Papa Lion, Mama Snake

by Sherza

Summary

In Canon, Septimus Weasley and Cedrella Weasley nee Black were either dead or played no real part in events.

What if they had? What if they had made different choices, made different stands? What if they stood between the Light and the Dark and did everything in their power to see the Dark defeated? What would have changed?

This is that story. A story of a man and a woman from completely different sides of the fence politically and socially. A man and a woman who joined forces and changed the fate of the Wizarding world in general - and of more than one person in particular.
This story was my NaNoWriMo project for 2013. It went so well I decided to edit, expand, and continue it after I reached the 50k goal.

I do not own anything to do with Harry Potter. I wish I did. I'd be rich beyond the dreams of avarice ... and a number of people who died in the books wouldn't have if I'd written them. Please don't sue.
The Princess and the Farm Boy

The Princess and The Farm Boy

=--=--=

1922, Black Manor

Cedrella sat in the child-sized chair in the room that had long ago been converted into a small schoolroom. There were a number of small chairs and tables for writing on, a blackboard, several bookshelves filled with books, and a number of illustrations and portraits on the walls, all relating to various subjects the scions of the Black Family would learn in this room. Cedrella watched Callidora out of the corner of her eye, trying her best to imitate her big sister’s erect, prim posture. She did not want to present a poor first impression to their tutor. Her cousin Cassiopeia sat on the far side of Callidora in a similar posture.

At five, Cedrella was finally considered old enough to begin her formal education. There was much for her to learn before she attended Hogwarts in six years’ time. Her nanny had ensured that she knew her letters and numbers, and had an educated vocabulary and proper pronunciation. Now, she would begin to learn her family history, the history of the magical world, Latin, magical theory, pureblood etiquette and tradition, dancing, and the art of conversation among other things.

At least, that was what Mother and Father had told her she would learn, now that she was old enough. It was a slightly intimidating list for the five-year-old. However, Cedrella had learned practically from birth that as a scion of the Black family, she was a cut above the average pureblood witch or wizard. They were thus, by necessity, held to a higher standard than the common masses. Their Family was to be the example that all others strove to emulate. As such, it ill befit a scion of the Family to perform poorly in any arena.

Their tutor, Professor Parkinson, swept into the room, and Callidora and Cassiopeia immediately greeted her. “Good morning, Professor Parkinson.”

Cedrella echoed her sister and cousin a moment later, when she realized the greeting was required. She, of course, had met the Professor before. The Professor was in the mansion almost daily, so encounters were all but inevitable. Cedrella knew her to be daughter of a younger son of Family Parkinson, and a fairly distant relative - it had been several generations since a Black had married a Parkinson at this point.

“Good morning, students.” Professor Parkinson said, eyeing the three girls. “Greetings, Cedrella. And congratulations on taking your first step to becoming a true scion of the Black Family.”

“Thank you, Professor.” Cedrella said.

“Today, we will be reviewing Latin conjugations. You must drill until the knowledge becomes second nature.” That last comment seemed to be directed at Cassiopeia, who had briefly looked less than pleased at the prospect. “Many spells are performed in Latin, and some of those that are not have Latin roots. A thorough knowledge of the language will give you a firm grasp on the effects of most spells you encounter without having to have them explained to you.” Then, in a firmer, more displeased tone. “You must control yourself, Cassiopeia. Allowing those around you to perceive how you feel about something allows them to tailor a strategy to manipulate and use you to their own benefits. You must be in control of your demeanor at all times in public. The less ammunition you give an opponent, the stronger your own position.”
“Yes Professor.” Cassiopeia said, managing a creditably neutral tone and expression.

There followed an hour of drill in Latin. Cedrella had to scramble a bit to keep up, as her sister and cousin were well ahead of her in this regard. Actually, she had to scramble a bit in all their lessons due to the two year age difference between them. But she was determined to succeed, and outshine them both.

=-=-=-=-=

1922, Weasley Cottage

Early mornings were about the only time Septimus had to work on his schoolwork. This was thanks mostly to his two little brothers, not that Septimus minded. They were active little scamps and needed close supervision - when they weren’t dragging an almost-always willing Septimus into some game or other. He liked that he was allowed to help out by keeping an eye on Victor and Felix now. He liked that his parents considered him grown up enough for that sort of responsibility.

His mother and father both taught him in the evening, and on weekends. Dad had even begun teaching Septimus everything he’d need to know as the future Head of the Weasley family. There was an awful lot to learn, but Septimus didn’t mind. He found most of it very interesting.

He just managed to finish the writing assignment mom had given him last night when he heard the rest of the family stirring awake. Septimus put his books away and went to help his little brothers get ready for the day. That allowed mother and father a chance to wake and get ready for the day themselves at a normal pace, rather than having to rush.

He’d just managed to get Felix, who at two was far more tractable, into some clothes before mother arrived to argue with Victor. Victor, at four, was at the age where he wanted to dress himself. As a result, he argued about what clothes he would wear and fought off assistance, despite still needing it.

While mother dealt with Victor, Septimus headed down to the kitchen and out to the yard. They raised chickens and pigs, both for their own use and to sell pork and eggs at the nearby Muggle village. It was his responsibility to feed them, and in the case of the chickens, hunt down eggs for breakfast every morning. It was a matter of a few minutes to search the most likely spots in the yard. Septimus came away with nearly a dozen eggs from the various nests. He then scattered some left-over bread crusts and grain for the chickens’ breakfast and headed inside. The pigs would be fed after breakfast.

Mother had gotten Victor dressed and was in the kitchen by the time Septimus finished with the chickens. She took the small basket full of eggs from him almost automatically. “Thank you, Septimus.” She said, and ruffled his hair. Septimus grinned, then headed to the cabinets to set the table.

“Did you have any trouble with the assignment your mom gave you?” Septimus’ father asked as he arrived downstairs. He was dressed in a formal robe, an indication that he’d be spending the day at the Ministry, wrangling with the Wizengamot. Father knew that Septimus preferred to get his assignments done the night or morning after they were handed out if at all possible.

“No. I got it done already.” Septimus said with a grin. “Just finished it before Vic and Felix woke up.”

His father gave him a pleased look. “Well done.”

Mother echoed the praise. “I’ll take a look at it before lunch, dear.” She told him. “Though I’m sure
it’s your usual good work.”

Once breakfast was over, Septimus collected the leftovers from their plates and threw it in the trough for the pigs to eat, along with the scraps from last night’s supper and some other contributions that Septimus collected from the village. Father ruffled Septimus’ hair affectionately as they crossed paths when father headed to the Ministry. Septimus helped his mother tidy the main areas of the house, then headed outside with Felix and one of his books to read for a while. He kept an eye on Felix while he played. Mother, meanwhile, worked with Victor on his letters and numbers for a while. When Victor was released from his lessons so that mother could prepare lunch, Septimus kept an eye on both brothers for a little bit.

After lunch, Septimus headed over to the nearest village. He did chores for some of the elderly residents, earning himself a few coins of Muggle money in the process. The goblins were happy to exchange it for sickles and knuts, so it provided a steady, if small, allowance for Septimus. Mostly, he saved it. He had quite a tidy pile of sickles and knuts tucked in a corner of his parents’ vault at Gringotts after a year’s worth of helping out wherever he could.

1924

Cedrella walked sedately beside her mother as they entered Diagon Alley. After two years of tuition, Cedrella had been judged worthy of attending the yearly Children’s Ball. The Ball, which took place every summer, was an event that allowed the pre-Hogwarts age pureblood children to intermingle and get to know one another.

The Ball was also traditionally a child’s first entrance into Wizarding society and the end of toddlerhood. Prior to attending the Ball, a child was considered too young to be accountable for their actions. From that point on, pureblood children were held accountable for their actions, and their actions could and did have ramifications on the Family as a whole.

For such an august occasion, the proper dress robe was required. The requisite visit to Diagon Alley was as much a reward as the Ball itself. No pureblood child of proper breeding was allowed out in public until they were judged worthy of attending the Ball. It was sudden death for the reputations of the parents if a pureblood toddler did something as gauche as throw a temper tantrum in public. Such a thing showed the parents inferior in their ability to raise and instruct their child. The vast majority of pureblood parents therefore ensured their children remained home until they were old enough to control themselves. Only the poorest families or those rare few who didn’t follow tradition brought infants and toddlers out in public.

As it was early October, Diagon Alley was fairly quiet. It certainly wasn’t the bustling thoroughfare it became in late August thanks to the beginning of the school year. Cedrella’s mother led her to Twillfit and Tatting. They spent the better part of three hours conferring with Mr. Twillfit as to the proper robe and color for Cedrella, and having her model various combinations of color, cut, and fabrics. Cedrella decided the robe they chose, a royal blue with silver piping on sleeves, neckline and hem, was quite smart. It was pretty without being ostentatious, which Cedrella approved of. She was a Black. She had no need to draw attention to herself.

Septimus straightened the hem of his second-hand dress robe, then flooed to Longbottom Manor, where the Ball was being held this year. It rotated among the homes of the well-to-do purebloods, so that no one family got all the recognition and attention that resulted from hosting the Ball.
Septimus had been attending the Ball since shortly after his seventh birthday two years ago. He’d gotten to know quite a few of the boys near his age. Some, he was not happy to know, like Abraxas Malfoy. That boy was a right bastard and a half, and it had nothing to do with the fact that his family Sorted Slytherin and the Weasleys Sorted Gryffindor. Abraxas was just … slimy, and rude, and uppity. He had begun attending the Ball last year and not made a good impression. Septimus wasn’t looking forward to dealing with him for the next few Balls and then for years in Hogwarts.

The Longbottom and Potter scions, on the other hand, were far more Septimus’ speed, despite them both being well beyond what Septimus knew to be his social station. They were both friendly, easygoing and not at all stuck up. Neither one of them disdained hanging out with him, which all too many kids did, seeing the Weasleys as a lesser Family of little to no consequence, which was more than slightly irksome, and something Septimus hoped to change someday.

He greeted Lord Longbottom and his wife, then headed into the ballroom. There were already half dozen kids there other than the Longbottom scion, so Septimus walked over to chat. About five minutes later, the Black family arrived more or less en masse. There were three girls Lucretia, Cassiopeia, and Callidora, between two branches of the Black Family. Pollux, the only confirmed male of the generation had already started Hogwarts. Septimus had heard whispers that there had been a second boy at one point, but no one had ever seen him, so Septimus figured it was just talk.

Because he was talking to a few of the other boys, it took him a moment to realize there was an additional girl in the Black gaggle. He ran the list of girls in that Family through his head, and after a few moments, figured her for Cedrella, the middle daughter of the youngest son. The age was about right, anyway. Sure enough, when she was escorted their way about ten minutes later by Callidora, she was introduced as Cedrella.

“A pleasure to make your acquaintance, my lady.” Septimus said, smiling down at the younger girl. “I am Septimus Weasley, Heir Apparent to House Weasley.”

“A pleasure.” Cedrella responded, and offered her hand.

Septimus bent over her hand briefly with a flourish and a smile. “Might I have the honor of your first dance?” He asked. He didn’t really want to … she *was* a Black after all – that Family was nearly as bad as the Malfoys, in Septimus’ books. They were Dark as it got, and had been pretty much since the dawn of time. Still, it was required for him to offer.

“It would please me to dance with you, Milord.” Cedrella said.

There was something in her tone that told him she was about as thrilled at having to give that response as he’d been to have to ask. Unfortunately, unless one of them had committed a serious gaffe, there was no polite way to get out of this. Ah well. Septimus would make the best of it. He’d only have to deal with her this year and next at the Balls, after all. Then he’d be at Hogwarts. They’d never socialize again after that.
Septimus at Hogwarts

=-=-=-=

Weasley Cottage/Hogwarts 1926

Septimus woke long before the sun on the first of August after his tenth birthday. Today was the day his mom and dad had promised to take him shopping for his Hogwarts gear. He spent the extra hour or so he had to himself wondering what Hogwarts would be like. Oh, he’d heard all his parents’ tales about their own school days of course but hearing about it was different from living it, he was sure.

Eventually, his brothers started waking up. As had become habit since he was seven, Septimus headed over to help Victor and Felix, now seven and five respectively, get ready for the day. Three years ago, he’d added another brother, Bilius, to that list.

Septimus was old and big enough now that he didn’t need his mother’s help to wrestle Bilius and Felix, who liked to dress themselves, into appropriate clothes for the day. Especially not when he had Victor helping him, now. Victor had also started learning Septimus’ chores in anticipation of Septimus being gone most of the year as of September.

As a result, both boys headed outside to hunt for eggs and feed the chickens. That done, they trooped inside to help set the table. After breakfast, Victor, Felix and Bilius were sent to their grandparents’ house for the day. Victor was old enough to go to Diagon Alley without causing problems but since this was a Hogwarts related trip and not general shopping, he was being left behind.

The change in Diagon from its usual quiet startled Septimus. There were kids and parents everywhere, most of whom Septimus didn’t recognize, which marked them as Muggles and their Muggleborn children. Septimus also noticed more than a few pureblood families in the mix who looked as if they had smelled something rather foul. He shook his head. Bullies and idiots, the lot of them.

Their first stop was to Gringotts of course. It was no small matter of pride to Septimus that he now had almost ten galleons in his parents’ vault. Every knut of it had been earned helping elderly muggles in the nearby village over the last five years. His father had begun to teach him about investment in the last year. Septimus planned to continue hoarding and adding to that tiny nest egg until he was grown. It wasn’t much, but it was at least a start, and Dad said it showed that Septimus had a lot of promise as the future Head of the Family.

Their first, most important and most expensive stop was Ollivander’s. This, Septimus had looked forward to since he was old enough to understand what a wand was. The sheer array of wands he was introduced to in the next twenty minutes boggled his mind. Ollivander had stuck to wands similar to what had been matched to his family in the past – the Weasleys were remarkably consistent in their familial temperaments and personalities, so what worked for one tended to work for others. It was only after the most obvious choices of wands hadn’t responded that Ollivander had begun pulling out other options. Eventually, Ollivander proffered a blackthorn wand. The rush of magic that resulted the moment the wand touched Septimus’ hand blew everyone’s robes tight against their legs. Septimus was slightly disappointed that there wasn’t a shower of color, which seemed to be a frequent result of a match, but the slightly wide-eyed look on his parents’ faces made up for that lack.

The rest of the trip went more smoothly, as the three of them went from store to store, carefully
choosing the best of the secondhand items available. Unlike most of the rest of the purebloods, Septimus’ father did not disdain giving the Muggles and their children assistance in making sense of where to go and what to buy. As a result, Septimus ended up spending far more time in Flourish and Blotts than they’d had any right to expect, as they’d gone to that shop about the same time as a group of Muggleborns and their families. One of them had asked about books about the wizarding world, and Septimus and his father both had ended up helping not just that particular Muggleborn but most of the rest in the shop at the time to find the best books to explain things and supplement the school books. Septimus found their interest in and curiosity about the magical world charming. Several of the Muggleborns tagged along behind Septimus and his parents to the other shops after that, so Septimus ended up talking to them quite a bit.

=-=-=-=-=-

Hogwarts, it turned out, was everything his parents had claimed it to be, and so much more. Seeing it for the first time on the boat ride across the lake left Septimus as much in awe as the other kids in his boat, all of whom were Muggleborns he’d decided to sit with on the train.

While he knew that the Sorting was not dangerous or painful, Septimus was still anxious about it. He didn’t want to disappoint his parents and umpity generations of Weasleys by becoming the first one to be Sorted somewhere other than Gryffindor. That would be embarrassing to say the least, and cause no end of comment. Though the reaction wouldn’t be too bad for Hufflepuff, he didn’t think. Most people who knew him knew he had a strong work ethic, so Hufflepuff wouldn’t be a horribly unsuitable second choice if there had to be one. Just as long as he didn’t get a reputation for being a bookworm or worse, a *dark wizard*. He shuddered in horror at the probable reaction if a Weasley ever got sorted Slytherin.

They were met by the Transfiguration teacher and Gryffindor Head of House, Professor Dumbledore. He seemed to be a genial, easy-going man, which relieved some of Septimus’ anxiety. Fortunately for the rest of it, when it was finally his turn to be Sorted, the Hat was fairly quick to decide on Gryffindor, though it speculated briefly on Hufflepuff – and made a comment about him having more cunning than expected. That comment had scared nearly a year’s growth off of Septimus, and made him yell at the hat. Fortunately, not aloud. He was reasonably sure that he’d had the nerve to yell at the hat had been the deciding factor, though he never admitted that to anyone.

He soon discovered that for all he’d been learning Latin and magical theory since he was five, he didn’t have much of a head start on the Muggleborns. He was, however, irritated to discover that many of the Slytherin purebloods had what seemed like entire libraries of spells they could cast from the first day, indicating their parents had been giving them tutelage they shouldn’t have been getting yet.

There was a reason that serious magical education didn’t start until kids were eleven. Until then the vast majority of children’s magical cores weren’t developed enough to handle the strain put on them by serious, concentrated training. Only the kids who would eventually become very powerful adults were really ready prior to that point. It was entirely possible to do damage to your magical core if you weren’t very careful. Granted, Septimus was betting the parents of the Slytherins probably only had their kids memorize the pronunciation and wand movement prior to that last year before Hogwarts and not casting magic, but still. They were taking awful chances even at that.

He worked hard all year, and it paid off. He came away with E’s and O’s in every class, though managing the E in History of Magic had been an unexpected trial. Binns could put anyone to sleep, which made it difficult to know what assignment he’d set. To be honest, Septimus wasn’t entirely sure Binns * graded* their assignments. Ghosts couldn’t affect the living world aside from making the temperature drop if enough of them were gathered in one place, or giving someone the shivers if they
accidentally put part of themselves through a ghost. He supposed that someone else must grade Binns’ assignments, though who that could be he couldn’t guess.

He’d made a number of good friends. There were eight boys in his year in Gryffindor, evenly split between Muggleborns and Purebloods. The purebloods were himself, the Potter heir, the Longbottom heir and a Prewitt scion. He made friends with all his roommates, though he got along with Potter and Longbottom the best of the lot. He also made friends with all of the second-year Gryffindor boys (there were seven of them), some of the first and second year Hufflepuff boys, and a single Ravenclaw who had proven to not be an anti-social bookworm. He was, not incidentally, one of the Muggleborns that Septimus and his family had assisted in Diagon Alley. The only House not represented, even tangentially, was Slytherin. That was more the fault of the individual kids in that House than to House rivalries or prejudices, as the Hufflepuffs didn’t have anywhere near the antagonistic relationship with that House that Gryffindor did, and were thus more likely to befriend the more tolerable Slytherins.

At the end of the year, they all promised to stay in touch. The Muggleborns had even taught the Purebloods in the group how to send Muggle mail, since owls flying about would get noticed sooner rather than later in the Muggle world.

Summer was almost a relief for Septimus. Oh, he’d spent Christmas and Easter with his family of course, but a week or so wasn’t near enough. He’d missed them all terribly. He probably spoiled his brothers more than he really ought to have, playing with them and indulging their more harmless whims. It resulted in a number of sleepovers in his room the first few weeks after he got back, but he didn’t mind.

He invited the friends he’d made over. The Muggleborns all seemed thrilled to be inside their first ever magical house. Hogwarts, while magical, didn’t count in that regard, an opinion expressed by several of Septimus’ Muggleborn friends, so he decided to take their word for it. The Ravenclaw in the bunch asked his parents a bunch of questions that Septimus hadn’t been able to answer during the year. He took some small measure of comfort from the fact that the questions seemed to startle and/or stymie his parents. It made him feel less of a dunce when they were caught out like that.

The Muggleborns reciprocated the invitation, which Septimus was only too happy to accept. He was sad, however, to discover that he was the only pureblood in their group comfortable with mucking about in the Muggle world. The others, while willing to try it, had looked like kneazles in a crup farm. Which is to say highly uncomfortable and very out of place. That said, they did their best to learn to blend in, and had made significant inroads towards that goal by summer’s end.

Second year proved to be both easier and more difficult than first year. Easier in that he was used to being away from home, now, and had some idea of what the teachers expected from him both scholastically and behaviorally. Not that he’d deliberately caused trouble his first year, but there’d been a few close calls and some lost points along the way.

He’d been tempted, briefly, to try out for the Quidditch team. But after some thought, he decided that while he loved the game, it would take up too much of his time. If he was going to have any chance of making something of himself, of turning the Weasley Family’s fortunes around, he needed to concentrate on his classes, not on Quidditch plays and practice.

Classes were harder in that they were, of course, delving into more difficult subjects than they’d faced in First Year. Septimus discovered that he seemed to have a talent for Defense Against the Dark Arts. The subject matter made sense to him, and he tended to pick up the counters to hexes, jinxes, and curses that were the year’s subject pretty quickly.

There was a bit of a dustup, Septimus’ second year, between some of the older Slytherins and
Gryffindors. Septimus never did learn what it had all been about, but it had to have been pretty bad. It had resulted in drawn wands and more than one curse fired in the heat of the moment. It had also resulted in a month-long siege between the two Houses, carefully disguised as ‘pranks’. The older students were fine, but the Firsties and his year caught the worst of it. There were a lot of bruises, strains, and broken bones from unexpected tumbles, ruined school supplies, ruined or missing homework, and rather vicious ‘prank’ hexes. Septimus frequently found himself chasing off Slytherins from the Gryffindor Firsties, and as such was a frequent victim of Slytherin excesses and visitor to the Infirmary.

He mostly took those lumps with pride. He couldn’t just stand aside and let them terrorize little kids who didn’t know any magic to fight back with. All he had to do was imagine Victor, Felix, or Bilius in the Firsties’ places and he had no problem blacking a few eyes in the name of justice.
Cedrella at Hogwarts

Black Manor/Hogwarts 1928

The morning of the first day of August, 1928 found Cedrella Black in her room. She had moved out of the communal room she’d shared with Charis the same week she’d attended her first Children’s Ball. After all, once she was attending the Ball, she was no longer considered a toddler in need of constant supervision. At that point, she was no longer confined to the Children’s Wing of the Manor, and sharing a bedroom was both unnecessary and unseemly.

In the privacy of her room, Cedrella permitted herself to express her dismay at the day’s impending event. She had no desire whatever to go to Diagon Alley. Not when it was going to be lousy with Muggles and their spawn. Muggles, she had been told, were nothing but ignorant savages, and their magical spawn were no better. Up to now, Cedrella had never (knowingly) met so much as a half-blood, never mind any lesser creature.

Unfortunately, there was nothing for it. Some of the Diagon Alley shops did not begin to stock and sell Hogwarts equipment until the first of August. Ollivander, while he sold wands year-round to adults who needed a replacement wand, point-blank refused to sell wands to underage witches or wizards except in August. The same was true of the apothecary. They sold ingredients year-round, but the Hogwarts kits were only available in August. Of course, that could be gotten around by purchasing the items individually, but it was an unnecessary bother.

The only shops that sold Hogwarts things year-round were Madam Malkin and the cauldron shop. Both sold year ’round because children grew, and new robes could be required at any point in the year thanks to a growth spurt, and replacement cauldrons could be required at any point in the year thanks to a disastrous accident.

Having given vent to her dismay, Cedrella gathered her things and went to perform her morning ablutions. That accomplished, she headed downstairs. Her parents were both up and already at the dining table, conversing quietly. Cedrella settled herself silently at her place at the table. Moments later, a plate full of her favorite breakfast foods appeared, as did a goblet of pumpkin juice.

She had just picked up her fork – breakfasts were an informal affair in their house, meaning she did not have to wait for her father to officially begin the meal – when her sisters arrived. They similarly sat down at the table in silence, knowing better than to interrupt their parents. Moments after they were seated, plates of food and goblets of juice appeared before them.

They had almost finished breakfast before their parents were done talking among themselves.

“Callidora, Cedrella, we will be leaving for Diagon Alley in two hours.” Father announced.

“Yes, Father.” Cedrella and Callidora chorused.

“I know that being forced to mingle with lesser creatures will be unpleasant, Cedrella.” Father continued. “But this must be endured. Consider it a trial run for your years in Hogwarts, when you will be surrounded by the creatures for months on end.”

Cedrella mentally made a face, though she made sure her distaste did not show in face or voice.
“Yes, Father.”

An hour and a half later, Cedrella retreated to her room once more to choose an outfit to go to Diagon Alley in. She chose one of her more conservatively cut robes as both armor against the lesser creatures and a visual cue that would set her apart from their uncouth, uneducated masses. The robe had a high neck, and fitted sleeves that were mostly concealed beneath a fuller outer sleeve. The bodice, like the sleeves, was double-layered, one that was snug against the body and another cut more fully to largely conceal what the under layer covered. The skirt was made of a heavy material and cut in such a way as to prevent any accidental exposure of one’s legs if the wind was blowing strongly, since a more form-fitting under layer was impractical. The under layer, which was visible at throat and wrists, was a deep charcoal gray. The outer, concealing layer was a lovely lilac color.

Once appropriately dressed, she headed downstairs. She nearly laughed when she realized that Callidora was dressed in a robe virtually identical to her own, save for the color of the fabrics. Callidora’s was a more sharply differentiated black under layer and sea blue outer layer. It made her feel somewhat better that Callidora found it necessary to wear a sort of armor when dealing with the lesser creatures.

It was a sore test of her control when Father and Mother appeared a few moments later in similarly conservative attire. Mother was in a grown-up version of the same robe that Cedrella and Callidora were wearing. Hers had a pale, silvery gray under layer and a deep forest green outer layer. Father was wearing the men’s version: A white, high-collared, long-sleeved shirt under a very dark (almost black) purple vest, which was under an identically colored high-collared overcoat. He also wore black trousers and knee-length black boots. Over all this was a sleeveless black open-fronted robe.

“Callidora, go with your mother. Cedrella, I will take you.” Father commanded.

Immediately the two girls moved to their assigned parents. Moments later they were side-along apparated to a corner of Diagon Alley set aside for such travel. Cedrella was thankful she had long since become accustomed to the uncomfortable sensations involved in side-along apparating.

She was also glad Father had been the one to take her to the Alley, because the immense crowds and racket were rather alarming. It was probably not all that seemingly to hide behind her father’s bulk, but Cedrella did it anyway, giving the flood of strangers a leery look from behind that sanctuary.

Unexpectedly, Father neither brought her to task for her momentary timidity, nor did he move away. He stayed where he was and allowed Cedrella to regain her equilibrium. After a few breaths, Cedrella managed exactly that and stepped away from her father a bit.

“Forgive me, Father. I was momentarily indisposed.” Cedrella said.

“Quite all right, Cedrella. It is understandable, under the circumstances.” Father told her. “Now, we shall go to Ollivander’s first, then the trunk shop. Then Madam Malkin’s, I think. Best to get there before the day is too far gone. Madam’s temper will be frayed later in the day, after having had to deal with so many.”

Cedrella nodded her acceptance of that itinerary, and they departed from the apparation point. Cedrella quickly found it was easiest to walk directly behind her father, allowing his larger, more intimidating figure to cut a path through the crowds rather than attempting to forge one for herself. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see Callidora doing the same with their mother. And even Mother had aligned herself so that she was close enough to benefit from the path Father was cutting through the crowd. She merely forced the crowds to part a bit further, rather than forging a path of her own.
Cedrella could not help but observe the crowds. There were children everywhere, of course. Most of them behaving in the most appalling manner she’d ever seen. Father and Mother would have put her on punishment for *months* if she were ever to behave in such a manner in the privacy of their own home, never mind in public! Had these beasts neither pride nor shame, that they comported themselves so poorly?

Eventually, they made it to Ollivander’s. Fortunately, he was between customers when they arrived, allowing them both privacy and his undivided attention. Mother and Callidora stood near the door, waiting to see what wand chose Cedrella.

Ten minutes later, Cedrella was the owner of a Cedar and Unicorn Tail-hair wand, ten inches, quite springy. Father and mother seemed surprised, but also pleased.

“Cedar indicates strength of character, loyalty, and perception.” Father said. “The unicorn hair will mean consistency in your casting, and a general lack of accidents. It will also not turn to the Dark Arts without serious effort.”

Ahhh, that explained their surprise. Between the wood and the core, it meant that Cedrella was never going to be a Dark Arts practitioner, despite the familial predilection towards the Arts. Some small part of Cedrella was disappointed, but she had long since discovered in herself a reluctance at the thought of performing many Dark Arts spells. She had no real want to hurt others, not even the ignorant cattle of the Muggle world.

From there, they went to the trunk shop. Choosing a trunk was a surprisingly difficult affair. Cedrella immediately disdained the cheap, plain, barely adequate trunks foisted off on the uninformed by several harried clerks. Those trunks, which had neither interior expansion spells nor separate compartments to organize one’s belongings, would not suffice for a full seven years of tuition. The trunk would be getting crowded as of third year, thanks to the additional wardrobe required for Hogsmeade weekends. By fifth, thanks to the additional studying required for OWLs and one’s eligibility to attend the in-school Balls (necessitating yet more wardrobe additions) the situation would swiftly become untenable.

At minimum, a three-compartment trunk was required. One compartment for one’s wardrobe, another for one’s ever-increasing library of books, and the third for one’s other school equipment. Unfortunately, that really didn’t narrow down the options. Trunks came with every variety of options that Magic could manage. Some of them were quite clever and reasonable. Others were much less so. Eventually, Cedrella settled on a handsome green-and-silver trunk that had space enough for a reasonable wardrobe and a quite ridiculously large library, as she fully anticipated eventually bringing tomes from the Black Library with her to school as reference material in her later years.

Madam Malkin’s was a madhouse, with no less than six families and their attendant clerks in the shop despite the early hour. Seeing the crush, Cedrella fully appreciated her father’s wisdom in coming here early in the day. After a full day of dealing with that sort of crush, even the most patient person would be quite cross and uncivil.

Madam herself attended them. Cedrella fancied she saw something like relief in Madam’s eyes at dealing with knowledgeable folks. It certainly took them no time at all to obtain the requisite robes. They immediately fled the store and headed out into the street.

“Where shall we head next?” Father asked, glancing at Cedrella and Callidora.

“The apothecary, Father.” Callidora opined. “That way we have time to get the foul odor out of our noses before we stop for lunch.”
“A sensible suggestion.” Father agreed. “And then Flourish and Blotts, I believe, before the best of their stock gets picked over, followed by Scrivener’s.”

And so it went. About the time they finished at Scrivener’s, it was time for lunch. Father took them to a small, discrete restaurant tucked in the relatively quiet zone between Gringotts and the main thoroughfare of shops that carried Hogwarts equipment. As a result, there were rather fewer lesser creatures about, providing a break from the crush.

Once they’d finished lunch, they made a few last stops – to pick up a telescope, phials, scales and protective gear for potions-making and Herbology. And then they were finally done, and could retreat to the Manor once more.

Cedrella breathed a sigh of relief when they were back at the Manor, then looked up at her father. “I almost thought you were exaggerating.” She admitted. “But they truly are uncouth, unprincipled beasts, aren’t they?”

“Yes. And quite happy to continue to wallow in ignorance.” Father said. “Or worse, actively attempt to abrogate our traditions and laws because they see them as ‘backwards’. They care nothing for the fact that things are the way they are for a reason.”

Cedrella shook her head. “You would think they would attempt to learn *why* things are the way they are before they started throwing a fuss.”

“One would assume that, yes. And one would be wrong.” Father said. “Worse, if certain members of the Wizengamot had their way, the creatures would be humored, even if to do so would do more harm than good.”

Cedrella was appalled. “That makes no sense!” She objected.

“Nevertheless, it is the way things are, currently.” Father said.

Cedrella shook her head in dismay.

Three weeks later, it was time to board the train. Here again, Cedrella discovered some of what her father mentioned. She overheard more than one of the lesser breeds complaining about the long trip, and being forced to make their way to King’s Cross, when they lived close to Hogwarts. The ignorance showed by such comments astounded her.

Yes, the trip on the train might seem odd from an outsider’s perspective, she supposed. But the trip permitted everyone a chance to socialize before the school year officially began. This was especially important for the new First Years, as it provided the only chance they all had to come to know each other before House rivalries put stumbling blocks in their paths, and conflicting schedules made getting together all but impossible.

Even Cedrella, for all her disdain for the lesser creatures, forced herself to at least attempt making acquaintance with some of them. She was surprised (and delighted) to stumble across a few such creatures who were, while still ignorant, quite tolerable. They were even willing to listen to the wisdom of their betters, who understood the magical world, how and why it worked in a way no non-pureblood could, at least not this early in their magical tuition.

Despite that, when they disembarked from the train, Cedrella ensured she got a boat with only other purebloods. That was easy enough to manage, since there were currently five scions of the House of Black alone in Hogwarts, never mind the other Pureblood Houses.

Once in the school proper, Cedrella immediately neatened her appearance, since her robes had
become somewhat disarranged in the boat. She took her place near the head of the line. They had been organized alphabetically by Professor Dumbledore, in order to speed up the Sorting slightly. It also allowed for more decorous behavior, since lining up alphabetically eliminated any need to push through the remaining group of unSorted children. Only the current Abbott scion preceded Cedrella.

When her name was called, she calmly took her place on the stool and permitted the Hat to be placed on her head. To her surprise, the Hat considered Ravenclaw for her at first. While it was not the preferred Sorting, it was certainly not a shameful one. While Blacks predominantly Sorted Slytherin, there had been a few Ravenclaws in the line over the years.

In the end, though, the Hat chose Slytherin. Cedrella’s ambitions were … quieter … than some, she supposed. At least, she did not trumpet her goals to all and sundry, nor have grandiose, unachievable aims. But despite that, ambition she had in plenty, even if she didn’t quite know what to do with it yet, other than becoming the very best at … whatever career she eventually settled on. All she knew was that she would not be content to merely be wife and mother. Oh, she wanted a husband and children when she got older, of course, but she wanted *more* than that for herself. She wanted to be able to stand on her own two feet, apart from her husband, and be recognized for her own contributions to society other than the children she bore and the parties she held.

She put all her will into her classes, determined to perform faultlessly. To, if at all possible, outshine the Ravenclaws, who normally took top honors scholastically. To her pleasure, she did exactly that in Transfiguration and Charms. Herbology, on the other hand, was an eternal trial. Cedrella did not approve of getting dirty, and could not see the logic in learning to tend plants. While she was sure such a thing had an applicability to future Potions Masters and Herbologists, she could not see where the rest of them would ever have any call to even remember most of what they learned in that class, never mind use the knowledge they obtained.

Astronomy was a delight, if only for the fact that her relatives carried the names of many of the constellations, and seeking them out in the heavens brought memories of home to mind. History of Magic was boring, but she had it on good authority it had been so for many years. Cedrella was just thankful she’d had six years of tuition in the subject at home, or she’d come away from that class as ignorant of the history of the magical world as the muggleborns did. Potions was both informative and amusing. Their Head of House, Professor Slughorn, managed to make what could otherwise be a tedious subject interesting, fun, and challenging.

She came away from her first year with all E’s and O’s, much to her pleasure, and managed to steal the top spot in her year in Charms. She’d gotten second in Transfiguration, behind one of the first year Ravenclaws. Her other classes, while she was not in the top five, she was in the top fifteen at least, top ten for all but Herbology.
Noticing

Chapter Notes

A/N: Rude French rant ahead – translation at the bottom.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Noticing

=-=-=-=-=

Hogwarts, 1929

For Septimus, third year had largely been an echo of first and second, just with the addition of his elective classes. He’d decided to take Arithmancy, Ancient Runes, and Care of Magical Creatures. Septimus had begun to entertain the notion of becoming an Auror at least for a time after he graduated. His father enjoyed good health, so it was unlikely he would be required to step up as Head of the Family anytime soon. That meant he would be afforded the opportunity to have a career.

The feud that had started between Gryffindor and Slytherin in his second year had carried through to third. He had a feeling it wouldn’t die down anytime soon. Tensions were always high between those two Houses to begin with. The situation that had occurred in second year had just given everyone an excuse to act on those tensions. He’d spent much of third year defending Firsties and Second Years again. And by year’s end, he’d begun to notice something. Something that slipped his mind entirely during the summer. His fourth year, though, started with something of a bang, all thanks to Abraxas Malfoy.

The Malfoys were immigrants, interlopers. At least by the standards of the pureblood community. Oh, the Malfoys were purebloods, and thus at least tentatively welcomed by the purebloods at large, but they had emigrated to Britain roughly a century ago from France, which made them inherently inferior to the natives, according to the native purebloods. Worse, they had brought many of their French magical traditions and etiquette with them. Traditions and etiquette that frequently clashed horribly with British traditions.

The Malfoys had compounded the problem by attempting to compensate for their lesser position and apparent faults with arrogance, disdain, and basically throwing their money around like it was going out of style. It had resulted in them being labeled ‘Novum Pecuniam’ – new money. It was a rather dreadful insult that was normally leveled at the more gauche of the ‘lesser’ Pureblood Houses when they managed to attain some measure of prominence and as a result, lost their heads a bit. Occasionally the slur was applied to a particular Head of House, if they had a tendency towards profligate expenditure, especially if the money was spent on ill-advised purchases. Septimus wasn’t quite sure what ‘ill-advised purchases’ were though.

The Malfoys had begun looking for ways to improve their reputation and standing. It was not unexpected that they would set their cap on marrying into an influential Family. They didn’t get much more influential than House Black. Unfortunately, House Black just happened to have a bumper crop of girls that would need marrying off in the not-too-distant future. Four of those girls were currently at Hogwarts with Abraxas, who was now a third year.
Lucretia, Cassiopeia, and Callidora had reputations as formidable duelers, and none of them were shy about using Dark Arts. Only a true fool would attempt to strong-arm any of them. Cedrella, on the other hand, had been so quiet last year as to be almost unnoticeable. Septimus wouldn’t even have realized she was in school if it hadn’t been for the Sorting, and hearing her name be called. Because she’d been so quiet, she hadn’t gotten the sort of reputation her sister and cousins had acquired yet. And Abraxas, the idiot, apparently decided that made her the easy mark of the lot.

Because of the bullying the previous year and at the end of the year before that, Septimus had taken to prowling the train. The prefects couldn’t be everywhere at once, and the Slytherin prefects couldn’t be trusted to actually intervene and stop a fight or bullying if they came across it. Besides, Septimus had friends enough from three Houses that they couldn’t all fit in one compartment. Wandering around allowed him to visit with everyone.

That was how he ended up stumbling across Abraxas, Crabbe and Goyle. The three of them were parked in one of the compartments right by the door. Cedrella was sitting by the window, at least attempting to ignore them, since it was clear she couldn’t attempt escape without getting in grabbing range. At least the three boys hadn’t forgotten themselves enough to get grabby. Yet.

“Malfoy, you do realize that it is inappropriate for the three of you to be in here alone with Miss Black?” Septimus asked.

Fortunately, Cedrella and Abraxas were young enough that this situation wouldn’t risk ruining her reputation, but it was cutting things fairly fine. In general, unwed girls were *not* supposed to be alone with boys. The older they got, the more inappropriate it became. Past about the age of fourteen, it would affect a girl’s reputation to be caught alone with a boy or boys. Past sixteen, and she’d end up labeled ‘loose’ … or worse. The only exception was if the girl and the boy in question were betrothed to each other. At that point, with marriage a foregone conclusion, the pair being alone wasn’t taboo.

“Mind your own business, Weasley.” Abraxas snapped.

Septimus snorted. “Yeah, I don’t think so.” When Crabbe and Goyle moved as if to hex him, Septimus pulled his wand out of its wrist sheath and pointed it dead at Crabbe’s face, as he was closest. “Don’t even think about it.” He barked, his voice going hard and commanding.

So of course Crabbe and Goyle both pulled their wands while Abraxas smirked at him. Fortunately, at that point Charlus Potter walked by. When he spotted the standoff, he immediately moved to bracket Septimus, wand pointing at the three Slytherin boys.

“Problem here?” Charlus asked.

“Yeah, but I got this part of it. Do me a favor, and find one of the Black girls, would you? These three … gentlemen … seem to have forgotten their manners, and the risk to Miss Black’s reputation that their presence presents.” Septimus said

“Not a problem.” Charlus told him. He pocketed his wand once more and hurried off.

A few moments later, Callidora came storming up, an amused Charlus following in her wake. Septimus wisely got the heck out of her way, and joined Charlus in his amused observation as Callidora went on the warpath. She got nose-to-nose with an abruptly nervous-looking Abraxas, her wand drawn. Said wand was not pointing at his face, however. It was pointing a good deal further south, which probably accounted for much of Abraxas’ concern.

“I shall say this so even your ignorant, uncouth self can comprehend it.” Callidora snapped. “Vous
êtes un infâme, un ver gluant. Votre mère a eu des relations avec une chèvre et un cochon afin de vous produire. Vous êtes ignorant, arrogant, orgueilleux et une créature tout à fait désagréable. Si vous prétendez à entacher l’air que je respire ou ma sœur avec votre présence encore une fois, je ferai en sorte que vous passerez le reste de vos jours chauve, tacheté et couvert de rougeurs.”

Septimus blinked. He recognized the language as French, and even understood a few words in there other than the ones that sounded like their English counterparts. Something about a goat and pig. Whatever it was, it *sounded* vicious and hateful. If Abraxas’ expression was anything to go by, he did indeed speak French and understood every word Callidora had just said – and it was every bit as bad as it sounded.

“Come, Cedrella. There is no need to endure this … creature’s … presence.” Callidora said, holding a hand out to her sister.

With Septimus and Charlus right there, not even Abraxas was stupid enough to try to force Cedrella to stay. Septimus was mentally cringing at Callidora’s final comment. ‘Creature’ was generally an epithet leveled at Muggleborns and Muggles by Blacks and their ilk. Which meant that Callidora had essentially put Malfoy at that level. Ouch.

Callidora turned to him at that point, and Septimus had to work to keep from flinching.

“I thank you for coming to my sister’s defense, milord.” She said, giving him a little curtsy.

Septimus gave her a smile. “Not a problem.” He eyeballed the three boys. “I don’t like bullies.” And not even a *Black* deserved to get bullied.

=-=-=-=-=

It was only when they were safely in another compartment that Cedrella spoke up.

“Why on Earth did he do that?” She asked Callidora.

Callidora did not mistake who she was talking about. “He is a Gryffindor.” She said with no small amount of disdain. “They are genetically predisposed to heroics.” She sighed. “I shall be informing Father about that boy. He will take *Lord* Malfoy to task for his heir’s presumption.”

=-=-=-=-=

Unfortunately, Septimus reflected later, Callidora’s rant hadn’t had any effect on Abraxas. He continued to follow Cedrella about and harass her. Normally, Septimus wouldn’t have noticed it, since they were both Slytherins, but the situation was causing a surprising amount of tension in Slytherin House. Enough to be noticeable even to the Ravenclaws, who were famously unaware of anything other than the contents of their beloved books.

On some level, it was amusing as hell, because Abraxas’ persistence had earned him a few Infirmary stays thanks to several rather impressive hexes. On the other hand, it annoyed Septimus to no end … because the *adults* weren’t doing a damned thing about the situation.

It brought to mind what he had begun to notice towards the end of last year. Which was that Slytherin House and their actions were largely ignored by the staff, both for good and ill. Septimus had noticed that in most classes he had with them, Gryffindors who answered a question or performed well were invariably awarded a generous number of points. Slytherins who did the same were not. Weirdly, in Potions, only certain Slytherins and a small handful of other students (not all of them purebloods, either) got points by the bucket-load, while everyone else was ignored. Bullying by Slytherins or aimed at them was at best passed off as slightly over-aggressive pranking – if it was
acknowledged at all.

The more Septimus saw of it, the more it offended his sense of justice. The rules were the rules – they ought to be equally applied to *everybody*. If one person got a point for performing a spell first, *everybody* who performed a spell first in class ought to get a point, regardless of House. And breaking the rules was breaking the rules, and punished the same for everyone (he’d heard rumors about differences in detentions according to House). Unfortunately it was becoming clear that the school staff didn’t see it that way.

=-=-=-=-=

Cedrella was somewhat disconcerted to realize that she had, apparently, acquired her own Gryffindor Knight in Shining Armor, as Callidora had put it with no small amount of amused asperity. Septimus Weasley seemed to crop up at the oddest times, and he had an absolute knack for showing up just when Abraxas Malfoy was at his importunate worst.

Not that she could not defend herself, of course, but she was of the opinion that granting Abraxas even the most minute amount of her attention would be perceived by him as a win. Thus she had embarked on a campaign to completely ignore him, no matter what he did. It helped that Callidora, Lucretia, and Cassiopeia were taking it in turns to hex Abraxas for every infraction. If he kept this up, he’d end up crippled for life before he made it to fifth year. Cedrella couldn’t be bothered to feel sorry for him if it got that far, and refused to think about him at all if she could avoid it.

Septimus on the other hand, was far more worthy of contemplation if only in an attempt to figure him out. He was, as Callidora had pointed out, a Gryffindor so on one level it made his actions explicable. On the other hand, she was a Slytherin and a Black. The enmity between their Hogwarts Houses and their Families was the stuff of legends. Septimus, by her estimation, really ought to be gloating about an enemy laid low, not coming to her defense at every opportunity.

Up until this year, Cedrella hadn’t really given much thought to her future spouse. She’d known it would happen, of course, but Abraxas’ pursuit of her had brought it into sharper focus. She knew that the Prewitts were currently in negotiations for a betrothal contract between Lucretia and Ignatius, who was the future Head of that House – a match that befit the eldest granddaughter of the Head of House Black. And Father had begun to debate options for Callidora, though no one had yet approached him. It would be some time before he began to attempt to arrange something for herself.

That fact afforded her the opportunity to consider her options herself. Thankfully, as a daughter of a younger son, she would have the luxury of possibly choosing her own match, rather than having her future husband chosen for her like Lucretia. Ironically enough, Septimus Weasley would make a not altogether poor choice.

He would be, after all, Head of the Weasley family someday. While the Weasleys were poor, being wife to the Head of even a poor pureblood family was a step up from being the wife of a lesser son of another family. Septimus would bear watching. If he continued to be tolerable, she just might put his name forward to Father in a few years.

Chapter End Notes

Translation from French (as per Google Translate): You are a loathsome, slimy worm. Your mother had relations with a goat and a pig in order to produce you. You are ignorant, arrogant, prideful and an altogether unpleasant creature. If you presume to taint
the air I or my sister breathe with your presence again, I will ensure that you spend the rest of your days bald, spotty and covered in rashes.
Birth of the Marauders

1930

Just after the turn of the year, there was a conference held at Potter Castle, between Septimus, Harfang Longbottom, and Charlus Potter. By that point, all three boys had noticed the distinct lack of action on the part of the school’s teachers and other staff as regarded the Slytherins and their tendency to make life hell on everyone else in the castle.

They had also begun to do something about it, mostly individually though there had been several times when two or more of them had been present for an incident. By the end of the year, it had mostly been the three of them working together to deal with the situation at Hogwarts as best they could. It had worked well enough, but all three of them had agreed they needed some serious planning time.

“If the adults aren’t going to do something about it, we should.” Charlus insisted.

“I don’t disagree.” Septimus said. “But I think that’s what good for the goose is good for the gander. If we start targeting Slytherin bullies somehow, we need to target *all* bullies.”

“A valid point, Septimus.” Harfang agreed. “I can think of a few folks in all four Houses that need their attitudes readjusted.”

Charlus nodded. “I can agree to that. We just need to figure out how to teach them a lesson without getting into trouble ourselves. In that arena, I think we need to take inspiration from, and I honestly can’t believe I’m saying this, but Family Black. The girls have been utterly vicious to Abraxas, everyone knows they are behind his streak of misfortune and accidents. Despite that, I don’t think they’ve gotten caught even once.”

Harfang nodded. “True. The one thing that bothers me about that is the fact it’s possible it’s part of the whole ‘ignore Slytherin’ mentality, but somehow I don’t think so.”

“No, it isn’t.” Septimus said. “Lucretia, Cassiopeia, and Callidora are very, very good, I won’t deny that. Unfortunately, they’re being helped by the fact that anything that can be labeled as pranks *is*. I hate to say it, but I have a feeling that so long as we don’t start using Dark Arts or outright curses, we can pretty much get away with whatever we want.”

“And humiliating the perpetrators will be so much more fun than beating the s**t out of them.” Harfang pointed out. “Bruises fade, and you can make out like you got them honorably. The gossip generated by humiliating incidents can follow you for life.”

That got amused grins from all three boys for the truth of that statement.

“So we’re agreed: prank the living h**ll out of bullies, and anyone we catch breaking important rules, like not pushing themselves on a witch.” Septimus said, holding out a hand to the other two boys.

Harfang and Charlus gripped his and each other’s hands, creating a tangle of fingers and palms. “Agreed.” They chorused.
“So, let the planning commence. We’re going to need to do this carefully, so that it remains anonymous as to who the perpetrators are.” Harfang said.

“We’re also going to have to find a way to make it clear to everyone that the pranks are a direct response to bullying or rule-breaking.” Charlus pointed out.

“Right.” Septimus grabbed quill and parchment. “Let’s get down to business, gentlemen. We’ve got a lot of ground to cover.”

The plan proved simple enough, for all it took a good deal of talking to work out the details. With all three boys sharing a room in Gryffindor, they didn’t have to make allowances for different living spaces when it came to planning pranks at school. That said, they would have to deal with their other roommates, as there were eight Gryffindor boys in their year. They also had differing schedules to deal with, as Harfang and Charlus were both taking Muggle Studies, having become intrigued by Muggles in their visits to Septimus’ home. Harfang was not taking Arithmancy, and Charlus was not taking Care of Magical Creatures.

They decided to convene their little revenge club in an abandoned classroom fairly close to Gryffindor Tower, which would reduce the chances of them being caught out after curfew. They also decided to keep their pranks as anonymous as possible. Septimus having friends in Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw helped them with that, as he would be able to find out what the passwords were if he was discreet about it.

That would allow them to hit people while they were in the ‘safety’ of their Houses. This deprived their targets of a potential safe area, and muddled the issue of who could be targeting them, since they would be unable to eliminate their Housemates. Of course, none of them had friends in Slytherin, but Septimus was of the opinion that if they approached the Black girls, they would be amenable to assisting with either giving them the password to the Slytherin Dorms or placing prepared pranks for the boys. Charlus promised to talk to his father, something about obtaining a family heirloom that would make their quest infinitely easier.

“If I present it right, he’ll be so pleased at me standing up to nasty sorts he’ll be only too pleased to hand it over.” Charlus told them with a grin. “But until I have it in hand, I’ll not tell you what it is. I don’t want us to count on having it until then.”

After some debate, they eventually decided on a way to code their discussions about pranks and targets. Here, Septimus’ extensive collection of living relatives came in handy. Any talk of birthdays, weddings, or the like with the name Weasley attached would garner little to no attention, because there were so many of them, and the odds of there being such an event in truth was quite high. Better, between the three of them, they had names of relatives (both living and dead) that started with every letter in the alphabet. This would allow them to substitute a name starting with the correct letter for the real name of their intended target. In this way, figuring out what gift to send for ‘Cousin Alphonse’s birthday’ would be code for planning for the next prank on Abraxas. They would also choose a different relative (and event) for each prank, so as to keep people from taking notice that they’d been debating about the same thing for an entire year.

They also agreed to put serious effort into learning defensive hexes. They were quite sure that eventually they would either stumble across someone doing something heinous that needed to be addressed *right then*, or someone would put two and two together and come up with four as to the source of their humiliating event, necessitating that the three boys defend themselves from retaliatory violence. In conjunction with that, they solemnly promised to back each other up if and when they came under attack themselves.

The next item on the list was to decide what was prankable, and what was not. Bullying obviously
was on the list, but they had to agree among themselves as to what constituted bullying. Once they had agreed on that, they debated what else was punishable by prank. Eventually, they decided that physical violence would result in a prank. Physical violence against a girl would result in a doubled prank. And though they prayed they would never encounter such a thing, any boy caught forcing himself on a girl would skip the prank meter entirely and get himself hexed impotent for life instantly. Beyond physical attacks, any hexes outside the normal range of prank spells would get the perpetrator (provided they could be identified) in trouble, unless the hex was performed against a known repeat offender on their list, since at that point it would become likely that the hex was in response to an incident.

They then decided that there would be an escalation in pranks. The first prank played on any one person would be mild – by way of being a gentle warning. Each successive prank played on the same person would get more and more embarrassing. Extra points in embarrassment would be awarded for multiple offenses in the same category. For instance, if someone bullied others repeatedly the pranks would get worse by orders of magnitude with each offense, jumping from the level of short-term hair dye to something like a spell forcing them to do or wear something very humiliating in the Great Hall during mealtime in very short order.

The last thing they agreed on was that they themselves could not ever stand accused of the wrongdoings they punished others for. Pranks could be humiliating, but could not cross the line into inappropriate – no making someone go naked, or some such nonsense. Such a thing would be qualified as crossing the line between ‘teaching a lesson/making someone accountable and bullying. And on pain of becoming a target themselves, they would never bully outside of pranks, either. Nor would they break the rules they had decided they would punish others for breaking.

It would be better than a decade before any of the three of them realized that they had laid the groundwork for a mutual Alliance Oath between their families, between their agreement to work together for a cause and act in each others’ defense.

By the time they returned to school after the Yule break, they’d gotten everything ironed out. Charlus had gotten his father to agree to let him have that family heirloom, which turned out to be an invisibility cloak. Septimus had been surprised, as such cloaks didn’t last long enough to end up considered ‘heirlooms’. According to Charlus, the thing had been in the family for hundreds of years, and aside from being an heirloom was something of a mystery and curiosity. Having it would simplify matters for them a great deal, as it would reduce the chances of getting caught to next to nothing.

It didn’t take Abraxas long to be caught being pushy with Cedrella Black yet again. Actually, he didn’t even make it through their first day back at school. The three boys had talked over what to do to Abraxas the first time he stepped out of line after they returned, so they immediately swung into action.

Their first prank on Abraxas was a finite-proof color charm that caused his hair to change colors every five minutes for an hour or so until it wore off naturally or someone realized it was finite-proof and used one of the more powerful spell cut-offs. Hexing him in the bustling confusion of the returned students without being caught proved ridiculously simple. It was less painful than the hexes the Black girls had been hitting him with, but more embarrassing.

By the end of January, the *entire* school was beginning to take notice of the fact that Abraxas and known bullies were being pranked. It didn’t take the student body long to figure out that the pranks were a response to the bullying. With members of every House being targeted, no one could really finger any likely suspect, though the most popular option was the fifth-year and above Gryffindors, followed by the same-year Hufflepuffs. Both houses were notorious for having issues with people
that hurt others, if for different reasons. The boys didn’t know whether to be pleased or outraged that while the students had figured out the cause and effect, the teachers were still oblivious. Oh, they’d noticed an upswing in pranks, certainly, but they hadn’t realized there was a pattern to the victims of a number of the pranks.

One of the first things that Septimus had done when they returned to school in January was to approach the Black girls. Since he and Charlus had acted in defense of Cedrella on the train, it was felt that they had the best chance of approaching the girls and winning their support. Septimus had deliberately approached Lucretia. She was the highest-ranked of the Black girls currently at Hogwarts, given she was the granddaughter of the current Head of Family Black, whereas the other three were all from the younger Black siblings. This made Lucretia the de facto leader and voice of the Black girls.

Lucretia had been understandably suspicious about being approached by two Gryffindors, even if they had come to her cousin’s defense. The fact they *had* earned them a hearing, instead of her ignoring them or hexing them to get them to go away. Septimus was fairly sure they had come within a hairsbreadth of getting hexed anyway when they told her what they were up to, and wanted from her and her cousins. It took some rather fast talking and soothing of ruffled feathers to calm things back down. Eventually, once Lucretia had calmed down and thought the matter over, she agreed to provide them with the password to the Slytherin dorms when they needed it in exchange for a future favor of her choice within certain limits – Septimus hadn’t been about to agree to a blanket ‘anything I want’ option.

The Black girls’ assistance meant that Abraxas wasn’t safe anywhere. Better, he was getting pranked at times, and in places, that the Black girls had iron-clad alibis for. That took some of the heat off of them, as Abraxas had been getting angrier and angrier with the girls over their attacks, with the distinct possibility of him eventually doing something truly stupid if he lost his temper. With attacks coming from another source, much of Abraxas’ attention was diverted. He was far too busy trying to figure out who the new perpetrator(s) were and protecting himself (futilely) to waste much time and energy on the girls.

Sometime in February, someone started calling the unknown pranksters (it was commonly agreed that there had to be more than one) the Marauders. By the end of the school year, ‘the Marauders’ were well on their way to becoming legends. The boys had agreed they liked the name, and had taken to referring to their little group by the name when they were in private and could talk openly.

Despite, or perhaps because of their extracurricular activities, all three boys managed exceedingly high grades, with none of them getting less than an E on any subject, and all three of them having more O’s than E’s to their names. On the train home at the end of the year, they made plans to meet over the summer and discuss more and bigger pranks for the upcoming year, and to research more defensive spells they could use when that eventually came up.
Cedrella’s Third Year

1930

Cedrella’s third year at Hogwarts proved to be exceedingly interesting on a number of levels. Scholastically, she found herself happily challenged. She had chosen Arithmancy, Ancient Runes, and to her family’s shock and no little amount of horror, Muggle Studies as her electives.

When Father discovered that she intended to take Muggle Studies, she had immediately been called into his study, and taken to task.

“I do not know why you waste your time and talents on such a useless subject.” Father said. “But I shall be writing the Headmaster and informing him you will not be attending that so-called class.”

“I will attend it, Father, whether you will or no.” Cedrella said firmly.

Internally, she was shaking in fear at defying her father’s commands for the first time in her life, but she wasn’t going to back down from this. At least, not unless he forced the issue by going to their Head of House. Not for the first time did Cedrella find herself grateful that her father wasn’t that august personage - it made it so much easier to do as she wanted, rather than what her father wanted her to do.

“I agree with you that Muggles are foul creatures. I am not taking the class because I *like* them.” She insisted. “I am taking the class because it is prudent to know the enemy – and one’s prey.”

While she had absolutely no intention of ever going Muggle-hunting, she knew that intimating she might actually do so would help to placate her father. It also helped that two truisms - ‘know thine enemy’ and ‘knowledge is power’ were as well known in the Wizarding world as they were in the Muggle.

“When one is in pursuit of a dragon, or a werewolf, or any other magical creature one desires to hunt.” Cedrella said. “Or has enmity with, one is *wise* to learn all one can of the creature’s habits, habitats, strengths and weaknesses. In doing so, one is less likely to come to harm in the pursuit of the creature. This is no different. In that class, I will learn a great deal about Muggles, and thus be better equipped to … deal with one. For instance, I am given to understand from conversations I have overheard that Muggles have a variety of weapons. While I am sure such crude constructs can do little to no harm to the prepared witch or wizard – I can only be prepared if I know what those weapons are, what they do, and what they look like.”

Father contemplated her for several long moments before he relaxed minutely. “There is wisdom in your argument, Cedrella.” He finally admitted. “Very well. You have my leave to pursue this.”

“Thank you, father.” Cedrella said, and then got while the getting was good.

