

"I believe, Justin, that your family is not as interested in a quick return so much as a long-term stable and profitable relationship, correct?"

Justin nodded.

"And you have a generous budget to work with I hope?"

Justin nodded again and Harry smiled broadly.

"Well then, Justin, let's spend money together to not only create a good business relationship, but to also create good will with the goblins."

Harry briefly told Justin about the ideas forming in his head to change the way things were in Wizarding society. It would take decades to accomplish Harry's plan, but he was committed to this world he loved, in spite of its many faults. Therefore, Harry planned on working to change it in the only way that would achieve lasting changes at a *societal* level - slowly. Justin seemed enthused about Harry's ideas. He said he'd like to think about these long term plans further, but that Harry could count on him for help.

Harry then explained about Gultangk's charging him by the hour, and other such matters.

"We don't really pay for bankers' services that way, Harry, but we do so with solicitors and accounting firms. You say that they are scrupulous in charging the fees, so... let's do it. I received access to a trust fund this past birthday, and I've already earmarked it for business purposes, so... proceed. I'll follow your lead."

Harry went to the door and called for Gultangk, who arrived momentarily.

Justin stood and bowed to the goblin. "Director Gultangk. I apologize for my actions and words this day and every other day I've been here. I insist that you charge me the premium rate for your services that Harry pays from this day forward, and I also insist that I pay his rate for the time we've spent together.

"In addition to that, I'd like to pay a half hour's standard rate to Director Printden, and any other goblin I've offended and to render my apologies in person. I will do so now or at any other time you can arrange that meets our mutual schedules."

If a goblin can look amazed, then perhaps Gultangk looked that way for just a moment.

"Potter, I see I was correct when I stated that you undercharge for your time. Mr. Finch-Fletchley, I accept your agreeing to my premium rate from now and going forward. However, I insist on paying Potter's rate for the day. Have you gentlemen discussed business with each other?"

They both looked confused.

"Potter, you are currently working with two concerns on Diagon Alley, Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes and your fashion start-up. Do they need raw supplies? FTFT makes nothing for sale to the public, but makes the processed goods and components that go into finished goods."

"Justin, does your family's company make fabric?"

"Finch Trading Company started by importing fine silks and brocades from the orient. It's a small but profitable piece of our business still. My dress robes for the ball our fourth year were made from Finch fabrics. The school robes we wear are rubbish. I've been tempted to have a Muggle tailor make

my robes for me with our fabrics, but that would be hard to explain. You're into fashions, Harry?"

Harry discussed his financial interest in Clarinda's start-up and Justin readily agreed that there was a definite need for updated clothing designs in the magical world.

"Gentlemen, I believe I see a new business relationship forming. Mr. Finch-Fletchley, have you opened your business account with Gringotts?"

"No, Director."

"Well then, let me offer you the same new account services I gave Potter. This hour is free and the next one too if needed. Do you have a draft or pounds with you?"

Justin handed over a bank draft.

"I see you are serious, Mr. Finch-Fletchley. We at Gringotts are, too, at least now that you are talking to me. I apologize for my other colleagues. I'll apologize to them for you as is proper, but no penalty fees are needed for their time, since they really never offered to serve you as you required, Mr. Finch-Fletchley.

"Umm, Director, I'd ask you to call me Justin, but I know from Harry the offer would be to call me by my last name. However, Finch-Fletchley is not really shorter than Mr. Finch-Fletchley. I'm not asking so I can call you Gultangk, I don't deserve that and I know I must work to overcome my previous bad manners. Finch-Fletchley is a mouth full in the Muggle world as well. However, with no strings attached, would you consider calling me what my father is called by his business friends? They call him 'FF.'"

"It would be an honor, 'FF,' and for your sake, for now, I must have you call me Director. Forms and conventions must be followed. But you've made true progress today.

"Now, have you, Potter, heard from Mages Importers and Distributors, Ltd. yet?"

"Yes, Gultangk. I'd have probably come to see you this afternoon if you'd not called me first."

Harry told Gultangk and Justin about the affair with Jenkins. Justin was angered by this and commented on how his family had dealt 'decisively' with such matters over the centuries, from pirates in the South China Sea to organized crime in shipping and trucking today.

Gultangk seemed like he'd expected this. "The Mages Importers and Distributors, Ltd. are just like organized crime extortionists. They buy from poor foreign sources for many goods so items wear out quickly. They buy the quality goods from Muggle retail stores I believe. They don't want an established business relationship with Muggle companies in the traditional sense. I'd feared this might happen, Potter, but not until you opened your doors for business. I did plan to call you in and warn you about this. I failed you by not doing so earlier."

"It would have been nice to be forewarned, but that's spilled cauldrons now," Harry said. "What can we do to protect the shop and more importantly the people? I know about Gringotts' warding services

from Bill Weasley and others. What about security guards or a rapid response force or something? And while we're at it, what about shipments from Justin's company? The M.I.D. could attack them as well."

"You are in luck on that point, Potter. Goblins can ward places of business to a degree, particularly while closed for the night. But when they are open, you cannot stop possible customers from entering, and we've never been able to ward for bad intentions. However, only for old Three-Thirty-Three Families and their businesses the law still allows Goblin Overseers to be implemented.

"We could install an alarm for someone to press if threatened in your home or business. We keep a number of Goblin Overseers on call at any one time. Sound the alarm and a trained Overseer arrives ready to defend you and yours to the point of death - hopefully the attacker's death," he said, before grinning briefly. "The Overseer also has the jurisdiction to call for other Overseers if the situation warrants it. This is much less expensive than a full time guard, and the Overseer arrives via goblin Portkey, seconds after you call. No dependence on the Ministry of Magic.

"This should cover the shop's security needs. As to the shipping concerns, just use industrial Portkeys for the goods. You could receive a license from the Ministry, or we could provide them, for a charge of course."

"We'd insist on paying to ensure the best Portkeys, wouldn't we Harry?"

Gultangk smiled the toothy grin that disconcerted so many magical folks, but Justin, like Harry, seemed unconcerned. "Now you're learning, Mr. Finch-Fletchley, er, FF. I'll roll your security services purchases into the same discount structure as you receive, Potter."

Gultangk paused, and then smiled again. "Do you two wish to form a clique?"

Harry said, "Umm, I'd hoped to someday join your clique, as more than an affiliate, if that is possible."

"Oh no, Potter. Humans can't *join* our cliques. As an affiliate you are as high as you can reach. A faction head may one day make you as an individual a Confederate of the faction, but there hasn't been one in nearly two hundred years, and she was so named after nearly seventy years as an affiliate.

"However, you could form your own Gringotts recognized organization known as a clique. It acknowledges your status as separate businesses working together. You could not form one with Weasleys' or your fashion business, since you partly own them. But you could form one to join your concerns with Mr. Finch-Fletchley's business - two separate entities are required to start a clique. From your perspective, it can mean whatever you wish it to mean, but we see it as a growing concern with more than just one mastermind involved. As long as you two work together in any business matter, the clique is maintained as viable.

"In the long-term your clique can grow to the point where your clique and my clique can associate. Strong clique associations eventually lead to your clique being recognized as a master clique in our faction, if we choose you and you choose us. Nothing in our charters or laws prevents a clique with

wizards from being fully integrated into a faction. You would never be required to be aligned with anything but wizard entities, but you could be treated as Muggle companies consider, "business partners" nowadays. There has not been a wizard clique in hundreds of years, and never has a wizard clique received master clique status. However, we have passed laws for it to happen in hopes that one day it might be possible.

"Clique formation fees are one hundred Galleons. I'd pay the fee myself for the privilege of being here for this event, but the law does not permit it. You must pay fifty Galleons each to form the clique, and each new clique member must pay his or her own fifty Galleon entry fee. Oh, though you form it as separate business owners, it also can have individual memberships. You can invite anyone to join your clique for the fee stated, but they must be part business owners in some concern themselves. So, either of the Weasley twins, or both, could join, and likewise, Miss Jordan, after you two form the clique. In addition, we encourage entrepreneurship, so any person who works full time for another company, but has started a business on the side, may also join your clique.

"It behooves you to grow your clique, but not haphazardly. Your members will reflect on you and your clique. The last wizard clique was denied associate status because one member was a rabid bigot, even though he never said anything against goblins per se." Gultangk showed his teeth as he continued, "Now I'll call Dolderap in to manage the paperwork."

"Er, Gultangk," Harry asked, "Isn't Dolderap in a clique in the other faction? Why ask for him? I know he came in for property management issues, but why have him here now? I want all my Gringotts business, property and all, under your clique, or at least under your faction."

"I appreciate your concerns and your confidence in me. However, it is our custom to have the secretary for a Director to be aligned with the other faction. It is a safeguard for insuring no mis-filings or illegal contracts are recorded. He will scrupulously take notes and arrange that any contracts, deeds, etcetera are done correctly, and I will review his work. We file and record together. It is a checks and balance system that keeps us quite proper.

"It also informs the opposition formally what goes on, so there are no surprises. My nephew, Klinkjod, acts as Printden's secretary. I could ask for no better training for him to advance in our clique and faction.

"Also," Gultangk bestowed on them another dubious smile, "I want to see Dolderap's face when he hears of your new clique formation. I hope it gives Printden his seventeenth heart attack. At twenty, he has to take a sabbatical."

Dolderap entered and arranged for the paperwork with a look of both loathing and fear on his face. Justin and Harry signed the clique formations contracts and contracts for the security measures the two would need.

After Dolderap left Justin said, "Well, gentlemen, er, that is..."

"I know what you meant, FF," said the Gultangk.

"Umm, sorry, well, would you two be my guest for lunch today? It's half twelve. I've heard that Greenbees is nice."

Gultangk sucked in his breath. "You invite me to dine with you?"

Justin squirmed. "Yes, but if I've offended you I apologize. I've not read the book you gave Potter. He'll loan it to me if you agree. I'm sorry--"

Gultangk politely held up his hand. "You do not offend me. It's just that no wizard has ever offered me such hospitality. Might I suggest... er, Greenbees is a good customer, and Harry Greenbee would serve us, but his clientele, would be outraged for the most part if I entered the establishment. I won't let my comforts cause a client's business to suffer.

"Gringotts maintains a small dining room for those at third level and above. There are humans who eat there, so food to your satisfaction is available. I'll reserve a private table for five minutes from now. I'll charge your account, FF, if you still agree, or Gringotts will--"

"No, Director. Please let me pay for lunch. I owe you and Harry."

The three entered the cafeteria and all eyes turned and followed them. The room was as Spartan as all of the conference rooms were, but the ornate tables and chairs were of the best manufacture, Louis XIV style.

Harry ordered fish, Justin the beef. Several of the dishes of Gultangk's meal wiggled of their own accord, and all of it was unrecognizable. Business was discussed and it was agreed that Justin would go straight to Clarinda's after lunch to discuss the types of fabrics she needed. He would then return on Monday with a number of samples for her consideration.

"Director," Justin queried, "Now that my banking relationship is on a sound footing, it's FTFT common practice in a new marketplace to arrange legal representation. Can you make a recommendation of a soliciting firm? You probably know better what counsel I'll need in the magical world than I do." "Do you have established representation, Potter?"

"No, Director."

"Then you'll need a soliciting firm as well. I'd suggest hiring a firm that works in both the Muggle and magical world. There are several, and the largest is on retainer with the M.I.D., so you may want to consider another. There is a very fine smaller firm that does excellent work, and also is as forward thinking on societal relations as you are. That is, they are friendly towards goblins and other sentient magical beings. I'm biased because of that but would never steer you towards any firm that would not serve you well."

Justin stated that he'd appreciate such open-mindedness, since he was Muggleborn. Harry agreed that this type of firm appealed to him as well.

Gultangk said, "The firm of Tonks and Tonks we hold in high regard. Theodore Tonks, who insists on being called 'Ted' is Muggleborn. He studied both magical and Muggle law. He met his wife,

Andromeda Black Tonks studying Muggle law at Cambridge. She's from an old pure-blood family, but rejected their bigoted ways.

"Your godfather, Potter, was Mrs. Tonks' cousin, and her daughter I believe you know, the young Metamorphmagus Auror seeing the Gringotts employee, William Weasley."

They spent the last few minutes of lunch discussing the factors Gultangk felt the two young businessmen should consider at the onset of a legal representation relationship.

Harry took Justin to the shop after bidding Gultangk adieu and introduced everyone all around. He told Clarinda, Lee, and George about his preparations for security and about the clique formation. Lee and Clarinda looked confused when Harry discussed their new clique, but George looked like Christmas had come in August.

The goblin security services manager, a witch named Sheila Clarkson arrived a short time later to finalize their arrangements. Justin asked to stay for his own education, as Clarinda, Lee, George and Harry debated their needs. In the end Harry asked for the full boat and paid from his own funds, saying that it would help him sleep better at night, since this would guard them against Death Eaters as well. He also contracted for the same security services for Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes, but George insisted on paying half of the charge for their shop.

Just past 2:00 Justin Flooed off and goblins arrived to begin the ward work. Harry bid them farewell and headed out into the Alley with his hood up. It was a Friday afternoon and the Alley was fairly busy. Harry walked to Quality Quidditch Supplies where he quietly asked for a private meeting with the manager.

Ten minutes later he called Dobby, who was charged with delivering the broomstick blanks and glue pot Harry had purchased to St. Simon's along with the book on flying broomstick repairs.

Harry bid the manager good day, swirled his cloak behind him, and Apparated away.

"Blimey," the manager said, "That was silent Apparation."

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It looked like an abandoned Muggle warehouse, and it was. Most of the square footage had been warehousing, but a hundred years ago there had also been a small horse-driven grinding mill in the corner of the factory farthest from the nearby town of Ottery St. Catchpole. The slap dash wards and charms caused Muggles to flee and magical folks to wander in a circle before arriving at the office.

A printing press now stood where the old horse drawn mill had been. It wasn't just any press, but a magical sheet-fed press. *The Quibbler's* sheet fed press was slow and its output was not of a high quality. But it did print the issues the monthly publication needed for its subscribers and the small amount of newsstand business it generated.

Or, at least it used to. Now that Harry Potter had been the subject of two powerful issues, containing



information not previously printed in the Wizarding world, subscriptions were up. The orders from newsstands were up as well. The old press could still deliver, but Sol Lovegood needed to spend more and more time working on it before each print run to make sure it would complete the larger monthly orders.

In the past if the monthly periodical came out every five to six weeks, its few faithful readers hadn't seemed to mind, or even notice for that matter. Now, many of the new readers of the magazine actually wanted the monthly delivered every month. Imagine that.

Since the events of two days before, Sol Lovegood's daughter had been confused. Luna used to understand her father's mind as well as he understood hers. Now, Sol would suddenly stop and stare off into oblivion for minutes at a time. After one of these episodes Luna's father would either burst into tears or launch into an inexplicable flurry of activity.

Luna did not really understand what had happened to her father. At times Luna thought she knew, but then she'd be confused again. The one thing she had figured out was that she needed help. After receiving Harry's message in response to her Owlpost, Luna found herself anxiously awaiting his arrival.

Bypassing the rickety old wards, Harry Apparated just outside the office of *The Quibbler* and knocked on the door.

Sol Lovegood muttered what he thought was a Muggle swear word, but was really a request for pickled lamb's feet in Turkish. He walked from the press, wiping grease from his hands with a rag, and then pulled his wand to clean them further.

"I'm coming," he called.

Luna ran out from the back office where she had been writing an article entitled, "Flying Flobberworms: Fiction or Ministry Forest Fire Weapon of Mass Destruction?"

"Father, we didn't receive the proper warnings of a visitor. We're under attack!" She screamed the last and they both pointed their wands at the door.

Harry heard her last shouted sentence and Apparated into the office with his wand drawn. "Where are they, Luna?" I'll hold them while you get your father out."

Harry stood in the middle of the office, both wands drawn, and looking like the angel of death for any one who dared attack his friend. One sensitive to magic would notice that the room crackled with portent. Sol smiled; his face showed that he could appreciate the finer points of what Harry said beyond the mere words. Luna staggered slightly. She could feel magic like a Squib might, but she was a powerful witch in her own rights.

Luna let off a small scream, and Sol Lovegood started laughing after a moment. Luna only looked out of sync with the world, but she was actually quite perceptive. She realized what had occurred and raised her wand hand toward the ceiling.

"It was you, Harry. Ginny told me you had learned to Apparate. You Apparated past our old wards somehow. You've always been more powerful than anyone else I've known. Welcome to *The Quibbler*. This is my father, Sol Lovegood, and I always like to introduce my mother's painting. It's not magical, she died before it was finished, but here she is, Stellar Lovegood." Luna indicated a painting of a beautiful woman on the wall near the front door.

Harry was shaking Sol's hand when he heard Luna's mother's name. He said, "Er, Stellar? Not Stella?"

Sol chuckled and Luna giggled before Sol answered. "Of course, Sol and Stellar Lovegood had to name their daughter, Luna. It was written in the stars."

Sol had a dreamy look in his eyes not too dissimilar to Luna's when she didn't feel comfortable with those around her as he continued. "Both sets of Luna's grandparents believed in giving names for their children to live up to. Mine named me Solomon hoping I'd seek wisdom. My sister's name is Charity, for the biblical idea of charity as love, not giving to the poor or such, although that type of charity should stem from love. Love Lovegood wouldn't have worked.

"Stellar's parents, Honour and Excellsia McTeague, believed in a similar naming convention. Stellar pointed towards a fine performance, and she was a stellar student and person all around. Her brother was named Bravenel. He lived, and died by his name, fighting Death Eaters in 1978.

"So, Stellar and Sol Lovegood *had* to name their daughter Luna. It was written in the stars." Sol barely repeated these last words before he burst out laughing again. Luna joined him instantly. Harry laughed several long seconds later.

"I like it," Harry said, "Truly I do."

Moments later Sol offered a chilled butterbeer, summoning three from the back room with his wand. They sat on rickety looking old office chairs that were magically sturdy.

"I received your letter, Luna, late last night. I had hoped to come sooner, but business got in the way. I hope I wasn't too late to help you."

"No rush, Harry, none at all now it seems, though I'm still a little unsure."

"I'm the problem, Harry," Sol said, "Luna was concerned for me. It was... well, please let me start from the beginning. Do you have some time?"

"I've no plans for the next several hours, so please." Harry knew it was too late to find Ginny and discuss Spell Mongery this day. "When Luna's mother died - no. I must go further back." Sol pulled a large plaid handkerchief and blew his nose nosily. "I finished Hogwarts the year before your parents started. I immediately went to work for the *Daily Prophet* as a cub reporter making a pittance and given the worst assignments to cover. It soon came out that I had a nose for news." Sol stopped and raised his oversized, crooked and pointed nose in the air and turned his head as in demonstration. Luna giggled again.

"I found news in the strangest places, and reported on the many odd occurrences with the fight with He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named and the Death Eaters, and there were many, believe me."

"Call him Voldemort, please, Mr. Lovegood. It's just a made up name for a half blood, probably bastard son of a dull if not retarded witch and a love potion-ed Muggle. How he succeeds in commanding pureblood followers in a fight for pureblood supremacy is beyond me."

"See, father, I told you it was true."

"Very well. Vol-. Vol-de.... Hmm. Vol - de - mort. Umm Volde-mort. Voldemort. Voldemort! VOLDEMORT!"

Sol Lovegood stood and ridiculously pirouetted around in front of them, and then sat. Luna heartily chuckled and Harry joined her.

Harry said, "I wish others broke through that easily."

Sol seemed refreshed and said with great enthusiasm, "There. Voldemort. Not hard at all, and he didn't appear or anything. Well where was I? Oh, yes."

"In 1976 I became too good at finding the odd stories, and soon I was fired for discovering that a Wizengamot family was probably connected to Death Eaters. The Sheets family to be exact, but I could never find the solid evidence I needed. I refused to give up the story when Barnabas Cuffe, who was then assistant editor, demanded I do so. I was fired and he was promoted to editor in less than three months. He's now the publisher and editor."

"I understand he's the one who lets them write such terrible things about me; do you think so?" Harry asked.

"Yes, Harry. He at the very least approved, if not commissioned the derogatory stories."

"Are the Sheets involved with the *Daily Prophet*?"

"Highly unlikely, at least I'd wager there is nothing that could be proven. I spent a month trying to confirm it in 1976, and they could not be directly linked with the *Prophet* in any way. I wasted a month proving it."

Sol ran his hand over his face and left the slightest bit of press grease on his nose. He didn't seem to mind, and neither did Luna. "Just four months before my dismissal, a great aunt, who loved my stories by the way, died and left me a comfortable sum. I bought this press and rented this building and then started *The Quibbler*. I named it that to poke fun at the quibbling staff at the *Daily Prophet* who feared writing the truth about Voldemort. That's easier to say every time I do it.

"Well, I worked hard and figured a monthly publication would work, since I could do everything myself in a four week time frame.

"I am not much of a businessman now, but I had no business mind then. I was printing the first issue

when I realized I had no outlet for my pub. No subscribers, no advertisers, and no newsstands to carry it. I put on my best robes and went to every newsstand and any other possible outlet and eventually convinced them to carry it for free and take all the profits for any they sold.

"I next tried to sell advertising, which *can* keep a free paper alive, but they refused to buy unless it had so many subscribers, or could say that so many each month were sold at newsstands. Therefore, I gave away free advertising so it would look like a profitable news monthly. I now had advertisers giving me no money and paper sellers giving me no money. Also, few people were actually buying it.

"I hired the services of an Owlpost delivery company for a few months and sent *The Quibbler* to different chunks of magical folks around the country, hoping to generate interest and subscriptions that way. After two issues, I sent a letter asking them to subscribe. Few did.

"By this time I was exhausted and going broke quickly. The *Daily Prophet* had been publishing ridiculous stories that I knew weren't true, but sensationalized works that feed on the public's fears. Their circulation was up to record highs. I became disgusted and published an outlandish piece making up the most preposterous stories. This was going to be my swan song, and I'd go to America to seek work there, even as a Muggle reporter if need be. I am a half-blood and I had visited my mother's Muggle relatives in the States during three consecutive summers as a youth. I can pass for a Muggle, or I could back then. I also placed a back page ad in that last issue shamelessly asking for subscribers and offering to publish any story a paid subscriber sent in. I then sent it to the newsstands and to everyone who had received an Owlpost delivery.

"I think I might have been consuming a little too much Ogdens back then.

"Lo and behold I received several hundred subscriptions, and a number of wacky stories to boot. Several advertisers sent me letters wanting to upgrade to paid, larger ad sizes. This gave me the idea of charging everyone for advertising. I sent them all messages that I was charging now and a rate sheet. Sixty-two percent of them sent in prepaid ad copy and mock-ups.

"Finally I went to all of my newsstands and told them I needed forty percent of the price on the cover and would repay them for each issue not purchased. Most offered for twenty percent and no return. They had sold out on my last issue. I settled for twenty-seven and a half percent and no returns.

"I was in business."

"Two years later in 1978, a recently finished Hogwarts student, Stellar McTeague, darkened my door and asked to work for me. I couldn't afford to pay her, but Stellar offered to work for free for three months and let me see. She reorganized the business, reorganized my life and discovered enough savings for a small salary for herself. I gave her double what she asked. In another three months, we were man and wife."

Sol stopped and pulled his handkerchief again. He noisily blew his nose and Luna moved behind him and hugged his neck.

Sol said, "Thank you my little radish."

Harry glanced to Luna's radish earrings, and she winked at him.

"Where was I? Oh, yes. Stellar was a lively girl with a sharp wit and a sharp tongue for all who believed our less-than-true stories. The serious news back half of each issue was our real work, but few appreciated it. We wanted to do more important journalism, but we were too happy together to try to figure out what it took to gain serious readership. Our lives were full, and we wanted a child.

"Now that I think about it, we were probably not attacked by Death Eaters because no one believed the true things we wrote."

Sol looked off wistfully through a window. Luna gave him one more hug and sat again.

"So," Sol said abruptly, "One day Stellar and I stopped using the Pre-Conception Prevent charm. Our little Luna was born nine months later." He beamed at her, and it was Luna's turn to pull a huge paisley handkerchief and delicately blow her nose.

"We went along, merrily saving our money, and hoping to reach the point financially where we could slowly convert *The Quibbler* to a serious news monthly, then weekly, that could rival the *Daily Prophet*, which was becoming more ridiculously slanted pro-Ministry and anti-sanity. When Fudge became the new Minister of Magic, the *Daily Prophet* kicked into a high state of pro-governmental drivel.

"Then six years ago.... Well, Stellar was brilliant. She wanted to be a Ministry Arithmantic Spell Crafter, but her ideas, which all seemed so good to Professor Flitwick and the other professors at Hogwarts, caused her to be rejected immediately when she applied. So, she dabbled with Spell Creation and was always searching for what little was written on the subject and available to the public.

"She began to make some headway when an experiment went terribly wrong. Luna walked in just in time to see her die, and was badly hurt herself. I paid a Legilimens to search Luna's mind, and her memories clearly showed Luna did not distract her mother, so I was able to convince my daughter she was not to blame right from the start.

"But I went mad the weeks Luna was in St. Mungo's. I mean literally off my noggin, not just a little mad like people think Albus Dumbledore is mad. I'd sit by her bed at night and mutter about the truth of the weird stories we published. When she was well, Luna and I began to seek out these fabrications, and I'm afraid my little girl was damaged by my actions."

Sol broke out in tears at this confession, and Harry panicked about how to help. Sol and Luna stood and hugged each other forcefully. Harry looked at Luna, and he noticed her change before his very eyes.

Luna had grown into her face over the past year. She was not nearly as wide-eyed as she'd seemed on the train at the start of Harry's first year. Now Harry saw Luna close her eyes, then blink a number of times. When she opened her eyes Luna was even less wide-eyed. She shook her head and her expression changed from one of dreamy detachment to clear-headedness. Luna stood straighter, but

then slouched back down a bit.

"Father, I've always known the truth. I've only played this game with you because I love you, and I wanted to be with you in grieving for mother. You must admit, we've had fun, and I've led my schoolmates on a merry chase these years."

They cried for a few very long moments. Harry felt he should be anywhere but here. He stood finally when he regained his wits and said quietly, "I'll just leave you two--"

"NO!" they both exclaimed, and then laughed tearfully together.

"Please stay, Harry, stay," Sol said, "You see, you caused this reunion, I guess you could call it that. I went mad for a few years and acted like the crazy stories I wrote and edited were true. Luna went along with me. The other day when I re-read your instructions on producing a Patronus, I had to go deep down within myself to reclaim the happiest moments in my life. That action, along with the emotional release of casting that spell, seemed to... I don't know... break through the shell I'd created. Now I'm back, and it seems that my little girl is back with me.

"I'm glad Luna Owled you, Harry. I wonder... I'll print the issue with your Shielding spell instructions - brilliant work by the way. I paid attention to how it felt, before and after doing your exercises to strengthen my shield; it made a great deal of difference when I followed your instructions.

"Anyway, that issue should go out next week. I was wondering what else you can write, on any subject? These two instructional articles are important public services, but I'd also like articles on subjects like the first piece we did in the early spring. People need information. Heck, I'll even research any subject you want to send me after."

Sol paused, expectation on his face. Harry was flabbergasted by the confidence Sol demonstrated by his offer.

Harry answered slowly, thinking as he spoke. "Mr. Lovegood, I like the idea of this, but I've never really thought about writing.... Well, there is one article I'd like to do, about Voldemort, telling all about him and showing him to be the sham that he is. A deadly and extremely dangerous sham, but a fake nonetheless.

"You know he claims to be *Lord* Voldemort, but he's no lord. We wizards don't have lords and ladies or other such titles. It's all a game he's playing with our minds to cause us to surrender before the fight."

Harry stared into the distance and father and daughter looked at each other and winked.

"I suppose I could work on something from time to time... as the mood hits me... and when I have a break in my schedule, which is going to be pretty busy in the school year."

After saying that Harry realized he hadn't told Ron and Hermione about his teaching assistantship yet, though Ginny knew. He quickly said, "I'll think on it and write something maybe, no promises, but I'm grateful for the offer. I might have a business for you to investigate soon, Mr. Lovegood, but I need to

see where things go for a few days at least."

The three visited amiably for nearly ten more minutes, before Harry departed. After saying goodbye, he simply Disapparated away.

"Luna, Harry was silent. Is that possible?"

"Father, Harry specializes in the impossible, but please don't mention it to him. He hates being singled out for his abilities, other than playing Quidditch, and even then he's rather modest about it.

"Now, what say we really have fun, Father, with the Crumple-horned Snorkack and other such beasties, and really give our readers some stories to talk about?"

"I love you, Luna."

"I love you too, Daddy."

~\*~\*~

Saturday found Harry in the part of the grounds around St. Simon's where Father William Martin told him he could practice Spell Mongery. He wasn't Mongering at the moment. He was reading the book on repairing broomsticks.

A racing broom would never be repaired if there was a major break, but everyday brooms used by families to visit magical neighbors in the next country home, or to look at crops, or for children to learn on, were often repaired by the craftsmen at Quality Quidditch Supply. However, they also sold the supplies and books to do repairs yourself.

Harry did not need to repair his Firebolt; it lay against a nearby tree. He had conjured a workbench, and had his repair supplies nearby. He practiced the End Cutting and Sharpening spells on several dead branches he'd gathered. He also practiced the Hole Boring spell to create the male/female mating of broom pieces. After perfecting his work with dead branches, he used one broom blank to create end-to-end and end-to-side holes and mated pieces. He felt he'd perfected the spells, so he stopped.

The broom repair book told Harry that the spells and charms to make a broom blank into a simple flying broom were basic and not very powerful. The incantations used to make a fast and maneuverable broom were trade secrets. If Harry's Firebolt were damaged, it would have to go back to the factory for repairs. Even shops like Quality Quidditch weren't trusted with such knowledge. Harry didn't want to make the contraption he was creating fly. It was the control charms he was interested in.

The control charms in the book were very sophisticated, for safety purposes. A major lawsuit over a hundred years before had almost bankrupted Cleansweep Brooms when its repair book failed to provide control charms of sufficient reliability. A racing broom might have a few advanced control charms for high speed maneuvering, but the basic control charms were all first rate on all brooms and

in all broom repair books.

The control charms were Harry's only interest this day.

Harry did some measuring on himself and his broom. He then took out the written measurements Mrs. Weasley had sent him in an Owlpost. He wrote out several simple calculations in his Mongering journal, and compared notes on several pages. Then he started to measure and mark the broom blanks, then using the Cutting charm. He cast the Boring charm where he marked it, and compared the fit of each intersecting piece.

He assembled the pieces using the special broom glue, and cast the Cement Hardening and Bonding spells on each joint. He looked at the odd rig he'd made and smiled. Then he applied a Cushioned Seating charm on the rig.

Before he cast any more spells, he opened the book by Filius Flitwick on placing permanent charms to objects so they could link to the charms on another object without harming either object or damaging the enchantments involved. He reread the marked places in the booklet, and looked at his newly crafted contrivance. He smiled a most devious smile and shot his wand out of his arm holster again.

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Sunday found Harry going to Grimmauld Place after morning services at St. Simon's. It was Ginny's birthday, and Harry was touched that she'd insisted the party take place at Headquarters, even though many of her friends would not be able to attend there for security reasons. However, because of its tight security, Harry was able to attend.

Because Harry was a strong Apparator and could leave anywhere pretty quickly, he would not have been in danger if the party were held elsewhere. However, his attendance would have endangered other partygoers. In reality, any normal party for Ginny would probably have been noticed by Death Eaters and attacked on the chance that Harry would be in attendance. All things considered Dumbledore and the Weasleys were pleased by Ginny's request to have a small birthday party at Headquarters.

Professors McGonagall and Dumbledore were present, as was Hagrid. Remus had attended services with Harry that morning and thanked Father William for all his help on his ward's behalf. The two came to Grimmauld Place just in time for the birthday lunch. Tonks attended with Bill, and Charlie and Fleur came by way of international Portkeys the Weasley parents had purchased. Of course the twins were there, causing excitement as usual. Their tabletop fireworks display launched prematurely, just before the meal instead of after the presents were opened.

Neville, Luna, and Colin Creevey also attended by way of a special Portkey Dumbledore had created and camouflaged with the Twin's special secure Portkey powder. These were the only students in attendance other than Harry, Ron, and Hermione.

Mrs. Granger was there, but not Hermione's father. All Sylvia Granger said, and all Hermione said



she knew, was that Steph Granger was away on business for the Order. Harry had received a note telling him knife-fighting lessons were postponed for an indefinite time - and no explanation.

The big surprise and delight occurred when Arthur went to the door, admitting Percy and his intended, Penelope Clearwater. Percy and Penny had already met with each Weasley (except Charlie) to clear the air. He and Charlie had Owled back and forth several times. Most of the siblings had reached an agreement, although Percy had received a black eye from Ron, which he wore stoically for several minutes, until Ron quit hugging him and Penny could heal the bruise. After meeting with the twins, it took an hour for Percy to stop clucking like a chicken and stop laying eggs, but the twin's revenge wore off soon enough. No one knew just what Bill had done, and Charlie punched him on the arm just before they hugged today.

Ginny saw Penny's engagement ring first and jumped up, shouting for all to hear. Penny apologized to Ginny for stealing a little of the joy of her day, but Ginny exclaimed that her joy was only increased.

Lunch was the usual Mrs. Weasley culinary triumph, with substantially larger Paladin sized portions for Hermione, Ron, Neville and Harry.

Ginny seemed delighted by all of her gifts, graciously thanking each giver, but the look on her face showed that she looked forward to opening the broom-shaped package from her parents. She'd asked for the new Cleansweep Twelve, slightly faster but more maneuverable than Ron's Cleansweep Eleven of the year before. That present would be saved for last.

Arthur came forward with Molly at his side, carrying the broom shaped wrapped package that Ginny had been glancing at all afternoon.

"Ginny, it's our tradition to give our children a special gift if they make prefect or some such other title. You've been made Gryffindor Quidditch Captain, and Professor McGonagall told us you could have been prefect also."

"Dad, hush," she said and blushed. She turned to the students in the room. "You lot don't tell whoever gets it, you hear?"

Arthur looked embarrassed, but Molly said, "We're just proud of you dear."

"Anyway," Arthur continued, "We had a broom all picked out, but then Harry approached me... well, open it. He joined us in this gift."

Arthur thrust the package into her hands and she pulled the bow, which opened the gift by itself for all to see.

Ginny was speechless, but Ron wasn't. "It's the new Firebolt C - the Firebolt redesigned especially for Chasers!"

Still the rest of the group was quiet, waiting for the response from the birthday girl. She hadn't said anything, but her wide-opened eyes showed she was pleased. Suddenly she launched herself at Harry. She had tears in her eyes and muttered her thanks incoherently. She tore herself away and hugged her

parents.

Harry looked over at Ron. He was genuinely delighted for his sister's good fortune that she could have such a broom. Then Harry looked at Hermione, and they both knew what he was thinking. Ron quickly joined her other brothers in congratulating her on the broom and on her captaincy.

After the congratulations died down, Harry said, "And I have something for you, Ron. It's not a gift, so much as a secret weapon to help us win this year in Quidditch."

Everyone looked at Harry in surprise, and he pulled a small box out of his pocket, tapped it with his wand, and it expanded to about three feet by three feet.

After a moment's hesitation, Ron advanced and opened it. He pulled out an odd device constructed of broom wood. It had triangular shapes and several posts sticking out at parallel angles. "Er, thanks, Harry, just what I wanted." He smirked.

"You prat," Harry said, "You don't even know what it is. We need to go out back to see it in action."

Everyone followed him to the back garden. The garden was within the boundaries of the *Fidelius* charm that covered the house. The space was wider than the house at fifty feet, and nearly one hundred feet deep. The warding went up to the top of the three-story house.

Harry drew his wand and called, "Accio Ron's broom!" The broom arrived in several seconds out of a second story window, and came to a stop right beside him. He placed the device on the broom and pointed his wand at it.

"Whoa," Ron said, "What are you doing to my broom? The directions say not to stick anything to it or you can mess up the charms and spells that make it fly safely."

"I won't hurt it, Ron."

"Are you sure?"

"I tested it on my Firebolt, yesterday, then rode it after I removed this device and pushed it to the limits. It was all right."

Ron looked at him and said, "Good enough," and grinned.

Harry grinned back and said, "You're going to love this, Ron."

He joined the device to Ron's broom with a sturdy but removable Sticking charm. McGonagall nodded in approval and Dumbledore twinkled. Harry cast a number of spells and charms that no one seemed to recognize, until the end.

Dumbledore said, "Some of Filius' Mastery thesis work, I presume?"

"Correct, Professor." Everyone else looked confused, and Hermione barely looked like she could

contain herself. "On you go, Ron."

Ron looked at his jury-rigged broom, and said, "You first, mate."

"All right." Harry climbed on and shuffled around placing his legs inside the contraption and on the parallel pieces. His feet rested firmly on what was now obviously footrests. He sat up straight and began zooming around the close quarters back garden. He backed up, zoomed straight up and down, went sideways and upside down, and rolled several times.

The amazing thing was that he did this without ever placing his hands on the broom at all. He had complete control, even when flying upside down, and *both* arms and hands were free to block any Quaffle coming near the goal posts.

Ron's face was splashed with ecstasy. "That's *beyond brilliant!* Come down and let me try, mate." Ron was dancing in place, and everyone else was excited also.

"Have you checked the rules on that, Harry?" Percy asked.

McGonagall answered, "There is nothing in the school or professional rules to preclude such a device. Nothing such as this has ever been envisioned before, so it will be controversial."

"That's why, Ron," Harry said, "You can't take this from here until after September first."

"But I want to test it with the goals at Hogwarts."

Harry shook his head. "No, the rules can't be changed once the school year starts, but any head of house can ask for a rule change to stop us from using this before that date."

"How *politically ingenious* of you, Potter," McGonagall said with a rare grin.

"Delightfully devious," Dumbledore stated nonchalantly.

"Positively Slytherin of you," Hermione said.

"Yeah," Ron agreed with a satisfied look on his face. "Think what the Slytherins will say when I ride out for the first match on this baby."

They all laughed.

Harry started casting Cushioning charms all over the ground.

"What's with that, mate?"

"You'll need them when you first try, Ron."

"Not me," said Ron, "This baby was built for me."

"I know," Harry said. "I built it for you. But I wish I'd put these on the ground yesterday when I first tried it. I was almost knocked unconscious."

"Not me, I've been looking for this all of my life."

In less than ten seconds Ron slammed into the cushioned earth, and then climbed right back on after thanking his friend for the protection, and lasted for almost thirty seconds before crashing again. In two minutes he was hovering steadily and doing simple maneuvers. In several more minutes he was about as proficient as Harry had been when demonstrating the device in the first place.

They all went back inside for cake.

Harry had thought earlier in the summer that Luna and Neville were a couple. She had written that she had her eyes on a Gryffindor, and Harry knew Luna was helping Neville teach his childhood friend, Eloise Midgen some Defense spells and hexes and such. However, Luna seemed to spend all her time with the twins when not speaking to Ginny. And Neville spent most of his time with Ron and Hermione.

Neville was just an inch shorter than Ron. But Neville was considerably more muscular than Ron, and Ron was in great shape. Harry went to speak with him when he moved towards the punch bowl by himself.

"Nev, looking good, mate. The Paladin Program seems to agree with you."

"Hi, again, Harry. You're looking like it agrees with you as well." Harry stood four inches shorter than Neville, and was not as powerfully built as his formerly pudgy friend. Neville's stature would now be considered impressive by amateur Muggle weight lifting standards. Neville continued, "I was caught by Luna kissing my partner on Aberration Day, only a minute after it started. She hexed me onto the magical treadmill and all I could do was exercise."

"Well, you've probably heard that whatever one of us were doing that hour, we were sort of stuck in. I know a little about your fight, and the growth spurt it put you under. Well, I couldn't seem to stop exercising for a week. And even though the exercise and potions up to that point had really helped, I have now outstripped the Expansion Charm on all the new shirts Gran bought me at the start of summer holidays."

Harry and Neville compared notes for a few minutes and then Harry said, "Neville, I'd intended to get you a birthday present this year but with the problems we just discussed..."

"Forget it, Harry. I didn't buy you anything either. Your friendship's enough."

"Neville, you can count on it. I suppose Eloise told you about our letters, about you in the Department of Mysteries?"

Neville blushed. It looked different on the young man who'd traded in his baby fat for a ruggedly chiseled cleft chin and prominent cheekbones. "That was nice...you, you..."

"Every word of it true," Harry stated firmly. "You were amazingly brave to take on Death Eaters without a wand or the ability to verbalize spells. I'm glad you're on my side, Nev."

"I am too, Harry, count on it. I'm taking this seriously, this training and all. I haven't decided if I want to be an Auror, but I want this training, and I'll fight when and where we need to. I'm not just doing this to defend myself. Call on me, Harry, if you need me. I, er, I owe them."

"I know, Nev. We both do."

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As the party began to wind down, Ginny asked if she could go to the Burrow or Hogwarts to try out her new broom. She invited Harry in the same breath and Ron, if he'd leave the Keeper's Rig behind. No need to give away a secret weapon before it could be guaranteed a part of the coming season.

Ron begged off, wanting to stay and familiarize himself further with his new contrivance and to stay with Hermione. Molly instantly feared for Harry's safety, but Dumbledore suggested they go to Hogwarts and use the Quidditch pitch, just for an hour. It would be enough.

Ginny and Harry Flooed to Hogwarts. As typical, Harry fell on his face while Flooing, and Ginny stepped over him, developing quite a lead racing for the pitch. While still in the castle Harry mounted his broom and shot after her, passing her in a few seconds. She jumped on her new broom and figured she could catch him when he slowed to open the doors. Of course Harry simply waved his hand and the doors parted before him. He slowed just the slightest, but Ginny was still a good fifteen feet behind.

Harry beat her to the pitch. Ginny couldn't accelerate as fast as he could, but she matched his speed eventually and was only moments behind. He pulled the neck of his broom up and stopped like a horse rider might a rein in a raging stallion. She pulled up next to him much more smoothly, and overshot him just a bit.

"I see by the look on your face," Harry said, "That you're concerned that your broom isn't as fast as mine."

"I thought since this is a newer model it would be at least a little faster, but yours is faster while three years senior."

Harry grinned and looped around her. He stopped and then looped again. She followed him the second time and completed the loop before he did and in a tighter circle.

"Now," he said, "Follow this." He accelerated slowly and she reached top speed right with him. He started into an obvious loop and she followed. Her loop this time was larger than his, but much smoother.

He stopped instantly and she went a little past him stopping herself. She turned and he came up to where their brooms were as close as possible without one of them actually transferring onto the same broom as the other. Ginny loved the fact that this new, confident, physically powerful Harry didn't

seem to know what he did to a girl if he came so close. She had long ago developed a 'Harry poker face'. She'd enjoy his proximity without showing her joy. She did broadcast the smile they both shared in flying.

"Have you figured it out?" he asked.

She nodded. "Yes, your broom and mine have the same speed factors, but yours accelerates for a Seeker, and mine does so just a little slower, but ideal for a Chaser. Mine performs more smoothly at speeds so I can hold and shoot the Quaffle, or steal it from another player. Yours accelerates more quickly and is less stable at all speeds. It's a trade off for a Seeker, who needs to catch the Snitch regardless of the cost. Mine is more maneuverable at slower speeds when fighting for the Quaffle. You don't need slow speed maneuvering because Seekers never do anything of importance at slow speeds."

He nodded his head. "It's basically the same broom with adjusted acceleration and braking, and heavily modified maneuvering."

"I love it, Harry, it's a great Chaser broom, just like a Firebolt C should be. Thanks!"

"Well, your parents paid... er...."

"I know, Dad told me that you talked him into spending a little more to pay half and you paid half. I'd now own a perfectly fine Cleansweep Twelve if it weren't for you, and I'd have been grateful, but this." Ginny leaned over and gave him an awkward hug, but did not blush. Then she rocketed off. "Beat you to the goal!"

Since Harry was pointed in the wrong direction, and the goal was not that far away, Ginny did beat him there. She whooped and hollered while going clean through the center ring and looping carefully around and through the ring on the left and then the one on the right.

Harry joined her yelling and shouting and they shot around the pitch in an all out oval pattern at top speed. Harry had accelerated a little slower than he could, so at top speeds for both of them they were neck and neck.

With the hour almost up, they landed nearer to the castle than was general practice during the school year and walked towards the Floo. Harry sighed when he offered Ginny the powder jar.

"What's the matter, Harry?"

"Flooding. I am a cracking whiz at Apparation. I'm just about silent and know how to make it actually noiseless. But I still fall out of the Floo on my face or my bum like I did the very first time. At least I know how to say my destination clearly and don't miss like then, but I still feel pretty foolish when I'm covered in soot and rolling around on the floor. Most of you just need a quick dust off, but I need hosing down."

"Harry, that first time, Ron said you'd never done it before, you *had* had the basic training at

Hogwarts, hadn't you? Most of us learn about it from our parents and do it with them when little so we have a feel for it before ever doing it solo. At the end of first year the Muggleborns and any who want it are offered a quick course in Flooing, didn't you take it?"

"I was in the infirmary at the end of first year. I told you about the Sorcerer's Stone, didn't I?"

"Yes. Oh! Well, er, when you Floo, how much er, magic or power or what ever, oh, let's say, how much willpower do you use?"

"I dunno. I figure I have to really concentrate so I think on it real hard and say the words as forcefully as I can."

"Oh, Harry, we've let you down again. We all know how much magical effort, I guess you'd call it, goes into Flooing, because we've felt Mum and Dad do it as we rode along with them. It doesn't take much. Mum says it like taking a slightly longer than usual step is all. Not like a running leap."

"Oh, well, I'm probably over doing it a might, giving it a good push." Harry didn't really blush, but he was obviously a little embarrassed.

"I'll say. You're a powerful wizard. If you're giving it a good push, it's a wonder you don't fly out and crash into the opposite wall when you reach your destination.

"Here. I'll go first. Pull up one of your Mongering tools if you can and watch how much I put into it. Then try it, toned down a good bit." She pulled out her own private supply of Secure Floo Powder, and placed a careful measure in her left hand. She grabbed a regular hand full of normal powder. Harry had his wand out and seemed to be looking through her. He nodded his head.

Ginny, threw down the regular powder, and before the green fire died, she dropped the security powder and called out the name of headquarters.

Harry shook his head and muttered to himself, "I hate not knowing these little things."

He repeated Ginny's process to the letter, and this time thought about the little power he needed to Apparate across a room.

Harry stepped out of the fireplace at Grimmauld Place as if he was walking across the threshold of a doorway. He looked at himself, smiled, raised his hands and circled to his audience of Ginny and Mrs. Weasley. "And soot?" he asked.

"Clean as a whistle," Ginny said and chuckled.

"What are you two on about, dear?"

"Mum, no one ever taught Harry how to Floo. He's been putting everything into it."

"Well, that explains the mess he's been all these years, doesn't it? There's lemonade in the cooler. Have a glass. Was the broom all you hoped for, dear?"

Ginny walked to her mother and hugged her, telling her briefly about the broom.

"That's nice, dear. Come along into the sitting room if you want, or sit at the table and have another slice of cake with your lemonade." She then left the room.

The flying had worked up their appetites, so they opted for cake. Harry poured the lemonade and Ginny cut the cake. They sat not at the table, but Harry made his way to a bench near the hearth, and she sat with him, close but not too close. He shifted a little closer to her, and then leaned over to steal a piece of cake from her plate.

"Hey, you. I'm the birthday girl here."

"I know, and you gave yourself the bigger piece."

"Not by much."

"No, but as the birthday girl, your piece has to be sweeter so I had to take some of yours to see."

Ginny had rarely seen Harry this carefree in his buttoned up life, except right after flying. She hoped he was enjoying her company as well. It had been a while since the broom rides, and the whole Floo thing had him fairly peeved at himself a bit earlier. She hoped he was at ease because of her presence, not just in her presence.

Ginny frowned the slightest bit, but not so Harry could see it. "Harry, I want to clarify something. I'm not as smart as Hermione, as she said the other day. I'm plenty smart enough I guess. I am the first in my class, but I'm not on her level. She is the smartest in her generation, and I'm in that generation."

Harry frowned just a bit. "Ginny, why did you feel you needed to tell me that?"

"It's just... well, I don't want you to think I think I'm that smart. You know Hermione as well as anyone, probably even better than my lunkhead brother, and he's been dating her all summer. I just don't want you to be disappointed when you see I'm not as brainy." She finished this looking down at the empty cake plate in her lap.

"Ginny. That thought would have never occurred to me. You two are different. She can write a book on dentistry because her parents are dentists. Had you heard of it before hearing her parents did that for a living?"

"Yes, but only because of Dad. Most others raised like us probably haven't."

"Yes, and there are loads of thing she can't tell you about growing up in a wizard home because there aren't books on the subject. You lot have never written about it just like fish don't write books on swimming. I couldn't care less about who knows the most particular facts. You're both the smartest and both my two best female friends and now she dates my best mate and--"

Harry stopped abruptly and Ginny wondered what he had been going to say.



"...and you're my best friend's sister and best friends with my other female best friend. Four best friends with other things bringing us together than what year we're in and who's smartest. Do you care that I'm not as smart as Hermione?" Harry asked.

"Of course not, but--"

"No buts to it then." Harry leaned in and looked her in the eyes. "You're special Ginny. Unique. Wonderful. Smart, pretty, wickedly witty, determined, and a bit temperamental if you don't mind me saying so."

She gave him an overdone frown and generated a steamed voice. "Who's temperamental?"

They stared into each other's eyes for a second before breaking up laughing.

"No, Ginny," Harry said after the calmed down, "I've been with more people this summer than any before, but I've still had loads of time to think. You, Hermione, Ron, and I are a special team of friends. And I want to include Luna and Neville but they've been out of reach to me this summer, so help me make sure they're in with us when school begins. But you three in particular have been true friends. I never had any before Hogwarts. First Ron and Hermione, then you, and now those two. If I never have any more good friends than you five I'll thank the good Lord above for bringing you all into my life. You're each unique, but each so fine. I'm sounding like a silly nancy boy as my uncle would say, but having friends like you after having none, well..."

Harry said this while staring at his hands. After a moment he slowly looked up at Ginny, and their eyes met. She realized in a moment that she could stare at him and probably make him self-conscious enough to change the subject drastically. She could make him uncomfortable and probably cause him to want to go be with the others. She wanted more alone time with him, but she knew the only way to have it. She had to lighten the mood, but hopefully not too much.

"Harry, if it sounds 'nancy boy' that's not too bad, but let's do what friends do most. Let's talk about things of interest to one or both of us. Let me tell you about a typical Wizarding household and how it works. You've seen Mum set the dishes to washing by themselves, but do you know the spell for that? You've done so many dishes for your family, if you have to go back next year you could set them off cleaning themselves and throw your aunt and uncle into a tizzy."

Harry readily agreed, and they spent the next hour talking about different aspects of everyday life in Wizarding homes and society. Ginny covered a variety of things she thought Harry might not know and Harry found it all fascinating. Sometimes they concentrated on a spell or charm as Ginny taught it to Harry, Sometimes they laughed at the antics one of her brothers had found themselves immersed in while mis-performing a particular spell.

Harry thought that it was hysterical that Charlie had failed his first Apparation test because he remembered just as he tried to Disapparate away from the test chamber, that he'd not separated his Muggle from magically spelled clothing before he'd put them into the charmed washtub. Not only did he have to retest two weeks later, all of his Muggle made trousers had fade marks on them from where the Foster's Liquid Scourgify accidentally damaged them.

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After one outburst of laughter from the kitchen, Ron stood from Hermione's side and moved to see what the commotion was about.

"No, Ron," Hermione said, grabbing his arm, "Leave them be." She pulled him down beside her.

"But Harry's in there all alone with Ginny. He shouldn't have to entertain her, her birthday party's over."

*Whack!*

"Stupid boy," Hermione scolded.

"Ouch! Did you have to hit my head? That hurt Hermione. I don't mind much when you hit my arm, but that..."

"I'll do more than that if you don't leave them be."

"But... but Harry and I could play Wizard Chess, or we could all three of us plan for the Quidditch season. New brooms and a new Keeper's rig for me won't win it for us, we need to--"

*Whack!*

"Mum! Don't thump my back!" said loudly.

"Shhh, Ron," said Hermione and Mrs. Weasley simultaneously.

"I said, don't hit me," Ron whispered loudly.

"You said don't hit your head. Now leave them alone."

"Hermione's right, dear. I can hear a few words every now and then, though I'd move if I could actually hear their conversation. Apparently Ginny is telling Harry about growing up in a Wizarding home and the spells, charms, practices and such not that we take for granted and he's never heard of."

"But I could help with that, and... and you're the expert, Mum."

Hermione and Mrs. Weasley looked at each other like Ron was a misbehaving three-year-old. "I'll tell him, Hermione, dear," Molly said.

She lowered her knitting to her lap and fixed Ron with the same gaze she used to gently correct all her children - when they were four or five.

"Ron, Harry doesn't have many opportunities to sit with a pretty girl and just talk."

"Ginny's a pretty girl?"

*Whack!*

"I said not the head, Hermione."

"I'm sorry, Ron," his girlfriend said, "But you weren't using it just then so I thought I'd treated it like it deserved for letting your mouth say that about Ginny."

"I'd have popped your head myself, dear, if you'd been within reach," Molly added tersely.

The look on his mother's face made Ron shrink down in the sofa and stare at the floor. She said, "The only other girls Harry's talked to, other than business I believe, have been girls in the Paladin Program during 'visits.' You know the potions running through you dears then make you, er, a bit not-yourself so to speak. So those aren't real conversations. Now he's talking, *really talking* to a pretty girl and I think it's about time."

Ron's eyes bugged out. "I thought Ginny was over crushing on Harry."

"*Ronald!*" Hermione exclaimed in frustration.

Ron ducked and leaned away from any further attack by his girlfriend, which never came.

"Ron," Mrs. Weasley said, calling his attention back to her, "There's no black or white to this. It's not that they are passionately in love or not friendly at all. Harry needs to spend at least a little bit of his time doing typical teenager stuff; goodness knows he's had so little opportunity." She paused and sniffed, pulled a hanky and blew her nose.

"But Harry can talk to me, or Hermione. We're his best friends."

"True enough, dear, but you have more friends than him. You talk to Ginny and a number of others because you go to the castle almost daily and see so many of your fellow Paladins during these summer classes and such. Harry did little of that until just recently, and I can imagine his *not* being on the potions and being with a witch who's being driven a bit mad by it, didn't make Harry anymore comfortable with girls. Now you're his best mate, but you are a boy. Hermione is a girl, but she's more like the sister he's never had, and she's your girlfriend. Harry will probably pull back from you a little this year to let you two have time alone together. Do you want him to be all alone during those times?"

Ron just shook his head. "But Ginny..."

"Ron, you can't see your sister like a lovely young woman she is," Hermione said, "Just like you didn't see me as a girl until the Yule Ball our fourth year."

"I've already apologized for that, Hermione. I'll tell anyone what a prat I was that year, about a lot of things."

"Ron," Mrs. Weasley said, "Ginny is over her crush, but now she sees Harry as very nice young man that she *could* draw close to if things go a certain way, though they may not. That's all." Hermione

nodded her head in agreement so Ron could see it.

His mother continued, "I spoke to Harry right after that horrid battle in Little Whinging, while he was in the bed in St. Mungo's. He thinks this war is all his to fight, or rather he must lead the fight, and I suppose..." she paused and sniffed again, "He's probably right in so many ways. You-Know-Who never leaves the poor dear alone, and I'm sure that won't end. Though I hope Dumbledore can defeat him first, I do believe Harry is preparing himself to stop that monster. Harry's preparing to lead you all into battle if need be, and then fight You-Know-Who himself... to kill him." She spoke this at a whisper, but they heard her nonetheless.

"I do think *he thinks* he can't have a girlfriend or anything much good in this life until he does so. Therefore, he probably thinks right now all he's doing is talking with a good friend, which Ginny is. But she, or some other girl could be so much more for him. "The possibility of that, regardless of whether he knows it or not, makes such talks with Ginny just that much nicer for him. And if you do *anything* to ruin this chance for Harry, and for Ginny as well, you'll answer to me, and Hermione will deal with whatever's left when I'm finished."

She sighed and rubbed the bridge of her nose between her eyes. "Even at school, if Harry is talking with another girl, like he is Ginny now, you'll not interfere. Is that understood?"

"But that'd mean he's cheating on Ginny."

"Ron," Mrs. Weasley's glare was terrifying. "I can't imagine if he and Ginny had a stated boy-girl relationship that Harry would cheat on her. It's not in his nature. But even if they are together, then he can talk to a girl, if he likes, just like you could before dating Hermione, and can still talk to them as *friends* if Hermione isn't made uncomfortable by the girl's advances. And mind you don't go off staring down the blouses of any of the newly attractive young witches in the Paladin program, or any other young ladies as well."

"MUUUMMM!" Ron was crimson.

Hermione rubbed the back of his head, like he liked. "Ron, you are a handsome man, and many girls will fancy you, particularly now with all these lovely muscles. Do be careful that girls coming up to talk aren't swaying your head. I tell you now, so you'll know, it will hurt my feelings if you do so.

"I don't expect you to be anti-social for me. I'll talk to other guys and it won't mean anything to me as far as you are concerned. But if a girl is flirting with you, you can't think it's great and stay there and enjoy it. Also, I've finally stopped you from staring at my new and improved figure. I like that you like it, but only the occasional look, not the look of drooling lust. Many other girls our year will also be similarly improved. If I catch you staring at the improvements, you'll wish all I did was hit your head."

Ron was turning from red to a decided embarrassed purple. "Hermione," he hissed, "Mum's here." Hermione showed no embarrassment and Mrs. Weasley said, "You're my sixth son, Ron. There's nothing you can do that I've not dealt with already in your brothers, but I have one bit of golden advice for you: don't disappoint Hermione."

"More tea, dears?"

~\*~

"Oh, Harry," Ginny said, "Have you told Ron and Hermione about your being a teaching assistant yet?"

"No. No time."

"You really should. They'll be proud of you, and Mum will be over the moon, but if they hear from somewhere else, it would hurt their feelings."

Harry looked at his watch. "Wow! Look at the time. We've been back and talking for over an hour. It's... time flies when I'm with you. Thank you, Ginny. I didn't know I needed this, but thank you." He gave her a hug and she reveled in it. He pulled back and helped her rise to her feet. "I have a little time, let's go tell them."

They went into the parlor where Ginny announced, "Harry has something to tell you."

She saw varying shades of shock on the three faces in the room, but she felt sure Harry never noticed. He launched into a modest rendition of what he was doing the coming year as a teaching assistant for regular Defense classes, and also explained the new Practical Defense classes in the afternoons starting first term.

"Those Practical Defense classes sound brilliant," Hermione exclaimed, "Did Dumbledore design them or did some other expert? Why, they sound a little like advanced DA sessions."

Ginny's eyes went wide. "You designed those classes, didn't you, Harry? That's why you're on the teaching staff. Who better to teach it than the course creator?" Harry's blush would have done a Weasley proud. It told them all they needed to know. Their gushing over him and Hermione's questions caused Harry to decide to leave, but only a few minutes earlier than he'd planned, and only after telling the three that he expected them to help in the Practical Defense classes. Hermione hugged Harry as he stood to go, as did Molly, and Ron shook his hand. Ginny offered to walk him to front door, and Ron started to follow but was jerked back.

Alone again in the front foyer, Ginny hugged him once more, professing her pride in his accomplishments. She found herself hugging Harry gently but not too closely for a long time, and he didn't seem self-conscious about it. Then Ginny remembered her new broom, jumped in his arms in renewed delight, and gave him a quick and chaste kiss on the cheek, professing her thanks again for the amazing gift.

They separated, neither seeing the other's blush. Harry opened the door, stepped out on the stoop, looked back and smiled sheepishly before he Apparated away.

"Blimey, he's silent," she said.

She closed the door and leaned against the wall, looking up at but not seeing the portrait where Steph

Granger's knife still resided, and where Mrs. Black never returned.

Just above a whisper, and after a big slow sigh, Ginny said, "Oh Harry."

There was nothing else she could say.

~\*~\*~

Harry had a large dinner in his room at St. Simon's that evening, with his elves joining him in eating but sitting at their own table as was their custom. He then went through a double session of exercises all straight in a row, three straight hours of hard physical exertions at a blistering pace. Harry drove himself like he never had before.

All he saw during this explosion of effort was a pair of fine brown eyes, framed by the loveliest, darkest red hair he'd ever seen. He thought about how he could stare into those fine eyes forever, before he upped the pace even faster, his hardened muscles straining from the exertion.

The last half hour he began quietly whispering, "Only after the battle's won." By the end of the session, sweat poured from him in spite of the Cooling charms he and the elves had placed on him.

Winky said quietly, "What is Harry talking about, Dobby? Has there been an attack we've not heard about?"

"No, sweetie, the First Master preserve him. I believe he's realized he might be in love, but he won't let himself feel until this war is over and he's won."

"It's not She-Who-Knits, is it?"\*\* They both chuckled at what the other Hogwarts house-elves call Hermione.

"I'd bet our Harry is thinking about Ginny Weasley," confided Dobby.

"I really like her," Winky said.

"She has faced Voldemort, just as Harry has, the Chamber of Secrets and all," Dobby said. "I think they can help each other and heal each other like no else. I'll do whatever it takes to protect him, Winky, and his Ginny also, now that they're drawing closer.

"I know, Dobby, I love Harry too."

The elves were convinced Harry couldn't hear them during his exercising, so they didn't affect the absurd elf speak wizards and witches expected from house-elves.

But Harry *did* hear them.

~\*~\*~

In a warehouse in the shadier area of the docks of Liverpool, a wizard, dressed quite believable like

a Muggle, but using his wand surreptitiously, was berating two stevedores for clumsily handling a crate marked The Tryon Co.

One man, hidden in amongst the various offloaded crates of this scruffy freighter looked on with a pair of Omnioculars, charmed to work for a Muggle. He looked like any other non-descript dockworker, but his equipment signaled him as anything but.

When he had all of the evidence that he needed, he flipped the lever on the package beside him, and made his way towards the doors, as quietly but as quickly as he could. Luck was not with him as another worker, late for work that night, staggered in drunk and knocked over a rubbish bin, drawing the wizard and the stevedores' line of sight to the man escaping.

