

YOU DON'T ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU ASK FOR

By

DrT

Table of Contents

YOU DON'T ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU ASK FOR.....	1
Chapter I.....	3
Chapter II.....	11
Chapter III.....	18
Chapter IV.....	27
Chapter V.....	35
Chapter VI.....	42
Chapter VII.....	49
Chapter VIII.....	56
Chapter IX.....	62
Chapter X.....	68

Chapter I

Late June, 1994

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Voldemort was elated that a follower had finally searched him out, although he was a bit disappointed that it was Pettigrew of all people. Still, he was making do. The fact that a Ministry employee had blundered upon them was also fortuitous. Voldemort had then used blood and poison from his familiar, blood from Wormtail and the woman, and a stolen Muggle toddler to create a temporary host for himself. Now, he had to decide how to restore himself more completely.

Granted, there was a ceremony which he could use, based on flesh, blood, and bone, but the best blood was Potter's, off in England and protected by the Old Fool. The flesh would have to be Wormtail's – hardly first rate. And, while his oldest followers had known him as Tom Riddle, Voldemort did not relish creating another connection to his Muggle father.

There was also another ceremony which seemed to offer a better prospect, which Voldemort was drawn to, but which he admitted to himself he did not fully understand. Whereas the first ceremony was Dark magic, the second was Light, and had to be based on good intentions. Voldemort claimed there was no Light or Dark, Good or Evil, just Power, and those who either commanded it or who were commanded by it. Therefore, he was trying to convince himself that it was the good he would be doing for himself that counted, not 'Good.'

In most realities, Voldemort would reluctantly finally dismiss the second ceremony as too risky. In this reality, he decided to risk it, having convinced himself of two things: 1) since he believed magic conformed to will, since he willed that his good was truly the Greater Good (it seemed to work for Dumbledore, after all), then his restoration and future conquests were Good and Light; and 2) if this did fail, he should be able to carry on with the convoluted plan he was developing to get Potter for the first ceremony. After all, simple was often best . . . wasn't it?

Voldemort sent Pettigrew, the helpless Jorkins, and Nagini away for the night, glad that Pettigrew had taken his wand from the Potter cottage and had kept it all these years. Voldemort invoked all the Powers of Higher Magic, demanding (instead of begging in supplication, as he was supposed to) that a suitable form be brought to him, from whatever time or dimension needs be, so that he could confound his enemies (as opposed to the enemies of Light, as again the ceremony demanded).

The Powers of Higher Magic were not amused.

A Servant of the Light made a suggestion, and was sent off. Higher Magic had already allowed one innocent to be Marked as the counter of this self-proclaimed 'Dark Lord.' The poor boy was not supposed to have suffered as he had suffered, but that was due to the arrogance of a former Instrument of Light Magic, Albus Dumbledore. The Child was supposed to have been brought up to be a true Warrior of the Light. Harry Potter had the soul for such work, but had been stunted in his development. In most realities, he would turn out at best a rather dim Champion of Light, not the Mighty Light Lord he was supposed to be.

The Harry Potter of this reality was currently no better off than most Harry Potters, although

fortunately no worse than average at the moment. The odds against him, however, were growing even worse, in fact far worse, than usual. A Servant of Light was sent to find help to restore not Voldemort, but Harry Potter, so that he could be the warrior he was meant to be. Ideally, a Warrior of Light, but at this point Higher Magic was willing to trade a fair amount of Grey for power and independence of spirit, not to mention the need not to upset the balance of other realities.

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The Servant of Light found a possible candidate, but wondered if perhaps this candidate's Grey was too Dark. Higher Magic was willing to accept Grey, but could not directly accept one this Grey, and so appealed to the Highest Authority.

And the Highest Authority merely said, "And so it must be."

*

At a different point of Universal Time, in a very different reality, Harry Potter was twenty-seven years old, and looked older. He had won his war against Voldemort just over nine years before, but had known little of the Light. All he knew was fighting and killing, and so he had kept doing so, albeit always for the Light. Still, mercy and compassion had been beaten out of him twenty-five years before. This Harry had not gone to save Hermione Granger from a troll, only doing so by accident because Ron had had the stupid idea of capturing the troll and becoming a hero and Harry had followed his only close acquaintance at the time out of curiosity more than anything else.

Hermione had introduced Harry to the ideals of the Light, albeit in an uncompromising and bossy way. He acknowledged these ideals as good things, but not ones he would ever feel deeply himself. Hermione's murder by Draco Malfoy in the final battle with Voldemort had insured that Harry had executed every survivor with a Dark Mark, which had in turn caused his own exile from Britain when none of the surviving Purebloods had had the guts to actually arrest him. Since then, he had been a ruthless paid mercenary, although a fairly picky one.

He had just taken down a cell of Dark Warlocks in Afghanistan, and was relaxing in a Muggle hotel in northern India with a bottle of mediocre but expensive gin when he was aware of another presence in the room. To his surprise, he did not immediately hex the being, but only because he was frozen in place from the neck down.

The being was rather androgynous, with blonde-white hair and a deep skin tone that could have been but wasn't a dark dark tan. The being was surrounded by light in the dim room, and looked a bit like Luna Lovegood.

"Hello, Harry Potter, wand-for-hire," the being said. "How would you like a second chance?"

Harry was allowed to answer, but not to otherwise move. "A second chance at what?"

"Do you like your life-style, Harry Potter? Having no intimates, let alone friends? Killing for living?"

"They hurt people," Harry answered simply.

"They do," the being agreed. "But you kill them with hate in your heart, not regret."

“That would make it alright to kill?” Harry snapped.

“How about if we say ‘less wrong’,” the being answered.

“So, a second chance at what?” Harry asked. He was not interested in debating morality.

“I can send you to another reality, the summer before your fourth year,” the being replied. “There, you can combine with the Harry Potter of that reality. You will have your current magical powers and most of your physical skills, but they will continue to grow as all adolescent mages’ grow. We will heal that body to a large degree as we impart the physical skills and fuse the magic, which will also help that new version grow and strengthen over time. You will have your knowledge and skills, but your soul will be that of both of you.”

Having seen so much in his life, and having had his life formed by prophecy, Harry was willing to accept the idea of Higher Magic and alternate realities. “Kind of harsh on that Harry Potter, isn’t it? Or does his life suck as much as mine did back then?”

“Not quite as much at that point. His Dursleys were slightly less abusive, and especially were rarely physically abusive. However, if we do not intervene, then this Harry Potter will probably be injured at the World Cup, and therefore crippled by the First Task. Crouch will be able to kidnap him early, and Riddle will destroy him.”

“Probably?” Harry asked.

The being nodded. “Because we are inserting you earlier in the time-line, we can not be certain. In this case, there is a five out of seven chance for that course of events if nothing changes.”

Harry thought about the offer. “How quickly would we integrate?”

“It should take about twenty-four hours. It will look like a mild case of the flu, but you won’t be aware of it. We will insure that the Dursleys leave you alone for that period. After that, it’s up to you.” Seeing the evil smile on Harry’s face, the being stated, “Remember, these Dursleys are not nearly as cruel as yours were. They are miserable human beings, but there is little need for you to hurt them. Well, at least don’t kill or cripple them.” Then the being smiled. “Feel free to scare them, if you wish, though.”

Harry nodded.

“The greatest temptation will be to expose Barty Crouch Junior at the World Cup. If you do so, you will make your task more difficult. As it is, with your knowledge and skills, you will hopefully destroy Voldemort in a year or less, and then. . . .”

“Are the horcruxes the same?” Harry asked.

“Except for a bit less abuse at the hands of the Dursleys, everything in your life is much the same at that point, including the soul containers,” the being answered.

“Any hints on how to get the bloody Cup out the Lestrage vault?”

“You’ll think of something.”

Harry made a face, but carried on. “Will I be considered dead here?”

The being nodded. “However, since you just updated your will last May, that should present no problem.”

“Can I at least bring my current possessions with me?”

“Not really. About the only thing we could get you is the amount of money, as replacement for what you have here can be found. The more individual items, no.”

Seeing Harry still hesitated, the being added, “As I said, you will not only keep your current skill and level of magic, but we’ll be able to greatly improve the gestalt’s physical being. You’ll be the same height as you were at that age – we’ll add in an extra growth spurt – but you’ll have an increased muscle mass and your current level of physical abilities.”

Harry shrugged. “Then let’s do this.”

*

Vernon Dursley frowned mightily as he got out of bed early. The fact that the Freak was ill had bothered him far more than it had Petunia. She was just glad that, so far at least, there was nothing she might have to clean up while the Freak was still ill. She didn’t seem worried that the disease might be contagious.

Coming out of the bathroom, Vernon’s frown deepened when he saw the door of the room the Freak occupied was open. A glance confirmed that the Boy was not where he was supposed to be. “Should have locked ‘im in again,” Vernon muttered as he went down the stairs.

Somehow sensing Harry was in trouble, Dudley had rolled out of bed as well, three hours early. He was out of the bathroom and at the top of the stairs as his father paused to glance wistfully at the cupboard under the stairs. Life was so much easier when the boy had been kept in his place.

Catching a whiff of food, Vernon marched into the kitchen, and was shocked at the sight of the Boy eating a full breakfast, something that he was denied due to Dudley’s diet. “Boy! What the hell do you think you’re playing at! You’ll pay for this, and I don’t just mean with chores!”

Vernon had rarely gotten physical, other than the odd shove, but his fear was feeding his temper. He made a move to undo his belt, and really give the Freak a beating.

Harry was out of his chair in a flash, and Vernon was wheezing on the floor, trying to catch his breath. In less than two seconds, he was joined by Dudley.

Harry pushed Vernon on his side with a foot and leaned over the older man. “Listen, you piece of filth,” Harry growled, “raise your hand to me again and I’ll kill you, that sorry excuse of an aunt of mine, and your pathetic spawn. Do you understand?”

Still unable to breathe properly from the blow Harry had delivered, Vernon could only gasp.

Harry kicked Vernon in the left kidney. "I asked you a question, idiot. Do I need to get your attention again?"

Vernon shook his head.

"Now, here's the deal. You and yours will not try to retaliate, and I will not have my meals with you. I will be out every morning, and will be left alone, just as I will leave you alone. Leave the bedroom door unlocked, unless you want me smashing it down. You hate me; I loathe you. I could leave here today, and nothing would happen to me, but you and the other two would be killed in less than a week. I don't really care, but would prefer not to have even that slight responsibility for your deaths, unless, of course, you force it on me. Do you understand?"

Vernon again nodded.

"Do you believe me when I say I will kill you if you try anything?"

Vernon again nodded.

"Do we have a deal?"

"We have a deal," Vernon wheezed.

"I left some sausages. I suggest you eat them before Dudley blows his diet for the week." With that, Harry strode out of the back door and went to call the Knight's Bus.

"Why?" Dudley managed to gasp.

Vernon had managed to get himself up off the floor. "You won't have to do National Service," he said. "I did my part, you know." Dudley managed to nod, although he wasn't ready to get off the floor yet. "I met some very tough men. Some of them looked the part, some were as scrawny as Potter, and everything in between. I learned then there were some men who are killers. I don't know how or when it happened, but Potter is a killer. He won't kill for fun, but never doubt if he's pushed into a corner, he will kill."

"But. . . ."

"No," Vernon said firmly. "He's a freak, and because of that he has no reason to like us. He will kill, Dudley. We need to make sure it's other freaks he kills. I think, if we leave him alone, it won't be us."

Dudley nodded, and looked longingly at the sausages.

*

Harry spent the morning shopping in Diagon Alley, after a brief stop at Gringotts for money, to inquire about his finances, and to unshrink the trunk he had found next to his wand. It did not contain all the wealth the alternate Harry Potter had controlled, but there was in excess of a million Galleons. He opened a new vault for that and made certain the goblins agreed to keep it secret from anyone else. He didn't like goblins, but they at least stuck with the letter of agreements. He was pleased to find his

finances were being well-handled at least and that no money was being stolen or diverted from his accounts. He exchanged the foreign currency he had also discovered when he had woken up into just under 25,000 Sterling, and then did his necessary shopping before leaving to get decent clothes in Muggle London.

To his surprise, the Dursleys left him alone that afternoon and evening. Harry decided these three must be at least marginally smarter than the ones he had known.

Harry had also decided that his conscious mind was primarily that of the Harry of the other dimension, which made sense if he was to use the powers he had brought with him. On the other hand, his emotions and morals were a good mix. The Harry from the other dimension would have at least seriously injured the two Dursleys, not just winded them.

The next morning, Harry took the Knight's Bus to Norwich, to visit his best friend.

Hermione was shocked speechless to have Harry on her front stoop at 9:00 am. Not only that, this was a much healthier-looking Harry than she had left just the week before, and one that was well-dressed. "May I come in?"

Hermione gestured him in, and then, after shutting the door, hugged him tightly.

To her surprise, Harry hugged her back. "I'm glad to see you, too," he said, just barely containing an emotional outburst that would have overwhelmed the pair of them.

"Harry, what's wrong? Why are you here? I mean, I'm glad you're here, but still, you've never come over, or even called, before. Is Hedwig alright? Is it Sirius? Is it. . . mmurf!"

Harry had leaned in and kissed Hermione gently. "I hope that didn't offend you, but if you're going to ask so many questions, you have to pause so I can answer," Harry teased. "In short, the Dursleys' tried to assault me yesterday, and I showed them I could defend myself without using magic. I think they'll behave. If they don't, I'll call the police. If that happens again, by the time Dumbledore memory charms everyone and hunts down the paperwork, it should be September. If they've actually learned their lesson, then I'll let things go."

Hermione considered that. She did not like the implications for either the Dursleys' treatment of Harry or the fact that Dumbledore not only knew of the abuse but had apparently covered it up in the past.

"As for why I'm here. You probably have heard how poorly I sleep." That, although he did not know it, was true for nearly every Harry Potter.

"I have," Hermione agreed.

"I'm making myself a dream-catcher. . . ."

"Oh! Good idea!"

"Thank you," Harry said drily at the interruption. "I need something from the woman who means the most to me, and that means you, of course."

Hermione blushed prettily.

“I’m afraid I need at least eight strands of your hair, including the root,” Harry added.

Hermione winced, but gamely said, “Do I need the pull them, or can you?”

“I should, and I’m sorry. . . .”

“It’s a small price to pay,” Hermione said. “Now?”

“We can get it over with,” Harry agreed. He pulled off the small knapsack he had with him and pulled out a long tube. Hermione, to Harry’s surprise, simply knelt in the entrance hall in front of him. She steadied herself with her left on hand Harry’s hip and took the tube with her right.

And Harry, part of whom had killed hundreds of people, had to steel himself just to pull the eight hairs out, wincing at each little grunt of pain Hermione made. “You better take a few more, just in case one breaks,” Hermione said as the eighth one was taken.

“Right.” Harry took four more. “I’ll destroy any I don’t use.”

“Why?” Hermione asked, looking up into Harry’s eyes.

“To insure no one can use them against you,” Harry answered. “Once used in something like a dream-catcher, they can’t be used for sympathetic magic.” Harry leaned down and kissed the top of Hermione’s head. “Thank you.”

“Harry. . . .”

“You’re my best friend,” Harry said. “I can’t say I’m sorry I was angry with you about the Firebolt, but I am sorry I let Ron turn it into so much more than it should have been.” He helped Hermione to her feet.

“Am I really your best friend?”

“Ron’s my mate, my pal,” Harry agreed, “but I think our friendship runs deeper than anything we’ll ever share with Ron, unless you fall in love with him.”

Hermione wrinkled her nose at that idea, not knowing that most Hermione Grangers inexplicable fell for Ron Weasleys, even though few Hermiones were ever able to mold their Rons into the sort of man they most wanted.

“I do need to get going,” Harry said reluctantly. Realizing he was still holding Hermione’s hand, he raised it and kissed the back of it.

“Harry. . . ?”

Harry smiled at Hermione. “I don’t know,” he answered. “I’m very independent, and, no offense, but you’re pretty bossy as well as very pretty. I don’t know if we could work out as a long term couple.”

“How about short term?” Hermione asked, squeezing Harry’s hand.

“Hermione, my wand, and my heart, always at your service. No one alive but you has any sort of claim on my soul. We just need to learn how that might work out, if you want.”

Hermione grabbed Harry in another strong hug, and, after a long kiss, somewhat reluctantly, they parted.

“May I drop by again?”

Hermione merely grinned.

Chapter II

Note: You-Know-Who and her minions own the Potterverse. I just play here.

*

Harry reluctantly shook off the emotions he had felt with Hermione, emotions neither version of Harry had really admitted to before, and which this new Harry had certainly not expected. He took the Knight's Bus to Hogsmeade. He quickly made his way to the fringes of the forest, making certain he was not observed.

There, Harry called, "Dobby!"

The house elf popped next to Harry. "Yes, Harry Potter, sir!"

Harry asked, "Did you consider what I asked you last night, Dobby?"

Dobby nodded, and bowed his head. Harry pulled a hair from the sparse scalp of the house elf. "Thank you, Dobby."

"May Dobby watch, Harry Potter, sir?"

Harry shrugged. "If you want."

Harry sat on the ground, and Dobby followed suit. Harry took three of the longest of his own hairs and combined them with one of Hermione's to make a thread. Harry next did the same with one of Dobby's and one of his own, before twining the two sets together. Harry next took a tail feather which Hedwig had donated and wrapped the combined thread around it. Harry had found a long straight woody bit of a rose bush he had trimmed the year before in the back shed at the Dursleys. Harry had been trimming and pruning that rose bush for many years, and had lost a bit of blood to it. He removed all the thorns but one. Harry placed the wrapped feather in the palm of his hand and placed the rose wood over it. Harry clenched his hand, pushing the thorn into his flesh. He muttered an incantation, and the blood, feather, and thread were absorbed into the rosewood.

Dobby gestured at Harry's hand. "May Dobby?"

Harry wasn't sure what the elf meant, but he held his hand out. Dobby placed the rough wand in Harry's other hand and then healed the small tear in Harry's palm.

"Thank you, Dobby."

Harry then removed the thorn and sealed the wand with a special, almost-instantly drying magical lacquer. A few more coats, and it would be ready to test.

Dobby brought Harry lunch, which the two shared. By mid-afternoon, the wand was done. Picking it up, Harry snapped the wand towards a small rock, using a silent 'reducto.'

The rock smashed in an explosion of dust. Harry next sent a much darker curse at another rock. It was almost transparent in day light, and usually invisible at night. Nothing happened.

Harry nodded thoughtfully, and then sent the same curse at a bush. Instantly, the bush started to wither. In less than ten seconds, it not only was dead, it looked like it had died months before.

Harry smiled nastily. "Cool," he muttered. He wished he could launch such spells wandlessly, but despite having more talent in that area than nearly any other wizard, that really wasn't saying much. "Thanks again, Dobby."

Dobby nodded, and Harry disappeared to the far-side of Little Whinging. He had a dream catcher to finish, and a master plan to work out.

*

Most summers, the Grangers spent a few weeks on the Continent, usually in France. This summer, they would be spending the last two weeks of July there. Harry spent the first half of July studying and working out in the mornings and spending the afternoons with Hermione, much to her parents' surprise.