In truth, Cedrella was taking the class because between her yearly encounters with Muggles in Diagon Alley and conversations she had indeed overheard, her curiosity had been piqued. She was still quite sure that Muggles were uncouth, violent creatures, but the claims of several of her classmates needed to be verified at the very least, and Muggle Studies was the best place to do so, short of venturing into the Muggle world. That, she was not prepared or willing to do.
The first thing she discovered in the class was that what was taught did not quite tally with what she was hearing from the Muggleborns in the castle. For instance, in the Muggle Studies class, ‘horseless carriages’ were presented as a brand new Muggle invention, and claimed to be very rare. From what she was hearing from the Muggleborns, however, that wasn’t quite true. The things were fairly new, yes, but they’d apparently been around a few decades. They were also rapidly becoming anything but rare. And that was but one point where things differed, though apparently they didn’t differ by too terribly much.

Cedrella was forced to decide that whoever wrote the books for the class only visited the Muggle world occasionally, rather than living there. She was also forced to decide that whatever else Muggles might be, they were clever creatures, capable of inventing the oddest things in rapid succession.

Most of the things Muggles invented proved to be work-arounds for things that a witch or wizard could do with a wave of a wand. Those carriages, for instance, were the Muggles’ answer to traveling long distances. Where witches and wizards had brooms, floos, portkeys and apparation (among other choices), Muggles had their horseless carriages. They also had some rather odd flying … things, apparently, as well as boats. While the work-arounds were bulky, crude, and inelegant, they nevertheless worked.

Arithmancy fascinated her. Arithmancy was the backbone upon which new spells were formulated. Its sometimes exceedingly complicated mathematical formulae provided the answers to how much power a new spell might require and the optimal wand movements to accomplish the required task. Balancing the two frequently proved to be entertaining, as the power level changed with the wand movements. It was possible to lower the power requirements by changing the wand movements, but this also frequently changed the spell’s effects slightly, or decreased the length of time the spell worked. Too far in one direction, and it wasn’t the spell you were wanting to create. Too far in the other, and only a handful of people might be able to cast the spell.

Ancient Runes was slightly less interesting, but no less important. Runes formed the backbone of all semi-permanent (lasting one to five years) and permanent wards, transfigurations, charms, or conjuring, among other applications. Runes could be used by anyone with so much as a spark of magic. Some squibs could even use them - those that had enough magic to perceive magical creatures but not enough to perform any actual spells.

Third year was proving to be interesting outside of academics as well. By the end of second year, Abraxas had seemed to at least partially learn his lesson when it came to hounding her, and had become more circumspect. He still pursued her, but he had learned not to cross the line in the sand that her cousins and the Gryffindor boys had drawn. That improvement in behavior continued into her third year. The relief from his attentions was welcome, even if having a triad of Gryffindors defending her honor would never cease to be odd.

She was amused to note just before Yule break her third year that Harfang Longbottom and Callidora had begun to spend an unprecedented amount of time together, given their Houses and Families. It was creating *quite* the stir in the school. While cross-House romances were pretty much expected after graduation, even between Gryffindors and Slytherins, such things happening *in* Hogwarts was cause for massive amounts of gossip and no little amount of shock, horror, and dismay from a variety of parties. Callidora and Harfang seemed to be rather enjoying the notoriety, and took a perverse pleasure in flaunting their relationship in the presence of the most vocal objectors.

The thing of further interest – and a great deal of intense amusement – was the so-called Marauders. Knowing who they were actually increased the amusement, mostly thanks to the entire student body
trying to figure it out. Even Septimus, Harfang, and Charlus got in on the ‘who are they’
shenanigans.

And that was the source of the rest of her amusement as regarded that group. Because for a triad of
Gryffindors, they were being very Slytherin indeed about how they went about making examples of
their targets. There was no crowing, no indiscreet discussion of targets in places they could be
overheard, and they even had the wit to join in on guessing who the Marauders were, rather than
keeping silent and thus bringing suspicion onto themselves. The pranks themselves were well
thought out and executed, and in many cases specifically tailored to a known weakness of the target,
for maximum effect.

Cedrella continued to keep a casual eye on Septimus. It didn’t hurt that she was of an age now to
really notice that Septimus was … rather good looking, really, with the promise of becoming more so
as an adult. Having something pretty to watch made keeping an eye on him that much more pleasant.
The more she watched him, the more she became impressed with him. He was the quintessential
Gryffindor – courageous, chivalrous, and determined. He also seemed to be largely without that
House’s worst vices – arrogance, pride, and leaping into situations without any forethought
whatever. Oh, he wasn’t perfect - Cedrella wasn’t putting him on that sort of pedestal - but his faults
were far outweighed by his good points.

He was surprisingly careful and methodical for a Gryffindor, and very protective of everyone
younger than him. For that, Cedrella was grateful, because without his assistance and that of the
Marauders, she would likely have faced an increasingly uncomfortable tenure at Hogwarts thanks to
Abraxas and his persistence in pursuing her. He was intelligent, hard-working, charming and
personable without being over-the-top about it. Yes, if he continued thus, he would make a not-bad
choice for husband. Not bad at all. He could use a lot more cunning and ambition, but that could be
developed with the right handling later.

School was otherwise quiet the rest of the year. To her surprise, her father pulled her into his study
the day after she returned home for the summer.

"I find myself curious as to what you learned in Muggle Studies.” He confessed. “I never took the
class myself, as the creatures were of no interest to me, nor have I encountered them outside of the
yearly Diagon Alley trips.”

Cedrella laughed. “You were in no way wrong about them being violent and uncouth, father.” She
said. “One of the first things we learned is that they have a surprising and distressing number of ways
to kill each other despite not having magic, and they employ these methods frequently, and for little
to no cause, both en-masse and on an individual level.” She gave her head a shake. “And they seem
to take pleasure in being quite rude to one another as well. Truly, I cannot comprehend how there are
so many of them, the way they go about things. As violent as they seem to be you’d think they’d
have wiped themselves out long ago.”

Father made a wordless sound of amusement and waved a hand, encouraging her to continue.

“Despite that, they are surprisingly clever beasts,” Cedrella admitted. “They seem to constantly be
inventing things, creating ways to muddle along without magic, and improving on those methods.
Granted, the methods are crude and bulky and generally far slower than magic, but they do still
work.” She gave her head a shake. “There also seems to be a discrepancy between what we learn
and what is real. I think because whoever writes the book does not live in the Muggle world, only
visits it occasionally.”

“Definitely a strong possibility.” Father agreed. “And how was the rest of your year, then?”
“Quite tolerable.” Cedrella said. “The Malfoy heir seems to have come to understand his attentions are neither appropriate nor welcomed finally. He still makes it plain he would have my hand the moment I am of age, but he no longer attempts to waylay me to express this.” She smirked. “Callidora and the cousins have been … quite thorough in expressing their displeasure at his presumption, and assistance in this matter has come from a rather unusual source.”

“So the rumors would have it.” Father agreed. “Something about a band of miscreants starting trouble?”

“Pranksters targeting bullies.” Cedrella corrected, knowing full well that father would by now know nearly as much about what was going on as she did. “Callidora certainly seems to approve of it.”

Father cocked an eyebrow at her. “It would be a felicitous match for her, if things continue to develop that direction.”

“I don’t disagree, father. Harfang is a personable, principled boy. I just find it amusing.” Cedrella said.

“You will find yourself similarly distracted in time.” Father pointed out. “It is the way of such things.”

Cedrella wasn’t so sure about that, but knew better than to disagree with Father. She well remembered that a few years ago, Callidora had been thoroughly uninterested in the male of the species. So it stood to reason that she would become more interested as time passed, and to claim otherwise would only see her made a fool of later on.

“At any rate, your mother has expressed an interest in traveling to Germany this year. As we have no other plans, I have agreed to indulge her wanderlust. You should make plans accordingly.”

“Yes father.” Cedrella said.

The news was quite pleasant. Family trips had been nonexistent until after Charis, her younger sister, had begun attending the Children’s Ball. That next summer, they’d gone to France for part of the summer. They hadn’t traveled since, so going abroad for a week or so sounded fun and exciting. For all the people they met were invariably strange, it was nevertheless fascinating to meet witches and wizards from outside of Britain and discover differences in how they performed and viewed magic.
The Ending of an Era

The Ending of an Era

1933

For Septimus, the last three years of his time at Hogwarts positively flew by.

He hadn’t much envied Professor Dumbledore the choosing of the Prefect for his year. Of the eight boys, there were really only two who were unsuitable for the job. They were only unsuitable because they were on the Quidditch team, and trying to juggle Quidditch, Prefect duties, and studying with OWL’s coming was just … very unwise. At least in Septimus’ mind. Choosing one Prefect from the remaining six boys couldn’t have been an easy task.

As it was, Dumbledore’s choice meant that he effectively had three Prefects for Septimus’ year. Dumbledore had chosen Charlus as Prefect. While Charlus was, indeed, a good choice, all three boys were fairly sure the selection had little to do with Charlus’ suitability and a great deal to do with Charlus’ surname.

The Potters were quite influential, second only to the Black family really, and at that only because the Black family had more members. The Potters had been producing single children only for a number of generations, which had drastically cut their numbers. It was pretty clear to the boys that Dumbledore had assigned Charlus with the hope of currying some small amount of favor. Slughorn had been currying favor too, considering that Lucretia Black was the female prefect for her year in Slytherin and Pollux Black, who was three years ahead of them, had been a prefect his fifth and sixth years and Head Boy the year before.

Charlus being a prefect had made their campaign against the nasty elements in the school infinitely easier. Charlus had a damn lot of fun nailing every idiot of that sort that crossed his path with the maximum punishment a prefect could levy, every single time. He had also turned a blind eye to Septimus and Harfang’s nighttime excursions, and had actually helped most of the time, even if he could only make sure the other prefect doing rounds that night patrolled away from where Septimus and Harfang were at.

Charlus’ advancement to prefect was also the beginning of the end of any respect Septimus had for Dumbledore. About a month and a half into fifth year, Charlus was called into Dumbledore’s office and taken to task for levying such ‘harsh’ punishments against blatant rule-breakers. Dumbledore had been of the opinion that such should be dealt with gently, that those in the ‘Light’ should not lower themselves to the same sort of punitive level the ‘Dark’ contingent used, and that the Dark-aligned students needed to be given the chance to see the error of their ways and repent. Dumbledore had even gone so far as to threaten (if vaguely) to rescind Charlus’ status as prefect if he didn’t toe Dumbledore’s line.

Charlus had given lip-service agreement to Dumbledore then gotten out of the meeting. He’d then called a meeting of the boys in their year and told them about the meeting. While their roommates remained unaware that Septimus, Charlus, and Harfang were the Marauders, they supported the Marauders’ cause, and were willing to refuse the badge if Charlus was removed as prefect.

The only reason the Marauders hadn’t pranked Dumbledore within an inch of his life on the spot was that they were worried he’d make the connection between his scolding of Charlus and the pranks.
They had mutually voted to delay their retribution for a while, to give Dumbledore a chance to either forget about it, or assume that they had. That said, they made extensive plans for either late in the year or Sixth Year, depending on how things worked out as OWLs got closer.

They ended up opting for sixth year. By the time Easter Break came around and it seemed safe enough to contemplate enacting the pranks, all three of them were up to their eyeballs in things to do, between patrolling, planning and carrying out pranks against the usual targets, and studying for their OWLs.

Dumbledore really got on their bad side just before Easter, too. He finally attempted to remove Charlus as prefect since Charlus had refused to stop punishing the worst offenders so harshly, and Dumbledore’s attempts to give back the points lost at least was for naught, because Charlus just took them right back off again as soon as he found out that points had been awarded or his subtraction of points had been nullified. Dumbledore’s expression when every last Gryffindor fifth year refused the badge in Charlus’ stead had been entertaining. Septimus, who had been approached last as his friendship with Charlus was well known, had been particularly entertained by Dumbledore’s frustration.

“Quite frankly, sir, leave the badge with Charlus and be glad of it.” Septimus had told Dumbledore, rather bluntly. “Because if I take that badge, they’re going to get worse than they already have. A lot worse. Charlus at least doesn’t have the Weasley temper to make things more difficult for that lot.” He’d pointed out. True, Septimus was more phlegmatic than many in his family, but that didn’t mean he didn’t get angry and hex first without asking questions. “And I don’t understand why you’re trying to protect that lot of ... undesirables ... either. I’ve watched that lot make everyone miserable the entire time I’ve been in this school. By my count, sir, their second and third and tenth chances are long since past. They’re not going to suddenly see the light and change their ways if we play nicely with them. The only thing they respect and respond to is force.”

Dumbledore had been rather horrified by that pronouncement, and had let him go. Charlus had retained his prefect status, but they all knew he’d never make Head Boy because of the stand he’d taken. Not that Charlus especially cared about that.

Septimus was pleased, come summer, to discover he had gotten O’s in everything save History of Magic. After some thought, mostly to ensure he was still interested in the possible career he’d chosen for himself until he became Head of House (he did hope that didn’t happen until he was ninety or so), he signed up for NEWT level classes in everything save History of Magic. It was going to be a rather heavy load of classes for NEWTs, but he knew he could do it.

Charlus and Harfang had similar grades in their classes, and opted to continue on with most of their classes. In their cases, besides dropping History like a bad habit, they had both dropped Muggle Studies. They’d learned enough in the previous three years to feel more comfortable in the Muggle world, and figured they would do better learning the rest as they went, rather than in a classroom. Part of that attitude was engendered because they had noticed that Muggle Studies lagged behind Muggles’ achievements rather noticeably. The other half of the reason was the slant put on the lessons by the teacher. They were fairly sure the teacher didn’t like Muggles at all, and it came through in what and how the teacher taught them.

The Marauders struck before the next school year had officially started. Somehow, between the arrival of the upper years via carriage and Dumbledore being required to meet the first years, he’d gotten hit by a prank that turned his hair – all of it – a blinding neon green. His hair was also puffed out around his head in a way that, several decades later and a continent away, would end up being called an ‘afro’. All his hair. Including the beard. The results were both eye-searing and hysterically funny. And if Dumbledore’s attempts were anything to go by, not easily gotten rid of. In the end, to
everyone’s startlement, he simply cut most of his beard off in order to be able to see and eat. He showed up to the first class of the year with his head-hair shorn close to his scalp.

The prank was cause for a lot of comment from everyone third year and up. Those were the kids who had been around long enough to have figured out the pattern to the Marauders’ attacks. The question of what on Earth a professor could possibly have done to merit being targeted was on everyone’s minds. Especially since it took Dumbledore nearly a week to get the color to go away. Doubly especially when that wasn’t the last prank he was subjected to. By the end of the year, the Marauders had played a grand total of a dozen pranks on the man, and everyone was wondering why.

Sixth year brought with it the advent of learning to cast spells silently. Septimus was surprised to find that it came to him relatively easily. DADA had been his best, favorite class since second year, but he’d sort of expected that, given he had a Blackthorn and Dragon Heartstring wand. That combination all but guaranteed he’d end up in combat at some point. The ease he had with silent casting had come as something of a surprise at first. Once he’d thought about it, though, it made sense. Being effective in combat meant being darn good at casting spells silently so that your opponent had no idea what you were about to cast.

Everyone else seemed to struggle with learning silent casting. It took nearly a month for anyone to cast silent spells with any kind of reliability, never mind any sort of speed whatever. Even then, learning to cast a single silent spell for the first time usually meant a minimum of five minutes of effort for everyone else until almost the end of sixth year. Septimus generally accomplished it within two minutes starting in late November. He managed to do it faster and earlier than that in DADA.

On top of the speed with which he was able to learn to cast spells silently, he was able to perform the spells with only a minimum of effort. Most of the others strained and fought and concentrated fiercely to cast silently all year. Septimus, once he’d learned to cast the spell the first time, barely had to try to be able to cast it after that. Again, by late November, he was able to cast spells he had already learned one-after-the-other far, far faster and more easily than anyone else he was aware of.

To his surprised pleasure, the DADA instructor took him aside just before the Yule break and offered him additional tuition, commenting that Septimus had an unusual affinity for the subject.

“I know what classes you’re taking, lad.” The man said. “And if you’re planning the career I think you are, you’re going to make for one hell of an Auror in very short order.”

Septimus admitted he was right about Septimus’ future plans, and spent an hour every weekend learning a variety of spells that weren’t on the syllabus, more for lack of time than any other reason.

“There’s more spells out there than a man can learn in a lifetime, lad, never mind in seven years of school.” The Defense teacher pointed out. “The more spells you learn, the more formidable you’ll be. People expect a certain range of spells to be aimed at them in a fight, depending on who their opponent is. In your case, they’re going to be expecting purely Light Hogwarts-taught spells and Auror-taught spells. Go outside that range, and you’ll catch your opponent out every single time.”

Before Septimus had quite known it, he was graduating, with all O’s. Better still, the Ministry headhunters had sought him out, offering him a spot in the Auror academy. Better even than that, despite not doing quite as well (both had at least one E, rather than all O’s), both Harfang and Charlus had also been recruited. They arrived at the Ministry together, and were confronted by the head trainer almost immediately.

“Ministry keeps an eye on what comes out of Hogwarts.” The man said. “DMLE picks up quite a few, of course, but we have a hell of a time teaching them to work in groups. You lot.” He waved at
them. “You already work together. That’s going to give you a huge advantage in the field, once you’re trained up. You’re not going to have to learn to trust your partner.”

What none of them found out for several months was that while partnering Aurors was standard procedure, it was usually *partners*. As in, two people. Not three. But the DMLE had seen how tight the three of them were, and in a rare show of intelligence, had opted not to break them up.

Auror training made a mockery of their school days. They were drilled incessantly on spell casting, tactics, laws and penal code, arrest procedure, recognition and breaking of a variety of wards, recognition of potions and their effects, recognition of and emergency treatment for potions or spell damage, and spell recognition based on color flashes and/or wand movements among other things.

The training forged the triad into a nearly unbeatable force. Septimus was the heavy hitter of the three – not necessarily more powerful than they, but he was the one with the broader knowledge of spells and greater ease in silent casting. Harfang quickly became their expert on wards, potions, shields, and healing. Charlus was their tactician and research expert, when research was required.

Of course, that didn’t truly become settled for another two years, but as it was merely expanding upon a division of duties that had come about in the Marauders, it wasn’t entirely unexpected by the three of them, nor difficult to set in place.

Around Christmastime 1933, the general atmosphere in Europe changed. Some Muggle fellow named Hitler came to power in Germany and … well, started making waves there. Worse, Grindelwald, long a dark stain on Europe’s magical presence, started making a bit more noise than usual.

The DMLE kept abreast of such things, just in case. Unfortunately, the attitude of the rest of the Ministry was that it was happening in Europe, not here, and therefore of no concern whatsoever. Especially that muggle.

None of them knew it then, but later, much, much later, Septimus and Cedrella both would point to the events of that year as the beginning of the dark time to come. A long period of fear, war, death and betrayal. Of brother fighting brother and old men who had long lost any empathy for their fellow man attempting to control the fate of them all.

Whenever the subject came up, later in his life, Septimus was quick to say that it had also marked the beginning of an unprecedented era – one of unexpected, felicitous alliances in the battle to fight the encroaching darkness. One of bright, rising stars in the Light. Of people willing to make a stand against lawlessness and depravity and Darkness.
Making Plans

1935

The Dumbledore Pranks had, Cedrella later decided, unexpected and unfortunate consequences. She had no idea why the Marauders had pranked the man, though she was quite sure Dumbledore had deserved it. Whatever else could be said about the Marauders, they only targeted people who stepped over moral or legal lines.

Previous to those pranks, Dumbledore had been content to wear the usual, fairly sober robes common to the average witch or wizard. Afterwards, in the wake of being forced to shear off most of his hair, both beard and head-hair, his taste in colors changed fairly radically. He took to wearing bright, clashing colors. It was both traumatizing and amusing.

Other than that, fourth year proved to be a quiet one – and Cedrella’s last quiet year. While she had begun to develop a more womanly figure prior to that point, the Hogwarts robes concealed it quite nicely. They had rendered her as androgynous as most everyone else under the age of fifteen save for the biggest of the boys and the most curvaceous of the girls. That state of affairs ended over the summer. Actually, it had begun to end in the last months of her fourth year, but it had only just become noticeable by the time they were on the train home.

Actually, from roughly April until November that year was actually a fairly uncomfortable time for Cedrella. It seemed like all her body’s systems decided to go into overdrive at roughly the same time. She hit one last (extensive) growth spurt, and the final stages of puberty hit. Worse, aside from the physical discomfort that accompanied those changes, Cedrella had to adjust to the change in boys’ attitudes about her. Until then, there’d been Abraxas and his much-unwanted interest, and a few other boys that seemed to take notice of her towards the end of fourth year, but she had otherwise not had to deal with importunate suitors. From the start of Fifth Year onwards, she found herself getting chased by a number of boys with amorous intentions.

From the vast majority of them, the attentions were entirely unwelcome. Worse, they did not seem inclined to take ‘no’ for an answer. Cedrella started taking a page out of Callidora and Lucretia’s books and became a master at the subtle, cutting put-down in remarkably short order. She took especial delight in hitting boys where it hurt the most, but in such a way that it took days – sometimes weeks, for the especially dim – to realize they’d been badly insulted. She absolutely refused to permit any of them to court her. The rare few that attempted to go over her head by appealing to her father, or in Abraxas’ case Lord Black, got shot down in flames by those authorities.

Of course, that decision had as much to do with her growing attraction to Septimus as it did her distaste at the fumbling attempts of the other boys. The fact that Septimus paid her absolutely no mind as an eligible single female won him a huge number of points in her books. He treated her like he treated everyone else that wasn’t considered an enemy. He was always polite, usually charming, and frequently protective. Oddly enough, Septimus’ chivalrous and protective streak didn’t annoy the hell out of Cedrella – probably because he applied it equally to everyone he considered to be more vulnerable than himself, and didn’t try to make her a special case because she was a girl. She’d seen him get between boys and their attackers repeatedly in the past, as well as defending girls.

Certainly, that protective streak was almost openly welcomed when Abraxas, noticing that Cedrella
had ‘become a woman’, returned to the obnoxious, presumptuous attempts at pursuing her that he had indulged in during her first few years at Hogwarts. The resultant smackdowns delivered by the Marauders amused Cedrella greatly.

Importunate would-be suitors aside, Cedrella’s remaining years at Hogwarts were generally quiet. She attained quite high grades, and eventually returned home.

Once there, she went straight to her father. She knew that he had begun negotiating with the Longbottoms for a betrothal between Callidora and Harfang – that duo had stood the test of time at Hogwarts, despite the general outrage of the students at a Gryffindor and a Slytherin courting. It would not be too long before her father started to consider a possible match for her.

She had not changed her mind about Septimus in the least, but she had a plan in mind. Septimus, she knew, was going to be Head of House someday. If he was to have any chance at all at turning the Weasley Family back into a Family the Wizengamot listened to, he was going to need expert assistance.

Unfortunately, as a daughter of the youngest son of the House, Cedrella had not been drilled extensively in political matters. She’d had basic tuition in that field, but nothing like what the future Head of House got, and that was the training she needed in order to be of most use to Septimus. She fully intended to correct this lack before any attempt at a union between the Weasleys and the Blacks was attempted.

She knocked on the door to her father’s study, and then slipped through the door when he called for her to enter.

“Good evening, father.” She said.

“Cedrella. It is good to have you home again, my girl. What did you wish to speak to me about?” Father asked, knowing full well she would not have disturbed him for no reason.

“I wished to speak to you about the future, father.” Cedrella said. “I know there will come a day, quite soon, when you would seek a match for me. By your leave, I would speak to you of the matter, as I think it is a bit more complex than expected.”

Father looked intrigued and sat back in his chair. “By all means, Cedrella.” He said.

“I have taken time, during my tuition, to observe those pureblood males that I know to not be entered into a betrothal, or negotiations for same.” Cedrella said. “There has been one who has consistently drawn my attention. He is … not badly put together, and attained high enough scores to be recruited straight into the Auror Academy out of Hogwarts. He is also in line to be Head of Family.”

“You speak of Septimus.” Father said.

“I see Callidora and Charis have kept you abreast of events at school.” Cedrella said. Though her tone was neutral, she was somewhat amused. Trust her sisters to gossip about something like that.

“A betrothal between our Families would definitely be … tricky to negotiate.” Father agreed. “And would take more than a little time. You are sure he is your choice?”

“Very much so, father. He has … impressed me, over the last few years. He may have Sorted Gryffindor, but there is a buried streak of Slytherin in him.” Cedrella said, then smiled just slightly. “And it must be said, a not inconsiderable streak of Hufflepuff. And while I agree that getting the Weasleys to agree to a betrothal will take considerable time, that is not the sole reason I brought this up now.”
“Go on.” Father told her.

“He will be Head of Family in time.” Cedrella reiterated. “And I honestly believe that given the right tools to work with, he could turn that Family’s fortunes around. But he will need able assistance, especially in the political field. Gryffindors historically do poorly there, and while he has some small bit of Slytherin in him, I do not believe it will be enough on its own to allow him to prosper in the Wizengamot.”

Father added two and two and got four. “You wish for additional tuition in the political field, in order to be able to guide him more effectively.” He said. He thought about it for a few moments and then nodded. “It has been said that behind every great man is a great woman. Far be it from me to prevent you from becoming such a one. I will speak with Sirius first thing in the morning.”

Cedrella nodded. “Thank you for your indulgence, father.” She said, and took her leave.

Sirius, their Head of Family, was apparently somewhat surprised to discover what Cedrella was wanting, but after due consideration, was willing to grant her request. She was to join him and his family for a time, in order to allow for the tutelage she had requested.

Sirius spent the summer drilling her on the appropriate protocols involved in being a member of the visitor’s gallery of the Wizengamot. From there, she would be able to observe the events of each meeting, permitting her to become familiar with how things were done in that august body. He further began drilling her on the current Heads and Lords in the Wizengamot, their political leanings, strengths and weaknesses.

Eventually, it was September, and the Wizengamot began a new session. Cedrella made her way through the Ministry Atrium early that morning, intending to get to the courtroom early enough to obtain a seat ideal for observation of as many people as possible.

She was partway across the Atrium when a triad of Aurors came off the elevator. Having not seen any of them in two years, it took Cedrella a moment to recognize the three. It was Septimus, Harfang, and Charlus.

Their appearance took Cedrella somewhat aback for a moment. They had all three still been boys the last time she’d seen them, still growing into gawky, ungainly limbs. That had changed markedly. All three of them seemed to have caught up to themselves, sporting broad-shouldered, muscular bodies that were enough so to be discernable even under robes.

The lion’s share of her attention – pun fully intended – was on Septimus, however. He’d been something of a heartbreaker his last two years in Hogwarts. Good looking and with a likeable personality, he’d had a number of girls trailing after him, to whom he had paid no particular attention, much to their dismay. Insofar as Cedrella knew (and she had been in a position to know more than most) he had not courted anyone in school. Why that was, she did not know.

An additional two year’s maturing physically had turned him from merely ‘good looking’ to ‘positively stunning’. His hair had darkened several shades from the normal ‘Weasley red’, though it retained a few lighter-red streaks that framed his face. He’d also grown a small, neat beard and mustache. Both only just escaped the designation of ‘scruff’ enough to lend him a roguish air without looking unkempt. There was an intensity and predatory air to his movements and the way he observed his surroundings that he had not possessed in school – doubtlessly something that had been trained into him at the Academy.

If Cedrella had been less extensively drilled in acceptable behavior, she’d have been drooling. As it was, she had to catch herself up smartly before her stare became noticeable. Sweet Merlin but he’d
become *quite* handsome since she’d seen him last!

Both amused and dismayed by her reaction to him, she gave herself a sharp mental swat and marched towards the elevators. While that goal took her very close to the triad, she didn’t think they would greet her, despite having worked with her in Hogwarts to deal with the undesirables in Slytherin.

She was wrong. None other than Septimus intercepted her.

“Milady Black.” He said, dipping his head in a restrained greeting. Despite that, Cedrella was not imagining it when she fancied that the expression in his eyes was far more welcoming. “It has been too long since we saw each other last.”

“Milord Weasley.” Cedrella greeted, deeply grateful to a lifetime of training for allowing her to appear totally unaffected, despite the fact she was still somewhat discomfited by her reaction to him. “I trust the Academy has treated you well? Have you graduated yet?”

“Just last month.” He told her. “All three of us. We’ve not all that much to do at the moment, thanks be. If I might inquire as to your purpose here today?”

“I intend to observe today’s Wizengamot session.” Cedrella said. “I confess to an interest in politics and political intrigue. Lord Black saw fit to entertain my interest, and has agreed to instruct me in the matter.”

Septimus’ mouth quirked in amusement. “Better you than me, Milady. I will end up bouncing heads together in there when my time comes, if half what my own father says is true of that lot.”

And that sort of thing was exactly why Cedrella was embarking on this extensive education. Septimus had less of the Gryffindor tendency to act without thinking than most, but he still had it. Which would prove disastrous to whatever ambitions he might have for his Family, when he became Head.

“I shan’t keep you any longer, Milady, as we both have other places to be.” Septimus said, giving her another restrained nod. She nodded in return, and they parted ways.

Oh my, but was she going to have things to tell her sisters later tonight!
Septimus had been surprised to see Cedrella. Mostly because she’d turned into quite a looker since he’d last seen her. Last time he’d seen her had been on the train home after her fifth year and his seventh, chasing Abraxas away from her yet again because she’d blossomed that year into a young woman. As a result, Abraxas had returned to the questionable, reputation-endangering chasing of her he’d indulged in before the Marauders had really started kicking his ass.

Septimus’d been far too busy with NEWTs, planning for his future, and pranking idiots and assholes to pay too much mind to Cedrella’s change in looks. He’d gotten the definite impression that his lack of interest had been a relief to her whenever they’d crossed paths or worked together to deal with idiots.

Going through Auror training hadn’t really given him time to think about much of anything else. He’d honestly been startled to realize that he recognized Cedrella after two years. Harfang was going to end up teasing him about that later. Harfang had begun teasing about the three of them having a thing for Black girls sometime after he and Callidora had begun courting. Sad thing was, he wasn’t entirely wrong. Even Charlus had seemed fine with hanging out with the girls in school.

These days, it was he and Charlus that were doing the teasing. The betrothal negotiations that had begun last month immediately after they’d graduated from the Academy were going well according to Harfang, and it was entirely likely he’d be married to Callidora in a year’s time. Septimus had honestly been a little surprised, as the Longbottoms had a long history of being militantly pro-Light. To the point that they technically weren’t a pureblood family by some purebloods’ standard, as they made a point of marrying halfbloods or Muggleborns every few generations. The Weasleys and Potters did something similar.

According to the more militant pureblood fanatics, you only qualified as pureblood if you could trace a wizarding lineage for at least five generations on both sides. There hadn’t been a Longbottom, Weasley, or Potter who could claim that in a really, really long time. The closest any of their families got was four generations on both sides. That said, the fact there’d been wizards with those last names in the same family for hundreds of years was enough for most folks to consider them purebloods.

All this was why Lucretia had been married off to a Prewitt. That family hadn’t married anything other than a fellow pureblood in several hundred years. Lucretia, as a daughter of the Head of Family Black, would be expected to marry pureblood in order to keep that line pure. It wasn’t as important for the daughters of the younger sons of the line, which was why Harfang’s suit was being entertained. That and most of the available pureblood sons for this generation were already spoken for. He, Harfang and Charlus were among a small handful that didn’t have a contract already.

Septimus rather thought the militant purebloods were idiots. The Potters, Longbottoms, and Weasleys hadn’t had a single squib – ever. And the Weasleys and Longbottoms didn’t have only one child per generation unless some disaster struck. The Blacks might enjoy multiple children per generation, but they were the only ones in the militant set. The cadet branches of Family Black, which had mostly been married off to halfbloods, hadn’t produced any squibs either. The Head of Family line, though, produced at least one squib every few generations. The most recent one had
been this generation, a son that had ‘died’ of a wizarding disease at the age of six. Septimus could only hope the poor kid hadn’t actually been killed for the crime of being born without magic.

All the other ‘true pureblood’ families managed, at best, an ‘heir and a spare’ per generation, and frequently produced squibs. But none of them seemed to see the connection between their marriage practices and the health, magical strength, and number of their offspring.

Over the next few months, Septimus saw a *lot* of Cedrella. At first, it was mostly accidental. He, Harfang and Charlus had the overnight shift as the newest Aurors on the force, so they came off-shift very early in the morning. Meanwhile, Cedrella arrived early in order to get a good seat in the Wizengamot session. Four times in two weeks they arrived in the Atrium at the same time. Each time, they exchanged greetings and a few other pleasantries.

Then the pattern altered somewhat, and they started running into Cedrella *every* morning. It didn’t take a genius to figure out that Cedrella had altered her pattern slightly in order to meet up with them each morning. The question was why. Septimus didn’t even try to figure it out. A Slytherin enacting a plot was an inscrutable creature that no Gryffindor had a hope of figuring out. All too soon, those meetings became the best part of Septimus’ day.

Two years ago, there’d been a shift in things in the wizarding world. Almost imperceptible at the time, save for a slight increase in Grindelwald’s activities. Since then, however, things were getting more and more strained in Europe. That muggle was stirring up as much trouble as he could manage, which was leading to a lot of unrest amongst the muggles in the area. That unrest seemed to be targeting anyone ‘different’, resulting in an increased danger of discovery for European wizards.

Worse, Grindelwald was definitely up to no good. The reports from the European wizarding community on that man were not good. He seemed to be building up to something, gathering followers and items of magical power.

Unfortunately, where the problem came in was that the Ministry was ignoring the danger signs. All this was happening ‘over there’. It could not, would not come to England’s shores, and was therefore of no concern. Any attempt at remonstrating with the Head of the DMLE (never mind anyone higher up the food chain) was completely ignored, even when it was veteran Aurors sounding a warning.

The Ministry continued its distinct lack of recruiting for any sector of the DMLE. Their triad had been the largest group recruited in ten years. Every other year, a maximum of two people were recruited for the Hit Wizard squad, Aurors, and general DMLE combined. Some years, there hadn’t been any recruits at all.

Worse, while the Auror drilling in various matters had been thorough, there hadn’t been more than the most basic of dueling training. The bulk of the attention in training had been in recognizing what spells were being flung at you and working together with your partner. Learning to actually fight had been a somewhat secondary concern. After all, there were no Dark Wizards in England currently. Rule breakers certainly, but never Dark Wizards … despite all evidence to the contrary.

To say it was exasperating was a vast understatement. Unfortunately, there was little their triad could do at the moment. They were on graveyard guard detail in the Ministry, not on patrol out in the world at large.

Finally, just after the Yule break, their triad was permitted to patrol, under the aegis of a veteran Auror pair. While patrolling proved to mostly be as boring as nighttime guard duty, they at least got to be around people. There was also the odd chance of running across someone doing something nefarious. This, of course, altered their schedule, but they were still in the Atrium early in the morning – simply coming instead of going, so they still ran into Cedrella every day.

By Easter break, the three of them had been judged capable of handling actual cases, again with
veteran Auror backup. This proved far more interesting for all three of them. Granted, there was nothing in the way of combat, as they were given very small, easy cases to start with. That said, figuring out the whys and wherefores of the problem was a heck of a lot more interesting than wandering around hoping for trouble to pop up.

Harfang and Callidora were finally married in late June of 1936. As befit a wedding between two such prominent families, it was pretty much the event of the year, and everyone who could possibly wrangle an invitation did so.

Wizarding marriage ceremonies bore little resemblance to their Muggle counterparts. For one thing, while there were betrothal contracts, dowries, and such things, these arrangements were between the families in question. The Ministry had absolutely no say, influence, or place in any part of the marriage process. The only involvement the Ministry had was to record, after the fact, who had married who and when for posterity.

The actual ceremony itself was mostly private, with only the couple, their parents, and their Heads of Family (if their parents weren’t the Head) standing witness and giving their blessings as the couple swore their vows. Those vows were sworn to Magic itself, and unbreakable. There was no such thing as divorce in the wizarding world.

A couple could break up after the marriage, but it was rare. Breaking up a marriage was reserved for such egregious sins as adultery and abuse, both of which were thankfully very, very rare. Unfortunately, while a couple could live apart the rest of their lives, they would still be married to one another until one of them died.

The invitations that had been sent out were for the wizard equivalent of the reception party after the wedding itself. Here, there was little difference between wizard and muggle events. There was dancing, toasts and blessings to the new bride and groom, and gifts given. The party frequently lasted long into the night for the guests. The bride and groom however were fully expected to sneak out as early as they could possibly manage. They were, of course, gently teased for doing so, and it was part of the fun to try to keep them from sneaking off if you could.

There followed after that a month-long seclusion, wherein the couple mostly kept to themselves. Whenever possible, the couple spent the entire month in solitude. If that wasn’t possible, one or both were permitted to go to work (or attend a funeral, or such things), but expected to keep their time away from their new spouse as minimal as possible. Extraneous socializing after work, or things of that nature were heavily frowned upon.

Given the financial status of the pair involved, Harfang and Callidora would be able to spend the entire month in seclusion unless a familial emergency popped up. With one of their group out of commission, Septimus and Charlus were put back on patrol and other light duties, so as to reduce the chances of them getting into a fight when they were down a member of their team.

The lighter schedule meant that Septimus had a chance to visit home for more than a few scant minutes. He decided to take advantage of the situation and headed to his parents’ house every weekend that month. The last weekend of the month, his kid brothers came home from Hogwarts, making for a full family reunion.

Victor had completed his final year at Hogwarts, while Felix had completed his fifth, and Bilius his second. The four boys had a rather rambunctious reunion, as Septimus decided to throw dignity to the winds. They ended up in a four-way wrestling/tickle fight for a while, until the other three decided to gang up on Septimus.

When they finally wore each other out, and were sprawled on the floor, Septimus got caught up on
the goings-on at Hogwarts. It turned out that his brothers had decided to carry on the Marauder legacy, rather than let it fade into history. Victor and Felix had begun working together in Septimus’ final year unbeknownst to him, and had included a few of their closest, most trustworthy friends in the campaign. Bilius and friends of his were taking over the bulk of the task now, with Victor graduating and Felix heading into sixth year.

Septimus was delighted that his brothers had decided to follow in those particular footsteps. Keeping bullies in line was a good cause. He was also dismayed that their intervention was still necessary. He’d hoped that by now the teachers would have woken up to the reality of the situation and started to act, but evidently they were content to continue to ignore the problem.

In a way, he shouldn’t have been surprised, given that the members of the Wizengamot had a nearly identical problem with recognizing a problem when one existed. All he could do was hope that it wouldn’t blow up in everyone’s faces – and stand ready to help clean up the mess if it did.

Once Harfang returned from his seclusion, the triad was quickly returned to their regular duties investigating cases. About a week after that, Septimus came to a decision. He’d started out talking to Cedrella in the mornings merely to be polite. But the more they interacted, the better he got to know her and the more he came to like her. Despite her family, she was a decent person.

She had definite views about muggles. Views that clashed with his. But she seemed content to dismiss them as violent (which he had to admit they frequently were) and leave it at that. She didn’t share her family’s predilection for Muggle baiting (or worse), and she even admitted they were frequently quite clever with their gadgets that got around a lack of magic. He’d begun to have real fun debating with her about them. Those debates had quickly expanded to include debates on a number of other subjects.

He’d been surprised to discover that while they did have differing views, they were not so diametrically opposed as was usually the case when a Black and a Weasley were involved.

The decision was simple enough. Instead of keeping the debate short and then making his excuses, Septimus began to make excuses to stay in Cedrella’s company. By the end of the year, they’d gotten to the point where they’d spend hours sitting in the Leaky Cauldron or Fortescue’s Ice Cream Parlour talking about anything and everything under the sun. And the more they talked, the more Septimus came to enjoy her company and actively like her. He kept that to himself, as the likelihood of her permitting him to court her was VERY low. He’d be content with what he could get.
1938 - 1939

Cedrella spent much of the next years attached to Sirius, her Head of Family, at the hip, learning everything he was willing to impart. She proved to be an enthusiastic and particularly adept pupil. Cedrella hadn’t quite expected to truly enjoy learning the ins and outs of the Wizengamot, but she did, and soon discovered she had a flair for it. Sirius took full advantage of her skill and enthusiasm … and her sex.

While women could and sometimes did act as Regents and Proxies for a family, it was rare. There was normally a well-defined line of succession along the male line that ensured a woman’s intervention wasn’t required. Every once in a while however there was either a disaster that killed all the adult males in the line of succession or a thoroughly incompetent Head of Family that neglected to set up a line of succession before his death. At that point, one of the women of the line inevitably got involved.

It was not easy. Women were seen as less competent (to put it nicely) at a great many things than men were, and this was especially true in the field of politics. Female Regents and Proxies had a very hard row to hoe if they wanted to be listened to. It made little sense, but that was the way it was.

Sirius took full advantage of that state of affairs as Cedrella’s skill became apparent. The other Heads and Lords governed their tongues in his presence. They were not anywhere near as discreet if Cedrella was about. Thus she became Sirius’ ‘snake in the grass’. She kept an ear out for what the other Wizengamot member really thought about various things, what they were planning, with whom, and which of the group might be swayed to another line of thinking. She also kept her eye and ear out for things people shouldn’t be doing but were, for potential use as blackmail material if such was needed.

For herself, Cedrella was only too happy to act in this capacity for her Head of Family, as it would be the best possible way she could help Septimus in the future. One of the two of them was going to have to have their finger on the pulse of events in the Wizengamot, after all. Septimus was personable enough to make allies easily, but he lacked the suspicious, cutthroat edge he needed to make him a truly effective politician, and Cedrella could assist with that.

She made a lot of notes over the years, filling several diaries with names, political leanings, who’d voted for which law, who was accepting bribes, and whatever other bits of information she could glean that would be of use in the future.

When she wasn’t up to her eyeballs in plotting, Cedrella could most often be found in Septimus’ company. They crossed paths every morning once she learned what his schedule was, and when he and his partners were advanced, they ended up crossing paths twice a day, as the Wizengamot sessions ended right about the time the day shift ended.

It didn’t take long for the two of them to end up parking themselves in the Leaky or at Fortescue’s in order to talk for a while without risking Cedrella’s reputation. Cedrella soon came to enjoy those talks, as they invariably ended up debating some one thing or other. She was delighted to discover that while Septimus’ world view was definitely Gryffindorish and Light-side in orientation, he was
not as extreme in his views as some on that side of the political divide could be, nor was he as extreme as Weasleys historically were. He was far closer to the middle than the far end of the spectrum.

Not even Cedrella was entirely sure when their daily talks went from ‘friends meeting up to gossip’ to ‘courting’. The transition was so gradual and subtle that it was hard to pin down an exact moment when it happened officially. Ok, that was a lie. Cedrella knew *exactly* when they tipped over the line.

It happened in the latter months of 1938. Cedrella had settled in at Fortescue’s alone, as Septimus had been held up briefly, needing to finish and file some paperwork before he could go off-shift. So naturally, Abraxas, who had not given up on acquiring her as his wife despite her firm refusals of him, showed up and started being his smarmy, overbearing self. She ignored him, up to the point where he said he was sending a betrothal offer to her father.

“He will not accept it.” Cedrella said, her voice cold. “You and your Family are far beneath the Blacks. To marry such a creature as yourself would be an unacceptably large step down. There are far better prospects available.”

Septimus apparently had the best timing ever, because he’d walked into the shop right at the tail end of her declaration. He assessed the situation with a glance, and closed the distance between them. He bowed to her, the sort of social gesture they’d long gotten past needing. Not that Abraxas would know that, which was probably why Septimus had included it. That it was also considered desirable to return to such overt displays of genteel respect towards one’s intended during a courtship was a fact that Cedrella promptly took vicious advantage of.

She lifted her hand to Septimus, allowing him to kiss her knuckles – a move she had not made to Abraxas, and never would. “My darling.” She greeted, giving him a warm smile.

She caught the brief look of startlement in his eyes at her address – something she’d never called him – but years of learning to deal with unpredictable events as first a Marauder and then an Auror allowed him to cover it fairly smoothly.

“I apologize for my tardiness, but business delayed me, my dear.” Septimus said. ‘Dear’ being something he’d never called her, but was again something quite common during courting.

Abraxas was not slow to pick up on all of this. The poisonous look he gave the pair of them was quite amusing.

“This?” He snarled. “This homeless, worthless beggar is your choice?” Abraxas scoffed. “I would have thought a Black would have more ambition than to push out a dozen babies and live in squalor.”

Septimus’ expression at that made Cedrella blink before she mentally gave a smug, delighted purr. He was coldly furious, and probably only seconds from drawing his wand, if that look was anything to go by.

“Even if that was the eventual fate of the future Lady Weasley.” Septimus snapped. “It would still be a better fate than being forced to bed a slimy, smarmy, abusive waste of air and magic like yourself.” He glared. “We are no longer boys, Malfoy. Cedrella made it clear during her school days that your attentions were not desired. Harass her *now*, and the results will not be embarrassing pranks. I can and will call you out in defense of her honor.”

It would be a fight that Malfoy, for all his superior airs, would lose. Badly. Oh, Cedrella knew that
he probably had a thorough education in the Dark Arts, but Abraxas was first and foremost a politician, not a duelist. Septimus, on the other hand, was a born warrior, and would make mincemeat out of Abraxas in very short order.

It would seem that her campaign to wiggle into Septimus’ affections had finally borne real fruit. To say Cedrella was pleased was to vastly understate the case. She had, after all, been working on Septimus for three years. In this one instance, it was quite a pleasure to see a man willing to get in a fight over her.

Abraxas, not being lethally stupid, departed in an offended swirl of robes, leaving a distinct odor of singed ego in his wake. Septimus glared after him for a moment before he huffed out a breath and settled into the chair beside Cedrella.

“I apologize for my behavior, Cedrella. He just makes me very angry. You’d think he’d have wit enough to realize you don’t want anything to do with him and give up.”

“Unfortunately, it would seem he does not have that much intelligence.” Cedrella said. “And there is no need to apologize.”

They talked for a little bit, then Septimus gave her an odd look. “You realize he thinks we’re courting, don’t you?”

Cedrella grinned. “Yes.”

“Would your father allow him to … ”

“My father knows very well what my thoughts on Abraxas Malfoy are.” Cedrella said with no small amount of asperity. “Abraxas would have to bankrupt his family and sell the members into slavery before my father would entertain any notion of him courting me, never mind a betrothal. And my Head of Family is of the same mind.”

Though in Sirius’ case, he was willing to leave Abraxas high and dry in favor of Septimus. He was enough of a political animal to understand that marrying into Light-side families would help the Black Family’s reputation. Septimus was helping his own cause (albeit unknowingly at this point) by his actions over the years. It was readily apparent to anyone that paid attention that Septimus was going to be *quite* the force to deal with in time.

Septimus gave an amused chuckle. “Well then, it sounds as if there’s nothing to worry about.” He said.

They continued to talk for a while longer, but Cedrella could tell that Septimus was working himself up to asking something. She let him do it in peace, rather than trying to draw it out of him. While she dearly hoped that whatever was on his mind involved courting, there was no guarantee of that and she’d rather not make a fool of herself. Towards the end of their usual meet-up time, Septimus finally gave Cedrella an oddly serious look.

“Cedrella …” Septimus hesitated a moment, then forged on. “I have come to think on you quite fondly over the last few years.” He admitted. “Enough so that occasionally, the thought of … well … ”

Again, he trailed off, much to Cedrella’s concealed amusement. Apparently, Gryffindor courage did not extend to things like asking to court someone. She was hard-put to conceal her glee that he’d finally come to this point, and tried her best to seem attentive and nonjudgmental of his atypical hesitation.
Septimus took a deep breath, then spoke again. “I would be honored if you would permit me to pay court to you.” He finally said.

Cedrella smiled openly, ducking her head in a coquettish gesture she’d learned from Callidora. “I would be honored to allow you to pay court to me, milord.” She replied. She promptly had to bite the inside of her mouth to keep from laughing aloud at Septimus’ immediate pleased smile.

“I fear I must take my leave.” Septimus said at that point. “There will be much to discuss with my father tonight. I will see you tomorrow.”

He offered her a slight bow, and she nodded, offering him her hand again. That got her a rakish, pleased grin as he kissed her knuckles then made his way out. Once she was sure he was well clear, she made tracks for her family home and her father, finding him once more in his study.

“Father.” She said as she entered the room after he called for her to enter.

“Cedrella.” Father greeted, then, after a more assessing glance. “You seem quite pleased today. Enjoyable talk with Septimus?”

“Far more so than usual, father.” Cedrella readily admitted. “Septimus was slightly delayed this afternoon, and in his absence, that odious Abraxas attempted to make a play for me again. Septimus arrived at a very timely moment. I made out as if Septimus and I were courting. Septimus caught on very quickly, and went along with it. Even threatened to call Abraxas out in defense of my honor.”

Father looked quite pleased. “Well, it would seem that your campaign to win his regard is working.”

“Better than I realized, father. After Abraxas had gone, towards the end of our usual meeting … Septimus asked permission to court me. I fully expect you to get an owl from him and his father by the end of the month. Perhaps sooner, depending on how convincing Septimus is.”

Father sat back in his chair, looking well pleased. “This is excellent news, Cedrella. I had not thought you would get quite this far this soon – the Weasleys are notoriously leery of anything that smacks of the Dark. Have you told Sirius yet?”

“No. I wanted to warn you first. I have no idea how Septimus’ father views this, or if he even knows, so I thought to warn you first, as his father might come to you in an ill-thought-out attempt to warn you – and me – off.”

Father laughed. “Septimus’ father isn’t quite that foolish, Cedrella, but I appreciate the warning. Now you’d better go and fill Sirius in. The days and weeks ahead are about to get very interesting.”
Unholy Alliance, Part 2

1938 – 1939

Septimus headed for the small house he shared with Charlus immediately after talking to Cedrella. He, Charlus and Harfang had shared the house since shortly after they’d graduated. These days of course, it was just Septimus and Charlus that lived there. He’d been surprised when the two men had offered to live with him. Even after seven years of school and friendship, he’d never lost his awareness of the massive gap between his social station and the station Harfang and Charlus enjoyed. Some small part of him had expected them to go their separate ways after school. Not only had they not done so, they had insisted on splitting the costs involved in the living on their own with him equally so that all three of them could live out from under their parents’ roofs for a while.

Septimus was pretty sure that the other two men had lied to him about how expensive the place was, and had reduced his ‘third’ of the costs involved in staying there in deference to his more limited funds. He had opted not to say anything about it. There was a time and a place for stubborn pride, and this wasn’t it. If Harfang and Charlus set their minds to something, it was *incredibly* difficult to budge them. Trying to force them to split the costs in even thirds would have been a constant running battle, and not worth the effort.

Any doubts he’d had along those lines had been laid to rest since Harfang’s marriage. He’d moved with Callidora into one of the Longbottom homes, and Septimus’ expenses towards the house’s upkeep hadn’t raised so much as a knut. While the matter did bother him, he was grateful to his friends at the same time. Not having to shoulder ‘equal’ expenses meant that the tiny little nest egg he’d started as a kid had grown over the years. Enough so that these days, it didn’t seem a waste of time and effort to use a vault separate from his parents’. It was still small, but it was better than many of his predecessors had had when they began courting.

Charlus grinned at him when he came in. “And how was the fair Cedrella today?”

Septimus snorted. “You do realize, Charlus, that Harfang and I both are going to give you *such* a hard time when you fall head over heels in love with some girl, don’t you?” He pointed out. “That said, Cedrella is fine. I’m dangerously close to hexing Abraxas into oblivion however.”

Charlus made a face. “He was after her *again*?” He shook his head. “That man has no sense whatever. She’s going to hex him impotent if he doesn’t watch his step.”

“No kidding.” Septimus said, then grinned. “The good news is … she’s agreed to let me court her.”

Charlus gave an amused snort, then patted Septimus on the arm. “I don’t envy you. Your father is going to have an apoplexy.”

Septimus sighed. “Don’t I know it. Though I’m hoping how much I’ve mentioned her and our talks – and the results of those talks – will have softened him up a bit.”

The next day, Septimus made his way to his parents’ home. It felt more than a little like walking into a battle zone before the battle broke out. His father wasn’t going to be all that happy about him
wanting to court and marry Cedrella. Septimus didn’t doubt he could sway his father, but there was probably going to be a good bit of shouting in the process.

Fortunately, his mother was home. With himself and Victor out of the house, Felix rooming with a friend and only visiting occasionally and Bilius in school, mother had taken up a part-time job as a midwife and nanny to fill some of her time. And, Septimus strongly suspected, to allow her to mother small children until such time as he and his brothers provided her with grandchildren to spoil. Mother had the calmer temperament of his parents, so she might be able to keep his father from exploding too badly.

“Septimus, darling! Good to see you. And during the week no less! To what do we owe the pleasure? You haven’t been injured, have you?” His mother asked, then hugged him.

To forestall an immediate physical examination for injuries, Septimus held up both hands. “Not injured in the slightest, mother. I asked for the day off as I’ve family business that needs tending.”

“Oh?” Father asked, coming alongside his wife to clap Septimus on the arm. “What sort of family business?”

Septimus took a deep breath and mentally crossed his fingers. “The courtship and betrothal contracts kind of business.” He said.

He nearly laughed, because it was instantly clear he had his mother’s full support. She got very big-eyed and visibly excited. “Oh, Septimus! Truly? You’ve finally found yourself a witch? That’s wonderful! You must tell us all about her. I’d no idea you were even entertaining the notion!”

Septimus gave in to the urge to laugh when his mother grabbed his hand and tried to tow him to the family dinner table in her excitement. He let her lead him there, sharing an amused look with his father in the process.

“Well, it sort of snuck up on me, to be honest.” Septimus said as he let himself be guided into a chair near the head of the table. His father took his customary seat at the head of the table, and his mother sat directly across from Septimus, allowing the three of them to talk face-to-face without trouble. “I wasn’t actually actively looking.”

That alone had his father (who was not exactly stupid) frowning slightly in suspicion. After all, there was really only one female he’d been in regular contact with for love to have a chance to sneak up on him. Love at first sight was still possible of course, but unlikely.

“That does tend to be how it goes, if you don’t fall in love at first sight.” His mother said. “It sneaks up on you and bites you in the rear.” She shot a look at her husband, then grinned.

Septimus, well aware by now of the story of how they’d gotten together, had to laugh again. The story was actually fairly similar to how things had gone thus far with Cedrella, though his mother was not from a traditionally Dark family. She was the daughter of two Muggleborns, and had apparently been quite smitten with Septimus’ father through much of her school days, while Father had taken his sweet time realizing he liked her in return.

His father gave her a tolerant look. “You’re never going to let me live that down, are you?”

“Never.” She proclaimed.

Septimus was deeply grateful to her for diverting his father and keeping him amused. It would help with his father’s temper.
“So.” His mother said. “Who is she?”

Showtime. “Cedrella Black.”

“What!” His father barked.

Well, at least it hadn’t been a full-on bellow. “Father, please. I *know* the Family Black’s reputation. This generation’s daughters don’t seem to share it. They’re all of them decent women. Oh, they have airs and think themselves superior to muggleborns and muggles, but …” Septimus shrugged. “That’s as far as it goes, with the lot of them. Merlin, Cedrella took *Muggle Studies*, father, and you *know* that’s not the done thing in that family!”

Father looked sour. “I’d say she’s bewitched you, but you’ve been gone on her since she started Hogwarts, and not even an eleven year old child from that family is capable of the sort of magic it’d take to bend someone to their will. And you were out of her sphere of influence for two years – more than long enough for a potion to wear off.”

Septimus snorted. “I’ve not been gone on her since she was eleven father.” He said. “I just didn’t approve of someone trying to force her into a corner. Abraxas is the worst sort of bully imaginable. I wouldn’t put it past him to have literally forced her at some point if someone hadn’t intervened. And her applying to her head of Family could only do so much good, with her away at Hogwarts most of the year. By the time the Black Head found out she’d been potioned or hexed, it would have been far too late to do anything about it.”

Father huffed, still looking less than pleased. “I suppose you are determined in this?” He groused.

Septimus nodded.

Father rolled his eyes. “As I know what it is to be a fool in love.” He slanted a look at his wife that was equal parts exasperated and adoring. “And as you’re an Auror and those partners of yours would have caught any spells or potions before now, I’ll not fight this. But do not expect me to be happy about it.”

Septimus was only too happy to get that much. He’d anticipated a much more severe fight than this over the whole thing. “That will be enough father.”

Father sighed. “I’ll get in contact with Sirius this afternoon, and start the wrangling. It’s not going to be pretty, son.”

“You never know. I do, after all, have Cedrella on my side, and she’s been thick as thieves with Sirius for several years now. If it weren’t for the fact that Headship is always patrilineal if a male heir exists in the line, I’d think he was grooming her to be the next Head.”

“He’d be well served to do so. I’ve heard rumors about his grandson, Orion, that do not paint the lad in a good light. Evidently, he didn’t attend the Ball until he was nine.”

Septimus’ eyebrows went up. “Nine? That’s rather late. Usually it’s seven. Sometimes earlier than that.”

“I also have heard that even at that late date, he made a fairly poor showing.” his father admitted.

Septimus shook his head. “We can only hope Sirius and Arcturus after him last until a better potential Head appears in the line if it’s as bad as all that.”

“Agreed.” His father said.
As much as father disliked the Black family, seeing it go to rack and ruin would be a blow. The Blacks were one of the oldest pureblood lines in the UK. They had, in that time, managed to remain one of the most influential as well. Seeing such a powerful Family crumble would be painful.

Thankfully, neither Septimus nor Cedrella were required to attend the initial negotiations. Their attendance would only be required once the two families had gotten to the point where the marriage was approved by both Heads. At that point, it would become a question of details specific to the marriage itself, which would require their input.

Much to Septimus’ amusement, he and Cedrella quickly fell into the habit of filling each other in on their respective parents’ moods and any insights they gleaned into how the initial negotiations were going.

Septimus found himself surprised at how fast and smoothly things were going. It was quickly apparent that despite their grousing, both family Heads (and Cedrella’s father) were in favor of the match. All three men seemed to be going out of their way to make the negotiations as smooth and easy as possible. Considering the families involved, that was no mean feat.

Before either of them knew it, two months had passed and the more intimate negotiations had begun. Sirius, who had fully expected to be providing the lion’s share of the finances for the marriage, was surprised and gratified to discover that Septimus had a respectable nest egg of money he’d earned since childhood. It was far too small for the pair to live more than a bare-bones life, but it was more than most of the Weasley clan could have claimed when they married, and spoke well to Septimus’ potential husbandry of the Weasley Headship when the time came.

Unbeknownst to Septimus, Sirius, vastly relieved at this sign of fiscal responsibility, had been far more generous than he had initially been inclined to be with the dowry for Cedrella. Combined with her father’s dowry, the pair would be comfortably set. Not rich by any means, but well above the usual Weasley standard. If Septimus was half as good a steward as he seemed to be, they’d increase that wealth over time.

There was a good reason for Sirius’ initial caution. The Weasleys had, a few hundred years ago, been very nearly the equal of the Blacks in money, land, and influence. Unfortunately for them, they’d hit a run of Heads who were spendthrifts, gamblers, and generally idiots where money was concerned. By the time the dust cleared, the Weasleys had been reduced to a paltry few galleons in the vault and one small estate that had originally been a vacation cottage … and a staggering amount of debt owed. From the records of the Black Head of the time, it had been clear to Sirius that the Weasleys had been damn lucky to escape indentured servitude to the goblins to clear the debt.