Shots rang out from a pistol, and were joined in moments by the burp of a submachine pistol expertly fired in three round bursts. *Reducto* r spells also joined the attack.

He made it out of the door unscathed, but ten feet away a bullet slammed into the meat of his right calf, and he tumbled to the ground. This was not his first firefight, so falling from the wound, he still was able to roll and make it behind a tractor. The bullet probably saved his life. Well actually the tractor did, because the debris from the exploding building hit the tractor instead of him. The spells and arms fire stopped abruptly.

The man rose with the adrenalin of a seasoned warrior who only stopped after completing his mission, or after dying. He staggered to the gate, not knowing if the wards had been brought down by the explosion or not. He had only one chance to escape, and would trigger it only when he was sure.

He reached the post outside of the gate and leaned against it. He reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a discarded tin can. He reached into his inner coat pocket and pulled out a wooden stick. He held the wand, not like a wizard or even a Muggle magician. He held it like a chopstick and touched it to the tin can.

As Steph Granger counted down from ten, he looked up and saw a security camera pointed straight at him.

~\*~\*~

The next day the *Manchester Times* had a front page story, below the fold, entitled:

**Meth Lab Dentist Now An Arsonist? Terrorist?**  
*Granger Caught On Security Camera Seconds After Explosion*





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*FanficAuthors.net*

# "Great Scott, Potter, This is War!"

## Chapter Seventeen - Business Dinner or First Date

**Author's Notes** - *Sorry I've been away for so long. The real world has been all consuming. Also, I've written an original short story and started another, and a novel. However, the next chapter of this tale is already in beta, so it should be out shortly. Thanks for sticking with me!*

*Here's my attempt at a chapter that is almost all fluff, or leading to fluff.*

*Pure Harry/Ginny. The tension builds.*

*My gratitude goes to my writing coaches, Pamela St Vines\* and Kokopelli, who have helped me substantially make this a relatively fluffy chapter. Thanks also to my beta reader Sparky40sw.*

~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*

Today was the day that Harry and Ginny would finally begin their research project on Spell Mongering. While Harry believed his discoveries would eventually shake up magical theory, he was equally eager to spend some time with Ginny, but it wasn't a date. He kept telling himself that - if he repeated it often enough, maybe he'd believe it.

The project, however, had to be worked around other recurring chores: Paladin visits (Harry with Sally-Ann Perks, Ginny with Wayne Hopkins) and an appointment with Flitwick to discuss other research. Ginny had agreed to wait for him and Harry knew just where to find her once he was free.

The Room of Requirement looked just as it had during DA meetings. Inside Harry found Ginny, Luna, and Colin, three he knew well, along with Mitchell Harper, a rising fifth year Slytherin who finished out the quartet.

Harry quietly slipped into a shadow so that the four didn't notice his presence. They were paired off guys and girls, and all four were very athletic in their spell dodging. Harry noticed that they used the standard spells he'd taught in DA, but the three he'd seen duel before were much more proficient and confident. The fact that Mitch used the same spells surprised Harry, as he had assumed the Slytherins learned all sorts of more violent Spellwork in their dungeons. But then it occurred to him that if Mitchell were like Draco and his ilk, the DA trio would have never brought him to the Room of Requirement.

In the end Colin and Ginny won, though both were close matches. Harry revealed his presence by applauding their efforts.

"Harry!" Ginny ran to him, her face flushed from the activity. She ran towards him, but stopped herself at the last moment. *She doesn't know what we are*, Harry observed.

Harry pulled her into a one-armed hug, saying "Well done Ginny. You too, Colin. It was close for both of you, but you persisted."

He released Ginny, perhaps reluctantly, briefly hugged Luna, and shook Colin's hand.

"Harry," said Colin, "This is Mitch, Mitchell Harper. He's helping with some of the Paladin visits, they usually need the four of us to make the schedules work Even Fred Weasley helps on occasions. "

Harry noticed Mitch's hesitation as he stepped toward him. Trelawney could have seen it without her glasses. He knew it was his place as the former DA leader to welcome the newcomer to this room.

"Nice to meet you, Mitch. I was under the impression that the Slytherins were pretty much self-contained in their Paladin visits."

"They are, at least to some degree. Tracey Davis and Clark Spinks have had a few visits with others, but not Malfoy and Parkinson," Mitch replied, his tone changing as he disdainfully spoke the last two names. "And Millicent makes an odd number, so I've visited with her several times. As I reckon it, I'm helping mostly because I live in the same small Wizarding community with Megan Jones, just outside of Nether Poppleton near York. There are so many of you Paladins scattered about, and all of you seem to be going to so many different places for tutorials and exercising, that Megan suggested they ask me to help. She knew I was kicking myself for missing out on the DA, but I understand why you didn't let Slytherins in on it. I had my issues with the Inquisitorial Squad myself. I want you to know a sizable number in my house are on your side in this, and many more want to remain neutral. I figure it's less than a quarter of the Slytherins that are pureblood idiots."

Not very Slytherin of him. Speaking ill of his house in front of Snape's whipping boy.

"Tell, him," Ginny said to Mitch, "about your family and why you're in Slytherin."

"It's okay, Mitch," Harry said. "You don't have to tell me anything. If these three trust you, I do, too. Your life's your own - choose wisely."

"No, Harry, it's important to me that you understand. I want in on your efforts to fight the Dark Lor-, He-Who-Must-- They insist I say *Voldemort*," he whispered. "I'd be hurt for saying his name in the dungeon, but I'm trying."

"We have something in common, you see. My father was an Auror, killed two days before you vanquished him the first time. I was six months old. Dad was a Ravenclaw and my mum was a Slyth. She's driven and ambitious in her career at the Ministry, but she's always stood with those fighting against the Death Eaters. I've always wanted to be an Auror, like my dad. Mum told me it's tough to make it into the Auror Academy, so I've studied really hard since I first started school. Mum said dad wanted to be the head of the MLE, and I guess that's my goal now."

Mitch paused and looked down for a moment before he said, "I never imagined the hat would put me in Slytherin. It saw my drive and asked about my ambitions and then my tie turned green and silver before I knew what hit me."

Harry placed his hand on Mitch's arm. "It's all right. I understand. The hat almost put me in Slytherin, too."

All four younger student's eyes went wide, even Luna's, if that were possible. Colin looked like he'd

been punched.

Harry smirked and said, "It saw I was anxious to prove myself because my Muggle relatives always said I wouldn't amount to anything. Before I got to school, I'd met Draco, and I decided that I wanted to go anywhere he wasn't, so when I was under the Hat, I insisted, 'not Slytherin,' and the only other choice was Gryffindor it seems."

Harry decided to change the subject. "Ginny, I said you could tell Luna about the changes for this coming year, did you tell these two as well?"

"Just about the Practical Defense classes. That's been all the buzz for a couple of weeks."

Harry looked at Colin and Mitch. "I won't require an oath or anything, I just ask you to promise me not to tell this to anyone else. Dumbledore asked me to take my ideas from teaching the DA in secret last year, and write up how I'd do it if the whole school were invited to openly take part in it this year, so I did.

"I thought my notes would be used to bring the next Defense Against the Dark Arts professor up to speed with what some of us knew, and set the stage for a new Defense Club out in the open. I thought the Defense professor would be the club's faculty advisor."

Harry went on to tell them that it was his outline that would become the curriculum for the new Practical Defense course being added to the curriculum in September. Harry was reluctant to say more, but Ginny's raised eyebrows and a vigorous nod convinced him to admit that he would be the Teaching Assistant, an idea used in American universities and new to Hogwarts this year. They asked about what would be covered in the elective course. After he described it, Harry asked, "Do you think anyone besides the Paladins will sign up for it? Essentially, the Paladins are pre-Aurors--they're *required* to take it."

"Oh, Harry," Ginny said, "Don't you know that now practically everyone will want to learn to better defend themselves, and once they find out you wrote the course and will be teaching it, you may have to turn away participants." Luna, Colin, and Mitch wholeheartedly agreed.

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Dobby had outdone himself. Harry and Ginny were well sated with the picnic lunch, and the Room of Requirement had turned from the simple meadow where they had enjoyed their lunch into a small research library setting. Any book in the Hogwarts library would be available to them.

"Harry," Ginny said with a little hesitation in her voice, "I heard that Hermione can see the raw slug of magic you draw up to Monger a spell. I could only see its fuzzy outline. She's much farther along in her magical maturing and could be of more use to you in actual spell creation. I'll be okay with it if you'd rather--"

Harry gently touched her arm, causing her to stop speaking. "Ginny, I had to trick Hermione into seeing the raw slug. I showed her the Spell Monger's Spell Scrutinizer, the tool we use for analyzing

spells. She confidently looked at the tool and saw the raw slug right off the mark. After she knew what it was she'd seen, she got all nervous, but I told her it was too late to go to pieces. I love her like the sister I never had, but even now, she's pretty tightly wrapped.

"You're different, Ginny, you can be critical and analytical when we need it, but you won't keep going back through everything we do, picking stuff apart. You ask questions when you don't understand, but you're not second-guessing me, trying to figure out whether or not I'm going dark.

"We may want her to pick apart certain pieces of our work from time to time, definitely if we create a Mastery thesis one day, but I just don't want to think about what her approach to 'helping' me with this would be.

"You, however, will be able to handle being my partner, my equal, instead of my inspector. You're not as knowledgeable as I am right now on this subject, but you'll be up to speed on the information and concepts quickly, and in a year or so you'll be to the place magically where you can try your hand at Mongering. Hermione wanted to try to monger a spell once she saw the raw slug. She got all huffy when I said, 'no,' but then I mentioned it would interfere with her N.E.W.T.s preparation, and she calmed down.

"You're equally smart, but less intense. I like that, and I think we'll make a great team. I expect you to ask critical questions whenever they come up, but... oh, you know what I mean."

"Well," Ginny said with a smile, "if you're sure you want me in on this, Harry."

"I do, Ginny, there's no one else I'd like to spend my time with more than you. I'm just grateful you've accepted my offer. It's your O.W.L.s year, and if our work interferes with your studying, just let me know. Like Hermione, I can be overly focused on Mongering at times. Dobby often has to tell me it's time to eat. I just get lost in it, so don't hesitate to tell me when it's too much."

"Fair enough. How do you want to get started?"

Harry reached into his bag. He pulled out a fresh scroll of parchment and said, "I guess we should write down the different major categories of research and magic and then I'll buy us some more scrolls as we need them for each category. I'll Feather-Weight them and Charm a bag like mine so you can carry it with you. Are you sure you don't mind keeping a record for us on this? My handwriting is pretty bad when I write normally and rather haphazard when I'm in a hurry to get something down. I've seen your notes - neat, easily readable, and very complete. I'm not sure how you do it."

Ginny smiled, "I think I have a better idea." She pulled her book bag off of a nearby chair and retrieved a new ledger-sized book. "You know George and Fred found the Marauder's map in their first year," she began.

"I knew that, but I didn't know you knew about the map."

She smiled. "They didn't tell Ron about it, but remember I've helped them with several of their pranks, even in my first year. They let it slip towards the end of your third year that they'd given it to

you, but back to my story.

"After using it for a year, they decided they'd like to make some modifications to it, and even make a map for the Burrow and then, eventually, Hogsmeade and Diagon Alley. They didn't want to disassemble the spells on the map itself for fear of damaging it beyond repair, so they went on a search for a book to explain how it worked. There was nothing in the Hogwarts library, even in the Restricted Section, so they asked a few of the teachers for possible references. McGonagall didn't help, as you might expect, but Flitwick was all for the idea of a piece of parchment that would record the progress of a Quidditch game for future analysis."

"That's the story they told Flitwick?"

She nodded. "McGonagall too; she, of course, didn't believe them. The twins suspect Flitwick didn't either, but he wanted to help them with the idea anyway. George thinks it's because Flitwick was a prankster when he was in school, but Fred thinks he helped because he wanted a Quidditch parchment himself. Ravenclaw's teams have tanked Quidditch for the last sixteen years, putting them behind everyone else--even Hufflepuff.

"Flitwick suggested a book, *Magical Parchment, Scrolls, Papers, and Books*. It had been out of publication for decades, but the twins finally found a used copy in Knockturn Alley. After all that, the book didn't help them at all in making another map or with much of their prank development. I, however, borrowed it the summer after the diary problem. I wanted to understand how the diary enchantment worked - it was part of coming to grips with what happened.

"When you raised the idea of cataloging everything about magic and Spell Mongering, I first imagined all the different scrolls we'd create and how frustrating it would be to keep up with them, and then find something we wrote in all the mess of scrolls. I remembered a chapter in that book and found it left behind in the twin's old bedroom. I used the Linking spell that points a reader to a place on another scroll containing information about a particular thought or subject. That way we can make our references automatically jump to the connected subject with a wand tap. See."

Ginny opened the ledger to a page and pointed to the top. "We have two major categories of magic, Transfigurations and Charms. So tap the one and we go to it, tap the other and we're in that section. We can easily add other major sections to it." She tapped 'Charms.' "In the Charms section I've initially set up 'General', 'Defensive,' 'Household,' and 'Enchantment' subsections. In the Transfiguration section I have 'Animate,' 'Inanimate,' and 'Conjuration.' We can add more categories or change these easily.

"Also, I don't have any samples to show you, but you can write a particular idea and use the charm *Invulgo Aptum*, to link it to another idea elsewhere that you think is pertinent to it.

"I also used the Never Ending Pages charm on this ledger. It's commonly used for diaries and journals, but it has to be done to paper, which is made of plant fibers, because it doesn't work on animal products, like parchment. That's why Tom Riddle used a Muggle diary. It was much cheaper to buy and he charmed it himself.

"I also used the Multi-Purpose spell on the pages. See these three small pictures at the bottom of each page? The two straight lines give you lined paper for writing, the two vertical and two horizontal lines give us grid paper to create what Muggles call a flowchart. We'll use it to diagram the processes of magic in general or a spell in particular. Tapping the empty square gives us a blank page for drawing out wand movements and such. What do you think? Oh, and I've made it fire-proof, water proof, tear proof, and we can charm it so that it will only open for one of us."

Harry listened to her explanation in silence, smiling enigmatically the whole time. By the time she finished Ginny looked a little nervous.

"Ginny, this is brilliant," Harry said. "You have an amazing tool here for all sorts of uses. Tell me, how much magical effort and time did this take to spell? Were you tired afterwards?"

Ginny shook her head and answered, "It took a lot of experimentation to get it right, but even that only took five hours or so spread out over several days. Bill helped me get started. I made this one first, and added our categories and such to show you. I liked it so much that I made one for my class notes. It'll be so much easier than carrying around all those scrolls. The second one took less than an hour to enchant. I'll still need parchment for class assignments, but this will be so much handier for my notes. No more rummaging through my bag for the right scroll. It'll all be right there--everything I write down in all classes and in the library. Plus by linking subject references, I can find my notes quicker. We should think about adding a Tracking charm or something so we can't lose it.

Harry examined the journal. It was roughly 10" x 14" and about an inch and a half thick. It was hardback, fabric bound in a neutral green with a heavy, dark, brick-red spine. "How much did this cost and where did you buy it?"

"There's a Muggle shop for office supplies on the high street in Ottery St. Catchpole. They were tagged at ten pounds, but I noticed they were covered in dust. I asked why, and the man said they weren't used much anymore. Something about computers taking over he said. He wasn't happy about it, so I offered him twelve pounds for the two of them and he agreed without a blink. Makes me wonder if I could have bought them for less."

"Your mum bought my parchment supplies for the last few years," Harry said. "I didn't take that many notes, which wasn't good, so I don't really know. What do good students spend on parchment for school each year? How much does your mum buy you?"

Ginny had a ready answer. "I was amazed when I went to that office supplies store by how much less paper costs than parchment. But then I figured out that Muggles use lots of paper, so they've created ways to mass-produce it. Parchment is still made by skinning animals, which is expensive. I asked the man at the Muggle store if he had any parchment and he laughed at me. He said he could find some for me and told me a price that was even higher than what we pay in the magical world.

"But that doesn't tell you how much I spend on parchment in a school year. I start first term with about ten Galleons worth. Ron uses much less. I usually have to buy a few more scrolls on a Hogsmeade weekend before term ends. I come back with another ten Galleons worth after Christmas and Mum usually sends me a little more in the spring. That's why I bought both of the ledgers the store had left.



With the Never Ending Pages charm, I won't need nearly as much parchment this year. Mum will be surprised when I tell her that I only need enough for the written assignments I have to turn in."

Harry reached into his pocket and pulled out his money bag. "Let me pay you for the one you bought for us--"

"No, Harry. Let this be my contribution to our project."

"Ginny, your contribution is taking all the notes we'll make and keeping track. People pay assistants to do such work. I've been meaning to ask you--"

"Don't you dare, Harry Potter!" Ginny said angrily. She grabbed his arm and said, "If you truly think of me as a partner, then that's my compensation. Do you realize how much I'm going to learn from all of this? People pay to apprentice to well-known witches and wizards to learn about magic on this level. I know I'm not a Spell Monger's apprentice, but I'll learn almost as much in terms of basic knowledge, I just won't be Mongering spells."

Ginny stopped and took a breath. "I *want* to be a part of this. I think it will be monumental. Dumbledore was an apprentice to Nicholas Flamel for several years during which they discovered the twelve uses for dragon's blood. Flamel was the famous alchemist, but Dumbledore gained a good deal of fame just from helping. I think one day this will be really big, and I'll be well known just for being a part of it.

"But that's not *why* I'm doing this - the fame. The knowledge is wonderful but mostly I want to help you. I want to see your ideas take hold in our world. I've thought long and hard about what faster spell development and a better understanding of magic will mean to us. I want in, Harry. I can't afford to pay you, Harry, so let me do what I can."

Harry took both of her hands gently in his.

"You don't know how much that means to me" Harry said. "You're the first person who's grown up with magic and heard all the bad things about Spell Mongering, who's turned around to support me in this. No, that's not quite right. Hagrid's behind me, but he's always been my biggest fan, and I do mean biggest. And Remus is all for helping me. He says that he'll talk to Professor Vector and try to soften her anger about my Mongering at Hogwarts.

"But you, Ginny, you're going beyond that to assist me - spending a good deal of time in your busy O.W.L.s year helping me develop my theories."

By time he finished talking, they were sitting very close, gazing into each other's eyes.

After a moment Harry leaned in to gently rest his forehead against hers. "Thanks, Gin," he whispered. "It means a lot."

Ginny smiled at him, and then they started working.

They only took one short break when Dobby brought in butterbeer. After four hours they reached a

good stopping place. They agreed to resume their efforts Wednesday afternoon, as Harry would be busy with the Wizengamot on Tuesday.

They were about to leave the Room of Requirement when Harry asked, "Ginny, do you think other students, particularly the more serious ones, would be interested in your enchanted notebook idea? Maybe the Ravenclaws for example."

"Probably," she answered. "Why do you ask?"

"You paid six pounds each for the ledgers. Even if you bought them at the full ten pounds each that would have been much less than three Galleons. You said you spend roughly twenty-five Galleons a year for parchment total. How much of that would you say is for the parchment required for written assignments?"

"Oh, about three or four Galleons worth at most, I guess. I even plan to write out my assignments in my StudyBook first and correct it there. That way I'll have rough copy of what I handed in."

"Is that what you call this invention, a study book?"

"For lack of a better name for it. Although Hermione suggested I run it together into one word and capitalize the 'S' and the 'B' so it looks like this." Ginny open the ledger to the front inside cover where she had printed very neatly in flourished handwriting, "StudyBook."

"Hermione saw it," Ginny continued, "and wants to borrow the spell list from me to make her own. Ron wants one, too, just so he doesn't have to keep up with all of his scrolls of parchment. Both of them like my linking system and think it will be great for revising. Harry, why are you so interested in this? Do you want me to make another one for you to use in your studies?"

"I'm wondering," he said, "if there might not be a market for these books, at least for Hogwarts students. Hermione and Ron aren't the only ones who might want these, but the fact that they *both* do proves you could sell them both to serious students and to those who are too lazy to keep up with all their many scrolls.

"You said the second one took a lot less time. Could you prepare the next one even quicker? I wonder if we could take all of the spells and Monger them so they use less power? What would it take for you to enchant twenty of these for example?"

"The hard part," Ginny admitted, "was the anchoring runes to preserve the charms over time. Enchanting, as you know, takes charms and makes them permanent. I couldn't begin to do the runic anchor work, but Bill helped me. He anchored both of these ledgers and it took him almost an hour, though the second one took less time. He was glad to do it, and laughed off my offer of pay, but I can't see him agreeing to do more than the two others for Hermione and Ron. I'd also rather not impose like that again. It was a bit draining on him. I could tell."

Harry took the StudyBook back. "Where are the runes?"

"On the inside back cover."

Harry opened the back of the book and shot his wand out of his wrist holster. He cast the Monger's Spell Scrutinizer and examined it for a few minutes, mumbling to himself. Finally he snapped the StudyBook closed and smiled at her.

He simply looked into her eyes for a minute before asking with a smirk, "You *do* know who gave George and Fred their start up money, don't you?"

"Of course, Harry, you did," she answered with a grin. "I sussed that out before we made it to the Burrow at the end of my third year, your fourth. They had a thousand Galleons in a moneybag. Shortly before that you had received the thousand Galleons prize money in an identical money bag."

"I'm just glad your mom didn't catch on so quickly," Harry said with a laugh. "Let me propose a business deal for you. Let's find out if we can buy those ledgers in quantity at a discount. You charm them. We sell them for twenty Galleons each and push the convenience and linking abilities, and point out that the savings in parchment for the year will pay for it and then they'll also have the convenience of an all-in-one StudyBook as well as the linking."

"But, Harry, what about the anchoring runes?"

"I'm guessing the runes and spells to cast them are in the book you borrowed from the twins?" When she nodded he continued, "Well, based on what I see here, we should be able to make much simpler runic expressions that will accomplish the same thing. We'll work on it Wednesday. Permanence is one of the major things I want to focus on in our Charms research. I'm actually more concerned about a ready supply of ledgers at a reasonable price than I am about the runes issue, but we'll have to solve it, too, before you have a business here."

"A business?"

"Maybe just a small business, meaning one that makes you some serious spending money at the start of each year, but I think this idea can be much bigger. But we'll start you off slowly, just StudyBooks for students at Hogwarts."

Harry's mind raced ahead with the possibilities, but he turned back to Ginny shortly and smiled.

"We'll sell them at the twin's shop. I'm sure they'll help us out. I think they are planning on advertising in the *Daily Prophet* for the last week before classes begin. We'll put a small ad right besides theirs, and see what happens. If we can buy the ledgers for three or four Galleons, sell them for twenty, give the twins a Galleon per unit for handling the sales, that's roughly fifteen galleons profit on each. I know George said the half page ad they want in the paper goes for two hundred Galleons. Say we spend seventy-five for an advert, we only have to sell five StudyBooks to break even. We take the cost of replacement ledgers out of the profits to create new inventory. After that we split the profits twenty-five percent for me and the rest for you. What do you say?"

Ginny pondered this for moments before saying, "I like the idea. You'll have to solve the runes issues, but I know you can do it. So, if we can find an affordable source for the ledgers to keep the costs

down, I'd like to try it, but Harry, as the investor you need to make more than twenty-five percent."

"I tried to *give* that first money to the twins, but they gave me thirty-three percent for a thousand Galleons. I doubt I'll put two hundred into our endeavor. It may never be more than a business on the side at Hogwarts that gives you spending money. If so, I'll let you buy me out for twenty Galleons after I've made back my investment. But I think we'll soon see Ministry workers carrying your StudyBooks, though we'll have to come up with a name for the non-student versions. Any sort of researcher should want one also. Too bad it has the Never-Ending paper charm on it. I like the idea of someone having to buy a new one each year. Maybe we can figure out a time limitation on the Never-Ending bit."

"Oh, the spell isn't really never-ending." She said. "It really only increases the paper in the ledger as you use it by up to five times. I just calculated the square footage of parchment I go through in a year and compared it to five times the number of number of pages in the ledger. It should only be about seventy to eighty percent full at the end of the year. The spell's name is an exaggeration."

"That's brilliant, Ginny. This could be a great business some day. Uncle Vernon has spent hundreds of pounds that I know of for time management seminars and business planners. Of course, he has little discipline for anything beyond writing everything down and giving it to his secretary to keep him on track. Wizards and witches are often a little scatter-brained, but at least the bright Ravenclaws and the hard working Hufflepuffs should see the advantage of this. After all, even Ron and I want one, so there should be a market for these to the underachievers, too."

"But, Harry, the man at the shop seemed glad to be rid of these two ledgers. Muggles may not even make them any more."

"Perhaps not, but I have an idea." Harry drew his wand and called Dobby. He wrote a quick note and said to his elf, "Please take this to Hedwig and send her off with it. I don't really know where Justin lives, but he is nearer to our summer place than he is to Hogwarts, and Justin said an owl could reach him. Ask Hedwig to wait for a reply and have her come back to you. Bring it to me at-- Hold it."

"Ginny, do you have plans for dinner, it's almost six?"

She shook her head. "There's an Order meeting tonight. Mum said that she'd make a big pot of soup so that everyone can eat when it suits."

"You're dressed Muggle enough. Would you like to go to dinner so we can talk more about the business?"

She nodded, smiling at him.

"Dobby, please take this to Hedwig as I asked, and then go to Headquarters and tell Mrs. Weasley that Ginny will be with me for dinner. Tell her I'll have her safely home by 9:00 or so. If Hedwig returns with Justin's answer before I get back, you'll find us at Harry's English Restaurant in Brighton. You do know where the house-elf entrance is or can find it, can't you?"

"Yes, sir, Harry, I haven't been there, but Winky knows it and can direct me." Dobby gave a saucy salute, and popped off.

"You own a restaurant in Brighton?"

"No," Harry said with a grin. "Different Harry. You've heard of Greenbees in Diagon Alley, haven't you?" When Ginny nodded he continued, "Harry Greenbee owns it now. It's been in his family for years. Well, Harry started a Muggle restaurant a few years back and that's where we're going. A lot of younger magical folks like to go Muggle for an evening and eat there, too. He has a Floo and staff members that can transfigure your robes for you if need be."

Harry left the Room of Requirement and turned right instead of left heading straight towards the dead-end wall.

"Harry, that's a wall--"

"Actually, it's the cabinet I'm heading for, Ginny. I know I can trust you; the cabinet leads to where I've been staying since--well, since I had that day in Little Whinging. During school students that want to attend church come here and go straight through into St. Simons. I stay in the attached abbey, so I take a little different route."

Harry opened the cabinet. He then took Ginny's hand, and led her forward, warning her about the steep steps as he went.

"You can't tell anyone you know about this," he warned. They walked outside and into the church itself. They then Flooed to Harry's English Restaurant in Brighton from a room just off the church foyer that was hidden by a Muggle-Notice-Me-Not charm.

A little before 9:00 that night Ginny Flooed back to Grimmauld Place and Harry stepped out right after her.

"Thanks so much for telling me the secret to Floo travel," Harry whispered in her ear as he squeezed Ginny's hand. "I hated ending up sprawled across the floor every time I went somewhere."

She giggled and said, "I'm just sorry I didn't think to ask you about it sooner. You know how to do such powerful and momentous things with magic, Harry, that it's never occurred to anyone to teach you the things we learned as children."

"Have a good meal, dears?" Mrs. Weasley asked as they entered the front parlor. She tried to appear engrossed in her knitting so that it wouldn't look as if she'd been waiting for them.

Ginny shot Harry a look that screamed, "I told you so," and he choked back a laugh which caused him to actually choke.

"Yes, mum, it was very good," Ginny answered as she thumped Harry on the back. "I had shrimp and clams in some sort of Italian sauce, but it was a white sauce, not red. Harry had the swordfish." Ginny's eyes shone with excitement.

"Thanks, Gin," Harry murmured before addressing Mrs. Weasley.

"My Uncle Vernon thought fish had to be fish and chips or it wasn't British enough for him," Harry explained, "so I never thought much of it one way or the other. Fish was just food, but I've had several different types of fish at the place I'm staying this summer, and I've acquired a taste for it. That's why I had to try the swordfish--I'd never had it before."

Molly smiled and nodded as Harry gave her a quick hug and said good night.

"So, I'll Apparate here tomorrow a little before seven," Harry said to Ginny as she walked him to the door, "and we'll go to the Leaky Cauldron to meet Justin for breakfast. Then you can Floo back here while I go on to my next appointment. You'll easily make your 9:00 tutorial with McGonagall."

"I'll be ready, Harry."

They had reached the front door, and Harry gave Ginny a quick one-armed hug, bringing his other arm around her in seconds. Ginny's embrace lasted longer and was firmer than the one he had given her mother. He then stepped outside and immediately Apparated away with the slightest popping sound.

"Good heavens, dear," Molly exclaimed as Ginny closed the door, "he's almost silent."

"Yes, Mum, he's just about got that spell mastered."

"What? What spell?"

"Oh, Harry says that we make a cracking sound when we Apparate because when we go, we leave a hole in the air." Ginny clapped her hands to demonstrate. "The air slams in and slaps together. So, he's working on a spell to release a small bubble of compressed air that expands to meet the crack and silence it. Harry almost has it, but it's difficult because he can't stay behind and hear what happens after he Disapparates. He's worked on it with Dobby and Winky and a person he stays with, but it's not far enough along yet to compact the spell and package it for sale, which has to happen before he can pass it along to anyone else. Normally he'd find another Monger to work with on perfecting the spell, but right now, he's the only one."

Molly walked with her daughter, listening as they made their way into the back parlor which had become their family lounge.

"So, how was your *date*, Ginny?" Ron asked snidely. Hermione popped him on the back of his head and when he turned towards her to protest Molly hit him from the other side.

"Ouch! What's that for? I've asked you two not to do that!" he complained.

"And we've asked you to not act like a nine-year-old *little* brother, Ron," his girlfriend said. "Honestly."

"It *wasn't* a date," Ginny said, smiling in anticipation of the small explosion she hoped to produce with her next words. "It was a *business* meeting."

Four "*What'?*"s rang through the room, much to Ginny's delight. Arthur asked, "What sort of business meeting? Did he need a companion for some special business affair?"

"No," Ginny said with a smile. "Harry and I are forming a new business. We think it may be as big or bigger than George and Fred's shop in a few years, if our ideas are as good as we think and we can control the cost of inventory."

She went on to explain about their plans. Everyone seemed pleased. Ron looked perturbed for a few minutes, but calmed down after Ginny assured him she'd still enchant his StudyBook for him for free, provided he buy the ledger first .

~\*~\*~

Ginny walked out of the loo on her way to bed just as Hermione came up from 'saying goodnight' to Ron.

"So, was that *really* a business meeting this evening?" Hermione asked with a smirk after they had entered their bedroom and closed the door.

"Yes, it really was," Ginny replied. "We mostly talked about our start-up. That's what Harry called it. Evidently it's a Muggle business term and I like it. Did you know Harry's also financing a new dress shop with Lee Jordan's sister?"

"I heard Parvati talking about it," Hermione mused. "I usually ignore such talk from her and Lavender, but honestly, the fashions in the magical world are so outdated, even I don't like them. And if anyone can make more comfortable school robes than what we buy at Madame Malkin's, I'll go all Lavender and buy a new wardrobe, or at least a good supply of whatever is available.

"So, Harry's behind that venture," she continued. "I didn't know he was interested in fashions, what with the Dursleys and all. He thinks the school robes are great, which is a terrible pity."

"It's not a matter of Harry's fashion sense," Ginny explained "although I believe he is now more aware of fashion than the typical guy in his teens--except for possibly Draco--because of this business venture." The girls both emitted 'yuck' sounds at the thought of Draco Malfoy and the appropriate facial grimaces to accompany the sounds.

Satisfied that they had insulted Malfoy appropriately, Ginny continued, "It's more a matter of Harry's business sense. He saw the need for a new dress shop, found a great designer--he absolutely raves about Clarinda's designs--and then put his money where it could help. He seemed very knowledgeable about all we'd need to do to start my little company. He believes it will be big someday. He thinks solicitors, ministry officials, potions masters, businessmen, and researchers will all want versions of my StudyBook. Oh, and he says the student version can be called the StudyBook, but we need different names for business, research, potions, and ministry versions of the book."

"Back to dinner, Ginny," Hermione pressed, "I want to ask something really important. Did it *feel* like a date?"

Ginny grinned wryly and sighed. "Maybe no, maybe yes. There's something there, Hermione, I can feel it, but Harry's holding back. We went to a Muggle restaurant owned by a wizard Harry knows. He seems to be developing quite a number of friends and associates outside of Hogwarts this summer. Anyway, the food was great, and Harry put up a Zone of Silence around us--something he mongered--so that we could speak freely of magical and business things and still hear everything around us."

"This *sounds* like a date to me, Ginny."

"Yes, I know," Ginny said with a sigh, "but Harry could have easily had most of our conversation with George and Fred, or even Justin Finch-Fletchley."

"Justin, what does he have to do with this?" Hermione wanted to know.

Ginny explained Harry's business dealings with the Muggleborn Hufflepuff, and also briefly their Gringotts connection, as she understood it. "As a matter of fact, Harry and I are having a business breakfast with Justin about Muggle ledgers at the Leaky Cauldron tomorrow at 7:00, so I need to go to sleep." With that Ginny finished her nighttime preparations, hoping to end this line of discussion.

Hermione returned from the loo several minutes later. Noticing that Ginny was not yet asleep, she couldn't resist asking, "It was wonderful tonight, wasn't it?"

After a long pause Ginny confided, "Yes, it was, but I am trying to not let my heart get ahead of my head on this. Harry does like me, although with all of the curvy girls running around Hogwarts, I surely don't see what he likes about me physically, but we both know that's not foremost in Harry's mind."

"You're really very pretty," Hermione insisted, "and we've both heard Harry say he loves your hair. A guy just doesn't say something like that unless he thinks you're attractive."

"Yes, but I need you to help me keep my feet on the ground here. I'm well over my crush on him and Harry knows it. We've trained together and fought together at the Department of Mysteries. Now we're research partners and soon to be business partners. *If* Harry were to date someone, sometime, he *might* consider me, but we both know he's absolutely determined to win this war.

"His business dealings, the Wizengamot, the Practical Defense courses, his own preparations to fight, even his Spell Mongering - all this comes first and Harry seems to have decided he won't have a personal life until some time in the vague future. Oh, if there's a Yule ball or something, he might ask someone, maybe even me since we're friends and he won't have to go out of his way to ask me, what with all the time we'll be spending together. I'll definitely be the convenient choice with all our research, but he could also ask someone else who happens to be around when the idea of going with a friend strikes him.

"Some day in the future Harry will feel like he can begin a social life, for lack of a better way of saying it. At that point I may or may not be someone he considers. But in his mind, planning for that is probably up there with deciding where he wants to have his thirtieth birthday party."





*Aaran St Vines*  
*FanficAuthors.net*



to learn Thunderfire. Have you decided how much to charge us?"

"I've decided to charge according to whom he wants to train. The Ministry doesn't have enough money to pay me to train Dawlish or Williamson."

"Oh, rest assured, our Minister will insist that all of his personal bodyguards be so trained."

"Well then, I'm going to come into a windfall very soon. I'll have to find a charity to give it to-- something that irritates Fudge and his cronies at least as much as the Werewolf Relief Fund."

Their laughter was followed by a comfortable silence.

"Harry, have you read up on your family's Rights to Rule and other matters?"

"Yes, sir. The details were a bit confusing, but I think I understand the basics. I plan on going to see Mr. Ledbetter today once the Chamber opens at 9:30 to check on my exact vote count. Will you go with me in case I have questions?"

"Of course, but you'll find Ledbetter very helpful. He'll not steer you wrong or intentionally mislead you in any way. Did you find anything else interesting in your folio?"

Harry smiled. "The answer to a perplexing question. Few Muggleborns have ever heard of me before coming to Hogwarts unless they buy tons of books above and beyond their course needs. My friend Hermione Granger is a voracious reader. She'd read about me, but no other Muggleborns knew much about me, except for two brothers. In my second year an average Muggleborn student was already my biggest fan when he arrived. It's more logical that his younger brother was the same, two years later. I couldn't understand it, but now I do--the Potter Educational Fund."

"Ah, yes," said Smith. "If I remember the history of it, the Potter that attended Hogwarts the first year it opened paid for a poor magical friend of his to go as well. That was Hogwarts' first scholarship. That same Potter set up your family's Educational Fund later in his life, and your ancestors have added to it over the centuries. How many students now attend on your family's largesse?"

"Twenty-four, and I plan to ask Dumbledore if more students need such help. It's a wise investment I feel. Now I understand why Colin and Dennis Creevey find me fascinating -- my family makes attending Hogwarts possible for them. Their father's a milkman, which is an honorable profession, but not that well paying if I understand it correctly.

Now that the question of the Creevey brothers love for all things Harry Potter has been answered, I would like to ask you about the passage in the Fund charter that describes the relationship between all students on these scholarships and the Head of the Potter Family. It states that all recipients are my magical charges until they finish Hogwarts. Can you explain to me what a 'magical charge' is?"

"It's an old position," Smith explained. "The recipients are too poor to pay their own way. Therefore, most are either half-bloods or Muggleborn, though there have occasionally been some from impoverished pureblood families, but most purebloods in that situation are home-schooled. Throughout the years your poorer Muggleborn and half-bloods have been the brunt of jokes at the

hands of the richer, snobbish students and sometimes by a wider circle within the student body. Occasionally those aided were seriously threatened or harmed. The Potters have always been hotheaded defenders of the downtrodden, and never have tolerated pureblood pretensions, or any other type of bullying for that matter.

"A magical charge has the protection of the Head of a Family, but isn't bound to the Head as an oath of fealty or allegiance would create. Of course, it is assumed the charge would be grateful, and follow, or at least consider the wishes of the Family Head."

Harry looked pensively at Smith for a long moment before asking, "How serious is the 'until they finish Hogwarts' part of that explanation?"

"What do you mean?"

"Is there an age limit?" Harry asked. "Does my responsibility end when the student turns twenty and hasn't finished? Twenty-five?"

"If it doesn't give an age limit in the charter for the Fund, then it doesn't end. These charters are funny that way," Smith observed. "Why do you ask?"

"Rubeus Hagrid was a Potter Fund student. He was falsely expelled and his wand broken in his third year. In my second year we proved him innocent. He's even a professor, now but he doesn't have a wand to this day, and he's not said anything about learning magic now that he can again."

"I believe I've heard he wasn't very powerful. A poor student and didn't show too much real oomph behind his spells," Smith stated.

"That's not accurate, sir, though it may have been the case when Hagrid was a student. He carries his broken wand pieces in that awful pink umbrella he has with him anytime he's away from Hogwarts. I've seen him perform wordless magic with it a couple of times, once a fairly complex bit of Transfiguration.

"Also," Harry continued, "You may not know this, but when a Spell Monger actually creates a spell, he pulls up a slug of raw magic from the core of his being. I did that once when Hagrid was present. He could see the raw slug of magic. Mr. Smith, only very powerful witches and wizards can see a raw magic slug. Remus Lupin could only feel the presence of it, and he's a pretty powerful wizard. It's not that only powerful wizards can see a raw slug of magic, only two of the four Hogwarts Founders could see it. Yet Hagrid described it perfectly. Seeing the raw slug *is* a sign of being powerful.

"If I understand it, a giant doesn't reach full maturity until his or her late twenties. They stay in their mother's wombs for seventeen months. Hagrid's a half-giant. Maybe he was too young to be allowed into Hogwarts at eleven. It would be like letting a regular student in at eight or nine, maybe. Does that make sense?"

Smith nodded absently in thought. "Entirely possible and logical, particularly based on your observations. Why do you raise this issue now?"

"Your friend, my grandfather Benedict was the Head of the Potters when Hagrid was expelled. Did he investigate or anything?"

Smith said, "He went to the hearing, but he was great friends with Armando Dippet. He'd have believed whatever Dippet said. Benedict did add his voice to Dumbledore's to make a place for Hagrid at the school as apprentice groundskeeper."

"Well, that's something," Harry said. "But the wording in the Potter Educational Fund charter is clear. There's no mention that expulsion ends my responsibilities towards my magical charges; it only ends when they finish Hogwarts. Although, leaving after O.W.L.s is considered finishing according to the charter. I don't have to see them finish their seventh years."

"It's just--I've been thinking. Hagrid was my first friend in this world. He's powerful, and it's a waste not training him to be a better wizard. From what you've said, Hagrid is still my magical charge, the charter is clear and you can't tell me anything else about a Family Head's responsibility to magical charges in general, that says differently, can you?"

"No, Harry. So, what are you going to do?"

"I'll take Hagrid to Ollivander's, buy him a wand, and teach him magic myself if no one else will, but I bet McGonagall and Flitwick will help me - probably take over from me if I'd ask. But I have some ideas about how he could do very well with magic, so I want in on some of his continuing education. He may not get too many written O.W.L.s, but I'd like to see him with practical O.W.L.s in Charms, Defense, and hopefully, Transfiguration. I don't want to see him in classes with other third years; it would frighten him and them, but anyone can stand any OWL test by requesting permission thirty days ahead of time and paying the three Galleon fee."

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"As you see, Miss-TAH Potter, you do have twenty-seven votes in the Wizengamot, but the Meadowbrook, Colt, and Wheatley votes are loosely tied to you," Ledbetter explained. "Those Families never formally gave over their Rights to Rule in ritual, or formally ascribed their Family Ensigns to the Potters. They can be challenged, although Potters have held the Colt and Wheatley votes for centuries, and both names have been gone from magical Britain for nearly as long."

"Also, you hold the votes of the Fletcher Family for three more generations assuming one Mundungus Fletcher has an heir, which he doesn't so far. And through the Black Family you hold the Bulstrode vote for one more generation, the Blackthorn vote for three more generations, and the Pickles vote for five more generations. Those are the only Families that still have truly magical heirs in our world and could claim their Rights one day. The other Family votes so assigned now have no magical heirs. When their Squib heirs have the appropriate generations to complete the assigned generational commitment, you will own those Rights outright."

"And, those Families are?"

Ledbetter consulted his list. "Dinderbokk and Greenoaks through the Potters in one and two

generations." He flipped several pages. "And for the Blacks: Grundy and Brownbranch in one generation, and Psaltry, Helmsman, and Leroux in three, five, and seven generations respectively."

The Wizengamot chambers were nearly full and there were only minutes left to go before the start. Harry and Mr. Smith took their places. The session opened as usual. Minutes from the last session were read, and there was no old business. Before new business was raised, Acting Chief Warlock Brownlea called for procedural presentations.

"Miss-TAH Brownlea," Florence Sheets rose, her voice clear and harsh. "I have a change of deputation of a Family's Right to Rule." Sheets looked at Brownlea, who tried to stare a hole in her looking over his reading glasses.

He sighed, "Very well, Ma-DAAM Sheets."

Throughout the entire session, no one present ever addressed a male Wizengamot member with any title other than 'Mister,' pronounced "Miss-TAH." Likewise, all female members received their titles pronounced "Ma-DAAM."

Sheets proclaimed, "I'd like to call Mr. Wilbur Meadowbrook."

A wirily thin man, sweating profusely in ill-fitting and inappropriate robes for the Wizengamot entered, admitted by Auror Dawlish. The gong that signaled a person could enter as a member of the Assembly did not ring, but neither did the siren indicating he should be ejected.

Florence Sheets pointed to the table where Ledbetter sat. The clerk had placed a plain wand on a square of simple black velvet, and stepped back from the table.

Meadowbrook sighed, and walked to the wand. He hesitated, but finally rushed to pick it up and call out tinnily, "Wilbur Meadowbrook." A single red spark exited the wand, rose less than a foot into the air, and fell towards the floor, going out before reaching the stones he stood on.

"It is enough," Sheets called out. "You have the floor, Meadowbrook."

"I, Wilbur Meadowbrook, Head of the Meadowbrook Family, do hereby assign... er, do hereby assign... Oh drat."

"Mister Meadowbrook. I'm Harry Potter. May I have your permission to ask a question?"

"Objection, Chief Warlock," Sheets shouted. "Potter is badgering this man. Censure him."

"Madame Sheets. Mister Potter's request is in form. Your outburst, however, is out of order, but even you do not deserve censure for it." Brownlea turned to Meadowbrook, whose face ran with perspiration. "Mister Meadowbrook, you have the floor and do not give it up if you allow Mister Potter his question. You do not have to answer, or you may, if you choose. You are in control for this unstoppable procedure."

Meadowbrook blinked twice, turned to Harry, and nodded once, curtly.

"Thank you Mister Meadowbrook," Harry said. "If I understand it, your family's magic dwindled with your grandfather, who assigned your Right to Rule to my grandfather. Nothing was permanent; both hoped your family would recover its magic, but it hasn't. Is that correct? And now Madame Sheets has offered to pay you for your vote?"

The man nodded once, again. "My great-grandfather it was."

"Fine, Mister Meadowbrook. So, did your grandfather or father follow my grandfather's advice and marry outside of magical Britain, or perhaps marry a half-blood or Muggleborn to improve the bloodlines--"

Shock and outrage filled the room. Cries of "Insults to all wizards," and "Pureblood heresy," could be heard among the bedlam. Brownlea hammered down the noise. He said, once silence resumed, "Answer or answer not, Mister Meadowbrook. You still have the floor and allow Mister Potter to ask questions as you will it."

During the cacophony Smith asked Harry what he hoped to do. Harry whispered back, "I hope to get him to pull back and have an heir that renews his magic. I'm sure Sheets bought his transfer of Right to Rule. I'll offer to pay him to wait and see if his magic returns."

"Never work, Harry," Smith said. "He wouldn't be allowed to enter here if the deal wasn't already struck and sealed. Give it up, lad, and try to get out of this as soon as possible."

Harry frowned and turned back to Brownlea as the moderator recovered control of the proceedings.

Meadowbrook answered Harry. "My family has remained pure. We've lost our magic but still have our pride."

Florence Sheets shouted out, "Who do you think you are Potter?"

Ignoring Sheets, Harry continued, "I am sorry your forebears didn't follow the Potter family advice, Mister Meadowbrook, your magic would most probably have been renewed, and you might be sitting here voting with us, instead of signing over your Right to Rule."

Harry spun on Florence Sheets. "And as to who I think I am. I am an heir of a founding Family of magic here in Great Britain. The Potters go back with the Smiths, and the Tillers to the time of Willen the Great Olive Hander in 382 BC." Harry paused and nodded to Alexius Tiller who sat up straighter in his chair, "We were the first magical families of Old Albion, something even your young family, Madame Sheets, new to this island as they are, should understand by now. I admit the truth of the fact, as do my ancestors, that inbreeding among a few pureblood families weakens the magical lines.

"You all know my story. My mother was Muggleborn, and many of you look down on me for it, but I challenge any of you to a Stone-Cutter Test\*. Might doesn't make right, but tell me how important pure bloodlines are to magic once you've shown me your power on the Flamel Penetration Scale." Everyone was silent.

"Is there anyone here," Harry continued, "Who will swear on their magic that in the last two hundred



years their families haven't either married magical folks from outside the country, or married in secret a Muggleborn, half-blood, or Muggle nobility? Or you've possibly found an obscure pureblood family living in seclusion and married one of them to recharge you bloodlines?"

No one said a word.

"I thought not." Harry turned back to Meadowbrook. "It's too late, Mister Meadowbrook, to save your Right to Rule, but since it's only been a few generations, perhaps your family can regain your magic by marrying any heir of yours to a Muggle or Muggleborn. Too bad you didn't know. But you see," Harry was addressing the entire chamber now. "The pureblood importance for magical power is a myth. The entire Wizengamot has just confirmed it.

"I wholeheartedly agree that a magical heritage is a wonderful thing. Few can match mine as a Potter, but I do not want to brag. I regret I have not been educated in more of my heritage and our society." Harry turned back to Meadowbrook.

"I'd love to have lunch one day and hear about the Meadowbrook Family. I'm sure you have a proud history. Please owl me when it would be convenient. My treat. Please continue with your declaration. I have no more questions."

Harry walked back to his chair, winking at Alexius Tiller on the way.

Obviously furious, Madame Sheets handed Meadowbrook a parchment. He sadly read the words that gave up his Family's Right to Rule.

While this went on, Isaiah Smith said, "You certainly made an impression with your first speech in the Wizengamot - not all favorable I might add. You barely stayed within the rules of order also."

"I just lost a vote. I think I'm allowed to vent. What would Sheets have done if I tricked one of her votes away from her?"

"Killed you, Harry, or had you killed rather."

"Well, she already wants me dead, so I might as well give her more reasons. She can't kill me twice, and as I said, she'll have to wait in a very long line with the others who want me gone."

Smith just shook his head. "Well, then I guess congratulations are in order. You fired a clear shot at the pureblood agenda and have everyone thinking. Tiller can't keep a smile off of his face, and it's not because Florence has a new vote. He hasn't taken his eyes off of you."

Harry turned. He and Tiller caught each other's eyes, and nodded. Harry smiled and turned back to Smith. "I lose a vote but perhaps Tiller will bring his and his friend Darance Bread's over to this corner. I'd trade twenty of my family's votes to bring sixty over to our side. It wouldn't be enough to vote No Confidence on Fudge, but it would give us a simple majority."

"Well done, Potter. You have been studying your book."

Harry grinned viciously. "You've not seen anything, yet. Fudge and Sheets have been conferring. If he says anything about me, I'm going to raise the Munch family as an issue.

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The previous Thursday, when the Death Eaters assaulted Smith at the Ministry Apparation Point and Harry had come to his defense, Eric Munch, the security desk guard, had stunned a Death Eater when the last attacker hit Harry with a Cruciatus Curse. Though Harry had stopped five Death Eaters before this, Munch *had* saved Harry a good bit of pain, and probably much worse, from the last Death Eater.

Monday morning the *Daily Prophet* quoted Fudge praising Munch to the heavens for saving the day, and not mentioning Harry's efforts at all.

Today Harry had noticed the guard at that same security checkpoint was wearing a black armband. When asked why, the man informed Harry that Eric Munch, his wife, and three children had been killed the night before. A Dark Mark floating over their destroyed home had led the Aurors to the scene.

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As Acting Chief Warlock Brownlea finished calling for any further procedural business, Harry noticed Fudge and Sheets talking among themselves and laughing while occasionally looking his way. They were delighted that they had taken a vote from him.

Brownlea called for new business, and Fudge gathered his papers to stand and speak.

Harry, however, beat him to it. "Mister Brownlea."

"The chair recognizes Mister Potter." The drawn out 'Miss-TAH' still sounded funny to Harry.

"Thank you, Mister Brownlea. I call for a moment of silence for the Ministry Security Officer Eric Munch and his wife and three children. It was a senseless killing, and tragic that it happened. I am new to this august deliberative assembly. Please tell me, is it appropriate to call for censure of Minister Cornelius Fudge for causing this tragedy?"

The room exploded with shouts, cries, exclamations, and some laughter. Brownlea barely managed to keep a straight face while hammering the room back to order.

"See here, Boaz," Fudge shouted, "Can't you keep Potter in order?"

The moderator hammered him down.

"Mister Fudge. It is appropriate for any member of the Wizengamot to ask the Chair procedural questions. He asked properly and in good form. You, on the other hand, MISSSS-TAHH Fudge," Brownlea deliberately exaggerated the title's pronunciation, "have not addressed Mister Potter or this Chair in accordance with the rules. And you are out of order in asking your question. Mister Potter has the floor and I am about to answer his question."

Fudge sat cowed in place. Florence Sheets split her killing stare between Brownlea and Harry. The Acting Chief Warlock turned to the youngest Wizengamot member. "Mister Potter, I probably would have answered that this is not the moment to censure the Minister of Magic but based on recent events, would you please tell me why you feel our esteemed Minister should be censured? I will then be able to better answer your question."

"Of course, Mister Brownlea, and thank you for helping me as I learn more of the manners and workings of this great and historic body.

"Last Thursday, six Death Eaters appeared in the Ministry Apparation and Floo Concourse. They were there to torture and I believe kill, Mister Isaiah Smith, for speaking in favor of the increased Auror funding legislation. They stated as much the second they confronted him and hit him with a Cruciatus Curse. I fought them, killed several, including Reginald Sheets, grandson of Madame Florence Sheets, and himself a marked Death Eater."

"Why, you--" Madame Sheets hissed as she rose and started to draw her wand. Dolores Umbridge sat on the other side of her from Fudge and said while grabbing her hand, "You *can't* draw your wand here, Florence."

Harry made no move for his wand, but was prepared to dodge any spell Sheet managed to cast. The room's security should have painfully stopped the woman moments after her wand inappropriately left her robes, but one can't be too careful.

Harry went on, "As I defended Mister Smith and myself, the sixth Death Eater cast a Cruciatus Curse on me. Eric Munch bravely came and helped us, cutting the time I was under that curse to mere seconds. But the fact is, I stopped five of the six, and Officer Munch only stopped one of them."

"Is your ego so gigantic, Potter," Umbridge interrupted, "that you must take credit from a dead hero?"

Brownlea hammer her down. "Ma-DAAM Umbridge." Once again he over emphasized the title. "I must insist that you use proper titles and proper order. You came to me after last assembly and insisted I keep a close watch on our newest member of the Wizengamot. You could not state strongly enough that he would not follow proper decorum here in this chamber. Well he has acted quite properly, while you three have set poor examples for him to follow." He pounded his gavel once more for emphasis, and then asked Harry to continue.

"Mister Brownlea, if my name never again appears in the *Daily Prophet*, it could not please me more, since most of what I read in it are lies and slander, particularly the quotations from our Minister here. The point I was hoping to make before I was rudely interrupted is that I would gladly have applauded Officer Munch's efforts, but Minister's Fudge's words exaggerating his role in the paper were his death warrant.

Harry turned to the entire assembly. "My fellow Family Heads and representatives, surely all of you remember the last war. Anyone who stood out, anyone who was acclaimed as a hero in that fight became an automatic priority target for Voldemort and his Death Eaters." Many members trembled and gasped at the use of that name. Harry frowned, but chose not to chide them for it at the moment.

"As I understand it," Harry continued, "no one was mentioned in the press back then unless they already had proper security or the Ministry was prepared to grant them asylum in a safe house. That type of war is on again, and in spite of that fact, no proper protection for the Munch family was provided. The Minister made them all high priority targets when Eric Munch was but a minor player in the action in terms of overall impact.

"I, on the other hand, can't be made a bigger target to Voldemort." More gasps. "And the Minister knows it. He also knows I live in a completely secure situation, the details of which are not known even by my closest friends. I want no more praise or fame. Killing Death Eaters is a hollow job that is too necessary. But I do it so that families like the Munchs can survive."

Harry hung his head. A tear showed on his cheek when he raised it to return the gaze of his listeners. "I was a baby, as you all know, when the last war ended. I've only read of the horrors, and yet I deeply regret not realizing that Voldemort would attack this poor family once I read it in the paper. Minister Fudge, or at least *someone* in the Ministry should have remembered the losses from the last war and protected them."

Harry sniffed, wiped his eyes, stood taller, and said, "That, Mister Brownlea, is why I ask if this body can censure the Minister of Magic."

The Acting Chief Warlock gazed at Harry for several long moments. He was obviously deep in thought. He finally sighed and spoke, "No, Mister Potter, under these circumstances it is not within this body's purview to censure the Minister of Magic."

Fudge sat up straight and smiled. Brownlea saw his smile and frowned darkly. He said, "Mister Fudge, though it is not in the charter of this assembly to censure you as Mister Potter requests, it in no way lessens the fact that you should be called into account for your actions. Those deaths are on your head, in my humble opinion. So, not as a member of this body, but as a magical citizen of this country, I ask that you be more careful of innocent lives, and more truthful in the press."

He turned to Harry. "Anything else, Mister Potter?"

"No, sir, er, Chief Warlock. Thank you for answering my question and giving me time to explain my request."

"You are welcome." He pounded the gavel. "Any more new business?" Brownlea looked at Fudge, who held many papers in his trembling hands. Fudge looked at Umbridge and Sheets. They shook their heads, and Fudge turned and shook his head to the moderator.

"This session is adjourned." The gavel fell.

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Alexius Tiller could not have been more bored for the last few years sitting in the Wizengamot if they'd all been petrified and left to stare at each other, unmoving.

Yes, he was very bored, until the grandson of his old friend, Benedict Potter arrived.

Since the first fall of Voldemort, there was little of true interest to Tiller in these chambers. He'd loved hearing Benedict Potter rally those around him to vote for this legislation or that, fighting for a cause - any cause - winnable or not. But his Potter year mate at Hogwarts had died three years before James and Lily. Now, Isaiah Smith tried to speak up from time to time like Benedict had, but Alexius sighed every time he thought about the grand rhetoric and finely pointed wit of the deceased Potter Family Head. Tiller regretted that he and Smith had seemed to consistently grate each other's nerves since Benedict's death - a friction that eventually brought them to different sides of the aisle. He wondered not for the first time in this past year just why he had followed the lead of Fudge, Umbridge, and Sheets.

Oh, he remembered - his vanity. Florence Sheets and Cornelius Fudge praised his pureblooded-ness and ranted about how he should vote with them. He missed Benedict speaking about the 'magical heritage' the Tillers, Smiths, and Potters shared as original magical families in Old Albion. Such words negated the fact that his maternal grandmother was the third daughter of a Muggle Duke, and that his paternal great-grandmother was a powerful and brilliant Muggleborn witch.

Funny how Florence Sheets always quietly reminded him of these blood facts--no, she bludgeoned him with these facts--before she openly praised his pureblood status. Yet he had continued to vote her way.

The last session had been momentarily thrilling and then completely frustrating, Alexius thought. Young Harry Potter looked very much like Benedict Potter had when they were at Hogwarts, and nearly identical to James on his wedding day to Lily. Then Harry had voted two votes instead of his full count, and Tiller found his hopes dashed, though he had not joined the others in laughing at the boy.

Today, however, Harry Potter had stood and spoke very much as Benedict did in his first days in the Wizengamot. Harry did not have the polish of Benedict in his latter years, and Harry had not conquered the phrasings and lingo of speechifying in this chamber, but he had the passion, the verve, and the commanding presence that Benedict had in full measure.

And, oh, it was music to Alexius' ears to hear young Harry speak of the importance of magical heritage. Tiller looked toward Florence Sheets and Cornelius Fudge to rub their noses in their having a thousand years *less* of magical heritage than he. It was good to be reminded that he was a direct descendant of one of the Tiller twins of early magical Albion, and that they had been friends of Torban Loundon and Willen the Great Olive Hander. Exactly which of the original Tiller twin's line he followed had been lost in the family histories but that was of little matter as both were magical and both were a part of the beginnings to magical society.

Sheets and Fudge, however, didn't look his way when young Harry mentioned magical heritage. Sheets was steaming, Tiller could tell from her three-quarter view, and Fudge was poorly dancing to Harry's tune. In the end, this session was mercifully short. Tiller was politician enough to know Fudge tabled whatever was on his mind this day because of young Harry's verbal assault. It would be politically wise to let Potter's momentum die before giving him another chance to publicly oppose the minister.

Alexius didn't stop to consider his next move; he was too excited by Harry's words. He simply walked forward and said, "I say, Madame Sheets, Mister Fudge, I rather enjoyed young Mister Potter's first words today. I think he spoke rather--"

"Oh, stuff it, Lexi," Sheets interrupted. "Who cares about heritage, you old fool?" She didn't even turn to look at him as she said this, but dismissed him without a glance and lowered her head to conspire with Fudge and Umbridge.

Tiller guessed he'd been treated more rudely in his life, but couldn't remember when. Darance Bread was his very good friend and the only person who hung on Tiller's every word. Bread had followed Tiller to speak to Sheets and had heard the woman's rudeness. His offense at his friend ill treatment was easily read on his face.

"Come, Mister Tiller, let us be where we should be."

"Yes, you are quite right, Mister Bread, as always."

The two gathered their possessions and walked over to what had been for years the Smith corner of the Wizengamot Chambers, but Tiller now thought of it as the place he should have never left. Smith saw him coming, lowered his head for a few swift words with Harry, and then they both stood. Harry looked a little nervous, but stood straight.

Tiller spoke first as he was the one changing position in the chamber. "I say, Mister Potter, forgive me for not welcoming you last session to our august body. You nearly brought a tear to my eye today, reminding me of when your grandfather and I first entered this chamber together so many years ago. I thought you were Benedict for a moment there, and I could offer you no higher praise."

"Thank you--" Harry was interrupted by Cornelius Fudge.

"Lexi, we need your opinion on a matter of vital import, why, how would we do without you--"

Tiller shrugged off Fudge's hand on his arm. Then turning with a scowl on his face, Tiller threw back his shoulders as straight as possible and said quite loudly, "Mister Fudge, I am not sure why you feel these unwarranted familiarities are appropriate. Must I remind you that we are still in chambers?"

Florence Sheets stood behind Fudge and to his right. She interjected, "Have it your way, Mis-TAH Tiller, but surely you aren't going to listen to the delusional words of a half-blood whelp--"

"Enough, Madame! I'll not have a pretentious upstart from a nouveau magical family say that about a Potter." Tiller was furious. Sheets' shaded insults to him over the years all rushed to his mind and he responded in kind. "We were magical nobility over a thousand years before your unwashed, illiterate Viking forbearers rowed across the Channel to steal, rape, and pillage. I'm back where I belong, standing besides those whose families nurtured British magic long before there was a Britain. Please take your false ideas of blood purity and go straight to Perdition. As Mister Potter so clearly explained, if you and yours didn't find fresh blood somewhere in the past five generations or so, your Death Eater nephew would have been a squib."

Harry pushed his left sleeve up near his elbow and showed his unmarked arm to Sheets. She emitted a guttural sound and moved to draw her wand.

"Pull it, Madam Sheets, please do," Harry said coldly. Any Wizengamot member who drew his or her wand in the assembly in a manner not used in official proceedings, broke the rules. If they drew their wands in anger, the one they were attacking, could ask for a duel and receive rights to the first shot without the other being able to raise a shield.

Florence Sheets mumbled several profanities before turning and stomping off. Fudge scurried off in her wake.

Harry spoke first, "Thank you for your spirited defense, Mister Tiller."

"Gladly, gladly." Tiller turned to Smith. "May we join you, Mister Smith?"

Smith nodded hoping Tiller was speaking of moving to their side in the fight and not just speaking of joining them in conversation at the moment. No doubt remained of their intentions when Tiller and Bread waved their wands and all their possessions moved across the chamber.