Harry was up well-before the Dursleys every morning, mentally reviewing his magical knowledge, as well as knocking out his homework for fourth year. (That part surprised and pleased Hermione.) He was out running by 7:00 and was back by 8:15, thus avoiding Vernon entirely during the weekdays as well as mostly avoiding Petunia and Dudley. While Dudley was being fed, Harry was doing exercises in the cellar. Harry would never be overly-muscled, he just didn't have the genetics for it. Despite the extra 'help' from Light Magic, Harry was still short for his age and would eventually only just hit 'average.' However, he did now have a physique that any gymnast or runner would envy. Then, after a long shower, Harry was ready to visit Hermione.

After the first few days, Hermione insisted that he come for lunch. She was determined that Harry would not be underfed that summer. While Harry's appetite would never be in Ron's league, Hermione was impressed by his better eating habits. Since Hermione did not cook and Harry did not want to add to the Grangers' expenses, they ate out at various places in Norwich. On Saturdays, he even treated the Grangers, to their amusement.

Most parents of teenage girls wonder about the boys they bring home. The Grangers were an exception, in part because they trusted Hermione (perhaps too much), in part because they were delighted that their daughter actually had a social life, and also because Harry managed to impress them as well. As for Harry and Hermione, they happily spent the weekday afternoons lustily snogging in the back garden, which was well-protected from causal spying.

Harry was a bit worried about letting Ron know that he and Hermione were dating, although the thought never entered into Hermione head after that first day. However, this Ron's jealousy, in this area at least, had not yet been aroused. That would have taken Krum, Hermione's having her teeth fixed (Ron never consciously noticed, but the change had some affect on him), and the Yule Ball. This Ron had not yet figured out that girls around his own age might be as interesting and attractive in their own ways as the women in the Muggle men's magazines floating around the dorms. Hermione was a sometimes-annoying chum, a resource, not someone to be interested in. If anything, Ron thought it odd Harry would date someone like Hermione but when he finally found out he thought that should mean Harry would not be interested in any girl that Ron might actually like. As far as Ron was concerned,

Harry+Hermione=more possible action for Ron.

When the Grangers left for vacation, Harry kept up a similar schedule. However, his Sunday afternoons and the afternoons of the first week were spent under glamors, exploring some of the shadier stores in and around Diagon Alley, including Knockturn Alley. Harry was establishing a persona which would be acceptable in such places. He also bought a three compartment trunk, which few would guess had two extra chambers, both fairly large. He had no plans to ever be connected to the Dursleys after this summer, and needed space to store his new clothes, books, etc. He also paid for some very expensive phoenix-tear treatments for his eyes. Within three days, he no longer needed glasses, although he kept wearing the frames with plain glass in them for now.

Most importantly, although there were still a few weak spots, Harry thought he had a plan which should easily gain him control over Voldemort well before the Third Task (should things reach such a point – he hoped to avoid the Tri-Wizard as anything more than a spectator). The first step were all of Harry’s prep work and conditioning. Harry was now ready for the second step – which started with the correspondence he had been having with Sirius. He had managed to get Sirius to tell him about Grimmauld Place, and agree that Harry should someday visit. Using that vague permission, Harry was able to force his way through the wards and into the house the very afternoon the Grangers had left on vacation.

It took three days of talking to convince Kreacher that Harry wanted to help complete Regulus’ last plan. He took the locket out to the back garden, broke the Horcrux, and then gave Slytherin’s locket back to the half-mad elf. Harry recovered the Ring the next afternoon and broke the Horcrux in it as well. Harry remembered to shadow the caretaker of the Riddle House, casting a modified confundus charm on him, so that he would ignore odd lights in the house at night. Harry hoped that would be enough to save the old man’s life, as he didn’t dare do more.

Harry was fairly sure he could avoid both being in the Tri-Wizard, and being kidnaped either way, but he took the time to replace all the bones he could find in the various Riddle graves with transfigured chicken bones. (Harry half-hoped to see the result of those being used.) He had also been to Hogwarts, and managed to ‘converse’ with the Castle. To his slight surprise, it had not only easy for him to do so, she (for Hogwarts was very much a maternal entity) was if anything pushing Harry to be even more pro-active than he had planned.

At this point in the summer, Harry was surprised that the Dursleys had been so docile. Because of their good behavior, he surprised himself and his relatives by confronting them the evening before the Grangers were returning, which was a Friday night.

“I thought we had a deal,” Vernon accused.

“We did, and we do,” Harry answered. “Since you’ve kept to your side so well, I’m going to remind you of something you may have forgotten, or underestimated.”

“And what is that?” Vernon demanded.

“I am here to establish a blood protection. We all needed that while I was younger. These days, it does little for me, but protects you from magical attack from outsiders from ‘that world’. However, the protection disappears on my seventeenth birthday. That’s just three years from tomorrow night at midnight, because the wards will crash, not fade. Since the ‘evil wizards’ don’t know we don’t care for

each other, they will sweep in, assuming their leader isn't fully dead by then, and they aren't either dead or in prison by that time, even if they know I am not here. They'll kill you, and torture Aunt Petunia and Dudley in the hope that I'll be stupid enough to try and rescue them." While Dudley could not comprehend why anyone wouldn't rescue him, neither Vernon nor Petunia were that dim. Vernon decided to ignore about the 'fully dead' part for now.

"The Old Man will somehow ensure you're stuck here until nearly the last minute, especially if you try and escape early. You need to have a plan to move, a place you can go to in late July. Then put the house up for sale so it's empty when the Deathaters come to burn it down or worse. At least this way, no one would get hurt."

Petunia looked horrified, Vernon angry.

"I'd make certain it's well-insured," Harry added.

Vernon suddenly smiled. "You're a lot smarter than I ever gave you credit for before," he admitted.

Harry merely nodded and left the room.

"So, we don't hate the Freak?" Dudley asked, confused.

"We hate that he is a freak," Vernon corrected. "He's staying out of our way, there hasn't been any freakishness, and in three years, we'll be free of him."

Harry, who was eavesdropping, walked to his room, satisfied. He then remembered to write the Weasleys; he did not want to disrupt the detente by having them send an over-stamped envelope.

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Harry enjoyed his few birthday presents, but enjoyed having Hermione back more. So far, things were going well enough that he felt justified in enjoying his time with her. The greatest problem left in Harry's 'master plan' was having no idea of how to get to the damn Cup in Gringotts. He had over two dozen ideas, but none stood out. If Harry had a plan for the rest of the 'Voldemort problem' and even some idea of how he wanted to change things in general, his other plans were still a bit loose. Still, he at least felt he had a good shot of dealing with them.

Hermione's parents felt confident enough in her and Harry to allow them to go to Diagon Alley. Hermione was impressed that Harry had just enough wandless magic to cast some small glamors and other charms on them. Harry explained the treatment for his eyes, and without his glasses and with blue eyes, longer brown hair (under a bargeman's hat, pulled low enough to hide the scar), and a plain dark blue robe, no one could recognize him easily. Hermione pulled her now dark blonde wavy hair into a pony tail and was given matching blue eyes. She wore shorts under her light blue robe to show off her calves and thighs, and had quickly varnished her finger and toe nails (showing through her sandals) to match the robe Harry had given her.

Harry picked up his dress robes, while Hermione ordered hers. They then spent three hours in Flourish and Blotts and two used book stores. After a shared sundae, Harry escorted Hermione home via the Knight's Bus. Hermione rather wished she could have kept the hair as it was – very wavy was better, to her, than wildly bushy.

Mr. Weasley visited the Grangers two nights later, making arrangements for Hermione to visit the Burrow and to go to the World Cup. He accepted Hermione's word that she could make the necessary arrangements with Harry, and Harry sent Hedwig off to the Burrow the next night, saying his family would arrange for Hermione and Harry to arrive. Harry didn't want to risk any pranks on Dudley or exploding fireplaces. In fact, the pair wore their glamors to Gringotts and changed out of them just before stepping through to the Burrow hand-in-hand.

The pair endured a little teasing from the twins, a bit more heavy-handed teasing from Ron, and some hurt looks from Ginny and Mrs. Weasley. Still, none of it was malicious, and everyone kept within reason. This was especially true of the twins, after Harry had a private conversation with them about possible investment opportunities. Some teasing did occur when Hermione got Harry to sit and allow her, Ginny, and Mrs. Weasley experiment, trying to cover his scar with magical and Muggle makeup. They found that both needed to be used together, a Muggle base with magical makeup over it.

Soon enough, the group going to the World Cup made the trek to the portkey, although this time Harry landed well and helped Hermione do the same. By mid-morning, the youngest quartet were ready to explore. Harry had Ginny makeup his scar, and then he swore Ginny and Ron to secrecy. They were amazed at Harry's wandless glamors. Ron and Ginny agreed to wear some as well, and Harry turned their hair blond, covered their freckles, and changed the colors of their robes (Ginny's mint green and Ron's, of course, Cannon orange). Harry lied, and said that Sirius had sent him a hundred galleons to distribute for fun, and so both Weaselys were willing to take twenty-five each. Each teen bought omnoculars, while Ginny bought sweets, Ron bought Krum souvenirs, and Hermione bought some pamphlets on different magic from buskers. Harry bought bags of hazelnuts for them to snack on during the game.

It took all of Harry's will power not to stun Winky and the hidden Barty Crouch Junior once they reached the box that evening. Instead, he managed to whisper to the startled Winky, "Your charge is not as under the influence as your Master might think. Be very careful unless you want clothes."

The little being gulped in terror, and managed to keep Barty contained all night. It wouldn't help when Voldemort and Wormtail showed up at the Crouch house in thirty-six hours, but it gave Harry one less problem to think about. He was a bit surprised that the Veela had no affect on him, and that just being near the Malfoys was not even more-aggravating than it was. The fact that Harry managed to place a Tibetan sterility hex on both Malfoys as well as Minister Fudge which, if undetected for a week, would both be permanent and lead to full impotence within three weeks, probably kept him in a decent mood.

Harry was surprised when Viktor managed to catch the snitch a bit earlier this time, resulting in a tie game. As the Cup could not end in a tie, the teams played 'sudden death' until a goal was scored. This should have favored the Irish, but under the special rules, the Seekers played as a fourth Chaser. Krum managed to get the Quaffle from the toss-up, and unassisted he scored the winning goal. Fortunately for the twins, since Harry given them hopes of securing investments from both Harry and Sirius, they had only placed a small bet with Bagman, which they had of course lost.

The startling end of the game meant most people were outside when the Death Eaters showed up. It was easy for Harry to disillusion himself with the rosewood wand and make his way towards the group. Most of the Death Eaters were 'playing' with the Muggles, but a few were terrorizing the crowd, although not hexing them severely. Harry decided to take out those waiting their turn to hex the Muggles. Three had fallen to his nearly invisible withering hex before the others caught on.

The Muggles fell to the ground, terrified from the experience and only receiving minor injuries from the fall. Harry took out three more Death Eaters on at a time before the rest retreated, in even more terror than the crowd had been in. He quickly made his way back to the Weasley tents.

“There you are,” a worried Arthur exclaimed.

“Sorry,” Harry answered. “I got split off. I just kept working my way away from the crowd and then back here.”

“Good job. The others are behind the tent. Let’s see if we can get out of here.”

*

Because of all the excitement and late hours, Harry did not come down to the kitchen until nearly noon, still beating everyone except Molly, Arthur, and Percy. The latter two were already at work.

“Good morning, dear,” Molly said. She smiled a bit and continued, “It looks like the rest will have to get a ‘good afternoon’ instead. Shall we have lunch? The other can have sandwiches.”

“Thank you.” Harry frowned. “I may be wrong, but is there something you’ve wanted to ask me or say to me since I first got here?”

“I admit, I’m curious,” Molly admitted. “Why Hermione?”

“Other than she’s always stood by me, and she’s bright, cute, and my best friend?”

“I thought Ron was your best friend.”

“You want me to date Ron?”

Molly gave Harry a stern look.

Harry ignored it. “What you meant is, why don’t I date Ginny,” he pointed out.

“I suppose,” she admitted. “And I do think Hermione would be good for Ron.”

“Hermione is bossy, okay, very bossy, but she’s not really controlling,” Harry responded. “The bossiness really irritates Ron, a lot more than it does me.”

“And how do you feel about it?”

Harry shrugged, “I listen to her and then make my own decision. But let’s be honest, Ginny is a bit more controlling, and a lot more possessive, than Hermione, and those things would irritate me a lot more than Hermione’s bossiness.” Harry also knew that Ginny would demand to be treated as a princess, and would be very irritating when not getting her way. “And Ginny has just turned thirteen. That’s a little young to date anyone, isn’t it?”

Molly was not about to publically agree about any of her children having flaws, although she

acknowledged to her self that Harry was likely right about both Ron and Ginny. She had to agree that Ginny was certainly too young to date, and did so.

The rest of lunch was companionable, and after Molly refused help Harry took the newspaper to the back porch to read. There was a small stop-press notice about the attack, and Harry was glad there had been no Dark Mark. Unfortunately, the names of the Death Eaters killed had not been released in time to make the morning edition.

The rest of the family, led by Bill and Hermione, were eating sandwiches when Harry came back in, and he sat down to enjoy some lemonade with the others.

The evening paper came early. It turned out that the Dark Mark had disappeared from the Death Eaters' arms after Voldemort's downfall, which was how Malfoy and the others had been able to claim being under the Imperius. However, there were now faint Marks on all six of the Death Eaters the night before, proving that they all, despite having been excused in 1981, been Death Eaters. Harry knew all six names. Two of the people were low-level Death Eaters, even in 1997-1998. However the other four were the Carrows, McNair, and best of all Lucius Malfoy. Harry was surprised, that being the case, that the Ministry had released the names. Reading thoroughly, he saw that the names had been released over Fudge's objections by Madam Bones. There was even an editorial calling for all those who had claimed Imperius as a defense to be re-examined.

Harry wondered if Fudge would stay in office long. His plans would work either way.

Well, there were ways. . . .

Chapter III

*

She Who Must Be Named and her minions own the Potterverse. I just play here.

*

Ron was of course gleeful that Lucius Malfoy was dead. Eventually, Arthur had to take Ron aside for a little fatherly talk. When Ron grumbled to Harry, Harry would only say that, because of the double-standards at Hogwarts, Ron should not start anything with Draco, and should certainly never say anything anywhere where Snape might be listening. Ron had to agree with that reasoning, even if he still didn't like it.

It was only a short time between the World Cup and September 1. Harry spent as much time as he could flying. He was grateful he had bothered doing his homework, as it meant he could spend much of his remaining time with Hermione and not scribbling away, as Ron was having to do.

Harry was pleased to see Luna talking to Ginny on the Platform, and he invited the pair of them to join the Trio. That in turn pleased Ginny and Luna, and Hermione was glad that she and Harry would have two reinforcements on Ron's behavior, as she was certain he would try and make trouble. Harry agreed, but he privately thought it might be better if Ron made trouble on the train than at Hogwarts. He was afraid that doing it Hermione's way was just delaying the problem, but he agreed to go along.

To Harry's slight surprise, Draco showed a little sense and stayed away during the trip. The five students had a basically good time, although Hermione was a bit confused by Luna, and Harry hoped that this signaled that some part of the upcoming year might be better than he anticipated.

The peace around Harry lasted through the downpour they had to make their way through to get to the castle.

Harry noticed Malfoy and some of his cronies lurking on one side of the huge entrance hall, rather than going into the great hall for the feast, which was pretty suspicious on its own. A slight movement in the shadows convinced him that Snape was lurking against the wall.

"Two weasels, a loony, and a Mudblood," Draco snapped. "Low company, even for you, Scarhead."

"Little boy, mind your manners," Harry answered calmly. "I know you're acting bravely only because your Head of House is behind you, waiting to pounce. Grow up." Draco reached for his wand, and Harry snapped, "Don't be stupid."

Draco continued the draw and Harry simply stepped forward and took it away from him, to Draco's shock."

"That will be. . . !" Snape started to call out, emerging from the shadows. When he saw Potter was grinning at him, however, he launched a silent Legilimency attack. Snape's gleeful expression lasted less than two seconds, as he then screeched in agony for several seconds as Harry planted a prepared mental program and series of hexes he had created, knowing this confrontation would happen sooner or later (although he had planned on it happening later) and then Snape passed out.

“H’mmm,” Harry stated dispassionately, “Professor Snape seems to have fainted. Typical of any Slytherin; they have no guts. Come on; I’m hungry. Hey, Malfoy, how’d you break your wand?” Harry pointed at the broken wand at Draco’s feet, where he had broken and thrown it down as everyone was distracted by Snape’s falling. He started to force his friends to disappear into crowd that had gathered.

“What is going on!” Dumbledore demanded, approaching Harry.

Harry moved up to the Headmaster, his eyes wide in faux surprise. Like Snape, Dumbledore instantly tried to enter Harry’s mind, rather than using passive Legilimency. He also passed out after Harry planted a more complicated program. Harry ‘tried’ to catch Dumbledore, taking both of them down. “Someone get Madam Pomfrey! and either Professor Flitwick or Sprout,” Harry called out. Harry pocketed the elder wand in the confusion.

It was a very unorganized Sorting and Feast, as both Dumbledore and Snape were not there. Still, the rest of the staff got the students Sorted, fed, and settled in their common rooms as best they could, considering the events before the feast, the announcement of the Tournament, and the startling arrival of ‘Moody’ during the Feast itself. The staff then trooped to the medical wing.

“What happened to them, Poppy?” the concerned McGonagall asked.

“Both were hexed,” Poppy stated, “Severus multiple times and Albus at least once. I can not tell what the effects might be, as the hexes are very advanced – more than any I’ve ever heard of, let alone actually have seen! All signs point to Albus now being naturally asleep, and I think he should be allowed to awaken naturally. We will wait for him before deciding what to do with Severus.”

“Shall I stay here?” ‘Moody’ asked.

Poppy shook her head. “The extra wards here should be more than sufficient.”

“We should search the castle!” McGonagall stated. “If the hexes were this advanced, there must be some outside agent in the castle!”

Needless to say, the staff found no traces of an invader.

*

Albus Dumbledore was trying to wake up, but instead, he found himself bound at a student’s desk, in a mock-up of the history of magic classroom as it had appeared when he was a student.

“Welcome, Albus,” a vague figure in the front of the classroom stated. “This is just a vision I planted in your head, so you can’t ask anything, only listen, as difficult as that it for you to do.” After a pause, the figure stated, “You may call me ‘Shadow.’ I am a collector. I have just completed a very important collection . . . the so-called Deathly Hallows.”

That shook Dumbledore to the core.

“I made a deal with young Harry for the cloak, and of course I have won the wand from you. You cannot be trusted, so all you get is this vision. Harry got a much better deal, although he does not really

remember me beyond what I have done for him. I am sure you also want to know, ‘what did Harry get?’”

After his concern over the elder wand, that was indeed Dumbledore’s main question at the moment.

“Well, the answer is many things; far more than you have ever done for him. All you have ever done was insure he was abused and unloved for ten years.” The Shadow paused. “You are either one sick motherfucker or a secret Dark Lord, unless you’re simply an incompetent and manipulative old bastard. First, I taught him Occlumency. Second, I told him the Prophecy.” To Dumbledore’s shock, Shadow recited it perfectly. How could this person have known?