The debt had been paid off eventually, but the damage to the Weasley name had been far longer lasting. Worse, without any start-up capital and a distinct lack of people or goblins willing to loan it to them, they’d not been able to get out of the hole those irresponsible Heads had dug for the family. Thus had the Weasleys fallen into ignominy.

He’d been slightly dubious about Cedrella’s preference for the man, but over the last few years he’d begun to see what Cedrella saw in him. Potential. Vast amounts of it. It was entirely possible that if Septimus listened to her, with Cedrella at his side, he’d be able to drag the Weasley name back into prominence once more. It made Sirius more than a little eager to watch the pair in the years to come.
Weasley Cottage, June 1939

Septimus paced uneasily in his room, watched by his highly amused parents. He was getting married today. Somehow, it didn’t seem possible. He was so wound up he could barely see straight.

“Lad, if you don’t calm down, you’re going to pass out.” His father said. “Quit pacing about like a caged dragon. It’s time to start getting ready anyway.”

Septimus gave an amused snort, but obeyed, slowing to a stop near the door to his room. “Like you were any better.”

“No, son … I was worse.” His father readily admitted with a smile. “Your grandfather threatened to hit me with a Rennervate at one point, I was so close to passing out.”

Septimus laughed. Then he walked out of his room to the bathroom and closed the bathroom door behind him, grateful it was time to begin preparations and give his mind something to do other than fret.

Septimus had been baffled, the first time he’d observed even part of a Muggle wedding. Wizarding weddings were so very different from Muggle weddings. His confusion had only deepened when he learned about all the usual traditions surrounding muggle weddings.

Or more precisely, the remarkable lack of truly meaningful traditions that seemed to surround muggle weddings. Oh, they had a few, like the items a bride was supposed to have at the actual wedding - something old, new, borrowed, blue. White or cream being the traditional colors for a bride, depending on her state of sexual purity. That, however, seemed to be the end of it. Even more baffling to Septimus had been the concept of divorce. By comparison, Wizarding weddings were up to their eyeballs in meaningful and mostly necessary traditions.

One of the few not-necessary traditions was that there were absolutely no parties or gift-giving of any kind prior to the wedding. To do so was seen as severely bad luck. How that superstition got started, no one knew, but it had been around for a very, very long time.

Sexual purity was not (to the surprise of many a muggleborn) of any importance when entering into a marriage. That said, fidelity once married was of extreme importance. Infidelity was one of only two acceptable reasons to separate (as divorce was impossible) from one’s spouse, the other being abuse. The burden of fidelity was shared equally between the married couple - unlike among muggles, there was not a double standard where men were more easily forgiven for infidelity than women.

Of nearly equal importance was coming into the marriage without any trace of duplicity or artifice. As a result of that, it had become tradition that colognes, makeup, glamours, artificial hair color, and anything else along those lines were forbidden. Additionally, wedding robes were deliberately simple in cut, not designed to conceal or enhance any given physical feature.

Once in the bathroom, Septimus took a thorough shower using a special scentless soap. While it wasn’t required, it had become tradition to bathe thoroughly just before the wedding – symbolically washing away all that came before, and any impurities on one’s person. That done, Septimus pulled
the deep purple robe over his head and smoothed it out before heading back out into his bedroom where his parents were waiting for him.

Wizarding brides always wore a shade of pink, and the grooms wore purple. This was primarily because of the fact that the most commonly used flowers that represented fidelity were in shades of pink and purple, thus linking those colors with that quality. Everyone else in the wedding party wore cream colored robes with either pink or purple accents, depending on which of the wedding party they were family to.

Unlike muggle weddings which took place all year 'round and were most often done indoors, Wizarding weddings took place in spring, summer, or fall, and whenever possible outdoors. Many a wedding party had resorted to canopies or spells to keep things dry in the face of an unexpected squall during the proceedings. Only truly foul or outright dangerous weather could drive the wedding indoors and there was sufficient warning of such foul weather, the wedding was usually changed to another, more clement day.

Septimus sat down on a chair that had been brought into the room. His mother pulled a basket of flowers she’d brought with her onto the bed, and began weaving them into a crown on Septimus’ head, anchoring the crown in his deliberately-grown-longer hair so it didn't get blown off by a strong breeze. There were cherry blossoms to symbolize love and good fortune, and purple amaranth and pink rosemary for fidelity. As the groom, Septimus’ crown had much more amaranth in it than rosemary, though it still had some of the latter. Cedrella would be wearing a similar crown, but with much more rosemary than amaranth.

It didn’t take his mother long to construct the simple crown, by tradition the only ornament permitted the bride and groom. Once that was done, Septimus stood up and the three of them headed out. As it was June and the weather was cooperating, Septimus was barefoot, while his mother and father were wearing simple sandals. Their own robes, while more elaborate than what Septimus and Cedrella would be wearing, were still far simpler than was the norm for day-to-day wear. Septimus’ father also had on the belt that signified him as Head of the groom’s Family.

The back lawn of Weasley Cottage had been transformed. There were pink and purple blossoms of every variety that had good meanings everywhere. Garlands and swags and wreaths of them draped on every available surface and twined in among the leaves of the trees, making it look like they were abloom.

A largeish circle of bare earth had been cleared in the lawn, on which to conduct the brief ceremony. The edges of the circle were ringed with stones buried in the earth that had been carved with runes – runes for protection, fidelity, fertility and luck among other things. There were also a few runes designed to contain the backwash of magic that would result when the vows were sealed and accepted by magic.

Those runes were not always needed, but they were always included in marriage circles like this. The strength of the backwash depended on a number of largely unpredictable factors aside from the magical strength of the pair swearing the vows. There had been cases, before the runes were included as a matter of course, of the backwash affecting things as far as twenty kilometers away. Granted, the effects were never destructive or punitive, but it was still problematic. In every such case, plants and animals within range of the wash, and any couples (married or not) that bore enough love for each other to be inclined to carnal relations … well, let’s just say there was a bumper crop of births and plant growth after such weddings.

That backwash was also the primary reason behind why only parents and heads of families were present at the wedding ceremony itself. Parents were largely immune to the arousal effect of the
backwash because half of it was generated by their child, and Heads were protected from influence of any sort by the magics that made them Heads. Siblings were not traditionally included in the wedding party because one or more of them could be underage, and even if they were half immune thanks to being so closely blood-related to one of the wedding party, exposing underage witches and wizards to such a backwash was anathema. Anyone else would get hit by the full effect, thus they were forbidden from attending.

The backwash was also why the ceremony was conducted on bare earth or stone. It was very common for plants (even trees) to spring up in the circle if it wasn’t stripped of plants and seeds. There was more than one rather amusing tale of a particularly strong backwash growing a ten-foot-tall tree in mere moments, hoisting one or more of the unsuspecting wedding party aloft as it grew. Such tales were amusing to tell, but no one wanted to have it actually happen to them, so clearing the ground had become required.

Cedrella was escorted out by both her parents and Sirius. Septimus couldn’t help but smile when he saw her, because despite the deliberate simplicity of the wedding robes, she looked … truly beautiful. If he was going to be completely trite and smitten, she looked radiant.

Not that he’d ever admit to that. Not after all the teasing he and Charlus had given Harfang when he’d made the mistake of admitting to thinking that very thing when he saw Callidora in her wedding robe. He’d never hear the end of it, and he wasn’t dumb enough to invite that sort of aggravation when it could be avoided.

Everyone stepped into the circle, careful not to step on the runes (another bad luck omen). Septimus and Cedrella took their places at the center of the circle, while their parents and Sirius took their places near the ring of runes. Once they were all in position, Septimus’ father spoke.

“I, Gaius Weasley, Head of the Weasley Family, do here invoke the Family Magics, that they bear witness to and bless the union of this child of my Family.”

There was an immediate wash of warmth and welcome, and the day’s light seemed to brighten as ancient magics stirred.

Sirius spoke next, his words identical to those of Septimus’ father, except for reciting his own name and Family. There was another immediate swirl of ancient magic, this one deep and dark, deepening the shadows that had been brought into sharp relief by the wash of light.

Gaius spoke again, this time with his wife, as parents of the groom. “I, Gaius Weasley, father of the groom, do here give my blessing to this union.” His mother’s was the same, just with her name. Then Cedrella’s parents gave their blessings. One after the other, four magical threads wove around the circle, invisible to the naked eye but each easily discerned from the other, one from each parent.

Finally, it was Septimus’ turn. He took a deep breath, cleared his throat, and then spoke. “I, Septimus Weasley, in the name of the spirit of Magic that resides within us all, by the life that courses within my blood and the love that resides within my heart, take thee Cedrella Black to my hand, my heart, and my spirit, to be my chosen one. To desire thee and be desired by thee, to possess thee, and be possessed by thee, without shame, for naught can exist in the purity of my love for thee. I promise to love thee wholly and completely without restraint, in sickness and in health, in plenty and in poverty, in life and beyond, where we shall meet, remember, and love again. I shall not seek to change thee in any way. I shall respect thee, thy beliefs, thy people, and thy ways as I respect myself.”

Cedrella smiled briefly at him before she spoke. “I, Cedrella Black, in the name of the spirit of Magic that resides within us all, by the life that courses within my blood and the love that resides within my heart, take thee Septimus Weasley to my hand, my heart, and my spirit, to be my chosen one. To desire thee and be desired by thee, to possess thee, and be possessed by thee, without shame, for
naught can exist in the purity of my love for thee. I promise to love thee wholly and completely without restraint, in sickness and in health, in plenty and in poverty, in life and beyond, where we shall meet, remember, and love again. I shall not seek to change thee in any way. I shall respect thee, thy beliefs, thy people, and thy ways as I respect myself.”

Two more magical threads joined the rest as they spoke, weaving around the pair. Once Cedrella finished her vows, they looked at each other, and then in chorus spoke one final time. “These be my vows to thee, sworn on my life and my magic, so mote it be.”

The magic coalesced into a firestorm, just visible at the periphery of one’s vision as a warping, wobbling mirage tinted with all the colors of the rainbow. Warmth, love, and devotion swamped everyone present inside the runic circle as the magic swirled around them, seeking an outlet … and only finding one. Like a tornado collapsing in on itself, the bulk of the magic wrapped itself around Septimus and Cedrella, binding them together in just-visible chains of magic before it slowly dissipated.

It took a few minutes for everyone to clear their heads and regain their equilibrium. Sort of. Septimus and Cedrella, having absorbed the bulk of the magic, were very wide-eyed and slightly on the hyper side. This would be the other reason the newly married pair were fully expected to ditch the after-party as early as they could humanly manage. All that energy had to go somewhere, sooner rather than later.

“Well.” Sirius said, blinking his eyes a few extra times. “That was one of the stronger bindings I’ve seen.”

“Agreed.” Gaius said, giving his head a shake to clear it. “You two all right?” He asked the new couple.

“Yeah. Buzzing, but functional.” Septimus said, then glanced at Cedrella. “You?”

“The same.” She said, patting his arm reassuringly.

“Well then. Off to the party we go.” said Cedrella’s mother. “I can’t *wait* to brag about this.”

“Mother!” Cedrella sounded more amused than anything else.

“Pish, dear. It’s a mother’s right to brag when her daughter makes such a strong match.” Her mother said.

“Indeed it is.” Septimus’ mother agreed.

Septimus and Cedrella shared an amused glance before following everyone out of the runic circle and heading for the party.
Unholy Alliance, Part 4

Unholy Alliance Part 4

=-=-=-=-=

June - December 1939

Septimus and Cedrella’s gift from Sirius Black had been a small cottage and the land it sat on. Well, small by Black standards, which meant it had six bedrooms, three bathrooms, kitchen, dining room, parlor and a room for a library/office. It was quite a nice place and would probably seem crowded once there were children or relatives about, but in the meantime Septimus felt like he and Cedrella were a pair of gobstones in an empty trunk. Not that either of them really noticed that effect for the first week. They’d been far too busy getting intimately acquainted with each other.

They did eventually start talking over the future. Though that had to wait until the first blush of their ardor had faded and they were capable of going more than a few minutes at a stretch without ending up making love.

“I’d love to drag the family name out of the mud.” Septimus said. “But I’ve no idea where to even start.”

Cedrella smiled at him. “That’ll be where I come in, Septimus. You know I’ve been tailing Sirius for years now. I know nearly as much about the political scene as he does at this point.”

Septimus eyed her for a moment, and then grinned. “Have a plan, do you?”

He wasn't an idiot. Faced with the realization that she had a plan, he knew she hadn't come up with said plan since they married. Slytherins in general and Cedrella in particular didn't work that way. At least, the 'good' ones didn't. They took a long view, plotted and planned and schemed far in advance and at least tried to take as many variables into account as they could. He rather suspected that she'd had something in mind regarding him since they'd started meeting up every day. It made sense of her altering her pattern, which had baffled him at the time.

If he'd figured out that she was planning something regarding him even a year ago, he'd've been ... upset. At this point, he knew her well enough to know that she truly loved him, whatever she was up to wasn't bad, and that she wasn't using him for her own aims. Well, at least not in a bad way. She was Slytherin, after all. Being ambitious came with the territory, and women had little power where it 'counted'. If she couldn't manage to make a name for herself in the political arena thanks to male egos, being the real power behind an up-and-coming Lord wasn't a bad second option.

“Something of the sort.” Cedrella admitted. “You’ve actually already done a good bit of the preliminary work. You’re widely considered to be commonsensible, hardworking, honorable, and very personable. About the only person that speaks ill of you is Abraxas, and we both know why, in that case. Without that base already in place, the job would be a lot harder.”

“So … what do we do from here?” Septimus wanted to know.

“We work on the financial end of things. That’s where the bulk of your family’s problems come from. If you’re seen to be investing and spending wisely, that’ll be the final cornerstone to getting people to listen when you talk rather than dismissing or ignoring you because they don’t want to risk siding with someone with a bad reputation.” Cedrella advised. “Again, you have already started some repair work there – that nest egg in your vault speaks well to your ability to save money."
You’ve also never once gambled or bought some painfully expensive but useless trinket. People wouldn’t know about the savings, but they’d have noticed the lack of gambling and buying things indiscriminately. On the investment end of things, we can use a portion of my dowry as investment capital, and work from there.”

Septimus nodded. “Something fairly low-risk at first.” He said. It was both the smartest thing, and what he was comfortable mucking with. “Maybe speak with the goblins?” He asked.

While wizards let goblins guard their money, and the goblins kept track of what businesses were doing well etc, it was the very rare pureblood wizard who would actually confer with the goblins and heed their advice before investing in a business venture, much less give a goblin full control to invest as they pleased. That had always seemed somewhat counterintuitive to Septimus, since the goblins would know where the best profits were to be had.

Cedrella made a bit of a face, but then sighed. “Probably the wisest course.” She reluctantly agreed. “Given that we don’t have much to work with, and a loss would both wipe us out and ruin our chances of pulling the family name out of the mud, as you put it.” She took a deep breath. “I also think we should put off having children, at least for a little while. We need a better base under us before then.”

Septimus opened his mouth to argue almost instantly. But then his brain caught up with him and he forced himself to think about the idea reasonably, and he clamped his mouth shut against the temptation to blurt out an immediate negative.

Right now, his salary was enough for them to live on without dipping into Cedrella’s dowry. The expenses involved in a pregnancy and raising a child would force them into using Cedrella’s dowry to close the gap between his income and their expenses. So they could either wait, using Cedrella’s dowry to get them in a better position financially, or spend it on kids now, with no guarantee that it would be enough when all was said and done.

Put like that, there wasn’t really much of a choice. He sighed. “You have a point. If at all possible, having enough money coming in to cover everyday expenses and have some left over to put towards Hogwarts tuition would be best. I know my parents scrambled to make ends meet from time to time when I was growing up. I don’t want that worry for our kids.”

Cedrella smiled and patted his arm. “I know that had to be a bit difficult to decide.” She admitted. “It was, but really, it’s the best thing.” Septimus said on a sigh.

Thanks to their finances, they were one of those couples exempt from not appearing in public at all. Septimus returned to work the day after their talk. Once their period of solitude was over, they both headed straight for the bank.

The junior teller they spoke to first was understandably surprised to have a pureblood couple seeking advice on investments. He got over it pretty fast however and immediately escorted them to speak with a more senior bank official in his office.

“So. You wish to invest.” Zartang said.

He looked much like every goblin Septimus had ever met, save for the fact he had blue eyes. Septimus half wondered if maybe Zartang was related to Professor Flitwick. Not that he was going to ask.

“Yes.” Septimus said. “We would rather something guaranteed to return as much as possible for
what we invest, given our currently limited capital. As goblins manage all the finances of the 
wizarding world, it follows you would know where the most profit is to be had. To ignore such 
knowledge is foolhardy.”

Zartang gave them a fangy smile. “You have more wisdom than most of your peers, Mr. Weasley. 
Yes, I can help you invest wisely.”

Septimus smiled in return. “I believe the standard fee for such matters is one percent of the 
proceeds?” He asked.

He’d done extensive research before coming here, both so he knew what to expect and to make as 
good an impression as possible. Turned out, not wasting time with frivolous small talk was a sign of 
respect, among other things that were quite different from how wizards did things.

“Yes.” Zartang said.

“Hmm. Double the money we invest each month, and I’ll raise it a tenth of a percent per month up to 
three percent.” Septimus offered. “Do well enough to get it to three percent within three years ... ” It 
would actually take just under two years if the goblin was as good as Septimus hoped, but Septimus 
had added time to account for possible problems. “And not only will it stay there, but you will 
become the goblin in charge of all Weasley vaults and monies when I become Head of House. Until 
that time, you’ll be in sole charge of our personal vaults.”

That sort of incentive ought to have the goblin working all hours of the day and night to increase the 
money Septimus would be investing. From what Septimus had read, being an Account Manager was 
a much-prized position. Being an Account Manager who was allowed to invest at their discretion 
*and* getting a larger share of the proceeds was the sort of thing goblins salivated over.

Zartang’s grin widened. “You have a deal, human.” He said. A wave of one long-fingered hand 
conjured a contract. Septimus read it over to make sure that there were no hidden clauses, then 
signed it.

That done, they left the bank. Cedrella eyed Septimus. “Three percent, Septimus?”

“Think of it as insurance.” Septimus said. “Goblins always want more gold. Earning three percent of 
whatever he manages to bring in for us via investments will ensure that he pays very close attention 
to our investments. We’ll be bringing in more per investment than any other clients he might be 
working with unless they’re investing ridiculous sums of money. It also earns us some serious good 
will, being willing to go above the minimums set in the last Treaty. You know as well as I do that 
purebloods don’t. And I don’t think many muggleborns think of it. They’re used to how things work 
in Muggle banks, which don’t permit that sort of haggling and incentive giving.”

“Good point.” Cedrella admitted after a moment. “I hadn’t thought of it that way, but you’re right.”

Zartang was as good as his word. By the time September rolled around, he’d earned two months’ 
worth of extra percentages. Enough for Septimus to return the seed money they’d used from 
Cedrella’s dowry with a bit of interest as thanks, and still have more to invest in September than 
they’d started with in July.

Unfortunately, in September, all thoughts of financial successes were driven from Septimus’ mind. 
That muggle that had been making Septimus so uneasy invaded another country. Worse, that same 
week, Gellert Grindelwald and a large contingent of followers marched on several small muggle 
villages.
The simultaneous nature of the attacks rang alarm bells for Septimus. Alarm bells he largely forgot about, because Europe promptly went insane. In the next few months, even from the slight remove of England, it was incredibly difficult to make sense of much of anything that was going on. Armies were everywhere, alliances were struck, both wizard and muggle, and more than one battlefield had members of both communities present right from the get-go.

What made him want to beat his head against a brick wall was that despite everything going on, the Ministry was still very firmly of the belief that it was of no matter to them. It was all happening in Europe, not here, so there was nothing to worry about. No one would DARE attack the UK, much less the magical portion thereof.

Septimus wasn’t the only one who openly scoffed at that. Charlus and Harfang were of equal mind with him. It was something they talked about with increasing frequency as the year waned and the fighting increased.

“’Tis going to come here sooner or later.” Harfang predicted just before Yule, when the Marauders got together on the weekend. “The muggles declared war on that German within days of him attacking Poland. The magical European communities did the same to Grindelwald two weeks ago.”

“And every available Hit Wizard and Auror on the continent is already on the warpath, with half of their Obliviators alongside, trying to keep the muggles from noticing what’s going on.” Charlus said. “What bothers me is that it’s clear to anyone paying attention that that muggle and Grindelwald are somehow in cahoots, despite there not being any clear communication trail yet. But no one seems to realize it. Or care, for that matter.”

“The ruddy bastard is going to end up exposing the wizarding world to the muggles if he’s not stopped.” Septimus agreed. “You’d think the Ministry would care about that at least.”

“Them caring about that would require that they be able to think that far.” Harfang pointed out with a disgusted snort. “Most of them can’t think beyond their next bribe.”

“Point.” Septimus said, then shook his head. “Let’s just hope that things are salvageable when they finally get their heads out of their asses.”
1940

Bit by bit, month by month, Septimus and Cedrella’s financial situation improved. Zartang, as Septimus had predicted, worked his tail off to ensure that their investments brought in the most profit possible in the shortest amount of time … with as little risk as could be managed. It would be a long time before they approached even the lower end of the ‘usual’ pureblood level of wealth, but they were making good progress towards that goal for so early in the game.

Over that same time, the situation in Europe continued to devolve. Hitler and Grindelwald were smashing their way through everything in their paths. Hitler had invaded and defeated what seemed like half of Muggle Europe and Grindlewald had done much the same to Wizard Europe. People, both wizard and non, were dying in droves. There were days when it was all Septimus could do to restrain himself from heading over there and trying to help, consequences be damned.

Then a day came when he didn’t have to fight that urge so much. Because Hitler started bombing England cities. Especially London. And more than one of the bombs got entirely too close to the Ministry and Diagon Alley for anyone’s comfort. That alone had been enough to bestir the Ministry. Then one of the bombs went off directly over the Ministry and it was discovered that some or all of the bombs had a magical component. That bomb hit the Ministry wards with a Siege Engine spell. Worse, it wasn’t the only such bomb, as several wizarding homes and St. Mungo’s took direct hits.

The Ministry, so long willing to ignore the problem in Europe, abruptly shook off its unconcern and started howling about something needing to be done to stop the madness. Incontrovertible proof of a magical conspiring with a muggle to destroy magical enclaves? Such must be stopped, and the muggles in the know killed or obliviated. Septimus wasn’t the only one to think there was more of an emphasis on killing the muggles than simply obliviating them.

Half the existing Auror corps was sent out to protect the UK enclaves, though what good they’d do against bombs falling from the sky, Septimus couldn’t figure. Rigging and reinforcing wards wasn’t what Aurors *did*. They all knew how to break wards down, and to cast anti-apparation and anti-portkey wards, but only a few had the knowledge and ability to cast wards that could stand up to a Siege Engine. The Ministry would have been far better served sending out ward smiths, but them doing the wrong thing in order to look good was pretty much par for the course.

The rest of the Aurors, and to Septimus’ ill-disguised relief that included the Marauders, were to be sent to Europe to provide more firepower. They were given two weeks to make any arrangements needed before they headed out. Septimus was not at all surprised when Cedrella and Callidora insisted on going with them. They even had a logical reason for it.

“I am quite sure that a great many Dark spells will be being thrown about.” Callidora said when everyone met up to talk about it. “Cedrella and I both have a lot of knowledge of those spells, and how to counter them, where counters exist. And what we don’t know, we can quickly discover through Sirius. But we’d need to *be* there to correctly identify the spells or catalogue the effects before we ask for information.”

And, it went without saying, neither woman was anywhere near all right with sending their husbands
into a war zone without that sort of assistance. Nor were their husbands stupid enough to try to force the issue. Septimus for one knew damn well that Cedrella would just leave after he had, and track him down. The end result of that would be exceedingly painful. For him. And he was pretty sure that Callidora would do exactly the same to Harfang.

Charlus dug up a tent for them to use. It was fairly small and unremarkable on the outside. It could pass for a Muggle tent, which could only help if they found themselves working with muggles. Even if they didn’t, having a small, unremarkable tent would make them less of a target than some of the utterly ridiculous tents wizards came up with. The inside, however, had space enough for the two couples and Charlus to live without problems.

Harfang, Callidora and Cedrella spent the better part those two weeks prior to their departure cooking up huge vats of potions that were then carefully bottled. Harfang then crafted belts for them to wear that would hold a number of vials of potions, the vast majority of them meant for battlefield healing, though a few held poisons and the like to use if opportunity presented itself.

While those three were busy, Charlus and Septimus took care of the rest: the shopping and packing needed to supply them while they were abroad. Spare wands from the Weasley, Longbottom, and Potter vaults were brought out and tested by everyone. The wands that responded to one of the party were carefully labeled: Which family they had come from, who the wand responded to, and a number that indicated how strongly. This way, if someone lost or broke their primary wand, they’d have multiple backups available.

Further raiding of the Potter and Longbottom vaults (the Weasley vault had long since been stripped of such valuable items) produced sets of armor for everyone, as well as a number of viable backup weapons. With the number of knives and other small, easily concealed sharp implements Callidora and Cedrella snapped up, he truly pitied anyone stupid enough to attack them under the assumption that a female made an easier target. He knew for a fact they’d both appealed to Sirius and been permitted to remove who-knew-what from the Black vaults for their use. Unfortunately, much of the Black family items were either Dark or be spelled to only be useable by full-blooded Blacks to prevent spouses and more distant relations from making off with Black possessions. As a result they couldn’t use much of anything from that source.

Clothing for both winter and summer was packed in plenty, as was a large supply of food. One of the Potter elves, Jinx, volunteered to go with them to cook and clean. The clothing had necessitated some shopping as while everyone had plenty of clothing, none of it was any good for sustained travel or fighting in a war zone, not even their Auror robes, since wearing bright red on a battlefield was a really, really dumb idea. They took care with their food supplies as well, concentrating more on practicality than indulgence.

Once they had everything ready, the five of them reported to the Ministry and were immediately portkeyed to the French Ministry. From there, once they’d checked in and gotten their assignments, they portkeyed to one of the training camps where they would meet the rest of their group and have their fighting capabilities assessed so the Magical Europe Generals would know how best to use them. They joined a group of about twenty other men and women, only two of whom Septimus recognized from the UK.

They were greeted by a grizzled, scarred man who looked to be in his fifties or sixties and was dressed in a military uniform. Septimus strongly suspected the man was a Muggle. There was another man with him who looked all of twenty and was dressed in a dueling robe and armor.

“Right.” The grizzled man said. “M’names Georg. I’m in charge of teaching you lot about the stuff you’re going to run into out there that you might not be familiar with. Which of you lot know what a
All three Marauders raised their hands, as did Cedrella. Septimus had learned about guns in his forays into the muggle village as a kid, and the other two Marauders had learned about them over the summers after Hogwarts started. Cedrella of course had learned about them from Muggle Studies, and Septimus had filled her in on a few of the changes the class hadn’t known about. About half of the rest of their group also indicated they knew what a gun was.

“And of you lot that know what one is … how many’ve seen one?” Only one or two hands were dropped, none in the Marauders group. “And of you lot, how many have actually fired one?”

Every hand but those of the three Marauders went down. Even they had only a few lessons in that art, having wanted to know what to do with a gun if they had to deal with it in the execution of their duties. Guns were tightly controlled in the UK, but they did exist and were occasionally used, and not all Auror cases stayed solely in the wizarding world. The elderly muggle they’d gone to in the village near Septimus’ parent’s house had insisted on teaching them not just how to handle a gun safely, but to fire it, since he was under the assumption that they were muggles themselves.

“Right.” Georg said. “At least now I know what I’m working with. You three, I’ll talk to later. I want to see how good you are.” He said, pointing to the three men before returning his attention to the rest. “Everyone, come with me.”

They were led to a tent, which held a myriad of guns and other muggle implements. Septimus recognized a few, but most he didn’t.

Georg proceeded to give everyone a basic rundown on guns, grenades, and other muggle weapons they might come across. He told them which to avoid touching at all cost (mostly mines), and how to safely handle the rest.

“I’ll be teaching you lot how to shoot.” Georg informed them. “I know you’ve got your wands, but if you ever don’t, but have a gun handy, you’ll thank me for it.”

“On the other end of things.” The young man who’d been partnered with Georg spoke up for the first time. “I will be assessing your magical abilities, so that we can assign you to where you’ll do the most good. I have notes on who is used to working in a particular group – do not worry that you will be forced to split up. Such partnerships will be kept intact.”

That was a relief to Septimus. He hadn’t been too worried they’d be split up, but it had been a possibility. There had been stupider decisions made in the past, to be sure.

After that, it was time for a meal, and then they reconvened, this time for their magical evaluation. This, Septimus watched with great interest, as most of their group was not from the UK, and might therefore know and use spells unfamiliar to him. It also behooved him to know who the weak links in the group were.

Surprisingly, despite their general lack of knowledge of muggle weaponry, the group was otherwise quite solid and capable. A pair from Switzerland that Septimus initially thought were fraternal twins but were actually (somewhat creepily, given their near-identical looks) a married couple were the real standouts of the group. Like the Marauders, it was clear the pair had worked together extensively, and knew each other inside and out, allowing them to flow around each other seamlessly in a fight. They also had quite an arsenal of spells Septimus had never seen before at their disposal.

Karl, the wizard doing the evaluations, was nearly as surprised by the Marauder triad as the Aurors initially had been, but he hadn’t been able to argue with the results. With the vast majority of magical
fights taking place either between single opponents, mass free-for-alls, or between duos, most defensive measures had been developed to deal with single or paired opponents. The third leg of the Marauders was a loose end that most defensive stratagems couldn’t immediately account for. It gave the Marauders an advantage, at least in the initial minutes of any confrontation. Sooner or later, their opponents would manage to compensate, but in the meantime, the Marauders weren’t shy about taking ruthless advantage of the resultant initial confusion.

Needless to say, everyone went to bed exhausted that night. The next day, the Marauders were pulled aside by Georg, who took them to the firing range and had them show him what they knew. Given it wasn’t much, that didn’t take long. At the end, Georg nodded.

“All right. Not enough to pass you out of the class, so to speak, but you’re a step up from the rest. I want you three to start practicing every day with one of these. Make sure one of us muggles is with you until you’re cleared to practice on your own. The others will start joining you on the range as they pass the ‘safe handling’ portion of the course. You lot still have to attend that, by the way. Modern guns handle a little differently than old hunting rifles.”

None of them were about to argue with that.
War

Chapter Notes

Warning, this chapter contains mentions of death, violence, and mild gore.

War

A/N: Warning, this chapter contains mentions of death, violence, and mild gore.

(_)(_)(_)

1940 – 1945

For the rest of his life, Septimus was only ever able to recall bits and flashes of the years of the war. Cedrella had a somewhat more coherent memory of those days, but not too terribly much so. Harfang had the clearest memory of those years, but Septimus didn’t find that out for well over two decades, as the three Marauders rarely rehashed the war years. Some of the memories they had of those days were good and many of them were bad. A few memories were outright horrifying.

(_)(_)(_)

Among the good memories was the time spent on the firing range in the early days with Harfang, Charlus and the other wizards. They spent nearly as much time laughing and playfully taunting each other for their poor aim as actually shooting. Septimus also rather fondly remembered sitting side-by-side with them as they learned to deal with grenades and other muggle weapons.

He definitely remembered smirking at the other wizards who mocked Cedrella and Callidora when the women joined them for the hand-to-hand and melee weapons practice. He remembered being torn between fierce pride and uproarious laughter as he watched the two women trounce everyone save the expert that had been brought in to teach them with remarkably little effort. Mostly by dint of simply being women and the men’s reluctance to attack them. He remembered his amusement at the women’s total disgust and disdain at being treated like delicate, helpless flowers and their pleasure at having the expert treat them as being dangerous opponents after watching them trounce the other men.

He remembered gathering in the main mess tent in the evenings to learn German from Karl and Georg, refugees from their own country. He remembered Karl and Georg laughing themselves sick more than once at how some of the words got mangled, and refusing to tell them what they’d actually said versus what they’d meant to say, even as the two men corrected their pronunciation.

He also had fleeting memories of many of the evenings they spent learning a stunning variety of spells from the various wizards in the group. He remembered teaching them the finer points of the spells he knew in exchange, and watching Cedrella and Callidora do the same. He remembered realizing, on one particular evening, that the women had been accepted by their group as equals and trustworthy fighters, and trying not to hurt his face for grinning so hard.

(_)(_)(_)

Unfortunately, the bad memories far outweighed the good ones. He remembered one of a number of
running firefights between their group and a unit of Grindelwald’s followers in a small rural village in particular, though he’s not sure why, as it hadn't resulted in horrific injuries on their side. He remembered ducking and swerving away from spells as the raced around and through the buildings without having time or opportunity to throw up a shield. He remembered managing to walk away from the fight with everyone alive and well, but leaving fire and devastation in their wake … and a burning funeral pyre of the dead bodies of their opponents.

(____)____

One of the worst things he remembered was of being ambushed by a contingent of muggles and wizards on their way back to camp. He remembered the horror of realizing in the midst of fighting for their lives that the contingent had come from the direction of the camp. Harfang must have realized it at more or less the same time, as they had promptly gone into overdrive, mercilessly slashing, hexing, and punching their way through the ranks of the enemy in an near-frenzy. It had taken Charlus and the others a moment to realize why he and Harfang had gotten so brutal, but the second they had, they had redoubled their own efforts in the fight to get back to the camp, hoping against hope it wasn’t too late.

He remembered the horrified, agonized grief he'd felt at finding the camp razed to the ground and fully half their support staff lying dead in the snow. Several of them had been hexed so badly they were almost unrecognizable. The rest had been shot repeatedly and/or blown to pieces. He remembered the sorrow that hit when he realized that Georg was among the dead, one hand still clinging to a gun even in death mute testament to his not having gone down without a fight. Worse, he remembered the complete terror and blinding rage that consumed him when he realized Cedrella and Callidora weren’t among the dead - and the contingent they’d slaughtered hadn’t had either woman in their custody.

He remembered the desperate, determined hunt to retrieve Cedrella, Callidora and the rest of their company before something truly horrifying happened to them. He remembered marching for days without sleep, using every trick at their disposal to find some scrap of evidence as to where they’d been taken.

He remembered damn near falling to his knees in relief when they finally found Cedrella, Callidora, and the pitiful remnants of their support staff three days later and twenty miles away from the burned-out remnants of their camp. The group had clearly somehow escaped their captors, as all of them sported bruises and cuts, only Cedrella and Callidora seemed to still have a wand, while the rest were making do with what looked like the two womens' cache of small, sharp weapons and a handful of stolen German guns. They'd been backed against a rocky promontory, Callidora and Cedrella at the front, faces fierce and grimly determined as they hexed everything in sight.

He remembered Jinx, who had probably been the cause of the group’s escape, standing between the two women. He'd had his hands up, projecting a shield for their company to shelter behind, face twisted in a feral snarl as he fought in the group’s defense. Septimus remembered the blood that had been pouring from a gash near Jinx's temple that Jinx was completely ignoring, mute testament to his determination to protect their group.

He remembered realizing that if it hadn’t been for Jinx, the group would have been slaughtered. Not even Cedrella and Callidora, for all their skill with magic, could have fought off such a large group without a lot of help.

He remembered the short, brutal, bloody and deadly fight as he and the others had come up behind the kidnappers. He knew for a fact that he'd taken absolutely no mercy on any of that lot. He was equally sure that Harfang had been as unforgiving.
He remembered curling around Cedrella that night after it was all over. Lying there under the stars with his face buried in the crook of her neck (and her face buried in the crook of his) and not being able to tell which of them was shaking – or crying – harder. He remembered that both of them had known Harfang was mere feet away doing the same with Callidora. And he remembered that the only reason any of the four of them were able to relax was Jinx standing between them, vigilantly watchful, sporting a bandage on his head but unwilling to rest, even when Charlus had tried to order him to.

He remembered Jinx’s teary-eyed pleasure over the next month at becoming the group mascot in the wake of the attack, and the resultant little gifts and friendly attention from everyone. He remembered the amusement he'd felt when, after they’d managed to resupply themselves, Jinx demanded that he take over the cooking and cleaning duties for their entire company.

(_)(_)(_)

He remembered the frustration of standing over an injured Harfang and being unable to help him. He'd been back to back with Charlus as they concentrated on fending off their attackers while Harfang patched himself back together. The incoming fire had been so heavy that diverting his attention would have meant exposing himself and Charlus to serious injury as well.

(_)(_)(_)

He remembered being the one Charlus and Harfang were standing over, defending him and unable to help. He remembered being half-blind with pain and barely able to breathe as he fumbled at his belt for potions. He'd been desperate to get himself patched together fast and allow them to get the hell out of there. He also remembered managing a scrap of gratitude that he’d not been hit by a Dark spell, merely a rather painful regular one.

(_)(_)(_)

He remembered the day he'd stood alone over both Harfang and a gravely, possibly mortally injured Charlus. His magic had been singing in his veins, burning like fire as it responded to his demands as he fought with everything he had to defend the men he considered brothers. He remembered having a completely time-inappropriate realization that the spells were coming faster and easier than they ever had. Which had immediately been followed by the equally time-inappropriate thought that there might be something to the old saw about blackthorn wands only truly coming into their own after their owners faced great adversity.

He remembered the blinding relief when he realized that Charlus, while gravely wounded and in need of better healing than was available in the field and a long recovery time, would live to tell the tale. Things got very fuzzy after that as the exhaustion had set in once Charlus had been safely evacuated to England for further treatment. That was followed by a fleeting memory of everyone scrambling towards him as he succumbed to magical exhaustion.

(_)(_)(_)

He remembered himself and Harfang laughing themselves sick months later after getting a letter from Charlus wherein Charlus mentioned meeting another of the Black daughters - Dorea. The way Charlus had gone on about her, it had been pretty obvious to the two of them that Charlus was falling for her ... and didn't yet realize that he was.

He remembered returning briefly to England for Charlus’ wedding celebration two months after getting that letter, and the happiness of knowing Charlus had finally found his match. He remembered meeting Dorea for the first time and realizing she was practically a clone of Cedrella and
Callidora in temperament and outlook. He also remembered himself and Harfang teasing Charlus unmercifully about ‘finally joining the club’ and having his hair hexed green for a week by Dorea in retribution.

He remembered Charlus returning to the front a month later, still a little pale, on the thin side and limping but determined to not leave Septimus and Harfang in the lurch … and bringing Dorea with him. He remembered the amused reactions of the rest of their group when they realized that Dorea was a cousin of Cedrella and Callidora’s, and their near-instantaneous acceptance and inclusion of her as a member of their group of fighters.

He remembered them accidentally stumbling across one of Grindelwald’s strongholds, and their horrified realization that it held an army of inferi. He remembered the desperate scramble to contain that army and burn the stronghold to the ground with those foul creatures in it.

He remembered watching the women tend the injured after battles, their hands kind and words gentle as they did everything in their power to heal the group’s various hurts. And he remembered holding Cedrella tight and letting her cry on more than one occasion when, after a long battle to prevent it, she’d had one of their number die of their wounds under her care.

He remembered the utter horror everyone felt when they stumbled across a huge fenced facility filled with people, muggles all. People who were almost skeletally thin, with haunted, dead eyes and most of them bearing grievous injuries. Worse, all of them bore numbers that had been engraved on their arms like they were cattle. He remembered most of the magicals not quite comprehending the wheres and whyfores of this horrible place until Karl, his voice strained and horrified, explained it to them.

He remembered wanting to find Hitler and blast him to atoms for that atrocity. Which had been followed by the grim, horrifying realization that this … this was something that could happen in their own world, if the extremist purebloods got their way. Harfang, Charlus and their wives hadn’t been far behind him in the realization. Their wives might even have got there before he did, considering the history and reputation of the Black family. He remembered the grim, solemn vow the six of them had made to never, ever allow that to happen, whatever it took.

He remembered their group methodically tearing the place apart, killing every guard regardless of attempts to surrender. He remembered them making damn sure that the place was razed to the ground, incapable of being used for the same purpose ever again - and his somewhat heartbroken respect when most of the ex-captives lent as much of a helping hand as their poor condition permitted. He remembered gently shepherding the surviving captives to safety at one of the magical enclaves where the worst of the physical damage could be mitigated before they were obliviated of any knowledge of magic, and taken far from war-torn Europe where they’d hopefully be safe among their own kind.

He remembered the jubilant celebration when Hitler was finally taken down. Their company had danced through the night, toasting the victory. He remembered the equally jubilant celebration less than a month later when word came that Grindelwald was in custody, his army broken.

He remembered sitting down and talking to their wives about their options, and agreeing to stay on
for a month or two, to help track down and shut down what they could of Grindelwald and Hitler’s followers, supply lines, and remaining bases. Then talking to the rest of their group and being more than a little amused at everyone’s reluctance to part ways right away, and their eager willingness to help with the final stages of the war effort.

(____)____

He remembered their dismayed horror as they found base after base, evidence of a long-term, well-thought-out plan on the part of both dictators. He remembered having to dismantle the things, their knowledge of ward-breaking getting a workout the likes of which they’d not yet seen at Grindelwald’s bases, as the man had clearly planned for the possibility of his bases being found by the enemy. Hitler’s bases had been a lot easier to deal with, in part because there were no magical booby traps, and in part because the man had become seriously unhinged in the latter days of the war and his planning had suffered for it, which showed in the state of the bases’ defenses.

(____)____

He remembered the white-faced horror the magical contingent had felt when word had come about the special bombs dropped on two Japanese cities. He remembered sharing a grim, horrified look with the otherмагicals, not quite able to squash the thought of such a thing being dropped on a magical enclave. He remembered a more than slightly sarcastic thought about the pureblood extremists thinking it was a good idea to antagonize people who were capable of such large-scale devastation.

(____)____

He remembered the relief and joy of finally returning home in the last days on 1945. All of them bore scars, both physical and mental, but they were relatively whole and ready to go on with their lives.

He remembered his and Cedrella’s amusement when Jinx showed up two days after they’d returned to The Den, insisting on popping in on them once a month, to check and make sure they were in good health and not in need of assistance. He remembered talking to Charlus shortly afterward, and Charlus’ amused permission for Jinx to do so. Charlus had simply being grateful that Jinx was only insisting on keeping an eye on the Marauders, and not the entire company, which was now spread all over Europe with the end of the war an the dissolution of their group.
Regaining Normalcy

Regaining Normalcy

1945 – 1946

The day after their amusing talk with Charlus, Septimus and Cedrella sat down to talk things over.

“It’ll take us a few days to unpack, clean and resupply the house.” Septimus said. “And I want to check in with Zartang, see how our finances are.”

Cedrella nodded. “Agreed. We also need to talk to Sirius and your father, see how things have been going in the Wizengamot, and what else has happened that we didn’t learn from letters home. Then we need to figure out how to wriggle into that place.”

“Harfang and Charlus will probably be happy to help us there.” Septimus pointed out. “It ought to help considerably.”

Cedrella nodded agreement. “Very much so.”

Cedrella started on cleaning the house while Septimus got their trunk unpacked. In doing so, he ran across a few things belonging to the other Marauders that had gotten mixed in with their things accidentally. He had little doubt the others would be running across a similar issue as they unpacked. He piled those items on the couch closest to the fireplace they used for flooing so they wouldn’t be forgotten the next time either they went to the other Marauders’ homes or the other Marauders came here. Once everything was unpacked, Septimus hunted Cedrella down and helped her finish cleaning the house.

Thankfully, with magic, it didn’t take long to clean. The house was mostly dusty and musty from being shut up for four years, rather than anything more dire, and that was easily taken care of. Once that was done, they headed out to resupply the house. Mostly, they needed food, but there were a few other things they needed as well. The house was completely bare of any food other than travel rations, as they’d known they would be gone for a long time and had emptied everything out when they’d first left for Europe. They’d been living on the travel rations the last few days rather than brave the Alley when they were tired and time-lagged. Their first stop was Gringotts, as they had nowhere near enough money on hand to buy all the food they’d need.

Zartang was pleased to see them when they were admitted to his office. “You will be delighted to know that your wealth has increased nearly one hundred fold in your absence.” He informed them, looking thoroughly smug.

“A hundred fold?” Septimus echoed. He’d never expected it this soon when they’d first agreed to the deal that had resulted in Zartang being their account manager. He’d thought it would take another three or four years at least. “If I’m doing the math right, that puts us at the goal we’d set when we started.”

In other words, they now had enough money in their vault to afford the expenses involved in having a child, including Hogwarts tuition, with enough to spare to handle unexpected expenses.

Zartang nodded and handed over their account statement. The picture it painted, when Septimus looked it over, was quite rosy compared to what he was used to growing up. It wasn’t enough to
have the newest and best of everything their heart desired. That said, their child would not be forced to use second-hand items when it came to the basic necessities of life and school equipment, with the exception of a broom. If their account continued to grow the way it had been, by the time their child was old enough to need or want a broom, they’d actually be able to afford a new one.

Septimus shared a pleased look with Cedrella, and was hard put to keep from laughing at the anticipatory gleam in Cedrella’s eye. Yeah … it was going to be *good* to be a Weasley for a while.

“This is excellent, Zartang. I hadn’t expected to reach this point for another few years yet.” Septimus said.

Zartang looked pleased, and they adjourned to the vault itself to withdraw enough money to restock their pantry.

Once they’d returned home from their shopping trip and stored everything in the pantry, Septimus floo-called his father. Gaius was only too pleased to have the pair over for dinner.

“Just know you’re liable to be subjected to an inspection, son. Your mother’s fretted about you something fierce while you were over there, and she’s going to want an accounting of every bruise.” Gaius told him.

Septimus laughed. “That does sound like her.” He agreed, then sobered. “Though she should be relieved to discover I made it out without too much damage. Charlus got the worst of it, really. He came perilously close to not coming back that one time.” He grimaced at that less-than-pleasant memory.

When Septimus and Cedrella arrived at Weasley Cottage, they found themselves ambushed by Septimus’ brothers and in the case of Victor, his wife and child. Septimus rolled his eyes at his father. Cedrella just smiled and offered no help whatever, the evil wench.

“A family reunion? Really dad?” He asked.

Gaius just looked smug while Septimus got tackled. For once, it wasn’t one of his brothers doing it … it was his mother. She clung to him for long moments before she finally pulled back and gave him a rather watery attempt at a glare.

“I’m so glad you made it home safe.” She said, dabbing at her face with a handkerchief. “Both of you. I’ve worried nonstop.”

“We’re all right. I’ll admit to a few more scars than I started with, but nothing debilitating.” Septimus said, patting his mother on the back when she finally let go of him.

Cedrella smiled again and said. “Well, I wasn’t about to let Septimus die on my watch, and my sister felt much the same about Harfang, so we made sure they made it back in one piece. Dorea helped immensely with Charlus once those two were married.”

Only when she returned to Gaius’ side did his brothers tackle him. Cedrella saw it coming and stepped out of the way. Septimus found himself having to actively restrain a far more violent response than he had once employed in such free-for-alls. Fortunately, Victor seemed to notice and called the other two off before something unfortunate happened by accident.

“So. Gossip.” Cedrella said, to cover the slightly awkward moment. “Because I know you guys didn’t tell us everything.”

The elder Weasleys and Septimus’ brothers were only too happy to fill them in, and they all settled in
the parlor for a long talk. They spent the rest of the evening catching Septimus and Cedrella up on all
the things they’d missed out on. Who’d married who, who had kids, NEWT grades in Bilius’ case,
as he’d graduated four years ago, after they’d gone to Europe. All those sorts of things that either had
been left out of letters or had been forgotten by Septimus and Cedrella in their concentration on
surviving the war.

The biggest nugget of gossip seemed to be Dumbledore. According to Gaius, Dumbledore had taken
off for Europe the moment the school year had ended, and spent the summer hunting Grindelwald
down. Largely solo, which had been cause for a lot of comment at the time. It seemed to have only
been sheer chance that their penultimate battle had witnesses from both sides of the war.

“The witnesses to their battle say it was incredible to watch. And apparently, a phoenix came to
Dumbledore’s aid, can you imagine that? Naturally, he’s something of the hero of the hour. Who
knows how long things would have gone on if he hadn’t managed to defeat Grindelwald. There’s
even rumors that the reason that muggle fell when he did was because Grindlewald was either too
busy evading Dumbledore or had already fallen to him, and couldn’t help the guy.”

Mentally, Septimus grimaced. He had not forgotten his dislike for how Dumbledore had handled
Charlus making bullies accountable for their actions as best he could as a prefect. He also strongly
suspected that Dumbledore was the reason that Charlus hadn’t become Head Boy. Charlus had
certainly had the scholastic marks to warrant the accolade. Moreso than the boy who had gotten the
nod. The Marauders might have been expecting the snub, but it had still bothered Charlus at the time.

“ Weird things have been happening at Hogwarts, too.” Bilius said. “There was this kid … Slytherin,
not a bully, but … something about him gave me the creeps, big time. Even as a third year, which is
what he was when I graduated, he was way, way too popular and influential in that House.
Especially since he wasn’t a pureblood.”

Septimus cocked an eyebrow. “A Muggleborn? In that House?”

“Not sure he was Muggleborn, really. Halfblood, maybe.” Bilius said. “I just know Riddle isn’t a
pureblood name. Anyway, something about the kid worried me. And I heard, a couple years after I
graduated, that someone was actually *killed* in the school. Oddly, not a lot of people seem to know
anything about it. It’s like it got hushed up or something. I’ve heard rumors of someone getting
expelled, but no one seems to have a name to go with it. And given how things were going in school
by the time I left, I’d be willing to bet real money that the person that got expelled isn’t the real
perpetrator.”

“You are unfortunately probably not wrong about that.” Septimus said on a sigh. “I know that there
was a strong tendency to ignore the real troublemakers in the school when I was there. It wouldn’t
take much for it to go from there to accusing the wrong people of wrongdoing. People who don’t
have the sort of power and influence inherent with being a scion of a pureblood family.”

They returned home fairly late in the evening after the brief family get-together. The next morning,
they got floo calls from Harfang and Charlus both shortly after breakfast, wanting to meet up.

They congregated at The Den, which, while smaller and less impressive than the Longbottom and
Potter homes, was sufficient to their needs. Septimus’ assumption that items had gotten mixed up by
all three couples was born out when Harfang and Charlus appeared with several items in hand.
Septimus was amused to note that Jinx had arrived with Charlus, insistent on attending the
Marauders. He disappeared into the kitchen to prepare lunch for them, much to everyone’s
amusement.

“Bet you he spruces up the house, too, despite it already being clean.” Cedrella said.
“Not taking that bet, cousin.” Dorea said on a laugh. “He fusses over all of us something fierce, doesn’t he?”

They took a few moments to return items to their proper owners, and then adjourned to the couches.

“So, we’ve talked to Lord Longbottom, Lord Potter, and Lord Black since we returned.” Harfang told them. “I’m betting you talked to Lord Weasley as well.”

Septimus nodded. “We mostly got family gossip last night, though. I was going to drag the Ministry and Wizengamot nonsense out of him later.”

“It’s not good news, brother.” Charlus said on a sigh. “The more extreme sorts have got themselves into important positions. Oh, not positions of power just yet, but ready to pounce when the existing powers leave their posts.”

“Sirius is all but foaming at the mouth about Orion and Walburga.” Dorea said. “Sirius has always been more neutrally aligned than anything else, but Orion and Walburga seem to be heading straight for the deep end of the extremist camp. They were apparently prime targets for the Marauders, and we all know what that means.”

There were nods around the room. “Things don’t look good, for fifty years or so from now, when Orion takes the Headship. Family Black is going to be in for a rough go of it unless something happens to improve matters.”

“The Wizengamot was passing more and more stringent controls and laws as the war wore on … and they’re showing no sign of stopping now, either.” Harfang said. “Father’s about to the point of slamming heads together, and he doesn’t lose his temper easily.”

Charlus shifted slightly in his seat, easing his weight off the leg and hip that still bothered him, legacy of his brush with death. “My father’s in the same boat. He’s been arguing himself hoarse in there with little to nothing to show for it.”

“We need to do something … but what, I haven’t a clue.” Harfang admitted.

Callidora spoke up for the first time. “The best possible thing to be done, is for all of you to work on your reputations. You’re war heroes to the general public. Parlaying that into a greater amount of influence and power would not be a bad idea.” She told them.

“And if we worked together, formed a voting block … ” Charlus said, nodding in agreement as he caught on to where Callidora was going with the idea. “We might be able to rally the other younger generation Light and Neutral families to our banner in a way our parents couldn’t. I know a lot of our age mates strongly suspect us of being the Marauders, even if it’s claimed they’re still at large in the school. They all know when the Marauders started working, and they’re not exactly stupid.”

The Marauders had defended those being bullied and stood up for what was right. In more than a few cases that had meant assisting or defending fellow scions. It made those suspicious of the Marauders’ identities far more inclined to ally with them.

“It would have the side benefit of being the last bit of leg-up you need, Septimus, to bring the Weasleys back into prominence. Being backed by the Potters and Longbottoms will go a very, very long way to easing everyone’s minds.” Harfang pointed out.

“And in a few years, when we have a power base to work with, we can talk to our respective fathers about stepping down from Headship early. With new blood working as a group in the Wizengamot, we might just be able to do something about the situation.” Septimus said, agreeing with the idea.
“It’s a plan.”
Irritants, Problems, and Issues

Chapter Notes

For the purposes of this fic, Augusta Longbottom is not Neville’s grandmother, but his great-grandmother.

Irritants, Problems, and Issues

Note: For the purposes of this fic, Augusta Longbottom is not Neville’s grandmother, but his great-grandmother.

(_)(_)(_)

1946

The Marauders swung into gear immediately after their little conference. By the new year, the plan was already bearing some fruit. Several families with close ties to the triad were expressing interest in joining forces.

In the early weeks of 1946, they were even awarded Orders of Merlin (second class) for their actions in the war. While their reputations hadn’t exactly been suffering, this did all three of them a world of good in the eyes of the general public. The problem was, they weren’t the only one to get an Order of Merlin. Dumbledore got one too, First Class, for defeating Grindelwald.

Septimus wouldn’t have begrudged Dumbledore the award if something about the man hadn’t been sounding a quiet alarm. Septimus couldn’t put his finger on what was bothering him, either – but something was. He could only hope that he simply had an overdeveloped sense of paranoia thanks to surviving the war and that there wasn’t really anything to be worried about. But every time he thought of that, he remembered Dumbledore chastising Charlus for punishing troublemakers, and the alarm sounded all over again.

It was rapidly becoming clear to the Marauders that the Wizengamot was polarizing in a way it hadn’t in living memory. Oh, there had always been extremists on both sides of the political divide but they had been a vocal minority. The bulk of the Wizengamot had always fallen somewhere in the middle between the two extremes.

That middle ground was slowly disappearing. More and more families were beginning to align with one or the other extremist camp. This trend had apparently begun during the war, according to the Marauders’ family Heads. Worryingly, the Heads suspected that the folks taking sides were doing so under undue pressure, especially from the Dark extremists. It was more than a little disturbing to see. Even worse, thanks to the two extremes gaining supporters, the Wizengamot, which had always been contentious at the best of times, at least according to their fathers, was becoming a battlefield.

After doing a considerable amount of information gathering, and quite a number of conferences between themselves to adjust and fine-tune their plans, they were ready to start. Due to a number of factors, it had been decided that Septimus would be the first to approach his father about ‘retiring’ early. Septimus approached his father in mid-March.
“In truth, I would not mind stepping down early, son.” Gaius told him when Septimus had explained what the Marauders were up to and hoping to accomplish. “You’re better suited to all that nonsense than I am, and being able to spend our twilight years together without having to deal with Wizengamot shenanigans has its appeal for your mother and I.” Gaius gave Septimus a pleased smile. “It helps that I think you can manage what I and our forbearers haven’t, and bring the Weasley Family back into prominence.” Then he cocked an eyebrow. “I assume Harfang and Charlus are having this discussion with Lords Potter and Longbottom?”

Septimus nodded. “I know Harfang’s father is not enjoying the best health, so he might be willing to step down as Head right away. It’s Lord Potter that is going to take some convincing.” Lord Potter enjoyed robust health ... and was stubborn enough to dig his heels in unless approached just right.

Harfang did indeed speak to his own father, who had readily agreed to the changeover due to his ill health. Unfortunately, about a month later, before he was able to complete whatever business he’d had outstanding, Harfang’s father’s health took a sudden turn for the worse. A week later, he died in his sleep. His death temporarily threw a wrench into the works.

Harfang’s mother, Augusta, took her husband’s death very hard. Theirs had been a love match, despite the custom at the time they’d gotten married for arranged marriages. There for a few months, there was an honest concern that Augusta would follow him in death, such was her grief. As a result, Harfang refused to leave her unattended until she stabilized somewhat emotionally.

The Marauders closed ranks around Harfang and Augusta, doing their level best to support them and help them through Lord Longbottom’s death. Jinx was a near-constant presence in Longbottom Manor for weeks, taking up the slack left by the grieving house-elves until they got their feet back under them.

Harfang took his place as Head of the Family the day of the funeral. All three couples dearly wished that the start of their triad coming into the Wizengamot could have happened under much better circumstances.

The one piece of good news was that Harfang taking up the Head of Family mantle put paid to the triad’s Auror careers. Harfang and Septimus both were exceedingly grateful for that. Neither of them would have minded continuing their careers for quite a while longer … but Charlus simply couldn’t.

During the war, Charlus had been hit by a spell that had blown a massive hole in hip and leg. He’d nearly bled to death on the field that day – would have, if the Marauders hadn’t had every healing potion they were capable of brewing on hand. He’d come to within a whisker of losing the leg, as well. He’d healed quite well, given the severity of his injury. Unfortunately, he was left with a permanent limp and pain – the degree of both Harfang and Septimus were *quite* sure Charlus had underplayed during the war in order to put their minds at ease.

He’d kept up during the war, but both Harfang and Septimus had seen how much it took out of him to do so. They’d done everything in their power to ensure that he wasn’t required to run, and both men had slowed their own walking paces to allow Charlus to keep pace with them more easily.

When they’d returned to England, the Auror Corps had understandably wanted them back. Harfang and Septimus had stalled and delayed as best they could, claiming a need for rest, and time to reconnect with their families while they tried to talk Charlus out of trying to continue as an Auror. Unfortunately, the Potters were well known for having a stubborn streak a mile wide. Charlus had been determined to continue as an Auror because he felt the three of them would be needed in the corps. The worst part was that he hadn’t exactly been wrong about that.

Now, there really wasn’t a choice in the matter. With one of their third permanently out of
commission due to his duties as Head of a Family, Septimus and Charlus would have been re-routed to desk jobs until and unless they managed to compensate sufficiently for the loss of their fighting partner. After better than half a lifetime of working as a triad, it was highly unlikely they’d have been able to adapt to a more normal two-person partnership. Neither Septimus nor Charlus much fancied spending the next however long stuck behind a desk filling out paperwork. Charlus finally stopped insisting he was able for Auror work, and they told the Head Auror they wouldn’t be returning.