"Welcome home," Smith said with a smile.

Returning his smile, Tiller said, "Where are my manners? Mister Potter, this is my good friend, Mister Darance Bread."

Harry snapped his feet together, clicking his heels as was prescribed in his copy of *The Book* for Wizengamot members and extended his hand. Bread clicked his heels as well and they shook.

"Mister Bread," Harry said, "I meant no disrespect to your illustrious family when I spoke of my magical heritage. Yours is a proud Three-Thirty-Three Family with a fine history. I only use such words to put the pureblood bigots in place."

"No offense taken, Mister Potter. I remember well the discourses Mister Smith here, and your grandfather Benedict engaged in over the years, fighting such bigotry. I believe he used to say quite often that there are advantages and disadvantages to everything, so never believe you are the answer to every situation. Something like that, wasn't it?"

Smith and Tiller nodded in agreement. Harry commented that he was just now finding out about his grandfather, and Tiller suggested they have lunch together so that they could tell Harry more. Harry thought Smith looked slightly dyspeptic at the prospect, but to Harry's relief his curmudgeonly mentor agreed.

They continued to talk congenially in the chamber, until Smith pointed out the look of disgust in Florence Sheets' eyes, and the grim look on Fudge's face. Sheets was in rapid discourse with Dolores Umbridge at the moment.

"Gentlemen," Harry said as he pointed to the two women. "I hope you and your family member are all protected. Madam Umbridge sent dementors to my relative's home last summer to attack me, and we

know what happened last Thursday when Death Eaters attacked Mister Smith right here in the Ministry's Floo and Apparation Point."

They all understood his meaning and discussed the matter among themselves as they exited the room. All three older men had house-elves waiting for them for their robes. None of them commented when Harry called Dobby, but they all stared a bit when Harry concentrated briefly and changed his hair from the shoulder length commonly worn in the Wizengamot back to its normal shorter style. Seeing their obvious curiosity, Harry matter-of-factly explained that he had a slight Metamorphmagus ability, but only in changing his hair.

The men agreed to Apparate to Hogsmeade and eat at the Old Wand Inn. Harry stated he'd never been there before, but asked Mr. Smith to stand still for a moment so he could concentrate on him. Bread and Tiller cracked off ahead of them. Harry nodded and Smith Apparated away. Two seconds later Harry arrived soundlessly.

"Goodness, Mr. Potter, you're soundless," declared Tiller.

"Arrival is not as hard to do quietly," Harry stated. "The crack sound comes from interrupting the air. When we arrive, we push the air out and it makes a slight noise from being displaced. Disapparation leaves a hole so to speak. The air rushes back in and makes a cracking sound when it fills the void." Harry clapped his hands together to illustrate.

"I've never thought of that," stated Bread. Tiller looked amazed.

Harry continued explaining like he'd taught in the secret DA meetings. "I can show you how to lessen the noise you make in arriving right now, regardless of how much of a crack you normally produce. Just Disapparate away while grabbing the hem of your robe and bring it forward as you leave. I'll be back in a few seconds." He made a slight popping sound as he left, but they all noticed his exaggerated hand movements with his robe as he'd described.

Three seconds later he reappeared, once again emphasizing his movement of his robe as he arrived.

"Bravos" all around greeted him. Harry looked slightly embarrassed as he explained, "With practice, you don't have to move your hand and robe as much as I did to demonstrate. It's not the complete answer; you do need some degree of power and skill to reduce your Apparation noise, but if it's already low, this will eliminate it. With some practice this slight movement will reduce whatever noise you do make Apparating.

"Now, departure noise is different. The air slamming into the hole we make when we leave isn't really affected by such movement. I'm looking for a simple spell to leave behind a compressed air bubble that expands to fill that void before the cracking sound occurs. Timing is everything, and I don't know if I can make it work or not."

They all asked him to keep them apprised of the success of his research. None of them were loud Apparators, but the prestige of silent Apparation was admired by all magical folk.



The conversation over lunch consisted of Tiller and Bread--and Smith to a lesser degree--regaling Harry with tales of his grandfather in the Wizengamot. They also threw in some stories of Benedict's Hogwarts days as they'd all known him at school although the four were all in different years or houses.

At the end of the lunch Harry asked a question that had been in his mind since the Wizengamot session that day. "Gentlemen, I don't like that I lost a vote today, but I'm more concerned for the poor Meadowbrooks that sold their Family Right to Rule, probably for too little.

"First, how can I protect my votes, and help the families whose votes I hold if they are in situations like the Meadowbrooks? And second, how can I find any votes at risk currently held by Sheets, Umbridge, Fudge and their band that we might take away from them?"

Tiller had really warmed to Harry during this lunch. The boy, no, young man, had listened attentively to his stories, something his own grandchildren never did. But this question upset him.

"Harry," Tiller started. The young wizard insisted they call him by his first name, but he'd continued to address all three more respectfully. "Harry, that type of maneuvering for power is not really the best form, lad."

Harry remained placid as he responded. "Yet, sir, that *is* what happened to me today. Can it be a coincidence that Meadowbrook just happened to offer his vote for sale to Florence Sheets less than four days after I first enter the Chamber?"

Tiller found he couldn't deny the reality of what had occurred in today's session. When he didn't respond Harry quietly continued.

"I was amazed to see that *The Book* for the Wizengamot advises, 'Do unto others as they have done unto you.' I consider that so much less than the Golden Rule, 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.' I plan to do as I want done unto me for the most part, but those three and probably some of their allies won't respond to kindness. They've basically declared war, and I intend to fight them. I expect to win. If that requires me to use their own tactics against them I will. You don't have to support me, you can even avoid me if you wish, but I find that I have a great deal of money. I plan to use a portion of it to do battle in the Wizengamot."

Tiller looked at him with amazement as Bread said, "I close my eyes and I can hear Benedict in his voice, can't you?"

The other two nodded, Smith with a slight frown on his face.

"I don't know how you received your second vote, Mr. Tiller," Harry said, "But if it isn't secure, can you guarantee Madam Sheets isn't conspiring to take it from you now that you've walked to our corner of the assembly?" Harry pronounced her title like he did Pomfrey's, not in the exaggerated manner of the Wizengamot.

Tiller was flabbergasted into silence by this gentle piece of logic. However, Darance Bread spoke

up, "We've been in her corner too long. It is a longstanding habit to think of her as an ally. But you are right." The man spoke quietly but with conviction. "Lexi holds his second vote securely. The Gundersen Three-Thirty-Three Family married their only daughter to a Tiller over two hundred years ago. But you have a point young man."

Bread turned to Tiller. "We can't sit back and let this go on, Lexi. Neither of us can really fight the fight like young Potter here seems able to do, like Isaiah has for years all alone since Benedict died, but we can help."

Darance turned back to Harry. "I suggest you go to the legal firm of Tonks and Tonks. Those bright young solicitors are the nearest things to expert legal counsel when it comes to the Wizengamot. Andromeda Black left her family, to marry Ted Tonks, a brilliant Muggleborn wizard. You probably know of this since you hold the Black Family vote as your strongest secondary vote."

"I know their daughter, Nymphadora," Harry said. "She's an Auror. I've also had their firm recommended by Gringotts for some business dealings."

"Well, there you go, Harry," said Tiller. "You now have two reasons to talk to them."

"Gentlemen," Harry asked, "would you mind if I call my house-elf to go make an appointment for me?"

Tiller was stunned at the idea, and Bread had a confused look on his face. Smith said, "Go ahead, Harry. I'll explain it to them."

Soon Dobby had his instructions and Harry joined Smith in explaining that Spell Mongery wasn't the evil that the Arithmantic Spell Crafters had made it out to be for the last thousand years.

About the time Tiller and Bread's attitudes had changed from shocked to outright fascination with Harry's spell creating discoveries, Dobby popped back to his side.

"Excuse me gentlemen," Dobby interjected at a lull in the conversation. "Mr. Potter, Mrs. Tonks said that she and her husband could arrange to give you an hour at most at two o'clock today if that is convenient with you."

Harry looked at his watch. Tiller looked at his and noted it was just after one o'clock.

Harry said, "Would it be rude of me to leave you gentlemen in thirty minutes?"

When they all agreed that it would be best for Harry to accept the appointment, he asked Dobby to inform the Tonks.

Tiller said, "Harry, how did you train your house-elf to speak so well?"

Harry grinned. "I didn't. I discovered by accident that what we consider normal house-elf speech is an *affectation* the house-elves maintain because they think we want them to talk like that. Somehow, over the years, the house-elves also discovered that witches and wizard leave them alone and

generally ignore them if we think of them as barely literate."

Harry explained what he knew of house-elves' speaking abilities and their practice of hiding it from their masters, as well as their reasoning for it. They all chuckled at that.

The conversation then turned to how Harry had freed Dobby.

It was not quite half one when the four decided to break up their luncheon. All had places to go and Harry thought he could make it to Flourish and Blotts before his appointment with the Tonks.

Harry opened the door of the inn and signaled for his three elders to precede him. Tiller noted once again how well mannered this young man was. Such courtesies seemed to be missing in so many youngsters these days.

Tiller and Bread went first. They stepped down to the landing, three steps above the ground. As they moved down to the next step Harry followed Smith right out the door.

Rapid multiple cracks placed four Death Eaters right in front of them with their wands raised. Although he felt frozen by fear Tiller continued automatically down the last few steps. He knew this would be the end when he heard the start of the Killing Curse.

Suddenly Tiller was violently knocked to the ground, landing on his left side. He sprained his left wrist, and badly bruised his hip, but he didn't lose sight of what he must do. Tiller drew his wand, thankful that he was right handed. He felt someone had stumbled and fallen right behind him, and knew it was Isaiah Smith for he could hear him cursing. Tiller looked for his friend Darance and saw one of the most amazing things he had ever seen in his long and varied life.

Two Killing Curses and two *Reducto* rs impacted on the now empty steps and the door they had just exited. Harry Potter rolled forward on the ground at the foot of the steps and came up with a wand in each hand, blazing spells. Two simultaneous *Reductos* hit the two front Death Eaters and they tumbled back, knocking over the two behind them. Potter's Cutting curses missed the back two only because they had been knocked down. A fifth Death Eater Apparated to the left of the tangle of injured and breathless Death Eaters. He Summoned Harry's glasses. Before the eyewear made it to him he caught the glasses with a Blasting hex. Then this attacker sent a *Cruciatus* towards the semi-blinded young man.

The torturous curse hit Harry, Tiller saw, but Potter had already begun raising his right wand arm towards this assailant. To Tiller's horror and admiration, Harry continued raising his arm even though he shook violently. Wordlessly Harry cast a Cutting curse through the *Cruciatus*, and hit the Death Eater squarely in the neck. Tiller mused under these macabre circumstances that Sir Nicholas might have company now to form the Nearly Headless Hunt.

Moving like an automaton, Tiller slowly raised himself while holding out his wand, all the while watching the Boy-Who-Lived. Harry held his hand right in front of his eyes. He seemed to be focusing on his hand as he slowly moved it back and forth, eventually extending it out fully. This took mere seconds. Potter smiled and turned back to the attackers. Alexius turned in time to see one of the fallen

Death Eaters from Harry's first pair of *Reducto* rs raise her wand and shout the Killing Curse at Potter.

Smith conjured a slab of stone that intercepted the deadly curse, but Harry wasn't there to be hit. He had Apparated away. The two Death Eaters in back who had fallen when the leading pair took Potter's first strikes scrambled to their feet. Assuming Potter was gone, one sent a *Crucio* at Darance Bread and the other cast the Dark Mark into the sky.

As the *Crucio* hit Bread, two more *Reducto* rs slammed into the two uninjured Death Eaters' heads from behind, killing them instantly. Bread suffered the Cruciatus for a fraction of a second, but it only hit on his right arm. Harry was standing five feet behind the last two Death Eaters he'd just killed. He immediately ran forward and set Binding spells on the two wounded Death Eaters, the only ones left alive. Harry then continued forward with his wands raised and took a position to protect his three fellow Wizengamot members.

Smith stood first followed by Tiller and Harry shouted, "Are you two all right? Please check on Mr. Bread. The Aurors should be here soon because of the Dark Mark."

In quick succession Harry cast four Battle Barriers to surround them. Tiller once again was amazed. As a youth he'd hoped to become a Professional Duelist, or at least a serious amateur. He'd learned the Battle Barrier spell, but quickly abandoned it as casting it left him too exhausted to continue dueling. Now, Potter had cast the spell four times in less than ten seconds, and looked no less winded than he had before starting.

"I'm all right," Darance Bread stated shakily as Tiller ran to his dear friend. "Please help me up, Lexi. I can't help defend us from here."

Tiller assisted his oldest friend to his feet as he asked, "Are you hurt badly, Darry?"

"No, Lexi," the man said quietly. "You remember twenty years ago at the start of the last war, I survived a Death Eater attack but went under a full Cruciatus for twenty seconds or so. This hurt, but nary a fraction of what that did, thanks to Harry here."

Smith stood by Harry with his wand raised, following Potter's example. Tiller watched the young man sweep from side to side, both arms raised and wands at the ready, the picture of constant vigilance in such a situation. The lad inhaled and exhaled deeply and raggedly, but otherwise appeared unshaken. Smith said, "Your eyes, Harry. You don't seem to be squinting."

Without moving from protect mode Harry took one last deep breath and said, "I've been playing with and mongering spells that require eye-hand coordination and other visualization based magic." He took another deep gulp of air and continued, "It struck me earlier today that I should look into a charm that would correct my eyesight. I've thought that losing my glasses in a fight might result in what just happened. When I heard my glasses go crunch and the *Crucio* hit, I knew after I dealt with that murderer I'd have to make my Eyesight Correction spell pretty quickly."

Tiller could not imagine the ability to develop a spell without months or years of research and a

carefully controlled magical environment. Now Potter had created a spell of no little importance in the midst of a life or death battle.

Bread was equally amazed and asked the question on both their minds, "You Mongered a spell right then and there?"

Harry shrugged. "I didn't really Monger a spell in the normal sense or follow typical Spell Mongery practices. I just willed it to happen because I had to have it happen. Since I don't know how it happened, I can't reproduce it. And I have no idea how long it will last either--a day, a lifetime? Who knows?"

Several Apparation cracks rang out and Harry shouted for them to duck. They all hid behind a Battle Barrier except Harry, who stood like a protective angel of vengeance. He sighed and said quietly, "Aurors." Tiller noticed that although Harry lowered his arms, he remained cautious.

Six Aurors appeared in the small courtyard of the Old Wand Inn. Three of them moved into position with their backs to the Wizengamot members looking for further attacks. Two moved to secure the prisoners, and Nymphadora Tonks stepped forward.

"Wotcher, Harry. Nice day for a street fight. Weather's perfect."

Harry chuckled and lowered his guard a bit more.

Another Apparation crack placed Dawlish right in the midst of the small group. Before he had blinked, Harry had both wands under his chin.

"I should have known you'd be here, Potter. I'm taking you in this time for--"

"You're what?" Tiller had had enough. He realized he'd been useless in the fight, but he could handle this battle for his rescuer. For many months he'd heard Fudge and Umbridge bad mouth this young man who'd just saved his life. They'd called Harry a weakling and self-aggrandizing. None of that was true, Tiller realized. The lad had delivered on the promise of the Boy-Who-Lived in spades, and Tiller was furious.

"Auror Dawlish, you haven't investigated anything; you haven't even looked around. You just start by arresting Mr. Potter. Leave. Tell Fudge and Sheets to keep you as far from me as they can. I'll launch a full-scale investigation into the practices of the Auror Corps and see just who trained you to act this way and who gives you your marching orders. Tell Amelia--"

"I answer directly to the Minister, I'm on his protective detail, so--"

"SO!" Smith interrupted, "if you are no longer on the rolls of the active Aurors, you have no business doing field investigations. You shouldn't be here, and you shouldn't have been at the Ministry Floo and Apparation Concourse Thursday when that attack occurred. But you were there, weren't you? Ready to cover up what happened, I'd wager. Now *I* plan to call for a formal investigation into why and how Minister Fudge's office is so aware of Death Eater attacks that he knows where and when to send his personal security head to clean up You-Know-Who's mess."

Harry had begun giving his report to Tonks when Tiller took on Dawlish, but they both stopped to watch the threesome face down Dawlish. The seething Auror Apparated away noisily. The three elder gents turned and politely listened to Harry finish his statement.

Smith looked at his pocket watch when Harry had finished describing the attack. "You have three minutes, Harry, to make it to your next appointment, if you feel like it, if you are finished with him, Madam Auror."

Tonks looked at Smith and then back to Harry. "Sure you don't need St. Mungo's, Harry?"

He shook his head. "It was only for a few seconds, and not that bad. He must have been a new recruit." Tonks looked at the now unmasked and nearly headless Death Eater and shook her head. "That's Bert Yaxley, or at least what's left of him. He was a vicious sadist. It must have hurt like the dickens."

Harry shrugged. "He must not have hit me straight on or something. I've had worse, Voldemort, or maybe I'm getting used to it." He shivered. "That's a skill I've never wanted to acquire." Everyone else shivered for various reasons. "Well, go on with you to whatever other mayhem you have planned for this afternoon," Tonks said with a hint of admiring sarcasm. "These gents will tell me what you really did, you modest blighter, you."

Harry started to protest, but Smith spoke, "Harry, if you are truly all right, then go to your appointment. We're fine now. Sure you don't want to go to St. Mungo's, or back in here for a stiff belt of fire whiskey?"

Harry shook his head. Smith shook his hand. So did Bread.

Alexius Tiller then took his hand and held it firmly. "You made a staunch ally today, Mr. Potter. And that was before this all occurred. Now I'm determined to offer more than my personal support. I will use every connection and every bit of influence I have to rally others to your cause."

"But, I'm just--"

"I know perfectly well what you are," Tiller said. "I dare say Darance and I will be visiting Gringotts to have our wards upgraded. We'll ask for Director Gultangk and tell him you recommended him. Now scoot."

Harry sighed again and Apparated away almost silently to the continued amazement of those left behind.

When they had finished their statements and Tonks was gone, Smith turned to his two friends. "I just know Florence is behind this. Bold as brass she's become. We've got to rein her in somehow. Let's think about it and meet at the club tomorrow afternoon to discuss it. Agreed?"

They all nodded.

There never was any mention in the *Daily Prophet* about this attack on four members of the Wizengamot.

~\*~\*~\*~

Harry thought the building facade at Tonks and Tonks looked almost as substantial as that of Gringotts, though obviously smaller, and not crooked as befit the goblin facility somehow. Judging the size of the firm from the outside, Harry guessed there might be twenty people at most inside, but probably less. He acknowledged that with Expansion charms what he would find inside could be a lot bigger.

In fact, the building's interior seemed to be just as it should be based on the exterior. The furnishings were finely crafted, but obviously of magical styling and influence. There was the obligatory Floo fireplace, and the receptionist wore finely tailored robes.

Both Tonks partners came out to greet Harry shortly after his arrival. Ted Tonks was wearing a Muggle business suit. He was a tall and slender man, and Harry thought Nymphadora probably took more after him than her mother. Andromeda bridged the gap between Bellatrix and Narcissa. She resembled both of them in different ways and seeing Andromeda, Harry could finally recognize a family resemblance in the distinctly different Black sisters.

Bellatrix was raven-haired and the ravages of prison hid only part of her former beauty. Her psychotic behavior hid the rest. Narcissa was almost painfully blond, and her aloofness and disdain for everything around her--no matter where she was--made her a beautiful statue - made of cold, heartless marble.

The eldest sister Andromeda's beauty was enhanced by well-earned laugh lines and a smile that told of a happy meaningful life--one she had chosen and created for herself--rather than a life of pureblooded perfection or extremist lunacy. Today she wore a witch's robe, unbuttoned, displaying Muggle women's business attire underneath.

Ted Tonks advanced on Harry extending his hand warmly. "Welcome to Tonks and Tonks. I'm Theodore Tonks, Mr. Potter. We're glad your elf arrived when he did. Ten minutes earlier and our two o'clock would not have cancelled yet."

Harry decided he like this man on the spot. Andromeda held out her hand in turn and said, "And I'm Andromeda, Mr. Potter. Our daughter has told us quite a bit about you, all good I might add."

"Please call me Harry. Tonks is too kind. Er..."

Andromeda smiled. "We know that she prefers her last name to her given name. Our daughter has made that very clear on numerous occasions, so don't distress yourself. Please call me Andi, Harry."

"And I'm Ted." The male partner turned to the receptionist. "Doris, please arrange for the shades to be drawn in Conference Room 4 B." He turned back to Harry. "Our two conference rooms on our Diagon Alley side are occupied with associates and their clients. We need to go to a conference room

on our Muggle side. I hate to ask, but would you mind taking off your robe. The shirt and slacks you have on underneath will be fine. Muggles don't really understand, you know."

Harry pulled his wand and casually, as well as wordlessly, transfigured his robe into a blue blazer. This went well with his white shirt, dark grey slacks, and the Gryffindor tie. The receptionist gasped. Andi's eyes opened wide. Ted Tonks commented, "Nymphie was right. You are right clever. Right this way, Harry."

As they stepped towards a door Andromeda said, "I thought you wore glasses, Harry."

"I used to." Neither asked him to clarify, and Harry assumed they thought he now wore contacts or had had Muggle laser surgery.

He followed them to the back of the building and through a door. They passed through a spacious reception area and walked down a corridor that ran along an outside wall of windows. Seeing the view Harry speculated that they were at least ten floors up in a modern office building somewhere in downtown London.

He said, "I love magic," as the two Tonks ushered him into Conference 4 B. They offered him a choice of beverages, which he turned down.

"Your elf told us a little, Harry," Ted began. "Exactly how may we help you?"

"First, and I know the clock is running. The goblins say that time is money, so I want to pay for your services from the outset. But please tell me about your firm. I'm looking for a long-term relationship with legal advisors for both the Muggle and magical worlds. Your two offices somehow attached together fascinate me."

The two looked at each other before Andi said, "Harry, different businesses in different worlds work differently. Goblins charge from the outset, but our introductory time together is on us. We recognize the potential of working with you and hope to succeed with whatever project you have for us--to become in time a soliciting firm you value and rely upon."

The couple proceeded to tell of meeting at Hogwarts and studying law at Cambridge together. They had been poor as church mice, but happily in love. Her family abandoned Andromeda the second she made her future plans clear. Ted's parents were older and living on a monthly stipend from his father's injury in a factory.

"That's odd," Harry said. "I thought Gultangk said that you two met at Cambridge. It's very unusual for the goblins to be wrong about such details."

Ted nodded, "Andi and I've heard that before. The only plausible source for the story that we've been able to come up with is Andi's family. It would have been a very 'Black' thing to do to circulate such a rumor to discourage other purebloods from allowing their children to attend Muggle universities."

After that sidebar, the Tonks continued their story. On Andi's twentieth birthday, a family trust had helped them pay their educational debts, and eventually set up a small practice in the magical world.



They had nearly failed, but work from Gringotts--things that Wizarding law precluded the goblins from doing themselves--eventually gave them sufficient contacts in the Muggle world to build their practice. The Tonks never abandoned their foundation in the magical world, but the reality was that the firm derived most of its income from Muggles.

"The firm of Blade and Redding is the largest soliciting firm in Great Britain in terms of its representation of magical companies and people. They also work with Muggles, but only a small percentage of their practice is Muggle related," Andi explained. "Combining income from both magical and Muggle sources we are nearly five times larger than Blade and Redding. They represent the M.I.D. I understand you ran afoul of them recently, or at least one of their Ministry stooges."

"How'd you hear that?" Harry inquired.

"Justin Finch-Fletchley sent us a brief but fact-filled owl post yesterday. He asked for an appointment, which we have set for tomorrow, but also hit on your M.I.D. conflicts, your joint meeting with Director Gultangk, and the fact that you two have formed a Gringotts clique. Our Gringotts contact is Randort. He's in a clique that's in the same faction as Director Gultangk, though he's a level or two lower than your advisor. Excellent work gaining Gultangk's counsel in such a short time, Harry. It took us years to move up the organization to Randort."

"Well," Harry interjected, "Gultangk was the first one to suggest I contact you, for business purposes of course. The second was Darance Bread at lunch a little while ago."

The two Tonks looked at each other with raised eyebrows. She said, "I heard, Harry, that you've taken the Potter and Black Rights to Rule and entered the Wizengamot. Now you're having lunch with Darance Bread, and I'm sure with Alexius Tiller as well. The two are inseparable in that assembly. Well done."

"I'm sorry you didn't receive the vote," Harry said contritely. "Is there any way I can give it to you?"

"No, Harry, but you are too kind to ask, she said. "Centuries ago the Black Family Right to Rule was voluntarily entailed to male heirs only. If all male Blacks were dead, the vote could only go to a male married or born to a Black female. Ted, being Muggleborn, could not take the Right, so Draco, the only male relative not in prison would qualify.

"Sirius derailed that effort, by naming you as his heir. He could have only done that if no male Black existed, and if you were the head of another Three-Thirty-Three Family. Your half-blood status would have negated that possibility unless you were already a Family Head designate at least. Sirius could have bequeathed it to your father, were he still alive, very easily.

"May I ask," Ted said, "why did Mr. Bread give you our firm's name?"

Harry explained how he had lost a vote today to Florence Sheets' maneuverings. "--it wasn't just losing the vote that upset me. It was what it meant for that family. When I asked for advice on how to prevent that from happening again, Mr. Bread suggested I contact you."

"All right, Harry," Ted said, "as I see it you want business help and help with the Wizengamot. We'd love to serve you in anyway possible. We also want to join your Gringotts clique if you'll have us. What specific project do you have in mind for us to prove ourselves to you?"

Harry looked slightly confused for several moments, and then said, "I'm not sure you have anything to prove. My associate at Gringotts recommended you. My allies in the Wizengamot speak highly of you. My fellow clique-mate, Justin plans on using your services. You want to join our clique, which is flattering by the way, and I think highly of your daughter. As far as I'm concerned, you're already my solicitors.

"You probably know more of how you can help me than I do. I expect you to tell me when you should do something for me. I need advisors for business and governmental matters. I'm a complete novice in all this. In my case, counselor is not a euphemism for solicitor. I need wise counsel and I know the best advice costs.

"I lost the Meadowbrook vote, but more importantly, the Meadowbrook family lost the vote permanently. Had they listened to my grandfather's advice and married outside blood, magical or not, they may have revived their magic enough to retake their seats in the Wizengamot. I understand the Wheatley and Colt votes are just as loosely attached to me, but their families seem to have been gone for centuries. Do you have investigators on your staff, both Muggle and magical?"

"We have some on staff and a number of specialists on retainer. We also could contract for any other expertise we need."

"I surely don't want to do anything unwise. May I call my house-elf?"

The Tonks exchanged a confused look before Andi said, "I'm not sure how you can, but please do so if you will."

Harry traced a square in the air with his wand and called for Dobby. The elf popped in and left with his instructions to gather Harry's portfolio with his Family ensigns.

By the time Dobby came back Harry had explained the spell that allowed him to call his elves. Harry shuffled through the case for a few moments and pulled out a variety of scrolls and parchments.

"These are my various votes and my notes from Mr. Ledbetter, the Wizengamot clerk. First, I want to see if any of these families that are gone have magical heirs now that can retake their Right to Rule. I know about half of them are irrevocable, but the rest are timed to certain generations in the future. Mundungus Fletcher is the last Fletcher and has no heirs I believe. Can we help him regain his family's place for the future?"

"Millicent Bulstrode's family was all but wiped out this summer by Death Eaters. She's the last. How can we help her? If now or in future generations an heir can take any of my votes, then I want them to be able to, rather than lose their magic by being pureblooded foolish or by selling to someone unscrupulous." He looked up at them.

"What?"

Andi said, "You want to help families recover their Rights to Rule from you? Help a few possibly take votes from you now, and be perfectly able to take votes away in future generations?"

"Yes." Harry answered firmly but with a trace of confusion in his voice. "Isn't that the right thing to do? I mean... I can't imagine Florence Sheets or Fudge doing things that way, but they're not my role models. If I help these families, I think I'll forge strong friendships and gain allies in the Wizengamot. I don't need the votes if they vote for the Light and against pureblood prejudices.

"My other request is not so kindly. I want to attack the votes of all those who vote with Fudge, Sheets, and Umbridge. I don't necessarily want the votes for myself. If we find vulnerability, first let's approach the family head and see if we can help them regain their position. If we can't, or the family has died out, can we make a stronger claim on the vote than one of them has? Can we buyout the family like they just did with the Meadowbrooks? We'll pay them a very fair price, perhaps an ongoing payment system of some sort. Get creative. We can help someone like Darance Bread or Alexius Tiller gain a few more votes. There have to be others who are clearly behind the agenda Mr. Smith and I have. Any questions?"

"Isaiah Smith?" Andi asked. Harry nodded. She said, "There is a good man for you to work with. He's shrewd but fair and honest. I'm sure you know he and your grandfather were thick as good cauldron bottoms." She hesitated. "Tell me, Harry, what is your ultimate plan for the Wizengamot?"

"Ultimate plan? Well, to be a member with fewer votes and see us eventually change Wizarding society into a more open, fair-minded world. No blood purity prejudices, but where a pureblood can be proud of his or her heritage for proper reasons and accept a half-blood or Muggleborn's heritage as having its own benefits. Everything has its pluses and minuses. Let's help each other succeed.

"I also don't want other magical beings treated like they are now. House-elves, centaurs, giants, half giants, goblins, and whoever else I'm forgetting right now. Oh yes, and vampires and werewolves. All need to be treated fairly. Why should wizards look down on goblins? It's beyond stupid, when they control our money and can really help us succeed financially."

Harry paused and looked at the two. Ted finally spoke. "Harry how soon do you want to change all of this?"

Harry almost smirked. "I want it all changed tomorrow, but I'm not a fool. This will take decades, generations perhaps. But I have a rough master plan. First we find out how to oust Fudge. There's got to be a way, and I think somehow getting more votes on our side in the Wizengamot is the quickest route, but I'm open to suggestions.

"Then we get information out to the people. I'm not sure how exactly, but Sol Lovegood asked me to write some articles for *The Quibbler*. He's recently changed his tune so to speak. You'll see his publication become more serious and factual real soon. I wouldn't mind funding research into validating the fact that the purebloods are at least marrying wizards and witches from other lands, but I think they also still secretly marry Muggleborns to protect their bloodlines from going weak from the

inbreeding.

"Hire investigators to go back in the pureblood bigots' family heritages and dig up the dirt. Go for the Malfoys, Sheets, Fudges, Umbridges, Notts, Parkinsons - whoever else is an outspoken pureblood snob. I want the dirt. Oh, that's terrible. I'm not looking for dirty blood, just the Muggle expression of digging up the dirt.

"Next, I want some sort of testing to validate a witch or wizard's power. Some real way established so a Sheets or a Malfoy can test against someone that is Muggleborn or half-blood and see who's more powerful. Something easier than the Stone-Cutter Test."

Harry paused and took a breath. "That's about all I've thought of so far. I don't expect you to do all of that, but I'd pay for help from you to find those who can do what I've mentioned. I also want better minds than mine to help think up how to do what I hope to ultimately accomplish in better and faster ways than I've just stated."

Both Tonks had been furiously making notes on Muggle legal pads, using stylish ballpoint pens. Ted asked about Harry's goals for business.

"I have stacks of Galleons - millions in vaults making a minimum return with the goblins. Some I want to spend on what I've just outlined. Some I want to have the goblins invest in the Muggle markets of different types. I'm sure you know they are restricted from investing there unless a wizard or witch is their partner in the investment."

Harry went on to tell the two about his investment in the twins' shop, and in Clarinda Jordan. They knew about Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes, but Andi was excited to hear about the fashion shop. She'd only heard tell that some sort of new wizard wear establishment was in the works.

"I've used Gringotts legal services for contracts so far," Harry said, "but Gultangk made it clear I should have a solicitor doing such future paperwork. Also, as I partner with them, I need outside representation to look at my contracts with the goblins. I trust Gultangk, but that's just good business, isn't it?"

They had several questions that required brief answers. Then they bid Harry go on.

"Well, I want to invest in other business opportunities with potential like Clarinda's."

"Is that the name of the shop?" Andi asked.

"No, but it sounds like a good name," Harry said. "We haven't decided yet. I've just stumbled on these two business opportunities so far. But the magical business world seems sort of stagnant, at least compared to Muggles. There have to be bright ideas out there to invest in, or rather, bright people with brilliant ideas to invest in. I don't know how Muggles do it, but can you suggest how to look into finding these people?"

Ted brought up the idea of using the same techniques Muggle venture capital funds use to hunt for new ideas. Andi thought they might create a Wizarding inventors' club and seek out the brightest who

apply. Harry and Ted agreed that that idea might appeal more to the quirky magical mindset of people like the Weasley twins.

"Muggles have companies called marketing research firms," Ted stated. "They analyze markets and decide where a new niche might be. It's sort of a systematic version of what you did with Clarinda Jordan. Perhaps we can find a Muggleborn who's gone back into the Muggle world and knows something about this."

"And look for Squibs as well," Harry chimed in.

"Yes," Andi agreed, "they know our world, but can also see how Muggles might do things better. They'd be good resources and might be a little homesick for butterbeer and chocolate frogs." They all smiled.

"That reminds me," Harry said, "when you mentioned stagnant businesses - Mages Importers and Distributors, Ltd. I want to know what I can about them, and I do mean everything, short of firebombing their offices. Let's attack their business at its root. Justin is going to start trying to sell fabric and such from Muggle sources to dress shops and the like. We'll hire goblin Overseers to protect the shipments, and even invest in protecting the shop owners who buy from us. That's expensive, but we can wait until we've broken the back of this M.I.D. to be in the black.

"Now you tell me," Harry concluded, "just how we can fight forces like the M.I.D. and build a business empire of free enterprises. Get together your ideas, talk to your sources, and come back to me with a plan and a budget, I guess. Within reason, I'll probably follow your lead if it seems logical. Start the pureblood investigations right away. The same with looking for ways of helping my votes' families and attacking the power base of the bad guys."

Harry looked at his watch. "Thanks for seeing me on such short notice. It's seven minutes until 3:00 and your next appointment." He said this while rifling through his valise. "Here's a draft for a thousand Galleons. Is that enough of a retainer to make you my solicitors?"

"Much more than enough," Ted said. "Let me get you the difference."

"No need. I think I'll eat through all of this pretty quickly. Start with this and tell me when you need more."

Harry brought out another sheet of parchment. "Do one or both of you want to join my Gringotts clique, or do you want to think about it?"

"Both of us," they said in unison and grinned.

Harry's wand flew from his arm holster and he wordlessly duplicated the parchment. Harry took out a quill and waved his hand over it for ink. The two Tonks looked once more at each other with raised eyebrows. He signed both contracts after printing the two Tonks' names at the top. "Just sign and fill out the rest of this information and Owl them to Gultangk with your fifty Galleons each or however you'd do it." They walked Harry back to the Diagon Alley entrance. At the door Harry turned and

said, "I recently discovered that I need to ask the following question more often. So think about it, and get back to me with your answer. 'What is it that I don't know but need to know in your area of expertise?' You've made some great suggestions, but only in response to my input. I know so very little. I believe you know where I want to go. What can I do to get there quicker than I'd never think of in a million years?"

In moments their farewells were completed and Harry Apparated from the foyer. The receptionist gasped, and Ted Tonks exclaimed, "Good lord, he's nearly silent."

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Steph Granger arrived by Portkey at the same training area parade ground at the SAS base where he'd been given his temporary commission as a Captain in the New Zealand Royal Army. He landed sure-footedly but rolled towards cover almost immediately. He came up on one knee with his wife's MAC 10 submachine pistol raised and the silencer engaged.

The only two others around for miles didn't move so much as a facial muscle throughout Granger's extraordinary entrance.

"He's as sharp as he ever was, Brigadier. But God's truth, I'll never get over Portkey technology." This comment came from a ramrod straight man with thinned white hair and a huge walrus handlebar mustache. He wore thick rimless glasses and was dressed in old faded khakis starched to board-like stiffness. His hands were on the handles of a wheel chair.

"Yes, Sergeant Major. Hair's grayer, but thinned little. He's added weight, but it sits well on him. Little fat if any. He's still as good with his knife as he ever was, and his wife seems to have not lost her killer instinct - lioness protecting her cub just like she protected her mate many years ago."

During this conversation Steph Granger walked up warily to the two. When he had finished his comments to his companion, the man in the wheelchair snapped out, "Report!"

The reflexive actions of his youth to this barked command had not been used in years, but they were as much a part of Steph Granger as his eye color. He snapped to attention and responded as he had many times, "Captain Granger, reporting for duty, fit and ready, SIR!"

"At ease, Captain. Ask your questions."

"Brigadier, er General--"

"They call me Brigadier in this outfit. I was one for over a decade, and only made a Major General the day I retired."

"Right, sir. Are... are you either a Squib, or a Muggleborn who left Hogwarts and came back to our world to follow in your family tradition?"

"Neither, Captain, though close. I was a Muggleborn who declined my Hogwarts letter. It just didn't fit into my sense of order. But I've learned much from magical folks. I now own a wand. I have since I







*Aaran St Vines*  
*FanficAuthors.net*



The shell of a shop Harry had acquired for her was turning into a fashion boutique. Carpenter-elves had put up changing rooms, display racks, and mirrors at strategic places all around, with Dobby and Winky looking over their shoulders to make sure no major mess was made. It was clear that the house-elves and carpenter-elves had little use for each other. The carpenter-elves were snobs about their specialized talents and in return the house-elves held them in contempt for their lack of neatness.

"Don't peek, Harry," Clarinda hissed from the dressing room.

Harry obediently closed his eyes. When Clarinda bade him open them, Harry was taken back because she looked stunning. He'd never realized how nice looking she was, and it occurred to him that the robe made all the difference.

"Wow! You look great. But... aren't these robes for a slightly younger crowd?" he said, "I'm guessing that most witches of a certain age, and er, deportment will find these robes *less than* flattering?"

"Yes, Harry, but like many Muggle women who find they're not slim girls any more, older witches will want versions cut for them as well. That's a very important segment of the fashion-buying population. Many of them have the Galleons to spent on such finery, but they are not that brave yet. We have to make our splash with the bolder, younger witches, and up-sell from there to their mothers once we're established. That Muggle business book you gave me about positioning has me wondering about the best way to do that, but first things first."

"It's gorgeous, Clarinda," Harry said. "And of course, you make it look good."

She beamed. "Flattery is always appreciated. You really do like it?"

He nodded. "I had no real idea why, but when I saw the clothes you created for me, I just knew you'd come up with something equally terrific for witches. I didn't know what it would be, but now that I see this, well, this is it."

Harry smiled at her. "You know you're going to be a smashing success, don't you? Probably the best investment I'll ever make will be starting you off."

Clarinda sighed. "I hope you're right. I'm so grateful to you--"

"None of that," he said feeling a little uncomfortable, "if people ever find out how little I've spent so far, I'll be accused of taking advantage of you once you and your brand name are famous."

"I'll know that's not true," she said, "and so will your friends. The rest, well, if what Fred, George and Lee say is anywhere near true, the public hasn't ever understood you. I'm guilty and so are the girls here for believing at least some of what we've read about you in the past, but now we know you better. We'd be willing to tell anyone who'll listen what a great guy you are."

Harry glanced around and the five seamwitchtresses were all nodding in agreement.

They were interrupted by an odd squawking sound. Clarinda excused herself and walked to the counter. She tapped her wand on a small box that was the source of the sound and called, "Clarinda

here."

"Miss Jordan, just our random check. All is well?"

"Yes, Overseer, thanks for your diligence."

"Our pleasure and sworn duty, ma'am. By the way, would you be expecting Mr. Potter there this morning, perchance?"

She looked Harry's way.

He nodded.

The Gringotts Goblin Overseer Service provided topnotch security as far as Harry could see. He'd cooperate with whatever was needed.

"Yes, he is here now, as a matter of fact."

"Please ask him to visit Gringotts at his earliest convenience. Director Gultangk wants him to know that this is a mutual opportunity and no charges either way will be applicable."

Harry looked at his wristwatch as he walked over. "Please tell Director Gultangk that I'll be there at 9:00 if that suits."

"The Director said that any time before 11:30 would be acceptable, and that you will only have to wait a few minutes at most, if that long. Thank you, Mr. Potter." The call box squawked off.

"How's that working out, Clarinda, the Goblin Overseer Service?"

"Fine, Harry. A drunken hag rattled the locked doorknob late one evening when we were still here. I hit the alarm and a goblin rolled out of the Floo in seconds. There were no problems, and I was pleased he wasn't rough with the poor unfortunate creature. She was harmless, but we panicked. The overseer understood and assured us such false alarms are part of the job. He made it clear we shouldn't hesitate to call again just because we had called for help when it wasn't really needed."

Harry was pleased by her report. They discussed a few more items and he left for Gringotts

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"Gadobble da' slababol, Gultangk'na," Harry said with a slight, sharp bow. "Flaunka Gobleena du'tow." *A profitable day to you, Gultangk. The peace of the warrior to you.*

"Gree-Gadobble du'tow, Potter. Trinksta Gobleena draa." Gultangk responded while giving him a similar bow. *Equal profits to you Potter. The rest of a warrior, also.*

"Thank you for coming, Potter. I believe Warrant Overseer Yagdill informed you this would be mutually beneficial?"

"Yes, Gultangk; I always expect profits for both of us when we speak."

Gultangk smiled in the toothy display Harry had come to recognize as true delight. "Ah, Potter, though said in English that was goblin thinking at its best. I approve wholeheartedly."

Dolderap snorted from his desk where he took notes. Dolderap was the nephew of Gultangk's staunchest enemy within Gringotts and Director Gultangk's private secretary. Gultangk's own nephew was private secretary to his enemy, Director Printdern.

Rather than roll their eyes, goblins made an equivalent to that facial expression by snorting in disdain while they alternated raising their eyebrows.

Ignoring his secretary, Gultangk continued, "Potter, we've discussed you having a full time private advisor to work on your behalf here at Gringotts. Several suitable goblins have expressed interest in the position, including Dolderap."

This shocked Harry for a moment, before he turned to the private secretary and said, "I thank you, Dolderap, for your interest. However, I would never want to end the education you receive in your current position, nor would I deprive Director Gultangk of your valuable assistance."

The goblin in question frowned menacingly, which lost a lot of its effect as it varied but little from his usual expression.

Gultangk continued, "There are several goblins that would meet your needs, but we've also discussed improving goblin-human relations. I feel, and so do others in my association, that you might be a client who would consider breaking new ground if it advances our mutual profitability of course."

"As I've stated, I'm always willing to listen to your proposals."

"Potter, the private advisor route is the inside track to advancement into the most important parts of Gringotts. There is no rule restricting a human from such a role--"

"Director, no!" Dolderap rose from his chair as he shouted and threw his dirk with deadly accuracy. Gultangk was off guard and could not move in time to dodge the blade or defend against it in any manner. Three feet from the director's chest a semi-transparent, silvery shield appeared, deflecting the blade.

A klaxon sounded from the room and six goblin overseers appeared out of nowhere. Harry dropped his wand and stood still with his hands raised high the second he saw Gultangk had his dirk drawn and was prepared to protect himself from Dolderap. The overseers all assumed the armed wizard was the attacker, and advanced on Harry menacingly.

A split second before Harry felt he'd have to dodge the spear of the nearest overseer; a harsh bark of Gobbledygook split the air. The overseers froze in place, but did not lower their spears. Harry exhaled for the first time in several long moments.

For Harry's sake Gultangk said in English, "Any of you touch Potter and I'll kill you with my own

blade." Harry relaxed further. "Dolderap, not Potter caused the alarm."

All of the goblin security officers lowered their weapons and moved in hesitant fashion to take up positions between Gultangk and his private secretary.

The director ordered, "Chief Overseer Flanter, please assign an overseer to stand at Dolderap's side for the rest of the day, until I can deal with him appropriately. I must serve our client now and I need an accredited secretary to do so."

"SIR!" Flanter shouted. He stepped forward. "I am of Dolderap's clan. Since he dishonored us by this act of treachery, may I stand at his side and ensure he pays for such disgrace in the traditional manner should he act dishonorably again?"

"You do your clan, proud, Chief Overseer. Do as you will. Expect my approval for your actions to appear in your pay voucher and on your permanent record."

"SIR!" Flanter shouted. He stepped lively to the position described.

"After the other goblin overseers left, Gultangk stated, "Flanter, Mr. Potter did draw his wand, but in my defense. His quick reflexes produced a shield that neatly saved my life from Dolderap's blade. Please read that into the minutes of the security log later today."

He turned to Harry. "Well, Potter, I owe you my life. Please allow me to ponder how I will pay that debt." Harry tried to interrupt, but Gultangk held up his hand. "No, Potter, it's not like a Wizard's life debt. It is more like a financial debt that cannot be paid back in gold. I will tell you later, how we have decided to proceed in this area. Because of my position, this is a matter for my clan to decide.

"Now, before the disturbance, I brought up the idea of a wizard being your Gringotts private advisor. Our internal laws make provision for it, but one has never been appointed. The Gringotts Cavern of Directors voted unanimously to approve the *possibility* of a human in that role over fifty years ago. Most of us like the idea, but we have never seen it work, so many goblins, most vocally Dolderap and Printdern's cliques and association, think it a bad idea to try it.

"As you might have guessed, we have not made it known to the Wizarding world that this can be possible. All would have asked for a human private advisor and we would have no control over the internal checks and balances that allow us to prove how scrupulously we protect the confidentiality and best interests of our Wizarding clients, as well as their Galleons.

"Many goblins have said we should never do this, as I've stated. My clan feels differently. So, I took a young man under my wing years ago after I interviewed him. He told me upfront he wanted to be the first successful human private advisor though he didn't know if that was a possibility. I suggested he go into the ancient and honorable profession of grave robbing. You humans call it 'curse breaking.'" He pressed a button that appeared on his desktop when his finger hovered inches over it. "This young wizard has succeeded admirably and has one of the finest records of a human in our employ."

A single sharp rap on the door was followed by it opening. Harry turned around.

"Hello, Mr. Potter. A profitable day to you."

Harry stood quickly and extended his hand. "Bill, equal profits to you."

The director interrupted. "Potter, it is proper in formal settings to call each other Mr. Potter and Mr. Weasley. Alone in Weasley's office you may do as you wish.

"I would like to recommend that you commission Weasley here to be your private advisor. He needs only a little more experience before he can guide you properly, but he cannot gain that experience until someone such as yourself accepts him as advisor. A which-comes-first-the-frog-or-the-spawn dilemma. If you take him on, I will oversee his final training myself. I will offer him up to three hours of my time each week at no charge for the first month to see if he meets your needs, and any time over that the first month or for the following three months I'll charge your account at half my going rate.

"I like the idea, Gultangk. Please consider that discount fulfillment of the debt for my efforts earlier today."

Dolderap inhaled sharply and growled.

"No, Potter. You don't know this, but you've just set the value of my life at a few hundred Galleons. I take no offense because I know none was meant." He turned to the other goblins in the room and said, "Flanter, do not hold this against Potter. You don't know this, but Potter calls me 'Gultangk' with my permission, as is right among associates, though he cannot take that place. I honor him because he first honored me and has never shown anything but courtesy. This was an innocent misstep on his part. I've not seen any witch or wizard genuinely consider us as equals or try as hard to understand and honor us as Potter here has."

"Your words are gold to my heart, Director Gultangk." Harry stated.

"You see, Flanter," Gultangk said smiling. "Have you ever met or even heard of a human trying to learn our ways with such sincerity?"

"No, Director. You speak the truth of Mr. Potter. I will inform my clan elders of these events."

"Potter, Advisor Weasley," Gultangk took on a solemn tone and Bill stood straighter and beamed at the title. "You must not tell any other human that Mr. Weasley is in this exact position. In public and in private with anyone but the two of you, you must state that Advisor Weasley is *assisting* me in advising you. Potter, you call him Mr. Weasley. Advisor Weasley, in front of any humans you will be addressed as Assistant Weasley by all goblins. That is a lateral move from Grave Robber. Were you unable to take that blow to your ego at this juncture, you would not be in this position.

"Goblins and humans are equal in their dislike of humility, but I trust you to understand and accept this necessity, to advance your personal situation and perhaps even advance the overall state of goblin-human relations."

Gultangk stared both wizards in the eyes during the moments of silence that followed. Finally he said, "Weasley?"

"Thank you, Director, for this opportunity," said Bill. "And thank you Mr. Potter for your trust. I shall endeavor to earn it everyday. Shall we adjourn to my office and discuss increasing your profits?"

They spent the next hour discussing Harry's four-pronged approach to investing. At the moment the bulk of his wealth existed in land or gold holdings. The gold was placed in Gringotts savings at the moment, giving a four percent annual return. Harry also owned considerable shares in a number of Wizarding companies, though he held no majority positions. Though no company was Dark per se, some of them from the Black side of the inheritances were questionable.

Harry asked Bill to first sell his shares in anything Bill himself wouldn't feel comfortable in owning - be it Dark, or a poor investment. Next, Bill was to find companies with smart, innovative management that were being held back from prospering by a lack of capital. That included start up opportunities that would be hard to find.

Because goblins were miners as well as bankers, they did invest in specific commodities in and around coal, oil, metals, and such. Harry asked that Bill place a certain amount into these futures trading, and pay the best goblin advisors and traders to help since no goblin at Gringotts would ever train a human in their understanding on these matters.

Finally Harry asked that Bill discuss with Gultangk joint goblin-Potter investing in Muggle stock exchanges.

"Harry, you'll make even better friends with Gultangk and his clique quite rapidly doing that. Wizarding laws prevent goblins from such investments unless a witch or wizard is an equal partner. Goblins feel sure they could profit greatly there, but are held back by us. It really rankles them."

"Gultangk politely told me that, Bill. As I understand it, Muggle stock exchanges can buy and sell quickly. If something came up I could sell in minutes if need be and have the funds available shortly thereafter. It's not like holding shares in magical companies."

"Essentially so. I'm guessing you don't want to know the intricate details of how that works."

"No, not at this time, and probably never. I like being involved on the level I am with George and Fred, and Clarinda. I'd like to help a number of other startups and Wizarding businesses needing funds to grow. That's where I'll be more involved. It's simpler than finances in the Muggle world."

Harry then spent the next half hour discussing his desire to spend money that may never produce a return in efforts to "fix" magical society. He asked that Bill contact Dumbledore and see if the Potter Educational Trust could help more students with their Hogwarts tuition, particularly Muggleborns and Half-bloods, but not excluding purebloods.

"I'm glad you feel that way, Harry. I was a Potter Trust Fund student, and so was Percy. Ron still is. Dad and Mum do well by us, but they would probably have had to home school Ron and Ginny had your family benevolence not been in place."



Harry displayed a worried look. "Ron doesn't know, does he?"

"No, and neither does Percy. I only know because I advise my parents now with their finances. When they won all those Galleons after your second year and took the whole family on vacation, I chastised them about spending it that way. I agreed with the basic decision after they explained about Ginny and the diary, but they should have saved a bit of it.

"Dad let me in on their finances after that, and I'm proud to say they are on a firmer financial foundation than they ever have been, not even counting the inheritance from Sirius. But that's how I know I was a Potter Student."

"I love Ron as a brother, Bill, but he has a volatile mindset when it comes to me and money."

"Believe me, Harry, all of us Weasleys know that. We've all experienced it, too, to a lesser degree. Ron's seen Charlie and me, and the twins succeed in our chosen endeavors, and even Percy, and he's glad for us. But he doesn't really have a clue about his future. He'd like to play professional Quidditch, but he's not that good and never will be, and he knows it. He's in this Paladin Program heading towards Auror training, but I don't think he sees himself as an Auror long-term. He's doing it to be prepared to fight in this war. Perhaps he'll like it and stay in the Corps, but I doubt it."

Harry pondered this. "Hmmm. Interesting observation."

Bill asked Harry what other directions he had for investing Potter funds in improving the Wizarding world. He told Bill about his new relationship with the solicitors Tonks & Tonks and what he hoped to accomplish. This provided Harry a great opportunity to kid Bill about dating their Auror daughter. Bill was obviously uncomfortable being teased and Harry didn't have the heart to press. Both of them thought Tonks was a special person, and Harry felt Bill might really like her a lot more than he was admitting out loud, or even to himself.

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That afternoon, Harry and Ginny performed a demonstration of Spell Mongering for Professor Dumbledore. The Headmaster could not see the slug of magic, but like Ginny, could see a vague outline of it. He was delighted to hear that Hagrid had seen the slug, and approved Harry's plans to take the Groundskeeper to Diagon Alley for a new wand. He even asked that his personal vault at Gringotts be charged for the wand as a gift to Hagrid in congratulations.

Dumbledore also approved the notion that Harry could Monger inside of Hogwarts following the Monger's Safety Rules, but suggested Harry and Ginny only do so in an unused classroom off of the Charms corridor. He stated that he'd put additional Safety wards up and would password protect the room for them.

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**Thursday, 15 August, 1996 - In the Wizengamot**

"--and that is why I wholeheartedly recommend the awarding of the Order of Merlin, Second Class to the esteemed forty-three year member of our Foreign Diplomatic Service, Ambassador Carver Westmoreland Glean."

Cornelius Fudge had spoken for over ten minutes describing all that Glean did to bring about the Vampire Negotiations in the first place. He then went on to tell of how Glean had handled the tricky negotiating with such skill and diplomacy. Finally Fudge outlined all Glean had done to convince the vampires, as well as the rest of the delegates to sign the treaty.

Glean, to his credit, sat there sweating profusely. He was only present in the Wizengamot chambers because the Minister Fudge had so ordered and no one else had refused him entry.

Fudge pointedly ignored Harry. Meanwhile Dolores Umbridge watched him as if daring Harry to speak up, and Florence Sheets stared daggers at Potter, Smith, Tiller, Bread and company. The three elder members in Harry's corner had contacted a number of their friends in the Assembly. Now there were nine of them in that right hand corner.

When Glean saw Harry in attendance his uneasy smile had vanished, and he had begun to perspire. He had grabbed Fudge's arm and spoken several quick words. Fudge had merely laid a hand on Glean's arm, spoken to him, and then invited the ambassador to sit beside his chair while Fudge spoke. Glean's uneasiness had increased even as Fudge extolled and exaggerated his role in the peace process.

Acting Chief Warlock Brownlea asked if there was any discussion on the matter before the vote was called. Smith had told Harry that this was fairly standard procedure when a treaty of such import was completed. However, most ambassadors were awarded an Order of Merlin, Third Class, not Second Class.

The terrible trio of Fudge, Umbridge, and Sheets probably expected Harry to protest. Or at least Isaiah Smith to do so.

Instead, Darance Bread took to the floor and began. He spoke of knowing Glean for years. They'd attended Hogwarts at the same time, but in different years and houses. Bread recounted warmly actions Glean had taken in his early days of service with the Foreign Diplomatic Service.

Then he said, "And all of this brings me to a matter of great pondering. Why would Carver Glean intentionally try to ruin the Vampire Negotiations after working so hard to arrange for the conclave to occur?"

Small outbreaks of quiet pandemonium popped up all over the chamber.

Brownlea asked, "Miss-TAH Bread. What do you mean with this accusation?"

"Chief Warlock, I have in my possession a copy of the *Actualites Magique*, France's newspaper of record for their magical nation. It has confirmed quotations from France's Magical Premier stating that Ambassador Carver Glean acted as if his aim were to deliberately *irritate* and insult the

vampires, and that even a recent graduate of any nation's Diplomatic Corps school would have known better. According to this eyewitness account our own Minister of Magic joined him in these sabotage efforts. It goes on to state that the vampires stayed at the negotiations only because Bulgaria's Acting Minister of Magic Oblansk pleaded with them, and promised to use every means possible to bring about a resolution to their concerns." "This is libelous," Fudge shouted, but his face showed fear. "That newspaper is a forgery, or a gross mistranslation at the very least."

"No," Bread answered calmly. "Here is the Gringotts seal of accuracy on the transcription. It goes on to state that you, Minister, couldn't have been more insulting to the vampire delegates if you had tried."

"Well," Fudge blustered. "The French have never liked me. They're envious of my stellar record as Minister of Magic." Alexius Tiller stood up. "Mister Fudge. I have here a copy of the German *Zauberer Nachrichten* also from the day after the completion of the successful negotiations. Their Magical Chancellor and their Ambassador to France both state that you two were most disruptive and nearly destroyed the chances for peace. Oh, and look, this newspaper also has Gringotts seals of accuracy for the translation."

"If I might add, Chief Warlock," Isaiah Smith stood and spoke. "I have Gringotts approved translations of the magical newspapers of Romania, Hungary, Russia, and the Ukraine. They all confirm what Ministers Bread and Tiller have said. Our Minister of Magic has lied to you for the last half hour."

"Chief Warlock," All heads turned from Isaiah Smith's corner to the special seating arranged for those few Ministry officials high enough to also be in the Wizengamot. Amelia Bones, Director of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement stood.

"I too, was at these negotiations," she said. "It saddens me to confirm that everything these foreign newspaper have printed, at least what these gentlemen have read here today, is true." Madame Bones sat back down.

"Mister Fudge," Brownlea said. "Do you want to withdraw your motion in light of these, er, revelations?"

Before Fudge could say anything, Florence Sheets stood up and shouted, "I second the motion to award Ambassador Glean with the order of Merlin, Second Class, and call for a vote by written ballot."

"I too, call for a secret ballot vote," stated Umbridge.

The ballots were passed out, marked, returned, and tabulated. Glean had his Order of Merlin. He still looked very nervous.

Smith told Harry that the odds were that the Fudge faction would carry the motion because of Umbridge's forty-seven votes. The only way to undercut support would be to shame those voting for it into not doing so. The secret ballot removed all shame from those voting the Fudge/Umbridge/Sheets

line.

The only good point, Smith would later point out, was that the measure passed with less than the typical vote count their enemies might carry in a less controversial issue. Their words and actions had helped.

The Acting Chief Warlock called for any final business.

Smith raised his hand and was given the floor. "Ambassador Glean, congratulations on your Order of Merlin." He walked slowly towards him, reaching into a robe pocket. "I have something for you too, Ambassador. This is an empty box of Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans. It's worthless, just like your Order of Merlin. I know your award is worthless, the delegates to the summit know this and so does everyone in this room. But that's not what's most important; what matters most is that *you* know it's worthless, too. Do remember that every time you put the other trinket on.

"That's all, Chief Warlock." Smith returned to his seat next to Harry.

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After the Wizengamot session, Harry Apparated back to the gates of Hogwarts and then walked to Hagrid's hut. He'd sent the half-giant a post by Hedwig to tell him of his intentions to take him to Ollivander's for another wand.

After surviving the obligatory slobber-fest with Fang, Harry accepted Hagrid's offer of tea and rock cakes. Harry dunked the rock cake into the tea; this made the cake chewable - barely - and actually brought out the sweetness of Hagrid's infamous treat.

"I just don' know, Harry. I've made out fine by my old wand bits in this umbruller here. I'm sorta fond of it actually."

"You can keep the umbrella, Hagrid, but you need a proper wand. I know that wand chose you way back, but it's broken, so it will never be what you need. Ollivander fits Auror's out with second wands all the time, so that means there is no *one wand* that will only work for you. I'm certain that another wand will work better than that one now."

"Ah, p'shaw. I never was no great shakes as a wizard back then. It was in third year that I had that bit o' trouble and was kicked out, but I was barely holding on in the classes when it happened. It's a waste o' time to go, and a waste of Dumbledore's money. Great man, Dumbledore, wanting to buy me a wand, it's just one more thing to add to the long list."

Harry knew he had to make this very clear if he were to convince his big friend that he *was* a capable wizard. Then it came to him.

"Hagrid, what happens if you try to harness a Thestral to the carriages when it's too young?"

"Well, it makes tha' p'ticuler thestral skittish 'bout 'em fer quite a long time afterwards. T'aint good for the other thestrals either to see a colt actin' up about it." "Okay, now why don't they let nine year olds

into Hogwarts?"

"Dunno, Harry. Guess the tykes woo'nt be ready fer it. Not mature enuff. What you goin' on about?"

"One last question, Hagrid. When did you stop growing?"

"Oh, I dunno. I suppose I wis twenty-five er thereabouts."

"Regular witches and wizards stop growing around seventeen or eighteen. I discussed this with Dumbledore, and he agrees. You started Hogwarts too soon. Giants grow up over a longer time period that we do, and you probably weren't magically mature enough to start Hogwarts at eleven. You were always behind your classmates, Hagrid, but that's because you shouldn't have started school until you were older--thirteen or fourteen, I guess.

"Hagrid, many powerful witches and wizards can't see a raw slug of magic. Godric Gryffindor and Salazar Slytherin couldn't. Dumbledore himself can only see a vague outline of it, so not seeing the raw slug doesn't mean you aren't powerful. However, if someone *can* see the raw slug of magic, it always means that they *are* pretty powerful.

"You could see it, Hagrid. You can do magic with a broken wand embedded in an umbrella and you aren't even touching the bits of wand. That takes a lot of power. You, my friend, are a powerful wizard, we just have to buy you a new wand matched to serve you, and train you to use it."

Harry looked at his watch. "Can we hitch up a couple of Thestrals to the carriage and go to Diagon Alley? I guess you haven't received an Apparation license, and I don't think there is a fireplace big enough for you to Floo from."

"Don't need one, Harry. Dumbledore's give me a perm'nent round-trip Portkey. 'Hit goes to the backroom of the Leaky Cauldron an' back te me hut to use fer Hogwarts business. 'Twas plannin' on goin' soon enuff anyway. I need to check on a new creature I've ordered for N.E.W.T. Care of Magical Creatures class. We could go do that too and then it 'twould be Hogwarts business."

Harry developed a guilty look on his face. "About your classes this year, Hagrid. I... I'm not... not going to take it. I'm sorry, but--"

"Codswallop, Harry. No one hardly ever takes N.E.W.T.s Creatures unlessin' they plan on a career workin' with 'em in some way; never 'spected to have you there, lessin' you took it fer your Auror e-lective, and a mighty few do that, I tell you. Don't feel bad about that."

Harry's face showed his relief. Hagrid found the Portkey under a bag of boarhound chow, and they were in Diagon Alley in no time.