“If you are wondering how I knew it, remember, I collect things. Harry is almost as cross about the Prophecy as he is about learning that his parents’ will forbade the Dursleys from having any input into Harry life, or benefitting in any way from their deaths. Lily Potter knew the disadvantages of growing up purely Muggle and wanted Harry spared that, and knew that her sister hated magic, even if she had no idea how cruel and abusive she and her husband would be. How much allowance did you make to them, even if you didn’t steal from Harry to do so? If you sent nothing, that would account for some of the abuse he endured; and considering they still claim Harry as a dependent for Muggle taxes and how little they spent on him, they still ‘benefitted’ to a degree.”

Dumbledore squirmed, but the voice went on.

“I also told Harry about the Horcruxes.” Dumbledore’s shock at least stopped his squirming.

“Just so you know, Riddle deliberately made six Horcruxes and made a seventh by accident. The first was the diary, which Harry destroyed. The second was Slytherin’s ring, which was also, ironically, the third Hallow.” Dumbledore shuddered. If Tom had known that fact, he might already have returned. “I collected that and broke the Horcrux, and it was that event that led me to Harry, and now to you.”

After brief pause, Shadow went on, “I may have the rest of them slightly out of order, but the next three were Slytherin’s locket, Hufflepuff’s chalice, and Ravenclaw’s diadem. I broke the Horcruxes on Slytherin’s locket and Ravenclaw’s diadem.” In truth, Harry had only done the latter that very night as Dumbledore recovered. “The first I returned to its possessor with thanks, the latter I have not yet decided what to do with.”

The being shifted slightly. “The last two are unusual, I must say. The sixth or seventh is of course Harry’s scar. Harry actually asked that I not remove the scar Horcrux, believing that having the Parseltongue gift and the fact that it made a fine Voldemort detector was worth it, but finally agreed that I break it.” In fact, the combining of the two versions of Harry had destroyed the Horcrux. “To our surprise, Harry still has Parseltongue. Hopefully the scar itself will fade away now.” The older Harry had known he would keep the Parseltongue, while losing the scar Horcrux itself would release his limited metamorph skills and increase his wandless abilities slightly. “The remaining Horcrux is Voldemort’s familiar, which was certainly a stupid thing for Voldemort to do. A living Horcrux is a contradiction in terms.” Dumbledore had to agree there. He was quite shocked to learn that Harry was no longer a Horcrux, which pretty well destroyed what passed for Dumbledore’s current plan.

“You should be thinking about how to get Hufflepuff’s Cup out of the Lestrage vault in Gringotts.” Dumbledore’s heart nearly missed a beat: to know what all the Horcruxes were, but knowing that at least one would be almost impossible to get. “Don’t make a boy do your work, you lazy bastard. Get

the Cup; that is your assignment. Harry can access the dead basilisk and get you the venom you need to destroy it.” Dumbledore nearly growled.

“As for the last thing I traded for the cloak. . . .” A wave of Shadow’s hand and the chalk board filled. “Do you recognize the first incantation?”

It was clear Dumbledore did, but the voice merely went on. “I taught Harry, and Harry used it on both you and Snape. I cast the remaining spells on Snape, and tied them to Harry. I then partially revived you and then disarmed you, claiming the elder wand.”

The voice had not been friendly, but only now did it actually threaten. “Two more things. First, keep Snape in line, Dumbledork. His actions have helped an entire generation of Slytherins go Dark. Reign him in, especially how he treats Harry. Harry is under my protection, and Granger, Longbottom, and Lovegood are under his. He now knows that the Weasleys, especially Ron and Molly, befriended him in part because of your orders, and the little girl’s obsession bothers him. Second, you had better have more than an age line protecting the Goblet of Fire. You may trust Snape, but while his loyalties may be more to you than to Voldemort, they are above all to himself. Afterall, Snape will not be the only one with the Mark in the Castle, as you well know. And I would not be surprised if there aren’t going to be more than two. If Harry is entered into the Tournament, then there will not be hell to pay, there shall be Armageddon in the British and Pureblood worlds. In fact, the Pureblood agenda, which you still partially subscribe to, will soon be under threat.” The voice now was clearly sneering. “I know you like to pretend to be tolerant and Light, but you are a Pureblood bigot at heart, almost as much as you were when you were Gellert’s lover, and I know that you are at least as grey as one can be without being considered Dark. I wonder, is your Phoenix enslaved?”

And with that, Dumbledore woke up in the Infirmary.

*

It was late in the morning before Dumbledore woke Snape up, who instantly demanded that Potter be expelled.

“For what?” Dumbledore asked mildly. “For calling your planned ambush out as the juvenile exercise it was, or defending himself against your illegal attack?” Dumbledore had, for once, actually asked what had happened rather than relying on Snape.

Snape’s jaw hung open from the shock.

“It has been pointed out to me that while you have indeed had to provide yourself with cover in your actions, I have allowed you far too much leeway. You will cease your vendetta against Harry and his friends, and you will instill some discipline into your Slytherins, as I fear it is far too late to instill any common sense or intelligence.” Seeing Snape’s jaw set, Dumbledore added, “Or would you prefer someone else take over as Head of Slytherin?”

“No!”

“Good. Now, as to what Harry did to us. Yes, to both of us,” Dumbledore added. “Harry had something someone very powerful and knowledgeable wanted, and I must admit he made Harry a fair trade.” He glanced at Snape. “Part of the trade directly concerns the two of us. Tell me, Severus, have you ever

heard of a hex called Odin's Defense?"

Snape frowned and then admitted, "I have not." He glowered. "Potter hexed me, and you demand. . . ?"

"Yes," Dumbledore snapped, "I demand, or you should walk from Hogwarts now. Odin's Defense was actually, in a sense, a defense against Odin, who is credited according to legend with developing Legilimency. It can only be used against those using active mental attacks, and I remind you, active Legilimency is an active attack and so is also considered a crime. In any event, as I said, the hex can only be used against those attacking with active mental magic, such as Legilimency or the Imperius, and it can only be used by the very powerful."

"Then that leaves Potter out," Snape snarled.

"May I remind you what he did against the dementors last spring?"

"Do you really believe he chased away even one dementor?" Snape demanded.

"No, I have proof he drove away a hundred and eight," Dumbledore snapped back. That startled Snape, who knew that few wizards were powerful enough to chase away even a half dozen dementors. "Now, for the effects of the hex. Should either of us ever use any mental magic on Harry, even a memory charm or passive Legilimency, we would drop dead."

Snape was outraged. "Potter is going to kill me?!"

"Not if we do not use mental magic on him," Dumbledore pointed out. "In addition, Harry's mysterious new patron has put you under several other hexes."

"How?" Snape demanded.

"I have to admit I do not know," Dumbledore admitted. "Still, I was able to determine at least two of the hexes he claimed to be on you actually are present." Without the elder wand, Dumbledore lacked the power to determine what the other hexes were. "Severus, your life is in the hands of this person . . . and yourself. Both of those hexes are tied to your Dark Mark, and I imagine the others are either tied to the Mark or directly to your magic or your life force, or perhaps even your soul. One of those hexes, if activated, would burn off the end of your arm at the Dark Mark, while the other would induce a heart attack. There are at least two other hexes on you, more likely three."

Snape was trying to understand his position.

"Worse, from your view point, they were tied by this person to Harry. Harm him or those under his protection, and any of these hexes may be activated."

"I don't believe it!"

Dumbledore sighed. "Fine. Don't believe me, and you will drop dead, perhaps instantly, perhaps after a few minutes of agony. If that is your choice, I cannot stop you." Severus was making himself unneeded to Dumbledore in this new situation with his refusal to listen to reason.

Snape swallowed nervously. He was not very worried about being dead, unlike Voldemort. Still, he was

in no hurry to die. “How many are under Potter’s alleged protection?”

“Granger, Longbottom, and Lovegood,” Dumbledore answered.

Snape was surprised. “Not Weasley?”

“No.” Dumbledore sighed. “His patron discovered that I had Molly put Ronald up to befriending Harry on the train. That is one of many reason that Harry is likely nearly as upset with me as he is with you, although the fact the Weasleys have come to genuinely like Harry hopefully helps there.”

Dumbledore’s face hardened. “Six Deathaters were killed last week, Severus. You know as well as I that many of the successes of the Deathaters, at least when Voldemort himself was not present, occurred because people were too frightened to fight back. Harry’s patron and apparently Harry himself are also not afraid to fight back. It is time your Slytherins find their alleged subtly.”

At that point, a very frightened-looking McGonagall hurried into the private room. “Albus! You must come, quickly!” She glanced at Snape. “I hope you are recovering, Severus.”

“What has happened?” Dumbledore demanded.

“You have to see, and I have the others searching the school.”

“Come along, Severus. Let us see what is going on.”

*

McGonagall led them to the great hall through a slightly roundabout route. There, on the back wall behind the Slytherin table, in blood-red letters, was the statement: SIX ARROGANT PUREBLOODS DEAD: HOW MANY MORE NEED TO BE KILLED TO SAVE MAGIC? Next to the letters was a large P in a circle, with a slash through it.

“Why is that still there?” Dumbledore demanded.

“We cannot erase it,” McGonagall admitted.

“Then get the elves to do it,” Snape said with a shrug.

“Ah. . . .” McGonagall summoned the head of the cleaning elves.

“Professor Ma’am?” the elf asked.

“Tell the Headmaster why you cannot clean that wall,” she ordered.

The elf frowned. “Elves cleaned the wall three times already, Professor Ma’am.”

“Get those words off!” Snape demanded.

The elf glanced at the wall. “The wall is as Hogwarts commanded,” the elf answered.

“Punish yourself for your back talk!” Snape ordered.

Before Dumbledore or McGonagall could intervene, the elf answered, “The Master of Hogwarts commanded no punishments without his permission.”

“And who is the Master of Hogwarts, other than the Headmaster?” Dumbledore demanded.

“Headmaster is temporary head of the school,” the elf answered. “The school is in Hogwarts, but it is not Hogwarts. Elves belong to Hogwarts, not to school or Headmaster.” The elf disappeared.

McGonagall sighed and said, “That slogan is also apparently in the Slytherin and Ravenclaw common rooms. There are also numerous other slogans, both there and in various corridors, such as CLEAN THE MAGICAL GENE POOL; KILL AN ARROGANT PUREBLOOD TODAY and WHY DID PUREBLOODS ALLOW VOLDEMORT TO BRAND THEM? BECAUSE THEY ARE AS INTELLIGENT AS CATTLE. One even says, KILL A DEATHEATER AND WIN A KNUT. Most common is the rather ungrammatical DOWN WITH PUREES; presumably ‘purees’ being those who believe in the so-called Pureblood agenda. That symbol is all over.”

Snape, stunned, stirred and said, “I should meet my next class.”

“I cancelled your classes for today,” McGonagall told him.

“Take today off, think about what I told you,” Dumbledore told him. He gestured at the words. “Also remember, the so-called Purebloods account for perhaps two thousand of the twenty thousand magic* users in Britain, yet they and their allies control the magical government and economy. Their children make up just under half the students here, and represent nearly all the Pureblood children in Britain who are not home-schooled or sent abroad. About a fifth of our students are first generation magic users, representing all the Muggleborn. The rest of the children here, however, represent just a fraction of the rest of the magical children. Britain is perhaps the most restrictive magical society of all, and most of the magic users are only seen on tax roles and at Quidditch games. They prefer to send their children to the Irish Free School, which is the second largest in Europe even though we like to pretend it does not exist, to one of the North American schools, or, if they have any language skills, to the Swiss Ecole, which is the largest school in Europe, Africa, or Western Asia. We, Beauxbatons, and Durmstrang are preeminent mostly only for our age, not the number or quality of our students. Durmstrang only survives by taking full-blooded students from all over Europe. Beauxbatons, like us, survive on a portion of old Pureblood families, the Muggleborn, and the children of the Muggleborn until they learn enough about magical society to send their children elsewhere.”

McGonagall started, “We are the premier school. . . .”

“A premier school is defined by educating children through the N.E.W.T.s or their equivalent, and we are the only school allowed to do so in Britain,” Dumbledore interrupted. “The three regional schools can only educate through the fifth year.” These were St. David’s, St. George’s, and St. Andrew’s, in Wales, England, and Scotland. “Together, they have more than twice as many students in those years as we do, and as I said an even greater number travel overseas from the start. We also lose about a tenth of our students to foreign schools for their last two years. When was the last time we had a student from one of the regional schools, or anywhere other than Durmstrang or Beauxbatons, come here for their N.E.W.T.s?”

“That’s allowed?” Snape asked, surprised.

“Of course it is,” Dumbledore answered. “The answer is 1962. Look at the rosters of the British Quidditch teams – nearly all are British or Irish born, and nearly every one of them has at least a few N.E.W.T.s. And yet less than a fifth of them attended Hogwarts – even if every Hogwarts Quidditch player turned professional and played for over five years each, that would not be enough players to provide a full roster for all the teams! Despite that, over ninety percent of the Ministry workers came to Hogwarts, with most of the rest being home-schooled or from Durmstrang or Beauxbatons, and although the Muggleborn make up a fifth of our school population, they make up less than five percent of the Ministry employees – nearly all in Accounting, with a few scattered in Law Enforcement and the Department of Mysteries, and all in areas where skill and knowledge count most. Nearly all the Wizengamot members were educated here, and the rest were educated at Durmstrang, Beauxbatons, or were home-schooled, and that has been true throughout my lifetime.”

Dumbledore made a face. “That’s why no one in the Ministry or Wizengamot will listen. That’s why Voldemort nearly succeeded, and why I so fear for us should he regain his body. Most of the Government sympathize with his supposed goals, just not with his methods. To be honest, probably most even sympathize with his methods, but just didn’t, and wouldn’t, want to share the power they already have with him and his followers.”

He looked at the two. “I do not know who this ‘master of Hogwarts’ is, although I will strive to find out. He claims to be here to help Harry, and identifies me, not to mention Severus, as obstacles. Harry has little reason to trust me, and no reason at all to trust Severus. If pushed, this person might be able to use Harry to rally the population, not just against Voldemort but against the current power structure.” He looked at McGonagall. “May I remind you, you are as much a part of that power structure as we are.”

McGonagall looked both confused and resentful.

“When the International set up its own Certificates of Mastery in the 1960s, none of us went and took the exams,” Dumbledore pointed out. “Severus is the only one with a Mastery in his teaching field – mine is in alchemy rather than transfiguration – although Sinistra’s Muggle doctorate in astronomy is considered an equivalent degree, none of us took the teaching certificate, which every staff member in the regional school has. None of the rest of us would be considered for employment at a large regional or premier school outside of Hogwarts, Beauxbatons, or Durmstrang.”

The pair looked dumbfounded at this information.

“This is all very public information,” Dumbledore pointed out gently. “Anyone looking through the Confederation’s periodical ‘Education Quarterly’ would know this. We do subscribe, you know. Granted, Irma has told me I am the only staff member who reads it, but a few students do every year, mostly from Ravenclaw, and most of them leave here after their O.W.L.s.”

Dumbledore looked at Snape. “In any event, do not think a revolution from the Muggleborn, Half-bloods, and Full-bloods cannot occur, Severus. If it starts at a bastion of privilege such as Hogwarts, with a symbol like Harry as its leader, I shudder to think what might happen. If you would consider some Muggle examples, I would suggest you look by looking at the French Revolution.”

“Then we had better stamp down hard on this,” Snape insisted. “Some idiots will be mouthing these disgusting slogans, so we should start there.”

“And if you take points for using ‘Puree’, will you also take points for ‘Mudblood’?” Dumbledore asked.

“She already does,” Snape pointed out, looking at McGonagall.

“Then I shall announce that anyone caught by a member of the staff using either phrase will have a point removed,” Dumbledore decided. He looked at both his teachers. “And I do mean, either. No favoritism on this. Am I understood?”

The two nodded, Snape a bit reluctantly.

“Then I shall inform the rest of the staff, and the Heads of House will have special meetings today at four thirty to inform their students.”

Chapter IV

She-Who-Must-Be-Named and her minions own the Potterverse. I just imagine it differently!

*

Draco Malfoy was a very confused young man. He had still not recovered by his father's killing. People like his father, and himself of course, were to be bowed to, not stood up to, and certainly not killed by some anonymous wizard in a crowd just for having fun.

Potter had changed as well. He had worked against Draco, but certainly had not really stood up to him before. Snape's comments Friday afternoon were also disturbing. Most of the his fellow Slytherins had quickly fallen into the new rules. This suggested to both Draco and Snape that most had not been very fervent believers in the Pureblood agenda. That response from his fellow Pureblood students merely added to Draco's confusion.

Things were slightly changing around Draco, and from the little he could see, he didn't like the concept.

A large number of other people were in similar states of mind, especially the Headmaster, Snape, and Barty Crouch Junior, masquerading as Moody. Crouch was especially confused, as he could not get a coherent statement out of anybody about what had happened just before he had shown up at the welcoming feast. He was looking forward to the first class he had with the so-called 'Boy-Who-Lived' the next week.

Snape was alternating between rage and fear. He did not want to accept that another Potter might have bested him, that the Boy might have enough power to affect him. On the other hand, while he did not fear death, as far as he was concerned dying at the hands of any school boy, especially Potter, was an embarrassment to be avoided. Even more than Dumbledore, Snape was constantly passively scanning those around him. If what the Headmaster had said was accurate and Potter was the one who had cast Odin's Defense, then meeting Potter's eyes even once would likely mean death. Snape would have to retrain himself not to passively scan all the time, or else the students, especially the Slytherins, would soon detect that he was acting defensively, perhaps even submissively, around Potter by not glaring at him, and once the students sensed fear, he would be in trouble.

Dumbledore was slightly less worried than Snape about passive Legilimency and a great deal more concerned about who might have taught Harry. He would have to make certain that Harry had much less freedom the following summer. As for guarding the Cup from interference beyond an age line, he decided to put Moody in charge of that. He needed to spend some time prowling around Privet Drive to see if he could discover anything.

Around the school, unnoticed by any of the staff, many of the students had quickly picked up on the 'anti-Puree' ideas – even most of the Purebloods, who, if not from the 'right' families were still discriminated against in Ministry hirings and in competing for Ministry contracts, saw this as a chance to push for change. To many of the less thoughtful Gryffindors, this was simply another way of being 'anti-Slytherin'. Many Hufflepuffs, no matter their blood-status, were simply offended by the lack of fair play in British wizarding society, and now that their noses had been rubbed in it they felt compelled

to voice their objections, especially once rumors of Harry Potter's involvement spread. Many of the Ravenclaws, and a few thoughtful members of the other Houses (like Hermione) and even some Slytherins realized that the odds were stacked against them, and thought this might help even the playing field.

None, not even Hermione, knew that Harry was behind it all. The Gryffindors did know from that first night that Harry supported the idea, and of course the rest of the students caught on well before the staff.

*

At dinner that Sunday, McGonagall made a startled noise. "What is it, Minerva?" Dumbledore asked.