Instead, they turned their attention and energy to bolstering Harfang. He had always been the quietest of their triad, content to let Septimus and Charlus garner the lion’s share of attention. Having to step forward now and be heard presented him with a difficult challenge. Especially since neither Charlus nor Septimus were in the Wizengamot, and thus unavailable to be leaned on for support.

Charlus and Septimus spent a lot of time in the last half of the year coaching Harfang. Helping him memorize what he intended to say about whatever piece of legislation was up for voting, letting him practice the speech on them until he was comfortable with it and such things. They also helped him tailor arguments to various members of the Wizengamot that might object to legislation Harfang was in favor of, and coached him on how to stand, walk, sit so he projected an aura of confidence even when he felt nothing of the kind. By the end of December, Harfang was finally finding his feet and was able to handle more and more of the Wizengamot shenanigans without Charlus and Septimus’ backup outside of the sessions.

At that point, Septimus was able to pay more attention to the various Wizengamot members with an eye towards what they were up to long-term, rather than dealing with what they were up to today that Harfang would need to deal with.

It was slightly disconcerting. He was both amused and disturbed to see Dumbledore doing much the same sort of thing the Marauders were – parlaying his popularity and influence thanks to his actions in the war into political power. Headmaster Dippet had started making noises about possibly retiring, from what Septimus had heard (third hand, so he didn’t quite trust those rumors), but it was certain that Dumbledore was trying to form a voting block of his own. He was almost never seen without the phoenix he’d returned from the war with on his shoulder. Septimus had to admit it was a brilliant bit of psychological warfare. Everyone in the Wizarding world knew that phoenixes didn’t associate with people who weren’t Light as it was humanly possible to be. That Dumbledore now had Fawkes as a companion was drawing a lot of people to his side. It was also giving his opinions and such a lot more weight than they otherwise would have had. The net result was that Dumbledore was slowly, sneakily working his way into a position of leadership for the ‘Light’ camp in the Wizengamot.

Given what he knew of Dumbledore from his school days, Septimus couldn’t quite help but wonder if Dumbledore had somehow managed to coerce Fawkes. It might be possible. Septimus had no idea how much truth there was in the old belief that phoenixes had to return to where their ashes were in order to go through their burning day … but if that was true, all it would take for Dumbledore to force the creature into his company would have been to stumble across the phoenix’s nest and steal the ashes. Maybe keep it in his pocket to ensure the creature stayed close. It was also possible there might be other ways to coerce a phoenix. Light and extremely powerful they might be, but they weren’t invulnerable.

Septimus frequently scolded himself for thinking along those lines. No, he was not a fan of Dumbledore’s, but to seriously consider that the man was coercing a phoenix? That was a bit much. The man was a canny politician, that much was for certain, and a bit shady, but that was a bit of a stretch.

What was truly worrying was that Abraxas’ father was emerging as the leader of the pureblood extremist set. Abraxas might be a stubborn fool (at least when it had come to Cedrella), but his father
had more wits about him, and enough political savvy to be worrisome. He was also power-hungry, wanting to bring the Malfoy name into the same circle as the Blacks, Potters, and Longbottoms (among a few others).

In that, at least, he was mostly foredoomed to failure. It would be at least another hundred years – probably a lot more than that – before the Malfoys were accepted as a member of the Wizarding elite. Heck, the LeStranges, also from France, but who had emigrated to the UK quite a bit before the Malfoys had, still hadn’t managed to enter that circle. And the LeStranges didn’t throw money around like it would solve all their problems, which the Malfoys had a tendency to do.

Unfortunately, while the Malfoys would not be joining the elites in Abraxas’ lifetime, they did enjoy a growing amount of political power that was worrying Septimus. Abraxas’ father had the sort of gilded tongue that swayed people to his way of thinking with relative ease, and he was using it ruthlessly. Many of the extremist and Dark-leaning neutral families were either beginning to follow his banner or listen to what he had to say.

All in all, Septimus couldn’t quite shake the mental impression that they were headed for the edge of a cliff, and if they didn’t put on the brakes, they were going to end up in a world and a half of trouble. Unfortunately, he couldn’t even begin to figure out how to apply those breaks. Worse, neither could Cedrella.

Septimus had talked to her extensively. While she didn’t quite share his paranoia as regarded Dumbledore, she agreed completely with his assessment of the rest of the situation that was developing, and did express concern over Dumbledore’s increasing popularity. Unfortunately, not even she, with all her political savvy, could figure out how to keep things from going the way they seemed to be heading.
In late January of 1947, Gaius floo-called Septimus and asked him to come over. Septimus had a feeling he knew what it was about, so he took the day off and headed over to the Cottage. His suspicions were more or less borne out when he discovered his father was in his office. The only times his father had summoned him for a talk in there - well, that room was strictly for business purposes only. There were only so many topics his father could want to discuss with him if he was wanting to talk there.

His father’s office was pretty crowded, despite it having been magically expanded at some point - possibly at several points, given the length of time their family had been around and how many of them there were. There were ceiling-to-floor bookcases covering every inch of the walls, crowded with scrolls, books, and journals. The shelves immediately behind his father’s desk also had sheaves of parchment scattered on top of the books in a seemingly random fashion. There was also a single cabinet situated behind the desk, between it and the shelves against the wall. The desk, an enormous monstrosity made from English Oak and one of the very few items of any worth the Weasleys had managed to hang on to, was covered in stacks of parchment, scrolls, books, quills, bottles of ink and lots of random odds and ends.

Despite the chaotic look of the room, Septimus knew from experience that his father could find anything he needed within seconds without resorting to magic. Septimus didn’t pretend to understand how that was possible, and dreaded having to make sense of all that mess and organize it in a way he could work with.

“Son, I know we talked last year about me stepping down early.” Gaius said after they’d greeted each other and settled in their respective seats. “And I know you boys have plans for the future, and your time together amongst the wolves.” He grinned a bit at describing the Wizengamot that way.

“And Harfang is in there alone at the moment. I also know you and Charlus spent most of the latter half of last year helping him find his feet in there as best you could. From what I saw of him in there, it worked.”

Gaius sighed. “We both know things are getting more and more shady and difficult in there.” He said. “I don’t have the temperament – or the backup – to continue much longer without things starting to go really badly. You don’t want to know how often in the last year I’ve had to bite the inside of my mouth bloody to keep from saying or doing something I know is stupid in reaction to someone’s shenanigans.”

Gaius took a deep breath. “I honestly think our Family would be best served with me stepping down. You’ve a far calmer temperament than I do, for starters, and you’ve Cedrella at your side to help you in that pit. Not to mention your informal alliance with Longbottom and Potter. The only reason I’ve waited this long since you first brought it up is because you really didn’t need to be dealing with adjusting to the Family Magic and finding your own feet in the Wizengamot while trying to help Harfang at the same time.”

Gaius then turned and pulled a small metal bowl and athame out of the cabinet behind his desk. He turned back around and cleared a flat space to set the bowl on that was roughly equidistant between
No one really knew how the Family Magics came to be … or if they had known at some point, the knowledge had long since been lost. What was known was that Family Magic began to appear when two generations of wizards were born under the same name. It was very weak and diffuse at first, but gradually gained in strength the longer the family existed. It took a minimum of ten generations to attain full power. At that point, family magic protected the Head of the family from all forms of magical coercion – even the Imperius – and allowed him to command and enforce the obedience of the members of his family to his decrees, if he used certain ritual phrases. It also enforced alliances and oaths, allowed for someone to be adopted into or removed from the family, and levied punishments on oath breakers, among other things.

These facts had been the start of the pureblood extremist movement. Certain families decided that the existence of family magic made them better than the common rabble. The other families, while willing to concede that family magic had its advantages, insisted it didn’t make them better than muggleborns. More than one person over the years had posited that muggleborns might just be descendants of pureblood lines through the squibs that had slowly become more and more common. After a few generations, any knowledge of their magical roots would have been lost, so that when a child was born with magic, it would assumed to be an accident of nature. Unfortunately, no research had been done into this possibility. That said, Septimus knew of one Muggleborn who had heard about the idea nearly a hundred years ago, did extensive research into their family tree and actually found a magical some ten generations back or something of the sort. It could have been mere chance, but then again, maybe not.

Fortunately for the families that possessed it, while the family magic was usually wielded by a Head of Family until their death, it was possible to name a successor and transfer control of the family magic prior to death. It had even been done fairly frequently, due to ill health or mental issues caused by increasing age. Twice in known history, family magic had preemptively torn itself away from a Family Head that was abusing their power and choose a successor on its own. Needless to say, the subjects of this tearing had rather gone down in infamy. In both cases, the families had died out within ten generations, though whether that was family magic punishing the family or just a natural consequence of no one wanting anything to do with such a family and them not being able to find spouses as a result Septimus hadn’t a clue.

Septimus had had the ritual to transfer Headship memorized since before he went to Hogwarts. Every Heir did, against the sudden death of the Head of the family. While the Heir could not take his place as Head fully until he reached the age of 17, they could begin to undertake control of certain aspects of Headship as early as age fourteen. Nobody *wanted* to have to perform the ritual at fourteen, but they all prepared for it just in case. They had to memorize it because a Regent was not Head of the Family and thus couldn’t do the ritual when the Heir was old enough to start taking on the mantle.

Gaius took the athame and cut his palm enough for it to bleed freely for a few moments, then held his hand over the bowl. “I, Gaius Weasley, Head of the Weasley Family, do here invoke the Family Magics, that they may bear witness to the oaths of myself and my son.”

There was an immediate wash of the warm, welcoming, bright magic Septimus remembered from his wedding. He fought down a blush as his mind almost immediately diverted to memories of what had followed the last time he’d felt this magic around him.

Across the desk, Gaius grinned at him, well aware of where Septimus’ mind had just gone. After all, he’d had much the same happen to him. Normally, an Heir’s first experience with the family magic was when they took a wife, so it was hardly surprising.
Gaius took a breath and continued. “I do here of my own free will set down my responsibilities as Head of Family Weasley, and name Septimus Weasley as my successor, so mote it be.”

There was a slight hesitation, and Septimus could have sworn he could feel actual *reluctance* on the part of the family magics to turn loose of Gaius, but then the magics gathered, visibly pulling away from Gaius as thick red-gold threads. The threads gathered into a central mass, losing their thread-like appearance in the process, and hovered between Gaius and Septimus as an enormous amorphous blob. As soon as it was totally free, Gaius’ shoulders sagged, and Septimus had to restrain the urge to ask if he was all right. He knew that the family magics would not hurt his father - Gaius was just reacting to not having that power wrapped around him for the first time in decades.

It helped him to keep his mouth shut when Septimus realized that once the family magic was free of Gaius, he was *not* imagining an air of expectation that was emanating from the big blob of magic. He took a deep breath as he took the athame from Gaius and cut his own palm enough for it to bleed freely for a few moments, holding his hand over the bowl where Gaius’ hand remained, their fingers touching, blood intermingling briefly before it dripped into the bowl.

“I, Septimus Weasley, eldest son and Heir of the Weasley Family, of my own free will give my oath to Family and to Magic, on my life and magic, that I will to the best of my ability protect, honor and serve Magic and Family Weasley. I will speak in their name, hold their charge sacred, and permit none to defile them unchallenged, be they Family, friend, enemy or stranger. So mote it be.”

A thin tendril of magic snapped out from the blob and dipped into the bowl, briefly touching the blood there as if to double check the veracity of who had called it and who was wanting to take it on. Then the tendril retreated and the blob of red-gold magic swooped forward and enveloped Septimus. He had to actively fight his instinct to duck despite knowing *this* bit of magic coming at him would not harm him. At absolute worst, it would find him unfit to be Head and refuse to settle on him, returning to Gaius or going to one of Septimus’ brothers if Gaius absolutely refused to retain it.

It wrapped around him like a warm cloak on a winter’s day. Septimus could actually sense something like emotions from it; chiefly curiosity and a sense of welcome. He felt it touch his mind, something he’d been forewarned about (as were all heirs) to judge his mind and heart.

What he hadn’t been expecting was to relive flashes of his life as the family magic rifled through his mind to see if he was worthy of taking up the mantle of Head of House. After what felt like days, but had actually only been a minute or so, the family magic settled more tightly around him.

For a moment, it felt as if Septimus had the weight of the world on his shoulders as the family magic settled on him, twining around his own magic and merging with it. Disconcertingly, for a moment he could see in his mind’s eye a complex web of magic, each thread linking him to a Weasley-by-birth, no matter where they were in the world. He couldn’t feel their emotions or hear their thoughts, but if they were in mortal danger, died, or had broken an oath, he knew that he would know. He would also know when a new Weasley was born. He might not be able to do anything about such information immediately, due primarily to how wide-spread the family was. He wouldn’t always find out instantly when an oath was given and why, for instance, and any hope of getting to someone in mortal danger when they were a continent or more away was nil. That said, he’d know it had happened, and could prepare to respond to whatever was going on as fast as possible.

Those threads would also permit him to enforce obedience to his decrees, if someone fought him, however unlikely that would be, in their family. Doing so wasn’t easy, and required a specific ritual in its own right, but it could be done. Same went for banishing someone from the family, or adopting them into it.

Septimus found himself sitting down rather quickly and forcibly as he tried to adjust to the weight,
depth, and damn-near sentience of the family magic. Gaius, across from him, watched him sympathetically.

“Just breathe, son. It’ll stop being so overwhelming in a bit.” Gaius advised.

Septimus blew out a breath that was half amused snort. “Not so sure about that at the moment.” He said. “No wonder you fumbled so badly trying to explain all this, and didn’t want me trying to adapt to this while helping Harfang. I don’t know that I’ll do any better when it comes to telling my heir. This is …” He blew out another breath. “I really don’t understand how any Head could …” He waved a hand, helpless to get the words out.

“I thought much the same thing, when I took the mantle.” Gaius said, understanding what Septimus meant - the idea of abusing their power as Head and facing the wrath of such powerful magic was damned intimidating. “Nevertheless, there have been Heads that have gone against that oath. Small wonder they didn’t last long after they did so.”

“I envy Charlus. It’ll just be him, his parents and grandparents when he takes the Headship.”

“I don’t think it weighs any lighter on them for their lack of extended family, son. If anything, it might be heavier, because *everything* depends on him and his heir.” Gaius pointed out.

“Hmm. Good point. Remind me to compare notes with Charlus someday.” Septimus said.

Gaius laughed. “I’ll do that.” He promised. Then he turned and pulled a small bag from the cabinet behind him, putting the bowl and athame in it. “You’ll be needing to take these with you.” He said. “You’ll not need them often, but you will need them. We can deal with all of this.” He waved to the contents of his office. “Another day. Or week.” He eyed the room again. “Or month, maybe.”

Septimus snickered at his father’s opinion of how long it’d take to go through the mess and transfer it to the Den. He probably wasn’t wrong about the longest estimate. It wasn’t until he reached forward to grab the bag that Septimus realized the cut on his palm had healed. It had healed so well that there was no indication he’d ever cut it. While he knew that would happen, it was still somewhat startling to see it.

“The Wizengamot’s going to be in for a few surprises.” Septimus said with a grin.

“I honestly don’t think they have the faintest clue what they’re going to be up against with you boys.” Gaius said. “It will be fun to hear all about it. I fully expect for there to be full-blown tantrums thrown before all is said and done … and not by you three.”

That made Septimus laugh. “You’re probably right … there probably will be.” He admitted. “If only because from what you’ve said, some of the Heads are rather childish.”

Gaius snorted. “That’s one way of putting it. There’s more than one I sometimes have to double check to make sure they’re not still in diapers, they act like such infants.”
Adapting to being Head of the Family, and the changes in his magic due to the merging, proved to be both simple and ridiculously complicated at the same time. One of the easiest parts, ironically enough, had been transferring all the family records to the Den and organizing it to his satisfaction.

The absolute easiest, of course, had involved Gringotts. As he’d promised Zartang, the first thing he did after he became head was to transfer the Weasley family vaults into Zartang’s control. Much to his amusement, Zartang had actually cackled over the challenge of doing with the collective Weasley funds what he had done with Septimus and Cedrella’s private account. Septimus had little doubt that in very short order, the Weasleys would be enjoying a collective wealth they hadn’t since that run of idiot Heads.

The third thing he’d done - after transferring the family records to the Den - was write every living Weasley, to confirm what sort of condition they and their family were in, and what skills everyone had. For the most part, while the answer on the financial end was ‘making ends meet and nothing more’, things were pretty good. A few folks needed more or better housing due to increases in their family size, or help shoring up the warding of their homes. Given the sheer number of Weasleys, it was fairly easy to find someone in the family with the requisite skills that lived close enough and ask them to help with those cases. More than one person asked for advice and assistance with investment of their private funds, and Septimus gave them the advice that had gotten his and Cedrella’s funds in such a rosy picture.

The fourth thing he’d done - which happened just after he’d sent the letters to his kinfolk - and by far the most problematic was Septimus’ entrance into the Wizengamot. Harfang had been pleased and relieved to have him there. Harfang had found his feet, to be sure, but it would be a lot easier on the quietest Marauder with one of his fellows there for immediate backup assistance. Septimus had made the decision to keep his entrance as low-key as was possible. Their triad wasn’t complete yet, after all, and they had planned to wait until all three of them were in the Wizengamot to really start rocking the boat. Septimus needed to slide in as quietly as he could so as to gain as many allies as possible before then, rather than stomping in, causing a scene, and making everyone hate him his first day.

It was now that all of Cedrella’s extra tutelage, both what she had gotten from Sirius and what she had imparted to Septimus over the years in preparation, paid its dividends. Septimus would never be comfortable with the lying, scheming, double-dealing, and other unpleasantness that happened in the Wizengamot. He at least knew how to handle it when it was aimed at him, could actually spot the nastier stuff when it was going on, and could lie straight-faced himself if necessary to mislead antagonistic Wizengamot members. Both he and Cedrella had immediately vetoed any attempt at Septimus actively participating in double-dealing, blackmailing, or any of the other dirty tactics common to certain members of the Wizengamot. It went against everything Septimus had stood for since he could remember for one, and he just didn’t have the mentality to pull it off for another. Not to mention the fact that he needed to keep his nose as clean as was possible if he was going to have any chance at establishing a *good* reputation in that pit of vipers.

That said, he was almost looking forward to the first time some idiot tried to blackmail or otherwise
coerce him. That was going to be fun. Because it was completely legal for Septimus to demand an
honor duel if someone went too far. The person he called out would then either have to apologize or
duel him. It was something he planned to take full advantage of, as most of the Heads in the
Wizengamot were quite a bit older than he was, and hadn’t been in a duel (if they’d been in one at
all) since they were the age Septimus was now. He’d wipe the floor with pretty much all of them.

He figured it would only take him challenging would-be coercers to a duel once or twice before the
word spread and people started thinking twice about trying to strong-arm him. Finding out that he
would not hesitate to actually duel to defend his honor - and that he could beat their asses fairly easily
- would make all but the nastiest think twice about messing with him. After that, people would
mostly leave him alone, at least in that respect.

Seeing the Wizengamot from the inside was disconcertingly upsetting. He’d paid attention to his
father’s rants and calmer discussions about it, so he had known it was bad. He hadn’t quite realized
just how bad it was, though, and how little actually got done in a day.

The Wizengamot sessions were supposed to start at nine am. Most days, they didn’t get started until
10, between people arriving late and/or carrying on conversations despite attempts to get them to shut
up and sit down. Once everyone was finally seated, they’d go over the minutes of the last session,
which would invariably cause an argument as someone (usually more than one someone) contested
something in the minutes. When that finally got settled and they finished the reading of the minutes,
it’d be nearly noon, and they’d open up the old business.

Opening the old business invariably included an argument over which bit of old business to start on
first. This included motions and countermotions and calls for votes. If they were lucky and managed
to agree on what to start working on, they’d reach that agreement right about lunchtime, which was a
two-hour break.

They would reconvene around three pm and if necessary finish figuring out what old business they
were going to work on, then start actually working on the old business. That involved a lot of
speeches and arguments – most of which got quite heated – and on many occasions outright name-
calling. On more than one occasion, there was an actual fistfight in the chamber. Septimus was damn
sure that only the fact that pulling your wand in a Wizengamot meeting except to give an oath or
register a vote would get you a stint in Azkaban kept things from devolving into duels on those
occasions. If they were incredibly lucky, they’d wrap up the particular bit of old business they’d
started working on, but many days they didn’t manage that.

Suffice it to say, by the time two months of meetings had passed, Septimus fully understood why his
father had said he didn’t have the temperament for dealing with the Wizengamot. Even Septimus had
been highly tempted to smack a few heads together most days. It was like watching a bunch of
toddlers have tantrums all at once.

The Wizengamot may have been the most headache-inducing part of being a Head, but getting used
to the changes in his magic took Septimus a long time - nearly a full year. It wasn’t that he was more
powerful or something like that, but the family magic altered how his magic worked somewhat, and
it took Septimus a while to get used to it.

All in all, it made for a rather hectic time. Before Septimus quite realized it, his and Cedrella’s tenth
anniversary arrived. They celebrated it quietly, as was their usual wont.

Septimus took the day off (rather gratefully, it must be said) and they spent a rather delightful and
lazy morning indeed, between sleeping in and then making love until they’d worn each other out.
They’d settled in to enjoy a late brunch that qualified more as actual lunch due to the hour when
Cedrella glanced over at him.
“I got you a little something, my dear.” She said.

Septimus blinked. Unlike with Muggle marriages, anniversaries didn’t have gift requirements. Granted, he’d still gotten Cedrella a bouquet of her favorite flowers every year, but that had been it. “Ced, you know you don’t have to …”

Cedrella grinned at him. “Oh, but I’m pretty sure this is something you’ll want.” She said as she handed over a small box wrapped in bright paper.

Septimus almost didn’t take it, because Cedrella had the gleam in her eye that meant she was up to no good. A Black up to no good was dangerous … even if they weren’t out to kill you. That had never changed with Cedrella (or her sister or cousin), and it had kept the male Marauders on their toes over the years.

He couldn’t resist pulling his wand and poking at the present, much to Cedrella’s visible amusement. Only when he’d assured himself there wasn’t anything obvious going on, and had time to remind himself that Cedrella wouldn’t be this overt about a prank, he opened it.

Inside the box lay a baby blanket, bonnet, and booties.

Septimus stared at them a second before the implications hit him, and then his head snapped up and he stared at Cedrella, eyes wide. “Ced – you …”

She just grinned and nodded.

Septimus whooped, jumped to his feet, snatched her up and started to swing her around. Halfway through the swing, he realized what he was doing, and that it might not be a good idea, and abruptly put her down.

“Oh, Merlin, sorry … I, you aren’t … ?”

Cedrella laughed at his complete inability to spit out a complete sentence. “I’m fine, Septimus. No morning sickness to speak of, and certainly no problem with dizziness. I honestly wouldn’t even have suspected I was pregnant if it hadn’t been for the fact I hadn’t needed to attend to certain matters for the last two months. I checked with a healer last week while you were in the Wizengamot and they confirmed it.”

Thankfully, she realized he’d put her down in deference to a potentially tetchy stomach, something she knew his mother had suffered from early in her last pregnancy from tales he’d told her, and not because he thought she was suddenly delicate, breakable and helpless. He didn’t want to know how badly she’d have hexed him if she thought he’d done it because of that. Septimus grinned at her and then proceeded to kiss her silly.

They ended up spending the rest of the day curled up together. It took a few hours before Septimus was coherent enough to put a whole sentence together, which managed to amuse even him. He’d not quite expected to have that strong a reaction to the prospect of becoming a father.

“I’m surprised you didn’t do that in front of the gang.” He admitted to her. “So that I wouldn’t ever get to live it down.”

“Oh, you won’t.” Cedrella said with a wicked grin. “But this, I wanted all to myself. A wife has to have some ammunition friends don’t, after all.”

“I’m doomed.” Septimus said, trying to sound doleful and not really managing. Mostly because he kept breaking out in a stupid, goofy grin every so often. This sort of doom and gloom, he definitely
didn’t mind.

The Marauders spent the next few months giving Septimus all kinds of hell. The worst part was, he really didn’t blame them. He had an unfortunate tendency to be a bit goofy about the whole thing, and had to actively restrain himself from dancing attendance on Cedrella like she was delicate and helpless.

Fortunately for everyone involved, Cedrella had a remarkably easy pregnancy, virtually devoid of any of the maladies that frequently struck pregnant women. Doubly fortunately, she was more amused by Septimus’ antics than annoyed, and didn’t take any of it the wrong way.

“Truthfully, I’d be more offended if you weren’t so wound up about your firstborn.” Cedrella told him at one point. “Mother said that any man worth having would be invested in the whole process.”

They spent the months making all sorts of plans – the usual grandiose daydreams and plans first-time parents have a tendency to indulge in. They argued amiably over names. Cedrella insisted on picking at least one girl’s name, despite the fact there hadn’t been a female Weasley born in generations.

“It’d be just our luck to not have a girl’s name picked, and have a girl.” She pointed out, and Septimus really couldn’t argue with that sort of logic.

Septimus raided his parents’ home for the bulk of the baby supplies they’d need, including clothes for the first months. A newborn infant wasn’t going to care if it was wearing secondhand clothes, after all. In the end, they’d needed only diapers, bottles, and a few other odds and ends.

Septimus had cause to thank all that Auror training he’d had when Cedrella went into labor. It kept him from completely losing his head. He hadn’t managed to keep his head completely, but he hadn’t been a useless wreck, either. He managed to get them to St. Mungo’s without too much dithering, and even remembered to call the other Marauders.

It was just as well that he had called them in, because Cedrella’s luck as regarded an easy pregnancy ran out when it came to the actual birth. She was in labor for two full days. Charlus and Harfang had to literally drag him out of the room whenever the Healers had enough of his pacing and fretting and banished him for a time. He would end up pacing the corridors for a few hours until he couldn’t handle it anymore, then storm back into the room with Cedrella, starting the cycle all over again. He didn’t sleep the entire time, and only drank or ate if Charlus or Harfang forced something on him.

While Charlus and Harfang dealt with Septimus, Dorea and Callidora did what they could to help Cedrella, which mostly amounted to distracting her as best they could with gossip, and making sure she didn’t get her hands on her wand whenever she hit a ‘I’m going to hex his balls off’ episode.

Finally, however, their firstborn made his way into the world. Despite the fact he was squash-faced, nearly puce, and honestly ugly as all get out, Septimus was smitten the instant the tiny bundle was put in his arms. Cedrella, much to her amusement, almost literally had to prise the babe out of Septimus’ arms in order to feed the tyke.

They decided to call him Arthur.
Arthur quickly became the apple of Septimus’ eye, and it had nothing to do with him being the Weasley heir. Septimus spent as much time as he possibly could with the little tyke. Cedrella was a highly amused enabler in this once she was completely back on her feet after the rather stressful birth. She’d always taken lunch with Septimus, as it was pretty much the only time they got to see each other during the day. After Arthur was born, he was included in the lunches as a matter of course.

This, despite the fact it wasn’t exactly the ‘proper’ way to raise a child, at least not by the standards Cedrella had grown up with. She’d not taken a meal with her family until she was five and had begun her lessons, and even then it had been a rare treat until she was judged worthy of attending the Children’s Ball.

They actually had enough to hire on a nanny if only barely, but Septimus and Cedrella had talked and decided it was a completely unnecessary expense. Maybe once they had more than one child a nanny would become necessary, but certainly not with one. Septimus managed to convince Cedrella fairly easily in this regard, as his parents had never used one, and he and his brothers had turned out just fine. Granted, they were all a touch rougher around the edges manners-wise than the cream of society liked to see, but they were otherwise fine.

Playing with Arthur and sharing meals swiftly became the best part of their days. Sometime shortly after Arthur’s birth, Sirius began to act a touch oddly. It wasn’t all that noticeable at first, which made pinpointing when he started going odd difficult, but it got worse fairly quickly. He became erratic, capricious, occasionally cruel and ... well, generally not himself.

If it hadn’t been for the fact he was Head of the Family, Septimus and Cedrella both would have suspected some sort of behavior-altering potion, but that sort of thing fit under the ‘magical coercion’ that Heads were protected against. Cedrella’s favorite theory involved a long-term poison that had erratic behavior as a side effect, which wasn’t covered under the protections. Septimus agreed it was possible, but privately wondered if the streak of near-insanity that tended to pop up in the Black family from time to time wasn’t rearing its head. The only problem with that was that it normally became clear a Black was a sufferer when they were still a child.

Whatever was going on, it wasn’t detectable by spell or potion. Cedrella tried repeatedly as Sirius’ behavior and decision making ability deteriorated, to no avail. She’d even consulted with Mediwizards, and snuck one into Sirius’ presence long enough for them to throw Healer-level detection spells at him to no effect.

Meanwhile, Septimus had to deal with the Wizengamot. The situation there continued to deteriorate, much to his exasperation. Practically nothing was getting done, no matter what he and Harfang did. They’d gained one or two allies, but most of the old members were content to stick with their existing power blocks, too busy fighting to form blocks under their leadership to want to ally with them, or inclined to treat them like they were still children. It was more than a little exasperating, and was making forming their own block rather difficult. They had a feeling they’d end up having to wait for a while longer, until some of the old coots started dying off and their sons took over. Maybe then they’d have more success.
Worse, the chaos and infighting was spreading outside of the Wizengamot. Normally, what happened in the Wizengamot stayed there for the most part, but the antagonism between various Heads was spreading to their families, resulting in a number of rather tense moments at the Children’s Balls, from what Septimus was hearing. Several families that normally hosted parties near Yule, Samhain or Beltane started becoming more selective about their invitations, disincluding those their Heads were feuding with in the Wizengamot.

Those days also marked the first time the epithet ‘mudblood’ was heard to fall from someone’s lips. It was soon clear that the epithet was coming from people who were roughly ten years younger than Septimus – in the age group with his brother Bilius. Predictably, it was coming from scions of the Darker families, Orion and Walburga Black chief among them. Abraxas Malfoy wasn’t far behind them, though, despite being much nearer Septimus’ age.

Then, at the start of the 1951-52 school year, Headmaster Dippet announced his intention to retire at the end of that school year, and named Albus Dumbledore as both his Deputy Headmaster and successor. The choice of successor was greeted with near-universal approval from the Light and Neutral families in a rather disconcerting display of support. A young woman named Minerva McGonagall was also announced as Dumbledore’s anticipated replacement as Transfiguration teacher and Head of Gryffindor House.

Septimus and Cedrella had been one of the few to be displeased at the news of Dumbledore’s promotion, the others being the rest of the Marauders. Having seen Dumbledore in action around the Ministry and Diagon Alley, not to mention remembering their school days, all six were rather suspicious and concerned. They could see that Dumbledore was up to something, but what, they couldn’t quite figure out. The one thing they all agreed on was that this was only the beginning for the man, and that there would be more to come.

It was to the point that the Marauders were wondering if Dumbledore hadn’t been Sorted Slytherin, despite everyone thinking he was as Gryffindor as it got. They suspected the assumption of Gryffindor was based more on the phoenix’s presence and him kicking Grindlewald’s butt than anything else, despite the fact that neither thing precluded Dumbledore having been Slytherin. Sadly, there weren’t all that many people still living who had gone to school with Dumbledore. Those that remained were either supporters or not talking, which made finding out if their suspicions were correct difficult.

The news was bad mostly because the Headmaster of Hogwarts had a seat in the Wizengamot. As the head educator of the upcoming generation, it had long ago been decided the Headmaster should be aware of and able to contribute to the lawmaking process. Traditionally, the seat was proxied by someone in the Headmaster’s family, as the Headmaster was generally too busy to attend meetings himself. This seat would give Dumbledore *two* votes, as he was also Head of Family Dumbledore. Septimus was firmly of the mind that the man didn’t need even one vote, never mind two.

The Marauders were very sure that wouldn’t be the case with Dumbledore. For one, no one was even sure if he had family. If he did, they were clearly not speaking to each other, which meant Dumbledore was unlikely to ask them to proxy for him. How Dumbledore planned on handling that problem no one was sure, but Septimus was betting it wouldn’t end well. He already had many of the Light and Neutral families looking on him with favor, and more than a few agreeing with his stances on things.

The worst part of it was, Septimus agreed with a number of things Dumbledore was saying, at least in theory. Unfortunately, there was a huge gap between what Dumbledore said and what he actually did. Worse, most of what Dumbledore was saying bothered Septimus rather a lot. He wouldn’t really have paid it any mind – after all, not even the Marauders agreed on every issue – except for the fact
that Dumbledore had an uncomfortable level of power and influence for a single man who had been all but unknown a decade ago.

From what Septimus knew, Dumbledore had been content to allow his Family vote to be proxied prior to his involvement in the War, and the proxy had never introduced any possible bills or taken any memorable stances on any particular issue. Dumbledore’s sudden interest in lobbying and politics was worrisome. It made Septimus pay more attention to what he was saying and doing. It didn’t help that Dumbledore had begun to attempt to get chummy with Septimus and Harfang, clearly trying to get them on his side. The grandfatherly attitude and subtle reminders of their childhood foibles – an attempt to remind them he was older and wiser and ought to be allowed to guide them, Septimus assumed – didn’t go over quite as well as Dumbledore had hoped, given their opinions of him during their school days.

Then, just to make things even worse – there was a wedding announced. Between Orion and Walburga Black. The Marauders were utterly horrified.

“They’re second cousins!” Dorea practically shouted, when the three families met up to talk about it. “It’s disgusting! Why are Arcturus, Pollux, and Sirius letting this happen?” She gave a convulsive shudder.

Cedrella wasn’t in much better shape. “I don’t understand it either, Dorea. It’s utterly foul. Sirius … well, he’s been getting more and more erratic over the last couple years, so I can understand why he is letting this happen, but what hold have those two got over their parents that they’re permitting this to happen? Do you have any idea, Dorea? Pollux is your brother.”

“I … I don’t know.” Dorea said on a sigh. “Honestly, our part of the family hasn’t ever been quite right that I can remember.” She winced. “I think because of Marius. I don’t remember him – I was only three when he was cast out. At least, I hope to Merlin it was ‘only’ cast out – but it affected Pollux and Cassiopeia, I think. Pollux especially. Marius was cast out just before Pollux went to Hogwarts, from what I discovered later.”

Marius was the squib boy child Septimus had heard about all those years ago, but hadn’t known for sure he existed until Dorea joined their number. She had been able to confirm his existence, though she’d only spoken of him once or twice before now. While she had been far too young to have any real memory of him, and was thus somewhat less affected than her siblings, she was still bothered by the whole thing.

“That would have an effect on a person.” Septimus agreed. “Which just leaves the question of what’s going on with Sirius and Arcturus to allow this. I know Cedrella’s done diagnostics on Sirius several times, since she is still his favorite of you girls, but she’s come up with nothing.”

“Which either means this is the insanity our family deals with popping up, or a long-lasting potion of some sort that leaves no trace of its presence in the body. Of which there are far too many possibilities.” Callidora said. “And most of them don’t fall under the ‘anti-coercion protection’ Family Heads enjoy, as their primary uses are for other things, and the mental instability is a side effect.”

“The worst part is that pair is going to eventually be Head of the family.” Callidora continued with a moue of distaste. “That is going to be a disaster. And there isn’t a damn thing any of us can do about it.”

They came close to deciding not to attend the party after the wedding, but in the end decided to go, half-hoping the family magics would have none of this nonsense. Unfortunately, the vows took, which they all found incredible. Orion and Walburga were entirely too smug for Septimus’ taste
during the party, and were rather conspicuous in staying longer than was usually the case.

That said, Septimus took an unholy amount of glee in taking part in the ‘keep the newlyweds from disappearing’ game when they finally began to try to disappear from the party. So did the rest of the Marauders. Between the six of them and some unscheduled and unexpected assistance from Arthur, who grabbed hold of Walburga’s hair when Cedrella was stalling her and got tangled up – they managed to stall the couple almost half an hour all on their own.

Two months after the wedding, Sirius died unexpectedly.

The timing of it all was so suspicious that it made Septimus’ teeth ache. The worst part of it was that there was nothing any of them could do – whatever had been done to Sirius had managed to get around the protections of the family magic, and while Arcturus was now protected himself, he hadn’t been prior to taking up the mantle, which meant that for all anyone knew, he could have been under the Imperius when he agreed to let Walburga marry Orion.

Worse yet, in a move that all but confirmed the Marauders’ suspicions about the Orion/Walburga marriage, Pollux and his wife retreated to a country house and more or less barricaded themselves in, refusing all visitors, even their own children and siblings.

“The only good news in this entire mess is that it’s very unlikely Orion will ever become Head, despite him thinking otherwise.” Septimus told Cedrella in the aftermath. “The odds on the family magic finding him worthy of being Head are miniscule. But their kids would be the first in line to take up the mantle if he fails the test, and he and Walburga will be able to mold those kids any way they please until then.”

“Which will be nearly as bad for the family as if Orion managed to make Head.” Cedrella said with a sigh. “And might be worse, because Merlin alone knows what poison those two will whisper in their children’s’ ears.”

“We’ll do what we can to counteract it.” Septimus promised her. “At the absolute worst, we’ll see them in the summer after they’re eligible for the Ball. And we can write them once they’re old enough to read. It’ll help.”

“It just feels like the whole world has begun to go mad.” Cedrella said. “And there doesn’t seem to be anything we can do to stop it.”

“Maybe not, but we’ll try our hardest anyway.” Septimus told her. “You never know when it’ll make a difference.”
Fighting Back

1953 – 1955

The next three years were incredibly difficult. Septimus watched in horror as the Dark families began to unite, one by one, in a way that made it clear they were being led. Led by a capable and clever commander, no less. The sort of person Hitler had been before he went insane, was Septimus’ best guess. Someone smooth and suave and with a gilded tongue.

Worse, the Light and Neutral families were beginning to fall apart into tiny, squabbling factions that disagreed vehemently and sometimes violently on nearly every issue. The end result was that the Dark families were getting more and more stringent laws passed simply because the other families couldn’t get their heads out of their asses long enough to work together and vote the laws down.

Worse was the fact that Dumbledore was gaining followers. By the time 1955 rolled around, Dumbledore led the largest Light-side faction. While that wasn’t saying much at that point given that the other Light and Neutral factions had as few as three people in them, Dumbledore had been very clever with his faction. He may only have had a half dozen or so people in his group, but they were some of the biggest shakers and movers, which gave Dumbledore’s faction both added potency in the Wizengamot and greater legitimacy.

What pissed Septimus off was the fact that while Dumbledore had a strong power base, he did not seem to be doing much of anything with it. He seemed to be more interested in rhetoric than in action. Septimus had heard him talking to people more than once about how this or that thing was wrong, but he never took a stand. Worse, the people around him seemed to be eating it up.

The biggest problem there was the fact that one of Dumbledore’s followers was Charlus’ father. He pretty much thought that Dumbledore was the best thing since sliced bread, and every word that came out of Dumbledore’s mouth was gospel. Dumbledore was not shy about using that to his advantage. Due to what Dumbledore was doing, Septimus strongly suspected that Dumbledore was aware of the fact that he, Harfang, and Charlus had plans for the Wizengamot once all three of them were in there.

There was no other explanation for the fact that Dumbledore convinced Charlus’ father that there was absolutely no need to step down as Head. He managed to convince his father that Charlus was young and intemperate, and as yet ill suited to the responsibility. Charlus was honestly worried that Dumbledore would somehow convince his father to refuse Charlus the title entirely if at all humanly possible, and force them to wait for Charlus’ child to grow old enough to take the mantle. They were just lucky that was the only choice left due to the fact that there were no other Potters, otherwise Charlus was very sure Dumbledore would have convinced his father to choose another heir. As it stood, until his father either wised up - which was highly unlikely - or died, his father would be heeding Dumbledore and voting as Dumbledore suggested.

Not a one of Dumbledore’s voting ‘suggestions’ sat right with any of the Marauders. In line with his habit of talking and not acting, Dumbledore was content to vote for all but the absolute worst of the Dark-sponsored laws. He told everyone who heeded his opinion to do likewise, and assured them that it was best to humor their compatriots. That the folks who sponsored the laws would come to see the error of their thinking in time, and the laws could easily be repealed when they had.
The wrong-headedness of that sort of thinking made Septimus long to call the old man out and hex him to bits. Unfortunately, there was no real way to do so, as Dumbledore was careful to never cross the line into giving offense. Not with Septimus, and not with anyone else. Actually, Dumbledore made it a real point to seem to be the reasonable one at every opportunity. It just added to his influence. He was the wise, reasonable, mature one, while people around him flew off the handle like the children they were. Septimus himself barely managed to keep from falling into that particular trap. Harfang had better luck because of his quiet personality - he just didn’t react violently to things. Charlus and Septimus could only grit their teeth and whinge in private.

As the second leg in his attempt to de-fang the Marauders before they could do much of anything in the Wizengamot, Dumbledore was directly targeting Septimus and Cedrella in several ways. He seemed to do a lot of whispering about the fact that Cedrella was a Black and a Slytherin, and that she was corrupting Septimus and turning him Dark. Septimus was honestly waiting for the day when Dumbledore overstepped himself in that regard, because Cedrella’s revenge would be ... impressive.

Fortunately, Dumbledore’s manipulations didn’t seem to be working. Yet. A lifetime of solid work ethic, incorruptible morals and a history of standing up for what was right was standing Septimus in good stead, as was his record as a war hero. It didn’t hurt that Harfang and Charlus backed him at every turn. Though, in his bitterer moments, Septimus fully expected Dumbledore to eventually try to cast aspersions on them publicly as well, given he’d begun to do so privately with Charlus. They had, after all, also married into the Black family and ergo were going Dark - at least by Dumbledores’ logic.

Septimus grudgingly gave credit where it was due and acknowledged Dumbledore’s wisdom in not trying to trash-talk Harfang to Augusta. That would end spectacularly badly for Dumbledore, because Augusta was fierce in a way seldom seen in women of her generation. She’d been active on the dueling circuit when she’d been younger for crying out loud. That was all but unheard of in a woman in her day. Her hex-first-question-later tendencies had only gotten worse when she’d finally found her feet after her husband’s death. Despite her advanced age and the fact they were all adults, she was a violently protective mama dragon where her children were concerned.

The whole mess with Dumbledore made Septimus long for their school days so he could prank him into submission and have done. He could target half the rest of the Wizengamot while he was at it. It wasn’t like schoolyard pranks would be beneath the Wizengamot’s collective maturity level.

Cedrella got pregnant again and gave birth to a second son in 1953, much to their mutual delight. Two years later, Harfang and Callidora produced their firstborn, a son they named Frank. Septimus quickly discovered that becoming a godfather was nearly as much fun as becoming a father, and doted on young Frank nearly as much as his parents did.

The Marauders had decided shortly after Harfang and Callidora had married that they’d be godparents to each others’ children when the time came. Being a godparent, unlike in the muggle world, was a solemn, magically-bound duty. It was the godparents’ place to raise, care for, and defend their godchild. They were even supposed to defend the child against its own parents if the parents became abusive. To not do so carried heavy magical penalties, up to and including the loss of one’s magic if the situation was dire enough.

More than one eyebrow was raised in the general populace at the idea of Septimus being godparent to the child of such a high-ranking family when the news broke. Fortunately there hadn’t been a damn thing anyone could do about it, not even Dumbledore. The fact that the Longbottoms trusted Septimus to raise their kid right - including full knowledge of their social station and everything that went with that - went a very, very long way to permanently silencing the doubters that still wondered about the new Weasley Head. It did more, ironically enough, than the fact that the Weasleys were
enjoying a fiscal plentitude they’d not had in hundreds of years.

Speaking of fiscal plentitude, shortly after his position as godfather became public knowledge, Septimus began to get letters from the members of the family outside the UK, all of them thanking and praising him for his advice, and how much it was helping their own private financial statuses. He’d also been able to increase the stipend family members received, something that hadn’t happened since their financial ruin. Septimus figured that in a generation or two, if their fortune continued to grow, they’d be able to buy back the Weasley heirlooms that had been sold to pay off the debt. Records had been kept of who had bought what, thank goodness.

Nineteen fifty-five marked the end of an ancient tradition. That year, the Children’s Ball was called off for the first time in close to a thousand years. The squabbling between families had gotten to the point where each faction only wanted to interact with their fellows. No one had been able to agree on who would host that year’s Ball, as every name put forward had significant numbers of families flatly refusing to attend.

The Marauders agreed that it was just shy of being a literal crime that the Ball was called off. Sadly, none of them could figure out how to fix the situation. They could see it degenerating, and could pretty much tell where it was going to end. It was going to end in blood and pain and death, and none of the Marauders wanted to see that shit again in their lifetimes. Sadly, it was looking more and more likely that they would.

The only good news in all that mess was that Arcturus wasn’t falling in with the Dark crowd. At least not yet. He consistently voted against the increasingly controlling laws in the Wizengamot, and refused to be seen with the Heads of the Dark-aligned families. He’d also apparently seen the same pattern that the Marauders had, and had become more than a little paranoid about his health and safety. He wore dueling armor constantly to protect himself from being hexed whenever he wasn’t alone. From what Septimus had heard, Arcturus was also obsessive about testing his food and drink for contaminants. Given what had happened with Sirius, Septimus didn’t blame the man one bit.

Much to everyone’s mutual relief, Orion and Walburga had gone quiet, as if they knew they couldn’t afford to pull anything else without all hell breaking loose. They’d retired to their home, seemingly content to sit back and wait. Septimus made sure he kept on top of where they were and what they were doing, just in case. He doubted they were done with their scheming.

Then, in August, Charlus’ father got hit by one of those illnesses the elderly fall prey to … and didn’t recover from it. As when Harfang’s father had died, the Marauders closed ranks around Charlus, providing him with as much support as they could. The day after the funeral, the Marauders met.

“My father went to his grave questioning my judgment and calling me a willful child.” Charlus growled, glaring at the table. “I am never going to forgive Dumbledore for that. Not as long as I live.”

Despite the anger in his voice, Septimus was pretty sure Charlus was close to tears. Not that Septimus blamed him a bit. Losing a parent at all had to be hard. Losing a parent under these circumstances had to be doubly so.

“I don’t blame you.” Septimus said. “I’m probably lucky I got the Headship before Dumbledore found his feet in the Wizengamot, or he’d’ve tried the same thing on my old man.” Then Septimus laughed. “And gotten hexed halfway to hell for it, Azkaban sentence for dueling in the chambers be damned.”

That made both men smile, if only briefly in Charlus’ case. Septimus’ parents weren’t quite on Augusta’s level of protective, but they weren’t far from it. Dumbledore would have paid dearly for
any trash-talking. It made Septimus feel more than a little badly that Charlus’ father hadn’t had that same sort of streak in him.

“We’re in for a hell of a fight, guys. I honestly don’t know if we can turn this around.” Harfang said quietly, bringing up what they’d gotten together to discuss. “Things have degenerated so badly in so short a time.”

“Someone is definitely pulling the Dark Families’ strings.” Septimus agreed. “If we can figure out who and how, we might be able to nullify the worst of their venom. Neutralizing Dumbledore’s going to be even harder. He makes it look like he’s invested in the Light winning, but if you actually pay attention … ”

“He does the absolute minimum required to make it look like he’s trying to fight the Dark families’ voting block, and then a whole lot of talking to explain why it’s not working, and talking people into not making a stand, because they need to give these people a chance to realize the error of their ways, a chance to return to the Light, blah blah blah.” Harfang continued. “It’s really irritating.”

“So we need to come up with a bomb-proof plan to shove this shit back down his throat, and cut the Darks off at the knees.” Charlus says, getting a look on his face that Septimus and Harfang know very well.

It has never ceased to amaze Septimus, but he could literally *see* when Charlus’ tactician brain swung into gear. Charlus got this squinty-eyed, flinty look on his face, eyes flicking back and forth like he could actually see the plan his brain was cooking up playing out in front of him. Without a word, Septimus shoved a roll of parchment, quill and ink into Charlus’ line of sight. Seconds later, Charlus was scribbling things down in a shorthand that only he ever seemed to be able to make sense of, despite him having tried to explain it to Septimus and Harfang on multiple occasions.

Harfang shot Septimus an amused look while they let Charlus mutter and scribble as he plotted. Septimus returned it, and felt vaguely grateful. If there was anything that would ease Charlus’ grief and anger, it was plotting the downfall of the man who’d hurt him so badly.

After about ten minutes, Charlus glanced up and grinned. “I think I’ve got a plan.”

“Talk to us, Charlus.” Harfang said.

“The families are dividing into factions, right? Well … what if we do something that negates a lot of that?”

“Like what?” Septimus wanted to know.

“Use the pureblood fanaticism and rank-consciousness against itself.” Charlus said. “Think. Just how many families have married into the Blacks? How many families could Arcturus influence if he put his foot down?”

Septimus’ eyes went wide. “Merlin. That’s … ”

“Vicious, brutal, brilliant, and just might work.” Harfang put in his two knuts, looking as startled as Septimus. “The challenge will be to get him to listen to us.”

“Send Cedrella after him. He knows damn good and well she was Sirius’ favorite of the girls, and the most political savvy of the lot. If she backs this, he might be more willing to listen.” Septimus said.

“We won’t get the Heads, not right away.” Charlus said. “But with the various wives, children, and
so on of Black blood putting pressure on their non-Black relations, it will eventually move up the food chain, and force the Heads to act, one way or another, Light, Dark, or Neutral.”

“At absolute worst, it’ll clear up the battle lines a bit. At best, it might just shut the worst of the squabbling down entirely.” Septimus said with a nod. “Either way, it’ll help by hitting pretty much all sides of the fight at once.”

Because the Blacks, as one of the more prolific families, had intermarried with literally every other pureblood family. Heck, they came close to doing it every generation, for crying out loud. And as one of the oldest of the pureblood families, what the Head of that family did and said carried immense weight.

“In the meantime, the three of us start agitating to get those laws removed, and vote any new ones down.” Harfang said. “With any luck, we can keep things from getting too much worse before Charlus’ idea starts bearing fruit.”

“They want a war? We’ll give them one. Just not the sort they were expecting.” Charlus said.
Don’t Mess With Blacks

Don’t Mess With Blacks

(_)(_)(_)

1955

Cedrella had been a bit startled and more than a bit impressed by the plan Charlus had come up with. Not for the first time did she wonder whether or not Slytherin had been a possibility the Sorting Hat had contemplated for him and Septimus, as both men had shown more than a little cunning and ambition over the years – far more of those traits than the typical ‘pure’ Gryffindor, at any rate.

The best part of it was that their idea had more of a likelihood to work than either man realized. This was mostly because Cedrella had been far more involved with Sirius and Arcturus than either man quite realized. Oh, Septimus knew she’d been learning the political scene of course, but he still (much to her amusement) hadn’t realized how much she’d been taught or why. He didn’t know that she’d spent a lot of time in Arcturus’ company, as he had to learn and keep abreast of things in the Wizengamot as future Head of Family Black, and Sirius had merely added her to Arcturus’ lessons once he’d caught up.

As a result, Cedrella had become quite close with Arcturus. They had fairly similar outlooks on a number of subjects, though Arcturus tended to be Neutral verging on Dark, whereas Cedrella was almost dead-center of Neutral. If anything, much to her amused chagrin, she leaned towards the Light rather than the Dark.

Because of that history, Arcturus would be far more likely to not only hear her out, but to actually act on ‘her’ idea. Actually, even more than that, he’d be willing to permit her to approach him at all, since he’d become understandably paranoid in the aftermath of Sirius’ rather suspicious illness and death.

She wrote Arcturus the day after Septimus told her about the talk he’d had with Charlus and Harfang. She got a letter that same evening granting her an audience the next day.

She dressed simply but elegantly for the meeting, opting for a semi-formal midnight blue robe with minimal embellishments – only slender silver piping on sleeves and collar. She flooed to the Manor precisely on time. Arcturus was waiting for her when she stepped out of the fireplace, looking pleased to see her. He greeted her with a hug.

“It’s been too long, Cedrella. How are things?”

“Quite well.” Cedrella said. “The children are a delight – you really should come by sometime. You haven’t met the two youngest yet.”

Their third child - and by mutual agreement their last - had been born only a few months previously. Cedrella’s three pregnancies had all been ridiculously easy, for which she gave continual thanks. Better yet, only Arthur had had a difficult birth. The other two had been born with a minimal amount of fuss and bother. At least on her end. Septimus hadn’t really improved much in his performance at either birth, something she teased him about fairly frequently.

“Hmmmm, no, I haven’t.” Arcturus said as he led her into his office. “So, you wrote telling me you needed to speak to me?”
“Yes, it’s about the situation in the Wizengamot.” Cedrella said as she settled into the chair he’d indicated.

A few seconds later a house elf popped in with a tray of tea and sandwiches, then popped out. Cedrella automatically began to pour and serve, having become accustomed to doing so in her own home. Arcturus gave her an amused look but did not demure, though he did tap his wand against the lip of the cup, murmuring a detection spell as an automatic precaution. Cedrella made no comment. Again, after Sirius, it was only common sense to take such a precaution.

“It is also about the situation the Family finds itself in.” Cedrella continued once they both had cups and plates. “Both situations dovetail a bit.”

“Indeed.” Arcturus agreed. “There is no way that Orion will ever make Head. I can’t prove it, but …”

“The odds on what happened to Sirius being natural are very, very, very long.” Cedrella finished.

“Precisely. I have no idea what exactly they did, but the maneuvering became rather obvious.” Arcturus said.

“No subtlety at all.” Cedrella agreed, making a moue of distaste. “The problem lies in the fact that while Orion will never make Head, his children, if they have any, will be the next in line. And he and Walburga will have the raising of that heir.”

Arcturus made a disgusted face. “Quite. Unfortunately, I am at a loss as to what I can do to mitigate circumstances.”

“I believe there is an old custom that might serve.” Cedrella said. “I remember a decree that said that an heir should be raised by the current Head – even if the Heir is not the current Head’s child. The decree allowed for the Head of the Family to bring said Heir into their home and raise them. After all, the heir must learn their duties, and where better to learn them than from the current Head?”

Arcturus blinked. “I had forgotten about that old bit of trivia.” He admitted. “It will serve admirably when the time comes – if it comes. If they produce no children, I’ll have to figure out who to name as heir.”

“At this point.” Cedrella said. “That would mean either Alphard, Phillip or Marcus. There are no other male heirs to be had.”

Alphard was of an age with Orion, and a full Black, which really made him the better choice than her own two younger sons, though they would be the next in line if something happened to Alphard. There were, of course, other sons born to Black women, but they were all heirs to other families, which made them nonviable as potential future Heads for Family Black.

Arcturus nodded. “I will speak with Alphard and appoint him back-up Heir in the event Orion and Walburga either don’t spawn, don’t spawn a boy, or don’t spawn a sane boy. With one of your two younger boys, whichever one seems more viable, as a double backup.” He took a sip of his tea. “And the other issue at hand?”

“The Wizengamot is out of control, from what Septimus is saying. There are a half a hundred factions all fighting for their slice and nothing at all is getting done. I know the Wizengamot has always been contentious and had factions, but this is ridiculous.” Cedrella said.

“I tend to agree with you and your husband.” Arcturus said. “I don’t know for sure what’s been going on, but it’s definitely getting out of hand.”
“Septimus was talking about the situation with Charlus and Harfang when Charlus reminded him of Family Black’s status, and the fact we have primacy over pretty much every family save the Potters and Longbottoms themselves.” And one or two other families, but that was it.

Arcturus was not slow to figure out where this was going. “He wants me to use the family influence on the married members of the family, and drag the various Families into alignment with each other.”

Cedrella nodded. “They’re aware that not everyone will go Light, or even Dark, but it will serve to eliminate a lot of the smaller factions if the families are forced to take definite sides, and we’re really the only ones who can do it.”

“And hopefully with fewer factions, the arguing will lessen and something might be accomplished.” Arcturus said with a nod. “I’ll start figuring out how to apply the heat and hopefully put it into action before Samhain. With any luck the winter sessions will be less antagonistic.”

“Have you any plans in mind with which to deal with Orion and Walburga?” Cedrella asked, meaning punishing them for their rather obvious guilt in the matter of Sirius’ death.

“I’ve been running options through my mind.” Arcturus admitted. “I’m half tempted to force them to remain in their home at all times. Given the custom for heirs, I can potentially remove all their children, if they have them, and raise them myself, to spare them. Though I imagine Orion and Walburga will object if that becomes the case.”

Cedrella laughed. “Let them. Condemned to their home, there is little they can do about anything.”

They spent the next hour or so gossiping, catching up on all the doings that Arcturus had missed for having kept to himself so much since his ascendance to Head of House. Eventually, Cedrella took her leave, well pleased with her day’s work.

She had managed to not only convince Arcturus to move against Orion and Walburga, and put pressure on the other families, she’d made him more aware of the fact that he was, in essence, allowing Orion and Walburga to win in their gambit to control and/or become the Head of the Family. After all, Arcturus had all but become a hermit since his ascendance three years ago, losing no small amount of influence in the Wizengamot and weakening the Black Family’s power and ties to the other families. It would take time and effort to repair that damage, but nowhere near as much as it could have if things had remained the way they were.

Arcturus was as good as his word. Better, actually. It became clear that he had begun to move on Cedrella’s suggestions by the end of September, never mind Samhain. The politically weakest Families began to better align themselves with the major players, reducing the number of factions by two or three just in that couple of weeks.

Better still, a letter was circulated to the family members, indicating that Orion and Walburga were being forcibly secluded and bound to their home until Arcturus said otherwise for acting against the Family, and that all communications with them were to be stopped immediately. Arcturus included a note in Cedrella’s letter saying that he had assigned one of the Black Family elves to do all of Orion and Walburga’s shopping, and that he’d had their floo cut off so they had no contact with anyone. He’d also gotten into contact with Alphard, who had then moved in with Arcturus and his wife to learn what he needed to know in case he ended up becoming the future Head of the family.

In short, Family Black was back in the game after nearly five years’ absence, Since Sirius had become a less than effective Head long before his death. From Septimus’ reports about the changes this brought in the Wizengamot, it was clear to Cedrella that a lot of people were not happy about the return. Especially Dumbledore. Evidently, Dumbledore had begun to look very sour as people began
to align more and more. Cedrella didn’t know what that man was up to, but she sincerely hoped that the Blacks putting pressure on the families put a massive spanner in the works.

Cedrella didn’t get too much time to contemplate the hellery that Arcturus was instigating by exercising his rightful influence. Raising three young boys was rather time consuming. Not that she minded.

Of the three, Arthur had definitely inherited his father’s fairly phlegmatic temperament. He’d rarely fussed without reason as an infant, and toddler tantrums had been equally rare. Phillip, at three, was far more cantankerous than Arthur had been on his worst day, showing early signs of having a more typically Weasley temper. Marcus was far too young yet to know where he would fall in the temperament stakes.

It was rather early to be thinking such things, but Cedrella was quietly of the opinion that Arthur would make nearly as ideal a future Head as Septimus had. Aside from a more even temper, Arthur had inherited his father’s work ethic, applying himself surprisingly industriously for a five year old to his lessons.