The bell chimed. The door closed. In an instant they heard the man before they turned and saw him. "Ah, Rubeus Hagrid. Sixteen inch, oak, rather bendy. Do you still have the parts, Hagrid?" Harry chuckled at the sudden appearance of the elderly wand maker. Harry had spent several days helping Mr. Ollivander take inventory during the weeks the rising third year had stayed at the Leaky Cauldron after blowing up Aunt Marge. During that time Ollivander had told Harry the story of his family and

how Ollivander's had been founded in 382 BC. The silvery-eyed wizard was a kindly, but very reserved man. Harry knew the sudden appearance in front of his customers and the trademark announcing of their names and wand type was all part of the Ollivander mystique and shopping experience.

As was common with many, it unnerved Hagrid.

"Er, yes sir, Mr. Ollivander. I've kept 'em as a me-mento, so to speak, er, never did anythin' untoward with 'em. No sir. Not hardly that is."

Ollivander peered into Hagrid eyes. "Yes, well it is a good thing, now that you've been cleared of that travesty of justice and can resume using magic. Albus Dumbledore has asked that I charge his account for the purchase, and... I wonder..."

This pause seemed to make Hagrid even more nervous.

"Mr. Potter," the wand maker snapped out. "Do you remember the fighting mace wands we inventoried three years ago?"

As Ollivander walked briskly into the aisles, Harry replied, "Yes sir. You said a few wizards who also fought in the armies of King Alfred the Great commissioned maces with magical cores back in the ninth century, wasn't it? None of them ever could raise a spark out of a one of them if I remember your story correctly."

"Yes, Mr. Potter. Widrey Ollivander was fascinated with the idea. He made nearly two-dozen of them and didn't sell a one." He walked out with seven oversized boxes.

"Your hands were smaller back then, Hagrid, but if you recall I stated that I'd have to make a custom wand for you once you reached your full maturity. We might need to go to a custom-made wand now, but I'd like you to try these first. A wand that waits for centuries before it chooses its Wizard quite often portends great and wonderful things."

"Er..." Hagrid said.

"Give this one a try, Hagrid," Harry said as he opened a box for his big friend.

"Your last wand had a dragon heartstring. These seven were all made with dragon heartstring cores," explained Ollivander.

"I likes dragons," said Hagrid.

"Oh, really?" said Ollivander who winked at Harry - much to Harry's amazement.

Two of the mace-wands gave off a weak spark or two in Hagrid's oversized hands, but the other five did nothing.

Hagrid dropped the last one with a dab of disgust and said, "I knew it was no use."

"Mr. Ollivander," Harry asked quickly, "just because Hagrid likes dragons doesn't mean he has to have a dragon core now, does it? How often do you fit out an Auror with a second wand that matches the core of the first?"

"I was about to encourage Hagrid along these same lines," Ollivander said. "Three in ten Aurors do not find their second wands match their first wands in anyway. I'll bring out the others."

"He was a Gryffindor, Mr. Ollivander." Harry looked at Hagrid and then said, "No, he *is* a Gryffindor."

Hagrid smiled at that and Harry continued, "I bet a phoenix feather core chooses him." "Interesting theory, Mr. Potter, although that never entered into any of my deliberations before, but let's start with the only phoenix core mace-wand, shall we? It took two phoenix feathers from different donor birds to fit into this twenty-six and a half inch, holly mace-wand - same wood and core type as yours, Mr. Potter. Well... give it a wave, Hagrid."

The mace-wands were over twice as long as most wands, and nearly three times as thick. They all had ribbed handles and a pointed knob head at the end. The phoenix cored mace-wand responded to Hagrid immediately, with a gout of red sparks and a not a few golden sparks.

"Oh, Hagrid," Harry said with genuine delight, "golden sparks. That's a very good sign, isn't it, Mr. Ollivander?"

"Very good indeed, Hagrid. Albus Dumbledore told me of young Mr. Potter's theory that you are a powerful wizard. I've seen more golden sparks than you just displayed, but not from very many other witches or wizards in my many years here in this shop. Like I told Mr. Potter on his first visit here, I shall expect great things from you, Rubeus Hagrid."

Even with the loose clothes Hagrid wore, the gentle half-giant was about to burst several buttons in his delight. A tear also winked at one eye.

"I wish me wee dad was here; he'd be sa proud."

"That he would, Mr. Hagrid." For the first time in Harry's memory Mr. Ollivander used the word 'mister' before Hagrid's name. "Your father, Rudrick was proud of you on the day he brought you here, and he is proud of you today, I am sure. Welcome back, Mr. Hagrid."

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Harry and Hagrid made their way back to the gamekeeper's hut, and Harry offered to help tutor Hagrid with any magic he wanted to learn.

"Thanks, Harry," Hagrid said. "I'm sure I'll be taking you up on that, but first I want to see what all comes back to me."

"Sure thing, Hagrid. Just let me know if I can help. Well, I guess I'll leave you to it then," Harry said with a nod to his friend. He was reaching for the doorknob when Hagrid stopped him.

"Oh, Harry, I almost forgot," Hagrid said as he began rummaging through a bureau. "Your post about today started me a'thinkin'. I thought about you and me dad and you and the Wizengamot and then I remembered sumthin'..." During this last bit of conversation the gentle half-giant pillaged a table in one corner of his hut stacked with items and debris of all types. "Surely I couldna found it and lost it all in one day. Ah, here it is."

He took out an old and faded piece of parchment. He smoothed it out and set it on his dinner table, smoothing it once again and placing a teacup on one end and a teapot on the other.

"It's worthless, but back when me dad took up w' me mum, he knew I'd never be allowed in the Wizengamot. Hagrids were a Three-Thirty-Three Family, but my dad's great-grandad sold the Right to Rule for four generations. I'd've been a Wizengamot member iffen me mum... well, you know."

Hagrid stood up taller than he had been and sighed. "Me dad loved me mum sumthin' fierce, but in the end, his love and mine t'weren't enuff." Hagrid paused and sighed again.

"Anyway, me dad had talked to your granddad, Benedict about buying the Right to Rule offa him even though me dad couldn't use it himself. Nothin' ever came of it, but here's the contract my dad had the solicitors draw up, all legal like. I thought you might like to have it just as a cur'osity. Or toss it, your choice."

The parchment had all of the appropriate ribbons and marks of the transfer contract Harry saw signed in the Wizengamot several sessions earlier.

Harry studied the document for a bit, and then stepped towards a window for better light.

"Hagrid, look at this. Did you read the fine print?"

"Na, too confusin'"

Harry said, "This passage here: I'll read it; tell me what you think about it.

*"I, Rudrick Hagrid, as the last pureblood Hagrid, do sign over the entitlement to the Hagrid Family Right to Rule to Benedict Potter, for the sum of one hundred Galleons. Since generations are not aligned and ages vary in this time of political unrest, I sign over the purchase of said entitlement to the Hagrid Family Right to Rule to Benedict, or his heir, or his heir's heir."*

"Hagrid, that sounds like I could buy the Right to Rule from you even now, since I'm Benedict Potter's heirs, heir. There was no time limit set on this document, just the generational limitation. He signed it and I can sign and pay you to activate the contract. I'll have my solicitors check it out to make sure I do it properly. Do you know who has the Hagrid vote now?"

"No, me dad never said, but I can tell you he didn't like him one bit. If that blighter's son or grandson was anything like him, whoever he was, you'd be doin' me an' me dad a favor in takin' it back from



him."

"If I can, Hagrid, I'll be sure to pay you whatever one hundred Galleons in 1921 are worth today."

"Keep your money, Harry, just get that Right to Rule away from that family, whoever they are. Even if it's someone you like now, I just don't want them to have it, for my dad's sake."

"No, Hagrid, I have to pay you what's right so it will be properly legal. I can't have it fail on a technicality."

~\*~\*~

## **Friday, 16 August, 1996**

Harry and Ginny were waiting at the main doors to the castle for Hermione and Ron, when Cho approached them tentatively. It was a little uncomfortable at first, but the three were soon enjoying a friendly conversation about how they'd spent their summers. Harry broke the ice by congratulating Cho on casting a Corporeal Patronus earlier in the summer, and Ginny wholeheartedly agreed with him. The conversation then turned to Cho's work at Woodhenge, working on recently discovered runes tablets. All three were relieved to find that any trace of awkwardness was gone when they parted.

Hermione and Ron came running up just as Cho left the two. Harry's two best friends had just finished a Paladin visit, and as was typical they were hyper from residual potions, speaking very rapidly, and utterly without their usual inhibitions.

"Harry," Ron exclaimed, "that was Cho Chang. What were you doing talking to her? Have you been leading my sister on this summer?"

Ginny was stunned and turned to see Harry's brow crease. What Hermione said next didn't help.

"I told you, Ron, we can't talk to Harry about his feelings for Ginny, it will scare him off." She whispered this, but it was loud enough so that anyone with normal hearing could make it out quite plainly.

Harry's face went blank and he walked off quickly, heading back into the castle towards the portal that would take him back to St. Simons.

Ginny pulled her wand and almost hexed the two of them, but thought better of it in spite of her extreme frustration. After all it was the potions talking. Her self-control was not without limits, however.

"If you two Palatwits don't make yourselves scarce this instance, I'm going to slap you both into next week - so scram! Start running, NOW!"

With that Ginny ran after Harry. She caught him halfway up the stairs.

Ginny knew she was on the razor's edge - she'd hoped to reach an understanding with Harry before school started, but she had also hoped for an opportunity to frame things perfectly. Now, thanks to Ron and Hermione, she had to seize the moment and do it in half the time she'd planned originally, without a script. She waited until she caught up to Harry, exercising yet more self-control to not shout out his name. From the set of his shoulders Ginny thought he'd heard her coming and she was encouraged that Harry didn't speed up to evade her. However, he didn't slow down either.

Ginny was grateful for the running she'd done this summer. She wasn't winded at all, but still took the time to walk silently beside Harry for a while, letting her heart calm. She thought it would be best to wait until Harry spoke first, if she could restrain herself. Finally he stopped and looked out over the balcony from the seventh floor to the corridor below.

Still, they both said nothing.

"This isn't fair to you, Ginny," Harry finally stated. Ginny remained silent.

"It's not fair. You're a pretty girl, and I'm sure that there are loads of guys who want to ask you out -- working with me and hanging out with me will only scare them off."

Ginny still didn't speak.

"Dumbledore told me that Hermione, Ron, and the rest of them were going to have extra potent potions for the last Paladin visits this week, to make up for the ground lost due to Aberration Day. He explained it when he said that I didn't have to help with any more of the visits. Only one more tomorrow and one on Sunday, and then they are off them for good. Did he tell you, too?"

Ginny didn't look directly at Harry, but when she saw out of the corner of her eye that he'd looked her way, she nodded.

"Of course he did," Harry said. "Do you have to go on any more visits, or are you finished helping out also?"

"Sunday with Kevin Entwhistle," she said, still looking out over the balcony.

Long moments passed.

"Actually, you're the one who's getting the short broomstick here, Harry," she said, breaking her silence. "How do you mean?"

"You're my friend, I like spending time with you," she explained. "On top of that, we're working on Spell Mongery, which will probably put me on the fast track to a Mastery in Charms, plus we're working on a business together with the StudyBooks, which entails yet more of your time."

She stopped and turned to look at him. To Ginny's considerable relief Harry turned towards her. She knew she was walking a thin line with her next words, but thought the goal was worth the price - however it came out in the end.

"You've not said it, Harry, but I think you've sworn off anything resembling the usual girl-guy relationship until after you've dealt with our very mutual un-friend, Tom. Oh, you might ask a girl to decorate your arm for a special occasion if you had to, like a ball, but I can't see you taking some sweet young witch into town on a Hogsmeade weekend when we both know that's as good as drawing a target on her pretty little backside."

He nodded.

"The only reason Hermione and I can spend any time with you at all is because we're already on every list there is; we're both targets in our own rights. So now, people look at you and Hermione and you and me, and try to figure out which one's the friend, and which one's the girlfriend, and some girls see that as a challenge, thinking that they can snatch you out of our platonic clutches, since you really won't look like you're dating either of us.

"I know you hate that type of attention, so as I said, it's not fair to you."

Harry looked at her with that penetrating glare he'd use on occasions. Ginny willed herself not to blush, and she succeeded. He had the faintest hint of an enigmatic smile, she thought, but whatever happened, happened, and there was nothing to do but look back at him.

"You really don't have a crush on me anymore, do you?" He asked.

For the first time that Ginny had recalled all summer, Harry blushed from embarrassment.

She smiled knowingly.

"That crush died by the end of your fourth year. The boy I had a crush on wasn't the boy I became friends with last year, and I think we've become very good friends this summer."

"I like being your friend, Ginny."

"Thanks, I do too, Harry. You can rest assured that the crush is history. Now, I will tell you in all fairness, that I still think you're quite fanciable, and if you were to kill Tom tomorrow, I'm sure that I could wrap my head around the notion that you could be something other than a guy-pal, but that's in the future. Even then the odds are that we would date once or twice, and then decide to remain just friends."

"What?"

Ginny smiled. Harry had said 'What?' too quickly and too loudly, and with just a hint of desperation.

"I said that *the odds are* against there being a foul-tempered redhead under your roof as a permanent fixture. Look at it this way. You know your father and mother married almost right out of Hogwarts, and so did Mum and Dad. Those are the two main marriages you know of and your only two examples. But the fact is, most people don't marry right out of Hogwarts. None of the Gryffindors from Fred and George's year did, and neither did anyone from Percy's year. Only about one in twenty Hogwarts students marry the summer after leaving Hogwarts.

"Dating someone doesn't mean you're going to end up with them forever - look at your mum and dad - Remus says that James Potter worked his way through a pack of girls before your mother finally gave him the time of day. Look at us: I've dated three guys and you've been out with two different girls. Life is funny; you could go professional as a Seeker, date a hundred girls, and then end up falling in love with Parvati, marrying the first girl you ever dated."

At this Harry's brow furrowed again. *Time for the kill*, Ginny thought.

"We're good friends, Harry. I like you a lot, and I could fall in love with you without a lot of effort. I'd like to flatter myself that you find me agreeable; I'm not my mother when it comes to her temper or her smothering ways. You're not your father when it comes to being an annoying prat. We're very compatible, but then, so are you and Hermione to a degree," she concluded.

"Not that much between me and Hermione," Harry observed. "She'd have to stop bossing me around. Ron, on the other hand, seems to like it."

"We're compatible," Ginny repeated with a smile, "but we're not perfect. Watching Mum and Dad has taught me that love grows, but you have to intentionally feed it and water it. You just don't say, 'I love you,' and consider that enough. But enough on that. We've got years before either one of us is seriously in the market for a life-mate. You can ask me questions about that then.

"But back to what may or may not happen, Harry. We're friends - who might, or might not date one another in the future, but even if we do, that doesn't mean much; we'll just have to wait and see - maybe it's really going to be Parvati after all."

"Spare me, Ginny." Harry laughed and Ginny laughed in reply. Behind her laugh she thought that this talk had gone better than she'd expected. She'd never thank Ron and Hermione for opening their potion-addled mouths, but for an impromptu performance, this chat would do.

"I just want to make sure," she said, "that we remain friends like we are now, whatever happens. Just don't marry a jealous, paranoid witch, okay? Oops! That would mean that you'd have to scratch Parvati."

They both laughed, and once again Ginny felt more relief.

Ginny looked at her watch. It was less than twenty minutes since Ron and Hermione had upset Harry.

"Come on," she said. "We can join them for three circuits of the lake before their hour is up."

Harry and Ginny were warming up when Hermione and Ron rounded the lake and approached. Harry was sitting, stretching out his calf muscles and was about to stand, when Ginny pushed him over and said, "Race you!" She speed off laughing and Harry shouted out that she was a cheater.

Ginny caught up with the two while Harry was still over thirty feet away.

Ron and Hermione both tried to apologize to her. She just cut them off with a warning, "Don't say another word. We'll talk later. Harry is fine right now but you'll upset him again if you say anything. If

you mention it in front of him *at all*, I'll show you what happens when you apply certain hexes to sensitive body openings."

Harry quickly caught up. He swatted Ginny on the arm, passing all three of them at a blistering pace. Ginny shouted and raced after him. The other two couldn't keep up since they had been at it long enough to begin tiring.

As they settled into a ground-chewing pace, Ginny ran right beside Harry. She knew he could run much faster, so she took his shortened stride as evidence Harry had shrugged off the insensitive words that had sent him off in a funk earlier. She'd run a risk, in making a case that she too wanted to wait until after defeating Tom. The truth was that if Harry stopped right then and asked her to date him, she would agree faster than words could be spoken.

Ginny's mind was made up, so she would stick to her plan of being there when and if Harry wanted a more serious relationship for any reason. It was a gamble, but no riskier than any other strategy she'd considered. And none of the other plans seemed to have any hope of success.

Harry looked over and smiled at her with the same smile he'd used over the last few weeks when they'd become close friends. Ginny returned his smile.

"It could be better, but it could also be a lot worse," she thought.

~\*~\*~

Harry had had plenty of practice at keeping a neutral face. As they ran together, he maintained an expression that he thought looked like he was just enjoying the late summer view.

Inside he ran over and over in his head the idea that maybe putting his life on hold until after he was done with Voldemort was a bad idea. It was painful to admit, if only to himself, that he had been counting on Ginny's crush to keep her out of circulation, to save her for him. This admission bothered him, because Harry knew it wasn't fair to her at all.

Ginny had a right to fancy whomever she chose. What right did he have to assume she'd be there, waiting for him in a few years? It really irritated him that he'd been thinking that deep down.

On further thought, Harry realized that if he'd expressed an interest in her earlier, say after Ginny had broken things off with Dean, she probably wouldn't have been *infected* with his determination to not date until everything with Riddle was finished.

And since when, Harry thought, had *he* given up on that idea?

Harry knew he'd spend several hours that night on his treadmill and stationary bicycle pondering that question.

But all he'd really think about for the most part would be Ginny.

~\*~\*~

At the end of the hour long run, they slowed to a brisk walk, and Hermione suggested walking around the perimeter of the castle proper. This sparked a brief discussion which revealed that none of them had actually been around the back of Hogwarts. It wasn't surprising as any outdoor school activities took place towards the Quidditch pitch, the lake, or the paddocks, all of which were easily accessible from the front doors of the castle.

They walked on until the four came to a square-ish building. It was obviously new, made of stone similar to that of the castle so it fit in, but the style was definitely different. Curiosity caused them to knock.

"Hello! Anybody here?" At the knock the door shifted ajar, but no one initially answered Hermione's call from the outside.

Then from behind a set of unusual cabinets they heard, "Hello there," And a woman of perhaps mid thirties popped up. "Sorry I look like this. I just connected the generator and changed the oil in it. Stand right there and I'll be with you--"

Her gaze went from Harry to Ron and Ginny, then to Hermione for a second and back to the Weasleys.

"Stay there, please." She seemed a bit excited and Ron made the typical snort he gave when someone else met Harry for the first time. "Just let me wash my hands." After several moments she rejoined them.

As she walked to them she said, "If you're Harry Potter, then," she walked past Harry, grabbed Ron's hand and said, "you must be Ronald Weasley. Do you prefer Ronald or Ron? And this must be your sister? The resemblance is striking- Oh, *where* are my manners? I'm just so excited.

"I'm Pricilla Newcastle, and I bet you can tell I'm not from these parts." She had a decidedly American accent.

Newcastle was about as tall as Harry and very slender, willowy. She had a full head of white-blond, almost Malfoy-esque hair, done up in a bun, from which many strands were falling out. She was neither pretty nor plain - the deciding factor was her grin. When she smiled her whole face lit up, starting with her blue eyes. It cast a delightful beauty about her face. When Newcastle frowned, which they would see later, she created a scrunched, pinched look that drew all of her features to the center, towards her nose. It was an odd contrast, but fortunately she was a jovial woman who usually smiled even when concentrating on something difficult.

"I'm Assistant Head of Information Technology at the Madison Academy of Witchcraft and Wizardry in Madison, Wisconsin. That's the school for Wizarding America, the Hogwarts of the USA as it were, because it was modeled closely on many of Hogwarts' fine traditions."

Remembering seeing a sign for the Salem Institute at the World Cup, Harry said, "I thought the Salem Institute was the Wizarding school in America."

"It was started as a school and was for a while, thus the name, but it's only been a historical society for over two hundred years now," said Newcastle.

Hermione spoke up in an agitated manner, "Ms. Newcastle--"

"That's 'Miss' Newcastle, dear. Like here in England, we female magicals in America don't mind telling folk if we're married or not. But thanks for trying. What's your question?"

Now slightly flustered as well as agitated, Hermione continued, "Miss Newcastle, the phrase 'information technology' indicates computers, but you can't use computers in magical society, they--"

Newcastle's laughter interrupted Hermione. "We American magicals always think of those of you here in Great Britain as the 'can'ts,' where as we're the 'cans.' We maintain a closer tie to primaries and modern inventions. Oh, I'm sorry you call them 'Muggles,' but we call them 'primaries.' The first magical folks in America thought the name 'Muggle' sounded a bit like an insult, sort of like 'muddling through' or 'muddy it up.'

"But to answer the question that's about to kill you: you can't run computers under any circumstances inside your castle, and you can't have a lot of magicals around your computers, if they are unprotected.

"So, when this computer lab is up and fully operational, there will be no more than ten of you in the room at one time, and each of you will have to be tested to see what level of protective clothing you'll need to wear."

Ron said, "Will computers harm us, Miss Newcastle?"

"No, *you* could harm a computer, though. This device over here," she walked towards a wood inlaid metal cabinet about six feet high and four feet wide and deep. "I have just hooked this up to the generators, which we've placed outside of the wards of Hogwarts. They have their own specially designed wards to protect them out there."

She picked up a piece of oddly shaped material that looked sort of like piping. It was about twelve inches in diameter outside, and four inches at its inside diameter. The piece was shattered, and the cross section held a variety of different colored materials.

"This is called electron-shielding. I won't go into all of the different materials, spells, and charms put on it, but you can tell we've been generous with the lead and synth-gold. All of this goes together to create a null void between the layers that blocks the interference your magical resonances create. When you're at the computers themselves, we cannot create a complete null void, so you have to wear varying degrees of protective clothing to stop leakage. This size of null void shielding is for power cables. It's also made in sheets for placing computer cases in protective barriers. And there's a transparent version of it for monitor fronts.

"Which of you have primaries, er, you call them Muggle family members you visit or stay with?" When Harry and Hermione nodded she continued, "Yes, I remember your story, Harry, and you

Hermione?"

"My parents are Muggles, or, primaries, Miss Newcastle. I think my dad will like that better, he's never liked the word 'Muggle' for the reasons you gave. Anyway, we have plenty of electrical and electronic devices at home. I even use a computer there and nothing happens to interfere."

"Please call me Cilla. I'm not a professor here, though I will be teaching computer classes and search techniques."

Ginny said, "Search techniques? Do computers get lost? Are they particularly hard to find?"

Cilla and Hermione almost kept their smiles from hurting her feelings. "No, Ginny. Many computers around the world are hooked together in a big confederation to share information. It is a network of computers we've started calling the Internet in the last few years. There is so much information out there that it is quite often hard to find what you're looking for. Some of our brightest minds have helped primaries develop a way to search for what you want. We helped in the creation of Altavista, the most powerful search engine in common use now. We call them search *engines* but they are just computer programs running on very powerful computers.

"But Altavista became too powerful for us to continue with. When those of us in the magical world in America help a company, we don't want to be involved with the biggest player in the field; that draws too much attention to us. So we stick to the higher priced more innovative route until a clear industry leader emerges, then we use the innovative and higher priced though cost effective third or fourth player in that field.

"Anyway, that's a little bit about how those of us in the magical community interact with primaries. Harry, what's your experiences with electronic devices?"

"I've never affected anything, but then I'm not allowed near... well, I did go near my cousin Dudley's computer once this summer, and the monitor went all screwy, and he said that the, how'd he put it? I thought it strange. He said that 'the window locked up,' or something like that, but they always lock every window except the one in my bedroom that Hedwig, my owl, uses.

Newcastle smiled, "Dudley probably said, 'Windows.' It's an operating system that is rather impossible for magicals to work with, it's difficult for everyone, but it is the industry leader, more's the pity.

"Let's test each of you for your protective level and then go look at our computers."

Cilla Newcastle flipped a switch on the back of the machine's cabinet. Several lights flashed and a small green screen attempted to light up, but then a major snapping sound occurred and everything went blank and silent.

"I should have guessed," said the technical expert. "Harry, you're too powerful for it to even test without initial protection. Here." She drew out a heavy black cloak with what looked like stiff panels on it, particularly the front.



She helped him into it and went back to turn on the device. The exact start up procedure, including the shut down occurred.

"All of you, put these on, and Harry you go outside for a moment."

Harry did as he was told and in less than a minute Newcastle called him back in. As he walked in, even from over fifteen feet away, the device snapped off again.

"Dear me," Cilla said, "I've read about this but never seen it. Wait right there; they arrived yesterday."

She left the room and came back in a minute dragging a heavy crate. Harry immediately cast a Featherweight charm on the crate and she thanked him, but asked him not to perform any more magic in that building. She placed the lightened crate on the table. She loosened four clasps and opened the lid. She had trouble trying to remove something from the case and Harry went to her aid.

"This, Harry, take it out and put it on. And I'll get the other stuff out."

Harry drew out another cloak of similar design as the first, except that it did have a red fringe on it. It also weighed three times as much as the first cloak she'd given him, and instead of small panels about a half inch thick on it, This cloak had major panels 6" x 10" on it, and they were overlaid like chain mail.

About the time Harry pulled this over his head and snapped the clasps shut properly, Cilla handed him what looked like a motorcycle helmet with a neck skirt around it and a pair of gauntlets for his hands. They had the palms and fingertips cut out but they were very heavy anyway.

She said, "We'll have to get a pair of glove liners for you and a special armored keyboard and mouse. They'll be here in a few weeks. Just don't point you hands towards the computer when we go in, if we go in. Let's test you first. Please stand."

Ron asked, "Computers have mice? Is that how they work, mice on treadmills?"

Newcastle, Hermione, and Harry chuckled, and Cilla said, "A mouse is computer parlance for what you might call a pointing device, and before you compare it to a wand, just hold on, I'll show you soon."

Harry's heavy cloak went all of the way down to the floor. He stood about ten feet from the measuring device. Cilla Newcastle turned on the machine and it came up and did not snap off.

"Walk slowly towards this, Harry, and stop if you see this monitor line start to squiggle."

Harry made it to within five feet before the line on the green screen began to curve and a speaker somewhere on the device started chirping.

"Okay, stop there. This device is more sensitive than the computers but you still need to stay behind the yellow line dressed like this. I don't know if we will be able to get you to a computer to work on

or not. You may just have to rely on your friend's for information. At least the monitors are all 21" and I'll change the resolution to make the characters bigger so you can read them from five feet away. I never expected a student to do this, few adults do."

Harry said, "I didn't do this to Dudley's, and I got closer than I did outside, unprotected."

Newcastle explained, "You weren't in a magical environment at Dudley's place, and how much younger were you than now, several years at least I'd say?"

"Just two months ago."

Ron said, "But, Harry, remember you got a jolt-"

Harry gave him an angry look and Ron stopped in mid sentence. Newcastle looked on askance, but Hermione drew her attention.

"Miss Newcastle."

"Cilla, please."

"All right, Cilla, why don't you need protective covering?"

"Well, if a magical grows up around electronic devices, their body just seems to adjust to *not* disturbing such equipment too much. When they reach maturity they may gain enough power in spite of that environment to need some protection.

"In my case, I'm a Squib."

All four students gasped at the matter of fact statement.

"That's another thing we American do better than you Brits. And it perturbs me a little, but you don't know any better. There are a lot more Squibs out there than you think. You here hide them, shun them, and hustle them off to your Muggle schools like they are mentally deficient or something. It's a waste, a crying shameful waste.

"Our foremothers and forefathers in magical America felt differently, thank God, and we fought a revolution with your Ministry of Magic several times before they accepted our independence. It was over primaries, Half-bloods, Squibs, and Muggle-borns as you call them.

"Do you know that Squibs historically score better in all non-wand magic subjects and theoretical testing than magicals at the Madison Academy? We do better at Potions too, except when you have to cast a spell or charm during brewing. We also interface with the primaries in industry and business more readily, so we've formed the backbone of our successful economy. We Squibs are quite often the breakthrough geniuses in American research and development labs, particularly in the smaller, more innovative companies. Remember, we avoid the big industry leaders to avoid too much attention."

Newcastle stopped abruptly, took a deep breath, and exhaled slowly. "I'm sorry. Some idiot at the Three Broomsticks last night chatted me up for a while - a good-looking guy or I wouldn't have let him talk for thirty seconds. When he found out I was a Squib, he got all angry and loud, mouthing off. Your Hagrid came over and threatened to drag him by his ears through a keyhole. Not that I needed protecting, I have my ways, but I do appreciate chivalry.

"But you guys are Paladins, or at least three of you." Ginny looked a bit displeased by that, but Cilla did not see it. "You just don't know what we know, or haven't seen what we've seen. I'm sorry for getting on my high horse."

Ron said, "What horse?"

Newcastle chuckled, "You have to not be so literal if you are going to be around Americans. We have a lot of expressions and analogies that aren't exactly what we mean, but say what we mean."

"Are we going to be around more Americans, Cilla?" Hermione asked.

"Yes. Twelve of our finest rising sixth-years are coming here to join your Paladin Program. They're taking the potions and going through the program right now at the Madison Academy. They call themselves the Eagle Squadron after the U. S. Army Air Corps fighter pilots that fought for you in the Battle of Britain in WWII, before America entered the war."

By this time they'd walked downstairs to a large room about 50' x 100' and it was only barely lit. Newcastle turned on a light switch, something the two Weasleys were only vaguely familiar with, and their guide said, "Near null lighting. It's a variation on neon lights but instead of creating electronic interference they actually suck up stray magical power. Don't you love it when I use technical phrases like 'suck up?'" She chuckled, and so did Harry and Hermione.

After examining the overhead lighting, Hermione finally looked at the computers. She exclaimed, "Macintoshes!"

Hermione's joy knew no bounds. "My parents first bought Macs to run their dental practice *ages* ago. I've used a Mac since I was eight, I think it was. Are these special Macintoshes for the magical world?"

Cilla Newcastle said, "No, Macintoshes arrive wizard proof for most wizards if no more than two or three get near it in a normal house. They are just better-built and more reliable than the Windows PCs." Harry barely understood what was being said, at least about half of it. Ginny and Ron were completely lost.

"The entire idea for the Macintosh line of computers was for witches and wizards to be able to use them in small groups and for larger groups to use them with proper shielding. Watch it, Harry, please stay behind the yellow line." There were five-foot radius yellow circles on the floor around each computer. "Sorry, hon, we can't have you blowing them up, can we? And please, I forgot to tell you, in addition to keeping your hands covered, you can never take your wand out in here. You'll wreck the place. Sorry. I'll acquire a larger screen and an armored mouse and keyboard just for you. Maybe that

will do. Give me two weeks, tops."

She turned back to Hermione, "Where was I? Oh, yes. Steve set out to make a computer for magicals, and got the best Squib minds in the electronics fields to help him."

"Steve Jobs is a Squib?" Hermione asked.

"He's a wizard, hon. He's the mastermind, but most of the design crew were Squibs, or primaries that have a life time association with the magical world.

"Of course, Steve did rather too well. They started out pricing them way too high to keep most primaries away, but they were still very superior to the DOS machines that he competed with. It's a hard and fast rule - no wizard-based technology company can lead the field. So Steve had to leave and let someone with a non-magical mind take the helm for a few years. Seems a terrible waste what they did to the Apple Computer Company.

"They even had to send several of our Squibs over to help get that pathetic Windows up and running. Billions spent on something called OS-2, and you'd wonder if they had a brain in their classical little heads there at Microsoft. We call them 'MightySoft.' Now *those* were muddling, muddy-headed Muggles!

"Finally Steve secretly became associated again with Apple a few months ago, and let me show you." Newcastle turned on the nearest Macintosh and after a few seconds a blue screen appeared. Hermione squealed with delight sending Ron for his wand before Cilla stopped him.

"You've got OS X! I've read about it, but it's not due for several years."

"It's one of the benefits of being a wizard with a personal computer, if it's a Mac, that is. The Madison Academy is an Alpha-W site. That's before a beta site, Hermione, and the W stands for Wizarding of course. The base core technology of Steve's Mach operating and compiler systems is now in Alpha-W testing. Even with bugs in it, if a wizard or witch is at the keyboard it starts up in a self-correcting mode. It's a debugging thing. Run a classical or Squib programmer next to a magical with an identical machine with the same code, and you can make comparisons on screen about what should and shouldn't be.

"This is the UNIX based Mach operating system that Steve developed when he was away from Apple. This is only the second porting to the Macintosh, but it's stable enough for you to use it, but not me though. I still use the beta versions of OS 8." Newcastle sighed with a longing look at the screen booting "OSX\_A\_W\_v2."

After several more minutes, Newcastle noticed Ginny, Ron, and Harry were a bit bored. "I'm sorry you guys, I really had hoped to get to know you better ever since I saw your name on the list of Paladins."

Harry polished off his I'm-tired-of-being-adored look, and Ron gave him his doesn't-suck-too-much-to-be-you look.



***Disclaimer---*** *What belongs to J K Rowling is J K Rowling's. Everything left is mine, I guess, but remember the old adage: "There is nothing new under the sun."*

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settlements, but New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Charles Towne were growing quickly. Each had hopes of rivaling Boston as the colonies' principal harbor.

Magical Great Britain had universally decided *NOT* to have anything to do with the New World. There was even an official decree from the Ministry of Magic so stating. The Minister of Magic was so convinced that going to the colonies was a bad idea, that he wrote the decree himself, without even consulting the usual scribes and solicitors who knew how such documents should be worded. Therefore, there were several loopholes in the document allowing daring or desperate wizards or witches to legally immigrate, breaking the spirit but not the letter of the law. No one bothered to rewrite the decree removing the "wiggly room" as everyone at the Ministry was convinced no one would want to travel to such a dreadful land.

In the spring of 1692 there were over one hundred students finishing their seventh year at Hogwarts. In those days, many students left that school after completing their O.W.L. years, so this number of seventh years was unusually high.

The year was unusual for several other reasons. It was not uncommon for a small group of students in a year to become the unofficial leaders of everything exciting going on at Hogwarts. For example, three students let's say, might combine their extreme magical powers, intelligence, and bravery and set off on a number of adventures that capture the minds and hearts of those in school and out - fighting Dark Lords and such.

Another group might be reckless and adventurous in their pranks and mishaps and go marauding about the school after hours. They might become the talk of Hogwarts during their years there. Almost always these unofficial focal points of Hogwarts attention came from the same house, whichever house that might be.

Of course, the thing about 'almost always' is that it is *not* always. The year 1692 saw the matriculation of one of those very rare, cross-house groups of students that captured the attention of all their schoolmates.

There were four students, one from each house at Hogwarts, who bonded together in an unusual way to provide gossip for the whole school. There was no great war between Light and Dark to deal with at the time, but all was not at peace either. There had been some small conflicts the year before with some Goblins, just tremors in comparison to the Goblin Wars of prior eras, particularly the major Goblin Rebellion of 1612.

It was the dubious commemoration of that eightieth anniversary by a select few that firmly fixed the fame of the Unusual Four, as they were called. Now, to understand the story properly, you need to know that 'the four' started out actually as six friends, five from magical families, and one from a very special Muggle family. They all lived in and around the small village of Ottery St. Catchpole. Their families had all served in yeoman positions in the great battles between Light and Dark, good and evil, in the era of the founders of Hogwarts. Their small but comfortably prosperous family farms had been granted as rewards for services rendered during those battles.

Matilda Hardesty, known as Mattie, was the unofficial leader of the group. Hers was the strongest of

the six strong personalities. Jamie Madison's family lived on an adjacent farm to the Hardestys' and the two had grown up just knowing they would be husband and wife one day.

The Hardesty and Madison families were long-term Hufflepuff house members, and at that time Hufflepuff's designation of loyal and hardworking was still respected. The house wasn't viewed as a catchall for the none-too-bright-brash-or-bold. However, this prejudice was beginning to rear its ugly head among the British magical community, because Hufflepuff had not *won* either of the cups in over seventy-four years. To make matters worse they had finished dead last for both the House Cup and the Quidditch Cup for the previous twenty-two years--before the Unusual Four.

Quentin Cooper came from a long line of Gryffindors, and Portia Hamilton's family had been Ravenclaws for the most part. Johnnie Jonas' family had been Slytherins long before the emerging stridency about blood purity.

The sixth of the lifelong friends descended from one of the most revered fighters of those great battles of the Hogwarts founders. All six families were famous after the battle of the Hogwarts Founders, but the sixth was uncommonly so and for good reason.

Benedict Pringle was the last heir of Cyrus Pringle who fought in that final battle. Cyrus was a Muggle - a Muggle who, because of his great cunning, strength, and prowess with a battleaxe, had been ignored as a factor in the battle by the forces of Darkness. But Pringle was not one to be ignored. The Pringles were a Muggle family that would be uniquely intertwined with the magical world for centuries.

In that great final battle at the turn of the Millennium, Benedict Pringle's untold-number-of-greats grandfather Cyrus Pringle had led a small contingent of Muggle warriors of significant abilities into the right flank of the forces of Darkness in the battle of the Founders of Hogwarts. Rowena Ravenclaw and Helga Hufflepuff had charmed each of their huge iron embedded shields to deflect most spells and curses. Nearly one-third of the Muggle forces under Pringle were archers with longbows, a weapon deadly against all flesh at distances far greater than the ranges of accurate spell and curse fire.

Between the longbows, the battleaxes, the huge sabers, and the charmed shields, Pringle's forces decimated the right line and then turned Slytherin's right flank. When this was noticed, the wounded pride of the forces of Darkness changed its direction. The Dark wizards and witches were insulted by the success of this Muggle attack, and shifted entirely too many of their numbers to "teach the Muggles a lesson."

The resulting weakness at the center provided the opening the nearly defeated forces of Light needed. The warriors of Light forced the line, the opposing army split, the right half was annihilated, and those victorious on the right attacked the remaining half of Salazar's contingent in a pincer movement. In one hour's time, the Dark forces had snatched defeat from the jaws of victory, and were routed from the field.

Though one-third of those aligned with the remaining three Hogwarts founders were killed, nearly nine in ten of those following Salazar Slytherin lay dead or seriously wounded.

Pringle's force had been the deciding factor, and they paid dearly for the privilege. Twenty-three of the just over three hundred and fifty fearless and powerful Muggle warriors lived through the ordeal. Cyrus Pringle lost his left arm just above the elbow and his left eye. He also walked with a decided limp for the rest of his life. The fact that it was Helga Hufflepuff who found him among the wounded probably saved his life.

After the battle that saved Hogwarts and routed the Dark forces of Salazar Slytherin for good, these six families were rewarded with the lands where these six young friends grew up nearly seven hundred years later. All of them except Johnnie Jonas openly accepted the Muggle Benedict Pringle as an equal. Johnnie's behavior reflected the ebbs and flows of his father's on again, off again tirades about blood purity and legalizing Muggle hunting. Rather than follow his father's agenda, Johnnie really wanted much more to be friends with all of the others, including Benedict, but he had to be circumspect in his public behavior or risk openly defying his father.

All six were the same age, and all six spent most of their time prior to Hogwarts being true friends for the most part. Their families had all agreed on one thing - the value of a good education prior to going to Hogwarts. The Jonas family was the poorest, the Pringle family the best off though not wealthy, so the six families pooled their resources and hired excellent tutors for all six. This joint education further cemented their friendship - even between Johnson and Pringle.

In February of their eleventh year, Matilda, the oldest by several months, received her Hogwarts letter. By Jamie Madison's birthday on June one, the other three magical children had received their letters, and Benedict had been accepted at Eton College, already one of England's most famous public schools in 1685. Jamie's birthday, however, came and went, yet his Hogwarts letter never arrived. It was a stunned five friends who received the pronouncement. Jamie's father had contacted the school and the assistant headmaster had traveled to Ottery St Catchpole to perform several tests that confirmed the news - Jamie was a Squib.

Accidental magic happened rarely in families that were so openly magical and loving. Though adventuresome to a degree, it had been Jamie who was the mollifying voice in the group, so none of their activities had stimulated such pre-teen wandless magical outbursts.

The six walked in silence to the small stream where they often played. Mattie held Jamie's hand fiercely, dragging him along to be with the five who were still his friends. Silently they sat, and silently they kept their own counsel, until Benedict suggested Eton for Jamie.

Squibs in the past were usually kept in dungeons, or *Obliviate* d and abandoned in the forests near distant Muggle communities. Sometimes they were killed. Jamie's parents loved him and did not want to do any of those things. The lad, though a Squib, had made better grades than the other five, even though they were all excellent students.

The Pringle family had been longtime supporters of Eton College, and when Benedict's father quietly visited the Dean of Admissions, a special acceptance was made for their brilliant "distant cousin" Jamie. And thus, the six became four - or that's how history looks at it - but true friendship, like true love, has a way of overcoming all sorts of obstacles.

On the day of Jamie's acceptance to Eton, Mattie took him alone to their favorite spot by the stream, where they swore, Jamie hesitantly, and Mattie unswervingly, their undying love. They also made plans to marry as soon as possible.

Each of the four Hogwarts-bound friends was sorted into their traditional family houses. Hufflepuff Mattie Hardesty was truly loyal and hardworking, but she was also fearlessly brave. She was an accomplished Defense student and won the Dueling Contests her last three years in school. Rarely did a sixth year beat the seventh years in that competition, and never had a fifth year won - until Mattie arrived at Hogwarts.

But she was known for her bravery and skills in battle long before her fifth year. In her third year Mattie had defeated three small trolls who had made their way into the lower levels of the school. When the cry went out to abandon the Hufflepuff's cheery lower level rooms, the teachers found the first two Trolls unconscious, and the third trussed and shouting at Mattie, as she tried to revive two unconscious first year Slytherins who'd been given bad directions by their more senior house mates.

In her fourth year, Mattie lead her three friends in thwarting a minor attempt by vampires to enter the Hogwarts grounds.

Portia Hamilton became a Ravenclaw, but her sorting was a close thing with the hat wavering between Ravenclaw and Slytherin. She had great ambitions to be the first female Minister of Magic, and knew she needed top grades at Hogwarts to enter the Magical Law Enforcement Department. Up to that point, that department had accepted only four females since its inception, and Portia wanted that department to be her springboard to the top Ministry post. Her grades were excellent - she made Prefect and then Head Girl in her final year.

Although Quentin Cooper's family had been Gryffindors for generations, the Sorting Hat wanted to put him in Ravenclaw. The normally easy going Quentin convinced the hat to place him in his family house. He never scored anything but perfect in theoretical classes, and did well enough in the practicals to make Head Boy. One could always find Quentin in the library--when it was open--unless he was in class, eating, or on the pitch.

All four of the friends were taller than usual for the days in which they lived. All four were also well above average in strength both physically and magically, and they had all become their team's Keepers in their second year. Though all four would have made fine Beaters or Chasers, playing Keeper kept them from facing each other in the heat of a Quidditch match.

Their friendship kept the Quidditch matches cleaner than they'd ever been. Keepers have always been a favorite target for unsportsmanlike conduct, but during those years, the teams learned that if a Beater were to attack one of the other team's Keepers wrongly, their own team's Keeper would come after them, threatening bodily harm.

Johnnie Jonas was brave, loyal, intelligent, and ambitious, but not to the degree of his more famous classmates. His Slytherin housemates berated him for not spouting the growing pure-blood rant of the day. There was fear in the magical communities of the Muggle population that had grown alarmingly since the increased availability of clean water, better sewage control, and basic medical knowledge

had all but ended the plagues.

Two major political camps in the magical world argued the best course of action to deal with the increasing Muggle population. Most magical folk wanted to isolate themselves from the Muggle world and supported the International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy. Only a small but vocal and influential minority supported any hostile actions towards Muggles.

British magical diplomats had participated in the International Convocation to draft this statute that all in the Wizarding world would live by, but there was a battle in the Wizengamot over whether the British Minister of Magic should sign on behalf of his constituency.

Basically the International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy was an extreme move to increase the secrecy and invisibility of the magical community. Seclusion was the watchword, and the decree for magical folk to avoid the New World colonies found one of its roots in this movement.

With this debate the pure-blood anti-Muggle faction rose up to oppose ratification. This faction was united in believing magicals should infiltrate the Muggle world and dominate from behind the scenes all Muggle governing bodies, causing them to pass legislation harmful in the long-term to Muggle advancements. - A small portion of this anti-Muggle group advocated a far more radical solution to the Muggle issues - the reinstatement of Muggle hunting to 'thin the herds' while they developed a means of destroying whole Muggle communities and cities to decrease the surplus population. Of course the wizard population would then assert its dominance by ruling over the Muggles.

"Their "solution" was based upon the premise that Muggles were sub-human. Therefore, these pure-bloods began to campaign against Half-bloods and Muggle-born being allowed to practice magic. They wanted none of them at Hogwarts.

This resulted in Johnnie being verbally bludgeoned by his housemates - no one would dare physically assault him because he was very powerful, and he did have three very powerful friends. Johnnie would listen and try to argue with them, but the smartest Slytherin was also the worst of the pure-blood advocates, Castor Weasley.

~\*~

"What?" exclaimed Harry, Hermione, Ginny, and Ron. They were shocked by this revelation.

"A Weasley, in Slytherin?" said Ron. "That *can't* possibly be. You're wrong. We've been all Gryffindors for sixteen generations, I think it is."

"Ron," said Cilla Newcastle. "In what house was the Weasley *seventeen* generations ago?"

Harry glanced at Ginny to see how she was taking this revelation. Although she remained silent, it was clear that she shared her brother's distress. Not knowing what to say, Harry placed his hand on Ginny's shoulder to comfort her.

When neither Ron nor Ginny answered her question, Newcastle said, "Ron, Ginny, all of you. I think you will like this story a lot. Remember, I was excited most about meeting *you*, Ron Weasley, not

Harry Potter. No offense, Harry, I'm really glad to meet you, too. Just give me a little more time--please--and you will see the happy ending to this. I promise."

~\*~

Castor Weasley came from a long line of Slytherin Weasleys, the next to the last of the Slytherin Weasleys. Castor was erudite, logical, and determined to win the battle for the minds of the magical world. He was determined that they would all embrace the righteous cause of Pure-blood Wizarding dominance and Muggle restriction as the proper means of keeping the Muggle population at acceptable limits.

Do not misunderstand - Castor Weasley *did not* advocate Muggle-hunting or overt actions to kill off Muggles. He was for developing methods to slow Muggle advancements and curbing overpopulation.

Castor was a deadly debater, using dazzling logic and an impressive vocabulary to conceal the questionable foundation of his arguments--the unexamined false assumptions common to pure-blood thought. His opponents would find themselves agreeing with him before they could spot the errors in his arguments.

Castor's father Pontifax Weasley was the leader of those arguing in the Wizengamot for Wizarding world dominance. They were the minority faction, and there was no Dark Lord currently active in the British magical world to lead in a violent attempt to force the issue. This was a purely parliamentary battle, and law and order would win out.

In January 1692, the final school year of the Unusual Four, the Wizengamot ratified the International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy as law in the British Isles. Those countries that had hesitated, quickly followed the example of the British magical government, and this statute became international law.

By that time Matilda Hardesty had become Matilda Madison. Since back then many students left school after their O.W.L.s, Hogwarts allowed its continuing students to marry after that year, with the understanding that they could only see their spouses during Hogsmeade weekends and Christmas holidays.

So, on Friday, February fourteenth, 1692, Jamie Madison traveled by Hogwarts Express to Hogsmeade to join his wife for the weekend. Jamie was joined on the trip by his Eton roommate Benedict Pringle who went along to see his friends, Mattie Madison, Portia Hamilton, Quentin Cooper, and even Johnnie Jonas.

Johnnie and Benedict had left each other's company on bad terms at Christmas time. Johnnie had thoughtlessly commented positively on the Pure-blood notion of Muggle population control within Benedict's hearing, and what began as a shouting match ended with fists. Johnnie was flat on his back with a black eye, and Benedict stormed out of the Hamilton home where they'd met on the last day of the holiday.

Mattie and Jamie had arranged this particular Hogsmeade Weekend visit in hopes of mending the broken friendship.

Trains were a new idea back then, and even with the help of magic the trip was an all day affair.

Mattie was allowed to meet Jamie at the station that night, and Benedict had his own room at the Inn in Hogsmeade, at the opposite end of the hall from the newlyweds. The couple slept in or whatever, and Benedict breakfasted by himself. He then stepped out into the streets of Hogsmeade in anticipation of his other three friends arriving from the school directly for a traditional Hogsmeade Weekend. Sure enough, he soon saw the three walking his way, and quickened his steps to meet them.

To commemorate the eightieth anniversary of the last Goblin Rebellion that had been planned and executed right there in Hogsmeade, and to remind the Wizarding world not to take the goblins for granted, a splinter group of goblins decided to replay the revolt from four score years prior.

Before Portia, Quentin, and Johnnie had reached Benedict Pringle, the goblins attacked from various hiding places. They'd timed the attack to catch the flow of Hogwarts students. Portia Hamilton and Quentin Cooper were knocked over and unconscious immediately. Johnnie Jonas had been missed in the initial barrage of goblin spells and curses. However, he was so startled by the unexpected assault that he did not act. For several long moments he simply stood there. Just as he finally pulled his wand, a goblin knocked him over with a Paralysis spell. At that point Johnnie could only watch the goblins prepare to kill him and those around him, but he could do nothing to prevent it. His opportunity had come and gone; Johnnie knew that he and his friends were now going to die because of his indecision - but he was wrong.

Benedict Pringle was after all a Pringle, and like his fathers before him, Benedict was a warrior. He always carried a sword in a cane as was the fashion of many Muggles of the day, and he was very good with it - fierce, ruthless, and effective. Benedict charged forward yelling and distracting the goblins from their intention of killing their captives. He fought like a demon, killing the three goblins who were about to kill his friends. This drew the attention of other goblins. The Madisons arrived on the scene--Mattie with her wand and Jamie with his sword--just in time to see Benedict Pringle, the last of the long line of wizard-trusted Muggle warriors, die painfully in a hail of Goblin cutting curses. Pringle had saved his three bound friends' lives, and Johnny Jonas had watched the whole fight, tears coursing down his cheeks because he'd failed to do anything when he'd been given the chance.

Johnnie Jonas would never be the same - and that would be a good thing.

Jamie Madison was the second most devastated of the five friends left - all of whom had never imagined such despair. Jamie had been Benedict's roommate for the past six and a half years. He'd been there when Benedict had received the news that his father had died. Benedict was the very last Pringle, and with Benedict's death, a noble family and name expired.

It would take Johnnie Jonas many years to overcome his depression and self-loathing from what was, after all, an event that took his measure in seconds.

~\*~\*~

In late March of 1692, Thaddeus Thurkell died. He was the father of seven squib sons. The *Weekly*

*Prophet* which was published twice weekly at this point, had followed the Thurkell family over the years as if it were an ongoing joke. Every year or two, something would befall one of the seven or the father. The paper would print the story and then the subsequent derogatory letters to the editor.

With the death of the father every story was re-run from over the years, and along with assorted Squib jokes, stories of Squib baiting, and many forms of ribaldry pointed at the few public Squibs, as well as Half-bloods and Muggle-born magical folk.

The Unusual Four had pooled their resources to subscribe to the magical newspaper, but they were all dismayed, and occasionally appalled by the intolerant stances, editorials, and slant to events that should have been objectively reported.

They each took turns being the first to read the paper. Quentin Cooper read the first few sentences of the purported obituary on Thurkell, and immediately left his place at the Gryffindor table to find Portia and Johnnie. Their initial plan was to hide the issue all together from Mattie, but they realized that if they did, Mattie would still find out eventually and be mad at the *Prophet* and them.

In a way, it could have been worse. It took a lot to rile Mattie, but attacking her husband was a good way to get hurt. Mattie also had an uncle by marriage who was a Muggle. All four knew her uncle and liked him, and there was concern about whether the child of this union, who was already showing signs of magical abilities, would receive her Hogwarts letter or not.

Three of the famous Hogwarts four of that era finished their seventh year with excellent records. Cooper and Hamilton received ten N.E.W.T.s each, all with Outstanding marks. Mattie Madison - her academic record and other accomplishments now listed under her married name, received ten NEWTs with mostly Os, and Johnnie Jonas received six, with one O, two EEs and the rest As.

Johnnie had gone into a self-loathing depression after the death of Pringle. The only emotions, all negative, that he spared for anyone but himself were pointed at the Ministry of Magic. Because only one person was killed and the goblins of Gringotts moved quickly to make amends and severely punish their own, the government hushed up this 'unfortunate event.' The Ministry considered the death of a Muggle to be basically inconsequential, even if it was the last heir of Cyrus Pringle. Revisionist history of Pringle's role in the battle of the Hogwarts Founders had for the past few decades succeeded in downplaying his importance for the purpose of political correctness.

None of the Unusual Four liked that, but their letters to the Ministry and the editors of the *Weekly Prophet* produced no positive results and went unpublished - but not unnoticed.

The negative results of their letter writing showed up when the job applications sent to the Ministry by Mattie, Quentin, and Portia failed to produce employment or even interviews. Other students leaving Hogwarts, all with lower grades, were being granted interviews and positions in the administration. Quentin and Portia, head boy and girl and tops in their classes, weren't even asked to interview.

Mattie was vocal in her lack of surprise. Quentin was stoic. Portia was bitter. Johnnie cared little for anything but sitting and staring at walls. They finished their schooling at the end of June and went



back to their homes in Ottery St. Catchpole.

The *Weekly Prophet* had glossed over unrest in the colonies in a small back page article, and the Muggle press had printed reports on the subject. However, in July of 1692, a small supply brig sailed into the port of Falmouth with news that made the front page in both Wizarding and Muggle papers. The story was below the fold in the Muggle press, but in the *Weekly Prophet*, the headline read:

### **Colonists Hang Bridget Bishop for Witchcraft Stupid Muggles Kill Their Own**

The article went on to congratulate the Ministry of Magic for its prescience in forbidding magical folk from going to the New World. The stupidity of Muggles in killing their own who were accused of witchcraft in the village of Salem in the Massachusetts colony became a running joke for several months to come.

Mattie and Jamie Madison invited Quentin, Portia, and Johnnie to dinner at their small cottage on the Madison farm. Jamie and Mattie forced the hiding Johnnie to attend, as it would not be a purely social occasion.

Mattie and Jamie had figured that where there was smoke there was fire. No known witch or wizard had gone to the New World, but what was there to stop Muggle-born magical folk from being born there? British citizens had lived in the Colonies since the Jamestown settlement in 1607. Now much of the eastern seaboard of that land had Muggles on it. In England Muggle-born magical folk were detected and guided to some sort of understanding of their powers. Who was doing that in the New World?

Jamie Madison had studied law and finance at Eton. He knew what opportunities were available in the colonies. Mattie saw going to the New World as a great crusade to address what she knew was an egregious wrong. The professorial Quentin thought of it as a wonderful intellectual adventure, and he definitely agreed with the need for action to protect the innocent - magical and Muggle alike.

Ambitious Portia, not well endowed with patience or tact, had spent a horrific three days in London at the Ministry of Magic, divining--even though she considered Divination a worthless, wooly subject, that she had no future there.

The Unusual Four, soon to be known as the Founding Mothers and Fathers of Magical America, began to plan. Finally they told their families about it and eventually convinced their parents to give their blessings. The four sold a number of possessions and some small properties, and set sail for Boston harbor in early August. No one from the Ministry of Magic was there to stop them for they foolishly believed the efficacy of their decree against immigration. In reality its only real power was as an example of a poorly written farce of law.

Upon docking in Boston, the four gathered their possessions and wits, and bought what supplies they felt they needed. They finally arrived in Salem on the afternoon of September 22, 1692, to learn that the local residents had hanged eight more people for witchcraft that very morning. The total came to twenty now, but there would be no more. The Four Founders and a good man named Increase Mather helped put the trials and executions to an end.

Mather stated that, "It were better that Ten Suspected Witches should escape, than that the Innocent Person should be Condemned."

As the most feared and hated of the accused having already been killed, the public took his words to heart. There was an immediate cessation of the trials.

Jamie immediately became friends with the leading men of the day in Salem, and Mattie and her magical friends started hunting for any who might be unknowingly magical.

There was one timid but bright girl who made the mistake of starting a fire in front of Quentin one afternoon. The fifteen year old had been very careful about doing this where she couldn't be seen, but Quentin was under his Invisibility Cloak, an inheritance from a great uncle.

Quentin observed her for several more hours. Then the four magical friends confronted the girl, and after several minutes of panic on her part, Lizzie Mae Pritchett calmed down enough to really listen. Mattie, who towered over the girl, seemed to be the one the frightened teen gravitated to.

In the time of Harry Potter, the average height for grown men was 5' 9", and the average for women was 5' 6". In the late sixteen hundreds the average heights were 5' 5" and 5' 3". Mattie stood 5' 9", and each of her friends was three or four inches taller than average. Jamie was the same height as his wife. Lizzie Mae was still to fill out a bit, but she was as tall as she would ever be at 5' 0" even.

After a day of talking, telling stories, and meeting the young girl's parents, Lizzie Mae and her folks were convinced that the four were trustworthy. She agreed to try to talk to the others that she knew of in Salem that were "strange."

The four she knew of were all children, Lizzie Mae was the oldest. Two were brother and sister at ten and eleven years of age.

As time went on the interesting thing was that Jamie the Squib was best able to look at a group of folk and detect that one of them might be magical. Jamie was also the one who legitimized their presence in the community. He had studied law and finance and came to the New World flush with the proceeds of several small inheritances. He invested in local business and practiced law. The New World was too small to support both barristers and solicitors, so he was merely a colonial lawyer who steered work to his friends.

The four discovered that they all had heads for commerce, and soon were in competition with, and then outshining the other local businesses. Success breeds envy in those you've bested, and the friends found themselves under a great deal of scrutiny. The solution was to move to the much larger town of Boston as it was not too far away, taking their young pupils with them. There they were small fish in a

big pond, and they determined to remain so.

In Boston Jamie found himself drawn to a small child one day who was being beaten by his drunken father. As the inebriated man paused and raised his fist, muttering something like, 'devil's child,' the boy looked up above the man, and a sign immediately fell on his father's head. In two days the lad had been investigated and approached, and they began looking through the growing port of Boston for other Muggle-borns.

Now, what to do with those they'd found?

It was only natural that they would find themselves teaching magic. The Four were all natural born teachers, and so was Jamie. They were teaching the basics of magic and the fundamental elements of keeping magic secret before they knew it. All four of them were good at it. They'd always been asked to explain things to their housemates at Hogwarts as soon as it became known that they made good grades. Jamie also turned out to be a great coach about what to do and not do in public, and how much could go unnoticed in front of Muggles.

The word Muggle was abandoned at this time. The four had never liked the term because it had rankled Benedict Pringle. To honor him, they spent a great deal of time discussing a new name for those not magical, but it was Lizzie Mae who had the brainstorm.

Lizzie Mae could never understand why primary schools in England weren't the first schools children went to; after all, 'primary' meant first, didn't it?

Lizzie Mae said, "Which came first, the magical or the non-magical?"

It was a question that none of them had considered, but they agreed that non-magicals had probably been around first.

With the wisdom and ignorance of youth, and not being imprinted with traditional thinking, Lizzie Mae said, "Well, then why not call non-magical folks 'Primaries'?"

She went back to darning a sock, and the five decided to ask her and the other children what they thought more often.

The parents of Muggle-born, no, Primary-born magicals were not all like the drunken lout Jamie had encountered shortly after they moved to Boston. Most were hardworking men and women of above average intelligence who loved their children. Jamie also found the mostly poor parents of their magical students to be a ready source of hard workers. Many of them also proved to have eyes for opportunity, bringing him methods and ideas for improving the specific businesses they worked in. These loyal employees also proposed new products and services to offer, and occasionally one would suggest an idea for an entirely new business.

In Boston the four plus Jamie intentionally kept their businesses small or sold them to Primaries who could grow the businesses to their full potential without fear of the scrutiny of success. The intent was to not draw attention to themselves by being too successful.

However, no good deed goes unpunished.

By 1702, the four were spending most of their time finding or teaching the Primary-born magical children. Mattie was pregnant with what would be her third son. Portia was unmarried and declared in a huff quite often that she never intended to marry. Quentin had gone back to visit England in a circuitous route, hitting Newfoundland, Iceland, Greenland, and the northwestern most tip of Ireland. He'd hired a boat all for himself, and played the part of the eccentric naturalist, trying to discover any previously unknown species of flora or fauna he could name for himself. In truth he was exploring the possibilities of an Apparation or Portkey route back and forth between the two continents. Once in England, he chanced upon Fryda Glant, a former Gryffindor housemate who had been three years behind Quentin. Quentin was the well-dressed former Head Boy and star Quidditch Keeper. Fryda had played Chaser on the team for the last three years he'd played, and they knew each other better than most with such age differences.

She was not a great beauty, but very, VERY pretty; and when she smiled the room needed no torches, or so Quentin believed. Fryda Glant became Fryda Cooper in a small service at St. Simon's Parish. Three days later they set sail for the New World. Quentin didn't know that a bungling brother-in-law of one of the assistants to the Minister of Magic had been given the useless job of watching ship departures. Though he could not do anything about it, the brother-in-law's report of two magicals leaving for Boston did cause a stir.

Upon his father's death, Castor Weasley held a position of prominence and power at the ministry. One of the useless things he was paid for was administration of Wizarding Immigration Prevention. The missing Mattie and Jamie Madison, Quentin (and now Fryda) Cooper, Portia Hamilton, and Johnnie Jonas were thorns in Castor's side. That they were no longer around did not bother him. He just wanted to know what they were up to. He felt he couldn't be so lucky that they had died somehow in a Lethifold attack or some such happy bit of nastiness.

The useless brother-in-law recognized both Quentin and Fryda, but could not remember which ship they'd sailed on. Eighteen possible ships, capable of carrying passengers, had left that particular port that day for Boston, Bombay, British Guiana, South Africa, Goa, Sumatra, Singapore, and eleven other points of the globe.