"Do you need new glasses?" she hissed. "Look closely at the lapels at three of the tables."

Dumbledore looked, and then swallowed nervously. Sure enough, every Gryffindor and Hufflepuff, and perhaps a third of the Ravenclaws, sported white buttons, each with a blood-red P in a bright-red circle, with a slash across it. He stood, and the normal background noise faded quickly. "Students, you were warned about using certain phrases Friday evening. Remove those buttons."

Not a student made a move to do so.

One of the Slytherin's shouted, "Remove those buttons, you Blood-traitors!"

Dumbledore was more startled by the collective growl from the Hufflepuff and Gryffindor tables. Another Slytherin (Pansy Parkinson, although few knew that) was heard to exclaim, "Filthy Mudbloods!"

Instantly, a chant started at the Hufflepuff table, and it was quickly picked up by the others button-wearers. "Down with Purees! Down With Purees! DOWN WITH PUREES! DOWN WITH PUREES!"

"SILENCE!" Dumbledore glared at the students. "I will have none of that!"

Harry stood up, saying, "Stop supporting the Pureblood agenda, Headmaster! You are the same as I am, the son of a Pureblood father and a Muggleborn mother."

"Mister Potter! That will be. . ."

"Take one point off of Harry, and you had better do the same to all of us!"

The members of the head table was shocked, because it was Hermione who had stood and stated that. Harry and Hermione had not been seen snogging, and so few realized they were a real couple, instead of just close friends. The rest of Gryffindor stood and shouted in near-unison, "AND US!"

The Hufflepuffs managed to be more unified, but followed, shouting the same. Half the Ravenclaws, including some not wearing the buttons, stood and glared defiantly at the head table.

"Blood does not matter!" Dumbledore stated firmly.

“True,” Harry responded. “After all, Voldemort’s father was a Muggle.”

“You lie!” Draco screamed.

Harry walked between the student tables and the head table, and did the ‘tom marvolo riddle’ = ‘i am lord voldemort’ trick. “He showed me that himself, Malfoy.” Harry moved so he was facing most of both the students and staff. “What Britain had during Voldemort’s first attempt to seize power was one small group of Purebloods and Pureblood wannabes who were trying to get power from an even smaller group, the Pureblood elite. They were fighting a civil war, a civil war between those who hate Muggles and the new ideas represented by the Muggleborn and those in contact with Muggle society, and those who wanted to kill those people. One set of bigots was attacked by an even more racist set of bigots. Together, they probably make up less than an eighth of the magical population in these isles.” He turned and glared at Dumbledore. “I, for one, will no longer tolerate the abuse encouraged by the coddling of the Pureblood bigots in Slytherin. The curriculum at Hogwarts is the weakest in western Europe, other than Beauxbatons, because the Purebloods are so inbred they can’t keep up. Either change the system, or expel me! I know that once a student steps foot in Hogwarts, they are compelled to attend through their O.W.L.s, unless expelled. So, bring the school up to standard, or expel me so I can attend a decent school and get a good education!”

“And if Harry goes. . . .” Susan Bones stated.

“We all go!” exclaimed the students standing yelled.

“Expel the inbred!” a Hufflepuff called out.

“Expel the Slytherins!” Ron shouted.

“DOWN WITH PUREES! DOWN WITH PUREES! DOWN WITH PUREES!”

“STUDENTS! GO TO YOUR COMMON ROOMS!”

Harry sneered at the Headmaster, and went, sat down, and began eating his dinner.

The rest of the students did the same.

Stalemate.

*

Harry was summoned to the Headmaster’s office. Despite the temptation, he did not have anyone else with him when he met with Harry, despite Minerva’s protests and Snape’s demands.

“What are you trying to do, Harry?” Dumbledore asked.

“I’m trying to save magical Britain,” Harry answered. “We both know that Voldemort will be back. If his Horcruxes aren’t destroyed, I can ‘vanquish’ him any number of times, and he’ll just keep coming back. Magical Britain was about to roll over and submit to him back in 1981, wasn’t it?”

“It was,” Dumbledore admitted after a moment’s hesitation. “Tom had gained sufficient followers

within the Ministry to seize control, and he almost certainly would have that December.”

“And now those followers, and their sympathizers, have even more seniority, more power, don’t they? Some killed off their relatives who had real power, after 1981 as well as before, and now some are even in the Wizengamot. Correct?”

“I have no proof, but I am certain you are correct,” Dumbledore again had to admit.

“And if Voldemort seizes power, how long before the Muggleborn and ‘blood traitors’ are hunted down and killed? Before the magical economy is wrecked and the general wizarding population is under his boot?”

“Probably not long,” Dumbledore admitted.

“Then will he go after the other magical governments or the Muggles first?”

“I don’t know,” Dumbledore answered. “There shall certainly be some Muggle-baiting. . . .”

“Some,” Harry said in disgust. “Did you know the Muggles know of us?”

“A few. . . .”

“Not a few,” Harry cut in. “Not just those with magical relatives, and not a few like the Muggle Prime Minister. I mean the Muggle military and secret services.” Dumbledore was stunned at the concept. “They’ve known since at least World War II; there weren’t enough wizards to memory charm everyone who witnessed magic. They can track magic, or at least large scale magical use. Their global satellites can find any structure under Muggle-repelling charms; just about anything not under something like a Fidelius, in fact, including Hogwarts and the Ministry building. Do you know what a hydrogen bomb is? Or at least an atomic bomb?”

“Atom bombs, yes; and I know what hydrogen is. . . .”

“A hydrogen bomb is much more powerful than an atomic bomb. In fact, an atomic bomb is used to trigger a hydrogen bomb. For a brief instant, the power of the sun is on earth. If the Muggles feel we are getting out of control, as Voldemort would be, do you think they would hesitate to launch a weapon on him? The Muggles keep a closer eye on us than you know, not because they are afraid of the backward wizarding world, but because they are afraid one Muggle government will coopt their wizards and use them, like the Soviets tried to before your lover wiped the Russian Muggleborn out in the early 1920s. If any government co-opts them again, the rest will swoop down on us. We can only protect ourselves by knowing the Muggles better than they know us. Humoring the Puree agenda will bury us, assuming we don’t die out all together.”

At that moment, Dumbledore was distracted by McGonagall approaching his door. He tried to stop her, but she charged in, wildly waving something in her hand. “Have you seen this!” she shouted flinging the object on Dumbledore’s desk. She glared at Harry and snapped. “I imagine you have.”

Dumbledore saw it was some sort of soft-covered book. He had never seen a plastic spiral-bound book before, let alone one this large, at nearly two inches thick. “What is it?” he asked.

“A report comparing the programs, O.W.L. scores, and fees at all the schools which fall under the O.W.L. and comparable systems,” Harry answered blandly. “Amazing – the Purebloods pay a quarter of the fees here that the Muggleborn do. I wonder how the Muggleborn families will react, especially those with younger magical children, when they discover they are paying inflated prices for inferior education.”

“You’re trying to destroy Hogwarts!” McGonagall raved.

“No, the people running the system have been destroying Hogwarts for over a hundred years,” Harry retorted. “This school is a mockery of what the founders tried to create.”

“That is not for you to say!”

“If a concerned student cannot say that, then who can? The parents that have been brainwashed? The Ministry that caused it? You staff members who go along? What can happen if a majority of the acknowledged magical children of Wales, England, and Scotland do not attend Hogwarts? Which, I remind you, they don’t?” Harry asked.

Mcgonagall looked confused, but Dumbledore looked horrified.

“That’s right, Mister Dumbledore,” Harry answered. “The recognized heirs of the Founders can take over the school, removing not only the Board of Governors, but the headmaster and any or all the members of the staff. The true primary bloodlines of all four founders have died out, but their vaults still recognize magical heirs – most likely whoever controls the Founders’ Symbols.” Harry raised his hand and the Sword of Gryffindor disappeared from Dumbledore’s shelf and reappeared in his hand. Then it disappeared. “That’s one. Either whoever controls Slytherin’s ring, or Voldemort or myself, would be the magical heir to Slytherin.”

“You?”

“I defeated and disembodied the last blood heir three times so far,” Harry pointed out. “That leaves Ravenclaw’s diadem and Hufflepuff’s chalice.”

‘I need that cup!’ Dumbledore thought. With it, he and Harry could stalemate Shadow.

Harry looked at McGonagall. “When Voldemort is destroyed, Hogwarts will be remade. It will become the greatest school, for the best of the best, blood be damned.” With that, Harry stood and left.

“Albus?”

“Harry’s mystery mentor claims to hold the ring and the tiara,” Dumbledore answered. “Putting Harry under any pressure would be counterproductive. At the least, he would leave after next year. I know where the cup is, but have no idea on how to get to it.”

“Then I suggest you put your mind to it!”

*

When classes started Monday morning, the buttons had disappeared. The few Slytherins who tried to

make their usual put-downs and insults found their usual victims growling and backed up by others in their House, even the Hufflepuffs. Their allies in Ravenclaw, who rarely said anything, advised the Slytherins to lay off. The Slytherins also noticed that while Snape was his usual sarcastic self towards Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs, that sarcasm was limited and stayed far-away from ancestry or House rivalry.

When Harry finally had his first Defense class, he sat stoically as ‘Moody’ demonstrated the three Unforgivables. He did not react when the entire class was lined up for the Imperius and as some of his classmates were put under the Curse. His expression gave the faux-Moody a second of hesitation, but then he commanded, “Imperio!”

Nothing.

“IMPERIO!”

Harry merely looked at the man. ‘Moody’s’ wand shook slightly, and then, hesitatingly, he lowered it, the classroom in complete silence. Most, especially the Slytherins, had their mouths open in shock.

Harry’s glare did not waver; ‘Moody’ swallowed nervously, and then managed to say, “Remarkable, Mister Potter. Remarkable.” Harry did not blink. “Ten points to Gryffindor. Have a seat.”

Harry merely nodded and sat back down.

*

“Dumbledore! What the hell is going on in this school!” Minister Fudge shouted.

“You must teach the Mudbloods and Halfbloods their place,” Undersecretary Umbridge agreed with a sniff.

“For over a hundred and fifty years, the Ministry and its allies on the Board have kept the Hogwarts curriculum in place as the world has changed,” Dumbledore stated. “At the same time, the Ministry hires almost exclusively from Hogwarts. The majority of the wizarding population no longer attends Hogwarts, and are increasingly cut off from what you consider, for no good reason, the mainstream magical community. Tell me, if the Ministry only represents some twelve to fifteen percent of the magical population, and Hogwarts deals with at most twenty percent of the total children, how representative is either? Without the Muggleborn and their children and grandchildren, Hogwarts would only be two-thirds its current small size at best. More importantly, without the higher fees charged to them, nearly a third of the Purebloods who attend would not be able to afford to be here. The problem is not that those students do not know their place; the problem is that they are learning it.”

Normally, both Ministry officials were oblivious to counter-arguments, but the glare that Dumbledore had them under made them both squirm and listen.

“I know your instincts are to try and crush what is going on here. But I warn you: remember that the Ministry is totally unrepresentative of British magical society. All it would take is a spark, and the general population could rise and demand representation. The entire Ministry could be overhauled, and merit would become the sole criteria if we are lucky – cronyism on the part of the more commercial classes is the more likely result. You control ‘the Daily Prophet’ and the news on the WWN, but ‘the

Prophet' sells only fifteen hundred copies a day, and exists only because of the Ministry subsidies. The Ministry is barely noticed, except to keep the floo going and to regulate Quidditch, by some three quarters to four fifths of the population. Do not interfere here, and it might stay that way. If you do interfere, the movement here will spread to the other schools, then to their parents, and they will destroy the Ministry as it currently operates."

Fudge and Umbridge left, unsatisfied and unconvinced, but seemingly shaken in their confidence and yet threatening to return soon. Dumbledore decided he had to speak to some of his contacts with outside newspapers. While 'the Prophet' was the 'newspaper of record' in Britain, 'the Irish Speaker' sold twice as many copies in Britain. The Ministry had no control over the Welsh newspaper, as few in the Ministry ever bothered to learn the language, and it sold as many copies as 'the Prophet,' as did the leading French paper.

As the confused Ministry pair were leaving, they made their way past a small group of students, which they ignored. Harry, however, did not ignore Umbridge. The Hogwarts wards had notified him as soon as she had entered the grounds.

There were many un-Marked (or as yet un-Marked) individuals who, although Harry loathed them, he was willing to spare, at least until they did something wrong in this universe. Umbridge was not one of those. Harry managed to place a complicated curse upon her. After the fourth time she apparated, an anti-apparation ward would be triggered. The fifth time Umbridge apparated, she would basically implode into a bloody mass.

News of her demise would make the Saturday Prophet.

When Dumbledore entered the staff meeting that Friday a few minutes late, however, he noticed that the group had become unnaturally quiet. "Oh, dear," he said, "what has happened now?"

"Essentially, we have lost one of our main disciplinary tools," Flitwick replied.

"Which one?"

"House points," McGonagall answered. "Several students have pointed out how unfairly a certain member of the staff has been using the House point system for years and is continuing to do so this year, again resulting in skewed results." Dumbledore saw the rest of the staff was glaring at Snape. "Basically, this has resulted in one House unfairly winning the last twelve out of fifteen years, and those last three were different only because of let us say odd occurrences at the very end of each year. And before you say anything," she continued, snapping at Snape, "I looked up some of your deductions – 'breathing loudly,' 'answering in too much detail,' 'walking too fast,' 'walking too slowly,' 'walking too loudly,' 'walking on the wrong side of the corridor' . . . Need I go on?"

Snape merely glared and then sniffed in contempt..

"Both the Hufflepuffs and Gryffindors have announced you should give what they now call 'the Slytherin Cup' to Slytherin, because they really don't care anymore," Sprout said. "And many, if not most, of the Ravenclaws agree."

"In addition, there is a petition with signatures from every non-Slytherin student demanding that all detentions be adjudicated by a Board consisting of one neutral Head of House, a neutral staff member,

and a member of the Hogwarts Board of Governors, since you have proven too aloof,” Flitwick added, twisting the knife.

“I know you won’t expel Potter short of his raping a student in the middle of the great hall,” Snape drawled, “but perhaps you should consider expelling a few of the other ringleaders. Soon, the school will be nothing but chaos.”

“Or, perhaps you should just find a better potions instructor,” Flitwick pointed out. “That would likely solve more problems. And watch what you say, Snape,” Flitwick warned. “You are one offensive remark, one attack on one of my students, from learning to see if I can still easily outclass you.”

“Enough, all of you,” Dumbledore stated. There was silence for a moment.

“Your options are rapidly decreasing, Headmaster,” the Muggle Studies instructor said softly, breaking the silence. “It is clear that the standards of Hogwarts’ instruction has declined over time, and that the structure of Hogwarts and the Ministry reflect each other, but not the general magical population. There is nothing we can do about the latter; well, perhaps you could but we can’t. We must upgrade the curriculum to at least start to meet current International Standards, and you must find a way to get the Governors not to interfere. And you had better do it quickly.” Twisting the knife, she added, “Do it before two other equally declining schools arrive, along with the international press.”

Chapter V

She-Who-Must-Be-Named and her minions own the Potterverse. I just rewrite it for free.

*

Dumbledore may have hoped to keep a lid on what he saw as the boiling cauldron of the anti-puree campaign, but the death of Umbridge had frightened Fudge and many of those around him. They quickly spread the fear, as various Purebloods decided to take the stories of their young relatives in Hogwarts a bit more seriously now as well. Sunday, the day after Umbridge's explosive splitch, saw a notice come around calling for a meeting of the full Wizengamot on the next day. The fact that a secret session was called for would only bring more attention to the meeting. The international press could not attend the actual meeting of course, but they would be waiting at the doors to collect stories and gossip.

They would get a story that shook the British Establishment.

The 'Elders' of the Wizengamot were, for the most part, in high voice when they met after a 'lunch' which most people would describe as a feast. All were from 'old' families – so old that most of the magical families which came into existence during the High Middle Ages, such as the Malfoys and even the Blacks, were still on the waiting lists for consideration for membership. For the most part, only a few of these 'elders' had taken part in governing through the Ministry before taking their seats (ten members of the Government had seats by right of office, but active Ministry workers could not be one of the forty life members), although some others had held various Government sinecures when they had been younger. Instead, the Elders 'managed estates,' which, for the previous 150+ years had meant allowing various squib relations, managers, and other 'hangers-on' to invest their monies in a Muggle world which they increasingly knew little or even nothing about. Only the facts that 1) the Muggle world could not tax most wealth which went into the magical world; 2) wizarding Europe did not tax income, but rather had a sales tax and an excise tax on most things coming into the magical world from the Muggle; and 3) the magical could repair most Muggle-made items, like furniture, when they wore out, rather than buying new, kept these old families in something like real wealth. If they had been taxed at the full British Muggle rates, nearly all would have had to do actual work to keep up appearances after a few generations.

Voldemort had drawn his support, for the most part, not from the from the actual Elders of the Wizengamot, but from their junior branches, the younger Pureblood families, and a few half-bloods who wished to recapture the prestige of their full-blooded relatives. The majority of the Wizengamot had seen Voldemort as a threat to their own power, although a few had sided with him to some degree. Still, for most members, it would have been difficult to know who they had feared most: a dark lord like Voldemort; the Muggle world; or the majority of their magical fellow-citizens.

In any event, some well-planned assassinations, before and after Voldemort's fall, had brought some of his followers, Marked or not, to the Wizengamot itself and made others (like Lucius Malfoy) likely candidates for seats in the near future. None of them had dared wonder aloud where their allegiance would be should the Dark Lord return. Still, on this afternoon in the British Wizengamot, it was clear to nearly all that the current immediate threat was from their fellow citizens.

Theodore Yaxley was one such person – he had not been a Marked Death Eater, although his younger brother had been, and so was his brother-in-law, Nott. He had acceded to the Wizengamot because five ‘accidental’ or ‘natural’ deaths between the early 1970s and the mid-1980s had cleared his way, and because his younger brother had thought it might be best to stay out of the public view despite having successfully claimed to have been under the Imperious the one time he had been identified at a murder scene.

Now Theodore Yaxley stood to speak after five rather incoherent rants, and the other Elders wondered what he might have to say.

“Elders of the Wizengamot, in some ways, even fundamental ways, we as a group disagree about how to view the world, both the world of magic and the larger world outside. Still, no matter if we admit it aloud, even to ourselves, we do agree that we rightfully control magical Britain, or,” he added, bowing towards the small number of truly liberal members, “at least we all enjoy our positions of power.”

He stood straight. “Nevertheless, let me speak not in the rhetorical manner we all usually undertake in this Chamber and to the Press, even the most plainspoken of us. Let me speak truths. We all, liberal or traditional, despise the Muggle, the mundane, world outside of magic to some degree, even those of you who think the Muggles have some things and ideas we can adapt for our own use. We also look down upon the shopkeeper and clerks, the small farmers and tenants, and of course the half-bloods and Muggle-born who work in the Muggle world yet try to pretend to be fully part of ours. At the same time, like the Muggle world itself, all those other common magic users have sheer numbers over us.”