Cedrella and Septimus both had been taking great care to present certain things neutrally. Traditionally, the familial Sorting, if one House predominated, was presented as the only acceptable Sorting, and the qualities of the other Houses vilified to varying degrees. Cedrella and Septimus were consciously trying to avoid that, trying to instill in Arthur and Phillip (Marcus would learn this as well when he was old enough to absorb such lessons) that the qualities of the Houses were neither bad nor good, and that whatever House would be fine. She sincerely doubted it would alter the Weasley heritage of Sorting Gryffindor, but at the very least, their boys would be more inclined to not look down their noses at the members of the other Houses, which could only help them.

Or, well, it would help them if things could get straightened out. The way things were at the moment, making friends outside of one’s House at Hogwarts was probably a quick route to becoming a pariah. It had certainly been heading that route even when she’d been attending, and it hadn’t seemed to get any better from what they’d been hearing from younger family members.
Arcturus’ crackdown had the desired results. While it deepened and strengthened the splits between Light, Neutral, and Dark, it also simplified the battlefield the Wizengamot had become into four large factions with more or less united causes, rather than a dozen or more small factions. They had even begun to get more done than arguing. Not much, granted, but more than they had when the Wizengamot was so divided.

Dumbledore remained their largest stumbling block. It was entirely due to him that the Light side remained split into two factions, rather than one. The man was a gifted orator, and a superb actor. He’d begun to cultivate a very grandfatherly and wise appearance and demeanor, and unfortunately it was working incredibly well. Septimus and Cedrella both could do little more than shake their heads in dismay as more and more people fell for the act. Because that was exactly what it was. Septimus didn’t know exactly what end-game Dumbledore was working towards, but he was working towards something.

Ok, that was a bit of a lie. Septimus had a fair idea of what Dumbledore was up to. The slow gathering of power was kind of telling. It was pretty clear that Dumbledore wanted to rule the UK Wizarding World. The only thing that remained in question was what exactly his agenda would be if he did end up ruling them. Dumbledore gave every appearance of being the opposite of the Dark families and their anti-Muggle/Muggleborn agenda, but Septimus wasn’t entirely sure that was the truth.

Worryingly, more and more rumors about thing in Hogwarts were making the rounds. None of it was good, either. The tales of changes in the curriculum for the worse were the biggest concern. It had also become clear that Dumbledore wanted to rule the UK. The only thing that remained in question was what exactly his agenda would be if he did end up ruling them. Dumbledore gave every appearance of being the opposite of the Dark families and their anti-Muggle/Muggleborn agenda, but Septimus wasn’t entirely sure that was the truth.

Neither Septimus nor Cedrella agreed with that opinion, if for slightly different reasons. Cedrella deplored and grieved the loss of yet more traditions after the loss of the Children’s Ball. Septimus thought that losing the traditional celebrations was doing the Muggleborn students absolutely no favors. They needed to learn that while the Wizarding world was anachronistic compared to the Muggle world, not all of it was because Wizards were contrary and backwards. Some of it was due to that, certainly, but not all of it.

Muggleborns’ only exposure to Wizarding traditions and the reasons for them prior to graduation came from Hogwarts. By ending the traditional celebrations, they were missing out on learning about that. Most Muggleborns would be unlikely to seek to correct the lack as adults. Therein lay the problem.

Septimus wasn’t fool enough to think that wasn’t deliberate. For some reason, Dumbledore wanted
to make the situation between purebloods and muggleborns worse. Without that grounding in traditions, most muggleborns would never discover or understand the deeper connections with magic that were made possible and/or encouraged by the traditional celebrations. Worse, their ignorance would annoy the purebloods and deepen the resentment aimed at Muggleborns.

To say he and Dumbledore had come to loggerheads over the issue was to understate the point. Septimus remained intractable and, to the bafflement of many of the Light-siders and everyone else, consistently voted against practically every bill Dumbledore brought forward. Weasleys had been Light-side for longer than Hogwarts had existed. For Septimus to apparently break with that and become effectively Neutral baffled practically everyone. Unfortunately, it did not seem to sound an alarm about Dumbledore and his motives, or if it did, Dumbledore successfully soothed them.

Arcturus spent most of his time in the Wizengamot with the Marauders. Just his presence lent their cause, and the Neutral party, more weight. That he had apparently shifted sides as well, becoming Neutral rather than Dark, baffled nearly as many people as Septimus defecting to the Neutral party.

Ironically enough, the Neutral party had nearly as many members these days as did Dumbledore. Most of the Neutrals that had come over in the last few years had done so more out of irritation with the hardliners on either side than because of pressure from Black family members or any truly Neutral leanings. They were just exasperated with the constant wrangling the extremists indulged in.

Late in 1959, it became necessary for Arcturus to enact the ‘heir plan’, as Orion and Walburga managed to procreate and produced a son. Arcturus managed to have young Sirius, who had been named to honor his unfortunate namesake, for a whole month before Dumbledore found out about it and attempted to intervene.

Septimus got a blow-by blow description of the resultant argument from Arcturus a few days later. It resulted in Dumbledore leaving with his tail tucked firmly between his legs, much to Septimus’ amusement. Though really, why Dumbledore thought he could possibly have any say in the situation confounded him.

Two months later, Dumbledore attempted to bring forward legislation restricting a Head’s powers. Septimus didn’t even have to try to rally support to vote the bill down. Dumbledore got shouted down before he’d even finished reading the thing. It had been a spectacularly ill-thought-out move by the man - rather out of character for his established pattern, to be honest. Septimus figured that Arcturus taking Sirius had forced Dumbledore to hurry his plan for some reason. That did not bode well for what Dumbledore’s eventual plans were, if he’d had in mind to try to control the Family Heads somehow.

Septimus had been more than a little amused when Cedrella found herself visiting Arcturus frequently in the wake of him taking custody of Sirius. With their own children long past the infant stage at that point, she had found she dearly missed having a little one to cuddle and coo at. Arcturus and his wife, both being older, were more than happy to let her watch Sirius fairly frequently. All of them were watching Sirius closely for any problems thanks to the closeness of his parents’ blood relation. Fortunately, he had escaped any blatantly obvious physical deformities, but there was always the possibility of something more subtle that would show up later.

In January of nineteen sixty, the next Marauder generation was finally completed, as Charlus and Dorea finally managed to have a child, a boy they named James. There was much celebrating among the Marauders, as James’ appearance was much desired and had been long in coming. Septimus quickly found himself having to reign in Charlus’ tendency to want to spoil James rotten.

“I understand the impulse, brother, but you’ll be doing your son no favors doing that.” Septimus told him one day. “He’ll grow up to be a menace, like Abraxas’ boy.”
Charlus had made a horrified face. Septimus, of course, had known that argument would work where all others might fail due to Potter stubbornness. The end of the Children’s Ball had resulted in the end of the rule that children were not to appear in public until they’d attended the Ball. While most people didn’t really mind meeting the new generation earlier, for some of them it was definitely a bad thing. Abraxas’ son Lucius was a menace of the first order, and had made a rather bad impression all around on his trips out and about. The threat of having his own son turn out like that was more than enough to see Charlus reigning in his tendency to spoil James.

Nineteen sixty-one brought its own big change to the Weasley family. Namely, Arthur got his Hogwarts letter. Septimus wasn’t entirely happy about it – it seemed like only yesterday he’d held a newborn Arthur in his arms. He grumbled more than a little about children growing up faster than they ought to, much to Cedrella’s evident amusement.

“And you laughed when I started watching Sirius. Now who misses having little children about?” Cedrella asked.

Septimus huffed at her. “It’s entirely different, woman.” He mock-argued, unable to keep from grinning a little at her in abashed amusement at himself. “And I’ll thank you to remember that.”

“And of course, my dear. I do apologize.” Cedrella said with mock contrition, all the while giving him a look that promised retribution later.

Septimus wouldn’t have had it any other way. He dearly enjoyed their ‘arguments’, and the ‘retribution’ and ‘making up’ after. It kept life interesting, and they both knew it wasn’t serious. They only very rarely argued in all seriousness, and those arguments had a markedly different tone. For one, there was a whole lot more yelling when they were arguing seriously.

The trip to Diagon Alley was a bit more hectic than usual. The pureblood families had enjoyed a bumper crop of children after the Grindlewald/World War Two, much the same as many of the Muggle countries involved in World War Two had. As a result, there were quite a number of children of varying ages running around the Alley in late August, of all blood statuses.

It was now that their early husbandry with their finances was bearing fruit. The Weasley coffers hadn’t been this full in a very, very long time. While they were not in the same financial bracket that the Potters, Longbottoms, and Blacks enjoyed, they were not all that far from it. Not that anyone would notice on first look, though. Septimus and Cedrella were still very careful with their money, and only ever bought what they truly needed, even if they bought it of a better quality than they had before.

As a result, Arthur was going to Hogwarts better equipped than Septimus himself had been, a sight that made everything Septimus had done over the last few decades more than worth it. Arthur was going to be going to Hogwarts with all-new equipment and clothing, a first for a Weasley since disaster struck.

Arthur, true to his easy-going personality, managed to make several friends during their trip. He even exchanged contact information with two of them, one a pureblood (the Cornfoot scion), another a completely overwhelmed and confused Muggleborn.

Septimus had made sure their children could comfortably deal with the Muggle world via a number of field trips and encouraging them to earn spending money the same way he had – by doing chores for the elderly and less-able muggles in the nearest village. Phillip and Marcus were mostly indifferent about the whole thing, complying with Septimus’ directive but not really invested in it. Arthur, on the other hand, was utterly fascinated, and pleased to spend time in the Muggle world. As a result of that and his newfound Muggleborn friend, Septimus and Cedrella didn’t see much of him
the last few weeks of August. He was always begging to be allowed to visit his friend. Both Septimus and Cedrella had been rather amused and quite willing to permit the visits.

Their amusement quadrupled once Arthur was at Hogwarts. They learned from Arthur’s first letter home that the Marauders were not only still known, but apparently still active. Better, somehow the group had managed to retain its anti-bully policy, rather than becoming nothing but a group of pranksters acting at random. Interestingly, it seemed to have become something of a tradition to tell the incoming first years about it on the train to Hogwarts - a combined reassurance and warning, Septimus supposed.

From a later letter, they learned that the torch was apparently passed from one generation to the next, usually from sixth years to second or third years. At least, that was what Arthur managed to find out when he’d managed to organize his roommates in Gryffindor into a Marauders group and they got found out by the existing Marauder group. Arthur had even managed not to blab that he was the son of one of the first Marauders, though Septimus would have given real money to see the expressions on their successors’ faces. Apparently, the ‘First Marauders’ were all but worshipped in certain circles.

The reason for that worship was rather easy to figure out. From Arthur’s letters, it was clear the bully situation had only gotten worse since Septimus and Cedrella’s day. The bullies were essentially operating under Dumbledore’s beneficence, as he refused to punish as harshly as some of the rules being broken demanded. It wasn’t like these kids were ten minutes late for curfew or anything. Broken bones and week-long stays in the infirmary were apparently very common results of the bullies’ actions. It had been bad enough to drive Arthur to reform the Marauders in his first year, despite Septimus advising him to wait until second year if he could.

Arthur came home for Yule sporting several bruises from a fight that broke out on the train home thanks to several of those bullies. Septimus had shaken his head in dismay at the sight – not because Arthur had fought back, but because it was necessary. Clearly, Hogwarts was out of control.
Arcturus ended up re-enacting the ‘heir plan’ the very last day of nineteen sixty-one, when Orion and Walburga produced a second son that Arcturus named Regulus. This time, Dumbledore didn’t try to interfere.

Septimus never asked, but he was fairly sure in later years that Arcturus hexed or potioned one or both of the crazy pair sterile to keep them from reproducing a third time. The risks were too great, and it wouldn’t have been Orion and Walburga paying the price, but their children.

Both Sirius and Regulus had escaped obvious problems, but another child might not be so lucky. No one deserved to struggle through life with serious physical or mental problems because their parents were complete idiots. It was best to prevent the problem entirely once they’d proven they could and would reproduce fairly easily.

Things in the Wizengamot were both better and worse. While the faction-based arguing had reduced considerably, the unfortunate result of the deeper, clearer split in the Wizengamot was that the Dark siders were becoming more effective. They were also becoming sneakier, though they lacked a truly gifted orator like Dumbledore as leader in the Wizengamot. They were every bit as bad about trying to sneak legislation past the rest of the Wizengamot at the bottom of otherwise sensible and sane bills as Dumbledore was.

The end result was that the Neutrals were expending all their energy stopping the extremists’ legislation, and were largely unable to introduce their own. Every bill was examined in minute detail, and the disagreeable portions that were snuck in were pointed out to the opposing side, with as much of a ‘do you really want to let this happen?’ twist as they could manage, to vote the bill down. Sometimes they were able to convince enough of the extremist families to vote accordingly that it was enough to keep a bill with an unfortunate rider from passing. Other times it wasn’t, and all they could do was watch as more and more of their way of life was eroded, to one extreme or the other.

By far the most unfortunate rider was one that the Dark side managed to get through, mostly by dint of the Light-siders not quite thinking it through despite the Neutrals’ attempts to educate them. That rider introduced the ‘illegal to do magic outside of school until of age’ law, and provided for the creation of an ‘underage magic’ department in the Ministry.

The Light-siders presumed (wrongly) that the law would level the playing field between Muggleborns and those raised in Wizarding families. They didn’t stop to realize that it was impossible for anyone to tell who did magic in a magical area or a thoroughly warded home, even with wands spelled to notify the Ministry.

Worse, the purebloods would either know or quickly find ways to remove the tracking spells on their childrens’ wands that the law proposed as a way to track magic done outside of school. Heck, worse came to worse, they could just give their kids a compatible heirloom wand from the family vaults to use during the summer.

This effectively meant that the Wizard raised could and would do magic prior to Hogwarts and
during the summer, while the Muggleborns would lose months of needed practice time in the summers, and quite possibly be unable to complete certain homework assignments at all, if the teachers forgot themselves and assigned their students the task of mastering a spell or potion over the summer. It also deepened the divide between the Muggleborns and their Muggle families thanks to the complete inability to truly share and show what they were learning.

More interestingly, Septimus had noticed it before, but it was becoming more and more clear that the Dark-side families were being led by someone. These days, it was becoming clear that the leader wasn’t someone in the Wizengamot, which presented all kinds of interesting information. It meant, to Septimus, that whoever their leader was, he wasn’t a pureblood. There had been a very, very rare few pureblood families that didn’t have representation in the Wizengamot throughout history, but Septimus didn’t think that was the case with this particular leader.

The Gaunts came immediately to mind as one of the more recent cases of lack of representation in the Wizengamot. That family had all but lost their family magic due to truly criminal levels of inbreeding and unfitness of any of their male heirs to assume Headship. There were persistent rumors of brothers and sisters marrying in that family – and not just once, but repeatedly. The last time that family had someone who qualified to stand as Head, never mind had a seat in the Wizengamot, had been nearly two centuries ago. The family had eventually died out completely a few years back, with the deaths of the last members of the family.

The clues that the Dark-side leader wasn’t a pureblood were few and subtle. They mostly evidenced themselves in a slight change over time in how the Dark-side purebloods were celebrating Samhain, Yule, and Beltane. Septimus had overheard discussions of the celebrations often enough to note that certain aspects of the celebrations had been phased out – aspects that purebloods knew about and adhered to, but a non-pureblood might not, and might not think to include if they were celebrating with followers. That would eventually have something of a trickle-down effect, depending on just how good the leader was, resulting in the purebloods eventually discontinuing those portions in their private celebrations.

What both irked and amused the hell out of Septimus was that the purebloods apparently hadn’t caught on to the true origins of their leader. There was absolutely no indication they thought this person less than a pureblood. Septimus supposed that the person was another Dumbledore to manage it, which fit with the way the Dark-side families were managing to work in the Wizengamot now.

Speaking of Dumbledore, by nineteen sixty-five, the man was incredibly close to more or less owning the hearts of the general wizarding populace. He’d managed to craft his image with such skill that the number of people who hadn’t fallen for it (for good or ill) could probably be counted on one hand. Even most of the Neutrals were swallowing his sales pitch. It was completely exasperating. These days, suggesting that Dumbledore might not be correct was terrifyingly close to sacrilege. Dumbledore was the Leader of the Light. He had a phoenix familiar. He was all-wise and infallible.

Never mind the fact that it was impossible for a phoenix to be a true familiar. Yes, they could (and did) accompany sufficiently Light-aligned persons for the length of their lives, but it that wasn’t a familiar bond. Septimus was still trying to figure out why people were falling for the phoenix-familiar story.

True familiars were rare, which had probably helped with the perception. Only perhaps one in a hundred wizards would acquire a true familiar at some point in their lives. Such creatures were always magical, their lifespans linked to those of their chosen wizard. They never outlived their wizard, though they always lived longer than their breed normally did thanks to the bond with their wizard. That bond rendered them essentially unkillable for their wizard’s lifetime, though they could
be gravely wounded. Phoenixes were essentially immortal and that prevented them from being able to be familiars.

It worried Septimus that Dumbledore’s phoenix hadn’t been seen in public in roughly a decade now. It seemed that Dumbledore had gotten the mileage he needed out of its near-constant presence in the early days and ceased to cart it about. It was evidently still around – more than one parent whose child had been called into the Headmaster’s office had mentioned their child reporting its presence – but that wasn’t all that reassuring. Septimus was still more than slightly convinced that Dumbledore had managed to coerce the poor creature somehow. Unfortunately, he had no way of finding out for sure, nor of freeing the poor thing if that was the case. He didn’t exactly have access to the man’s office, after all. None of their children were overt troublemakers, and were thus unlikely to be called in to speak with Dumbledore. And if they weren’t called in to speak with Dumbledore, their parents wouldn’t be called in either.

Septimus discovered near the end of Arthur’s second year that he was slightly mistaken about that assumption. It turned out that Dumbledore could and would call kids into his office for reasons other than extreme malfeasance. Arthur reported to his parents that Dumbledore had called him into his office shortly after the end of second year exams, ostensibly to talk to Arthur about his third year elective choices.

“But dad, he really didn’t spend much time at all talking about that. Hardly any really. Though he did try to talk me out of Muggle Studies.” Arthur pouted a bit when he reported that. “Which I really want to take. He seemed more interested in fishing for information about you and mom. And a little about Uncle Arcturus and little Sirius and Regulus.”

Arcturus was, of course, not actually Arthur’s uncle, but it was simpler to use that designation, especially considering how much time the two families spent around each other. Marcus, their youngest, was young enough to be a viable playmate for both Sirius and Regulus, as there was only a few years between them. Phillip was just enough older than them to disdain hanging around babies, while Arthur didn’t mind babysitting in the least. As a result, they spent a lot of time in Arcturus’ company these days. All the Marauders did, as Frank and James, who were closer to Sirius and Regulus’ ages than Septimus and Cedrella’s boys, had become fast friends with them.

It didn’t surprise Septimus in the least that Dumbledore was fishing for information. The gulf between himself and Dumbledore was such that they never spoke amicably, and Dumbledore was thus deprived of virtually all first-hand information about Septimus and Cedrella’s plans and doings. Arcturus similarly would have nothing to do with the man.

“I didn’t tell him anything.” Arthur said, then giggled. “Not like I could, really. I mean, yeah, we talk in letters and stuff, but it’s mostly about school and how it’s going, how my friends are doing, that sort of thing.”

That would, Septimus knew, change in a few years, once Arthur was a bit older. It would become time to start letting Arthur be aware of the activities and decisions Septimus participated in as Head of the Family, as a primer to the more involved lessons regarding politics and their associated shenanigans that Arthur would be dealing with when he came of age. Those particular lessons Septimus planned to leave to Cedrella. Even several decades on, she was the better at understanding that minefield of the pair of them, and he depended heavily on her advice. He honestly couldn’t ask for a better tutor for his son and heir in that field, and unlike a number of other patriarchs, he wasn’t anywhere stupid enough to disdain Cedrella’s knowledge and ability just because she was female.

The good news about Dumbledore’s curiosity came with Arthur’s next comment.

“I don’t like him much, really. Dumbledore, I mean.” Arthur told Septimus. “He … I dunno, dad, but
he sort of really favors Gryffindors. A lot. He gives out points like they’re candy, despite being Headmaster and not really, you know, involved in the teaching and stuff. And he’s all but going mad trying to figure out who the Marauders are, trying to stop them – despite the fact they only target the bullies that make everyone else’s lives a misery. Fabian and Gideon warned me’n my roommates to learn Occlumency as soon as we can – apparently, it’s been suspected for years that Dumbledore’s a Legilimens. I think they might be right – he didn’t seem too happy when I didn’t want to look him in the eye when he had me in his office.”

Well, at least Arthur was forming a less-than-sterling opinion of Dumbledore all on his own. It was a relief to Septimus. He hadn’t wanted to contemplate trying to unscrew his son’s thinking where that man was concerned if he started worshipping Dumbledore like so many did.

It was through Fabian and Gideon Prewitt, sixth years and part of that generation’s Marauders, that Arthur met (and swiftly became utterly smitten with) Molly, their younger sister. She was in the same year as Arthur, but Arthur, like most pre-pubescent boys, had more or less ignored her existence for the first few years they were in school together. It wasn’t until fourth year that Arthur started having hearts in his eyes where she was concerned.

It helped that she was more than happy to step up and take one of the places her brothers would be vacating in the Marauders. At first, Septimus wasn’t entirely sure that Molly would be a good match for Arthur.

Mostly because she had a loud, fierce, vibrant personality that could all too easily overwhelm Arthur’s far quieter personality. By the end of their fourth year, though, it was becoming obvious that the blooming friendship-leaning-to-more between them was doing both of them a world of good. Arthur provided an apparently much-needed stabilizing influence for Molly’s explosive temperament. Better still, rather than her overwhelming Arthur, she had a tendency to fire him up about things more than he otherwise would have been on his own. She actively encouraged him to voice his opinions and act with more surety, rather than bludgeoning him into agreeing with her opinions about things. If that pattern continued and held true, Septimus would have no problem at all approving of the pairing. However, the eventual fate of their barely-begun romance was yet to be seen.

By late in nineteen sixty-five, it was becoming obvious that Sirius at least was indeed affected by inbreeding, though thanks be to a far lesser degree than anyone had feared might happen. He seemed to have inherited some small measure of the streak of insanity that ran through the Black line, though it was far less marked than what one of his cousins, young Bellatrix, suffered from. Sirius mostly seemed to suffer from unpredictable, uncontrollable mood shifts.

In the muggle world, the diagnosis would have been bipolar disorder, but such things were not known about in the wizarding world, and merely got lumped under the blanket label of ‘insanity’. Fortunately, Sirius’ mood instability wasn’t severe, and Arcturus had begun to teach the boy the rudiments of Occlumency far younger than was normally done in the hopes that the mental discipline would assist in leveling Sirius’ moods out. He was also consulting with Healers regarding potions regimens to help with the problem, among other possible solutions.
Well, we’ve been sneaking away from canon in dribs and drabs, fits and starts up to now. This chapter introduces the first BIG changes.

Arthur and Molly did indeed stand the test of time – though not without a fair few rather explosive arguments. Septimus actually counted those fights in the ‘win’ column, because prior to becoming involved with Molly, Arthur had been quiet and laid back enough to simply refuse to argue at all. He’d allowed other kids to sort of railroad right over him without meaning to. That Molly had gotten him to the point where he’d stand his ground and fight was actually a good thing.

They married straight out of Hogwarts, and found a small, fixer-upper home within their financial means. Between them, they spent the next year sprucing the place up into quite a nice home, and named it ‘The Burrow’.

Six months after Arthur and Molly married, Lord Voldemort made himself known to the general public.

Much to Septimus’ horror, it was very much like listening to Hitler’s broadcasts all over again, hearing what Voldemort had to say and how. He was smooth, and clever, and convincing. He wooed and schmoozed the purebloods. He catered to their phobias and perceptions of their superiority and importance. He played on their fears and blew pretty much everything out of proportion. He made it seem like every concession made for Muggleborns was a sign of the End of Days or something.

Septimus was willing to grant that many of Dumbledore’s desired concessions weren’t good news. They were a far cry from Ragnarok however, no matter what Voldemort was whispering in the ears of his followers. Followers he had in plenty, and gained more practically daily. A lot of people were listening to what he had to say and agreeing with him.

In the space of two years, the Neutral party all but disappeared. It was down to only a handful of families as everyone else in the Wizengamot polarized. The Wizengamot also weaponized, developing a distinct ‘if you’re not with us, you’re the enemy’ mentality. This was far more antagonistic than the more normal ‘if you’re not on my side, you’re an opponent’ mentality. By nineteen seventy, it had become a damn good thing that dueling in the Wizengamot resulted in an Azkaban sentence, as Septimus was very sure that many a session would have devolved into a series of duels otherwise.

The pressure on the remaining Neutral families was immense. Especially on Arcturus as the Head of the most populous and thus truly most influential House. He came under an unprecedented amount of fire from both sides. The Light side condemned him as a Dark supporter pretending he was otherwise. The Dark side alternated between condemning him as a Light supporter and trying to get
him back to the Dark side of the fence by various means.

The good news was that in 1971 James and Sirius started Hogwarts. They had become all but inseparable over the years. Fortunately for Sirius, the Occlumency training and potions regimen Arcturus had begun when Sirius was still a toddler were paying off. Sirius was still a little emotionally unstable, but it had improved considerably. He had improved enough that it was easy to mistake him as merely being a bit of a wild child, rather than mentally unbalanced. Septimus was glad for his sake. Regulus, by some miracle, seemed to have escaped any unfortunate side-effects from inbreeding, though Arcturus was still keeping a careful eye on him. There was no telling when a problem would make itself known.

Things got … rather interesting rather quickly once they boys were headed to Hogwarts. Charlus received a letter from his son before the train had even gotten to Hogwarts. He talked to Septimus and Harfang about it that afternoon, concerned about its contents.

In the letter, James expressed concern about two boys he’d met shortly after Charlus and Dorea had seen him onto the train. Both boys were evidently half-bloods, but that wasn’t the problem. The problem was, at least according to James, that both boys were clothed in really tatty third-hand clothes … and there were some suspicious bruises on one of the boy’s arms and face. James hadn’t liked the look of it, nor some of the offhand comments the bruised boy had made, and had immediately written his father, worried for the boy’s welfare. The good news was that the bruised boy had some sort of support, as he’d come on the train accompanied by a red-haired Muggleborn he was clearly very close friends with.

Unfortunately, there wasn’t all that much that the Marauders could do about the two boys’ financial issues right then. Worse, without firm proof the one boy was being abused, they couldn’t do anything about the bruises, either. That said, the elder Marauders were determined to provide both boys with a refuge, and planned to include the two boys in the group’s Yule celebrations if the two boys remained at all friendly with James and Sirius.

Charlus got a second letter that evening before Septimus and Harfang had left. The letter reported that the boy they suspected might be abused, whose name was Severus Snape, had gotten Sorted into Ravenclaw. Severus’ female friend, Lily Evans, and the other poor boy, Remus Lupin, were both Sorted into Gryffindor, much to James and Sirius’ pleasure.

They were pleased because with the two in Gryffindor (where James and Sirius both had been Sorted) they would be able to keep an eye on them and protect them. Severus, according to them, would be a bit tougher to keep an eye on, being in a different House. Fortunately, the Marauders knew that Flitwick was the most likely teacher to stomp all over bullying if he knew it was happening, so that would help the boys keep Severus safe.

James admitted in a letter some weeks later that there’d been a long, heated discussion on the train about Slytherin, and the qualities it espoused. According to that later letter, James said it took nearly the whole train ride but he had managed to convince Severus that while there was nothing wrong with cunning and ambition, he’d be in for a really bad time in Slytherin House because he was a half-blood. That it was not Severus’ fault so many Slytherins were bigoted idiots, but that he would have been miserable there.

The boys kept them abreast of events in the school, which was good. Mostly because if things were getting dangerously out of hand in the larger world, it was completely out of control in Hogwarts. According to James and Sirius’ letters, the Marauders were to the point of needing a group in every year just to deal with all the problems that kept cropping up. Certain Slytherins had become an unrepentant menace to everyone. That said, the Marauders were almost as busy dealing with the
Gryffindors – who invariably went overboard in their attempts to counteract Slytherin bullying – as they were dealing with the Slytherins themselves.

Sirius reported in one of his letters that the only good news was that all the nonsense with the Slytherins had completely convinced Severus that James and Sirius had been right about Slytherin House. Evidently, Severus had begun muttering almost nonstop about that House forsaking their House attributes after all of two weeks of watching them bully everyone in sight. He had also started joining James and Sirius in planning pranks.

In November of that year, Arthur and Molly had their first child, a boy they named William. Septimus was slightly concerned at how early they had started having children, but not too much. Arthur had managed to forge himself a more than capable career in the Muggle Artifacts office of the Ministry with a good salary. Molly was supplementing their income by cooking for several elderly Muggles near their home, raising and selling chickens, eggs, and pork, as well as knitting things that she then sold. Between them, they were managing to cover expenses and put money away, despite having young William to raise.

By December, it became clear that Severus, Remus, and Lily were going to be fast friends with James and Sirius, so the lot of them were invited to Potter Castle for Yule, along with the elder Marauders. Cedrella spent a half hour around Severus and was completely horrified. To be honest, so was Septimus. As bad as Severus’ situation had seemed as reported by James in that first letter, the reality was worse.

Severus was, to put it bluntly, extremely leery of Septimus, and only marginally less so of Harfang and Charlus. It didn’t take much intelligence to figure out why. Septimus was fractionally taller than either of the other men, and definitely more muscular. He had also never lost his fighter’s prow, which Charlus had lost completely early on thanks to his injury. Harfang’s had eventually faded away a few years after they’d returned from the war as he’d never really been a warrior at heart like Septimus. Septimus was aware that he tended to cut a rather intimidating figure to people who didn’t know him well, and even sometimes to those that did. Still, it hurt Septimus’ heart to see the boy flinch away from him like he was expecting a blow if Septimus accidentally surprised the poor kid.

Remus proved to be surprisingly quiet and almost shy. Septimus suspected he knew the reason for the apparent shyness. James and Sirius had reported the boy’s illnesses over the last few months. The oddly consistent timing had tweaked Septimus’ curiosity enough to investigate. It hadn’t taken long to stumble onto what was probably going on. Septimus certainly wasn’t about to treat the lad badly for it, if it was true. It wasn’t like the poor kid had chosen for it to happen. Nor was he going to inform the boys, at least not until they figured it out themselves or Remus told them. Hopefully Remus would confide in them first.

Both Septimus and Cedrella were more than slightly amused at Lily. Unlike the two boys, Lily was all passion, fire, and ebullience. She definitely lived up to the reputation of red-heads. She also acted as Severus’ guard dog. It was clear that she was aware that something was wrong, at the very least, if she didn’t know for a fact Severus was being abused. As a result, she was fiercely protective of him, and was prone to lashing out in his defense. Interestingly, Severus seemed more than happy to let her.

The three adult couples spent the Yule holiday getting to know the three children, and introducing them to the traditional celebrations. On the second to last day of the holiday, Cedrella approached Severus, as both she and Septimus agreed it was a bad idea for him to do so, at least for now.

(Opcode)_

“Severus? Might I speak with you in private for a moment?” Cedrella asked Severus.
He looked wary, but agreed. Cedrella strongly suspected only out of a concern that he would be coerced or even punished if he disagreed. Once they were in a private room, she settled on a chair.

“Severus it has become clear to us that your home life might be less than ideal. The Potters, Longbottoms, my husband and I have all talked and we’re all willing to provide you with assistance, if you want it. That assistance can come in a number of forms.” Cedrella told him.

Severus cocked his head at her a bit, clearly trying to figure out what her angle was, before he finally asked. “What forms?”

“Well, we can simply provide you a place to go on the winter and Easter holidays so that you don’t have to return home, or stay at Hogwarts unless you want to. That, we will do anyway, no matter what you decide. You will always be welcome in our homes over the holidays, the same as the boys’ other friends.” Cedrella told him.

“Alternately, one of us could sponsor you. That would involve taking over the financial responsibility for your education during your Hogwarts years, and help you find an apprenticeship that suits your skills once you graduate. Your third choice would be for one of us to become your magical guardian. It’s a fairly rarely-used clause for the protection of abused children that allows for them to be removed from the abusive environment and live somewhere more suitable. It is primarily for those with Muggle parents who develop a distaste for magic, though there have been a few cases of abuse among purebloods.” Cedrella said.

“You would then live with whichever couple you chose and essentially become an adopted child of their House. It is even possible for you to officially be blood-adopted, provided both you and the family in question desire it, and their Head of House agrees. Fortunately, in this case, Septimus, Harfang, and Charlus are the Heads of their respective Houses.” Cedrella grinned at Severus.

Severus stared at her like she’d just told him the sky was orange and the sun rose in the west. “I … you … *why*?!”

“Because we care, lad, and none of us is happy with your situation. I imagine Harfang is going to have a fairly similar conversation with Remus later today.” Cedrella told him. “None of our husbands like seeing underdogs getting trampled on, and are known for getting between them and their oppressors.”

“I … I’ll think about it.” Severus said at last.

“Let us know at any time when you make up your mind – or need help. Even if it’s two days before the next school year starts.” Cedrella told him, then wisely left the situation at that. She could only hope he’d take them up on their offer.
Septimus and Cedrella were startled when Severus took less than a day to think about the offer Cedrella had made and make a decision. They had both fully expected Severus to take a good bit longer than that, if he acted on the offer at all.

The only thing that didn't surprise them was who Severus approached. Harfang was the quietest and gentlest of demeanor of the elder Marauders, which would have made him far less intimidating to someone used to violence from adult males. Even at that, Severus had opted to approach Callidora rather than Harfang himself.

According to Harfang and Callidora, when they talked to the rest of the Marauders later, Severus had asked for them to become his magical guardians. He had, apparently, made it quite clear that if he never saw his parents again, it would be far too soon. He had also revealed the source of his speed in acting on the offer tendered.

It had been his friend Lily. Evidently, Severus had gone to her to talk it over, and she had encouraged him to both accept the offer and go for the magical guardian option. This hadn't really surprised Septimus and Cedrella. During the two-week vacation, it had become quite clear that Lily was deeply concerned about Severus' welfare. The two of them acted more like brother and sister than they did friends, much of the time.

Harfang had immediately begun the process of making himself Severus' magical guardian. That Severus was Muggle-raised would simplify the process immensely, despite his mother being a witch. It was easier for the authorities involved to believe a Muggleborn or muggle-raised child had been abused than it was for them to believe a wizard-raised child had been. In this one instance, the prejudice against muggles worked in the Marauders' favor.

The process proved to be even easier than anyone thought it would be ... because Eileen Snape didn't fight the assignment. It turned out she was ill with a lingering, degenerative and incurable disease. A condition she had hidden from her son, though Severus had been aware her health was frail. She would be dead before Severus came of age, no matter what the Healers did for her.

She had been as badly abused as her son, but she'd had just enough will left to recognize that Severus' situation would become dire indeed once she passed. She'd also had wit enough to realize that the magical guardianship Harfang was willing to take up was Severus' best chance at escaping her abusive husbands' clutches. When Harfang had shown up with the paperwork (and a lawyer, just in case), she'd lost no time in signing them. Tobias hadn't been able to sign them fast enough to suit him, eager to be shut of Severus.

When they learned about Eileen's condition, Harfang lost no time in hexing Tobias to forget about her and removing Eileen from the home. Her marriage could not be broken, but she could and would at least spend her last years in comfort and free of fear ... and not be separated from her son. It was the best that could be done under the circumstances.

Harfang also went to speak to Lord Prince, Severus' grandfather. The man had disowned Eileen
when she had fallen for and married Tobias. Harfang was hoping that he could convince the man to reinstate at least Severus. His chances of that were good, as there were no other males to inherit the Prince title when Lord Prince died. The Prince estate was closer to the size of the Weasley estate than what other pureblood families enjoyed, but it was more than enough to see Severus well settled as an adult. It would also give Severus another layer of protection and support.

It took Harfang a few months of arguing with the old man, but eventually Lord Prince saw the wisdom of reinstating Severus as the Prince heir despite his halfblood status. Unfortunately, despite her terminal status, he refused to reinstate Eileen. Still, it was better than nothing.

The remainder of the '71-72 school year was pretty quiet, so far as such things went, both in and out of Hogwarts. It wasn't until the summer of 1972 that things really started heating up.

July saw four attacks on Muggleborns and their homes - one per week. Each attack was accompanied by a skull-and-snake sign hovering over the house. In all four cases, the parents had been tortured before being killed. Three of the Muggleborn students had also been tortured and killed. The fourth had, by some miracle, managed to escape. The going theory was that accidental magic was responsible, as the kid had been a first year, and hadn't known anywhere near enough magic to fight off or escape an unknown number of adult wizards bent on torture and murder. The poor kid was in pretty bad shape both physically and mentally, but he was alive and would recover.

The attacks alarmed Septimus for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it made it clear that Voldemort had someone in the Underage Magic department, as that was the only way his followers could have known where the muggleborn children lived - not even the teachers knew that. The only person at Hogwarts who would know the childrens' addresses was the Headmaster, and then only if he looked at the Book of Names for some reason.

The second reason it alarmed Septimus was because far too many people had not made that connection. Even Dumbledore seemed to be clueless as to how the four families had been attacked. He seemed to be assuming they had been four random and unexpectedly lucky attacks. The third reason for alarm dovetailed with the second. Because no one else seemed to be making the connection, absolutely nothing was being done about the situation. It boded ill for future problems.

Septimus talked to Harfang and Charlus, and they agreed that if Voldemort and his followers were being so bold, there was a damn good chance they'd strike the Alley when it was full of Muggleborns and their families. Accordingly, and knowing that the Aurors would not be present in any kind of numbers, the three men agreed to do what they could to keep an eye on the Alley during that crucial couple of weeks.

Fortunately, it proved to be one of the few times they were wrong. The atmosphere in the Alley had certainly been tense, but Voldemort and his followers hadn't made their presence known. Septimus for one was grateful, but he wasn't about to make any bets on how long that state of affairs would last.

Especially not when, shortly after school started again, so did the attacks. September, October, and November saw an attack a week. This time, it was all on muggles who didn't have magical children. The Aurors still had to go investigate due to the presence of a magical sign. The Marauders still had a lot of contacts in the Auror corps, so they soon heard about the attacks. That was the only reason Septimus and the other Marauders became aware of them - because Voldemort always left that skull-and-snake marker above the attacks. None of the attacks made it into the Prophet because the muggles attacked had no other link to the magical world, and the events were thus deemed unimportant.

In December, Septimus tried for the first time to sound an alarm in the Wizengamot about Voldemort
and his activities, bringing the proof of all the attacks with him. Rather predictably, he was more or less ignored, as everyone seemed to be of the opinion that attacks against muggles weren't any of their problem.

The only good news was that a summer spent with the Longbottoms seemed to have done Severus some good. According to James and Sirius, he was in much better spirits those first few months of his second year than he had been his first year.

Septimus was very, very amused when Charlus received a letter from his son James in mid-December, asking for confirmation of his suspicions as regarded Remus and the source of Remus' apparently fragile health.

Remus had not accepted any of the offers of help that had been tendered. At least, not thus far. He hadn't said a firm no yet, either. Septimus strongly suspected that Remus had refused to accept because of his condition, not wanting to force people he thought were ignorant of the truth into helping someone like him. Septimus knew that Harfang hadn't told Remus they knew about his condition - mostly because they wanted Remus to trust them enough to tell them himself.

At any rate, the boys seemed to have finally not only noticed the pattern to Remus' illnesses and absences, but had also managed to figure out a possible cause of it. Charlus, highly amused at it having taken them so long (a full year and a half - shameful!) wrote back confirming James' suspicions.

It quickly became clear that there had been a war council at the school over the information, because all three of the elder Marauders received letters asking for information on ways to deal with lycanthropy, and any possible ways for someone to be around a werewolf safely come the full moon. Septimus later found out that Sirius had included Arcturus in the information request as well.

The letters made it clear that Severus, Lily, James and Sirius were both looking for a way to help Remus, and doing so behind his back. He had not told any of them of his condition as yet. Septimus finally decided to say something to Remus over Yule break. It was all well and good to wait for Remus to trust them, but lycanthropy was ... not well looked upon by the general populace, and there was a damn good chance Remus would never feel safe in telling them on his own. It might well be better just to let him know they had figured it out, and didn't give a damn.

Weasley Cottage was large enough, if only barely, to play host to the Marauders and their various children and their friends, so that year everyone spent the holiday there. As a result, the cottage was the fullest and busiest it had ever been. Aside from the boys and Lily, Arcturus, and the other two Marauder couples, Septimus and Cedrella's boys were about, as were Molly and Bill, her and Arthur's first child. Septimus' brothers also stopped by for a bit at one point over the holiday, as did his parents and the still-living parents of the other Marauders.

As a result, Weasley Cottage was quite lively for the entire two weeks, with much laughter, goofing about and playful pranks played on all and sundry. By that point, their various children considered it a point of pride to, someday, manage to prank their parents. They hadn't managed it thus far, but not for lack of trying.

Septimus finally pulled Remus aside on Boxing Day.

"Remus, there's really no gentle way to put this, so ... we all know you're a werewolf." Septimus said. "And before you start worrying - we don't care. Actually, we knew last year, when Harfang made the offer to you about one of us sponsoring you or becoming your magical guardian."

Remus went milk-pale for a minute, but finally blew his breath out. "I ... you ... really?" He asked
"Really." Septimus said. "You're a kid, Remus. There's absolutely no way that you became a werewolf of your own free will. You shouldn't have to pay the price for someone else's cruelty. As you've learned, Harfang, Charlus and I take a rather dim view to people getting the short end of the stick like that."

Remus gave a slightly hollow-sounding chuckle. "Yeah, I sort of got that memo." He admitted. "Especially when you were willing to step up for Severus."

"Now ... that offer is still open. I'll admit to suspecting you haven't acted on it one way or the other because of the fact you're a werewolf, and you didn't think we knew about that ... and that we might rescind the offer when we found out."

Remus actually blushed, glancing down at his worn trainers for a moment. "You wouldn't be wrong." He admitted. Then, after a moment. "Though I ... if you wouldn't mind ... " He hesitated for a moment, then visibly gathered his courage. "If you'd be willing to sponsor me, I'd be grateful." He finally managed.

Septimus wasn't too surprised that Remus would ask it of him in particular. How much being a werewolf affected someone varied widely from person to person, but the chances of the effects being stronger increased the younger a person was when they were first infected. Remus had clearly been infected very young, so the odds of him being strongly affected were very high.

The most common expression of lycanthropy was a tendency towards pack-ishness. That is, werewolves tended to be very social given a chance, and sensitive to power structures within a group. Remus showed absolutely no signs of the sort of dominant personality that would make him a leader. As a result, he'd be looking for a leader to follow, even if only subconsciously.

Charlus had been and still was the leader of the elder Marauders, but Septimus knew that someone like Charlus, with a permanent, debilitating injury, would not be respected as a leader. Septimus, who still retained his physical health, virtually all of his fighting prowess from the war and an unashamedly dominant personality, would be very ... alluring ... as a potential leader for someone like Remus.

Septimus grinned and gripped Remus' shoulder gently. "I'd be happy to." He told Remus. And it was the truth. Helping alleviate some of the financial burden Remus' parents faced dealing with his lycanthropy wouldn't be a hardship for Septimus and Cedrella at this point. Their overall wealth was increasing steadily despite the expenses involved in getting their children through Hogwarts.

Septimus spent the next hour or so talking to Remus about school, and the arrangements that had been made for him for full moons. He made a mental note to check the shack Dumbledore had set up for himself, unwilling to trust the man to have equipped and safeguarded it sufficiently. Eventually, both he and Remus rejoined the others and continued their holiday.
Sponsorship Challenge

There had been no noise made from pretty much any quarter about Harfang becoming Severus' magical guardian, so Septimus was thoroughly startled when his sponsorship of Remus was challenged. Startled, but really not all that surprised given the source of the challenge.

Dumbledore.

At least there was nothing too untoward in how Dumbledore found out about the sponsorship. Because the charges for Remus' tuition would be taken from a different account than previously, the school was notified so they sent the bill to the right account. Septimus figured that Dumbledore got curious as to why the change was being made, and poked his nose in where it didn't really belong. It would not have been hard, especially given Dumbledore's connections these days, to discover Remus was now being sponsored, and by whom.

Two days after the Yule vacation - and a mere four days after Septimus had registered his position as sponsor with Remus' parents' grateful approval and the resultant change of vaults for expenses, Septimus found himself being approached by Dumbledore moments after the Wizengamot broke for lunch.

"Septimus my dear boy ... " Dumbledore started.

Septimus gave him a flat glare. "Lord Weasley, if you please, Lord Dumbledore."

He got an unholy amount of glee out of that, to be honest. Dumbledore had a tendency of using first-name-basis. From most people, it wasn't a problem, but from Dumbledore ... well, he'd taught a lot of the younger generation that was coming into the Wizengamot. Septimus had a feeling Dumbledore was calling people by their first names less as an attempt at familiarity he hadn't earned and more as a subtle reminder that he HAD taught them, and that they were all ignorant children in his eyes. Ignorant children that needed to listen to their elders and betters and let said elders lead them.

By the same token, Septimus' insistence on 'Lord Dumbledore' made it clear that he was not a fan of the man's without going anywhere near actionable offense. Most people called the man 'Headmaster', which rather confirmed Septimus' suspicions about the man using peoples' first names. Dumbledore's closest 'advisors' and allies generally called him by his last name. The thing was, in the Wizengamot, titles other than 'Lord' really only mattered when things got entirely too heated. At that point, the Chief Warlock called the shots, and a wise Lord would use that title with all due respect when speaking to that official.

Dumbledore gave him a twinkly-eyed look of amused tolerance. "Ah, yes, of course. Forgive me, Lord Weasley. I sometimes forget myself."

Yeah, and Septimus was actually the son of a Cerberus and a centaur. Especially when Dumbledore had that 'humoring the immature child' tone to his voice when he said that.

"If I might speak with you privately on a matter regarding Hogwarts?" Dumbledore asked.
At that point, Septimus had a feeling he knew what this was about. What he couldn't figure was why Dumbledore cared. Maybe because Remus was a werewolf, and he didn't know that Septimus knew? Septimus was willing to give Dumbledore the benefit of the doubt at least that far.

"Of course, Lord Dumbledore. I believe there are conference rooms free." Septimus said, indicating one of the corridors off the courtroom where the Wizengamot met regularly. The conference rooms were used by the various committees that were charged with looking into and dealing with various things, but they'd be empty now.

Dumbledore looked like he kind of wanted to argue, but nodded and led the way to a nearby room. Septimus figured he had wanted an invite to the Den, something that had never happened and never would. Once they were in the conference room, Septimus leaned against one of the walls with a deliberate nonchalance.

"What's on your mind, Lord Dumbledore? Hogwarts needing better funding and not getting it?" Septimus asked.

Mentally, he snickered, because that was a more than slightly underhanded jab at the declining standards of education at Hogwarts in certain classes. Septimus had even heard rumors of a curse on the DADA position. He didn't know if that was true or not, but if it was, he didn't know why Dumbledore wasn't doing something about it. As it was, Septimus only barely managed to keep a comment about finding a competent cursebreaker in the Weasley family to take a look.

From tightening around Dumbledore's eyes and the reduction in that annoying twinkle, Septimus' strike hit home. "Thank you, but no. Hogwarts is doing better than ever in that regard." He said. "This rather has something to do with a student."

From the look on Dumbledore's face, he clearly expected Septimus to think his youngest boy, the only one still in school now, was in serious trouble. Except he knew better than that. While his younger two boys had Weasley-typical tempers compared to Arthur, they were neither of them stupid, or bullies, and they wouldn't have gone around hexing or beating people up. Nor would either of them have gotten caught pranking bullies. They'd been taught better than that. Besides, even if they had been troublemakers of the sort that got hauled into the Headmaster's office, Septimus wouldn't have given the man the pleasure of reacting to the insinuation.

"Really? Which one? Not another abuse case, I hope. I had a time of it keeping Charlus and Harfang from hexing Tobias Snape into oblivion." Septimus said.

Which had the benefit of being the brutal truth. Except where it had actually been their wives holding all three of them back. Septimus had wanted to beat the man black and blue, to hell with hexing him, once they'd realized just how bad the situation had been in that house. The worst part of it was that they had gotten there just barely in time. Eileen's condition had begun to degenerate a lot faster in the last couple months. The Healers had revised her expected lifespan to less than a year, at this rate.

Harfang was of the opinion that Eileen had previously been fighting her illness with everything she had because she didn't want to leave Severus alone with Tobias. Harfang thought that now that Severus had a safe place to live and people that cared about him, Eileen felt like she didn't have to fight so hard anymore - her son would be well taken care of once she was gone, now. Septimus thought that Harfang might well be right.

Septimus' comment had the benefit of being another attack at Dumbledore, because the mediwitch at the school ought to have caught the fact that Severus was being abused, and something should have been done without the Marauders interfering. The poor kid'd had bruises all over him at the start of his first year for sure, and Merlin alone knew what else he'd been hiding under the robes. The
Marauders had later discovered that Tobias regularly beat Severus, which should have left lingering evidence to be found in a medical scan.

Again, it seemed to be a telling hit, as the corner of Dumbledore's eye twitched again. "No, no abuse cases." Dumbledore assured him. "I merely wished to ask if you were certain about your decision to sponsor young Remus Lupin. I do know your family's funds are limited."

Oh, so Dumbledore was going to play that game, was he? Septimus gave a mental snort. "I assure you, Lord Dumbledore, that my family's finances are quite a bit less limited than they once were." He said.

"Ahhh, Charlus and Harfang were good enough to loan you start-up capital?" Dumbledore asked, twinkling brightly.

"Lord Potter and Lord Longbottom." Septimus said pointedly. "Have never loaned me so much as a knut. They've had no need to." And even as he said it, he could tell that Dumbledore didn't believe it.

That was fine with him. Let the bastard underestimate him. He'd find out he was mistaken sooner or later. Hopefully in a very painful and public manner. "Let us cut to the chase, Lord Dumbledore. This is not about my family's finances. Or it should not be. Even if we were in so dire a case as we once were, it would be none of your affair if we decided to sponsor someone. This is about the fact that Remus is a werewolf, and you think me, my children, my friends' children and their kids' friends to be criminally stupid. It took me less than six months to work out that Remus was a werewolf from secondhand reports, and the children figured it out not much later." Septimus told him. "And when the time comes, it will be simple enough to find him a job in the employ of someone in the family, so that he need not fear being fired for missing several days a month, or because he is a werewolf."

If it came to it, Septimus would strongly recommend that Remus relocate to the United States. That country actually had anti-discrimination laws on the books, aimed at preventing people from being fired for being a sapient magical being, so long as they didn't hunt or hurt humans. As a result, America had become something of a mecca for werewolves, vampires, and veelas alike. Septimus had even heard rumor of Acromantula colonies. Depending on the state of affairs in the UK when Remus graduated, the Americas would be a far better place for Remus to make a place for himself. If, that is, Remus could bring himself to separate from his pack. Which Septimus had to admit he had his doubts when it came to that.

Dumbledore looked somewhat taken aback, which made Septimus laugh.

"Really, Lord Dumbledore? You thought that boy could share a room with four or so other boys and not be discovered pretty darn quickly? Speaking of his condition, I want to examine the Shrieking Shack for myself. Remus says it's secure enough, but he's also only a boy."

"I assure you ... " Dumbledore said.

Septimus had no idea what he wanted to assure Septimus of, but he interrupted anyway. "Assure all you want, Lord Dumbledore. I still want to get a good look at his hidey-hole for transformations myself. I would be remiss in my duties as his sponsor if I didn't." Such a thing was, after all, within his duties to take care of.

Dumbledore didn't look too happy about it. "I do not know that you can." He said. "The route to it is designed for teens, not a fully grown adult."

Septimus shrugged offhandedly. "So I use a temporary expansion charm to fit. No big deal."
Dumbledore sighed. "Very well then, I shall show you, say, this Saturday?"

"I'll head over yet today." Septimus said. No way was he giving Dumbledore a couple days to (temporarily, he'd bet) improve the place.

"If you insist. I was just returning there myself." Dumbledore said.

Septimus let the man think he was escorting Septimus. It would just be easier that way. Once they were through the floo, Septimus didn't let Dumbledore delay his investigation.

"The route to the Shack, if you please." He requested.

Dumbledore reluctantly led the way to a spot out on the grounds. Septimus recognized the Whomping Willow, fairly small but still capable of protecting the entrance to the tunnel, from Remus' descriptions.

Remus had told Septimus how one got the Willow to quit thrashing. Septimus had held out hope that there were more protections than that on the tunnel entrance, but that hope proved to be in vain.

"Lord Dumbledore, do you mean to tell me that the only means of protection for the tunnel entrance is this tree? What if someone figures out how to get past it?" Septimus demanded. It wasn't beyond the realm of possibility by any means.

"I assure you, Lord Weasley, that the children have been warned away from the Willow." Dumbledore claimed.

Yeah, right. Like that was going to work. Septimus frowned, froze the tree, expanded the hole (it was definitely too small for him to fit into) and slid into the tunnel. He immediately turned around and began to inscribe runes on the rock floor and into the tree roots to put a ward in place. The ward would act as a secondary safety measure - you would have to know the runes were there and how to deactivate them in order to get into - or out of - the tunnel. Septimus added two more such wards at intervals along the tunnel, using different rune sets each time. This way, it would take quite some time for a curious student to get to the Shack, and make it utterly impossible for Remus in wolf form to escape via this route.

Thankfully, Dumbledore had elected not to follow Septimus into the tunnel, allowing him to do as he pleased without having to deal with snarky comments.

The Shack itself was, thankfully, soundly and heavily warded. The walls, floors, ceilings and roof had been reinforced to withstand a rampaging werewolf, and Septimus was glad to see that a good number of pieces of furniture were scattered around for the werewolf to maul. That taken care of, Septimus crawled back out and gave Dumbledore a nod.

"Sufficient, once the tunnel was warded." Septimus allowed.

He then left via apparating. But he didn't apparate home. Instead, he apparated to the exterior of the shack to check the external wards. To his horror, he found none - someone could walk right up to the house and force their way in.

Shaking his head, Septimus set to work putting up strong, rune-based wards. The wards actively repelled both muggles and wizards from the Shack, keeping them well back. That accomplished, Septimus nodded to himself and headed home. Once there, he immediately wrote Remus about the changes, and how to deactivate the wards in the tunnel. He got a reply a few days later thanking him profusely for the added security.
The remainder of that school year was quiet, at least insofar as Hogwarts was concerned. The wider world, however, was not so lucky.

Voldemort's followers were getting bolder. The attacks on Muggles increased rapidly from one a week to nearly every day. Worse, the Marauders became aware that Voldemort's followers, the so-called Death Eaters (a name that had engendered much scoffing among the Marauders) were beginning to put pressure on the Neutral and Light pureblood families, trying to force them to side with Voldemort one way or another.

Thus far, the Neutral and Light families were holding firm, but how long that would last was anyone's guess, if things continued to worsen. Which they were going to. Because that was the other problem. The Ministry wasn't doing a damn thing about the situation.

The Ministry in general and the Wizengamot in particular seemed to have decided that this wasn't their problem, but a Muggle problem. That the Death Eaters' first victims had been Muggleborns and their families seemed to have been forgotten by virtually everyone.

What really pissed Septimus off was the fact that Dumbledore seemed to be at the head of the 'not our problem' club, somehow without people accusing him of being Dark, to boot. How Dumbledore was pulling that off, Septimus hadn't really figured out, but it was driving him up a wall, and making it increasingly difficult to not hex the bastard into oblivion.

Unfortunately, so long as Voldemort and his followers kept to Muggle victims, there wasn't a whole hell of a lot the Marauders could do about him on a private level, either. Until Voldemort and the Death Eaters were acknowledged as a threat to the Magical UK, any attempt to hunt them down would be very ill-received, regardless of the status of the people hunting them down. And that was if the Marauders stayed within the letter of the law. If they stepped outside the existing law, which would be all but assured to happen since their targets would be very unlikely to play by the rules, they'd find themselves with long stints in Azkaban.

The start of summer saw the elder Marauders and Arcturus Black having a council of war, to figure out what they *could* do until such time as Voldemort and company made themselves public enemies.

"We need to figure out a way to protect the Muggleborns." Charlus said. "They're going to be next on Voldemort's hit list."

"Agreed." Harfang said. "The question is what to do."

"The simplest solution would be providing them with an escape route." Arcturus said. "It would be a simple matter for all of us, as Heads of Families, to create portkeys. I know the Blacks have several properties that could be refitted as refuges."

"So do the Potters." Charlus said immediately. "Hell, I could open up the Castle to the Muggleborns. It's not like that place lacks for room."
That got amused chuckles from the Marauders, who had all seen the place personally. "Too true." Septimus said.

"That will take care of the school-age kids." Harfang said. "What the hell do we do about the kids too young for Hogwarts?"

That made them all go quiet, as that was truly a problem. Finding pre-Hogwarts age Muggleborns before the Death Eaters did was going to be a hell of a problem, as none of them had ready access either to the Department of Underage Magic or the Hogwarts Book of Names.

"Maybe we can appeal to the Hogwarts elves?" Charlus said after a few moments. "I mean, one of them has to know where the Book is. If we tell them we want the list in order to be able to protect the kids ... "

Septimus nodded. "They just might go for it." He had less experience with House Elves than Charlus and Harfang did, but he knew that house-elves were legendary when it came to protecting their charges if they were well-treated. It wasn't beyond the realm of possibility that the Hogwarts elves would be willing to protect future Hogwarts attendees, even if only just by offering up their names to wizards.

Charlus nodded. "I'll ask Jinx ... "

He got no further, as Jinx popped in upon hearing his name. "Jinx goes and talks to the Head Elf." He proclaimed. "Jinx makes him understand Master and Master's friends wanting to protects from the bad mens." And he popped back out.

The Marauders shared a deeply amused look and more than a little laughter. Nearly two decades on, they still hadn't gotten over their amusement at Jinx's antics where they were concerned. Truthfully, at this point, they'd all miss the little blighter if he suddenly went back to 'normal' house elf behavior.

"Well, that takes care of that. If Jinx can't convince them, no one can." Charlus said after they'd all calmed down.

"Agreed." Septimus said. "And by transporting the muggleborns to your various properties, we'll neatly avoid Ministry notice. They'll assume it's you guys visiting your properties for whatever reason, if they notice the portkey going off at all."

"And once they're there, we can offer sponsorship or guardianship to protect them better, and force the Ministry and Dumbledore to keep their noses out - or at least give us a leg to stand on when they do stick their noses in." Harfang said.

"We need to prepare for ... well, where this is going to end up, sooner or later." Septimus said with a sigh. He'd hoped he'd been done with war, after the last one.

"Agreed." The other three men chorused.

"Especially me." Arcturus said with a sigh. "I need to put things in place against me being killed before the boys are of age. Otherwise, Orion will become Head, and worse, the boys will end up back in his home. That can't be allowed to happen. Even if I'm pretty sure the Family magics would reject him, it's not worth the chance they won't."