With such faulty intelligence it was impossible to follow them, but Castor Weasley was finally given sufficient staff to set a watch at all the major ports for the Unusual Four and their assorted spouses. Portia Hamilton did come back to England two years later and returned to the Colonies shortly thereafter with a husband. Portia married a distant cousin who also bore the name of Hamilton with whom she'd been corresponding for several years. Now all the remaining members of the proud old English magical families of Madison, Hamilton, Jonas, and Cooper were no longer in Great Britain.

In addition to her groom Perkins Hamilton, Portia took back to Boston all of the books, devices, and equipment unavailable in the New World that were needed to start a first class school of witchcraft and wizardry.

She also unknowingly brought with her a spy for the Ministry - Glyphco Malfoy.

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All four students gasped at Pricilla Newcastle's latest bombshell.

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In 1704, Glyphco Malfoy covertly followed the newly wed Perkins and Portia Hamilton back to America. They were on a larger boat to hide themselves in the numbers, and the couple occupied a modest but comfortable private room above the water line.

Glyphco survived the sickness of the lower decks in the most squalid of shared accommodations. He had little funds advanced to him for the trip, and no personal funds to improve his creature comforts. He was also under the strictest of orders to do nothing to draw attention to himself as a wizard. He wanted to kill those in the tiny cabin with him near the bilge pumps, but he merely used a light *Confundus* charm to be left alone.

The Malfoy family traced its line back to the purest of French Wizarding blood traveling to England after the Norman invasion. They had their bloodlines and their ambitions, and not two Knuts to rub together, even after six hundreds years. The Malfoys were a Three-Thirty-Three Family and they had their founding vote in the Wizengamot, but they barely made it onto the list, having made the cut only because the Ollivander family refused to join.

The Malfoys had always considered "working" to be beneath them, so they had never in the four hundred or so years since the charter of the Wizengamot bothered to seek honest employment for their family's advancement. They scurried around currying favors and participating at instant-wealth schemes that occasionally added to their coffers only to be spent all too quickly.

So Glyphco decided spying for the Ministry would be his method of making a living until his father died and Glyphco could take his seat in the Wizarding assembly. In the meantime he'd develop a suitable blackmail list to live off of.

Not far from the docks in Boston Portia Hamilton spotted a little girl doing accidental magical. She stopped the wagon sent to bring them to their magical community just outside the city, and spent over an hour investigating. Glyphco heard it all from underneath his Invisibility Cloak, the one truly valuable tool the Ministry had provided him.

Over a week later, Glyphco Malfoy entered their settlement and waited until Perkins Hamilton was passing by. When he was sure Perkins would see him, Glyphco faked struggling with a butter churn that he'd stolen that morning, and then slyly *Reducto* -ed it with his wand hidden up his sleeve. He had spent the week practicing casting a *Reducto* r with only the tip sticking out of his balled fist.

Perkins was delighted to have "found" his first Primary-born wizard, and had little trouble convincing Malfoy to go with him. Glyphco played his part well, feigning ignorance and surprise, and within two weeks he was helping with the creation of their school of witchcraft and wizardry.

On the fifteenth day that Glyphco awoke as a part of the new magical educational community, he

walked outside, only to be punched in the nose and knocked down. Johnnie Jonas had arrived back from his honeymoon, and upon seeing his old Slytherin school chum, had rendered the proper salute. Johnnie had remembered Glyphco's boasts of raping a young Muggle-born witch - a memory that still enraged him when he'd knocked Malfoy to the ground that morning.

In addition to being four years older than the Unusual Four, Glyphco had left Hogwarts after his O.W.L. year, but in their one year as housemates he had treated Johnnie unmercifully for the friends he'd kept, and Glyphco had bragged incessantly of the joys he'd taken in illegal Muggle hunting over the summer with his father.

Johnnie knew Glyphco for what he was -- a spy, and a threat to all they'd accomplished.

Johnnie Jonas was a very different man from the one who left England. He'd come to enjoy helping people, especially those who could not help themselves in the magical world they did not understand.

At fifteen Lizzie Mae Pritchett had gone to Mattie Madison that first day for solace, but it was Johnnie she'd had her eyes on. He and the others had helped her learn control over her magic, and she'd proven to be a bright student and a naturally gifted witch. Lizzie Mae now helped teach the newly found magical ones, and she was particularly gifted at helping them through the transition she'd experienced herself.

On her twenty-fourth birthday, Johnnie looked at her as if he'd never seen her before. Their courtship was a sweet and innocent affair, something no traditional Slytherin male would admit to, but Johnnie could not be happier.

Perkins Hamilton was horrified at his mistake, but Johnnie and Quentin let him help take Malfoy to the harbor, and send him bound and gagged on his way back to England. The captain got a pathetic amount of work out of the wandless Malfoy on the trip eastward.

Six months later, Glyphco and sixteen Aurors arrived in Boston and made their way in force towards the magical settlement just outside of the port. They had with them the approved teachers for a school that would many years later eventually be known as the Salem Institute. At this point Malfoy's initial commission from the British Ministry of Magic was to start a simple trade school to make servants out of the Muggle-born wizards and witches they found in the colonies.

The British Ministry forces found no trace of anyone in the abandoned compound. Glyphco knew nothing about Jamie Madison from his brief time at the settlement, because Mattie had been away most of the time scouting out the country to see if there were any magicals among the native populations. When she was gone, Jamie tended to stay in Boston proper and concentrate on his commercial enterprises.

Though there was shamanism in the uncharted reaches of the new continent, there was nothing magical as was known to them at the time. Mattie had traveled by broom, which was particularly painful since the Cushioning charm for brooms had not yet been invented. She had nailed a board to her old broom, and placed a small pillow on it for comfort. When she was tired of that she'd line of sight Apparate across open plain areas, going several hundred yards at a time. Tiring of that, she'd remount her

broom and fly along until her power was sufficient to Apparate again. However, it would be a one-way trip by broom and Apparation, because of a new technology called the Portkey.

Apparation was only a few hundred years old in 1704, but Portkeys were a brand new development of the Department of Mysteries. Apparation was thought to only work when one knew the landing place very well, and it was not more than twenty-five to thirty miles away. Unknowingly many were Apparating longer distances, but the general consensus was that thirty miles at best was the limit.

The Portkey held the promise of going much greater distances, hundreds of miles, and it did not rely on the magical power of the one traveling to make the jump. The power came from the caster of the Portkey, and his or her understanding of the location and the power needed to go the distances.

All of this was hush-hush, but a truly brilliant but bashful Ravenclaw lad, two years older than Portia, had shown her the scrolls recording the procedures for Portkey making. Two minutes of mostly innocent flirting on her part one day when she fruitlessly waited for an employment interview had yielded a visit to his office.

It was the most fortuitous thing that could have occurred. Portia *did not* see all of the warnings and admonitions on the second page of the document. When any new Wizarding technology was developed, the standard procedure was to imagine everything that can go wrong and then slowly and methodically work to disprove or control these possible mishaps. Then and only then would the farthest reach capability of that technology be explored, with great safety factors engaged. It wasn't until 1759 that the limits were reached by the Unspeakables as to where one could not Portkey. Because continents could be spanned and oceans crossed, the Ministry of Magic locked down Portkey manufacture as tightly as possible. It is still highly regulated today in most of Europe.

But in 1704, three days after Glyphco Malfoy found himself shanghaied out of the New World, Mattie Madison Portkeyed from the middle of the continent, back to their home just outside of Boston. They just didn't know they weren't supposed to be able to do that. Even more important, now that Mattie had been there, she knew just how to Portkey back to her starting destination on the upper plains.

It wasn't until 1924 that the English attempted transporting a Muggle by Portkey technology, but after several experiments in a nearby field, Mattie proceeded to portkey her Squib husband back to the beautiful lakes she'd discovered. They soon established a new magical community just west and south of the five Great Lakes in the middle of the continent.

At first they only called it 'the school.' It would be known in later years by a different name, but the first true school of magical learning in the Americas started with thirty-two students on September first, 1704.

There were four houses, Hufflepuff, Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin, of course. But they differed from their British counterparts.

Johnnie Jonas headed a different version of Slytherin house. Because of Benedict Pringle, Johnnie never stopped striving for understanding and acceptance of all humans, regardless of position or abilities. Helpfulness was highly prized in his house and a desire to serve, but Johnnie also

encouraged ambition and the desire to do great things for the betterment of all mankind. He urged his students to study hard in hopes of accomplishing brave and daring goals of service.

Portia Hamilton, ably assisted by her husband Perkins, populated Ravenclaw with the smartest and most ambitious students. No goal was too lofty, and nothing would stand in their way. Her Ravenclaws studied hard, worked hard, and bravely and adamantly took on anything standing in their way.

Mattie Madison, the head of Hufflepuff house, opened her arms to all. But before they would choose it, she would deliver a rousing speech of bravery and daring do, that captured the imagination of all of those brave enough to go to extremes to loyally help others. She imagined her house members finishing school and going out to rescue all of those lost magical souls who didn't know what that meant. Her husband would deliver the means and methods for them to move among the populations and immigrants arriving on those huge shores, and find those who might need to be brought into the magical fold. She envisioned Hufflepuffs smart enough to exist in two worlds, ambitious enough to daringly succeed, and helpful enough to bravely and selflessly serve in this rescue mission roles.

Quentin Cooper inspired those in his house to be the truly brave Gryffindors. Brave enough to study and know whatever needed to be known to succeed. Brave enough to work hard to serve the others with brilliant scholarship, outstanding practical experience, and training in dueling so that they would be equipped to fight for justice and freedom.

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Glyphco Malfoy saw his mission in America as his stepping-stone to power. Subdue the magical aberrations in the local populous, set up the school for a servant class of magicals, and go home the conquering hero.

He did all this--or at least he did in his reports -and he did accomplish some of it in a very limited way. The trade school was a harsh and cruel two-year program teaching household magic, Lifting and Banishing spells for domestics and farm hands, and the importance of subservience to their pure-blood masters. Glyphco had few students, but his requests for budget increases proclaimed that he was gaining a strong grip on the rowdy locals.

Magic can be a great equalizer, and it had already become clear to the Founding Mothers and Fathers that Primary-born witches and wizards were on average more powerful than the rank and file pure-bloods. Glyphco had this fact pounded home when he hit a young girl with the Cruciatius curse, and her older brother used his wand to Banish Malfoy into a wall, knocking him unconscious. The huge lad was bound by one of Glyphco's associates, and the crazed blond-haired spy-turned-educator tortured the boy to death before taking further revenge upon the sister.

If Glyphco had gained any real skills from Hogwarts, it was his brewing abilities. Shortly after the assault, the students in the two-year program became significantly more docile and compliant, and basically useless as servants-which proved the point of Muggleborns being inferior rather nicely Glyphco thought. The daily potion saw to that.



His success and potions-induced "proof" of Muggleborn inferiorities stimulated rapidly increasing funding from the Wizengamot - most of which went into Glyphco's own purse.

With the Wizengamot's money Glyphco hired the lowest of poor magicals in Great Britain, secretly and illegally brought them to the colonies, and placed them in permanent indenture in his personal empire. He siphoned off funds to feather his vault in Gringotts and continued to appease the Ministry with false reports. He blackmailed any magicals returning to England to support his elaborate fabrications, and if they refused to cooperate, they disappeared--or died.

A few of the Muggleborn witches and wizards born in the colonies and trained in what Malfoy called "the trade school" made it back to England as servants, but they were those who were too intimidated to be enticed away by the agents of the Unusual Four.

In 1734, Glyphco Malfoy returned triumphantly to the Ministry in London, fairly wealthy and clamoring for a bigger post. He had his eyes on Minister of Magic, but there was enough skepticism about him in the Wizengamot to ensure that would never happen. Glyphco, embittered but pragmatic, decided the post would go to his son, Apollyon Malfoy. Glyphco had married well according to bloodlines, but not according to inheritance. His wife was Lucretia Fudge, who came from the poor branch of that old family. She was beautiful and blond, and everyone knew that their children would inherit her pale blond hair.

Castor Weasley, married late in life, after his fortieth birthday. His bride was a beautiful red headed girl he'd known since he was seventeen. Illisa Crinald was only nine years old when she met Castor, but she was already gorgeous. People would stop the family in Diagon Alley to comment on her beauty. Illisa attended a Ministry event the summer she met Castor. The nine year old told the Hogwarts seventh year that day that she planned on marrying him, and though he laughed along with the rest of her family, Castor never forgot it and Illisa never doubted it.

Castor did not see the girl or her family again for decades. But in the lonely years after that meeting no woman he ever met was as beautiful, and none had her verve for life.

Castor Weasley, who was known as the confirmed old bachelor of the Wizengamot, was walking through the Ministry of Magic one day soon after his thirty-seventh birthday, when he stopped dead in his tracks. Standing before him was the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen - even more beautiful than the stunning little girl he had never forgotten. Her hair was as red as Illisa's. She was tall--as he imagined Illisa would be--and as vivacious as the precocious little girl had been.

There was a good reason for this - the woman before him *was* Illisa Crinald.

She had been the Head Girl at Hogwarts her seventh year, and was now a rising star in the Department of Magical Law Enforcement.

But alas she had been a Gryffindor!

On his forty-first birthday, Castor Weasley happily swallowed his pride and married Illisa, the love of his life. He'd spent three foolish years not letting her have what she wanted - him as a husband.

She'd given up her promising career to transfer to the secretarial office of the Wizengamot. She then made it to the position of his personal assistant in less than a year. Castor had tried in vain to have her replaced, but Illisa had charmed the office manager into resisting his rants on the subject. Of course, his protests were half-hearted at best and Castor never made good on his threats to that manager.

Castor Weasley still struck a dashing figure, even though a good bit of his red hair was grey now. Illisa had a few barely noticeable lines on her forehead, and a strand or two of grey herself. Regardless, the *Daily Prophet* called it the most fashionable wedding of the season. He was forty-one; she was thirty-three. Eleven months after the wedding, Percival Bilius Weasley was born. Their one and only child, for Illisa had a terrible time in labor and delivery.

Papa Castor had wanted a true Slytherin, but his Gryffindor wife had softened his heart. While father Castor had told him of the merits of pure blood, Percival's mother told him of her Muggleborn friend who'd achieved the highest scores at Hogwarts in Potions and Charms their senior year.

Following tradition, the Sorting Hat placed Percival Weasley in Slytherin. As a Slytherin he managed to say all of the right things and made all of the right connections. But he never forgot that the Hat said that he could have been a Gryffindor, if he'd wanted.

Percival Weasley became Sir Percival as a last act of the last royal witch in England. Magical royalty had no say in the government of the magical world in that country, but it was still respected. Knighthoods on Wizardkind were bestowed for services to the Queen - magic had nothing necessarily to do with it. There were no royal witches or wizards per se, only witches or wizard who happened to be royal.

Duchess Clarinda of Hondstooth was of noble birth and a Muggleborn witch. She was as childless as she was toothless and unpleasant, but she read the papers. One day she was drawn to an article about a young wizard - in his late thirties though that was young to the one hundred and forty seven year old spinster - and she decided he should be knighted. She petitioned her cousin-by-marriage, the King, to invest Percival Bilius Weasley, and he became Sir Percival.

In 1756, Apollyon Malfoy went back to the colonies because his father thought there might be powerful advancement in subduing the rebellious native magical community that insisted on a say in their government.

By this time the existence of magical folk in America was commonly known, but the Ministry of Magic would only recognize those who had attended and completed their trade school.

In 1767 Mattie Madison came back to England as spokesperson for the other school and assumed her Hogwarts education and distinguished awards in school would validate her worthiness. All it did was make her a target, along with the other four, her Squib husband included.

The arguments and actions of those in the Malfoy faction on behalf of the trade school became more outlandish, particularly when one considers that his dubious organization was no longer much of a school at all. It had become the British Ministry of Magic's base of operations in the New World as it sought to bring the colonial magical population under its control. In correspondence to the Ministry

the Unusual Four became more vocal in their advocacy for an independent local governing body in America that only loosely answered to the Ministry of Magic in Great Britain. The Four still considered themselves British, but like their Muggle counterparts, the mother country was making it difficult.

It didn't help their cause in Britain that the American born witches and wizards-- along with their families--were calling the Unusual Four, the 'Founding Mothers and Fathers.'

Of course the use of the term 'Primaries' became a rallying cry *against* the American Founding Four and all they stood for in the colonies. Apollyon Malfoy funneled information to his devious father, who was now in charge of the Information Office of the Ministry in London. The *Daily Prophet* was filled with story after story for years smearing the work of the Four in America. They were called the 'Rebellious Four' in the press and even in governmental documents.

No one was protecting their image, interests, or reputation back home in England. The Malfoys continued to spread innumerable lies about the Rebellious Four, and the Weasleys believed their smear campaign along with everyone else. Even those classmates who knew the four well were influenced by the misleading drivel year after year.

It was inevitable that the spies of the Ministry-backed trade school would eventually uncover a business with connections to Jamie Madison's efforts to support their school.

In 1773, a Malfoy spy overheard Boston dock workers mention "moonstone," followed by "hellebore" a few sentences later. Recognizing these as commonly used potions ingredients, the spy knew he was on to something. One of the first businesses Jamie had begun--and the first to reach outside of the colony of Massachusetts--was a tea importing company. Of course, it imported more than tea, as it was also the perfect cover for importing those potions ingredients that were heretofore unavailable in the colonies. The precautions required to protect tea from moisture and other contaminants during shipping also protected the precious potions ingredients, and the strong fragrance of the tea helped hide them from inspectors.

While the East India Company was frustrated in the competitive American market--even with its royal charter--other import/export companies were doing well, and Jamie's company was a strong contender within the second tier of those firms.

After Malfoy's spy uncovered this operation, his men boarded a ship by night and dumped its entire cargo overboard, believing it to be the shipment of potions components. In reality they had attacked the wrong ship and dumped an entire shipment of tea into Boston Harbor, which caused a transatlantic political crisis within the Muggle community. Upon realizing their mistake, the agents of the trade school tried to hide their tracks with a ridiculous cover story blaming the native Indians for the attack.

Mattie Madison traveled back to England in 1774 to appeal to the Wizengamot and the Ministry for a calming of tensions and a normalization of relationships between what she referred to a "two existing nations." Thinking of herself as a traveling diplomat without portfolio, she was greeted by protests on the docks and was accused of everything from attempting to overthrow the government to carrying the plague.

After five months of fruitless frustration, Mattie returned to America just before she was to have been arrested on charges of stealing state secrets. The proof of this according to the Malfoy factionaries was Mattie's use of a self-made Portkey to safely travel within Great Britain. Because Mattie had made her way by ship to America following the route taken by Quentin Cooper much earlier, she now knew her way around the Great Magical Circle Route as they called it. Therefore, she was able to Portkey from London to Boston in just less than three days including the rest breaks they believed were necessary at that time.

In governmental circles, any decision worth making is worth putting off. So, the call for immediate action by the louder--read pro-Malfoy--factions of the Wizengamot finally resulted in the decision to send an independent investigative team to the Americas in 1776. The man all sides finally agreed upon to head the team was Sir Percival Weasley. His father Castor was initially considered, but he declined the honor, citing a reluctance to make the journey. The truth was that his health was failing due to a disease that the healers at St. Mungo's would not be able to cure at this time. However, Castor and his wife hid the seriousness of this from their son, so he would not miss this opportunity.

As a result of both genetics and conscious imitation, Sir Percival appeared and sounded like his father Castor. But his heart had inherited the sensibilities and kindheartedness of his mother Illisa.

Sir Percival was widely respected not only for his passionate commitment to justice, but also for his calm deliberation and coolly detached objectivity when considering the facts of a matter. In essentials he believed like his father did about blood issues. Both men believed in the superiority of pure blood, but frowned upon magicals harming Muggles. Of course, Percival had spent his formative years at his mother's knee, and Castor had been her husband for decades, so the reality was that neither man was now as adamant as he sounded.

Behind the scenes father and son Malfoys were plotting ways to make Sir Percival see the light and adopt their more extreme position.

Also, unknown to even Glyphco Malfoy, his son, Apollyon, was now deeply immersed in the Dark Arts. It was the reason Apollyon had never returned to Britain. He was actually being changed physically by entering deeper and deeper into such loathsome reaches. Apollyon had sent some of his more trusted--that is despicable--associates back to England to recruit more disreputables to their cause, so by 1776 there was a small army of Dark Arts trained wizards ready to fight for control of the magical community of the British colonies--maybe the whole New World.

The Founding Mothers and Fathers had all feared that action, rather than just words might be needed. When Mattie returned from England with the story of her treatment there, they began training for the seemingly inevitable fight in earnest.

Sir Percival arrived in Boston in late 1776. In addition to being the Ministry's emissary to investigate the accusations against the Rebellious Four, he carried the charter to convert the trade school into the Salem Institute.

After the school of the Founding Four had been established in the northern Great Plains, France and Spain had started proper schools of magic in Martinique and San Juan, and the British Foreign Office

of the Ministry of Magic had received great ribbing about their colonial trade school. That would theoretically change now. In addition to expanding the curriculum, the charter specified that an impressive new structure be built to house the school.

The Salem Institute was built and used as a school for only a couple of years. Today it serves as a museum and culture center.

Under Glamours so his Dark-changed appearance would be unrecognized, Apollyon Malfoy and his functionaries showed Sir Percy only what they wanted him to see. Weasley even reported back by post what appeared to be the facts: the Rebellious Four were ruining America and pushing for a break from the mother country--or so everyone Sir Percival met said. And that alone caused him to wonder. Not *everyone* hated the worst tyrants in history.

Sir Percival Weasley bided his time and watched for any opportunity that would allow him to discover what was so obviously being hidden from him. That opportunity knocked when he was walking along the street one day with Jenkins Philby, one of Malfoy's flunkies dogging his every step. They were passing by a small shop when Jenkins made a derogatory remark about Muggles. To Percival's surprise the lad watering the flowers in the window box looked up sharply. The dislike on his face was unmistakable, if fleeting. The boy sadly shook his head as he returned to his task. Fortunately Philby was too full of his own importance to notice.

It took several days--and a bit of deceit--to get rid of Philby but the Weasleys were never stupid. Like his father, Percival could assume a benign facial expression when it suited him to mislead others into thinking him shallow.

Poppycock.

After Sir Percival had lain down for a nap the third day in a row, saying "Headache you know. Can't abide the potions to stop them," his minder left to have a cuppa. As soon as his footsteps had faded down the hall, Sir Percival Apparated to an alleyway he'd been studying for this very attempt, and then made his way to the business where he'd seen the boy frowning at unkind words about Muggles.

He marched in, looked around until approached, and then said in the friendliest of manner, "I'm Sir Percival Weasley, Plenipotentiary Investigator for the British Ministry of Magic, and I want to speak to Mattie Madison."

The young clerk's gasp confirmed that he knew of what the visitor spoke, and Jamie Madison stepped into the room with a wand pointed at his guest.

In a flash, Sir Percival drew his own wand, called "Expelliarmus," and then handed both wands to the clerk.

"My good man, I know you are Jamie Madison and a Squib, something I am prepared to overlook, and take into consideration in my report if you will show me the customary courtesy of my diplomatic status, and help me in my investigation. No one from the so-called trade school knows my whereabouts. I want to know your side of all this. You can't be as bad as your opponents say; you've

not bitten the head off of a single puppy since I entered this establishment."

Sir Percival sounded snobbish, but he was no fool, and Jamie knew it immediately. Jamie called for a young man from the back, and whispered in his ear. The tall youth took out a silver Knut, rubbed it with his finger, and Portkeyed away.

Less than one minute later, Mattie Madison Apparated into the shop. Meanwhile the doors had been locked and the curtains drawn. She looked outside through a slit in the curtains, consulted with her husband, and stared at her dubious visitor for several long moments.

"Sir Percival, why shouldn't I kill you where you stand?"

The stuffy man replied immediately, "Three reasons. First, you are a killer, but not a murderer. A distinction the press in England has failed to note. Second, you've not breathed fire, drowned a baby, or even pulled the wings off of a fly in the two minutes you've been here, so you are not as cruel or evil as you are portrayed. Finally, while I definitely do not believe in what you are *reported* to want, what little you were allowed to say in England a few years back holds sway with me. I want to understand your position and I do believe you're the proper one to educate me.

"And here is a fourth reason: if you entertain any hope of your message reaching the decision makers back in England, then I am your best hope of making your thoughts known with any objectivity. The others here representing the Ministry couldn't make you appear more evil without stating you have horns on your head.

"I promise you this. I *will* take your message to the Wizengamot. I will present it fully. What enthusiasm I employ in delivering that message, and what recommendations I make will be up to your powers of persuasion to sway me that you have a just cause.

"Sir and Madam, I am not your judge or jury. But I am the only ear you will be given a chance to convince. I have one hour until I am missed. Any additional time will cost *me* to give you. Make it good. And I suggest we go in yon office and have your man bring tea. You are tea importers here, right?"

The next morning after breakfast, Apollyon Malfoy broached the subject with Sir Percival that there was little else for the Plenipotentiary Investigator to see. He then asked if accommodations for a return voyage should be secured.

Sir Percival replied, "I have accepted an invitation to see the countryside, and will make my own arrangements for my return voyage. Mr. Malfoy, I appreciate your hospitality, but I must deliver an objective report. My next few weeks with the Madisons should ensure that."

Malfoy speedily drew his wand, but Weasley triggered the Portkey handkerchief in his hand before Apollyon could cast a spell.

Sir Percival landed in an empty barn, and the young man, who had greeted him in the shop the day before, led him outside and to the farmhouse next door.

Jamie met him at the door, and drew him into the main room. "Welcome to what we call the farm for no reason in particular."

"Clever," was all Weasley replied, but his disdain of these primitive surroundings was clear. He also couldn't resist wrinkling his nose at a most unpleasant smell.

Jamie politely continued as if he had not noticed their guest's reaction, "My wife you've met. please allow me to present the rest of what you call the Rebellious Four, what we call the Founding Four. Quentin Cooper, Portia Hamilton, and Johnny Jonas."

Johnny came forward. "Welcome, fellow Slytherin. I am afraid that I am what you smell. Just had a potions experiment go bad on my wife and me a few minutes ago."

Weasley pulled his wand and was surprised to see all but Jamie had their wands pulled and pointed at him. Jamie had a pistol in his hand.

Completely unfazed, Sir Percival said, "Indeed. There's a newly developed spell. Cleans up clothing rather keenly. It should remove most of if not all of the offending odor as well."

"Let him," said Johnnie. "You can kill him later if he harms me, and if it is not a new Cleaning spell we will have a good bit of the answer as to whether or not we can trust him in a limited manner."

*"Scourgify!"* performed as proclaimed, and it was new to them. Sir Percival obligingly showed them the wrist and wand action, and soon they were all cleaning something. Jamie chuckled.

The mood lightened after that and they began to talk about inconsequential things. Sir Percival's face gleamed in delight as he brought out the handkerchief. "This was my first trip with a Portkey. I understand that you can take them up to a hundred miles. I've Apparated thirty miles before," he said with pride. "How far did I go just now?"

"Just over ten miles," said Mattie. She looked at the others, and their guest noticed that they all were silently agreeing to something. "Sir Percival, I do not know if you have been lied to, or just that it is unknown, but the distances a Portkey can span are much greater. We want to take you somewhere."

Mattie Madison took out what appeared to be simply a piece of rope. They all stood and grabbed hold, Jamie included, and before Sir Percival could say that Muggles could not Portkey, he felt the same tug behind his navel that he'd felt a few minutes before. As the trigger words registered in his brain, 'the school,' he found himself touching down and falling to his knees on a grassy meadow.

The first thing Weasley noticed was it was a bit darker. It had been just after 7:00 AM when he'd finished breakfast, and they had only been chatting in the farmhouse for about twenty minutes before traveling here. He looked up to see if it was about to rain.

Mattie Madison said, "Sir Percival, you've just traveled well over a thousand miles, and landed within feet of my intended destination. I've personally Apparated over a hundred miles, and Quentin has gone over a hundred and fifty."

"Mrs. Madison, Mr. Copper, I find that hard to believe."

"Look at the angle of the sun," said Quentin. "It's lower than when you came to us. If you remember the earth's rotation from Astronomy, you'll know you've gone as far as we've said. Oh. And please call me Quentin. We've become less formal here in the colonies."

They all called out their given names, but Sir Percival did not give his. He did use the names they gave him, however. He scanned the horizon, working from right to left. He took in the broad vista of the main lake, its shore just a few hundred yards away, and the smaller ones within sight. He continued to circle until he came to the most impressive white stone structure he'd seen since embarking from his ship in the Americas.

It was relatively square appearing from this distance and about the size of the Ministry of Magic in terms of footprint. He could see four roof sections with yellow, red, blue, and green flags flying, one over each of the four sections.

Mattie, said, "Welcome to the school. The students are just going to breakfast now and will be in their classes in an hour. We have nearly two hundred enrolled in our seven-year program, all set into four houses. The building will be different, but I believe much of what you'll see will be familiar to you."

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Miss Newcastle," asked Hermione. Where was that school located, and is it still there?"

"It is still there although the building is in what the Primaries consider a bit of a marsh. It's on Lake Monona in the state of Wisconsin. Monona is the largest of the four lakes there at the city of Madison, the capital of Wisconsin. It took some massive landscaping to convert that small hill into a marsh to hide the school, but by then there were some construction elves in America to help. Twice since it was founded the school gained major additions, and instead of going up, they've gone down and under the lake itself. They have skylights, which let filtered sun light in through the lake water and into the building. Of course the Disillusionments ensuring the Primaries only see a muddy bottom are constantly monitored. But it's a small price to pay.

"Speaking of construction elves. I was here when the elves were clearing for this building, and they discovered an ancient chest with parchments and such. Your Professor Vector, is it? The Arithmancy instructor seemed rather excited when Dumbledore called her. Seems the top scroll was newer and she could read that it was something about a Half-blood Prince to be revealed when the chest was opened. The older parchments she could not translate, but they were much older, perhaps even from the time of Merlin himself she speculated.

"I see her at dinner in the Great Hall most nights," Newcastle continued. "She always seems excited even though I don't think she's made much headway in translations. Has her top seventh year Arithmancy student working on it with her. Seems the girl - Cho Chang's her name - seems she had been researching something at Woodhenge that make her quite the authority on these runes, but no one's made much progress. Any of you know this Chang? Pretty girl; real serious, though. Studying this bit so extra hard, and in the Paladin program to boot."



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The Four Founders took Sir Percival on the tour of the school. To reduce the disruption of the ongoing lessons only one founder would escort him into a classroom to observe what was being taught and answer his subsequent questions. Mattie accompanied Sir Percival into a fifth year class in Defense Against the Dark Arts; Quentin, third year Transfiguration and sixth year Arithmancy; Portia, Charms and Astronomy; and Johnnie escorted him through a first year Potions lab.

The Four, Jamie, and Sir Percival ate in a private room off of the Dining Hall that night. There were few house elves at the school, only those who had traveled to America once the Founding Four's families died out back in England. None of the Four's parents were alive now, and they themselves were now approaching their one-hundredth birthdays. Because of the limited number of house-elves, the meals were served by each student going through a line. Detentions were served helping the house-elves in the kitchen.

Just before Sir Percival could express his outrage at the idea of a witch or wizard helping a house-elf, Johnnie, sensing the tender point, asked, "Sir, Percival, What most caught your attention in the classes today?"

"Well, you did tell me that each of these children is either Muggleborn themselves, or the children or grandchildren at most of Muggleborn witches and wizards, correct? Except of course for your own grandchildren or great grandchildren. Well, I am amazed that they are able to do so well in their classes. Naturally, I assume that the better students are your grandchildren - no Muggleborn could do so well. And of course your Hogwarts trained professorial staff has helped them tremendously. How ever did you persuade them to come?"

"Sir Percival," interrupted Mattie. "Each student that spoke out during your tour was a first generation Primary-born witch or wizard, what you call Muggleborn. They weren't our descendents or even the offspring of Primary-borns. We purposely asked that any students who are not Primary-borns refrain from answering in the classes you attended. And as to the professors - all of them are Primary-borns, trained by us, and invited on staff because of their brilliance in their subject matter."

Johnnie added, "Yes, Sir Percival, and the woman teaching Potions is my wife, the first Primary-born witch we found here in the Americas. She's far better at Potions than I am and I made all "Outstandings" on my Potions tests at Hogwarts--and O's on my Potions O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s as well."

The touch of anger in his voice was obvious, but Johnnie took a deep breath to collect himself while Weasley was recovering from his astonishment. Johnnie continued more calmly, "Now, *Sir Percival*, since we have created a viable Wizarding government here in the colonies, started a school that will rival Hogwarts in another hundred years or so, created a network of Watchers through out the colonies to find Primary-born magical folk and remove them from the general population until they are trained to control their magic, and created a method to finance this whole operation without one brass Knut from your Ministry of Magic, don't you think you ought to at least let us call you Percy?"

There was a long moment of silence; the other four were convinced their Slytherin friend had pushed

his fellow housemate too far.

Just before Mattie intervened, Sir Percival said, "Not Percy - Bill. My middle name is Bilius, and I've always wanted to be called Bill."

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Apollyon Malfoy had been busy since Sir Percival had Portkeyed away. He immediately sent a courier by packet ship to his father, outlining everything and making suggestions of how to attack the Weasleys on the various issues Sir Percival might bring up after his visit.

Glyphco Malfoy had never liked the now infirm Castor Weasley, so he relished the excuse to plan his downfall. Apollyon wanted to make himself a kingdom in America, so Glyphco had begun grooming his second son Draco years before to be his successor--and hopefully the future Minister of Magic. Because of the American prosperity of his first son, and questionable but semi-legal investments back in England, the Malfoys were now rather well off, although they still lacked big money and the lands needed to be viewed in a few generations as the cream of magical society.

Plans within plans within plans - conniving machinations, thy name is Malfoy.

Johnnie Jonas escorted Sir Percival back to the coast by Portkey, but they chose the port of Charles Towne for his departure.

The Malfoys had Aurors meeting every ship arriving from the American colonies with orders to greet and arrest Sir Percival. Time in Azkaban before he was released to present his report would make Weasley look disreputable.

But Sir Percival had acquired a love of long distance Apparating in America. Knowing that the port was less than one hundred miles from his family home and suspecting Malfoy's plotting, Sir Percival Disapparated just before his ship entered that harbor. He arrived in the Weasley Estate gardens that he knew so well.

Sir Percival was alarmed by his father's deteriorated health and the worry in his mother's face, but the three of them had a number of long talks about their son's experiences and what they knew to be lies reported in the *Daily Prophet*.

Castor Weasley was no longer the typical Slytherin he had been at Hogwarts, fighting for the expanding role of the magical community into the affairs of Muggles and hating Muggleborns and Half-bloods. He had been changed over the years by his wife's influence, not only by her calm, logical opposition to his bigotry, but also by her friendships--and subsequently his own--with Muggles who were aware of the magical world.

To Castor's dissatisfaction he still could not defeat Jason Benning in chess, after fourteen years of trying. It no longer disturbed him that Benning was a Muggle and professor of philosophy at a nearby university, but Castor did hate to lose.

At his wife's insistence Castor had befriended Danford McGee and they had met for years at a local

Wizarding pub - in a private backroom of course, that befit the dignity of the Weasley patriarch. They both enjoyed discussing the matters of the day. Now, Danford and his wife, Helen, ate with the Weasleys on the first Thursday night of each month, and the Weasleys took evening repast with the McGees on the third Saturday of the month.

Helen was the only child and heir to the adjoining estate. Danford and Castor managed property issues together from time to time. In Illisa's timetable, the McGee's eventually revealed that Danford was a Muggleborn wizard who had been a Gryffindor at Hogwarts.

After a week of deliberations, the Weasley family agreed to support Percival in his intention to fight for the rights of Muggleborns and Half-bloods, *and* recommend independence for the American Wizarding nation thriving in the colonies.

Castor was in his last days. It would be only three months before he succumbed to his illnesses, but the patriarch sent post owls out to every friend he'd ever made, and helped present his son's findings and recommendations. They persuaded, pressured, and down right threatened a few to support Sir Percival's "Rights for All Wizards" legislation.

When Castor died, the conflict in the Wizengamot became even more intense. Sir Percival spent huge sums of his own money and wielded the Weasley family's forty-six votes like a scalpel one day and a battle axe the next. He compromised and voted for measures he previously would not have supported, all in an attempt to gather allies for the rights of the British Muggleborns and Half-bloods, and an independent American Wizarding nation.

Sir Percival was still truly a Slytherin. When Derford Umbridge categorically refused to ever support Weasley's agenda, Sir Percival pulled all of his support from a small measure that would have slightly aided his own financial position, but in denying its passage, Sir Percival hurt the Umbridge fortunes significantly. Glyphco and Draco invited Derford to lunch later that day.

In the end, however, it was Sir Percival's good heart and sincere commitment to doing what was right that provided ninety-five percent of the support needed to see all of his pro-Muggleborn and Pro-American legislation passed.

The last five percent was provided by the machinations of the Malfoys. Glyphco arranged for Weasley to succeed, but at the cost of Sir Percival's integrity. On that day Malfoy and Umbridge simply were not present for the vote. Without their opposition, Sir Percival's measures all passed by three votes. He'd burned all of his bridges and good will among his fellow Wizengamot members to do it, but the measure was now law.

And at that time, a law, once passed, could not be overturned for thirty-three years, unless it was repealed within thirty-three days.

The year was 1780. The vote was taken on Thursday, April 27th, just before the one month Spring break before budgetary discussions began in June. Because this legislation was not a popular subject, little was reported in the *Daily Prophet*.

Thirty-four days later, on Thursday June first, Glyphco Malfoy and Derford Umbridge exacted their revenge when they accused Sir Percival of bribing their personal secretaries to stop them from voting against the measures. They even produced signed receipts for the bribes. In truth, Weasley had thought he was paying for certain costs related to paperwork he had requested, but he had failed to read the detail written on the receipts. With Malfoy and Umbridge's personal secretaries agreeing to all of the accusations, there was little Sir Percival could offer in his own defense.

Since it was too late to overturn the legislation, Umbridge and Malfoy urged that the deepest and harshest damages be awarded to them from the Weasley family, since they were the ones aggrieved.

All of the Weasley lands and holdings were confiscated. Most of their liquid funds had already been used in the campaign. The Malfoys were awarded all of the wealth not taken as Ministry fines, and Derford Umbridge was given the Weasley Family's forty-six Wizengamot votes for ten generations.

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"Miss Newcastle."

"Yes, Harry, and it is Cilla."

"Er, Cilla, you have that last part wrong. The Weasleys lost the Family votes indefinitely. I've seen the actual documents."

"Oh," she said, "I was certain that I had that part right."

"Never mind that," Ron shouted. "The Malfoys became rich by stealing from us!"

"Ron," Harry said. "I assure you after my time in the Wizengamot this summer and reading the rules, they didn't actually *steal* it. It was completely rotten and dishonest, but not illegal. It was malicious and despicable, but it was all within the laws of the day."

Ron silently fumed, and Ginny's fair skin grew even paler. Harry took her hand to comfort her, and Hermione leaned from her chair to hug her boyfriend.

"There is some good news from all of this," Newcastle said.

Ron looked up, snorted at no one in particular, and resumed glaring at his feet.

Cilla continued, "The Madison, Jonas, Cooper, and Hamilton lands had all been confiscated, but everyone forgot that Matilda was born a Hardesty. After two months of living in a tiny inn near what had been named the Weasley Manor, and now is the Malfoy Manor, Sir Percival was called late one night from the tiny suite he shared with his mother.

"A very tall figure completely covered in a black cloak with the hood drawn up around the face beckoned Sir Percival over to a barely lit corner of the empty dining room.

"It was Mattie Madison," Cilla revealed, "and she had three things for Sir Percival. First she offered

him the undying gratitude and admiration of the American Wizarding nation, and to his credit, the journal of the first Mattie Madison recorded that those sentiments meant the most to Sir Percival. \ Knowing that he had paid a great personal price to obtain their freedom, Mattie Madison also gave Sir Percival one hundred Galleons, and the chance to buy the un-confiscated deed to the Hardesty lands in Ottery St. Catchpole for fifty Galleons, the minimum payment required by law. The remaining fifty Galleons were to fix the homestead the Burrow and despite Sir Percival's insistence otherwise, she persuaded him to keep that money."

"So that's how we have the Burrow?" Ginny asked.

"Yes," Cilla said, "assuming it is still the same land.

"Oh, and I should tell you that in the main court inside the oldest building in the Madison Academy in Wisconsin, there is a statue of Sir Percival Weasley. A similar statue stands in the Department of Magic's main entrance in Langley, Virginia."

Cilla smiled and said, "See, Harry, you are well known in American, but the Weasley name is famous, even though no Weasley has ever set foot in our country since Sir Percival's brief visit in late 1776."

Hermione asked, "You said the first Mattie Madison?"

"Yes. Just because the British Ministry of Magic had granted the magical colonies their independence, didn't mean that Apollyon Malfoy had given up his desire to be magical lord of the New World. He had his Dark army, and he became our first Dark Lord.

"We had our spheres of influence in New England, and across the upper Midwest of American, all the way to the Badger state."

"The Badger state?" Hermione asked.

"Yes. Each state in the US has a nickname. Wisconsin is called the badger state in honor of Mattie Madison being a Hufflepuff. We use the same house colors and mascots Hogwarts does. Of course the Primaries in Wisconsin think it's called the Badger state because all of the miners dug their holes in the side of the mountains like badgers would, but that's just silly.

"And of course, Madison is the capital city of Wisconsin. It was named for Mattie and Jamie Madison."

Newcastle looked at them like she'd lost her place, and then said, "Oh, yes, the first Mattie Madison. All during what non-magicals the world over call the American Revolution, the Dark army of Apollyon Malfoy fought to help those Primary, er Muggle British forces that were the most brutal and sadistic. He was a mad man with all of the rituals he'd undergone and and potions taken to increase his power.

"Fourteen months after Mattie Madison sold Sir Percival the Hardesty estate for a pittance, the forces of Light and the Dark Army met not five miles from the siege taking place at Yorktown. Apollyon was

determined to destroy the French fleet that was blockading General Cornwallis's army there, and preventing the British fleet from rescuing them.

"In a terrible battle Mattie Madison defeated and killed Apollyon Malfoy, saving the magical and non-magical American colonies from subjugation. Unfortunately, Mattie died of her wounds a few hours after the victory was assured.

"I said she was the first Mattie Madison. Madisons almost always have sons, who are highly intelligent Squibs. On the rare occasion a daughter is born, she is named Matilda. They have all been brilliant and powerful witches, not to mention Madison Academy head girls from Hufflepuff house.

"The great-granddaughter of the first Matilda, was such a witch and died defeating the Dark Lord Bartholomew Tryon during what is called the War of 1812.

"The third Matilda Madison died in 1865 defeating the Dark Witch, Glenda Forrest, the torturer of slaves and Primaries alike.

"Another Matilda Madison died in 1918 in the American Wizarding Expeditionary forces that brought about the Magical Armistice in June of that year.

"I understand your History of Magic professor hasn't covered the Grindelwald war, has he?"

They all shook their heads.

"Well," Newcastle continued, "a Mattie Madison died protecting Albus Dumbledore's back while he fought the final duel, defeating Grindelwald in 1945.

"And we are all excited, because there is another Mattie Madison who is a rising sixth year now. She is leading the Eagle Squadron of Madison Academy students coming to be a part of the Paladin Program this year at Hogwarts.

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### **After the Visit**

They were reluctant to leave when Hermione noticed the time; but they would be late getting back to Grimmauld Place if they didn't go soon. They all thanked Cilla Newcastle for her wonderful historical account and demonstration of computer technology.

After they left Ron said, "If all history was like that I'd pay more attention."

"Do you mean if it was all that interesting," Harry asked with a smile, "or if it all featured the Weasleys as heroes?"

"Both," Ron said with chuckle. "I want it to be interesting, exciting even, but I could stand a little droning on if a Weasley is the good guy?"

They all laughed and continued talking about the afternoon.

As they walked back into the castle, Harry asked Ginny if she had plans for the evening.

"No, Harry. Why do you ask?"

"I'd like to have another business dinner to discuss your StudyBook marketing efforts. The student edition looks brill, but I think there are even greater possibilities for different versions for the workplace."

Ron started to say something but Hermione knocked him into a wall before he could open his mouth.

Ginny's glare, which Harry missed, stopping Ron from any further misspeaks.

"I'd like that," she said. "On the condition that you let me buy tonight, Harry."

Hermione and Ron had walked away from the two, at Hermione's insistence, and Harry leaned in and said, "I won't do that, but let me explain why after they leave, all right?"

Ginny looked up into his eyes and willed herself not to blush. By this time they'd caught up with the Ron and Hermione at the Floo fireplace.

"What time should Ron tell Mum you'll have me home, Harry?"

He looked at her. "Is 10:00 all right, Ginny? I have several things I want to show you."

"Tell, Mum I'll be back by eleven, please Ron."

"But Ginny, that's awfully late, and besides--"

Hermione took advantage of that pause in Ron's wind up to shove him in the fireplace, toss in the Floo powder, and shout the address. Then she said, "I'll tell her, Ginny. Good night, Harry. Fascinating day, wasn't it?" With that, she Floo-ed off as well.

"What's Ron's problem, Ginny?"

"Male Weasley Foot-In-Mouth disease. You remember Percy and even the twins could open their food traps and say the most idiotic things."

"Yeah, but the twins were always funny, and Percy was pompously hysterical. Ron is..."

"Ron hasn't yet found his brand of humorous tripe to spew. I blame the Paladin potions; it should have surfaced by now."

"Oh... okay, if you say so."

"So, where are we having this business dinner?"

"First, I want to show you something."

They Flooed to a magical pub outside of Windsor, west of London. Harry hailed a taxi. It was a brand new LTI model, and the cabbie was only too proud to tell of its many features. Ginny smiled and oohed and aahed, and Harry laughed. Her face showed him she didn't understand much of it, but she'd enjoyed it anyway.

"You sure you want this place, Gov?" the cabbie asked when they reached their destination.

"It's fine. I own it."

"Bit of a wreck isn't it?"

"I hope to fix that. Do you mind waiting?" Harry asked handing him a ten-pound note. "We'll only be a few minutes. Keep the meter running. That's just a tip to wait. I'll pay the full fare and appropriate tip when you take us to our next destination."

"Take your time, Gov. Bob will be right here, when you're done. Spot on right here."

Harry and Ginny entered the building. It stood on the edge between a commercial district and a warehouse district, but it backed up to a wooded area a hundred yards or so beyond a fence. Inside they found an open space over 150 feet by nearly 200 feet, with a high ceiling. To the right was another open area that was about two-thirds as large, but with a lower ceiling--about sixteen feet high.

Ginny looked around for a bit and then looked at Harry with curiosity.

He said, "The Potters own a fair bit of magical land, but much more Muggle industrial property. Most of it has long-term leases with factories on it--boring but profitable. This place was an idea a great-uncle of mine had in the twenties. I just wanted you to see it. When we go to the next place, this will make sense to you." They climbed back in the taxi and in ten minutes Bob deposited them in front of a restaurant. They entered to see the eating area, but to the right was a bar with an open area for dancing. -The bar was relatively deserted--there was no band, just soft music playing in the background.

The maitre de came forward. Harry asked for a secluded booth for two, but asked if they could look at the dance floor first and then be seated. The restaurant was only half full, so this was no problem.

After a brief tour of the nightclub area, they moved to their table in the restaurant side and ordered. Harry said the cuisine was something called "California."

"It's all the rage with the Yanks, supposedly," he added. "If you like fish or chicken let's say, and you think the way a particular meal is described appeals to you, just order it. If you don't like it, we'll ask for something else."

Ginny had the fish, and Harry ordered chicken. The meal was not like anything they had ever tasted, except for Harry's one previous visit. Bill had brought him here, at the advice of the goblins. Bill had



suggested that Harry open a restaurant in the vacant Potter property. His goblin mentors had agreed with Bill that a successful restaurant could be a great business, and a goblin retail specialist in the field had suggested visiting this particular restaurant for ideas. Bill had even shown Harry a Gringotts manual printed on Muggle paper that outlined the steps of succeeding in the restaurant business.

By the time Harry and Ginny had finished eating and talking about the StudyBook professional versions, the place had filled and there were more than fifty people sitting in the dancing area.

A young man dressed oddly even for Muggles stepped behind a counter on the opposite side of the dance floor. He spoke into a microphone and invited everyone to dance.

"How did he do that without a *Sonorus* charm, Harry?"

"Muggles have a number of inventions to accomplish what we do with magic. You saw those computers today. I don't know much about them, only what Dudley and Vernon complain about, but once in a while they would tell of what the devices can do.

"Imagine the entire Hogwarts library in that one box. Imagine you type in Healing potions and cuts. As I understand it, if the information is in the system, you would find a list of every potion used to heal cuts, along with how to make the potion and how to use it. All in a matter of seconds. No more searching the stacks."

"It's... it's like magic, Harry."

Harry smiled. "I've been around a few Muggle devices that will completely amaze you, Ginny, and I've been kept from most of them by my relatives. Never let the fact that they can't do magic make you think Muggles aren't capable. Your dad isn't mad thinking they are fascinating. It's the same only different with Mrs. Granger's fascination with magic."

They listened to the music for a while. Harry looked at his watch, and called the waiter over.

"I want to stay in this booth for a couple of more hours, but go dance for a while. Is that all right?"

The waiter looked at him with distaste. "Wouldn't sir like to move to the dance floor?"

The service had been excellent, so far, so Harry said, "Sir wishes to do as he said." He handed the waiter a twenty-pound notes and said, "That's to keep the table. I'll pay and tip you generously for the meal in full. We'll also have pudding later, and perhaps coffee or something else. Satisfied?"

The waiter looked contrite. "My apologizes sir, it's just that this is a prime table for those not interested in dancing. It could produce several more tips for me this night. Do you want to talk to the manager to have a new waiter or waitress assigned to you?"

Harry looked at his nametag. "No, Stuart, you'll do nicely. I thought that was the way it worked with the table, but probably most young people don't. I'd planned a better tip, but you didn't know that.

"Tell you what, we want to do a taste test. In about thirty minutes bring us one of every soda you have

and we'll stop to rest. Neither of us have done much of this type of dancing, so we'll take a break then and regroup."

"Very good, sir."

"Harry, I don't think I can do that type of dancing," Ginny said nervously.

"I can't either, but if you notice, no one does the same thing really. We'll just go out there and sway to the beat, trying whatever we see that we like. No one knows us here, so what if we look terrible. It's not like Draco will walk in and see us, and then go telling everyone at Hogwarts we can't Muggle dance."

He smiled at her, and she swiftly agreed.

They struggled through a few of the songs, but others were easier to dance to. They both were in great shape, so it didn't tax them at all to try steps they observed.

Harry saw the drinks arrive and steered Ginny back to their table.

He said, "None of these are anything like pumpkin juice or anything else you've had before, I don't think. They're fizzy, so put it up to you mouth carefully and drink slowly until you're used to the tiny bubbles hitting your nose."

Ginny liked the clear sodas best, with their citrus-y taste. She thought the colas were a bit strong, and the root beer reminded her of a drink her mother made on occasions, which she didn't like.

"I like this one a lot," Ginny said, pointing to one of the clear drinks. Harry smiled, and then turned a little serious.

"What do you think of this place, Ginny?"

"I like it. Do you plan to turn that building you showed me into another one like this?"

"You're too quick for me. I've thought about it, a Wizarding version of it. Before today I thought we could only do it with live music, and there are only a few Wizarding bands, and they're too expensive to have every night. This place can exist for less money per night by using that bloke playing music and running his mouth. Couldn't you see someone like Lee Jordan or Colin Creevey doing what he does?"

"Either of them or Paul White in Hufflepuff. What you saw today with those computers will help you with this?"

"Yes. All that sound equipment won't work with a room full of magicals, but if we could use the Null Void Shielding Cilla Newcastle told us about, then it becomes possible. Bill suggested making a restaurant only, but to do that would need major renovations. Like this, we only have cosmetic changes to make. The building is structurally sound.

"I can't decide whether to bring in one or two partners," he said.

"Oh?"

"I've decided to approach Harry Greenbee, with Greenbee's restaurant. I think he could make the food a go, and I don't know a thing about that business. I thought of him after we visited his Harry's Restaurant last time we went to dinner together.

"The other partner might be Justin Finch-Fletchley. He can bring in the technology, but that's not hard to take care of. I'd like to bring him in on this just to help him make a success in the magical world so he can prove himself to his family. It spreads the risk as well."

Harry went on to explain about Justin, and their dealings beyond what she knew regarding his supplying them the blank ledgers for their StudyBooks.

The two danced some more, and had pudding. They left as the place became really crowded.

"Are we calling another taxi, Harry?" Ginny asked as they walked away from the restaurant.

"Can you keep a secret, Ginny?" She looked at him in a humorous perturbed manner. He chuckled and said, "Of course you can. But this is a secret from everyone--everyone."

They walked into an alleyway and Harry wandlessly and wordlessly Summoned a tin can. He shot his regular wand from its holster and pointed it at the can.

*"Portkey!"*

Ginny looked perplexed. "Harry, that's not the incantation, and the Ministry won't like it if you make Portkeys without a license."

Harry smiled. "First, that wasn't the Portkey charm, it's my own Mongered charm to enchant traveling anchors for the spell I call the Portus charm. The incantation is *Portkey* ."

"Oh, Harry, the Arithmantic Spell Crafters will be furious. You're rubbing their noses in Flobberworm dung with that name and incantation."

He grinned. "It's completely untrackable by them. I used it all around the Ministry today and nothing happened. I didn't have the Portkey charm to mimic, so I designed this completely from scratch last night."

"You did this in a night? I read where it took the Ministry Crafters back then over fifty years to produce that spell."

"Well, I've been thinking about it for awhile. I have a weapon in mind to use with a modification of this exact spell. I'll talk to the twins later about it. In the mean time..."

Harry held out the can and she grabbed hold. He activated it and it felt nothing like Portkey travel.



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Harry smiled ruefully. "I don't go looking for it, Professor. I just deal with what comes my way as best I can."

"Do you, Harry?" asked Dumbledore.

Harry stopped and looked the Headmaster in the eyes for several seconds.

"Explain please, Headmaster," Harry said. He had a blank, almost warning look on his face and in his tone.

"I understand most of the Death Eaters that have attacked you have been taken to the morgue at the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, rather than Admissions at St. Mungo's."

Harry said nothing, but continued to fix Dumbledore with his stare.

The Headmaster sighed and continued, "I fear for you, Harry, that killing has become too easy for you, and that you hold too little value for life."

Harry frowned. "Have you asked Darance Bread, Alexius Tiller, or Isaiah Smith how precious I hold their lives?"

"I admire your abilities to protect those you know, Harry, but what of the lives of those you've killed? Could you not have used a Body-Bind or Petrification spell?"

"I could have. We used them in the Department of Mysteries, the six of us who went there, but the Death Eaters simply cancelled those spells as fast as we cast them - faster, since it generally took us a number of shots to hit a moving and shielded target. Those I've hit this summer don't stand back up and fire at me or anyone else."

"Yes," Dumbledore said slowly. "Most of them never stand up again."

"Right, Professor." Harry's voice was hard now. "They never stand and apply the Cruciatus to children again. They never laugh as they rape young girls again. And they never kill whole families again and then enjoy a drink at the pub before going home."

"Tragic to think of all of life's little pleasures those Death Eaters will miss out on in the future, thanks to me."

"Sarcasm doesn't become you, Harry." Dumbledore said.

"Favoring the lives of those bent on evil instead of the innocent doesn't become you, Headmaster. Good day."

With that Harry turned towards the doors to the Entrance Hall.

Before Harry was out of earshot Dumbledore said, "Such callousness towards life was a hallmark of Tom Riddle as an older student, Harry."



Harry paused for a second, and then huffed. He mounted his broom there in the Entrance Hall. With a wave of his hand the doors shot open and he blasted out of the castle at the Firebolt's full acceleration speed.

Dumbledore moved towards the doors but before he had taken two steps, Dobby popped into his path, his bony green hands raised threateningly towards the Headmaster.

"Professor Dumbledore. You will never speak to Harry Potter that way on this subject again. You don't know of what you speak, and I will not have you upset him."

"Dobby, your speech--"

"House-elves learn human speech from our masters, but we talk as you like us to. Harry Potter asked that I never speak in that way again. I express myself as the greatest wizard in the world wants his friend and house-elf to talk. But you distract me.

"Professor Dumbledore, yesterday morning at St. Simon's after Morning Prayer, Harry Potter was walking an elderly Muggle woman to her granddaughter's automobile. As they drove off, another auto hit a dog that had been crossing the road."

Dobby paused and his voice lowered in respect. "Harry Potter ran to it and tried every healing charm he knew to save it. He called for me and I followed him to an animal clinic in the nearby town. He told the veterinarian that money was no object, but it was too late for that poor creature."

A tear formed at the corner of Dobby's eye. "Harry Potter cried for the longest time. Father Martin has been warning him something like this would happen. Father Martin sits and talks long into the night with Harry Potter after he kills to protect others. You may wish to speak with the good priest. Though Father William will keep Harry Potter's confidences, I am sure he can calm your fears, if you do not believe me."

Dobby sniffed and then straightened his shoulders.

"Never discuss this with Harry Potter again, or you will answer to me."

Before Dumbledore could respond, Dobby popped away, intentionally producing the most earsplitting popping sound he could.

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The next day was Sunday. After early services at St. Simon's, Harry opened the Sunday edition of the *Daily Prophet*. He wanted to see the ads for Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes and Phoenix Fashions, the new name for Clarinda's Shop.

Harry had suggested calling it Clarinda's, stating that it was standard in the Muggle world to name the shop after the chief designer, but Clarinda had insisted on something else.

"Phoenix Fashions" had come to her while Lee Jordan was telling the seamstress Mazey about

Harry's relationship with Fawkes.

Everybody associated with the new enterprise and the closely associated Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes loved the name.

Harry had balked at posing in Clarinda's wizardwear for the advertisements in the *Daily Prophet*. However, the twins made a strong case (with no pranks or humor) that Harry's face and name would add cachet to the shop and its new fashions. Of course, after Harry had agreed to do it, Fred and George teased him unmercifully.

Fleur Delacour had also posed for the ad. There were several shots of each of them wearing various outfits Clarinda selected to feature in the paper, and there was one small shot of the two of them together.

That advertisement Harry sought was there in the Sunday edition. However, he was *not* ready to read the headline of that day's *Daily Prophet*.

### **PEACE IN OUR TIME!**

Minister Cornelius Fudge late yesterday declared "Peace in our time," when he announced a signed peace treaty with He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Fudge stated, "I've had Ambassador Carver Glean working on this treaty for months now. In spite of those who nearly destroyed this peace through the Vampire Clan negotiations, and in spite of those who have attacked emissaries of peace sent from, er, Lord Thingy, we have secured a lasting peace."

Details were sketchy in the rushed press conference late Saturday afternoon, but the Minister stated that all so-called Death Eaters would no longer react to those attacking the traditional Wizarding way of life. "Instead," Fudge stated, "we will have a committee headed by Undersecretary Dolores Umbridge, with Ambassador Glean participating, to address the issues You-Know-Who and his Traditionalist supporters seek to, er address."

This reporter asked the Minister if his remarks regarding interference with the negotiations and attacks on emissaries of You-Know-Who were referring to Harry Potter, the so-called Boy-Who-Lived. The minister refused to confirm or deny Potter's interference with peaceful negotiations."

Harry almost tore up the paper in disgust, but noticed a second article just below the fold on the front page.

## Diagon Alley Peace Day!

Minister Fudge announced that to celebrate "Peace In Our Time," the Ministry is arranging for a special day for all of those families and students of Hogwarts coming to Diagon Alley to buy their school supplies.

Fudge declared, "Sunday, August 25th, will be a special day in the Wizarding world as we celebrate "Peace In Our Time." The Ministry will use Arithmantic Spell Crafters from the Department of Mysteries to expand the thoroughfares at Diagon Alley to promote a carnival atmosphere. We encourage booths of special entertainments and perhaps even a circus ride or two. The Ministry asks all of those planning to come to Diagon Alley for their start of school supplies to wait until that day."

Harry tore the paper to shreds. Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes and Phoenix Fashions had already purchased full-page ads in this edition of the *Daily Prophet* and smaller ads for each day this week. Had they known of this earlier they could have saved their money and bought bigger ads only for the next weekend.

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Harry had planned to go to Diagon Alley and watch the shops from the back offices, coming out to help if, and only if, the best of all hopes happened, and the shops were swamped with customers and needed an extra hand.

Instead, Harry walked casually down the Alley from the main Apparation point, and noticed that the place seemed fairly empty. He made it to Phoenix Fashions and asked after everyone and what they thought of the news.

"Well I'm not displeased to have a few more days to prepare," Clarinda stated. "If we can have more clothes on the racks to sell, we'll realize more immediate income and more word of mouth than if we only have samples to peruse. And a down payment on advance orders is not as good as having the total sum from a regular purchase. There is nothing like trying on what you fancy and having it fitted to you right then and there."

Just as Harry walked into the back room to go to Weasleys', he heard the door slam shut and a rough voice address Clarinda rudely. "So, you bloody chit, no Potter around to save you. I'm going to mess you up and your ruddy store for not paying the M.I.D. like you should have." A small explosion followed his crude words.

It was Albus Jenkins of the Department of Magical Business Licensing and Fees. The thieving bureaucrat used his position in the Ministry to line his pockets with Galleons from Mages Importers and Distributors, Ltd., - known as the M.I.D. - the organization that offered shoddy goods at exorbitant prices and used fear and violence to enforce their stranglehold on Wizarding business owners.

The small explosion resulted from a spell Jenkins cast to destroy the call box to the Goblin Overseers Office - the organization Harry had hired to protect the two shops he had a financial and personal interest in.

As Jenkins raised his wand to wreak some other sort of havoc, Harry Apparated right in front of him and plucked the wand from the man's hand. Then Harry pushed his own wand into Jenkins' fleshy neck.

"I hope you have ten Galleons on you, Mr. Jenkins. That's the deposit we paid for that box. Pull out your purse with your left hand and place it on the counter, then dig out the coins. Do it slowly and I might not snap your wand."

"You can't--"

Harry pushed his own wand deep into the man's neck.

"Whatever I may choose to do to you right now, I don't think you are in any position to stop me. Do as I tell you or I might cut off your left sleeve and see what we find tattooed on your skin."

"Hah! I'm no Death Eater," Jenkins protested.