He ignored the grumbling around him, as these were truths none of the members liked admitting to. “Three hundred years ago, I understand the Muggle world was run much as we still are. Even eighty years ago, this was still largely true outside of North America and a few other such radical places. Now, in many places, even in magical places, the idea that people should be born to a ruling elite, an elite trained to lead and command from birth, has fallen by the wayside. We,” he said, gesturing, “represent a tradition that goes back over a thousand years, with aspects which go back millennia before that. Tradition. Culture. Those things which mean to be magical, beyond mere wand-waving or potion-making. And, it seems, we may be under threat from those who believe that mere sheer numbers mean more.”

He took a deep breath. “Nearly thirty years ago, a voice demanded to be heard, which proclaimed the idea that we in the Wizengamot and the Ministry could not be trusted to protect this culture. Because the idea was accompanied by violence and, it seemed to many, because that voice was using these ideas as much to promote power for the speaker and his followers as much as it was raised to protect our culture, the Elders rejected that speaker.”

There was now complete silence, brought on by shock and even fear of where this speech might be going.

“There,” Yaxley stated, pointing to the dais where Dumbledore, the Minister, and a few other officials sat, “sits the Master Manipulator, who basically said, ‘fear not, reject the speaker for he wishes only to replace you, and who will likely make us lose all.’ Well, maybe he was right, maybe not. We cannot turn back time to that degree and try things another way. I personally do believe that the Old Grey Manipulator was right, but that is only my opinion.” Outrage from all sides was now behind the murmurs building in the chamber.

“Violence against the sheep will create revolution! The Dark Lord’s way will not work!” is what the Old Man up there basically said to us.” The grumbling voices were now getting louder. “The Old Manipulator’s way is now falling apart was well! The Minister, we all know, is a spineless, venal fool, and until now we have wanted a Minister to be just that, so we could buy him whenever necessary!” Only the rules which stated that a speaker could not be stopped, and could only be reprimanded after he was finished, kept the Elders from silencing him.

“I see no way out, my friends! The Dark Lord, that half-blood bastard Tom Riddle, would kill us, even if we helped him to power, for he will not share! We have emasculated the Ministry over the last few years, and there sits the greedy ball-less wonder who has allowed it while pocketing our money! Next to him is the Old Manipulator, who was worthless in the last war, and whose methods are even more old and tired and deceitful than he is!”

Yaxley raised his arms. “Let this speech be my dying declaration!”

That silenced the chamber. A dying statement was a vow, and always truthful. It was also widely believed that it could only be given freely.

Yaxley next identified fifteen men as Marked Death Eaters, including his brother, and a further eighteen, including Fudge, who were easily bribable members of the Ministry or Wizengamot, or both. Yaxley then concluded, “I curse Tom Riddle, the Dark Lord who called himself Voldemort! I curse the Dark Grey Manipulator, Albus Dumbledore! I curse the venal Cornelius Fudge and his allies! And now, I die!”

Yaxley’s left hand went to his mouth, and an instant later, he was dead.

In the Room of Requirement, Harry Potter merely smiled as the connection ended.

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Even though the Wizengamot session was supposed to be secret, the fact that Yaxley had made a dying declaration meant that his entire speech had to be reported, and published, as he had said it. Even though The Prophet had buried it in the back pages and only printed enough copies to be sent out to the regular subscribers, the other magical media had picked up the story and reported it in full across the world.

The magical population of Britain was talking, and that meant the Ministry and the leaders of the various Pureblood factions were very very worried.

They were about to become more so.

Still, enough of the Purebloods who had bribed Fudge into office were afraid of change to keep things going as they had been . . . for the moment.

*

The next Sunday evening, the entire Hogwarts community was just sitting down to the usual Sunday dinner of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. Nerves had been on edge all week, and the various factions had been growling at each other. Only Harry managed to keep his side in check, while the fears of the

pro-Purebloods kept them from stepping over the line.

Two on the dais were especially worried. That morning, a very frightened Severus Snape had reported to the Headmaster that he had somehow been taken control of the evening before. When he had awoken that morning, he was in his secret storage room, where he kept his more dangerous ingredients and potions and which only he could access with a drop of his blood. Worse, he had no memories over the previous eleven hours.

That frightened both men, as Snape was immune to the Imperius, yet somehow he had been controlled, with no sure sign of how it had happened. In addition, there was no obvious signs of Obliviation, and yet Snape, master Occlumens that he was, still could call up no memories. Dumbledore knew that it was likely 'Shadow,' using the Elder Wand, who was behind this, but he would hardly admit that to Snape.

Even more frightening, most of Snape's supply of the Draught of the Living Death was missing – and only a bit of the antidote.

With the dinner starting, the students across the tables calmed down a bit. Generally, the desserts/pudding course at Hogwarts was restrained, but on Sundays the elves always made an effort which nearly rivaled a feast, especially for the final course. When the sweets arrived, the students and staff relaxed even a bit more.

It therefore took a moment before all the people's attention was attracted to three Slytherins who had suddenly stood up and started to move towards the staff dais.

Harry's faction looked at him for a clue on how to act, and calmed down, although did not relax, when they saw Harry seemed merely attentive and curious as Parkinson, Nott, and Crabbe moved.

Dumbledore and Snape both made moves, as if they were going to stop the three students, but both suddenly froze, followed by the rest of the staff. Few of the students noticed, however, as they were watching the advancing trio.

The three students stopped off to the side of the chamber, although near the dais, so that all could see them. All three's arms shot up in the Roman/fascist salute, and they all cried out, "All Hail the Dark!" Pansy continued, "Purity needs the Dark to continue to rule, which is why it is weak! We asked the Dark for help, to crush the fools who oppose us, and the Dark demanded sacrifice!" The salute ended.

"We tried to avoid the sacrifice. So, we approached the agent of the Dark Lord, polyjuiced as Moody, and begged him for help, and he tried to Obliviate us!" Nott claimed. That both terrified and confused Crouch; terrified him since they had blown his cover, and confused him as he was certain they had not approached him.

"We then asked the Dark Manipulator for help, and he sent us away with a lemon drop," Pansy sneered.

"We asked the Dark Prince, who pretends to be the agent of both the Dark Lord and the Dark Manipulator," Crabbe announced, stumbling a bit over the last word. "He sneered and told us to carefully harass Scarhead, even though we've all seen he's lost his balls, since he can't even look Potty in the eyes any more."

“And so, we come back to the idea of a sacrifice to the Dark!” Pansy proclaimed. The three arms were raised in salute again. “All Hail the Dark and the Dark Lord!”

“All Hail the Dark and the Dark Manipulator!” Nott added.

“All Hail the Dark and the Dark Prince!” Crabbe cried out.

“We who are about to die, give our souls to the Dark!” they cried out. Then all three brought their left hands to their mouths, and then all collapsed, which released the staff from their frozen positions.

Madam Pomfrey was at the students’ sides in a few seconds. “Magically enhanced cyanide,” she told Dumbledore.

Dumbledore could only nod. That was the same thing which Yaxley had taken.

“How could we have been frozen like that?” McGonagall demanded. “The wards should have helped us!”

“More importantly, where did Moody, or whoever that is, go?” Flitwick demanded, looking at the crowd of staff by the dead students but unable to see over them.

“He’s still sitting on the dais!” Vector answered, surprised.

Indeed, ‘Moody’ was still frozen. As most of the staff approached him, he was released but easily captured by the staff. In less than six minutes, his real self was revealed as the polyjuice wore off.

“Well,” Madam Hooch was heard to remark, “I don’t know which will be the bigger scandal. His identity, the students’ accusations, or their deaths.”

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All three scandals were indeed huge, although Dumbledore and Snape were able to convince the Ministry that they had not had a conversation with the students, or at least did not remember them. The discovery of Barty Crouch Sr. under the Imperius was not the greatest addition to that scandal, however. When Junior had been questioned, he revealed that Voldemort was partly back, and under the care of Peter Pettigrew. That led the aurors to the Riddle Mansion, where Pettigrew was discovered, under the influence of the Draught of the Living Death, along with the decapitated corpse of a huge, magically mutated snake.

These discoveries led to Sirius Black’s acquittal of all charges and to the dismissal of Cornelius Fudge as Minister of Magic and the arrest of Crouch Senior (he would end up only forcibly retired, with no pension rights). Madam Bones was Fudge’s replacement, and she spent the rest of the year both preparing for any upswing in Dark activities and trying to clean out much of the corruption within the Ministry itself. Most of all, the MLE, especially the aurors, were searching unsuccessfully for Voldemort in his homunculus form.

It was only the size of that combined political scandal that prevented the scandal over the death of the three students from driving Dumbledore, and Snape, out of Hogwarts, despite their denials of involvement. One of Minister Bones’ first acts was to send a retired auror named Fraser, whom Harry

had never met in his previous life, to take over the job of DADA professor. She was obviously hoping to prevent any recurrences of the violence and suicides of the previous weeks.

Harry was hoping that all these scandals would convince the other two schools to cancel the Tri-Wizard. Unfortunately, it turned out that all the magical contracts had been signed the previous July, and even though none of the participants were now interested in holding the contest, they were all committed.

Harry was disappointed, but he was used to disappointment. One reason he had wanted to expose Crouch/Moody was to make certain his name was not entered into the Tournament, just in case it was not canceled. Now that the faux-Moody was gone, Harry felt safe on that count, as there should be no one who would be taking orders from Voldemort to do so. Voldemort, who was in suspended animation because of the Draught of the Living Death, was safely tucked away in the Chamber of Secrets until the last Horcrux could be destroyed.

All this also meant that Harry had to decide if he would enter someone into the tournament, just to stir up some trouble. Ron was one possibility, as he had been slightly annoying, mostly just because he was much more immature than Harry now was, and Ron was jealous and loudly resentful of Harry's changes. Malfoy was another possibility, of course. Harry at times toyed with the thought that he might get away with entering Snape or even Dumbledore

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Amazingly, the deaths of the three Slytherin students took the edge off of the tensions at Hogwarts. The information which had underlaid the turmoil was not forgotten, and in fact it was popping up in all the schools in Western Europe by late September through late October. The Establishment tried to fight back, but it was 'tradition vs the facts', and it seemed as if tradition was losing in Britain, especially since Minister Bones leaned towards reform and had the Ministry busy cleaning itself up, leaving little time for official meddling. There was a growing set of demands from the regional schools in Britain, not the least of which were a demand for equal rights to the recruitment of the Muggle-born and easier and less expensive access to Hogwarts for their post-O.W.L. students. The Hogwarts Board of Governors had raised the price of 'late admissions' so high that few could afford them back in the early 1960s, and had kept raising them. At the least, it looked like that might change.

In the face of this, the up-coming Tri-Wizard Tournament was being highlighted. All three of the self-proclaimed 'premier' schools would be in the spotlight created by the Tournament. Whoever was chosen champion for their school would not just be carrying the reputation of their school, but of the entire established educational hierarchy in Europe, especially as the traditionalist press, such as The Prophet, was predicting all three champions would 'of course' be Pure. Press from outside Europe, which had totally ignored the Tournament in Harry's other lifetime, were arriving, and setting up a press camp in the fields between Hogsmeade and Hogwarts by mid-October. Anti-tradition activists from all over Europe and then from around the world were also showing up, and ended up creating what they called 'a village of equality' on the far side of Hogsmeade. By the time the other two schools staged their dramatic arrivals, there was a media circus unprecedented in the magical world.

Still, it was a fairly relaxed Harry Potter who sat snuggled next to Hermione to watch the Goblet of Fire choose the champions. He was unsurprised that Krum was chosen a champion, but was a bit that Fleur was again as well. He hoped Cedric would again be chosen the Hogwarts champion.

The piece of singed paper flew out of the Goblet, and the Headmaster announced, "Harry Potter?"

"WHAT!" Harry screamed, so startled that Hermione had ended up on the floor. "I didn't enter this stupid contest!" Harry pulled his wand. "I swear on my magic I did not enter this contest or ask to be entered!"

"None the less, you appear to be entered," Dumbledore replied regretfully. He missed the smirk on Snape's face, but Harry did not. "Unless a name comes out which meets the requirements, I fear you are. . . ." At that moment, another piece of parchment popped out.

"Ah," Dumbledore said, relieved. He did not want to face the scandal Harry's forced entrance would create, not to mention the grief Harry, and the mysterious Shadow, would likely cause. He hoped it would have the name of a Light Pureblood, like Diggory, which had been his plan all along. "The true Hogwarts champion is . . . Draco Malfoy?"

Chapter VI

She-Who-Must-Be-Named and her minions own the Potterverse. I just rearrange parts of it for fun.

*

As Harry passed by Snape, he muttered, “You’re a dead man, Snivellus.” Snape, to Harry’s surprise, had managed to contain himself, both in class and out until now. He had hoped the greasy-git had learned his lesson.

Snape merely smirked and followed Harry to the meeting of the champions and their schools. “Why blame me?” Snape asked mildly to Harry as he caught up to him. He softly added, “Why, I am no more responsible for your name being entered than you are for Draco’s.” When Harry scowled, Snape merely offered, “Shall we call this a draw, with neither of us making further reference to any of this? I am sure your friend Shadow will help you get through this, if you need any assistance.” Harry swallowed his response, and merely nodded as they entered the room, with a confused Draco following.

“What are these leetle boys doing here?” Fleur demanded.

Harry ignored her and rounded on the three heads of the Schools and Bagman. “I don’t know about Malfoy, but I want no part in this farce.”

“Scared, Potter?” Draco sneered.

“No, but unlike you, I’m not stupid, either,” Harry retorted.

“Someone, or more likely two people or groups, took your legitimate signatures and added them to the Goblet,” Dumbledore said sadly. “It must have been Confounded in order for four names to come out. Alas, the Tournament must go on as scheduled.”

Both Krum and Fleur, as well as the heads of their schools, smiled. How much competition could these youngsters be?

Dumbledore was not nearly as happy. He would be the one who would have to explain to the massed international press what had happened. He hoped this would not be the straw that broke the back of his political career.

*

Harry’s oath that he had not willingly entered showed him in a good light. Harry also issued a simple statement to the international press gathered outside the gates which also garnered him a fair amount of sympathy. Since Harry had his statement out early, the champions from the other two schools wisely made statements which earned them some credit as well.

Draco Malfoy, however, was busy boasting – about the superiority of his ‘pure blood’ and his family, and that of Hogwarts (or at least Slytherin) over any other educational institution. “A fourth year Slytherin champion is worth at least as much as any seventh year from an inferior school,” was just one

reported boast.

It tempted Harry to throw the tournament to Krum.

Instead, Harry used the fact that his oath had led nearly all the students in three of the Houses not to lay any blame on him, and they were willing to say so whenever they encountered members of the press or the others gathered around the area. (The press were not given open access to Hogwarts, nor the students allowed off the grounds, but there was some give-and-take at the ward boundaries.) Most students had been following his lead in the anti-Puree protests in any event. With just a little additional manipulation and subtle hints, the international press was soon following the ideas put across by most of the students – that Harry was the symbol of merit while Malfoy the symbol of flagrant favoritism (some leaked stories about Snape's indulgence of Malfoy and his other favored Slytherins as opposed to his treatment of Harry, and the story of the broom 'donation' two years before, cemented reputations of Malfoy, Snape, and Slytherins in general to the outside world), with the other two champions the symbols of stagnant tradition to all but their national press corps.

Why Harry should be such a symbol, however, was never explained to the press, but they did not question the representation of 'the-Boy-Who-Lived'. Some periodicals, such as 'The Daily Prophet' and similar media outlets, saw this idea of merit as a bad thing, but all quickly picked up on the general idea. Malfoy's show of arrogance at the wand weighing, however, made even the traditionalist 'Prophet' withdraw its support for him, although it remained fairly hostile to Harry.

Without Crouch to give him the hint, Hagrid did not clue Harry in on the dragons. Harry verified their presence on his own. He also did a little scouting, and learned that only Dumbledore and Hagrid apparently knew of the dragons amongst the Hogwarts staff, at least through the morning the day before the First Task, when Madam Pomfrey was informed so she could prepare. Harry hoped that Draco would stay uninformed.

*

Draco was putting on a good act. In reality, he was a little worried about what the First Task might be. The fact that much of his own House only supported him in public was also worrisome. Within the confines of Slytherin, most were threatening him bodily harm, or worse, if he embarrassed himself, and therefore them.

The idea that they should help Draco Malfoy in the First Task no more entered their minds than the idea that Draco should ask for help entered his. Draco had quickly decided that if there was a task he could not easily handle, Snape or some family retainer would alert him. What Draco had not reckoned with was the fact that most of his father's 'followers' were busy covering themselves from any association with the Malfoy family, as Lucius had, after all, been killed while causing mayhem and wearing the robes and mask of a Death Eater.

Malfoy had finally broken down and asked Snape for help a few evenings before the First Task. Snape had been forced to confess that he did not know what the Task was – that Dumbledore had kept the information from him. (Snape did not know Dumbledore had done so only because of a visit from 'Shadow'. In reality, when Snape found out shortly after Draco had asked for help, he would decide that at this late point giving Draco the information would only lead to his panicking.)

It was therefore a somewhat troubled Draco Malfoy who followed Harry out to the tent that had been

set up for the champions. Fleur looked at the two Hogwarts contestants and leaned over towards Viktor. "One little boy is ready, and one has no idea," she commented in French.

"Well, of course none of us really do," Viktor teased in the same language. He glanced at Draco and Harry. "But you are right. Blond braggart is idiot."

"You two look ready," Harry told the foreign pair.

"Of course . . . well, as ready as we can be," Fleur responded.

"How bad can it be?" Draco asked, trying to be confident.

"Do you think Norbert got you ready for this?" Harry asked, pretending to be surprised.

"Norbert?" It took Draco a second to remember that was what that oaf Hagrid had called the stupid little dragon back in their first year. "What does that bloody animal have to do with this?"

"Didn't Snape tell you?" Harry asked, a little more surprised that in fact the Potions Master had either actually not found out, or had refrained from telling Malfoy, despite his warning to the Headmaster.

"What?" Draco asked in return.

"Norbert?" Fleur asked.

"Norbert was a baby I dealt with a few years ago. I know Malfoy saw him, at least."

Draco paled and his eyes went wide as this information tried to sink into his brain.

The International Sports Commissioner, from Thailand, came into the tent. The International had taken over after Crouch's disgrace. "Gather around," she ordered. "The task, as you are not supposed to know, is to gather a golden egg from a clutching dragon. Who wishes to pick one first? First the dragon from this bag, and then the turn from this one."

Harry gestured to Fleur, and Krum shrugged his shoulders. She reached in and came out with the Swedish Short-Snout, and she would be going third. Harry gestured to Krum, who came up with the Chinese Fireball, and would go second. Since Draco was still too stunned to move, Harry shrugged and went next, choosing the Welsh Green and fourth.

The judge reached into the first bag and handed Draco the model of the Hungarian Horntail. "You will go first, Mister Malfoy. Come along." She had to grab Draco's elbow and pull. "A referee will come for each of you when it's your turn." She dragging the stumbling Draco from the tent.

"They won't let the dragon eat him, will they?" Fleur asked, merely curious.