"Well, you can count on us to support them and take them in, if it comes to that." Septimus said, then made a face. "I'll have to put something in place as well. Arthur is a good man, but he isn't good Head of House material. He doesn't have enough teeth for it."
Septimus would have to arrange some sort of support for Arthur if he did have to become Head. Molly would help - she more than made up for Arthur's general lack of aggression, but she wouldn't be enough. Unlike Cedrella, politics hadn't been one of Molly's hobbies, so she wasn't as well informed about that end of things as Cedrella had been when she and Septimus had married. That lack of knowledge would end up with Molly advocating actions that would end badly. Septimus honestly hoped to be around long enough to discover if any of Arthur and Molly's children would be suitable, as that would be a better solution.

"Other than that, it's pretty much a repeat of our plans for the old war." Harfang said with a sigh. "Stock up on nonperishable goods, armor and weapons. Break out the backup wands again, just in case."

"And start teaching the kids as much defensive magic as they can manage to learn during the summer." Charlus said. "I'll not have any of them be helpless if they get separated from us at an inopportune time."

That got nods from everyone. "Teach them to become Animagi, too, if they're capable." Septimus said. "They'll be more than amenable once they realize being an animagus will make it safe to accompany Remus during the full moon."

They'd kept that information from the kids until now because their magic wasn't developed enough to manage the transformation. Hopefully, by the time any of them had succeeded in the preliminary steps, they'd be strong enough magically ... or have the patience to wait until they were.

"Good idea. They don't have to register until they're twenty-five, which will give them a good long while with no one the wiser as to their ability." Charlus said with a nod. "And it's not like they'd be the first animagi in history to never register."

That got several laughs, as they all agreed. It just didn't seem realistic that there were as few animagi as the register proclaimed there to be. The odds on most animagi just not registering was pretty high. Especially since the Ministry had no way to discover if someone was an animagi short of hitting every animal they came across with the spell that forced an animagi that was in animal form back into human form.

Not all forms would be of use outside of accompanying Remus. That said, if the kids lucked out and became something that had a known population in the Isles, they'd be in good shape. They'd be able to hide, and perhaps even blend in (if one of them became, say, a cat) and eavesdrop or attack the enemy without the enemy being any the wiser.

"We ought to try to teach Frank to become an animagi while we're at it." Septimus commented. "He's still young enough to be able to learn it and adapt. Hell, come to that, I'm tempted to try it myself." The good knew he was magically powerful enough to manage the transformation. They all were. The only factor their age would have was whether or not they'd become set in their ways enough to resist adapting to the changes being an animagus wrought on a person.

"I'm far too old to bother." Arcturus said, making a face.

The other Marauders looked thoughtful. After a bit, Charlus sighed. "I doubt it'd be a good idea in my case. Who knows how my injury would play out."

Septimus reluctantly admitted that Charlus had a point there. If Charlus' injury had been purely physical, it wouldn't be as much of an issue. Unfortunately, his injury had been magically caused, which had the potential to wreak havoc with the animagus transformation.
Harfang grimaced. "I doubt I'm good enough at transfiguration to manage." He admitted.

That made Septimus and Charlus both scoff. "That's shite, Harfang, and you know it. Just because you didn't outperform the two of us doesn't make you a dunce." Septimus said, beating Charlus to it by mere seconds.

"All right, all right. I suppose I can give it a try." Harfang said.

Their plans laid out, the men broke up their meeting. The Marauders headed for Potter Castle.

"I didn't bring this up with Arcturus, because I didn't think he'd go for it ... at least not without a lot of work." Charlus said. "But there's another way to protect at least ourselves, and our heirs."

"An Alliance Oath." Harfang said.

Septimus nodded. "We've all but got one in place anyway." He said. "The Oath would just formalize it, and ensure that if the worst happens to one of us, our House and heirs will have protection and assistance that no one could interfere with without magical, political, and personal repercussions. Severe ones. Formal alliances were fairly rare, but those that had existed had exacted horrific tolls from anyone who messed with their memberships, and every pureblood and wizard-raised halfblood knew those stories.

"We'd best floo home and get our gear." Septimus said, then snorted. "And our heirs." Another reason not to include Arcturus yet. Neither Sirius nor Regulus were of age. While James wasn't of age either, he was the only possible heir to the Potter Headship. That changed a lot of the usual rules that applied to heirs, both in the Wizengamot and in the eyes of Magic.

Septimus and Harfang immediately left for their homes, and to fetch their sons. Fortunately, it was the weekend and Arthur was at home. Frank, who'd graduated from Hogwarts this year and had been 18 for all of two weeks, hadn't even had time to decide if he was going to take a break for a year or try to get a job right away.

Within minutes, everyone had reconvened at Potter Castle, heirs, ritual athames and bowls in tow. They all went into the Castle's dueling chamber - one of a few places in the castle built to withstand the sort of magical whammy the Alliance Oath was liable to unleash without getting wrecked.

All six men arranged themselves in a circle. James, despite being the youngest of those present, had an unexpectedly serious expression on his face as he stood at Charlus' shoulder. The bowls were set on pedestals that put them at roughly waist height. One by one the elder Marauders called on their family magics. The sheer expectant weight of the magic brought to bear on them as a result took Septimus' breath away.

As the politically and socially weakest of the three Families present, Septimus began the Oath.

"I Septimus Weasley, Head of House Weasley, hereby acknowledge Harfang Longbottom and Charlus Potter, their designated heirs, future successors and Magical Houses as allies of House Weasley. I will support and defend them, their heirs, successors, and Houses as if they were my own. Their enemies, friends, and causes shall be as my own and those of my House until I and my House, or they and theirs are no more, so mote it be."

Arthur, as heir and witness, echoed the oath, confirming that he agreed with it.

Septimus had to set his teeth against the sudden vibration from the family magic. It wasn't that it hurt, but it was rather disconcerting, and was making his hair stand on end.
Harfang took the oath next, changing only the names in the appropriate places, with Frank echoing the heir's version of the oath. Septimus almost cringed as the air vibrated a second time, harder and longer than the first. Then Charlus and James took their oaths.

It was like the world's biggest gong went off. A deep, almost subliminal basso-profundo sound that defied description assaulted their ears the same instant an earthquake-like vibration rattled their bones and all the air in the room seemed to compress for several heartbeats. Then, with an audible snap, everything abruptly returned to normal. There was dead silence in the room for several long moments.

"Holy mother of Merlin." James finally sputtered, breaking the silence. "Is that ... normal?"

"No idea." Septimus said. "It's been several hundred years since the last Alliance Oath, I think. I don't know as anyone ever recorded what happened during and after the oath was taken. That said, not all things involving family magic go like that."

Little did any of them know just how much their alliance would change the coming war ... and the future beyond that war.
Immediately after their private meeting and the establishment of their Alliance, the elder Marauders
got to work. Harfang and Charlus went to Gringotts and dug out all the war equipment they'd bought
to replace what had been lost during the raid on their camp that had seen Cedrella and Callidora
captured along with some of the group's support staff. Septimus dug out the wands in the Weasley
vault that had been of use to the group last time, along with his and Cedrella's personal equipment.

The three women went over the lists of the various Black, Potter, and Longbottom properties in order
to develop an efficient itinerary for visiting each of them. They needed to see which would be
feasible as retreats for the threatened muggleborn children and their families, and how many people
could live at each property comfortably. Once that was decided, the three women talked over
potential additions to existing ward schemes, storage of extraneous furniture, irreplaceable valuables,
and portraits (none of them wanted a portrait with a frame elsewhere to tattle to enemy forces about
what was going on) and setting up the properties for their potential guests.

Charlus flooed Septimus and Harfang late that evening. Jinx had finally returned, clutching a thick
sheaf of parchment and a triumphant grin.

"We've got the address of every kid currently attending, and all the Muggleborns that have done
accidental magic to date." Charlus told them. "They promised to alert us to changes of address, and
whenever a new kid popped up on the list. I almost kissed Jinx."

That had made Septimus laugh, not that he'd blamed Charlus for his glee. "Go to bed, Charlus. We're
going to have a hell of a day tomorrow."

"No shit. The Wizengamot is going to have a collective apoplexy." Charlus said, grinning like a
fiend. "I'll make copies of the list for you two, and a copy to go in my vault, just in case."

"Make enough copies for us to put one in each of our vaults too." Septimus recommended. "The
more backups we have, the better."

"Good point. Will do." Charlus said, then retreated from the fireplace.

They had no choice but to announce their Alliance - there was no way in hell the Ministry in general
or the various Families in particular had missed the blast of magic that had accompanied the sealing
of the oath. Fortunately for their activities that day, while pretty much everyone knew *something*
big had happened, almost no one would be able to figure out what it was, or who was involved. The
Light, Neutral, and Dark sides would be able to talk to their own people and eliminate some
suspects, but none of the three sides were talking to the others anymore, so they wouldn't be able to
tell if something had happened with the other groups. This allowed the three men to visit their vaults
without raising any alarms.

Their biggest advantage lay in the fact that they could lie about just how long the Alliance was in
effect if anyone asked, saying it was only for the remainder of their own lives, not binding to their
families in perpetuity. That would incline any inimical parties to wait until the existing generation
was dead and gone before acting on any nasty plans ... at which time they'd be in for a hell of a
surprise.

What amused Septimus though, was the fact that most of the reason the Wizengamot would be having a fit was because the Weasleys were in the Alliance. The bright among them (which was most of them) would realize that the Longbottoms and Potters now essentially had an army of grunts at their beck and call thanks to the sheer numbers House Weasley enjoyed. The petty idiots would be offended that the poor, politically and socially useless Weasley family had been accorded the incredible honor of an Alliance with two such prestigious families.

The brightest among the Wizengamot would realize that whatever apparent uselessness the Weasleys had in political circles did not reflect their usefulness elsewhere. The Alliance basically meant that if the Longbottoms or Potters got wiped out thanks to their lesser numbers, the Weasleys would come down like a ton of bricks on whoever did it. That basically nowhere on the planet would be safe, as there were Weasleys on every continent save Antarctica. Worse, what the Weasleys had always lacked in funds, they had not lacked in magical strength, magical skill, or overall intelligence, making them a very formidable fighting force. There was nowhere the perpetrator could flee to evade the Weasleys' wrath.

Better still, thanks to Septimus' careful husbandry, the family in its entirety was in a far better financial place than it had been in a very long time. However, everyone still assumed the Weasleys still lacked funds. It hadn't yet penetrated the collective consciousness of the Wizengamot that House Weasley was no longer anywhere near as poor as it had been a generation ago, or that the family's wealth was now increasing daily. They still weren't anywhere near the Potter/Black level of wealth, but they also weren't dead last in finances anymore. William, Arthur's oldest boy, would probably be dead and gone before the Wizengamot truly bought a clue in that regard.

(_)(_)(_)

The next day, the three men were hard put to it to keep from snickering as they walked into the Wizengamot. The entire place was abuzz, people gabbing back and forth as they discussed the previous day's magical event and what it could possibly mean. The Wizengamot was, at this point, so used to the three men arriving and sitting together they took zero note of them now, which just increased the men's amusement exponentially.

Once everyone had settled down finally, which took longer than usual due to everyone's excitement and curiosity, Charlus pushed to his feet. The entire place fell silent in anticipation of what Charlus was going to say.

"We are all aware of the magical event that took place mid-day yesterday." Charlus said. "It is therefore my duty, honor, and privilege to inform this body that Houses Potter, Longbottom, and Weasley have entered into an Alliance Oath."

There was complete, dead silence for roughly the count of twenty. Septimus, who had been watching Dumbledore (and the people nearest him) carefully, saw the brief flash of ... well, something other than pleasure and happiness. At the distance the two men were from one another it was hard for Septimus to tell what exactly the reaction had been, it was there and gone so fast.

Then, after that twenty-count, all hell broke loose. All three men, having planned this, had agreed to watch separate sections of the room so they could compare notes about reactions later. Dumbledore may have been something other than pleased, but Septimus noted that the people around him had different reactions. All the people around Dumbledore were his allies, the so-called Light side. Almost to a man, they looked ecstatic at the announcement. The few who weren't that all had 'well, it's about damn time' type expressions on their faces. Septimus would admit that himself, Harfang and Charlus going that far would hardly have been a shock to the people that knew them, given their
tight friendship virtually their entire lives. What bothered Septimus was the fact that pretty much everyone in that arc of the room also looked expectant. It didn't take much for Septimus to realize they were all assuming that the three Houses would re-align with the Light 'where they belonged'. Why they thought that when all three Houses had made a point of being Neutral, he didn't know.

It took a good ten minutes for everyone to be brought back to order. Even then, the entire day was pretty much wasted, as no one seemed to be able to concentrate on the normal business of the day. Everyone seemed to be far too interested in contemplating the power shift that the Alliance represented, and what it would mean to the escalating hostilities with Voldemort and his group.

Later, when the three men talked, Septimus discovered that the Dark contingent had, more or less to a man, been furious and/or apprehensive, and had spent most of the rest of the session whispering to each other. The Neutrals had all looked pleased, and had evidently had a few 'about damn time' faces too, but had lacked the expectant 'yay, they've seen the light and are going to rejoin the Light' expression Septimus had seen on the faces of some of Dumbledore's people.

The rest of that summer was hellaciously busy. Cedrella, Callidora, and Dorea spent the summer traveling, going from home to home, both in the UK and elsewhere, evaluating the various homes at their combined disposal. A half dozen of the biggest and easiest to defend were chosen as retreats for the threatened muggleborns and their families, at least initially. Several other properties, while smaller than the chosen six, were earmarked for use if those six got filled up, which was entirely possible. That done, they then cleaned the places out as planned with the assistance of the resident house elves, and put in the things necessary to host a number of people fairly long-term. All told, the six primary rescue houses would be able to hold a hundred people. The backup houses would be able to hold another fifty. Hopefully, it would be enough.

Arcturus personally went to the chosen Black homes and swore the elves there to complete secrecy, forbidding them to communicate in any way, shape, or form what was going on in the house they were in charge of with anyone other than Lord Black, Cedrella, Callidora, or Dorea. Given his family's normal leanings, it just wasn't worth the risk to have an elf accidentally blab to a hostile family member what was going on. Especially considering just how fanatical Orion, Walburga, and the teenage Bellatrix were. He also wrote a very detailed Will, ensuring that if he was killed before they reached their majority, that Sirius and Regulus would be taken care of and protected from their Dark relatives, especially their parents.

Similarly, the Marauders wrote their own Wills. Charlus, the only one with an under-age Heir at that point, made sure that James would be covered. It wasn't really necessary, not with the Alliance in effect, but it was a case of better safe than sorry. The more they could cover their butts, the better.

Everyone but Charlus and Remus started working on becoming an animagus ... even Cedrella, Callidora and Dorea. The kids were thrilled, and threw themselves into it with a will, determined to achieve becoming animagi come hell or high water. Remus, realizing that a lot of their enthusiasm came from being able to help him during his transformations, was incredibly touched. He did what he could to help, which mostly amounted to ensuring the other kids weren't disturbed while they meditated (or attempted to) as they tried to find their forms. Septimus also started teaching him the animagus-reversal spell, so that he'd know it and be able to perform it easily by the time any of his friends started trying to transform in a year or so. He also planned to inform Professor McGonagall of the kids' efforts once school started, so she could oversee them whenever possible, or just be available for advice both for the kids and the adults. He also planned to swear her to secrecy when he told her, to prevent Dumbledore from finding out.
Animagi meditations weren't the only thing on the schedule, either. As planned, the kids were given an accelerated, concentrated course in offensive and defensive magic, so they'd have a chance in hell of surviving if they got separated from their parents in the middle of a firefight. They were careful to keep it to the kids' power levels, but any and every useable spell in the three families' repertoires got introduced.

(_)(_)(_)  

Unfortunately, the Alliance weren't the only ones kicking things into a higher gear. Dumbledore tried no less than six times to meet with one, both, or all three men over the summer. All three of them gave him the cold shoulder. Dumbledore then sent some of his stooges as emissaries. These, the Alliance had to handle more gently than they did Dumbledore, as they didn't want to alienate them. All three men did their best to attempt to plant the seed of doubt in their visitors' minds. Unfortunately, it didn't seem to do any good.

And on the less pleasant side of the equation, attacks on Muggles nearly tripled in the wake of the announced Alliance. Worse, Septimus received word from several of his further-flung relatives that people of 'questionable character' had been seen about, gathering in groups and muttering who-knew-what. It was a clear indication that Voldemort was trying to extend his reach beyond the UK proper. Septimus immediately charged his family to gather what allies they could, and prepare for either an attack at their locations, or to be needed elsewhere when the 'questionable sorts' relocated. They couldn't risk Voldemort either building a base of operations outside the UK proper, or bringing in an enormous army of foreigners with no one in the UK the wiser, or prepared to defend against such a thing.

Septimus also shared that news with Arcturus, Harfang, and Charlus. All three got in contact with foreign allies, and relatives in the case of Longbottom and Black. Arcturus was careful to only contact those he could trust to come down on the side of the good guys, and not Voldemort's. Those allies and relatives were told to liaise with any Weasleys in their vicinity.

By the time the new school year rolled around, the Alliance was as ready as it could be given the situation. They just had to wait to see how events would fall out.
Calm Before The Storm

Calm Before The Storm

(__(____)

1973

It was truly surprising and a little disheartening what one could consider 'business as usual', Cedrella reflected as she waited for the train to arrive at the start of the Yule break, standing next to Septimus. The school year had started out well. The kids took a page out of the book the elder Marauders had worked from, and had ensured that between the four of them, they had all the elective classes covered (except for Divination). Remus and Severus, being by far the most studious of the four, had both taken Arithmancy, Ancient Runes, and Care of Magical Creatures. Sirius had taken Muggle Studies and Care of Magical Creatures, while James had taken Muggle Studies and Arithmancy.

By all accounts the year had started well. Then, around Samhain, Regulus had abruptly fallen apart at the seams for no apparent reason.

Regulus, who was a year behind Sirius, had until now seemed to have avoided any unfortunate consequences due to inbreeding. Granted, Arcturus and the rest of them had never stopped keeping an eye out for any instability, given that Sirius had problems, but he'd seemed fine enough. His collapse had surprised them all. Cedrella was just grateful that his Head of House, Pomona Sprout, had caught it so fast and had called Arcturus in.

Arcturus had been forced to resort to pulling Regulus out of Hogwarts in an effort to get him stabilized - Regulus had been dangerously close to not just thinking about but *acting on* suicide. Poppy was one of the best at fixing physical damage, but the sort of problem Regulus was having was far beyond her knowledge and skill.

Cedrella was still torn between immense amusement and not a little horror every time she contemplated the reaction House Black at large had had when Regulus got Sorted into Hufflepuff. There had been horrified outrage when Sirius had Sorted Gryffindor - it just wasn't the done thing for a Black, after all. Until Sirius, Blacks had mostly Sorted Slytherin, with the occasional Ravenclaw thrown in for flavor. Even she had had to check her initial reaction when Sirius had Sorted Gryffindor, despite knowing the lad quite well and thus *knowing* there was no chance in hell he'd go Slytherin.

But as bad as Gryffindor was in House Black eyes, Hufflepuff was worse. Gryffindor, well - Sorting there meant you had a want of wit and cunning. Sorting Hufflepuff meant that you may as well be a Squib. Because Hufflepuff took the dregs of magic-kind. Or, that had been House Black's take on it. As a result, they had collectively had an apoplexy. A few of the more militant had actually had the temerity to write or floo Arcturus and demand that Regulus be disowned. One had actually dared to suggest, if in a roundabout, veiled way, that Regulus be *killed*.

Dumbledore had not been pleased with Regulus being removed. He'd tried to argue that Poppy could treat Regulus. Arcturus hadn't been amused by Dumbledore's interference in the least, and had threatened to remove not just Regulus, but *all* Black-born children currently attending Hogwarts and to decree that no Black would attend Hogwarts in the future, in his capacity as Head of House. Having House Black educate their children elsewhere despite living in the UK would have been a horrible blow to Hogwarts' reputation. Dumbledore had promptly folded and allowed Regulus'
Ironically enough, Regulus’ collapse had brought the two brothers a lot closer. They hadn’t hated each other, but neither had they had the sort of bond Sirius enjoyed with the other ‘young’ Marauders. Sirius had taken to writing Regulus several times a day when Regulus had been taken out of Hogwarts. Sirius, having lived with mental instability and the resultant potion doses (and changes in potions) since he was a toddler, could and apparently did reassure Regulus that it was possible to live a normal life, and that it wasn't always going to be as bad as it was right then. Regulus, in turn, used Sirius as a sounding board for things he felt he couldn't talk about to the adults around him, or so they all hoped. Arcturus had encouraged the whole thing, and had not attempted to oversee or interfere. The only thing he'd done was to ask Sirius to tell him if Regulus started talking about committing suicide in their letters, so that such a thing could be prevented.

Two months into treatment, and Regulus was doing much better. He was stable enough that Arcturus was seriously considering letting him return to Hogwarts after the Yule break. Regulus was a bit hesitant, but that was understandable, given the reasons behind why he had left, and how long he'd been gone. His Housemates would doubtlessly ask questions that he would be uncomfortable answering. At least he hadn't fallen behind in his schooling while he'd been gone. Pomona had insured that Regulus got the homework assignments that were handed out, and Arcturus and the elder Marauders had been able to instruct Regulus sufficiently.

The thing was that, other than the initial moments of alarm when Regulus' collapse was reported, it had essentially been 'business as usual' where Regulus' mental health was concerned. The same was true for the continuing attacks on Muggles as performed by Voldemort and his followers.

They were all keeping a careful eye on that, but there was literally nothing they could do. They had no way to predict Voldemort's movements. They couldn't even ask the house elves, because that would alert the house elves of Voldemort's followers, and they might inform their masters that other house elves had been asking way too many questions.

Worse, even if they could have predicted where Voldemort would strike next, there still wasn't a damn thing they could do about it. It was still being dismissed as 'muggle troubles' by virtually all and sundry. If they’d dared to try to fight Voldemort and his followers off, it would have been the Marauders that got into trouble. Business as usual.

The only thing that wasn't business as usual were the reports from the non-UK Weasleys. The only Weasleys that lived in magical communities but were not reporting worrying congregating of undesirable elements were those in the United States, where such things had a harder time finding a foothold thanks to the equality laws and the fact that most of the families that lived there had fled Europe in general and the UK in particular *because* of the bigotry and prejudice.

The entirety of the Weasley, Longbottom, and Black families were preparing for war. Unfortunately, Arcturus and Alphard excepted, the Black family adults were largely on Voldemort's side. So were many of the teens, though it was beginning to look like Andromeda at least was following Sirius and Regulus' lead when it came to defying the family stereotype.

If the younger Marauders were right, she was actually dating a Muggleborn Hufflepuff on the quiet. Though how she was managing that, Cedrella dearly wanted to know. Andromeda had, after all, followed the bulk of the family into Slytherin. Harfang and Callidora, who had flaunted the ‘accepted’ in-school dating rules themselves, were both highly amused. Come to that, so were the rest of them. Arcturus had commented that if they were still dating come graduation, or if they were exposed and stuck together, he'd ensure they had the means and opportunity to continue despite any objection Andromeda's parents might have.
Cedrella knew in her bones that they were running out of time. Voldemort would hold off only so much longer. He’d *have* to act, openly or covertly, against the magical world soon. Every indication they had said that his power base was more or less complete and ready.

She cut off her internal musings as the Hogwarts train arrived. The station was shortly a chaotic hive of activity. Despite that, the kids found them pretty quickly. Cedrella gave Remus, the first one to find them, an affectionate hair-ruffle, which made him grin at her before he hugged his parents, who were standing next to Cedrella and Septimus, and had been invited to Weasley Cottage for the Yule break and celebrations.

Unfortunately, it was looking like Eileen would not be attending most of the fun this year. She was still alive, but she was clinging to life by her fingernails, and in no condition to weather the sort of energy and chaos and excitement that was an inevitable result when you had close to thirty people in and out of the house at all times of the day and night. More and more these days, Eileen was finding it difficult to merely sit up in bed, never mind anything more strenuous than that. She would be staying at Longbottom Manor with the redoubtable Augusta Longbottom, as the Manor had been decreed the better place for an invalid to stay in peace. That said, there were plans to ensure that Severus spent as much time with her as he wanted to, and if Eileen found the energy to hang out at the Cottage for a bit, she’d be more than welcome.

Thankfully, in the wake of Harfang gaining guardianship of Severus and pulling both him and Eileen out of that hellhole, Severus and Eileen had patched up some of the holes in their relationship. Severus was no longer as bitterly angry with Eileen as he had been. It would make her death all the harder for Severus to bear, but at least he would not have the bitter regret of being estranged from her when she finally lost her battle with death. And at least now, her death wouldn't come as a horrible shock. Severus knew it was coming, and soon. Cedrella was honestly worried that Eileen wouldn't make it to the new year.

As if thinking of him had summoned him, Severus arrived next, giving everyone a nod and a reserved and quiet but truly happy smile. He was never going to be boisterous and outgoing, Cedrella knew. That said, he was doing much better than he had been before the guardianship. He actually smiled and laughed these days. Better, he had stopped flinching away from people in general and men in particular when he got startled. He wasn't even flinching around Septimus anymore, though he did still watch Septimus with wary eyes.

Lily, as was the norm, was hot on his heels and gave a far more boisterous greeting even as she tugged Severus right into the middle of the gathering, rather than letting him lurk on the outskirts. Severus permitted it with a fond, exasperated eye-roll. Lily too was improving. Thanks to having to worry less about Severus, she was slowly becoming a touch less militant about his safety and happiness. She still kept a careful eye on him, and was quick to jump to his defense, but she was beginning to relax.

James and Sirius arrived moments later, arm in arm, wearing mischievous grins and bouncing like they were on a sugar high - which was entirely possible. Sirius more or less literally glomped Regulus, which got the first real laugh any of them have heard out of Regulus since his collapse. Which was probably what Sirius was aiming for, if the triumphant look on his face is anything to go by. The two boys got in a friendly mock-wrestling match for a few moments. Cedrella was delighted to see Regulus so light-hearted after the last two months of wild and mostly negative mood swings.

Everyone gathered, all trunks and pets accounted for, they trooped to the apparation point and headed for their various homes. Cedrella knew they'd be seeing everyone soon enough, but the next few days were for gift-shopping and that required that they not all be together, lest they be able to discover what gifts they'd be getting and spoil the fun.
Cedrella was looking forward to this Christmas for Remus' sake. They'd replaced almost all of his very worn, secondhand clothes and school things, save for a couple sets of clothes to play in without having to worry. That said, this would be the first Christmas where Remus would both be getting - and able to give - more than one or two cheap presents. Not that any of them were going overboard, but still. His parents just seemed to be relieved that they had reliable help for their son. They'd not been blind to what Remus' future would probably have been like, without the Weasleys sponsoring him. Being a werewolf meant living a parlous hand-to-mouth existence in the UK and most of Europe.

And people wondered why werewolves would flock to the banner of someone who was clearly evil. All said evil person had to do was fake a concern for werewolves and promise better living and they'd have werewolves all but falling over themselves to join their cause.

Sometimes the willful, blind ignorance and stupidity of the magical world really burned Cedrella up. Yes, bastards like that Fenrir Greyback needed to be controlled, or better yet put down. One bad apple did not mean the entire bushel was rotten however. Punishing everyone for the transgressions of a few was foolhardy in the extreme. Cedrella shook those thoughts off with an effort, and got to work making dinner. Thankfully, Molly would arrive early in the morning the day after everyone's shopping was done to lend her expertise in feeding the hordes that would overtake the Cottage, and of course Jinx would be assisting with the cooking and the cleaning as well. Otherwise Cedrella would never be able to keep up.
Dark Days

Chapter Notes

The chapter wherein shit gets real, and the First Voldemort War 'officially' starts.

Dark Days

(_)(_)(_)  

1974

Much to everyone's relief, Eileen made it through Christmas. She did not however live to see the new year. She died quietly in her sleep on the thirtieth. Fortunately, school did not begin again until the seventh. Since she was, if distantly, related to the Blacks (as were pretty much all the pureblood families) and the Prince burial grounds were denied her, she was laid to rest in a small corner of the Black Family grounds on the fifth.

Severus was determined to return to school on time, despite repeated reminders from everyone that they didn't expect that of him. Septimus had a feeling that Severus' determination to return had more than one cause. It would provide a distraction from his grief being the main one. The other reason was Lily.

Lily, upon discovering that Eileen had died in the night, camped out at Severus' elbow and in his bedroom and point blank refused to be removed from his presence for more than about five minutes. Septimus wasn't all that sure why she was glued to him. Since she knew him better than the rest of them did, having been friends with him since they were about seven, Septimus was willing to allow that there might just be a valid reason for it. Or at the very least, there *had* been a valid reason, before Severus had caring adults in his life, and Lily hadn't quite adjusted to that change enough to not default to old habits in the face of something so dire.

It was kind of telling that Severus made no demur about her hounding him. Septimus hadn't even caught him looking exasperated or anything like that. At any rate, Severus was probably worried that if he stayed out of school, Lily would try to as well, so he was going to go back. Whether that was a good idea or not, Septimus wasn't sure, but Harfang seemed to think Severus would manage. Since Harfang knew the boy a bit better than the rest of them did, he was willing to trust Harfang's judgment on the matter.

Less than a week after the kids had returned to Hogwarts, Voldemort finally made the move the elder Marauders had been waiting for. Though it had to be said that the move was larger than they'd been anticipating.

In the wee small hours of the morning, ten of the warning devices the Marauders had set up as close to the homes of Muggleborns as they could manage without arousing suspicion started shrieking fit to wake the dead. The monitors, and relay alarms that would allow for everyone to be alerted within seconds of an attack had been set up in Potter Castle. The Castle had the most room for such an endeavor, and the Potter elves were by far the most idle of the trustworthy elves available to them, as they only had three people to serve currently. The Potter elves then scattered to inform the Marauders of who exactly was being attacked.
When the alert blared, Septimus was out of bed and half dressed before he'd even woken up sufficiently to comprehend what the heck was going on. Cedrella wasn't very far behind him either. Right about the point they realized what was happening, one of the Potter elves - not Jinx for once - popped in.

"There is being lots of attacks!" The elf said. "Ten! Master is saying you is needed to go to this address. There is two houses being attacked on same street." The elf then rattled off the address.

Septimus didn't demur. He was the heavy-hitter of the Marauders - the one most able to defend two places from attackers, especially in this case, when the houses were literally separated by only one or two houses. Especially with Cedrella at his side. Less than a minute later, he and Cedrella both were fully dressed and armed. They disillusioned themselves and apparated to where they were needed.

Septimus had opted to apparate to a spot between the two beleaguered houses. Hopefully the attackers would be so concentrated on their victims that his arrival would surprise them. Cedrella, he knew, would opt to apparate in somewhere behind where attackers outside the houses would be likeliest to be standing, so that they were caught between her and Septimus.

The street was eerily quiet when they popped in. Septimus could see flashes of color from a window on one of the houses. This swiftly made it apparent that the Death Eaters hadn't wanted to have to leave quickly, and had opted for some small measure of stealth by not setting fire to the homes and garnering the attention of muggle forces.

There was no one visible on the street. Septimus narrowed his eyes, then accio'd a clod of dirt as big as he was. He broke it up into fine particles and then sent it swirling around the area. If anyone was standing around, whether under disillusionment or some other means of invisibility, they'd be revealed by the dirt moving around them.

Sure enough, two disturbances were revealed, one tucked down beside a bush near the one house under attack, the other standing in the middle of the front garden of the other. Both got nailed by Cedrella before they'd even realized they'd been discovered.

They wouldn't be getting back up again, either. That decision had been an easy one to make, and unanimous. Death Eaters and Voldemort got no quarter, no mercy. None of the Marauders trusted that the bastards would end up in Azkaban where they belonged. Even if they did, the Marauders weren't going to take bets on how long the convicted would STAY in Azkaban. None of the Marauders were willing to stun a bunch of murderous lunatics only to have to repeat the procedure two or three or six months or a year or whatever later. And then again a few more months or years after that. No, if they were going to do this, they were going to do it right and make sure that Voldemort suffered as many permanent losses as humanly possible.

That dealt with, they immediately split up. Cedrella headed for one house, and Septimus the other. Septimus was relieved when he discovered that there were no alarms or sealing spells he'd have to deal with. There was, however, a silencing spell in place, which Septimus had figured from the relative silence on the street. The moment Septimus slipped through the door, he passed its boundary.

He had to squash the urge to race upstairs and put a stop the screaming as fast as he could. The chances of ending up dead or badly injured doing that were very high. First, he gave the ground floor a fast check, making sure no one was down here to hex him in the back once his attention was elsewhere. The ground floor cleared, he slipped up the stairs, keeping his wand up and at the ready and a curse on his lips, just in case someone was watching the stairs.

There was someone in the hall, who was probably supposed to be on watch, but they had gotten caught up in watching whatever was going on in the one bedroom. Septimus was able to sneak up
close enough to hit them with a lethal spell, then catch them before they hit the floor, thus preventing
the other attackers from noticing they were in trouble.

That taken care of, Septimus went on the warpath. He stormed into the bedroom like an avenging
angel - more or less literally. As he was still disillusioned, it looked a whole hell of a lot like the
attackers were sprouting holes in their guts and spewing blood all over the place for no apparent
reason. It all happened so fast in the tight space that it was over before the attackers were even
wholly aware that they were in danger.

Now came the hard part. Septimus retreated out of the room, then cast a privacy ward so none of the
family would hear or see and become even more alarmed, then called for Jinx. Jinx wouldn't come,
but because he listened for all the Marauders as a matter of course, he would know that Septimus
needed assistance, and send another Potter elf. Sure enough, a few seconds later, two elves popped
in.

"Pack all their stuff. I want the house stripped bare as fast as possible." Septimus said, pointing to
one of the elves. Then he pointed to the other. "I'll need your help transporting everyone to the
Castle." He said. The parents were going to need a lot of care. They'd gotten here as fast as was
possible, but magic could do a hell of a lot of damage in an extremely short amount of time. Septimus
was just glad he'd gotten here before the damage was ... well, really bad. Both parents had been
tortured, yes, but they were also still aware of their surroundings and torn between freaking the hell
out and trying to comfort and protect their kids despite their injuries.

Now he was going to have to reveal himself and do some hellaciously fast talking.

He transfigured his battle gear temporarily into muggle-style clothing, the better to be able to
approach without making matters worse. Then he removed the disillusionment and poked his head in
the room. Once the alarmed screaming died down, he spoke.

"Help's here, folks. I know you're really hurting right now, and really confused, but I can explain
what the hell just happened, and fix at least some of the damage." Septimus said.

The eldest of the kids, who was ten and possibly the one who'd be going to Hogwarts (Septimus
wasn't sure) gave him a narrow-eyed glare. Thankfully, the Death Eaters had been more interested in
the parents than the kids, and none of the kids was injured physically. Emotionally was an entirely
different matter, given they'd all been forced to watch their parents get tortured.

"You're one of them!" The words were a scared-stiff, high-pitched near-wail.

"No, son. I'm not." Septimus said. "You know how there's bad people and good people?" He asked.
The kid nodded. "Well, these are the bad guys." He pointed to the dead bodies in the room. "I'm not.
I can bring you, your parents, and your siblings somewhere safe, and fix your parents up. And
explain all this in far more detail."

The kid still gave him the stink-eye, for which Septimus didn't blame him a bit, but the state his
parents were in tipped the scales in Septimus' favor, and the kid let him come into the room.
Septimus made fast work of triaging the parents. The second elf then disappeared with them.
Septimus tugged the two kids in against him and then apparated out, bringing them to Potter Castle.

To say the next few days were difficult missed the mark by a considerable amount. All of the
families had managed to be rescued, with no lives lost or permanently debilitated mentally.
Unfortunately, even explaining the wheres, whyfores, and such of the magical world and what the
heck was happening hadn't made any of the rescuees very happy. None of the Marauders blamed
them at all.
To make things even more interesting, the Auror Corps hadn't managed to show up at any of the homes until well after the Marauders and the elf defenders had evacuated the families and all their belongings. In every case, they'd left the dead bodies of the perpetrators where they'd fallen.

The Ministry threw a collective conniption. Nor did they seem to know what they should be reacting the most strongly to - that some group of idiots was attacking magicals (regardless of their blood purity), or that some *other* group was killing the members of the first group with extreme prejudice, and in the process killing off members of the pureblood community.

The Marauders alternated between putting out the Ministry fires or fanning them, depending on who was saying what and how. They also had to spend a lot of time smoothing feathers with the rescued victims, getting everyone at least started on healing, and getting them to agree to move in somewhere they'd be safer until this mess was over with. The latter was by far the more difficult.

Unfortunately, they weren't given much of a break. About two weeks after the first attack, there was a second. This time, only one home was attacked, and something like thirty Death Eaters were in attendance.

If it hadn't been for the house elves, the Marauders would have lost that family. As it was, the Marauders and their wives had to fight a pitched battle outside the home. This got the attention of most of the Death Eaters and allowed the elves to pop in and escape with the victims without getting themselves killed in the process.

There was no hiding that battle, either. There had been enough noise and destruction of property to bring what seemed like half of the UK's law enforcement community down on the area, and pretty much the entirety of the Auror and Obliviation corps. Thankfully, this caused so much chaos and confusion that the Marauders and company were able to slip away unnoticed by either side. The elves were even able to strip the homes of their belongings in the confusion without being noticed.

Due to the numbers involved, there'd been no deaths - on either side of the fight. There had, however, been a whole lot of injuries. More, thankfully, among the Death Eaters than among the Marauders. Having house elves on their side came in handy big time. The house elves were more than happy to help shield the Marauders from incoming spellfire, which meant they didn't have to waste their own time and energy on that - though none of them had abused the assistance by standing out in the middle of the road and not moving or such like.

The other good news was that the Marauders defending the second attack seemed to have helped with the survivors of the first attack. Seeing that the rescue hadn't been a one-off seemed to incline most of the first batch to calm down and accept that not everything about magic was awful, though they still weren't happy about not being able to return to their homes.
Just to top off a miserable month, Dumbledore cornered Septimus in the Ministry two days after the second attack.

"I wonder if I might have a word with you, Lord Weasley?" Dumbledore asked, eyes twinkling and expression genial.

Not that Septimus bought that look for a second. "Of course, Lord Dumbledore. Shall we repair to an empty meeting room?"

Septimus still took a perverse pleasure in according the man only the least of his titles. It was still correct and not even a snub which meant Dumbledore couldn't do anything about it, though from the flicker in Dumbledore's eyes every time Septimus called him that he took it that way and dearly wanted to put Septimus in his place. Likewise, Septimus' continued refusal to allow Dumbledore anywhere near his home, or to follow Dumbledore tamely to Hogwarts and Dumbledore's seat of power when it was just the two of them gave Dumbledore fits, even if he'd never admit to it.

"If you insist." Dumbledore said, his tone that of a disappointed grandfather.

Septimus didn't even bother acknowledging that attempt at manipulation and just led the way to an empty meeting room. Once they were both inside he turned to face Dumbledore. "What did you want to speak to me about?" He asked.

"Given the scale of the recent attacks, it was decided to check on the whereabouts of pureblood families for their protection." Dumbledore said.

Septimus hadn't known about that. Such a measure ought to have been brought before the Wizengamot as it impinged upon the rights of the purebloods by making them account for their whereabouts without being formally suspected of or charged with a crime. Septimus was damn sure it hadn't been brought before the Wizengamot because if it had, he'd still be hearing the howling. That was, of course, if such a thing had actually been suggested in the first place. Septimus half suspected it hadn't, and that Dumbledore had been being an interfering busybody all on his own, but was attempting to disguise it.

"Interestingly enough, neither yourself, Lord Potter nor Lord Longbottom could be located at any time before you entered the Ministry today." Dumbledore continued. "Nor, when the matter was investigated, had you been seen anywhere immediately in the wake of the first attack."

It was obvious to Septimus that Dumbledore was trying to get him to confess to ... well, doing what he had been doing. Sadly for Dumbledore, Septimus was nowhere near that easily manipulated.

"Can you tell me, Lord Dumbledore, when this so-called security measure was brought before the Wizengamot for approval, as it must have been?" Septimus asked. "Asking citizens to account for their whereabouts when they are neither suspected of nor charged with a crime is, after all, an impingement upon their liberty. I have been in attendance at every Wizengamot meeting in the last few years and cannot recall such a measure being brought before us. Though there is, of course, the
remote chance that it was brought up after I became so bored that I fell asleep." Which had never once happened. "I shall have to inquire of my fellow Lords as to who approved that measure."

Dumbledore, however, wasn't easy prey himself. "A small impingement upon one's liberty is a small price to pay for security in a time of war, Lord Weasley."

Septimus gave Dumbledore a wide, toothy, predatory smile. "So the Minister has admitted we are at war then! This is excellent. Lords Longbottom, Potter and myself had despaired of the woman ever admitting there was trouble afoot. Yet I do not remember this being announced, nor any recommendations for the sort of things that are required when one is going to war. I do, after all, remember the days just prior to our involvement in the Grindelwald War. I have not seen any like activity either in the Wizengamot or the Ministry."

Mentally, Septimus was laughing. He sincerely doubted that Dumbledore had the faintest idea of what to do with a political opponent who could not be manipulated, cowed, or marginalized in some way. At the same time, verbally fencing with the man was the most fun Septimus had had in quite a while. There hadn't been all that many Lords willing to try their mettle against the combined might of the Marauders even before their Alliance.

Septimus could always have come up with some lie as to the whereabouts of himself, Harfang and Charlus, but that would have established a dangerous precedent. To whit, that Dumbledore had the right to know about where they were and what they were doing at any given time. Septimus was unwilling to give Dumbledore so much as a toe in the door in regards to his family, and knew that Charlus and Harfang were of like minds. So this had to be stopped cold right here and now. Or at the very least, he had to serve Dumbledore notice that such things would not be tolerated or humored. From the look on his face, Dumbledore was getting the message. It was also clear that he wasn't happy, and wasn't willing to give up just yet.

"One could almost think that certain people had something to hide, expressing such unwillingness to be open and aboveboard about their whereabouts." Dumbledore said.

Septimus shrugged. "Maybe someone is. That is hardly the point, however. The point is that such a measure restricts civil liberties, and must needs therefore be brought before the Wizengamot, either as a separate bill or as part of a declaration of a state of war. For it to exist otherwise is the beginning of a very dangerous, slippery slope that can and would lead to highly unfortunate circumstances. After all, such measures were the start of Grindelwald's assumption of tyrannical control prior to his declaration of war on the continent. I do not by any means think the current Minister is such a one as Grindelwald, but the current Minister will not forever be in office, and a successor could be the sort to take advantage of such a situation. Likewise, while the Minister herself would not stoop to such actions, not everyone in the Ministry or other positions of power is as pure-hearted." And on that last comment, Septimus gave Dumbledore a flat look.

Dumbledore could hardly refute Septimus' last point, as such blights on Magic as the Malfoys were on the Wizengamot, as well as any of a number of members of other unsavory Pureblood families. That they both knew Septimus meant the comment for Dumbledore himself didn't really change the fact that it was applicable to others and thus made it impossible for Dumbledore to object to it on any wise.

They exchanged a few more prickly comments back and forth before Dumbledore finally, if reluctantly, quit the field, admitting to a stalemate in the process. Septimus went home with a predatory grin on his face. He made a point of properly thanking his wife later that night. Because without her tuition, Septimus would not have been able to hold his own half so well. While being a Marauder had given him some small practice in straight-faced lying and the like, it had by no means
prepared him for the shark-infested waters that were the Wizengamot. Cedrella's assistance in that arena had made all the difference.

The next morning, Septimus and Cedrella talked over what Dumbledore had told Septimus. Cedrella cackled for nearly ten minutes as she contemplated informing the other Lords of what Dumbledore had tried to pull and just how much hell they'd put him through for it. "Best part of it is, if Dumbledore attempts to disagree, a few drops of Veritaserum will establish that he did, indeed, say such things."

Cedrella spent most of the day drafting and mailing letters to every pureblood in the UK. By the time the week was out, everyone would know what Dumbledore had tried to do. While some of them would dismiss it as an anomaly, or as Dumbledore's right to do so for whatever reason, a good number of folks would be less than pleased at Dumbledore's presumption, further weakening Dumbledore's political influence and support. With any luck, it would be enough to make a few of the supporters Dumbledore had gathered to himself question the depths of their loyalty.

The next few weeks were ... quite interesting. As predicted, the news that Dumbledore was putting his nose in other peoples' business hadn't gone over well in a lot of circles and several Lords who had already been inclined to disagree with Dumbledore got a whole lot louder in their disapproval. It even won the Neutral party (as led by the Alliance) two new members, both minor Pureblood Houses that had been on the periphery of Dumbledore's group.

There were also three more attacks on Muggleborn families that resulted in four dead purebloods and a whole host of injured magicals on both sides of the fight. Thankfully, none of the Muggleborn families lost members or were permanently disabled either physically or mentally, though they hadn't managed to get out of the attacks without injury. Voldemort was getting cleverer in his attempts to successfully complete such raids.

Then, in early March, there was a fourth raid, and disaster struck.

Neither Septimus nor Cedrella had been present for that particular attack - the Marauders took turns leading the defense when there was only one attack to be concerned with. After that first single attack with such large numbers, Voldemort had never again committed so many to a raid, so it had never become necessary for the 'reserves' to be called in to help with a defense.

As a result, they didn't find out about what happened until it was all over.

This particular attack, like the ones before it, had elements that differed from previous attacks as Voldemort attempted to find a combination that would work. This time, he employed both Dementors and such depraved werewolves as Fenrir Greyback and his followers.

It proved to be the first lethal combination that Voldemort had tried. The defenders, caught between maintaining the only known defense against Dementors while simultaneously defending themselves against werewolves, did not fare anywhere near as well as they had in the past. While several of the enemy were killed, sadly Fenrir Greyback himself was not one of them. And in the process, two of the defenders were killed. One via being subjected to the Kiss, the other dying under the teeth and claws of a werewolf.

The victim of the Kiss had been Charis, Cedrella's little sister. She and Callidora had been, rather understandably, devastated. Dorea had only been marginally less affected.

The true nightmare of the situation was that Charis was not, technically, dead. Her body still breathed and eliminated wastes, still moved if guided. It even fed itself, if mechanically, once that action was begun for it. Worse, without the atmosphere of Azkaban, it was entirely possible for the body to
continue to live for decades provided its basic needs were provided for it. But everything that made Charis, well, Charis, was gone. Nor could what had been taken be restored. This left Cedrella, Callidora, their parents and Charis' husband with a horrifying choice - whether to commit the body to St. Mungo's, thus keeping it alive despite knowing there was zero hope of recovery, or killing the body by one means or another and thus being the ones that, technically, killed Charis.

In the end, Arcturus himself took the horror of that choice out of the hands of Charis' closest relations. He had a Black house elf pop in and feed Charis a fast-acting, relatively painless poison. He admitted to Septimus to having done it a week or so after Charis' funeral. Whether anyone else was ever told, or figured it out, Septimus never knew and never asked, willing to let them all believe the body had died of natural causes, as the poison Arcturus had used left no evidence of itself in the victim. It merely made it look like the victim's heart stopped. Given the situation with Charis' body, it had been incredibly easy for everyone to assume the body had given out without a personality or will to drive it. Septimus would never disable them of that peace of mind by telling them the truth, and Arcturus swore the house elf involved to silence.

The day after Charis' funeral, Arcturus laid down the law with his errant family, exercising a level of power and control that most Heads of Family never bothered with, simply because it wasn't needed to keep their families in line.

Arcturus couldn't actually prevent any of his family from taking the Mark or assisting Voldemort and his cause. He did make it very clear to his family that anyone caught with the Mark or aiding and abetting Voldemort would be disowned immediately. On top of that, all Black Family monies or items held by the offending party would be seized and returned to Family Black. There would also be monthly checks for Marks to make it clear that this was not an empty threat, and Arcturus would be exercising his right as Head of House to inspect family members' financial dealings, which would bring to light any financial support of Voldemort's cause.

The Marauders had approved of this wholeheartedly. It would cut a considerably swathe through Voldemort's followers, since he had been recruiting - or trying to - Black Family members rather heavily.

Charis' death, tragic as it was, had a benefit. Several of the members of Family Black that had been waffling as to whether or not to join Voldemort's cause came down solidly on the side of 'oh, hell no, over my dead body'. Several others who had decided not to join him, but hadn't gotten involved in fighting against him either, ended up joining the Marauder Alliance in standing against him, since none of them were fool enough to think they'd be welcomed in Dumbledore's group even if they'd been willing to join it. The problem with them joining Dumbledore, of course, lay in the fact that they all still believed in pureblood superiority. They just wanted to put Voldemort six feet under for having had the temerity to kill one of their own.

Needless to say, Charis' death put Cedrella and Callidora on the warpath. Not that they hadn't been there already, but now they weren't just out to win. They wanted ... well, quite frankly, the things they wanted to do to Voldemort for killing their sister scared Septimus spitless. He did not envy the poor bastard *at all* if either of those women ever actually managed to get their claws into him.

In the aftermath of that fight, the Alliance put a lot of effort into figuring out how best to deploy themselves to deal with the dementor-and-werewolves combination, sure they'd see it again since it had been successful the first time. Next time, Voldemort wasn't going to be so lucky.
The Voldemort War Begins

Chapter Notes

So yeah - just in case anyone missed it up to now - THIS IS AN AU. Things are going to go VERY differently from canon from here on out.

The Voldemort War Begins

(_)(_)(_)  

1974 March

While Arcturus raised hell with his family, and Cedrella, Callidora, and Dorea made increasingly disturbing lists of what they'd like to do to Voldemort and his followers, the elder Marauders hit the Wizengamot like a triad of pissed-off mama dragons.

They stormed into the courtroom in full battle dress, rather than in their Wizengamot robes. Charlus was in the lead, with Septimus a half step behind and to the right, and Harfang a half step behind and to the left. They planted themselves in the center of the room. The speed with which the room went silent was almost amusing to Septimus. More amusing was the confounded look on Dumbledore's face. Better still was the expression on the Chief Warlock's face when the three of them refused to be seated. Eventually, the Warlock gave up and the triad had the floor.

"How many times." Charlus bellowed. "How many times, in the last four years, have Lords Longbottom, Weasley and myself attempted to alert this body to the actions of magical terrorists in the muggle world? How many times were we ignored? Told that the troubles in the muggle world were solely muggle problems? Or worse, had the severity of the situation downplayed, ignored, or dismissed as 'random but deplorable muggle-baiting' despite having submitted proof that the incidents showed common roots, indicating a far more severe situation was at hand? How many times?"

"Even when Muggleborns were being attacked, this body refused to listen." Septimus snarled, taking up the verbal baton as they'd planned. "After all, they were 'mere' Muggleborns. Hardly worth the bother." And if it was possible to pack more disdain and disgust in his tone, Septimus didn't know how. "Worse, this body was up in arms because someone dared to defend the lives of those Muggleborns against these terrorists, these blights on magic ... and the terrorists were found to be purebloods. Their deaths were worthy of note when the deaths of their victims were not. As if, because of the circumstances of their birth, these terrorists had a greater right to life than other sentient beings, whether magical or not."

"That it is only now." Harfang growled, taking his own turn. "After a pureblood was struck down defending Muggleborns, that this body is bestirring itself to respond to this threat disgusts me. Disgusts our entire Alliance. The dragon has been at the gates for FOUR YEARS and because the dragon wasn't eating the king's relatives, it was ignored. This is unconscionable. Every life, magical or not, is precious and cold blooded murder cannot be condoned no matter the target. Anyone who is willing to commit such cold-blooded murder forfeits their lives in return, for they are beyond any possibility of redemption. That this body clearly thinks otherwise makes me question its right to govern so much as a pile of rocks, never mind living, breathing beings of any description."
"Make no mistake." Charlus bellowed. "We are at war. We have *been* at war for four years. Before this day is out, this body *will* ratify wartime measures. That means doubling the budget for all law enforcement branches. That means authorizing the construction and raising of war wards on private residences and public venues alike. That means ensuring the general public know and can perform at least the most basic self-defense spells. That means ratifying the formation of a squad dedicated to the pursuit and destruction of this terrorist group and its leader. A refusal to do so will result in a vote of no confidence not only of the Minister but of this entire body. If we must, we will go to the Queen herself to adjudicate this mess."

To their surprise, one by one the Neutral Lords got to their feet, wordlessly indicating their agreement with the Marauders. Lord Greengrass, one of the more influential of that group behind Arcturus, finally spoke up.

"I find I am in agreement with Lords Potter, Longbottom, and Weasley. That this body is willing to ignore a significant threat to our world in favor of petty bickering is disturbing in the extreme. That this body was willing to condemn those that rose up in defense of helpless muggles and muggleborn *children* is despicable and intolerable."

And with the entire Neutral part on their feet, it became clear to the Dark faction and Dumbledore's faction just how few in number they were in comparison. The Neutrals comprised fully half of the seated Lords, perhaps a bit more. Better still, while Septimus was firmly of the belief that Dumbledore was trouble with a capital T, his was a less lethal form of trouble, and he had slightly more than half of the remaining Lords on his side, leaving the Dark faction as the smaller faction, at least for now. Hopefully, it would remain that small permanently. Sadly, Septimus knew that even if Voldemort never managed to get any other Lords on his side, he could and would get individual family members from both the Neutral and 'Light' factions. Still, that was better than him getting entire families. Especially in the case of the Blacks. The thought of Voldemort with Black Family backing gave him the willies.

It was only at that point that the elder Marauders took their seats. The rest of the day was ... quite interesting. Up until now, the Neutrals had largely been content to sit back and let the Dark and Light factions squabble and be idiots. Now, however, they were forcibly ramming measures through the Wizengamot despite more than slightly vociferous complaint on one side or another. The brutal fact was that the Neutrals had a majority vote - not because they comprised more than half of the Wizengamot, but because the Dark and Light factions would never even consider working together to keep the Neutrals from getting the majority vote needed for any law or measure. With some or all of the Light faction ending up voting for the various measures, they had a two-thirds majority without hardly trying.

By the end of the day, the Marauders had their measures ... and one more besides. It having been discussed that the so-called 'dark mark' was seen at most of the latest attacks, creating or possessing anything that bore that mark became a jailable offense. The Marauders had hoped to get something of the sort passed, but had opted not to even bring it up in their list of demands because it was, in the scheme of things, pretty darn minor at this point.

Of course, Dumbledore was incapable of leaving things alone. He'd not been able to vote against any of the measures - if he had wanted to. Septimus was honest enough with himself to admit that Dumbledore had only looked displeased at two measures. The first one decreed that cold blooded murder - whether committed via Unforgivable or any other means - was an automatic death sentence. He'd also looked less than thrilled at the measure that declared killing someone in defense of your own life or the life of someone else who was actively being attacked would not result in jail time.

The second measure had been the most hotly debated, because most people were uncomfortable with
killing, even in self defense. Septimus had eventually pointed out that they weren't saying that everyone ought to aim to kill when they were defending themselves, but if it came to that, they weren't going to get in trouble for it. That had silenced most of the arguing at that point.

At any rate, at the end of the day, Dumbledore followed them out. The Marauders wordlessly led him to one of the meeting rooms. Once in, Harfang hit the room with every privacy spell he knew. Septimus settled leaning lightly against a wall, one hand 'casually' near enough to where his wand holster sat to allow him to grab his wand in a hurry. Charlus focused on Dumbledore.

"Let's save the pussyfooting around, shall we, Lord Dumbledore?" Charlus growled. "We will not be ashamed for suggesting the measures we did today. We will not be ashamed for forcing them through. We will not change our minds and ask for any of them to be recalled - unless it is to make the punishments listed more severe still, which will be hard to do in at least one case. These measures should have been on the books at least a year ago, if not earlier than that. It's a damn poor state of affairs when the *Neutrals* have to step in and do the 'Light's' job. One might question what you were actually doing with your time, talents, and leadership."

Had Septimus mentioned that the Marauders were just *done* with pussyfooting around? That they had declared war? He wondered how long it would take some folks to wise up. The smarter ones would have smelled trouble months ago. The medium-smart would have caught the clue today, as blatant as they'd been. Sadly, there were bound to be a few who didn't understand, and probably wouldn't until things got even bloodier than they already were.

Dumbledore sighed. "Your actions today were most unwise." He said in that patented 'disappointed grandfather' tone.

Charlus snorted. "No, no they weren't. Because this Voldemort guy, and his followers? They'd have just kept going. Would have kept escalating. What we did today? Will serve notice that that sort of bullshit won't be tolerated. That we will fight back. Those of his followers who are not as enamored of his politics and schemes as they pretend to be might - might - decide to give themselves up and walk away from him, knowing they face death or heavy jail time if they get caught. It'll make lawbreaking seem a lot less appealing at the very least. The ones that keep on as they have until now? They are irredeemable already."

Septimus gave a toothy grin when Dumbledore looked startled at the inclusion of the 'redeemable' comment. "What, Lord Dumbledore, you didn't realize you were that predictable? We all know that would have been your next try at getting us to back down. Unlike you, we do not believe that everyone is redeemable. There are some folks who just won't stop hurting and killing others, no matter how many opportunities they're given to change their ways. The ones that are inclined to change their minds will find ways to either surrender or keep from committing crimes that will end up with them dead or in Azkaban for life. The rest are fair game."

"And before you go there." Harfang said. "No, we are not lashing out irrationally in grief. That'd be Cedrella and Callidora. Voldemort better pray those two never get their hands on him, because the sorts of stuff they're planning to do to him in retribution for their sister's death is bloody scary. Dorea is only slightly less scary." Harfang gestured in the direction of the courtroom. "We've had this planned since shortly after Voldemort and his followers started attacking muggles a couple years back and no one cared. We knew that he'd eventually do something the Wizengamot couldn't ignore, and planned to take full advantage of it when it happened." He sighed. "We just didn't count on that act being quite so ... personal." He snorted. "If we hadn't planned in advance, this would have been a whole lot uglier, because we *would* be acting out of grief, and not with clear minds."

Charlus laughed at Dumbledore's shocked look. "Don't look so shocked, Lord Dumbledore. We've
kept in fighting trim. Well, as much as is physically possible in my case.” Charlus gave his game leg a sour look. "And you know our record in the war. It took entire companies to stand against the six of us when we put our backs into it. Voldemort and his crew are just lucky our wives don't know where or even who they are. If they'd had known, there would have been a pile of bodies in the courtroom this morning, and all six of us would have been guilty parties. After all, none of the three of us are dumb enough to gainsay our wives. Not on something like this. It'd have been *us* dead on the floor if we had.” Charlus sounded more amused than anything else by that last fact.

"What neither you nor most of the rest of your contingent seems to have realized." Septimus said. "Is that Voldemort and his band of idiots are a very real threat to the safety and secrecy of our world. They've been running around hexing muggles for years. Just how many of those people did the Obliviation Squad miss? How many people are out there that not only know magic exists, but know that there are magicals that want to hurt and kill 'normal people'? Just how long do you think it will take before they find each other, and begin to form some sort of group designed to fight back? There are a lot more muggles than there are wizards, Dumbledore. The odds against us in pure numbers are something like a hundred to one. Possibly more than that. And muggles have weapons that magic cannot hope to combat. Explosive forces that make bombarda maxima look like a squished bug in comparison, just to name one possible venue of attack."