"No, you just act like one - common thugs, all of you. No, instead of cutting off your sleeve, I'll just take you down to Gringotts. That box belongs to them; we only rent it. I'll let you explain why you destroyed goblin property. Better make it twenty Galleons to pay for the replacement." Harry had no idea if they bought, rented, or just had the call box there, but he decided Jenkins was going to pay in some way before he left the shop.

Jenkins paled momentarily when Harry mentioned the goblins and damaging their property, but the fear gave way to resignation as he slowly pulled his coin pouch from his robe and placed it on the counter as instructed. He carefully used one hand to withdraw twenty Galleons.

Harry lessened his wand's pressure on Jenkins' throat, and the wizard stumbled backwards towards the door. Harry followed the man and crowded him away from the door handle.

"Potter, you're in trouble now, threatening and robbing a Ministry official," Jenkins brayed.

"I doubt it, Mr. Jenkins. I have several witnesses here that saw you attack our property, heard you make threats, and begin to cast a spell on Miss Jordan here.

"And I, as a member of the Wizengamot, do hold a little sway with Magical Law Enforcement. I think I can persuade Madam Bones to request Veritaserum testimony from you, if you decide to press charges. I'll visit the Department of Magical Law Enforcement later today; then we'll be by to see you."

Harry sneered a very Snape-ish sneer and said, "Good day to you, sir. Do come again - in a hundred years or so." Then Harry opened the door for him and tossed his wand out onto the cobblestones, making sure to reverse the polarity of the wand core for good measure.

Jenkins glowered, but ran into the empty thoroughfare to retrieve his wand.

Harry closed the door and called, "Dobby."

"You called, Harry?"

"Yes, Dobby. Please go to the Goblin Overseers Office and inform them that our call box was destroyed by a Ministry thug that also moonlights for the M.I.D." Harry explained the rest to him and Dobby popped off.

Seconds after Dobby left, they heard Mazey, one of the seamswitchresses, screaming right outside the shop. She'd volunteered to run to Fortescue's for coffee and scones.

Through the shop window they could see Mazey on the ground, and under the Cruciatus Curse, which they just lifted.

Lee, who had just come in through the doorway connecting the shops, drew his wand, growling; he'd begun dating Mazey recently.

"No, Lee," Harry said. "You stay here and protect everyone else. They shouldn't be able to penetrate the wards without a significant effort, but stay here just in case. Dobby should be right back. Have him return to Gringotts for Overseer help. Meanwhile, shout for the Aurors through the Floo. I'll get Mazey."

Harry raised his hands and both wands snapped into place. Soundlessly he Disapparated out of the shop and right behind the two Death Eaters who were standing over Mazey, ready to torture her again.

Harry's first instinct was to use *Reducto* rs on them, but taking Dumbledore's request for moderation to heart, Harry cast simultaneous Stunners instead. The Death Eaters fell over, and Harry reached for Mazey. A significant crack echoed through the Alley as he Disapparated her back into the shop.

Harry looked out of the window and saw the stunned Death Eaters being released from the spell by their cohorts in crime. He raised his wand and silently Apparated to a position right in front of the shop.

"Surrender now, that was my last Stunner."

An unexpected event occurred next. Two Death Eaters Apparated to either side of him. Their Apparation cracks were very loud and close by, and as they were on either side of Harry, the distraction delayed his response. That was all the time they needed to snatch Harry's wands from his hands and Disapparate away.

The remaining pair of Death Eaters then cast simultaneous Cruciatus curses on him.

Inside the shop Lee moved to the door, but Mazey and Clarinda reminded him that opening the doors would lower the wards protecting them. Lee tried to Disapparate outside, but couldn't. When he asked no one in particular how Harry had exited that way, Clarinda speculated that Harry had had himself

keyed to the wards.

In tremendous agony, Harry still managed to raise one hand towards his two attackers. A weak Cutting curse lazed out of Harry's hand, and hit the Death Eater's wand hand. The cut was not too bad, but the surprise of it combined with the pain caused that Death Eater to drop his wand. The other Death Eater looked at his co-torturer in surprise, and lowered his wand, releasing Harry from torment.

With a grunt, Harry reached across his battle vest and pulled from the Concealment charms two of his throwing knives. He held them out by the hilts as if to stab, not by the blades so he could throw them.

Harry simultaneously Disapparated from his lying position noisily. The two Death Eaters looked down to where he had been. To their surprise, Harry Apparated right in front of them and pushed the blades into their throats.

As they fell over, Harry was struck on his right thigh with a Cutting curse. It didn't cut all the way to the bone, but it did open a gash that bled freely. Harry fell to his right and leaned over grabbing his thigh, which probably saved his life. A *Reducto* missed him flying just where his head had been a fraction of a second before. Harry rolled away from another *Crucio* that landed where he had fallen. The blast from the Unforgivable blew stone shrapnel into the back of his head, which also began to bleed.

Harry came up out of his roll and raised his hands in front of him. He cast *Protego* just in time to deflect another Cutter and a Stunner. Then he Disapparated and re-appeared right behind one of his attackers with his Fairbairn knife already drawn. Harry stabbed the Death Eater in the back and through a lung, before he was hit by the edge of a *Reducto* r spell on his right shoulder. Harry dropped the knife, his right arm useless.

He Disapparated again and was gone for several seconds. He reappeared right in front of one of the remaining Death Eaters holding the short stubby wand Harry kept in his right boot. The Cutting curse Harry wordlessly cast would have given Sir Nick another almost headless friend, if the Death Eater had become a ghost. Harry instinctively raised another Shield charm in time to interfere with a powerful *Reducto* r.

Most of it dissipated against the Shield, but some of it came through and hit Harry in the chest, beating him to the ground and knocking the breath out of him. The triumphant Death Eater walked over to the young wizard, as Harry gasped for air while groping for his wand.

Harry rolled in a ball, protecting his face and ribs from further damage.

Bellatrix Lestrange pulled up her mask and said, "Potter, I engineered your defeat here. I'll take your life now, but I want to see your face as I do it."

She stepped up to him and with amazing strength she used her stiletto-heeled boot to kick at his feet, causing him to roll over onto his back to face her while he was still balled up.

Big mistake.

As he rolled, Harry thrust forward with both of his legs that had been curled to his chest, aiming for her kneecaps.

Her scream resounded throughout Diagon Alley in a chilling echo of pain as both of her legs bent in the wrong direction. Bellatrix fell over and disappeared a second later.

The only Death Eaters left in the Alley were down and probably dead. Cursing his uselessness, Lee bolted through the dropping wards as he opened the shop doors and ran to Harry with Clarinda right behind him, tears in her eyes.

Aurors arrived at that moment, running from the Alley Apparation point.

Much can be said about Aurors arriving late to the scene of a fight, but in truth, they are often not to blame. Kingsley Shacklebolt led this group and he had no intention of arriving one second later than he could to help Harry. Aurors had protocols they were forced to follow - some wise and some ill conceived.

It is dangerous to Apparate right into a battle zone. An Auror doing so has a moment of disorientation when arriving. Only in line-of-sight-Apparation did one appear without that second of bewilderment. At that moment, the person appearing is an easy target for attackers. Unfortunately, Fudge signed a rule that Aurors must use the Diagon Alley Apparation Point and travel on foot to their appointed location of action. That added perhaps thirty seconds to their arrival in this particular instance.

From Harry asking Lee to Floo Auror HQ to the time Kingsley arrived was less than two minutes. Wizard firefights, at least Harry Potter's firefights, just didn't last that long.

Tonks ran to Harry's side and quickly applied Wound Closing spells to his deeper cuts. Harry was still gasping for air.

"Benson, establish a perimeter and begin questioning the witnesses," Kingsley ordered. "Flowers, take any Death Eater that lived through this to Holding and call a mediwizard. You know what to do with the dead. Tonks and I will Portkey Harry to St. Mungo's and I'll be back shortly."

"Wait," Harry spoke raggedly.

"Harry--" Tonks began with concern in her voice, but Harry raised his working left hand.

He took a rough deep breath, closed his eyes, and then called out, "Fawkes!"

The firebird flashed into sight and landed at Harry's right side. The majestic bird took in Harry's condition and leaned over to release a tear.

"No, Fawkes," Harry croaked. He took another pained breath and said quietly, "Someone took my wand, the one with your feather in it. Can you... is it possible for you to sense it and retrieve it for me? No worries if you can't, or if it's too dangerous--"

Fawkes disappeared in a burst of flame.

No one spoke for a while, and then Kingsley cleared his throat and said, "Well... all right then. Yes," he finally said decisively. "You all have your assignments. Now, Harry, if Fawkes finds your wand I'm sure he will--"

Another fiery intrusion erupted above them and Fawkes circled to land next to Harry once more. He held out a talon holding the wand in question. As the bird released his catch, three bloody fingers, apparently recently torn from a hand, fell to the ground.

"Thank you, Fawkes," Harry said weakly.

The bird trilled and all of those present felt a thrill run through them. Fawkes then proceeded to drip tears on several of Harry's deeper cuts that Tonks had just field dressed.

Harry grabbed his wand and said, "I don't know if Aurors use finger prints, blood samples, or any other test that might identify who those belong to, but at least tell St. Mungo's Patient Admitting to call you if someone comes in missing those three fingers."

Harry nodded at his wand and the blood vanished. He tossed it around to bring the handle towards him. Before it landed in his grasp the wand retracted into his wand holster.

Harry then passed out.

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The sound of a door opening and the accompanying change in pressure in the room awoke Harry. He kept his eyes closed, and took stock of his condition. He hurt but it wasn't too bad. Harry remembered why he was here, and then realized a soft hand was holding his.

"Any changes, dear?" Harry heard Mrs. Weasley whisper.

"No, Mum," Ginny responded. The nearness of her voice told Harry it was Ginny holding his hand.

"I'm awake," he said in a croaky voice.

"Hello, Harry," Ginny said as she dropped his hand. "Can I help you sit up for some water? How do you feel?"

"I think I can sit up by myself, but have a pillow ready, please."

"Are you hungry, Harry dear?"

"No... well, actually I am a bit, thanks just the same, Molly. How long have I been here, and when can I leave?"

"You were under the Cruciatus, Harry dear, and thanks for feeling free to call me Molly. Surely you



have the nerve pain and shakes from the curse?"

Harry looked at the ceiling for a moment. "No, just a bit of a headache from bouncing around on the cobblestones, and a few sore places where I was cut or beat on, but I've felt worse after Quidditch practice. They must have been new Death Eaters, their *Crucios* weren't that bad."

"Lee told us one of them was Bellatrix Lestrange."

"Yeah," Harry responded looking at his hands. "She must be losing her touch, or I'm getting used to torture." He shivered. "That's a talent I could do without."

"Lee told us you severely damaged Bella's legs. Is that true?" Ginny asked with a smile on her face. She knew that stories about Harry tended to be either wild fabrications or gross understatements.

Harry chuckled tiredly. "Yes, did he tell you the circumstances?"

"No. Her back was to the shop and no one saw what you actually did."

"I was down, and had just lost my third wand. I had also lost my Fairbairn. Oh, did some one pick it up for me, and my short boot wand?"

"They're here with your main wand, Harry," Ginny assured him. She pointed to Harry's wand holster where he could see it on the table by the bed and his holly and phoenix feather wand beside it so he could reach it without bothering with the holster.

"I was down and weaponless," Harry stated. "I didn't think about the other throwing knives I had, and I couldn't easily reach the wand at my back. I have to do something about that."

"Well, I'd had the breath knocked out of me and was balled up like a baby. Bellatrix said she was going to kill me, and I was gathering my strength to Disapparate away just as she started the Killing Curse. However, when she used her boot to kick me over so I'd be facing her when she killed me, I saw my chance and slammed my legs forward and hit Bellatrix in both kneecaps. Her legs folded in the wrong direction. She may not walk right again if she doesn't find proper medical care. Now that would be a crying shame, wouldn't it?" Harry grinned at them.

"As much harm as we can do with a wand, one should not underestimate the satisfaction of physical violence, or so Arthur says," Molly stated with a sigh of resignation. "That was close, Harry, too close."

"In part I blame Dumbledore," Harry said. "No, that's not fair to him really. I should blame myself for being stupid enough to listen to him."

He then went on to tell of how and why he'd attempted to only stun the first two who had tortured Mazey, when his first inclination had been to do them real, perhaps permanent harm. Although he might have been injured even if the first two had stayed down, Harry theorized that the fighting style he'd developed lately would have kept him moving right after the two had Disapparated with his wands, and he probably would have escaped most, if not all of the damage.

"But," Harry said with a sigh, "that's all speculation. I am what I am and where I am and that's that. Just, no more trying to capture Death Eaters without harming them. If they hurt someone, then the best they can expect from me is to be maimed at least enough to put them out of the fight. Five seconds after I Stunned those first two, they were back in action and ready to do harm."

"Dumbledore was here, Harry," Ginny said. "He told us of your conversation. I was about to hex him, but then he said that he had a long conversation with Dobby and now he believes you've only... how'd he say it? Oh, 'you've only put on a cold, uncaring face to keep yourself from breaking down during a fight.' But inside he said, 'you're still our caring Harry.' I'm still not happy with the way he treats you sometimes, but..."

"Now, Ginny," Molly said. "Albus Dumbledore..."

"Albus Dumbledore," Harry interrupted gently, "is a great man with feet of clay. He makes mistakes like we all do. He and I have discussed this over the summer. I give him the benefit of the doubt, and I hope others will do the same for me." "I'm not sure what your conversation was about, Harry," Ginny continued, "But Professor McGonagall was shocked to hear him say what he said."

"McGonagall was here too?" Not waiting for an answer, Harry went on with a smile, "And how about that Dobby? I can only imagine what he said to Dumbledore, but my little elf won't stand for anyone messing with his Harry Potter."

"You sound like he owns you, not the other way around," Molly observed.

"It's my belief, that that is truly the nature of the bond, not the master/elf relationship wizards and witches settle for. When I say, 'my elf' it should mean the same thing as when someone says, 'my brother', or 'my wife, or 'my father.' You don't own the other, you belong to the other and they belong to you. That's what Dobby, Winky, and I have, and I'm all the better for it."

After several moments of silence, Harry asked, "How long have I been out?"

"Eight hours or so - it's late afternoon- but since it's Sunday, no one's working except those in Diagon Alley. Fred and George, and all of the people at Phoenix Fashions sent Clarinda to check on you. She left an hour ago or so. Ron and Hermione came by here as well and left then also. The mediwitch said you've been unconscious because of the potions they gave you, not because of your injuries."

"When can I leave here?"

Ginny smiled broadly. "Who would have ever guessed you'd ask such a question?"

Harry left a half hour later with several potions in Dobby's possession, and the house-elf agreeing to look after his master as well as possible.

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The week leading up to Fudge's Peace Day in Diagon Alley was packed with events. However, in spite of the ballyhoo or perhaps because of it, the days crawled by. Harry acted bored while Fudge

crowed about his "peace in our time" in the Tuesday Wizengamot session. The Minister had asked that standard protocol be suspended and that he be allowed to explain the peace negotiations even before the opening of the session.

Harry had arrived just at the start time and could not check with Mr. Ledbetter to see who held the Hagrid family Right to Rule. Mr. Smith didn't know, and neither did anyone of the family heads or proxies who had joined Smith and Harry in their corner. The count of those openly siding with the two had risen to eight wizards and three witches, representing twenty four votes in addition to Harry's twenty six and Smith's seventeen.

A quickly whispered survey as Fudge pontificated on about his peace with Voldemort showed that none of those in the Smith/Potter corner claimed the Hagrid vote.

Smith counseled quietly, "Harry, it would be best to wait and confirm that you do not take that vote from an ally or even a neutral."

"I promised Hagrid I'd take it from that family, whoever it is, even an ally. If it is a friend, I'll return a proxy to them."

"Well, wait until next session so you can make your claim without upsetting anyone."

"We'll see. Fudge is entirely too pompous with this peace treaty of his."

"Calm, Harry, remain calm."

Harry said nothing in reply. Smith sighed and turned back to Fudge and his self-aggrandizing verbosity.

Eventually Fudge came to an end, saying, "And so, in conclusion, Ambassador Glean and I were able to forge this peace with He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named and his Traditionalist supporters."

Fudge hesitated, looked down at Harry, sneered, and added, "A peace we were able to create in spite of the best efforts of Harry Potter to spoil this accord."

Fudge sat down, and Harry immediately rose to his feet and addressed the assembly.

"I claim the right to comment on our Minister's self-congratulatory gloating, since I was mentioned directly--and insulted--in his boastings."

Florence Sheets interrupted him, shouting, "You're out of order, Potter, you didn't ask the Acting Chief Warlock for permission to speak."

Boaz Brownlea rose and said, "Mister Potter may speak since Mister Fudge insisted on speaking before the session was called to order, Madame Sheets." Brownlea used the customary pronunciation of the titles. "It is only proper that Mister Potter be given the right to respond after such charges. The only one out of order is you since you did not accord our youngest member his proper honorific. I've warned you before. Once more and Mister Potter will have the right to respond in kind." He turned

back to Harry. "Please proceed briefly, Mister Potter."

"Thank you, Chief Warlock. I have little of the skill our esteemed Minister possesses of taking a great deal of time to say very little." Many chuckles were heard around the room. "But I'd like clarification about exactly how I interfered with the Minister's negotiations with murdering terrorists for this very questionable peace treaty. Was it when I saved the treaty with the vampires, as the governments of seven countries participating in that convocation said I did? You remember, the very same peace treaty for which our Minister and this august body rewarded Ambassador Glean an Order of Merlin. It cannot be that event of which you speak when you say I tried to spoil your chances of peace in our time, unless you and the good ambassador were hoping to start a war with the vampires as a means of providing Voldemort with more deadly allies.

"Oh, I know, perhaps the good Minister wishes that I had not defended Messers. Smith, Tiller, Bread, and myself on the occasions when Death Eaters tried to kill us. So, other than defending myself and others from unprovoked attacks and saving a peace treaty, how have I jeopardized this dubious peace in our time?"

Harry paused here, but no one responded other than to smile or stare daggers at him.

Harry continued, "I call it a dubious and questionable peace for the simple reason that I cannot imagine it will last a month. As a matter of fact, I'd wager a vote in the Wizengamot that Voldemort will break this peace by the end of September."

"Potter, how dare you hold this esteemed body in derision by gambling with a Family Right to Rule," Florence Sheets spat.

"Oh, I am in good company when I do so, Madam. Your father, Creadmore Sheets, gambled away two votes and wagered to win three others for your family throughout his long years serving on the Wizengamot. I thought my bet followed an established precedent you'd appreciate."

Harry smirked at her, before saying, "But I appreciate your concern for my vote count. I'll discuss this further after we're in session."

Brownlea called the Wizengamot to order and soon Harry had the floor again to bring a procedural change.

"I have in my possession a writ of sale for a Three-Thirty-Three Family Right to Rule. Its current bona fides have been confirmed by solicitors, and I'll sign it now in the presence of our Clerk Mr. Ledbetter after he's examined it, so he may verify it and see to passing that vote into my possession if he and the Chamber approve my purchase."

Harry walked to Ledbetter's table and presented the document. There was silence, as was appropriate during such a time, but soon Dolores Umbridge broke decorum and shouted, "What family will you swindle for their Right to Rule, Potter?"

Harry smiled. "Come now, Madame Umbridge, you prove yourself uncouth by not following protocol.

Considering how you rejoiced when Madame Sheets took one of my votes," Harry sniffed dramatically, his nose pointed skyward. "Do I smell hypocrisy in the air?"

Harry smiled at what he felt was a well-worded retort to an out of order insult. He remembered at that moment Umbridge's hatred for all half-creatures as she called centaurs and half-giants. He decided to tweak her displeasure a bit more.

"I'll have you know, Madame Umbridge, I have taken charge of the Potter Educational Fund and found Rubeus Hagrid was a Potter Fund student while at Hogwarts. As he was cleared of the charges that expelled him in 1943, he has now resumed his education. I've taken him to buy a new wand, and by the way, he produced a noticeable stream of golden and red sparks." The gasps around the room and Umbridge's eyes becoming wide showed Harry that the meaning of the quantity and color of sparks did not go unnoticed. "Seeing your magical abilities last year at school, Madame, I dare say you cannot produce an appreciable amounts of sparks of any color.

"But back to Hagrid. Because of his educational status in relationship to my family, I am taking an interest in Hagrid's training and hope to see him pass a number of O.W.L. exams in the near future, which will discharge my duties as Protector of one of my magical charges."

An even louder surge of gasps and exclamations of disbelief greeted his last words, and Harry made a mental note to determine just how he'd stepped in it again with this declaration.

"Chief Warlock," Mr. Ledbetter chose that momentary pause to gain the attention of the assembly. "I have reviewed his document. It is legally and appropriately written. I find no fault with its form or provisions. You only need Mister Potter to sign it in our presence to discover if the magic of this Chamber accepts it and makes the transfer. Of course, if it does, the Hagrid family ensigns must be forwarded to Mister Potter in the specified time period."

When Ledbetter mentioned the name Hagrid as the actual family vote in question, Cranford Boom, a crony of the Fudge/Sheets/Umbridge Triumvirate sharply inhaled. Harry, and any number of the rest of those assembled in the room, noticed his actions. The current holder of that Right to Rule had identified himself, and Harry inwardly sighed in relief that he wouldn't be taking a vote from an ally or neutral he'd hope to sway to his faction.

Harry approached the Clerk's Table. He heard Fudge trying to gain the Acting Chief Warlock's attention, but Brownlea gaveled him down. With his signature, Harry heard the melodious gonging sound of an accepted change of a vote from one member of the Wizengamot to another.

Cranford Boom now had three votes instead of four, and Harry had another enemy.

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When that day's assembly ended, Harry turned to Smith immediately upon stepping out of chambers and passing his Wizengamot robes to Dobby. While he casually shrank his hair back from below his shoulders to its usual messy length, he turned to his group of allies and asked, "What did I do this time when I stated I was Hagrid's Protector?"

Several of his newer allies gawked at his hair changes, but Isaiah Smith, Harry mentor in the Wizengamot, was the one who spoke.

"Harry, the Potter Educational Fund charter, like most older charitable charters, becomes deeply involved in the lives of its recipients. Your charter states that those receiving your largesse are your magical charges, but it specifically *does not* declare you *Pater Protector*. As Pater Protector you bring Hagrid, and by extension all of the Potter Fund students, into your family to a degree. They have a right to lay claim to some of your estate should you die without a will, for example." Smith paused, but obviously intended to go on.

Harry interrupted, "But, sir, I didn't say Pater Protector. I used only the title Protector. I believe I can claim the role of Patron Protector, but didn't say that because I'm not entirely sure yet what all that title entails. By not claiming a specific Protector role, I can state that I mean protector-with-a-small-'p' of my magical charges. The Fund charter does say that a magical charge may ask the Potter family for protection."

That explanation brought reflective silence from the small group surrounding Harry. Smith had walked the group of allies to one of the several smaller rooms near the Wizengamot chamber. It was there for such meetings. With Harry's words, Smith pulled his wand and shut the door, casting Sealing and Silencing charms on the entire room.

Almost all of the allies now in the Smith/Potter right hand corner of the Wizengamot chamber were there. Only Mazelina Abbott, Hannah's grandmother, Bartholomew Sigridsen, and Walter Graycloth had pressing matters and had left after closing the session. Bread and Tiller were there, as well as Tiberius Ogden, Mildred Allenton, Trent Macmillan, Dennis Fox, and Fordwin Keels. But it was the eldest member of the Wizengamot, Griselda Marchbanks who spoke next.

"Isaiah, you've led from the right hand corner ever since Benedict Potter died. Do you trust all of us present, or do we need to invoke a magical pledge from each?"

Smith looked at each one in the eyes. He did not linger on any one in particular, but Fordwin Keels spoke. "I have voted on occasion with Fudge and company. I may in the future, but only when I truly agree with the issue, not as a part of their cabal. But please, allow me."

He drew his wand, held it over his heart, and said, "I pledge to keep all said here today privy to only those present, and with those Isaiah Smith includes in the future. So mote it be." He placed his wand back in his robes and said, "Sorry, Harry, Isaiah knows better whom to include ; I mean no slight in not mentioning your name as well." "I have no qualms with your pledge, sir," Harry said. "Remember, in less than a fortnight I return to Hogwarts and my votes will be held in proxy."

Quickly, all there gave similar pledges to Smith. Harry did not do so, and he realized later this was because he was the prime mover right after Mr. Smith in the right hand corner of the chamber.

"Now," Smith said, "Madam Marchbanks, you were about to speak, I believe."

"Thank you, Isaiah. Mr. Potter, why do you believe you have the right to claim Patron Protector? The

Potter Educational Fund only supports twenty-four students. You do not have the numbers for that title."

"I have expanded the fund's endowment. Oh, and please call me Harry, all of you. I now have thirty-four students, thirty-five if you include Rubeus Hagrid, which I believe it does, since the charter of the Fund states I am responsible for my charges until they take their O.W.L.s or leave Hogwarts as students, which ever comes last. Oh, and my advisor for the Fund at Gringotts told me there are two other students that we should subscribe this week.

"That number takes me over the required thirty three magical charges so that I may claim Patron Protector status, and if I understand that role, it is not like family, but more like a liege lord without claiming my charges as vassals. Sixteen of the Potter students are Muggleborn, and only three of the remaining students are purebloods, though one we'll enroll this week is a pureblood and newly orphaned as of this summer. I'm looking for ways to extend protection to all of these and others, and I'm willing to put my Galleons into it to see it done proper. But I need your guidance and advice, all of you."

Most were stunned at first, but many smiles appeared shortly.

Alexius Tiller, said, "Well done, Harry. You're Benedict's grandson for your principles, but I've never heard of any Potter as willing to pay such a serious price to back his words, and I mean no insult to the Potters coming before you. They were always much more generous than most."

"Yes, well done, Harry, so far," said Marchbanks, "but are you ready to go to the logical conclusion? As Patron Protector, you not only offer protection, you need to commit funds to your House Guard. That requires ongoing funding for training, equipping, and salaries. Where do you propose to find those who will make up such a cadre?"

Harry looked at her, then glanced at all those present. He stared at his hands and finally said, "I've set nothing into motion as of yet, but only studied the matter." He sighed, straightened his shoulders and continued, "I plan to commit one million Galleons to do what you describe."

Several gasped and most looked amazed.

"I figure, money is only worth what you do with it," he continued. "I grew up with nothing, and only found out this summer that I am wealthy. If I contribute half of what I have to this effort I'll still be richer than I ever dreamed, so if I spend it and make people safe, so be it."

He lowered his eyes to his hands, and spoke in a lower tone. "Most of you don't know this, but because of this curse scar, I sometimes have nightmares where I actually see Voldemort and Death Eaters killing people. I've learned Occlumency, but sometimes I still see what goes on. Each death kills me a little, and I'll not have it if there's any way to stop it. I'd give every Knut I have if it would stop it, but... that's foolish even to say, because it's a vain pretension. This... this House Guard idea... that can do some good. I'm open to suggestions about whom to recruit and how to go about it."

Several had ideas and a few said they knew of individuals experienced in the dueling championships

or an ex-Auror to join the guard. Harry had thought about former Aurors, knowing the Fudge administration had fired a number of them over the years. Harry figured any Auror Fudge didn't like probably was just the person he'd wanted.

Griselda Marchbanks cleared her throat, bringing the group's attention back to her. "That is commendable and I applaud you, Harry, but you open up opportunity *and* danger if you assume the role of Patron Protector. The Pater laws are from the Old Ways, grandfathered in at the founding of the Wizengamot. They go on for scrolls about the father and his role as head of the household. Pater Protector is the vast majority of those edicts included in the Old Way rules. Most Three-Thirty-Three family heads know them well because of the inheritance laws Isaiah first mentioned to you. I ask all of you, how many of you have read the Patron Protector Codicil to the Pater laws?"

Only Isaiah Smith, Darance Bread, and Tiberius Ogden raised their hands.

Marchbanks said, "It's all from the Old Ways. When you begin to work with the Old Ways, you open up great opportunity and leeway. You can literally raise armies, loyal only to the Muggle Crown above yourself. That is a part of the Old Ways. They are a blending of laws with the Muggle nobility and royals of the time.

"However," the old educator paused for effect as any good teacher would. She had a look of fear in her eyes as she continued. "If you go to the Old Ways, you expose yourself if you aren't very careful regarding the reasons the Founding Three-Thirty-Three families first chartered the *Magicae Magna Carta*. It was a barbaric time. Families could lose all of their lands and submit all family members to serfdom and near lifetime indenture on the outcome of a duel fought in the heat of emotions.

"I have many of the scrolls on the Old Ways, and will make a copy for each of you so you can see the pertinent passages." She looked Harry deeply in the eyes and continued, "I am sure your House Guard will open no cause for worry to you, as long as they are circumspect in their actions. But, Mr. Potter, for Harry will not do for a Patron Protector... you, Mr. Potter, need to know where you are headed with these steps."

Harry looked at her seriously as he nodded his head to acknowledge her admonishments. He kept a straight face, but inside he delighted in the possibilities.

Oh, the ignorant bliss of enthusiastic youth.

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On Thursday August 22nd, Harry fought Fudge and company in the Wizengamot alongside the growing faction he and Mr. Smith were gathering around themselves. Smith was very excited when Clarence Spinnaker moved to their side of the room. The wizard held four votes, but he felt required to vote one proxy vote basically in line with the Fudge faction, with few exceptions possible. He held that vote for his cousin, Blake Roper, who was infirm with Wizarding gout. Smith assured Harry that Clarence was trustworthy, but he chose the honorable path and voted as his cousin would like, which added to why Smith trusted him.



The most exciting aspect about Spinnaker was that he was very good friends with Tilden Farmer, who controlled thirteen votes. Farmer generally voted in line with the Smith/Potter faction, but hesitated in joining that side of the room. Spinnaker's presence made that more likely in the near future.

Smith, Harry, and company spent the day stopping Fudge from awarding himself accolades for a peace that was only days old and unproven. Umbridge pointed out that no Traditionalists had attacked the usurping Muggleborns or Halfbloods who didn't know their places.

Walter Graycloth, a quiet but eloquent man on the rare occasions when he did speak, pointed out that if Voldemort and his Death Eater terrorists did have nefarious plans for this peace ruse, they wouldn't jeopardize it with small attacks. All begrudgingly accepted the stellar logic of his statement, and Smith winked at Harry when the younger wizard looked to his mentor with appreciation.

Harry became more confident that he could leave the Wizengamot for school and not fear his efforts of the summer in that assembly would be for naught.

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Harry met with Bill Weasley several times during the week leading up to Peace Day, finalizing enrollment of Potter Fund students and certain other financial matters.

"Now to business," Harry said. "I want you to invest in the Muggle corporation Apple Computer. I've recently seen their technology and found out they have a number of Squibs as well as a few wizards involved in their research and development. I think we should invest significantly in such joint magical/Muggle technology companies, if we can find them. And ask Gultangk if he or any of his faction or clique would like to join me in this."

Bill smiled. "I've informed the Director that you wish to offer goblins participation in any Muggle investments you make. He is delighted, and let me know he has made great gains in the struggle within the goblin business community regarding your relationship.

"The Gringotts branch bank in San Francisco, I believe it is, has a few goblins watching Muggle technology. I don't doubt Gultangk will arrange very favorable fees for their consulting, since he will participate with you."

"Great. You know my intentions and the limits we discussed. Use your skills and protocols to invest as carefully or aggressively as you wish. I tend to lean more toward aggressive, because this technology should only grow in the future. Look for new trends, and place whatever percentage you think appropriate in speculative areas that could really pay off."

Bill smiled. "You spoil me, Harry. The other advisors, all goblins, think you're giving me such leeway because I'm human and not a goblin. Gultangk was quick to disabuse them of that notion. Now they just envy me, which is a respected goblin emotion."

There conversation turned to developing the Potter House Guard.

While training the British Aurors in the use of Thunderfire a few weeks earlier, Harry had learned

that Fudge had fired Senior Auror Bentley Johnson and Auror Samuel Freezemore. The pair had not only escorted Harry and Dumbledore to the vampire negotiations under Amelia Bones' orders, but they had also stood by Harry at Pont du Hoc, stopping the Aurors loyal to Fudge from attacking the vampires. For that action, Fudge had sacked them.

Harry explained as much to Bill and added, "I'd like you to approach those two about joining the Potter House Guard. As a Senior Auror, Johnson should be able to help in founding the Guard properly. They also probably know other former Aurors who might want to join us."

"Former Aurors will be expensive, Harry," Bill pointed out. "There are wizards and witches who are skilled in fighting, that we could hire for less. Paying for equipment and even training is one thing, but ongoing salaries is another."

"I know, Bill, and we may want to hire some of those less expensive types to fill the ranks, but Johnson and Freezemore have already proven themselves loyal to my way of doing things. That's worth a lot. Also, we need the best at the top, to make sure those not as well trained are brought up to standard. We want lawful action, not hooliganism. The *Daily Prophet* will attempt to smear our every act simply to accommodate Fudge. We need to be above reproach."

Bill looked a little concerned, and Harry asked what was bothering him.

"You know I'm dating Dorey, er, Tonks, don't you?"

"Ooh! Can I call her Dorey?"

"Only if you don't value all your body parts, Harry," Bill said with a smirk. "Tonks is extremely frustrated by all of the restrictions Fudge and Umbridge have placed on the Auror Corps. Bones is trying to fight them, but with very limited success. The Auror requirement to only Apparate to Diagon Alley at the Apparation point is one example you are all too familiar with. Magical Law Enforcement has detection equipment in large magical areas to let them know when something happens. They don't want to Apparate into the middle of a spellfight, but they should be allowed to arrive closer to the action if it's well away from the Apparation point."

"The Aurors were too late to help in your fight in front of the shops, Harry, because of that very rule. I know that Tonks hates those types of restrictions, but I wonder if these former Aurors will insist on continuing to observe the Auror Corp regulations."

"Good question, Bill. When you interview former Aurors,, particularly Johnson, who I think might make a good Captain of the Guard, feel them out on the subject. I want us to be unquestionably legal, but we have to do better than current reaction times."

"Also, ask for their ideas on different types of spells they'd like to use, or think would be handy that they don't have now. If Hermione and some of the Ravenclaws can't find the spells they need, maybe I can Monger them. Such new spells might also help with the Practical Defense courses I'm teaching this year."

Harry and Bill spent the next few minutes discussing that new course before parting.

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As Sunday approached, Harry helped out when and where he could with Phoenix Fashions and Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes. There was little he could actually do, but he was there, to his partners' delight.

Not all shoppers postponed their buying until Peace Day. Both shops had customers every day, and if the week's business was indicative of the future, Phoenix Fashions would be as popular as they had hoped.

Some say it's all right to be paranoid, *if* the whole world *is* out to attack you. In anticipation of Voldemort and the Death Eaters breaking the peace agreement, Harry, Clarinda, and the twins paid Gringotts Overseer Services to erect Outer Rampart wards.

When activated, the Outer Rampart wards would snap visible gates into place in front of the shops in a matter of seconds, and goblin Overseers would tumble out of the Floo, ready to meet any potential threat. Friendlies only fleeing a spellfight outside could run through the warded doors for protection, but only those keyed to the wards could leave.

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On Tuesday while Harry endured Fudge's crowing about "Peace in Our Time" in the *Wizengamot*, *The Quibbler* finally published Harry's article on Shielding spells. The article had been completed, but Harry suggested, and Sol Lovegood agreed, that Harry write an addendum that discussed the Shield charm variation, *Protego Amplexus*. That particular charm could add shielding to a wall or any other barrier, and, if the caster was strong enough, it could erect a Barrier Shield Wall without anything material to anchor it.

In the spring, the Rita Skeeter article on Harry in *The Quibbler* had been the most popular edition in the tabloid's history. Sol Lovegood had been forced to reprint it three times to meet demand, and new subscriptions poured in as a result. After the Battle of the Department of Mysteries, when the *Daily Prophet* ran the very same article word for word, the news was quickly spread by all of those who knew, that *The Quibbler* had run the story over a month before. Subscriber levels skyrocketed again.

When *The Quibbler* ran Harry's article on how to cast the Patronus charm in early summer, demand increased yet again, causing news outlets to carry more copies of the monthly. New subscriptions flooded the owl post delivery window, particularly after the DA members had used the Patronus to drive away dementors so effectively at points all over Great Britain.

For the release of the issue with Harry's article on Shield charms, Sol Lovegood used a promotional technique he'd seen at a Muggle newsstand in King's Cross Station. He printed posters declaring a new Harry Potter instructional feature was in the current issue, and he gave copies of the poster out to all news outlets where *The Quibbler* was sold. He even attracted new outlets by telling potential vendors such an article was coming, and citing sales figures for previous issues including stories

about and/or by the Boy-Who-Lived.

When Harry left the Wizengamot that day, he went straight back to St. Simon's. Regular Owlposts addressed to Harry from unknown sources were being directed to Hogwarts this summer, not the abbey. That combined with *The Quibbler's* flexible publication schedule meant that Harry didn't realize the issue was out until the next morning, when Dobby asked him what he and Winky should do with the hundreds of posts still arriving at the school for him.

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**Sunday, August 25th, 1996**

### **Peace Day Celebrates Peace in Our Time!**

The *Daily Prophet* heralded Cornelius Fudge as if he'd defeated Voldemort himself, Harry thought in disgust. He also noticed that there was no mention of what Fudge had offered Tom and the Death Eaters in the negotiations. Also conspicuously absent were any mentions of guarantees or penalties or assurances that peace had indeed come to magical Britain.

Oh, there were loads of quotations from Fudge, and a number of pictures of the man attempting to look regal, wise, and anything else the wizard photographers could pose or retouch. And of course there were a number of snide remarks aimed at Harry Potter, even several that mentioned him by name - all attempting to smear him for nearly preventing peace, though there was no mention of anything in particular he had done to try to stop it.

The *Daily Prophet* walked a fine line in exactly what it said about the youngest member of the Wizengamot. The news rag had been very circumspect ever since the day Isaiah Smith had confronted the publisher Barnabas Cuffe, and reminded him what might occur if the paper slandered a Wizengamot member. From that point on, nothing bad was ever written as an opinion of the paper about Harry, but they quoted anyone and everyone who said anything insulting about the young wizard.

Harry had tried to buy the paper; not knowing how much it would cost, but asked the goblins to make inquiry anyway. Their request on his behalf was rudely rebuffed. The owner's name--or names--weren't even available.

That Sunday, "Peace Day," the Weasley twins and Clarinda Jordan told Harry there was no reason for him to help behind the counter. Fred and George asked him to go out and walk around instead, and then come back into shops to see if he could draw a crowd. Harry laughed at the joke, but it turned out it was no joke. Clarinda asked him to do the same, and she'd never kid Harry like that.

Traffic was light in both shops at the usual opening time of 10:00, but within an hour the crowds were

already as large as Fred and George had projected they would by mid-afternoon, the busiest time of day. Harry was surprised to see Luna Lovegood and Millicent Bulstrode helping Lee, Fred, and George at the prank emporium. The two witches knew well their way around the shop and how to explain the wares. Luna was all business and only stared dreamily at people who couldn't make up their minds as to what to purchase.

Millicent was surprisingly friendly and solicitous of the needs of potential patrons of Weasleys'. The witch had lost all of her relatives in a Death Eater attack on their family farm early in the summer. The Bulstrodes were all Slytherins and long-time Voldemort supporters, but it had come to the Dark Lord's attention that the family had a Muggle living in their home - Millicent's maternal grandmother. The family had passed her off as a near Squib for decades, but once that was revealed to be a lie, the family was killed. Millicent had survived because she was visiting with Pansy Parkinson, listening to the offer to join the Paladin Program.

Millicent had turned the offer down during that meeting, but after returning home to death and destruction, she had promptly volunteered to be a Paladin. According to Remus, Millicent had work harder than any other student he'd helped with their studies to qualify for the program. Millicent had asked to meet with Harry, and in that meeting has sworn a Witch's Pledge to train hard and fight by Harry's side in the battles to come. Harry counted her as an ally of the first order, and looked to her to sort through her house to find those who were for the Light and those who weren't. Harry had rejected the notion that Slytherins were all bad, and he and Ron were known to debate the matter heatedly from time to time.

There was one visibly obvious aspect about Millicent and the Paladin Program - the exercises and proper diet had done her a world of good. She was now rubenesque as opposed to fat, and she smiled most of the time instead of frowning. Millicent was a different person to look at and be around.

Even though the ads in the *Daily Prophet* and *The Quibbler* had featured Harry and Fleur Delacour wearing Clarinda's fashions, Justin Finch-Fletchley and Lavender Brown were modeling her designs that day. Justin had supplied Clarinda's shop with cloth, thread, and accessories, and the classically handsome, dark haired Muggleborn seemed to know just how to walk, turn, and show the outfits to their best advantage. Lavender was not as poised a model as Justin, but she was strikingly gorgeous after the affects of the physical maturations of the Paladin Acceleration potions. She had been beautiful and tall for her age the first day she'd set foot on the Hogwarts Express, but now Lavender was a breathtaking goddess of blonde curls and devastating curves.

There was a small but prominent display of Ginny's StudyBooks off to one side. There was a looping demonstration of how it worked, charmed into the table so students could see all the different features in about a minute. The StudyBooks were available at the counter and at Scrivenshaft's Stationers.

There was also a sign telling parents that professional versions of the StudyBook were available only at the stationers. Listed ProStudyBooks were:

Solicitor: LegalBook

Ministry Official: PlanningBook

Potions Master: GuideBook

Businessman: LedgerBook

Researcher: IdeaBook

Bank Official: GoldBook

Professional Quidditch Coach/Player: PlayBook

Professor/Teacher: GuideBook

Dark Lord/Death Eater: EvilBook

The last book name was neatly printed by hand by one of the twins. Ginny and Harry thought it was hysterical and agreed to make a mockup version of the EvilBook for display as well.

It was lunchtime, and Hermione, Ginny, and Ron came into the back of the shop where Harry was overseeing Winky setting up food for all the workers for both shops - like Winky needed supervision. They ate and chatted about what they wanted to see after their meal.

Harry had kept Hedwig busy all week, delivering messages to almost all of the Potter Fund Student families, asking to meet them today. He'd not sent one to the Weasleys simply out of a desire to spare Ron's pride. The notes were addressed to the parents instead of the students. In addition to requesting a meeting, Harry told the parents that if their child didn't know about the scholarship, to please let him know by return post so that he could avoid saying anything to cause hurt feelings or break confidences. The exception to this was Millicent, who was a new Potter Fund student because of her parents' deaths.

It sort of surprised Harry when all of the parents responded that their children already knew that the Potter Fund was paying their tuition. Evidently none of his schoolmates had said anything about it to Harry because he wasn't managing the fund before. In fact the Creeveys' Muggle father wrote that he had told his boys it wasn't polite to bring up such financial matters with Harry, because it might embarrass him. He went on to add that his boys felt only gratitude and no sense of shame that they'd needed assistance. It did explain, at least in part, their fascination with Harry. But the pair had toned down their Harry-worship during the DA sessions the year before.

Mr. Creevey joined his two sons for the "Peace Day" festivities, and was delighted to finally meet the great Harry Potter. Harry hated the man's excessive gratitude, but it amused him to see the two young Creeveys cringe at their father's ravings.

Harry had Dobby and Winky arrange portable meals for the shops with Warming or Cooling charms on the food as needed. The workers had planned to work straight through, so they appreciated the sandwiches, chips, crisps, fruit, biscuits, and variety of drinks.

Shortly after lunch, a young witch he only barely recognized approached Harry. Hermione had dragged Ron off to Flourish and Blotts, and Ginny and Harry were on a mission to Quality Quidditch Supply. He felt like he should know the girl coming toward him, seeming bent on dragging her little sister and mother to meet Harry.

"Orla Quirke," Ginny whispered, as if she were reading his mind. "Rising third year Ravenclaw. She and Dennis are friends."

"And a Potter Fund Student," Harry stated quietly in return.

"Hello, Orla," Harry said. The young witch was both pleased and surprised at his recognition. That very moment, Harry decided to apply his Occlumency-inspired memory skills to memorizing the names to go with the faces he readily remembered.

"Hello, Harry," Orla said, beaming and blushing a little at him. "May I introduce my mum, Amanda Quirke--"

Orla's little sister tugged almost violently at Orla's arm to be introduced as well. The young witch looked peeved, but a throat clearing from her mother settled the matter.

"And this is my sister, Patience, but she's anything but."

Patience moved forward with a determined look, and said, "I'm Patty, and I'm a witch, too." She stomped her foot at the last declaration.

"Patience, behave yourself," her mother said. "I'm sorry, Mr. Potter, I don't know what's bitten her today, she's in a mood. She did just have her first case of accidental magic, and Orla wrote off to confirm it with Hogwarts that Patience is on the list. She just doesn't understand that she can't have a wand and go to Hogwarts next Sunday as well."

Harry told Mrs. Quirke, "Please call me Harry." Then he knelt to face Patience and asked, "So you're a witch too, huh? Well, what did you do to prove it, Patty?"

Patty took half a step back when Harry knelt down to address her, but then stepped back forward boldly, and said a little more civilly, "I broke a tea cup. I couldn't reach it and I just stared at it and it shattered." Harry smiled. "Well, that's pretty powerful, but it's also wasteful. Next time hold out your hand and will it to come to you. But mind, only do it if you can see the handle, or if you know there's nothing in it. Your mum would skin me if you burned yourself with hot tea."

"Gosh, Harry, I hadn't thought about that."

"Call him. Mr. Potter, dear."

"No," Harry said not looking up. "If it's just the same with you, I'd like her to call me Harry."

"All right," Amanda said.

"Yes, Patty, magic has responsibilities with it. It's not just having your way when you want it. People could be hurt; you could be hurt. Magic means being careful and certainly not telling anyone in the Muggle world."

"Mum and Orla told me all about that. I'd never tell," the little girl said, wide-eyed. "But it's nice to

know I can do magic, isn't it?"

"I'm very fond of it, Patty. So tell me, your sister's a Ravenclaw; that makes her real smart. Do you like to read?"

"Oh, yes! I love to read!" she gushed.

"You'll make a Ravenclaw too, I'll wager... although, you charged up to meet me like a Gryffindor, so don't think only of Orla's house, unless you really want it. How old are you, Patty?"

"Nine last Saturday."

"Ah, a birthday girl as well." Harry stood. "Patty, this is my friend, Ginny. She's real smart and a Gryffindor. Ginny, do you think you could help me find a good supply of books for Patty to read about magic, to help her prepare, and perhaps lessen the desire to do magic when she shouldn't?" "Of course, Harry."

Harry looked back at Patty. "We have a friend named Hermione that is already at the bookstore. Ginny knows a bunch of good books, but Hermione is Muggleborn like you. She'll probably know of special books just for you.

"Do you want to be a Potter Fund Student, when you go to Hogwarts, Patty?"

"Oh, yes sir!"

"Patty!" Mrs. Quirke said. "Mr. Potter, we never... I... Paying for Orla is so kind of you. I'm sure I can manage. Jack left us a little--"

Harry put his hand on the young widow's arm. "Mrs. Quirke."

"Amanda."

"Amanda," he corrected, "the Fund is there for people just like you and your daughters. There will be four students finishing Hogwarts the year before Patty starts. I intend to reserve a place for her unless your financial status changes, so there is no burden on you at all. Please, accept this from me, and let me spoil your daughter with books today as well. You'll make my day if you agree."

"Mr. Pot--Harry, I don't know what to say. The Fund now pays for tuition and books for Orla-- Oh, God bless you!"

"He has, Amanda, He has. Now let me be a blessing to you."

As they walked through the crowds towards Flourish and Blotts, Amanda was as amazed by the different sights as were her children.

"Orla is listed with the Potter Fund as a Muggleborn. I'm guessing there are no magical folks you know of on either side of the family?" Harry said.



"No, although my mother was with us when Professor Vector came to our home and told us Orla was. Mum speculated that her paternal great-grandfather might have been magical if the stories about him were true.

"This," she waved her hand about, "was equal parts enthralling and terrifying the first time we came to Diagon Alley. Last year Orla and I came just the two of us on a Monday morning and there were few enough people around, but with Patty showing magic, and with Peace Day, we decided to make a family outing of it.

"Orla has told me a little about this Dark wizard no one names. It's rather confusing and frightening. I'm glad there is peace now. I understand you've fought this wizard several times before. Did you have anything to do with this peace treaty?"

"No!" Harry said that single word with such vehemence that he knew he had to explain more. "I probably know more about how Voldemort thinks than anyone alive who isn't one of his evil servants. Probably even more than most of them do. I was not consulted on this peace, and I am a member of the Wizengamot, our Parliament. It's a hereditary position," Harry added, when Amanda looked at him curiously.

"It's not in Voldemort's nature," Harry continued, "to give up his demands and his desire to rule magical Britain. There was nothing in the papers about what our Minister *gave him* to stop fighting. I fear it is a ruse, and we'll be ill prepared, or even begin disarming to a degree during this lull in the fighting, and all the while he'll be preparing to take what he wants. That's the only reason he would have agreed to peace for now."

They arrived at the bookshop and the conversation died.

"I think I saw Ron with Hermione in Scrivenshaft's while you were talking, Harry," Ginny said. "If she comes in while we're here I'll ask her opinion, but I've talked to Colin Creevey enough to know some of the better books Hermione recommended to him."

Harry whispered to Ginny to buy as many books as she could find that she thought appropriate for Patty. The number grew so large that Amanda protested again and again, to no avail.

As Harry took the young girl to the books about Quidditch and other more lighthearted subjects, Ginny drew Amanda aside. "You must let Harry spoil Patty. I've never seen him like this, but he somehow *needs* to play this role of sort of a rich uncle or indulgent big brother. Harry could buy her the shop, goodness, he probably owns the shop, the building that is, not the business.

"In spite of always being wealthy, Harry grew up as if he were penniless in a horrid, abusive situation. He needs to do this for some reason, and I must say it does my heart good like a medicine to see him with Patty. So humor me, if not him."

Amanda Quirke spent the rest of the time in the bookshop shaking her head in amazement. Even more amazing was the spell Harry put on books to shrink them that Orla could verbally trigger when they made it home. Then the parcels would expand, but not alert the Ministry as to underage magic.

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In the published and wireless announcements of the day's events, it had been highlighted that the Minister would speak at 2:00. Harry realized it was petty of him, but he wanted to try to speak to the Minister just before his speech in hopes of disconcerting the man right before he started.

Harry and Ginny picked up Ron and Hermione as they worked their way through the crowds heading towards the podium. The thoroughfare of Diagon Alley had been expanded significantly. Where as it normally seemed closed in and cramped on busy days, today the Alley was wide, open and sunny, despite the over crowding. The side streets had all been expanded as well, all except Knockturn Alley. Harry couldn't blame the Ministry for that. No reason to open up to public inspection the less desirable part of this Wizarding equivalent to a High Street, though under different circumstances, a different type of inspection would be a good thing.

On their casual stroll towards the podium, the four spoke to a number of schoolmates and fellow Paladins. Ernie Macmillan and his girlfriend Hannah Abbott congratulated Harry for persuading Justin to model for Phoenix Fashions. Harry told them it was all Clarinda's idea, and Justin agreed because she was Justin's first magical business client.

Zacharias Smith tagged along behind his fellow Puffs gripping Su Li's hand possessively. He and Harry had met for dinner one night at Isaiah Smith's invitation. Harry felt bad, because here he was once again in a better position to Zach - invited to the Smith home as a peer of Zach's great grandfather, not as Zach's friend. Harry could tell that Isaiah had bragged about their joint actions in the Wizengamot. Harry tried to smooth things over with Zacharias when his year-mate walked him to the Smith property Apparation point.

"Look, Harry, you're in a position I envy. Gramps missed your grandfather Benedict something fierce. He's fought a lonely and losing battle in Chambers for over sixteen years, and I can quote verbatim many of his stories about the two of them fighting Malfoys, Sheets, and Umbridges. You've given the joy of the good fight back to him, and for that I am grateful to you.

"I could have told you tonight wouldn't work out things between us, because you came here as his friend, not mine. But I could never say that to Gramps. You and I are not friends almost solely because of my pigheadedness. How about once we're back at Hogwarts we start over, deal?"

The two had agreed, and Zach told Harry he'd tell his great grandparents that they'd made much better friends, which is what the elders wanted and what Harry and Zach wanted as well. They parted with a friendly handshake.

At a vendor cart of sweets and biscuits in the expanded Diagon Alley, Harry and company ran into Anthony Goldstein and Terry Boot escorting the Patil twins around. The two couples looked very affectionate. Also there stood Dean Thomas arm-in-arm with Tinica Waters, and Ginny seemed fine with it.

"Hey, you three," Harry asked his closest friends once they came to a less crowded area where they could talk, "Is it my imagination, or has everyone paired off? All the Paladins."

The three looked at each other and Hermione explained. "It's not a matter of dating seriously, it's just a date for most of them. Ernie and Hannah are together, and if you noticed they were the most natural together. The others are probably just on dates. It may be the first date for all of the other couples for all I know."

"The Patils are on a first date," Ron said. "I heard them this week at school mentioning that they felt today would be first *and* last dates with these two blokes. They talked like there wasn't much future there."

"But they were glued to each other, almost disgustingly so," Harry said.

"I know, Harry," Hermione stated. "The Paladins that went through Aberration Day without being separated from their visitors are now very demonstrative in their affection. They even kiss on the lips as if it's nothing when they greet a fellow Paladin. Did you notice Sally-Anne Perks? She came up to you and shook your hand warmly, but then gave a lip-to-lip kiss to Steven Cornfoot right there in front of us." "I thought they must be a couple," Harry admitted.

"They don't even like each other, but see how they reacted. The girls ignore you and Ron, and the guys ignore Ginny and me. Ginny because she wasn't a Paladin, and you, Ron, and I are ignored because we were interrupted that day. Maybe it's pheromones."

"We have to come up with different names for it besides kissing and snogging," Ron said. "This is becoming redundant."

"Neville isn't attacked by the girls either," Hermione continued to explain. "He was with Eloise Midgen that day. Luna was visiting with Mrs. Longbottom, something having to do with hats." Hermione smirked at this, but made no editorial comment. "Anyway, Luna came in and found them snogging right after the hour started. She broke them up and stuck them to different pieces of exercise equipment."

"I thought Luna and Neville were dating," Harry said, "from some correspondence with her earlier this summer. But now I see her in the shop with the twins. And Millicent's there as well. What's up with that?"

"Fred is dating Luna," said Ginny. "He said she's brilliant and inspiring. They have a backlog of new product ideas from their conversations with her, and Fred loves to sit and chat with her all day long."

Ron said, "And George is dating Millicent. Yeech! Be still my stomach."

Hermione popped him on the back of the head.

"I hate it when you do that, Hermione," Ron said, annoyed.

"And I hate it, Ron, when you act like an idiot. Millicent has sworn allegiance to Harry in this fight, and Fred says she's a different person than we've all thought."

Harry nodded to agree with Hermione, but moved to change the subject. He said, "So is Neville

dating Eloise Midgen?"

"No," Hermione responded. "She and Neville have been friends since they were little. He's helped her learn what you taught us in the DA last year, and they exercise together because Eloise's mother doesn't want the mostly-Muggle equipment in her house."

"Have you seen Eloise Midgen since this summer, Harry?" Ron asked. When Harry shook his head, Ron said, "The Paladin potions really changed her."

"Ron, you're being rude again," Hermione scolded. "She has feelings--"

"I know, Hermione. I've not said anything about how she used to look. I said that she looked good now. Pretty. How can that be insulting? I told you this morning when you came down that you looked nice. Was that an insult?" He winked at Hermione when he said this and patted her arm warmly.

Hermione looked at Ron and groaned. Ginny rolled her eyes. Harry gave Ron a sympathetic look.

"So all of the Paladins that weren't interrupted that day are sort of compelled to be overly affectionate toward each other?" Harry asked, coming to Ron's rescue.

"Yes, Harry. Professor Dumbledore seems to think it will pass," said Hermione. "Professor Snape mumbled something about all of us being dunderheads, but Mother is concerned to a degree. They weren't like that until last week when all of us went through that high potency potion series to make up for the ground lost on Aberration Day. Now they are all quite demonstrative.

"Mother thinks it may adversely affect how seriously they take their studies, particularly when they should be paying attention in Defense and Practical Defense classes. She admits that it may wear off, like how we stopped rampaging towards each other at the start of the visits, but she thinks this is different."

"Dumbledore can be overly optimistic," Harry said. "He and I discussed it some this summer. He has his reasons for his optimism, personal reasons that I can't share with you, but we need to watch out for him being too forgiving of Death Eater children and general Slytherin nastiness. He gave me permission to come to him, and I plan to, but only when we agree it's necessary. I trust you to help me decide on that." Harry realized he had been talking directly to Ginny all of this time, and so he turned to include the other two.

"You too, Ron, Hermione. It's just that as a non-Paladin Ginny will hear things we won't. We've seen how Dumbledore has given the Slyths a pass all these years, all too often. Now that I'm on staff to a degree, and after he and I came to certain agreements, I think I can make a few changes, slowly. I'll need all of you to help me build my case if I do go to him."

The four turned and again walked towards the podium. "There's Neville," Ron said, easily looking over the throng. "Look at the arms on him," Ron said. "Hermione and I spent our time during the Aberration Day hour worrying about you. We still do more than we ever did. But Neville was stuck on an exercise machine. He tells it that he spent eight to ten hours a day the next week exercising, and

still feels compelled to do it all the time. He's a great bloody hulk."

"Ron, language."

"He's not as tall as me, but look at him, Harry. He's wearing loose robes, but... but, just look at him. Only so much exercise was needed, after all."

"Did you only exercise the minimum required this summer, Ron?" Harry asked.

"It was enough. I've never been in such good shape. I can arm wrestle Charlie and win. Why, did you do more?" Ron asked incredulously.

"Usually two or three hours a day over the minimum. Sometimes more."

"You should feel Harry's arms, Ron," Ginny said.

"No thank you. I'm not going to feel another bloke's muscles, even my best mate's. I'll take your word for it."

Ginny looked at Harry for just a moment like he was a delectable morsel, but changed her expression once Harry turned an eye toward her.

By this time they had made their way to Neville. Neville introduced all of his friends to Mrs. Longbottom.

"I hear great things about you in the Wizengamot, Mr. Potter," Mrs. Longbottom said. "An active and vocal Potter has been missed since your Grandfather Benedict."

"Thank you, Mrs. Longbottom. I've heard from many whom I respect that you are sorely missed in chambers. When will your presence grace the assembly of equals?"

Ron whispered loudly, "Why's he talking like that?"

"Quiet, Ron."

Neither Harry nor Augusta Longbottom turned to look at Ron, but Harry gave her his best "what can I do" expression and she smiled slightly in return.

"I have no heart for the Wizengamot, and no patience with government these days, Mr. Potter."

"And we are all the less blessed because of it, Augusta." It was Cornelius Fudge. Harry clenched his jaw at the Minister's first words, and took some comfort in seeing that Mrs. Longbottom was also perturbed by the Minister's interruption of their conversation.

"Cornelius, I am not aware that we are on a first name basis," she said. "Why would you miss me since you know I'd vote against you?"

"You wound me, Madam," Fudge was in his element in a conversation like this. "I always vote the Fudge vote the same way that your proxy votes the Longbottom's' Rights to Rule."

"Yes," she said, looking down her long nose at the man who was significantly shorter than she. "And then vote the Malfoy ensigns and proxies as *he* would vote them."

"I feel that I must do so to maintain my integrity."

"Indeed" she snorted back and looked away from him.

"A clever game, Minister," Harry interjected. "One I'm sure Voldemort approves of, but few will see it as anything but voting the Death Eater line." The Boy-Who-Lived found this too good an opportunity to needle the Minister.

"Mr. Potter," the Minister sneered. "I see you have the temerity to show your face this day after all you've done to try to prevent peace in our time." Fudge loved that phrase, and used it every chance he could in the Wizengamot and in the *Daily Prophet*.

"That tired old line again, Minister. I really think you should retire it. One day the people will know of all you've done; and I'll be more than ready to cast my votes when the Wizengamot finally calls for a vote of no confidence."

"I guess it's fortunate for me, Harry that your votes don't add up to anywhere near what you need to do that."

Fudge looked around and noticed people were congregating to hear the conversation between two such public figures. They'd been talking quietly, but he didn't want to risk their words being overheard.

He took a step back and said expansively, "I'm so glad you're here, Harry, for our first annual Peace Day celebration. It should go down in the annals of history along with the day you defeated He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named all those years ago. Today could be said to recognize your efforts then as well."

Even louder he said, "Good people, don't you all feel safer now? I don't even need my bodyguards."

Harry gasped. Something had been bothering him all day, and it finally hit him.

There were no Aurors around. None.

Even the first time Hagrid took him to Diagon Alley, back when everyone thought Voldemort was dead, there were Aurors present just like Muggle Bobbies would walk busy High Streets.

But there were no peacekeepers present in the Alley today.

"You ruddy fool!" Harry hissed quietly. "You've left everyone here unprotected."

Harry turned to see what could be done.

Fudge said loudly, "See here, Potter. You can't go around spreading panic. It's 2:00 and I'm just about to give my speech."

It was at that precise moment that several explosions occurred, mostly around Gringotts. Then a number of very loud Apparation cracks were heard around the expanded Alley as Death Eaters appeared throughout the crowd. The panic was instantaneous.

"Neville, you stay here and protect your Gran and the Minister. Ron, you and Hermione make your way towards Gringotts. Gin, stick with me if you can."

Harry cast *Sonorus* on himself and shouted. "DA! Pair up and defend in twos. In twos, everybody."

"They should work in threes, Harry." Ron said.

"Not now, Ron, just go, and look out for each other."

At that moment the echoing pop of a Portkey sounded louder than anyone had ever heard. The loud panicky shouts stopped completely for a second, and then resumed much louder than before.

A giant had Portkeyed into the center of the widest expanse of the enlarged Diagon Alley.

"YOU must protect me, Potter, I'm the Minister."

Harry turned to his friends, ignoring the quivering man, and said, "You have your assignments. I'll be back soon, Gin."

"What are you going to do, Harry?" Ginny asked, worriedly.

He looked back at the giant, it was just roaring toward the sky at the moment. Harry smiled. "I've wondered about this. Let's see..."

With that, he Apparated away.

"He... he ran. The coward," said Fudge fearfully.

"No, you damnable fool," Augusta Longbottom said. "Look." She pointed toward the giant.