"Eat? Probably not," Krum answered, unconcerned. "Roast? Yes." Harry hid his smile well.

*

Draco Malfoy stood up straight and walked towards the dragon, his mind a complete blank. He didn't

know what he was doing, or even exactly where he was going. Suddenly, the huge Hungarian Horntail rose on her hind legs, and let out a roar mixed with fire that reminded those who knew the Muggle reference of Godzilla.

Malfoy stopped, very clearly shit his shorts, and passed out. After he didn't move for nearly three minutes, the International Sports Commissioner signaled and the handlers started to exchange the dragons while Malfoy was taken to be cleaned up.

To the surprise of everyone, Karkaroff started off the voting by giving Draco a 2.

"Two?" Madam Maxime asked. "I grant you one, as he at least did not hesitate at first."

Karkaroff shrugged and said, "True. But look around you. They are here for entertainment. I, at least, was entertained."

Maxime and the Thai judge each gave Draco a point for at least trying to stand up to a fully grown, angry dragon, while Dumbledore gave him a 2 as well.

When Harry finally came out, the crowd was restless. Krum had fumbled, and his dragon had crushed some of her eggs. Fleur had transfigured numerous objects into animate ones to distract her dragon, while also trying to charm it. However, while she had gotten the egg, she had just missed the time limit.

Harry simply walked out and towards the dragon. Just as she had started to rear up, Harry hit her with a charm from the Elder Wand that cast a blue light. The dragon blinked, and then just laid down and shut its eyes. Harry cancelled the beam as he walked over, using a bit of slight-of-hand to change wands to his official one. He picked up the egg and walked away, all in under three minutes. Harry earned 39 points, Viktor 25, Fleur 18, and Draco, of course, 6.

Harry refused to say what the charm was, but whatever it was, it kept the dragon asleep for nearly two hours.

Dumbledore wondered for a moment if it had been Harry who had taken the Elder Wand, but then dismissed the idea. He could believe an unknown 'Shadow' might best him once, but not a schoolboy he had kept ignorant.

*

Harry was a bit disappointed in the results of the First Task. He had been about to cast a series of spells which would have both made Draco very attractive to the dragon (it would have put the dragon in heat as well as making Malfoy give off the pheromones to drive the dragon wild) as well as set the dragon free. However, Harry had decided he really wanted to beat Malfoy out in the open. That, he felt, would have been an appropriate way to deal with Draco Malfoy, although he still longed to kill the annoying Ferret. However, when Draco had collapsed (he was claiming to have been knocked out by 'dragon's breath'), Harry tried to argue to himself that that was satisfaction enough.

The part of Harry from the other dimension was unhappy over 'going soft.' Overall, however, Harry was content with Malfoy's humiliation. Plus, of course, there were two more tasks to go.

Harry was surprised that the merpeople's song was slightly different this time. It appeared as if going

into the lake was only a part of the next task, and that he would have to recover a clue there to complete that task. Still, he reasoned, at least it seemed as if Hermione should be safe.

Draco, of course, was highly embarrassed. Few believed his claim that the dragon's breath had knocked him out, although a few were willing to concede the possibility. He had been told that the egg had a clue to their next task. Since he had failed to secure his egg, the clue would be revealed to him two weeks before the next task, which would be in late February. Dumbledore also felt it necessary to warn Draco that attempting to get at another champion's egg would have dire consequences, including permanent erectile dysfunction.

Once Dumbledore had explained the term, Draco vowed not to attempt to get any of the eggs.

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Severus Snape was suddenly awake.

It took the Potions Master only a few seconds to realize that, although awake, he was helpless, certainly under a hex rather than a potion.

A few worried seconds later, Snape felt himself being sat up and his eyes opened. In the shadows was a figure, while Potter was glaring at him from a few inches away.

Snape then felt his head, throat, and chest released. "I'm surprised it's taken you so long to visit," he managed to say.

"I was curious if you would have the sense to not help Malfoy," Harry retorted. "I was pleasantly surprised that you did not."

"No," Snape confessed, "I did not help Draco, but only because I became aware of the nature of the First Task Saturday night."

"Hagrid?"

"Yes," Snape admitted, which made him realize he must have been dosed with some sort of truth potion. "He was excited about the dragons that night in the staff room. But since I didn't have a good strategy for Draco, I decided to let him go to the Task unaware, hoping he would react as he did, and so survive."

"I see," Harry mused. "Why do you hold his life so dear?"

"I care for all the students. . . ."

Harry snorted, and said, "I would have a difficult time believing that, even if you ended the sentence by adding, 'all the students in Slytherin'."

"Well, I care enough not to want them, or even you, dead," Snape retorted, "and yes, that is especially true of my Slytherins. As for Draco, well, his mother was special to me when we were in school, and she appealed to me for help. Now tell me," Snape went on, "why put Draco's name in the Cup?"

A voice came from the shadows, "I would have preferred he had joined Parkinson's little performance, but Harry talked me out of it."

"Shadow, I believe?" Snape hazarded.

"Crouch would have entered me," Harry responded, "and you know perfectly well the Head Manipulator wouldn't have lifted a finger to keep me away from confronting Voldemort yet again."

"I don't know that for certain," Snape retorted, "but given his past record I can see why you would believe so."

"And since Draco claims he is far and away the best of our class, if I could be expected to face these tasks, why shouldn't he?"

"Draco is a very competent student for his age, but he isn't special, nor does he have your luck," Snape replied.

"But does he know that?" Harry demanded.

"No," Snape admitted, "he does not. Thank you for not causing him any direct harm, but what can I do to prevent you from getting him injured in the other two contests?"

"I would consider that only if I knew for certain he wouldn't get help from anyone else," Harry replied.

"I'll think about how to word an oath to that effect," Snape answered, to Harry's surprise. "Care to tell me where the Dark Lord is, if he is still alive?" When Harry said nothing, Snape added, "My guess is he is in suspended animation, under my Draught of the Living Death, in the Chamber of Secrets."

"I was surprised it actually worked on that form of his," Harry confessed.

"I did have to add an extra eighth of a drop of basilisk venom to the solution to make it actually work," said the voice from the shadows.

That variation made Snape swallow nervously. It would have killed anyone else. "Why is he still alive?"

"You know about his Horcruxes?" Harry asked.

"The Headmaster told me about them in general," Snape said. "I take it they aren't all destroyed yet?"

"One remains," the voice said. "I made the mistake of relying on Dumbledore to take care of it. He has failed. Tell him he has until the spring equinox to succeed."

"Rest well, Professor," Harry added, as Snape was lowered back onto the bed, falling asleep as he did so. He then cancelled the spells which created 'Shadow', as well as the ventriloquist spell which allowed Harry to speak as his alter ego.

Snape was very pleased that he actually woke up the next morning.

He worked very hard on an oath, and called Potter to his office that evening. Harry was pleasantly surprised by the thoroughness of the oath offered, which he accepted.

“Other than helping Malfoy, why?” Harry asked before leaving.

“Your father, at least through the end of his sixth year, would have been trying to force me into situations where my Legilimency was engaged,” Snape replied. “You have not, even once, made even the slightest move to do so. However much you look like your father, I must admit if anything you act a bit more like your mother.”

“I have no idea how much I act like either, since Voldemort, the Headmaster, Pettigrew, and you robbed me of the chance to know them, and yes, I know it was you who overheard part of the Prophecy and gave it to Voldemort.”

Snape swallowed nervously.

“I also know you begged your Dark Lord for my mother, so you could enslave her. . . .”

“I wanted to save her!”

“You would still have had to enslave her, and she would have had to endure not only that, but knowing she lived not only because of her husband’s death, but because she had willingly given up her child to be killed. Now, since you claim to know my mother, could she have mentally and emotionally survived having done that?”

“No,” Snape whispered. “No, she might have physically survived, but she, the Lily I knew and cared for, would probably not have survived as a person.”

“Look me in the eye, Snape!”

Surprised, Snape did just that, and then howled at the instant of severe pain.

“There, I have changed Odin’s Revenge. Use active mind magic on me, and you’ll still pay the price. Truly passive Legilimency will now only give you a headache worse than what you’re suffering now.”

Snape could only hold his head as he nodded his understanding, and say, “Ow!”

“You’re welcome.”

Snape was so pleased, once his headache was gone, that he never noticed that while the oath exchanged protected Draco during the performance of a Task, other than the part of the Oath where Harry promised not to kill Draco unless Draco attacked him during a Task or after the Tournament, it did not do so at any other time.

Nor did Snape notice that nothing in the oath exchange in any way protected Snape himself.

Chapter VII

She-Who-Must-Be-Mentioned and her Minions own the Potterverse. I play off in the corner for free.

*

Harry did not totally lack common sense. The country was still in a political uproar, as notices of meetings, demanding greater access to the Ministry and greater political rights, were appearing in various venues. Fudge was long gone, and there was no set response from any Ministry official on the social/class issues that had been raised, although Madam Bones had reordered much of the Ministry finances and augmented the auror corp by hiring 50 aurors from around the world on two year contracts. The Wizengamot was still debating and deciding nothing, although many of the more reactionary voices were accidentally doing their side far more harm than good with their speeches. Harry did not want to interfere with the process, as so far it was at least peaceful. Harry therefore put away his plans for dealing with Voldemort and the remaining Horcrux, Snape, Malfoy, Dumbledore, etc. etc. etc. for a few days, and put his efforts into what really mattered in the short term: Hermione and the Yule Ball. In almost any given dimension, Harry Potter was, at fourteen, a socially awkward and very shy adolescent. Even 'Hit-man Harry', before merging with the Harry of their current dimension, had technically been a virgin. Still, that Harry had become observant, and had also had to watch a lot of television in many different countries between 'hits'. Perhaps because of the lack of romance in his life, he had preferred romantic movies, especially romantic comedies, to any other form of fictional viewing, and had also watched various 'self-help' shows, trying to figure out human behavior (not that he ever had, of course).

Still, that meant he had some idea of how to treat Hermione. He had invited her to the dance as soon as it had been announced; he had made certain that the dress robes she had brought still fit and inquired as to what kind of flowers she would like (white tea roses on a wrist corsage); offered her access to the Potter family jewels for the evening (she asked for and was given a choice of various diamond earrings and necklaces, and chose some very pretty but sedate selections); and made arrangements so that they could learn the formal steps of the opening dance together.

Harry was a bit surprised that his other friends had made their arrangements nearly as quickly as he had. Dean and Seamus had asked the Patil twins, although it seemed the quartet were going as casual friends. He wasn't sure if Neville was much more interested in Luna than his other dorm mates were interested in the Patils, but Harry hoped he was. Luna had, to everyone's surprise, blushed furiously when she had been asked. Being Harry's friend, even a somewhat casual one, had improved her treatment in Ravenclaw in that she was not being harassed, but only a few of her fellow Housemates were more than casually polite.

The friend Harry had thought would have the more difficult time asking for a date had been Ron. Right after the Patils had been asked, however, Lavender had walked up to Ron and informed him she was his date. Ron had merely nodded, unable to speak. Of all Harry's acquaintances, only Ron had to be dragged to the dance lessons Hermione had arranged. Lavender was thankful she had not had to do the dragging – Ginny, who had been asked by Ernie Macmillan to everyone's surprise, had simply told Fred and George to bring Ron to the lessons. As their own dates had followed along behind, the twins had then realized they were taking the lessons as well. To the surprise of most of the boys, they actually enjoyed holding their dates more than they were embarrassed by the actual lessons. Ron was a bit

distracted by Ginny's tight hold on Ernie, but since neither Fred nor George made it an issue, Ron could only glare.

Harry had loathed the Yule Ball in the other dimension, but this Ball was a joy. Even though Hermione was still a bit sensitive about her teeth, she was still regarded by most observers as one of the true 'belles of the Ball'. There were no incidents reported, although Harry had 'accidentally' stepped on a rather gaudy bug, squashing it, when he caught sight of it.

After the Ball, as the inhabitants of the castle drifted off into (for the most part) happy memories despite (in many cases) tired feet, Harry made his way out of the castle, then on to Gringotts. He had figured this would be his best chance to meet with the goblins without being discovered.

By nature, goblins were people of the dark, disliking the glare of daylight. The high management, therefore, often worked at night. The goblins had been amazed when Harry had shown up the previous summer with a magical trunk filled with gold. That, coupled with his Trust Vault and the Potter Trust itself, made him a major depositor for the bank. Compared to truly wealthy Muggles, no magical being would even be in the top 1000 wealthy, but on the magical scale, Harry was to be valued. The fact that Harry had invested most of his money, via Gringotts, into the Muggle economy where it was earning a very good return, albeit if only a short time, also made the head of the London Branch of Gringotts willing to meet privately with the young wizard.

"What can Gringotts do for you, Mister Potter?" he asked, without introducing himself by name.

"I find myself in a dilemma," Harry answered.

"How so?"

"While I know that Gringotts prefers to stay well out of wizarding politics," the goblin merely nodded at that – he of course knew that few wizards tolerated goblins outside the financial realm, "would I be correct in stating that you know that Voldemort would have been even more hostile to your people in the long run than any current wizard government?"

The goblin thought, and then acknowledged, "An interesting, and likely accurate, assessment."

"There was a prophecy, not, I admit from a fully accredited seer, which claimed that only I would have the power to destroy him." The goblin looked much more attentive. "Seeing how Dumbledore completely messed up my life and education, I have had to make other arrangements so that I would both win and survive. I discovered that Voldemort had made several Horcruxes." Harry stopped for a moment.

"We had our suspicions he had done so," the goblin acknowledged.

Harry nodded, satisfied. "Well, all have been destroyed, except one. Voldemort is under my control. However, he cannot be fully disposed of while the last Horcrux exists. Killing the construct he inhabits would, in fact, merely free him to stage yet another comeback. I certainly would prefer to take care of this problem now, and I would prefer not to do so in the glare of the public eye."

"I take it you have come to us because you believe this last Horcrux is stored in Gringotts, not for privacy sake?"

“I know it to be here. Granted, I have come up with twenty-seven different ways to access and destroy it.” The goblin blinked at that. “By coming to you like this, I have, in effect, cancelled out at least twenty-one of those ways. However, even though I would prefer not to destroy this branch of Gringotts, or the public’s faith in your insitution, giving up most of those others was an acceptable risk.”

“I take it you have an alternative which would not damage us?” the goblin asked. Threats were a common goblin negotiation tactic.

“I do not need to destroy the object, just the soul fragment within. A tiny drop of basilisk venom will release the soul fragment. The object will be marred – there will be a hole about half a millimeter across – but nothing more.”

“And then?”

“And then Voldemort will discover if there is any afterlife or not.”

Ragnok looked at the teen sitting across from him. He could not have risen so far within the goblin hierarchy had he not been both a warrior and a business man, and a shrewd judge of character, both goblin and human. Every instinct and judgement within him was screaming out danger signals, that this average looking human teen was much more dangerous than he should have been. “I’m surprised you did not start off with a bribe,” was the only thing he said. “Most of your kind would have, unless they started off with an overt threat.”

“I doubt either would have been effective,” Harry answered with a shrug. “Even though I will be the only human who knows for certain what must have happened, the act will bring upon you great honor before your ancestors, even if few others know of it. You will have done more than anyone else in aiding my destruction of Voldemort.”

“Who else would have even an idea?”

“Dumbledore,” Harry said regretfully. “Although he doesn’t know it was me, he was tasked with this last September. Would I be correct in believing he has done nothing about it?”

“Nothing I am aware of, directly or indirectly.”

“I take it this presents a problem?” Harry asked seeing the look on the goblin’s face.

“Having you know we would enter a vault like this is one thing; you are a co-conspirator, after all. Having Dumbledore know, though?”

“I see the problem,” Harry acknowledged. “Difficult. . . .”

“What would merely be ‘difficult’?”

“The timing.”

Ragnok frowned. “The timing of what?”

“Let me pass an idea by you, and see if you can agree.”

Five minutes later, a very startled, impressed, and even frightened, bank manager agreed to Harry’s plans. Fifty minutes later, a tired Harry was slipping into his bed for a few hours sleep. The last Horcrux was gone, but he would be very busy taking care of the loose ends.

*

The students in the Castle woke up New Year’s Day to find a pair of aurors stationed inside each common room. They would only find out later that most of the entire auror corps, and a fair percentage of the aurors of the rest of Europe, North Africa, and North America, would be in the Castle within the hour. The students were confined to their Houses until the next morning.

When the students awoke on January 2, each found a pair of notes on their beds. The first stated that they were free to leave their Houses. The second was a print-off of the press release/article from the night before’s ‘Evening Prophet.’

TRIPLE DEATH AT HOGWARTS! screamed the top headline. The second proclaimed, YOU-KNOW-WHO, DUMBLEDORE, DOUBLE AGENT DEAD IN BIZARRE RITUAL! followed by the actual stop-press article:

Aurors were called into a formerly sealed-off portion of the dungeons of Hogwarts early this morning, where the naked bodies of Albus Dumbledore, Severus Snape, and an artificial construct believed to be the temporary body of the He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named were found. There were numerous partially destroyed symbols, drawings, and inscriptions surrounding the bodies, the meaning and purpose of which were either not immediately clear, or at least not released to the Press at this time. Under enormous pressure, an Unspeakable actually spoke, with his department’s and the Ministry’s permission, right before press time:

“We will have to study the situation in detail, and with extreme caution. Right now, we cannot say what is the more likely solution. Dumbledore and Snape might have been using this ritual to destroy (name deleted)’s homunculus for good; Snape or even Dumbledore might have been trying to bring (name deleted) fully back, and the other interfered, destroying (name deleted), although that is the least likely. I suppose the two might have even been working together to bring (name deleted) back, and the ritual failed, killing them as well as (name deleted), although that’s also unlikely. It’s possible we may never know, as part of the ritual inscriptions were destroyed by some sort of magical backlash. We hope to determine with greater certainty, at the least, if the homunculus had been the temporary soul-housing of (name deleted) or if that was what the ritual was designed to create. We do know, beyond any doubt, that (name deleted) and death magic were part of the ceremony.”

Associated articles detailed Dumbledore’s sometimes controversial career, and there was one shorter article on Snape as well. The paper speculated that either Dumbledore and Snape had been working together (“most probably to destroy, rather than to resurrect, the Dark Lord”) or that Snape had instead played Dumbledore back in 1981/1982 and had actually stayed a loyal Death eater all along.

Harry read the press article with great inner satisfaction, hoping that he had, with the goblins help (they were happy to assist in the killing of wizards, when they could get away with it), created enough confusing conditions that what had actually happened would never be suspected. If so, then Harry knew that, in many ways, he was free.

Harry would never have to see the Dursleys again. He would certainly never have to endure Dumbledore's meddling again. Harry would not be free to live wherever he wanted to, but he should be able to live with Sirius, and really get to know his godfather, and Remus for that matter, much better. While Snape had largely been neutralized that year, it was good to know that the man would never again be even an annoyance, let alone a threat.

It was therefore with a light step that Harry made his way down to the common room early that morning, before most students were even stirring. He knew he would likely have to do some playacting at Dumbledore's funeral, whenever that might be, but he was not too worried.