Septimus took a breath. "Hoping for the redemption of these criminals, and thus permitting them to go out - again - and commit crimes against muggles - again - risks yet more muggles escaping obliviation and retaining their knowledge of us. The faster we take them down, the safer we'll be. The redemption of a single individual, or even a handful of individuals, is *not* worth the death of our people as a whole through muggle warfare. The sooner you understand that and start backing us and our measures, the better."

"Though to be brutally honest, as today showed, we really don't *need* you, or your vote. We have enough people on our side to force things through as it stands." Harfang said. "And are likely to gain more from the fringes of your group and the Dark contingent as they realize what they're risking by letting Voldemort run rampant."

"If we're going to save our world, this is the way it has to be." Charlus said. "Whether we like it or not."

They didn't wait to see what, if anything, Dumbledore had to say about all of that. They just turned and left the room.
Planning Vengeance

Chapter Notes

Once more with feeling: DO NOT FUCK WITH THE BLACKS. They will *fuck your shit up* and not even blink.

Planning Vengeance

(____)

1974 April

It took Cedrella about a month to recover from the gut-punch that was Charis' horrifying demise. Oh, she wasn't over her grief, not by a long shot. The shock, though, and the accompanying difficulties in doing much of anything about it came to an end.

At that point, she pulled Callidora and Dorea into a meeting. It was a meeting that, if their enemy had known it was taking place, would have made them very nervous. Let their menfolk do battle in the Wizengamot and on the literal battlefield, when such arose. The Black women had their own battlefield to conquer.

"The first thing we must do is confirm our targets." Cedrella growled to her sister and cousin.

That would be ... easier for them than it would be for others. As Blacks, they had a damn good idea of who was a pureblood extremist, and who of that subset would be willing to do the sorts of things that Voldemort's group were doing. They also had a fair idea of those people who weren't extremists per se, but who liked doing those sorts of things and might join to be allowed to do them unopposed. The more difficult part of the list was figuring out those folks that, while not necessarily wanting to kill, torture, and so on, could be pressured by one means or another into joining Voldemort.

The list was shorter than it otherwise might have been, with the entirety of the Black family warned off. Oh, one or two of the family might be willing to go against Arcturus' decrees, but nowhere near the numbers that might have gone over to Voldemort if the decrees weren't a factor. Despite that break, the list was ... unfortunately long, as most purebloods were either elitists, deranged like Bellatrix or easily pressured into following someone else's lead.

From that list, Cedrella teased out the names of Heads of Families, and set that much-shortened list aside to give to Septimus, so he would know who to keep an eye on in the Wizengamot. The rest of the list, the three women kept for themselves with no intention of ever telling their husbands about it.

Not because they wanted Voldemort and his cohorts to win, but because their husbands were going to need plausible deniability when certain people started dropping like flies in winter. If the men didn't know who might be on Voldemort's side for sure, they would be as surprised as everyone else when someone ended up dead. They would suspect the who's, why's, and wherefore's of those deaths since none of them were stupid, but they wouldn't *know* and could therefore claim innocence and ignorance if anyone thought to question them.

Sadly, they couldn't kill everyone on the list. That would be too noticeable. At least, they couldn't kill
them all at once, anyway. Spread out over a year or so, however, and it would be a bit more possible. They just had to figure out who to deal with first, and how.

They were strongly tempted to find out who had been behind Charis getting Kissed and start with them, but unfortunately doing so would involve questioning people. Potentially a lot of people before they found someone who knew the information they sought. The more people they had to question, the stronger the likelihood they would be discovered. They would therefore have to content themselves with the knowledge that sooner or later, their proposed program of annihilation would get the people responsible.

Those folks that would fold to pressure were put on a separate list. If they would fold to Voldemort, they would fold to pressure from other quarters as well. The women would just have to apply the right pressure - something that would make those folks less likely to fold to pressure from other quarters.

Cedrella knew that what they were planning was at best morally gray. That they would be 'stooping' to some of the selfsame tactics Voldemort had had to be using. She didn't much care. Taking the moral high road only got you so far in a situation like this, facing an opponent like this. At some point, you were going to have to get your hands dirty if you were going to stand a chance of bringing such an enemy down.

Cedrella had absolutely no problem with getting her hands dirty. Actually, she preferred it compared to the alternative. Let Septimus fight this his way. He was well-suited to that venue after her tutelage in the early days of their marriage, and would see a remarkable degree of success. But Septimus was very, very ill suited to the darker, seedier underbelly of underhanded dealings. Blackmail, coercion, and a (past a certain point, anyway) flagrant disregard for the law were foreign to his makeup, and Cedrella honestly wouldn't have it any other way. If he ever became comfortable with such things, he would cease to be the man she'd fallen in love with.

In his own turn, Septimus was more or less giving Cedrella carte blanche by not saying anything. After being married for this long, Septimus had a very good idea of how Cedrella would respond to Charis' death. He could, as her husband and Head of Family, forbid her from seeking retribution. Septimus hadn't even brought the subject up in a roundabout way, never mind speaking of it directly, whether to forbid her or not. That was as good as telling her 'go for it'.

"I think it better if we strike at random." Dorea said as they contemplated where to start. "If we do this at all systematically, they might figure out the pattern and then we'd end up with a problem."

"Agreed." Callidora said. "Well, for the ones we plan on hurting, anyway. We're going to have to hit all the pressurable ones we can in one fell swoop, or they're going to end up forewarning someone we don't want to know we're coming."

"If we get Cassiopeia and Lucretia involved, we'd actually be able to hit everyone at once." Dorea offered. "Split among the five of us, the pressurable list won't be as unmanageable."

"A good point." Cedrella agreed. "And they both would be willing to help. Let me go see if they're available."

She headed for the floo. About ten minutes later, Lucretia Prewitt nee Black and Cassiopeia Black stepped through the flames and greeted their cousins, and in Cassiopeia's case, her sister.

"Please tell me this is a plan to make those bastards sorry they ever lifted a finger against a member of Family Black?" Lucretia asked.
"Of course it is. We've already got a list, but the two of you should look it over just in case you have any names you can add." Dorea said, then pushed the two lists over. "This is the list of folks that will follow whoever manages to bully them the best, and these are the ones we think might be following Voldemort for various reasons."

The two new arrivals took the lists and read them. "Hmmm, you did miss a name or three." Lucretia said. "There are a few members of cadet lines that might jump on Voldemort's bandwagon that you haven't listed." She put down a few names.

"Oh," Cedrella said after reading the names. "Yes, I had forgotten about them. But are you sure about this one?" She tapped one of the names. "I've never heard anything about their thoughts on blood purity."

"Oh, I'm quite sure." Lucretia said. "I overheard them ranting about muggleborns in the most appalling terms a few years back. I thought nothing of it at the time ... that sort of view is sadly fairly prevalent, but it has bearing now."

"Indeed. Anyone you know of that we missed, Cassiopeia?" Callidora asked.

Cassiopeia thought for a moment, then gave the list another read-through. "No, I've not heard anything definitive about anyone not already on one of these two lists. Oh, I've heard a few rumors, but nothing solid, and that's what we're looking for right now."

"So ... now we deal with this list." Lucretia waved the 'pressurable' list. "Many of the names on this list will fold just because it's a Black putting the pressure on. Either because they are newly married into the family and follow family dictates, or because of the family's reputation. That will make things much easier. I'll take the ones that won't respond to that pressure. The Prewitts are more tolerated in those circles. I'd have better luck getting in the door than any of the three of you would."

Lucretia indicated the three other married women. "And they'd ignore an unmarried woman, as such carries no power or influence."

Lucretia didn't roll her eyes - a Black never did something so uncouth - but the eye roll definitely came through in her tone. Anyone that thought an unmarried woman powerless, Black or not, was a complete idiot. Sadly, there were a lot of those around. There would come a time to challenge such views, but now wasn't it, not if they wanted to achieve their goals.

"As for the others ... " Lucretia eyed the second list. "The idea of striking at random is a good one. But we're going to have to figure out a way that cannot be connected to us."

"There are potions ... " Cassiopeia offered. "And ways to expose people to them, especially in crowded public situations, that couldn't be traced."

"Crowded situations like when Hogwarts gear goes on sale in August." Cedrella said, nodding in agreement. "Dorea, Callidora and I even have viable excuses to be in the Alley during that time, since all three of us either have children attending, or are sponsors for a child attending. In the rush and crush, no one would ever be able to pinpoint when they'd been exposed, never mind by whom. If they could identify what they'd been exposed to in the first place. Which, if we choose well, they won't."

"I dislike being forced to wait so long." Cedrella admitted. "But it is for the best. After so long, they will have become complacent. They will assume that nothing will be done to them."

"Revenge *is* a dish best served cold." Callidora said, repeating a Black maxim. "I for one intend for them to suffer for what they have done."
The five women shared a grimly determined look. It was most unwise to cross a Black ... and it was high time people were reminded of that truth.

1974 August

The last four months had been, not to put too fine a point on it, hell. Their menfolk had been waging war in the Wizengamot, throwing their combined power against both Dumbledore and Voldemort, even if the latter was 'in absentia' as it were. If it hadn't been for Arcturus throwing the weight of Family Black behind them, they may well have faltered a time or two. Fortunately, he had, and thus far the Alliance was managing to retain the high ground and keep their momentum going, which was no small feat in the current atmosphere of the Wizengamot. They were facing some stiff competition.

Dumbledore was a wily old bastard. He might not have the sort of political clout that came with an ancient, well-respected or feared family name like the Blacks, Potters, Weasleys and Longbottoms, but he made up for it in other ways. Primarily with a level of political acumen and oratorical skill that most Slytherins would envy. That got him followers from among other, stronger Families, and loyal followers to boot.

On the other side, Malfoy, the bastard, was every bit as dangerous as Dumbledore, though his methods differed greatly. Malfoy much preferred to grease palms or blackmail rather than weave clever word traps for people to fall into. The good news there was that people forced to follow out of fear could potentially be convinced to leave with the right bait. Unfortunately, Malfoy had the money to pull his method off with great success, even if he wasn't in the same league as the Blacks. Yet. Unfortunately, there were rumors in the family that Lucius Malfoy was pursuing Narcissa Black. Worse, from all appearances, Narcissa welcomed his attentions.

Worse even than that, Arcturus didn't really have a viable excuse to step in and forbid the match. Lucius was, by all appearances, an appropriate match for Narcissa. Pureblooded, influential, and while Cedrella was firmly of the opinion that he was a slimy bastard, she was woman enough to admit her perception of the boy was tainted by her distaste for the boy's father. Beyond that, Arcturus could really only step in if Narcissa appealed to him for some reason, as both her father and her grandfather were still alive and had more of a say in who she wed than Arcturus did unless it went against family rules or the like. That, she was unlikely to do if she approved of Lucius.

Cedrella supposed that there was no accounting for taste, sometimes. Personally, she'd never have been able to tolerate being married to that slimy git, or any of his get. Merlin alone knew what sort of things Abraxas had taught the boy.

Come to think of it, perhaps she should arrange to meet Narcissa somehow, and test the girl for potions residue. She wouldn't put such a thing past a Malfoy. Especially a Malfoy who had been thwarted in his pursuit of a Black bride in the past. Lucius himself, after all, could be wholly innocent of wrongdoing, but Abraxas might not. Hmm, or perhaps she should get Dorea to meet the girl? She was more closely related to Narcissa, being her great aunt. Yes, that might serve.

"Dorea dear." She murmured quietly as they made their way through Diagon Alley. "If you would be willing to find a way to meet with young Narcissa? That Malfoy boy has been sniffing around her. She seems amenable to it, but with Abraxas being the boy's father, I'd prefer to take no chances."

Dorea nodded. "I remember the tales you two told of him from your time in school. I'll try to get a visit with her. I assume you're wanting to check for interference?"

"Yes, both normal pressure being put on Cygnus, and potions or spells. Abraxas was relentless in his pursuit of a Black as a bride, and I wouldn't put it past him to employ nefarious means to get a Black
as a bride for his son." Cedrella said. "I'd check it out myself, but it might look a bit strange, me seeking the girl out."

They broke apart then, and Cedrella turned her attention back to Remus and the acquisition of his yearly school supplies. All three of the women were keeping an eye out for potential targets of their scheme, all three of them armed with a potion they'd prepared in the interim months.

They'd chosen a potion that destabilized a person's magical core as their weapon of choice. The best part was that the potion mimicked a certain magical disease which included core destabilization as a symptom. No one would be the wiser as to the true source of the problem, and the person would be taken out of action for a while since the illness was communicable and the person so affected would be isolated as a matter of course until the symptoms went away. That would result in them being sidelined for as much as two or three months. Then, the women could choose new 'victims' at the Yule break shopping rush.

The potion wasn't technically lethal, though if someone decided to be an idiot and ignore the destabilization of their core and attempt to perform magic, it could end up that way. They had been badly tempted to use something lethal right off the bat, but had eventually decided on this approach so that 'deaths by disease' didn't seemingly come out of nowhere. They would hit the targeted purebloods again come next August with this potion ... then hit the worst of the lot with a lethal potion at the Yule break, when apparently getting hit with a nasty, eventually lethal illness like Dragon Pox or the like wouldn't raise eyebrows.

And all it would take was a bit of potion on their skin. Just a few drops would be enough - something that was eminently manageable in the August and Yule crushes. Sure enough, Cedrella found opportunities to dose two of their targets in the crush. She later found out that Dorea and Callidora managed to hit three others between them.
It had been an incredibly long and very trying near-year since Charis' death.

Septimus had spent most of that time, alongside Harfang and Charlus and Arcturus, fighting tooth-and-nail with the Wizengamot. They, and the Neutrals, had the majority vote in there, but that didn't stop a lot of very bitter and vociferous arguments, or a boatload and a half of stalling tactics, bribery and blackmail attempts and a whole host of other problems. They'd eventually gotten their way, but they'd had to fight for it.

As of last month, all the changes in laws they'd wanted were in place. Casting, or bearing, Voldemort's symbol was now punishable by a minimum of six months in the minimum security wing of Azkaban. Of course, if you got caught doing more than that, the time (and where you got put to serve it) would change, but the punishments for doing things like casting Unforgivables were already on the books and widely known and had been for a long time.

Similarly, the Auror department was now awash in more money than it quite knew what to do with, and recruiting and training Aurors had begun as of the first of the month. None of the new recruits would be ready for at least six months even if their training was compressed, but it was better than nothing.

Alastor Moody had been chosen to lead the special anti-Death Eater task force - the Aurors, Hit Wizards and other specialists dedicated to bringing down Voldemort and his cronies. Septimus couldn't think of a better man for the job. The Moody's had made a family tradition of being Aurors, Hit Wizards and other levels of law enforcement for centuries. While the odd incompetent forced into a career they hated was inevitable in such a family ... so was the occasional family member who was truly gifted at the family's traditional occupation.

Alastor was most definitely in the latter category. While Septimus hadn't been an Auror for decades now, he still had contacts in that community, and got to hear quite a bit of gossip because of it. He'd heard nothing but praise for Alastor from any of his contacts, and Alastor had risen rapidly in the ranks, and not just because he was a Moody. Even in the supposedly 'peaceful' years between the Grindelwald war and now, Alastor had managed to track down and put away quite a few Dark Wizards.

Quite a number of folks experienced in ward construction had volunteered their time to beef up home security and figure out wards for places like Diagon Alley. Interestingly, people had quietly withdrawn their offers of help or their membership in the anti-Voldemort squad when it became known that checks for Dark Marks would be made both before being allowed to sign up and after one had signed up at unannounced intervals.

Septimus had been rather thoroughly amused when Augusta Longbottom and several of the other elder ladies of the pureblood community had begun to wear robes with short sleeves. Septimus hadn't expected much help from that quarter. Not because he thought them incompetent or unwilling to assist, but because they had come from a time when women just *didn't* get involved in such things. Ironically, they had found a way to help that they were comfortable with and that Septimus hadn't
even considered - by beginning a new fashion trend that would make it all but impossible to hide a Mark.

Their daughters would follow their mothers' lead, either because it was expected of them to do so, or because they realized the benefits of the short sleeves in the current struggle. Those daughters would ensure their children had such robes. From there, the men following suit was a foregone conclusion, either because their wives were holding the revocation of certain privileges over their heads, because they did not wish to be seen as more cowardly than a woman, or because they too realized the benefits of the short sleeves and wanted to help in some small way.

Septimus had been quick to follow their lead for the latter reason, of course. So had Harfang and Charlus. Arcturus had taken a week or so to catch on and adjust his wardrobe accordingly. After that, the rest of the Neutral faction following suit was a foregone conclusion. From there, the Light-siders would eventually pick it up, Dumbledore's approval or disapproval be damned. Or at least, so Septimus hoped.

Septimus had been deeply tempted to offer his services to the anti-Voldemort squad. They had made it clear they'd take anyone with usable skills, not just Aurors and Hit Wizards. Septimus had kept himself in fighting trim after leaving the Aurors. Other than his hair color starting to fade and wash out, there was no indication of the fact that Septimus was in his late sixties. He appeared to be mid to late thirties thanks to the extended lives witches and wizards enjoyed.

In the end though, he hadn't. It felt wrong on a fundamental level to wade into a fight of any description without Harfang and Charlus at his back. Even if that hadn't been a factor, he was going to be rather too busy with other things that would be taking up the lion's share of his time and attention. He would be wrangling with the Wizengamot in general, and with Dumbledore and Malfoy in particular, doing 'secret' raids to get muggles out of the line of fire or responding to attacks that managed to stay under the radar of the Aurors or the new squad.

Most of his attention was going to have to be on Dumbledore.

Malfoy, after all these years, Septimus knew how to handle. The bastard was at heart a coward and a bully, and that sort Septimus could handle in his sleep. Dumbledore, though ... that one bore watching. Septimus didn't know what he was up to, but Septimus didn't like what he was seeing.

You'd think that the champion for the Light would actually, you know, fight for the Light. And maybe that was what Dumbledore had convinced himself and his loyal followers that he was doing, but from the outside, it looked shady as hell.

Dumbledore had fought incredibly hard in the Wizengamot to keep the death sentence for murderers - regardless of the method used to end the victim's life - from being passed. He'd quibbled about raising wartime wards everywhere humanly possible. And he'd all but had a coronary about ensuring that the general populace both knew how to fight back and would be comfortable doing so if it became necessary. He didn't fight the anti-werewolf legislation someone tried to sneak in under the radar. Thankfully, the Alliance had caught that one, and kept it from getting through. Things were bad enough for werewolves as it stood. That piece would have made it worse.

Septimus supposed there might be legitimate reasons for all of those things - and more besides - but Dumbledore wasn't sharing his thought process with anyone. Cautious inquiries of the families firmly under Dumbledore's sway only ever produced variations on 'Dumbledore knows what he's doing' as answers. It made things look very, very, very fishy from an outsider's perspective.

It didn't really help that Dumbledore persisted in trying to shut the Alliance up by various means. He tried to meet with them in private at every Wizengamot meeting, and had asked to meet with them at
other times as well. While the 'young and intemperate' tag he'd tried to slap on Charlus before his
father's death wouldn't really work anymore to cut support out from under them in the Wizengamot,
he persisted in treating them like they were fresh out of school. Septimus figured it was an attempt to
make himself look aged and wise in comparison, with the hope they'd turn to their 'trusted elder' for
advice.

Yeah, that was never going to work. They had Arcturus and Gaius to turn to if they needed advice
when it came to Head of Family matters or dealing with the Wizengamot. Better, the Alliance
actually trusted those older gentlemen, compared to the distrust and suspicion they held Dumbledore
in. Nor did they have a lack of candidates if they found they needed an elder lady's perspective on
things, as while both Harfang and Charlus' fathers had died, their mothers still lived, as did Septimus'
mother, and Arcturus' wife.

Back on the 'good news' end of things, though, well, there was more. Septimus, Harfang and
Charlus had studiously kept their noses as far away from their wives and any retribution they might
have been planning for Charis' death as they could possibly manage. None of the three of them were
dumb enough to think their wives would sit back and let that go unpunished. At the same time, the
three men really didn't want to know what their wives were planning, for more than one reason.

That said, their chosen method of retribution had become fairly obvious to the three men when
several of the more extremist types in the pureblood families came down with illnesses they really
oughtn't to have. Not that their husbands were going to say a dang thing, either to them or to anyone
else. Septimus was of the general thought that the folks so targeted deserved a little pain and
suffering. They'd certainly dished enough out over the years.

Personally, he was waiting for Malfoy to fall prey to the women. Cedrella had never forgiven
Abraxas for his pursuit of her despite her, her father and even Arcturus telling making it clear his
advances were not welcomed. There was no way Cedrella wouldn't target Abraxas if an opportunity
to do so presented itself.

The biggest question - and problem - that remained was figuring out who in hell Voldemort was.
There had to be some sort of record somewhere. People didn't just appear out of the ether. His
familiarity with UK wizarding traditions said he'd been either raised somewhere in the UK, or with
UK traditions. The fact he was getting bits and pieces wrong, or not including them said he was
muggle-raised for some reason, not a pureblood, or *extremely* cunning. Other than that, there was
very little to go on. No one whom Septimus had talked to - and was willing to trust - had actually
seen the man. The whispers he'd heard from sources he didn't trust placed Voldemort as apparently
fairly young - Septimus hadn't heard any mention of white hair or other indications of old age. If that
was true, that put Voldemort somewhere under the age of seventy.

It wasn't a very helpful description to go on. Someone who may or may not be a UK native, who
could be any degree of blood status short of pure muggleborn, and was anywhere between seventeen
and seventy.

The first, best place to start, Septimus decided, was to eliminate the purebloods, if he could. They
were the fewest in number and would be the easiest to track because of it. Hmmm. He'd talk to
Charlus and Harfang, and through them their house elves. The little blighters might be able to tell
them more than any human knew, and if they didn't already know it, might be able to find it out.
Merlin knew most people paid them no mind. Even Septimus had been that way before the war and
Jinx saving Cedrella, Callidora, and half their company's support crew.

They wouldn't even necessarily have to risk their hides to do it, either. Even if Voldemort wasn't a
pureblood, most of his followers were. One of their house elves was bound to have seen or heard
something. And while house elves could be sworn not to tell outsiders things, not every pureblood would even think to prevent that sort of gossip. And Septimus knew from Jinx that house elves gossiped. A lot. While they doubtlessly had a lot to do - especially in the bigger families like the Blacks - their jobs didn't take up every second of every day. And apparently, there was only so much you could do to entertain yourself when you were a house elf.

All it'd take is one chatty house elf in the right place at the right time, and them not having orders to not tell outsiders things. Granted, that was a lot of ifs and maybes, but the odds against it weren't all that bad, actually. And some of the braver house elves might be willing to actively spy on the purebloods in question. Though that had its own risks. The odds of an eavesdropping elf being seen by wizards were nil, but any house elves that worked in the home that was being spied on *would* notice the stranger and would be very liable to do something about it, either on their own or by telling their master about the situation.

Still, worth talking to Charlus and Harfang about, and from there, the elves themselves. Jinx would volunteer in a flat second, Septimus was sure. The little guy was still, and probably always would be, protective in the extreme of the Marauders as a whole and of Charlus in particular. Anything he perceived as a threat *would* be dealt with, one way or another. And Jinx would very likely interpret the Death Eaters and Voldemort as a threat. At which point Septimus pitied them. A lot. Because while Jinx might not hex the crap out of the lot of them the way Septimus and the Marauders wanted to, he'd find a way to make their lives a living hell.
Cedrella waited beside Septimus at the station to greet the children.

It had been an incredibly busy and chaotic six months. No less than a dozen very low-ranked Death Eaters had been caught and prosecuted under the new laws in the last few months. Cedrella wasn't all that pleased that it was only the low-levels that had been caught, but she could understand why it was being done that way. The dedicated anti-Death Eater squad had needed time to get to know each other and work out the kinks in their battle plans. The best way to do that was to cut their teeth on fairly easy targets.

Things would step up considerably over the summer. For one, the newly trained Aurors would begin to be sworn in and put on rotation over the summer as they completed their compressed training. That would increase the coverage the Auror department had significantly, allowing them to join in on the fun. Plus the warmer weather would bring the Death Eaters out in greater numbers. The bitter cold winter months did tend to put a damper on anyone's enthusiasm for running about causing mayhem. They'd already begun to see an upswing in activity in the last month or so due to that factor.

They'd had no joy figuring out who Voldemort was. While the house elves had been willing to help, that only went so far. They recognized people by their magical cores - which meant they had to have encountered that person before. While there were apparently quite a few house elves who'd been within 'detecting' distance of Voldemort, none of them had ever heard any other name used for him.

While they'd checked with the Hogwarts elves, they hadn't gotten anything there either. The primary problem from that end being that any one Hogwarts house elf encountered literally thousands of witches and wizards in their lifetime of service at the school, and remembering any one person out of that mass was difficult unless they did something rather memorable, or had some unique characteristic. Family elves had it easier when it came to identifying people because they rarely dealt with more than about twenty people regularly, and briefly encountered another twenty or so.

Speaking of Hogwarts - from the letters they'd gotten from the children, the school was nigh on to a war zone. The rivalry between Gryffindor and Slytherin had gotten more severe than ever, to the point where wands were frequently drawn - and used - whenever members of those two Houses encountered each other in the corridors. Worse, attacks - perpetrated by both sides of that conflict - were being dismissed as 'pranks'.

The kids, under the aegis of the Marauders, were doing what they could to punish the guilty on both sides of the fight, but they seemed to be the only ones doing so. Slughorn was far more interested in currying favor than with discipline, and while McGonagall was apparently quick to remove points and assign detention when something was brought to her attention, she had a tendency to punish the Slytherin without first ascertaining whether or not they were actually at fault. Worse, the kids had heard rumors that if a Gryffindor was punished by a teacher, the punishment would frequently be lessened. Not by McGonagall, but by Dumbledore.

Unfortunately, there was no real proof of that, only unproveable rumors. That seemed to be a
specialty of Dumbledore's ... to not leave any real evidence of potentially shady doings behind. It aggravated the elder Marauders and their wives no end.

They had so many suspicions regarding Dumbledore. Like Septimus thinking that maybe Fawkes was not with Dumbledore of his own free will. But how in the name of everything did they find that out for sure? None of them even knew for sure how a phoenix became a familiar, or ended up hanging out with a human. Oh, there were rumors that they could be forced into someone's company if you found their ashes and kept them with you, but really, that was just a rumor. There was no actual evidence for it being true.

Virtually every other suspicion they had suffered from the same sort of problem. Things Dumbledore did looked fishy as all hell, but finding out if they actually were or not was virtually impossible. It was enough to drive them all mad.

At least the kids were out of the school, and its increasingly poisonous atmosphere, for a few months. They planned on spending much of the summer either at Potter Castle or Longbottom Manor, both of which had the room necessary to host their rather large company in toto.

With the war heating up, Septimus, Harfang, and Charlus were more adamant than ever that the kids be taught to defend themselves. It helped that they were getting to an age where they could learn heavier-duty spells now, too. So much of the summer would be taken up with that, though they did still plan to have a good bit of fun as well.

Cedrella knew that Septimus was still working on trying to become an Animagus, as was Harfang. Their progress seemed to be pretty slow. It was probably more an effect of their ages and being somewhat set in their ways, rather than any lack of power to achieve the accomplishment. Cedrella herself had joined in the meditation sessions, mostly out of curiosity as to what she could become, if she could in fact become something. Both Callidora and Dorea had opted not to try for it. In Dorea's case, mostly out of sympathy to Charlus, who couldn't attempt the transformation for fear of his old war injury screwing up an attempt at transformation, or making being whatever animal he could become useless if the transformation itself didn't get messed up.

Cedrella did entertain herself with her private bets as to what Septimus might become. Her favorite choices were a lion - more for his violently protective streak than for the Gryffindor associations. Her other favorite choice was a wolf, again because of the protective streak, and in their case, the 'cooperative hunting/raising kids' thing. Because male lions mostly didn't do cooperative hunting or raising the kids. They left that to the females for the most part. Male wolves were far more involved in the day-to-day life of their pack.

The train arrived and the kids all piled out. It took a few moments for the confusion to die down enough for individuals to be spotted in the mass. While some of the kids were acting just shifty enough to activate Cedrella's 'kids up to something' detector, the first she really knew of trouble was when a scowling, fuming, clench-fisted Sirius found them.

"Septimus! Cedrella! Thank goodness. You need to come on the train. Someone hexed Severus and Lily pretty bad. We've done what we could but there were no adults on board and we didn't know who to trust of the older kids."

Septimus growled angrily and tore towards the train. Cedrella hesitated just long enough to send a patronus message to the rest of their group, who had spread out along the train platform so as to keep an eye on any trouble among the students. Then she too raced towards the train.

They found Severus on the floor of one of the girls' bathrooms, covered in blood. James, Regulus, and Remus were outside the bathroom. Lily, while bleeding, was at least still on her feet and was
hovering over Severus, caught between tears and sheer, undiluted rage.

"One of the older Slytherin girls decided to make an example of me." Lily said when Septimus and Cedrella piled into the bathroom.

She didn't need to clarify why the Slytherin would want to make an example of Lily. Cedrella privately fumed even as she and Septimus began throwing spells around, checking just how bad the damage was and slowing or stopping what bleeding they safely could without exacerbating spell effects.

"I tried to fight her off, but she was a seventh year." Lily continued.

A fourth year, even a well-trained one, wouldn't have much of a chance against a seventh year. Especially if the seventh year was from a Death Eater family or a Dark supporter family and therefore knew a lot of Dark Arts and were willing to use them.

"Severus came looking for me because I was taking so long, and ... " Lily swallowed hard, visibly fighting tears. "Between us, we almost had her. Then some of her friends showed up."

"That's when we came on the run." James said. "We could hear all hell breaking loose. It took us a while to take them down. They're in the baggage car." He all but snarled the last. "Severus got the worst of it. None of the prefects showed up to help, either. Though they might have been in a meeting."

Well, that would make sense - attacking when the only 'authority', however marginal that might be, was otherwise engaged. And if anything, James had understated how bad Severus had gotten it. The poor boy was covered with cuts, bruises, and odd growths. Fortunately, it didn't look like any of the really nasty curses had been thrown - the seventh years had probably been cautious of possible monitoring on the train - but the damage they'd managed to do was bad enough.

Right about then, Harfang, Callidora, Dorea and Charlus arrived. Cedrella nodded to them before turning her attention back to the kids.

"You were wise to only do what you could, and not attempt to reverse this mess yourselves." Cedrella said. "Now, let's get him to St. Mungo's and get him fixed up."

"I'll just go check the baggage car." Harfang said.

Cedrella blinked. Harfang was by far the gentlest of the three elder men. She'd never heard him sound so venomous. Not that she blamed him a bit for the reaction of course, it was just a bit jarring and alarming to hear a normally peaceable man sounding like he wanted to hex someone into flinders.

"No, old friend. As much as I don't blame you, you need to go with Severus. You're his guardian." Septimus said, clapping a sympathetic hand on Harfang's shoulder. "We'll contact the Evanses as soon as we can so Lily can have her parents with her."

Harfang looked briefly mutinous, torn between the desire to help Severus and hex his attackers. Then he relented. Probably because he knew Septimus and Charlus would deal with the offenders - and if they didn't, Cedrella, Callidora and Dorea most certainly would.

Septimus and Cedrella worked together to maneuver Severus out of the bathroom and into the corridor where there was a bit more room without exacerbating his injuries. From there, Septimus quickly created a portkey, and Harfang disappeared with Severus and Lily to St. Mungo's. Once he'd taken off, Charlus called Jinx.
"Jinx, I need you to go to the Evanses, and tell them they're needed at St. Mungos." Charlus told him when Jinx popped in. "Tell them Lily is not badly hurt, but she is very upset. I'll meet them outside the building so they can get in." Charlus told him. Jinx nodded and popped away.

That left the rest of them to go ... interview ... the suspects.

James led the way, as he knew where the perpetrators had been put. When they got there, James pulled his wand and started fingering it like he wanted to hex them all over again.

"Easy, son. They'll get what's coming to them, one way or another." Charlus said.

The three were trussed up to a fare-thee-well, and everyone portkeyed to St. Mungo's. Callidora was holding court in the arrival room when they arrived, filling in three Aurors that had been called in.

"Here are the perpetrators." Septimus growled. "Our children were forced to subdue them themselves." He glowered at the four seventh year Slytherins. "Other than an incarcerous to ensure they wouldn't escape easily, no one has cast a spell on them since they were knocked out, to my knowledge. I cannot speak for the period of time between the attack and when I first laid eyes on them."

"We didn't touch them." James growled. "Not for lack of wanting to, I can tell you. We just had bigger concerns on our minds."

The Aurors checked everyone's wands. That caused more than a few concerned looks as the Slytherins' wands showed at least one borderline Dark spell each. The Aurors interviewed each of the kids separately. By the time that was done, the Evanses had arrived. Or well, the parents at any rate. Lily's sister Petunia was conspicuous by her absence. Not that Cedrella had expected anything else. They'd all become aware of the rift between the sisters over the last few years. Unfortunately there was nothing they could really do about it.

Two of the Aurors remained at the hospital to stand guard over the accused Slytherins while the third went to report in on the incident. The four teens would be charged and facing trial by the end of the day, in all likelihood. If they weren't, Cedrella would find out why in an all-fired hurry.
The Beginning of the End

1975 June

Severus got patched together quickly enough, but the Healers insisted on him sleeping off the trauma under observation, just to be safe. It meant that no one could question him until the next morning. Fortunately for everyone's well being, the Slytherin attackers were medically cleared within an hour of arrival and were remanded to the Aurors, to be held overnight in the Ministry holding cells. Lily had been more fortunate, and was both healed and cleared to leave the hospital before the end of visiting hours. Not that she'd gone anywhere.

Septimus was not surprised in the least when Harfang and Callidora planted themselves on either side of Severus' bed and refused to be moved, despite the Healers' best attempts to get them to go home after visiting hours were over. Lily alternated between sitting on the foot of Severus' bed and on a chair next to her mother, who was sitting next to Lily's father against the wall nearest Severus' bed. The Evanses had to resort to promising to return first thing in the morning to get Lily to leave, and even then she left under heavy protest.

Septimus, Cedrella, Charlus and Dorea all returned first thing the next morning as well. Severus woke about fifteen minutes after they arrived. The relief and gratitude in his eyes when he saw his bed quite literally surrounded by 'family' made Severus want to go hex Tobias all over again.

The Aurors arrived at the start of visiting hours, about an hour or so after Severus woke up. Severus told them his account of events, and they headed off. One of them, an old workmate of the elder Marauders, pulled Septimus aside and warned him that the kids' parents were throwing a fuss, and that Dumbledore had already begun to both advocate for leniency, and insist that any punishment should be limited to school punishments since the attack had taken place on school property.

Septimus mentally growled at that, but thanked his old coworker and headed back to Severus' room.

"Well, the nurses have been at us to thin the herd a little, but we didn't want to until you'd woken up, Severus. I think we ought to humor them now." He grinned at an abruptly bristling Lily. "Don't worry, I have no intentions of trying to drag you out of here." He told her. "But Charlus, Dorea, Cedrella and I really ought to go."

Charlus and their wives, not being dummies, realized something was up, and were willing enough to head out after promising to stop by later in the day. Once everyone was well away from Severus' room, Septimus turned to the other three.

"We have a problem. Both the parents an Dumbledore are throwing tantrums about the kids being prosecuted." Septimus told them, then repeated what he'd been told.

"Like hell." Charlus said, looking thunderous. "I'll start stirring up the folks as will listen to me."

"And we shall stir up the rest." Cedrella said, a look in her eyes that promised a world and a half of pain.

"I'll try to stall and distract Dumbledore." Septimus said. "Slow down his attempts to interfere."
The four of them split up, with both Septimus and Charlus heading for the Ministry. Their wives headed ... well, Septimus was almost afraid to know where they were going and what they intended to do. If the look Charlus shot the departing women was anything to go by, he was of the same mind.

Once they were at the Ministry, the two men split off, Charlus to go shake trees where the Lords were concerned, while Septimus went on a hunt for Dumbledore. It didn't take him all that long to find him, ensconced with several of his more zealous followers.

"Lord Dumbledore, a word." Septimus said, cutting across the chatter going around the little group. His tone made it clear this was not a supplication. Septimus was not begging for a moment of Dumbledore's time. He was commanding Dumbledore's attention. From the outraged expressions of Dumbledore's followers, they caught the implications.

Dumbledore, on the other hand, seemed utterly oblivious. Not that Septimus believed that for a second. Dumbledore was entirely too canny a player to miss something as obvious as the tone of Septimus' voice, especially given he wasn't exactly trying to be subtle.

"Septimus, my dear boy ... " Dumbledore started.

"Lord Weasley, if you please, Lord Dumbledore." Septimus snapped, unwilling to permit Dumbledore the familiarity.

Dumbledore had a bad habit of doing that sort of thing - presuming to call people by their first name, or dropping honorifics and sticking with just 'Mr.' or 'Mrs.' or the like. It was a sneaky-ass tactic, as that level of familiarity had, until the ending of the Children's Ball (and much of the pomp, ceremony, and tradition that had gone with it at the end of that era), been reserved for blood family, close friends and most trusted confidants.

Septimus was willing to bet that was why Dumbledore did it. For most folks, calling someone by their first name still had that connotation. It probably would for a good century or more to come, until those who had grown up with it had gone on to their final rest, leaving behind the generations that hadn't grown up with it.

"Lord Weasley, of course. My apologies." Dumbledore said, in the sort of tone an adult used to humor a child.

Septimus fought down the desire to either say something about his tone or glare at the old man. He knew he'd end up seeming like a petty child if he did, which was probably what Dumbledore wanted. "I would like to know what it is you're playing at." He said. "In regards to those four *adults* who hexed two newly-graduated fourth years so badly a stay at St. Mungo's was required."

Dumbledore smiled benignly at him. "I'm quite sure ... " He started.

"Do you want the Healer's records? The Auror's reports? Veritaserum? The kids are willing for any and all of it." Septimus said.

They hadn't actually volunteered such things, of course, but Septimus knew both of them would very likely be willing. Or well, they both would be after Lily got done with Severus. She could talk him around to nearly anything. It'd worry Septimus if Lily wasn't at heart a good, gentle person who only wanted the best for her friend. She was also the only one Severus allowed that sort of influence on himself and his behavior. Oh, he listened to and obeyed Harfang and Callidora, but that was a different, as they acted as his parents. Everyone else might as well bang their head against a wall as try to get Severus to do something he didn't want to do - they'd get further that way.
"The facts, Lord Dumbledore." Septimus said. "Are that a fully trained adult saw fit to magically
attack a fifteen year old girl because she was a so-called 'jumped-up mudblood that needed to learn
her place'. That is, incidentally, Lord Dumbledore, a direct, verbatim quote from the first attacker, as
per the Auror report. When the girl's fifteen year old friend went looking for her due to her extended
absence and came to her defense, he was hexed so badly by the adult and three adult reinforcements
that arrived that he could have *died* on your precious train if Charlus' son and Abraxas' grandson
hadn't had some knowledge of healing spells. He was required to stay at St. Mungo's overnight. The
girl, by some miracle, managed to escape with somewhat less serious injuries but even she required
several hours of Healer attention. If you think that detentions and loss of points is going to be
sufficient punishment for so grievous an attack, you are badly mistaken."

Dumbledore didn't look any too happy. But neither did his followers. "What's this?" One of them
said. "We were told it was a bunch of children whose pranks got out of hand."

Septimus gave Dumbledore a fulminating glare. "It was nothing of the sort, Lord Doge, I promise
you. Young Lily Evans is a very bright young witch who happens to be a Muggleborn. She missed
out on Ravenclaw by a whisker, I'm willing to bet. Certain families find the fact that she and her
childhood friend Severus Snape, who happens to be a halfblood, have the best marks in Hogwarts
offensive. They seem to be of the mistaken belief that those of ... impure blood ... should not dare to
show up their betters. Which is ridiculous codswallop at best and thoroughly insulting rhetoric at
worst. Blood purity means nothing. Anyone with any wit knows that."

Dumbledore looked like he wanted to argue, but realized that most of the possible arguments he
could make would look very stupid or suspicious just now. In a couple days? He could doubtlessly
carry on as usual and convince everyone he had the right of it. But here and now, with Septimus
right there to contradict him and willing to provide incontrovertible proof of his claims, arguing was a
very bad idea. At least along some lines. Dumbledore, though, wasn't one to give up entirely.

"Are you so willing to condemn four promising young people for a moment of intemperance?" Dumbledore asked.

"When they're willing to hex someone badly enough to result in eventual death - and apparently
planned it well enough to wait until the prefects were all in a meeting on the train? Yes. That speaks
to a sort of mentality that I learned in the Aurors only ever gets worse. If someone is willing to
contemplate cold-blooded murder once, regardless of the method used, they're liable to again."

Septimus eyed Dumbledore. "That this bunch was comfortable taking action in such a public venue
is even more troubling. It makes me wonder just what sort of school you're running, Dumbledore,
that they would think they could get away with such a heinous act under your putative control."
Then he snorted. "Actually, I take that back. It doesn't make me wonder. I already know. I've heard
quite a lot from children in several Houses as to the situation in Hogwarts. It is a report I find less
than comforting, I assure you. I did not think it was quite the done thing for open war to be possible
in the halls - yet I have heard, nearly every month for the last several years, how spells are flying in
the halls between two or more parties, and nothing is done."

"I assure you ... " Dumbledore started, all but literally bristling at Septimus' accusations.

Septimus didn't give him a chance to get going. "The children aren't stupid, Lord Dumbledore. They
might not be able to track detentions, but they do track the points given and taken. They've shown
me the results. There is never any indications, points-wise, that these incidents have occurred. Nor
were the children involved seen to be missing from the school, indicating they weren't suspended for
their behavior. Now, maybe you have decided to issue only detentions for such incidents, and the
children missed the indications of those punishments, but if so, it clearly isn't working and more
stringent punishments are clearly required before someone actually does commit murder."

Then, he cocked his head slightly to one side. "Unless, of course, you ... condone ... such behavior?"
Then he shook his head. "No ... I don't think that's what this is." Well, yes he did, but actually
admitting to it wasn't the brightest idea. "I think, rather, what's going on here is a somewhat
misguided attempt to rescue poorly-raised children from unfortunate paths."

"What you seem to have failed to realize, in your attempts to rescue these children, Lord
Dumbledore." Septimus said. "Is that you cannot expect a child to correct improper behavior if you
do not first, indicate that such behavior is, in fact, improper, and second - provide the children with
an example of the behavior desired. And third, provide a deterrent that makes the improper behavior
less rewarding than the desired behavior."

Septimus smiled at Dumbledore. "As you have not raised children of your own, the mistake is
understandable. You at least have some of proper method down - you just need to buckle down and
make sure that punishment for undesirable behavior is meted out sufficient to make that behavior less
pleasant to indulge in."

Septimus got unexpected help from Lord Doge. "Aye, Lord Weasley has the right of it, Headmaster.
If you want kids to grow up proper, you have to show 'em the way of it. They're not going to learn it
from nowhere. And y'gotta take 'em to task when they muck up. They'll never learn the difference
between right'n wrong if doing 'wrong' don't carry a penalty."

Septimus was none too sure that Dumbledore was actually listening, much less intending to take
them up on their advice. That said, the man made it at least *look* like he was.

Dumbledore sighed sadly. "I suppose you may be right, gentlemen. I fear I have much to consider. If
you'll excuse me."

He nodded slightly to them and took his leave, heading, incredibly enough, for the elevator.
Septimus didn't know if he was actually leaving, and couldn't reasonably follow, but he'd at least
derailed Dumbledore's head of steam. That was good enough for him.

"So it was all true?" Doge asked him.

"The attack and such? Yes. Cedrella and I are acting as the Lupin boy's sponsor. His parents are
poor enough to make previous generations of Weasleys look well-off. And Harfang is the Snape
boy's guardian. They're still at St. Mungo's with him, though the boy is due to be released before
dinner, I believe. Between them, Charlus' boy and their friends, we're kept well informed of the
goings on in Hogwarts."

Doge frowned. "Hmm. I'll have to have a word with a few folks. Dumbledore'd have it that
Hogwarts has never been better."

Septimus decided to call it a really good day when he got one of Dumbledore's more ardent
supporters questioning him, however temporary that questioning might eventually turn out to be.

He never did realize that the attack on Severus and the events immediately thereafter marked the
beginning of the turning of the tide in the affairs of the UK Magical world. But then again, no one
could have anticipated the fallout, however long some of it may have been in coming.
1975 July - December

Cedrella did her best to not be alarmed by the way the children spent most of the summer in close conversations that went silent whenever an adult came near. Whatever they were up to, it boded ill for their targets.

But for all it was alarming, it was also a blast from the past. She well-remembered her own school days, and how often Charlus, Harfang, and Septimus had been in similar conferences, usually with one or more of the Black Family girls in attendance. She had a feeling the children were doing exactly what the Elder Marauders had been doing in such conferences - with suitable variations, of course.

To everyone's surprise, in the last weeks of August, both James and Sirius managed to begin the process of actually transforming into their animagus forms. No one had been at all surprised that Sirius had an immense dog as his form. Cedrella considered it quite apropos that the dog was black, and more than slightly resembled the legendary Grim.

What had been a surprise was the fact that James' form was that of a large black stallion. Cedrella, along with everyone else, had been expecting something else. A wolf had been Cedrella's guess, and she knew that Septimus had been of a similar mind. James, Sirius, and Remus were so close that the two boys' animagus forms being similar just made sense.

But when Cedrella sat back and thought about it, she realized it fit shockingly well. In general, horses were symbols for power, grace, beauty, nobility, strength and freedom. All attributes James had to one extent or another. But it was the rest that made it really interesting. In the UK and Europe, horses were associated with war, and through war with power, victory, courage and honor. Again, either attributes James possessed or would need, considering the situation.

The fact that he was a black horse of a size to have been a warhorse in ages past just strengthened the connections to war, and would serve as an omen to the superstitious, as black horses were associated with death. Much as Grims were, and with which Sirius' form could be easily confused. Cedrella hadn't seen them in their forms yet of course, and wouldn't until at least Christmas, given they'd just started the transformation part of the process. They had, however, found pictures that resembled their forms. Sirius had picked out an Irish Wolfhound, and James had, after double checking sizes, pointed out a Friesian.

Lily, while not yet at the stage to begin working on transforming, had at least seen her form as well. It was, appropriately, a bear. Cedrella'd had that one pegged from the moment animagi had been mentioned to the children. Severus was the only one who had never mentioned seeing an animal form. Cedrella was completely convinced that he had, but was just keeping his mouth shut for reasons of his own. Cedrella had had a lot of fun trying to figure out what he might become. Unlike with the other children, there were any number of potential choices that would be good fits, one way or another. Coyote, fox, crow or owl for their association with intelligence, and in the cases of coyotes, foxes, and crows trickery and cunning. A snake of some description would also be apt for rather obvious reasons. Despite their association with Hufflepuff, a badger was also a contender, as they had associations with determination, tenacity, and protectiveness.
Part of the problem with Severus, at least where Cedrella was concerned, was that Severus was very private by nature and didn't generally display his thoughts and emotions for people to see. She was quite sure that Harfang and Callidora knew him at least a bit better than anyone else, if only by virtue of his living with them. Everyone else was left to guess.

The kids and their work towards the animagus transformation had been the summer's bright spot. The rest of the summer was not nearly so congenial.

Dumbledore had at least tried to lobby for leniency in the case of Lily and Severus' attackers, but he got overridden. With help from an unexpected source, to boot. Septimus had told Cedrella about Lord Doge's reaction to Septimus' explanation of what was going on in Hogwarts. It quickly became clear that Doge had had a word with at least a few other folks who had kids in Hogwarts. Evidently, he hadn't much liked what he'd heard, because he'd begun to make a point of requesting, rather pointedly, for Dumbledore to clarify his position, refusing to let Dumbledore engage in his usual tactic of meaningless doubletalk and rhetoric.

While it wasn't quite siding with their Alliance, it had tripped Dumbledore up more than once over the summer, in the hearing of other people. People who the Potters, Weasleys, and Longbottoms had then been able to try to convince that Dumbledore was not the beneficent, wise old man he liked to portray himself as with the evidence they'd gathered over the years.

It hadn't been enough to get any of them to walk away from Dumbledore - but more than one had joined Doge in asking pointed, uncomfortable questions and not accepting vague doublespeak as answers. The Alliance was willing to count that as a victory. They knew they would only manage to roust Dumbledore using baby steps.

On the other side of the conflict, Voldemort and his minions were ... well, they were basically throwing tantrums is what it amounted to. Which was rather disconcerting. They were still raiding - perhaps even more than before the wartime measures had become law. Given the results, Cedrella couldn't quite understand the logic Voldemort was operating under.

Every raid resulted in injured Death Eaters at best, and frequently dead or captured ones. Ten Death Eaters had already been chucked through the Veil, having been convicted of casting Unforgivables in eight cases, and of cold-blooded murder without the use of an Unforgivable in the other two. Another twenty were serving hard time for rape, torture, terrorist activities and sedition.

If things kept up at this rate, Voldemort would run out of followers within a year or two. Cedrella couldn't begin to understand why Voldemort was doing it. It made no sense. But then again, that could be the answer. That *he* wasn't making sense. That he was crazy in the worst sort of way.

Well, the sooner they put the poor bastard out of his misery, the better if that was the case. Actually, whether or not that was the case. He needed to go. Sooner rather than later.

Of course, Dumbledore had tried to intervene with the trials for the Death Eaters too, again counseling leniency. Cedrella couldn't figure out *his* angle, either. Yes, people who screwed up deserved second chances. She wasn't even going to argue with that. But they did not deserve those second chances at the cost of justice for their victims, nor at the potential cost of future victims. And some people were quite simply beyond any possibility of redemption and deserved no such consideration.

Yet Dumbledore seemed to think that anyone and everyone could be sweet-talked to the side of the 'good guys'. Just by letting them off lightly for, as Dumbledore liked to put it, 'making an ill-considered decision out of ignorance'. As with the situation at Hogwarts, he seemed to make no provision for actually guiding people to the 'right path', or making it so that choosing the 'wrong' path
was exceedingly unpleasant.

At least he was consistent, which was more than could be said for Voldemort.

It wasn't until Hogwarts letters went out again that Dumbledore cottoned on to the fact that someone, somewhere, was doing something to protect the Death Eaters' most popular targets thus far: The Muggleborns and their families. And he figured it out because five or six owls couldn't find the recipients of their letters. Which led to an investigation of what the heck had happened, because all of the missing children had attended Hogwarts in years previous.

Dumbledore threw quite the fit when he couldn't find them either. He spent the better part of a week looking for them and sending owls every which way with copies of the Hogwarts letter. While he was haring around the country, the Hogwarts elves snuck the Alliance copies of the letters from some of the owls, so that the children could respond. Which had resulted in another tantrum from Dumbledore when they refused to reveal their whereabouts.

Because they couldn't. Cedrela was just glad the homes they were staying at were under Fidelius, and the addresses couldn't be forced out of the children by any means Dumbledore might come up with. She wouldn't put it past him to try. They already had plans in place to make sure none of the kids' things had tracking charms or the like when they came back over the holidays any for the summer.

She, Dorea, and Callidora all escorted the Muggleborn families to get their children's Hogwarts gear, taking them in multiple small groups so that the three women wouldn't get overwhelmed trying to protect ten to fifteen people (or more) if trouble started up in the Alley. Keeping each group to one parent and the Hogwarts child, and only having three families at a time meant they only had to keep an eye on six people at a time.

They still managed to 'catch' a few known troublemakers in their net, despite escorting the Muggleborns and their parents. Much to Cedrella's pleasure, the catch had included Abraxas. Knowing he was going to suffer for at least a week and probably as long as a month or two put her in a very, very good mood.

Anything that humiliated that white-haired, arrogant ponce was great news for Cedrella.

The months between the start of Hogwarts and Yule were almost depressingly quiet. Despite the raids and wrangling in the Wizengamot. Cedrella was going to *miss* having kids underfoot when the kids all got old enough to live in their own homes and weren't yet old enough to be parents themselves. It was bad enough during the school year as it was.

Cedrella was rather ... amused and disconcerted ... when Abraxas' illness lingered. By all rights, the cantankerous old bastard should have gone to a Healer to be treated for Dragon Pox, which would have alleviated the symptoms of the potion he'd been hit with even if he wasn't actually suffering from Dragon Pox. But the idiot seemed to have decided that getting sick and Healers were for lesser beings than a Malfoy, and was ignoring his poor health.

With, of course, the net result that he was making himself worse by insisting on carrying on as usual. If he kept this up, the idiot would end up killing himself. Not that it grieved Cedrella to think about that possibility, but she would have preferred if the idiot didn't die in quite so ignominious a fashion.

Come Yule, the Alliance had to intervene at Hogwarts, again. This time because Dumbledore refused to allow the muggleborn children that had been rescued by the Alliance - not that Dumbledore knew they were the source of the childrens' rescue, but he probably suspected - on the grounds of them not apparently having a place to stay that *he* could certify as safe.
She, Septimus, and the rest of the Alliance had a thing or three to say about that. Primarily that if those children weren't safe because Dumbledore couldn't certify their homes as such, then clearly, he had inspected the homes of all the other children. Because singling out those six was otherwise inappropriate in the extreme.

It had taken more than a little wrangling, but eventually Dumbledore caved. The Alliance then ensured the kids got on the train, and were met at the other end by Arcturus. Arcturus took them to his private home and made sure they weren't sporting tracking charms or the like. Which every last one of them was. Actually, multiple such charms. One each on the child themself, one on their trunk, and for those that had one, on their pet.

Arcturus had thrown a rather epic fit. He'd stormed to Hogwarts and proceeded to give Dumbledore quite a bollocking for his interference and illegal actions. Putting tracking charms on things or people that didn't belong to you was, after all, heavily frowned upon or outright illegal unless they were in imminent danger, and/or were acting as bait for the Aurors, in which case *Aurors* could place a tracking charms on a person or item not belonging to them. Again, Dumbledore had been forced into admitting malfeasance, however reluctantly and with many attempted caveats that Arcturus had not been in any mood to let him get away with.

Arcturus had even let them see the memory of the whole thing in the Black Family pensieve. Cedrella wasn't sure who ended up laughing harder of the three men. Even she, her sister and her cousin had been laughing, if with somewhat more restraint than their husbands managed.

Cedrella had paid close attention to the whole thing. While she had learned quite a bit from Arcturus' father right alongside Arcturus himself, she had not learned everything that Arcturus' father had had to impart. That had had more to do with the previous Head's prejudices than her own reluctance.

Oh, he'd been more than happy to use Cedrella's sex against the other Heads, and have her eavesdrop on folks who thought she had no understanding of politics, but that had been about as far as his acceptance had gone. He'd not seen the need to teach Cedrella all the tricks a Head needed to know, because she was a woman and would have no need of such knowledge.

While Arcturus and Septimus would be able to pull things she could not by virtue of bearing the ring of the Head of House, and the additional power and authority that came with it, she could still pick up other tricks whenever the opportunity arose, and this had been a golden one.
The Deep Breath

_(_)(_)_

December 1976

Abraxas died in early January of 1976. Cedrella hadn't quite known what to do with that. She'd noticed his health had been going downhill more than could be accounted for with their potion, but she'd thought that he would eventually seek the aid of a Healer. Evidently, the man's delusions had extended further than she'd suspected.

His heir, Lucius, was going to be interesting. It had become clear over the last year that while the apple hadn't fallen far from the tree, Lucius had sufficient variations on Abraxas' theme to be far more of a thorn in the Alliance's side than his father ever was. Lucius was in most ways an ideal Slytherin. Cunning, ambitious, and ruthless. He was also nearly as clever with words as Dumbledore. Worse, Lucius was now making plans to marry Narcissa as soon as the year mourning period was over. Dorea had managed to meet with the girl, and she was not suffering under blackmail, potions or spells. She genuinely was in love with Lucius.

Cedrella supposed there was no accounting for taste. That said, Dorea had layered Narcissa with as many protections as she could manage, both with and without Narcissa's knowledge and approval. If Lucius ever hurt her, or tried to potion her against her will, they'd know post haste, and well ... at that point, Lucius' days would be numbered.

Though it was through her that they had learned a vital piece of information. In response to the new fashion trend of short sleeves combined with the penalties for bearing the Dark Mark, Voldemort had actually begun to remove the Marks on his already Marked followers. He was immediately re-marking them, but putting the new Marks somewhere that would remain unseen unless the person bearing it was either naked or wearing truly scandalous clothing.

Lucius had, apparently, undergone that process just days after Abraxas' death, due to his new high-profile place in the Wizengamot. Unfortunately, there was nothing they could *legally* do with the information. It wasn't like they had a chance in hell of passing a law allowing for strip-searches in an effort to find Dark Marks. That said, there was quite a bit they could do unofficially, and both their husbands and the Ladies Black made plans to ensure that, in future, any Death Eaters they left behind at the various raids would have the newly-hidden Marks exposed to the world.

As for Lucius, the first time he did something they could kill him for, they'd take no mercy. Unfortunately, either Lucius or Voldemort were canny characters. Lucius had either never been required to perform Dark Arts spells or had had the wit to 'clear' his wand before entering the Ministry, as Dark Arts spells would show up in the wand check that was a requirement to enter the Ministry building.

Lucius was one of several people who, at least among the Marauders, had a 'kill if possible' tag on them. Not every Death Eater did - just those that were the most dangerous, whether due to combat skills or other factors. They were the ones most likely to either buy their way out of Azkaban or cut an unholy swathe through those that stood against them.

Other than Lucius' ascension to Head of House and a gradually increasing number of attacks on Muggles, Muggleborns and Halfbloods, the first half of the year had been quiet. The only other
matter of note had been the kids completing their OWLS. None of them had gotten less than an EE on any of the tests. Now though, looking back on the last half of their OWL year, Cedrella realized they had been rather ominously silent and subdued. And in retrospect, she understood why.

It was one thing to play 'pranks', especially under the anonymous aegis of the Marauders. Even if they got caught, anything that could be dismissed or explained away as a 'prank' would at worst earn them detentions and lost points. Anything too blatant or nasty though, and they'd run the risk of getting expelled, which, without having passed their OWLs, would result in snapped wands and, at least in Lily, Severus, and Remus' cases, bound magic and obliviation. There wouldn't even have been anything the elder Marauders could have done to spare them that fate.

But, having passed their OWLS, their wands would not now ever be snapped, regardless of what law they broke, nor would their magic be bound and themselves obliviated of all knowledge of magic's existence. That didn't mean, of course, that they would not face dire consequences if they went too far or were caught, but at least they wouldn't lose their magic. Protected from that fate ... well. Let it be said that the younger Marauders were now playing for keeps in Hogwarts.

Especially Severus.

Cedrella had mostly forgotten that James and Sirius had had to talk Severus out of Sorting Slytherin. He was so quiet, so studious, it was easy to think he'd always been destined for Ravenclaw. But these last few months, she had been reminded rather sharply that Severus was, at his heart, as Slytherin as they came.