Harry stood precariously on the top of an amusement ride about twenty-five feet in the air and about forty feet in front of the giant. He sent up several fountains of red sparks to capture the behemoth's attention and then sent out a flaming arrow that began to circle above him at the eye level of the giant. The flames mesmerized the leviathan for a few seconds.

Harry was guiding the arrow with his wand as if it was on a string. As the giant's focus left the arrow, Harry made a whipping motion with his wand and the arrow flew straight toward the giant. At the last moment, Harry shouted, "Engorgio!"

The flaming arrow expanded to twelve feet long and nearly a foot in diameter a few feet from the

giant's chest. The increase in mass at the consistent speed multiplied many times the punching power of the arrow. The head was razor sharp. The arrow went through the giant right at his heart, and came out of his back almost three feet.

The giant fell forward in what looked like slow motion. Harry disappeared from atop the ride and Apparated right beside a woman and child in the path of the falling giant. Harry wrapped his arms around the two and Disapparated ten feet away, out of the path of the falling monstrosity. They barely made it.

Silence reigned for a few moments. Then one shout was heard, setting everyone in motion again.

"Crucio!"

The battle began in earnest.

Ron and Hermione ran off towards Gringotts. Harry arrived next to Ginny and Apparated her to a safe spot on a building that over looked the battle. "You'll be safe here, Ginny."

He turned to leave but she grabbed him. "You're not leaving me here, Harry Potter. It's as much my fight as it yours." She clung to him with a fierce determination.

He looked at her with mixed parts of worry and pride. "Okay, but I need you to be fairly safe so I can concentrate. You're a pretty accurate shot, aren't you? So I'm going to place you where you can hit the enemy from a distance. When you do, that distraction will allow me to Apparate to a new location or do something different to confuse them all the more."

Without waiting for her answer, Harry grabbed Ginny in a hug and Apparated them both to a vantage point on the wall of Gringotts. An explosion had made the crevice. From there she could easily see the front of the bank, and fire down on the attackers. Before Ginny realized it Harry Disapparated and reappeared in the middle of a group of Death Eaters. He spun in a circle with both wands drawn, firing like a madman. In little more than a second the six of them were down, most for good.

Ginny decided to stop watching Harry, when he barely ducked a spell from a Death Eater she could easily see. Ginny knew her Cutting curse was strongest, most accurate, and invisible. It also dissipated less than most other spells over a distance. She aimed and fired, hitting the shoulder of a Death Eater who had just fired on Harry.

After dodging the one *Reducto* r, Harry Apparated to the top of the building and then back down into the midst of another Death Eater group. Once again he spun around firing, taking them out, but a Cutting curse hit him on the leg and he fell - under a Killing Curse's path.

Ignoring his wounded leg, Harry Apparated sideways while still lying down and appeared right in front of the Death Eater who'd hit him. The *Reducto* r from below brought a grisly end to his attacker, and the spells Harry shot at the others were gruesomely effective as well.

All around, DA members reacted as Harry had commanded - moving off in twos and attacking Death Eaters at will. There was no doubt in their minds who had issued that command. They remembered



what Harry had taught them and followed his orders. They knew doing so would offer them the best chance of surviving the moments ahead.

"But I have a peace treaty," Fudge whined.

"Shut up, you fool!" Augusta said as she pulled her wand. Neville moved to push them both toward a brick wall and away from the podium, which would be an obvious place to find the Minister.

"Move, move!" he shouted, finally shoving Fudge into wobbly action.

Fudge stumbled and fell. Augusta moved in front of Neville and stooped to help the Minister up. "Protect us, Neville, while I take care of him."

It was at that exact moment that six Death Eaters Apparated right in front of Neville.

They all wore their robes, but most of them wore no masks. No one recognized any of this group of attackers.

"I surrender," said Fudge.

*Reducto!* Neville shouted, and the front Death Eater spun around as his left arm tore from his torso. Neville started sending out *Reducto* rs as fast as possible, but was soon forced to exclusively cast the Shield spell.

Augusta Longbottom fired off two well-placed Cutting curses, and two Death Eaters Apparated away, howling in extreme pain. She, too, had to shield after that.

The remaining Death Eaters were joined by three more. Augusta Longbottom cast a purple spell, incanting, *Dolo Bifidus*. The Death Eater's chest caved in. The Death Eater beside him winged Mrs. Longbottom with a " *Reducto!*" and she fell back, holding her shoulder.

"Gran!"

"I'm fine, Neville, fight!"

And fight he did. During that moment of distraction Neville was hit by a cutting curse on his shoulder, but it didn't put him out of action. The blast of a *Reducto* r hit Mrs. Longbottom's shield, and it cracked. She went down but called out that she was all right. Neville now faced four Death Eaters alone.

Neville fought on. His grandmother was down and Fudge was a useless quivering mass, still trying to surrender. His spell work was mostly defensive, but Neville occasionally landed a curse or hex.

Soon, three more Death Eaters joined the fight, and Neville went completely on the defensive for a moment. His Gran managed to summon a slab of building debris and placed it as a barrier for herself. She then began sniping at the enemy as occasions arose. When the one who appeared to be the leader of this group went down from a hit by Mrs. Longbottom, Neville dropped his shield and began

running and dodging, firing only *Reducto* rs as fast as he could. This strategy soon reduced his opponents to only three Death Eaters. Soon two others went down, but a crack occurred and Neville found himself being attacked from the side by a huge Death Eater he didn't recognize, who stood well over six and a half feet high.

This appearance caught not only Neville but also the other Death Eater he faced by surprise. Mrs. Longbottom landed a Cutting curse on the original Death Eater, severing his wand arm from his body. The man screamed and Portkeyed or Apparated away, leaving his appendage and wand behind.

The oversized Death Eater wielded two wands, something no one there could remember anyone doing except Harry. With two quick spells Mrs. Longbottom was wrapped in chains and knocked unconscious. The hulk then turned to Neville, as he swatted away one of the young wizard's *Reducto* rs.

It took the colossus four quick curses and hexes to batter away Neville's attacks, blast him to the ground, and Summon his wand. Then the menace stepped toward the Minister with a gleam in his eyes.

"Minister Fudge--" he said with an American accent, but that was all he said.

At that moment, the down-but-not-out Neville Longbottom hit him with an herbal-based pellet from a blowgun.

*A blowgun!*

The big man froze on the spot, and fell over, off balance from taking a step when stricken.

Neville crawled toward the nearest downed Death Eater, grabbed her wand, and used it to Summon his own. Neville had a broken leg from being blasted into the side of the building nearest them and several badly bruised ribs. He cast a field healing spell on his leg, and painfully pulled himself up by a nearby street lamp. From there he staggered to each Death Eater and bound them and stunned them just to make sure. Then he headed towards his grandmother to check on her.

He ignored the gibbering Minister of Magic.

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Elsewhere, the last of the explosions that the started the attack was randomly placed with its only purpose being to cause panic. In the blast path stood Percy Weasley and Penelope Clearwater. Penny worked in Muggle Relations at the Ministry and had volunteered to escort two Muggleborn First Years to Diagon Alley for Peace Day.

When the bomb went off, Percy and Penny threw themselves on the eleven year olds and pushed them to the ground. The children were safe, though pinned down by the unmoving older witch and wizard.

Percy was unconscious, but would awake basically unharmed just as the battle ended.

Penny Clearwater was dead.

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In the midst of the now-destroyed Peace Day celebration, witches and wizards were putting up Protego shields, just like Harry Potter had taught them in *The Quibbler*. Their shielding was, for the most part, effective and frustrating for the Death Eaters. As the battle progressed more and more Death Eaters resorted to the Cruciatus, a spell that could not be blocked by anything other than a physical object. No magical shielding could stop it.

This was a terror attack. Voldemort had instructed his minions to harm as many people as possible because wounded people create more long term disruptions than the dead. However, they should not spend time killing any victims unless they found significant key people. Pro-Light senior Ministry officials should be eliminated. Harry Potter was on this list, but none of his friends were. Any Auror there with his or her family was to be killed, as well as any known member of the Order of the Phoenix.

The effective shielding spells left Death Eaters only the Cruciatus to break through the shields to harm people. More and more, cries of *Crucio!* rang through Diagon Alley.

More and more, furious people stopped sending out their Stunners and Petrifiers, and resorted to "Reducto!" and "Diffindo!" The battle became bloodier and bloodier. Like most battles, this one seemed to go on for an eternity, even though only two minutes had passed since Harry had toppled the giant.

That one seemingly impossible act had, in fact, inspired resistance in many of those who were originally terrified by its appearance. "Harry the Giant Killer" soon joined his many titles.

Ernie Macmillan suffered a serious cut that Hannah was able to heal fairly quickly. He'd struck down three Death Eaters in almost that many seconds when they appeared right before him. He'd had his wand out, and fired off *Reducto!* many times before he'd realized he was hurt. Hannah and Zach Smith fought very well also, though Hannah found providing shields for the two and healing the occasional wound was her forte. Zach's date Su Li had not been a DA member and was mostly frightened during the battle.

The pairings of Boot and Padma Patil and Goldstein and Parvati Patil proved to be a tough double duo to fight. They moved around each other while Shielding and sending out Stunners like a well-practiced machine.

The Gryffindor Paladins fought with great heroism, taking chances they shouldn't have, but usually surviving without harm. Most ended up in personal duels with Death Eaters.

The Ravenclaw Paladins contributed their intelligence and accurate spell fire to the fight, Stunning and Petrifying as they went.

It was the Hufflepuff Paladins that surprised most observers during the fight. For no real reason, most

non-Puffs thought the Hufflepuffs would be too merciful to try to harm the Death Eaters. However, the loyalty, friendliness, and openness classic to the Badgers, did not translate into the expected timidity. They were fighting *for* their friends, families, and the good folk around them.

The Hufflepuff Paladins were vicious and decisive. Although none of them had discussed it with Harry, they instinctively understood his reasoning about stopping a foe rather than Stunning, so he or she didn't get up to fight again - maybe forever. Hufflepuff Paladins only fired off spells that could do serious damage - and they succeeded.

Ron and Hermione ran toward Gringotts at the opposite end of the Alley. Ron cast Cutting curses, and Hermione wielded a serious " Stupefy!" that few would recover from easily. Together they battled towards the Wizards' bank, but encountered too many who needed their help along the way to arrive in time to help Harry.

Ginny's nature was to be furious that Harry had treated her like a child, but she quickly realized he really hadn't. She was in the fight, but in a position where he didn't have to worry too much about her. She remembered hearing about how her father had required her mother to sit out any of the battles the Order entered during the first war with Voldemort, even though she was a capable fighter in her own right. Molly had explained it to Ginny that Arthur was more experienced and skilled, but he would be significantly less effective in a fight if he had to worry about his wife, the mother of his children.

This popped into her mind seconds after Harry Apparated away, and Ginny watched just how magnificent he was in battle. Harry was almost poetic in his dance of destruction.

She watched him fight, while effectively sniping away at Death Eaters on the periphery of the battle focused on Harry. He was a wonder. He'd Apparate into the midst of one group, fire away and then roll through them to appear below another group who would begin to go down under his accurate spellfire.

He'd next appear in the middle of an unoccupied space and cast several Battle Barriers to fight from for a while.

He'd then roll on his back and Apparate sideways along the ground going from place to place, never stopping for more than five seconds. Then he'd appear above them all on the sign above Gringotts, where he'd drop several of his Boulder Bombs before Apparating into the next group that ran up.

As Harry fought behind another hastily cast Battle Barrier, he heard his name called. Patty Quirke and her mother and sister had taken refuge near where he was standing. Harry turned to see the little girl wave, even as her terrified Muggle mother pulled her back into cover.

At one point a shout was heard, and in seconds all the conscious Death Eaters either Apparated or Portkeyed away.

The silence was so loud Harry thought his eardrums would burst. He panted with exhaustion as his adrenaline level began to ebb.

Then another group Apparated in, and one of them sent a blasting spell at Ginny's perch. Harry saw her fall as he fired at those around him. Unable to rescue her, he sent a spontaneously Mongered spell to Ginny that was intended to protect her.

A spontaneously Mongered spell was what Ginny called it when Harry just made a spell up on the moment and willed something magical to happen. Such a spell would almost be a waste of magic, because he could never recover it to use in his Scrutinizer to package it for sale. He could only repeat it, though it was a limited use spell at best.

Harry simply waved his wands around as he spun about and those Death Eaters around him fell in various states of damage and/or containment. He turned back to the fight, but in a few moments the Death Eaters remaining conscious all Apparated or Portkeyed away again.

Without checking that any of those Death Eaters still there and down were all incapable of rejoining the battle, he Apparated the fifteen yards to Ginny's side.

As he arrived, Harry retracted his wands into their holsters and swung his arms open, causing all of the building wreckage around Ginny to scatter as if it was just pebbles before a stiff broom.

Ginny was encased in a translucent lozenge-shaped barrier. Harry knelt down to pick her up, and as he did so, the protection around her vanished.

Ginny's eyes had been closed in her cocoon, but she'd had a peaceful look on her face. When the "bubble burst" she opened her eyes, to find Harry's arms tightly wrapped around her, crushing her to his chest.

"Ginny, please be all right, please be safe, dear. If... If you're... I'll die right here. Please, sweetheart, wake up... for... me."

As he said these last words, Harry drew back so that he could look into her eyes. Ginny was fine, he could tell, and his heart thrilled even as his pulse lowered in relief.

She gave him the simplest of smiles. His face was inches from her.

"Oh, Ginny, my sweet Ginny." He then lowered his lips to hers for a chaste kiss.

Moments later he moved his lips to create a delightful friction between them. Moisture from their mouths caused the friction to cease, and a new sensation replaced it. Their lips parted. The kissed deepened ever so gently. Soon they trembled as their tongues tentatively explored each other's mouths.

Harry gently eased Ginny into a sitting position across his lap. His left hand moved from her back and lightly brushed the hair from her face, his fingers continuing back through the length of her hair. As if moving of its own volition, his hand slowly returned to caress her cheek as Harry kissed her again.

He pulled his lips away from Ginny's slowly, exhaled in relief, and opened his eyes.

"Are you okay, sweetheart?"

The dazed look on her face passed, replaced by confused delight. He chuckled.

"Yes, Gin, sweetheart. I've wanted to call you that for almost a month now. I've realized that I love you, is that okay?"

She nodded her amazed approval, and he asked, "Can you stand if I help you?"

She nodded again, and Harry began to help her up, but before he had moved much at all Ginny tightened her grasp of his arm and said, "I love you, too, Harry."

He smiled. "It does my heart good to hear that, Gin. Now let me help you. Be careful."

Harry rose and lifted Ginny to her feet as if she weighed nothing. As she found her footing, he softly rubbed his thumb across her cheek and then he kissed her again, longingly.

Applause brought them out of their embrace, and they sheepishly parted, though Harry firmly took Ginny's hand in a way that all could see.

At that moment, a horrifying scream pierced the air, followed by two other screams.

In seconds, Harry Apparated with Ginny to the source of the screams. A Death Eater he had knocked down in this last flurry of spellfire before going to Ginny's rescue now stood, laughing maniacally, his mask boldly cast aside. Before him on the ground was a small broken body and Harry's heart raced and froze at the same time.

The Death Eater was the sadistic Creature Exterminator Walden McNair, and he had just cast the Entrail-Expelling curse on little Patty Quirke.

As Harry appeared, McNair turned and saw him. Harry swiftly raised his arms and his wands appeared in his hands, pointed forward. He shouted, "Null Apparate!" followed by, "Null Portkey!"

It was clear from the look on McNair's face that he'd tried to Disapparate away a second too late and then he tried to trigger a Portkey in his pocket. When that didn't work, he raised his wand to attack, but Harry blasted his wand with a *Reducto* r. McNair fainted from the pain of his shattered hand.

Harry turned to the little girl moaning in horrendous agony. Her mother and sister were hysterical. Both knelt near her but were afraid to touch her, lest they somehow make her pain worse. Harry stared at Patty for a moment. Then he pointed both wands at her and shouted, "*Stasis!*"

Patty froze in place just like those paralyzed by the Basilisk in Harry's second year. All blood stopped flowing and her entrails ceased oozing. Harry flashed his arms around in the air and a transparent golden box formed around the girl.

Harry looked up and saw Remus Lupin making his way toward him through the crowd. "Remus, would you go with them to St. Mungo's?"

Harry's guardian swallowed and said, "Of course, Harry."

Harry poked at the golden box and handles appeared. "Take hold, Mrs. Quirke, Orla. You too, Remus."

In a daze the three did as instructed.

Harry said, "Oh," reached down into his boot, and pulled out a short wand. He muttered to it as he swished his holly and phoenix feather wand around it.

"Put this in your pocket, Remus. Once the mediwizards and healers have her located where they can help her immediately, tap this wand on the box three times and say, 'Release.'"

"Er, of course, Harry. Be safe."

Harry raised his wand above his head and swirled it around. As he brought it down in a bold stroke, he shouted, "*Portkey!*" A second later, all five vanished from sight.

Stunned silence greeted him for a moment. But Harry simply stared at those who looked like they were about to ask questions.

The attack and subsequent rescue of Patty Quirke would take longer to describe than it took to occur. McNair was coming around by the time Harry sent the five off to St. Mungo's. Knowing he had done all he could for Patty, Harry turned his attention back to the Death Eater.

"Well, Potter, arrest me yourself or call the Aurors," McNair snarled. "I need St. Mungo's to restore this hand."

"You're not going to St. Mungo's, and you're not going to regain your hand."

McNair barked out a pain-racked laugh. "Are you going to let me suffer? No worries, the Aurors *have* to take me for help." He laughed again, looked at the horror on Ginny's face, which turned to disgust and anger as she looked at him. "I see you have a spitfire here, Potter." Then he addressed Ginny. "I can't wait to see you in my tender care, red. Did you see the look on that little girl's face? And her mother? Muggles scream a little more pathetically than witches, don't you think? More despair and no hope at all."

McNair grimaced in pain. "Give us another Stunner, love, to ease the pain," he said to Ginny, "and I'll just kill you when I see you next - no torture."

Harry saw red at this. McNair sat with his back to some rubble, holding his damaged right hand with his good left hand. In one swift motion Harry raised both of his arms above his head. He brought his hands together and the Gryffindor sword appeared in his grasp. In one blindingly fast action Harry brought the sword down and cut off McNair's other hand. While the sadist was speechless at this, Harry brought the blade down again and cut off both of the wizard's legs above the knees. When the blade rose again to the zenith of his swing, Harry let it go and it disappeared .

By this time McNair was screaming again, and Harry cast a Silencing charm on him. Then Harry pointed both wands at the wizard and shouted "*Cauteriso!*" four times. This spell cauterized the wounds, saving McNair from dying of blood loss, but also forever preventing the magical restoration of his hands or legs.

The wizard continued his silent screaming until Harry cast "*Petrificus Totalus!*" McNair froze in place with only his terrified eyes moving, but he could still hear. Harry then cast a *Sonorus* on himself.

"Those in the Quirke family are magical charges of mine. I, Harry James Potter, claim Patron Protector rights and have delivered justice in accordance with the Old Ways. All who support Voldemort beware of House Potter, beware of House Black, and beware of House Ollerton."

Then Harry conjured a wooden pallet. He levitated the silenced and severely damaged McNair onto the pallet, and cast a Levitation charm on the rig. He conjured a sign with these words printed on it:

## **THUS END ALL TORTURERS OF CHILDREN**

By proclamation of  
*Patron Protector Harry James Potter*

Harry pointed his wand at McNair and said, "*Accio Portkeys!*" As a Portkey shot toward Harry, he swished his wand around violently and it stopped, hovering right in front of him. He cast the Monger's Spell Scrutinizer on it, and looked at it for nearly a minute. He poked his wand at it and muttered a few words, then said, "Six hundred seconds." He pointed his wand at the pallet and said, "Nine hundred seconds." Then he waved his wand again and pointed toward Knockturn Alley.

Finally Harry cast, "*Acroasis Acclamatio!*" As the pallet slowly made its way towards the more disreputable shops, McNair's voice could be heard loudly reciting the words of the sign, over and over.

Ginny looked down at her robes, and saw blood on them, a good bit of it. She looked to Harry, and noticed he was cut badly in several places and had only used rudimentary field healing charms on the worst of them. There was also something odd about how he favored his right shoulder and the right side of his body. Some of his hair was scorched as well.

"Harry, you're hurt," she said in alarm.

He turned to her and finally allowed some of his pain seep to his face. Harry held out his left hand, and Ginny stepped into his awkward embrace. He drew her closer and holding Ginny firmly to his







*Aaran St Vines*  
*FanficAuthors.net*

# "Great Scott, Potter, This is War!"

## Chapter Twenty-Two - A Day That Will Live In Infamy!

*My gratitude goes to my writing coach, Kokopelli, and to my beta readers GardenGirl and Sparky40sw.*

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*Author's Note - This story was plotted out before HBP described Side-Along Apparating.*

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Ginny, being the youngest and the only Weasley girl in who knew how long, had experienced Apparation several times before. Once Bill and Charlie received their Apparation licenses, and after Charlie convinced Molly he wouldn't repeat the error he made on the test the first time, the two eldest sons, and Arthur and Molly, Apparated with Ginny whenever it suited them. It had been a practice of theirs the summer after the Chamber. Ginny hated being alone in the Floo network that summer, and even now she didn't like it much.

Ginny therefore knew what Apparation felt like. She had grown accustomed to being "squeezed through a tube" to come out at the destination. The first time was a shock, but she had been warned. She eventually could ignore it like they said she would, and she looked forward to Apparating herself in two years.

Normal Apparation with her family usually gave her no sense of time passing, and she saw nothing. Apparating with Harry was different. She felt no squeezing pressure, just a sort of rushing wind sound, and even though she really didn't see anything, she had the impression of being in a light fog just before daybreak. Also, she felt time pass with Harry - she felt several long seconds, for sure.

When she reappeared she expected to feel a jostling of some sort, as if she'd jumped from two or three steps up, but all of a sudden her feet were on solid ground just like they had been when she'd popped away in Harry's arms.

Ginny was about to ask him about the differences, when she felt her balance upset as Harry released her and crashed to the ground. He groaned as he crumpled there.

"Harry!"

"I'm hurt, but I'm all right, Ginny. You can't cast a Levitation charm this summer outside of Hogwarts, can you?"

"No," she said, as she knelt beside him. "This isn't St. Mungo's or Hogwarts. Where are we? Should I

call for help? Oh Harry, you're a mess. You must need help something fierce."

"It's all right, Ginny, most of the blood on me isn't mine. My leg is broken and so are several ribs, but I've had worse. I just applied a Numbing charm. Hold on."

Harry waved his hand carelessly about and he levitated to about waist high.

"There, please grab my cloak collar and walk toward the door of the church. It should open for me."

"Where are we, Harry? Like I said, this isn't St. Mungo's and it isn't Hogwarts. Who's going to help you?"

"This is St. Simon's Church. We're heading to the Friary, where I've had sanctuary this summer since Aberration Day. Father Martin has been looking out for me and he knows some field healing spells, but Brother Caleb was a Mediwizard during the Grindelwald War before taking Orders. He's well prepared to deal with injuries such as this. He's worked on me before."

At that moment Dobby popped to his side. "Oh, Harry," the elf said, wringing his hands. "May I take him from you, Miss Ginny?"

By this time they were inside the foyer of the church. "Stop for a second, Ginny," Harry said. When she made to protest he said, "The Numbing charm is working fine so I'm really not hurting that much for a few moments, and I'm not really bleeding."

Without waiting for an answer from his new girlfriend, Harry asked his house-elf, "Is everyone in our two shops safe? Are any of them hurt?"

"Miss Clarinda and her staff stayed in the shop and tended as best they could to anyone who came in hurt. All of those you trained in the DA, as well as Miss Millicent, went out and fought. They're all a little battered, but mostly scrapes and bruises. All of them are helping tend to the wounded and putting up temporary repairs to buildings. Hermione and Ron are well, you both might like to know."

"Thank you, Dobby," Ginny said, "Harry, please let me take you to this Healer."

"Almost done, Ginny. Dobby, go back and find out about all the Potter Fund students and their families. Offer them whatever assistance they need. Then you and Winky help wherever you can. Oh, during the Grindelwald War Mr. Ollivander vouched for low cost rebuilding loans for those who couldn't afford it after an attack in Diagon Alley. Please see Gultangk before the day is over and tell him I want to make the same offer. Ask him to look up whatever happened back then, and tell him I agree to whatever he says." Harry paused and sighed. "Is there anything else I can do that either of you can think of?"

Dobby shook his head and then Harry said, "Oh, is there enough help there in the Alley for clean up?"

Dobby made to tug on his ear, but stopped his hand halfway there.

"Dobby, does this Heir of the First Master thing hold any weight with house-elves other than you and

Winky?"

"Yes, Harry, all house-elves revere you for that status."

"Well, I don't want to make any type of demand or break any established rules, but can you go to Hogwarts and ask if any elves can help without forsaking their first duty to the school? Perhaps you should ask Dumbledore first."

"Dumbledore is at Beauxbatons today, Harry. Dinker, the chief elf always sends spare house-elves to help when needed. I'll send Winky to him in your name; he never liked *me* all that much."

When Dobby popped off, Harry asked Ginny to proceed to the door, which opened before them. He gave her directions.

"So, this is a church," she said. Harry explained that both Muggles and Wizard folk attended, and they got along very well, though most Muggles didn't know about magic.

"There is an Friary attached to the church, but it's designed not to be seen easily, as it goes down the sloping hill. I have a small room close to the church. The entrance from the offices is off the rector's personal corridor to the friars' cells."

As Ginny levitated Harry into the office area, he waved his hand at a switch. A small buzzing sounded for several seconds.

"That will bring Brother Caleb."

Harry directed her to Father Martin's private corridor, and just inside he pulled his wand and swirled it in a rather complex pattern. An archway of significantly older design and materials than the church appeared, and Harry directed Ginny in and to his room, less than twenty feet away.

A monk approached. "This is Brother Caleb. Caleb, this is Ginny Weasley, who seems to have become my girlfriend in the last twenty minutes."

"A pleasure, Ginny. What's he done this time?"

"Took on fifty or more Death Eaters, I suppose. I have no idea how many there really were, but they were drawn to Harry like pixies to trouble."

He looked at Harry. "Did you kill any, son?"

Harry hung his head. "A fair number, Caleb. Please pray for their families."

"I will, Harry, and... I hate to have to say this, but I'm glad you stopped so many. My own killing last war drove me to orders, but I still believe every death was necessary, while all being so senseless. However, that fact doesn't stop the dreams at night, does it?"

Harry just shook his head.

All during this dialogue, Brother Caleb was moving his wand in an intricate pattern of diagnostic spells. He held out a potion and Harry downed it immediately. In seconds, the young warrior was unconscious.

The friar turned to Ginny. "Harry is pretty banged up, but nothing serious. I'll only be a bit with him and Harry will be able to see you when he wakes. Most people would be out until morning, but he'll be awake in less than a half hour, I'd wager, except I don't wager... as you might guess."

She looked at her watch.

"Molly?" Father William Martin called as he walked in the door. "No, you can't be Molly, you're too young. But by the life of me, you must be Molly Prewitt's daughter. Is it Ginny, right?"

"Yes, sir, Ginny, short for Ginevra. I am Molly Weasley's youngest."

"Ginny, meet Father William," Brother Caleb said. "William, she'll update you on Harry, while I finish my work here," The friar then walked to the curtain he'd conjured, "but all will be well. I just need some more time with him."

"Harry has told me a little about you, Father Martin. You've given him sanctuary since Aberration Day, and you've taught him Occlumency. You must know of his history and the fights he's been in this summer, and now this..." Ginny choked up a little and the priest knelt and opened his arms to offer comfort.

He was hugely tall, but not like Hagrid. Ginny flung herself into his arms, and cried on his chest unreservedly. "He's so strong and so powerful, and he fights like a dozen wizards, but Father Martin, so many Death Eaters were trying to kill him!"

"There, there, Ginny, please call me Will."

She sobbed and said, "But I couldn't. My mother never would--"

"Your mother called me Will from her seventh year at Hogwarts - all the Weasleys came to St. Simon's until..."

Ginny pulled back from him. "My family attended church? Here?"

Father William sighed. "Yes, Ginny, but I feel like I might be telling you family secrets that your mother might not thank me for. But... I do this for her good as well as yours.

"Your brother Bill probably remembers St. Simon's and maybe Charlie too, but Percy was tiny when your uncles, Gideon and Fabian, were killed by Death Eaters. Molly came to Sunday services and even came to Morning Prayer several times a week when your father didn't have to go to work early. She worried herself sick praying for Arthur and your uncles, and when your uncles died, I think she felt like God had let her down. She was polite and made sure that I knew she didn't blame *me*, but I've not seen anyone from your family since I buried those two.

"I only tell you this because God is not responsible for their deaths. It's hard to explain concisely, but death is the handiwork of our enemy, the Devil. Jesus came that we might have an abundant life, but evil in the world causes this tragic suffering. It's complicated, and I'd love to tell you more about it, if and when you're ready.

"But right now, tell me about Harry. Has he told you how he feels about you yet?"

Ginny pulled back further and began blushing. Father Martin took that opportunity to move from his knee to a chair.

Ginny smiled through the blush. "When I tell you the circumstances, and tell you that I thought it was extremely romantic, you will think I've gone daft."

The priest chuckled. "I know a good bit about how Harry lives his life. There are friars here in the abbey that dedicate several hours a day to pray for him and the burden he bears, and the Abbott requires all of the brothers to add him to their daily prayer list.

"He speaks modestly of his accomplishments, in his fights particularly, but I've seen them in Occlumency and Legilimency training. He can protect his mind better than most Occlumens, but he's let me in to inspect his filing systems and barriers. And, he lets me see his battles so he won't have to talk about them, but so I can still help him with his internal struggles over guilt, and ease his worries about becoming like Tom."

"You knew Tom?" Ginny asked, amazed.

"Oh yes, I was a few years ahead of him, and in Slytherin house to boot. Before you're so shocked that I was Slytherin, you must realize that the house was very different back then and... well... the war with Grindelwald made something very different out of me.

They were sitting at right angles to each other with their knees almost touching. Ginny placed a hand on his forearm and he looked up quickly. He smiled. "I see myself just why Harry feels the way he does about you. Tell me the odd circumstances around his declaring his feelings for you."

Over the next minutes Ginny told of the start of the battle, Harry's giant slaying, and his eventual use of Gringotts as the point to attract and fight the Death Eaters. The priest coaxed out Ginny's none-too-insignificant efforts at helping Harry, and he had her see that she had played an important role, defending his back and flank, depending on Harry's angle of attack at the moment, which was an essential part of the young warrior's success.

Brother Caleb vanished the conjured curtain, and told them all was well. Harry should awaken in a few minutes. Father William asked Ginny to pass Harry his regards, and the two friars went into Diagon Alley to see if they could be of any use.

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Harry awoke with a familiar hand holding his. He squeezed it. The person on the other end of the hand rose without letting go, and in a few seconds he opened his eyes as she finished her light kiss on



his lips.

He said, "So it wasn't a dream, you're my girlfriend now?"

"You haven't asked me to be your girl in so many words, but you did tell me you've loved me for a couple of months now," She said.

"And you said you loved me too, Ginny. Sweet words I don't ever want to forget."

She smiled and leaned over to kiss him again. "Don't even think of asking me to be your 'girlfriend' Harry - we're beyond that. I've wanted to hear you say that you felt something for me, as I've felt something for you - I just never thought that this would be the time or place - not that I mind, thank you."

Harry adjusted on his bed. "Thanks, Ginny. I'm delighted too. Er, Ginny, sit so you're comfortable. I need to tell you the prophecy. No one our age knows, and we need to keep it that way, but if we're together, you have a right--"

"Harry, you don't have to tell me. I'm not going to scare off and leave you, so don't feel that you have to let me in on it."

"Hmm. I never thought that you'd leave over the prophecy. If you think about it, you'll guess what it is. And you already know I plan to kill Tom, and kill or damage severely every Death Eater who doesn't surrender right away."

Harry told her the complete text of the prophecy as it played in Dumbledore's Pensieve.

"I consider it hopeful," he said. "It means I have a chance to kill him. We don't both have to die, he and I, though that would be worth it to defeat him. But if I didn't plan to live through this, I certainly wouldn't have told you how I felt about you."

"Well, I'm sorry you have to be the one," Ginny said, "and I shudder to think what it would be like without the Paladin Program and everything else you've done this summer to prepare, but I have every confidence in you. And you won't be alone. Think of all those wanting to be there with you, and I'll be there too"

"Er, Ginny, this might make you mad, but when that battle comes I may ask you to stay someplace safe, for my peace of mind, so I can concentrate on killing Tom."

"Look me in the eyes, Harry. It's not because you don't think I can fight, is it?"

He stared straight into her eyes and smiled. "They are beautiful eyes, dear heart, but it's not because I think less of your fighting abilities. You haven't had the potions to help you reach your maximum magical prowess yet, but that's not essential.

"No, if I have to take on Tom to the death, I need you someplace where I don't have to worry about you. Today you were just one more person sending spells at those Death Eaters we faced. Once it gets

out that you're my girl, it will be a different matter." "We need to see about some personal protection spells for you. Maybe ask Bill about that. If all else fails, I can Monger some sort of alarm for you where I can know that you're safe. That's something I'll have to research, maybe mention the idea to Hermione and see what she finds."

Harry stretched his muscles a little and asked, "Can I get up?"

Ginny looked at the wall clock. "Brother Caleb said that you have to lie here at least another fifteen minutes. Oh, Father William came by while you were under and asked about you. When Brother Caleb told him you'd be fine, the two of them left for Diagon Alley to see how they could help.

"Tell me, Harry, what were those two spells with numbers all about?"

"The six hundred seconds, ten minutes, is how long I wanted the pallet to float through Knockturn Alley before McNair's Portkey activated. I wanted plenty of darker witches and wizards to see what I'd done to him, so more than just active Death Eaters know of my threat. If the pallet went to Voldemort right away, they might keep knowledge of my proclamation quiet. This way my message gets out to many others leaning Dark, but perhaps not under his influence quite yet.

"The nine hundred seconds is sort of different. I hope it works. I haven't told you, but I've been working on conjuring explosives. The basic work was done by Grind himself, who modified a combustion spell of Welsh Monger named Gruffoid. Grind never could cause an explosion like gunpowder, but he did get it to do two things, burn rapidly, and look like wood.

"I've been able to upgrade the explosive power a bit; it actually explodes, rather than just rapidly bursting into flames, but it's still a low yield explosion. That spell is in my Mongering process, but I haven't begun to compact it as a final spell or prepare it for sale.

"I spontaneously Mongered a detonator to go off at nine hundred seconds. I told you about Spontaneous Mongering, where I just Monger a spell out of sheer willpower, but then can't access it because I didn't develop it properly. I have other charms for detonation in the works, but this was one I just threw together. The problem is the Stasis spell and the Anti-Apparation and Anti-Portkey spells were all Spontaneous Mongering. It's nice to have those, but I wish I could pass them along to others.

"Anyway, back to the nine hundred seconds. Five minutes after the pallet arrives at wherever they go, the whole rig should blow up, though I have no idea if it will or not, and no idea how big an explosion it will cause. I've only worked with small pieces of wood, and I don't know if I can conjure that much wood as a disguised explosive, or if it's still just wood. Though it's not high-powered combustibles, there was enough of it that I hope it causes a pretty big blast."

Ginny nodded, looked at him pensively, and then asked, "Was that the Sword of Gryffindor? How did you call it? Does that mean you're the Heir of Gryffindor?"

"Nice spotting, dear heart! When I'm a teaching assistant, remind me that I owe you ten points. That was the Sword of Gryffindor and no, I am not his heir. I looked into my family tree, and the Potters are not heirs. I'm not sure why I could call it, but I needed it, and it just came to me. I called Fawkes

last week, which doesn't make him mine, but he came to help me nonetheless. My working theory of the moment is that the sword comes to anyone who is defending Hogwarts or its students."

"I like when you call me dear heart. I've never heard that endearment before. Where'd it come from?"

"I want to say I read it somewhere this summer. I've read a couple of hundred books and scanned through several hundred more. Dear heart you are to me, but I'm not planning on using it in front of the whole school," he said. "You are something very special, not just to me, but very dear to me. You have a good heart, long-suffering from the years you've been around me and I've ignored you. I admire your personal sense of worth combined with a goodness I've come to love this summer."

He leaned further over from the pallet to her face. They adjusted their heads so their mouths more easily aligned, and their tender kiss lasted until their necks hurt, which wasn't that long.

Harry groaned. "The kiss was great, but we have to find a better angle; my neck you know. Can we leave yet?"

"Five more minutes, Harry. How do you feel?"

"I'm a little tired, and generally sore like a hard day's working out double or triple time, but I don't feel any of my wounds or breaks. How about you?"

"I'm fine," she said, and he smiled at her. "No, Harry, I can say that and it means something. I was only doing a fraction of what you were doing, so I don't feel any magical exhaustion."

"It's not magical exhaustion I feel, just a little physical tiredness. Of course I was up before 5:00 and did a full workout before early services. Father Will had a great sermon today. Anyway, I was bored after the service so I did another workout session before going to Diagon Alley."

Ginny hesitated a moment, but then reached out and felt his upper bicep. Her eyes widened.

Harry blushed a bit. "I'm glad you like that. Ginny. I like the way you're put together, too. Looking at you, you just do something to me."

Ginny huffed. "I'm not sure why. Did you see Padma and Parvati, and all the Hufflepuff Paladins, and don't even mention Lavender Brown, what a strikingly gorgeous girl."

Harry looked at her quietly. She sputtered to a stop as he stared at her and she finally said, "What?" with a little petulance.

"Ginny, you are very pretty and you have a good bit of maturing left to go. These girls are three years ahead of you because of the Paladin Potions. I know you know this, so here are the plain facts.

I'm the shortest guy in my class and I have a messy head of hair. Have you seen the pictures of my father? At twenty he had a receding hairline. I'm not tall and striking like Dean Thomas, nor handsome like Michael Corner, and let's not even mention Justin Finch-Fletchley. I'm secure enough in my manhood to admit that he is one of the best looking guys in the world. Objectively you have to admit

they are all better looking than me."

"No, Harry--"

"Yes, Ginny, objectively, *objectively*, yes they are, and I don't care. I have this whole powerful wizard Boy-Who-Lived thing going for me to make me appealing to the ladies."

"Now, permit me to turn the objectivity lamp on you. You've stated earlier this summer your current physical attributes, and they have only changed a little. The thing is, you are a petite beauty that cannot compare to those other girls in the same way because they are older and much taller.

"Look at Cho Chang, however. She's as tall as she's going to go, and she's less than two inches taller than you. You should top her easily. But you can't be compared to Cho either, because you are polar opposites in appearance. She's so olive skinned and dark haired, and you are the fairest girl at Hogwarts with an absolutely gorgeous mane of red hair that girls would die for. I've heard Parvati and Lavender comment on how beautiful your hair is and all you do is wash it and brush it, they said. Apparently they have to do a good bit more to theirs.

"Now let's look at you a little closer. I mentioned Dean, Michael, and Justin. Two of those blokes dated you, and Justin asked me last year if you were dating anyone. He didn't know you were seeing Michael. I thought Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws were a little closer - sharing information at least - but apparently not.

"Anyway, there are three blokes that are better looking than me and they all have dated you or wanted to. So, let me ask you, are you going down-market by being my girl?"

Ginny sighed with an exasperated smile. "You are quite something, Harry Potter. Okay, no more me-down-on-my-looks. But if you meet someone--"

Harry placed his a finger over her lips. "I don't think you mean to, but you're about to insult me. Do you think me the type of bloke to be unfaithful?"

Ginny shook her head with his finger still in place. He removed it and continued, "I'll date you and we'll see where we go. I'm a guy, and guys have wandering eyes. Though I've decided looking at young ladies the wrong way isn't proper, I'll still gaze too long, too often. But know I'm working on it.

"As far as girls I'm interested in, I can only be interested in one at a time - and that's you. If you and I date and grow apart, it will be that we've grown apart, not that anyone has come between us. I can promise you that. I'll stick to it. You have the right to call me on gazing too much, but then so do I about you. Should we stop seeing each other, and I don't want that, because I think you're just wonderful, but should we, then you and I can do as we will. Believe me? Comments?"

"Harry, you're sounding like some scary male grown up version of Hermione, analyzing adolescent dating patterns. Actually, now that I say that, you sound like Sylvia Granger when she's in Muggle-teenager-psychologist mode." Harry smiled and leaned over to her to kiss once again. "What I really want to do is enjoy getting to know you even better than I do now. I want to keep you all to myself,

because you're a lot prettier than you were at the end of last year, and I don't want other blokes sweeping you up before I do. So, I guess I'm glad that I was worried enough about you an hour or so ago to tell you how I feel. I have enough on my plate this school year without pining for you because someone smarter than me snapped you up."

"You make me sound like a prize."

"Only in the very best sense, not as a trophy to be shut away, but as someone I want for me."

"So I don't have to worry about other girls?"

"In a word, no. It hit me when we were talking a minute ago that I am going to have to pay a lot of attention to others individually, girls and guys, when school starts. I'll be a teaching assistant in a practical course and I hope to be approachable - you know, the opposite of Snape, who as a Potions Professor in another practical course was completely unapproachable. Who knows what he'll be like as a Defense professor.

"So, if a pretty girl asks me how to do something, I have to help her. I want to do this right."

"Harry, how do you think of all this?"

Harry smiled ruefully. "I've been alone most of the summer, except for Dobby and then Winky, and they are predisposed to let their master keep his solitary ways. I've had nothing but lots and lots of time to think. I need less sleep, and all the exercise is mindless. Even Mongering lets me ponder this when reactions are happening - you know how they can be so slow sometimes. The Occlumency training has ordered my mind so I can put extraneous thoughts away.

"This year I'll be glad for school to start for a new reason, not because of leaving the Dursleys', but to have things to occupy my mind."

"Poor boy, come to me and let me kiss you whenever you need something to concentrate on."

Harry grinned "Deal!"

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## **Elsewhere**

"Crucio!" "Crucio!" "Crucio!"

It was a very large room for a personal dwelling, even larger than the outsides of the building in which it existed. It was a dungeon in fact, but no one who had visited this one would call it a dungeon.

It was closer to a throne room, yet three people held court at this time in different parts of the underground facility.

To the west of the room Colonel Talmadge Tryon conferred with his lieutenants and a number of his "troops," as he referred to his small but growing army of the Wizards of the Blood. Those who had failed this day were assigned painfully long sessions of casting debilitating spells that sapped the witch or wizard of his or her strength for days. In the end, it also strengthened the magical core of the one punished to a small degree. If a trooper failed him sufficiently, the Colonel just killed him, or her, without notice or explanation.

Koschei Svarogich had the largest number of followers. They were known as Craveners in English. Svarogich was from the dark forests of what was now known to Muggles as southern Ukraine, but he cast a wide net for recruiting into much of Slavic Europe and western Asia. He cared little of what the Muggle governments called their so-called country this year. His domain had no specific name, but magicals looked in its direction from all points of the compass and shuddered at the idea of going there - and so it had been since anyone could remember.

The Craveners that returned from the Peace Day Attack reporting great victories - the biggest braggarts died of fire and ice. The Svarogich family had developed the Blood Burning and Blood Freezing curses millennium before.. More than a dozen "former Craveners" were in the process of dying, boiled from the inside out. Today was a Burner as Svarogich stated when he awoke that morning. A dozen more were recovering from being released from a Blood Burner just in time.

Svarogich was a Legilimens with the taste and talents of Severus Snape. He mind raped his followers after a defeat to see who did what. The ones who had survived their few defeats in the past, knew to think only about their personal successes during the fights in question.

Voldemort dispensed the Cruciatus Curse generously. Returning Death Eaters who reported a less than desired outcome lay in quivering masses around the center of the hall where their master held court.

A young wizard, obviously under the Imperius Curse, led a hovering wooden pallet into the main room and right up to his master. There was some charm on the pallet broadcasting the words of the sign hung around the neck of the quivering mass of useless flesh perched on the pallet.

"Silencio!" "*Muffliato!*" The usual silencing spells wouldn't stop the repeated declarations:

**THUS END ALL TORTURERS OF CHILDREN**

By proclamation of  
*Patron Protector Harry James Potter*

Finally, Voldemort cast several over-powered *Reducto* s to break through the protective barrier and destroy whatever enchantment proclaimed the words of the Dark Lord's number two nemesis.

Of course, the *Reducto* s also killed McNair, but Voldemort had already decided to reward such failure in this way.

"Crucio!" Riddle decided to tickle the explanation out of the Imperius'd wizard who brought this mess before him. The Cruciatu s broke the Imperius.

After a minute of music to his ears, Riddle asked the drooling-in-pain-but-still-coherent young wizard, "What is the meaning of this? How did this happen?"

"My Lord," The sixteen-year-old Death Eater gasped out, "McNair stayed behind after the recall to torture a young Muggleborn girl. I Apparated away as soon as possible, upon your command. Roughly ten minutes after that, McNair's Portkey activated, it seems, and this is how he arrived. Mister..." The young Death Eater struggled here and could not overcome the Obliviation. "Umm, someone Apparated to Knockturn Alley and found out that this pallet had floated around there for five minutes or more making that proclamation before coming here." He fought the Obliviation again. "Mister... er, I thought I should bring him to you as soon as possible."

"Come forward, boy."

The young man fumbled as he rose from his knees. He was racked with pain. He almost fell again as he approached his Lord.

"*Legilimens!*" Voldemort pierced his nonexistent mental barriers like a charging hippogriff. He culled everything he could from the lad's weak mind, shattering it, and then cast him aside.

Death Eaters, Cravers, and Troopers milled around the room and looked to the center. Koschei Svarogich and Colonel Tryon walked over to Voldemort during this spectacle. They considered themselves his equals, probably even his betters, but they knew not to interrupt him when he was in this mood. Voldemort hit two Death Eaters near him with short *Crucio* s and then seemed to calm a bit, taking in several cleansing breaths.

"Lord Voldemort," the Colonel finally said. "I have a number of reports of teenagers, school-aged girls and boys, fighting and defeating some of my Troopers. Can you ascertain if they are the cadre of students trained by this Potter you so despise? We were led to believe that they would be of no consequence. Is your source's other intelligence to be trusted?"

"My Cravers give me similar information, Lord Voldemort. Two who returned badly wounded but able to walk claim, to have fought Potter himself. What fool told you he is a pathetic fighter, if I may ask?" Svarogich waved his wand and a ghostly image similar to a projected memory in a Pensieve appeared. There was no containing device and it was two-dimensional, not three, and soundless. It was from the perspective of a wizard attacking Potter, and occasionally a wand arm rose to fire a

spell. It was clearly the view of a Cravener sent to attack in or around Gringotts Bank.

Harry Potter whirled around like a dervish, weaving in and out of his Battle Barriers, while his marble slab shields spun at his back deflecting curses and hexes of all kinds. The viewer's attention was clearly fixed on Harry, but occasionally one of his attackers came into the periphery of the projected images. Those attackers who appeared were dispatched by Potter with ruthless efficiency.

In a moment Harry's gaze turned right into the projection. He raised both wands and fired several different spells independently. Shielding spells were raised in front of the view, but in seconds the projection abruptly ended.

Talmadge spoke up. "Wielding two wands independently. Shields covering his rear that act independent of his attention and move of their own accord. Lord Voldemort, what fool told you of this Potter's poor fighting skill?"

Riddle seethed inside. He was losing face in front of his allies, inferior though they were. But now was not the time to debate their value. His plans for global domination required their support, before he eventually killed them and took over their countries as well.

Many thought Lord Voldemort mad, insane. He was anything but, though he admitted to himself he did have a temper that he let loose more often than he should. He'd even rarely admit he had too great a fondness for the Cruciatus, and he ruined more followers than was prudent.

"Severus, come forward."

With no hesitation, Snape came from Voldemort's left and knelt before him. "Your servant, my Lord." His voice betrayed no fear or emotion of any kind.

"Severus, my little spy. What is it that you always say when asked about Potter? You have a mantra that I've heard in many a rant from you."

Snape remained silent.

"Bella? You remember Severus's opinion of young Harry, don't you?"

The psycho-witch came forward. "Of course, my Lord." She nearly giggled, then lowered her voice into a passable imitation of the Potions professor. "Harry Potter is a spoiled brat of modest magical ability and no training or discipline. He gets by on reputation and luck; he is as arrogant as his father was."

Bella finished. Voldemort clapped his gloved hands together several times, and the witch actually performed a slight curtsy before returning to his side.

"I believe Bella quotes you verbatim, don't you, Severus?"

"Would that all of my Craveners were as unskilled and lucky," Svarogich stated. All of his minions laughed appreciatively, and a number of Tryon's Troopers joined them. The Death Eaters remained



still and silent.

"I'd like some sort of explanation, Severus," Voldemort said quietly.

After a very long moment that lasted only a few seconds, Snape cleared his voice and said, "The boy has been in seclusion all summer. Perhaps Dumbledore has arranged for training--"

"That does not explain," Voldemort coldly interrupted, "why his fellow students were so successful fighting us in this attack. Nor does it explain why almost everyone there cast such potent Protego shields."

Not wanting to admit out loud that he had allowed his spy to convince him that even Potter's fight in the Little Hangleton graveyard was sheer luck, Voldemort continued, "My dear Severus, it seems you have allowed your prejudice to sway your judgment. Not very Slytherin of you, and very costly to a spy." Voldemort paused, then in a flash cast, "Crucio!"

He held the Potions master under the torturous spell for the eternity of one minute. Snape never screamed under the curse. However, when he was released he did gasp once and then let out a brief, low moan.

"Severus, you are too valuable to kill, and I fear holding you under the Cruciatus too long and damaging your mind for my service. I must think of another way to punish you. I advise you to never force me to chastise you again."

"I will endeavor--" Snape gasped, but Voldemort cut him off.

"Severus, I do not want to hear from you what you think I want to hear, nor do I want your biased reporting. I need facts; I need impressions, as objective as you can provide. I need to know my enemy. I already know your hatred for all things Potter."

Voldemort paused and leaned back in his chair. "I will soon have more eyes in Hogwarts, in place to both confirm your insights and provide information from different perspectives. I'd like to have your unvarnished reports to validate the impressions of these new sources. Can I rely on you in this?"

"Of course," Snape hesitated, swallowed, and then continued. "I will endeavor to remove my bias from future reports, My Lord."

"That, Severus, is an answer I can believe from you at this juncture. Now accomplish that and I will be justified in my trust in you, and shall reward you accordingly."

With this Voldemort turned to his allies, in effect dismissing the Potions master, who did not hesitate to remove himself from proximity of the Dark Lord. It was a wise move that he found himself closer to Tryon's Troopers than his fellow Death Eaters.

Before continuing his conversation with Svarogich and the Colonel, Riddle commanded, "Young Crabbe, remove that mess from my presence." He pointed to the Death Eater that had brought the pallet with McNair into the cavernous room. "Finish him if he still lives."

Voldemort turned to another of his minions and pointed to the shattered pallet. "You, dispose of that debris."

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Johnny Popkins was a pureblood wizard who grew up in one of many tiny secluded Wizarding communities that rarely contacted the outside magical world. Johnny was home schooled and knew a great deal about Charms and basic household and farming Transfiguration spells. He had ambitions and left home at nineteen, hoping to join the greater British world of magic. Having no Hogwarts education and no O.W.L. or N.E.W.T. scores, Popkins could only find work as a hired hand for menial labor. He was a classic recruit for Voldemort's mass of disposable Death Eaters.

The Dark Lord had pointed to him to dispose of the debris from the pallet. Johnny had been the primary person asked to bring in wood for the huge fireplaces, and had carried it in, rather than levitate it. Normally other Death Eaters might laugh at Johnny under these circumstances, but the new recruit was over six and a half feet tall and he was very powerful at casting the Cruciatus.

Johnny started picking up the pallet pieces, and then one of the Inner Circle sniped at him to use magic. Rather than banishing the wood, Johnny *Accio-ed* it together and levitated it to the fireplace.

Harry Potter's half completed Detonation spell failed. It had been nearly twenty minutes since the pallet should have exploded. However, Potter's conjured wood was very similar in composition to nitrocellulose. It did react to fire.

Violently.

The fireplace was destroyed, several other Death Eaters were hurt badly, and another Death Eater had to clean up the bits of Johnny Popkins that were spread all over that end of the room.

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Vincent Crabbe was glad he had on his mask. No one could see the few tears he couldn't stop. He had followed his father's instructions from prison, and he and his best and only friend, Gregory Goyle, took the Dark Mark.

Now, Greg's mind was shattered by the Cruciatus Curse, and Vinnie was all alone in the ranks of the cruelest men he'd ever met. He decided not to kill his friend as commanded, even though Vinnie knew Greg would never recover. He quickly moved the limp body to an unmanned Floo and secreted him away to his home. He decided there was the only place he could care for his friend. Vinnie's father was in Azkaban, and his mother had died when he was four.

Before Flooing away from his master's headquarters, Vinnie heard the explosion, so he quickly traveled back to see what had happened.

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After recovering, Harry Apparated himself and Ginny back to Diagon Alley, right near the twins'

shop. Harry commented, and she agreed, that they thought there would be more wreckage in the Alley. Harry turned and saw goblin overseers still stood guard in front of both Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes and Phoenix Fashions.

"Harry, there you are, and Gin-Gin." George ran up to them holding Millicent's hand, followed closely by Clarinda Jordan. Since joining the Paladins Millicent Bulstrode had lost a lot of weight and appeared to be taking better care of her appearance. Or perhaps her new boyfriend was the reason she made that last effort.

George hugged his little sister and patted Harry on the back, pointing to their intertwined hands. "About time, mate."

Ron and Hermione arrived and she said, "We'd heard you were hit."

"Minor damage," Harry stated plainly. Ginny huffed but Harry followed with, "Well, I got better. How are you and everyone else? What's happened here in the last..." Harry looked at his watch, "...hour or so?"

They were walking towards Gringotts. The buildings and shop facades didn't look quite as nice here, but Harry soon saw a blur of short creatures fixing and cleaning at a feverish pace.

"Hogwarts sent twenty-five house-elves and they've been a Godsend. Of course, Dobby is directing them so I guess you had something to do with this." Harry said nothing, so George continued. "They first made sure everyone was either unharmed or gathered together for mass Portkey to St. Mungo's. Then they just started cleaning - it's what house-elves do, I guess, so things are well in hand."

"I stood guard over the captured Death Eaters along with several other students, Harry," Millicent said. "The Aurors finally showed up and dealt with the survivors, taking them to prison, I guess. I found those watching them turning their backs on them, so I hope you don't mind, but I used your name to say they had to guard them more closely. I didn't think they would follow my lead."

Harry looked at her. "They might not have, but I bet they will now." She smiled.

By this time they had reached Gringotts. The dead goblin guards were gone, and several goblins were busy placing heads of dead Death Eaters on pikes around the bank. An older, official looking goblin, fiercely dressed in what looked like battle armor of some sort, walked up to Harry.

"Mr. Potter," the goblin said in a surprisingly soft voice, "Gringotts hopes you won't mind if we took the heads of your many kills and added them to our own few trophies, as is our tradition. I was informed that you would understand the gesture, particularly after your declaration of Patron Protector."

"Please call me Harry, and I guess you've spoken to Director Gultangk."

"No, sir and yes, sir. No, sir I will not call you anything but Mr. Potter since Wizards disavow the Muggle titles of Lord, even for a Warlord. So until you assume any other title you must be at the very least, Mr. Potter. And yes, I have spoken with the director. He thought you'd like the symbolism of

placing the heads of your kills on pikes with ours."

Harry paused in thought for a moment. "I do appreciate the honor you and your great nation pay me. It would not be how I would dispose of their remains, but I will respect your customs. However, please try to keep my name out of this, if possible."

Harry looked at the building. "Were there any breaches within the vaults?"

"No, sir. There is no indication as to what the motives or intent of this attack on Gringotts might have been. We killed the few attackers inside the bank right away. Those Death Eaters amassing out here may or may not have tried to storm us and do something, but you and your friends effectively ended whatever plans they had. The placement of their explosives actually stopped us from arriving outside sooner to help you. That being said, these attackers would have been stopped going in by the same destruction that held us up. They either had no intention of entering the bank, or they were marvelously incompetent."

"I'd bet on the latter," Harry said, "for right now, depending on further evidence to the contrary. It is so unlike Death Eaters to use Muggle devices of any kind, but... Hold on."

"I heard different languages than English, and I believe I heard a few American accents as well. All of the attackers wore Death Eater robes, *however*, only about a third wore masks. The ones obviously not British wore the robes without their usual care for fit. Voldemort must have acquired allies, rather than recruits--"

"Nonsense, Potter. Your imagination is running away with you." It was Auror Dawlish. "There is no evidence to support such a fancy."

"We *were* just discussing the evidence, you fool," Harry growled at him. By this time a good number of survivors of the attack had made their way to this area as it went around that Harry Potter was there. Harry raised his voice. "Those of you that were here, did you notice most of the attackers weren't properly dressed as Death Eaters, and that many of them spoke foreign languages or heavily accented English?"

Many of the crowd shouted agreement to Harry's words. Dawlish turned in surprise at this support, but quickly sent off a small burst of red sparks with his wand to quiet the people.

"You're not valid witnesses. You're in shock and merely responding to your Boy-Who-Lived like sheep. Cooler heads, like those of us in the Auror Corps, will decide this."

"None of *you* were here," Harry spoke loudly. "You were waved off by Fudge himself. How can you decide what happened? Is this how the Ministry decided Voldemort wasn't back last year? That was a piece of brilliant analysis - spot on, all would agree."

The crowd roared their agreement. More sparks from Dawlish.

"I'm not here to debate with you, Potter," Dawlish drew his wand. Harry tensed, but didn't draw his -

yet. The Auror continued, "I'm here to take you in for questioning about the death of several pureblood bystanders in this recent scuffle."

The crowd began to grumble. "I'll arrest you if I need to, Potter." Dawlish and his four Aurors began to position themselves to thwart the crowd, pointing their wands outward. The people backed away. However, it was from the doors of the bank that the response to this demand came.

"Auror Dawlish, I am Director Gultangk. By what authority do you try to arrest a Patron Protector? Are you aware that in doing so without the written authorization of the Minister of Magic *and* the Supreme Mugwump of the Wizengamot, Potter may attack you on the spot and kill you if necessary? And as the Patron Protector is an associate of Gringotts, I must tell you we will look unkindly on dubious arrests made for political reasons, instead of sound rule of law."

Gultangk looked at Harry and winked. Then he turned back to Dawlish and said, "If you arrest Potter now and do not have witnesses to a specific crime, I cannot imagine how many weeks it will take to reopen Gringotts to serve the good witches and wizards of Great Britain. How will the people react if they cannot access their money?"

Dawlish cowered at this.

"Dawlish," Harry said. "I'll be at the Wizengamot session on Tuesday, and any emergency session that should be called in this time of unrest. Since you cannot produce any evidence against me here in front of my peers, I will gladly answer in front of *the* Peers of the Wizengamot."

As the crowds chuckled, Harry leaned in and spoke so only Dawlish could hear. "After this summer, and your other feeble efforts against me, be forewarned. The next time you draw your wand on me, make it good, as you will not get another chance."

Harry turned away from the Auror, but he saw that a number of his supporters kept an eye on him. Dawlish huffed and walked away.

"Dobby!" Harry called

"Yes, Harry?"

"The Potter Fund students are all safe?"

"Both Creevey brothers were slightly wounded, but they'll be fine. All others either weren't here or were unharmed. Winky is at St. Mungo's right now checking on Miss Patty Quirke."

"All right, you've done a fine job here, Dobby. When the Hogwarts elves are finished, if I'm still here I want to thank them personally. If not please thank them for me. Also, if you can think of some small gift--"

A loud elf popping sound interrupted Harry's words. An ancient house-elf stood before him, and bowed deeply before speaking.

"I is Dinker, Harry Potter SIR, chief elf at Hogwarts. Dobby is not succeeding, Dinker's sees, in making Harry Potter SIR understand that hard work *is* a house-elf's reward. Anything else is confusing to Dinker and others. If Harry Potter SIR truly wants to thank house-elves, Harry Potter SIR should invite house-elves to more disasters to clean up."

With that, Dinker bowed deeply again and popped away.

"I've tried to tell you, Harry," Dobby said. "Winky and I do appreciate our gifts from you, and Winky and I will fix a special house-elf pudding for the Hogwarts elves once school starts, but serving you truly is our one desire and great reward." With that, Dobby popped away nearly silently.

Harry looked at Hermione. She sheepishly concluded, "I guess that completes my education regarding house-elves. I can only campaign against house-elf abuse, not slavery."

Right then Winky popped in.

"Harry, I'm glad you are here. I can report and get back to work."

"How is Patty?"

"She is safe and will recover, but it will take months. Magic and potions can only do so much. The Healer said, just before I left, that he thinks all will be well, except Patty will... never... never have... children."

With this, Winky dissolved into tears. Harry knelt quickly and reached for her. She threw herself into his arms, and cried in a tinny voice. The crying jag lasted for only about ten seconds, and then Winky was fine. House-elf emotions are not human.

"Winky, please go tell Remus that I insist that Patty's mother take leave from her job and stay with Patty during this whole time. I'll fund their family indefinitely, if necessary. Have them insist for me, telling Mrs. Quirke I have work for her when she is able, and that my employees always have such sick and disability benefits.

"Should I go there now?" he finally asked.

"I don't think so, Harry," Winky said. "Not unless you really want to. It's very crowded and quite the situation you despise. I'll tell them you asked about all of them and that I suggested you stay away. I can find you if you're needed."

Harry stood, and Hermione said, "And yet, you still teach me more about house-elves."

Harry smiled, held out his hand to Ginny, and they walked to see what else might need attention.

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**Day of Infamy!**

At a press conference held at 9:00 last night, Minister Cornelius Fudge declared, "Today, Sunday, August 25th, -- a date which will live in infamy -- the Wizarding nation of Great Britain was suddenly and deliberately attacked by the Death Eater forces of, er, uhm, Lord Thingy.

"After misleading the Wizarding world, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named sent scores of Death Eaters into the Peace Day celebration yesterday at Diagon Alley.