Harry was slightly surprised to see Hermione waiting for him, alone in the common room. He leaned over to kiss her hello, and Hermione turned her head so he kissed her cheek. Then she turned and whispered in his ear, "We need to talk. I need to know why you killed Dumbledore."

Harry, although shocked, merely smiled, nodded, and held out his hand. Hermione hesitated a split second, but then took it, stood, and the pair walked out the common room door.

The pair was silent as Harry took Hermione to the Room of Requirements. It only took a little over thirty minutes for Harry to explain what had happened to him the previous summer and since, although he then had to backtrack and spend almost another hour showing Hermione memories of the 'other' Harry in the pensieve the Room provided:

Cedric's death and Voldemort's resurrection;

Scenes of Umbridge's reign of terror;

Sirius' death;

Dumbledore's murder;

Horrific scenes of Voldemort's takeover, including Hermione's parents, shredded by magic, and Luna's broken body after she had been gang-raped by fifty Death Eaters;

Ron's desertion of the pair on the Horcrux hunt;

Hermione's execution by Draco, and the rampage Harry went on because of it, destroying the surviving Death Eaters.

Hermione saw tortures she had never imagined, more death than she could comprehend. Had she not been so emotionally close to Harry over the previous six months, Hermione would have been appalled first, and then (perhaps) come around later. As it was, Harry had been her emotional and (to her surprise) intellectual partner, and she had already known about some of Harry's behind-the-scenes work in the anti-Puree campaign at Hogwarts, which she certainly approved of. Therefore, Hermione was not nearly as emotionally torn, or, once the initial shock wore off, really surprised, as she might have been. Still, to say Hermione was upset by much of what she had seen would be an understatement.

"Never again," Harry stated as he hugged the sobbing teen. "I know society will never be truly good, never mind perfect. People are self-absorbed, selfish, even with the best intentions. I know I can be. But while I am alive, in this universe or some other, I cannot allow that level of inhumanity, that much injustice. If I have to, well, sin, so that people like you, kind sweet people like Luna and Neville, have a chance to spread the Light, then I will. I cannot be the Warrior of Light that being talked about to me. I am not Light. I am as Dark Grey as Dumbledore, maybe even more so. But I can be a Warrior for Light."

Harry twisted around as he knelt before Hermione. "I love you. I cannot follow the Paths of Light you go determinedly on, because I see too much Darkness around us that must be fought at almost any cost. But please, if you can't love me as we hoped, please still love me as a friend. I need you in my life. . . ."

Hermione grabbed Harry and hugged him to her shoulder, the tears still streaming down her cheeks. "Don't be daft," she managed to say.

After several minutes, Hermione released Harry and picked up several of the handkerchiefs the Room provided. As she cleaned up a bit, Hermione said, "Thank you for telling me all this Harry."

"I'm glad you believe me," Harry admitted.

"It is amazing, but is it that much more unbelievable than magic itself? It actually explains a lot of what has happened." Hermione paused. "So now what do we do?"

"About?"

"About changing society; about the remaining Death eaters; about the Tournament." Hermione shrugged. "About so much."

"As long as we work together, we can at least find solutions for ourselves," Harry answered. "I've given British magical society a push, and some day, we may even take over Hogwarts if things don't improve. We have to be careful, and not become Dumbledores in turn – thinking our power allows us to manipulate everyone."

"You have been manipulating a lot," Hermione pointed out.

"True, and I don't like it," Harry could only say. "For now, maybe we should see if the people outside of Hogwarts actually act in their collective interests, or if they simply bleat a few times and go back to being sheep."

"Fair enough," Hermione replied. "At least for now." She frowned, and asked, "Outside of Hogwarts?"

"The wards here actually influence everyone here a little," Harry admitted. "It's not absolute, of course – Malfoy could not be the git he is if it wasn't possible to go against those wards, but it does push people a bit. That's one reason why so many backed the anti-Puree stuff early on. They knew it was in their best interests, but that push allowed them to act on it instead of holding back for any but a strong reason."

Hermione nodded, and said, "So, the Hogwarts wards push the sheep, and you control the Hogwarts wards?"

Harry shook his head. "After a thousand years, Hogwarts is more aware than any magical painting you've talk to. She's close to the Sorting Hat, if not a match. I can suggest, nothing more."

"Are you going to kill Malfoy?"

"I promised Snape not to . . . at least during the Tournament. Let's see if that humbles him a bit."

“I wish it would,” Hermione said, “but I rather doubt it.”

“So do I, but that’s up to Draco.”

Chapter VIII

She Who Must Be Named and her minions own the Potterverse, I just play here.

*

Harry was not surprised that the Pureblood families who controlled the Wizengamot and much of the Ministry finally fought back after the shock of Voldemort's death and the situation surrounding it finally sunk in. The lies and misrepresentations Riddle had surrounded his ancestry with, which so many of the Purebloods had been happy to believe (or at least pretend to believe) when they wanted to were now ripped away in a blaze of publicity. The fact the Voldemort, Dumbledore, and Snape were all Halfbloods was then touted as 'proving' that only Purebloods could be trusted with power, that these Halfbloods had 'mised' the various factions of Purebloods over the years.

Needless to say, the vast majority of the magical population of Britain were not happy to have the prejudices of the ruling elite move away from the Muggle-born and 'half breeds' and on to them. By now, there were at least two propaganda newsletters put out by opposition factions from those of mixed Magical/Muggle heritage (or at least there were two which also circulated around Hogwarts). The larger and more frequent one was sponsored by a large number of the families who made their livings dealing as middlemen between the Muggle and magical world, bringing in the food and raw materials needed to allow the magical world to function, as well as the factotums who managed the Muggle investments of the elite Pureblood families, which allowed them to hoard their gold and lord it over the rest of magical Britain. A one week strike of the former in late January nearly (and literally) almost starved most of the political elite, who had no idea of how to get food, other than fetching it (or having their house elves fetch it) from the magical suppliers.

This first newsletter demanded that the merchants' forms of wealth as well as the wealth of other magical professionals be taken into account when political power was divided up, not just old blood status and old money. The second newsletter demanded even more democratic reforms, and included rights for beings of mixed-origins (the partial giants and goblins, like Hagrid and Flitwick, for example, not to mention a number of other types; there were even some mentions of werewolves' rights) in their demands as well. The second newsletter also proclaimed that the ease with which the Purebloods had swallowed Riddle's half-baked claims of 'pure' ancestry, and the fact that so many Purebloods had allowed themselves to be branded as his slaves, if any thing proved that Purebloods were too stupid and gullible to be trusted with power.

The government, under Madam Bones, was somewhat sympathetic towards the first alternative group, although not totally hostile to a more limited Pureblood agenda. She was also determined not to use violence first, nor to use any trumped-up charges against her political opponents. However, none believed that she would allow any violence go unanswered, and so all sides were being very careful not to step over that line.

Harry, whose money was carefully funneled into the second newsletter through various channels so that no one knew where the money (and about a tenth of the articles) came from, certainly appreciated the lack of violence so far, not to mention the fact that basic rights were not being violated. He did, however, draw up a list of Pureblood leaders to be assassinated in case it became necessary. He was really hoping it would not be.

The economic facts of life were slowly being absorbed by the elite – while they concentrated wealth, it was those who traded between the magical and Muggle worlds who generated much of that wealth. Nearly every single non-magical material and item came almost exclusively from the Muggle world, right down to the cauldrons, all the food, all the ingredients but a few and all the equipment for making both butterbeer and fire whiskey, all the non-magical potions ingredients (and of course all the vials, bottles, and lab equipment) and every bit of equipment save the magic on the snitch and the brooms for Quidditch, just for a few everyday examples. In addition, the ‘import’ taxes on items coming in from the Muggle world supplied the vast majority of the magical ministries revenue around the world. Unless the Pureblood elite wanted to learn how to plow fields, plant, and harvest exclusively through magic, they were as dependent on the modern industrial Muggle economy as any Muggle town.

This was an unwelcome set of revelations, but as winter turned to spring, even the most stubborn Purist knew they were true.

They would still be trying to save their political and economic power and influence, however.

*

Meanwhile, at Hogwarts, McGonagall was named the temporary Head of the School, and a number of lecturers were brought in to teach Potions and Transfiguration (although McGonagall still taught the First and Seventh years). It took a few weeks, but the students, although jarred by the changes to say the least, adjusted. In short, the academic life ground on. The students, staff, and visitors were at least as interested in both Valentine’s Day and the Second Task as the changing power structure of magical Britain. Valentine’s Day itself was on a Sunday, while the Second Task had been pushed back a few days, from mid-week until the Saturday February 20. A delegation of Sixth and Seventh year girls had asked the Heads of the three schools for an informal dance on the night before Valentine’s Day, which was granted.

Harry was glad to see that, while pink was the predominate color of the decorations, there was less of it, and in more shades, than there had been back when Lockhart had been in charge two years before. The music was supplied by the Wizarding Wireless, along with a bank of magical speakers. While there was slightly less dancing than at the Yule Ball, most of the students seemed to enjoy it more. Harry, not to mention Neville and Ron, were pleased that Draco Malfoy seemed more and more nervous as the Second Task approached, and so spent most of the dance sulking in a corner, with no one staying with him the entire time, and only Goyle and Bulstrode spending some time with him. No one was willing to partner the Slytherin champion.

In the Slytherin dorms, nothing succeeded like success and power. Draco had had little success that year, and was especially seen as letting down the pro-Purebloods in the First Task. With his father, mentor, and would-be Dark Lord all dead, Draco had few cards of his own to play, unless he could have some real success in the Second Task. True, in a few years he would succeed to the Malfoy estate, still the largest magical family fortune in Britain, but there was no way to know if Draco would use it, lose it, or just plain misuse it. There was also, of course, the chance that Draco might not see the end of the Tournament, if the last two Tasks were as dangerous as the First. In short, the pressure was on Draco to at least not embarrass himself, and Slytherin and the Purebloods, in the Second Task, and he was not reacting well to that pressure.

*

The four champions of course had a rough idea of what the Second Task would be. However, the evening before it was held, an International official called them together to outline more precisely what was expected. There was a map of the Lake displayed. "You will gather at the school landing on the Black Lake by nine o'clock," she said. "At precisely nine, you will start. You will have to row or paddle, without using magic, a supplied boat to this location, the second deepest part of the lake and then dive to the bottom. You may get down there however you will, so long as you do not use anything other than your wand to aid your breathing or propulsion." Draco was disgusted by the idea of actually having to row a boat.

"There you will collect a token, which will also measure the time it took to reach that point and that will complete the leg. You may only take the one with your name on it. Taking another's, or in any way interfering with one or the other champions, will disqualify you. First to take theirs will get ten points. Second will get a maximum of eight, third six, fourth four. Depending on the times, those score may be lower. You will then swim to this point. There, you will press the token on to one of the brooms which will be there."

"What kind brooms?" Viktor grunted out.

"Ah. Hogwarts will be supplying four Nimbus 2001s; from one of the House Quidditch teams I understand." Harry smirked at that, while again Draco looked disgusted.

"You will then take your broom on an obstacle course. The time between collecting your token and touching it to the broom will be scored the same way, as will your time on the course. However, points will be deducted from your scores for missing any of the stations on the course, while fractional points will be deducted for hitting any of them. The course will take you to the Quidditch stadium, where you will make five laps in a clear tunnel, with a five meter diameter. If any of you are still close to each other at that point, that might provide for an interesting finish. Finally, your overall time on the third leg will in a sense count double, one score for total time, one for how well you got through the entire course." The four nodded their understanding.

"At that point, you should have accumulated two single sets of scores and the double overall score for the last leg. The total will be added to your scores from the first task to establish your overall standing. That will be important in the Third Task, as you will have a staggered start based on your points. Any questions? Then good luck."

*

"What are you wearing, Mister Potter?"

"It's called a 'wet suit.' It will keep me warm, and does not aid my breathing or propulsion," Harry answered.

The official sighed. "I take you like being difficult?"

"No," Harry retorted, "I just try not to limit my thinking."

After a brief conclave, Harry's wet suit was allowed. Viktor was glaring at him, obviously wishing he had thought of the same thing, while Draco and Fleur were slightly confused by Harry's outfit. All three were wearing nineteenth century bathing costumes, right down to the stockings and clogs.

The group was surprised to see they did not actually have boats to row, but canoes to paddle. It turned out Harry was the only one who had ever handled a canoe, and he made it to the float marking the dive spot first. He merely put on the bubble head charm and dove straight in, using a charm to make him heavier. The three others had to apply warming charms before leaving their canoes once they got there. Viktor was only a few seconds behind Harry, while Fleur was a few minutes behind them. Draco was a short ways behind Fleur, in part because he had wasted so much breath complaining the whole way.

Harry, Draco, and Fleur had each gone for the basic bubble head charm; Viktor had to get into the water to transform the upper part of his body into that of a shark. Fleur, coming third, made of the mistake of trying to apply the bubble head charm while already in the water. Draco, seeing that, tried to place his before getting in. However, he accidentally tipped his canoe over at that point, which slowed him down even further..

Harry, Viktor, and Fleur had realized that the float was not directly over where the tokens were. Whereas Harry was swimming across the surface of the lake to that spot before weighing himself down, the next two went to the bottom at first and then had to make their way through the weeds. Draco, well behind Viktor and slightly behind Fleur, remembered from Lupin's lessons that there were grindylows in the weeds just below them, and decided to take a middle course, swimming in the middle of the murky depths.

Harry had the least resistance by swimming at the surface, but once he reached his approximate destination, he had to sink/swim more-or-less straight down. Viktor's form was the fastest. The two advantages roughly cancelled each other out, and they reached the tokens at nearly the same time, Harry just missed edging Viktor out, mostly because he had had a quicker start plus the bubble head had taken far less time than Viktor's transformation. Still, Viktor won the race to the tokens by a fraction of a second. Viktor would also manage to reach the shoreline quicker than Harry. Again, however, Harry was able to just come out of the water and sprint towards his broom, touching it first, while Viktor had to transform. Harry therefore was taking off just as Viktor was reaching the next broom.

Meanwhile, Fleur had swum too close to the weeds, and had been forced to fight of some grindylows. Draco had gone off-course, but had glimpsed Viktor and Harry leaving the token site. Draco managed to reach the tokens and leave just after Fleur had left. That made the score of the first leg Viktor 10, Harry 8, Fleur 5, and Draco 3. Draco should have had a slightly stronger stroke than Fleur, but while he was slightly stronger, Fleur was in better condition. Fleur, however, again made the error of swimming too deeply, giving her a much longer distance to swim. Draco just got to the brooms a few seconds ahead of Fleur. Still, both had made decent times, so after the second leg Viktor and Harry were tied at 18, with Fleur and Draco tied at 9.

None of the four racers would miss any of the stations in the broom race – some were hoops to fly through or bars to fly under, others were obstacles to fly around, usually a combination. As good a flyer as Harry was, the professional Viktor had more experience. However, he, like Draco and Fleur, had forgotten to renew the warming charm on his bathing costume. The flight would eventually dry them out, but it was very chilly to do so, and the water weight affected their balance. At the same time, the combination made them both a bit clumsier. Harry flew the course without a single touch, while Fleur only brushed against two of the obstacles. Viktor, more used to muscling over other fliers than pure finesse, slightly brushed against several, while Draco did the same and actually knocked his foot against one hoop.

The finish was everything anyone could ask for, as Harry and Viktor corkscrewed around each other in the tunnel, trying to come out ahead. In the end, Viktor edged Harry out in a photo finish by just over an inch. Had the other two started with them, Draco would have been just over a length behind Harry, Fleur half a length behind Draco.

In the end, half their flying scores came from their timed finish, with Viktor gaining 10 points, Harry 8, Draco 6, and Fleur 4. The other half came after their deductions were made from 10 possible points for skill: Harry 10, Viktor 8.5, Fleur 8.5, and Draco 7.5. Harry therefore ended the Second Task with 36 points, with a total of 75; followed by Viktor with 36.5 and 61.5 overall; Fleur with 21.5 points in the Second Task and 39.5 total; and finally Draco, with 22.5 and 28.5 total.

Harry was very satisfied, even if Viktor had technically won both the event and their race. Harry had flown slightly better, although not quite as fast. Draco was also somewhat satisfied with his showing. He had placed third and had in no way embarrassed himself, other than floundering a bit in the canoe and in the water trying to get the bubble head charm in place, and getting slightly lost.

Draco tried hard to ignore those bits, and concentrate on the fact that he had managed a third.

Neither Viktor nor Fleur were in any way satisfied; Viktor because Harry had slightly shown him up, Fleur because in parts of the event she had just been out-muscled and had come in fourth mostly due to poor strategy. She knew she was an excellent flyer, and felt that if the entire event had only been a more complex obstacle course, she would have had a chance to have placed higher. Still, she had not in any way done badly, just not well enough.

To say there were celebrations in the Gryffindor common room would barely scratch the surface.

In Slytherin, Draco brooded.

The entire year had been awful, so far as Draco was concerned. From the death of his father onwards, it seemed as if there had been one embarrassment or disaster after another. When his name had come out of the Goblet of Fire, dreams of power and fame had stayed in his head, dreams of becoming the Right Hand of the Dark Lord (at least until he could figure out a way to replace the Dark Lord with himself) and vanquishing those inferior beings who were daring to challenge the Purebloods' right to rule – until he had seen a full-grown dragon up close and angry.

Granted, his acceptable finish in the Second Task had brought a few of those dreams back, but how to push those dreams forward? What might take the anti-Purebloods down a notch, besides a Malfoy as champion?

The answer was simple.

The death of Potter, of course.

Even Draco could not persuade himself he could take out Harry Potter in a face-to-face fight to the death. For the entire year, Scarhead just had an aura of danger about him which Draco had been unable to ignore since that confrontation the evening of September 1.

So, for the moment, Draco just dreamt of hexing Potter in the back during the Third Task if the

opportunity arose.

For the moment.

Chapter IX

She-Who-Must-Be-Mentioned and her minions own the Potterverse.

I just rewrite parts for free in a neutral corner.

*

As February turned into March, Harry Potter was an upset warlock. So far, there had been five curses aimed at his back, two attempted poisonings, and once a rock nearly dropped on his head while he was navigating a set of moving stairs. Even ignoring the attempts at poisonings, and the fact that despite magic being used in the corridors was mostly ignored when there were no staff or prefects present, these were too many ‘accidents’ for even the most gullible mage to believe they were in fact accidental. In addition, while Harry’s not-so-mysterious enemy had both forced the house elves to poison Harry’s goblet at one meal and his plate at another, and ordered them not to disclose who he was, the elves had both warned Harry of the attempts (so he could ‘discover’ the poisons himself, giving the elves cover) and given him so many clues that even someone with the intelligence of the late Vinny Crabbe would have figured things out in a few seconds.

The question was, what could Harry do about it? Even though Snape was dead, Harry was still sworn not to kill Draco during the Tournament, although he could likely get away with crippling the idiot. Harry berated himself for not just doing so, but his ego just would not allow the possibility of anyone thinking that he had disabled the little ponce to eliminate him from the Tournament. Granted, Harry probably had enough evidence to get Draco expelled from Hogwarts, but that would not suspend him from the Tournament. If anything, that might just give him more time to plot.