Worse, Severus had few people he cared about - and those few, he guarded jealously. At the very top of that short list was Lily. And certain Slytherins had *dared* to harm her. Granted, the students responsible for the most recent attack were now out of Hogwarts, having been seventh years at the time of the attack, but ... well. They hadn't been the only ones to target Lily in some capacity. They'd just been the most vicious about it. And Cedrella had the uneasy notion that Severus would catch up to those of Lily's tormentors that had graduated prior to the beginning of Severus' vengeance at some point in the future.

It had become blatantly apparent that Severus had kept track of everyone he'd ever so much as heard say a cross word about Lily. Those that were still in Hogwarts had, over the last few months, found themselves under siege. There'd been an epidemic of kids in the Infirmary suffering from humiliating spell or potion effects that no one had ever seen before and had no idea how to treat.

That not one of the kids so afflicted had the faintest idea how they'd been attacked spoke either to Severus' ability to sneak about and generally avoid detection, or just how effective he'd been at cowing and/or blackmailing them to silence. Hells, the only reason Cedrella knew that Severus was behind the attacks was that Remus wasn't an idiot, had put two and two together to get four, and had written to all of the elder Marauders during the year, worried about what Severus was doing and the odds of Severus going too far.

The whole thing worried Cedrella more than a little. While she applauded avenging wrongs done to someone you cared about, Severus was ... well, particularly vicious and thorough about it. It spoke to the kind of mentality that could and would bend itself to the Dark Arts in a heartbeat, as many of the spell and potion effects skirted the edge of Dark Arts without quite going over.

It was pretty clear the only constraints on Severus' morals and sense of vengeance was Lily herself, and what she would tolerate being done to others in the name of defending her. Not for the first time was Cedrella grateful that if Severus was going to allow someone to be his conscience, it was Lily he was trusting with that responsibility. She had a good heart and strong morals that would both prevent her from taking advantage of Severus' loyalty and ... suggestibility, for lack of a better description,
and prevent Severus from going too far in the name of defending her.

Cedrella didn't know if it was an effect of the abuse Severus'd suffered or not, but ... there were things about him that worried her. His lack of concern with right versus wrong and his definitely cruel vindictive streak being the biggest worries. Even with Lily, the other young Marauders and the Elder Marauders intervening, Severus was far too willing to get very, very nasty. The idea of what he'd have been capable of under less ideal circumstances - or worse, what even this better off Severus would be capable of if Lily or any of Severus' 'acquired' family was badly hurt (or worse, killed) ... well that almost scared Cedrella. And considering what she'd lived through in her lifetime, that was saying quite a bit.

The fact that Severus had, insofar as the young Marauders knew and the elder Marauders had observed, shown zero interest in anyone romantically speaking was also worrying, if less so, and for different reasons. That had become a concern in the last few months mostly because James and Lily had, according to Remus and Sirius (who found the whole thing hysterically funny, it must be said) begun to get very awkward with each other and giving each other 'looks' when the other wasn't looking. Sirius and even Remus had begun to at least moon after various people they liked, if they weren't actually dating, both by their own admissions and according to the observations of the other young Marauders. Severus had not.

Cedrella had been a bit worried at first that James' burgeoning interest in Lily (and vice versa) would cause problems with Severus. For one, Lily was, as Cedrella had noted, effectively Severus' conscience and he was very attached to her. Having her attention elsewhere for any reason had had the possibility of causing problems. Cedrella had also been inclined to think that if Severus was going to show romantic interest in someone, it'd be Lily, and thus he might resent anyone who showed such interest in her as well. Thankfully, those worries had not come to pass. Severus was (again, according to Sirius and Remus) fully aware of the situation between James and Lily, and was apparently more amused than anything else.

Cedrella had no idea why Severus was so uninterested in romance or sex. She just hoped that he was a late bloomer and that he'd get there eventually. A life alone was not something she'd have wished on anyone short of Abraxas. Though it must be said that Severus *was* very quiet, private, and Slytherin by temperament, so it was entirely possible he had a girlfriend and was just keeping the relationship private.

At any rate, Severus had been going through Slytherin House like a dose of salts, with a healthy side course of various folks from the other Houses. But he hadn't exactly been alone in his pursuit of rough justice. The rest of the Marauders had gone on the warpath as well.

The end result had been the elder Marauders being called to Hogwarts three times since September in response to one or another of the kids having little to no mercy on a bully in very public fights rather than the more subtle and anonymous pranks of previous years. One such incident had involved ALL the younger Marauders in a (for a given value) no-holds-barred firefight versus the entirety of the seventh year male Slytherins. The kids had caught the Slytherins red-handed in the process of ... importuning (to put it nicely) ... a third year Hufflepuff girl (who just so happened to be a Muggleborn). The other two cases had involved one or more of the kids hexing the living hell out of some idiot bigot pureblood non-sexually attacking a Muggleborn.

Needless to say, the elder Marauders hadn't had a problem descending on Hogwarts like nesting dragons protecting their clutch when Dumbledore had summoned them. Especially the first time - which hadn't been the near-rape incident - and Dumbledore had tried to pull his usual bullshit. Fortunately for Dumbledore, not even he was willing to ignore a case of near-rape on his watch, and he'd disciplined the perpetrators. Though it must be said, not nearly as severely as Cedrella would
have liked. Though she was woman enough to admit to being a bit bloodthirsty. Dumbledore had, in that case, called them to Hogwarts mostly due to having had the parents of the perpetrators descending on the school in an attempt to prevent their children from being punished. Dumbledore didn't like the elder Marauders *at all*, but even he knew that the six of them had their uses - the fact that not many people were willing to risk going to war with the entire Alliance by offending just one of them being the biggest.

The other two times, Dumbledore'd called them in in an attempt to remonstrate with both them and the kids, trying to get them to agree to his worldview, wherein everyone deserved umpity million chances to change their ways, to the detriment of the decent, law-abiding - or at least not-committing-capital-crimes - segment of the population that the irredeemable monsters were victimizing. Yes, some people could and did change. Cedrella wasn't about to contest that. The problem with Dumbledore's ideology was that the folks inclined to change their ways rarely got into the deep end of the trouble they'd dipped their toes into, and generally weren't involved in it for very long. The real hard cases - the ones that raped, killed, and tortoured for fun - they were *never* going to change, and trying to give them chances to do so just gave them more time to add victims to their lists.

The Marauders, kids and adults both, had rather obviously been deaf to Dumbledore's entreaties, subtle and not-so-subtle threats. At this point, it really didn't matter if Dumbledore expelled the kids. They could and would get private tuition to pass their NEWTs. As all of them were still underage *and* they'd been defending someone who'd been attacked, nothing else could or would be done to them legally. As for the adult half of the equation, well ... Dumbledore had little to no leverage against them, either. Thanks to the Alliance, Dumbledore had lost virtually all of his influence in the Wizengamot in general, though he did still retain influence over some of the more gullible or easily influenced Light-side Family Heads and various individuals from a number of Families.

All that said, Cedrella had a bad feeling that the situation at Hogwarts was an indicator of incoming trouble in the world at large. Kids were, generally speaking, less temperate and patient than adults, and more inclined to doing stupid things. That said, for the most part, they only went as far as they figured they could get away with, so the fact they felt so comfortable as to hex other kids in full view of multiple witnesses was not good news. Clearly, they thought they would, at absolute worst, have powerful backup keeping them clear of the consequences of their actions.

Cedrella had a very bad feeling that Voldemort and his followers were on the verge of a big move, somewhere, and that as a result the war, which had been fairly desultory and predictable up to now, was about to get very, very ugly.
As much as things can be changed by making different decisions ... some things cannot be changed.
agree that they might have gone too far this time. But Dumbledore did not know that. He had no proof.

The whole mess had, at least, revealed a problem they hadn't known existed until then. Regulus couldn't have been the first pureblood kid to have been approached in that manner. The 'join or die' tactic was ... worrying, to be blunt. It meant Voldemort was getting desperate. Desperate people did crazy, desperate things. And this would be on top of Voldemort's already established lunacy when it came to his actions and plans. If he actually had plans at all, that was.

Unfortunately, there was little to nothing the Alliance could do about the situation. They had no way of knowing who was being approached or who would fall prey to those sorts of tactics. They'd just have to deal with the fallout. Which included dealing with their errant children. The kids went home over Easter break as usual, and were greeted by very grim-faced parents and guardians. They were separated, and forbidden contact with each other for the duration of the break. From there, punishments (and remonstrations) were applied according to the various adults' usual discipline patterns.

Cedrella was not at all convinced that they'd gotten through to the kids, but they'd at least tried. She didn't blame them for wanting to strike back, but there were lines you shouldn't cross, and this particular stunt had come dangerously close to crossing them (if it hadn't actually crossed them, that was). None of the adults was going to tolerate the kids becoming bullies or worse in the pursuit of 'justice'.

A few months later, they all found out just how desperate and crazy Voldemort truly was.

In the normal course of events, no one with sense or sanity would ever have risked the wrath of *any* Alliance by attacking one of its members, no matter who the Alliance consisted of. The Black/Potter/Weasley Alliance ... was far more formidable than most, both politically, magically and in sheer numbers. That said, Voldemort was, as they had all noticed, crazy as a shithouse rat and thanks largely to the Alliance's actions, getting more desperate by the day. It was inevitable that he do something ... extremely stupid.

Cedrella and Septimus had been enjoying a quiet lunch together when Septimus abruptly lurched out of his seat and swung around. His wand appeared in his hand and he looked half a second from hexing the crap out of someone on sheer instinct alone. A second or two later, an expression of sheer murderous rage twisted Septimus' face. It was an expression Cedrella hadn't seen since the war.

"Septimus? What on earth?" She asked.

It took Septimus a few seconds to calm down enough to be able to answer her. "Something's bad wrong. Alliance." He said.

Cedrella's confusion cleared up at least a little. Alliance oaths came with an alert system - magic itself letting the members know when one of the allies was in danger. The members of an Alliance couldn't always be in each other's presence after all, which made it possible for a member to be attacked without the rest of the Alliance being there to back them up. While Cedrella was a part of the alliance by marriage, she wasn't part of it by blood, and thus didn't get the warning. The only way a by-marriage member of the Alliance would get that warning of danger was if an Alliance had been put in place previous to the death of the Head of the family, they were Lady of the family and acting as Regent until their son was ready to take his place as Lord.

Less than two seconds after Septimus had spoken, a crying, shaking, miserable Jinx appeared. Cedrella didn't even need him to say anything to know what had happened. There could only be one reason Jinx was so upset. Septimus clearly understood the implications as well, because the
expression on his face went back to murderously enraged.

"What happened, Jinx?" Despite the expression on his face, Septimus' tone was gentle.

"Master and Mistress be going to Alley to shop." Jinx sniffled. "They is being hit from behind by ...
" He sniffled again, the expression on his face saying he didn't want to say what he had to say. "by killing curses. They is not even knowing they is in danger. Jinx is not even knowing!" Jinx wailed.

Which explained how Charlus and Dorea had ended up dead. If there'd been any warning at all, either they or Jinx (or even another of their house elves) would have been able to fend off their attackers. There was no way to defend against someone unexpectedly whipping out their wand and AK'ing someone. Especially in the crowded, busy environs of the Alley.

Cedrella throttled the grief that tried to well up. Now was not the time. She'd grieve later. Septimus suddenly cursed. "Jinx, you need to make sure James is protected. If Charlus and Dorea were killed ...
"

Jinx's eyes went wide in horror.

"Jinx." Cedrella said quickly, wanting to catch him before he left, her voice slightly shaky. "House elves tell who is who by their magic, right?"

Jinx nodded.

"Can you tell from a spell cast on ... " She didn't get any further than that, because Jinx nodded. He also at least started to catch on to where Cedrella was going with that question, because misery was starting to transform to rage.

"Find them." She commanded. Normally, it wouldn't work. House elves didn't usually take orders from someone not their family. But Jinx had latched on to all of the elder Marauders and their wives. Not only that, but Cedrella was giving Jinx an order he probably badly wanted to get, right about now. "Find them after James is safe, and bring them to us. Damage them as much as you like, but they have to still be alive when they get here."

Jinx blinked out without another word. Cedrella did not pity whoever he was hunting. Not in the least. The best part was that by the laws that dealt with Alliances ... the members of an Alliance could do anything they wanted to whoever killed or injured a member of the Alliance and the Ministry couldn't do or say anything - not without risking magical (and other) consequences themselves.

"I need to get hold of Harfang. If Voldemort was willing to attack one of us ... if he has any brains at all, he'll target the rest of us. Because he has to know we'll do our utmost to kill him for this." Septimus growled. "The faster he gets rid of the rest of us, the safer he'll be. Or so he'd think."

Cedrella could only nod. "Not that they weren't already." She said. "But Voldemort just made himself and his people enemies of the Alliance. He declared war on us."

She knew that even if Voldemort somehow managed to wipe out the Potters and the Longbottoms, who had the lowest population of the three families, he'd never wipe out the Weasleys. And despite what Voldemort probably thought, as long as a Weasley existed, they'd be driven to do whatever it took to take Voldemort and his people down. That's how Alliances worked.

Septimus shot her a look. "He's not going to like how this plays out." He growled. "Not at all." Then he left to go call Harfang.
Cedrella watched him go, more than a little worried. Right here and now, Septimus, like herself, was pushing grief aside. If, in his case, the grief had even hit yet. But sooner rather than later, the fact that Septimus had lost a man he regarded as a brother even before the Alliance had been sworn would set in. That wasn't going to end well.

For that matter, Harfang was going to get hit too. Not to mention Callidora. Dorea might only be a cousin, not a sister, but they'd been closer to her than they'd been to most of the rest of the family. When reality finally sank in, they were all of them going to be a mess for a while.

And oh. The kids. They had to tell the kids. Cedrella almost cringed as that thought hit. James would be an even bigger mess than Septimus and Harfang would be. It would probably be best to arrange for James to miss school for a month or so. He'd need that long just to get a handle on his grief, never mind having to take his place as Head so young. At least he'd have Septimus and Harfang to lean on when it came to that end of things, and his friends for the rest of it.

She'd best deal with that end of things while Septimus hunkered down with Harfang. She was woman enough to admit having things to do would allow her to defer her own reaction to this for a while. Besides, she sincerely doubted that Dumbledore would let James out of school without an argument. She could use a target for her anger right about now, and better Dumbledore than some unfortunate, innocent party. She headed for the floo.

"Hogwarts Headmaster's Office!" She barked after she threw in enough powder for a floo call.

It took about a half a minute for Dumbledore to come around to the floo.

"Lady Weasley. To what do I owe the pleasure of this call?"

"No pleasure, Headmaster." Cedrella said. "We've just received word that Charlus and Dorea were killed in the Alley. I've little doubt that Aurors are headed to Hogwarts even as we speak to inform James. I would much prefer he hear such news from family than complete strangers."

To his credit, Dumbledore actually looked upset by the news. Whether he actually was or not, given how much a thorn the Marauders had been in his side since their school days was debatable, but he managed to at least appear sad. For a wonder, he didn't even attempt to temporize.

"Of course, of course. Please come through."

Cedrella pulled back, added more powder, and stepped through into Dumbledore's office. Dumbledore looked quite curious when Septimus didn't come through as well.

"Septimus went to warn Harfang. Whoever killed Charlus and Dorea will be after the rest of us as quick as they can." Cedrella explained.

Dumbledore looked like he wanted to remonstrate with the remains of the Alliance to act temperately, but he knew better. "Of course." He called a house elf, and asked them to tell whichever teacher he was with that his presence was required in the Headmaster's office.

Cedrella reluctantly approved of the tactic. James and the other kids had been summoned in like manner so many times since they started Hogwarts that James would think nothing of it.

While they waited, Cedrella decided to iron out James' leave from school. If an argument ensued, it would hopefully be done before he arrived, and at least she wouldn't be having to wrangle an intransigent Dumbledore while trying to comfort a doubtlessly distraught James.

"James will be leaving Hogwarts with me." Cedrella said. "He will need time to grieve without
having to worry about school assignments and such. He will also need time to assume his place as Lord Potter and get used it."

Dumbledore again looked like he wanted to argue, but kept his mouth shut. This time, Cedrella suspected it was because he suspected that Cedrella would rip him to shreds. He wasn't wrong.

James walked in a couple minutes later, saw her, and sighed. "What do they think I've done now?" He wanted to know.

Cedrella sighed. "Come sit, James." She said.

Something in her tone or expression must have been off (hardly surprising, given the circumstances), because James obeyed without comment, his expression going from irritated and put-upon to concerned.

"There is no easy way to say this, James." Cedrella said. "But you parents were killed less than an hour ago in Diagon Alley."

James' face went a pasty white and he started to tremble. The glance he shot Dumbledore's way made Cedrella suspect that James was doing everything he could to not fall apart in front of someone he neither liked nor trusted.

"Come, I'll be taking you home. We can send one of your elves for your things later." Cedrella said, getting to her feet and more or less pulling James to his as she went. James just nodded mutely and followed her lead. Cedrella turned to Dumbledore.

"The other children will collect his assignments." She said. "Callidora will likely wish to inform them of this later today." She'd have to. The kids would notice James' absence and get twitchy. "I will inform you when James is ready to resume classes."

With that, she pulled them through the floo.
By the time Cedrella returned to their home with James in tow, the beginnings of a war council were at hand.

Septimus had lost no time in getting a hold of Harfang. Harfang, in his turn, had been quick to raise the war wards on his Manor, then flooed to Weasley Cottage with Callidora in tow. Augusta, Frank and Alice had followed mere minutes later.

Arthur had arrived alone, as he and Molly had three young children all under the age of eight at home. Bringing them was very ill-advised because such little ears did not need to hear the sort of talk that would be being bandied about at this meeting. On the other hand, leaving them alone just wasn't possible. Marcus and Phillip, Septimus and Cedrella's two younger sons, arrived hot on Cedrella's heels. Marcus

"Enid and Algie will be along in a few minutes." Augusta informed them. "They don't move quite as swiftly as they did when they were younger."

Given that Augusta was the elder of the three, and more than able to keep up with her son and his friends, this was a rather amusing statement. Then again, Augusta hadn't been called the battle-axe of her generation (well out of her earshot, to be sure) for nothing. Even in her so-called dotage, she was a firebrand.

They got a bit of a surprise, though. Just as Enid and Algie Longbottom arrived, a visitor was announced at the front door. Septimus went to see who it was, fully prepared to blast Dumbledore to smithereens if it was him.

It wasn't. It was Andromeda Tonks and her husband.

"We saw it happen." Andromeda said when Septimus let her in. "Didn't see who did it, but we saw them go down. Arcturus can't really throw the Black family into this. Well, I mean, he *could*, if he used the Head of House magics, but ... pretty much half the family or better would be fighting him every step of the way, and finding every loophole they could to wreck things or get out of doing anything."

Septimus gave an agreeing snort. "So it's on a volunteer basis?"

"Yeah. Alphard should be showing up shortly, and Aunt Cassiopeia. I flooed them about what happened. You might have your wife talk to Aunt Lucretia. The Prewetts are more neutral than anything else, but with Molly in the family ... "

Septimus nodded. "We might be able to draw them in." He hadn't thought of that angle. At least, not yet. He'd been far too busy making sure Harfang was still in one piece and would remain so, and clamping down on his grief. He could grieve later. A lot later. Right now, there was entirely too much to do.

Thank Merlin.
Of course, Alphard and Cassiopeia did arrive a few moments later, and everyone settled down, cups of tea to hand even though none of them figured they'd be all that interested in drinking it.

Septimus had been letting Cedrella do what she could to comfort James until now. The poor lad was white as a sheet, and his hands were shaking. Despite that, he had a look in his eye Septimus recognized. He'd seen that look in Charlus ...

"Damn it. Septimus forced himself away from that line of thought.

"James, lad? You sure you want to be here? No fault will be laid on you if not." Septimus asked.

White face and shaking hands or not, James lifted his chin and gifted Septimus with a look that made the hairs on the back of his neck rise.

"That ... that ... that bloodless, faithless, honorless, cowardly back-stabbing warmonger just ... " James inhaled sharply, shook his head, and then continued. "This is about more than mom and dad, Uncle Septimus. This is ... he doesn't think you'll do anything about it. I mean, that can be the only reason he's done this. He must think the Alliance is a lie or something, and that either you won't do anything in retribution or that folks will try to stop you." The look on James' face made it clear he figured that second option would happen, in the shape of Dumbledore if no one else. "Too many people have been killed by this monster and his minions already. I can't ... I can't stand by and let it happen to someone else, even if the Alliance wasn't a factor."

And, Septimus knew, plotting ways to kick Voldemort's arse would give James something to do other than curl up in a miserable ball and lose himself to grief. Not that his friends and remaining family (by choice, since there were no close blood relations remaining) would necessarily let him, but James had to be feeling like he wanted to.

"Well then, we've planning to do." Septimus said.

"We still don't have any idea who Voldemort really is." Augusta said. "I think at least one of us should concentrate on finding that information. It may give us information we could use to hunt him down with."

"Like if he has a Family Manor he could be using as a base or something." Frank agreed.

"Molly might be able to find something." Arthur offered. "The Prewitts have one of the more complete lists of pure and halfblood magics - well, one of the more complete and unbiased lists, anyway. I'm sure the Blacks have a more in depth one, but with their ideals, I don't trust them to have squibs and the like listed."

"You'd be right on that guess, Arthur." Cedrella said. "I've seen at least some of the Black records - it's all pureblood only, with a lot of names blocked out for who knows what reason."

The other Black ladies were all nodding agreement, having all seen those records as well.

"We'll help her." Enid offered, and Algie nodded. "Neither of us are fighters so we won't be much good on that end of things, but research, we can do."

"We also need to focus on Malfoy. He's Voldemort's big player, money and politics wise." Cassiopeia said. "Much as I dislike contesting with family ..."

"Leave the Malfoys to the Weasleys, then." Septimus said. "I've cousins and such enough that Lucius won't have a moment's peace, and it'll keep you ladies from having to cross wands with Narcissa." Then Septimus smirked. "Besides, I still owe that family a black eye or three in Abraxas'
That earned him a slap on the arm from Cedrella, but it had to be said that she did not really look put out.

"I can sic the gang on the Marked kids in school. Not like we aren't already giving them hell, but we can step it up." James said. "I'm *very* sure that Severus has a few ideas he hasn't implemented yet for various reasons, at the very least, and when we put our heads together we'll come up with a few dozen more ideas. And there won't be a damn thing Dumbledore can do about it because of the Alliance, and if he tries, as ... " James choked briefly, then forced himself to say it. "As Lord Potter, I can pretty much bury him alive."

"With us right behind you, lad." Harfang said, speaking for the first time. "Though that brings something up. With the Alliance having been breached, and our members under demonstrable threat of death, we could - and should - demand that all the children under the Alliance banner be roomed together. James, Sirius, and Remus are safe enough, but they cannot get to Lily to aid her if she is attacked in her room - which is admittedly unlikely but cannot be dismissed as a possibility. Severus and Regulus have no backup at all. And we know for a fact that some of the children of Voldemort's minions are not afraid to get violent."

"Good point." Septimus agreed. "Though I have no idea where the kids could be housed instead."

"There's bound to be somewhere." Callidora said. "That school is far bigger than the spaces being used currently, so it would not surprise me at all to discover that there are entire suites hidden away in odd corners, long forgotten by the human residents."

"But the house elves would know, so if worst comes to worst we apply to them and see what they can rustle up." Augusta said.

Before they could get any further with the discussion, a distinctly rumpled Jinx popped into the room, an unsettling, toothy grin on his face.

"Jinx is finding them! They is in Master Remus' cage now, at the Manor."

"You didn't get hurt, did you, Jinx?" James asked, looking at the loyal little elf worriedly. There weren't any obvious bruises or cuts, but that meant very little with house elves, who were both fairly sturdy and had a tendency of hiding how badly they were hurt in order to keep serving their family. Jinx was worse than most elves when it came to hiding hurts in order to be of service. Not that he ever got punished, obviously, but accidents could and did happen.

"Jinx is fine. Be having a few bruises, but Jinx is not getting hexed by bad wizard."

"Who was it?" Septimus wanted to know.

"Is Tenibrus Carrow." Jinx told him.

"Huh. He's one of the last I would have expected something like this from." Septimus said. "Then again, even a coward and a weak wizard can hex someone in the back."

Tenibrus had been a year behind Septimus, Charlus and Harfang. He'd been a Slytherin, but one of the ones that, to Harfang's mind, begged their way into the House they wanted, rather than actually belonging there. Tenibrus had never shown much in the way of Slytherin qualities, and had perpetually been in the bottom half of the school standing scholastically. He's more or less made a career out of hiding behind more powerful, ambitious, and influential wizards.
"We'll deal with him later. Possibly tomorrow." Cedrella told Jinx. "Thank you for finding him."

"Get your injuries looked at, get something to eat, and get some sleep." James ordered. "I'll call one of the others if I need anything, but I doubt I will, since I'll be staying either with Septimus and Cedrella or Harfang and Callidora."

Jinx gave James a mutinous look, but then sighed. "Jinx will do as Master asks." And popped out.

"All right, kicking the son of a bitch who cast the curse can wait for a bit. Make the bastard sweat." Augusta said, with far more relish than one would expect from an elderly lady. "Let's get back to figuring out how to make the whole lot of them pay for this."

Most of the adult men in the room gave some sign of amusement. "Augusta, you are a treasure." Septimus told her. "That said, she has a point. Back to business."

"Which phrase brings a possible avenue of attack to mind." Harfang said. "How many businesses, between the three of us, do we own outright or have majority shares in?"

"Probably most of Diagon Alley and half of Hogsmeade, why?" Septimus asked.

"Well, what if we drafted something saying none of the businesses under our banner could do business with Marked folks? We'd have to figure a way to detect and keep the bastards out - a ward or something - but it'd hit 'em where it hurts if they can't even buy necessities like normal law abiding folks."

That and other options were discussed for a couple hours before James succumbed to sleep in the middle of the talking. Septimus excused himself to carry the boy to bed - not nearly so easy a task with a long-limbed teen as it was a younger child - then returned.

"Now he's asleep, we need to talk about what will be done with the Carrows." Septimus said. While the other ideas they'd all brought up would be part of the upcoming war on Voldemort and his people, they had all kept to less bloody methods of retribution. There would be a time and place for James to get blood on his hands, but at just barely seventeen, none of the elder adults in the room were willing to push him in that direction just yet.

"We'll have to let the lad have a shot at Tenibrus." Harfang said. "But unless I've misjudged James horribly, he won't be able to bring himself to kill the man."

"I'm not so sure. Kill him quick and clean? James could quite possibly do that, especially given what Tenibrus did. Torturing the bastard or the like, however, would definitely be something James could never do." Septimus said.

"Hmpf. Good point." Harfang agreed.

"We'll have to hunt the rest of them down while James is in school. He won't be able to miss what's going on, but the less he sees of it, the better I'll feel about the whole thing. Those kids are going to have to grow up faster than I like even without that." Cedrella said.

"Agreed, and in the name of keeping this as nontraumatic as possible for the kids on both sides, we do this quick and clean." Septimus said. "And we keep it to Marked folks only in any family. Everybody else gets a pass. We don't have a beef with them, just Voldemort and his people."
Again, my apologies for the long silence. Life sucked for a while there.

In much better news, it's NaNo season, and I am hoping to double the normal goal in writing this month (meaning I want to write 100k). So. Chapter updates on my fics will be *frequent* this month. At least one new chapter posted on one of my fics a day.

The next day, Cedrella and Callidora headed for the werewolf-proofed cell that Tenibrus had been thrown into. While they had, of course, known Jinx had arrived looking rather ruffled to tell them of Tenibrus' capture, and both women knew the little elf well enough to know he would not be gentle with the man, they were a bit surprised at Tenibrus' overall condition.

Tenibrus had not been given food or water since he'd been dumped in cage, nor medical care. Not one of the Alliance felt bad about that. On the contrary, they'd done it deliberately. Tenibrus was a dead man walking, his only value in the information he might have that they could wring out of him before he died. Before they started trying to get the information out of him, they had wanted – and needed – to both weaken him a bit so he'd hopefully be more liable to cooperate and to ensure he had no protections, magical or otherwise, against their interrogation methods.

Septimus and Harfang, as much as they might have wanted to get a few licks in themselves, knew better than interfere in their wives’ plans. Especially when, as born Blacks, the pair of them were better equipped to get nasty with Tenibrus if it was required. Not to mention they weren't stupid enough to get the womens’ ire focused in their direction. Ever.

Both women were armed with only their wands and a single vial of Veritaserum. The day's delay had ensured that there was no possibility of Tenibrus having some potion or spell on him that lessened or negated the effects of Veritaserum. Spells Jinx would have noticed, and potions would have worked through his system by now. Especially with him injured.

And injured badly. Very, very badly. Jinx had … definitely expressed his ire on the man. Cedrella strongly suspected there wasn't a single unbroken bone in the man's body. He was covered head to toe in cuts, bruises, and even a few burns. She shot Callidora a raised-eyebrow look, wondering what the heck Jinx had done that had managed to burn the man. Maybe toss him towards a fireplace? Whatever it was, it spoke to the little elf's rage. Cedrella was fairly impressed.

“Ah, Tenibrus. How kind of you to join us.” Cedrella purred, her tone one of pure malice. “I do apologize for our elf's care in retrieving you.” Then, with even more venom. “I had expected to find you in here in multiple pieces. Really, Callidora, we must have a word with Jinx about his mercifulness. It's a shameful thing to have in a Black Family elf.”

Jinx was not, of course, a Black Family elf, but it hardly mattered if she told Tenibrus the truth or lied through her teeth to him. He was dead, after all. He just didn't know it yet. Or maybe he did, but
again, it didn't much matter. What did matter was making it very clear to Tenibrus that he was in deep, deep trouble. Sounding like the damage Jinx had done was not enough was simply a bit of psychological warfare.

“Now. You're going to tell us everything we want to know. How cooperative you are … well, let's just say that we might be inclined to kill you quick and clean if you cooperate. Get stubborn, and well, what a shame. We'll have to practice our spell work on you. We are dreadfully out of practice, after all. It's been a while since either of us have … gone hunting.” Callidora chimed in. She somehow managed to sound even scarier than Cedrella had, which was impressive.

Tenibrus remained silent, and pretending unconcern. Cedrella knew it was pretend because the man was sweating a bit and having a lot of trouble remaining blank-faced. He knew the Black family reputation. He knew of the existence of the Alliance. As a pureblood, he knew exactly what that meant and what he'd courted by doing what he'd done.

“Start talking dear, or I start practicing my skinning spells.” Cedrella demanded, her voice hard.

“Fuck off, bitch.” Tenibrus snarled.

Cedrella almost – almost – hexed him into oblivion then and there. But she hadn't been a Slytherin for nothing. Tenibrus was obviously attempting a time-honored gambit. Piss off your captor and get them to make mistakes. Whether those mistakes led to you managing to escape or you dying with most of the information you possessed undiscovered, you would, in effect, win.

She gave a low, evil chuckle. “Oh. I could almost like him, Callidora. He's actually got a Slytherin bone or two in there somewhere. Rather sad it's corrupted by so much Gryffindor.”

That got a sneering snarl out of Tenibrus. “Pah. I'm no Gryffindor.”

“Oh really? Because last time I checked, a true Slytherin wouldn't be stupid enough to sign their own death warrant by killing a member of an Alliance.” Callidora retorted before Cedrella could.

That seemed to cut him, if not deeply. He gave them both a glare. Cedrella sighed theatrically. “Last chance, Tenibrus. Start talking.”

The demand was met by silence. Cedrella snorted and shook her head, then traded looks with Callidora, wordlessly agreeing as to who went first and did what. Callidora flicked her wand at the man, hitting him with a wordless spell that Cedrella wasn't familiar with. That hardly surprised her, given that the spell bordered on being Dark.

Cedrella, true to the predictive indications of her wand, had never had a knack for the Dark Arts, and even less interest in studying them for anything other than ways to counter them. Callidora, on the other hand, while not a Dark Arts practicioner, was both much more capable of such spells (not to mention the ones that trod the line between so-called 'grey' and Dark) and more inclined to use them, true to her Black roots.

It took less than a minute after that for the screaming to start.

Some six or seven hours later, the two women finally returned. Cedrella crawled straight into Septimus’ lap. While she had not cast a single Dark Arts spell, she also did not truly have the stomach for the after effects of … shall we say dubiously applied so-called Light spells. She'd made sure Tenibrus didn't notice anything amiss, but now that it was over and it was only family there to observe her, she didn't care about maintaining appearances.

Suffice it to say, between the grief of Dorea and Charlus' deaths and having to torture someone,
Cedrella was pretty much done for the day. Fortunately, Septimus was more than willing to take up the slack. He and Harfang very carefully talked about nothing of any true importance at all for a few hours. All the while, both men cuddled their wives until both women had recovered their equilibrium sufficiently to resume dealing with the matters of the day.

At that point, both men gave their wives careful, concerned visual going-overs to make sure they truly had recovered. And both men endured the knowing, half-annoyed, half-affectionate looks they got from their wives for their concern. Which was the confirmation they needed that their wives had rebounded sufficiently. Only then did they even tentatively bring up Tenibrus, his potential information, and his ultimate fate.

“So, did you have any luck?” Harfang asked.

“Quite a bit. Unfortunately, he didn't want to play nicely, which meant getting what we wanted was a bit … stressful.” Callidora said. “We got confirmation on most of our list of suspected Death Eaters, and he gave us two names we hadn't pegged as possibilities. He also had a bit of information on Voldemort's plans. Or whatever his plans are at the moment. According to Tenibrus, he has become significantly more … unhinged … in the last few years. Enough so that his own people are noticing.”

“Enough so that a few of them have had to be 'reminded of where their loyalties lie'.” Cedrella said, her tone making it clear she was quoting Tenibrus verbatim. “He has apparently gotten rather crucio-happy of late in response to a handful or so of his people starting to make noises of dissatisfaction or concern regarding him and his behavior, his aims, and how he's going about getting what he wants.”

“Whoever he is, he is definitely suffering some sort of madness, from what we got out of Tenibrus. It's going to make predicting him incredibly difficult. Even for us.” Callidora said on a sigh. Even the Black family experiences with madness wouldn't help them much, since its expressions seemed to be very individual. Some people, despite being batshit insane, were fairly predictable in what they would do. Others were not, and you never knew which you were going to get.

“Worryingly, he's got at least the beginnings of backup abroad. A few younger sons of younger sons looking for more wealth, power, and advancement opportunities than their birth rank otherwise permits in the more traditional pureblood families. A few folks who got told to leave and never come back or were outright excised from their family trees for some crime – perceived or actual – or other. Not many, apparently, but even one or two is three too many.” Cedrella said.

“Agreed. If you got names and locations, I'll pass them on to our kin abroad. They'll be in a better position to deal with such offal, and probably grateful for the opportunity.” Septimus said. The more far-flung (genetically speaking) arms of the Weasley family wouldn't feel the effects of the breached Alliance as keenly as Septimus' closest relations, but they'd still feel it more than enough to get antsy about not being able to do anything of use. Only if Septimus and those most closely related to him died (whether of old age or in defense of the Alliance didn't matter) would those more distantly related start to feel the effects of the Alliance oath more keenly.

“We need to figure out what, exactly, to do with him.” Cedrella said. “Aside from killing him, I mean. Do we drop him off in a forest? Dig a shallow grave? Or make as much of an example of him as we can manage?” Her tone made it clear she favored the final option.

And if she was reading Septimus' expression half as well as she normally did, he favored that option too. For that matter, they all did. None of them were in any kind of mood to exercise restraint.

“Right in front of Gringotts? Not on their land, obviously, but just off it. Where everyone will see it?” Harfang suggested. The other three nodded their agreement pretty much instantly.
“Sounds good to me. With a note explaining exactly why he was killed. Just so no one but the most suicidal decide to try to come after us for his death.” Septimus fairly growled.

It didn't take them all that long to set it up. Tenibrus' body got strung up on wooden supports like a macabre scarecrow, a brilliant white board tied around his neck bore writing explaining exactly why he'd been killed. The whole thing was portkeyed in such a way the base of the pole buried itself a foot into the ground of Diagon Alley ten feet away from the steps of Gringotts and official goblin territory. To make sure no interfering busybodies (Dumbledore) tried to remove it, they added spells that ensured it could not be removed from where it landed for a full day.

They all knew that regardless of the existence of the Alliance, they'd face backlash for what they'd done. There would always be some that got their panties in a wad about such things. And Dumbledore was the worst of the lot. They figured they had an hour, two at most, before he tried to intervene where he wasn't wanted or needed. He was going to get incredibly short shrift when he did.

Dumbledore didn't disappoint them. He flooed them precisely fifty minutes after Tenibrus' appearance in the Alley. Septimus rolled his eyes at the other three in amused annoyance before he let the floo call go through.

“Was such a thing truly necessary?” Dumbledore remonstrated. At least he didn't waste time getting to the point, for once.

“Yes.” Was the blunt, emphatic, and rather loud response from all four.

“Don't interfere, Dumbledore.” Septimus snapped. “You know the penalties for interference in Alliance affairs, especially this sort of circumstance. People have been stripped of their magic and killed for trying to stop an Alliance's retribution.” And not by the Ministry or the members of the Alliance in question, either. Magic itself exacted heavy penalties when magically-enforced oaths got messed with, by anyone. It was even worse if you were stupid enough to break a magically enforced oath.

Dumbledore gave them all one of his patented 'supremely disappointed' looks, but wisely said no more, and retreated back out of the floo. He of course, knew what Septimus had said was true, and they knew that despite his desire to interfere, he wouldn't want to risk getting killed or stripped of his magic.

“That won't be the last we hear of this from him.” Cedrella predicted. “He'll keep trying to push the boundaries, find where the wiggle room is.”

“Agreed.” Septimus said. “Fortunately for us, there is very, very little wiggle room. About all he'll be able to get away with is those looks of his and an occasional whine at us about our methodology – so long as he doesn't stray too far into 'you must not do that' territory when he does. So he'll be very easy to ignore.”
Vengeful Thoughts

Chapter Notes

Item the first: James Potter? Is understandably pissed right the hell off.

Item the second: From this point on, more and more of the chapters will be from the point of view of someone other than Cedrella and Septimus. They will still play a major role in things, but as James and Co get older, more of the action will be taking place in their presence when they’re not with Cedrella and Septimus.

Vengeful Thoughts

(_)(_)(_)

May 1977

The family funeral of Charlus and Dorea Potter took place a week after their deaths. Funerals, like weddings, were private affairs. Grief was not, in the wizarding world, something put on display in the company of others unless there was no other choice.

Every House had, somewhere, a family burial plot or crypt. This site or building also included a small ritual circle. Aside from funerals, these ritual circles were used – though not by all Families or even all members of any one Family – on Samhain.

The exact rituals themselves varied hugely. No two Families conducted funeral rites or Samhain observances in the same way. That said, the ritual circles all had one thing in common. They were carved into the most durable and purest white stone – usually granite or marble – that could be found or purchased at the time the circle was created.

The color white had links to birth, death, and purity. Funeral rites most frequently focused on purifying the soul of the departed, grieving the loss, and a hope (or outright belief) that the soul so recently lost would someday be reborn.

The passing of a person could be marked by a funeral ritual performed by anyone that knew them at any point after the person’s death. They had simply to go to their Family circle and do whatever rites they felt appropriate.

The rites performed by close blood family, on the other hand, were a bit more involved, and commonly had some aspect of all three of the main purposes of a funeral rite included. The funeral rites performed by others – especially those more distantly acquainted with the departed – generally only contained the grieving the loss portion and perhaps the purifying the soul part in the form of a wish for safe passage to the land of the dead.

Because of all this … James had to perform the funeral ritual for his parents alone. It was, maybe, a good thing. He had been rather a bit numb the last week, too stunned by the suddenness of the loss and the weight of the Potter Family magic landing solidly – and solely – on his shoulders to do or be or even think anything else. He’d also not been alone for even a minute all week. Sirius, Regulus, Remus, Severus and Lily had rotated watches.
Perhaps unsurprisingly, James had appreciated Severus' silence and understanding more than the rest. Oh, the others tried, and they were a comfort, but … they didn't, couldn't, understand the loss James had suffered. Severus, having had to deal with the death of his mother, understood better than the others possibly could.

But now, alone in the family crypt, the horrified shock was finally fading. And on its heels came a towering, vengeful wrath. James was, after all, half Black by blood. It ought to surprise exactly no one that having his parents murdered would wake a dragon.

So it was perhaps a good thing there was no one to bear witness to – and be scared spitless of – the angry, writhing pulses of magic that was escaping James' efforts to control both his magic and his rising temper enough to complete the rites the way they rightfully should be done.

It took a while, but eventually he succeeded. And when the rites were done and the magic of the circle had faded, James stood there for a moment and silently vowed that whatever it took, the man ultimately responsible for his parents' deaths was going to pay dearly for it.

Severus and Lily were waiting for him just beyond the edge of the family burial grounds. James and Severus locked eyes almost the instant they came in view of each other. Severus' expression flickered so briefly James almost missed it before Severus gave a brief, almost imperceptible nod.

Oh yes. Severus understood better than the others could. Both the pain of losing a parent, and the burning need to avenge that death. James had little doubt that once he was of age and able to hunt Tobias down without the Longbottoms or Weasleys getting involved, there would be an accounting between Severus and his much-loathed father. Tobias wasn't going to enjoy that encounter at all. Because while Eileen may have ultimately died of something completely unrelated to Tobias' abuse, said abuse had doubtlessly hastened her demise.

For the moment, he let the far-more effusive Lily all but strangle him in a hug. Lily and Severus' friendship had never ceased to amuse James, as the two were as different as night and day. Severus was taciturn and somber and more than a little wary and withdrawn – all understandable given what he'd apparently survived prior to coming to Hogwarts.

James still considered befriending the rattily-clad and rather woebegone boy Severus had been back then the best day's work of his life to date. He didn't even want to think about the could-have-beens otherwise.

Lily, on the other hand, was gregarious, vivacious and more than a bit of a chatterbox, especially when excited or stressed. About the only thing the two of them had in common was formidable tempers. That and their unshakable loyalty to each other. James figured they'd both burn the world to cinders if the other was endangered.

More than once in the last year or so, James had wondered if the two of them would not become romantically involved. But no, neither of them seemed to even consider the other an option in that regard. Which, really, was lucky for him. James had been finding himself more and more drawn to Lily in the last year. He hadn't quite worked up the nerve to ask her out before his parents' death. Maybe in a couple months, if he could think of something other than bathing in Voldemort's blood by then.

In the meantime, if he could get Severus alone, the two of them would have a bit of a conference. That, unfortunately, was probably going to have to wait. His friends were understandably concerned with his welfare and unwilling to let him think himself alone. Not a thought that would normally occur to him – not after being friends with Sirius and Regulus most of their lives and the others since the start of Hogwarts, but grief wasn't known for being sensible.
James was a Gryffindor through and through. But Severus? Oh, Severus was every bit the viper he could have, should have been if Slytherin House wasn't up to its eyeballs in pureblood fanatics. He'd had more and better ideas than, say, force-collapsing wards and storming into Voldemort's lair to hex the bastard into oblivion. Because right now that was about all James' mind was giving him.

The good news was that while some of the adults might not wholly approve of James getting his hands bloody, not a one of them would seriously consider stopping him. If he read Uncle Septimus right, he'd actually help James, if James asked. And there might come a time when James did.

Of course, neither he nor Uncle Harfang (not to mention their wives) were going to sit back and let James' parents' deaths go unpunished. They wouldn't have even if the Alliance hadn't been a factor. James had heard the stories – both from his parents and his aunts and uncles. His favorite version, though, was the one Jinx told.

Speaking of another being that hadn't let him alone for even a moment. James had been forced to resort to ordering Jinx to get the amount of sleep he needed to operate at full capacity. The little guy, pissed as hell and completely ashamed at 'failing' James' parents, was bound and determined that absolutely nothing and no one that even dreamed of being a threat would get anywhere near James. After, that was, he got over his fear that James would blame him for their deaths. James had nearly rolled his eyes into another country when he'd realized that. As if he would ever do such a thing! He'd given Jinx a very light, playful swat to the head and told him that was his punishment, now quit being an idiot. And then he'd had the elf shadowing his every move.

Also, speaking of another that would both understand and help with his desire for vengeance. James didn't think there was another house elf alive as bloodthirsty and determined as Jinx when it came to protecting his bound Family – or his chosen one. The latter being, insofar as James knew, a unique phenomenon. House elves could be made to serve someone not of their bound family, but a house elf choosing, of their own free will, to serve another? Yeah, unheard of. And yet there was Jinx, who didn't hesitate to serve the Weasleys or the Longbottoms and even obeyed their orders slash requests far more often than not.

James wouldn't even have to say anything. Jinx would probably anticipate him and … yeah. They'd have a conference later tonight, after everyone else had finally gone to sleep.

Killing Charlus and Dorea Potter? Stupidest damn thing the insane moron had ever done, on so many levels it boggled James' mind. Because really. Dumbledore aside, James' parents had been popular and well thought of. A lot of people would be pissed just on the strength of that. That some complete and utter moron had had the temerity to breach an Alliance? That was going over like a tamed nundu. Add in pissing off Family Black. James was willing to bet that not a few people were settling in to watch the show as someone got their just deserts in fine fashion with a certain perverse pleasure.

If it had been anyone else that had been killed that had the same circumstances, James knew he'd been doing the same thing. He'd heard Lily calling such overwhelmingly but entertainingly bad situations a 'train wreck' at one point early in their acquaintance. Having spent enough time in the muggle world now to understand what she'd meant, he agreed with the sentiment.

The rest of the young Marauders joined them as they walked into Potter Castle. James suppressed a shudder. As much as the place had seemed enormous but homey when his parents had been alive, it seemed like an enormous, echoing cave right now. Thank heavens the Weasleys and Longbottoms both had made it crystal clear he'd be staying with them, emancipation and Lordship be damned. James didn't think he'd be able to handle staying here with only house elves for company.

All but James and Sirius flooed to Weasley Cottage once they'd assured themselves that James was
holding up. James had one last task before leaving. To close the Castle until he finally felt able to live there again. Fortunately, that task was a brief one. The two of them walked to the ward border and the activation stone just beyond the ward border. The activation stone could only be used by a Potter by blood, and could only be used to raise and lower a very limited set of wards. To whit, the ones that put the Castle in stasis when the Family did not intend to inhabit the Castle for a prolonged period.

That done, the pair of boys who were very rapidly becoming men used the portkey Sirius had gotten from Septimus for just this purpose.

Late that night, hours after everyone fell asleep, James roused himself from his doze and sat up.

“Jinx.”

“Master?” Jinx asked as he popped in.

James patted his bed. “We need to talk, Jinx.”

Jinx shifted uneasily, but gamely clambered onto the bed and sat down, expression one of curiosity.

“I know the man who actually cast the curse is dead.” James said.

That one had been kind of hard to miss, what with everyone and Merlin's pet dog reacting to what Septimus and Harfang had done with the body when Callidora and Cedrella had gotten done with it. James had zero illusions about who, in the family, to be afraid of. For all Septimus cut an intimidating figure and was, admittedly, a formidable foe in a fight, he wasn't a patch on his wife. Callidora made Harfang look like a newborn kitten in comparison. The sisters collaborating? That was the stuff of nightmares for anyone with sense.

“But you and I both know the man actually responsible isn't.” James continued.

Jinx scowled. “No. Is not.” He agreed.

“You are not, under any circumstances, Jinx, to risk your own death.” James said firmly. “I refuse to lose anyone else to that asshole. But I want you to find them. I want you to learn everything you can about them.”

He growled. “Just killing them isn't enough, Jinx. I want to destroy them, and make sure no one is ever stupid enough to follow in this bastard's footsteps. I know the adults have been doing everything they can to make him writhe, but … “

“Is not enough.” Jinx said, his tone one of total agreement. “I will do. I not lets Master and Mistress be killed and not makes them … makes him … pay for it.”

“Just be careful.” James reiterated. “They adored you. They'd never forgive me if I got you killed avenging them. I'd never forgive myself.”

That he was excessively fond of Jinx did not need to be said. House elves could tell how their master or mistress felt about them. It was part of what allowed them to serve. Knowing when you'd pleased or pissed off the person you served was vital. It worked like a feedback loop, at least in the Families that didn't consider house elves to be lower than dirt. The happier the master or mistress, the happier the elf, and the greater efforts they went to to care for their master/mistress. The better they cared for their master/mistress, the more that person cared about the elf and their welfare.

“I not die. I gots to take care of Master James, I does. Nobody else do it right if I doesn't.” Jinx said.
James almost laughed. That refrain had been a near-constant in the Castle, with the other Potter elves. Ever since Jinx had gone to war with his parents during the Grindlewald War, he'd made it plain that no other elf, Potter-bonded or not, was capable of caring for Charlus and Dorea properly.

Apparently, there'd been more than one squabble amongst the elves in the early days over his attitude. These days, the others were used to it and mostly ignored it.
James was champing at the bit. And severely irritated, to put it mildly. Voldemort had been attacking randomly nearly daily since the deaths of Charlus and Dorea. Muggles, Muggleborns and their families, half-bloods and the odd ‘blood traitor’ families had all been hit.

And there wasn't a damn thing James – or any of the young Marauders – could do about it. They still had a year of school left. James had given serious thought to just … not. He was a Lord. A very, very rich one. NEWTs meant very little, in the end. If he'd needed to work to sustain himself that would have been one thing. As it was, his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren could all live off the Potter wealth without working a day in their lives without putting an appreciable dent in the total unless they were ridiculously free with their spending.

But as much as he was tempted to just walk out and not bother with NEWTs, he knew better. Voldemort and his minions wouldn't last forever. Once they were gone, James knew he would very quickly go stir-crazy if all he had to do with his days was watch over the Potter holdings. A job was kind of a necessity, not for the money it provided but for the distraction and stimulation. Besides, if he became, say, an Auror, he'd have a legitimate excuse to hunt Death Eaters for sport. Not that he really needed one, thanks to the Alliance, but still. It'd help keep a disapproving Dumbledore off his back if he had at least the appearance of a legitimate reason to be hunting the bastards down.

Honestly, James was waiting for the day when Dumbledore overstepped himself. He'd been dancing dangerously close to the line of interfering with Alliance affairs ever since the death of James' parents. James knew that Septimus, for one, was about ready to punch Dumbledore's head in. Harfang was a bit quieter in his disapproval, but then he was quieter in general.

Speaking of Dumbledore, the last two months of Hogwarts had been … interesting. Septimus, Cedrella, Harfang and Callidora had insisted the young Marauders be given separate, secure housing. While they didn't know of anyone in Gryffindor who was a Voldemort supporter, that didn't mean there was one. Same went for both Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw.

Dumbledore had tried to argue against the kids all being moved into their own dorm. At least in part due to Lily, who was the only female in the bunch. But he'd also claimed the Gryffindor boys had no need to move, because no Gryffindor would stoop to joining Voldemort.

That sentiment had been treated with the derision and disbelief it deserved. Dumbledore had had no choice but to cave. In those last weeks, Hogwarts had become a warzone. Not that they'd been sparing the rod before – they had the OWLs necessary to get their wand-rights since the start of the year, so hadn't had to worry about being expelled. But after the funeral? Oh yeah. All hell had broken loose.

The Voldemort supporters had tried to even the odds and/or stop Marauder retribution by essentially taking hostages. That is, they not only traveled in packs, they forcibly included students who weren't supporters in the hopes the Marauders wouldn't start a fight for fear of hitting innocents.

Idiots.
Not only had this pissed the Marauders off even worse than they already had been, it was utterly useless. Because they didn't have to wait for the idiots to be out in public to hit them where it hurt the most.

So the Marauders made a very pointed point of completely ignoring the supporters in the halls, classroom, and Great Hall. Instead, with Jinx's help, they hit the supporters after they'd retreated to Slytherin House in the evenings. Not a one of them got a moment's peace. Clothing and school supplies stolen. Homework shredded and/or soiled beyond repair, and every mean, vicious, hurtful 'prank' the Marauders could come up with were employed. Yet every time a teacher or, more frequently, Dumbledore, checked, they had a cast-iron alibi. It never occurred to them that a Family house-elf was being employed to accomplish the harassment.

Once again with feeling: idiots.

Now, though, James had an entire summer before him. To perfect his animagus transformation, among other things. James had no idea what the Weasleys and Longbottoms had been up to while he'd finished the year, but they'd made it clear that everyone was allowed to go Death Eater hunting, if they so desired. All of them had signed up. Even Lily.

The first thing the adults did was have everyone try out old wands. While they would hopefully not be in any pitched battles where their wands could be broken, it was better to be safe than sorry. And while no one could say anything about the younger Marauders taking part in the hunt for Voldemort and his followers, having the backup wands to use the more questionable spells with would keep too many eyebrows from heading for hairlines.

Then it was time to get to work.

The next two months were … well, interesting. James and Sirius, who were both interested in becoming Aurors – if only for that legitimate licence to hunt Death Eaters for sport – learned a lot from Septimus and Harfang about what sort of knowledge they'd need to make it in the Auror corps. It was also more than a bit of an education to see the two men in combat. Even if the 'combat' was about ten thousand times less harrowing than the war had been. At least according to them, at any rate.

More often than not, James felt like he could all but see his own father, and Charlus' usual place in Septimus and Harfang's fighting tactics. It was fairly obvious that the two of them were used to working as part of a triad, even to James' largely untrained eyes. Seeing that gap hurt.

Even as it amused. Because the young Marauders had their own unique style. They had learned to work in pairs as was the norm, but had also learned to work in triads as well, thanks in large part to the elder Marauders. The young Marauders put their own twist on it, however, by interchanging who was in which triad on a whim. Though the triads that worked best were Severus, Lily, and Regulus together, and James, Sirius, and Remus together. Thanks to the fact there were six of them they'd also learned to fight in groups bigger than three, including all of them at once.

The first thing they did was go Carrow hunting. Tenibrus was dead and gone, but thanks to his idiocy, his entire family were legal targets. Not that they were going to go after the whole family. Just the Death Eater scumbags in the family. Which was limited to Tenibrus, his wife and his kids, who had been in Hogwarts with the young Marauders.

Had. They had (wisely) left Hogwarts when the young Marauders left to mourn the deaths of Charlus and Dorea. James was honestly grateful for that because he was not entirely certain he'd been able to restrain himself from killing them in cold blood in the weeks after he'd returned to Hogwarts. He's also fairly sure Severus would have done something lethal to them. Though Severus
at least wouldn't have been so rash as to hex them in the sight of all and sundry.

It was slightly worrying to realize that making those three pay for his parents' deaths had felt good. Just slightly. The way a nundu running around was slightly worrying. James' only comfort, and it was a very small one, was that the others all felt much the same way.

The Carrows weren't dead. They'd just been ... well, scared out their damn minds and chased all over the UK. Eventually Tenibrus' wife had fled the UK entirely to escape the Alliance while she and her kids were still alive. At the start of it all, James had been all for doing a lot worse, but now he was glad they hadn't. As long as he never had to see any of the three of them again, he'd be fine.

By the end of August, James somewhat ruefully decided the adults had known what they were doing. Initially, he'd wondered if they'd gone a bit 'round the twist when the young Marauders had been invited along. Hardly surprising, given what had happened, but still. Encouraging a bunch of very angry teens to kick ass and take names as violently as they liked short of the Unforgivables? Sounded kind of iffy, on the surface of it.

Two months solid of chasing after idiots, hexing the heck out of them and interrogating them had cooled everyone's ardor. As angry as James had been ... and still was ... the irrational edge had been worn off. At this point he was just ... done. Tired of it. Still pissed as hell, but calmer by far than he'd been at the start of summer. Even Jinx seemed to have calmed down somewhat, though whether that was because James had calmed down, or because Jinx was honestly feeling calmer was debatable.

They rolled back into Weasley Cottage in mid-August. Just enough time to shop for their school gear and unwind from the summer-long hunt. First thing they did was touch base with Frank and Alice. While they were a few years older than the other young Marauders, they hadn't been old enough to not want anything to do with the younger set. Even Arthur, who was even older than Frank, had watched the younger Marauders a time or two when their parents were busy.

The check-in had two purposes. The most important to see how Frank was doing. The secondary purpose was to find out what they'd missed. They'd been in and out of the Cottage and Longbottom Manor all summer while they hunted, only rarely staying long enough to bother reading the paper rather than catch up on sleep or what have you.

The good news was that four known Death Eaters had jumped ship and fled in the wake of Charlus and Dorea's deaths. They'd known they would be in the Alliance's sights and wanted no part of that nonsense. Either that or they'd been horrified that Voldemort would attack an Alliance. Which was understandable. No one with a lick of sense did that. So it made it pretty clear that Voldemort was batshit insane, desperate, or both.

Probably both.

The neutral families had, for the most part, headed for the safety of their heavily warded manors, intending to stay the hell out of the way. A few had stepped up and started Death Eater hunting themselves, but they had to be careful about it, as they didn't have the excuse of a violated Alliance to hunt the bastards with. Most of the light-siders were torn between frowning in displeasure at the attack on an Alliance, frowning with displeasure at the extremes the Alliance had gone to to avenge themselves, or (most rarely) debating the wisdom of joining the hunt like some of the neutrals had done.

No points for guessing who was leading the 'we are disappointed in you for the severity of your reaction' crowd.

James was really starting to hate Dumbledore.
On top of all that, despite the hunting going on, Voldemort had his people spend the summer raiding. The good news being that with Jinx's help, they'd managed to stymie a couple of the raids entirely and break several more up before they got much further than setting up anti-apparation and anti-portkey wards.

By the end of summer, Jinx knew most of the Death Eaters if not by name, then by their magical signatures. He also had what sounded like half of the Hogwarts elves and most of the elves serving light-side families on their guard and on standby in case their families got hit by any of the people he'd gotten signatures on and could pass that knowledge to other elves. Calling in more elves to defend their families might save those peoples' lives, which was something every elf with a decent Master/Mistress could get behind.

Shopping was quieter than usual, though whether that was because they were doing it later than they normally did or because people were avoiding the drama was debatable. Whichever it was, there were definitely a lot less people on the Alley than James was used to.

James spent the last few days before Hogwarts going over the Potter accounts, both on his own, with Septimus, and at Septimus' urging, with the goblin in charge of the Potter accounts. While James hadn't known all the details before this summer, he'd known that Septimus had arranged things such that the Weasley family was, for the first time in centuries, flush. So he was willing to take the man's advice on investing and the like.

Fortunately, his ancestors had been a fairly conservative bunch where money was concerned, so there hadn't been a lot of investments in general, and none in anything risky. It had simplified things considerably. After talking it over with the goblin in charge of the Potter vaults, James had given the go-ahead to invest more aggressively, and with more risky investments, so long as the goblin was sure of a profit in the endeavor. He had also, much as Septimus had done, increased the percentage the goblin got for doing his job. Though in his case, because he could afford it, he went with five percent, rather than the three Septimus had offered. James could afford to pay a five percent fee easily, where Septimus hadn't.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!