"A number of people were killed" Fudge went on to say, "but thanks to the high quality of training Hogwarts has given for many years, especially under Senior Under Secretary Delores Umbridge last year, the wizards and witches in attendance were able to defend themselves adequately."

When the Minister was asked about rumors that Harry Potter fought and killed many attackers, including a giant, the Minister had this to say, "Haven't we had enough glorifying of that, er, glory seeker yet? Yes, he fought some of the attackers, but we have plenty of evidence that he might have wounded and maybe killed a few good purebloods that happened to be there and innocently happened to be wearing black robes.

"If you want to talk about a hero, talk about young Neville Longbottom. This young man from a well-known pureblood family fought valiantly while outnumbered, and saved me from being abducted. Not only was he quite effective and powerful with his wand, the young genius at Herbology developed a secret weapon over the summer. After he was finally overpowered and lost his wand, he pulled a blow gun from his robes and paralyzed my attacker."

Harry forced himself to read on. The rag went on to magnify the villainy of Voldemort, glorify Neville twice again, and cast aspersions on the Boy-Who-Lived from time to time. Harry was glad for all the nice things said about his Gryffindor dorm mate, but he felt his fury grow and grow with the accumulation of lies.

Where was the responsible press asking government the tough questions about this dubious peace treaty, and about the lack of Aurors present in Diagon Alley during the day? Also, why didn't they talk about the other students that fought so well? Harry huffed to himself, and Winky and Dobby knew him well enough to let him steam.

"I can't buy the *Prophet*, they won't sell, and they won't even tell me who owns it so I can talk to them about selling. What we need is another paper!"

And that's when lightning struck.

It was 7:14 AM, and Harry had already exercised, gone to services to pray for those injured and the families of those killed, and eaten breakfast.

Harry stood up, paced around the small table, and sat back down. Then he stood again and started to call for his elves, but they were there already.

"Uhm, okay, Dobby, please go ask Director Gultangk when I can see him this morning."

*Pop!*

Harry sat, and wandlessly and wordlessly summoned parchment and a quill. After a few moments

writing one note, he started another. Hedwig flew into the room and landed on his outstretched arm.

"Winky," he said, "I'll have a note for you in a second."

"Don't forget, you want to go see little Patty Quirke this morning," she said, handing Harry a rasher of bacon for Hedwig.

Harry paused, then said, "That's why I asked you to remind me, thank you. I will as soon as Dobby comes back and tells me the time of my appointment. Your note will be ready soon."

He fed the bacon to his owl and then said, "Hedwig, if I don't know where a person is, but I know her name, do you think you can try to deliver a message anyway?"

The owl gave Harry a very human like tilt of the head and a blink that expressed her exasperation with her unbelieving human, and then held out her leg.

"I should have known, girl, you are the smartest owl in all of England. Please wait for a response if she has one, but she might not. Take care of yourself, I don't know what I'd do without you, you great beauty, you."

Harry finished his second note, and said, "Winky, have you ever been to Ottery St. Catchpole?"

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**Monday August 26, 1996 - 3:13 PM**

Director Gultangk and Andi Tonks nodded. She said, "Mr. Lovegood, we have the contract written as you requested. It's ready for you to read and sign if you are satisfied, but I'd still feel better if you hired representation and had your own solicitor review it."

Sol Lovegood took off his glasses and began to absentmindedly clean them for the fourth time in the last hour. He sat with his daughter, Luna, and looked both excited and confused.

"No, Mrs. Tonks, er, Andi. I trust Harry Potter, and if you tell me this contract protects both of us and fulfills the spirit of what he asked of you, I have no need for other representation. I never liked a single solicitor I've ever talked to - until I met you. Harry will be my partner. So that makes you *our* solicitor as far as I'm concerned. If he is not worthy of my trust, then all is lost, so why should I care?"

Everyone present looked around at all the others in the room.

Finally Harry spoke. "Andi, why don't you read the pertinent elements of the contract, leaving out all of the legal, er, boilerplate I believe you called it."

"Okay, Harry." She cleared her throat.

"On this day, August 26, 1996, I, Sol Lovegood, hereafter known as Seller, do hereby sell 49 percent



of *The Quibbler* Amalgamated and Ltd., hereafter known as *The Quibbler*, to Harry James Potter, hereafter known as Buyer, for the sum of 300,000 Galleons. Buyer also agrees to purchase a new Heidelberg Magical News Press, and pay for renovations to the premises owned by *The Quibbler* to accommodate the new press.

"Both Buyer and Seller agree to set up an operating fund of 100,000 Galleons, according to the percentage of ownership, to upgrade *The Quibbler* to a weekly paper within one month, and a daily paper within one year or sooner.

"Seller agrees that at a minimum, 50 percent of each issue will be dedicated to traditional news, and the news which *The Quibbler* has been known to print in the past will be relegated to the second section of the paper.

"Seller and Buyer agree to attempt to make *The Quibbler* a newspaper to rival the *Daily Prophet* and hope to either change its competitor into a serious journalistic entity, or run it out of business. To this end shall Seller as Managing Editor strive with all seriousness, including recruiting and hiring sufficient staff to accomplish this."

Andi paused, and lowered her reading glasses. "From there on the contract is boilerplate. You two do realize that last paragraph holds no legal substance to cause either of you to have to do anything, don't you?"

Harry and Sol both nodded. Sol said, "I just like it there to tell anyone who chooses to look, what we plan to do to the *Prophet*." Harry nodded in agreement.

"All right, you two sign under your names, Harry first. Director, I assume you have the funds prepared to transfer to the correct vaults?"

The goblin nodded.

"And, Mr. Lovegood, may I be the first new advertiser to sign up for a quarter page ad each week on whatever page you think would be appropriate for a solicitors' firm. I'll have some one bring you the mock up by Thursday, is that soon enough?"

"Oh, yes, Mrs- er Andi, and thank you for your help and your patronage. I cannot say when our next issue will go to press, but we will be running it as soon as possible."

Andi Tonks left. Sol, Gultangk, and Harry walked through the maze of old machinery from the past occupations of the building to the place goblin printing experts were preparing the building for the new press. The Heidelberg Magical News Press weighed more than six tons and was five times longer than the existing press.

"Sol," Harry pointed to the unused machinery and asked, "Can we clear out most of this stuff? What's it good for?"

"Oh, I always used to say I'd take it all apart one day and figure out how it worked. Some of these devices are Muggle, don't you know. I like to see what I can learn about our non-magical brethren."

"All of this stuff is no longer used," Harry said. "Studying it will tell you how the great, great grandparents of Luna's Muggleborn classmates *did* things."

"Oh, well, I've been meaning to do that for nearly fifteen years, so I guess I'm glad I never wasted my time. I'll have someone clear it out."

"Director Gultangk, Mr. Potter, Mr. Lovegood," A supervisory goblin addressed them. "The flooring is stable enough to begin transformation of the press foundation. We can inform the Heidelberg goblins they can deliver the press anytime after next Wednesday."

"Excellent, Tusgoff, you and your minions are to be congratulated. It looks like you will earn Mr. Potter's performance bonus with progress like this."

At this point a woman that worked in the office arrived. She was flustered by the goblins, and even more so by Harry. "Mr. Sol," she finally said, "The guest you told me about is in the waiting room."

"Very good, Missy, we'll be there directly. See if she wants tea, or, er, whatever else we might have to offer."

"I'll stay here with the pre-installation crew," Gultangk stated. "Good luck to you, Mr. Lovegood, Potter."

As she walked to the office, Sol said, "Harry, are you sure this is wise?"

"I looked into her early work, Sol, she can do what we want. The question remains *will* she do things our way. We certainly have the incentives that should interest her. Do you want to talk to her about this?"

"No, you know her better, and your history together needs to be, shall we say, clarified, for this to work. I'll jump in if I think it wise."

With these last words the two entered the office waiting room.

"Harry Potter!" the witch gushed. "It's been too long, to what do I owe the pleasure? Granting me another interview?" "Who would you sell it to, Rita? Not Sol here. I believe the *Prophet* has told you to never darken their doors again, or the *Evening Prophet* for that matter."

"Oh, Harry, a story about *you*, written by *me*, that will sell regardless of what that rag says."

"That rag, and the vicious tone you use to talk about it, is why *I've* called for you. So why did *you* come?"

"I seem to remember you mentioning an offer of revenge," she said, looking at her nails as if she wanted to sharpen them. "Far be it for me to turn down an opportunity for revenge against Barnabas Cuffe and whoever owns that disgrace of a newspaper, may they all rot in Perdition."

"Don't hold back, Rita," Harry said grinning. "Tell us your true feelings."

"I bet you'd like that, Harry. No, I have my reasons for hating them, and leave it at that. Now tell me, why am I here?"

Harry looked at Sol, who nodded for Harry to go on. "I just bought a minority interest in *The Quibbler*. Sol and I have agreed to take on the *Daily Prophet* by creating a respectable newspaper that reports the facts from both sides of an issue if at all possible, so that people know what's going on. We will be up front with ownership, and right under the banner it will say that Sol owns 51 percent and I own 49 percent."

"Stupid, Harry," Rita stated bluntly. "They'll roast you over it."

"I'm sure they will, but we have two tactics to fight that, well, three I guess, but the third is little more than an idea with no real substance yet. First, you are going to write about anything and everything you don't like about me, without making things up. For instance, I have twenty-seven votes in the Wizengamot. That is about eight percent of the votes, and that is entirely too much power in the hands of one person. Plus, I just inherited it. What qualifies me to vote wisely?"

Rita smiled, calculating wheels turning in her mind could be seen on her face and just about heard out loud.

"Next," Harry continued, "I just declared myself Patron Protector over thirty-six families, and I don't mind adding to that number. With that declaration, I have the right to raise my own private security force - what might be called my own army. How dare I do that, aren't there sufficient Aurors to protect the people?"

"Oh, and then there is the fact that I have helped start two, er, rather three small businesses recently by making capital investments with brilliant entrepreneurs. Four if you count Sol here. With the other three, I've defied the M.I.D., the Mages Importers and Distributors, Ltd. They have the protection of the Ministry to force individual shop owners to buy inferior raw goods at extortionist prices, and I've defied them. How dare I do this?"

"Rita, you have all sorts of things to write about." Harry ended his list and smiled smugly.

She looked at him still calculating. She turned to Sol, who nodded confidently. "I'll ponder this, Harry, while you tell me the other reason or two why people will accept you being a part owner of this rag, er, sorry Sol, news journal?"

Sol laughed. "I'll tell you later, Rita, why I've published the *The Quibbler* as I have in the past, and what's happened recently to change my mind about its direction. But for now, accept that I'm with Harry on this one hundred percent. Go on, Harry."

"You said that articles about me sell. What Sol has also discovered is that articles *by* me on Defensive spells and how to fight sell even better, if you look at Sol's limited subscription base and his even smaller number of distribution outlets. Did you read my article last week on the *Protego*

Shield?"

Rita smiled. "I didn't read it until Tuesday. I didn't pass a shop that carried it until then, and the owner, you'll be glad to know, Sol, told me that he had sold out twice already, and was upping his normal allotment of issues he takes when you publish. He sneered at that, and then griped about your erratic publish dates and unreliable press."

Harry said, "We're installing a new Heidelberg Magical News Press next week. The Gringotts goblin technicians are back there now finishing up site installation prep. Sol and I are also investing in the staff to run it, and the staff to fill it with articles of interest. The back half will be dedicated to the typical *Quibbler* articles its long-term readers expect, but the front half will take the fight to the *Daily Prophet* and try to compete with it. Which brings us to you. We want you to report for us."

"I'll string for you for my usual," Rita snapped instantly. "I get five Sickles a word, and I want Bozo as my photographer, at ten Galleons a photo published, a sickle a photo taken on the subject of an article of mine."

"We don't want you to be a stringer, Rita," Sol said. "We want you to work for us."

"Actually," Harry said, "We don't want you to work for us, we want *this writer* to work for us." At that Harry held out two press clippings, from years before. One was from the start of the first Voldemort war, and it proclaimed that there were indications of graft in the Ministry of Magic connected to a rising Dark lord. It used the name Voldemort, not He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. The second article was printed at the start of the trials after Voldemort was defeated in 1981, and it pointed to an early payoff of a Ministry official by an accused Death Eater.

They had been buried on back pages.

"What happened to this reporter, Rita? I really admire her."

Rita had the good graces to blush a bit before jutting out her jaw and saying. "She starved to death, or I nearly did. The Rita you know has eaten well, er...." She lost a bit of her blatancy. "That is, until the last year."

Sol said, "I know, Rita, that as stringers you get a Sickle a word, except on your story about Harry last spring, and Bozo gets a Galleon a photo used, and three Knuts per photo on subjects for the archives. We don't want you to string. We'll pay your salaries, what you both made before the *Daily Prophet* fired you, but we want her," Sol pointed to the articles in Harry's hand, "to write for us. No Quick Quotes Quills or unsupported slander.

"We write supported facts and put an anti-corruption, anti-pureblood bigotry spin to it. We have an agenda, but we admit to it. We'll put it on our masthead or on our statement of purpose on the editorial page at the very least. We're for merit advancement and equality for all. Harry surprised me when he said his friend Hermione found out several months ago that you've hidden the fact that you're a half-blood, and you've risen to your status on your skills alone - you've had no family patronage. It's time you were celebrated for all of this, not ashamed of the facts."

Rita looked at the two of them with unseeing eyes. Harry and Sol looked to each other quickly, then Rita spoke.

"It's like what Dad did during the Grindelwald wars," she said, "when the *Daily Prophet* was a real paper. They took on the old *Magical Guardian*, the paper that was the lead news source in magical Great Britain. It failed to denounce Grindelwald's pureblood movement until the war was nearly over." Rita paused here and smiled at the two men wanly.

"My Mum was a driver for the Muggles that interfaced with the Wizarding Expeditionary Forces. My father was a photographer for the *Prophet* as a young man, and went to the battles in Dumbledore's forces. Dad was wounded in the last battle. It's what killed him eventually, but not until 1964 when I was ten. I remember him coughing his way through, telling me about what lengths they went through at the *Daily Prophet* to make sure the news was accurate, and how they killed off the *Guardian* with better reporting and great pictures, he liked to add."

"I know nothing about that," Harry said, "But it sounds like what we plan to do. Is your father why you became a reporter?"

She smiled again. "Yes. He wanted me to be a photographer, but I'm just incapable of holding a camera steady and squeezing the shutter release. Dad allowed that reporters might earn their keep. When he died I was already writing news stories about what went on at my witches' day school." She paused again and they remained silent as well.

"Barnabas Cuffe's grandfather was responsible for making the *Daily Prophet* what it was. His son had no interest in the paper, but Barney has spent his life using it as a means to make money, selling it and himself to the highest bidders, even though no one knows who actually owns the *Prophet*. I say we put a small picture of Hyrum Cuffe in the paper somewhere, at least on occasions, and maybe in the offices as well. It will really irk Barney, and I'll consider that part of my pay. He's the one who made me a hack, though I sold out to him willingly enough."

She paused again, and after a few moments Harry spoke. "I knew nothing about this, Rita. It would make a good article, or even a series perhaps. How else can you help us? Will you help us?"

She looked at them and pulled out a pad of parchment and standard quill. "You're a monthly now, you have to go weekly and daily as soon as possible. What are your plans?" "I plan to re-enter active reporting myself to help at first," Sol said, "And we are financing for new staff. I'm open to suggestions on people you know that want to report like we've described. We want to go weekly in a month or so, at least bi-weekly. And I hope to go daily in a year, though I've had only since early this morning to think about it once Harry came to me with this proposal." "I'm in," Rita said, "Though forget Bozo. He a good photographer, but he likes being a hack, and he's a pureblood bigot through and through. He'd faint if he knew I was a half-blood. I think I'll tell him at the next press conference."

"I can take your twenty-seven Wizengamot votes and slam the Fudge cabal featuring that toad Umbridge and her forty-seven votes. I'll love sticking it to Florence Sheets. I know what to do with the M.I.D. also. I'll go with those two first. I don't know enough about the Patron Protector stuff. I just heard about it for the first time in this morning's paper, so I'll want some help from you on it." She

paused, scratching several further notes silently.

"I'm in, but under one condition. I think I'd like to try my hand at the news editor's desk. The *Daily Prophet's* news editor is very powerful and a despicable witch with a capital 'B.' I'd like to think I could do the job one day, but I want to prove it to myself as much as to you. I just want the opportunity to try."

Harry looked at Sol for a moment, then nodded. Sol said, "I'm not opposed, though I'll take it for a while, eventually going to publisher and editor-in-chief. I've no problem giving you a trial in that post once we need someone else in that position."

"Fair enough," she said. She turned to Harry.

"What's the third thing you two plan to promote the new *Quibbler*. Have you thought about changing the name?"

"No!" they both said in unison, causing all three to laugh.

Harry said, "I want to try to promote *The Quibbler* to gain new subscribers. Sol and I both have our funds in this and realize it will lose money for a good long while, but I'd eventually like to see a profit, and that means advertising, which means we need readers to warrant the ads. It's just an idea that I might be able to use my fame and connections to promote readership and advertisers. I'm open to discussions."

They talked into the late afternoon.

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Harry spent only an hour with Ginny later that night telling her of his activities of the day. They then kissed for a few minutes and parted reluctantly.

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Tuesday brought more Fudge-generated smearing of Harry's good name regarding Peace Day, which was now called the "Day of Infamy." Harry couldn't tell exactly why the *Prophet's* coverage revolved around the victims, Voldemort's treachery, and Neville, but Fudge continued to harangue solely on Harry. There was even a veiled threat about bringing the matter up before the Wizengamot for some sort of action. Harry snorted in his breakfast with this. Let Fudge bring on his censure. If such action was worded carelessly Harry could challenge him to a duel for his honor - so stood his status now that he declared himself a Patron Protector.

Before heading to Diagon Alley and then the day's Wizengamot session, Harry stopped by Father William's office and asked that he send a note to the Friary to pray specifically for him this day in Chambers with the other legislators.

The Alley still showed signs of the battle, but it looked significantly better than it had at the end of day Sunday. In spite of everything, Clarinda's shop had done a good business, and many people had

come back on Monday to buy her apparel. Ginny's StudyBooks and other versions were a big success. The twin's joke shop had done well, and run out of catalogs for Owlpost orders.

While at the shops, Harry was told that Patty Quirke was doing better than expected, though it would still be over a month before she was as fully recovered as possible. She would eventually have only a few small external scars, and would walk and even run normally in time.

With little time to spare, Harry made his way to St. Mungo's and visited the family. Orla and Amanda were there, but Patty was asleep. He raised a Silencing barrier and they chatted quietly.

"Mr. Potter, I can't begin to thank you for paying for Patty's bills here, and the employment possibility. I didn't mention it to the girls, but there was a fair chance I'd be put on half time at my work. Are you sure you have a place for me?"

"I'm very sure, though I don't particularly know what it will be. I have several business interests, and I've chosen to take a position in Wizarding society called a Patron Protector. I'll be able to raise defense forces of my own and protect people like you and your family that have some sort of relationship to me. I'm starting with all of the Potter Educational Fund students and their families. It's sort of like the lords and dukes of old raising their own regiments, but more on a security force scale. There will have to be someplace for you helping in administration for all of this. I assume that's what you do."

"Yes, though I was a computer specialist, I am a trained typist and good at bookkeeping. I understand computers don't work in the magical world."

"There is a way to do it, though I will probably never be able to use one. I have someone looking into it. If you know computers you can help research it. That would be a great business in itself - bringing computers to our world. Help figure out how to do it and I'll give you a minority piece of the business, if there's anything to it."

The look on Amanda and Orla's faces were enough to make that offer worth it to Harry. But at that time Patty startled awake, and mother and sister ran to her.

"I'm here, Patty. Orla and I are here. You're safe. And Harry Potter is here looking in to see about you."

She looked to him as though he was a long way off, even though he was a few feet from her mother. "Am I still a witch?"

Harry looked to Amanda, who nodded quickly. "They say your magic will blossom fully as you grow older. How do you feel?"

She looked at the ceiling for a moment. "All numb, Harry. How do I look?"

"Simply gorgeous, sweetheart. I cannot remember a more beautiful nine year old. Even with the bandage on your cheek, you're too cute for words."

She smiled, then frowned. "Mummy says I can't have babies. Does that mean no boy will want to marry me?"

Harry determined he would answer her as best he could. "I think many a guy will want to date you because you're so pretty. Out of all that lot, there will be a few that won't want to marry you for one reason or another, but the rest will look past that and see that life with you will be worth it. If you want, I'll help you pick out a good one, since you don't have a big brother."

He smoothed the hair from her right eye. "Now, as to babies, just because you can't have a baby, doesn't mean you can't be a mother. My parents died when I was one year old. I was stuck with my terrible relatives, but I would have much rather had someone like you adopt me and be my mum."

Patty looked into his eyes. She yawned. "Good, as long as you help me pick out a good husband, I'll adopt a baby like you."

At this time, a mediwitch interrupted them and gave Patty a potion that put her back to sleep.

"Thank you, Harry," Orla said. Amanda was crying into a handkerchief, but smiling brightly at him. "We tried to convince her of all of that, but... I guess yesterday was too soon for her. But she did ask about you. We told her Dobby came by for you. I didn't tell her about house-elves. Patty thinks Dobby is your valet." "I guess he is at that."

"But today, Harry," Orla continued, "Patty seemed to believe you. Thank you." "Yes," Amanda said, "Thank you so very much for everything."

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So, it was with a sad heart but resolute determination that Harry ran through the Ministry and made it to the Wizengamot chambers just before the session began. He actually pulled his robes out and unshrank them after entering, raising the ire of Florence Sheets. Harry looked at her and forced his hair to lengthen while returning her glare. This startled her momentarily, but she was her bitter-looking crone self soon afterwards.

Harry rushed to sit by Isaiah Smith and then looked to the Chief Warlock, but before Brownlea could call the session to order, Fudge sniped loud enough to draw everyone's attention, "Surprised you have the gall to show your face here, Potter."

"Mister Fudge!" Brownlea exclaimed and hammered down his gavel. He looked to Harry, who shook his head. Brownlea nodded to Harry courteously. Then he called the session to order.

Fudge, Sheets, and Umbridge were huddled together throughout the reading of the minutes and what little passed for old business. When the Chief Warlock asked for new business, Fudge stood and called for the floor, but then he conversed with Sheets and Umbridge until Brownlea called his name several times.

"My apologies, Acting Chief Warlock," said the Minister. "It has been a month since we first broached this subject, and now it is time to vote on the endowment to St. Mungo's. As you know, I



pardoned Sirius Black of all charges against him after his death in June because of an endowment in his will."

This bludgeoned Harry with a flat iron.

"There had been some dubious evidence of his innocence, but now that he is dead, releasing him would not send a possible Death Eater back onto the streets to join You-Know-Who. However, pardoning him does release the funds his black heart set aside to buy absolution for his many sins--"

"Mister Fudge, you're a liar!" Harry spoke out of turn, but he did use proper addresses.

Brownlea spoke quickly, but with less rancor than he had to Fudge moments before. "Mister Potter, you spoke out of order. You may have a turn when Mister Fudge has finished."

"Thank you, Boaz," Said Fudge.

"You, Mister Fudge, have shown no respect to the naming procedures of this chamber. Please speak as you know you should."

"Right you are, Acting Chief Warlock. I put forth for brief discussion and final vote the proposed Fudge Black Medical Research Wing for St. Mungo's. I propose to allow this go forward with the great financing from myself, and whatever that rogue Sirius Black decided to leave for this project. There is enough to endow this research facility, but those of us responsible enough to the future of our society decided to make sure the Black name did not soil our lives by its solo presence. I looked high and low to find a fine pureblood family to lend their name to this to negate the Black blight, but none came forward. In the end, I decided to risk my own money and good name to see this center endowed."

He sat, and Dolores Umbridge stood, and took the floor, even though Harry tried to ask to speak properly. "Sit down, boy. I wish to second this proposal for final vote, and I wish to take this opportunity to praise our wise and courageous Minister of Magic for his generosity and desire to risk his good name to clean up the blight of the Black name."

She sat looking smugly and Harry immediately stood and asked for the floor.

"Potter," Sheets sneered, "I was speaking first."

"No, Madame Sheets," declared the Chief Warlock. "Mister Potter asked properly, unlike your compatriot, Madame Umbridge, and unlike you. I only let her go on because Mister Potter graciously nodded his assent. Now he has the floor and I remind you that you *must* use proper decorum and addresses for all in this assembly. This reminder goes for all of your little cabal. Now be seated and let Mister Potter continue."

"Yes, Acting Chief Warlock." Sheets scowled as she said this.

"Thank you, Chief Warlock," Harry said. "I have heard Professor Binns speak on Goblin Wars for years, as have most of you, but I have never heard more useless ramblings of half truths and outright

lies in all of my life than I just heard from our esteemed Minister."

A good deal of laughter followed this. Harry continued, "I must correct the Minister on several points. Sirius Black was not a Death Eater and he did not betray my parents. Peter Pettigrew did; the same Pettigrew that received a Order for Merlin, from Mister Fudge's hand."

"You have no proof, Potter, and you know it."

Brownlea hammered him down.

"Chief Warlock," Harry asked, "You've several times alluded to allowing me to use their names without the honorific if they continued to *not* addressi me as is proper. May I have that privilege?"

Browlea smiled as the three stood and shouted while out of order. Brownlea pounded them down.

"Mister Potter. These three proved even again that they do not know what proper decorum is. I declare that all here in this assembly have the right to address Fudge, Umbridge, and Sheets without the appropriate honors in these chambers for one month. If at the end of that month they have not addressed anyone improperly, then we will return their honorifics. Please proceed, Mister Potter, and thank you for setting a good example for these three."

"You do me honor, Chief Warlock," Harry stated, bowing slightly as was custom. He cleared his throat. "I stated that Sirius Black was innocent, and I believe there are ways to take my sworn testimony on the matter, not as legal precedent, but as to clear his name once and for all. I offer Pensieve memories, a Wizard's Oath, or, if Mister Smith alone asks the questions, Veritaserum testimony."

There were many gasps around the chambers at what Harry was willing to do to clear his Godfather's name.

Brownlea turned to Ledbetter, the Clerk of the Wizengamot. "What is the procedure, Ledbetter?"

"Pensieve memory with a Wizard's Oath after viewing, swearing that the memory has not bee altered has been accepted in the past."

Fudge stated, "As Minister of Magic, I will only accept Veritaserum with me asking the questions."

Harry said, "Mister Ledbetter, as a Patron Protector, if I submit to that extraordinary and insulting means of verifying the truth of my testimony, do I have the right to demand Fudge undergo identical testimony regarding the amount of his intended contributions to the research wing for St. Mungo's?"

"Why yes, Mister Potter, you do."

Fudge quickly stated, "I withdraw the request."

"I bet you do," Harry said as an aside, but loud enough for all to hear. Even more laughter followed.

A Pensieve was brought out. Harry gave the memories of Peter, Sirius and Remus in the Shrieking Shack from third year, and Pettigrew killing Cedric Diggory and performing the ritual to bring back Voldemort in fourth year.

They were projected so all could see and hear. When they were finished, Harry stood, drew his wand and proclaimed. "I, Harry James Potter do swear on my magic that what was just presented in this chamber was my untampered memories. So mote it be."

He lowered his wand and said, "May I perform some simple task of magic, Chief Warlock?"

"Proceed, Mister Potter." Harry cast a Levitation Charm on a piece of parchment on a desk. It shot quickly two feet high, rotated slowly, and then descended more slowly.

"Well," said Brownlea. "That proves Mister Potter's testimony about the innocence of Sirius Black. It also proves, Mister Potter, that you told the truth in the spring of 1995, that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named had come back. You have my apology for considering our Minister correct then. I'd like to think many others in this chamber will apologize to you for similar thoughts for the past fourteen months. I fear asking how you escaped." Harry blushed, lowered his head and his voice and stated, "I fought him to a draw and escaped him and his Death Eaters in the confusion, making it back to Cedric's body and *Accio'd* the Portkey TriWizard Trophy Cup to get away and back to Hogwarts."

"All lies!" Umbridge screeched.

"Madame, you are out of order!" Brownlea declared forcefully. He was furious. "Once more and I will have you removed and censured."

He turned back to Harry and politely said, "I believe you, Mister Potter. You have nothing to prove here."

"Chief Warlock," Harry asked, "May I show my fight that night in the graveyard - to clear my good name once and for all times of these accusations? I can also show you Voldemort interviewing his loyal Death Eaters. It includes several former members of this assembly."

Brownlea looked at his pocket watch. "Perhaps not the interview, but we owe you the fight after what you've been accused of in this chamber today, and for the accusations of the past month."

Harry nodded, pulled the appropriate memories, and watched as required the battle the Wizengamot now viewed. At the end there was nothing but silence, until Harry eventually cleared his throat and said, "I, Harry James Potter do swear on my magic that what was just presented in this chamber was my untampered memory. So mote it be."

During the projection of the battle, Harry remembered he was a Patron Protector, and he needed to always act like he was worthy of such a position, one taken by self-proclamation and backed by force of will and force of magic.

After taking his oath, Harry drew his wand and cast, "Expecto Patronum!" A nearly solid silver Prongs leapt from his wand, but did nothing more than turn, nod to those present, turn to Harry and

bow to him before disappearing in silvery mist.

"Well," Brownlea stated, a little flabbergasted, "I do believe that eloquently proves in more than one manner that Mister Potter did indeed fight Voldemort and live to tell about it. Please proceed, Mister Potter, you still have the floor."

Harry took a moment to gather his thoughts. "I thank all of you for watching my memories with tolerance--"

"It was a great honor, Mister Potter," Tiberius Ogden called from the back of the room. Many others agreed loudly from all over.

After a moment of quiet applause, Brownlea gently tapped his gavel and nodded to Harry.

"No, you all honor me, but I wish to honor my Godfather, Sirius Black. The Black family, for generations, had been a scourge on this society, Sirius felt. He wanted his name to stand for more than what it had before him. He endowed a number of charities, including an orphanage, so that children who lose their parents won't have to endure being raised in situations intolerant of magic, like I was.

"I know Sirius gave 500,000 Galleons to St. Mungo's. Has Fudge offered more, so that his name goes up first ahead of Sirius's? Has he offered half as much to have his name with Black at all? That's my question, and I'd like an answer."

Harry sat down at this point.

Big mistake. It relinquished the floor and made his question rhetorical, not one Fudge had to answer.

Florence Sheets stood and proclaimed, "I move that the Fudge-Black endowment be accepted as is without any further discussion."

"I second the motion," Umbridge shouted right after Sheets.

There was nothing else for it. The vote had to go forward, before that question or any other debate could occur, and then only if the motion was defeated. With the current count, particularly with the Umbridge forty-seven votes, the motion would pass with over two score votes clearance.

Grabbing at straws, wanting to postpone the vote for even the shortest of times and faintest of hopes, Harry called, "I ask for the thirty-three minute delay."

In each calendar year, each Wizengamot member has one chance to delay a vote for thirty-three minutes without any need for a second or any discussion. The call is made and a vote is delayed. Period.

Smith looked at him. "You have your thirty-three minutes. I don't know what you can do, but get to it."

Harry pulled at his hair, and then ran from the chamber. He would be the only one allowed to leave. He paused outside and then thought of Dumbledore, all the while knowing there was nothing the aged

mage could do to sway enough votes. After a second's thought, he ran to Arthur Weasley's office. He thought for sure the man could Floo call the Headmaster from there, or would know how.

Harry ran into the office. Perkins wasn't there. "Mr. Weasley, can you fire call Dumbledore from your fireplace?"

"Why, yes, Harry, use the Floo powder in the small box and just say, "Headmaster's office. And do call me 'Arthur' like we agreed."

After nearly a minute trying, Harry gave up, and stood from his kneeling position. He leaned against the wall and sighed sadly.

"Harry?"

"Fudge and Umbridge are going to pass a law that names the research wing at St. Mungo's 'Fudge Black' and I just know Fudge isn't giving hardly anything to get the recognition. They have the votes, and no amount of reasoning will stop it."

Arthur immediately stood and looked to the framed ensign of his family's denied Right to Rule. Harry and he naturally gravitated to it.

Almost as graffiti, the words *Abnego Interrex Stativus* were written so carelessly on the ensign. Arthur, like last time, touched the scrawl of poorly worded Latin that declared his family had been denied the Right to Rule forever. Once again it gave off a sickly yellow spark and a disagreeable odor. Once again Arthur waved his wand wordlessly and cleared the air.

But everything changed after that. Harry pulled his wand at the exact moment that he remembered the historical narrative of the American Squib, Cilla Newcastle.

Harry pulled up his Spell Monger's Scrutinizer and checked the magic of the document. There was a general set of old magic with object wards on it that Harry guessed could be the original recognition spells for the Wizengamot Chamber. Then there was the banning magic, which after closer inspection was two spells, one on top of part of the other.

"Arthur, may I cast an analysis spell on this document to see what that banning statement consists of?"

"Sure, Harry, you're the one with the time limit."

A general *Finite Incantatem* would be too general. But Spell Mongers had a very precise low power magic canceling spell that could end a tiny portion of a spell in development. Harry cast this on the written word, *Stativus*.

There was another spark of yellow and a greater rotten smell, but then the word 'burned off' with royal purple sparks. A springtime scent filled the room. Where the previous ban was, now it read *Abnego Interrex Posteritas X*.

"Good Lord, Harry, that basically reads 'Rule Denied Ten Generations.'"

"Arthur, did Ginny or Ron tell about the American we met that told us the life story of Sir Percival Weasley?" "Yes. I've been meaning to visit her, perhaps even invite her to dinner."

"Well, the Americans record the event that the Weasleys were only denied rule for ten generations. This backs up that idea. If that was the case--"

"Then we Weasleys have been denied the right to rule for seven generations."

Harry looked at his watch; he had eight minutes left of his thirty-three. "Come with me, please, sir. You can take back your family votes, all forty-six of them. You'll turn the balance of power in the Wizengamot and save... save Sirius's legacy at St. Mungo's."

Arthur stared at him for a moment, and then said, "Let's go, Harry. I don't have the appropriate robes, but that doesn't matter I don't think, at least not the first time. I have the inheritance from Sirius, and I can buy whatever robes are needed."

They ran to the Chamber, and came to the door with just under two minutes to spare.

"Let me go first and grab Isaiah Smith."

"Is Dumbledore in there?"

"No, he hasn't been in all the past month or so. Wait thirty seconds. If I haven't come back, step just inside the door, but don't go further."

At the thirty count, Arthur stepped into the door. He'd been there for testimony for his Muggle protection legislation before, but had entered through a witness's box. He held the framed Weasley's Three-Thirty-Three Family Right to Rule as a shield before him.

Arthur looked to Harry who was rushing back to him, but his attention was drawn to the shouting voice. "Weasley, if you enter this room you are fired from the Ministry of Magic immediately!" It was Fudge ranting at him, anger and panic in his voice.

"That will be okay, Mr. Weasley," Harry assured him. "You--"

"Harry," Arthur interrupted him, sticking out his jaw. "I'll do the right thing because it's the right thing. Consequences can go to blazes."

Arthur stepped forward and a loud gonging started.

"Chief Warlock!" Fudge and Sheets shouted in unison. Sheets screeched, "We have a vote. Nothing can stop a vote."

Boaz Brownlea had been Dumbledore's Acting Chief Warlock for over ten years. He'd seen more excitement in chambers in the last month than in all those previous years combined. This day was shaping up to be the most interesting in his forty-four years as a Wizengamot member.

Brownlea said, "As I understand it, and the Clerk of the Wizengamot can confirm this, the only thing that can interrupt a vote, interrupt anything going on in session for that matter, is the challenge of a member's Right to Rule, by someone holding magical evidence that *they* might have a prior and higher claim to another's vote or votes." He looked to Ledbetter.

"Yes, Chief Warlock, you are correct," the clerk stated. "and that sound was the challenge gong that insists we stop all proceedings and investigate. Mr. Weasley. Please bring forward your Family ensign."

Arthur, visibly shaking, stepped towards the Clerk.

"Chief Warlock," Harry said, "while our more than capable Clerk investigates this, may I explain why I brought him here?"

"Proceed, Mister Potter."

"I was aware of the Weasley family indefinitely losing their Right to Rule seventeen generations ago. However, just recently, I heard from a questionable source that the loss should have been only for ten generations. I dismissed that, assuming the Weasley ensign, which I had examined, had been correct.

"In desperation today I went to Mister Weasley's office to call Chief Warlock Dumbledore. No disrespect to you, Chief Warlock Brownlea, I wanted Mister Dumbledore here to try to persuade votes, not take your place."

Harry bowed and Brownlea bowed back, indicating he understood.

"While there, I noticed the spell declaring *Abnego Interrex Stativus* was poorly settled magic. I thought for sure such a decree would be better cast. Upon closer examination, the indefinite abrogation of power showed itself to be counterfeit, and *Abnego Interrex Posteritas X*, Interrupted Rule for Ten Generations, was underneath. If that indicates what I thought it did, and this chamber may point to my conclusion, there is a change of voting rights needing to occur."

"Chief Warlock," Ledbetter said out loud, catching everyone's attention. The man had perfect timing. "I find no fault with the document and its implication that Mister Weasley should join this august body. It only remains to inquire of this chamber which votes go to him, and what level of punishment, if any, is to be exacted from those who have wrongly held those votes."

"Please proceed, Ledbetter." Brownlea said.

Ledbetter laid the ensign on the Clerk's table and stepped back. He slowly withdrew his wand, and pointed it at the document. A quick swish and some indistinct Latin later, the document began to glow. A different, more melodious gonging occurred.

A basso profundo voice stated mechanically, "*Forty-six votes withdrawn from the usurper Umbridge family. Forty-six votes returned to the Weasley family. The Weasley Family is aggrieved. The Thirty-Three Second Directive applies, beginning with the next tone.*"

Isaiah Smith ran to a shocked Arthur Weasley, who had walked to Harry's side. Smith said, "Mister Weasley, I congratulate you and welcome you to our assembly. There is no time for formality, which will be attended to after this--"

A quieter, but obvious gonging began and continued every second.

"Count, Harry," Smith ordered, then turned to Weasley. "You have certain rights to extract retribution. I cannot explain all right now. Will you trust me? I want to see Umbridge severely punished, but not physically harmed."

Harry said, "Eight."

Arthur gulped and nodded, but said nothing. Sheets and Fudge, as well as other Family Heads who voted with them were shouting and calling for the floor. Brownlea ignored them.

Smith stated, "You have until thirty-three, or you lose the right for retribution. Will you trust me?"

Arthur gulped again and stuttered, "Yes, s-sir."

Smith spun Weasley around to face Brownlea and whispered into his ear. "Say my words: Chief Warlock Brownlea."

Harry said, "Twenty."

Arthur began to parrot, "Chief Warlock Brownlea, I am eager to join this assembly. I ask that the Umbridge Family be required to forfeit their Family Vote until they pay to the Weasley vaults the back wages that my family has been denied for seven generations." With that, Dolores Umbridge fainted.

Harry said, "Twenty-eight."

Arthur continued, "And I ask that I receive five thousand Galleons, immediately to transition my family to where it needs to be to serve."

The last gong rang. After several pregnant moments, the room's voice stated. "So mote it be. Remove the usurper. She has no Right to Rule."

Arthur wavered but did not faint. Harry and Smith moved him to their corner and pushed him in a chair to prevent his falling.

Brownlea declared, "Auror Dawlish, it is your duty to escort Umbridge out of this chamber immediately."

She had been revived by Florence Sheets. The squat witch looked panicked for the moment, then she turned to Harry.

"You ruined *everything!*" Umbridge then drew her wand and tried to hex Harry.



For his part, Harry knew the room would not allow a spell cast in attack on one of its members, or any other magic that was out of order. But he stood to dodge the spell and lead it away from those sitting in his corner.

But Harry's efforts were unnecessary. Umbridge flew back under a significant magical backwash, even though she'd cast nothing. Dawlish carefully withdrew his wand and levitated her out of the room.

Brownlea hit his gavel. "Before we officially welcome our new member to this assembly, we have a vote."

"Chief Warlock, I withdraw my motion," Fudge said. Harry chuckled and Fudge squared his stooped shoulders a bit and said, "And it's a pity that St. Mungo's will not benefit from the donation I was prepared to make."

"Fudge," Harry said, not treating him with any decorum, as the Chief Warlock's earlier decree allowed. "If you will tell us what amount you were willing to contribute, perhaps we will vote in favor of your measure. If you are offering the same 500,000 Galleons Sirius Black contributed, or more, *I'll* make the motion to include your name with his on the new research facility."

Fudge slumped. He muttered as he sat down. "No, I irrevocably withdrew my contribution."

Harry turned to Smith. "Do we have the votes to call for a Vote of No Confidence on Fudge as Minister?"

"No, we need a solid two hundred and twenty-three votes, not two-thirds of the existing quorum."

"Pity."

Brownlea pounded his gavel. "I'd like to be the first to enter into the minutes of this session, my welcome to Mister Arthur Weasley, as our newest member."

The applause was hearty in some areas of the room, and non-existent in others.

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Still in shock, Arthur went back to his office to clear out his desk. Only the Senior Undersecretary for Law and Order, the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, and Minister of Magic can hold a position in the Ministry and still be an active Wizengamot member. Harry offered to help him, but Arthur turned him down, wanting to be alone as he removed his possession from the desk he'd occupied for decades.

Arthur asked Harry to go to Grimmauld Place and tell his family about what happened, and to tell them he'd be home early. Before Harry could leave, a Gringotts raven delivered a post telling Arthur that the five thousand Galleons transition money had been delivered to his vault.

Arthur fell into his chair. "Well, that will add to the forty-five thousand from Sirius. I have a long

time before I have to find a job, but I'd rather not touch very much of it for the future. And I need the new robes and such, whatever that takes." "Mr. Weasley." "Now, Harry, we've asked you to call us Arthur and Molly, and you've done it some. In the Wizengamot I understand we are Miss-Tahs Weasley and Potter, but as peers now, we need to be Harry and Arthur." Harry smiled. "All right. Arthur, you don't seem to know that as a Wizengamot member you receive a daily stipend."

"Yes, but it is something like a Galleon or two a day, not enough to live on." "It's three Galleons a day now, and three *per vote* that you control. You have forty-six votes, so that's... er..."

"A hundred and thirty eight Galleons a day," Arthur said, amazingly doing the maths in his head, "for two days a week, totaling two hundred and seventy-six Galleons a week for two half days of work basically." Arthur gazed at the family ensign casually placed on a filing cabinet. He turned to Harry.

"But I only make two hundred and twenty Galleons a week as it is. I get a fifty-six Galleons a week raise for working less than a fifth of the time I did here.

"Harry, that's not right."

"Oh, it's right that you be paid, it's just not right that one man has forty-six votes, and that I have twenty-seven. You've studied Muggles, what do you know about their government?"

"Each person of age has one vote, and in the House of Commons the people elect every official. Each of them has one vote in their assembly. That's amazingly fair, and the Prime Minister is elected that way also."

"Yes, Arthur, that's fair. That's what Mr. Smith and I want, and everyone sitting in my corner is very open to the idea. We're keeping our votes consolidated until we can pass sweeping changes and revamp our government along the lines of merit and one vote per person. Would you like to join us?"

"Er, why yes... Yes, Harry I would. I've admired Muggles for their ingenuity, but treated them like specimens in a lab. The Grangers have made me aware of just how backwards Wizarding society is in such governmental matters."

Harry remembered an important detail. "Arthur, I've done you a disservice today." "I'll read this huge book by Thursday morning, Harry."

Harry laughed. "It's dry enough, but start with the back half, believe it or not. That's where most of the current information is. But no. Most of the people that have joined my side and Mr. Smith's this summer have been attacked shortly thereafter by Death Eaters. Mr. Smith was attacked right here in the Ministry at the Floo and Apparation Concourse. Can you Floo to Grimmauld Place from this fireplace?"

"Most fireplaces inside of the Ministry are Floo calls only. Because I have to react to Muggle secrecy problems instantly, this Floo is one of the few that transports as well. I just use the secure Floo powder Fred and George developed and I can go straight to headquarters from here."

"Good, please do that. And talk to Bill about personal security measures. You are now a prime target

for Death Eaters, even more so than you were as a member of the Order of the Phoenix. I'm serious. Isaiah Smith, Darance Bread, and Alexius Tiller have all been attacked, and I happened to be there each time to save them. You are now a bigger threat than they were. Everyone in our corner has spent time and money on wards and personal protective measures. You really need to take this seriously."

Arthur blinked. "I never thought of that. We have wards at the Burrow, and Grimmauld Place is as secure as can be, but I walk around Diagon Alley just as you please. I'll talk to Bill for sure, and all of the children. They're all supposed to be home for dinner tonight. You'll come, won't you? You can help me explain all of this. We're helping Percy make final preparations for Penny's funeral Thursday afternoon. It's at 3:30. We'll be finished in the Wizengamot by then, won't we?"

"We've never gone past 1:30 in my time," Harry stated, "Though I've only been in it for a month or so. But I've seen members get up and leave, so we can do that if needed."

"I won't be there for dinner, Arthur. I know you and Molly consider me family, but I'd rather let you all do that with out me. I will be by tomorrow at 10:00 to take you for robes. Meeting Ernard Tattershall at Tattershall's will be a treat. Be prepared to spend money on robes like you've never imagined, but it is important."

Arthur said, "If you won't come for dinner, please come for breakfast tomorrow. I get up at 6:30 and eat at 7:00 even on vacation. It won't change tomorrow now that I'm unemployed, or part time working for more money than I've ever made."

Harry agreed to go briefly tell the Weasleys at Grimmauld Place about the day's events. Arthur would walk around and said goodbye to his many friends, and finish packing after that. He said he'd be a couple of hours at most.

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Harry Flooed from Arthur's office to Grimmauld Place. He'd spent little time there this summer, but thanks to Ginny, he at least knew how to land without face-planting himself.

When he called out in the empty kitchen, Molly responded from the salon. Ginny was there, and he ran to her and planted a big kiss on her. Molly beamed at the two. Ginny glued herself to Harry, and Ron said, "Aguamenti is the incantation, isn't it, Mum?"

Harry and Ginny broke apart. She said, "You do know that would cost you dearly, don't you, brother?"

"Oh, yes, but I've been working on my Door Locking spells, and I'm pretty sure I can run faster than either of you, so..."

"What brings you here, Harry dear," Molly asked, "not that I'm not glad to see you."

"I have a message from your husband. He'll be home early. It's a long story, but Fudge was going to push through a terrible piece of legislation. I ran to Arthur's office to try to reach Dumbledore, but he

wasn't available. Arthur and I looked at the Weasley Family ensign as a Three-Thirty-Three Family."

"That old parchment just depresses Arthur," Molly said. "I've tried to convince him to throw it away, but he refuses."

"Well, I'm glad he didn't. We discovered the Weasleys didn't lose the Right to Rule forever. Umbridge and her forefathers have been cheating the Weasleys' for seven generations. So Arthur took his ensign down to the Wizengamot chambers and took her votes away. Fudge threatened to fire him, but Arthur quit right there. He was nervous, but magnificent."

Harry didn't notice that Molly sat down hard at the news of Arthur being unemployed. Ron balled up his fists and walked towards Harry, who wasn't looking his way until the last second. Harry turned to see Ron reach back to give him a mighty blow to the head.

Harry half-stepped away in a blur of motion and raised his hand, catching Ron's hand in a vise-like grip. He shoved his friend away.

"Why'd you do that, you git?" Harry shouted.

Ron stood, advanced towards his best mate, saying, "You get Dad fired like it's some great joke. We need his income." Ron took another swing, and Harry stepped away again, not touching Ron this time but letting the redhead's momentum drop him on the sofa edge.

Ron rose, amidst Molly, Ginny, and Hermione telling him to stop. Ron made for his wand, but Harry appeared right before him and said coldly, "Don't move." His wand was at Ron's chest.

"First of all, you great bloody prat," Harry said, "I would never let your family starve."

"We don't want your charity." "And I wouldn't give charity. I have need of someone just like your father at a decent salary. But that's not going to work for him now that he's a Wizengamot member."

"Do you want to own every Weasley, Harry?" Ron spat.

"What?"

"Bill works for you. The twins owe you their start, and give you money for doing it. Ginny now works for you. You want Dad too?"

Ginny pushed her brother around so he was facing her. Her wand was out and fire was in her eyes. "Harry is my partner, not my boss. He's given me the opportunity to make money that I'd have never had, without him. He's a *junior* partner. And I get the lion's share of the money, when he could rightly ask for half. That's the way it is with the twins, and Clarinda Jordan. And as for Bill, no one would have given him the opportunity to advance at Gringotts, much less such a big opportunity. Harry is Bill's client not his boss."

Hermione looked flummoxed as to what to do, as her boyfriend Ron tried to pick a fight with one of the three most powerful wizards in all Great Britain.

"Put your wands away, all of you. Harry knows your father, Ron," Molly added a little more gently. "Any job offer would most likely have been doing more with Muggle contraptions than he does now, and you know how Arthur would have enjoyed that."

By this time, Ron and Harry had calmed down. Harry said, "I should have told you from the start, but the next thing out of my mouth would have been that your dad gets paid as a Wizengamot member."

"He does?" Molly asked. "Oh, it's just a stipend as I understand it."

"Yes," Harry explained. "I won't tell your business, Molly, but it's so much per day per vote controlled. Arthur now has more votes in the Wizengamot than anyone else. He works less than a half-day on Tuesdays and Thursdays and he told me that with his forty-seven votes he'll make fifty-seven Galleons a week more than he does now. Plus, there are the punitive damages from the Umbridge family for cheating the Weasleys all of these years. You're coming into a windfall, Molly."

Ron asked quietly, "How many votes do you have, Harry?"

"Twenty-seven." Then Harry's brow narrowed. "You're concerned about how much I make a week to serve, aren't you, Ron? Well, I'll ask your father not to tell you what the stipend per day per vote is."

Harry ran his right hand through his hair. "I consider you my best mate, Ron, but your perspective is twisted sometimes. Ginny and Hermione tell me you're big on figuring out strategies this summer - the strategy of Transfiguration and the strategy of Charms. Well, here's an assignment. Try to figure out what the strategy of a best mate is, and then get back to me.

"In the mean time, think about this. Just how do I qualify for my stipend from the Wizengamot? Here's a hint. For you to get the Weasley Family stipend your dad would have to die. Then Bill would have to die. Then Charlie would have to die. Then Percy would have to die. Then Fred would have to die. Then George would have to die."

"Let me know when you want to trade places, Ron."

Harry took a deep breath and turned from Ron. "Molly, always lovely to see you. You too, Hermione." He turned to Ginny. "Dear heart, I'll see you tomorrow."

With that, Harry silently Apparated out of the house.

Ron turned to the ladies in the room, knowing he'd be in trouble. "He's not supposed to be able to Apparate from here, is he Hermione?"

"He can do whatever he wants, Ron," Ginny answered for her, hands on her hips. "And I was hoping he'd spend time with me this evening. Harry has never turned on you --! Oh, I give up! Why bother, Harry said it so even you can understand what you did wrong.

"I'm going to my room. Avoid me for the rest of the day, Ron. Mum, please call me after he's finished his dinner, and I'll eat whatever's left over."

Ginny stormed out, hot tears in her eyes. Ron turned to the other two women present.

The weather forecast inside Grimmauld Place called for immediate lightning and thunder.

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At breakfast at Grimmauld Place the next day, both Molly and Arthur tried to apologize for Ron's behavior.

"There is nothing for you two to apologize for," Harry stated, "this is between mates. I can understand being upset that it looked like I caused you to lose your job, Arthur. I'm sure I could have explained it better, but trying to punch me is... well, beneath Ron."

"Nevertheless, Harry, I do apologize that apparently I didn't raise him to know better, particularly now that he is almost an adult. Molly joins me in this."

"He's already eaten, hasn't he?" Harry asked.

"I made him wake and eat before Arthur said you were coming. I sent him off to his room to ponder your assignment. The girls are at Hogwarts checking on something or the other. I think that was very clever of you, Harry," she said. "Ron has learned a great deal about magic this summer in his pursuit of the strategies of different magical disciplines. Minerva started him on it for Transfiguration, but the rest has been his idea, and he's only discussed it with Hermione to refine his statements. She's been impressed as well."

"Well, let's see what he does about it. Back to you and the Wizengamot, Arthur. First and most important, you've explained to everyone the security risks?"

"I didn't have too great a discussion with Charlie. The long distance Floo call connections to Romania were terrible last night, but he did understand that personal security is important, and Bill told him he'd send along some ideas about personal wards and other ideas. Bill talked to all of us last night about it."

Molly said, "I hate not being able to just go to a shop here or there without checking with someone else with the Order to go with me as backup."

"Yes, Molly dear, but do it for me, please, and for your children. I don't think I could live without you."

She looked at her husband fondly. "I feel the same, Arthur." They kissed and then she pulled back. "We'll embarrass the boy, dear."

"No," Harry said, "I does my heart good to see a happy couple show true affection. My aunt and uncle hardly ever did, though they used affectionate nicknames for each other. Had I grown up with them kissing or hugging, it would be one thing, but the idea now is a bit revolting. I use you two as a model for how couples should be."

Molly stood and moved to him. Harry rose - surviving a Molly hug was easier if you could keep your head above water. The hug occurred, then they sat again.

"Now," Harry said, "You two have discussed the idea of one vote for one Wizengamot member, and those members being elected by the adult population?"

"Yes, Harry," Molly said. "At first I didn't want to give up the income. Old habits die hard. We hadn't let Sirius's inheritance affect our daily finances. But then Arthur pointed out that we should receive a goodly sum from liquidating the Umbridge estate even if that cow can't pay back everything. And there is whatever you had in mind for Arthur to do in your businesses if it comes to it. He and I both have thought about opening a shop for helpful Muggle devices that aren't in the magical world yet. So there are plenty of opportunities for the future."

"Besides," Harry said, "I think changing society and the Wizengamot to that point will take years, perhaps decades. And we'll need Arthur's level head and sound advice with us all of the way."

"I'm still in shock over all of this, Harry."

"If you want a shock, let's go to Tattershall's for your Wizengamot robes. Ernald Tattershall is a unique human being - a combination of fashion sense, governmental gossip, and the biggest busybody since my Aunt Petunia. But all that said, I like him, and he can be a valuable asset.

"I started off trying to scare him at Isaiah Smith's advice. Ernald proclaimed he didn't like half-bloods, but when I apologized and treated him fairly, he turned right around and changed his very demeanor in the conversation. Mr. Smith says it's like he has a fake personality for his shop, and we saw the real person there. Ernald gave me a wealth of information in a non-gossipy way, and has sent me several notes with information that he thought I'd like to know he's gleaned from other members.

"Don't get upset, when you see the prices, Molly, but they are what I would consider very good dress robes. You could easily do with two sets only, Arthur. And even though many wear a wig, a number of the members don't have long hair at all."

Harry showed them how he changed his hair length, and said that after further research with Tonks, that is the only metamorphic abilities he discovered.

The rest of the morning Harry told them of all of his experiences in the Wizengamot to date until Tattershalls had opened at 10:00.

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Harry and Arthur Apparated right to Tattershall's. Arthur had never been there before and Harry took the older wizard with him. At first he was hesitant to Apparate with only one wizard, but Ginny had told them all about Harry's ability to Apparate someone safely by himself.

"Er, Harry, that didn't feel like normal Apparation."

"I've been experimenting on ways anyone can Apparate silently, or at least make less noise than they

normally do. I'll show you later if you wish."

"Well, I guess that could make the difference, son."

They'd Apparated with their wands drawn, but no threat occurred, and they relaxed and put them away when they went inside the shop.

Harry walked towards the back of the shop as he had before. Tattershall looked up with venom in his eyes, but changed to an odd smile after a moment.

"Ah, Potter, Weasley, I was expecting you."

"Ernald, how are you today." Harry wondered what was going on. Tattershall usually gushed over any Wizengamot member, particularly those with a larger number of votes.

"Fine, Potter. Let me measure our new Wizengamot member for his robes."

Harry stepped back but moved to where he could see Tattershall's eyes. Arthur turned as instructed so Ernald could measure him. The tailor had a tape measure in his hands.

Harry saw the tape measure fall and Tattershall raised a dagger to Arthur's neck.

Harry raised his hand in a flash and cast a concentrated *Reducto* r before the wand was in his grip. The dagger, hand, and side of the neck of the assailant were ripped away by the spell and Arthur was sprayed with blood.

"What the--" Arthur exclaimed in fright, after looking up to see the bright red spell hurling over his shoulder.

Harry rushed behind the counter and looked around. He reached down and pulled up a goblet, sniffing it.

"Polyjuice!"

They heard a shuffle behind the curtain and ran to the back room. Arthur followed with his wand drawn, ignoring the blood on his back.

A Death Eater, mask resting on the table, stood with his wand to the real Ernald Tattershall's throat. The wand tip glowed green. Tattershall was badly beaten and was bleeding from several wounds.

The Death Eater pulled his wand back and then started to push it forward into the tailor's neck. At the same time he took a deep breath and started to cast.

The spell *Diffindo!* was half cast, but interrupted by Harry Disapparating across the room and appearing with his Fairbairn knife embedded in the Death Eater's throat. As he appeared he violently ripped the knife out and away from him and Tattershall.



The Death Eater died with the fountain of his life obscenely decorating the wall. The Death Eater's wand had caused a small but dangerous cut in Ernard's neck, and Harry clamped his hand over the wound as best he could.

"Arthur, Apparate now to the Emergency Entrance of St. Mungo's. I have to get him there, but I'm not going to leave you here unprotected."

Weasley stood in shock at the death Harry had wrought in seconds.

"Arthur!"

"Right, Harry. St. Mungo's Emergency Entrance."

Arthur Apparated away, and Harry followed a second later.

~\*~

Tattershall was not as badly hurt as he looked. He'd be back to work the next afternoon. He then insisted that Arthur Weasley would have his Wizengamot robes for the Thursday session.

Harry returned to the tailor shop with two Aurors less than ten minutes after leaving, but the bodies of the two Death Eaters were gone. The destruction and blood weren't.

~\*~

Thursday's Wizengamot session was a non-event. Fudge and Sheets weren't even there. Many a witch and wizard in session offered the newest Wizengamot member their congratulations, even those who didn't mean it, such as the head of the Yaxley and Parkinson families.

Harry had send word to the people that sat in the far right corner with him and Isaiah Smith. They met in a private room near the Wizengamot Chamber thirty minutes before the session started. He evenly distributed the proxies for his votes to the group, asking them to vote their conscience first and foremost, but to also take into consideration how he might want his votes cast.

Penny Clearwater's funeral was interesting to a degree - at least as much as such a sad event could be. The Clearwater parents were Muggles, however, their four children had all been magical. Because Penny was the youngest, and her oldest brother was fourteen years her senior, the service was magical with a nod to Muggle traditions. The Clearwater parents had both been only children so there were no Muggle relatives attending. The Muggle Church of England traditions were for the parents, but it was a wizard CofE priest who conducted the service.

Harry felt very out of place as some recognized him and thanked him for all he did in a battle where Penny had died. Percy was nearly stunned to silence during the entire time, only occasionally releasing a tear that he quickly brushed away. Percy accepted Harry's condolences like an automaton, but he treated everyone else the same as well.

During the rest of the week the *Daily Prophet* didn't mention anything about the shift in power in the

Wizengamot, but it did quote Fudge even more vehemently about Harry being too big an influence on society and somehow the cause for the failed Peace Day. Harry received a number of Owlposts chastising him for it, but Dobby and Winky enjoyed blowing them to bits.

Unlike when the *Daily Prophet* had printed bad things about him in the past, this time Harry received a small but significant number of posts from people who didn't believe what Fudge said.

Harry made sure they received a complimentary six month trial subscription to *The Quibbler*.

In the final days before school started Harry spent a good bit of time with his new girlfriend, and even more with Remus. His guardian had come to mean a great deal to Harry over the summer.

Bill Weasley arranged a meeting for Harry and the recently fired Senior Auror Bentley Johnson and Auror Samuel Freezemore. They agreed to form the nucleus for the Potter House Guard, with Johnson in overall command. They would approach all other former Aurors they trusted to join his staff full time, and to form an Auxiliary of concerned citizens that would be part timers as well. Bill immediately volunteered for the Auxiliary.

"I've financed this pretty well," Harry told them. "Bill is the financial controller for this operation. I want you to spend it wisely, but I don't want you scrimping to accomplish your work. Get creative in how you do things. You both were in the Corps for a long time and have wished you could try this or that. Discuss it with Bill and try out your ideas. If you need a bit of magic you can't find, let me know what you're looking for and I try to Monger it together.

"Buy good equipment and don't hesitate to spend money on safety for you and your cadre. I want you to start with the families of the Potter Educational Fund students. Make sure they are safe and have escape options if attacked. Next, please approach the Muggle families of Muggleborn students. After that, do what you think makes sense. You know better than I do."

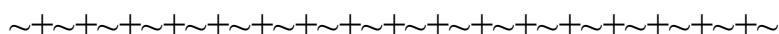
Harry also spent time refining his class agenda for the Practical Defense lessons in light of the events of the last month, and Mongering bits and pieces of magic he thought he'd need for the coming year.

In the fullness of time, it was Sunday, September first, and unlike in the past, Harry, as well as the rest of the Paladins would not be going to Hogwarts on the Hogwarts Express.

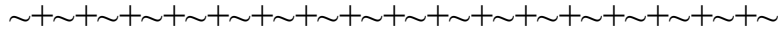
Two weeks before, Dumbledore had sent them a message saying that all Paladins would Floo to Hogwarts by 2:30 in the afternoon to be on hand to greet the Paladins from around the world as they arrived by International Portkey.

On Friday, all of the regular students received Owlposts instructing them to arrive at Platform Nine and Three Quarters at 10:00 AM instead of 11:00. The Paladins were instructed to arrive by 1:30. Something else special would happen at dinner that night.

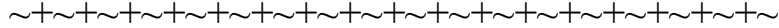
Chapter End



***Thanks for reading and reviewing.***



***Author's Note*** - The phrase, "A day that will live in Infamy" came from President Franklin D. Roosevelt's speech on December 8, 1941 to a joint session of the Congress. The president used these words to describe the sneak attack at Pearl Harbor by the Imperial Japanese Fleet the day before.



***Disclaimer---*** What belongs to J K Rowling is J K Rowling's. Everything left is mine, I guess, but remember the old adage: "There is nothing new under the sun."

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