Hermione was now more actively watching his back, and had recruited a few others to help. Draco would not get another easy shot at him. Still, the ‘Puree Prick’ was persistent. Harry sighed, and decided to sub-contract the problem with Draco, at least until he could kill him after the Tournament was over. He therefore called Fred and George into a meeting. The twins had been very subdued that year, as they planned out their joke shop, now that they had both the financial backing of Sirius and Harry and lots of ideas from Sirius and Remus. In fact, the actual company was scheduled to be created on April 1, the day the twins reached 17. It would be a full partnership – Sirius would put in 2,000 Galleons, while Harry put up 1,000, and each twin 500. Each twin would own 25.5% of the company, Sirius would own 25%, and Harry and Remus would each have 12%. Remus would be in charge of most manufacturing for a while, so that the Company would have a good stockpile of merchandise when its store opened (currently scheduled for June 30, 1996). Therefore, nearly all the twins’ pranks had been on (mostly) willing ‘test subjects’, primarily the younger Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs. Still, Harry thought it was worth consulting them.

The pair heard Harry out, and then George asked, “What exactly are you asking us to do?”

“As much as we’d love to really hurt the blond bastard, it could easily blow up in all our faces,” Fred reluctantly agreed.

“I want several things,” Harry retorted. “First, I need to know where he is at all times. I gave you the Map back so you could avoid the Filch and the prefects when you are conducting your ‘market research’. I talked with Remus, and he’ll need it for a day so he can make me some Malfoy detectors, so we can watch my back better.”

“He might have help,” George pointed out.

“I doubt it,” Harry replied. “I don’t think Goyle would help him these days, and I doubt if he would trust anyone else who’s left.”

“We’ll send Remus the Map by tonight,” Fred said.

“Second, I need Malfoy’s time taken up with something other than plotting against me. I was hoping you might be able to arrange for him to be kept on his toes. If you can’t, I’ll think of something else.”

“You told us you took an oath not to kill him. Why not just cripple him?” George asked, not quite seriously.

“Because I haven’t come up with a fool-proof way of it not being traced back to me,” Harry answered.

The twins looked at each other. They knew Harry had grown tougher, even harder, over the previous summer, but that answer still slightly surprised them. Fred then asked. “Does Dobby still work here?”

“Yes, although he also works for me part time. Dobby!”

Dobby popped into the room, bouncing up-and-down. “Yes, Harry!” Harry had, mostly, gotten the elf to calm down when called.

“Does he know about this?” George asked.

“Oh, yes,” Harry answered. “He knows all about it.”

Fred took out a small bottle from his left pocket. Harry saw the top was stoppered with an eye dropper. “Could you, or some other elf, put a drop of this into one of Malfoy’s ears tonight?”

“Despite what bad Malfoy tried to force elves to do, elves may not harm students under castle wards,” Dobby said. “They would have warned any student, but may not have revealed who had given order. Elves would not have had to punish selves, even if Harry had not ordered them not to.”

“One drop will interrupt his inner ear for two days, if it is treated, five days if it is not,” George said.

“Hogwarts tells Dobby youse is telling truth, but that does that mean?” Dobby asked.

“It means he’ll be so dizzy if he moves too much, especially with his eyes open, that he will fall or puke, if not both,” Fred replied.

Dobby seemed to listen, and then said, “Hogwarts would normally say no to elf asking this, but approves for Harry.” He took the bottle and popped away.

“Does Hermione know you have a girl on the side?” Fred asked.

“Hogwarts is a girl, right?” George added.

“She does, and she is,” Harry answered. “Thanks, guys. That gives me a few days at least.”

“We’ll see if we can’t think of something to help out,” George said.

“It could be fun!” Fred agreed.

“Do I want to know why you had something like that in your pocket?” Harry asked, curious.

“One set of our ‘under-the-counter’ products will be what look like candy, but which actually make you look ill,” George answered.

“So students have a reason to get out of a class, if needs be,” Fred added.

“We just bottled this concentrated potion this morning. Three drops. . . .”

“. . . will be enough to spread over fifty pranks.”

Harry could only shake his head in amazement.

*

Once he recovered from a serious dizziness attack, Draco Malfoy quickly became one frustrated and confused wizard. First, no matter how hard he tried, he just could not find Harry Potter alone again. Most of the time he spent out of the Slytherin area, Malfoy found he was not alone. Groups of annoying, insignificant students (ie, anyone who did not follow his own beliefs) always seemed to have him in sight. Try as he might, he just could not seem to shake them off his trail easily. The few times he succeeded, Draco either could not find Potter, or wound up have those killing curse colored eyes staring right at him.

After three weeks of this, Draco came to the conclusion that the only way he might take Potter out was to walk right up to him at the start or end of a class and stab him. As that would prevent the most important part of his plan to fail (getting away with it), Draco did not consider this a good basis for a plan. Had the Dark Lord not been so completely dead, he might have tried this, using the ‘but I was under the Imperius’ excuse, but Draco didn’t dare try.

Worse than his failure to get Potter in his sights again, however, was the series of minor but prevalent mishaps which befell Draco outside of the class room. Minors hexes seemed to strike him every few minutes when he was in the corridors, and every morning he woke up with body parts modified. He quickly learned to check his feet before getting out of bed, as every morning, they were different sizes (from each other, as well as different than normal). His legs or arms were often mismatched as well. His hair could be any shade, other than its normal white-blond. His teeth were often sizes that would make Granger’s look acceptable, and for four days running his left ear lobe hung past his waist.

No, March, April, May, and early June were not good months for Draco.

What passed for the highlight of that period had been learning about the Third Task. Draco could only hope he could make the maze run fast enough to overcome the lead the other Champions would have going into the maze. At least Malfoy could convince himself that he had a good chance, especially since the International officials would take off any hexes he was under at the time.

To his surprise, while the numbers of students keeping an eye on Draco if anything increased, the week before the Third Task the pranks and other problems Draco had been encountering slacked off. To Draco, it was if he was coming out of a fog, and able to see the landscape around him clearly for the first time since early March, if not sooner.

He did not like what he saw.

The Wizengamot had bowed to the economic pressures on its members, and there would be an election for the first time in Britain's history on the next winter's solstice. The Wizengamot would increase in size from fifty to seventy members. The original arrangement would still hold – forty members from the Old Families, who would select their new members whenever one died or retired, and ten from the Ministry (the Minister and the five senior department heads, plus four senior members appointed by the Minister). But the new members would be elected for five year terms, with four up for election every year. In addition, it turned out that about 5 percent of the Ministry's positions were already technically 'unrestricted' (i.e. determined by merit alone). This was now raised to 25 percent.

Reforms for Hogwarts and the regional schools would be announced in June, right after the O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s. Muggle Studies and History were the two courses most affected, and both would be radically updated over the next ten years. Courses in Muggle Culture for the magically-raised and Magical Culture for the Muggle-raised would also be mandated for Hogwarts (the regional schools had had such courses for decades). The magical 'vocational' courses offered to 16-18 year olds at the regional schools would not be offered at Hogwarts, but the Muggle ones, designed to help the magical gain employment or further their education at Muggle universities and technical schools, would be. Hogwarts, however, would remain the only British school to offer the full range of electives (Runes, Arithmancy, Muggle Studies, and Care, and in fact it remained the only British school to offer Divination), the regional schools offering Muggle Studies and one other elective.

Draco, and those with similar backgrounds, were appalled. Hermione and most of the other Muggleborn had been outraged that the reforms had not gone further. Harry was content, as they had actually gone further than he had anticipated, and he hoped that the reforms would continue to evolve over time. He pointed out to Hermione, who spread the idea, that if the reforms were too radical, there could either be a backlash or perhaps a cascade effect causing a truly bloody revolution (as in the French and Russian revolutions). As few of the anti-Purees of any kind, in or out of Hogwarts, wanted bloodshed unless the pro-Purebloods started something, let alone open warfare, as that idea spread the more extreme agitation, fortunately, quieted down.

Meanwhile, most of the surviving Death eaters and those with similar outlooks had realized that now was not the time to use violence. In fact, many had come to believe that they had fair shots at winning most of the newly opened seats. After all, they had convinced themselves, they were the natural leaders, and therefore the sheep of Britain would vote for them. The new representatives, after all, would not represent regions. On the winter's solstice, each British mage would vote for four candidates, and the top twenty candidates would simply win. (There would be twenty, as all the representatives would be elected to staggered terms. The top four would have five year terms, the next four would have four year terms, etc.) While none of those who were thinking of running were naive enough to believe they and their allies would win all the seats, they did believe they should capture at least ten, from mere name recognition as well as their ancestry.

Back at Hogwarts, all four champions were training, three (Harry, Viktor, and Fleur) were even training

hard. Draco was spending more time planning on how to use his victory to create a political career than he was in actual training, but even he spent almost an hour a day (most days, anyways) training and practicing.

Finally, however, the O.W.L./N.E.W.T. examiners left and the other students had finished their exams. The new standards were announced for future classes. The Third Task was ready to go.

*

As Harry entered the maze, he tapped his glasses, fully enabling a powerful version of mage sight. His preferred strategy was based on the idea that while magic had been used to grow the maze, the shrubs were not actually magical. Of course, there was still the possibility that the shrubs were enchanted.

The mage sight allowed Harry to determine that while parts of the hedges were indeed enchanted, and reminded him that while there was devil's snare and a few other magical plants mixed in, over half of the shrubs were now magically inert. Harry had three and a half minutes before the final canon shot would signal Malfoy's entrance into the maze, which also signal the magical sensors the International had set up to turn on. Those would tell the crowd watching what each champion was doing, and Harry wanted to take full advantage of that time.

A muttered spell directed at himself, an old Celtic 'ghost' spell, both turned Harry invisible and allowed him to move through any non-magical barrier. Harry had snuck out one evening and verified that the area the Cup would be placed was the same as before, and this allowed him to take a more-or-less direct route to the Cup without having to know the plan of the maze.

This time around, Harry had asked the International referee what would happen when the Cup was touched. She told him that doing so would signal fireworks, thus alerting the other contestants the contest was over, and portkey the winner back to the starting point. She also swore that she had in fact verified that the portkey had been correctly made.

While Harry could not go in a precise direct line to the Cup, he had only had to make minor course corrections as he jogged some two hundred and forty meters to the Cup. Harry therefore got to the Cup just over two minutes after he had entered the Maze, having avoided the magical plants and having encountered none of the magical animals or other traps.

Harry glanced at his watch and frowned. A wave of his wand verified that the Cup was a two-way portkey, but this time, it had already been used once. Harry hoped that was from the referee using the portkey to get to the center of the Maze to plant the Cup.

Harry got into a defensive stance, took a deep breath, and grabbed the Cup.

The hooked/travel sensation took almost no time before Harry was slammed down to the ground, but years of practice enabled him to land on his feet. Harry raised the Cup a little with his left hand (since it was in fact fairly heavy) and glanced at Malfoy.

"Still here, hey, Draco?" Harry asked. Anything else said but anyone was then obscured as the crowd went wild and the fireworks shot off.

The party went on long into the night but not in Gryffindor Tower. That was because Harry asked that

any party actually be given in the great hall. He made certain that all the students, including the visitors, were invited. Even most of the Slytherins came, although not Draco.

Harry was seen drinking a lot of the non-spiked punch (granted, the punch had to be replaced often, as the Weasley twins were not the only ones spiking it), and therefore he had to take many restroom breaks. A number of people left after 11:00, which was when the staff forced the First and Second years to go to bed.

Ron Weasley left around 11:30. He knew there was a distance that had grown between himself and Harry, but he had never really felt how large that distance had become until that night. He realized that his brothers and even Neville were more friendly with Harry than he now was. For once, he did not blame Harry, or Hermione, or the universe, but realized that he had not even tried to stay close to Harry that year. He had waited, and waited, and waited for Harry, or Harry and Hermione, to come to him. Instead, they had passed him by as Ron sulked.

It was a self-pitying Ron who went to sleep, but at least he was only blaming himself for once.

No one had seen Malfoy since shortly after the Third Task was finished. After this final embarrassment, few were surprised when he was found the next morning, hanging from the ceiling of the potions classroom.

No one thought it anything but suicide.

Or at least, if anyone did, they said nothing.

Chapter X

You knew I don't own the Potterverse, and make no money from it, right?

*

With Snape, Malfoy, and a few others dead, and without a Dumbledore to excuse bigotry, over time Hogwarts became a (somewhat) less-biased institution. That did not mean it became egalitarian in any real way, but it was at least more open. With the N.E.W.T. fees made fair for the first time in over forty years, N.E.W.T. students from the regional schools started coming to Hogwarts, albeit in small numbers. Still, after 2010 more N.E.W.T. students were coming to Hogwarts than were leaving to attend other schools after the O.W.L.s, the first time that had happened in nearly 100 years.

The first elections for the open seats on the Wizengamot, and the only time all 20 seats were open at the same time, were a disappointment to all the factions. The more vociferous Purebloods only won two seats, while the 'Wizengamot families' only managed to get four of their number elected. The largest faction elected came from the business faction which operated in both the magical and Muggle world, with nine members. Once elected, however, they failed to form a solid voting block, as they were nearly as competitive with each other as they were with the two main Pureblood factions.

The other five members elected were true independents, although none really favored greater interactions with the Muggle world. Still, with those five and the business interests at least not overly paranoid about Muggle society, and willing to at least entertain the possibility of somewhat equal relations with other sentient races, some of the more restrictive Ministry practices would slowly be modified.

That would, slowly, include changes in Ministry hiring practices. While there had long been official guidelines against hiring too many of the Muggleborn-and-raised into the general Ministry positions, nothing had been official against hiring magically-raised people from 'new' families (no connections to the Ministry) who had not attended Hogwarts. Over the next fifty years, the number of Hogwarts and 'Ministry' and traditional Wizengamot families hired by the Ministry slowly dropped to fifty percent – still out of touch with the general population, but at least far less than the nearly one hundred percent it had been.

Meanwhile, Harry and Hermione made their way through their O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s. In terms of application, of course, no one could touch Harry – the combination of his extra power and maturity made certain of that. Historically, only a few could match Hermione's intellectual talent – for Hogwarts, only Dumbledore and Riddle were measurably ahead of her, and perhaps a dozen or so others over the previous 120 years (when the scoring system was established) matched her. Still, while Harry was excellent on theory, especially in Defense and Charms, so were many other students, and Hermione was only well above average in terms of raw power. Therefore, while Hermione's O.W.L. scores placed her first in their year at Hogwarts and Harry second, they were second and fifth in the United Kingdom and Ireland standings, and twelfth and twenty-seventh across the standings of all the schools which used compatible scoring systems. No one, however, seeing the all-time records set by Harry on both his O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s in spell casting, felt like challenging him to a duel.

Hermione's parents had convinced her to keep up with her more mundane studies, and she would enter

a Cambridge college after Hogwarts, earning degrees in Philosophy and Mathematics, and she eventually earned her doctorate in pure mathematics at MIT in the United States. While she was earning her doctorate, Hermione also earned her Mastery in Arithmancy. Combining her knowledge made Hermione one of the most sought-after Arithmancers of her time, partially revolutionizing the field and becoming honored over time as one of the founders of advanced techno-magic.

When Harry left Hogwarts, he was not as well prepared as Hermione. However, the Department of Mysteries did have some influence in one Cambridge college, which admitted Harry to study Criminology. Afterwards, while Hermione was studying in Massachusetts, Harry was also in the area, gaining his Masteries in Defense and Charms. While his name would always be widely known, since he was not linked to Voldemort's demise he was not nearly the person of interest he would otherwise have been. So, while many people would at times wonder what Harry did as a member of the International's Bureau of Mysteries, few really paid much attention to the question other than moments of idle curiosity. Harry was glad few of the assignments he drew in this world were assassinations, although he was called upon to act as a 'final solution problem solver' on occasions. Mostly, he was called into situations where the magical and mundane worlds overlapped with surprising consequences – usually situations involving rogue 'monsters' (vampires, zombies, werewolves, demons) or the odd rogue warlock trying to move towards becoming a true 'dark lord' type wizard.

Harry and Hermione married while they were in North America, and would eventually have a son and a daughter, both of whom would attend Hogwarts, although neither of their parents were enthused about their children's living full-time in Britain (they spent most of their time split between New England and Switzerland). Their close acquaintances from Hogwarts would stay in Britain, for the most part following paths they had forged at Hogwarts. By the time they left Hogwarts, although friendly with a large number of students from all the Houses, Harry and Hermione really had no close friends other than Neville and Luna. Neville would marry Susan Bones and take up running the family estate, adding to the magical plants on it and becoming a minor economic power in the country because of the amount of potion materials he supplied. With some behind-the-scenes pushing, Neville was named a permanent member of the Wizengamot at 40, and also become a political power in the country.

Luna drifted away from most of her older friends as well as Ginny, as she traveled around the world in search of her creatures. She always seemed to know where Hermione and Harry were, however. To the surprise of many, she would eventually discover or prove the existence of a dozen new or mythological (if small in size) magical creatures over the course of fifteen years, although the Snorkack was not one of them. When she came back to live in England and take over The Quibbler, she had two green-eyed daughters with her, although she never would say who Rose and Violet's father was.

The Weasley twin's prank shop was enormously successful, and would within thirty years have branches in over thirty different locations around the world. The twins also entered politics in their late thirties. For 12 terms, they alternated as members of the Wizengamot, usually pushing an agenda which was both business-oriented and socially moderate to liberal.

Ron Weasley had not been happy when Harry had announced that since he had grown to over five foot eight and had put on a fair amount of muscle, he could not play Seeker in his last two years at Hogwarts. Ron had (just barely) made Keeper, while Ginny had played Seeker instead. While not the natural talent Harry was, Ginny was an excellent Seeker, and went on to play nine seasons professionally, four of them as a starter. She would eventually marry the head of her fan club, a Quidditch fanatic who had gone to the Scottish school and earned his N.E.W.T.s in Canada. They also had two children (sons), and Ginny dominated her family far more than her mother ever had. The two

boys never really left home, married meek women, and Ginny continued as matriarch until she died, well into her nineties, when fox glove was 'accidentally' mixed into her salad. No one ever questioned how all the fox glove had gotten into just her salad bowl.

Ron had also played professionally, although only for seven years in his case, and never as a starter. Still, the final two years as a reserve he had at least played for his favorite team. His team spirit, at least, was never lacking, and he took over the publicity for the team as he moved out of active playing. With a little help and advice taken every once in a while from the twins, Ron built the fan base of the Cannons to the best in the League, no mean feat for a team which would throughout his lifetime never finish better than third from the bottom. In his sixties, still unmarried and eligible for a tiny pension, Ron took those skills and turned to politics. He would manage to be elected to five straight terms as a Wizengamot representative. Ron did not stand for any position in particular, and so many in the electorate took him to represent their own views. Neville, the twins, and even Harry campaigned for him a little, as being a member of the Wizengamot made Ron happy, and while he did only a little good there, at least he did no harm.

Overall, the Powers of Higher Magic and Light, while hoping that Harry would have been both Lighter and a bit more active, were satisfied that the magical situations in this dimension were under control.